

Chapter 9

Balancing Individual Strategies and Cultures

ABSTRACT

Strategies may be formulated and published by senior leaders; they may be supported by line managers and by teams. The success of a strategy comes down to the actions of individuals. In particular, the authors are interested in managing those risks result from an individual's day-to-day behaviors and actions. What changes at this level? Two things change. First, who conducts the assessment changes? The individual must take responsibility for knowing the organization's strategies, becoming aware of their personal strategies, and their own cultures. The individual must drive this process. Second, the individual must have a clear understanding of which individuals are responsible for which strategies.

WHY DO WE CARE ALIGNING AT THIS LEVEL?

Strategies may be formulated and published by senior leaders; they may be supported by line managers and by teams. Ultimately, though, the success of a strategy comes down to the actions of individuals. Individuals must be invested in a strategy; it must align with their individual beliefs, assumptions, and values. Moreover, it must be reflected in their actions and behaviors. When these do not align, we have a risk. Small risks accumulate and add up to unrealized or contradicted strategies. These risks are different for every individual in every unit. The risks we encounter at these levels when strategies

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and cultures are not aligned may have higher business costs because this is the level at which work happens. We will not repeat those arguments and justifications in this chapter, but we do remind the reader that they apply to these levels as well.

There are two dimensions to risk at this level. First, an individual may not buy into the organization's strategies. Their actions may not impede those strategies, but they may not support them. This is a clear example of how culture might undermine strategy. Second, an individual may have their business strategies, and these may run counter to the organization's, or they may support the organization's but only in a way that benefits that individual. When these do not align, we have a risk. Small risks accumulate and add up to unrealized or contradicted strategies. These risks are different for every individual in every unit. In contrast, as individuals engage and become invested in the organization's strategies and adopt its cultures, the organization's behavior begins to change. Our goal as business and information managers is to find a fit that grows our information and business cultures and supports our business and information strategies.

The goal is to identify ways to reduce the risk of strategic failures at the person or individual level. In particular, we are interested in managing those risks result from an individual's day to day behaviors and actions. It is at this level that we face the most significant risks. All of the arguments and justifications we laid out in Chapters 7 and 8 are valid at this level. The framework we introduced in Chapters 7 and 8 holds at this level, with a few changes.

What changes at this level? Two things change. First, who conducts the assessment changes. The individual must take responsibility for knowing the organization's strategies, becoming aware of their personal strategies, and their own cultures. The individual must drive this process. Second, the individual must have a clear understanding of which individuals are responsible for which strategies. This means the organization must be clear about responsibility and accountability for strategies and must communicate this clearly to individuals. This means that ultimately there must be a strong management model supporting each strategy. Armed with this information, and when provided with self-assessment tools and incentives, it is up to the unit, the team, and the local manager to shape all of those individual assessments into something that supports the immediate strategy and culture. Perhaps the best way to accomplish this is to build it into the periodic performance appraisal process. This is not, though, a one-time effort. Shaping and adapting is a continuous effort, requiring continuous support from the organization – because it is part

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