

Perform & Transform: An imperative for organizations and leaders...but how can we get it right?



Navnit Singh
*Chairman & Regional
 Managing Director, India*
 Korn Ferry International
 Pvt.Ltd.

Introduction

Gone are the days when companies could solely focus on short-term results and ignore the need for innovation. The dynamic nature of markets, rapid advancement of technology, and evolving expectations of customers and employees have made it clear that performing and transforming are no longer mutually exclusive but rather interdependent forces that drive organizational success. To thrive in this era of constant change, there is a need to strike a balance

between delivering immediate performance and driving transformative initiatives that ensure long-term success.

Where performance refers to achieving operational efficiency, meeting financial targets, and delivering consistent results; transformation implies the ability to adapt, innovate, and embrace change. It involves questioning the status quo, exploring new business models, adopting emerging technologies, and responding swiftly to market disruptions.

Organizations that excel at performance tend to have strong operational capabilities, a customer-centric approach, and a relentless drive for excellence. Transformation-oriented organizations, on the other hand, are agile, forward-thinking, and open to experimentation. They understand that in today's fast-paced world, standing still means falling behind.

Striking a balance between performance and transformation

Boards and organizations that focus solely on performance risk becoming stagnant, obsolete, and are vulnerable to disruptive forces. Conversely, organizations that prioritize transformation without maintaining a strong focus on performance may struggle to sustain themselves financially and lack the operational strength necessary for growth.

Therefore, the synergy between performance and transformation is paramount. It means integrating a dual mindset, where efficiency and innovation go hand in hand. By effectively blending performance and transformation, organizations can unlock their full potential, position themselves as industry leaders while staying adaptable and resilient.

Achieving a delicate equilibrium between performance and transformation is not without its challenges. It

requires leaders to navigate complex trade-offs, manage competing priorities, and overcome resistance to change. It demands a willingness to take calculated risks, make tough decisions, and invest in the development of new capabilities.

Today's leadership faces numerous challenges; the constant feeling of overwhelm is a common struggle, as leaders are bombarded with an ever-increasing number of agendas to address and decisions to make. Additionally, the various forms of transformation happening at firms – be it digital, cultural, organizational structuring, etc. - are often not mutually exclusive and intersect. Therefore, the pressure on leadership to anticipate the future and get it right without falling behind is unrelenting.

So how can we get it right... Is there a guiding north star?

For decades, the traditional business maxim was that economic value and social value could not be maximized at the same time. But the current climate has underscored one resounding truth: we can no longer operate in an 'either/or' world. We are leaders of ecosystems, and leadership is no longer confined by boundaries. As the historical "line" between business and society becomes more porous, it is not enough for leaders to focus solely on achieving their organizational objectives; they must also demonstrate a deep commitment to the well-being of stakeholders, the environment, and future generations. Companies must act to create a world that respects everyone's dignity and makes equal opportunities available to all.

Therefore, it is crucial to pause and ask - are we taking into account all the stakeholders? Are we truly considering the impact of our actions on the wider community? Are we building inclusive and equitable organizations along the way? The answers to these questions determine whether our efforts will make a genuine difference in the world. It is important to think far and broad, with a purpose-fueled & inclusive vision that goes beyond customers and competitors to more fundamental elements that drive collective success, both now (based on current capabilities) and in the future (based on their capacity to develop).

A strong sustainability strategy that integrates environmental, social and governance factors into important business and operational decisions is key – be it for environment related impact and risks, social impact involving workplace safety, wellbeing & culture or governance criteria that ensures good decisions are made for customers, employees and the community at large.

Today, building equitable and inclusive organizations is a crucial aspect of performing and transforming responsibly. Diversity and inclusion are not just buzzwords, but essential pre-requisites that must be firmly integrated into the fabric of an organization's culture and practices. We know that inclusive organizations recognize the richness

and strength that comes from different backgrounds, experiences, and ideas. They actively work to remove barriers and biases and foster an environment where everyone can thrive and contribute their best. But, beyond leveling the playing field, businesses find that embedding DE&I into their culture, purpose, and practices gives them a competitive advantage.

Conclusion

While it is essential for organizations and leaders to perform and transform simultaneously, the approach that they take to do this makes all the difference. Balancing the interests of various stakeholders, being equitable & inclusive and making a positive impact on the world are

key. The world is constantly evolving and those helming the organizational ship are striving hard to ensure that they are well-equipped to deal with both the known and the unknown. The choice between driving performance and ushering in transformational changes is not limited to what kind, but also how and when to truly reap their benefits at the organizational as well as wider business ecosystem level. And that is where the role of responsible leadership is pivotal.

The question to ask is – are we making the world a better place because we exist? If the answer is yes, then the organization is getting it right.
