

Paradigm of Success

In this era of “hyperconnectivity,” when each move we make opens up a web of interaction that brings us into virtual contact with hundreds of people, it is easy to lose focus on individual acts. When we can offer a whole new set of options to our customers by plugging something in, or by typing a few lines of code, it is often a huge work of self-restraint to stop from trying to be everything to everyone. Rich Rexeisen cautions us against such a mistake in “Paradigm of Success.”

In the article, we are warned that there are four types of organizations that need to be particularly cautious about trying to be all things to all people. Rexeisen then offers us some tips for structuring our business model to avoid spreading ourselves too thin, and to help us focus on a single aspiration – the power of just one good idea.

One of the great business lessons of the last two decades is the necessity of developing a clear and unambiguous focus. Mission, vision, outsourcing, core competency are but a few of the terms and concepts that are directly related to the importance of being focused and of sustaining a consistency of purpose. As an ancient proverb reminds us “If you chase two rabbits, both will escape.”

My experience suggests that trying to be all things to all people is a common business mistake, especially for: 1) publicly funded institutions, 2) non-profit organizations, 3) startup ventures that are under-capitalized, and 4) organizations that are under some measure of financial duress. If more than one of these conditions applies to your organization, there is an even greater tendency for your organization to become over time increasingly unfocused, inefficient and as a result, ineffective.

Organizations that suffer from a lack of clarity of purpose do so either because they are confused by the meaning of their public mandate, they lack strong internal leadership, they lack skills to discern their core competency, they are simply unfamiliar with value of a disciplined approach to business, or they have slipped into what can become a contagious survival mentality.

So what can you do if any of these conditions apply to your organization? If we keep it simple, there are a few basic activities that you must never compromise on.

Abstract

Richard Rexeisen,
Ph.D.

1. Know and exploit your core competency
2. Understand and respect the value of your service or product from the perspective of your customer
3. Let others do what they do best to augment and support your primary mission
4. Redouble your efforts and start all over again at step number one

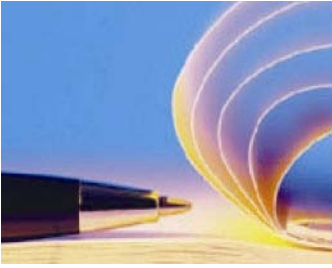
The discipline of discovery and implementation of step number one is absolutely essential to achieving sustainable success. Core competency must be at the organizing theme for every activity within an organization. Does your organization know, accept and focus its attention on exercising its primary core competency in the market? The question is not what you are good at doing but rather what you are better at doing when compared to your competition. Never waste valuable time or energy lamenting your weaknesses or your troubles. Focus on your successes. A relatively simple technique that I frequently recommend to organizations is to compare and contrast those areas where they are the most successful with those that they experience the most difficulty. You then ask yourself why. What is the difference between these two cases? In all of my years on consulting I have never yet encountered a situation where you cannot uncover a recurring theme.

Perspective shifting is also an essential element of success. Contemporary research clearly documents, however, that most people are not very good listeners and western culture moreover tends to encourage a “me first” attitude. Both of these factors reinforce an egocentric as opposed to a customer-centered perspective. The difficulty of perspective shifting is one of the major reasons why marketing encourages focusing on well-defined target markets. It is far better to serve few well than many poorly. The question for you therefore becomes, what have you done lately to try to better understand your services from the perspective of your customers?

Another very important element of the paradigm of success is the importance of delegating to others activities that are peripheral to your core competence. There are two reasons why delegation is essential. First, and I hope that we can all accept this with a smile on our face; “other activities” are by definition outside of our core competency. We all have our shortcomings but if we deny or excessively focus on our weaknesses we simply enable the very outcomes we fear most.

The second reason for delegating is that given the difficulty of building and sustaining a meaningful focus, common sense suggests that you eliminate distractions. It’s simple mathematics. For a given unit of effort you get much more done by focusing on those activities that you do better than others.

Specialization of labor was the compelling logic that gave rise to the industrial revolution and more recently is fueling the accelerating trend towards outsourcing. Outsourcing is where you assign to vendors (ideally those that are best in class at whatever they do) the task of supporting your organization with essential services. In the final analysis your customers really don’t care



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how the value they are receiving was created. Your customers only care, as they should, about maximizing the value they receive from each and every transaction.

And just when we think we are executing our lessons well, we must be reminded to redouble our efforts and start all over again. But herein too we can discern valuable feedback. If you turn the corner to redouble your efforts, and to do so leaves you tired or dismayed, then you are not being very effective in executing one of the first three steps: 1) you're not focusing on your one, true core competency, 2) your customers really don't care about the service you are offering, or 3) you are not leveraging your efforts by enlisting the complementary core competencies of other organizations.

While the core good idea that resonates within this article may differ from person to person, I would like to conclude emphasizing two basic alternatives. For those organizations yet to recognize or resolve their need to focus on their core competency, then I commend further education on the topic of creating a disciplined approach to business. And for those organizations that understand the importance of being focused in what you do, then the good idea is not to have this article serve as a reminder but simply put, "No more excuses!" Do what you know it is you need to do to improve your situation. My experience suggests that this often involves enlisting the help of others who will bring to the task the best of class at whatever it is that they do.