

# “The Three Pillars of Corporate Excellence”: Vision – Culture – Branding

Globally, the Covid-19 pandemic has brought about a massive disruption to traditional work practices with many staff at all levels having to work from home and arrangements for more face-to-face interactions characterised by radically enhanced health and safety measures. Businesses which do not pivot to this new reality are likely to go to the wall and those which have relied on various bailouts without using the time to adapt their work practices are the most vulnerable.

The storm clouds of Covid have gathered but, for those with the right mindset, it may have a silver lining. It has forced business owners and managers out of complacency and caused them to make changes in outdated practices which perhaps should have been made anyway. This includes enhancing their online presence, moving towards cashless transactions and considering necessary adjustments to staffing at all levels from management to the shop floor. One of the characteristics of disruption and chaos is that the settled state which follows is almost always at a higher-level, providing opportunities are grasped and learnings acted upon.

This means going back to basics and understanding the three pillars of corporate excellence – vision, culture and branding. The harmony between them is responsible for how the corporation is perceived in the world. In turn, this is reflected in profits which at the end of the day is the main reason that most businesses exist. These three pillars require to act in synergy and, while continually adapting, the corporation needs to protect its identity, culture and reputation. Too often these are separated when they become silos, instead of pillars. Silos by definition are hidden from the world and from each other. This separation contains the seeds for destruction when staff and departments do not act together for a common purpose.

## **Vision/Mission**

The vision statement defines the *raison d'être* of the company. It is about the future and where a company wants a community or the world to be as a result of its service. It must be meaningful and inspiring so employees at all levels can ascribe to it and feel they are participating in something worthwhile. It is a story, reflecting ethics and values to which all may subscribe. It is about internal communication and is a living document which needs to be continually revisited and revised.

While vision is about the future, the mission statement is about the present and is a manifestation of the vision. It is about the actions and orientation required to achieve the vision with a roadmap of how it is going to be achieved, placing the business squarely in the context of its environment. A vision statement is therefore internal to the company and about employees, whereas the mission statement is about external perception and targeted towards the customer base. Together, they form an integral part of the strategic plan.

The job of management is to translate the vision and mission statements into the three levels of strategic, tactical and operational management. In other words, setting the direction in line with the vision, deciding how those objectives are to be fulfilled and goals achieved on a continuing basis and then how the plan is going to be carried out on the ground in terms of day-to-day management.

It is the function of the CEO and management team to confidently command, control, coordinate and communicate the vision and mission with clear, consistent messaging throughout the organisation. Externally,

this is reflected in customer confidence and trust, which comes from knowing the “why”, the purpose for which a company exists in the first place and having a quality product delivered to them on a consistent basis by empowered and motivated staff.

## **Culture**

The second pillar of corporate excellence is the culture within the organisation. Culture develops when a group of people with similar values act together consistently in terms of their team, their section, their region and ultimately their whole organisation. For the culture to be positive it must be healthy and aligned to the values of the organisation, so staff can perform to a high standard. This can make or break any business depending on whether the overview is selfish or external.

Company culture affirms the beliefs, behaviour and ethics within the organisation, informing how employees and management interact and handle business transactions and therefore is essential to success. It reflects a set of values which, unfortunately, are more often implied and not expressly defined. While culture will develop naturally over time, it is the responsibility of management to ensure it stays aligned with the vision by constant evaluation and encoding. It is a fundamental aspect of leadership that the chief executive aligns with and models the values of the organisation, ensuring these are integrated into the fabric of a business. It is something staff at all levels from the top team to the shop floor need to believe in and uphold with clarity of purpose. This allows decision-making to be delegated to lower levels within the organisation since employees can be empowered because their decision making is guided by their moral code, integrity and values. It is an essential element of any staff retention strategy.

The atmosphere within a business pervades how people perform/work. The more fragmented and spread out they are, the more isolated they become, leading to more difficult lines of communication and consequently a lesser tendency to cooperation. In the present Covid situation, the development and maintenance of company culture has become a problem with so many people working from home.

Further, new additions to any workforce learn by both training and apprenticeship. Those who graduate from training schemes should be basically competent and confident in what they do as they are actually hired for their technical expertise. They do, however, need nurturing, supervision and day to day guidance which is often difficult when senior staff are working from home and not interacting with new employees. This can result in them becoming under confident and demotivated. Nurturing new staff is therefore of vital importance.

The young learn from the generation above them by emulation which “rubs off” over time. They need to be in close proximity with their trainers, coaches and mentors so that, not just competence and confidence, but also ethics and values develop in a healthy way. No-one is born with ethics and value systems, but these grow and develop over time and are learned from those around them.

## **Branding**

If culture is internal, branding is about how the company is seen and judged by the outside world. It is about the interaction between a company and its customers which basically comes down to personal communication. Marketing is all about the brand and how customers feel by associating with the business. When vision and culture are



aligned, actions by company personnel generate certainty and trust in clients which leads to business success. A lack of trust by clients and customers is the most common source of business failure and this is obviously reflected in the bottom line and market value.

There are two types of branding, branding by association and branding by results. Individuals working for a company are branded by association with the company's reputation. In turn, the company is branded because of how those individuals achieve results with customers and how satisfied a customer is about the way in which employees in the past have represented the business. There is, therefore, a closed loop between them.

Senior management must get out of their silos, be visible and fully aware of what is happening on the shop floor. For successful branding, all employees have to be customer based and service orientated. It is through listening that we develop an understanding of what the customer wants and needs, so mechanisms have to be in place to process feedback as well as analysing and acting on trends. It is this analysis that impacts business success. At the end of the day businesses succeed because their customers are successful.

The brand of a company has to be nurtured and protected, which is one of the prime responsibilities of a CEO. Branding starts with defining how a company wishes to be perceived, organising the business, communicating that promise with consistency and being accountable. Branding helps customers relate to a business and is the prime

marketing drive because it gives a pre-set understanding so customers know what to expect and they will always expect what they know. It is all about credibility, consistency and through them the generation of trust.

#### **Conclusion**

Corporate excellence does not happen by accident. Concepts of excellence change since they are in the eye of the beholder. Therefore, corporations must be constantly looking for both internal and external feedback on how to make their offering better, faster and more efficient, to increase profit margins and ensure the ongoing success of their customers.

The three pillars of corporate excellence are found in the vision, culture and branding of the company. It is the duty of the CEO, management and all employees within the organisation to ensure the highest quality of service and product delivery. This can only happen if everyone has a similar value system with a pride in the company and its vision.

To avoid complacency and ensure progress, companies need to constantly change. This may require shaking up what is delivered, redefining it and then solidifying the systems again. For many companies, the changes forced by Covid-19 can have a positive benefit in terms of future success, provided there are systems in place to support the staff teams and protect the culture. Throughout history, those companies which do not pivot to stay relevant in the changing environment will not survive.

The sky is not falling in, it is opening up for opportunity. All it requires is the right mindset, skillset and action plan.

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