



**ADAYANA®**



**White Paper**

## **Start Organizational Strategy and Human Capital Development by Asking**

By Mike Jackson  
President and Chief Executive Officer, Adayana

## ***If Your Consulting Partner Seems to Have More Answers than Questions, You May Not be Getting the Value You Deserve***

The phrase “Shoot first, ask questions later!” may have resonated in the classic shoot-em-up westerns of 1950s television, but it is no way to do business in the second decade of the 21st century. Organizations that supplement their internal resources with expertise and services from outside consultants – whether these are management consultants, research firms, marketing communications agencies, information technology experts, or learning and development companies – could be better served from such engagements by first answering one simple question in mind.

### *The question is “why?”*

I do not mean “why are you engaging outside consulting partners?” But rather, “are your consulting partners asking you questions such as ‘why’ often enough?”

*Why* are you employing a particular strategy? . . . *Why* do your customers choose to do business with you? . . . *Why* is your product portfolio structured as it is? . . . Have you explained the “*why*” of the latest strategies to your employees? . . . If not, *why* not? . . . *Why* are your business results on budget or off budget? *Why* have you set the goals you have?

If your consulting partners are not asking “why” – or if you are not answering them when they do – chances are you do not have a partnership at all, but merely a vendor relationship that may not be delivering the value you need to achieve your organizational goals. If you have experienced such a relationship, you may have felt that whenever your vendor told you what time it was, they were really just looking at your own watch.

The following four-step model outlines the four basic components of a healthy and valuable partnership between an organization and its consulting partner. The outcome of such a partnership is ongoing organizational effectiveness. Effectiveness that is achieved through market differentiation, human capital development, process integration, customer satisfaction, and category leadership.

# 1. Doing the ‘Right Things’: Organizational Intent, Strategy, and Direction

Strategy. It is square one of the ideal client-consultant partnership. In its simplest form, “strategy” means doing the right things. An organization can be blessed with the most talented employees and possess “best practices” galore, and your people and processes may seem to be making things happen. But what if all this human capital expertise and organizational process is executing on the *wrong things*? What if the resources you are deploying are off-strategy?

To help you prevent this, one of the first questions your consultant-partner should be asking is *why* are your people and processes doing these things? What is the organizational strategy being implemented?

As an organization intent on helping our clients achieve organization success, Adayana is often fortunate to engage with clients in the early strategic design phase of a business opportunity. Whether an organization is going into a new market, introducing a new product, leading a change in its category, acquiring and integrating other companies, reinvigorating a brand, or engaging in some other organizational change, Adayana is often at the strategy table helping leaders determine what those “right things” are that will set the direction that leads to achieving organizational goals.

## Immersion in the Strategy

Not that we are always at the strategy table, but even in those client partnerships in which Adayana was not involved in helping create the strategy, our team gets immersed in that strategy. In these engagements, we ask ourselves the “why” questions first. If we don’t understand *why* our client has chosen to take a particular strategic direction, we simply cannot do our best work in helping them get there – whether that work is learning and development solutions, strategic communications, or performance technologies. In this process of immersion in client strategy, we often discover additional opportunities that we bring to

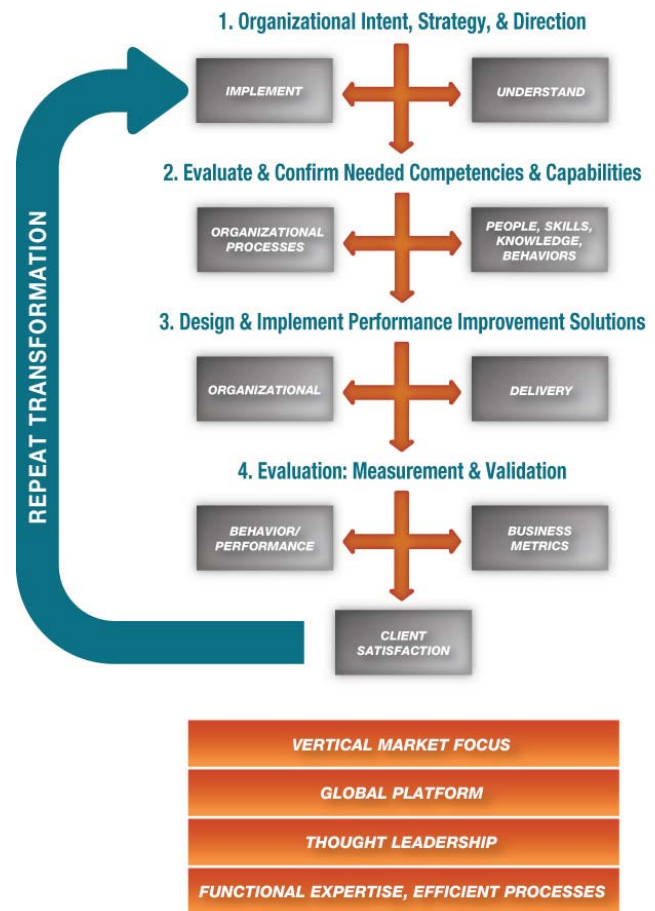


Figure 1 Adayana Client Engagement Model

the client. Certainly, we cannot know any client's business to the depth its own leaders and people do, but our expertise in their industry gives us the confidence to ask relevant questions about the strategy. Often, as we collaborate with the client to discover the answers to such questions, the strategy becomes even sharper.

From our experience, confident and visionary organizations encourage their consulting partners to immerse themselves in their strategies. They empower them to ask questions, because they know that involving their consulting partner in the critical thinking improves the odds of achieving success.

As a consulting partner, our immersion in the strategies that drive an organization does not have to occur only at the top of the organization. Departments, divisions, regions – any part of an organization that is responsible for results – can benefit from a consulting partner that is immersed in its strategy.

## 2. Human Capital Development: Evaluate and Confirm Capabilities and Competencies Needed to Accomplish the Strategy

While organizational strategies set the direction for *doing the right things*, the human capital assets of the organization play a major role in ensuring that the right things get done right, which contributes to fulfillment of the strategy.

Everyone understands that a “*Ready, Aim, Fire*” approach will hit more targets and achieve better ROI than “*Read, Fire, Aim.*” If strategy development is the “*Ready*” component, then ensuring that the organization's processes and people are prepared to implement the strategy is the “*Aim*” part of the formula for achieving success.

This is where aligning human capital development with strategic intent comes into play. In our experience, those organizations whose leaders make it a priority for their employees to have a clear vision of the future that is consistent with their own, have a tremendous head start over their competitors.

It is not sufficient for employees to merely understand the strategic intent, however. They must also be able to fully implement it. This requires a careful evaluation of needed competencies, an assessment of current capabilities, an analysis of critical competency gaps, and creation of the learning strategy and development plans to fill the gaps. To do less leads to spotty strategy execution, and often, confusion on the part of management as to the cause for not achieving a significant strategy. Was it poor strategy or insufficient implementation? Either way, the net effect is suboptimal business performance and fragmented efforts to find and fix the problem.

In addition to ensuring that employees either have or can gain the required competencies to help the organization excel, the learning and development solutions should also help employees understand where the organization is going -- and *why*.

## *A Two-Way Street with Employees*

More than ever, human capital development needs to be a two-way street between an organization and its employees.

In our view, human capital development today is the active *balancing of short- and long-term business requirements with the career and professional development needs of your people*.

Traditionally, the human resources function filled the necessary jobs to support an organization's long-standing business mission and practices. Today it is a matter of attracting, developing, and retaining those motivated, digitally networked, multi-tasking, what's-in-it-for-me employees who will set the organization apart for its customers. Such people need to see how their vision for their own future success intersects with the organization's strategic vision.

In their paper, *Learning at Top Speed*, featured in the January 2010 issue of Chief Learning Officer, Atkinson and Barry make the case for organizations to create a consistent understanding of strategy, ensuring leadership alignment with the strategy, and taking time to share ideas and capture knowledge from employees. That way, "people understand the factors that form the basis of the strategy and what the strategy means for them." This internal dialog helps prepare people for their roles in implementation. <sup>1</sup>

Karl Speak, founder of Brand Tool Box, a company with which Adayana frequently partners, states that an organization that achieves alignment between its strategies and its people is going to have a more customer-centric employee culture. "When the personal brands of key employees are in alignment with the organization's brand, both can become stronger. When the personal brand is a good representation of the corporate brand, the corporate brand can become stronger with every interaction with a customer. At the same time, when the corporate brand reflects the values and aspirations of the personal brand, the employee is in an environment where they believe their brand can prosper – an attitude that is a foundation for retention." <sup>2</sup>

---

*Learning at Top Speed*, Chief Learning Officer, January 2010

Adapted from *Achieving Strategic Speed*, Tom Atkinson and Steve Barry, The Forum Corp.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.brandtoolbox.com/blog/>

<sup>2</sup> Brand Insight With Attitude

So again, your human capital consulting partners needs to be asking questions with every learning and development engagement:

- What knowledge, competencies, information, processes, and attitudes do your people need to effectively deliver the performance you need to achieve organizational strategies?
- What are those levels now, and where are the gaps?
- How does your learning and development program ensure retention of your best people?



Figure 2: Adayana Human Capital Development Model

### 3. Execution: Designing and Implementing Performance Improvement Solutions

Just as the organization’s human capital development plan needs to address the challenge of aligning the hearts, minds, and competencies of employees and other stakeholders with organizational strategy, the actual solutions to be implemented need to close the gaps between what exists now and what needs to exist to achieve the strategies. Simply, organizational processes, such as R&D, marketing, sales, communications, training, technology, and customer service, must all be driving toward excellence.

Some organizations strive to be “best-in-class.” Others envision “market leadership.” Creating “value” for customers, investors, or stakeholders drives others.

#### *What Does Excellence Look Like?*

Is your consulting partner asking you to be specific about what excellence looks like for your organization? In our experience, the questions we ask at the beginning of the implementation phase of an engagement are crucial to the quality and effectiveness of the work we do.

Some consulting organizations may assume they have the right answer to a client’s need without taking the time to ask the right questions. At Adayana, we do our best work after we get information from multiple areas of an organization, including senior leaders, functional directors, managers, sales people, technical people, and even customers. Topics of such fact-finding include: product features, value drivers, channel relationships, technology requirements, customer segments, marketing plans, employee competencies,

competitive pressures, and risks. Even a question like “what strategy have you deployed that will be the least relevant 24 months from now?” can be insightful.

After listening aggressively, we synthesize what we hear. This intellectual curiosity, combined with the expertise to use the information in building integrated solutions, is the foundation of excellent execution.

In Execution Revolution, Gary Harpst introduces a formula of excellence that is the sum of strong strategy plus strong execution. Strategy is the promise an organization makes to its constituents, along with the map for delivering on that promise. Execution is the art of getting there. “A clear trend is emerging where business leaders are demanding a management approach (or business system) that integrates both the formation of strategy and its execution. They want this service from their management consultants . . . that already have a trusted reputation for addressing strategy and operational issues.”<sup>3</sup>

If you are paying your consulting partner just to “get you there,” without showing them the map and collaborating together on the route, then excellence could be further away than it needs to be. Worse, if your consulting partner is not asking you *why* when you describe your vision of excellence, then you are more on your own in getting to your destination than you may realize.

## 4. Evaluation: Measurement and Validation

The most useful evaluations are those that can measure a project’s contribution to on an organizational strategy. Fulfillment on a strategy is a true “solution.”

Again, before your consulting partner ever begins a project, they should be asking questions about what success will look like and how it will be measured and validated. Effective change management requires validation that the right changes are in fact occurring. Metrics can include employee competencies and behaviors, effectiveness of processes, loyalty of the channel, perceptions of customers, and many others. The measurement is science, but the art lies in asking the right questions in the first place to ensure the right things are being measured.

While this four-step process for achieving organizational excellence has a logical flow, it is rare that organizations and their consulting partners actually start at the top and follow this progression. More often, it is a matter of starting with the client’s largest or most immediate need.

---

<sup>3</sup> Six Disciplines® Execution Revolution: Solving the One Business Problem That Makes Solving All Other Problems Easier

Where Adayana starts our engagement with a client is not as important as asking the right questions to effectively connect the dots among all the phases. Then, upon completion of the project, we can leverage what we learned together to collaborate with their client on their next opportunity.

That's the way organizations build momentum and accelerate success.

## About Adayana

Adayana is a global human capital development and organizational performance improvement company, serving clients in the targeted vertical markets of agribusiness, automotive and manufacturing, U.S. Government, and healthcare.

It is this targeted vertical market business model that empowers Adayana team members to immerse themselves in client strategies. We monitor policies, issues and trends of the vertical we serve, and use this information to help our clients develop their people and their organization. Every client engagement deepens our experience, helping us expand our clients' horizons – and our own.