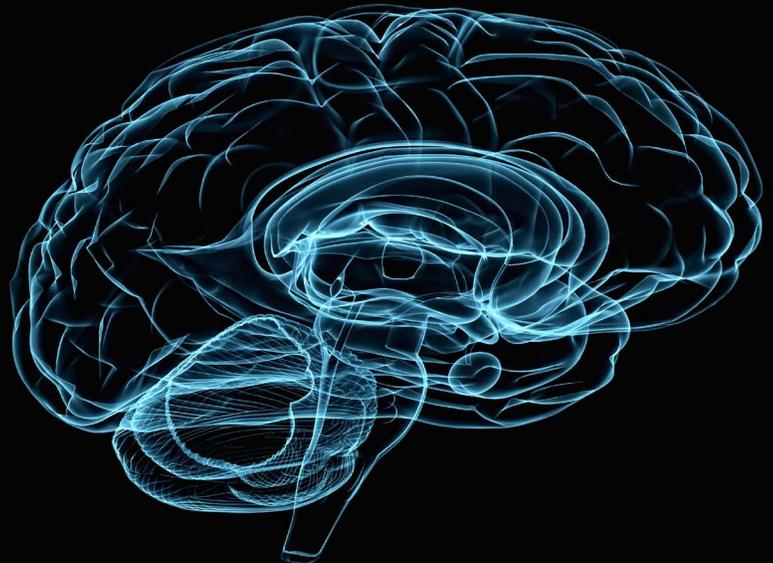


BUSINESS & THE BRAIN:

In Pursuit of Operational Excellence

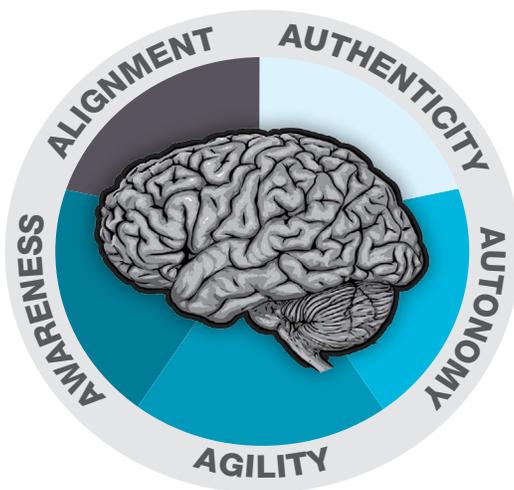
Following an organizational review and a meeting with the board, Gerhard sat down with his senior leadership team and said, “We need to reduce our costs by 10%, make **PROCESSES** more efficient, meet the demands of our clients more effectively and improve the productivity of our people. Team, what we need is an operational excellence project implemented. Times are turbulent and we need to make sure that we have the systems, processes, structure and people to continue to not just succeed, but thrive.”

Like Gerhard and his team, implementing business improvement, operational excellence or process improvement initiatives are a familiar undertaking for senior leaders and synonymous with the journey towards building efficient and sustainable businesses. However, the secret to creating sustained operational excellence has eluded even the most rigorous of operational improvement plans. This is because we fail to effectively engage people on the path to change and harness the mindsets and behaviors of individuals across the organisation. The most powerful tool that leaders have available to them to achieve operational excellence is their people. Leaders who can harness the power of the brain and understand that maximizing human capital will determine its ultimate success above all others will achieve true transformational operational excellence.



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The 5As of Operational Excellence provides leaders with the fundamental elements required for successful business improvement. The 5As are **Alignment, Authenticity, Autonomy, Agility** and **Awareness**. The critical questions to reflect on are: “How is your business performing against the 5As of Operational Excellence? Are you focusing on the right things to achieve your improvement targets?”



Alignment

Are your people united towards a common vision and do they know what success looks like?

Most mature organizations have a guiding vision, targets that need to be achieved along the way, and clearly articulated indicators of success. However, what organizations typically miss is the effective (that is – a clear, engaging and inspirational message) and consistent communication of this vision as well as a methodology to ensure individuals know how things are progressing along the way. Across the organization, people may be heard to ask: “Where are we?” and “Are we there yet?”

Creating alignment towards a vision and understanding what success looks like is critical to empowering individuals to ensure their day-to-day decisions align with the vision. Additionally, a sense of achievement, which is essential to positivity, sustained engagement and creating immunity against setbacks, is fostered. Think of the notable interaction between John F Kennedy and the janitor during a visit to NASA, when the former President asked what the janitor did. The janitor replied: “I help men get into space.”

At a basic brain level, people want to feel connected to a higher meaning and purpose; they want to know where they are going and why. When they do, the research tells us they perform better. For example, in 2011, eminent organizational behavior experts, Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer, from the Harvard School of Business reported that, based on 30 years of research, the secret to fostering amazing performance is empowering talented people to progress and succeed at work that is meaningful. Leaders who can create alignment between work tasks and organizational vision to create meaning and purpose for their employees will have a team destined to perform at their highest potential.

Authenticity

Are communications authentic across all levels of your organisation where everyone is expected to say what they mean?

Nothing fosters greater trust in leaders than when they are open, honest and genuine in their communications, demonstrate an enduring commitment to their purpose, live their values consistently and establish strong and positive relationships with their team. For authenticity to permeate the organization, it has to start with this level of authentic communication across all levels of leadership. In fact, our brains are hardwired to detect inauthentic behavior in others and it has a strong preference for honesty; so when we fail to be authentic, it is detrimental to organizational engagement and performance in the long run. When an organization operates with a high level of authenticity, and therefore trust, individuals are more likely to embrace change, collaborate, choose to weather adversity and honestly confront challenges together. Has your organization got the level of authenticity required to achieve operational excellence?

Autonomy

Is your structure and leadership model supportive of autonomy and innovative thinking?

Recent advances in neuroscience tell us that the degree of control, or otherwise, that an individual feels over their environment is a significant factor in their ability to function to their highest potential. Organizations that establish a structure and leadership philosophy to support autonomy such as minimizing hierarchy,

allowing people to organize their own work day and collaborate rather than be micro-managed, will create empowered teams. Individuals who feel empowered to make their own decisions, problem solve creatively and are given plenty of latitude to make choices and mistakes are less stressed and higher performing than those who are not given the same freedom. Leaders who understand this dynamic are most effective in engaging team members' best talents and consistently breed efficient and productive teams – ultimately fostering a culture of excellence.

Agility

How well does your organisation harness and respond to change and setbacks?

A hallmark of operational excellence is the capacity of an organization to adapt rapidly to changes in the business environment in productive and cost effective ways. While this is the traditional view of agility, many businesses fail the agility test. Why? Because the essence of agility actually lies within an individual's capacity to respond to changes – and this is often overlooked. For organizations to be agile, they need to develop capabilities around resilience, innovation and effective risk-taking behavior. Additionally, they need to overcome unhelpful thinking patterns and fear frames in their people to develop a mindset in their team that can embrace change.

Too often, we hear that change is daunting, that people don't like change and that change is difficult. We could liken this with the thinking patterns of the 1970's where people considered zero harm in the workplace as impossible, or safety as a cost to a business. Over time, such mindsets have changed and we have seen significant improvements over time in workplace safety. While change can be frightening, it is also possible, desirable and is a primary driver of reaching excellence. We call this the paradox of change. It is the organizations that help their people reframe their attitude to change that will flourish with innovation and productivity gains. Think of the late Steve Jobs. This was a man who defined the need to remain agile in the face of adversity and to see the opportunity in what others would see as failure. Steve is not alone in this mind set. How many of today's (and yesterday's) world leaders can you reflect upon that defined the need to see failure as the path to success, regardless of the prevailing attitudes around them and barriers to change they faced?

Awareness

Do your people understand what drives them, their potential and their capacity to use their brain?

One of the most powerful jobs a leader has is to help their team and organization realize and attain their highest potential. The latest advances in the psychology of excellence tells us that individuals who have a high degree of self-awareness are more able to self-monitor, independently adjust their behaviour when required, and recognize and overcome obstacles to ultimately fulfil their own potential. We have traditionally relied upon scheduled performance reviews and out-dated paperwork to try and encourage this form of self-awareness in both leaders and their team members. It hasn't worked and the scepticism has set in. We need to redefine our approach to the fostering of self-awareness.

Creating opportunities for increased self-awareness, through spontaneous reflection opportunities, quality "brain-based" assessment tools, ownership over discreet projects, stretch assignments and a knowledgebase of how the brain functions in the workplace is the key to fostering optimal human potential and subsequently, operational excellence.

So, is your business on track to outperform all others? Are you positioned to achieve sustained and transformational business improvement through Alignment, Authenticity, Autonomy, Agility and Awareness? Founded upon the neuroscience and psychology of human behaviour, the 5As provides leaders with the pathway to maximizing human capital and ultimately, the foundation of achieving operational excellence.



is an award winning global business dedicated to achieving safety and operational excellence in the workplace. Focused on creating sustainable organizational change, we solve our clients' most critical business challenges and believe that the brain is our most important change and performance tool. With this fundamental idea, Sentis partners with organizations to enhance safety, operational excellence, leadership & corporate wellbeing. We do this through diagnosis and assessment, training programs, and customized solutions to enhance the performance of leaders, teams and organizations.

Eric Michrowski

Eric is a globally recognized leader in combining Human Performance, Operational Excellence and Process Improvement to drive Business Transformations that achieve substantial shifts in Customer Experience, Operational Reliability, Employee Engagement and Financial Performance.

Combining elements of Organizational Development and Change Management, his approach is anchored in over 15 years of hands-on experience in a blend of Operations Management and Management Consulting roles across Financial Services, Telecommunications/IT, Airlines and Logistics.

In addition to leading operational portfolios, transformational programs and consulting teams, his experience ranges from leading a highly successful business turnaround in Investment Banking, a large Customer Experience transformation within a Contact Center, a global safety portfolio through a material reduction in injury rates and key post-merger integration functions.

He is a highly sought after public speaker, conference chair and Executive speaker on the global scene and has received several international awards both personally and for the teams he has led including Top Global Deployment Leader in Process Excellence (2012), Top 10 Best Places to Work in Process Excellence (2010), Honourable Mention for Best Process Excellence Deployment (2013).

He holds a Bachelors in Laws and a Lean Six Sigma Master Black Belt.

Dale Lawrence

Dale is a ten-year veteran of driving Lean and operational excellence across a wide range of businesses and has held Continuous Improvement Leadership roles at both London Drugs and TELUS. His extensive experience in driving process transformation includes success in supply chain, retail operations, telecommunications, procurement, call centers and construction organizations. His award-winning work has been recognized at the Process Excellence (PEX) awards as the Best Project (2012). Dale's Lean Redesign approach has been described, as not only the perfect combination of creativity and logic but grounded in an outside-in, common sense approach with the customer in mind. What sets his success apart is the speed that great work is done.

As a skilled Lean Redesign and Lean Six Sigma Black Belt, Dale applies a business outcome focus. Through a unique and highly successful rapid assessment and implementation approach, Dale's teams have redesigned retail-ordering processes, aligned service procurement methods and changed how a call center serves its' customers. By blending multiple process methodologies, Dale applies expert-level skills to solve complex problems. He collaborates across stakeholders to unlock common sense solutions, fast. Dale speaks, blogs and writes articles on process excellence among other topics.

