Strategy Rollout Feedback

Top 3 Positives
1. Having a standard strategy/performance philosophy and workflow across a large system is a huge benefit.
   - The system goals and strategy allow for a common language and common goals to facilitate cross-functional projects. (“To which system goals does this project align? If the answer is “none,” should we pursue it?”)
   - Having a standard way that strategy is discussed and cascaded across the system really allows staff members to have an increased sense of involvement in achieving system goals.
   - Beginning to think about our daily work in terms of “strategy” has allowed us to start thinking about our goals in 4 main categories:
     i. Alignment to system/leader goals
     ii. Project work
     iii. “Run the business” work
     iv. Professional development
2. Having a structured strategy framework helps leaders plan and customize different types of performance discussions:
   - High-performing staff need to be developed/promoted
   - Solid performers need to be appreciated and retained
   - Low performers need to focus on improving performance
3. The results of system/department/team member strategy achievement can help guide other system programs. For example, the “big picture” data can help the H.R. team see what tools leaders need most:
   - An abundance of high performers might point to the need for formal mentoring or career development pathways.
   - Solid performer data might point to new training programs needed – what skills/training programs would help move these solid performers into strong/top performers?
   - Low performers can indicate several things. Are the onboarding programs sufficient? Did we do a good job of describing the job and requirements to the staff member at the beginning? Did the interviewing/selection process pick out the best staff members for this role? Does the leader need coaching/communication tools for tracking performance? Are there competency/screening tests that would be beneficial in the pre-hire phase? Are “basics” courses needed for skills like Microsoft Office, Public Speaking, Time Management, Professional Appearance?
   - Evaluating results and goal achievement is a fair, impartial way to administer bonuses, raises, performance awards, etc. Striking the right balance between awarding tenure and awarding achievement is important.
Top 3 Negatives

1. Rolling out strategy/goal-setting to a big system is not easy, nor is it quick! It is helpful if the senior team can agree to a philosophy and long-term strategy and to "staying the course" despite the initial protests that are inevitable. The concept of accountability is well-received by some, but not by all.

2. Ongoing tools, coaching, classes, and resources do cost time, money, and manpower. Leaders need help and they need time – time to help digest the philosophy, time to learn the tools, time to set their own goals, time to set goals with staff, time to track performance with staff. If the "tracking" piece is not done well, the whole system collapses. Time is in short supply, so consider what tools the team can offer to leaders to help minimize disruption and maximize adoption/return on investment.

3. Selecting the right set of tools to roll this out can be difficult. If you use "low tech," it can be hard to track and report data. If you use "high tech," selecting the right technology system, configuring the system to meet your needs, training new staff and leaders on the tools, and maintaining the technology tool needs a dedicated team of FTE’s to do it well.

Have we been able to make this approach stick? Yes, we have. We have exceeded our target of 90% of staff members with approved goal plans by our cut-off date each fiscal year. The keys to "making it stick" were having C-level champions, an ongoing communication plan (so that it was not discussed only in September and then forgotten about), and linking strategy and goal-setting to performance reviews (so that it was relevant for every single staff member).

The first couple of years were the hardest. As you well know, organizations our size do not change quickly or quietly! As you may recall, the first year that we rolled out strategy/goal-setting out to front line staff, we had not yet selected a long-term technology solution. So, our leader team opted to go ahead and roll out the system “low tech” using Excel spreadsheets. The benefit of that approach was that we were able to introduce a key concept a year earlier. That approach was quite labor-intensive and came with its own challenges (varying comfort levels with Excel, tracking changes/updates).

In year 2, we launched a technology platform (Taleo, which was subsequently purchased by Oracle) as a comprehensive suite to contain strategy/goal-setting as well as performance reviews all in one place. The system was awesome! We branded it the "My Performance" system to underscore the fact that each staff member owns his/her goal achievement and overall performance. This technology tool was a HUGE win for the team that administered these tasks for the system. To be frank, end users were frustrated at “another change” so soon after the first, but we had a comprehensive training/communication/change control plan in place, and it worked out well.
What do we wish we knew in 2012? There are many lessons learned, as you can tell from the length of this section! As a general rule, the more you can consider long-term vision before you ever roll out the first step, the better off you will be. We did not do a great job of mapping out a 5-year plan and as a result, each year we introduced “changes to the process.” This was labor intensive for the H.R. team and frustrating for leaders to have to learn something new each year. The main ones:

- **TRACKING PROGRESS IS PARAMOUNT.** Leaders must, must, MUST commit to sharing system goals AND sharing system progress along the way. It is very ineffective and frustrating if staff members never hear how the system is doing...and never hear another word until new goals are set next year. Consider ahead of time what the right frequency/forum for system strategy/goal updates will be. E-mail? Intranet? Town hall meetings? Newsletters? Also consider how frequently leaders should meet with team members to track goal progress. Monthly is ideal but not feasible for some teams. Quarterly at a minimum!

- **Determine if/how strategy will link to other programs.** Consider before you begin which pieces you will link to strategy/goal-setting. Will this be a stand-alone exercise? Will it also link to performance reviews? Will goal achievement and performance review scores affect eligibility for raises? What part of salary increase will be based on years of service vs. performance scores? Will achievement of system goals allow front line staff to receive “gainsharing” bonus dollars or other awards? Obviously, you do NOT have to bite off all of these pieces at once, but if you do, then be sure all of the H.R. representatives and leadership are plotting out the “big picture” as you are planning the roll-out, tools, and communication.

- **Don’t forget other areas of performance!** Don’t focus so much on strategy and goal achievement that you forget other key pieces of performance, such as values/culture/job competencies. If a staff member will be evaluated on goals, values, AND job competencies, be sure that you give equal “air time” to the importance of each piece of performance (and, equally as important, that you give leaders tools in their toolbox to talk about/coach/course correct all of these areas with staff as well). We do not want to see goals achieved at the expense of ethics, team morale, or due to cut-throat “all about me” tactics. One possible approach is to “track” values along with goal achievement during tracking discussions.

- **Teach new staff and old staff!** In order to embed this in your culture, you have to have a two-pronged approach. You need to share with all new staff in orientation as “the way things work around here,” but you have to keep circling back to the existing staff members to make sure that THEY keep it up, too. We had some initial feedback from brand new staff members that they heard about how strategy was SUPPOSED to happen in orientation, but that it never quite materialized once they got onto the unit.

- **SMART goal-setting is NOT an innate skill.** It’s true. This is not necessarily something that is comfortable, even for very high-level leaders and executives. EVERYONE needs practice/coaching/group discussions to craft really SMART goals (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, time-bound). If a senior leader cascades a weak goal such as “improve patient satisfaction,” it is really difficult for the team below him/her to have SMART goals themselves. Including “strategy” courses as ongoing/required courses for your leader team is important – so that they understand both the philosophy AND whatever online technology/tools you have – is really critical in making it stick.
• **Consider different goal weights for different staff levels.** Consider ahead of time that higher level leaders and front line staff members may need to have goals/strategy weighted differently in their performance review (if you are linking goals to performance). We missed this the first time around. When we first rolled this out, we kept the weights the same for all: 50% goals, 25% Core Values, 25% Job Competencies. Afterwards we realized that front line staff may need to have a higher weight on day-to-day work activities, while leaders may need a higher weight for strategy/goal achievement. Year 3 we rolled out yet another change so that leaders at the director-level or above had goals weighted 50% with values and job competencies at 25% respectively, but all other staff and leaders had all 3 components weighted equally: 33% for goals, values, and job competencies. No one liked the feedback that “every year something changes.”

• **Staggered “strategy” deadlines for staff levels are helpful.** When we started, we gave all staff one deadline for turning in their goals. Since then, we have realized that if the top level takes 3 months to finalize goals, it is hard for the remaining 200 staff on the team to finalize goals in 3 days. Now our due dates are in phases: System goals due X date, Senior leader goals (directors up to senior executives) due 1 month later, manager/supervisor goals due 1 month later, all front line staff goals due 1 month later. This means a longer roll-out, but easier to plan the work required, especially for bigger teams.

• **Consider ahead of time who (if anyone) will be excluded.** Will physicians participate? PRN staff members? Contractors? Nurse practitioners/physician assistants? Think about why/why not and get senior leader support PRIOR to roll-out instead of scurrying after the fact to announce “to whom this applies.”

• **Have a plan in place for “escalating” leader review/approval.** If a leader with direct reports leaves the organization unexpectedly or is out of the office for an extended period of time, what should happen? Hopefully these instances are few and far between, but it is good to consider how/when/to whom goal plans will escalate for staff whose goal plans need approval but leader cannot (or will not) approve.

• **Plan the process map for staff changes.** If you are linking strategy/goals to performance, consider ahead of time how to handle staff changes. For brand new staff members, consider a cut-off date. For example, we think that if you have been here 90+ days prior to end of fiscal year, then you DO need goals and a performance review; if hired after a certain cutoff date, be explicit that they will not have goals/performance review (nor are they eligible for merit raise). Consider how you want to handle staff transfers. If a staff member spends half the fiscal year in one department and half in another department, how will goal revisions occur? How will performance review be handled? Will you allow staff members to transfer during the performance review period, or will transfers be “frozen” for a certain time? If transfers are allowed, what happens to the performance review form? Does it “move” with the staff member to the new leader, or does it stay with the old leader to complete, or should both old/new leaders be allowed the opportunity to collaborate.
- **Provide explicit descriptions of performance levels.** If you are linking strategy/goals to performance reviews, provide very explicit directions and behavioral anchors on what “counts” for each level of performance. We use a 1-5 scale and learned that historically leaders wanted to give “5’s” for all the “good staff.” We had to be very explicit and spell out ratings that matched achievement levels:
  - 5=Top performer (No higher level of performance can be obtained)
  - 4=Strong performer (Performance meets all targets and exceeds targets in several areas)
  - 3=Solid performer (Performance consistently meets targets)
  - 2=Inconsistent/developing performer
    - Developing= Occasionally achieves desired results (acceptable rating for staff new to role)
    - Inconsistent=Performance needs improvement (not acceptable rating for staff who are not new to role)
  - 1=Unsatisfactory performer

- **Performance improvement plans are an unpleasant but necessary evil.** If the system is taking the time and money to roll out strategy/goal-setting (and especially if this exercise is linked to performance reviews), don’t wait until the “bad” reports come in to offer performance improvement plans. Decide ahead of time which situations will warrant a performance improvement plan (rating below X.XX, consecutive ratings below X.XX, failure to meet X% of goals, etc.). Provide a recommended template for action items, follow up, explicit expectations for observable improvement, and whether the plan will progress to disciplinary action (if terms not met) or awarding “back to work” status if the plan is satisfactorily completed. Again, this is an unpleasant/sticky subject, but it is better to plan in advance how your system/leader team wants to handle it. Otherwise, if the staff who fail to perform are not addressed, this drags down morale for those who did work hard to meet goals. Obviously this is not talking about staff who fall short despite best efforts, but staff who are either unwilling or unable to meet. They need to be coached up or coaxed out.

- **Consider your ideal ranges of performance ahead of time.** Is it okay for a leader to give all “5’s” for the department? Do you want to provide “target” ranges? Do you want there to be a calibration or adjustment phase where a higher level leader reviews/adjusts ratings related to strategy/goal achievement?