

Successful Re-engineering.

“Seven ingredients for success”



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In today's business environment of technology convergence, rapid development cycles, price sensitivity and increased competition, more and more companies are trying to boost their performance with different forms of process improvement or business process re-engineering. All of these activities are motivated by the need either to retain or gain competitive advantage, in a world in which your good

competitors are adapting and changing as rapidly as your own company!

The content of re-engineering work has been summarized by Hammer as:

- Understanding the old process and customer requirements so as to recognize the weaknesses of the existing process and the performance demanded of the new one.
- Inventing a new process design that shatters long-held assumptions.
- Constructing the new process, including fleshing out the full details of its operation, developing its implications for all aspects of the organization, training people and building requisite information systems.
- Selling the new way of working and living to the organization as a whole.

There are seven essential ingredients to successfully accomplish a successful re-engineering exercise and an even greater number of elements that are nice-to-have. For the purposes of this brief essay, I will concentrate on the essentials.

1) Strong Leadership

It is axiomatic that re-engineering can only succeed if it is driven from the top. Middle management has too much vested in the status quo to be a consistently successful proponent of re-engineering. The leader must have a clear vision of what the company could be, how its processes could best work; the leader must be able to communicate and motivate across functions and many times without formal line authority; and finally a strong leader will have the ability and have (or be given) the authority to make things happen.

If all these elements are in place, strong leadership will ensure that the re-engineering process is focused and remains balanced: over the short and long term: between costs and benefits: and between the needs of the company, its employees and other stakeholders.

2) Process Identification & Understanding

It is self evident that before you can embark on process reengineering you must first identify the processes to be tackled! Certainly many projects go awry by not clearly identifying the appropriate processes for change. Certainly too, it is necessary to understand the processes, how else could they be redesigned successfully? However in our experience, this understanding should be at a fairly high level, it should be more concerned with the “what” and the “why”. Companies need to be wary of too deep an analysis into the “how” of individual processes. Although there is a comfort factor in a full analysis, there is a danger of becoming so bogged in the detail of yesterday, that you lose the will to look up and see the potential of tomorrow. We all need to remember the danger of the paralysis of analysis.

3) High quality, cross functional teams

The requirements of a re-engineering team are different from a more standard project team. The latter generally has well defined goals and a clear plan going forward. Re-engineering teams are on a voyage of discovery, it is an ambiguous voyage one in which ideas must be formulated and tested before all the facts are available. Accordingly re-engineering teams need to have a different profile to project teams. Reengineers need to have a process orientation and a holistic perspective; a restless creativity and design skills; they need the internal enthusiasm and optimism to keep going, coupled with the persistence and tact to convert others to their point of view; and finally they need a full set of interpersonal, teamwork and communication skills!

4) Aim for genuine breakthroughs

Successful re-engineering requires radical ideas about process design. Creative thinking must be encouraged, not be drenched in cold water! A radical idea can too easily be drowned at birth; it needs to be nurtured for a while to determine its ongoing impact on the business. If allowed to develop fully, you will find that you create radical solutions to problems that your predecessors thought to be unsolvable.



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5) Re-engineer quickly

If you don't achieve quick results, say within one year, you will lose momentum; as you lose momentum, your support will be eroded. To achieve quick and tangible results reengineering teams must remain focused and must resist the temptation to continually broaden the scope of the project. It is vital that the re-engineering project is seen to be successful as soon as possible; otherwise the forces of inertia will smother the activity.

6) Develop an Implementation Plan

Linked to the need to re-engineer quickly, it is important to adopt the right style of implementation. It is not possible to establish a deeply detailed analytical implementation plan for a re-engineering project, plans needs to be much more fluid, improvisational and iterative. If there is an opportunity for an immediate positive impact on performance, that opportunity should be taken; it will create positive momentum and confidence in the future. The only way to reengineer is to *do* it, not just think about it, or plan it or discuss it!

7) Attend to the diverse needs of all interested parties

Not everyone will embrace change readily, some will need reassurance others will need to be told the answer to the "What's-in-it-for-me?" question. Any successful reengineering effort must take into account the individual needs of those it will affect. The new process must offer benefits to the very people who are being asked to change. The transition from old to new must be undertaken with sensitivity, bolstered often by innovative bonus and remuneration packages that reward those who tackle the required changes positively.

These are our seven key ingredients for success; if you have them all then your business stands a much greater chance of successfully re-engineering its key processes to the benefit of all stake-holders.

Sadly there can be no absolute guarantees, but at least the odds will be in your favour!

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