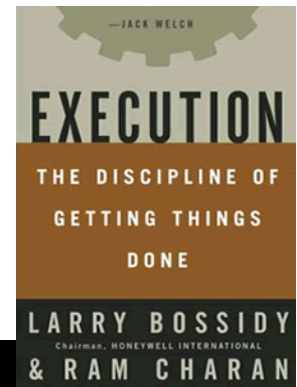# EXECUTION

THE DISCIPLINE OF GETTING THINGS DONE

An Executive Book Summary by Jennifer Haywood　　　　　**07/04/15**

The Gap Nobody Knows

According to authors, Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan, there is a big gap that many people do not know about in the running of major organizations. It lies between what a leader wants to achieve and the ability of the organization to achieve it. Too often a leader's great ideas and innovations fall flat because they are not properly executed. *Execution* is the major job of a leader and needs to be a part of an organization's strategies and goals.

The Authors

Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan stated that people are able to explain what *execution* means but many do not know or are unable to explain *how* to execute. Execution - The Discipline of Getting Things Done clearly defines just what is *execution* and how to achieve it in order to have competitive advantage. The authors provided many practical examples from cooperate businesses in order to illustrate just how to achieve an effective culture of *execution*.

According to the authors, *execution* is built on three building blocks. Once these blocks are in place, a foundation is created for operating and managing effectively the three core processes of any business: people, strategy and operations.

Execution is not an easy task but the authors break it down with practical advice and easy to follow steps. Leaders need to build *execution* into their organization's strategy, goals and culture. It is a set of behaviors and techniques that once mastered give them a competitive advantage.
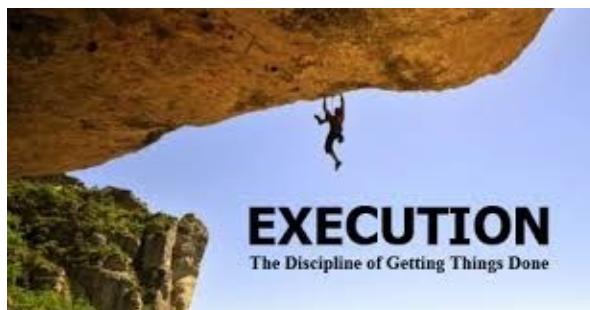
"No company can deliver on its commitments or adapt well to change unless all leaders practice the discipline of execution at all levels."

-Larry Bossidy & Ram Charan

Three Key Points to Better Understand *Execution*:

1. *Execution* is a discipline

It is the organization's ability to execute their strategies; this includes identifying the hows and whats, questioning, following through and ensuring accountability. The heart of ***execution*** lies in three core processes: people, strategy and operations. These must all be connected and visible to everyone as this is "where the things that matter about execution need to be decided" (p. 23).

2. *Execution* is a major job of the business leader

Leaders need to be "intimately and intensely involved" (p. 23) and are in charge of getting things done by running the three core processes.

3. *Execution* has to be in the culture

Everyone needs to understand and practice the discipline of ***execution*** and be involved in order for meaningful cultural change.

Three Core Processes of *EXECUTION*

The Three Core Processes

1. People
2. Strategy
3. Operations

The three core processes play an integral part of **execution**. Organizations usually include all three processes but they are often used separately. If ***execution*** is to be affective, they need to be used together and tightly connected.

Bossidy and Charan introduced these processes briefly at the start of the book and dedicate whole chapters to them at the end of the book.
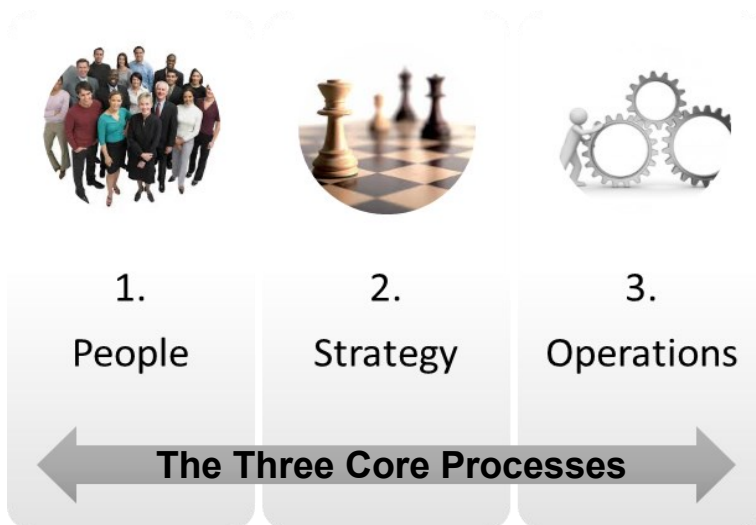
1. The People Process ⟹ tells us who's going to get it there

The people process is the most important out of the three; it links the other two and if it is not in place then the other two will not work. The people process evaluates individuals accurately and makes sure that the right people are in the right jobs.

2. The Strategy Process ⟹ defines where a business wants to go

The strategy process "defines a business's direction and positions it to move in that direction." (p. 178).

3. The Operations Process ⟹ provides the path for the people to get there

It is focused on the operating plan which links strategy and people to get results.

What makes an effective leader?

Building Block One:

The Leader's Seven Essential Behaviors

There are seven essential behaviors that form the first building block of **execution**:

- **Know your people and your business:** "Leaders have to live their businesses" (p. 57). It is important for leaders to be where the action is and to be engaged. Leaders must be consistent, present and be able to connect with people.
- **Insist on realism:** It is important for leaders to be realistic and upfront about what is going on in the organization, even the weaknesses.
- **Set clear goals and priorities:** The focus needs to be on a few clear and simple goals. Leaders need to be able to explain them easily so that others can understand and act on them.
- **Follow through:** A major problem of **execution** is when no one follows through on the goals.
- **Reward the doers:** In order to produce results, you need to reward those that achieve results. In order to create a culture of **execution**, you need to everyone to know that rewards and respect are based on performance.
- **Expand people's capabilities:** Leaders can achieve results and leave a legacy by coaching others and expanding their capabilities. It is done through a process of questioning and asking others to think and search for new and better ways in a trusting and honest way.
- **Know yourself:** It is said that "leading an organization requires strength of character" (p. 78). It is important to develop *emotional fortitude* and understand your own strengths and weaknesses. This will give you the strength and confidence to deal with what comes your way.

Emotional Fortitude

Emotional fortitude is the foundation of people skills and comes from self-discovery and self-mastery. It is when a leader can build on his or her strengths and weaknesses. Leaders are faced with challenges that test their emotional strength every day. If these challenges are not met, then the desired outcomes will not be achieved. *Emotional fortitude* is also important when thinking about the people in the organization. Emotional weakness will destroy both the leader and eventually the organization. There are four core qualities that make up emotional fortitude:

AUTHENTICITY

SELF-AWARENESS

SELF-MASTERY

HUMILITY

Building Block Two:

Creating the Framework for Cultural Change

The second building block of **execution** is to create the framework for cultural change. If the business isn't doing well it is important to "think about how to change the corporate culture" (p. 85). Leaders need to make changes with the hardware (structure and strategies) but also to the software (beliefs and behaviors). Bossidy and Charan developed a simple reality based framework to get things done. It is designed to "change people's behavior so that they produce results" (p.86). First you make sure that the desired results are clearly stated, you discuss how to get those results, provide extra support and coaching if they are not achieved and if needed people are let go and others are rewarded if the results are achieved.

Operationalizing Culture

The culture of an organization is a combination of its values, beliefs and behaviors. When looking at creating or changing culture most people think that it is the values of the organization that need changing. But it is the beliefs that influence the behaviors that need to be changed. For example if people believe that people will get the same reward for doing less work, then no one will push themselves to so more work. It is the behaviors that become the actions that then show the results.

There are 4 keys to creating the type of behavior that supports a culture driven by *execution*:

4 KEYS
CREATING BEHAVIORS THAT DRIVE EXECUTION-DRIVEN CULTURE

1

Linking Rewards to Performance

The culture of a business defines what gets appreciated and what gets rewarded. "If a company rewards and promotes people for *execution*, its culture will change" (p. 92).

2

The Social Software of Execution

An organization can be thought of in two parts: the software and the hardware. The software consists of the social system which is made up of people, beliefs and behaviors. The hardware of the organization consists of strategy and structure. Both need to exist to function.

Problems with rewards:
-Ram believed that people often lacked the *emotional fortitude* to give honest feedback, and would either withhold or penalize instead
-performance assessment needs to be based on collected information on behavior and performance criteria and needs to be honest
-need to reward strong achievement but also the desirable behavior

A key component to the social software is the *Social Operating Mechanisms*. These are the formal and informal meetings that take place, or simple put it is anywhere that dialogue takes place. They are integrative and practiced consistently so they become the *Social Operating System* of the organization, this is what drives the culture. It creates consistent framework needed to create common ways of thinking, behaving and doing.

The Importance of Robust Dialogue

Robust dialogue makes an organization effective in gathering information, understanding the information and reshapes it in order to make new decisions. This dialogue is needed to have an *execution*-driven culture. It is important to go in with an open mind in order to listen, make contributions and at the end decide on commitments.

"Formality suppresses dialogue; informality encourages it" (p. 103).

Leaders get the Behavior They Exhibit and Tolerate

In order to build culture, leaders need to create and reinforce the social software. They need to model the desired behaviors and take part in the robust dialogue. It is their own behavior that reinforces the beliefs and behaviors that they want to create in order to develop their culture of *execution*.

"Success in executing a cultural change depends first and foremost on having the right people."

- Larry Bossidy & Ram Charan

Building Block Three:
Having the Right People in the Right Place

In the world of organizations it is unpredictable and there are many uncertainties. The one thing that leaders can control is the quality of their people. Leaders need to understand the importance of *selecting and evaluating* their people but still many do not do a good job. They do not dedicate enough time to the selection and evaluation of people and they do not think about who are the right people for the job. As a result, quite often the wrong people are hired and weak performers are not dealt with. Successful businesses have leaders who are focused on the *selection and evaluation* of their people.

PEOPLE

WHY THE RIGHT *PEOPLE* AREN'T IN THE RIGHT JOBS?

"The foundation of a great company is the way it develops *people*."

-Larry Bossidy & Ram Charan

LACK OF KNOWLEDGE
- leaders often focus on the wrong criteria; they need to understand the job requirements in order to hire successfully
- leaders need specific examples about the *people* applying

LACK OF COURAGE
- leaders lack the emotional fortitude to confront and take decisive action with *people* that don't perform well

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL COMFORT FACTOR
- leaders promote the wrong *people* because they have developed a sense of loyalty or have become too comfortable

LACK OF PERSONAL COMMITMENT
- leaders know that there is a problem with their staff but do nothing to fix it
- leaders need to commit as much as 40% to selecting, appraising and developing *people*

A GOOD LEADER...

inspires, develops strategies and has a vision but is too often hired based on their educational and intellectual abilities. It is important to ask can this person get the job done, can they execute the plans and the visions….is he or she a doer?

What does a good leader do?

They energize people…

A good leader can create energy and energize people and will likely hire people like that too.

They're decisive on tough issues…

A good leader has the emotional fortitude to be decisive.

They get things done through others...

A good leader is able to get things done through others and benefit from the talents of their people.

They follow through...

A good leader follows through to make sure that all commitments are being carried out.

"You can easily spot the doers by observing their working habit. They're the ones who energize people, are decisive on tough issues, get things done through others, and follow through as second nature."

-Larry Bossidy & Ram Charan

Decisiveness is the ability to make tough decisions in a timely matter and then act on them.

How to Get the Right People in the Right Jobs

HIRING (external)	ASSESSMENT (internal)
⇒ during an interview, need to create a whole picture of a candidate	⇒ good assessment looks at how a person has met their commitments
⇒ important to ask questions to find our about accomplishments, how they think and what their goals	⇒ there needs to be honest feedback so that person can learn and grow
⇒ Bossidy looked for signs of enthusiasm for execution and verified their references directly, this takes time and persistence to really get a good picture	⇒ Bossidy believed a good assessment looks at what person does well and what they need to do better
	⇒ needs to be done in context of the job
	⇒ leader needs to meet and discuss the appraisal as well as discuss future actions

The People Process

The people process is the most important of the three processes as it links the other two; it's the people that define the strategies and makes them operational. If you don't get the people process right, the business will not succeed.

This process achieves three goals:
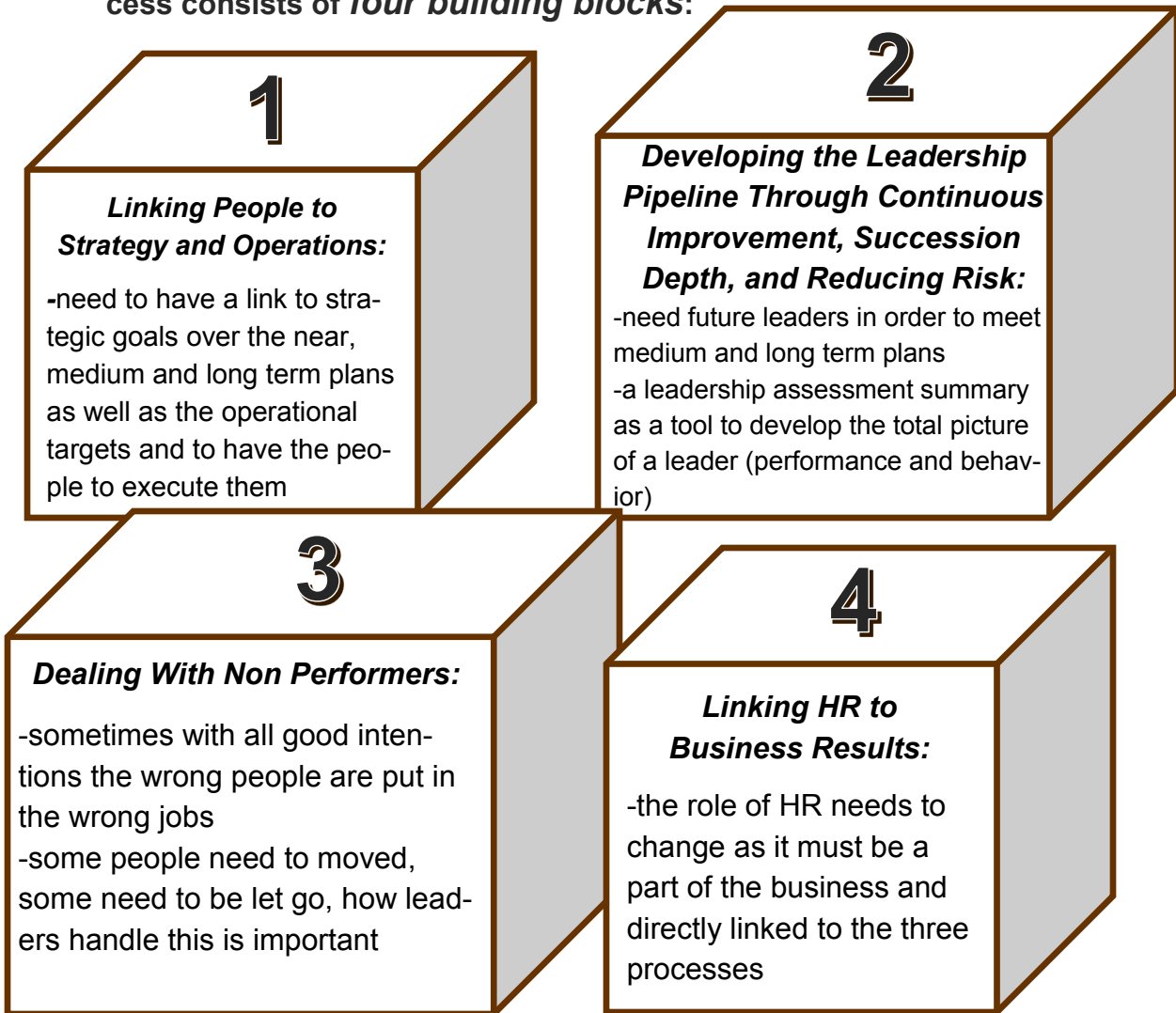
Strategy ⟷ Operations

-evaluates people in an accurate way and in depth

-develops and identifies leadership talents in order to execute strategies

-creates leaders in order to have a good succession plan

Few companies are able to accomplish all three goals; they focus too much on the present instead of the future.

In order to accomplish these goals, the people process consists of *four building blocks*:

1

Linking People to Strategy and Operations:

-need to have a link to strategic goals over the near, medium and long term plans as well as the operational targets and to have the people to execute them

2

Developing the Leadership Pipeline Through Continuous Improvement, Succession Depth, and Reducing Risk:

-need future leaders in order to meet medium and long term plans
-a leadership assessment summary as a tool to develop the total picture of a leader (performance and behavior)

3

Dealing With Non Performers:

-sometimes with all good intentions the wrong people are put in the wrong jobs
-some people need to moved, some need to be let go, how leaders handle this is important

4

Linking HR to Business Results:

-the role of HR needs to change as it must be a part of the business and directly linked to the three processes

The Strategy Process

People   Operations

A strategic plan comes from the minds of the people and "defines a business's direction and positions it to move in that direction" (p. 178). It is important for the plan to address the *hows* of executing the plan. It is linked to the people by having the right people in place to execute the plan and to the operational plan so that all the parts are working and moving in the right order.

Building the Strategic Plan

The strategic plan identifies the direction of the company in clearly defined terms. It needs to look at it's present situation, where it will be going in the future and how it will get there. In order to be effective, it must be built and owned by the people who will execute the plan. The leader is in charge and knows the organization the best; they are best prepared to add the details and develop action plans as well as the ability to deal with any issues.

> **"A good strategic plan is a set of directions you want to take. It's a roadmap, lightly filled in, so that it gives you plenty of room to maneuver. You get specific when you're deciding the action part of the plan, where you link it with people and operations."**
>
> **-Larry Bossidy**

QUESTIONS FOR A STRATEGIC PLAN

-a strong plan addresses these questions

What is the assessment of the external environment?

-look at the environment around them and understand it

What are the important milestones for executing the plan?

-make sure the business meets its goals and adapts the plan if necessary

Are the short term and long term balanced?

-make sure everyone knows what to do in between plans

What is the best way to grow the business profitable, and what are the obstacles to growth?

-one best way to do this is market segment planning

Can the business execute the strategy?

-know your capabilities

How will the business make money on a sustainable basis?

-how will business make money now and in the future

How well do you understand the existing customers and markets?

-look at the needs and buying behavior of the customers

Who is the competition?

-don't miss the emergence of new competitors

What are the critical issues facing the business?

-every business needs to address its critical issues

How does a leader conduct a strategy review?

-it needs to be inclusive and interactive

-there needs to be solid debate with robust dialogue where people are involved

-it needs to be a creative process with clear outcomes

-it needs to clarify and confirm the agreements and there needs to be follow through

-it needs to establish the links between all three processes as well as discuss growth and new products

> **"The strategy review is also a good place for a leader to learn about and develop people." (p. 209)**

The Operations Process

People   Strategy

The final process is the operations; an operating plan focuses on the specifics of operating and executing on a short-term time scale. This is where all of the parts of the organization are aligned, and where the strategy and people are linked. It provides the path for the people and breaks long term output into short-term goals.   The plan includes all of the things that a business will complete in one year such as earnings, sales, margins and cash-flow. People involved take part in debates on assumptions in order to set realistic goals. Once all assumptions have been considered, the operating plan can be built. This involves setting key targets, developing action plans and getting agreement and closure from all participants.

EXECUTION

...in Education

Execution in education is as important as it is in business. Many of these same practices and steps can be applied to the world of education. Where the goal in business is to create profit and a successful business; in education our profit is student learning our business is our students. In implementing strategies across all processes, one can't help but imagine the benefits that it would lead to in the success of our students.

The leader or in this case principal is in charge of managing the three core processes. Let's begin with the most important, the people process. There has been more effort in examining how we get the right people in the right jobs. Unlike in a business where people can be fired or moved to another job, in education once a teacher is hired it is quite often a 30 year investment to the school division. Leaders need to understand the importance of taking the time to hire the right people through the interview process and by assessment. Getting to know new applicants, their strengths, abilities and speaking to them as well as their references. Using an assessment practice to look at all aspects of their teaching before offer-permanent contract. This information helps to build a better understanding of the applicant.

The strategic plan is the next process. While the principal owns the plan for the school; it is in the best interest of the plan to have all stakeholders involved: the staff and community. It needs to be written in detail to explain how teachers plan to achieve the goals. Staff also need to know the plan, their exact roles and feel like it is important a part of their day to day job; it can not be an extra. Individual school plans align with their division and then with the ministry of Education; this alignment is important and outlines the long term goals. It is about understanding our customers or students their needs and building from there. Unlike in the business world where we might see other schools as competition, a school or division might work together to create the best plan with everyone having the same goal of success in students no matter what school or community.

Finally the principal then works within this plan to oversee the day to day operations. What does he or she need to do to support those teachers to accomplish it, buying materials within a budget, assuring student data collection and managing teacher collaborative groups to ensure best teaching practices. The principal monitors and keeps everyone on the path to achieve the years goals.

In order for student success, a lot rides on the right people, how strategies are set up and the day to day operations. All of this takes commitment, time, and most importantly *execution*.

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