Keynote Paper:
Digital Age Corporate Leader Approaches in OBOR

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ABSTRACT
Different digital age corporate leaders follow different strategic life cycle solutions as they operate across differing complex global business environments. Here, each strategy likely requires agile (and sometimes dynamic) quality solutions. There is considerable scope to develop this next wave of quality safeguards – with the digital age span-of-quality extending throughout the corporate.

Keywords: Authentic, transformational, transactional, digital age, corporate leaders

1.   Introduction

Today corporate leaders are encountering digital age technology pressures to remodel and revamp their business structures and systems. However, corporates generally change incrementally. Such incremental corporate change often follows social, political, business settings or broader economic conditions settings, and over-time changes advance the corporate's capabilities and market reach.

In contrast, and across recent years, technologies have typically attempted to advance their structures and systems in exponential ways (Hamilton, 2016). For example Intel's chip memory improvement attempts to better Mohr's Law (a doubling in memory every 18 months). Similarly, producers of computers, mobiles, data and personal connectivities have pursued their advances in their complexities and individual consumer deliverables against such exponential target settings. Technology platforms such as Microsoft, Apple, Amazon, Google, Adobe, and Facebook have also advanced their digital deliverables at rates emulating exponential improvements.

Thus, as shown in Figure 1 technologies changes periodically over time move away the incremental corporate changes that normally arise. Figure 1's three coloured incremental change lines represent Reeves, Zeng and Venjara's (2015) normal three levels of corporate change approaches.
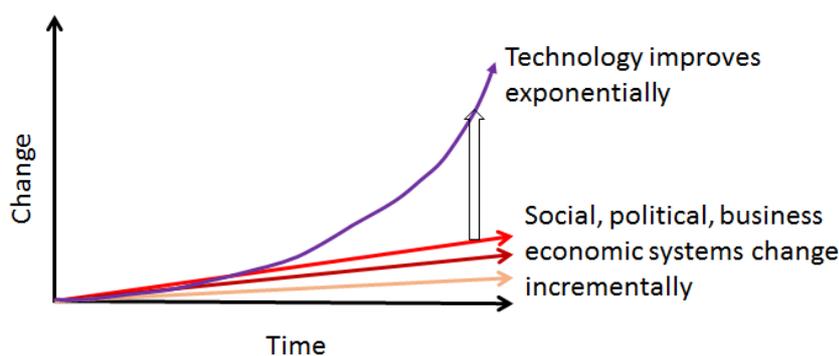

Figure 1: Rate of Corporate versus Technologies Change

In Figure 2 these three coloured incremental change lines are labelled and shown as relative profit deliverers over time. The self-tuning corporate approach adjusts the rates of corporate experimentation and advancement to fit business circumstances, but always aimed at generating strong, consistent profits matched to the stable or dynamic business situations. The second and adaptive corporate approach, involves a simpler approach where experimentation and advancement occur as-per-usual at a constant rate and also the corporate targets delivering further profits when operationalized. The third and classical approach, find the best answer to a key corporate problem and then executes it (Reeves, et al., 2015)
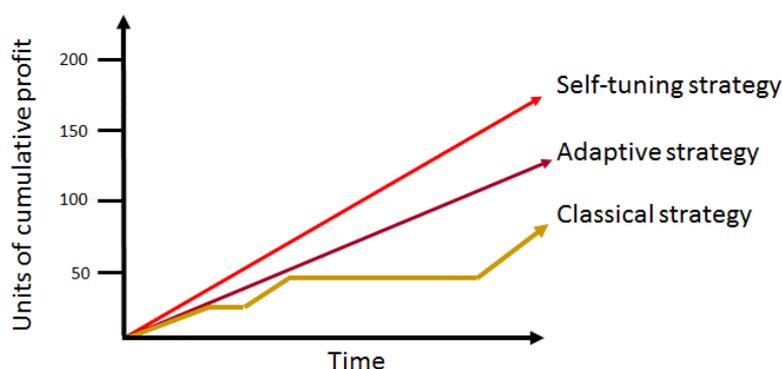
Figure 2: Differing Rates of Corporate Change (adapted from Reeves, et al., 2015)

At a point-in-time the gap between technologies advancement (typically a killer app like Apple's iCloud) and incremental change is sufficient that leading corporates realize their potential. They then learn to adopt, solve, and adapt this emergent technologies advancement (or killer app). The incorporation of this technologies advancement subsequently releases new waves of corporate change and new capabilities.

The vertical arrow between the straight lines and the curved line of Figure 1 represents a corporate's required jump to catch up with the technologies advancements, and to move away from their prior incremental change approach. This jump is a corporate disruptive change. Further, over-time, one positive corporate result is that corporate competitiveness can often be improved.

Over-time various technology advancements have life cycled (emerged, matured, and been superseded). Each new generation of technologies advancements has allowed adopting corporates to enjoy life-cycle financial benefits – before they take the next disruptive jump into another newly-emerging technologies advancement.

Across these technologies advancement progressions the life-cycle enjoyed by each has continuously shortened (Hamilton & Lynch, 2016). This has placed demands on corporates who decide to be early-adopters. Hence, these technology-leading corporates are becoming more agile, and more capable of remaining towards the technologies advancement horizon (or forefront). Here, such corporates are now incurring less years per life-cycle to derive the financial benefits from their innovations and product pricing premiums.

2.   Digital Disruption

In 2012 the digital age further crystalized. The capabilities of software to radically integrate other software allowed a new wave of technologies to develop and share intelligences. These radical suites of social-mobile-analytical-cloud (SMAC) technologies (Shelton, 2013) emerged across combinations of digitally-enabled devices. They created new ways to link, communicate, share, and intelligently mine data.

The SMAC technologies advancement is the most recent digital disruption (Hamilton & Lynch 2016). Digital disruption can sometimes be considered as the bringing together of human capital under a 'relational theories of identity change' (Utesheva, Simpson & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2016). The SMAC digital disruption has established leading corporate changes. This latest SMAC technologies advancement life-cycle has now largely superseded the former (2000- 2012) internet-enabled-PC's life-cycle.

3.   Upper and Lower Corporate Horizons

Reconsidering Figures 1 and 2 those corporates that do not jump across the digital divide stay in business by advancing their operations incrementally. Laggard corporates typically focus on unique, or niche, or a mass-consumer products.

Laggards are typically risk-adverse and conservative and they only engage technologies advancements long after they have been tried and proven as successful by other more innovative and technologies-adopting corporates. Thus the laggard's competitiveness remains through very-skilled, highly-efficient and precisely-targeted (authentic) leadership, and specifically because they often focused towards delivering the most-efficient, commodities-style products possible.

There is a risk to this laggard strategy. Laggards are likely to be left further behind if digital age technologies advancement life-cycles shorten further, and disruptive jumps occur more frequently.

Digital age corporate leaders move disruptively and that they continuously build on the capabilities gained from past disruptive technologies advancement life cycles perspective. Over time, where corporate leaders have been part of disruptive technologies advancement changes, their relative business productivity has positioned them, and moved them, progressively along the current upper-horizon life-cycle.

This upper-horizon life cycle follows the major, innovative, disruptive changes of digital/computational/technologies over-time. From the late 1960's, four suites of technologies integration life-cycles significantly moved corporate leaders beyond mainframe computing through to today's combined social-mobile-analytics-cloud (SMAC) computing solutions (Shelton, 2013). Each emergent life-cycle has disruptively allowed corporate leaders to pursue further 'blue ocean' productivity gains (Kim & Mauborgne, 2015) and to advance along their specific life-cycle.

Over time, each technologies advancement disruption and its subsequent life cycle first becomes more digitally productive as other corporates offer variant solutions and/or related digital technologies productivity flow-ons emerge and reach consumers (Reeves, Zeng & Venjara, 2015). As time progresses further each life cycle's leading-edge initiator advantages eventually erode as rival corporates discover, and unleash, the next disruptive digital life cycle solution. These competitive (and/or disruptive) shifts over-time form a progression of adaptive, more productive, beneficial, emergent technologies advancement life-cycle solutions.

The lower-horizon solid saw-tooth pathway represents the laggards of the corporate system. Laggards advance via incremental progressions as per Figure 2 and they observe each new technology advancement carefully before adopting the specific enhanced products of particular use to their business.

4.   Digital-age Corporate Leaders

Today digital age corporate leadership can exist in many forms. However three current leadership framework drivers are emerging that basically superimpose across the current (and relevant) leadership styles. These are the authentic, transactional, and transformational corporate leadership formats.

Authentic corporate leaders deliver actionable and corporate effective models with refined and understood patterns of internal deliverables – built through the corporate's self-awareness within its environment. Authentic corporate leaders work transparently and deliver balanced, moral consumer values (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Avolio, & Gardner, 2005; Tonkin, 2013).

Transactional corporate leaders establish, manage and standardize practices that generate corporate performance and the achievement of efficient corporate productivity goals. These corporate's pay strict attention to fault finding and the rectification of deviations. Transactional corporate leaders apply performance rules, overcome deviations, and reward effort (Bass, 1996; Avolio, Bass & Jung, 1999).

Transformational corporate leaders identify the need for change and inspire a new solution that challenges the corporate to deliver effective business renewal. Transformational corporate leaders aim to collectively accomplish of great things (Bass, 1990; Bass & Avolio, 1993; Bass, 1996).

Each of these three corporate model provides leadership frameworks that allow strategic-structuring/restructuring. Each corporate leadership format encompasses multiple possible competitive advantages – provided the corporate successfully harnesses (and deploys) its unique capabilities, technologies advancements.

5.   Digital-age Strategy and the Fourth Corporate Leaders approach

Tomorrow's leading-edge corporates continuously rebuilds, refines, and transforms their digital uniqueness. They competitively-plan their operations to incorporate new, chosen, strategically-targeted, digital age, leadership-positioning devices against their competitor environments, and they pursue blue ocean strategies. These approaches are different (and can be considered mutually exclusive). Hence, we display them at right angles to each other (Hamilton, Tee, & Prince, 2016) as shown in Figure 3.
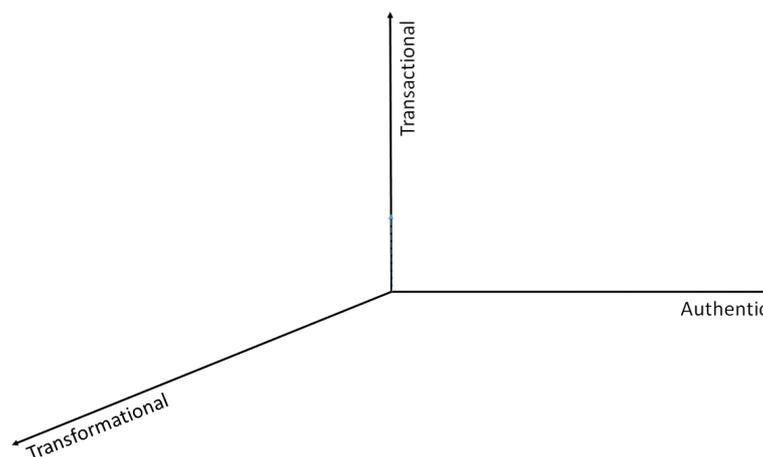

Figure 3: Today's corporate leadership approaches

The past, the now, and the future technologies advancements all suggest further corporate change is inevitable. These changes also suggest corporate jobs are likely to be short-term – with the nature of work being removed/changed in-line with technologies advancement life-cycles (as corporate competitive advantage grows, matures, and declines to the point of delivering little/inadequate value).

Understanding Figure 3 unleashes great scope for corporate leaders. These is another corporate leader approach to technologies advancement in the digital age. Here, corporate leaders should strategically and conjointly consider all three corporate leader approaches (and not be locked into one approach).

In the digital age they should reposition themselves to harness a complex set of targets (that likely encompass mixes of the above corporate leader approaches). This combined corporate leader approach delivers the fourth *digital age strategic positioning* approach when following tomorrow's technologies advancement disruptive life-cycles.

6.   Conclusion

Digital age corporate leaders follow different strategic life cycle solutions as they operate across differing complex global business environments. In the digital age, four corporate leader approaches exist: (1) transactional, (2) authentic, (3) transformational, and (4) digital-age.

For quality exchange groups (such as ICIT and TQMJ), this life cycle approach differentiation of corporate leader approaches also opens-up new fields of internal and external quality considerations and of quality safeguards. Here, each corporate leader strategy likely requires agile (and sometimes dynamic) quality solutions. There is considerable scope to develop a next wave of quality safeguards – interlocked with a digital age span-of-quality extending throughout the corporate.

 As a starting-point, these quality foci can group as: (1) effective business renewal systems (transformations), (2) efficient enduring performance systems (transactions) (Hamilton & Lynch 2016), and (3) delivering business-consumer service value networks (authentics) (Hamilton, 2007). These new digital-age qualities should only be applied towards the latest technologies advancement life-cycle, and they should continually-debated at this conference and beyond to draw out latest agile and dynamic quality solutions.

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Author' Background

*Prof. **John R. Hamilton** is Chair Professor of Management and Governance. He researches competitiveness, innovation and strategic futures. He has extensive corporate national (and international) leadership and management experience. He consults on online and/or offline engaging interactive environments, and develops capabilities for business-consumer real-time interfacing. Current research interests include: leadership, value-deliverance, social networks, corporate and virtual intelligences, cloud business scenarios, major-events management, tracking, and interactive learning. John's Acute Futures Group (AcuteFutures.com) deploys international R&D task teams (Hong Kong, Indonesia, Singapore, and Australia). Acute Futures unique value-deliverance systems create custom-built experiential skilling scenarios for global and futures-focused organizations.*