

The great in-between: gridlocks of the "old school" to replace

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When transitioning from the old school of thought PESTELICC environments, there are gridlocks that have to be replaced. This transition from static, siloed analysis to dynamic PESTELICC environments (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental, Legal, Institutional, Competitive*, Cultural) requires dismantling fundamental gridlocks and rebuilding leadership architecture for perpetual adaptation. Here's the breakdown:

Gridlocks of the "Old School" to Replace:

1. Static Analysis vs. Dynamic Sensing:

* Gridlock: Treating PEST(LE) as a one-off, backward-looking report. Updates are infrequent and disconnected from real-time operations.

* Replacement Needed: Continuous, real-time environmental sensing integrated into daily workflows and decision cycles.

2. Siloed Intelligence vs. Systemic Integration:

* Gridlock: PEST analysis confined to strategy teams or specific functions (e.g., marketing does Social, legal does Legal), rarely synthesized. Insights don't cross boundaries.

* Replacement Needed: Holistic integration where Political shifts inform Technological investments, Social trends reshape Economic models, etc. Cross-functional synthesis is mandatory.

3. Linear Planning vs. Adaptive Strategy:

* Gridlock: Rigid 3-5 year plans based on a single PEST snapshot. Inability to pivot quickly when assumptions collapse (e.g., pandemic, sudden regulation).

* Replacement Needed: Strategy as a portfolio of experiments, dynamic resource allocation, and rapid scenario-based pivoting informed by constant PESTELICC monitoring.

4. Centralized Control vs. Distributed Sense-Making:

* Gridlock: Only top leaders or dedicated analysts "own" environmental scanning. Frontline insights (sales, customer service, R&D) are undervalued or lost.

* Replacement Needed: Empower everyone to be sensors and contribute localized PESTELICC insights. Harness collective intelligence.

5. Predict & Control vs. Sense & Respond:

* Gridlock: Obsession with predicting the future accurately to control outcomes. Leads to paralysis or denial when the unpredictable happens.

* Replacement Needed: Building organizational resilience and responsiveness to thrive amidst uncertainty. Focus on detecting weak signals and rehearsing responses.

6. Slow Decision Cycles vs. Tempo Advantage:

* Gridlock: Hierarchical, consensus-driven decisions that are too slow for the velocity of change in PESTELICC factors.

* Replacement Needed: Flatter decision rights, empowered teams acting within clear strategic boundaries ("commander's intent"), faster OODA loops (Observe, Orient, Decide, Act).

7. Risk Aversion vs. Intelligent Experimentation:

* Gridlock: Fear of failure prevents testing assumptions or exploring responses to emerging PESTELICC threats/opportunities.

* Replacement Needed: Culture of safe-to-fail experiments, rapid prototyping of responses, and learning from small bets.

The Modern Leadership Architecture for PESTELICC:

This architecture focuses on perpetual sensing, rapid sense-making, empowered action, and continuous learning. Think of it as building an adaptive nervous system for the organization.

1. Strategic Nerve Center (Not Just a

Planning Dept.):

* Function: Continuous PESTELICC monitoring, synthesis, scenario planning, weak signal detection, early warnings systems.

* Composition: Cross-functional experts (data scientists, futurists, sociologists, economists, technologists), rotating line leaders.

* Outputs: Dynamic threat/opportunity dashboards, prioritized scenarios, recommended strategic options (not fixed plans), triggered alerts.

2. Distributed Sensing Network:

* Function: Embed environmental scanning into all roles. Frontline staff, engineers, sales teams are trained to identify and report relevant PESTELICC signals.

* Mechanisms: Simple digital tools for reporting observations, dedicated time for "sensing," internal platforms for sharing insights, recognition for valuable contributions.

* Technology: AI-powered tools aggregating external data (news, social, regulatory feeds, sensor data) and internal insights.

3. Empowered & Adaptive Teams:

* Structure: Cross-functional teams organized around missions/capabilities, not rigid functions. Clear autonomy within strategic guardrails.

* Decision Rights: Push decisions to the lowest capable level. Teams have authority and resources to respond to PESTELICC shifts within their domain.

* Tempo: Teams operate on faster cycles (sprints, iterations) aligned with environmental volatility.

4. Dynamic Strategy & Resource Allocation:

* Process: Regular (e.g., quarterly) strategic reviews focused on PESTELICC changes, not just financials. Strategy is a living set of hypotheses.

* Resource Fluidity: Flexible budgets, modular investments. Ability to quickly shift resources between initiatives based on changing PESTELICC priorities (e.g.,

reallocating from Tech to Environmental compliance if regulations shift).

* Portfolio Approach: Manage a portfolio of strategic bets (core, adjacent, transformational) with different risk/reward profiles, constantly evaluated against the PESTELICC landscape.

5. Learning & Adaptation Engine:

* Mechanisms: Robust after-action reviews (AARs) for all initiatives and responses to events. Psychological safety for sharing failures and learnings.

* Knowledge Management: Rapidly codify and disseminate lessons learned, best practices for sensing/responding, and updated scenario responses.

* Experimentation Sandbox: Dedicated space and resources for testing responses to emerging PESTELICC challenges (e.g., piloting new tech for carbon reduction, simulating supply chain disruptions).

6. Leadership Mindset & Capabilities:

* Systems Thinkers: See interconnections across PESTELICC domains and organizational functions.

* Comfort with Ambiguity: Tolerate "not knowing," make decisions with incomplete data.

* Strategic Foresight: Think in multiple time horizons and scenarios.

* Empowering Coaches: Shift from commander to coach, enabling distributed sense-making and action.

* Learning Agility: Rapidly assimilate new information and adapt mental models.

* Communicative & Transparent: Constantly share context, rationale for decisions, and the evolving PESTELICC picture.

* Resilience Builders: Foster psychological safety and organizational stamina for continuous change.

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Bridging the gap between mental health policies and workplace realities

In recent years, we've seen a growing wave of organisations proudly launching mental health policies, wellness days, and branded awareness campaigns. While these are important milestones, many Zimbabwean and regional workplaces still grapple with a persistent challenge: the "gap between mental health policy creation and actual, sustainable implementation."

As a workplace mental wellness consultant, I've encountered HR teams and leadership who are sincere in their efforts but stuck at the strategy execution stage. So, what can be done to ensure mental health is not just a document in the HR folder or a once-off poster campaign, but a living, breathing component of the workplace culture?

1. Start With a Baseline Mental Health Assessment

Before drafting policies or rolling out programs, organisations must measure the current state of employee mental health. Anonymous surveys, focus group discussions, and one-on-one interviews are excellent tools to understand burnout rates, psychosocial hazards, help-seeking behaviors, and workplace stressors.

This data-driven approach allows policies to be relevant, inclusive, and rooted in organisational realities rather than assumptions. "What gets measured gets managed." – Peter Drucker

2. Policies Must Align with



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Organisational Culture

A mental health policy is only as effective as the culture it's embedded into. If the leadership style remains authoritarian, toxic managers go unchecked, or work-life boundaries are disrespected, then no wellness strategy can thrive.

Implementation begins when leaders model the values outlined in the policy: openness, empathy, flexibility, and respect. A supportive culture is not created by a policy, it is reinforced and protected by it.

3. Practical Implementation Plan:

Roles, Resources, and Reviews

Many organisations fail to move from strategy to impact because they skip the "how" of execution. Your policy needs:

Clear accountability: Who owns the implementation? HR? Wellness Committee? An external partner?

Dedicated budget and time: Without funding and timelines, policies become wish lists.

Monitoring tools: Annual reviews, anonymous feedback loops, and a real-time reporting mechanism for psychosocial risks.

For example, a telecommunications company recently developed a mental health policy but ensured its success by creating a Mental Health Steering Committee, quarterly check-ins, and training sessions tailored to each department.

4. Train Leadership and Middle Managers First

One of the biggest blind spots in policy implementation is the failure to prepare middle managers. They are the bridge between executive vision and employee experience, and often the gatekeepers of wellbeing.

Organisations must prioritise emotional intelligence, psychological safety, and conflict resolution training for leaders and supervisors. Without this, policies gather dust while toxic behaviors continue unchecked.

5. Integrate Mental Health into Core

Business Strategy

To sustain mental wellness, stop treating it as an HR side project. Mental health must be woven into:

Annual performance targets (e.g., reduction in absenteeism due to stress)

Customer service metrics (happy teams = happy clients)

Leadership KPIs (e.g., engagement scores, exit interview feedback)

Mental health is a productivity and profitability issue. When businesses see this link clearly, strategy becomes intentional and sustainable.

Conclusion

Mental health policies without action are like safety signs in a building with no fire exits. They may look good, but they won't save lives.

As we move toward a more conscious corporate world, let us shift from simply adopting policies to activating them. This requires intentionality, leadership buy-in, and a commitment to transforming workplace culture from the inside out.

It is no longer enough to have mental health on paper. It must be in the budget, on the agenda, and part of daily operations.

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