

Lessons from the Book—*Execution, the Discipline of Getting Things Done*

As companies scrutinize performance in demanding market conditions, leaders are increasingly analyzing their abilities to execute on strategy. In the past, leaders were called upon to deliver the strategic vision, and managers were expected to handle the details that turn that vision into reality. Today, this is changing—and changing for the better.

In their 2002 groundbreaking book, *Execution, the Discipline of Getting Things Done*, authors Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan highlight the importance of strategic execution. The book was featured as Recommended Reading in the January 2003 issue of *Skills Measurement Report* (available at www.brainbench.com/business), and since then, a number of readers have expressed interest in exploring the role skills measurement systems can play in strategic execution.

Skills measurement systems are ideal tools in a culture of execution. At an enterprise level, they can support key business initiatives and address specific performance issues. From linking processes to addressing skills gaps, online measurement systems enable effective tactics for turning strategy into results.

Skills Measurement Facilitates Key Business Processes

“The heart of execution lies in the three core processes: the people process, the strategy process, and the operations process.” (p. 22) No discussion of execution would be adequate without touching on the primary processes involving strategy, people and operations. Skills metrics can play a significant role in each process:

The People Process: “One of the biggest shortcomings of the traditional people process is that it’s backward-looking, focused on evaluating the jobs people are doing today. Far more important is whether the individuals can handle the jobs of tomorrow.” (p. 142) One of the primary benefits of the objective metrics delivered by a skills measurement system is that they can serve as a leading indicator of future performance. Most business metrics, such as sales, profits, and market share illustrate past performance. Employee skills, however, will affect future performance in all facets of business, from customer satisfaction and service delivery to product development.

The Strategy Process: “To have realism in your strategy, you have to link it to your people process: Do you have the right people in place to execute the strategy?” (p. 179) Objective skills metrics provide a direct link between the people process and the strategy process. Without skills metrics, decision-makers are forced to base their strategic decisions on subjective assessments (such as self- or peer-reviews) of their employee skills assets. An objective skills measurement system enables companies to pinpoint and address skills gaps before they compromise strategy.

The Operations Process: “The operating plan provides a path for... people. It breaks long-term output into short-term targets.” (p. 227) At an operating level, most strategic visions, particularly those that involve organizational transformation, require a shift or improvement in employee skills. An online skills measurement system enables self-service skills improvement from every employee, ensuring maximum participation. In addition, repeatable tests and immediate results, combined with access to relevant and related learning material, help employees establish and achieve attainable skills milestones on a path to a larger strategic objective.

Putting Skills Measurement Into Action—Tactics for Execution

The book draws from lessons learned by past corporate initiatives to illustrate how business processes can be influenced by a culture of execution. In building a culture of execution, organizations can enhance the effectiveness of many measures by applying skills measurement systems and tools. Strategies for building a culture of execution include:

Shape the Plan with Participants' Input—To ensure participation, the authors recommend identifying the people responsible for a strategic plan's success and including them in the creation of that plan. The result is a culture of ownership that motivates all participants to perform. A skills measurement system can help organizations identify skills that relate to most strategic outcomes—from organizational transformation to performance improvement. Using the system as a framework, everyone involved in the planning process can participate in setting long-term skills objectives as well as intermediate milestones for improvement.

Establish the "Hows" of Execution—"If a strategy does not address the hows, it is a candidate for failure." (p.179) Whether or not a company achieves results depends on its ability to create a realistic strategy with realistic outcomes. Objective skills metrics ensure that employees have a realistic measure of their critical skills, and that decision-makers know their company's strengths and weaknesses before embarking on strategic initiatives.

Create Milestones—As mentioned in the operations process, milestones are crucial to effective strategic follow-through. Skills milestones establish skills accountability. Whether an employee has to meet a baseline score in a core skill or demonstrate competence in a new skill, an online assessment system can help bridge the gap between planning and execution. If skills milestones are not met, organizations can take steps early to provide the training needed to correct the problem or revise the strategy as needed.

Skills Data Provides Leading Indicator for Success

It would be misleading to suggest that any one strategy, process or tool will provide a formula for transforming strategy into reality. However, any resource that provides benefits across all major business processes can prove crucial in the execution of an organization's strategic plan.

Whether an organization uses skills assessment scores and certifications to validate capabilities, pinpoint weaknesses for improvement, streamline training, or create career milestones, the results provide objective metrics that can measure progress toward attaining and exceeding corporate goals.

All references in this article: Bossidy, Larry; Charan, Ram; *Execution, the Discipline of Getting Things Done*; Crown Business, New York, NY. 2002. This book is available at Amazon.com