

Beware the Fad

MBO, TQM, EVA, B2B, BPR, EI, P2P, ABC, JIT – an alphabet soup of management ‘fads’ and that’s before you even get to the main course of Six Sigma, Balanced Scorecard, Supply Chain Management, Kaizen, Mentoring, 360 degree reviews etc, etc, etc.

Don’t get me wrong, by describing the above as fads I’m not suggesting they are of no use and should be ignored. Not at all. Many of those management tools and techniques mentioned above bring extremely positive benefits to organizations if they are utilized for the appropriate purpose and are implemented correctly. In this regard correct diagnosis of the specific problem or opportunity is critical. In the same way you cannot hope to heal a broken leg with a dose of Aspirin, implementing a Kaizen programme is unlikely to greatly assist an ailing organization needing a severe shake-up.



Fashions in management appear to change as quickly as those seen on the cover of Vogue and it is apparent that new fads attract an increased amount of cynicism. Indeed given some of the more recent corporate shake-ups (James Hardie, Enron, Worldcom etc.), a shift towards basic corporate principles can be seen including greater focus upon corporate governance, fundamental business practices and the ‘bottom-line’. A ‘back to basics’ philosophy is something that can benefit all organisations from time to time.

In assessing the needs of your organisation, before reaching for the prescribed solutions of the latest fad, try addressing the following questions:

1. What are you trying to achieve? Is there something inherently ‘wrong’ within your organisation that requires fixing or is there an opportunity you wish to pursue? Be absolutely clear on what you want.
2. Can the process of achieving your objective benefit by utilising an appropriate management tool or technique (note how I have stopped calling them fads....)? Remember, one-size never fits-all and it is fundamentally important you chose the correct tool for the task at hand.
3. Do you or your organisation have the necessary skills to correctly implement the process you have chosen? If not, beware! Many great intentions never achieve the required results due to poor implementation. A six sigma black belt does not achieve such exalted status by merely reading a “10 Steps to Six Sigma” book.

So, if one of the many management techniques (that word again) does enthuse you, learn as much as you can about it – read books, trawl the internet, speak to colleagues, suppliers, customers or competitors who you know have implemented such a programme. It is incredibly valuable to be able to learn from the successes, and failures, of others.

Equally, upon implementation, beware of the Homer Simpson management philosophy - “If at first you don’t succeed, give up!” Re-examine your motives and if you still truly believe in your course of action, persevere. Changing ships in mid stream will only

accentuate the cynical 'fad' mentality and will finally close the door shut to the utilisation of other, potentially very valuable, management tools.

Cheers

Cam Charlton – Director

KLEINHARDT
BUSINESS CONSULTANTS
cam@kleinhardt.com.au