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WORK MATTERS

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Project delivery is the only way out for managers and leaders.

Can you depend on the functional arrangement of staff in your business to deliver on your many business projects? Not entirely. With small to large sized businesses configured with specialist departments focusing on a dedicated goal such as marketing or procurement and staff hired and conditioned to perform a narrow scope of activities, businesses will continue to lack agility in responding to market opportunities and threats. Coupled with many decision makers in a process, poor workflows between departments and high emphasis on documentation, businesses will continue to be inflexible in an uncertain business environment. In the pandemic environment with businesses having to shelve many ideas, embark on new product lines and even change business models which cut across all business functions, the only way toward value delivery is the project management of business outcomes by managers and leaders. Project management is the torpedo in the arsenal of management strategies used to get an organization, its departments, people, and processes behind business outcomes toward successful fruition. Without it, many businesses will fail miserably in their spaces.

According to the Project Management Institute, project management involves the application of multidisciplinary knowledge to a dedicated outcome to ensure its delivery within scope, time, cost and quality constraints. As such, with projects having planning, resourcing, risks, procurement, stakeholder, and communication requirements amongst other areas which often stretch across all business functions, people and processes from near and far within the organization have a crucial role to play in achieving project outcomes. Too often, the rule based, procedural way of checking stock, registering a customer, or fulfilling claims results in an impatient customer, a lost lead and a poor reputation. Such process-based methods of handling activities are driven by stakeholders who cannot see the outcome or impact to the business as they are engulfed in getting the activity procedurally right. Conversely, project management promotes the results-based management approach where staff work is centered on business out-

comes and impacts to business goals rather than solely on activities which are part of the outcomes. In this way, the business succeeds in efficiency, effectiveness, and outcome-value delivery to its primary stakeholders. To be frank, department managers and CEOs need to disrupt their specialist capabilities in their departments with project-based working toward market driven business outcomes. In this way, department staff will see the “cake” as the result, and not only the lack of ingredients for the batter. Leaders will need to work with their staff not only to identify their roles in the business outcomes but also the related outputs and impact. Although staff may have to extend themselves, learn more, reflect on their feet and have the foresight to realize the business’s bottom line, they may also be able to achieve career growth and job enrichment needs, in addition to suitable rewards. If this project management connection between what staff does and how it aligns to organizational goals cannot be identified, businesses can soon become unresponsive to external pressures such as supply chain management fluctuations, climatic changes, the Covid-19 pandemic, the Russian Ukraine war, and wider socio-economic challenges. No doubt, the demise of businesses will linger in this volatile space.

So, what must leaders do? They must disrupt what they are accustomed doing and desist from over emphasizing rule-based working. Those at the helm must communicate a clear vision of what is to be achieved with their staff and create a psychologically safe environment for staff to experiment and take risks in learning how to achieve clear targets. Rigid job titles, task specializations and departmental boundaries must collapse in favour of collaborative project teams, emotionally intelligent communication amongst staff coupled with suitable intrinsic and extrinsic employee rewards. Leaders will have to conceive everything they do as part of their portfolio of projects aimed toward meeting strategic outcomes. Given the impact the macro environment has on businesses, the portfolio will require constant reassessment, where projects may halt, others shelved, and new ones initiated. More so,

creative training opportunities for staff will need discovery in times of low budgets else businesses will continue to run the risk of deskilling their staff. Providing staff with stretch assignments, access to webinars and infusing reflection and learning as part of the job should not be ruled out. In aligning staff outputs with organizational targets in a mode of business sustainability, tough decisions will have to be made: Who to put where and why? Who must be empowered and hold to account? Finally, the project economy has arrived. A space where individual staff projects intersect with what the business must achieve and how these projects connect to what external agencies are doing..

Nigel Bhagwatsaran

Programme Dean

Project Management Department, CCLCS