Rapid Results

The original Rapid Results approach was developed long before anybody ever talked about »Agility.« Robert H. Schaffer and his colleagues at Schaffer Consulting, our strategic partner in the USA, invented the concept and distributed it successfully around the globe.

by Markus Spiegel and Thomas Mandl

SCHAFFER CONSULTING

Schaffer Consulting has over 55 years of experience helping its clients focus on results. They do so by working side by side with clients to translate strategic objectives into well-defined, short-term targets. To go after these targets, Schaffer convenes teams and coaches them, so they make measurable progress right away. The approach cuts through complexity and unlocks hidden capacity to drive change while at the same time developing skills and competencies in the organization.

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Rapid Results is based on the observation that in times of crisis, many organizations seem to be able to tap into a »hidden reserve« to perform at a much higher level than usual. The idea is to reproduce the same dynamics without actually having a crisis at hand. Many of its principles and practices are shared with critical elements for any agile methods and approaches.

Use it for breakthrough

Rapid Results can help mobilize teams in an organization when there is a need to overcome barriers of change and tackle business challenges in a tangible way. These may vary from gaining momentum for a new strategy, to process improvement, post-merger integration, sales acceleration or even cost reduction. As a key requirement, the challenge must be seen as highly important, so that it compels the organization to learn (solution is not obvious), and that it usually needs some cross-functional collaboration to make anything happen (see illustration).

Three essential ingredients

One of the main advantages of Rapid Results is that it helps to create space and conditions for teams to be successful within a specific challenge. By shifting the focus towards what matters most and ensuring leadership support, it gains strength. In addition, it can be combined with almost any set of tools that is available. You can rely on Six Sigma, Lean and all types of agile tools. In any case, these three essential ingredients shouldn't be omitted.

1 Fast moving and autonomous teams

By setting the team up for the challenge, it is important to ensure that it does not grow too large and has enough empowerment. This makes sure that it can be easily coordinated and move with great speed. In our experience, teams should consist of four to six members. If more people are necessary for a successful strategy, it is crucial to create additional team units that closely coordinate with each other but can deliver value independently. This needs to be complemented by decision rights within defined boundaries and flexibility to come up with their own solutions.

2 Uncompromised focus on results

To create a tangible impact with Rapid Results, it is crucial to ensure that the team itself sets an ambitious goal and delivers a measurable business outcome or result such as revenue generation, time savings, process time cutting or customer commitment. It is also important to go for the final business benefit and not deliver an easier activity like »recommendations delivered« or »number of people trained« and critical that the goal can be measured during the implementation period, so the team understands whether or not they have made progress or need to shift gears.

3 Timeboxing

Rapid Results teams usually have to deliver results in +/- 100 days. The time frame has proven to provide enough time to experiment with different ways to achieve the goal while at the same time requiring that they swing into action immediately. A firm date in the near term forces the team to break away from endless preparation and get into »doing.« During that time, all team members usually work on the project for a minimum 20 percent of their time and often more. The defined time horizon not only requires fast action, but also helps the team to see »the light at the end of the tunnel.« It's a short, but intense period where most teams deliver incredible impact.

Résumé

In short, whenever you need or want to show tangible progress in a short timeframe for a high priority topic and the solution is not obvious, Rapid Results might be your intervention of choice. Not only does it deliver measurable impact, but it also helps you to build execution skills and capabilities in your organization to achieve even more. Robert H. Schaffer expresses it the following way: »The most powerful driver of better performance is better performance itself.« ●

Four phases to set up and conduct Rapid Results projects

SHAPING
~ 1–3 weeks

— Shape, define and align on strategic project challenge for team in project charter
— Recruit team, ensure leadership support and availability of needed resources

LAUNCH
1 day

— Set Rapid Results goal
— Create work plan and backlog
— Establish team operating rhythm and rules to collaborate

IMPLEMENT
100 days or less

— Carry out work plan using agile methods
— Experiment and learn
— Conduct formal review sessions
— Develop sustainability plans and thoughts on next opportunities to tackle

SUSTAIN
Post 100 days

— Ensure results can be sustained
— Expand learnings and innovations to other areas
— Communicate success to the organization