

“Take a GIAnT Step”

A new tool promises to assess your organization’s readiness to take on large-scale initiatives.

by Ted Santos & Edward M. Petrosky

The future success of an organization often depends on disruptive initiatives that drive new revenues and position the organization as a market leader. While it’s the Board of Directors’ job to intentionally create strategic problems for the CEO to solve, board members are sometimes reluctant to use this approach for fear of overwhelming or disrupting the CEO and staff. The result: Many great ideas are never attempted.

But wait. What if the Board and CEO had some way of measuring the organization’s readiness to execute large-scale initiatives? What if it was possible to prepare an entire organization to execute initiatives that appear to be disruptive to the existing business model? What if the Board and CEO could assess the unspoken objections and concerns that might derail a particular initiative before it’s even launched, and could take the necessary steps to avoid them?

The Great Idea Alignment Tool (GIAnT) was created to do just that. This is how it works.

The GIAnT is an organizational satellite that provides a comprehensive vertical and horizontal picture of your organization. It indicates who is prepared for an initiative, how prepared they are, and what it will take to get staff ready for the initiative.

The GIAnT consists of more than 200 items that measure 18 human factors that will drive or derail an initiative, such as urgency, innovation, ownership, commitment, trust and sabotage. These items are based on a combination of cutting-edge research, organizational and leadership development theory, and the collective coaching and consulting experience of the tool’s creators.

The GIAnT is unique in several ways. First, it is individually tailored to assess preparedness for a specific organization initiative (i.e. the “great idea”). Second, whereas most comprehensive assessments focus on individual executives, the GIAnT assesses the organization as a whole. Third, many of the companies that use assessment tools to inform decision-making limit themselves to employee feedback surveys. These tools often indicate what people are saying but not what caused them to feel the way they do. The GIAnT, on the other hand, indicates not simply if people believe in an initiative, but why they do or don’t. Finally, the GIAnT corrects for positive and negative impression management; in other words, the degree to which respondents portrayed themselves or their organization in an exaggeratedly favorable or unfavorable light.

The GIAnT is administered online to each employee. The resulting report is organized in a top-down format, beginning with a broad snapshot of the organization at 50k feet, and then drilling down by variables of interest. The GIAnT indicates the percentage of the organization as a whole and the percentage of each business unit within the organization that is aligned, resistant, conflicted/ambivalent, and apathetic towards the initiative.

Leadership can take this information and use it to decide whether the organization is ready for a costly initiative. Since results are also provided for each business unit, company leaders are able to determine where the most and least support lies. Once they have this information in hand, they can decide which geographical or functional unit would be optimal for the disruptive initiative's launch.

Perhaps most importantly, the GIANt indicates why staff members are either aligned with or pushing back against the initiative. Company leaders can use this insight to exploit the factors supporting alignment and to correct the factors causing push back.

The entire assessment process spans about 4 weeks, and includes aligning leadership on an initiative and individualizing the GIANt accordingly, a proprietary solution to maximize the rate of employee GIANt completion, experientially based feedback sessions to leadership and staff, and action plan development and execution.

Cheryl S. Wilson, CPA, principal of Wilson-Heidrich Associates, Financial Accounting Advisors, serves on a board that recently used the GIANt to launch a new initiative. As she explains, "A major capital improvements program along with the related financing has been approved for this corporation by the Board of Directors. Millions of dollars are to be spent over the next three years. The additional debt service and continual increase in operating costs make improved operating efficiency and new revenue streams an imperative. A focused, expeditious launch of a new initiative was called for and the Board didn't have the time or skill sets to obtain the information we needed to evaluate our options or determine the probability of success.

"I thought if we could obtain the organizational reasons why certain past initiatives were never fully launched or, if launched, were not successful, then this insight would provide the Board with the necessary information to modify our strategy and its execution to allow us to achieve our desired growth objectives," she explains. "The organizational assessment we chose, the GIANt, could provide objective information we otherwise could not obtain."

Wilson goes on to explain that, in essence, the GIANt provides a virtual walk around the entire organization—a walk around that leadership would never have the time to take on its own. It also provides a data-driven basis for predicting whether an initiative is likely to succeed and what needs to be done to increase the likelihood of success.

"We interacted with the entire organization in less than two months and increased engagement throughout all levels of the corporation, therefore achieving alignment of the Board, CEO and management and staff on an innovative initiative," says Wilson. "Involving the entire organization in the assessment emphasized the importance of the project, instilled urgency and energized the management and staff."

Today, the Board and CEO are taking action much more rapidly than they have in the past, says Wilson. "Board member attendance and participation at meetings has increased. The entire Board is engaged and aligned on new initiatives with targeted outcomes and completion dates. Communication has improved significantly and members of the Board are working as a team to address issues."

Ted Santos, CEO of Turnaround Investment Partners (TIP), partners with CEOs and board members, serves as a trusted advisor to companies going through change, and coaches executives to uncover and penetrate untapped markets, shift corporate cultures and align staff and management to the corporate vision. Dr. Edward M. Petrosky, a psychologist by training, focuses on organizational alignment, retention, executive development, succession planning, outcome measures and hiring. He has presented at national professional conferences, published in peerreviewed scientific journals, and taught 11 different psychology courses to undergraduate and graduate students. Dr. Petrosky maintains a private consulting practice in Forest Hills, NY. Visit www.turnaroundip.com for more information on GIAnT.

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