

Silos, Politics, and Turf Wars

Patrick Lencioni

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Summary – 4 pages

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Examples will be given at the end of the summary, and the concept introduced first.

Introduction

Silos are nothing more than the barriers that exist between departments within an organization, causing people who are supposed to be on the same team to work against each other. It can have many names besides silos, but it is one of the most frustrating aspects of life in any sizable organization. Silos are not generally present because of something that is intentionally done, but because of something that is simply left undone, which is provide a compelling context for people to work together.

Without context, the demands and responsibilities pull at each person and each department, who often pursue seemingly worthwhile agendas assuming that they are in the organization's best interests. Overtime, what is happening by accident can lead to confusion, which can turn into disappointment, resentment, and hostility; and eventually people can start working against each other on purpose.

If there is a place for blame, it's at the top; departmental leaders who have failed to understand the interdependence necessary for a healthy organization, or who have, understanding it, failed to communicate it in the culture of people they oversee.

Components of the Model

The model for combating silos has 4 components:

- A thematic goal
- A set of defining objectives
- A set of ongoing standard operating objectives
- Metric

THEMATIC GOAL

A single qualitative focus that is shared by the entire leadership team – and ultimately, by the entire organization – an that applies for only a specified time period. A thematic goal is not a long-term vision, or a tactical measurement or measureable objective. Rather it is a single, temporary, and qualitative rallying cry shared by all members of the team.

The elements of a thematic goal...

Single – you can only focus on one at a time and that is why it is temporary. Something has to be the most important at any given time period.

Qualitative – it's not a number and it's not easily measureable. It's a statement of what you desire to accomplish, and is usually best expressed using a verb – improve, reduce, change, eliminate, etc. Metrics will come into play later in the model, but a thematic goal is qualitative, not quantitative.

Time-Bound – it does not exist beyond a given time frame, for then it would become an ongoing objective (which is further down on the model). The time frame for accomplishing a thematic goal is usually 3-12 months depending on the situation and the nature of the business. A University things in longer terms than a start-up tech company.

Shared – the goal applies to all on the leadership team despite their area of interest or expertise...or their title. All team members must take responsibility for the goal, and for doing anything they can do to move the company towards reaching it. They must remove their functional hats (marketing, finance, sales, HR) and replace it with a generic one that says EXECUTIVE. They must be willing to ask questions and make suggestions about areas other than their own, even if they feel they know very little about those areas.

A thematic goal is not enough, and alone leads to confusion...enter *Defining Objectives*.

DEFINING OBJECTIVES

These provide actionable context so that people know what must be *done* to accomplish the goal. They are the building blocks for knowing what is meant by the thematic goal. They are qualitative and shared across the entire team...and because they are linked to the thematic goal, they are bound by the same temporary time period...and therefore change.

Qualitative – The temptation to make these too measureable is understandable. However, assigning numbers and dates to them will limit the teamwork devoted to them as those without expertise will feel helpless to contribute. Quantitative measurements will come into play soon enough.

Shared – All team members must feel responsible for these objectives if the team is truly going to operate as an organism. All departments will likely have objectives that fit their department more than others from time to time, and to work as a whole, team members must take cooperative responsibility.

Time-Bound – when the thematic goal changes – the defining objectives change too.

STANDARD OPERATING OBJECTIVES

These are the objectives that never change, no matter what the shorter-term focus is. These are the things that you must always do to maintain organizational functioning and health. Most employees find it hard to rally behind things like making sales numbers, or managing expenses

because they know that these things will come up again, and again, and again. In essence, these are the things that must be done day in and day out regardless of what the rallying cry is.

But, there are times when a standard operative objective needs special focus and may become the temporary rallying cry for a season.

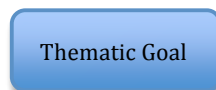
METRICS

Once you have a rallying cry (thematic goal), defining objectives, and standard operating objectives identified, you can discuss measurement. These do not always have to be numbers, but they can be dates too. My recommendation is to use colors. Yes colors. Green for good, red for bad and yellow for OK, but not good. Orange and lime green can be used for tie breakers.

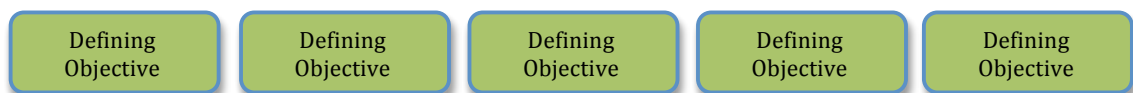
IDENTIFYING A THEMATIC GOAL

This will often require discussion without feeling the need to arrive at a decision too quickly. Sometimes the first attempts at a thematic goal are often better suited to defining objectives. Ex. A company's product has caused harm to someone, with all the implications that come with that. Someone has suggested, "fix the product" for the next rallying cry. However, "fix our credibility" is probably a better thematic goal/rallying cry, and "fix the product" a better defining objective, or piece of the puzzle to restoring credibility. It's certainly not the whole part, but one important temporary piece.

DIAGRAM



The single, temporary rallying cry share by all team members.



The temporary qualitative components of the goal. Usually between 4 and 6.



The ongoing priorities of the organization. Usually between 4 and 6.

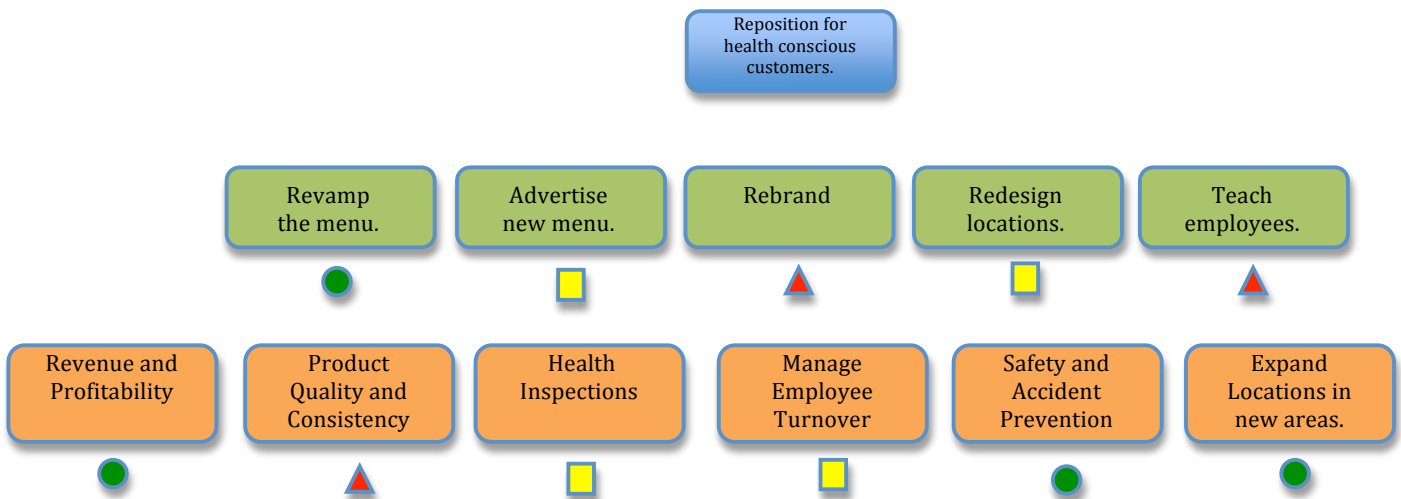
HOW TO USE THE MODLE:

Start your meetings by reviewing each piece and grading it with a color. This should take only about 5 minutes and brutal honesty is required. The top executive or team leader can break ties about which color something should be. Once ratings have been given you have a clear idea of where work needs to be done. Everyone needs to focus on the problem areas, and if you do

nothing else during the meeting, make sure you address these. Needless discussions need not be spent on the areas where you are doing well.

EXAMPLE

A fast food chain restaurant that is losing customers who are looking for healthier options and switching to fresh options and fast Mexican food.



LONG TERM CONTEXT

When a goal runs its course and is largely accomplished, move on to another, and another.

This model falls somewhere between long-term strategic planning and day to day operations. This is not a strategic plan in and of itself...but more of a model or a tactic for dealing with the important stuff that comes up and is critical to success. If you are already addressing something in your long-term strategic plan, chances are it won't come up. However, you can feel free to take one of the items on your long-term strategic plan, pull it out and make it a shorter term Rallying cry...and knock it out of the park.

More examples of different companies and industries are given in the book, but I choose not to reproduce them here.