

Triad Systems Group

David Kane, Bill Houston, and John Foreman explain how this company's flexibility and experience are helping it remain strong in a down economy.

A Three-Fold Approach



When an individual walks away from a steady job at a well-established company with a global reach, he or she is taking a risk, and if that person is leaving with plans to build a separate business, the long-term effects of the wager become even more unpredictable.

David Kane, Bill Houston, and John Foreman are all very familiar with this sort of gamble. After working together at a big-name firm for several years, the three men decided to leave the company they worked at, with hopes of establishing their own business.

The decision was made at the end of 2006, and with the support of a handful of their former colleagues, Kane and Houston founded Triad Systems Group in Lafayette Hill, Pa. In 2008, Foreman joined the venture and became a partner.

“We had a vision of what we wanted to do and how we wanted to do it, and branching out was really the only feasible path,” said Kane, president of Triad. “There was a specific group of client leaders and consulting experts that we wanted to bring together.”

Bill Houston, who serves as one of Triad’s vice presidents, explains that, through prior work, he and the rest of the team developed a business strategy that focused on customer service—one they weren’t able to fully execute before starting their own firm. “Our philosophy is to create positive interactions with our clients and bring as much value as possible to them,” he said. “We weren’t able to take full advantage of and tailor our broad set of capabilities until now.”

The three-fold approach

Today, Triad’s client list includes such major global companies as DuPont, British Petroleum, AstraZeneca, TD Williamson, and Borealis. Typically, the organization’s team is contracted by an executive leader at one of these corporation’s divisions to consult for a particular line of business. “We target businesses that run a P&L of anywhere between \$200 million and \$2 billion,” Houston said.

Although each client’s case is tailored to meet the requirements of the industry it’s in and the results it’s looking for, the team at Triad outlines every project with its tailored, three-fold approach, which is where the idea for the company name came from.

Using the Triad Approach, the organization’s team leverages three groups: the client’s leader or process owner, the client’s internal change agents, and outside resources drawn from Triad’s network of partners.



David Kane,
president



Bill Houston,
vice president



John Foreman,
vice president



The approach ensures clients not only develop the solution they’re looking for but are also shown how to integrate and apply it in the most efficient way. “You have to build alignment at the leadership level in regard to what exactly the client wants and what the potential solution looks like,” Foreman said.

When the initial details are made clear, Triad’s team focuses on engaging the employees within the client organization that are accountable for delivering results. Triad works with these individuals, dubbed internal change agents, to develop and implement an appropriate solution.

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A large part of the implementation stage involves a strategy called change management, of which Kane, Houston, and Foreman are strong proponents. "It's about helping the client move from point A to point B elegantly and get the most value from the latter position," Houston said.

A lean structure

With a handful of core leaders, Triad's staff consists only of a senior team, but this model has proved beneficial. The company's outside network consists of hundreds of professionals with 15 or more years of experience in the consulting and change management fields, and although it might seem like the small size would limit the team's reach, Kane said this is not true.

Because all of the people at Triad have worked in the field for a number of years, the organization has a strong, diversified network of professionals it draws from when looking for a company to partner with on a project.

"Unless you operate a huge firm, it's difficult to have all the necessary skill sets and meet all of the geographic and language requirements a client might need inhouse," Kane said. "Clients want accelerated results, and each one may require a different geographic reach, skill set, and base of language capabilities, among other things. It's impossible to have every skill set at your firm while maintaining a lean cost structure."

With its broad network of partners, Triad is able to gain access to a range of capabilities without investing a great deal of capital in building an inhouse team.

The lean operating model allows the company to make economic propositions that are attractive to its clients. And because the network is often reciprocal, it's not uncommon for the team at Triad to be contacted by one of its partners to assist on a project, which builds the team's revenue and expands its client base.

"The model works because it allows us and our partners to help each other, and clients benefit because we always put them first," Kane said.

The year ahead

Although there are many consulting firms throughout the world, Triad's leaders believe three components play a major role in helping Triad stand apart from the rest: flexibility, experience, and dedication to the implementation of a solution.

Looking to the year ahead, Kane, Houston, and Foreman are confident but realistic. In a down economy, outside resources



that aren't seen as necessary are the first capital expenditures cut from an organization's budget, and consulting services usually categorized as such.

Fortunately, Triad's flexibility allows the company to adapt to the new environment by expanding its footprint, branching into new industries. Although it works primarily with process-industry clients, like companies in the chemical, oil and gas, and pharmaceutical fields, the team is looking to penetrate the healthcare market, where similar tools and methods have proven effective.

The second part of Triad's plan for the coming months is to continue to leverage its team's experience. This depth enables the company to help its clients quickly identify, analyze and implement changes that bring about tangible results, and the firm plans to continue to capitalize on this ability in today's tough environment.

"The current economy makes the consulting environment difficult. Until recently, many businesses were booming, and a lot of companies couldn't fulfill the needs of the market," Houston said.

"They came to us because they needed to solve capacity issues and wanted to be able to create more product in a shorter time span," he continued. "Today, more clients are approaching us and asking, 'How do I do this more efficiently? How do I do more with less?' We use the same tools and approach, but we can deliver a different outcome." ■

—Ashley McGown