

Defining Key Organizational Traits and Developmental Objectives

By: Kevin Strawbridge

Background

This paper was written after several years of organizational change surrounding the turnaround efforts at a large multi-channel retailer. As stability takes hold, it is necessary to build the foundation for continuous improvement from an organizational standpoint. After groups within an organization have prospered and learned significantly over a period of time, it is critical to maintain the desired growth for the business, as well as individual professional growth for the associates within the group.

Opportunity

An associate within a group should be developed to grow on three particular levels – **Tactical, Analytical, and Strategic**. As an associate grows, he or she should become well versed in all three disciplines and these skills will be transferable upward within the group as well as into other groups throughout the enterprise. As the group seeks new associates, it is imperative to look for moldable traits from each level in order to develop long-term growth. The ultimate goal is to produce associates that can think strategically and understand the analytics and tactics within a program or group. In turn, this produces a logical path as follows:

- ▲ – An associate that is solely focused on tactical execution
- – An associate that has learned or is being trained in tactics, analysis and strategy
- ▼ – An associate that has developed all three traits and leads through strategic direction



The director of the group should be ▼. His or her direct reports should be ■. In turn, all others within the group should be developed from ▲ to ■ over a pre-determined interval. This creates opportunities and direction for associates while defining measurable objectives and creating a well-run and effective organization. The following information outlines each level of development and how they inter-relate.

Tactical

Day in and day out, there are functions that need to be performed in order to keep programs running, customers happy, and analysis happening. These tactical procedures are typically basic in nature and repetitive at different intervals. This is the best training ground for associates as they grow into analytical and ultimately strategic associates. Being grounded in the basic fundamentals of programs allows for easy movement between programs and ultimately to a deeper understanding of individual programs and enterprise directional thinking.

Traits:

- Detail Oriented
- Organized
- Learning Focused
- Process Oriented

Analytical

Being analytical does not mean printing out reports once a week, glancing at them and putting them into a binder never to be seen again. Analysis means getting into the numbers, understanding the strategy set forth by the enterprise, and seeking knowledge to which action can be associated. An analytical associate is usually grown out of tactical execution. Someone that has done the day-today activities of a function should inherently be able to analyze the output of the function. Current associates should be challenged and the organization should seek new associates that get into the business at a micro level and seek a thorough understanding of it in order to drive the program and enterprise ever-forward. Finally, an analytical person should always have a sense of the metrics of the program and seeking new ways to measure the business.

Traits

- Detail Oriented
- Organized
- Critical Reasoning
- Contextual Thinking
- Intuitive

Strategic

Often, people confuse strategy with operational effectiveness. In the article [“Michael Porter’s Big Ideas”](#) (K. Hammonds, *Fast Company*. March '01), Hammonds writes “There’s a fundamental distinction between strategy and operational effectiveness. Strategy is about making choices, trade-offs; it’s about deliberately choosing to be different. Operational effectiveness is about things that you really shouldn’t have to make choices on; it’s about what’s good for everybody and about what every business should be doing.” He follows on to say “The essence of strategy is that you must set limits on what you’re trying to accomplish. The company without a strategy is willing to try anything. If all you’re trying to do is essentially the same thing as your rivals, then it’s unlikely that you’ll be very successful.” Therefore it is imperative that associates can understand, derive, and deliver strategy in an effective manner. The learning of this takes time and is built on a foundation of understanding of the enterprise, the business, and roles within the enterprise. Before strength in strategy is built, an associate must first know the tactical and analytical roles within the program or group. As each of these is grown it leads to a basis for strategic understanding.

Traits

- Visionary
- 360° View
- Tactical
- Analytical
- Strong Business Acumen
- Communicative

Summary

While these points may seem intuitive, it is necessary for a manager (at any level) to maintain a view of these types of traits and the corresponding development. Often companies spend more time reacting to growth, positive or negative, than to developing a solid platform to attract, grow and retain associates that are ultimately responsible for the long-term goals of the company. As an architect designs a house and a contractor builds it, each piece is reliant on another to be successful.