



EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES

Abbreviated Backgrounders for Busy Managers

THE BOARD WORKSHOP



Harrison Executive Summaries are extracted from detailed Backgrounders based on our experience in client assignments. These Backgrounders are available on request.

THE BOARD WORKSHOP

1. Introduction

One of the key functions of Senior Management is to provide **leadership** and **vision** for the business. Typically, a great deal of energy is expended on the issue of **mission statements**, or **vision and value statements**, but without an equivalent attention to the strategic and directional input which is needed to achieve these visions.

One of the most common complaints of Senior Management teams is the lack of opportunity to think about the business and **where it is going**. Even Board meetings can become distracted by “*fire-fighting*” and crisis management, rather than discussing longer term strategies. Statements of **business objectives** are frequently unclear and unhelpful, such as:

maximise profits on a year-by-year basis

we aim to be the best in the industry

embrace world best practice

second-to-none in the market place

*we are in the communications/energy/leisure (or other “**buzz-word**”) business*

2. The Senior Management Workshop - A More Practical Approach

To overcome the problems highlighted above, and to create a significant opportunity to review the Corporate objectives, and strategic direction of the business, we have developed **Senior Management Workshops**. The objective is to review systematically and objectively the current goals and status of the business, the **problems** and **opportunities** which face us, and to **facilitate inputs** by all the relevant players.

The Workshop is generally attended by the **whole top management** team and is made realistic and practical by the **actual decision making** that occurs. It is not a training session, but an action-oriented meeting which produces useable **output**.

We have found that it is more effective if there are at least **two external members**, who are professionally experienced, to ensure that traditional assumptions, attitudes and opinions are challenged and either proved or discarded. One of these external facilitators should take the **Chair**, with the other **documenting** the meeting as it proceeds. Alternatively, one of the attendees may be delegated the task of documenting our discussions.

3. The Agenda

A carefully and individually constructed **agenda** is needed for each client situation; an example is shown in the **attachment** to this backgrounder. We facilitate discussion on the items listed, and when statements are made, they are challenged for proof. If proof is not available, such statements are set to one side for further research, so that the **flow** of the meeting is maintained. Sometime, the meeting is preceded by a **marketing audit**, or **Trade Survey**, so that evidence is readily to hand. At the very least, a thorough briefing is needed. Conclusions are drawn at each stage of the process, firmly where possible, or to indicate the research which is needed in less clear areas. At the end of the workshop, it is important to clarify what **decisions** have been reached, and the **actions** which need to follow.

4. Practical Aspects

A workshop of this nature normally lasts for one or two days (maximum), and frequently, a **series** of workshops is needed, as there is not enough time or data to reach decisions on all items. Sometimes, the best solution is to hold an annual series of two, three or four workshops before the beginning of the company **planning cycle**.

We have also found that it is best to hold such meetings away from company premises to **avoid distractions**; furthermore, new and unfamiliar surroundings frequently stimulate creative thought and discussion.

It should be noted that the **Senior Management Workshop** differs from a normal Board meeting or management planning meeting in a number of ways:

it focuses entirely on the future rather than current performance
it involves the total top management team so that decisions can be taken
it lasts longer than the average board/management meeting
external facilitators play a significant role
if held off-site, creative thinking is stimulated

The **external facilitators** perform an important role in these meetings, which includes:

chairman
sounding board for discussion purposes
devils advocate to challenge assumptions
clarification and summarising of key issues
overall process control
provision of the framework and agenda
informed inputs on best practice and wider industry perspectives
documentation of progress

5. Summary

We have had successful experience with **Senior Management Workshops** in fields as diverse as pharmaceuticals, public services, engineering, fast moving consumer goods, beverages, grocery and transport services.

Although the detailed agenda and process differs significantly in each case, such Workshops do provide an effective mechanism for deciding the **Corporate Marketing objectives and strategies**, and providing vision and direction for the business.

ATTACHMENT - AGENDA (Very Broad and Generic Example)

(The Agenda is always highly tailored to the Client situation and needs)

- 1. Review of Current Corporate Objectives:**
 - ❖ *marketing*
 - ❖ *financial*
 - ❖ *growth*

- 2. Discussion on where the market / channel map is going**
 - ❖ *trends*
 - ❖ *implications for suppliers*
 - ❖ *best practice data from elsewhere (eg US Home Centers)*

- 3. The Corporate Marketing Vision:**
 - ❖ *what business are we in?*
 - ❖ *what profits do we want to make?*
 - ❖ *how fast do we want to grow?*

- 4. Review of Current Marketing Strategies:**
 - ❖ *market penetration*
 - ❖ *market development*
 - ❖ *product development*
 - ❖ *diversification, acquisition, licensing, or other*

- 5. Brainstorming Session and Innovation / Incubation**
 - ❖ *generation of ideas*
 - ❖ *assessment criteria and review*

- 6. Analysis of Opportunities, Threats, Strengths and Weaknesses:**
 - ❖ *products*
 - ❖ *pricing*
 - ❖ *distribution*
 - ❖ *advertising*
 - ❖ *promotion*
 - ❖ *sales force*

- 7. Specification of Further Information Required**
 - ❖ *and action plans to obtain it*

- 8. Redefinition of Objectives and Strategies**
 - ❖ *if necessary*

- 9. Setting of Action Programmes**
 - ❖ *activities*
 - ❖ *responsibilities*
 - ❖ *timings*