

Thinking

While it is true that thinking is something that many of us engage in on a somewhat regular basis, the act of thinking as a strategic imperative is, to some extent, less popular. The idea of an article on thinking might come as a bit of a surprise, almost as if someone were to write an article on how to breathe. But isn't it true that doctors are taught to think in a specific way, as are engineers, and lawyers, and architects, and many others. Under this train of thought, is it really so outrageous to suggest that people engaged in business also need to learn to think in a very specific way?

Although there are theories galore with regard to how businesses should think and there is an entire pop culture of business books that try to influence business thinking, the fundamentals of business thinking remains somewhat resistant to new tactical programs that come and go as quickly as consultants, professors, retired business executives, and the book publishers can turn them out. The scope of this article is far less ambitious and certainly less radical. This article merely seeks to relay and discuss the three types of thought processes available to businesses so that they can make sure that the decisions made are the result of thinking and not a reaction to events.

Before discussing the three thinking categories it is important to mention that good thinking is the result of what can be referred to as the verbalization of thought. When one verbalizes thought one in a sense listens to his or her own thoughts in his or her own voice. This allows the individual the ability to cognitively exam the thought as if it were being presented by outside stimuli. Often the human brain evaluates thoughts differently than if it were processing an external message. By verbalizing the thought you may allow your brain to consider it in a way that is more calculating and examining than if you confine it to an internal thought that you can justify or that you are perhaps seeking to self validate.

With this in mind, the three types of thinking are:

1. Analytical Thinking

Through analytical thinking you will evaluate your options in a logical sequential order as each relates to your objectives. The analytical process brings you through a series of thoughts that review each possibility and how they individually serve to advance your company. The process allows for the selection of the option that most maximizes the opportunity. The downside of analytical thinking is that it is devoid of human factors and emotion and can lead to decisions that are rigid and difficult to reverse. The positive aspect of this type of thinking is that it makes certain that all the possibilities are identified and considered and that the criteria (company goals) remains consistent. The use of analytical thinking can help a company identify and adopt strategic positions that best suits its current and most demanding needs.

2. Abstract Thinking

An abstract thinking process replaces logic as the primary thinking tool with emotion and intuition. It is not unusual for a business person to make a decision based on his or her "gut" feeling. When doing so, abstract thinking is being deployed. The downside to abstract thinking is that it uses feeling and senses as its guiding lights, sometimes ignoring or minimizing the meaning of facts on the ground that should be influencing

company behavior. Conversely, the negation of market facts has sometimes led companies to try and achieve what might have otherwise been deemed as impossible (and therefore not even attempted) had the company leadership used analytical thinking. Abstract thinking is a more human response to circumstances and can lead to great events or major mistakes as the strategies and tactics born of the abstract thinking interact with the market.

3. Symbolic Thinking

Symbolic thinking calls for the consideration of an issue from many different perspectives. By placing yourself in the position of others – customer, competitor, distributor – the notion is that your overall understanding of your activity will improve, as will your thinking associated with it. The use of symbolic thinking is helpful particularly in the development of marketing and sales strategies, as well as when a company is seeking to introduce operational efficiencies and new products. By viewing the pending activity from all related perspectives you will be able to develop a plan that positions your company across from all the relative parties. The downside to this type of thinking is that it can lead a company to try to be all things to all people, meaning that it dilutes the company's message and can lead the company to a situation under which it is poorly defined within the marketplace.

Paul Simon once wrote a lyric in which he pondered whether or not he thinks too much. Thinking too much is definitely a possibility, and not always a good thing. It is possible to think so much that the opportunity passes by while the thinking is going on endlessly. On the other hand, while thinking too much can be a liability, there is neither doubt nor debate that thinking too little is far worse.