



CRITICAL EYE

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How to Win in a Changing Technological World

Advancing technology offers a multitude of options and just as many risks.

James Hallatt, Senior Vice President of the Oral Health Category at GlaxoSmithKline offers some tips on how to tackle tech



It is no secret that the world is changing at an accelerating rate. Every day there are technological advances that can enhance our lives as new ways are found to make things easier and simpler to do. At the same time, the risks are greater as has been amply demonstrated by the misuse of data and the speed with which trust can be lost.

And whether the change is for the good or not, it can be overwhelming either way and that's just when applied to our personal lives. In the world of business, the multitude of opportunities and threats can appear even more daunting, especially as each new wave of development seems shorter in its duration and more revolutionary in its impact than the last.

Here are seven observations on how business leaders can thrive in this ever-shifting landscape.

Tech is an Enabler

It's so important to be clear what you are trying to achieve with your business as opposed to a specific technology. This really needs to be carefully defined. That means being clear as to what success looks like in, say, five years, in simple language so everyone can understand it and with a few clear measures explained. This process is fundamental to provide a vision of success: where you want the business to be at a future point in time, that is realistic and achievable.

With this you have direction. Without it you won't know where you are going and so you can easily fall into the trap of thinking any road will get you there.

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Right to Win

The more difficult question is: how are you going to get there? Strategy overall is important but usually relatively easy to define. Delivering the strategy – and staying focussed on that delivery – is always the hard bit.

To define a strategy, simply speaking, a business has to properly understand what its potential customers want and then determine if there are market areas / niches / opportunities that are underexploited. A key question is to be clear as to whether the business has the capability to exploit these opportunities better than anyone else, which requires brutal honesty. If the answer is 'yes', then this gives you an area with the potential for your business to have a 'right to win'. If 'no', then you must decide if that capability can be reasonably – and efficiently – built.

Strategy is about making clear choices to achieve the vision. My assertion is about making certain your business understands that the choices you

make are ones where the purpose is to win. Within this, new technology may well be a way of delivering your strategy but it is not a strategy in itself.

Don't be Distracted by the 'Bright Shiny Things'

It's easy to be overwhelmed by today's myriad technological choices. Of course you can't keep up with it all, no one can. Everyone thinks they are behind in the new world, leaving businesses feeling vulnerable and so they chase new technologies simply because they look interesting (as an aside, all this anxiety is a consultant's dream, particularly because it is senior people who understand new technology the least and are most threatened by it).

The trick is to be choosy, to keep learning but most importantly to ask the obvious basic questions and keep asking them until you are satisfied. Questions such as: 'Does this really help us deliver our vision and align with our strategy?'; 'Is my customer really going to be interested in whatever it is the business is offering?'; and 'Can we monetise it?'

Then try the few most likely things to succeed, learn fast – or fail fast – and stay open minded.

So much of this is marvellously measurable. The trick is to try things and quickly learn what is working and what isn't.

Rethink Organisational Design

Organisation on its own does not mean you will win. What matters is how your organisation operates so it has the best chance of delivering the strategy. However, making the organisation clearly aligned to your strategy so it's >



meeting real external needs, not the imagined internal ones, is challenging. It has to be done in a fashion that makes it as easy as possible for middle management as it's they, after all, who are the ones tasked with getting stuff done.

The changes should be designed to minimise the internal reporting and processes of a business, thereby maximising the external 'make it happen' orientation.

A simple and efficient organisation is obvious but rare.

Find the Best Talent

Perhaps this is really rule number one. Get outstanding people; treat them well; pay them more than fairly; ensure they have the capability aligned with the 'right to win' strategy; maximise that capability with world class training; empower them....and let them go for it.

People want to do great work that is rewarding. Management's job is to choose the best, train them well and let them go at it; support them when it doesn't work and recognise them when it does. Good people, with great capability, who are motivated and empowered, give you a fighting chance.

Moreover, investing in developing people individually will drive up capability.

Create a Sense of Purpose

Investing in people has to go hand-in-hand with investing in them collectively. This means driving engagement across the team – human beings, with their contrasting personalities, preferences, strengths and foibles, mean that active

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care has to be taken to bring them together and align them behind the purpose of the organisation.

If you build a strategy that is underscored by a credible right to win, you ought to be able to harness this and galvanise everyone in the company so they are moving in the same direction.

Driving engagement is a constant management task, not a once year effort at an event.

Cultivate a Winning Mentality

It probably sounds counter intuitive, but you want consistency in your people in a fast-changing world, rather than always seeking to bring new people in.

Good people, who are well-trained and expected to stay in their role for a proper stint, whereby they are genuinely responsible for their results, will be even more serious about delivering them. Too many organisations change their people every couple of years – it's too quick and leads to short term decisions. Also, the new people who then come in need to make their mark and change what the old people were doing. What matters is winning year after year.

Perhaps 'consistent winning' is the hardest task of all in any field. It would

seem that every organisation has cycles of performance – the trick is to maximise the up cycles and have them last as long as possible. Then, on a down cycle, be quick to analyse what is going wrong – do it honestly – and make clear changes that address the issues.

Keeping management in place for a minimum of three years allows for consistent delivery and ownership.

So, the world may be changing fast, but the principles for success remain. It's about focussing on what matters in a consistent way, supported by great people. This will give you the best chance of navigating through disruption, so that you find success in a way that can be sustained for years to come. ■



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James currently leads GlaxoSmithKline's global Oral Health & Skin Health Categories. He has over twenty five years' experience with the company, leading businesses in Asia, Continental Europe and the UK. He also spent several years running two of GSK's global brands.

James is an Internationalist with a rich background in Consumer Marketing and General Management. He is a strong leader with an effective mix of strategic flair combined with the capability to 'make it happen'.

James enjoys spending time with his family and is an ardent supporter of Wasps Rugby Club.

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