The "XF-50"

TOM PETERS

12.05.2007

50 Ways to Enhance Cross-Functional Effectiveness and Deliver Speed, "Service Excellence" and "Value-added Customer 'Solutions'"*

A 2007 letter from John Hennessy, president of Stanford University, to alumni laid out his long-term "vision" for that esteemed institution. The core of the vision's promise was more multi-disciplinary research, aimed at solving some of the world's complex systemic problems. The chief of GlaxoSmithKline, a few years ago, announced a "revolutionary" new drug discovery process—centers of interdisciplinary excellence. (It worked.) Likewise, amidst a study of organization effectiveness in the oil industry's exploration sector, I came across a particularly successful firm—one key to that success was their physical and organization mingling of formerly warring (two sets of prima donnas) geologists and geophysicists. The cover story in *Dartmouth Medicine,* the Dartmouth med school magazine, featured a "revolutionary" approach, "microsystems," as "the big idea that [might] save U.S. healthcare." The nub is providing successful case outcomes in hospitals by forming multi-function patient-care teams, including docs, nurses, labtechs, and others. ("Cooperating doc" may top the oxymoron scale.) One of the central responses to 9/11 is an effort to get intelligence services, home to some of the world's most viscous turf wars, talking to one another—we may have seen some of the fruits of that effort in the recently released National Intelligence Estimate. And in the military, inter-service cooperation has increased by an order of magnitude since Gulf War One—some of the services' communication systems can actually be linked to those of other services, a miracle the equal of the Christmas miracle in my book!

All this, and much more, amounts to a "revolution" (the latest revolution?) called "working together." Web-based tools certainly abet this latest attempt, but the story at the end of the day is timeless: attitude, relationships (investment therein), protecting powerbases-turf, "corporate cultures," and the like. I.e., dealing with human nature itself. But if anything helps this eternal-intractable problem it is simply "keeping it on the agenda." Relentlessly! In *Re-imagine* I tried to do just that with a full chapter titled "Welcome to XF/Cross-functional World." The main idea was-is that in order to provide the "value-added" solutions to customer problems that are necessary to move beyond commodities and compete with India, China et al., we have no choice but to deliver the "integrated" "goods" from every nook and cranny of the organization and its supply chain. XF wars are a killer, now much more than ever. Alas, no one paid the slightest bit of attention to this chapter—which I thought was one of the most important in the book.

tom**peters**!

But I refuse to give up. The *Re-imagine* chapter was organized around a list of 50 ideas. I have herein resurrected that list—and modified it significantly in the process. Hence this holiday gift—of sorts. In short, nothing (n-o-t-h-i-n-g!) is more important than getting the bits of the organization, or organizations (most project teams extend beyond our borders), in synch. "In synch" and more, much more—XF work at its best is not merely about "reducing organizational friction," as important as that is. It is about fundamental revision of the breadth and depth of the "product" the company offers. If the chef doesn't get along with two of our four waiters—the clientele is screwed, and the restaurant evaporates. Intellectually that's the same story, writ small, as development of the Airbus A380 or intelligence services cooperation.

Enough of my introduction. What follows is my latest effort to get you to pay "strategic" attention to what has always been Issue #1 in organizational effectiveness, from Airbus to the Army, from Napoleon to the man on the moon:

1. It's our organization to make work—or not. It's not "them," the outside world that's the problem. *The enemy is us.* Period.

2. Friction-free! Dump 90% of "middle managers"—most are advertent or inadvertent "power freaks." We are all—every one of us—in the Friction Removal Business, one moment at a time, now and forevermore.

3. No "stovepipes"! "Stove-piping," "Silo-ing" is an *Automatic Firing Offense.* Period. No appeals. (Within the limits of civility, somewhat "public" firings are not out of the question—that is, make one and all aware why the axe fell.)

4. *Everything* on the Web. This helps. A lot. ("Everything" = Big word.)

5. Open access. All available to all. Transparency, beyond a level that's "sensible," is a de facto imperative in a Burn-the-Silos strategy.

6. *Project managers rule!!* Project managers running XF (cross-functional) projects are the Elite of the organization, and seen as such and treated as such. (The likes of construction companies have practiced this more or less forever.)

7. "Value-added Proposition"= Application of integrated resources. (From the entire supply-chain.) To deliver on our emergent business raison d'être, and compete with the likes of our Chinese and Indian brethren, we must cooperate with anybody and everybody "24/7." IBM, UPS and many, many others are selling far more than a product or service that works—the new "it" is pure and simple a product of XF cooperation; "the product is the cooperation" is not much of a stretch.

8. *"XF work" is the direct work of leaders!*

9. *"Integrated solutions" = Our "Culture."* (Therefore: XF = Our culture.)

10. Partner with "best-in-class" only. Their pursuit of Excellence helps us get beyond petty bickering. An all-star team has little time for anything other than delivering on the (big) Client promise.

11. *All functions are created equal!* All functions contribute equally! All = All.

tom**peters!**

12. All functions are "PSFs," Professional Service Firms.
"Professionalism" is the watchword—and true Professionalism rises above turf wars.
You are your projects, your legacy is your projects—and the legacy will be skimpy
indeed unless you pass, with flying colors, the "works well with others" exam!

13. *We are all in sales!* We all (a-l-l) "sell" those Integrated Client Solutions.
Good salespeople don't blame others for screw-ups—the Client doesn't care.
Good salespeople are "quarterbacks" who make the system work-deliver.

14. We all invest in "wiring" the Client organization—we develop
comprehensive relationships in every part (function, level) of the Client's organization.
*We pay special attention to the so-called "lower levels," short on glamour, long on
the ability to make things happen at the "coalface."*

15. We all "live the Brand"—which is Delivery of Matchless Integrated
Solutions that transform the Client's organization. To "live the brand" is to become
a raving fan of XF cooperation.

16. We use the word *"partner"* until we want to barf! (Words matter! A lot!)

17. We use the word *"team"* until we want to barf. (Words matter! A lot!)

18. We use the word *"us"* until we want to barf. (Words matter! A lot!)

19. We obsessively seek Inclusion—and abhor exclusion.
We want more people from more places (internal, external—the whole "supply
chain") aboard in order to maximize systemic benefits.

20. Buttons & Badges matter—we work relentlessly at team (XF team) identity
and solidarity. ("Corny"? Get over it.)

21. *All (almost all) rewards are team rewards.*

22. We keep base pay rather low—and give whopping bonuses for excellent
team delivery of "seriously cool" cross-functional Client benefits.

**23. *WE NEVER BLAME OTHER PARTS OF THE ORGANIZATION
FOR SCREW-UPS.***

24. *WE TAKE THE HEAT—THE WHOLE TEAM.*
(For anything and everything.) (Losing, like winning, is a team affair.)

25. *"BLAMING" IS AN AUTOMATIC FIRING OFFENSE.*

26. *"Women rule"*—women are simply better at the XF communications stuff—
less power obsessed, less hierarchically inclined, more group-team oriented.

27. Every member of our team is an honored contributor.
"XF project Excellence" is an "all hands" affair.

28. We *are* our XF Teams! XF project teams are how we get things done.

29. "Wow Projects" rule, large or small—Wow projects demand by
definition XF Excellence.

tom**peters**!

30. **We routinely attempt to unearth and then reward "small gestures" of XF cooperation.**

31. **We invite Functional Bigwigs to our XF project team reviews.**

32. **We *insist* on Client team participation**—from all functions of the Client organization.

33. **An "Open talent market" helps make the projects "silo-free."** People want in on the project because of the opportunity to do something memorable—no one will tolerate delays based on traditional functional squabbling.

34. **Flat! Flat = Flattened Silos.** Flat = Excellence based on XF project outcomes, not power-hoarding within functional boundaries.

35. **New "C-level"?** *We more or less need a "C-level" job titled Chief Bullshit Removal Officer.* That is, some kind of formal watchdog whose role in life is to make cross-functionality work, and I.D. those who don't get with the program.

36. *Huge (H-U-G-E) cooperation bonuses.* Senior team members who conspicuously shine in the "working together" bit are rewarded Big Time. (A million bucks in one case I know—and a non-cooperating very senior was sacked.)

37. *Get physical!!* *"Co-location" is the most powerful "culture changer."* Physical X-functional proximity is almost a guarantee (yup!) of remarkably improved cooperation—to aid this, one needs flexible workspaces that can be mobilized for a team in a flash.

38. *Ad hoc.* To improve the new "X-functional Culture," little XF teams should be formed on the spot to deal with an urgent issue—they may live for but ten days, but it helps the XF habit, making it normal to be "working the XF way."

39. **"Deep dip."** Dive three levels down in the organization to fill a senior role with someone who has been proactive on the XF dimension.

40. **Formal evaluations.** Everyone, starting with the receptionist, should have an important XF rating component in their evaluation.

41. **Demand XF experience for, especially, senior jobs.** The military requires all would-be generals and admirals to have served a full tour in a job whose only goals were cross-functional. Great idea!

42. **Early project "management" experience.** Within days, literally, of coming aboard folks should be "running" some bit of a project, working with folks from other functions—hence, "all this" (XF stuff) becomes as natural as breathing.

43. **"Get 'em out with the customer."** Rarely does the accountant or bench scientist call on the customer. Reverse that. Give everyone more or less regular "customer-facing experiences." One learns quickly that the customer is not interested in our in-house turf battles!

tompeters!

44. Put "it" on the–every agenda. XF "issues to be resolved" should be on every agenda—morning project team review, weekly exec team meeting, etc. A "next step" within 24 hours (4?) ought to be part of the resolution.

45. XF "honest broker" or ombudsman. The ombudsman examines XF "friction events" and acts as Conflict Resolution Counselor. (Perhaps a formal conflict resolution agreement?)

46. Lock it in! XF cooperation, central to any value-added mission, should be an explicit part of the "Vision Statement."

47. Promotions. *Every promotion, no exceptions, should put XF Excellence in the top 5 (3?) evaluation criteria.*

48. Pick partners based on their "cooperation proclivity." Everyone must be on board if "this thing" is going to work; hence every vendor, among others, should be formally evaluated on their commitment to XF transparency—e.g., can we access anyone at any level in any function of their organization without bureaucratic barriers?

49. Fire vendors who don't "get it"—more than "get it," welcome "it" with open arms.

50. Jaw. Jaw. Jaw. Talk XF cooperation-value-added at every opportunity. Become a relentless bore!

51. Excellence! There is a state of XF Excellence. Pursue it. Talk about it.

Good luck!

Possible Application:

1. Pick one of these items that you can start on by yourself in the next 24–48 hours.

2. Do it!

3. Use the list as the trigger for an ongoing discussion.

4. Come to a consensus on the topic of whether "this stuff" is "a good set of action items"—or the essence of "the way we do things around here."

5. Regardless of the answer to #4 above, as a team, pick two long-term and three short-term ideas.

6. Construct an implementation program for the above.

7. Review, regularly—what works and why, what didn't work and why.

8. Measure progress—develop a formal "Report Card," issued semi-annually or annually.

9. Pick a few more items.

10. On a semi-annual basis, review the list as a whole—particulars and the "spirit of the list."

tompeters!