Corporations' next major project

WHAT CAN organizations learn from the Pan Am/Parapan Am Games being held in Toronto in July/August 2015?

It's not so much the events themselves that hold the lessons (although the athletes are inspirational) — it's the fact that the organizing committee started from nothing in 2010 to now employing 431 full-time employees and will soon be employing about 20,000 volunteers.

And the sole objective is to successfully host 10,000 athletes and 250,000 visitors for just over three weeks, with the eyes of the world watching to witness their final "product."

Oh yes, as a sidebar, Toronto 2015 will also boost the Canadian economy by an impressive $3.7 billion in the process. What other organization can boast those kinds of statistics?

Project format evolves through various stages

So how is Toronto 2015 going to accomplish this? Simple. Instead of

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organizing itself in the typical hierarchical, command-and-control structure, it has set the company up as one big project.

Sure, there's a CEO, a CFO and a smattering of vice-presidents, but the bulk of the team is aligned in a project format.

And as the project evolves through its various stages, these team members will be redeployed as needed — it's a very dynamic, fluid environment.

This approach makes sense. So why don't other organizations

function this way? Why do they continue to cocoon themselves in the very rigid command-and-control hierarchical structure? Why do they permit silos and fiefdoms to develop?

These only encourage petty politics and turf wars among the various departments and divisions and, more importantly, they stifle change.

Get rid of archaic 'shackles' around employee roles

If we look closely at an organization, it's really just a bunch of projects anyway. The yearly objectives tell us this. What are we going to accomplish this year? Projects!

So why not align the overall structure this way? Move Mackenzie from accounting to IT where she will be part of the new ERP (enterprise resource planning) design team. Move Michael from production to marketing where he can add insight and sober second thought to the new product launch. Move as many as possible.

Changing perspectives

When these people are transferred in this way, possibly for up to two years, their perspectives change — they start to look at things more from the entire company's viewpoint as opposed to just their departments'.

They also gain more experience than they might normally have thought possible and become more valuable employees.

The days of the fossilized corporate structure are over. So too is the "We've always done it this way" mentality.

Organizations must become much more flexible and adaptable in order just to survive, let alone flourish. The way to do this is to transform to a more project-oriented architecture.

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