



Episode 69 Show Notes: What Is Iteration and How Can HR Benefit?

Ed Muzio is an expert in the scientific study of measuring and modifying human behavior. He explains “*Iteration*” - the way effective organizations solve problems and achieve complex goals. He offers advice on how HR can help solve business problems (versus get in the way); how the process of iteration works, and how HR can leverage it to drive its own agenda and strategic initiatives. Ed argues that if you look for the highest-performing entrants in any given market, chances are they are iterating. Managers are the feedback system of an organization, and those who are iterating continually ask themselves and their teams what the next logical step is. They take it, learn from it and repeat the process.

Ed Muzio is CEO of Group Harmonics and an award-winning three-time author. He is a sought-after consultant to business and industry worldwide and a popular media source. Ed discusses his new book, *Iterate: Run a Fast, Flexible, Focused Management Team*, and how he guides senior leadership and management in understanding the key behaviors that help an organization iterate.

Key Learnings From This Episode

- **Ed’s work with Line Leaders.** Half of his work originates from HR and half comes ‘around’ HR when an executive or leader says, ‘my HR team cannot help me, can you?’ This has given Ed a unique perspective on the role that HR can play. When HR has a seat at the table, you know they have been sought out. Ed developed a program, ‘Own Your Seat’. When HR is not at the table, leadership wishes they were, and HR wishes they were.
- **How can HR get invited into discussions?** HR needs to understand its audience. Business leaders have a set of resources, a group of people they are trying to mobilize, and clear (or unclear) objectives. When HR talks to leaders about getting those things done, leaders are very interested. When HR talks about HR acronyms/tools (i.e., development practices, competencies, etc.), they are not interested. While the tools are important, HR should talk to leaders about how to reach their goals. Keep the HR tools in their toolbox until needed, versus making them front and center.



- **What is the concept behind Iterate?** Iterate was born from 70 years of research in understanding how management teams are run well and what are the best organizations doing. Managers and leaders are playing a long game. Iterate is a way to look at what an organization needs to do, from the perspective of the leadership.

- **To help clarify Iterate, there is an analogy, ‘walk to the car’.** Picture the following: You leave an office building, look at your watch and realize that you have 3 minutes to get to your car to get to your next meeting. You can’t see your car, but you begin to walk in the direction where you believe it is parked. When you begin walking, a few things are happening:
 - Your front line workers (feet and muscles) are dealing with the surface, maybe it is slippery or covered in gravel
 - Your top executive office (your brain) is not involved. Your brain set the output, but your feet are taking care of that
 - Your feet are using blood oxygen as a resource, and if they need more, they can call for more to middle management, your cardiovascular system – if needed, middle management can escalate and communicate to the executive office that you need to either breathe harder or walk slower – upward communication in the organization
 - What are you doing in your executive office when you are walking to your car? You are looking where you are going, sending down information. This is all happening without you taking much notice
 - All the while, you are making sure every step you take is the most intelligent step you can take from where you are based on what you know.
 - Then, what you learn from that step is what you incorporate as knowledge into the next step.
 - This is what it means to Iterate and what the highest performing organizations do. They keep stepping towards their goals, regardless of the plan, one step at a time



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WHEN HR TRIES TO LOOK GOOD INSTEAD OF TRYING TO SOLVE A PROBLEM, IT DERAILS THE RELATIONSHIP WITH LEADERSHIP AND THE ORGANIZATION, AND CAN DESTROY HR'S REPUTATION.



Leaders are solving their organizational problems and, for things that are complex, identifying the most sensible, immediate, actionable steps that can be taken to make progress, even if they do not know exactly where the entire process will lead.

- **Why is iteration so difficult for organizations to do?** People are resistant to change. Organizations tend to follow the typical North America management model, making a plan, following it, and then evaluating people against that plan. People are rewarded who stay to the plan – as opposed to saying, ‘the plan was good, but what do we do now?’

Folklore has it that when Intel and Motorola were competing, someone inside Motorola said to someone inside Intel, ‘you can change your strategy in the market in the time it takes me to get approval for an airplane ticket to go somewhere’.

- **What is the role of management and how can HR support it?** Management’s primary job is to be the feedback system, asking, ‘where are we trying to go, where are we now, what do we know, and what is our next best step with our current set of resources to get us there?’
- **Ed’s view of manageMENT:** Management does: (1) ‘managING’ - settING pay scales, getTING employee feedback; (2) change management – big organizational changes; and (3) manageMENT-every day, every week saying, ‘are our resources in the right place, are we producing the results we thought, how is it different, and what needs to be changed to keep us on track or get us back on track to our goals?’ Management operates at all levels and needs to practice the five key practices in Iterative Management that are outlined in Ed’s book.
 1. Output & Status Broadcasting – define our outputs
 2. Work Preview Meetings – define resource allocation
 3. Group Decision-Making – how we have meetings in groups
 4. Linked Teams – how we perceive the organization
 5. Front Line Self-Sufficiency – how we manage the front line
- **Traditional management tools**, such as graphs showing the plan and how a team has historically performed to it, are not typically useful. Graphs tell a more useful story when they look at variances between the plan, what is happening now, and what may happen in the future, and then making adjustments.



- **What is the real work of management?** It is the constant assessment and adjustment of, ‘are we or are we not on track to our GOALS (not our plan)?’, and the responsibility of allocating or reallocating resources to get as close to on track as possible.
- **What can HR do to support this way of managing and leading?** A manager can practice the method of **upward-looking success**, saying ‘you all have your goals, but here are my goals’. This encourages individuals to work together to manage their resources so both can meet their goals. HR can help to facilitate, or they can get in the way of this. HR can advise and remind managers to communicate that everyone functions as a team and that their success will be determined based on achievement of the overall team goals. As the managers ‘look up’ at their leader’s goals, the leadership can ‘look out’. If managers are looking down, then the leadership is looking down, and no one is looking where they are going. When drawing an organization chart, don’t draw lines from individual to individual. Circle teams, and link the teams across the organization to show the critical relationships necessary to achieve success.
- **How can people be coached to get onboard and embrace this approach?** People can be territorial. Try ‘looking down’ and ask a manager if it would be useful or possible to have less competition between their subordinates for resources and more collaboration between them to achieve the manager’s higher level business goals. If a manager is having problems in that area, they will be happy to have the help.
- **Are there ways that HR can use the Iterate approach to drive their HR agenda or strategic initiatives to support the business?** Use forward-looking data and be clear about the output you are trying to deliver. Display and model a forward-looking forecast. If you are running an Iterating HR organization (always looking forward and asking how HR is doing relative to goals), it is better equipped to ask for help because the organization understands where HR is and what it needs to do. Bring real facts to leadership instead of trying to position HR as being in good stead with leadership. When HR tries to look good instead of trying to solve a problem, it derails the relationship with leadership and the organization and can destroy HR’s reputation. Once this ‘perception management rather than output generation’ is detected by a leader, the credibility is lost. **People need to have more business acumen.** They should run their work to the higher level business goal instead of running it to their little fiefdom. This builds credibility and produces useful output.



Recommended Reading and References From this Episode

- [Iterate: Run a Fast, Flexible, Focused Management Team](#) by Ed Muzio
- [IterateNow.com](#)
- [Group Harmonics Website](#)

To Follow Ed Muzio

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