



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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The Winning Edge

Time and again people have asked: *What are the qualities of a winning business leader? What sets apart a successful organization from an also-ran?* Technology may appear to be the most appropriate answer considering its all-pervading nature across the functions and businesses in the modern scenario. However, a recent study has proved that a company's ability to comprehend its employees' and customers' philosophical outlook is as important to its success as its R&D efforts.

Technology -a user's perspective

Technology is no longer the exclusive domain of companies such as IBM or Microsoft. Rather, technology is fast assuming the role of being the core asset of organizations across sectors including consumer goods companies such as Wal-Mart. This brings us to the basic question: *'How can one define technology?'*

Let us consider the use of computers. A business executive might view a personal computer as a communication tool, a teacher as an educational tool and a child as a toy.

In other words, various perceptions or meanings may be possible for a particular technology. As more organizations enter the global marketplace, they have to evaluate the need and application of technology with respect to each segment of the market. Only then can one decide the positioning of the technology-based product.

However, though technological assets indicate the development of an individual, an organization or even a country, the move to accept or reject technology is largely influenced by abstract ideas that are entrenched in an individual's (or a nation's) philosophy of life. At the macro level, it is the social transformation that prompts technological innovation. At the corporate level, it is the "*technological momentum*" that takes the organization on the path to success. According to this concept, at the formative phase, business environment influences a specific area of technological innovation. However, when the field develops and reaches the maturity phase, the influence of external social and market forces on technological innovation becomes less. It is then increasingly driven by technological considerations.

To understand the extent of impact that a thought process of an individual or society can have on technological innovation, we may consider the example of 19th century Europe that took a prominent position in air gliding in the nineteenth century. Yet, the continent could not etch its name as the home of the first powered flight as Europeans considered air flight as a threat to the established social order. In the process, it was the Wright brothers, who had an unstructured and advanced viewpoint that donned the mantle of being the first to undertake a powered flight.

The situation is no different in the business world. In the global marketplace, it necessitates tremendous effort on various aspects. This includes an evaluation of the market's belief system, which will help unveil an invention in a specific market. For



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example, genetically modified foods are more welcome in the U.S. than they are in the European Union. In other words, designers, manufacturers, salesmen, managers of technology and its users need to understand the metaphysical foundations of technological change to enable smart choices and implementation. This perception is also important for technology-intensive companies. Conventional business criteria, apart an investor in such companies should take into consideration how a company could utilize its technological assets and adapts to changing belief systems around it.

Adapting to consumers' mindset is crucial too

Organizations aiming to achieve success and sustaining it need to adapt not only to the changing perceptions of its employees and the market but also to that of its consumers. For example, with cell phones and TVs becoming a reality and technology advancements making the product more viable both in terms of utility and costs, there is a spur in demand for the product. However, doubts about a sustained demand for the product remain because of higher energy requirements for the phone. In the process the life of the battery lowers.

It may be noted that though the segment is marked by competing standards, a uniform technology standard is expected to evolve soon. This would lead to the development of miniature video cell phones that provide excellent picture display and sound. How many customers embrace the concept of TV channel surfing over the mobile is yet to be seen. This can be attributed to the fact that mobiles are primarily intended for people on the move, for few can afford to watch TV while on the move. Moreover, the few instances when cell phone users will be tempted to watch video will also be the times that their Wi-Fi-enabled phones will be in range of a high-bandwidth Wi-Fi access point. Moreover, they have the option to download the videos for viewing when they get back into 3G territory. It should also be borne in mind that though the technology for two-inch handheld TVs has evolved significantly in recent times and led to better resolution and frame rate, size plays a key role in the TV illusion. At two inches, cell phone users might not find it very comfortable to watch TV over a significant period.

Key to success

Evidently, the level of performance of an organization in terms of success or failure eventually depends on the extent to which they can either adapt to or modify prevailing cultural beliefs, establish new ones, or fail. It also necessitates a flexible effective management of corporate culture to adapt to a changing environment.