

Modern strategy for operational excellence: building agile and adaptive organizations

Raymond J. Gerwitz

Healthcare security leaders who serve in an industry built on traditional and static protection and response protocols must become more agile and adaptive in planning and responding to evolving threat and risk profiles, the author states. In this article, he tells how to use operational excellence to continuously improve performance.

(A veteran of 30 years in military, municipal and campus policing, Raymond J. Gerwitz currently serves as Director, Risk Strategy and Operational Excellence for the University of Texas Police at Houston at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center and The University of Texas Health Science Center. In his current role he provides executive leadership to the Strategic Planning and Analysis, Operational Excellence, Risk Mitigation, Risk Operations, Professional Recruiting and Development, Community Outreach and Law Enforcement Accreditation teams.)

As the threat and risk exposures faced by healthcare organizations become increasingly complex and the resulting harm more significant and occurring with greater velocity, safety and security teams must become more forward facing strategic business partners of the organization. Modern safety and security teams are now engaging in more sophisticated planning activities while leveraging internal and external partnerships to increase their value as a recognized business partner within their organization.

MOVING BEYOND THE LANGUAGE OF BUSINESS

Anyone who has been in a healthcare security leadership position for even a short amount of time has certainly read countless articles and attended many conference presentations focused on how to be viewed as a respected business partner within their or-

ganization. Some of the typical article or presentation titles include, “Learn the Language of the C-Suite” or “Using Metrics to Demonstrate Value”. While this persistent knowledge transfers over time has certainly provided overall value and assisted many in elevating the value and visibility of their teams within their organizations, it may be difficult to sustain this benefit without moving beyond the language of business. Sustaining the benefits of this added organizational value requires evolving this strengthened partnership to one where the safety and security team consistently performs as a respected business partner. The remainder of this article will examine several areas some teams are beginning to focus on to better sustain their ability to partner with other organizational leaders on behalf of unified success and organizational resiliency.

ESTABLISHING THE STRATEGIC CADENCE OF AN AGILE AND ADAPTIVE ORGANIZATION

The increased cadence of communications and the velocity and frequency of organizational change has forced today’s modern organizations to react quicker and be-

come more adaptable than ever before. Healthcare safety and security organizations are certainly not immune to this increasingly important trait of resilient and successful teams and organizations. The challenge for security leadership is to understand this need for aligning our planning and operational execution cadence with that of the organization and communities we serve in an industry built on traditional and relatively speaking static protection and response protocols.

In becoming more agile and adaptive as an organization the safety and security team is better positioned to plan and respond to what sometimes seems to be a continuously evolving threat and risk profile for an organization. Our ability to adapt to fast forming threats and remain agile in our ability to implement successful mitigation strategies is dependent on our ability to establish an appropriate strategic cadence that supports the goals and purpose of the larger organization. This ability is an expectation of senior leadership for all credible business unit partners of any successful healthcare organization and the safety and security team must demonstrate this capability to maximize their value to the

organization. Our safety and security teams must be agile and adaptive in our prevention, preparedness and protection strategies and services to sustain our organizational success.

BUILDING A STRATEGIC FOUNDATION

Like many things in life, it is one thing to say you’re going to plan for strategic success and it is another thing altogether to achieve sustainable success. Building strategic success relies upon establishing a strong foundation that promotes organizational engagement and is both aware of organizational culture and informed on appetite for change. After all, as Peter Drucker has taught us all “Culture eats strategy for breakfast.”

Employing Visuals

In building a successful foundation organizations are increasingly creating visual complements to the traditional strategic planning document allowing team members to reach a mutual understanding of the desired goal outcome and more easily visualize strategic success. For example, strategy maps can be created as frameworks to define the organizational resources and prac-

tices that will best position the team for success. This approach allows team members to gain an overall understanding of the planning and execution process and goals without requiring the reading and interpretation of a fairly lengthy and high level planning document.

Other Tools To Demonstrate Value

Other tools such as story boarding and data visualization can be used to quickly demonstrate process and value measure to different audiences with varying levels of organizational knowledge. The most important feature of the strategic foundation is its cultural fit with the organization. In a more innovative environment, visuals are more valuable than lengthy documents and bulleted lists of goals and measures. However, in a more traditional organization the planning document may be accepted as the standard in packaging and executing planning objectives. The tools may be different but the need for a strong culturally relevant and acceptable strategic foundation capable of building and supporting team engagement remains the same.

The Role of the Story Teller

The late Steve Jobs once said

“The most powerful person in the world is the story teller. The story teller sets the vision, values and agenda of an entire generation that is to come.” Upon first reading this quote you may think to yourself what does this quote have to do with strategy? Well, when considering perhaps the most important ingredient to strategic success is team engagement these words have everything to do with strategic success. A thoughtful and well packaged message when properly delivered in a consistent manner by leadership can serve as the guide for a team as it moves along its strategy journey to success. The ability of leaders to influence team engagement on behalf of strategic success is certainly tied to their ability to tell the story of how the success will benefit not only the team, but the organization as a whole.

Perhaps a more straightforward approach to understanding the power of storytelling is to better understand how to craft and utilize a strategic narrative. A strategic narrative defines the shared purpose of a group and how they intend to move from where they currently are as a team to where they desire to be upon the success-

ful execution of their goal driven strategy. It represents a structured way to share your strategic story with the team to enhance overall engagement or commitment to achieving the goals of the organization.

USING OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE TO SEE SUCCESS

Operational excellence is a common system and process management approach by many large organizations to improve performance. Safety and security teams can use this same approach in pursuit of continuous improvement. Modern healthcare safety and security teams are beginning to use this approach to complete audits of various functional units and programs and identify areas of opportunity for improved performance and services. The same approach can be used to oversee large performance improvement initiatives on behalf of strategic success. In this way operational excellence supports the sustainability of strategic accomplishments by avoiding the potential diminishing returns of successful initiatives and programs as they age or resources shift their focus to new organizational goals.