



This year, businesses are facing two end-of-year challenges: re-emergence into a Covid-19 marketplace and the traditional process of clarification and re-alignment of goals. How you will handle these issues will reflect how you lead. Do you bury your head in the sand like an ostrich, or do you have a 360-degree view like an owl?

The pandemic has impacted our organizations in many different ways, creating scattered thinking, loss of focus and lack of unity, all critical components of successful companies. Accountability, always an issue, has specifically become more challenging with remote workers. As Stephen Covey said, "Accountability breeds response-ability."

It's time to shift from working in the company to working on the business, looking top-down and bottom-up, controlling what happens and communicating goals and priorities.

Complexity breeds ambiguity and lack of clarity.

Most leaders with a staff of less than 20 begin as ostriches. The "plan" is often in their head or scratched on an envelope. This CEO-centric approach is function-focused: "We don't need no stinkin' plan" may be what is communicated in words or action, and "just do it" becomes the mantra. The vision, passion and energy fueling the company is dependent upon the CEO/business owner.

When staff size increases (20-60 employees), the CEO/business owner has to start letting go to grow. Typically, during this growth stage, companies add managers and executive positions, and the approach to planning evolves by doing what worked in

an earlier stage. But the "put your head in the sand" approach to planning leaves a company grappling for clarity of purpose and critical alignment among the leadership team.

Instead, what is required is for the company to recognize the importance of adopting new methodologies or processes vital to growing organizational capacity. Such a plan may evolve using traditional approaches such as an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT), One-Page-Plan, Entrepreneurial Operating System (EOS), and the Balanced Scorecard. The completed plan can be as simple as a single page or as complex as sections for each department or function.

Traditional thinking is that the quality of a plan derives from a detached and more formal approach. The prioritized list of actions can range from 20 to 135 items on a "to-do" list and may be beyond the realistic scope of accomplishment. With even more growth, staff, management and executives' numbers increase, and growing complexity places increased stress on issue clarity and action alignment. Most problematic is the fundamental challenge that you don't know what you don't know!

Many leaders consciously use their company and industry knowledge to populate a planning approach for analysis and priority setting with all good intentions. Many companies even use an independent expert to facilitate this process. The difficulty is objectively uncovering root causes and focusing team alignment for action. Because participants can't quickly identify symptoms, the dilemma's source remains obscured, and the core issue is often unresolved.

Objective data drives results.

Between 1994 and 2001, organizational research by James Fischer, along with data from over 650 firms and their CEOs, provides verifiable insights into how companies from one to 500 workers grow in complexity. Fischer's study connected complexity to the addition of people. Between 2001 and 2006, Laurie Taylor, founder of FlashPoint!, collaborated with Fischer to incorporate his research into the Stages of Growth X-Ray.

Fischer's book, *Navigating the Growth Curve*, shows that firms proceed through seven distinct growth stages, which exhibit

separate and unique sets of growth advancement rules. Fischer's significant finding is that a company has three revolving priorities that need attention: (1) profits, (2) process and (3) people. All three are essential, yet the complexity of the growth stage determines the priority of focus. Just like a medical X-ray, the Stages of Growth X-Ray helps discover the real causes of the symptoms and pain in a business. Because the X-ray process is research-based, identified issues give teams clarity, alignment and implementation accountability.

The business X-ray is a set of objective assessments that evaluate business performance and leadership parameters. Specifically, it looks at eight hidden factors adversely impacting organizational performance and leadership effectiveness, giving leaders owl-like perception to see beneath prevailing symptoms. Participants can complete the online surveys in 30 minutes to identify five top challenges and strengths, 36 confidence-caution factors, and 45 stage-related growth rules. These 360-degree owl-like views uncover critical, stage-specific data from different perspectives.

The significant benefit is that science-driven data reveals the hidden agents that cause performance drag and ineffective leadership engagement. The team can also focus on root-causes, achieve alignment and produce data-driven action steps for planning.

Clarity of thought produces superior results.

Regardless of the planning process methodology, beginning with research-driven data is an essential foundation. Rekindled relationships and including executives and managers in the conversation increases commitment, just like Alan Mulally, former Ford CEO, said: "When people feel accountable and included, it is more fun."

By utilizing the business X-ray, an organization can create a plan that helps them focus on the right things at the right time, predict how growth will impact them and help the leadership team adapt the necessary skills to what the company needs as it grows.

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