Predicting Success

“Failure shall disappoint, but never discourage”

Success is the favorable outcome of an endeavor, which is planned and executed by a leader. The ability to predict at every stage if the strategies are still targeting the goal is crucial and often most difficult part of management and in life. There are always factors which are dynamic, uncertain and unpredictable; the decision making is complex maze of probabilistic analysis, exhaustively trying all possible outcomes. The study of various successful leaders is often inconclusive since there appear to be multitude of factors behind the success, often resembling no relation with one-another. It might seem that success can come through many reasons, ranging from detailed analytics to simple gut feeling or experience.

This article is an effort to reverse the process of analyzing success as a cause-effect, instead identify the basic factors that manifest themselves into various observable outcomes.

Factors influencing success

As one attempts to break down success into different reasons or components, and then classify them into primary or derivates, it approximately converges into three main factors.

1. Ability

The ability of an individual or organization is the core knowledge required to perform the assigned task or accomplish the business objective.

2. Motivation

Motivation is a set of forces that directs an individual or organization to the behavior that results in better job performance.

3. Opportunity

Opportunity is the presence of favorable external environment that supports the growth and success.

The right balance of all the three factors is crucial to success, it is analogous to the primary colors in perfect balance would create the bright light.

The three primary factors exist in the aether or field which creates the synergism between
them, which acts as a catalyst of success. One method to probe the presence of synergism between these factors is by eliminating one of them and observing its effect on others.

- **Lack of ability**: Opportunity gets unnoticed or unharnessed, de-motivation due to lack of confidence.
- **Lack of motivation**: Nothing can drive a person if there is no willingness to achieve something higher.
- **Lack of opportunity**: A full potential cannot be attained with just talent and willingness, if some form of opportunity doesn’t exist. A particular example can be seen during economic depression; the other two factors fail to make any immediate noticeable impact.

**Model for Predicting Success**

The proposed ‘success model’ in this section provides the application of the mentioned ‘success factors’ through different ‘leaders’.

**Differentiators**

Each of the factors can be further sub-divided by two differentiators:-

1. **Innate**: It is the very nature or the physics of each factor; it is internal to the existence of the factor.
   - Motivation x Innate = Intrinsic motivation
   - Opportunity x Innate = To seek an existing opportunity
   - Ability x Innate = Natural talent
2. **Acquired**: It is the external influence that provides the essential nourishment to strengthen each factor.
   - Motivation x Acquired = Extrinsic Motivation
   - Opportunity x Acquired = To create a new opportunity
   - Ability x Acquired = Learned skills

**Intrinsic Vs Extrinsic motivation**

Intrinsic motivation has its roots inside the individual; it satisfies the ego, sense of accomplishment or power. Extrinsic motivation is stimulus that is presented to the individual from outside in form of rewards or expectations. Intrinsic motivation for a team can be the challenging problem that they would like to solve together, while team awards to choose the best performing team is an extrinsic motivation tool. Similarly, intrinsic motivation of an organization can be the disruptive technology that it has created while extrinsic motivation is the pressure from board and shareholders to create more value. (See also - Employee)
**To seek or to create an opportunity**

Opportunities exist in the external environment, ‘to seek’ an opportunity requires scanning & analyzing the environment for the market segments that are not yet capitalized to full potential (environmental intelligence). While, ‘to create’ an opportunity requires establishing a new market segment, often by deploying innovative business, marketing strategies or technology (controlling the external environment). Creating an opportunity is often hard and rare, at both individual & organizational levels. (See also – Organization’s External Environment)

**Natural Vs Learnt Skills**

The natural talent is an inborn skill; it’s in the DNA, just like domination of physical characteristics by genetics, the brain also has similar pre-dispositions. However, it is the most controversial and forbidden topic, both socially & politically. Learnt skills on the other hand are welcomed since they emphasize on the value of effort, hard work and perseverance. This is the reason why trait theory of leadership is often discounted compared to all other leadership theories. The main reason is the difficulty of formulating a process to identify talent with high certainty. Thus the better and more accepted alternative is to pursue “bend it until it breaks” philosophy as the method of discovering the maximum potential.

The natural talent of an organization is its core competency, the initial vision of its founders. However, during its lifecycle, as it grows or ages, it has to adapt to changes by developing and diversifying into many products, that is the learning role of the organization. (See also – Leadership Skills)

**Factor Modifier – The Time**

Each of the ‘success factors’ in the model is dependent upon ‘time’, factors might grow or decay in their strength or usefulness with elapsed time. This is particularly more relevant in modern economy where the organizational lifecycles are shorter, having both higher rates of growth & decline. The reason for this shift is large number of new endeavors and exponential growth of both technology & human population. (See also – Organizational lifecycle and decline)

- The skill sets of the employees becomes obsolete within a decade after their graduation, unless there is constant re-learning of newer skills, it’s a deferred social & economic burden.
- Similarly in every economic cycle, new opportunities are created while old are phased out.
- Age of an employee or an organization is the single most factor adversely affecting its motivation.

**The Success Leaders**

The champions who can lead the path to an achievable success are the ‘success leaders’. The complexity of modern technology & environment requires creation of a leadership entity that comprises of various complementary skills.

- **Individual as Leader**: This entity class comprises of an individual with a goal, it can be a high school student aiming for college, or a CEO leading a company. Although an individual cannot operate in vacuum, without other supporting functions, the role and responsibilities are usually very independent. The individual has the ability to lead with sufficient sphere of control.
- **Group as Leader**: This entity class comprises of a group of individuals with
complementary skills, often joined in partnership to produce a desired product or outcome. Even though the group might have a task coordinator, all partners are equal stakeholders in overall decision making and direction. A married couple is one of the easiest examples of partnership of equals, yet complementary in roles but with common goals of a happier life. An open-source community is another example where different coders bring their own unique skills to develop a project.

**Organization as Leader:** This entity class comprises of a whole organization influencing the existing external environment domain, often making systemic changes to it. A large internet organization would try to bring various freeware and hardware to the masses, in attempt to reduce the digital divide and thus changing the way people might interact in future.

**Conclusion**

The abstract model for predicting success is presented in this article; this model can be extended to various applications ranging from self improvement, science, humanities, business etc. The model should be used to identify the different ingredients for success; create a plan to execute and assess the progress with time. The key is to strike a balance between the factors, and to work the inbuilt contradictions in each of them.

“The test of first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposite ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function. *F. Scott Fitzgerald*”