

WHITE PAPER

FUSION CELL

Use Fusion Cells to leverage “whole-of-business” capabilities to drive and maintain your priorities: *tackle today’s cross-cutting threats and seize the greatest opportunities*



RECENT CHALLENGES HAVE TAKEN A TOLL ON YOUR ABILITY TO ACHIEVE COMPETITIVE GOALS

Navigating the challenges of hybrid work and the Great Resignation, organizations have increasingly focused on internal operations at the expense of evaluating their strategic environment

Under stress of persistent fire-fighting, teams have become hyper-tactical, rather than focused on strategic goals

With constant external and internal change, teams are distracted and struggling to respond proactively to their customers and the competitive environment



1. OVERVIEW

Most priority efforts require a whole-of-business effort to succeed in a complex environment. Internal- and externally-facing operations depend on each other to succeed in a world comprising multiple adaptive systems: customers, competition, supply chain, natural and man-made crises, etc.

In today's environment, traditional processes to gather information and drive action can operate at peak performance and still prove insufficient.

Many of these organizational functions are individually excellent, but often limited in their mandate, the information to which they have or seek access, and the context within which to interpret it. Organizations can end up with a hodgepodge of departmental and functional interpretations of the overall priorities—all of which may be individually valuable, but which often exacerbate information overload and overall fail to add up to more than the sum of their parts. This phenomenon is exacerbated when both internally- and externally-focused teams have been increasingly tactically and internally focused.

Many organizations assume that senior leadership will handle this type of cross-boundary thinking. While senior leaders do focus on these issues, our increasingly complex environment moves more and more problems up the hierarchy because they impact multiple siloes at once. Leaders are simply running out of time.

Fusion Cells are purpose-built to focus on priorities, enable cross-functional thinking, and drive action so that not every complex problem requires executive attention.

2. BRIDGING THE CURRENT GAP

Fusion Cells leverage a variety of data but with a human and operational element, supporting faster and more contextualized decision making, and driving faster action.

Aligned Goals vs. Individual Excellence

Challenge: Most priority efforts require a whole-of-business effort to succeed in a complex environment. While many teams are increasingly tactically and operationally focused, competitive success requires that they connect their efforts to priority goals, while managing dependencies with other teams.

Solution: Fusion Cells leverage participants from teams brought into the cell with laser-focus on the value proposition: how their team contributes to overall success, and how they can better-achieve their own goals (and help others’) by participating.

Decision Support vs. Direct Action

Challenge: Traditional approaches often struggle to connect information to decisions to action quickly enough to adequately support priority work. Traditional reporting channels and approaches often slow and de-contextualize decision-making, even as increasing operational complexity and messaging on priority issues increasingly drives decision requests up the organizational hierarchy.

Solution: A Fusion Cell does not add another set of decision-makers. Rather, it is a powerful cross-functional tool that helps decision-makers at every level move faster. Frontline teammates are pushed actionable insights. Senior decision-makers are given a common operating picture. Decision-makers at every level set the goals and define success; the Fusion Cell generates options, and provides decision support with integrated and creative thinking.

Intelligence vs. Information

Challenge: Most organizations have enough (often too much) data. Priority efforts can exacerbate this overload as teammates respond to urgency by adding meetings and reporting requirements. Particularly when paired with limited alignment between teams that have tended to have an operational focus, this phenomenon produces multiple operating pictures. Without a “single source of truth” teams will struggle to recognize and respond to dependencies, accurately evaluate your competitive environment, and to undertake the coordinated action needed for success.

Solution: A Fusion Cell is not an information aggregator (an important function but rarely helpful to solving fast-changing problems). A Fusion Cell filters raw data, leverage your existing expertise to “fuse” it into fact-based insights, then provides a single operating picture on key metrics. Cell members are constantly sense-making: putting local data into context of the broader plan then driving action down and, as helpful, pushing information up so that it can continue to inform strategic thinking.



3. OPERATIONAL SNAPSHOT

A Fusion Cell can be directed against any problem set identified by decision-makers. They are most effective when deployed against complex problems in which multiple internal functions and operations need to coordinate in an adaptive and unpredictable environment.

No two Fusion Cells look exactly alike but successful ones rely on similar principles:

- The Fusion Cell must have a straight (and short) line to decision-makers. The cell must link to those in a position to act on the intelligence, and those taking action must link back to the Fusion Cell to offer feedback on the quality of insights.
- A Fusion Cell must have vertical trust. A successful cell short-circuits traditional reporting to drive action down. While upward communication is vital, a Fusion Cell's bias to action requires leaders to trust that selected members will faithfully execute the mission assigned.
- Fusion Cell members must build horizontal trust. To tackle the most pressing challenges, cells often pull across traditional boundaries and bind together operational experts who may have never worked together—opportunities for misunderstandings abound, and all members will need to assume others' positive intent and remain focused on the mission.
- Fusion Cells bolster trust with transparency and communication. Clarity and concision drive shared success. Sharing information with other members and back to their teams is part of the Fusion Cell's power in leveraging the combined strengths of all members.

COUNTERTERRORISM ORIGIN STORY

In 2005, Fusion Cells were established to combine US military, intelligence and law enforcement resources into a unified counterterrorism network designed to beat the global Al Qaeda network.

While individual teams achieved spectacular operational successes, the technically and militarily superior US capabilities were losing the war. Against an opportunistic and adaptable enemy like Al Qaeda, our collective teams were — quite simply—too slow.

Bureaucratic boundaries did not allow newly identified intelligence to be analyzed and sent back to the point of action quickly enough to keep pace with the threat.

Fusion Cells pulled representatives across hierarchies, sources of intelligence, and loyalties. Only one step removed from the frontline operators

with whom they were in direct communication, these teams captured and shared raw intelligence and best practices from one location that could drive action elsewhere, while simultaneously giving decision-makers a common operating picture across traditional silos to drive resource allocation.

Fusion Cells provided frontline leaders with relevant and updated target lists, smoothed frictions between operators and intelligence personnel, and allowed commanders to optimize and rebalance resources to shape operations hundreds of miles apart—hours before intelligence had made its way to headquarters.

This problem is not specific to the battlefield, nor is the solution. Networked problems require traditional organizations to connect across boundaries and drive action faster than a hierarchy can move.

4. IMPLEMENTATION

A Fusion Cell is tailored to the decision-makers who convene it, the problem-set they face, and the constraints and opportunities of their environment.

All share the following basic steps:

Identify the Mission: Articulate the priority issue on which you most critically need decision support and successful action. Define success: the Fusion Cell is built to address this challenge.

Establish Executive Access: Fusion Cells need to get intelligence and decision support to key executives without fear of bureaucratic repercussions. Executives do not usually run Fusion Cells, but cell members need executive access to support needed decisions and problem-solving.

Establish Lines of Effort: Based on the mission, identify key workstreams. Construct a preliminary list of metrics to track progress in each line of effort: how they will evaluate progress and the cross-functional stakeholders that must be involved?

Members: Identify Fusion Cell members from each of the stakeholders that drive these lines of effort. The best cell members are often not the heads of these teams, but do need significant operational expertise and positive reputations (ideally across multiple verticals). This allows them to quickly evaluate information, identify risks, and craft and assess recommendations; and ensures that their findings carry weight.

Establish & Align the Fusion Cell: Align cell members on the shared goal. Members (and their supervisors) need to understand the priority; their team's role in success, and how their participation helps both their team and others succeed.

Create a Common Operating Picture: Partner with cell members to finalize success metrics, ensure mutual understanding of who owns which line of effort, and establish the communications and procedures (e.g. information sharing, thresholds for "noteworthy events" and reporting, expected response timelines). Design your information exchange to meet leaders' information requirements, address dependencies, and provide latitude for unexpected field intelligence.

Establish an Operating Rhythm: The Fusion Cell should meet on a cadence that matches the speed of your environment.

Establish Outside Connections/Comparisons: Establish how the Fusion Cell will start looking up and out. What competitors, benchmarks, other entities can provide useful inputs or could benefit from outputs? Which should be watched as "early warnings" or other indicators relevant to the mission?

Iterate: A good Fusion Cell will adapt. If a line of effort isn't working, kill it. If the team meetings aren't getting participants and decision-makers what they need, change them. If a new member is needed, add them. If a line in the rule book is preventing timely and key action, bring that immediately to those with the power to change the rule.

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