



Beat the Whirlwind: Achieve a Heightened Level of Workplace Excellence



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As a departmental leader, you've likely experienced days—if not months—where the whirlwind and chaos of your job leave you feeling nothing short of overwhelmed.



Some days, you are responsible for ensuring that all your critical tasks (daily output, strategic initiatives, budget, etc.) remain in the air at the same time. Sometimes you are asked to complete a seemingly impossible task with limited resources and time. Other times, you are eager to try something daring and extraordinary to move your department forward.

With mounting pressure to have your team run leaner, more efficiently and more strategically, the process of achieving excellence in the workplace can feel like a dizzying act.

The daily whirlwind is greater than it has ever been. In fact, a recent global survey by Zenger Folkman found that 14% of respondents [feel chronically overwhelmed](#) by all that's on their plate. As a leader, you are focused on everything from developing your employees' careers to setting department strategy to investing in the right technologies. Ultimately, though, when everything is a priority, nothing can be a priority. And what often falls to the wayside first is a keen focus on the way outdated, broken technologies, operations and systems can negatively impact your team.

You may start to experience the following:

- Employees who feel disengaged and disempowered
- Broken processes that never get addressed because we are “too busy”
- System workarounds because we don't have time to reconsider our technology investments
- An inordinate amount of manual effort stemming from a perceived lack of a better way
- Acceptance of “it's the way it's always been done” environment

“In business, the ‘good enough’ mentality takes hold, especially when it comes to our technologies, systems and processes,” says Randy Jackvony, Trilix's Principal of Technology & Client Services. “Employees and teams are executing processes that add little value or they become comfortable and complacent with a known but inefficient process because they perceive it as adding value to their role. Systems and technology remain inadequate because the thought of replacing them is overwhelming. Therefore, organizations remain in a ‘good enough’ mode, never reaching greatness and learning to accept moderate success.”

It's the job of any effective leader to reject the notion of “good enough” and to strive for greatness. What's more, a leader is responsible for pinpointing the exact culture, technology and process issues impacting a team's ability to succeed and assuming ownership in solving the problem. When a leader commits to continuous improvement and the belief that everything can fundamentally be improved, he or she takes considerable steps forward in helping a team reach a heightened level of workplace excellence.

Redefining Workplace Excellence

In 2001, Jim Collins released his best-selling business book, “[Good to Great](#).” Collins wanted to understand how some companies were able to make the leap to great, whereas others only reached a level of good. He studied dozens and dozens of businesses—from Coca-Cola to Intel to General Electric to Merck—and found that the companies that were able to make the leap to great subscribed to similar principles.

For starters, they had what Collins referred to as “Level 5 leaders,” individuals who had a high degree of personal accountability and humility. When things went right, these individuals looked elsewhere to attribute success; when things went wrong, they were the first to look in the mirror to understand the role they played. The great companies also understood the role of technology as an accelerator—not creator—of greatness. In other words, they recognized that technology played a chief role in creating momentum and prioritized its importance.

When you think of your own business—and how to make the leap from good to great—one of the first places to start is to examine the connectivity between your people, processes and technologies so you can more successfully marry them together. Often in business, the three components are imbalanced. For instance, an organization may be so focused on a technology rollout that it fails to account for the importance of user adoption. Conversely, a business may be racing to develop a custom application that will provide a heightened level of differentiation, but isn’t pausing to consider how an iterative, documented process will move that innovation along. People, process and technology can end up working against each other rather than together.

Organizations reach a heightened level of workplace excellence at the point at which operations and culture fuse together to achieve organizational goals. Businesses that center on workplace excellence uniquely understand the powerful way people, processes and technologies come together to move an organization toward its desired future state. It’s about approaching and making every business decision—whether strategic, philosophical, tactical, technological, etc.—against that excellence model. It’s about choosing to be a great organization.



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Randy Jackvony, Trilix Principal of Technology & Client Services



Why Now?

The concepts of continuous improvement and change management are not new, but they are becoming increasingly important when it comes to corporate survivability and employee retention. Market research demonstrates that accepting an “it’s the way it’s always been” philosophy puts our companies at great risk. Just consider the following statistics:

- 51% of American employees are not engaged and haven’t been for some time - [2017 Gallup State of the American Workplace report](#)
- 63% of executives and managers feel the pace of technological change in their workplaces is too slow - [MIT Sloan Management Review and Capgemini Consulting](#)
- 75% of American workers don’t believe they have access to the latest efficiency-boosting technology - [Staples](#)

“The reports paint a grim picture; we are killing our teams, failing to innovate and accepting the status quo simply because we are not making time to own the problems within our departments,” says Trilix CEO/Founder Tim Hebert. “We are keeping our teams behind the curve. For example, despite technological advancements out there—mobile applications, customer portals, etc.—we may still be operating by spreadsheet, with the ‘Excel guru’ being regaled as the hero. What’s more, though we know technology exists to connect our most pertinent business systems—e.g. our CRM and office phone system—we may still be maintaining siloed systems.”

“If broken processes and legacy technologies are the very impediments to productive working teams, happy employees and efficient workforces, then it is every leader’s job to address the problems at hand,” he adds. “If we don’t, we are at risk of employee attrition which ultimately impacts morale, culture and our external stakeholders.”

As a business leader, you need to embrace a mindset of continuous improvement, believing that everything and anything can run, operate, perform and function better. This means actively searching for manual processes to automate, for broken processes to fix and for legacy technologies to replace.

So how do we begin to make things better? Let’s take a look...

51%

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Gallup

A Matrix for Excellence

There are several steps businesses can take to accelerate their path to workplace excellence. Let's dive into each a bit further.

Document It

To begin strengthening departmental processes and technologies, a first step is to understand what is broken. To do so, have crucial conversations with your employees.

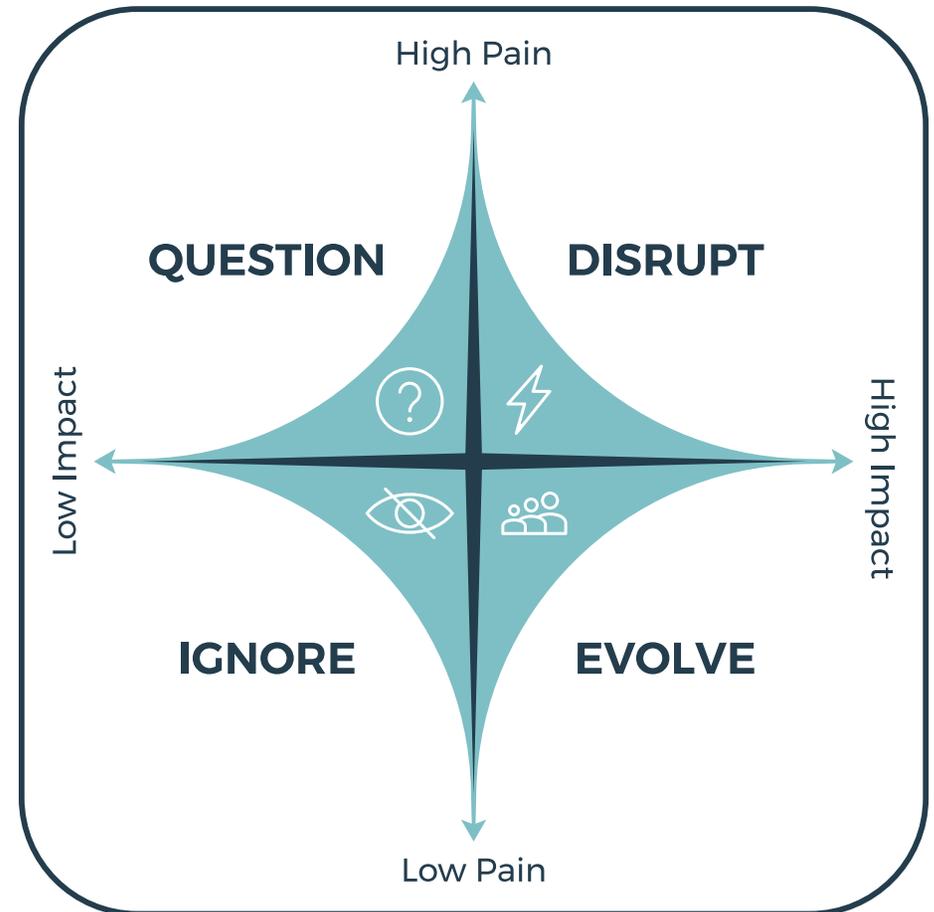
"Make a concerted effort to ask your employees what would help them do their jobs better," says Dana McInnis, Trilix's Principal of Business Solutions. "Employees need to feel empowered that they can offer a better way to operate and be part of the engine that feeds the change. They certainly know and will tell you if your company is committed to hearing about how they can make company-wide improvements."

Schedule the necessary amount of team interviews, meetings and conversations needed in order for you to document the key processes, systems and technologies upon which your department depends.

Plot It

With everything documented, begin to plot each process', system's or technology's affect on the business across two major axes:

- Impact: The measure of how business critical the process, system or technology is
- Pain: The measure of how severely the process, system or technology is contributing to disengagement, disempowerment issues



Your obstacles will fall in one of four quadrants:

- **Disrupt:** Challenges that fall into the Disrupt quadrant are high pain and high impact. As a leader, it is urgent and imperative that you disrupt, or introduce radical positive change. The barriers that fall into this quadrant, while troubling, grant you the opportunity to profoundly shape your legacy. Your ability to disrupt and challenge the status quo will move your department to a more favorable place.
- **Evolve:** Characterized as high impact, low pain, this quadrant requires a steady eye. Obstacles that land in this quadrant can quickly shift to high pain if you are not careful. Our job as a leader is to not be complacent, recognizing that everything can be improved, regardless if it's crying out in pain. Approach this quadrant against the "good to great" lens and determine how you can evolve to a better state.
- **Ignore:** Processes, systems or technologies that are low pain and low impact can be ignored. If a challenge falls in this quadrant, table it for now.
- **Question:** If one of your processes, systems or technologies is low impact but high pain, question it. For instance, if you employees are continually complaining about the instant messaging tool being clunky, question it as this is not a business critical tool. If there is high pain around a low priority day-to-day team tool, you may want to explore why.

Prioritize It

With everything documented and plotted, systems and technologies documented and plotted, now is the time to prioritize where you want to start when it comes to tackling workplace woes. To begin, pick a challenge in the Disrupt quadrant.

"Part of beating the whirlwind is to understand what adjustments will enable you to move the needle the fastest when it comes to departmental productivity, efficiency, morale and effectiveness," says Hebert.

"When prioritizing pain, ask yourself what business challenge can you not afford to last another day? Which obstacle is quite literally crippling your team if left unaddressed? The answer may surprise you."

Raise It

With a top challenge documented, plotted and prioritized, you are able to embrace an "It is my job" mentality. Once you understand the weight of the challenge from a pain and impact perspective, it is your job to raise the flag to your peer leaders so you can actively inch closer to the solve.

Business leaders that subscribe to reaching a heightened level of workplace excellence take ownership of the pain that impacts their team and raise up the issues.

Change It

As a final step to move your department forward, you need to change the very issue, system or process issue you documented and identified earlier. That may mean several things, like:

- Automating a manual, paper-centric process
- Investing in the creation of a customer portal
- Creating connectivity between two critical business systems
- Eradicating processes altogether that no longer serve your team
- Replacing legacy technology with something modern

How you change it will be up to you and the unique circumstance surrounding the obstacle. But the change should answer the question of: How will this improvement add value to my team and the business as whole?

Shifting Mindsets

Business leaders that commit to reaching an amplified level of workplace excellence approach the day differently. For example, among many behaviors, they:

- **Unwaveringly commit to continuous improvement.** Every choice they make helps the team and the organization become greater.
- **Empower their employees.** Armed with the right technologies, systems and workflows to do their jobs right, their employees emerge as agents of change.
- **Healthily obsess over the point of intersection.** These leaders understand that operations and culture do not sit in silos. Rather, workplace excellence is about how collectively an organization's operations and culture come together to move the business towards its desired end state.
- **Embrace a growth, versus, fixed mindset.** They challenge everything because they recognize that everything needs to be challenged for a business to remain competitive and differentiated.
- **Hold themselves accountable.** By relying on both quantitative and qualitative feedback, these leaders constantly gauge how successfully they are moving the needle forward.
- **Excitedly consider what could be.** Exhilarated and inspired by the thought of potential, these leaders are on a never-ending quest for utopia.



“We as business leaders have the opportunity to shape our legacy and to leave our teams and departments a little better tomorrow than they are today,” says Hebert. “But this is hard work. We are dealing with so much whirlwind and competing priorities that sometimes we can forget the obvious—that we have daily grievances that happen repeatedly that keep us from becoming excellent. But when we can remember this and tackle the pain, we become the agents of change. We become the keepers of excellence.”



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