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BUSINESS ADVANCEMENT INC.®

The Harper Report:

Four Questions C-Suite Executives Should Ask Before Acquiring New Technology

Go to any trade show, and the sheer volume of opportunities available, including software applications, devices, instruments, and equipment available to expand your company's innovation is staggering. So what makes the difference between organizations where this new technology realizes its promise of a brighter more exciting future and those where the new technology goes unused and gathers dust in the corner of the room?

The answer starts with strong leadership.

Most CEOs and executive teams we meet already recognize that technology decisions should be about serving their company's strategy. However, the further away from the C-suite that technology decisions are made, the easier it is for these considerations to get lost in the promise of the technology itself rather than in considering the fit of the technology with your company's strategy and customers, and what it would take to enable your organization to use it to its full potential.

Certainly we're not advocating that all technology decisions be made in the C-Suite; however we are saying that it's critical for CEOs and senior executives to ensure that those who are making decisions about new technology are thoroughly grounded in both the strategic and execution issues that can make or break successful outcomes. Questions to ask include, but are not limited to:

- 1. Why is this technology the best option for enabling us to better serve our customers and support our strategy?** Does it enable your company to meet an unfulfilled need in a way that best fits your unique requirements? For example, rather than purchasing an existing service support app, one company decided to invest in developing their own app that was highly customized and would better enable their customers to quickly share information that would increase the speed and effectiveness of their field service operation.
- 2. How will this technology impact existing and planned priorities?** For instance, in the case above, the CEO recognized that developing the special app would require the company to temporarily shift resources from existing high priority projects to take on an even higher priority project. This resulted in moving timing of existing projects to accommodate this new priority.
- 3. Does our company have the competencies needed to quickly and successfully adopt this particular technology?** For example, social media such as Twitter, Skype and video blogging, are designed to be easy to learn. And yet, we've personally experienced that what seems "simple" to one person can be daunting to another. It's critical to budget time and resources not only for training, but also for real-life application.

4. What is the fit of this technology with our culture? Even welcome change has an adjustment period. However, if new technology represents a radical departure from business as usual, it's important to recognize and address the specific aspects of your culture that will impact success. For example, many people welcomed the April 2013 ruling from the US Securities and Exchange Commission giving permission for public companies to use social media channels to communicate with investors. However, every board must grapple with the degree to which communicating with investors through social media is a fit with their own values, beliefs and practices.

The Bottom Line

Ensuring that everyone involved in making and implementing technology decisions has a consistent understanding of both the strategic and execution issues underlying technology decisions vastly increases the chances the right choice will be made for your organization.

Beyond that, since people will be looking to the C-Suite as role models for embracing new technology, it's essential for you to be comfortable with the changes in habits and new learning that will be required of you personally.

And finally, providing positive reinforcement during your organization's learning curve and modifying performance expectations as necessary will enable employees to change their own habits and learning so that the new technology truly lives up to its full potential on an ongoing basis.



About the authors:

Pamela S. Harper is the Founding Partner and CEO of Business Advancement Inc. (BAI), based in Glen Rock, NJ. She is an internationally known business performance expert, author, and professional speaker with over 20 years experience in internal and external consulting to entrepreneurial, middle market, and Fortune 500 companies in a wide range of industries, all going through extraordinary growth and change. Pam is the author of the critically acclaimed book, *Preventing Strategic Gridlock®: Leading Over, Under & Around Organizational Jams to Achieve High Performance Results*. She has published and been quoted in prominent media outlets including: *BusinessWeek*, *Investor's Business Daily*, *Red Herring*, *Entrepreneur*, *Forbes.com* and major global newspapers.

D. Scott Harper, Ph.D. is Sr. Partner and COO of BAI. He is a globally recognized expert in innovation processes and systems with a unique ability to translate technical insights into desired business results, gained from over 20 years of leadership experience in Johnson & Johnson Consumer Company, Pfizer Consumer Healthcare, and Warner-Lambert Company.

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