

Draft/...

Lessons in Strategy from Sport - The Manchester United Success Story

The Graduate Institute of Management and Technology (GIMT), and leading computer company Compaq, recently hosted a breakfast where well-known English consultant and business school lecturer, Rakesh Sondhi, talked in detail about strategy lessons we can learn from sport. Kumar, a fanatical Manchester United supporter, used the club and the actions of its well-known manager, Sir Alex Ferguson, to illustrate key aspects of strategy for success.

As eleven players, in eleven positions, are needed to win a game of football, Rakesh emphasised eleven key actions that, will result in any organisation “winning the game”.

These are:

1. Long term vision - keeping the goal in focus

Organisations must have a vision that offers a unified image of the corporate activities required to achieve major steps forward, as well as to give a definite acknowledgement of the long-term vision as they move toward the 21st century.

2. Cultivate desire – Right back in the mind of winners

Managing expectations strengthens the value of the whole organisation. This implies delegating to allow time for strategic thinking, communicating effectively and using politics to the advantage of the organisation.

3. Focus on core activities – The role of the flank

A key step in strategic planning is the identification of an organisation’s core competencies and the development of a plan for building and deploying those competencies. The identification and nurturing of core competencies allow organisations

to have a specific strategic focus and allow concentration on the core services that ensure singular market strength.

4. Empowerment – The heart (centre) of change

It appears that the intent of boundaries in a culture of empowerment is not to restrict action but rather to create freedom to act within defined responsibilities. Leaders must have the ability to inspire loyalty within the organisation, by treating the human capital with dignity and by finding time for personal mentoring. Leaders should also remove fear of failure and invest in the pride of accomplishment.

5. Strong leadership – Defending the foundation

Leaders must maintain a balance between a clear understanding of the present and a clear focus on the future. The challenge is to achieve a balance of strong leadership and strong management. Corporate needs competent leadership at all levels. Good management brings a degree of order and consistency to key issue like readiness, availability and consistency.

6. Changes – Sweeping changes

Focusing management on change is a mere holding action and an endless game of catch-up with moving goalposts. Leadership needs to constantly redefine the strategy and to shift management from an operational burden and mere tactical concern, to a business opportunity and a competitive advantage. This demands some new approaches to doing business and therefore, corporates require new core competencies.

7. Networks – Support on the Wing

The company must be strong enough to be aware of what has not been perceived by prompting new insights within the organisation. Attempts to expand current worldviews are achieved by identifying issues of significant potential. This means that based on current knowledge any organisation must increase its shared awareness of change by

monitoring areas such as environment, technology, politics, society, the economy, and culture.

8. Embracing culture – The engine of change

Recognising and embracing the value of diversity by creating an environment, in which employees feel safe to constructively challenge organisation standards and practices, can only result in continuous change. Individuals in organisations come from diverse backgrounds and experiences and will have different frames of reference from which the organisation must source the expertise.

9. Competency based – Striking at the new area

Organisations have to manage in a diverse team and influence human performance management. The leader requires competencies in planning and evaluation, customer focus, management controls, financial management and budgeting, technology management, and creative thinking. The competency-based approach helps identify and measure performance gaps and pinpoint development needs for leaders within an organisation.

10. Quantitative assessment – Striking for consistency

Performance measurement is an undertaking that organisations must implement. It requires some reasonable performance measurement as input and it can be an important element of a broader strategy to focus on.

11. Teamwork – Striking for change

Unlike technical knowledge, intercultural awareness and skills are not something you can achieve just by reading a management book. People's cultural backgrounds play a tremendous role. These cultural backgrounds, which embrace appearance, names, language, accents, artefacts and shared worlds of reference, are visible at once.

Kumar's novel presentation style certainly "got the message across" whilst the audience participated by asking some searching questions. Responses continued to give us

further insight into how this supremely successful football team has achieved its dominance of the Premier Division of English football.

Note to editor

Rakesh Kumar Sondhi, Bsc (Eng), MSc, MBA, MBIM, is Managing Director of BMC Global Services (a managing consultancy firm specialising in strategy). He has 20 years' marketing and strategy experience in senior management positions with blue-chip companies, covering financial services, aviation and agricultural machine industries.

Rakesh has extensive lecturing experience with The Henley Management College, specialising in strategy for both MBA and Executive Development programmes. Other subjects relate to the international business environment and its various elements.

His career has involved working extensively in Bahrain, Jamaica, India, North Korea, Switzerland and other parts of Europe. He has also been involved in projects in Bolivia, the Caribbean, North Korea, Ghana and Zimbabwe, with particular focus on privatisation in the Caribbean and Africa.

Despite this hectic workload, Rakesh Sondhi is studying for his doctorate (**in what?**), researching the formation of global alliances in the airline industry.