Thinking Comprehensively about Your Organization

Do you sometimes feel overwhelmed at the number of factors requiring your attention all the time? I'd like to offer a simple seven-category model to help you organize the way you think about your organization. (I'll tell you up front this is not my model. It's publicly available, but it's not as well known as it should be.)

RESULTS. Every organization is striving to achieve desired outcomes in the areas of product and service, customers, revenues and profits, retention of employees, organization effectiveness, contribution to the larger community, etc. If you've not already identified the three to five key results that you highlight within your organization, I suggest you do so.

PROCESS FOCUS. The "real work" of any organization is the myriad of linked activities that generates a product or service for a customer. Usually, a series of steps is required. If these steps are reliable, a desirable outcome can reasonably be expected. Once a reliable process has been developed, it is preferred that it be repeatable, so that variation is minimized and the quality of the outcome lies within the acceptable range.

Most effective organizations have allocated the time to explicitly articulate each of its processes. Only if you've been detailed enough to identify each sequential step can you expect to make intentional improvement.

WORKFORCE FOCUS. People do all of the work of an organization. There are systems for bringing people into the organization, giving them basic orientation, assigning them to specific work, building their skills and confidence, paying them, etc.

These three topics together form the execution or physical creation portion of the model. Now, let's move to the thinking or planning portion of the model.

CUSTOMER FOCUS. Everyone in the organization and all of their work should be directed to meet some need of a specific external or internal customer. Who these customers are and what they want should be at the center of the thinking of every contributor in the organization.

STRATEGIC PLANNING. Most organizations expect to be around for longer than just a few months or even just a few years. Whatever is being done in today's organization should build a foundation for the direction the organization is headed in the future. In addition to being able to describe current reality, leaders should be able to describe a vision, a set of values, and a direction for the future of the organization.

LEADERSHIP. The quality of any organization rises or falls based on the quality of its leaders. The thinking, planning, and decision-making of the leaders gives direction and order to the future work of the organization. Fortunately, leadership skills can be improved! That's what this weekly column addresses!

Further, perpetually strong organizations invest significant time and energy in the development of its younger leaders. After all, these individuals will be the leaders of the future.

These three topics together form the mental creation or leadership portion of the model. To complete the model, you have to consider one more dimension of your responsibilities.

MEASUREMENT, ANALYSIS, AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT. Leaders choose how they measure progress in each of the six components described above. Analysis of the current condition can identify improvement opportunities for the future. Most of what is known in the business is contained in the minds of the employees of the organization--and the ideas for how the organization can be improved are there, also!

As a leader in your organization, I ask you to pause and consider if most of the items you think about are contained in these seven categories. I speculate that they are.

Briefly described above is the organizational performance model that forms the foundation for the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. More information is available in a copy of the booklet "Criteria for Performance Excellence," which is available from:

https://www.nist.gov/baldrige/publications/baldrige-excellence-framework

The booklet contains excellent information, but it may not be easy to understand at first. The language is very general and not at all prescriptive. It's filled with questions about how you manage each of these characteristics for your organization. If you are overwhelmed when you obtain your copy, contact me. I'll be happy to help with the translation.

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