

FutureFocus

Growing Your Organization

from Kirby Martzall

In working with organizations, systems and cultures over the past 25 years, we have observed common patterns and sequences in organizations as they move from birth (start up) through maturity (being well established). Equally, at some point in maturity, organizations face the decision whether to stay as they are, make changes ranging from incremental to radical, or close business (decline or sell).

This sequence of change and transition works as a cycle that repeats over time and in some cases results in organizational transformation. In response to these observations we created a multi-use **Organization Cycle™ Model** for learning, auditing, assessing, applying- strategically.

THE MODEL

This overview covers four phases in sequence forming a cycle. A newly forming organization's (in birth) phases are **Vision, Start-up, Application, Refinement**. For a 'mature' organization facing 'where to go from here', the cycle begins with **Re-Vision and follows through as presented**.

Re-vision: A time where the previous vision is restated, refined or confirmed to clarify vision for the organization looking to create the future. Culture- the underlying values, principles, and behaviors that influence and define how people relate and interact are given the same re-look. Vision and culture greatly influence who joins the organization, who stays and who exits. Re-vision commonly spans a 2-6 month period.

Start up: Putting to work the new focus, strategy, priority, expertise, behaviors, processes, resources and people that were created or involved in the re-vision phase. Startup can be exciting, motivating and a

time where people see the opportunity ahead and how they are essential in putting the vision to work. It can also be confusing and stressful; some may have difficulty seeing how and where they fit in the new picture. Startup includes facing challenges.

In effective startup- the 'new' is started and debugged, learning is at a high point, people make mistakes and learn from them. People find common ground, norms and standards emerge, and consistency and continuity take place as a practical, natural way of working, serving and doing business. This forms the foundation for performance and results.

Managing change and dealing with the stresses of change are critical skills. Understanding culture (the soft stuff which significantly influences the hard stuff) vs. technology (the hardware and structure stuff) and investing in reshaping culture is vital. Building culture involves identifying and investing in values, creating new behaviors and competencies aligned with achieving the re-vision. It also means supporting and reinforcing existing behaviors and competencies when no change is required. The startup phase commonly lasts for 12 months.

Application: At this point the vision is in place, culture is forming through startup, testing has worked out initial bugs, and some improvements are in place. Measuring, monitoring and evaluating progress leads to refinement and continuous improvement as part of running the cycle. This is where the organization's functioning as a total system is practiced and tested as a natural way of working, interacting, and serving. What was tried or suspected in the startup phase is now verified and standardized as part of the maturing and streamlining process of a growing system and group of people. This commonly spans 12 months, reflecting a

full-year business cycle. The more complex the organization and systems/processes the longer this phase lasts. The more conflict, significant disagreement or dysfunction the longer this phase lasts. Some organizations and people get stuck here and keep re-cycling through people, startup and application.

Refinement: It's now been a little over two years and two yearlong cycles. This phase commonly includes refining and honing, adding points of distinction, pursuing niche markets, growth, expansion, innovation. It appears some people are ready to do more or go to the next level- whatever that means specific to the organization and situation. Refinements clearly lead to continuous improvement and innovation. This phase sees new members enter and planned leadership succession taking place throughout the organization. Members also exit based on fit or performance decisions and realities.

Succession and transition become effective when the focus, strategy, systems, values and guiding principles of the organization are now owned by the people who give the organization meaning. These foundational elements move from subjective (attached to a few specific people) to being a natural, integral part of how and why the organization functions, interacts and exists. Culture is in place, relevant and 'lived'.

Year three begins refinement and can continue purposefully for many years until the need for Re-vision emerges. When things are not working, markets are changing, or people are neither functioning effectively nor aligned with where the organization is, the organization may need to move back to Re-vision or Startup. One indicator is the extent to which the organization is able to remain aligned internally with those served externally and with the external market and world.

PUTTING THIS MODEL TO WORK

Some actions you can take for a starter-

- **Determine which part of the cycle you are in** as an organization. Is this appropriate for where you want and need to be?
- **What would it be like to move your organization to Re-Vision** at this time or in the next 12 months? What are the opportunities? The challenges?
- **Are you stuck** in a phase?
- **Do some research** to learn more about organization transformation, scenario planning and future trending.
- **Identify specific systems, processes, behaviors or performance points** to improve or refine over the coming 12 months.
- **Compare how people interact and the organization performs** with the strategy, design and culture you envision for your organization. Is there a match? Are there gaps?
- **Compare your market, current customers and identified prospects** with the strategy, design and culture you envision for your organization. Is there a match? Are there gaps?
- **What are your known competitors doing** and what does this indicate?
- **Where are your new/next competitors coming from** and what does this indicate?

By focusing on the critical and working to achieve it, you apply leadership within your organization and position your organization and all involved for the future.

At KL Martzall we take the mystery out of 'How People Change Their Organizations'