

The value of taking a holistic approach to operations leadership

Businesses are often extremely complex—in my case, it takes an army of people, machines and innovations to get a product to market. In order to deliver a seamless customer experience, companies require the right leadership, a range of departments, employees with varying skill sets, and the appropriate tools and resources. With all these intersecting parts, how can operations leaders implement changes and decisions that take each arm of the business into account?

Effective operations leadership comes from considering each department's unique goals and perspectives, then finding solutions and efficiencies that suit the needs of all simultaneously. My team, for instance, has three divisions that must work in tandem to meet our customers' needs. While it is tempting to view each department as its own silo, I have found some key strategies that operations leaders can leverage to build a holistic approach:

Aligning on end goals can align business units

Each department of a business strives to maintain a high level of customer service and deliver satisfaction. One of the most valuable strategies for operations managers is to keep the end goal top of mind – what each team is trying to achieve and how they contribute to customer satisfaction. Each team must align with the client timeline for a specific project or goal. For instance, if a technology company is selling a product to a client, this means sales must set realistic expectations in tandem with how quickly IT can deliver on a project. As an operations leader, it is essential to ensure synergies of all key players, and that they keep the customer in mind throughout, as each team's relationship and role with a customer will vary.

Operations managers should invest in digital solutions to keep teams aligned and leverage digital cloud solutions, such as the Salesforce Service Cloud, for example, that streamline processes and make materials easy to access for all teams. Solutions like these allow teams to track projects simultaneously so everyone, whether it's a receptionist or the company president, can access the current status of a deliverable or task underway. Status updates can run from the very beginning of a project all the way through the customer deployment stage, so all teams receive real time updates and any team member can problem solve or provide client updates. Additionally, programs of this kind offer reporting capabilities so teams can see the amount of time spent on a project or access relevant communication materials so they can streamline processes in the future to deliver even better client service.

Leveraging communications tactics fosters collaboration

When balancing the needs of several different departments, it is important to align on priorities and remain flexible. In some instances, the main objective may be managing overhead costs, while in other projects it could be important to go the extra mile to win new business. Every circumstance is different, but all require operations leaders to communicate effectively and adapt to current priorities with ease. One way to do this is to set up meetings with team leaders so everyone is on the same page regarding goals and priorities for each project. This allows separate teams to set deadlines and hours toward the same goal, so each project runs

smoothly.

Effective communication also allows teams to deliver top-notch service to clients. Priorities will shift throughout the day and it is imperative that teams communicate internally and with clients. For instance, an installation specialist might be rerouted during trips to handle an unexpected issue, so operations managers must have a firm understanding of how that impacts the remainder of the trip, the employee's workload, and client schedules. Fostering a sense of community across departments is a key way to boost employee communications. Weekly in-person meetings establish familiarity and trust among employees and also provide the opportunity to share regular status updates on projects that are underway. Something as simple as office seating arrangements can also impact communication and collaboration among team members. Seating employees from different departments amongst each other can help build positive relationships and an understanding of each other's' day-to-day. The more employees collaborate and understand pieces of different worlds, the easier it is for them to work together effectively and find effective solutions.

As an operations manager, taking a step back to understand how each team and department fits into the needs of its customers is essential. I have found that putting myself in other employees' shoes when making decisions and considering how these decisions will impact the outcome has led to increased collaboration internally and a smooth external customer experience. Focusing on big picture operations, leveraging resourceful tools, and embracing flexibility will lead to solutions that keep each side of the business productive, efficient, and happy.