

# Brief

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## ***Strategic speed: mobilise people, accelerate execution* by Davis, Frechette & Boswell – a book about putting people at the heart of ‘speed to value’ delivery**

This book from Harvard takes a more rounded view of how to achieve speed to execution than many others. The authors describe the first generation of speed (1980s – 90s) as being about technology, systems and process re-engineering. This book, they say, is about the second generation of speed – when people, and teams need to be at the heart of any approach to accelerating execution.

### **Not speed for its own sake – ‘speed to value’ as the new definition and measure for business**

They say that speed, for its own sake, can lead to thoughtless speed, speed without quality, or speed that does not deliver value. The authors define ‘strategic speed’ as how long it takes until an initiative or new strategy adds value, not how fast until it is executed. They call this ‘speed to value’, and have definitions and tools to measure it.

The book is a good combination of being evidence-based (thanks to a survey of 343 leaders), experience-based (with a wide range of case examples) and practical (with some clear tools and frameworks). The research identifies the nine characteristics of faster, successful companies including: focusing on a few priorities; translating strategy into a few concrete goals and behaviours; cross-boundary collaboration; maintaining a bias for action; and capturing and communicating learnings.

### **The strategic speedometer - the most important ‘people’ factors in accelerating speed**

- **Clarity:** shared, clear understanding of your situation and direction
- **Unity:** wholehearted agreement on the merits of that direction and the need to work together to move ahead
- **Agility:** willingness to turn and adapt quickly while keeping strategic goals in mind.

### **Leaders play a central role in increasing speed with four essential practices**

- **Affirming strategies:** clearly articulating the strategy, creating energy and alignment, ensuring widespread understanding so that everyone knows the part they can play
- **Driving initiatives:** defining objectives and roles for delivery; resourcing delivery teams with the best people and ensuring that those who lead initiatives keep their hand on the steering wheel
- **Managing climate:** creating the conditions for open dialogue, productive collaboration across teams, full ownership and accountability and confidence to pursue new goals
- **Cultivating experience:** allowing time to reflect on progress, learn from experience, make adjustments quickly as problems emerge and contribute to each other’s learning.

The book is not perfect. It is US-focused and there are too many tools and lists. It takes a linear approach to progress, performance and outcome (if you do the right things in the right order, then success will follow).

Overall however, the book contains important and very worthwhile reminders of the organisation practices that support effective speed to execution.

It is most valuable in defining a single strong concept: that of "speed to value".