

DEVELOPING A CLEAR STRATEGY FOR BUSINESS

Dr Mick Lyons, Founder of North West Process Improvement, UK, explains why effective business strategy is critical for organisations and quality professionals



During my fairly long and eventful career as a Process Improvement Specialist and Operations Director, I've worked with many leadership teams. Over the years, what has surprised me is how many leaders fail to pay attention to the basic concept of a strategy.

This lack of strategic consideration can take a number of forms. We have leaders who just think it's not necessary – and profess to know where they're going and that's that. They have an objective but no adequate plan to achieve it.

We have leaders who will state that they have a strategy, but when they're pressed, it turns out to be a mixed bag of actions loosely linked together. At the end of the financial year this has kept them very busy, but taken them no further forward towards their vague and poorly defined goal, which is usually "increase profit, increase sales," or similar.

I might be a little harsh here, but the issue is that the strategic vacuum associated with these approaches tends to result in the generation of a set of poorly linked actions thought-up by various departmental leaders. These are then pursued unilaterally, resulting in an

inevitable resource conflict. The strategic alignment between the actions is missing and can incur expensive costs for the organisation as a result.

For quality professionals, the issue here is the absence of one of the key factors required for the system-focused approach of ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management Systems. A clear strategy allows balanced allocation of focus and resource to areas other than the purely financial. The ability to easily communicate it, or even better, to involve the workforce in the deployment of the strategy, following Hoshin Kanri's principles, will significantly improve workforce engagement.

One of the most common problems I've witnessed is a lack of willingness to commit time to developing a solid strategic plan. In reality, the required allocation is comparatively small if a clear and simple process is adopted.

Focus on strategy

A good strategy development workshop is typically based around the strengths, weaknesses opportunities and threats (SWOT) or political, economic, social and technological (PEST) frameworks to examine the internal and external drivers and socio-economic factors that influence the strategy. The key to success is active team involvement and good preparation. Surely, the development of a strong plan to deliver the success of the organisation is worth investing in a few days of leadership team time?

After all, what is the role of the management team if they're not setting the company direction for their organisation? As always, it's down to the quality teams to question, push and facilitate improvement. They must also ensure attention is paid to strategy – after all, ISO 9001:2015 requires it.

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