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Top 10 Strategy Execution Trends for 2016 Released

Flatter, leaner organizations; impact of “design thinking”; and millennials’ effect on leadership major themes, according to TwentyEighty Strategy Execution experts

ARLINGTON, Va. (Jan. 21, 2016) – The Top Ten Strategy Execution Trends for 2016 were released today by TwentyEighty Strategy Execution. This year’s trends fall under the theme of understanding and communicating the strategic picture.

Whether it’s experimenting with leaner, flatter organizational structures in a drive to accelerate responses to shifting external factors; leveraging design thinking to solve every day problems as well as innovation challenges; or the impact millennials are having on how organizations lead successfully, winners in 2016 will have a well-defined and communicated strategy. Importantly they will also work to clear the path to successfully execute the work required to achieve it. Full details on the trends, including a free infographic, can be found at strategyex.com/2016-stratex-trends.

“Our Strategy Execution Trends for 2016 reflect how smart organizations are coping with the ever increasing complex and ambiguous environment we all must operate within,” said Tim Wasserman, Chief Learning Officer at TwentyEighty Strategy Execution and Program Director, Stanford Advanced Project Management Program. “Achieving strategy seems to be just as important as ever, and yet too many organizations continue to commit the same mistakes. In many ways, this year’s trends urge leaders to step back and look beyond strategy to how they are connecting it to their workforces, constituents and the work that needs to be done to realize strategic success.”

AGILE IS EVOLVING ENTERPRISE-WIDE

Agile is seeping into every aspect of the organization. Once firmly embedded in the IT department, Agile practices can now be found in the legal, marketing and HR departments and elsewhere. The need for speed is forcing companies to change the way they do business. As a result, Agile adoption is growing. Smart organizations that have adopted Agile methodologies find that enterprise-wide agility is about questioning routines and identifying opportunities. But while Agile practices are being steadily adopted, organizations either still react so slowly that they can’t seize opportunities or mitigate emerging threats (29 percent), or react quickly but lose sight of company strategy (24 percent), according to a recent study in the Harvard Business Review.

EXECUTIVES RECOGNIZE THE NEED FOR EXPERIENCED PM’S

Demand for experienced project managers and leaders is growing faster than the market can supply them. According to a recent TwentyEighty Strategy Execution Project Manager Salary and Talent study, 83 percent of project organizations reported that they were understaffed, with 44 percent of the open positions for senior project professionals. These numbers will continue to rise as demand for talent in the marketplace grows. For this reason, leadership should focus on avoiding the financially driven war for talent, and instead commit to long-term investment in talent by “up skilling” existing talent.

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THE STATE OF ORGANIZATION IS MOVING TOWARD FLAT AND LEAN

Smart organizations are finding a balance between hierarchy, bureaucracy and innovation by pushing decision making out to the edge. Given this dynamic change in the business environment, organizations are dumping the old post-industrial model of how work gets done and becoming flat and lean. To be flat and lean, today's leaders need to be less top-down and more collaborative and inspirational at all levels in order to drive strategy execution and alignment within their organizations.

MILLENNIALS ARE CHANGING LEADERSHIP

Millennials are becoming the dominant demographic in the workplace. They are redefining "effective leadership" and how organizations engage with this segment of the workforce. According to a recent Deloitte survey, Millennials place less value on visible (19 percent), well-networked (17 percent), and technically-skilled (17 percent) leaders. Instead, they define true leaders as strategic thinkers (39 percent), inspirational (37 percent), personable (34 percent) and visionary (31 percent). Smart companies are adapting to this workforce shift.

INTERDEPENDENCIES: SILO WALLS ARE GROWING THINNER

When asked to identify the single greatest challenge to executing their company's strategy, 30 percent of managers cite failure to coordinate across units, making that a close second to failure to align (40 percent). They also say they're three times more likely to miss performance commitments because of insufficient support from other units than because of their own teams' failure to deliver, according to a recent study in the Harvard Business Review. To address this common challenge, smart organizations are eliminating layers of management and creating networks of teams. It's no longer about your "department," but your "team," which is made up of people from various areas inside and even outside of the organization who bring different skills and come together to achieve a common goal.

DESIGN THINKING IS PERMEATING PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND BEYOND

Historically, IT, strategy and product development have been cast as owning innovation. Today, smart organizations encourage innovation at all levels, meaning everyone should look at what they do and ask how they can iterate and innovate, even on a small scale. It occurs when we look for opportunities to get more feedback from customers and observe how they are using products and services. Gaining insights by rapidly prototyping and testing ideas before developing extensive plans is another way to innovate, learn from mistakes and improve. Continuing to develop and foster an environment where people are allowed to question the way it always has been done and take risks has powerful implications. This is design thinking, which drives innovation.

BIG DATA WILL DRIVE COMPLEXITY

There is no shortage of data today. The challenge is what organizations can do with the deluge of information to make better decisions faster. Tying back to complexity, smart organizations are identifying how to best simplify information to have people understand and buy into new ideas. Forward-thinking organizations create more transparency around business decisions. They create the right tools and systems and ways of thinking about data to effectively mine what they have and apply it.

CONTINUOUS LACK OF GOVERNANCE HAMPERED BY LACK OF RESOURCES

Governance failures are a key place in which strategy execution alignment falls down, yet not many organizations are willing to admit it. All too often, “go – no go” decisions are seemingly made at random without consideration for resource requirements. Proper governance requires transparency into the complete portfolio process, including resource allocation and decision-making criteria. Organizations that can balance their desire for growth and change against their available resources will continue to outpace their competition.

PMOs ARE BECOMING STRATEGIC PARTNERS

Because there is a real drive for project professionals to think more strategically and holistically about the organization and their objectives, PM leadership, including PMOs, will advocate for a more strategic role within the organization. The PMO should ensure the execution is aligned with strategy. Forward-thinking organizations have already elevated the PMO to that role. Those that are successful have a strategic mind-set in the services they provide and can clearly demonstrate how they exhibit their value.

BUSINESS ANALYSIS (BA) IS BEING ELEVATED

Like the PMO, business analysts have an enormous impact on an organization’s strategy execution. As a result, leaders must embrace the BA’s role and elevate it to communicator and facilitator, going beyond just gathering requirements. The benefit is that employees across the organizational chart can contribute to the development of project portfolios and deliver business benefits that the organization needs. Smart companies empower BAs to play a bigger part in the strategy execution alignment role.

TwentyEighty Strategy Execution assembled a panel of experts and senior executives from around the world to compile the Top Ten Strategy Execution Trends for 2016.

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About TwentyEighty Strategy Execution

It takes people and performance to profit. At Strategy Execution, a TwentyEighty Inc. company, we deliver performance education that closes the strategy execution gap by strengthening peoples’ strategic and project execution capabilities to drive higher performance. By combining the best of cutting-edge university research and proven business techniques, we deliver a performance-focused perspective designed to increase alignment and engagement across teams, business units or the entire enterprise. Learn more today at strategyex.com.

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