

WHEN GROWTH STALLS: HOW IT HAPPENS, WHY YOU'RE STUCK, AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

Steve McKee, BusinessWeek.com and McKee Wallwork Cleveland Advertising,
1030 Eighteenth St. Northwest, Albuquerque, NM 87104;
smckee@mwcmail.com

ABSTRACT

Today corporations of every shape and size are struggling to cope with the global economic crisis. Companies that were once growth stars now find themselves on the ropes, and organizations that had already been struggling are declaring bankruptcy in record numbers.

While the extent of the current crisis is somewhat unprecedented, the problem of stalled growth is not. There is always something – or someone – that threatens even the healthiest business model. As a result, stalled growth is the rule, not the exception – even for the best-managed companies.

That is especially true in unpredictable economic environments such as the one we are experiencing today. Circumstances beyond their control are catching business leaders off-guard, and how they respond to those circumstances will make a huge difference to their companies' future prospects.

Steve McKee, BusinessWeek.com columnist and president of McKee Wallwork Cleveland Advertising, discussed what happens when growth stalls. Over the past six years his firm has studied some 700 corporations, many of which had at one time been among the nation's fastest-growing businesses.

McKee's research was borne of necessity. After five years of breathtaking growth, his firm – which, ironically, specializes in helping other companies grow – suddenly, shockingly stalled. The reasons were not obvious, and McKee and his team assumed it was just a temporary slowdown. But through two painful years of trial and error, McKee discovered that all of the skill, enthusiasm, and marketing expertise of his talented staff were not enough to restart his company's growth engine.

McKee set out to learn more about the dynamics that fuel growth, understand the common reasons that cause it to stall, and determine whether some or all

of them could be reversed. Working with Decision Analyst, a leading national research and consulting firm, McKee's research probed areas as diverse as corporate structure, competition, branding, finance, and strategy. His work yielded fascinating stories and personal testimonies from executives who had been living on the front lines of real-life growth crises.

Like his own firm, every stalled company McKee studied had its unique story. But the data also showed patterns into which many companies fell. Sluggish growth is generally produced not by mismanagement or strategic blundering but by natural market forces and management dynamics that are often unrecognized – and widespread.

The study identified seven characteristics that commonly correlate with stalled growth. Three may not be surprising. They are external forces to which countless companies have fallen victim: economic upheavals, changing industry dynamics, and increased competition. What the study pointed out, however, is how often they catch companies off-guard. These factors do a lot of damage simply by going unrecognized for too long.

More surprising are four subtle and highly destructive internal factors that conspire to keep companies down: lack of consensus among the management team, loss of nerve, loss of focus, and marketing inconsistency. All four are psychological, all are capable of ruining companies from the inside out, and all are preventable – *if* leaders know what to look for and how to respond.

Like McKee's firm, most struggling companies suffer from some combination of the four internal factors. For them, understanding what is happening is the first step toward getting back on the growth curve. Regardless of what's going on outside of an enterprise, it is what is inside that counts.

STUDENT HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT: BEYOND CURRICULUM

Gerald S. Abergos, De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines; gerald_bergos@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

OBJECTIVES

This special session discussed:

1. an educational strategy to ensure the holistic development of students;
2. a recommendation to create a better controlled learning environment;
3. an administrative solution to faculty absenteeism problems;
4. transparency in school finance as to the student tuition fees and academic services;
5. an administrative marketing mix strategy for schools to create a better social reputation; and
6. the start of a student "culture of research," focusing less on grades and more on educational experience and knowledge fulfillment.

INTRODUCTION

To follow the program curriculum approved by the Commission on Higher Education is compulsory and obligatory. However, the courses, mandated school activities, and administrative educational thrusts of individual schools through the academic affairs office may not be enough to satisfy students' craving for knowledge, whether that knowledge is in the scope of the program they are enrolled in, or just a temporary preoccupation they are engaged in because of their individual or group hobbies, social issues, trends, and fads. After graduation, these temporary preoccupations will haunt them, making them focus their careers in reaching for what they enjoy doing best, equipped with the lessons, concepts and academic experiences of college. Thus, educational institutions should find ways to create a controlled learning environment, where educators feed hungry minds with academic concepts as well as uniquely supervised topics and interests which in turn would be individual student preoccupations leading to individual research and a sense of fulfillment, consciously knowing that this hard work is not part of the computation of their grades.

When teachers are absent, students may get short-changed of the education expected to be delivered to them. Teachers are the frontlines of this task. It is a shame if schools unintentionally create students who do not anymore care if all the concepts and learning experiences in the syllabus are effectively delivered.

Though teachers do not plan to be absent, uncontrollable circumstances make them do so, knowing that these absences will reflect in their performance evaluations. Teacher-absences are also a concern to administrators. It is a common administrative problem. May it be a university of more than 300 professors, or a college of even less than a dozen professors, the administrative stress ratio is still proportional.

"Whatever..."

Students have diverse interests, information they feel is worth searching for rather than the topics and concepts in the course syllabus. Even inside the classroom, these interests preoccupy their minds. If educators will also focus on the interests of students, it will bridge these ideas with the curriculum.

Students' holistic development is not achieved by the curriculum alone. The school in itself is the learning environment, and the classroom is the best venue for development, where the teachers somehow emanate authority and control. Ironically, students at times lack interest in topics which they consider "academic."

"Do we have class?"

The usual class schedule is one and a half hours. In most schools, if there is no prior announcement from the course professor, the students are obliged to wait for their teacher for fifteen minutes, after which they can leave the classroom. The dean's office or the office of the program director may be able to know beforehand if the professor will not come to class, and will announce the news to the students.

When a professor is not able to attend classes, students wait in the classroom with two frames of mind: "Cool! The professor is absent! Break time!" or "This is not fair! I am paying hard-earned money for my education. I demand knowledge from my professors!"

Students paid for their tuition fees in full. They are not given a rebate for every class a professor has been absent.

FEEDING HUNGRY MINDS

It is proposed that a one-hour lecture could substitute for the academic lecture class of the absent professor, thus ensuring that students receive knowledge from reputable sources, and not just street-smart peer conversations where information at times is not derived from scholarly work, first-hand sources, and academic expertise.

The office of academic affairs, through the college deans, may create a pool of lecturers, with carefully selected topics that are interesting to students. These topics outside the curriculum and individual course syllabus may range from simple information on about any topic of interest, to serious academic, social, or political issues facing students.

Students will not anymore feel short-changed of the educational services they feel entitled to receive for the fees they paid. The absence of the course professors may feel less of a loss to them since they will be looking forward to a topic of their interest. Schools who adopt this concept will create students who will engage in individual research because the lecturers will open their interest on the topic, and consciously encourage them to learn more by themselves, not focusing on grades since this is not part of the syllabus, but searching for the truth and reflecting on how these topics will help them in life.

Through this, educational institutions will be able to reach out to students and make a significant

connection. Through the careful choice of topics, educators will significantly contribute to students' holistic development, beyond curriculum.

ADMINISTRATIVE PREROGATIVE

The following are some policies and lines of thought that school administrators may consider if they decide to use this concept in their institutions:

1. The program is for the best interest of student development. The lecture substitution program does not justify teacher absenteeism.
2. Substitute topic lecturers will only be of service in their free time. This will not in any way affect their regular class schedule.
3. Substitution pay should be given to the lecturer who took over the class in lieu of the regular class.
4. The choice of topic should be decided by the substitute lecturer and the department head or dean. Students will naturally leave the class if they are not interested with the topic.
5. Students will not be graded and attendance is not compulsory. Thus, the choice of topic should be decided with the best interest of the students in mind.
6. Substitute lecturers may be given recognition during faculty meetings or institutional celebrations.

Other policies and guidelines should be decided upon by the office of academic affairs, the college deans, and the department heads.