**The Quick Win Approach**

By Rick Bridges (Mentor Quick Wins TELUS Communications)

There exists today an ever widening corporate knowledge gap which is adversely impacting the average business culture, as employees or team members feel less in command of their surroundings this results in entrenching types of behaviours and attitudes like cynicism, protectionism and victimization. These are the cornerstones to creating a very stoic un-agile business culture which is very resistive to change and transformation. It is these properties that create the silo’d and fractured business structures which add complexity, cost and defocus on the critical enabler of any company “an exemplary customer experience”.

By instilling a simple structured approach managed by coaches comfortable with business and technology in the business operations which focuses on taking people in the business on a journey of Exploration, Experimentation and Education, we can eliminate the effects of this widening corporate knowledge gap. This approach focuses on reclamation of old knowledge, then introducing technology and business understanding at the rate of absorption by employees or team members and lastly creating value inside the time frames of today’s business change. This allows employees or team members to bring immediate value to their business, create confidence and willingness to change and drive higher understanding and knowledge of their business needs which promotes more salient and effective requirements when trying to leverage technology.
The Quick Win Generator
This simple structured approach of Exploration, Experimentation and Education creates a true transformation engine which is fuelled by 3 key strategies:

- **Value Synchronization** - synchronizing the value of the opportunity(s) to the shelf life of the leader(s) sponsoring it
- **Appropriate Technology** - employing technology at the level of understanding of the business community
- **Business Knowledge Reclamation** - uncovering the hidden rules and laws that govern how frontline operations get the work done

It all starts with Value; something has to be perceived as valuable in order to garner the appropriate influence and attention necessary to motivate people to want to start on a journey. Maintaining the perceived value of any venture is critical to its continued success. It requires performing a delicate balancing act between the outcomes of actions taken and the constantly changing priorities, needs and agendas of people, groups and organizations. Without managing Value Synchronization, projects have tendency to fizzle away or worse achievements are ignored. Once people are motivated to act then we must constantly engage them at their level of understanding so they can continue to be full functioning partners in the actions taken and by utilizing appropriate levels of technology create the thrill of starting to drive real progress through actions. Finally focusing on Knowledge Reclamation brings employees or team members’ new insight to their environment and through this new understanding begins to generate brand new value from the results obtained. This feeds back into the Quick Win Generator which fuels the whole process over and over again.
**Value Synchronization**

Determining the true value of something is actually a very complex proposition and yet is so critical in maintaining the attention and level of engagement needed to create change. The first level of complexity is the three lenses you need to look through in order to assign actual value to an opportunity, project or action being taken.

- **Lens 1** - What is best for the corporation?
- **Lens 2** - What is best for the immediate business unit organization?
- **Lens 3** - What is best for the individuals involved in?

In order to maintain perceived value and influence you have to continually be able to understand and recognize the answers to these 3 questions for any given situation. If you do, then you will be able to communicate the relative value of the situation to all key stakeholders and command the level of engagement or attention required. This leads to support, trust, less time spent on answering questions, more time on achieving and freedom to act as the situation requires. Answering these questions ensures that the right things are being done by maintaining a balance of value between the intrinsic needs of the corporation down to the exigent or immediate needs of the business operations.

If synchronization is not maintained then the reverse happens. For example, let’s say we are changing out some key back-end legacy technology. We may have the full support of the executive as they understand this is a critical foundational piece to drive automation, which will eventually increase free cash flow or EBITDA. But you do not have the hearts and minds of their management as they are wrestling with budget challenges for this year. This leads to questions of priority by middle management which the executive is duty bound to answer. This requires the project team to jump through more hoops to answers questions to mollify any fear that may exist to current targets etc... The front line teams or operations need to pump out product faster today, so any talk longer then 3 months has no relevance and you will not get their attention. Yet attention is what is required to get the true requirements. Value has to be recognized and felt by all three constituencies.

The next level of complexity to synchronizing value is that any assigned value has a shelf life of only 4-6 months. This is brought upon by the different phases employees, teams or organizations go through during their job, project or strategic life cycle. There are 3 distinct phases to what I call “Developmental Churn”.

- **The Learning Phase (aka - Drinking from the fire hose)** - During this phase people value any activities that explore, uncover and measure the current situation or provide history
• **The Action Phase (aka - Want to make a difference)** - During this phase people value any activities that are action oriented like the core functions or task of a job. This includes supporting activities like planning, strategizing, recovery etc...

• **The Harvesting Phase (aka – Positioning for the next challenge)** - During this phase people value any activities that provide validation, communication, networking, sharing etc...

In order to maintain resonating value with people or groups you need to recognize the types of things that are valued in each of these phases, as well as when people or groups are going through those phases. This helps to anticipate the types of things, which will resonate and maintain attention or influence with all key stakeholders. But rarely do these phases line up between the different strata that exist in corporations. This requires you to be sending the right value message for the right phase to each level in the corporation.

The phases themselves are very straight forward. People want to learn new things when they come into a new position, apply that learning and upon making something happen move on to the next opportunity to learn and grow. So if the majority of people are new and “drinking from the fire hose” they will value more the actions of understanding things and measuring things. But, if your project is at the planning stage and looks to solidify actions then there is discord between the value of the project and the people surrounding it. People in the “Learning” stage will naturally want to slow down, then discuss and understand before considering taking action because, of course “Learning” has great value to them. Conversely, if your senior sponsors are in the “Harvesting” phase, they are looking for things that have already happened and can be leveraged. If you show up talking about all the planning your project is doing then life takes a sudden turn for the worse. Again ensuring that the value of your actions lines up with the many faces of your key stakeholders is critical.

![Job Phases Diagram](image-url)

Rarely do all levels of an organization synch up as far as what is valued.

Another of complexity is “Job Churn” this is the rate at which people progress through these phases and then moving on to their next opportunity. The length of time is significantly altered by your position or rank and...
capability. On this I have no empirical data accept from personal experience and history, but, on average, VPs assignments last 12 months before roles are changed, Senior Management is about 18 months; Front-line supervisory staff is usually 2.5 years and front line team members 4 years. These numbers can change based upon size of company and type of industry, nevertheless, by cataloguing this churn in groups of people or organizations you can begin to understand which types of things will resonate with the different constituencies and even begin to anticipate things that will be considered of value.

Developing a sophisticated approach to understanding value and maintaining a constant vigil to ensure that value is perceived correctly, is absolutely vital. It all starts from value, your support, influence; level of engagement and funding are contingent on how different parties in different phases, in different places, perceive this relative value. You will start to see that there is an order in what is seemingly a chaotic and revolving mess and even begin to anticipate those things that will be of value or priority.

**Appropriate Technology**

It appears we have lost sight of one immutable fact. Technology does not provide benefit; it is people applying technology on behalf of other people that provides that benefit. So installing the latest and greatest technology with all the bells and whistles will not provide advantage, unless the people in that business are trying to apply that technology at the level of sophistication of that technology. Yet if you look around, you see nothing but example after example of how technology has gone beyond the average person’s understanding and I dare say that at most 50% of the total capabilities of the simplest and more common available technologies like VCRs, Telephones, Coffee makers are utilized, despite years of use and even with the availability of expansive documentation.

In his book “Legacy System Transformation Strategies” William M. Ulrich explains how in order to modernize our corporate legacy systems we have to extract or decouple a lot of embedded critical business logic that is still in use today. This needs to be done in a waved based approach. The waves he described in his book line up with the different phases of understanding that business users need to go through before they can begin to see the real possibilities of change in their business. If we look at the progression of understanding that occurs in the business when you take them on a journey of exploration, experimentation and education we start to see 4
definite phases “Pen & Paper”, “Copy & Paste”, “Pave the Cow Path” and finally “Transformation”. As people or organizations start to progress through these stages it drives different problem statements, requirements, values, new behaviours, solution architectures.

The first phase is “Pen and Paper”. In this phase the business has a simplistic understanding of technology and how it can be leveraged in their business environment. They are generally looking for simplistic point solutions to solve uncomplicated but immediate business issues. They tend to talk of value in terms of return on investment or ROI. Usually with statements like “I can save x amount of money, by automating x amount of widgets”. In these cases the solutions provided tend to be very quick (2 days or 2 weeks), very cheap (less that $10,000) and simple (a web page with some basic capability). Also often times business assumptions are incorrect and these initial starts are thrown away and tried again. Over the course of several weeks 2 or 3 attempts at solving a business issue maybe delivered before the business has honed the problem statement down to exactly what needs to be fixed and the appropriate solution designed. After a series of point solutions have been delivered the business has been able to instill in their environment 3 important things. Firstly they can change their environment around them in a time frame that has meaning, second they recognize the need to standardize their naming conventions, processes or approaches in order to gain more benefit from technology and lastly they have had to re-build the ability to integrate new knowledge into the business operations at a faster rate then previously thought possible.

At some point after a number of solutions are introduced into a particular business area the business understands that it has on one hand obtained immediate value from the proliferation of these point solutions, but at the same time has also added complexity to their environment. This is when the business understanding has evolved to the next level called “Copy & Paste” for obvious reasons, as the business operations are copying and pasting information from different legacy systems or previously delivered point solutions, this drives a natural change to their “quick return on investment” focus to a “simplification or consolidation” focus. This drives new behaviours as the business begins to see how, not only changing or standardizing process in their immediate business area can they bring simplification, but by working with immediate upstream or downstream partner’s even further consolidation can occur, especially, if those partners are at the same time experiencing similar journeys through this Quick Win approach.
The third phase is called “Pave the Cow Path”. In this case we have covered that proverbial “Cow Path”, that informal or undocumented process into a more permanent roadway using the Quick Win Approach. Because this was done in partnership with the business and at their speed, it gave them the time to see the new things their business can do and in return devalue the old things being done. This unshackles the business further by now arming them with 3 new capabilities. Firstly, a better understanding of their current business environment, secondly the necessary components to initiate, integrate and validate new knowledge and lastly a better appreciation or vision of the capabilities being offered by technology. It is from this position of confidence that allows the business to consider radically altering the way their business is done or in a word, transformation of their business which is the last phase.

If we are to leverage business technology in a more effective manner then we need introduce in a similar waved approach appropriate levels of technology into the real business environment and allow people, in a safe and structured way, to apply that technology to the tangible work that is being performed. It is only through this process of application in real world settings that people can begin to visualize beneficial opportunities, understand risks and mitigate potential impacts.

**Business Knowledge Reclamation**

Why we need to reclaim old business knowledge has been well chronicled earlier in this article. The consequences of this lack of knowledge, through bad experiences with “Extreme Make Over” ventures, have re-enforced in our typical business cultures, a resistance to change. Change threatens the working but not fully understood traditional ways of operating, resulting in a low degree of tolerance to risk.

Most business operations are functioning today with a significant degree of unconscious lore that govern the smooth operations and sometimes actually creates the current challenges those operations face. These unarticulated rules can only be felt as they are experienced by the real front line operation. Only by creating a mechanism for the exploration of business process does that allow the front-line operations to uncover and reclaim these unwritten governing laws. Then they begin to rebuild the necessary expertise and confidence in understanding the business to the point of wanting to change and become equal partners in determining the acceptance and success of technology in that change.

As a simple example, smart new car buyers always ask to take the perspective car they wish to purchase home for the night to make sure it is really what they want. Initially in the showroom and even driving around near the Dealership things seemed to be good. But when they take the car home they are now experiencing it in a more realistic context. When they try to park the new car in their garage, that is when they remember the boat they have stored in there. The car is too wide. Maybe they can move the boat to the side of the house, but then the shed needs to be moved. But that is OK because they were planning to move the shed to the other side.
anyway, but of course that was only after they landscaped the front property. Just another undone thing on that growing list of chores, so do they buy the car or is the new critical requirement for purchasing a car now width?

This is a simplistic example but it is exactly the process required to encounter and validate reclaimed knowledge, complete with all the unforeseen consequences of its application.

That is why for business knowledge reclamation purposes you need the people doing the actual work to be involved in test driving these solutions, not in a simulated environment, which never fully simulates the real environment. Again with the business in control they mitigate any risk to themselves and their customers very effectively with people who are actually doing the work. The business operations through being involved in this process start to re-build the mechanisms necessary for handling more reclaimed knowledge. You start to see the concept of coaches or training primes being assigned, more and more requirements are defined in how these point solutions will manage and maintain the knowledge through living training manuals embedded in the solutions, managed by the business. You start to see the business mature its capability in the whole process of initiating, integrating, applying and finally validating new knowledge. This leads to new agility in the business place, a capacity for change and a drive for more knowledge.

Transformation an “Everyday Experience”

To me the word transformation is synonymous with revolution and I have never heard of a revolution that was started in the Palace. It has always been down in the streets with the people.

So before we go about trying to transform our business by spending lots of money on the latest technology, methodologies and industry experts, we need try a grassroots approach at transforming our people first. Use an approach that leverages the iterative application of appropriate technologies, with coaches comfortable in both technology and business, allowing us to safely explore and experiment to build new levels of understanding about the inherent properties of our current business processes and technology. Create a corporate tool that helps prepare the business community by breeding that “Can Do” attitude on daily basis, building willing partners in change and transform of their business.