



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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Winning Thoughts

For once group think works...

The combination of intelligence, talent and skills in organizations is futile unless harnessed effectively. The task of getting the best from employees rests primarily with the leaders. Effective leadership takes advantage of the competitive advantage that collective thought processes of individuals in an organization provide. 'Best thinking,' as experts call it, is the ability of leaders to draw from the thinking abilities of individual managers and employees and aligning them to meet the corporate objectives.

Best thinking, though a much talked about phenomenon, is rarely witnessed in corporate settings. Most leaders work through individualized talent pools rather than using compounded knowledge pools of employees across the organization. Best thinking, if used effectively, can provide a definite competitive advantage.

Its impact on organizational success can be better understood when one closely analyzes its properties. Inherently a catalyst, best thinking can affect the pace and efficiency of work processes. For instance, on applying the best thinking approach to work models, an organization can:

- Boost work efficiency to attain higher and newer levels of success
- Build a distinct corporate advantage
- Keep work teams charged emotionally and intellectually
- Lead change by motivating the entire organization to participate

The impact of best thinking is pervasive, with the advantages trickling down through levels. Thus, organizations that want to join the party need to blend best thinking with their culture.

Despite its many advantages, the use of best thinking as a success strategy is limited. The reasons are largely attributed to the traditional corporate hierarchies that work through a pre-determined protocol. In hierarchical models, it is rather difficult to call for ideas and innovations from different levels of management.

Leaders in the top slot are less receptive to the bottom-up approach to management and tend to weed out ideas at the very initial stages. Further, even if ideas are solicited from lower levels, the spirit dies midway when the ideas get hammered through various levels. Furthermore, in a hierarchical corporate structure, work groups are segmented on the basis of their functions and each function operates as a vertical silo.

Thus, every functional head believes that his function plays a critical role in determining organizational success. Thereby, it undermines the part that other functional areas play. Such self indulgence prevents best thinking from delivering to its potential.

Leadership and best thinking



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Corporate leadership has an important part to play in developing best thinking as a strategic tool. The CEO and his management team encourage best thinking as the reigns rest with them to take the organization ahead. The CEO is expected to be honest and aware of his strengths, weaknesses, skills and shortcomings.

Self awareness gives the leader control over a situation and helps him lead the organization in the right direction. Leaders with high self-awareness can inspire people to develop cross-functional best thinking by working in teams.

Despite the understanding of how leadership impacts best thinking, organizations have restricted the use of best thinking to interim brainstorming sessions. Brain storming is the furthest that organizations have gone with best thinking. Organizations have traditionally used collective thinking exercises periodically. Irregularity in the use of best thinking exercises has left best thinking out of the culture front.

Therefore, in order to integrate best thinking into the corporate culture, leaders must ensure its use in all strategic planning exercises. Furthermore, leaders must encourage the concept of shared knowledge in their organizations. For instance, when the manufacturing unit is challenged with producing extra product units with a restricted time and budget, the workers and leaders should invite suggestions from other parallel divisions like finance, production, sales and marketing.

Restricting strategic perspective to one function can impair the entire process of strategic decision making.

So, what prevents organizations from building best thinking as a best practice? The following list has reasons that most organizations cite for not practicing best thinking.

- Negligible CEO involvement
- Mindsets that govern working patterns in an organization. The mindsets are a result of past experiences and hence organizations find it difficult to think in unconventional ways. Thus, they restrict best thinking to short-term group think processes like brainstorming.
- False image about respective functional roles
- Inability of leaders to handle workplace diversity in terms of thought processes and beliefs

These apart there are many company-specific barriers to building best thinking. They are largely related to the business and industry requirements.

Weaving winning thoughts

Best thinking can be developed through diligent involvement of the CEO and other company leaders. CEOs must encourage employees to come up with ideas and suggestions that they think would help meet the corporate objectives. Enough time and hearing should be provided to employees during planning sessions. Hierarchical protocol should be completely avoided during the decision-making process.



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Building cross-functional teams can also provide a good breeding ground for best thinking. Further, leaders can also appoint skilled facilitators to help employees bring their best thoughts to work. Facilitators have proven skills that help motivate others to contribute their best.

Best thinking is indeed the best that a leader can do for an organization. Its ability to enhance workforce productivity and drive corporate success stories cannot be undermined. Hence, leaders who wish to sustain performance levels should gather all the best thoughts floating within the corporate talent pool.