

Agility in a knowledge-based business

Agile organisations are powerful machines for innovation and learning and, according to McKinsey, are ones that have the ability to balance fast action and rapid change, on the one hand, with organisational clarity, stability and structure, on the other. The capacity to see future opportunities and gear-up to capture them, takes **focus, commitment, courage, investment, and a willingness to learn.**

Donald Cant Watts Corke is a good example of how a consultancy business has redefined and grown its business through agile thinking; being responsive to the changing structure of the built infrastructure sector and building diverse capability to capture new opportunities.

Understanding Market Dynamics

New markets underpinned with a strong core

All markets change, whether they are disrupted by new entrants, different offers, technological advances, changing regulations or government policies. Building a viable business requires the ability to understand the shifting market and to gear-up in time to capture new opportunities, while keeping a strong core business.

The move of Donald Cant Watts Corke into project management in the early 2000s, PPPs, IC and IR work in the mid 2000s and then into the health advisory and strategic asset and facilities management sectors in 2012 and 2014 respectively, are instructive examples of how a business can retain a core service and utilise it to build a stronger, more vibrant and sustainable business.

Reading industry trends

The most significant of the changes for Donald Cant Watts Corke was the first; diversifying into project management from its core of quantity surveying.

As Glenn Corke notes:

'Over the years we provided a lot of advice as cost planners, that was really our role, to work alongside the client to ensure that the project was completed profitably. There weren't really any independent project managers in the 1970s—there were cost planners and the architects were overseeing the projects. By the late 1990s I could see the shift of various professionals in the construction space into project management roles as architects were being bypassed. I believed we could capture this space as a trusted advisor to clients.'

Glenn subsequently built-up a high-level team across a range of key disciplines and geographic areas and, by doing so, extended the firm's scope of business and deepened its commercial relationships.

Leveraging relationships

Leveraging existing, close relationships was a core part of the firm's development of its project management business and provided the platform for significant growth in this area. Long-term clients, such as the University of Melbourne and the Walter & Eliza Hall Institute, provided a sound base for shifting into health advisory services and extending its educational advisory and strategic asset and facilities management businesses.

Willingness to experiment

The same openness and drive to develop high-quality advisory services independent review/certification business when major public private partnership projects started to be undertaken in the mid 2000s. There were substantial risks in such work, something that deterred other companies in the field.

The move into health advisory and strategic asset and facilities management services is the latest move, developed after a combination of external hires, consultation with the sector, and engagement with the senior leadership team.

Building new teams on a stable foundation

For businesses to have longevity, they must continually build and grow new teams, while retaining knowledge and expertise.

Values and alignment

A critical component of team building is alignment of existing and new employees and managers to the values and culture of the organisation. For Donald Cant Watts Corke, its values underpin their vision to be a trusted advisor to clients.

Diversity

Building diversity into a consultancy business delivers greater input and knowledge into complex issues, opens up the possibility of exploring new areas at lower risk, facilitates extending relationships more broadly with existing clients, and reduces group-think/profession-think. In 2016, the firm has specialists in over 40 different areas.

Management capability

For businesses that are growing, there is also the need to develop management skills within the core group of leaders. Donald Cant Watts Corke is now implementing a highperformers' personal development, training and mentoring program for young high-achievers.

Fit-for-purpose corporate structure

Development of the right corporate structure is one of the most challenging aspects of a high performing growth business. The acquisition of such systems alone is not sufficient. Organisations need the internal capability to integrate these into the business and to ensure the systems are used to their full potential.

Independent advice

Leaders of business need to develop a structure that provides independent advice and input into discussions and different skill sets, networks, ideas and approaches to the business. A board can also deliver clearer governance practices and a focus on performance.

Knowledge sharing and dynamic systems

Creating dynamic teams

Creating an organisation that is truly knowledge-based requires the development and support of dynamic problem-solving teams across a wide range of skill and knowledge sets.

For Donald Cant Watts Corke, a key part of knowledge sharing has been the adoption of the Joined-Up thinking model. Joined-Up Thinking is an integrated approach to strategic and operational planning. The model breaks down geographic and professional silos and facilitates a much wider and deeper view of projects.

Growing a consultancy business in a rapidly changing business environment requires a range of skills; agility being a primary one. Where many businesses fail, is in building and **sustaining organisational clarity, stability and structure.**