

# Road less traveled vital to operational success

Sometimes the path less traveled — although it can be exhausting and intimidating — really is the best way to go.

And not just because Robert Frost said so.

Patric Sazama, regional project director for Impact Washington, would agree. He recently spoke to the Three Rivers Entrepreneur Network in Richland about achieving operational success by addressing the less tangible elements of an organization — the company's less traveled path.

According to Sazama, there are three areas that companies should focus on in the pursuit of operational excellence, and none of them is tactical in nature. They don't

relate to things such as the company's products or services, markets, supply chain or processes. The three include leadership, execution and accountability, all of which are elements of culture.

Not so coincidental about the importance of these elements in maximizing operational performance is that culture is the most difficult part of an organization to manage successfully. It's the gray area, the softer, less tangible but equally critical side of the business. If tactics are the car, culture is the fuel that keeps it running smoothly.

In strengthening leadership, companies should focus on communicating effectively, team building, developing the ability to build and nur-

ture trust and cooperation, defining and building a desired organizational culture, improving the ability to coach and mentor, and effectively managing conflict.

"Conflict is an inevitable part of people working together," Sazama said. "It's only bad when not managed in a way that fosters growth as an outcome."

He encourages companies to be open to understanding their strengths and deficiencies in pursuit of improving leadership.

"Every strength has a corresponding weakness. The more you understand this yin-yang effect, the better," Sazama said.

The objective for organizations is to focus on leadership as not something they simply do, but something they can influence, control and get better at.

Leadership is the foundation of successful execution, which is carried out through effective actions that companies take to cause a specific outcome. Without execution, nothing happens. And just as different situations require different flavors of leadership, they also need different execution methods to be effective.

The good news is that outstanding execution can be taught, coached and improved. Companies first need to identify what "effective" means to their organization and employ an accountability model, the third key to operational success.

Accountability is the process by which organizations are able to manage, direct and improve their ability to assign ownership and realize a successful outcome. To do this right, companies must understand expected out-

comes, decision authority and budget-related dependencies — and the work load of those involved.

"This is where I see a lot of organizations, especially the smaller ones, fall down," Sazama said. "You cannot set people up for failure."

All three of these elements, when laid out together, make perfect sense. Leading work effectively paves the way for strong execution, which requires an effective accountability model.

And it all starts with and points back to leadership.

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