CHAPTER 4

Seizing the Agility Advantage

C reating an advantage assumes competitors exist in the marketplace. It also demands organizational capabilities to sense and respond better and faster to ever changing customer expectations as well as competitor capabilities by being more focused, fast, and flexible at all levels in your organization and in your relationships with all your stakeholders. Agility is at the heart of your strategy for creating competitive advantage. Agility capabilities must operate at all levels within and connected to your organization—learn how to seize the agility advantage in this chapter.

➤ BEING FOCUSED

Begin by learning to focus. The word *focus* goes back to the Latin word *foci*, which means the convergence of light rays to create fire. That definition offers more than just the clarity

aspect typically implied in focus, it also shows a resulting outcome from taking focused action. Fire represents the kind of enabler for action and outcomes that characterizes focused and agile organizations. In a similar way, we often here the phrase "burning platform" to describe a strong sense of purpose and call to action. Although there has been an explosion of technology tools to help improve personal and corporate productivity in the real-time world, there is no substitute for focus and the basic understanding of the value proposition that differentiates your business from the competition. Apple's revolutionary iPod phenomenon, which was developed as a result of having both a continual focus on consumer lifestyles and a dedication to finding the important lifestyle-related trends in consumer daily life patterns, influences, and needs of its core and very loyal consumer franchise. This is an excellent example of applying focus and understanding to the value proposition of a business.

Focus might also be *the* most overused and least understood word in today's business vocabulary, yet it remains the largest lever for increasing speed and responsiveness. In 2007, the American Management Association published a study on *The Keys to Strategy Execution* that clearly demonstrated the high correlation between financially successful organizations and those with high ratings for clarity of mission and message. When leaders keep consistent focus on the vital few priorities and align the appropriate resources to match those priorities, the essential conditions for success are in place.

What is the focus of your organization? Focus relates to a discussion about strategic objectives but also has just as much to do with organizational values. Agile organizations create an elegant partnership when what the organization does and how it does it operate as an inseparable combination. When ambiguity about priorities and/or values exists within the organization, speed and commitment regarding performance often become casualties. Increasingly, organizations around the globe are beginning to dial up clarity on key operating principles to guide management actions instead of detailed rules to control and conform because today's organizations are too global and too complex to prescribe every rule for every transaction in every situation. Focused organizations strive to build and project clarity at the highest levels around vision, values, operating principles, strategic capabilities and priorities. Organizations become what they tolerate. Focus must have an accountability obligation if it is to be sustainable. Focus sets the stage for organizations to then become fast and flexible.

If your efforts to focus your organization on the vital few priorities are going to bear fruit, you must be clear on both *what* is to be done and *how* things are to be done with regard to values and operating principles. The whole organization has to be clear on vision, values, and operating principles to shape the future of that vision.

CHARACTERISTICS OF FOCUSED AND UNFOCUSED ORGANIZATION

Focused Organizations	Unfocused Organizations
• Consistently attain high customer satisfaction scores	• Chronically receive low customer survey scores
• Consistently achieve high participation rates on customer surveys	• Probably do not have regular customer surveys or customer satisfaction measures
• Consistently attain key objectives; maintain a culture of accountability and commitment	• Consistently fall short on key objectives; low trust level in commitments made
• Create highly visible, real-time key performance indicators for every function and location	• Lack consistent or visible metrics; could be measuring things rather than priorities
• Establish an active and aligned performance feedback system for all team members	• Use performance reviews inconsistently or simply avoid them; viewed by the troops as a punishment system
• Actively measure internal customer satisfaction across all areas of organization	• Lack an awareness or culture for satisfying internal customers; have high conflict silos