focus

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Cultivate **strategic doubt**

The challenge

We base our decisions and thinking on a certain number of convictions. These convictions help us take efficient action without constantly having to ask ourselves basic questions, such as: To what are our customers sensitive? What must we keep an eye on to be successful? Etc. Most often, such underlying convictions are forged upon a relevant analysis of the situation. The problem is that, as time goes by, this relevance may diminish. Companies must be aware of this risk to avoid being blinded by an obsolete vision of their environment and to maximize the chances of seizing emerging opportunities.

Some safeguards against strategic blindness

Regularly challenging the validity of convictions helps to determine when some may need to be changed.

QUESTIONS TO ASK	SOME PRACTICES TO FEED THIS BENEFICIAL DOUBT
What do we believe? Why do we do what we do? Explicitly articulating the convictions behind strategic choices makes it possible to become aware of assumptions that deserve to be confirmed or amended.	**Periodically auditing convictions**, for example with the leadership team or the entire organization, helps people to become aware of their thought routines. It also makes it possible to collectively identify broadly shared principles of action and points of divergence. For example: • What are the main aims and values of the company (or the team)? • Upon what is the current success of the company (or team) built? • What should we monitor to be successful tomorrow? • What are our most important current and future markets? • Which competitors should we watch closely?
Are these convictions and practices still fully relevant? Deliberately challenging your framework of action will keep you from being lulled into complacency by day-to-day obligations and emergencies.	**Asking thought-provoking questions** is a good way to take a fresh look at the convictions which are otherwise, by definition, often perceived to be self-evident. For example: • What would our customers do if we suddenly could no longer deliver our leading product? • On what technologies or management principles are our production practices founded? Do any of our competitors do things completely differently? • What explains the business success of our competitors? • Of what are we proud? Why doesn't this convince some prospective customers or consumers? In addition to this subjective analysis, **talk with industry experts and key suppliers and partners** to compare your convictions with other perspectives.
Are there things that surprise us or that we have trouble explaining? Paying attention to what appears dissonant, even events that appear trivial, is the best means to identify emerging shifts early on.	For example: • The quality of your products is superior to that of your competitors, but you have more and more trouble getting a price that reflects that difference. • You are decreasingly solicited spontaneously. • You have just lost two choice prospects back to back. **Keeping an updated list of these weak signals** helps to keep us from missing important—though perhaps diffuse—information due to our tendency to ignore that which goes against our established convictions. **Broadly communicating business intelligence** or specific market trend information (e.g. contracts won by competitors, new players in your environment, etc.) also gives people the means to develop their vigilance and critical acumen.