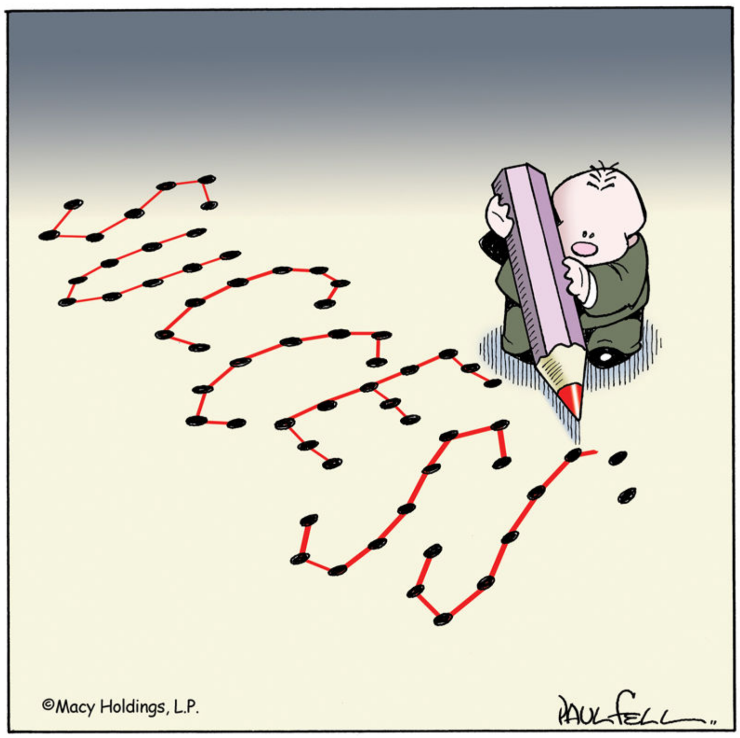
Reconnecting the Dots

Many companies strained through difficult times as the global recession raged. To stay afloat, some have downsized, dropped their less viable products or services, restructured, and tightened their belts. For some now, the sun can be seen about to rise over the horizon.

How can these companies, fortunate to have survived through the turmoil, most quickly rebound and get back in the black? How can managers and leaders reconnect the dots to give their companies the desired success?

The upheavals of the economy have necessitated adaptation by businesses, some slight and some deep. And with the intensity of the adaptations, varying timelines will govern how quickly these adaptations take effect and pay off.



For example, in the midst of reshaping the business's products or services, much may have shifted. Leadership interventions…. perhaps a new organizational structure and reporting relationships, a redefined value chain, redesigned processes, a new set of managers, more controls, new employees…. all of these can take months to years to be fully implemented and functional. Without realizing it, the decision-makers may have chosen interventions that will take resources and time away from the actual work, thus delaying the business' final recalibration.

Are there ways by which these adaptations can be synched in so that their effectiveness produces the desired bottom line more quickly? The answer is yes, and all of them, as well as others that are in the same family of interventions, have a common ingredient.

Here are some prime synchronizers.

<u>Roles and Accountability Recalibration</u>: Drag out that old RACI chart (RACI, a role structuring processed developed by Dr Roger Crane, stands for ***R****esponsibility,* ***A****uthority* ***C****onsultation,* ***I****nformation).* Now's the time when misunderstandings about who does what are most likely to happen and then form an ongoing ineffective pattern of behavior.

Unless specified otherwise, employees will assume they continue to be accountable for their former tasks. But in a revised business plan, that may not be so. Not only is it important to clearly specify each individual person's accountabilities, but also to clarify how all of the roles contribute systemically toward the team's essential product or service.

Employee-Manager Recalibration: Perhaps the manager of a group has changed. Often it takes a new manager a good six months to a year to deeply understand the responsibilities of the new group as well as the people and their capacities. On the other hand, employees report that they live on pins and needles for the first year or so until they have had multiple examples of what the new manager wants and how s/he reacts emotionally. Only then can they calibrate themselves to the new manager.

A transition meeting is an intervention that speeds up the "clicking" between the new manager and the team. The general agenda for such a meeting includes the new manager's management style and expectations, the team's essential charge and how it has changed as a result of the post-recession planning, roles and resources, etc. That's probably not new, but here's the twist. Talk about the things that are *really* on the minds of team members as well as the boilerplate stuff.

When I conduct these meetings, I interview the manager in front of his/her team and ask questions team members most want to know but are afraid to ask, such as:

- What really pleases the new manager?
- What kinds of things irritate him/her?
- What does s/he do when mad or emotional?
- How should employees bring mistakes or problems to the attention of the new manager?
- What happens if the employee has made an error…are they branded forever?
- How does an employee get back in the good graces of the manager after a mistake?

Awareness of tacit but critical rules of relationship with the new boss can save months of trial and error that costs time and productivity.

Management Team Recalibration: New managers will struggle just as do their employees as they seek to fit into their new boss's management team. The ante is high in the midst of urgent pressure to bring productivity back up. How can that management team quickly become high performing? The charge of this group takes much the same agenda as any other new workgroup, but with additional importance. The key is for the management team to recognize that however it forms and however it performs, the vibrations it sets in motion will replicate themselves throughout the business. One of the biggest points of intervention in any organization is in the functioning of its leadership and management teams. The buck starts here.

These are just a sampling of possible interventions that shorten uptake time. They all have one common, often overlooked ingredient. That is "relationship." No, it's not the touchy-feely meaning we often give to the term "relationship." Rather it's how the essential business functions fit together. How well do the gears mesh when the engine is turned on? How do the pieces of the puzzle fit together to make the whole produce? How do people, tasks, teams work at the interfaces? Without carefully meshed relationships, messy handoffs and rework slow the business' recalibration and tamp down performance.

Of course, there are many aspects of recalibrating after the turmoil of the recession, but attention to this one – *relationship* as it plays out in the interface between levels or units or persons – is one of the most neglected and one of the most powerful.

Nail the relationships and shrink the time until your business is operating in the black again.

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