

## "Best Practices in Leading the Global Workforce"

**Background:** A world-wide communications company is a Fortune 10 company and one of the world's leading providers of communications services, with approximately \$68 billion in revenues and 221,000 employees. As the leading provider of communication services and provides a full range of services including cellular, voice, data and long distance.

### **Chapter Excerpt:**

#### Emerging Business Challenges

The client had been a very successful company with a reputation for delivering solid results. However, the year 2000 began a period of dramatic change. The emerging challenges appeared to be completely outside of the control of the organization and too insurmountable to overcome. The company found itself in an increasingly volatile and potentially devastating environment.

How does the client continue to deliver great results year after year while being subject to such tremendous external pressures? What strategies have emerged? What is the secret of this organization?

In such a tumultuous economic environment and rapidly evolving industry, the key success factor for this organization became the people within the company and the manner in which they worked together. By engaging all of the employees with the vision and strategic direction of the company, not only survived against all odds, but continued to deliver positive results. A well-designed and well-orchestrated strategic planning process became the roadmap for a business transformation. It brought the leadership, management team, and employees together around one strategy...one vision...and this allowed the company to go through economic chaos with a minimum of damage and a significant amount of success.

The process used to navigate through this unpredictable environment delivered results beyond mere survival. What has emerged is a stronger, faster, and more flexible organization aligned around a common objective...one that is fully engaged at every level. Not merely "words on a wall", the vision became a living thing...a fire kept alive by the people...a high purpose spelling out the advantages they provide to their customers, community and employees alike.

### **The Journey - Continuous Business Transformation**

The annual strategic planning process became the catalyst for the business transformation that emerged. Each year, a 5-year strategic plan was established and presented by the executive team. A facilitator/consultant would be brought in and over the course of three days, a plan would be assembled.

The process had its shortcomings. Three days of facilitated planning did not allow for the development of an understanding comprehensive enough to result in an executable plan which would be fully embraced by the organization. Further, the 12-month planning cycle did not allow enough time to fully implement the strategy or to analyze and respond to its effectiveness. Previous strategic plans had delivered disappointing results because they had not been fully implemented and did not achieve consensus throughout the siloed functions of the organization. Year after year, the organization was burdened with layer upon layer of "projects"...some of which were implemented and many of which were not. The sheer volume of the accumulated projects proved to be a significant drag on resources and a source of great dissatisfaction among management and employees.

A business transformation process was adopted that centered on a simple illustration (See Exhibit 1.1). It was designed to be an emergent process that was very organic in nature and that would develop the capacity for change while simultaneously delivering significant results in what was fast becoming a more complex and difficult operating environment. The new process allowed the executive leadership team to initiate a strategic plan that centered on the people involved and

that engaged the entire organization in a way that had never been accomplished in the past.

### **Alignment**

Common themes emerged from the conversations with members of the executive team. The individual interviews exposed diverse, as well as common ideas, which were organized into high-level themes. The exploration of these themes became the agenda for the first group session. In this session, the consultant shared with the team the patterns that had emerged throughout the interviews. The group began to see its present state in similar ways and with this common foundation, it began to move ahead.

### **Diversity**

While building strong alignment among the leadership team, the process simultaneously allowed for a new level of diversity and inclusion. The differences and strengths that each member brought to the team were openly recognized and respected, bringing a new level of acceptance and alignment to the group. This made it possible for the team to learn from these differences and to use them to enrich their understanding of their organization. By allowing individual thoughts and honoring diversity among the team, the team was stronger, smarter...better. This was a different kind of alignment...one that drew on the strengths of each member and the collective wisdom of the group.

### **Clarity**

This new collaborative environment gave the team the power to act in a more effective manner as leaders and as architects of the future of the organization. From this vantage point, the team was able to effectively scan the terrain, obtain a clear picture of where the company was in relation to its surroundings, and view the challenges they must rise to meet. It became very apparent what needed to be focused on in order to be successful in the next five years. They had successfully evolved from implementers of tactics to designers of strategy.

### **Inquiry & Reflection - Reaching our Destination**

In today's world, the process of business transformation is continuous. It is an ongoing cycle with no beginning or end. The company is still in the midst of its implementation, but it is also already looking at itself again and asking the same questions it initially asked:

- Where are we in our marketplace?
- What is working?
- What needs to be improved?
- Is there anything new to consider?
- What are we learning?

There is now a perpetual process of inquiry and reflection. This emergent process has required a certain amount of flexibility from everyone involved. Rather than relying on a planning process that only occurs every 12 months, the organization has started a continuous conversation that connects the company to its world.

The client understands that today it more closely resembles an organism than a manufacturing line. Moving from 'organization as a machine' to 'organization as a living thing' is a significant transformation. A tree does not switch itself on and off. It does not have to stop and plan for its next growth spurt. Instead it's an ongoing moment by moment response to the conditions around it (heat/water/soil) and within. The client has started a process that has provided the organization this organic level of responsiveness.

Most organizations haven't figured out how to stay this aware, but those that do achieve a significant competitive advantage in today's changing environment: an increased ability to compete on speed.

## Key Learnings:

- Every transformation begins with the motivation and engagement of the people in the company. Designing objectives and direction is relatively easy, but obtaining commitment in the decision-making process makes the quality of implementation so much better. Important issues such as cost management become easier to manage because the team is motivated to maximize the dollars spent and to do what it can to protect the company and the vision to which everyone is committed.
- Learning to trust the principle of emergence is empowering. In the beginning, it was uncomfortable to start this process without the clearest of beginnings and endings, but the results have been so much greater than could have been anticipated. Letting go of the old ways and allowing new answers emerge was very empowering. It's important to continually ask questions that allow for the emergence of new ideas...What else do we need to do? What needs to be adjusted? How can we better meet the needs of our customers?
- Drawing on the resources of the entire team and embracing their contributions opens many new doors. A leader has much to gain and learn from the team. The days of the all-knowing charismatic leader are over. No longer can the lone genius hope to lead organizations of significant size and complexity without the power of the team. Team IQ rises when every member is working together to understand what they see and how they will respond. To provide people the freedom to work together, express their ideas and create results that are 'theirs' is amazing. It is the key to developing a high performance team that has the potential to move the organization to greater heights. Functional expertise alone is not the key to long-term success. True long-term success is about raising the awareness of your team and enhancing their capacity to develop their organization; this changes everything.