

Agility Levels the Playing Field. Anticipation Changes the Game

The global marketplace is hardly a novel concept. But what is constantly new is the shifting challenge of knowing where you and your organization best fit into that setting—a form of ongoing flux that's only going to accelerate in the future.

That's why an anticipatory mindset is critical to succeeding in an economy largely defined only by the geographic limits of the planet. As is the case with so many traditional ideas and principles, the strategies that worked yesterday may only be holding you back today and tomorrow.

That's a Yes ... and a No

Reading about how others approach the global market can be equally intriguing and frustrating.

One article that sought to cull business leaders' views on this topic cited research from the consulting firm Deloitte. What was number one on the list of attributes central to effective global market leadership? Agility.

Agility serves an important role helping companies react quickly to unforeseen change. The biggest advantage to an agile organization is that they can react faster than their slower competitors. Unfortunately, reacting and responding quickly provides less advantage every year as the exponential pace of technology-driven change accelerates. In addition, many companies are trying to use agility as a tool to drive innovation, and that can produce results, but due to the reactive foundation of agility, it is difficult to jump ahead. Did the people who came up with the innovative, billion-dollar idea for Uber or Airbnb use agility? No, that would not help at all! That's where learning to be Anticipatory comes into play.

A core concept of my Anticipatory Organization Model acknowledges that agility is still a valuable skill in adjusting to shifting conditions and issues of immediate concern. But as I suggested earlier, it's a game largely composed of catch-up, dancing on a string in response to one thing as you risk being disrupted by something else. Sooner or later, you fall behind—or get disrupted by someone else who saw the future first.

Happily, the Deloitte article touches on other attributes for which I have a great deal more enthusiasm. One is collaboration—working together with people inside your organization as well as others who might often be labeled as competitors. To that end, the story reports 72 percent of emerging market companies say they anticipate working with other similar businesses. Once again, this is good, but will it help them jump ahead of the others with confidence? Agility without learning to Anticipate has trouble doing that.

So, too, does the article identify the overriding importance of innovation in identifying and staking out a niche in the global economy. In particular, the article underscores the value of looking to others outside an organization—such as the collaborators we just discussed—for fresh ideas that ultimately can lead to new forms of innovation. This is all good, but to jump ahead with both confidence and lower risk, you will need more than agility.

The Key Is to Become Anticipatory

Change your mindset, and you will change your results! By developing and using an Anticipatory mindset—not merely to identify opportunity in a fast-shifting global marketplace but, even better, to anticipate those developments long before agile competitors see them.

To that end, it's important to understand the function and import of both Hard and Soft Trends—two of the cornerstones of the Anticipatory Organization Model. Hard Trends are based on future facts that will happen; those things we can anticipate with absolute certainty, from a growth in disruptive digital technologies to demographic shifts, such as the aging population we, and many other countries, are experiencing. They're going to take place, and there's nothing that any of us can do to stop it. But we can learn to see the disruptions before they disrupt turning disruption into a choice. We can see the impact of an aging population and the opportunities, as well as challenges, this represents before they happen.

Soft Trends, on the other hand are based on assumptions and represent future possibilities—those things that may or may not occur. The advantage to Soft Trends is that they're open to influence—a type of leverage that any of us can use to push Soft Trends in directions that are advantageous.

For further discussion on Hard and Soft Trends and the ways to differentiate between the two, go here.

With the concepts of both Hard and Soft Trends in mind, consider how best to pinpoint a growing niche in the global marketplace that will happen and that affords you the greatest opportunity. Are there economic or political certainties that need to be considered? By the same token, are there relevant Soft Trends that can be changed to foster more favorable conditions?

By being anticipatory and knowing what you can count on with certainty—as well as factors that may or may not matter—you not only identify game-changing opportunity in the global marketplace, you can also better manage the risk of targeting markets and consumers with whom you may not be particularly familiar.



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