

Survive the Downturn - Focus on Health

By Patrick Lencioni



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The current economy has forced many leaders to reevaluate how their organization is performing and possibly adjust how they plan to work in the future. During this time, leaders need to make sure they don't overlook a critical and underestimated aspect of running a business – its health.

Smart vs. Healthy

Regardless of the economic climate, I believe that all successful organizations share two qualities: they are smart and they are healthy. An organization demonstrates that it is smart by developing intelligent strategies, marketing plans, product features and financial models, all leading to a competitive advantage over its rivals. It demonstrates that it is healthy by eliminating politics and confusion, which leads to higher morale, lower turnover, and higher productivity.

As important as these two topics are, I have found that most leaders spend the majority of their time and energy making their organizations smarter, with relatively little effort directed toward making them healthier. This is understandable considering the predominant focus of business schools and business media. It is regrettable, however, when one considers the powerful attributes of organizational health.

First, healthy organizations have a way of making themselves smarter. Even if their ideas are temporarily inferior to those of competitors, they are usually humble and agile enough to recognize their deficiencies and make changes in their plans before it is too late. On the other hand, plenty of anonymous and forgotten companies have squandered intellectual advantages because of infighting, lack of clarity, and other problems that plague unhealthy organizations.

Second, healthy companies are far less susceptible to ordinary problems than unhealthy ones. During difficult times, for instance, employees will remain committed to a healthy organization and stay with it longer, ultimately working to reestablish competitive advantage.

With a robust economy, companies tend to cast aside health with few visible ramifications, but in a downturn, health cannot be ignored.

Make the Investment

The best place for an investment right now is in the general health of an organization. I'm talking mostly about improving the functioning of the executive team and their clarification of and recommitment to the organization's values and purpose. Doing this will require a little time and energy, but very little money. And it will yield significant returns now, and even more when the economy rebounds.

This concept of health was outlined in my book *The Four Obsessions of an Extraordinary Executive* and asks leaders to focus on four areas:

1. Build and maintain a cohesive executive team (No daylight between executives)
2. Create organizational clarity (Know who you are and where you are going)

3. Over-communicate organizational clarity (Repeat, repeat and repeat key messages)
4. Reinforce organizational clarity through human systems (Make promoting, hiring and firing inline with your clarity)

Healthy organizations typically have less politics and confusion, higher levels of morale and productivity, lower unwanted turnover and lower recruiting costs than unhealthy organizations.

Assess Your Organization

While most leaders would not dispute the power of these qualities, most struggle with how to make them a reality. The first step is to understand how your organization is performing in the area of health.

To help leaders wrap their arms around this concept we developed a complimentary Organizational Health Survey. The survey is designed to give leaders a snapshot of their organization's overall health and provide insights on how to bring about change. To take this complimentary survey, please visit www.tablegroup.com/survey.

I sincerely hope this approach helps your organization succeed in a new way.

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