

The 12 Reasons Why Operational Excellence Never Lasts

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By
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Foreword

Operational Excellence has been a central theme in my professional journey, a path marked by numerous deployments, coaching sessions, and a relentless pursuit of sustainable high performance. This eBook is a culmination of those experiences, encapsulating the insights, lessons, and methodologies that have proven effective time and again in real-world applications. It is my sincere hope that the knowledge shared within these pages will serve as a valuable guide for anyone seeking to achieve and sustain Operational Excellence within their organisation.

The journey to creating this eBook has been both personal and collaborative. My approach to Operational Excellence has been shaped not only by hands-on experience but also by the rich literature and contributions of many esteemed authors and

thought leaders in the field. Their work has provided a foundational understanding and offered various tools, techniques, and methodologies that I have incorporated into my own practice. These elements have been meticulously tested and refined over the years, ultimately becoming what I consider my personal recipe for success. I have mentioned some of the literature explicitly in this eBook but the others are included in the Appendix. It is not my intention to infringe the copyright of any of these outstanding pieces of work but rather to champion them.

Throughout my career, I have had the privilege of working with diverse organisations across different industries. Each deployment presented unique challenges and opportunities, allowing me to adapt and evolve my approach. These experiences have reinforced the importance of flexibility and the need to tailor Operational Excellence strategies to the specific context of each organisation. What works for one company may not necessarily work for another, and this eBook emphasises the need for a customised approach that aligns with the unique culture, goals, and capabilities of each organisation.

One of the core principles that I have consistently advocated for is the integration of motivational and cultural elements into the operational framework. It is not enough to simply implement tools and techniques; the true essence of Operational Excellence lies in fostering a culture where continuous improvement is ingrained in the DNA of the organisation. This requires a deep understanding of human motivation and the creation of an environment where employees are empowered, engaged, and aligned with the organisational objectives.

The concept of Focused Excellence, which is introduced in this eBook, is a reflection of this holistic approach. It goes beyond traditional methodologies by incorporating elements of human psychology and cultural development. Focused Excellence is about creating a system where high performance becomes

inevitable, driven by the collective actions and behaviours of individuals within the organisation. It is self-reinforcing and self-improving, ensuring that success is not just achieved but sustained over the long term.

The tools, techniques, and methodologies included in this eBook are drawn from a variety of sources, each contributing to the comprehensive framework that I present here. Lean Six Sigma, Total Quality Management, Kaizen, and many other methodologies have influenced my approach. While these tools are widely recognised and utilised, their true power lies in how they are integrated and applied within the context of an organisation's unique environment.

I have included these methodologies in this eBook because they have become integral to my personal recipe for success. They are not just theoretical concepts but practical strategies that have been tested and proven in real-world scenarios. Each tool and technique has been selected for its ability to drive meaningful and lasting improvements, and I have seen firsthand how their effective implementation can transform an organisation.

As you read through this eBook, I encourage you to think about how these concepts can be adapted and applied within your own organisation. The journey to Operational Excellence is continuous and ever evolving, and the strategies presented here are designed to provide a solid foundation upon which you can build. Remember that success in this field requires not only technical expertise but also a deep commitment to fostering a culture of excellence.

I am deeply grateful to the many authors and thought leaders whose work has influenced and inspired my own journey. Their contributions have been invaluable, and I am honoured to include their methodologies in this eBook. It is my hope that this compilation of knowledge and experience will serve as a useful

resource for you and your organisation, guiding you towards achieving and sustaining Operational Excellence.

Thank you for embarking on this journey with me. I am confident that with the right approach and commitment, you too can achieve the high levels of performance and success that Operational Excellence promises.

Sincerely,
Dan



Introduction

Overview of Operational Excellence

The traditional definition of Operational Excellence (OpEx) might be something like:

‘A business philosophy that focuses on the continuous improvement of organisational processes and performance. It aims to create a culture where employees are constantly seeking ways to enhance efficiency, quality, and customer satisfaction. Achieving Operational Excellence means that a company can deliver high-quality products and services consistently while minimising waste and maximizing value.’

This sort of description has historically been a satisfactory definition and will undoubtedly have served the ambitions of most organisations well in their annual plans to advance the way their business operates. The problem I have with a definition like this is that the wording implies to me that somebody can come along and engineer a culture in which employees do what the organisation wants them to do. Having a focus on continuous improvement, seeking ways to enhance efficiency, and aiming to deliver high-quality while minimising waste will undoubtedly drive excellence, but how do you get everyone in your business focused on the right things and doing the right actions repeatedly, reliably, and irreversibly? Operational Excellence shouldn't be about creating a culture, but rather defining how a culture is created. This might sound like the same thing, but a more helpful definition that an organisation can rally around should emphasise where the focus should be that results in the desirable outcome. It shouldn't imply that people's behaviours and actions can in some way be engineered as if they were simply resources or assets to be consumed and used. Culture, after all, is simply the product of the shared actions and behaviours of the people who exist within it. For the context of this eBook I'm using the word Culture to mean the ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular group of people, and not for instance a definition that relates to arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement, or indeed one that relates to biology like the cultivation of bacteria, tissue cells!

If you've been involved in OpEx up to now you will know that it involves applying various methodologies and tools, such as Lean, Six Sigma, and Total Quality Management, to streamline operations and eliminate inefficiencies. It's not just about short-term gains but about building a sustainable framework for long-term success. However, what often tends to happen is that the people who are doing the work on the frontline tend to drift away from the tool or technique that was rolled out during the

deployment, and to address this, organisations usually set up a system of auditing to check and keep track of who's adhering to the system they were given and who isn't. If you've ever been audited and someone has made a bureaucratic judgement on your standard of Operational Excellence, then you'll know how impersonal and autocratic it can feel. In these circumstances it won't make you feel motivated to continue doing the 'desired' action nor will it increase the level of trust you have in the organisation or its leadership.

In our changed and changing world there are a smaller and smaller number of people who will tolerate this type of treatment, and those businesses who can move with the times and change their definition of Operational Excellence will have a unique advantage over their rivals to fulfil their rationale for existing in their society and the broader world. Having the correct approach will increase employee engagement, retention, and performance, which will ultimately lead to much longer lasting levels of high business performance.

Importance of Considering Irreversibility

While many organisations achieve Operational Excellence temporarily, maintaining it over the long term is a significant challenge. The initial excitement and improvements often fade, leading to a gradual decline in performance. This decline can result from several symptoms, including complacency, lack of focus, misalignment of goals, lack of engagement with and by the people in the organisation, and lack of time given for each individual to incorporate the newly introduced concept or technique and make adjustments to the way they do their work.

Irreversibility of the Operational Excellence system or framework used within an organisation is crucial because it ensures that the benefits are built upon rather than having energy and resources

consumed in maintaining it or rebuilding it when skills and habits are lost. It allows organisations to remain competitive, adapt to changing market conditions, and continuously meet customer expectations. Without sustainability, the efforts and resources invested in achieving OpEx can quickly become wasted. Metaphorically speaking, what is going to be the chock to stop the organisation rolling back down the hill?



Most often an organisation will layout its plans to implement a system of work which will be based upon Lean, Six Sigma, or possible Agile methodologies, all of which will add significant value and capability to any organisation that adopts it in the right way. Traditionally a team or committee will be formed to decide

upon which tools or techniques the organisation will benefit most from and then a plan will be pulled together to roll them out across the organisation itself. Perhaps there will even be a communication plan drafted in an attempt to solicit buy-in from key stakeholders and the broader population. Thought will undoubtedly be given to how to measure the progress of the rollout and reporting mechanisms, routines, and format decided upon to be able to track and report back to the Senior Leadership on how well it is progressing, and also highlight any challenges and the corrective actions which will be taken. It's possible a dashboard will be devised so people are able to tell at a glance which areas need attention and possibility which areas need praise.

A strategy like this is a sure-fire way to set up a substantial and significant system which, if used faithfully and correctly, would ensure that the level of the organisation's performance is increased significantly and most certainly in a highly desirable way. However, the question which I would ask the team or committee who are accountable and responsible for such a justifiably great piece of deployment work is what their exit strategy is? What is it that is going to stop every part of the organisation from slipping back to the original way of doing things? In the interests of full disclosure, I have to declare that I have been a member of a team or committee like that, and I have also been the person on the ground in an organisation teaching them how to use the "new" system of work and then proceeding to judge them on their ability to use it. I have also been the person reporting back to a centralised senior team on how well the organisation is adopting the system and which areas they need to work on. What I can tell you from direct experience is that no amount of planning, governance, or quality of the tool and techniques being deployment will make one bit of difference over whether or not I could leave that organisation with the confidence that the system would stay in place. The idea that an area of the organisation, or perhaps the whole organisation itself, would stop

using a system, either in part or in its entirety, is rarely given the consideration it deserves.

In and Manufacturing circles Toyota is often upheld as the pinnacle example of Operational Excellence with the term Lean and the Toyota Product System, or TPS, often being used interchangeably. Having the accolade of a leadership position within Toyota on a person's CV is a reliable way of gaining instant credibility. In *The Toyota Way*, Jeffrey K. Liker outlines Toyota's 14 management principles, which emphasise the importance of fostering a culture that prioritises process over short-term results. Liker explains, 'Toyota's success is attributed not just to its use of Lean tools, but to its commitment to long-term philosophy and relentless focus on continuous improvement.' Despite being written 20 years before this eBook was written the perception of Toyota as the apex organisation for all things Operationally Excellent is a testament to its commitment and the irreversibility of improvements they make. The mistake that many people make is in thinking they can lift the system (including the tools and techniques) made at Toyota and simply transplant it into their own organisation. In a kind of "voila" moment to instantly change the fundamental DNA of the organisation they are trying to change so that their plans are both implemented and become permanent.

The most proactive considerations I've seen often result in some form of auditing, like Kamishibai found in the Lean tradition, being incorporated into the system of work which is being developed. Although this is one of those tools which if used correctly will almost certainly enhance the way people do their work, it relies upon people to perform the audits and it has a crucial Achilles heel insofar as it is paradoxically a part of the system which needs checking. In short, is the tool used for checking tools are being used, being used?! It is of course also quite common for organisations to go through unplanned external and internal change which results in people being moved to do different things within the organisation, or perhaps leaving all together. Ways of

doing things are then put under pressure as new arrivals and people new to now vacant roles climb the predictably steep learning curves and often find limited or no help to ensure that they can pick up from where the previous incumbent left off. Ideas like auditing to see if somebody is using the correct colour coding system on their visual management boards can easily fall down, and then off, the priority list. There are of course many other scenarios which result in people not maintaining the very aspect of the system that is 'built in' to maintain the system, but ultimately, they all boil down to one thing. Are the people within the organisation motivated to use the system or not.

The absence of long-term motivation to use the best and most appropriate tool, techniques, standards, and ways of working is at the heart of why Operational Excellence never lasts. Therefore, to create irreversibility the countermeasure to this absence must be to design your deployment around the concepts of human motivation, and not just the roll out of the most ideal techniques to solve the current business issues.

A great place to start is to think about how multiple people can develop shared repeated actions which they feel motivated and possibly compelled to do. The role of the deployment should then be to guide those people to develop the actions that lead to high performance within and between the teams. If a significant number of people all adopt similar or identical repeated actions, or habits, then they will technically have created a 'culture'. It's therefore through true cultural change, not only tool deployment, that the organisation should adopt a system of excellence. I call this Focused Excellence.

Introduction to the Focused Excellence

Focused Excellence is not a tool or technique based approach, however tools and techniques are most definitely an integral part. Whereas traditional Operational Excellence deployments will aim to create a culture through adherence, Focused Excellence is a 'Way' of developing a 'Way' so that the 'culture' is simply an outcome rather than a specific aim. It's like thinking about an athlete as someone who trains every day and as a result wins medals, rather than thinking an athlete is someone who runs races. It's both self-reinforcing and self-improving so that success become inevitable. The system and the people within it will not need to be audited, but rather supported, to be the best version of itself and themselves.

The Focused Excellence mindset can be broken down into specific discrete components, each of which interact with each other. This eBook will describe each of these components and when an organisation, or a team, deploys them to create their own 'Way of Working' they effectively create a system. A Focused Excellence System.

There are four components to Focused Excellence, each of which has three elements. Each of these twelve elements aim to resolve specific issues which can erode the irreversibility of the system, or way, that is being created:

- Focused Techniques are the methodologies and tools that organisations use to achieve excellence. They fall into three categories:
 - Proactive Techniques: Methods that highlight reality, set direction, and both anticipate and prevent problems before they occur.
 - Reactive Techniques: Approaches check progress and solve issues as they arise.

- Integrating Techniques: Strategies that ensure all methods work together cohesively and that local optimisation is not given priority above organisational optimisation as a whole.
- Goal Focused Motivation relates to the more traditional approaches to human motivation which lies within the Maslow Hierarchy of Needs model. This involves:
 - A Rationale as to why a goal has been set.
 - A Direction on how they are supposed to achieve it.
 - The ability to take appropriate Action, and crucially a means to be able to tell if it's having an impact.
- Identity Focused Motivation relates to the drive to satisfy needs that exist and originate from within us. This involves:
 - Autonomy, to do the work the way we know is best.
 - The ability to develop our Proficiency in what we do.
 - To do work that has meaning to us as individuals.
- Focused Culture is about shared values, beliefs, and habits. It's not enough for one person to be at their best, it has to be everyone in the organisation. This involves:
 - Values: Establishing and maintaining core values that are the roots of desirable behaviour.
 - Beliefs: Creating those ideas that everyone asserts to be true
 - Habits: Developing reliably repeatable actions that support continuous improvement and sustained high performance

We'll take a look at each of these areas in more detail in the rest of this eBook. But, before you move on, take a moment to assess your organisation by taking our free **Focused Excellence Maturity**

Assessment to identify gaps in your current system. Go to our website www.focusedpotential.uk for more details.

References:

Liker, J. K. (2004). *The Toyota Way: 14 Management Principles from the World's Greatest Manufacturer*. McGraw-Hill.



Focused Techniques

Before we take a look at Focused Techniques let's first of all run through an overview of both Operational Management Systems (OMSs) and Operational Excellence Systems (OESs). This will provide us with a context and help define what I mean by a tool or technique.

Although similar in many ways there is a difference between an OMS and an OES and it lies in their focus and approach:

Operational Management System (OMS)

- Focus: The OMS is primarily concerned with managing day-to-day operations efficiently. It ensures that resources are optimally utilised, processes are followed, and goals are met.
- Approach: It involves strategic planning, process management, performance measurement, quality management, risk management, supply chain management, customer relationship management, technology integration, human resources management, financial management, compliance and governance, continuous improvement, sustainability, and regular review and evaluation.
- Objective: The main objective is to ensure smooth, efficient, and effective operation of the organisation, maintaining consistency and reliability in delivering products and services.

Operational Excellence System (OES)

- Focus: The OES is geared towards achieving and sustaining high levels of performance through continuous improvement. Traditionally, it aims to create a culture of excellence where every aspect of the business is constantly being improved, but as I mentioned earlier it should focus on how a culture is created.
- Approach: It emphasises strategic alignment, leadership and culture, continuous improvement methodologies (like Lean, Six Sigma, or Kaizen), performance measurement, employee engagement, customer focus, risk management, technology and innovation, sustainability, and regular feedback loops.

- **Objective:** The main objective is to deliver superior performance, enhance customer satisfaction, and drive long-term growth by continuously seeking out and implementing improvements across all areas of the business.

The key differences then are best described in terms of Scope, Approach, and Objective as follows:

Key Differences

- **Scope:**
 - OMS: Broader scope covering all aspects of managing operations.
 - OES: Narrower scope focusing specifically on achieving excellence and continuous improvement.
- **Approach:**
 - OMS: Structured around managing and optimising existing processes and resources.
 - OES: Centred on how a culture of continuous improvement and striving for higher performance standards is created.
- **Objective:**
 - OMS: Ensure operational efficiency and effectiveness.
 - OES: Drive superior performance and sustainable growth through continuous improvement.

In summary, while both systems aim to optimise business operations, the OMS focuses on maintaining and managing operations efficiently, whereas the OES is dedicated to achieving

and sustaining high performance through continuous improvement and a culture of excellence.

If we were to list all of the tools and techniques used in both OMSs and OESs then it's likely that any of them could be classified as a Focused Technique in some way. That's because for something to be a Focused Technique it needs to support the approach of putting the Motivation and Culture at the heart of the system in which it exists. It's not about the technique itself but rather the intent and the way in which the technique is both deployed and utilised by the people doing the work.

It might be helpful if we define what is meant by a technique and also look at some examples. A technique refers to a specific method or procedure used to accomplish a particular task or objective. Techniques are applied to manage and optimise daily operational activities, ensure resources are utilised efficiently, enhance processes, solve problems, and drive continuous improvement. Unlike tools, which can be physical or digital instruments, techniques are more about the practical application of knowledge and skills. Techniques have 4 main characteristics:

1. **Methodological Approach:** Techniques follow a structured, methodical approach to achieve specific outcomes.
2. **Process-Oriented:** They focus on optimising or improving processes, solving problems, and enhancing efficiency.
3. **Skill-Based:** Techniques often require a certain level of knowledge or training to be effectively applied and must be practiced to achieve high levels of proficiency.
4. **Adaptability:** Techniques can be adapted and applied to various situations and industries.

Appendix A in the back of this eBook shows a table of examples of techniques used in OMS and OES. Another book by John Bicheno and Matthias Holweg which I would encourage people to read, refer to and own is the 'The Lean Toolbox'. It provides a

comprehensive set of practical tools for Lean transformation, emphasising the importance of process efficiency, waste reduction, and empowering employees to contribute to ongoing improvement efforts.

Operational Excellence initiatives often fail because organisations lack the proper focus for the deployment and application of their techniques. It's not enough to rollout the techniques simply through training and then expect people to utilise them forever. People are not robots and although many aspects of their current roles and responsibilities will undoubtedly be replaced or enhanced by Artificial Intelligence, organisations will always need people. This is because organisations ARE people, and so to approach the way of running or improving your business without putting your people's motivational psychology first is leaving the question of sustainability, or irreversibility, on the table unanswered.

Whichever techniques are used within a system of work there are three categories which must be populated sufficiently for either the OMS or OES to function effectively as intended. Let's take a look at these next.

Proactive Techniques

Can the people in your business tell if yesterday was a good day or a bad day? I've asked this question many times and the answer is always fascinating and very telling. If you ask the people doing the work on the front line and their answer isn't one which describes in some way their progress towards the organisation's, mission, vision, or rationale for existing then you've probably got some work to do in regards to the development and deployment of your Proactive Techniques.

These techniques focus on the decision making process for determining where the business should be headed, developing the plan to get there, identifying potential issues that may get in the way, implementing measures to mitigate or prevent the issues, and providing the means for the business to understand where exactly it is at any given point. Without proactive techniques, organisations often find themselves in a constant cycle of firefighting, addressing problems only after they have already caused disruption. They are essential for preventing problems before they arise.

If we think about the metaphor of a group of people out in the wilderness trying to survive and thrive, Proactive Techniques would allow the group to formulate the plan of what they should do next. They could just decide to walk in any direction and see what happens, but this clearly wouldn't be very proactive or smart. Instead, they could take stock of where they are right now, what resources they have at their disposal, what skills they have within the group, what the environment and conditions are like, and also what their needs are both in the short term and in the longer term. If the group is led by an autocratic leader who may only canvas the opinions of their closest advisors but ultimately make decisions on behalf of the group, then making decisions and setting direction may be a simple task. What the leader and the group will not benefit from, however, is harnessing the complete power of human motivation to achieve the desired outcome once the decision has been made. If, however, the leader follows a process which canvases the opinions of the wider group, then they will have a much more fully detailed picture of what the people in the group actually desire and therefore what they will be more likely to give their best for.

Taking this picture and factoring it into the decision process will turn the leader from simply directing to providing direction. The consequence of this for the rest of the people in the group is that they will feel much more part of the strategy that is being

developed and hence will be much more motivated to achieve it. There may be a small portion of the group who won't ultimately agree with either the objective, direction, or strategy, but then it's up to them to decide whether being a part of this group is what they want. This is a lot different to deciding whether or not they want to follow a particular leader. Think about how football fans almost never turn away from their club, but can often turn on the Manager or Chairman of the club. This type of motivation taps directly into the belonging element of human psychology and can be a powerful drive in the group achieving its aims. It's also a key way of retaining the people within the group and their valuable experience and skills.



What I'm not advocating here is a system of making decisions through referendums, or without some sort of a leadership structure in place. A leader must obviously be comfortable with accountability and making decisions is at the heart of this. In our metaphor the leader must ultimately make the decision on what the group should be aiming for next. They may surround themselves with a close team of senior leaders to assist them in this, and perhaps take on some of the heavy lifting when it comes to decision making. But ultimately the leader will have to accept that they made the decision to appoint which ever person they put in place for whatever types of decisions that person needs to make. As such the ultimate decision on what the next objective should be still lies with the leader. For the purpose of this metaphor let's assume that the objective which has been set is to move across a mountain range to greener pastures on the other side.

Although making the "big" decision is the responsibility of the leader, figuring out the plan of how to achieve it does not have to be. In fact, harnessing the complete capabilities of the entire group to formulate this plan will mean that it is much more robust and, because of the way in which people were able to have their say in the objective setting, will be much more motivating for the people within the group. This of course rapidly increases its chances of success as people utilise each other's expertise to anticipate the problems and hurdles that come with scaling mountains and descending into unknown landscapes. Experienced people who have had similar experiences can highlight potential hazards that they may come across, like steep cliffs or sudden changes to the environment, and also prepare an eventuality countermeasure which the group could take with them. The less experienced members of the group could contribute really insightful "why are you going to do it like that?" questions which will cause the rest of the group to pause for thought and make sure that what they were planning is robust.

In fact, when leveraging the collective expertise of the team, the potential for more robust and innovative decision-making increases significantly. Tara Swart, in Neuroscience for Leadership, highlights that when diverse perspectives come together in a group setting, the brain's neural networks are activated in ways that promote better problem-solving and creativity. Swart notes, 'Collaborative environments stimulate the prefrontal cortex, the area responsible for complex thought processes and decision-making, leading to enhanced cognitive performance and more innovative outcomes.' This demonstrates the critical role of group dynamics in harnessing the collective intelligence of a team.

Included in this plan will of course be milestones and status checks to make sure that the group as a whole is proceeding as planned, and also that any concerns that parts of the group have will be escalated to the decision makers in a suitably timely fashion.

To summarise, Proactive techniques are

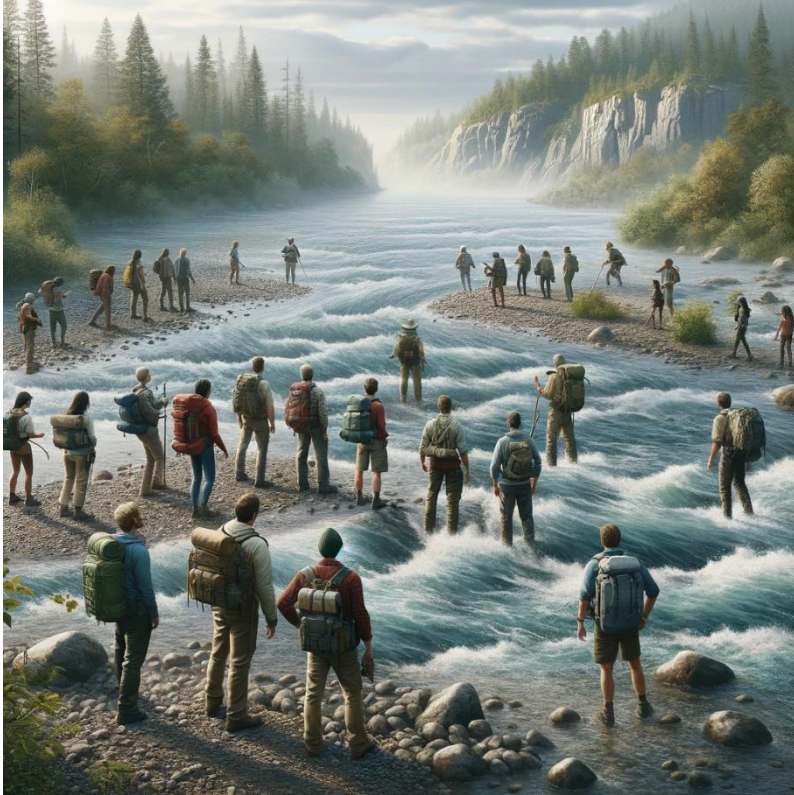
- A way of robustly deciding what your business needs to do next to meet its broader purpose of vision (like the group who wanted to survive and thrive)
- Drafting the strategic plan to achieve it.
- Anticipating problems that may occur and preparing the necessary resources and countermeasures.
- Making arrangements to perform status checks and improved lines of communication between the decision makers and the rest of the group to take timely actions during the journey.

Reactive Techniques

If you're a leader and you're reading this, think about how many times something lands on your desk or into your inbox which clearly should have been solved by someone else closer to the front line or the source of the problem. Does dealing with these issues stop you from doing the job you believe you should be doing, or worse still leave you under tremendous personal strain while you struggle to do your own work while dealing with issues that, given the appropriate means, could have been dealt with by somebody else. Perhaps you've even become so conditioned to the fact that you apparently have to deal with those things that you don't even notice that it's not your job anymore. You might have formulated your own paradigm of what your job actually is which will only serve to encourage other to send more issues your way to solve.

Reactive Techniques are methods that allow the people in your business, including you, to deal with issues quickly and effectively. A key point here is that not all issues need to be dealt with by the senior decision makers in your business. In fact, if you have a culture where people escalate issues on a routine basis then it's likely that they are not being dealt with either efficiently or effectively. If we again use the metaphor of our group in the wilderness traversing a range of mountains then reactive techniques would enable each member, or each subgroup, to be able to deal with the problems that they encounter themselves as long as they have been given the appropriate level of means, ability, and accountability. So, for instance if they come across a particularly rough river crossing then top-down hierarchal decision making might cause them to stop and wait for further instructions rather than cross the river and risk something undesirable happening. However, if the group has been trained in some practical problem solving techniques and has the delegated authority to look for a more appropriate crossing then, with the use of improved communication to the wider group and the senior

decision makers, what is more likely to happen is that they will highlight the hazard in real time and have found a more suitable crossing in the same time as it would have taken to get the senior leaders to actually attend the location once they have been notified.



In this river crossing example there are actually two problems that need to be solved. The first is the ‘crossing of the river’ *problem* and the second is the ‘what should happen when a part of the group has a problem’ *problem*. The role of the more senior leaders within the group is to solve the second problem by providing the wherewithal for the rest of the group. Specifically, the means, the ability, and the appropriate level of accountability depending on

what type of problem the subgroup members come across. There will of course be some types of problem which haven't been anticipated and therefore, rather than put any member of the group at risk of making a significantly bad or fatal decision, will require escalation to either more senior members of the group or possibly more experienced members in the wider group who have specific expertise. By providing the wherewithal and an efficient means of escalation the group as a whole can deal with problems in a much more effective manner, which also has the benefit of giving the senior leaders time, and energy, to deal with types of problems that they should be dealing with at their level.

Reactive Techniques are equally as important as Proactive Techniques and actually one without the other reduces the effectiveness of whatever is you have in place. Organisations that neglect reactive techniques often struggle to respond effectively to problems, leading to prolonged disruptions and decreased performance.

Integrating Techniques

One of the many pitfalls that organisations often experience when they adopt either an Operational Management System or an Operational Excellence System is that of local optimisation at the expense of global optimisation. Meaning that one part of the organisation experiences a significant increase in performance which benefits the people within that part, but in doing so puts more pressure on the rest of the organisation and effectively decreases their performance and thus the performance of the organisation as a whole. If you've ever been a part of an improvement to a bottleneck or constraint within a business, you'll know how this can suddenly uncover other issues in the business which people weren't prepared to deal with. I've seen it many times when internal downstream processes begin to see their inbox or work-in-progress increasing suddenly, or perhaps

upstream partners in the supply chain unable to meet new increased demand. Most often people will say things like “if I’d have known I could have done something to prepare, and we wouldn’t have this problem”.



Having Proactive and Reactive Techniques is absolutely vital in achieving an organisation’s objectives, but ensuring that they are integrated will mean that the group as a whole traverses the mountain range together and that nobody will be left behind. Any objective involving the whole group is only ever achieved once every member of the group has arrived. If we think about our group in the wilderness, imagine some people being responsible for carrying the baggage train which contains the tents, shelter, and

all of the things needed to set up camp each day. They will have an entirely different set of problems to the more nimble elements of the group who perhaps hunt and gather food. So, crossing a hazard like a river for one part of the group will not be the same as another, and reaching the destination only to find that nobody else is there to set up camp is going to be as much of a problem as figuring out how to get everyone across the river in the first place.

Integrating proactive and reactive techniques is crucial for maintaining a balanced approach to Operational Excellence and Operational Management. Failure to integrate these techniques can result in siloed efforts, where different parts of the organisation are not aligned or communicating effectively.

Summary

In this chapter, we discussed the importance of proactive, reactive, and integrating techniques in sustaining Operational Excellence. Organisations that neglect any of these areas often find themselves struggling to maintain their initial gains. By understanding and implementing these techniques, businesses can create a robust framework for long-term success.

Next, we'll explore the second reason why Operational Excellence initiatives often fail, inadequate Goal Focused Motivation. This involves ensuring that everyone in the organisation understands and is motivated, and a desirable way, by the company's goals.

References:

Swart, T., Chisholm, K., & Brown, P. (2015). *Neuroscience for Leadership: Harnessing the Brain Gain Advantage*. Palgrave Macmillan.

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Goal Focused Motivation

When people think about motivating employees, they often think about doing something externally to trigger a response in people to get them to do something, that perhaps they wouldn't do given the choice. There is also common cynicism from people in general about the ambitions of businesses to motivate their employees. Often people suspect something underhanded or manipulative is happening, such as expecting them to work harder or for longer just to increase the return of profits, or maybe even dividends to shareholders. I would like to offer a different mindset when it comes to motivation which highlights the energy and time people put into doing things that they choose to do, like spending time

with friends and family, or spending hours on their favourite pastime or hobby. There are millions of people who spend a significant amount of time doing things for free in name of charity, community, or simply because “it’s the right thing to do”. Why should it be that because you are being paid for something you should in some way expect a lower level of motivation to do whatever it is you’re doing for that money?

I hold a belief that all human beings are born with an inherent desire to be motivated to perform at their best. I don’t know of anyone who actively attempts to be really bad at something they want to do. I know that as a father, husband, son, and friend I want to get all of them right. In fact, I harbour a significant desire to excel in all of these roles, and I give up a huge amount of my thought processes to that aim. I also want to achieve other things in other parts of my life. Professionally I want to be the most impactful Business Transformation Coach I can possibly be, and I test myself repeatedly with every client, project, and programme I agree to take on. I am highly motivated to do whatever it takes to achieve my ultimate aim. Perhaps this sort of mindset is something that resonates with you, so is it so difficult to make the leap that everyone in your organisation could satisfy their own desire to be motivated whilst symbiotically achieving what the organisation as a whole desires?

It’s not cynical to want your employees to feel motivated it’s actually an act of respect and service, and a way of doing the right thing for the people in your charge. In this chapter we’ll talk about the first part of focused motivation required for Focused Excellence, ‘Goal Focused Motivation’, and in the next chapter we’ll talk about ‘Identify Focused Motivation’. To truly have irreversible excellence you need to enable both.

Rationale

Most common wisdom about setting goals within organisations, certainly at the strategic level, will say that a business must set out or declare a Vision statement. This is often a single paragraph or sentence which describes what the leader or owner has decided they want to achieve in the longer term. You may have even been a part of an annual review or setting of this Vision statement yourself, I know I have. I've even facilitated the drafting of it by members of a company's board of directors. How wrong I was.

The reason why I was wrong is that I failed to take into account the motivations of the people who will be asked, and paid, to work towards this vision. In the past I also failed to take into account how difficult it would be for everyone within the business to be able to easily connect what they did in their roles with whatever the text said in the Vision.

There's nothing wrong in setting out a "Vision" for the whole organisation to get behind, but if an organisation wants people to be able to satisfy their desire to feel motivated, then the intent and the way in which it is formulated must be done in the right way. For instance, why do we start with what the leader or owner wants to do? Why not start with what the people within the organisation want to do? In more recent times I have run multiple activities of canvassing the opinions of the broader workforce in the setting of the vision and it never ceases to amaze me how close the broader view is to what the owner or leader could have laid out themselves. The difference here is that people were asked rather than told. Of course, the leader or owner still has the ultimate say, but at least people feel valued in being asked to give their opinion and contribute. Quite often there are ideas put forward which the leadership had not considered and consequently become a significant part of the journey the business undertakes.

Although this approach is much more desirable and will certainly result in motivating people in a positive way, it is possible to go one step further. Why not consider an actual rationale for why the business even exists. How does it fit within the local community, the broader society, or even its place in the world? Giving this a first thought might seem a bit fluffy and intangible if your very existence within the organisation relies on achieving some important business metrics like profit, customer satisfaction, growth, on-time-delivery, or sales targets. However, if you consider that in order to achieve these lagging indicators you need everyone to be at their best, then why not focus on the leading indicators in such a way that people can feel like they are a part of something which is much bigger than themselves. Although this is not a quantitative indicator it most certainly can be a qualitative indicator.

There are people that would almost work for free because the organisation that they work for has a place within society that they care deeply about. Think about the people that work for our armed forces, policing, health care, and education. Many of these people began their careers because they wanted to feel like they could contribute in some way to either a national endeavour, or simply because being a part of it made them feel good about themselves. But what if you have a business which doesn't have a romantic purpose or, dare I say, undertakes their activities to provide something which on the face of it has moral or ethical questions to it. An example of this might be a firm that produces plastic food packaging for instance. If you're a leader of a company like this then you might hesitate at the thought of opening up the question of 'Rationale' to the people within your organisation, for fear of what might come back. What if people said they wanted the business they work for to stop using plastics and find another way to package food? Well, what if they did? Just because you're not asking, doesn't mean they're not thinking it anyway. They may even be considering a move away from your business because they're so uncomfortable with what the business does. In this

instance, you could consider formulating a Rationale for existing which says something like:

‘Providing a means to keep the food we eat fresh and safe without harming the environment in the process’



This is now suddenly something which people can get behind. They might know that currently you use plastic, but think about how motivated they could become to work towards a solution which fits the rationale. You may even feel better about working for the business yourself. Be brave and do the right thing and people will back you in my experience. Rather than enforce a top down direction for the company which is uninspiring and doesn't

motivate, why not develop a new direction for the company with the help of the people within it instead which will still do great things, have a healthy balance sheet and Profit and Loss Statement, but also allow people, including yourself, to be a part of something which is much bigger than they are.

Take a look at a company like Patagonia, known for its environmental activism. Patagonia's clear mission to "build the best product, cause no unnecessary harm, use business to inspire and implement solutions to the environmental crisis" resonates strongly with its employees and customers.

Direction

As was explained in the last chapter, to enable the motivation of the people in your business it is important to involve them in the setting of objectives and the creation of the plan to achieve it. However, at a local level people still need to understand in more detail what it is they need to be aiming for to support the broader aims.

You may have come across the story about John F Kennedy visiting the NASA in the early 1960s when he came across a janitor and said to him "Hi, I'm Jack Kennedy. What are you doing?" The janitor is said to have replied "Well Mr. President, I'm helping put a man on the moon."

When we think about an aim like putting a person on the moon we could be forgiven if we were to focus on the marvel of the engineering, planning, logistics, bravery, and flying skill involved, and perhaps ignore the fulfilment of the countless other tasks performed by people which free up the time of the Engineers, Logistical Experts, Planners, and Astronauts so that they can focus on what they're good at. For the people involved in these other tasks it's perhaps not that easy to understand what it is they

should be aiming for in their area of the organisation. It's still vital however that they are given a plan and framework which lays out exactly what it is they need to accomplish in order to support the achievement of the larger goal.



Even the people who are more directly involved in the production of the product of service that an organisation provides can still struggle to identify clearly what it is that is expected of them. It's a simple truth that in order to feel motivated people need to understand what it is they should be aiming for specifically, even if they understand what it is the organisation is aim for. Helping them with this connection is what Direction is about. Again, as was mentioned in the last chapter, the approach to enable

motivation is not to 'direct' but instead give 'direction'. People do not want to have to be told exactly what to do, but rather be given an aim, and the means to achieve that aim, and then be left to achieve it. We'll touch on this more in the 'Identity Focused Motivation' chapter but the key point to understand is that people have an innate ability and desire for autonomy and rather than it be an 'either/or' question in regards to Direction it is instead an 'as well as' question. How do you ensure that your people have direction whilst also providing them with the appropriate level of autonomy to achieve it. This is one of those problems that senior leaders should be solving, rather than perhaps some of the unnecessarily escalated issues that having a robust system of Focused Techniques can prevent.

Action

A quick Google search of the relationship between plans and action will yield a lengthy list of quotes for a myriad of people throughout history, including:

Albert Einstein was once asked how he would spend his time if he was given a problem upon which his life depended, and he had only one hour to solve it. He responded by saying "I would spend 30 minutes analysing the problem, 20 minutes planning the solution, and ten minutes executing the solution."

"Thinking will not overcome fear, but action will." – W. Clement Stone

"Action is the foundational key to all success." – Pablo Picasso

“There are risks and costs to action. But they are far less than the long range risks of comfortable inaction.” – John F. Kennedy

“When it is obvious that the goals cannot be reached, don't adjust the goals, adjust the action steps.” - Confucious

“An organisation's ability to learn, and translate that learning into action rapidly, is the ultimate competitive advantage.” - Jack Welch

What's both clear and obvious is that only by taking action can we achieve our aims, but ask yourself this question; how easy is it for the people in my charge to take the action that they need to take?

Having an inspiring vision, robust strategy, and detailed plan are all essential but how does this translate to the people doing the work. Are they simply given a set of tasks or aims and expected to get on with it, or has thought been given to how to make it as easy as possible for them to carry out the actions that are required.

A highly common waste that is found in businesses is that of waiting waste. Those of you familiar with Lean will know that this is one of eight wastes. A waste is defined as something that doesn't add value to the fit, form, or function of the product or service that a business or process provides. There are three things which people need in order to take action and not having one of these things will cause them to have to wait:

- Means
- Ability
- Accountability

Giving somebody the ‘Means’ to do something is to provide them with all of the physical and virtual tools, techniques, methods, and time that they would need to actually carry out the task. Giving somebody the ‘Ability’ is more than providing them with the knowledge that they need, it is also providing them with opportunity to practice and become proficient. We’ll talk more about proficiency and its impact in the ‘Identity Focused Motivation’ chapter. Finally giving someone the ‘Accountability’ is to delegate and empower whatever level of authority is needed to carry out the task as close as possible to the person who is carrying out the action. Think about how many times you’ve had to wait for someone to sign off on something you know will work but you haven’t been given the authority to do it.

What is worth remembering is that although the Leadership can offer these three things, the person doing the work has to accept them. This might seem paradoxical in some way but understanding why someone might not accept the manifestation of the Means, Ability, or Accountability still lies with the responsibility of the leader. We’ll talk more about this in the Focused Culture chapter, but the answer may not lie where you think.

In addition to taking action it’s also vital that people can tell that their actions are having an effect. Working long and hard on a task only to finish it and not be able to tell if it’s having the desired effect can leave people feeling empty and thinking whether their contributions actually matter, or even if they as individuals are actually valued. For people in a physical process building something tangible which they can easily see is a vital part of its construction, then this might be less significant for them, but even these people will at times do something like writing a Standard Operating Procedure that they suspect nobody follows, or complete a dashboard of metrics which they suspect nobody reads. Both of these things may be vital parts of the overall strategy and plan but if the person creating it can’t tell who’s using

it and whether it's useful to them, then it's relatively easy to develop a transactional relationship with the work that they're doing which by definition won't be motivating.



A key component to either an Operational Management System or an Operational Excellence System is to provide feedback. This maybe in the form of a daily or weekly roundup of the work that was done in the previous period, or something more direct like a leader observing and then providing coaching feedback to a person performing an activity. One of the most beneficial forms of feedback is for one leader to observe another leader in the act of leading. This may sound contrived in some way, but Leadership is a difficult skill to master, and if the only feedback a leader gets is

when people have started to complain about their leadership ability, then their proficiency curve is going to be a shallow one. However, inviting another leader to observe them in their interactions with the people in their charge can yield a much more frequent and useful form of feedback, which can increase the growth rate of their leadership proficiency before any issues transpire.

Effective leaders thrive on feedback, not just as a tool for personal growth but also for improving their emotional intelligence. In *Neuroscience for Leadership*, Tara Swart explains that feedback can rewire neural pathways in the brain, helping leaders to adjust their behaviour and emotional responses over time. Swart writes, 'When leaders receive constructive feedback, it activates neural circuits responsible for learning and adaptation, leading to increased self-awareness and improved emotional regulation.' This demonstrates how consistent, meaningful feedback helps leaders develop resilience and emotional intelligence.

In short, in order to benefit from Goal Focused Motivation people need to be able to both take action and be able to tell what, if any, impact their actions are having through whatever feedback mechanisms are available to them.

Summary

In this chapter, we explored the critical role of Goal Focused Motivation in sustaining Operational Excellence. Ensuring that employees understand the company's rationale, have clear direction, and possess the ability to act is essential for maintaining long-term success.

Next, we will address the third reason why Operational Excellence initiatives often fail: weak Identity Focused Motivation. This includes fostering a sense of ownership and purpose among

employees through autonomy, proficiency development, and meaningful work.

References:

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Identity Focused Motivation

How many times in your life have you achieved something, or acquired something, only to be left with a bit of an empty feeling a short time afterwards? How about when you bought the house of your dreams, only to find fault with it as you lived in it? How about getting the job promotion only to find that the day-to-day reality was a lot more mundane and uninspiring than you imagined it to be? What about buying that car you'd been obsessing about, only to find that it became pretty ordinary and you started to notice other cars on the road that you imagined you'd be happier with? What about if you've been lucky enough to start a family, only to find that after a while you felt like you didn't know who you were

anymore (this is very common by the way) as the responsibilities of family consumed your free time.

Striving to achieve a goal is most certainly motivating, but once the goal is reached it's perfectly normal to be left with a "so now what" feeling. There's nothing wrong with the way that you feel, in fact it's perfectly normal. It's a simple part of human psychology that the structure of our brain primes us to look for the next thing that we need to accomplish, in order to ensure that we as individuals and the group we belong to both survive and thrive. This instinct, however, can have a negative effect on our motivation if we find ourselves in a place where there are no more goals to accomplish, or that we've repeatedly accomplished them and we're just not getting the same sense of satisfaction from them.

In his book *Transcend*, Scott Barry Kaufman reimagines Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, emphasising that self-actualisation is not a final step in human psychological needs but rather a dynamic and ongoing development that people experience as their more immediate requirements are met. At the heart of this journey is the need to transcend basic desires and achieve a sense of purpose, connection, and personal growth. Kaufman argues that true fulfilment comes when people pursue their unique potential and transcend beyond individual desires to contribute to a greater good. In the context of an organisation, employees are most motivated when their work aligns with their internal identity so that it offers not just professional achievement but also personal meaning. In fact, Kaufman notes that self-actualisation involves the harmonious integration of autonomy, mastery, and purpose, much like what Daniel Pink outlines in his work *Drive*. However, Kaufman extends this by highlighting the importance of psychological flexibility and resilience by being adaptable in the face of challenges while remaining grounded in a sense of purpose and identity.



There are people in the world that find themselves in jobs that they hadn't planned to be in, only because the opportunity popped up in front of them serendipitously. However, most of us are in the jobs we are in because they are a means to the fulfilment of who we see ourselves as. Many senior executives and C-Suite leaders have exceptionally pressured jobs which take a huge toll on them as individuals and sometimes their family and friends as well. These executives trade off many of the parts of their lives that others wouldn't dream of doing in order to hold the roles that somehow make them feel whole or fulfilled. The reason for this is that we formulate a system of beliefs in our minds about who we are, or who we ought to be. This system of beliefs works together to form an image in our minds which in turn drives us to

take actions. Actions which we calculate will enable us to become the image of that person, or perhaps just maintain it.

Think about the number of people who buy exceptionally expensive items of clothes to wear around the people whose opinions they care about. Why do they do this? Quite simply to project an image of who they want other people to think they are. What about the people that include letters after their names on their social media profiles or email signatures because they want people to know what qualifications they have. It could be argued that they are trying to increase their credibility in a professional capacity of course, but if people wanted to know or check then it would be relatively easy for them to do so. What actions like this reveal is that people are motivated to become the idea of who they want to be, and if their current reality doesn't match this idea, or if there is a risk that they may lose this image, then they will take action to resolve this incongruence or disparity. In short, they will possess motivation.

This identity focused motivation has the ability to create a dynamic and symbiotic relationship between an organisation and the people who work within it. If the organisation is seen as a means or a vehicle to someone to achieve the sense of identity they have about themselves, then they will take whatever action is required, subject to their own personal values of course, to ensure that the organisation itself is a success. This is because the fate of the organisation and that of the individual will become entwined in the mind of that individual.

All this might sound like something which is highly self-oriented, but that doesn't necessarily need to be the case. If we define beliefs as something that we assert to be true and we define a sense of identity as the image formulated in someone's mind that has been derived from a system of beliefs, then the image itself is entirely dependent upon the individual beliefs. For instance, if someone holds a belief that they are a good person, and they also

hold a belief that good people care about the environment, the society that they live in, and the fair and equitable way that organisations and countries should be governed, then these two beliefs can form a system. So, in order for the person to become the image of a good person, it also follows that they should personally take the actions that protect the environment, behave in ways that promote good citizenship, and support the policies of organisations and governments which treat people fairly. Having a sense of identity as tacit as this can lead people to dedicate their lives to a cause.

As we talked about in the last Goal Focused Motivation chapter, if your organisation is brave enough to set a Rationale which the people within it have had the ability to contribute towards, then you may find yourself with an army of people who commit themselves entirely to the activities of the organisation, because it allows them to fulfil the need they possess of become the type of person they want to be. This type of motivation is hugely powerful, but remember that whatever that Rationale is, it must be authentic and not seen as a cynical way of getting people to do things. If people even suspect this, it will destroy their motivation as quickly as it was created. Harnessing Identity Focused Motivation is truly and genuinely a symbiotic relationship. Aligning the wants and needs of an organisation's people with that of the organisation itself can be an unstoppable force for good.

My own experience of coaching, consulting, and leading large scale transformation change programmes in both Bluechip clients and Small-to-Medium sized Enterprises for nearly two decades made it clear to me that there was indeed motivational forces at play which aren't covered in the tradition Maslow Hierarchy of needs type understanding. Both Kaufman and Pink talk at length about the psychology of this and I would encourage you to read both of these outstanding texts. Where as Kaufman describes something which transcends the Maslow Hierarchy of needs, Pink describes an intrinsic motivation which is made up of three things

which forms a practical basis for being able to formulate a strategy to take advantage of this phenomenon. My own experiences however had not exactly matched Pink's Autonomy, Mastery, and Purpose exactly and so I offer a variation here of Autonomy, Proficiency, and Meaning.

Autonomy

For anyone lucky enough to start their own family, or work in education with young children, they will know how all people are born with an innate ability and desire to work independently and to experiment. From our earliest developmental stages we begin to explore the world around us in a way that makes sense to us. Parents, guardians, and teachers will be able to testify that this drive to do things in the way the children want to do it, rather than in the way the adults desire, can often be a cause of the greatest moments of joy and also the great moments of frustration. In fact, cajoling or compelling a young child to behave or take actions which they don't want to take will almost certainly result in the child providing the feedback about how unhappy they are about it, in whatever form that may take. As we develop as human beings this desire for freedom to do whatever it is we want to do does not leave us. It may be constrained or controlled by our learned and programmed behaviour, but nevertheless give someone the opportunity to chart their own path and they will grasp that opportunity and be motivated to do whatever is they feel compelled to do. This freedom from external control or influence is what we define as Autonomy.

For us to have a sense of ourselves we need the freedom, or autonomy, to choose what it is we believe in. These beliefs can of course be formulated from our programming, or rather the influences and experiences of our past, but we still ultimately have the freedom to choose which beliefs we are going to assert

as true. So, autonomy is essential in the formulation of identity, and thus in our ability to be motivated to take certain actions.



As a business owner or leader, you can be forgiven for thinking that you'd rather people just got on and did what you need and are paying them to do, rather than worry about what it is they want to do. That's fine as long as you're happy that the only relationship you and your organisation has with these people is a transactional one, which will be shallow and nowhere near as effective as it could be. You pay your money, you take your choice, as the saying goes.

However, if you desire an irreversibly higher performance for your organisation and its people then forming a symbiotic relationship with the people in your charge and offering them an appropriate level of autonomy is essential. It doesn't mean that your people get complete autonomy. For Identity Focused Motivation you don't need a mindset of unilateralism, you need a mindset of multilateralism. There must be an acknowledgement by all parties that in order to work together there are certain boundaries and frameworks within which activities will be conducted. In fact, the very idea of delegation and empowerment relies upon people to feel like they have the ability to make their own decisions within the framework or context in which it is offered. Trust is obviously key to this arrangement and is actually a way of binding the relationship together. By offering a suitably wide enough framework in which people can metaphorically move around you are in fact offering a generous act of trust. This generosity will not go unnoticed by the people in your organisation, and as long as it fits with their sense of identity will result in actions powered by huge feeling of motivation, as people strive to become the image of themselves that they hold inside their heads.

The key here is to offer an appropriate level of autonomy not complete autonomy, and a big constraining factor to this level will be the proficiency of the people in the task or responsibility with which they have been assigned. This is what we'll discuss next.

Proficiency

There is a simple truth when it comes to proficiency, people get good at what they practice. There will of course be some level of genetic influence in the ability that people develop that may separate a small number of people from the crowd, but even these people must practice in order to develop the skill that they were perhaps born with a natural advantage for. Too often in life, and specifically in business, people are not given the opportunity

they need in order practice the very thing they desire to be better at. The reason for this, sadly, can often lie in the environment or culture in which they live. You may be one of the lucky ones that grew up and have existed in a space where mistakes are celebrated as learning opportunities, but this is not the case for everyone. I have found myself in what I regard as being a very fortunate position of finding a primary school in the UK for my children which actively celebrates the making of mistakes by its students. At first glance this may seem counter intuitive as we may assume that students go to school to become better at whatever subject it is they're learning, but this active encouragement for mistakes breeds one important habit amongst the student population, namely the willingness to try something and learn from the outcome. Notice that I used the word outcome. Trying something new, either completely new or a slight variation on something that is already being practiced, is the only way to truly learn. Science is based upon this very foundational principle of experimentation. There are methods to make it as robust as it could be, but ultimately the willingness to do something in a controlled way and to see what happens without the fear of getting it wrong or something undesirable happening is a crucial way in which knowledge, skill, and then attitude are developed. The outcome is simply the outcome, for better or worse.

Even if people are willing to give something a go, they don't always continue with it after the first few attempts, or maybe even after the first try. I imagine there is a high likelihood that you know somebody that tried something new and because of an undesirable outcome never attempted that particular activity again. Maybe that person is you. There is often a pressure, either imagined or real, that people feel in regards to getting something right.



In a work environment the fear people experience of the likelihood of losing their job, or getting a bad appraisal from their boss, or possibly even being judged by their colleagues that may or may not be depending on them, can cause people to do a simple risk evaluation in their heads which results in a decision to play it safe. Why risk the income that they depend upon to keep a roof over their heads, or maintain the car finance payments, or save for that amazing holiday when they can keep their heads firmly below the parapet and risk nothing? The obvious problem with this is that if someone doesn't try something new then by definition there can be no change, and without change there can be no improvement, either for the organisation or the individual.

The answer to this low or no risk taking culture is to create an environment in which people can take risks in a safe way that doesn't result in dire consequences if the outcome isn't a desirable one. In fact, celebrating the negative outcome as a growth opportunity will give the people taking a risk a reward regardless of the outcome.

The idea, of course, is not to continually get things wrong and reduce the performance of the person or the organisation. Learning from the outcome and then continuing to practice the activity with slight adjustments aimed at getting the desirable outcome is also crucial, and at the heart of this mindset is the activity of reflection. Thinking about and analysing what happened and what could be the causes of the outcome, for better or worse, can give a much deeper understanding and appreciation of the activity being practiced. There is a danger, however, that this reflection can become a repetitive loop in someone's mind if the impact of the outcome is painful in some way for the people involved. Let's think about the scenario of a person taking up a new leadership role after perhaps impressing their superiors in their proficiency at the function in which they work. Perhaps this person is even sent on some training courses to provide them with the knowledge they need regarding Leadership. How does this person turn knowledge into skill? Quite simply through application and practice. However, if their first attempts at interacting with the people in their charge does not go as well as it might with a more experienced leader then a situation of criticism can develop, which is most certainly not aimed at helping the leader to grow. I've personally seen this happen at all levels of leadership, including people in their first "managerial" position to more seasoned professionals moving from a Senior Role to an Executive Role. If the only feedback a person receives is in some way negative, then it can quickly become isolating and result in those people ruminating over the "mistakes" they made. They can go on to develop an internal dialogue inside their minds which tells them that they're no good at the thing they're attempting.

Beginners luck is indeed a “thing”, or at least there are people who seem to make the right choices in the early stages of attempting something new, but this is far from the most common scenario. If, however, this person has people to offer a perspective on their experiences that frames them in a cycle of growth then the new leader can begin to see this as a way of developing their proficiency.

If there are significantly undesirable outcomes then it is only right that people clear up their own mess, but this again is just part of the learning cycle. This clear up might involve something like an admittance of failure to someone who was on the receiving end of the undesirable outcome and then finding a way of making it right. But it’s also vital that the leader is not dissuaded from taking risks in the future because someone else experiences something less than optimum.

Safety for everyone involved is of course key. Taking irresponsible risk is not something that should be encouraged either, so a thorough risk assessment, either formal or informal, is also key. Irreparably damaging an individual or an organisation reputationally, financially, or otherwise, is not a risk that should be taken lightly, but allowing people to take controlled risks which result in no real harm and therefore no foul is what a Focused Culture should have in order to develop proficiency.

All this is great, but you may be thinking “what’s this got to do with motivation?” The answer is that being good at something is a part of the image of identity that someone formulates in their mind. Think about the thing, role, or person you see yourself being. For a minute let’s assume you see yourself as Senior Leader or perhaps a ‘Chief’ of such as a CEO, COO, or CFO. Do you see yourself as being bad at this job. Is that what you aspire to be? What about if you want to be a parent or guardian and have your own family. Do you want to be bad at being that parent or guardian? Of course not. The natural inherent desire for people is to be good at

whatever it is they desire to be. Nobody desires to be a really bad painter, athlete, businessperson, friend, grandparent, leader, or otherwise. Proficiency therefore is a crucial component to identity, which in turn is a crucial component of motivation, which in turn is a crucial component to achieving sustained and possibly irreversible excellence.



In short, continuous learning and development are crucial for keeping employees engaged and motivated. When an organisation fails to provide these opportunities then their people may feel stagnant, unvalued, and unfulfilled, leading them to seek other opportunities to satisfy this very basic psychological need. Why not, then, provide this opportunity within your organisation

and receive the symbiotic benefit of a motivated person performing at their best. Here are some ways to consider doing this:

- **Training Programs:** Implement regular training sessions, workshops, and courses to help employees develop new skills and improve existing ones.
- **Career Development Plans:** Work with employees to create personalised career development plans that outline their goals, and the steps needed to achieve them. Their ultimate aim may be to progress beyond the opportunities that are presented by working for your organisation, but don't shy away from this. Help them and therefore potentially achieve part of the Rationale for why your organisation exists. You'll get a lot more out of them while they are in your organisation.
- **Mentorship Programs:** Pair employees with mentors who can provide guidance, support, and insights into career growth. This will have an additional benefit of helping to fulfil the identity of more experienced mentors providing the support.

I would also encourage you to read 'Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience' by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. Csikszentmihalyi describes how individuals perform at their best and are most fulfilled when their tasks challenge their skills without overwhelming them, creating the perfect balance for optimal engagement. A key point here is when tasks are perceived to be too easy, or too hard by the person doing the tasks then this can affect their motivation and feelings towards that task. There is most definitely a sweet spot which ensures that the task which people are striving to proficient becomes the most rewarding.

Fostering an environment where flow is possible means providing employees with tasks that are sufficiently challenging, offering opportunities for skill development, and reducing unnecessary

distractions. When employees experience flow, they not only perform better but also derive meaning and satisfaction from their work.

Meaning

If people have the autonomy and the ability to develop the skills they need and desire, then what? What are people going to do with it? Being able to do something and having a reason to do it are two separate things. It may be that people need to apply their capabilities to create a life of safety and have their physical and psychological needs satisfied, but the vast majority of us will have these needs met to a reasonable level. What could possibly drive us to do more than we're already doing, if functionally we have everything we need to survive and then thrive? Why do people push themselves beyond their comfort zone to deliberately make their lives painful or difficult in some way? What is it that motivates people to push themselves further than wherever they are at now? Quite simply the answer is found in meaning.

In a psychological sense, "meaning" refers to the significance or purpose that an individual perceives in their life or experiences. It is a fundamental aspect of human existence and well-being which is inherent in influencing behaviour and can be a key component to mental health. If a person can find an organisation to work for whose Rationale for existing is aligned with their own meaning in life, then this can be a powerful motivational drive which will give rise to symbiotic benefits for both parties. The meaning that somebody assigns to their life will guide their decision making at a fundamental level providing them with their own sense of direction, and perhaps laying out a route through life. If an organisation's Rationale for existing is compelling enough, then a person can dedicate significant parts of their life to that organisation. I believe there will be a high likelihood that you will know someone like this, and maybe that person is you.

A common aspect to 'meaning' is that of coherence. This is the tendency or ability of a person to link together their experiences up to their current point in life and draw conclusions from it, which give a perception of things making sense in the context of the life they've led. It's a way of answering the "why me?" question. Why did those things, good or bad, happen to me and not someone else? What was the value of those experiences? What am I supposed to do with the lessons I learned? How can I make them into something positive for me and the world? Integrating all of the events and experiences in a person's life into a coherent narrative can significantly contribute towards a person's sense of meaning. The most wonderful things you see people doing for charity often have their roots in an experience they had in their lives. This maybe something that happened to them directly or it may be something that happened to someone they know or are close to. From this experience they form a reason larger than themselves that they can dedicate significant parts of their life to. In a business context it maybe that the organisation can begin to contribute either it's people's time, a portion of its profits, or use of its assets to charities and organisations who exist for the good of society. It would be a way of integrating its own activities into a narrative that fits its Rationale and subsequently contributes to the meaning people assign to their own lives. Of course, if the organisation itself has a Rationale that was compelling enough in its own right, so that it's business as usual activities were enough on their own to contribute to the narrative, then people would have a much more tangible way of integrating their own daily experiences into their own individual narrative.

Together with a sense of autonomy and a significant level of proficiency, having a meaning in life will shape a person's sense of identity from the building blocks of the values and beliefs which have in turn been shaped from their life experiences since birth. We'll discuss values and beliefs in the next chapter.

Here are some ways to help the people in your organisation find meaning:

- **Connect Work to Larger Goals:** Create a system that demonstrates to employees how their work contributes to the company's Rationale and Direction. This can be done through regular communications, team meetings, and performance reviews.
- **Recognition Programmes:** Recognise and reward employees for their contributions. This can include awards, bonuses, and public acknowledgment of their achievements.
- **Community and Social Responsibility Initiatives:** Encourage participation in community service and social responsibility projects. This can help employees feel that their work has a positive impact beyond the organisation they work for.

Summary

In this chapter, we explored how weak Identity Focused Motivation can hinder the sustainability of Operational Excellence. By increasing autonomy, providing opportunities for proficiency development, and helping employees find meaning in their work, organisations can build a more motivated and engaged workforce.

Next, we will address the fourth reason why Operational Excellence initiatives often fail; the fragility in their culture. The antidote involves establishing and maintaining a strong culture through shared values, beliefs, and habits.

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Focused Culture

When I travel to a city or a country what strikes me first is the culture of the place. I can feel it instantly in the way multiple people all seem to have similar behaviours. For instance, the closer I get to London the less tolerant people appear to be of the mistakes of others when driving on the road. When I use the London Underground I'm struck by the fact that nobody appears to talk to each other, and certainly nobody smiles at each other. I quite like to smile at people and even engage them in small talk when I travel on the Tube to see what they do. It's usually treated with pleasant surprise but all too often it can also be greeted with an unmistakable and nonverbal "leave me alone" response. How often have you visited a city, or a part of it, and been struck by how much litter is on the floor or by how little. What about a walk through a leafy village where people make eye contact with you as you go and say "good morning" or "isn't the weather lovely today?"

What sort of a feel do you get in a place like that? Perhaps a feeling that you'd quite like to live there?

Culture is something that we are all tuned into and it's very easy to detect. We also can't help but become part of a culture, and often we gravitate towards people who are like us. This can be seen quite dramatically in teenagers as they begin to work out who they are and who they want to be. Suddenly in senior school there are groups and tribes which look distinctly different to each other, but internally share a common dress sense, behaviours, and mannerisms.



When I walk into an organisation I also get the same instant feel for the place based upon my first impression and observation of people's behaviours, and the way the environment in which the work is done is presented. Spending a few hours in the organisation and talking to multiple people and it becomes very apparent, very quickly, what sort of place it's like to work in and where the priorities lie in relation to the customer, suppliers, owners, and colleagues. Are people inward looking with a scarcity mindset, or outward thinking with a growth mindset? Do people only focus on metrics, or are they more interested in the inputs to the process that drive and influence the metrics? Do people look out for each other's wellbeing, or is it every person for themselves? Do they see themselves as one organisation, or are their true loyalties to the smaller group of people they work with every day?

Why Do We Gravitate Toward Certain Cultures?

We're obviously social animals and as such we've evolved in a way which increases the likelihood of us surviving and thriving, and a natural part of that strategy is to ensure that the group we assign ourselves to survives and thrives as well. The reason for this is a simple truth that our ancestors who we're inclined to cooperate with others had a much higher likelihood of surviving past the point where they had procreated, and who's offspring were old enough to take care of themselves. Cooperation will have allowed specialist to form within the group and economies of scale to develop. Think of the people, possibly grandparents, who stayed in the camp to look after the children while the adults were out gathering food. How about the team of hunters who practiced their trade and regularly returned home with a reliable food source. Or perhaps the teams of builders who were able to provide shelter and make larger structures in which people could live their lives. Forming groups and finding a way to bond the group together through behaviours like loyalty, love, trust, and

reciprocity, is clearly inherent in our nature but it can manifest in ways that are counter to our desirable outcomes. Think of how often you hear about things like a workforce being at odds with the management, or how a Sales Team can complain about the performance of the Operations Team, and the Operations Team in turn complaining about the unreasonable demands of the Sales Team. Many times these conflicts can be due to a fundamental misunderstanding by one or both parties based upon what it is they see the other group doing. What actions and behaviours do they display and what conclusion might the other side draw from inside the paradigm from which they observe them? Behaving in a particular way in one group might send a completely different message to the people from another group, and any process of resolution will often involve getting the two parties to sit down and understand each other.

Why is it that the Sales Team call twice per day to see what is happening with their customer's order? Why does the Operations Team spend so much time not communicating with the outside world? Why has the management team decided to spend so much time on the shop floor watching people? Why isn't the workforce highlighting the problems they are experiencing every day?

Sitting down and talking about our feelings behind the behaviours will yield an understanding of what we may regard as being the motivations of people. We might begin to see that the behaviours we observed came from a good place, perhaps. Such as feelings of disconnection and the inability to control the outcome from the Sales Team whose jobs rely upon high quality and delivery performance of the Operations Team. Or perhaps the disrespect felt by the Operations Team at having to update somebody twice per day on a process which was designed to take as long as it takes. What about the feelings of accountability felt by the management team as they realise that they need to support the people in their charge, which they can't do from behind their desks. Maybe having been left alone for so long makes a

workforce suspicious of the intentions of a management team which, until recently, haven't bothered to be present in the workplace unless there was a problem.



Why We Do What We Do

Notice that in all of these scenarios I describe a team or group of people. When one person has a behavioural trait, we might call that a habit, but what makes a culture is when two or more people exhibit the same or similar behaviour repeatedly. We also instinctively know that behaviour is an outcome of something that happens inside an individual. It is not possible (yet) for someone

to think something in their own minds which instantly changes the thinking of somebody else, although with the advances of neural implant technology this may change in the future. So, what's going on that results in this synchronicity? To have a desirable set of behaviours at a culture level, i.e. two or more people, requires a shared set of thinking at the individual level. To understand how this is possible let's look at what happens inside a person's head which results in behaviour and actions. Shad Helmstetter laid out his sequence of 'Self-Management' in his book 'What to Say When You Talk To Yourself' in 1986.

1. Behaviour
2. Feelings
3. Attitudes
4. Beliefs
5. Programming

This is a great model in which we can understand why we do what we do. In essence, our 'behaviours' are a result of how we 'feel'. This makes perfect sense. If you feel angry then you're perhaps more inclined to raise your voice or be assertive, and even consider taking someone to task to explain why you're not happy. If we are happy, we're more inclined to be understanding of other people's challenges and perhaps tolerate mistakes which impact ourselves.

Our 'feelings' in turn are a result of our 'attitude' at that point in time. If our attitude is one of "I'm on my own and there's only me that can change anything" then it might lead us to begin to interfere in what other people are doing, or perhaps branch out on our own and leave the group, metaphorically or even physically, in the belief that we're better off alone. Likewise, if we have an attitude of cooperation, we may seek to understand what it is we can do to make other people more likely to achieve success in what they are doing.

Our ‘attitudes’ are subsequently a product of our ‘beliefs’. Again, this make sense since an attitude can be thought of as a summary evaluation of a situation based upon previous experience and learnings of the same situation or something similar. Drawing conclusion about something based upon multiple data point both past and present is something that our brains do in an instant.



Have you ever turned a corner in an unknown town or city, or entered a pub or bar, and instantly got a bad feeling about the place. Something that you can't quite put your finger on but knowing that something feels off? This is your brain working as a complex system and deriving an evaluation of the risk or rewards of your current situation based upon a corroboration of inputs

from your senses in that moment, and the memory of what happened to you last time those inputs were present.

If you've not had direct experience of the situation before then your brain will draw on memories when you imagined these types of scenarios and will use them in the same way as experiential memories. This ability of your brain to quickly provide you with an assessment is what is at the heart of the Freeze, Fight, or Flight response.

I like to call this response the Lizard Response after the Triune Brain model developed in the 1960s by the neuroscientist Paul D. MacLean, who described the human brain as having three concentric systems with the most primitive Reptilian (Lizard) Brain at the centre, and the Limbic (Emotional) System surround that and then the Neocortex on the very outside. Although this model has been superseded by more advanced models as neuroscience has developed, it is accurate enough for us to have a great way to think about how the human brain works in a practical and pragmatic sense. The Lizard Brain is actually the system within the centre of the brain at the top of the spinal column called the Basal Ganglia, and is a system we as humans share with many other species and was once believed to make up most of the forebrain in Reptiles and Birds, hence the name Lizard Brain. What is now well known is that the Basal Ganglia is responsible for our instinctive and habitual behaviour. It is highly connected to other parts of the brain and will quickly take over your actions and behaviours in certain situations. If you have a phobia or something similar like a significant dislike for something that you find difficult to explain, like cotton wool, snakes, a particular noise which "goes through you", or even something that you can't stand to watch on TV even though you know it's not real and is a creation of highly skilled filmmakers, then you will know what it feels like to have your Basal Ganglia take over. This ever-present system is constantly monitoring the inputs it receives from your senses and in evolutionary terms is essential in our own personal survival.

When you see a car approaching you on the wrong side of the road when you're driving, you don't have time to carefully consider your response, instead you're likely to quickly stamp on the brake pedal and receive a huge injection of adrenaline which you feel in your chest. In terms of survival, it's better to be safe than sorry if you find yourself in a high risk or dangerous situation.

Another reason that we rely so heavily on the Basal Ganglia, and its connections to the rest of the brain, is due to the high consumption of energy which the brain requires for its function. As researchers have pointed out, "The human brain is a highly energy-demanding organ, accounting for about 20% of the body's total energy consumption, despite representing only 2% of body weight" (Raichle & Gusnard, 2002). It also consumes many chemicals which the body produces naturally but these chemicals can at times be consumed more quickly than the body can recreate. These chemicals are known as neurotransmitters and are used to send signals between brain cells and along neural pathways. There are many different types of neurotransmitters which will not be detailed here, but you may have heard of some of the more well-known ones such as Endorphins, Serotonin, Dopamine, or Norepinephrine. In the times of our distant ancestors when resources and food sources were not as abundant as they are now it was essential that our brains made efficient use of the energy, minerals, and vitamins that we consumed. A brain that had to think things through thoroughly but still make some decisions quickly would have required higher levels of energy and chemical consumption which the environment may not have presented. So those animals and people who were fortunate enough to develop a fast and efficient way of making decisions and driving appropriate action will have been able to procreate more effectively and successfully, given the amount of energy they could reliably source.

To summarise then, forming an 'attitude' about something is a consequence of the way in which our brains are structured and

operate, and we can think of it in terms of motivation as a result of a complex system of beliefs, experience, and crucially interpretation. Shad Helmstetter describes this as our ‘Programming’ which is an elegant metaphor which leans on the way humans have invented a written set of instruction that computers follow to perform specific tasks. These computer programmes happen at high speeds, are completely repeatable, and rely upon a system of integration with other programmes and inputs. This therefore is very analogous to how the human brain works. In the Self-Management Sequence beliefs are a consequence of our programming, but in my experience, they are more than that. There is a fundamental connection between the ‘Belief’ that we formulate and the ‘Values’ that we hold.

Rewriting Beliefs and Values

If a ‘Belief’ is a conviction or acceptance that certain things are true or real (whether we have proof or not) then a ‘Value’ is a moral principle or accepted standard. A value to a belief is what a line of code is to a computer programme. Modern advances with Artificial Intelligence have resulted in computers that can write their own code which is exactly how the human brain works. Some of our “code” is a product of the evolutionary structure and functioning of the brain but other “code” has been “written” by our own brains and stored in our memory for use at an appropriate time.

From birth we begin to experience things and our brains learn from those experiences. In early childhood we formulate our basic values from the people around us, such as our parents, family, and close social connections. As we move through life we rely upon these values, i.e. principles and standards, to inform our interpretation of new experiences which is the fundamental principle of coherence which was discussed in the last chapter. We formulate a narrative and then store a summarised version in our minds in the form of beliefs. The younger a brain is the more

plasticity it has, meaning it is easier for the brain to change its neural network, and so it is not uncommon for teenagers or young adults to reject the values and beliefs of their elders because of a reinterpretation of something based upon new information or experience. As the human brain ages this plasticity reduces but certainly does not disappear. It simply manifests as being harder to change someone's mind about something, which also makes sense from an evolutionary perspective since older people have more data points on which to draw their conclusions.



In the context of the Self-Management Sequence ‘Programming’ describes the process of embedding specific thoughts and beliefs into the subconscious mind, but I would specifically draw out the

notion of Values as well. And just like an advance AI programme our brains have the ability to re-write our programming which is done one line of code at a time, i.e. a reinterpretation of our values (principle and standards) based upon new experience or in fact deliberate thought. So, to change a person's behaviour requires a reassessment of their values, and to achieve a Focused Culture will require two or more people to have a shared set of Values and Beliefs that subsequently lead to repetitive behaviour which we can call Habits.

Values

Shared values are the foundation of a strong organisational culture. When employees' values are misaligned with those of the organisation, it can lead to confusion, conflict, and disengagement. Traditional thinking might say that the senior team or leaders should decide on what the values need to be to achieve the business objective and then roll these out to the broader population to inform them of what will be required. The senior leaders may even go as far as to try to filter out people who don't "share" the organisation's values which they've espoused, either through an appraisal system or recruitment process. Like a large-scale purge of undesirable people. Although effective in the short term, what if having these values proves to be problematic as time goes on and circumstances change. What if a portion of the values ended up having the reverse effect to the one that was desired? Is the solution then to have another purge? What if the organisation was completely successful in getting rid of all of the people whose value system didn't exactly match that of the organisation? Should they replace every single person with an entirely new population since these people have demonstrated exactly what their values are? After all that's why they were allowed to stay in the organisation in the first place.

This type of fixed one-dimensional thinking is often at the heart of why many Operational Management Systems and Operational Excellence Systems fail. The temptation to treat people as resources or assets to be spent and used at the expense of the fictitious entity that is the “organisation” is very real (an organisation isn’t a thing, it’s group of people with a particular purpose). It’s a mindset that has prevailed strongly throughout the last two decades. Why do companies still insist on having ‘Human Resource’ departments and personnel? Are humans really only a resource? What does that say about the true values and beliefs of the organisation? Human beings are not components of an organisation, they are the organisation. Despite the fact that some of the people in the organisation may draft the official list of values and beliefs and then spend financial resources in promoting them, it won’t actually change the values and beliefs of the people within the organisation. It’s ludicrous to think that putting up posters on office and workshop walls will cause people to reassess deeply held values and beliefs which have resulted in a lifetime of experiences and interpretation. The true values will be held solid, regardless of what people will feel compelled to say when asked by an authority figure.

The simple act of advertising and remind people of what their shared values are is not in and of itself a bad thing. What will not give irreversible excellence, however, is ignoring the real shared values that already exist with an organisation’s culture. So why not instead start off by asking and finding out what the values are of the people who do the work? If it turns out that there are crucial values to success missing from the current set, then begin the dialogue and communication as to why certain standards and principles are needed. Rather than attempting to provide people with a “line of code” why not open up engagement activities which fundamentally speak about morals and standards? Is turning up late and keeping other people waiting fair? Should someone come to work and expect people to accept them for who they are? If someone feels bad about themselves because of a joke how

should the other parties respond? These types of discussion will cause the people within your organisation to reflect on the values that they already hold, and perhaps begin to modify them based up a different perspective or new information. People can often feel horrified that they cause such upset from things like “banter” which they engage in only because that’s what they’ve always known. In fact, they probably possess a belief system that tells them that it’s desirable to be able to “take a joke” and “give what you take” because that was part of the conditioning that they enjoyed during their formative years. Through a simple process of feedback, reflection, and reinterpretation people can easily formulate new values which result in entirely different behaviours.



Try these simple ideas for establishing a common set of shared values which will improve the performance of individuals and the organisation alike:

- **Establish and Define Core Values:** Through active consultation establish the values that already exist. For problematic values engage people in a repositioning and alternative perception of the impact some values can have on the other people within the group or wider organisation.
- **Communicate Values:** Regularly communicate these values through various channels, such as onboarding programs, internal communications, and leadership communication.
- **Lead by Example:** Leaders must embody the organisation's values in their actions and decisions, serving as role models for employees.
- **Reflection:** Periodically engage the people in your organisation to understand how values may have shifted. Are the outcomes of these shifts desirable for the organisation and move it closer to excellence or should people be encouraged to find common ground which allows either tolerance or alignment of core principles and standards.

Beliefs

As was mentioned earlier Values are to Beliefs what lines of code are to computer programmes, and like computer programmes sometimes they can essentially be only one line of code long. It is often tempting to disappear down the rabbit hole to draw a clear distinction between Values and Beliefs but for the purpose of this consideration let's assume that Values make up Beliefs, but sometimes the Belief is nothing more than the Value its based upon, and there's nothing more complicated to it than that.

Beliefs by their nature are more than an accepted, or acceptable, standard by which to conduct oneself or indeed a moral principle. They are more detailed and thus require more of an explanation to communicate it to someone else. You might believe, for instance, that the best way for a company to be run is with definitive and ridged lines of hierarchy. You may also believe that it should be enough for someone to be paid a generous wage and in return they should give their very best every single hour of every single day that they turn up for work. You might instead believe that people aren't robots, and are fundamentally more complex, and will have a lot going on in their lives that could affect their performance at work. Furthermore, you might believe that the best way to run a company is to help people with their life problems in some way which doesn't involve removing agency and accountability, the result of which would be a higher level of performance on aggregate, and combine with a culture that aligns with this belief, could give the organisation the competitive advantage it needs to survive and thrive in a highly competitive trading environment. Whichever system of belief you more closely align to, the point of listing these examples is to demonstrate what a belief and belief system are. They are not simple things and multiple beliefs can interact with each other.

Like computer programmes stored on a computer hard drive, these beliefs will exist in the memory banks of the individual and depending upon the inputs being experienced by the person at that point in time some will remain dormant and others will activate. Your brain will then formulate a summary of this complex system which we experience as being an attitude or perspective. We are not however at the complete mercy of our values such that we cannot control the beliefs that we define. The areas of the brain that Triune Brain Model would describe as the Neocortex are responsible for the cognitive functions that we are consciously aware of such as thinking and reasoning. This area of the brain is also associated with our ability to plan and communicate. An important functionality of our brains is that of connectivity, insofar

as how certain areas of the brain in each Triune system are strongly connected with other areas of the brain in one of the other systems. These connections are in fact our neural pathways and as such its quite easy to apply a level of conscious thinking which can rewire these pathways to formulate new beliefs from the same set of values, and possibly even reevaluate the values themselves. This conscious thinking is what we would call interpretation and it is fundamental to the way in which we can take both responsibility and accountability for our own programming.



This reprogramming, or reinterpretation, can absolutely be done on our own but it is much easier to do it with a trusted partner to

assist in thinking things through. This can be your friends, family, spouses, partners, or even someone who can provide a service in a professional capacity like a mentor, coach, councillor, or therapist. Depending on the type and level of the belief system which you need help with, these professions can help guide you in reviewing and possibly rewriting your belief systems.

This is analogous to the concept and practice of 'Pair Programming' in the computer code writing industry. This technique is an agile software development technique in which two programmers work together on the same code. It's a highly effective way of writing better code because there are two brains looking at the same problem, halving the workload for each line of code.

The style of leadership a person adopts is by definition a product of their behaviours, and as such are formulated through their values and belief systems. According to Tara Swart in her book *Neuroscience for Leadership*, the neural pathways formed by our values and experiences are critical in determining how we respond to challenges and make decisions. Swart explains that, 'Our brains have evolved to prioritise certain belief systems that align with survival and social belonging, which ultimately influence our leadership effectiveness.' This shows how deep-rooted values can shape leadership performance by guiding decision-making under pressure. It's not just about the behaviour of the people on the front line who are doing the work, it's also about the behaviours of the people in the layers of leadership which usually exist in organisational hierarchies.

Talking to somebody about your thoughts is also a highly effective way of being able to gain new insights and interpretations of experiences and situations, whether it's leaders or frontline workers. The outcome of which is the formation of a new perspective or attitude which will in turn change the way you feel about things entirely.

It's a common misconception that we are at the mercy of our feelings. The truth is that our feelings are ultimately a product of our values, thinking, and beliefs, via our attitude or perception. The way to help people be at their best, perform the right actions, and behave in the most desirable way is therefore to help them with their programming. The ultimate secret to irreversible excellence is not in compliance to perform the top-tier technique found in the latest Lean or Operational Excellence textbook, but rather the combination with motivational understanding and creating cultural excellence.

Habits

Charles Duhigg defined the habit loop in his 2012 book *The Power of Habit*, in which is proposed the four components of Cue, Routine, Reward, and Craving. James Clear repositioned these same four components in his 2018 book *Atomic Habits*. Both books are fantastically written, well researched, and formulate a strong argument of how to create desirable and break undesirable habits. I personally have used the concepts described in these books with great success, for me personally and with the clients I have supported in my 10+ year coaching and consulting career. Its power lies in its simplicity and its effectiveness in understanding how to change pragmatically and practically what we do on a reliably repeatable basis.

I will not attempt to recreate their work here mainly because its unnecessary and instead would encourage you to read the books after you've finished reading this one (if you haven't read them already, of course)!

The key point to consider is that if through a process of reflection you, the leaders within your organisation, or the people doing the work, arrive at a conclusion that the actions being undertaken on a routine basis are not in keeping with the drive for excellence

which your organisation both desires and requires, then it is possible to break out of the old pattern and formulate a new pattern. Again, this can be done on one's own, but it is so much easier to do it with the help of someone else. Finding someone with the same problem and buddying up to support each other and talk through thoughts can be a highly effective way at formulating new habits. If more in depth knowledge is required, then finding a suitable coach or mentor may be the best and most effective way to doing it.

Once a system of neural pathways is formed within the brain those pathways will exist forever. This is a structural phenomenon within the brain which allows us to retain knowledge, skills, and attitudes throughout our life even if we don't have cause to practice them on a frequent basis. We may become rusty at something not undertaken in a while, but with a little practice we can soon approach the performance level we were perhaps used to. The counter to this essential functionality to the brain is that if the neural pathways which are formed become undesirable in some way over time, then we can struggle to not use them. The physiological reason for this is that as we use our neural pathways our bodies and brains respond by coating them in a substance called myelin which insulates them and promotes more efficient transfer of the electrical signals passing through them. The longer and more frequent we use any given neural pathway the thicker the coating of myelin is and subsequently the easier it is for us to use those same pathways. This is why old habits do indeed die hard. We have to use our conscious parts of our brain to lay down new pathways and actively stop using the existing established pathways. To do this on one's own can be immensely difficult which is why many people struggle to maintain their New Years resolutions. Introducing a new trigger, such as a regular session with a coach or mentor, can assist in the laying down and use of the new pathways thus making it easier to use. We are in essence "rewiring" the brain by laying out alternative pathways for signals to flow down.

Try these practical examples if you're trying to change a habit or pattern of behaviour:

- Introduce a new cue. If you're trying to take up a running habit, then leave your running shoes near the front door so they are the first thing you see when you walk in your house. If you want to ensure that everyone in your team feels supported, then put it as an explicit agenda item on your team's visual meeting board to prompt the question.
- Make the existing routine difficult. If you don't want to check your work emails when you get home, find a place to put your phone which is difficult to get to. That way you won't easily reach over and grab your device when you're sat on the couch, or worse still at the dinner table! If you want to increase the interaction people have with each other in an effort to reduce email traffic, then introduce a policy of not sending emails on particular days of the week. It'll feel strange at first, but soon people will get used to it and start to jump on video calls or better still visit each other face to face.
- Remove the reward. If people are chasing a metric rather than doing the right thing at work, then remove the metric. This might seem counterintuitive in a traditional Operational Management System mindset, but with proper application more desirable and effective behaviours will result.

Summary

In this chapter, we explored how a culture can undermine the sustainability of Operational Excellence. By aligning values, ensuring consistent beliefs, and cultivating healthy habits,

organisations can build a strong culture that supports long-term success.

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Conclusion

I started this eBook with a definition of Operational Excellence which I offered was no longer a suitable definition. It seems only fitting that I offer a definition of Focused Excellence which is in keeping with the approach of outlined in this eBook.

Definition of Focused Excellence

Focused Excellence is a comprehensive approach to achieving sustained high performance within an organisation. It centres on the integration of specific methodologies and tools while deeply embedding motivational and cultural elements into the operational framework. Focused Excellence is characterised by:

- **Focused Techniques:** Utilising a balanced combination of proactive, reactive, and integrating techniques to highlight realities, set directions, anticipate and solve problems, and ensure cohesive operations across the organisation.
- **Goal Focused Motivation:** Ensuring that every individual understands and is motivated by the company's broader goals through a clear rationale, direction, and the ability to take appropriate actions.
- **Identity Focused Motivation:** Promoting intrinsic motivation by providing autonomy, opportunities for proficiency development, and meaningful work, aligning personal identities with organisational objectives.
- **Focused Culture:** Establishing and maintaining a culture based on shared values, beliefs, and habits, creating a supportive environment where continuous improvement and high performance are naturally sustained.

Focused Excellence is self-reinforcing and self-improving, transforming the organisation into an entity where success becomes inevitable and irreversible, without the need for constant external auditing or enforcement.

What Can You Do Next?

To truly achieve and sustain Operational Excellence, organisations must adopt the strategies outlined in this eBook. This involves embracing the Focused Excellence System to address common pitfalls and drive long-term success and growth. By implementing these strategies, businesses can ensure that their Operational Excellence initiatives are not only effective but also enduring, securing a resilient and prosperous future.

Achieving operational excellence isn't easy, but it's most definitely within reach if you focus on making it irreversible. The strategies

outlined in this book provide a roadmap for overcoming common challenges, but your journey doesn't stop here.

As you reflect on these 12 reasons why operational excellence often fails, ask yourself:

- Are your teams aligned with your organisation's goals?
- Have you implemented tools and techniques that truly stick?
- Do your leaders focus as much on motivating and inspiring your people as they do on process and procedure?
- Is your organisational culture built to sustain success?

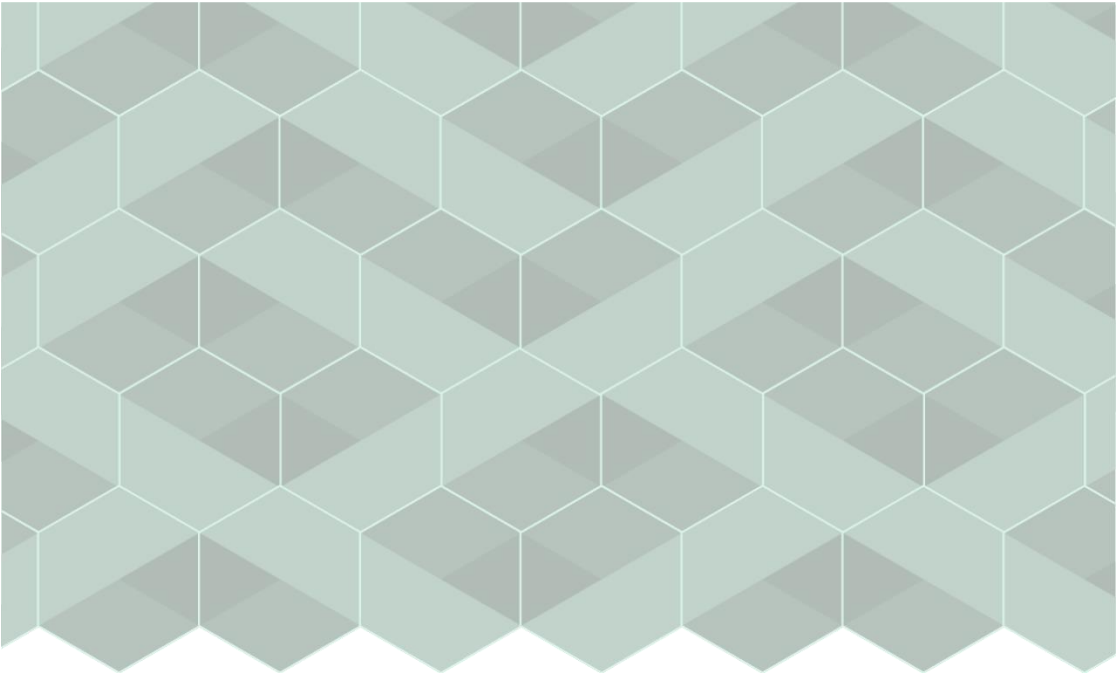
Focused Potential, the business I founded, can support you in your journey toward excellence. Visit www.focusedpotential.uk or connect with me on LinkedIn www.linkedin.com/in/daniel-stanway-8444491a/ for more information. You'll find free resources such as Online Masterclasses and Maturity Assessments which you can use to begin your journey and also provide others in your organisation with the knowledge you now possess.

Final Thoughts

The journey to Operational Excellence is not a one-time project but a continuous commitment to improvement and sustainability. It requires a holistic approach that integrates technical methodologies with motivational and cultural elements. By focusing on the key areas identified in this eBook, organisations can build a robust framework for Operational Excellence that not only achieves immediate gains but also secures long-term resilience and success.

As we move forward, it is crucial to remember that the foundation of Operational Excellence lies in the people within the organisation. Empowering them, aligning their goals with the organisation's objectives, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement are essential steps toward creating an environment where Operational Excellence can thrive sustainably and irreversibly.

By following the principles and practices outlined in this eBook, organisations can transform their operations, achieve lasting excellence, and ultimately, ensure a successful and resilient future.



Appendices

Appendix A - Operational Excellence and Operational Management Techniques

| Technique | Purpose | Application |
|--|---|--|
| Root Cause Analysis (RCA): | To identify the fundamental cause of a problem or defect. | Techniques such as the "5 Whys" involve repeatedly asking "why" a problem occurs until the root cause is identified, while the Fishbone Diagram (Ishikawa) helps to visually map out potential causes of problems. |
| 5S | To organise and standardise the workplace for efficiency and effectiveness. | The 5S technique involves five steps—Sort, Set in Order, Shine, Standardise, and Sustain—to create a tidy, efficient, and safe work environment. |
| DMAIC (Define, Measure, Analyse, Improve, Control) | To improve processes and reduce defects in a structured manner. | Part of Six Sigma, the DMAIC technique is used to define problems, measure key aspects, analyse data, improve processes, and control future process performance. |
| Kaizen | To promote continuous, incremental improvements in processes. | Kaizen involves small, regular changes and encourages employee participation at all levels |

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| | | to suggest and implement improvements. |
| Poka-Yoke (Error Proofing) | To prevent errors and defects in processes. | Poka-Yoke techniques involve designing processes in such a way that mistakes are either impossible or immediately detectable, such as using fixtures that prevent incorrect assembly. |
| Kanban | To improve workflow and manage work in progress (WIP). | Kanban involves visualising work items on a board and managing the flow of work through different stages, often used in Lean and Just-In-Time (JIT) production systems. |
| Standard Work | To ensure consistency and quality in processes. | Standard work involves documenting the best practices for performing tasks, ensuring that every employee follows the same procedures to maintain consistency and efficiency. |
| Visual Management | To communicate information effectively and enhance process transparency. | Visual management techniques use visual signals, such as charts, graphs, and signs, to convey information about process status, performance, and issues. |

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| Bottleneck Analysis | To identify and address constraints in a process. | Bottleneck analysis techniques involve identifying the slowest part of a process that limits overall throughput and finding ways to improve or eliminate these constraints. |
| Gemba Walk | To understand the actual work process and identify improvement opportunities. | A Gemba Walk involves leaders and managers going to the "Gemba" (the place where work is done) to observe processes, engage with employees, and identify areas for improvement. |
| Scheduling | To allocate resources and plan activities efficiently | Techniques like Gantt charts, Critical Path Method (CPM), and Program Evaluation and Review Technique (PERT) are used to create and manage schedules |
| Process Mapping | To visualise and understand workflow | Techniques like flowcharting, swim lane diagrams, and SIPOC (Suppliers, Inputs, Process, Outputs, Customers) diagrams are used to map and analyse processes. |
| Capacity Planning | To ensure that production | Techniques such as Rough-Cut Capacity Planning (RCCP) and |

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| | capacity meets demand | Capacity Requirements Planning (CRP) are used to match production capacity with demand forecasts. |
| Cost-Benefit Analysis | To evaluate the financial feasibility of projects and decisions. | Techniques involve comparing the costs and benefits of different options to determine the most cost-effective solution. |

Appendix B - Further Reading

| Title | Author(s) |
|---|---|
| Neuroscience for Leadership. Harnessing the brain gain advantage. | Tara Swart, Kitty Chisholm and Paul Brown |
| Neuroscience for Dummies | Frank Amthor |
| Neuroscience for Coaches. How coaches and managers can use the latest insights to benefit clients and teams | Amy Brann |
| What to Say When You Talk To Yourself. Powerful new techniques to programme your potential for success! | Shad Helmstetter |
| Drive. The surprising truth about what motivates us. | Daniel H. Pink |
| Transcendence. The new science of self-actualisation. | Scott Barry Kaufman |
| In distract able. How to control your attention and choose your life. | Nir Eyal with Julie Li |
| Hooked. How to build habit-forming products. | Nir Eyal with Ryan Hoover |
| Why Has Nobody Told Me This Before? | Dr Julie Smith |

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| The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. Powerful lessons in personal change. | Stephen R. Covey |
| Atomic Habits. An easy & proven way to build good habits and break bad ones. | James Clear |
| The Power of Habit. Why we do what we do and how to change. | Charles Duhigg |
| Flow. The classic work on how to achieve happiness. | Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi |
| Certified Six Sigma Black Belt Primer | Quality Council of Indiana |
| The Toyota Way. 14 management principles from the world's greatest manufacturer. | Jeffrey K. Liker |
| Creating a Lean Culture. Tools to sustain lean conversions. | David Mann |
| The Lean Toolbox. A handbook for lean transformation. | John Bicheno and Matthias Holweg |
| The Machine that Changed the World. How lean production revolutionised the global car wars. | James P. Womack, Daniel T. Jones & Daniel Roos |

Discover the critical insights behind why Operational Excellence often falters and learn the strategies to ensure lasting success. In "The 12 Reasons Why Operational Excellence Never Lasts", Dan Stanway shares his extensive experience and practical wisdom, integrating proven techniques from leading experts. This eBook presents the Focused Excellence System, a comprehensive approach combining proactive, reactive, and integrating techniques with motivational and cultural elements. Transform your organisation's performance and cultivate a sustainable culture of excellence with actionable steps and real-world examples. Achieve enduring Focused Excellence and drive continuous improvement with this essential guide.