Flexibility, Vitality and Sustainability

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Sustainability of enterprises requires both vitality and flexibility in its functioning

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Flexibility is a core attribute of a living system. Whether it is an individual or an organization, it is desirable to be flexible, adaptive and responsive to cope with the environmental turbulence and uncertainties. In the context of enterprises, it connotes having options, change mechanisms and freedom of choice so as to provide the customer with the choice in products/services with speed. Speed and choice are emerging to be significant factors of sustainable competitive advantage after the era of cost and quality.

Flexibility in purpose, people and processes acts as a basic ingredient of vitality of any living system. Vitality is the measure of degree of liveliness of any individual or organization. The vitality can be at various levels, such as physical or operational, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual. There can be various mechanisms for continuous vitalization or revitalization of enterprises; flexibility, is the central one of them which interrelates with all others such as, learning, innovation, and entrepreneurship. It creates vitality in organizations to survive and grow and perform well under challenging circumstances.

Flexibility, in terms of adaptation to the changing situation and responsiveness to customers needs, vitalizes the organization. This is based on learning and reflection on the strategy execution and operational feedback mechanisms. It also leads to innovation and a risk taking attitude through which organization sustains itself under challenging environment in terms of competitive pressures, technological obsolescence, market randomness, and so on.

The vital enterprises are more adaptable towards changing environment. Organizations adapt themselves with the changing environment by developing more *flexibility*. The firms that are more flexible serve their customers in a better way than those that lack flexibility. The vital enterprises initiate new courses of action, and eliminate obsolete or unproductive activities, which show the *innovativeness* of the organization. Based on its vision, mission, standards and plans, the organizations, which are vital, are ready to take appropriate risks. Leadership activities, proactiveness and risk taking attitude are the key qualities of *entrepreneurial* behavior in the organization. Some of the vitalization processes are visible in different organizations, e.g. GE for learning, 3M for innovation, Dell for flexibility, and Google and HCL for entrepreneurship. These vitalization processes not only contribute to vitality of organizations, but also support in making them sustainable.

Sustainability of enterprises requires both vitality and flexibility in its functioning. Sustainability, on the one hand refers to survival and growth under adverse conditions, whereas it has a larger perspective towards other stakeholders, i.e. society and environment on the other.

The concern for environment and ecology has filled the drive for sustainability. Enterprises are not supposed to focus only on economic considerations, but to keep in their ambit the triple bottom-line of economic, environmental and societal concerns, at the same time. The concepts of green (or sustainable) enterprises, green technologies and green supply chains are gathering momentum which will support flexibility and vitality in purpose, people and processes. Thus, it can be observed that flexibility, vitality and sustainability are interrelated and interdependent, and are essential for current as well as future performance of any organization.

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