

Surviving Significant Growth

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As a professional in the recruiting industry for more than 15 years I have worked with hundreds of employers of all types, representing all industries and sizes. Throughout my career I have witnessed several organizations experience significant growth, each handling their windfall in different ways, but in some cases not well enough to succeed their growth.

It is counter-intuitive to think that rapid growth and increased corporate profits can be crippling to a business, but in some cases it can be just that. There is an old saying that suggests if you give someone enough slack they can hang themselves. Principally, growth can do the same to an otherwise healthy organization. This begs the question, "How do successful companies succeed their growth?" Below are a few points that I have witnessed to be paramount to succeeding significant growth.

An organization that will succeed significant growth will have a strong culture rooted in corporate vision, mission, and values. Their strict and relentless commitment to corporate values and strategy will serve as a scalable foundation if the following three objectives can be met.

- Top Grading Talent
- Optimizing Business Processes
- Integrating Core Technologies

By far the toughest of these three objectives to implement is the first. The reason this task is so difficult is because historically successful and capable staff may no longer be qualified for their positions. However, the natural response by leadership is to promote and reward these long-tenured and proven resources based on the assumption that they are capable of handling larger and more complicated issues brought on by significant growth. While some key employees may be more than capable of handling the new complexities associated with their current role or a promotion into a broader role, it cannot be assumed that all are capable of making this transition. In fact, most are not. These members are important to surviving growth, but putting them in a position where they will likely fail is not the answer. Hiring proven talent from outside the organization can bring fresh ideas, perspectives, and solutions to problems on a scale that is more similar to what the business is now facing. I would suggest looking for talent from organizations that have survived major growth, or experienced significant organizational change, like a merger or acquisition, on a scale that would mirror, at a minimum, the anticipated growth. The difficult task is hiring from the outside, ensuring cultural fit, and doing so without discouraging the key contributors that have helped you achieve this windfall.

Effective top-grading of the organization's talent pool will then lead the business through complex problem solving that helps identify opportunities to optimize business process, cut costs, improve margins, and increase revenue opportunities. Einstein's definition for insanity is "doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." It is with this definition in mind that enduring organizations will evaluate their current paradigms and begin to make significant changes, when appropriate, to the paradigms that will help them tackle the new challenges now facing their business. The new paradigms often involve changes in organizational structure, new marketing opportunities, development and launching of new products/services, and potentially identifying merger/acquisition opportunities.

It is likely that some of these changes to the organization will require the implementation of technologies to help optimize the business and provide future scalability, as well as better reporting on key metrics that indicate performance against the company's balanced scorecard. It is typical that companies experiencing significant growth will have many disparate systems, and in some cases manual processes that need to be automated. Effective technology integration will align with corporate

strategy today and into the future and typically involves combining multiple systems into one fully integrated platform like an MRP or ERP system. It could also involve the implementation of SaaS (Software as a Service) applications that are core to the organization's business.

While there are many other aspects organizations need to consider when experiencing growth, these are the three that I have learned to be fundamental to an organization surviving significant growth.

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