

Dangers of hastily thought out change

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Strategising is a process in which tough decisions need to be made. It requires deep reflection, structured thinking and, of course, time. Without planning, backs will be up against the wall, providing no further opportunity to squirm away from facing the inevitable. Adaptation and renewal will be the writing on that wall.

Once the difficult decisions are made, priorities will have shifted and change will determine the road map to success. Cutting and pasting a strategy from previous years cannot be an option while a business remains at the mercy of a larger economic, political and business community ecosystem.

With evidence of debilitating consequences resulting from little or no investment of time in the strategic process, why is there still a tendency to race through the thinking and development phase, not dedicate reflection time to the strategic objectives and not prioritise a structured and detailed approach to the transformation that is needed. Let's explore three possibilities here:

1. Lack of experience

I've been told that the words, "you can't put old heads on young shoulders" are often overheard in the hallways of traditional corporations. Without past experience, assumptions and decision-making may be limited and ill-informed.

Some principles that have stood the test of time have done so because they add value, even in unpredictable and emergent business conditions. One example would be the strength gained from adopting a solid structure as the backbone of decision-making in business. Structure provides a framework that holds things together.

Those who are inexperienced or who have limited perspective rarely appreciate the value of frameworks or the investment of time to construct them. Countless reasons could account for this yet here are two options to manage this situation:

- . Allow the non-structured approach to move ahead; accept that this will likely not reap intended positive results
- . Hold the hand of those with limited experience while investing in structured approaches and allowing them to see and feel the benefit

2. Lack of consistency with a vision

Visions have been described in myriad ways - the anchor that positions a business, the star that guides a business or even the view from where we currently are. Regardless of the terminology, a vision becomes the dream

that has evolved through a leader who believes there is a better way, one who is committed to make the change happen. In this better way is hope - hope that the product, service or state of being will serve all positively.

A vision exists twice - once in the mind and secondly in reality. In both, it should remain consistent, though there may be flexed versions of the vision that vary due to the discovery of new knowledge or new techniques. This is like a ship's anchor that may shift with strong winds in one direction, allowing flexibility for the ship to stretch and explore yet remain solidly in one anchorage.

One example may be a city's strategic plan that seeks to build a manned tram system, then discovers and re-prioritises to a driverless or unmanned tram system. Throughout this shift, the intention of moving masses of people every day has not changed.

Change can be incremental or radical, with the realisation that visions require phases and milestones, preparations and management, evaluations and measurement, and time. Keep moving the benchmarks forward and reward the achievement of milestones.

3. Lack of long-term thinking

Business is a process, with inputs and outputs. It has ups and downs, productive and counterproductive results. It is a system in which components will always have scope for improvement. Short-term thinking, often facilitating deviation from a vision or plan, will not breed trust with customers. A long-term business with short-term thinking can confuse and sometimes even irritate the very thing that can and will judge with its feet: customers and employees.

Reactive leadership encapsulates all three of the above. Embarking on realignments in business will take time. Expecting anything less will simply double the time, keeping in mind the rework that will inevitably lead to starting all over again, with three likely priorities:

- . Defining leadership's direction, priorities and capabilities
- . Preparing the right people to take the project forward
- . Defining the project's structure and resources.

Just like a three-legged stool, if one is missing, lack of balance is inevitable. Time invested to build a strong operating framework for change will yield increasing incremental gains over and over again, ensuring reactivity and rework will be packed away tightly in the "lessons learnt" compartment.

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