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## Laying the Foundations: Have you ever asked why?

You may recall from the preface that what we mean by 'better' doesn't matter, it is what you mean by 'better' that counts.

So what **do** you mean by 'better'?

Let us start from the basics. What is your business? Do you work in a factory or an office? Do you make things, or provide a service? Perhaps you work in a charitable organisation or in church work? Whatever you do, I guess you regularly turn up

day-after-day, week-after-week, to do it. Not always in the same place, or even the same country, but you are always there, somewhere.

And if someone asks you why your organisation needs you to do what you do, you can probably tell them quickly and confidently. You say, "Because X!"

And if they then ask: "Why do you want X?" (whatever 'X' happened to be) well then maybe you pause for a little while. Why actually do you, or your organisation, want X? You may already know, or if you think about it for a little while you will certainly come up with an answer. You say, "Because Y!"

They smile, and nod sagely as they assimilate this information, and then they ask: "Why do you want Y?" (whatever 'Y' happened to be). Perhaps you think it is obvious. Perhaps you have taken it for granted for years. Perhaps you have never had to explain it before. Why do you want Y? If you think about it a while longer, you might find doubts beginning to creep in. Perhaps it isn't so clear after all. Perhaps you begin to see that you might not be able to quickly articulate a complete answer. And if you do, can you be confident it would be the same answer that your colleagues would give? "Z", you say!

"Why do you want Z?" they retort quickly.

"For crying out loud! DOES IT MATTER?" you yell back.

Does it matter?

No, probably not, if you are happy to do things simply because someone else told you to: Grow profit; sustain market share; increase shareholder value. Not if you are happy to do what you have always done, simply because you did it before.

But yes, YES, if you are beginning to think that your life ought to mean something; if you want to see your values manifest in what you do. Yes, if you are concerned that you really want to make a difference, and you want to work with your colleagues to make it happen. Yes, if you are anything other than a machine that is bound by the bidding of others. "For crying out loud, YES!"

Because Z, or whatever comes a few 'whys' further down the track, is where the organisation's values lie; the foundations of its reason for being. The difference it fundamentally makes in the world – for good or ill!

And it is vitally important that these foundations are properly anchored, because business values (especially those that are inherently benevolent or honourable) have a horrible tendency to drift if they are not properly anchored, particularly in times of storm or drought. They drift because they are often implicit, unspoken and assumed, not clarified or documented.

And if they drift, you could find yourself working for entirely the wrong reasons. Because for you, Z is also the connection to wherever your personal values lie. And it is important for your own personal well-being and fulfilment that they are compatible. If they are not, then work can only ever be 'just a job' for you. Imagine that, half your life, 90,000 hours, in thrall to something you don't believe in. Your identity and existence invested in ... what?

So how do you anchor the foundations? How do you ensure that your organisation is premised on appropriate values?

Probably the best tool is simply asking "Why?", as illustrated in the opening part of this chapter. In seeking, with your team, to

answer the question “Why?”, different assumptions are unearthed and reconciled, fundamental issues are worked through and addressed, confusing behaviours are explained, new possibilities and links begin to emerge, and the team is usually pulled closer together behind a common purpose.

This is a vitally important step in building a better business. A shared picture of the purpose is the foundation on which everything else is built. With a common understanding of what we are working toward, almost any issue can be resolved, but without such a foundation, the cracks soon begin to show in the rest of the organisation. A shared picture of the complete purpose of the organisation, and the logic by which it is deployed, is the bedrock on which you and your team will base all of the rest of your endeavours.

A structured method of exploring your purpose, of asking “Why?”, is the Why-How chart. This simple tool can be used to map the underlying logic of the organisation, and to provide a living record of it for subsequent consultation and refinement.

The steps to produce a Why-How chart are:

1. Start by listing out the currently agreed objectives of the organisation. Transfer each objective on to a separate sticky-note, writing clearly in a flipchart pen so that the objective can be seen and understood by those who may be stood a little distance away from it. (This requirement will be true of all

sticky-notes that are written for this exercise.)

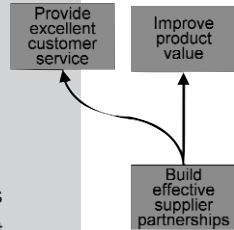
2. Place the first of these sticky-notes in the centre of a section of wall covered with brown paper or flipchart paper (at least three sheets wide by two high). Ask the question of the group: "Why are we doing this?" and reach agreement on the answers (there may well be more than one valid reason). Write each of the reasons on separate post-it notes, ensuring they are phrased in a form that can be understood as an objective (e.g. 'Increase sales of our product' rather than 'Sell')
3. Stick these new sticky notes in a horizontal line just above (c. 5cm) the original sticky-note, and a short distance away from each other. Link the top of the original sticky-note to the bottom of each of the new sticky-notes by arrows drawn with a flipchart pen. One for each of the new sticky-notes, with the arrow head pointing to the new sticky-note. The arrow now repre-

*If your organisation does not actually have objectives, you will need to start with what you think they should be - but don't worry if your thinking is incomplete, since the following steps of the exercise will help to fill in the blanks.*

*Agreeing how objectives relate to each other helps your management team to develop common clarity on how the business works.*

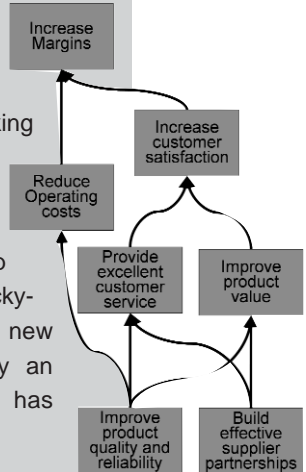
sents the why-how relationship between the sticky-notes, the head of the arrow pointing to 'why', and the foot of the arrow pointing to 'how'.

4. Take the second of your objectives generated in step 1, and stick it beside the original sticky-note, but a little distance away from it. Ask the question "Why are we doing this?" of this new sticky-note, and once again reach agreement on the answers. Some of the answers may well be the same as for the original sticky-note, and will therefore already be stuck up on the chart, in which case they can simply be linked by an arrow to this new sticky-note (arrow-head pointing to the 'why' part of the relationship). New answers will need new sticky-notes creating, and arrows drawn.
5. Continue with each of the sticky-notes generated in step 1. As the chart develops it will be difficult to keep it in tidy rows, but endeavour to ensure that the 'whys' are always higher than the 'hows'. Be aware that some of the sticky-notes generated in step 1 may also be



'reasons why' for other sticky-notes generated in step 1 - in this case stick them above or below as appropriate, and link them with an arrow as explained in step 3.

6. Continue the exercise by looking at the new sticky-notes you have created, and asking the question "Why?" for each of these. Continue to develop the map by creating new sticky-notes and arrows for each new reason, or simply linking by an arrow to each reason that has already been identified.
7. Be mindful that it is the debate and reconciliation that is most important in the Why-How chart, and it is important that you do not lose sight of this by becoming too focused on completing the diagram. Regularly check that everybody is fully engaged in the debate, and that the chart is facilitating useful debate on the organisation's values and how they relate to each other. Resolve any disagreements through encouraging everybody to understand each other's perspectives and explanations. Endeavour



to narrow the chart in on to some fundamental 'Whys' but don't force it. When the group has finished exploring 'up the chart' with 'why' questions it may then get additional value by exploring down the chart with 'how' questions.

*Resolving why-how disagreements encourages new insights and perspectives that help the team to better understand each other and agree on priorities.*

8. Once the underlying logic of the why-how chart has been mapped out, it is useful to consider the map from a more creative perspective. This can be achieved by considering alternative 'hows' to various 'whys'. Sometimes these unearth new 'whys', and sometimes novel ways forward. Accepting or rejecting new 'hows' also helps to reconcile the teams view on the organisation and its values.
9. As the diagram develops, it is usual that at some point it will need to be redrawn (sometimes more than once). Identify which section of the chart is becoming confusing, and decide how you want to re-lay it out. Move the sticky notes to a clean sheet of paper in this new layout, and then redraw the arrows. (If you are concerned about losing



relationships, number each of the sticky notes, and transfer that number to the spaces you have taken them from on the old chart. You can then use this to audit the new chart to ensure it is complete.)

*While redrawing at first seems an onerous task, it is actually a way of reinforcing the key messages and internalising the relationships.*

When the Why-How chart is complete, ask the team whether it really reflects the logic of the organisation. Make corrections until your team confirms that it does. Then ask them what they personally learned from the exercise. This is an important step because it helps people to assimilate and confirm in their own minds any new understanding that has arisen for them. New understanding will be inevitable unless the 'Why-How' chart simply fell out first time without debate (highly unlikely unless people were not properly engaged in the exercise) or unless the debate was not properly resolved. In either of these cases you may need to address other issues in how your team works together before you reattempt this exercise.

But if your debates have been open and productive, you will now have achieved two very important things. You will have made the values of your organisation explicit and documented, and you will have aligned your team behind them.

This is a vitally important step to the longevity of your business. In his study of sustainable business, Jim Collins determined that two key factors in those that withstood the test of time were a clear purpose and core values.

Together these two features helped to generate a cultural

integrity within the organisation that encouraged its people see past short term compromises and build something of lasting value.

The why-how chart provides an excellent means of beginning to draw out and understand the building blocks of your own organisation integrity.