The Patience Spectrum: From Insight to Execution

By John Adams

At my core, I, like many leaders, find myself to be highly patient and mentoring in some situations, while impatient in others. I consider this, as does Daniel McAuley in his article 'The Paradox of Patience', to be a key component of effective leadership, as well as a critical cornerstone for organizations that are successful innovators consistently delivering strong organic growth. Patient leadership is a priority in critical situations where the ability to influence the outcome is minimal, either in the immediate or foreseeable future. Think COVID-19. Similarly, it is a virtue in situations where the ability to influence the outcome is very high, but the impact will be realized later in time. Think SpaceX and Tesla. Impatience, however, is truly a virtue in situations that can be controlled and have a high sense of urgency. Think project execution.

I am not alone in this perspective, as noted in the famous book 'Good to Great' by James C. Collins, in which he recounted a quote by James Stockdale, a US Navy Commander in Vietnam, and PoW for 7 ½ years:

"…You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end — which you can never afford to lose — with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be."

I have led and facilitated numerous growth initiatives in industries ranging from high tech to industrials to health care services, with stakeholders ranging from short term equity investors looking to capitalize in the near-term, to long-term investors committed to cultural change. Across the spectrum, the businesses that have seen strong core growth are the ones that are able to be patient during the innovation cycle and execute at blistering speed with high precision in the deployment phases.

How is this done?

Quite simply, the organizations that have figured out that innovation and problem-solving are one in the same, and built upon that as a cultural premise, are the leaders of today. Take the iPhone as an example. Prior to the iPhone, it was necessary to carry a PDA, a telephone with texting ability, a computer, a GPS, and an iPod, at a minimum, to meet the same functional requirements. The brilliance of Apple and Steve Jobs was two-fold: Articulating the problem in the context of the customer experience and developing and leveraging technology to solve the problem. That sequence is critical – defining the problem before engaging in solution development.

In problem solving, we talk about 70% of the effort being focused on defining the problem, and the balance on solving it. The same holds true for innovation. Defining the problem involves true start-to-end understanding of our customer's value streams and user experiences, and identification of the core wastes and pain points in those experiences. The use of Voice-of-the-Customer to validate the learnings and gain consensus on the specific problem definition and root causes is critical to alignment on the top innovation priorities aligned to the business strategy. From there, the application of rigorous lean product development systems is critical to manage and mitigate risk on the front end of the program, while clear definition and execution of project plans and Obeya initiatives are core to the successful delivery of top priority growth programs.

Growth can be achieved through a systematic value stream approach to innovation in three distinct phases: discover, develop, and deliver, driving alignment and focus on the tasks that will create value. Trust the process and reap the rewards.

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BACKGROUND

John has held executive and leadership roles with public and private equity backed companies including Teradyne, Danaher, Rego, Coveris, and TC Transcontinental. More than half of his career has been spent in General Management and Senior Vice-President roles leading transformational change through the use of growth tools and lean operating principles.

During his early career as a design engineer, John was a lead mechanical design engineer on Teradyne's transformational J750 development team, where he learned first-hand of the impact of disruptive technology on markets. Successive leadership roles based in Asia and the US gave John a broad understanding of how to navigate cultural differences to deliver results in global teams. Subsequent to Teradyne, John Spent the past 10+ years at Danaher, Coveris, and Transcontinental Advanced Coatings, applying and refining strategic planning, commercialization, and lean tools to accelerate core growth, build high performing teams, and deliver best in class profitability. John holds a BS in Mechanical Engineering from Worcester Polytechnic Institute, and an MS in Manufacturing Engineering and an MBA from Boston University.

INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE

Semiconductor Equipment, Test & Measurement, Automotive, Power Distribution, Metering, Industrial Controls, Mining, Oil & Gas, Electronics, Industrial and LNG Gas, Medical (Advanced Wound Care), Energy Storage, Continuous Urethane Film Casting and Coating, and Contract Manufacturing.

LEAN EXPERIENCE

Building/Installing Problem Solving & Kaizen Cultures, M&A/Due Diligence, Acquisition Integration, Strategic Planning & Policy Deployment, Sales Force Efficiency & Effectiveness Tools, Customer Market segmentation/ strategy, marketing excellence, Situational Leadership, EBITDA focused operational improvements, 6S & Visual Management, Standardized Work, Daily Management Installation and Processes, Value Analysis & Engineering, 3P, Accelerated Product Development Tools.