

## HOT TOPICS:Q 4 Future proofing\*

A question for you - what future proofing exists in your company or organisation? Share it with us to add yours to the richness of the mix. You may well recognise or resonate with future proofing that follows.

Responses collated by Halina Jaroszevska PCC

Here is a flavour of future proofing those asked shared:

- The main gap is in **creating and maintaining solid strategy** that propagates right down to operations. Right now we're defining strategy from the top as well as taking on feedback from staff. There's a gap here because the staff feedback influences processes in the short run, whereas the strategy isn't completed to a point where it can be the main anchor for all aspects of the business. Consequently, prioritisation and focus are issues because there isn't a clear, single point of reference. It's in process and that process is going well, but the in-between part feels somewhat risky because business continues as we do this strategic work.
- Gaps: part of the **challenge is the 'don't know'** at the moment. Traditionally retention is biggest challenge. Training gap - appraisals & goal setting. Looking ahead – enabling everyone to be thinking about what needs to be done to take business forward successfully.
- Looking at new trends, ideas, what the consumer wants (that they don't know they want) is a core part of the marketing function, as Innovation sits under marketing. And whilst future trends can be anticipated, it's difficult to say if they can be future proofed. Things change and move on quickly, so a business needs to be **nimble enough to react** to these, or working far out enough, to look like they are reacting to these quickly (even though they may have been in development for 18 months or longer).
- We are constantly creating new services and refining services for quickly changing market, our future markets are staff training, integrations for cloud-based services and sustainability.
- Again this is a collaborative team effort, the ultimate budget responsibility of course lies with the two Directors but the **insights come from the team as whole**. We hold regular meetings which help to identify systemic understanding. On a Monday morning we have a meeting to discuss the work for the week ahead, discussing any issues that might impact on this; on a Wednesday morning we have a content marketing meeting to discuss what our next bit of content marketing is going to be about, identifying who the content owner is, who the audience is, what the channel it's going to be released on is and when etc; a Friday afternoon is when we get to research latest trends & innovations although this does happen throughout the week and fortnightly, we have a new business meeting. These all contribute to identifying gaps, latest trends, investments to be made and let go of – we are all key players in shaping the direction of the company and the work.
- We need commitment across the board; to find a way to make **everyone clearly see the benefits** of investing in this sector, ie jobs and other direct benefits.
- We have a technology watch to look out for future trends, a production forecast capacity, a business continuity plan for emergencies and a learning and development team to look out for future skill development. All this and more is good, I think with a **healthy dose of realisation** that we cannot fully predict the future. What is important is that we become a learning, developing, agile organisation that can adapt and thrive as things change around us.
- It's ironic. I love my business, so thankful that have had the whole experience. I would expect a member of staff to take over from me. **I believe a leader / MD / CEO has a shelf life**. When the business gets bigger someone else probably needs to take over to expand the business with their different experience and knowledge.
- From all the performance reviews to do a skills audit ... for longevity do a soft-skills to leadership and ask the question: **What is the profile we need?**
- Gaps: team to be more conscious of the importance of sales & marketing; they need a greater understanding as to how a project gets onto their desk. They might have **ideas as to how to bring in new work**.
- Team needs to **understand the 'wholeness'** of the business not just their bit.
- Future proofing on the technical side: pace of technological change is daily so paramount for us to know about new technologies that come in which will make current one redundant. **Clients leave because they want the new technology**. We need to show that we are au fait with the latest aspects. Need to keep the ball rolling & learning.

- Need to be interested outside of work and who brings the new into the team to share the latest which might be just the thing that the client wants. Any new developments give the team USP on their CVs – the benefit of a small company is the agility. **Big companies tend not to see the relevance of innovation** simply re-package the old stuff eg Google buying all the start ups

**Being nimble in a quickly changing market** – agility is key; knowing what the organisation / company needs; always asking what profile is needed; succession planning; planning for the business's development stages; team development in order to use effectively skills, attributes, qualities, potential; all employees to understand how the business works, how they can help it work even better, how to bring innovation into the mix, understand how a piece of work arrives on their 'desk'; tuned in to the fast pace of technological change; predicting what clients / customers might want ahead of the competition and the clients / customers!; ensure that everyone truly knows that they are key players in shaping the direction of the company and the work - all played a part in what was considered necessary for future proofing. What is the part that reputation at all levels and in all senses in our Social Media savvy world? How can **managing reputation play a part in future proofing**? What strategies are in place for both organisation and employees regarding reputation?

At the same time the challenge is how to create, maintain a solid strategy that propagates right down to operations; how to maintain balance, manage the risky while strategic work is done before it disseminates down through the organisation; holding the space for the 'don't know' to have time to be explored; to have that technology-watch identify and capitalise on what's next before it has been thought of; how to have a plan for emergencies flexible enough to manage the unforeseen; how to predict and then employ those who have the future skills. As was commented, it is important that we **become a learning, developing, agile organisation** that can adapt and thrive as things change around us.

While considering that whilst future trends can be anticipated, it's difficult to say if they can be future proofed. Things change and move on quickly, so a business needs to be nimble enough to react to these, or working far out enough, to look like they are reacting to these quickly. Together with a healthy dose of realisation that we cannot fully predict the future or can we? Maybe **being a magician might help**.

*\*[Thinking Points: How do you know where the gaps are in skillsets/abilities/thinking/leadership? Who has responsibility for looking ahead, forecasting what might be the next trend, the next 'out of left field'? What needs to be invested now to pay dividends going forward? What needs to be let go of / brake taken off regarding / thinking changed to enable your organisation to be fit for the next decade?]*