

Collapse From Increased Load



In January 2006, "the roof of one of the buildings at Katowice International Fair collapsed in Chorzów / Katowice, Poland." Subsequently, "a forensic investigation found numerous design and construction flaws that contributed to the speed of the collapse. The snow from the roof was not being removed which resulted in construction overload by more than 100%."¹

This story illustrates what increased load does to a building if it is not designed accordingly. In organisations, structures are also created to support load—either purposefully designed for scalability or, in an ad hoc way that can never adequately accommodate increases in workload. And when we neglect these structures amid heightened workloads, collapses are common.

Right now, many construction-related businesses are experiencing significant increases in workload and are running hard to keep pace. Now is a strategic time to review and address key structural pillars that may have served well but that could be vulnerable to collapse under load.

Here are eight areas worth reviewing to ensure flexible structural pillars capable of responding to changes in load.

1. Leadership

Efficiency cascades down through the fabric of an organisation from leadership. When leadership-teams are cohesive, focused, and harmoniously work together, efficiency flows with less resistance, positively impacting all areas. But when leadership is reactive, unfocused, with degrees of infighting and conflict, the cascade effect can be detrimental.

2. Strategy

Strategy is about endpoints. It connects where we are today to an ideal future state whilst providing a framework for decision making aligned with the direction of the organisation. Checking in to ensure your business strategy has been adequately adjusted to enable responsiveness to the uncertainties inherent in 2021 is an activity well worth the investment of time and effort to safeguard against collapse under load.

3. Time Management

When workloads increase the tendency is to run harder, faster and longer. While busy periods demand heightened responsiveness and adaptability, the undergirding structure of planning our time and managing our selves often takes a hit. This then creates broader inefficiencies impacting our people, our clients and attention to detail. As load increases so must our thinking and planning time.

4. People

When our people *feel the love*, they are more likely to *show the love*. When management: communicate their value of each team member; express interest in their broader life; provide the opportunity for advancement and training; ensure people are placed in the right role according to their personality and skillset; define their responsibilities and performance measures while supporting and holding them accountable to such; this provides significant strength to the organisation. And in times of increased load, people who have been treated such as described, will often go the extra mile for their leaders.

5. Workflows

Smooth effortless workflows are a feature of strong businesses. The systems we have in place may have worked well in previous periods but as incoming work increases, these can falter. Being aware of the obstacles to flow such as delays, duplications, errors, customer complaints and staff unhappiness will increase your responsiveness to the changes required and maintain strength in this critical area.

6. Marketing

This area often takes a secondary position when work increases and sales are strong. However, I have observed that companies who stop marketing when things are good are left floundering when the tide turns (and it always does). You will do well to be consistent in your marketing efforts.

7. Sales

Similar to marketing, sales efficiency is relegated down the chain in good times. Training those who are responsible for winning quotations and business development, along with establishing performance metrics provides an underlying strength. It will also give you a competitive advantage as most companies don't invest in strengthening this area.

8. Money

It's far too easy to get caught up in doing the work and neglect the fundamentals of financial management. Too many companies have collapsed because they focused on top-line growth and forgot about profitability. Incorporating a rigorous financial management process that includes diligently monitoring cashflow, attention to key

financial ratios, job monitoring and completion reviews with a stringent collections process is essential to provide a bedrock of strength in this area.

The structural pillars mentioned above require ongoing attention and investment to ensure they will support you strongly. Creating one or two key indicators for each area also assists in quickly identifying that which is solid and those that are likely to crack under pressure when reviewed in light of anticipated workloads. If you do this regularly it will help ensure that your organisational roof doesn't collapse.

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