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firm's technology strategy.

Jim Boomer • May. 22, 2012

Does your firm have a formal technology committee to chart the I.T. strategy for your firm? Is it a balanced group with representation from all functional areas of the firm? If you answered yes to both of these questions, then I commend you and encourage you to continue reading as you'll probably learn a few things to help you improve. If not, I would encourage you to start building out your committee today. This post will outline some general guidelines to consider when building out your committee, the importance of a balanced membership and why you should consider having an outsider sit on your committee.

Firm Projects NOT I.T. Projects

The technology committee, if built correctly, can be a valuable asset in building the firm's technology strategy. Once you've set the strategy and decided upon the initiatives to focus, it's time to execute. A common mistake firms make is to label most (if not all) of these initiatives as "IT Projects." The problem there is that these are firm projects and should be led by firm leaders with IT support. If you simply throw projects to IT, you're setting yourself up for failure and throwing away time and money. This is why many of the most successful firms make use of a technology committee to help steer the IT strategy.

Important Characteristics of the I.T. Committee

The technology committee should:

- **Be responsible for plan execution** – A plan is worthless without accountability

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- **Realize IT Department ¹ Technology Committee** – If you just label your IT department as the technology committee then you're defeating the purpose. The IT department can make decisions in a silo without the effort of formalizing a committee.
- **Understand the IT leader is not the de-facto Chair** – The IT leader should definitely be a member of the committee but shouldn't always be the chair. Unless the right skills are present in this individual (communication, marketing, project management, budgeting & cash flow, HR & technology) you should select someone else to be the chair. Ideally this will be someone that is organized and skilled in meeting management.
- **Include the Training & Learning Coordinator** – The success of any project hinges on training and change management. Since the T&L coordinator will play a huge role in both of these, it is important to have their involvement on the committee.

A Balanced Group

As you start to build out the committee, it's important to understand the preferred working style of the potential candidates. This will allow you to go beyond building a representative team based on practice area and level within the firm. You should strive for a balance between researchers and quick-starts to bring to the table both their unique abilities and equilibrium to counter some natural tendencies. If you select all researchers for the committee, there is no doubt you will have all the facts but it may be difficult to reach a decision and move projects forward. On the other hand, if the committee is comprised of a bunch of quick-starts there will be plenty of decisions and action but they might not be based on enough facts. Tools like the KolbeTM Index are great tools for better understanding your team and ensuring that you have the right mix.

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the decision making process.

- **Less likely to change/cancel meetings** – It's often easier to inconvenience our own team members by canceling or rescheduling a meeting. However, when someone from outside the firm is involved the temptation to do this is minimized.
- **More likely to stay on the agenda** – Along the same lines as not changing or cancelling meetings, committee members will be more averse to wasting the time of an outsider. This leads to a meeting that stays on the agenda and thus, on time.
- **Attendance by the right people (MP, CIO, management committee)** – The committee's level of commitment also naturally increases when a 3rd party is involved. They are often influenced by the fact that this person made the effort to attend and will hold themselves accountable to do so as well. Additionally, depending on who the outsider is, they might be a draw for firm leadership to attend.
- **Focus on what is really important!** – The presence of an outsider can help keep the group focused on what matters most.

The last point – focus on what is really important – not only relates to pulling in an outsider, it should also be a guiding principal of your technology committee! Meetings should be about progress and not perfection. They should focus on the accomplishments made since the previous meetings. While we certainly want to ensure that we learn from mistakes, avoiding the temptation to dive into the “why” and point blame will keep the group moving forward towards positive results!

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