What Great CEOs Do Differently – #1: Agile Decision Making
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This month's Harvard Business Review captures the agility challenge for CEOs, Executives and their teams these days – **What Great CEOs Do Differently (May-June 2017),** resulting from a 10 year study called the CEO Genome Project, identifying the specific attributes that differentiate high-performing CEOs.

Our most important discovery was that successful chief executives tend to demonstrate four specific behaviors that prove critical to their performance. We also found that when boards focus on those behaviors in their selection and development processes, they significantly increase their chances of hiring the right CEO. And our research and experience suggest that when leaders who aspire to the CEO's office—87% of executives, according to a 2014 survey from Korn Ferry—deliberately develop those behaviors, they dramatically raise the odds that they'll become high-performing chief executives. The behaviors we're about to describe sound deceptively simple. But the key is to practice them with maniacal consistency, which our work reveals is a great challenge for many leaders.

1. **Deciding with Speed & Conviction [=Agile Decision Making].** "High-performing CEOs do not necessarily stand out for making great decisions all the time; rather, they stand out for being more decisive. They make decisions earlier, faster, and with greater conviction. They do so consistently—even amid ambiguity, with incomplete information, and in unfamiliar domains. In our data, people who were described as "decisive" were 12 times more likely to be high-performing CEOs".

Good CEOs realize that a wrong decision may be better than no decision at all

2. **Engaging for Impact [= Agile Engagement].** "Once CEOs set a clear course for the business, they must get buy-in among their employees and other stakeholders. We found that strong performers balance keen insight into their stakeholders' priorities with an unrelenting focus on delivering business results. They start by developing an astute understanding of their stakeholders' needs and motivations, and then get people on board by driving for performance and aligning them around the goal of value creation. In our data, CEOs who deftly engaged stakeholders with this results orientation were 75% more successful in the role."

When tackling contentious issues, leaders who are good at engagement give everyone a voice but not a vote. They listen and solicit views but do not default to consensus-driven decision making.

3. **Adapting Proactively [= Enterprise Agility].** "For evidence of how important it is for businesses and leaders to adjust to a rapidly changing environment, we need look no

further than the aftermath of Brexit and the recent U.S. presidential election. Our analysis shows that CEOs who excel at adapting are 6.7 times more likely to succeed. CEOs themselves told us over and over that this skill was critical. When asked what differentiates effective CEOs, Dominic Barton, global managing partner of McKinsey & Company, immediately offered: "It's dealing with situations that are not in the playbook. As a CEO you are constantly faced with situations where a playbook simply cannot exist. You'd better be ready to adapt."

Most CEOs know they have to divide their attention among short-, medium-, and long-term perspectives, but the adaptable CEOs spent significantly more of their time—as much as 50%—thinking about the long term. Other executives, by contrast, devoted an average of 30% of their time to long-term thinking. We believe a long-term focus helps because it makes CEOs more likely to pick up on early signals. Highly adaptable CEOs regularly plug into broad information flows: They scan wide networks and diverse sources of data, finding relevance in information that may at first seem unrelated to their businesses. As a result, they sense change earlier and make strategic moves to take advantage of it.

> **4. Delivering Reliably [= Agile Execution].** "CEOs who ranked high on reliability employed several other tactics as well. Three-quarters of them were rated strong on organization and planning skills. They established business management systems that included a cadence of meetings, dashboards of metrics, clear accountability, and multiple channels for monitoring performance and making rapid course corrections. Most important, they surrounded themselves with strong teams."

Leaders ignore the importance of reliability at their peril.

In other words Translating AGILE Strategy & AGILE Execution into Traction, avoiding Wheel$pin, with the AGILE Decision Making Required, and AGILE engagement of all employees in that Enterprise-Wide and Enterprise Deep. More and more companies and corporations are engaging their employees enterprise wide and enterprise deep in the imperative to pivot to AGILE.

AGILE strategy. AGILE execution. AGILE decision making. That's our work. Helping enterprises go on a transformation journey to AGILE.
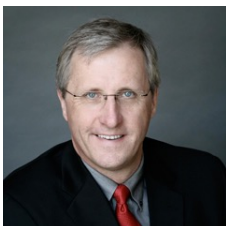
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