tomorrowtoday informing inspiring impacting

June 2007

# WHY STRATEGIES DON'T WORK

article By Pete Laburn

## Article at a glance

*There is little doubt that an obsession with short term focus, whether by choice or circumstance, is compounding the difficulties that organizations face in coping with this world of rampant paradox – where everyday is just head down, churn out what is expected, and a 'don't think, just do' approach.*

**continue...**

In the many strategic sessions we run, we usually ask delegates “Who feels frazzled in their work?” Response to this question at is inevitably almost 100%. And when challenged as to why this happens, the usual answer is that ‘that’s the way it is today’. When pushed on just how enjoyable or satisfying their work is, delegates eyes glaze over, they shrug their shoulders, in apparent resignation that this is their lot in life, and the only possible way to cope in today’s world.

There seems little encouragement to lift their heads and to try and catch a glimpse of the new, fast changing world around them. Occasionally when offered the opportunity to get out of the ‘just do’ world, into the ‘think about the future’ world, they grab it, often in wide eyed amazement, with energy and enthusiasm, only for the brief interlude with the future to disappear, a day or two after returning back in the stifling office environment.

When challenging their superiors about why this happens, the retort is usually one of anxious frustration that they can’t keep up with demand, there are ever mounting pressures on them to just meet the current demands, they can’t retain staff and that to seriously think about the future is not possible at present.

There is little doubt that an obsession with short term focus, whether by choice or circumstance, is compounding the difficulties that organizations face in coping with this world of rampant paradox – where everyday is just head down, churn out what is expected, and a ‘don’t think, just do’ approach.

Sadly, many organizations who do spend some time in strategic sessions supposedly planning strategy, do so because head office requires a plan, or because they ought to do it, or have always done it. It’s kind of a ritual, an annual rain dance, that will hopefully this year bring new opportunity. And yes its true that many organizations often aided by skilled facilitators, do a reasonably good job of looking at their changing world, undertaking market research, doing a competitor analysis, talking about their perceived strengths and weaknesses in dealing with the threats and opportunities their market is presenting.

But all too soon, on returning to the office, it is back the grindstone, with the very best intentions, only to be overtaken by the 200 emails, and pressing demands and budgets to be met. Another question we ask is “what percentage of strategy that is strategized, actually gets implemented?” The

the rapid change.

The third is that an organization's capability is primarily determined by the leadership – or lack of leadership. Proactive, forward thinking leadership will identify what capabilities are required in the future and put them in place ahead of time. They will take their stakeholders with them, communicating openly and deeply, and preparing them for the anticipated changes. They are likely to keep their organizations in a continual state of change, but within a clear strategic field, clearly identifying what is 'out of play' on their strategic journey. Weak or non existent leadership, as so often typified by short term management obsession, will not proactively address the future capabilities needed, and thereby plunge their organization into facing one crisis after another. This is a zero sum game.

Developing appropriate organizational capabilities and leadership are crucial elements of the strategic thinking process, requiring as much focus on, and interpretation of the rapidly changing world as the strategy formulation does. Strategic thinking is a holistic process, an ongoing journey, a vital dynamic enabling tool for organizations when given the appropriate time, focus and energy.

*Pete Laburn*

*Strategy Consultant and part of TomorrowToday network. He has been the CEO and MD of Hollard Insurance and a board member of Liberty Life.*

informing inspiring impacting

## About TomorrowToday

We are a global management consulting company who works with many of the world's leading companies. Our focus is to find creative ways to connect organisations with people. Why? Because to put it bluntly, connecting with people pays!

**We inform:** Our clients are quicker and better informed than their competitors about changing business, consumer and societal trends. Our diverse research simplifies complex trends and explains the "**why**" behind change.

**We inspire:** Our professional speakers are amongst the best in the world. Through high energy, humour and entertainment our multimedia presentations convey powerful business messages at conferences and company workshops.

**We impact:** Our team of consultants create long-lasting and significant improvements in company performance.

We are world leaders in Generations: a valuable framework connecting companies, talented staff and valuable customers.

**TomorrowToday Ltd**

www.tomorrowtoday.uk.com

info@tomorrowtoday.uk.com

+44 20 8274 3000

+44 7525 160 964