

The End of the Corporate Gunslinger

By Tom Keeley

Corporate decision making has been the domain of executive management. Some organizations focus on making objective, fact-based decisions, while others utilize reactionary, subjective, and shoot-from-the-hip approaches.

Those organizations that utilize fact-based decisions attempt to gather all the data and then use objective techniques to evaluate that information in order to make the decisions.

The gunslingers observe a point in time and make snap decisions that have instantaneous impact.

The fact based decision-makers point out the risks associated with the snap judgment approach. They highlight the benefits of designed-in-quality, rather than products that have to be re-engineered to correct product design flaws.

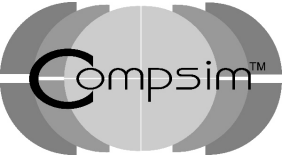
The gunslingers point out the delays encountered in gathering the facts and in making objective decisions. They suggest that in today's internet-time, that making any decision is better than delaying to make a better decision. They claim their trained senses yield better decisions than any fact based process.

These two approaches to management have been applied successfully in the past. The analytical approach to justify decisions has been applied in a number of companies. There are a number of management training companies focusing on formal decision making processes. The gunslinger approach is usually inbred into the corporate culture of a company. It usually develops when individuals grow rapidly through the organization and develop a personal vision of infallibility; a feeling that they know all.

In today's internet time, the impact of corporate decisions is more important to the long term success than in the past. In the past, there was always time to correct bad decisions. There would be time to reverse decisions and redirect the corporate strategy. Now the impact of inappropriate decisions is magnified. It can lead to constant redirection of the workforce, while the competition moves directly to the optimal solution.

Companies are now faced with betting their future on investments in a strategic direction. Decisions based on the shoot-from-the-hip approach are relegated to short term success at the best, and almost certain obscurity in the long term.

New tools are becoming available to accelerate the analytic approach to decision making. Knowledge capture and knowledge management are on the horizon for most companies. Artificial intelligence, rule based decision making, neural nets, fusion, and chaos theory have been around for years. Exponential increases in processing power will finally take these and other technologies into mainstream corporate environments in the near future.



Incorrect business decisions will result in ultimate demise of the gunslinger decision making methodology and in all likelihood, the companies that hold on to that management style. It will no longer be acceptable to hold on to the “old boy network” where the management groups are collections of people that just work well together. It will be those well oiled organizations that collect experience in a formal manner and use that information to make the most objective decisions that will succeed in a consistent manner. The technology will reduce or eliminate the time lag that previously differentiated the gunslinger from the analytical approach. So while the gunslinger had a good run, his time is short.

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Compsim LLC
PO Box 532
Brookfield, Wisconsin 53008
(262) 797-0418