



Case Study: Aligning Department Structure To Meet Critical Short Term & Strategic Goals

Situation:

A highly technical manufacturing company had a number of chronic talent bottlenecks. They were concerned about falling behind the competition in a mission-critical R&D race. They were also facing succession planning and knowledge management & transfer challenges with the impending retirement of baby boomers in key roles. The stage-gate process they were using to manage projects and capture knowledge was not fully adopted. They had tried unsuccessfully over more than a year to recruit a “six million dollar man” to head up key global projects but without success.

Actions:

We created a 360° snapshot of the priorities through phone and in-person interviews with all key stakeholders at the company in the technical and sales functions. This was an inexpensive, defined-scope project that yielded extremely valuable decision making information: it became very clear that unless an R&D leadership position on this critical innovation project was re-gained, the rest of the needs might be irrelevant. This one piece of information was the trigger for leadership commitment and action.

No one in the company presently had the needed project management and innovation leadership experience to step in to manage this initiative in addition to their existing responsibilities.

We interviewed a variety of external experts on innovation in similar industry segments to see how other companies had handled similar challenges. From this, we developed the hypothesis that *several of the challenges on our list could in fact be solved sequentially* by hiring an innovation leader. This person would be an expert in innovation and commercialization, and use this high-stakes project as the springboard to create a more effective stage-gate process for the future. The stage-gate process could then become a key component of the future knowledge capture and management strategy.

We remained flexible on the specific requirements for the job, and focused on recruiting candidates who had successful outcomes in comparable situations, and would bring expertise that was presently lacking on the team. This also allowed us to attract the best talent by creating what was essentially a customized job description that met the company’s most important needs while providing prospective candidates with an attractive application of their strengths in a position with high visibility and future potential.

Results:

We recruited a candidate with the ideal background in our client’s core technology, with proven expertise leading innovation projects and with prior experience implementing and championing stage-gate at his prior employer. The immediate impact of this hire led to the decision to refocus and upgrade the job description of an additional research position to provide the additional push at the front end of the innovation process.

Aligning hiring directly with corporate strategic priorities broke the logjam and crystallized the vision for the overall R&D function.

The combined push-pull created the needed additional momentum and re-energized the existing team’s performance.