



The Flywheel

by a head of global operations

The flywheel became a powerful metaphor in our company for aligning and exciting the organization to drive forward the company strategy. From the outset, perhaps influenced by much contemporary management thinking, we saw the stimulation of innovation as the key to success: to out-innovate the competition in all that we do. The increase in pace and intensity of innovation was represented by the flywheel.

As leaders we felt that we had a compelling strategy but quickly learned that presentation of slick PowerPoint slides was a useless method of transferring our enthusiasm to employees. Rather we found it essential to communicate our vision through leaders at all levels who could enthuse their teams by demonstrating their own energy and enthusiasm for the strategy in a meaningful local context. Conversely, uncommitted leaders at any level became an enormous drain of energy as they took on the traditional blocker role. So we used the 'Flow of Leadership' as the first key driver of our flywheel in the East.

The obvious question for anyone to ask, once inspired by a strategy, is 'What can I do – what is my place?' We therefore tried to describe clear roles and a line of sight for each employee to the goals of the company. Also important was to set out rules of play, lines which should not be crossed. Aware of the disciplines, everyone was liberated to play their part as creatively as possible.

After that our customers and our connection to them were always seen as imperatives. While, like many companies, our objective was to delight our customers, we soon discovered that connecting more of our employees to our customers generated an amazing amount of energy. Those in most direct contact with customers were by far the most energized by our strategy. So the challenge became clear: how to spread this through the company, while recognizing that direct contact for all was just not possible. We targeted our researchers. I was particularly struck by the observation I had at a workshop held for customers and researchers – that it was hard to tell which group was enjoying themselves more. 'Customer Connection' in the West was our third key driver.

Enhancing innovation, making it a way of life in all parts of the organization, can only be possible through the creativity of employees. Communication of the strategy by our leaders, making contribution possible by all and transmitting the energy gained from delighted customers are great ways to start. But it is necessary to provide ways of releasing creative energy. We gained great benefit from holding a succession of events such as themed workshops, often called deep-dives, team meetings, trainings and recognition events, the latter being a very good way of sharing best practice. All were designed, using micro-skills, to catalyse co-creation, which we found to have a significant multiplier effect over individual endeavour. Releasing 'Creative Energy' was our key driver to the North.

We now use our annual employee survey to check how fast our flywheel is spinning in every part of the organization and target action accordingly.

