

SOUTHWESTERN ASSEMBLIES OF GOD UNIVERSITY
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STRATEGIC THINKING, PLANNING & ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

LDR 5313-531

INSTRUCTOR:

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ASSIGNMENT: Book Synthesis Paper. Predictable Success by Les McKeown

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BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ENTRY

McKeown, L. (2010). *Predictable Success: Getting Your Organization on the Growth Track—And Keeping It There*. Greenleaf Book Group Press.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Les McKeown helped start over forty businesses in five years. Some of these include PR agencies, computer and technology companies, and owning the Pizza Hut Master Franchise for Ireland, with the initial intent to open twenty locations (McKeown, 2010, p. xii) and launching that number of ventures catalogs him as a serial entrepreneur. As described in the book, he is also a consultant that has helped hundreds of organizations identify their cultural rhythms to become companies that grow. McKeown has traveled the world consulting for companies of all sizes, from enormous transnationals to boutique design agencies. He first developed the framework for Predictable Success when he started a venture to help people start businesses in Northern Ireland (McKeown, 2010, p. xiii).

CONTENT SUMMARY

McKeown addresses the need for all organizations, regardless of size, to evaluate the life cycle stage in which they operate to continue pursuing intentional growth. The book describes the seven life cycle stages companies can enter. The categorization describes the optimal life cycle stage as Predictable Success.

The first three life cycle stages are “Early Struggle,” “Fun,” and “Whitewater.” In these stages, the organization is growing (McKeown, 2010, p. 16). In the beginning, the organization will discover what it takes to reach viability by establishing a market, how to keep expanding its sales, and enter into the early stages of systematization.

In the Early Struggle stage, the organization focuses on launching. The two main challenges of this stage are having enough cash to launch successfully and establishing a market (McKeown, 2010, p. 16). One of the main objectives in this stage is to get out of it as soon as possible (McKeown, 2010, p. 36). Success lies beyond this stage, and though many romantic bootstrapping entrepreneurs will say otherwise, the organization needs to find its way out of this stage to become successful.

The second growth stage is “Fun.” The survival pressure is off as the organization has enough cash to pursue more business endeavors (McKeown, 2010, p. 18). The organization finds a market, and many opportunities for sales happen, even to the point where the organization is willing to customize its products to make deals. The organization will pursue any contract it can generate. The environment is exciting; top sales representatives emerge, and everyone in the organization admires them as the company focuses on creating sales (McKeown, 2010, p. 58). On the downside, successful employees during this stage need to learn to cope with ambiguity (McKeown, 2010, p. 58). Continuous growth in Fun inevitably brings the organization to Whitewater (McKeown, 2010, p. 58).

Whitewater is the third stage in growth. The complexity brought on by the number of sales in the Fun stage creates a need for more systems (McKeown, 2010, p. 19). At this point, expectations change from what they were in the Fun stage; the focus in healthy organizations shifts for a moment from making sales to creating systems that can accommodate more significant numbers of sales. Businesses that find themselves in trouble in this stage do not often realize they have left the Fun phase and are now in Whitewater, and thus keep their focus on sales at the expense of the systems in the organization (McKeown, 2010, p. 64). Organizations must strengthen their operations to match their sales to get out of Whitewater.

Predictable Success is the peak organizational performance stage. In this stage, growth is constant, and systems are in place, but those systems do not bury the organization in bureaucracy. Quite the opposite, those systems propel it forward. The fact that there are now more robust systems does not eliminate the organization's entrepreneurial spirit (McKeown, 2010, p. 81). The strategies the organization began to implement in Whitewater will help it set and regularly achieve goals in Predictable Success (McKeown, 2010, p. 81). In this stage, when the organization encounters barriers and makes mistakes, it will have the right tools to adjust and respond to those snags (McKeown, 2010, p. 82). At this point, the organization has a tension to manage to continue in Predictable Success; it needs frequent adjustments to stay on course and new goals to avoid the trap of feeling as if it has arrived at its destination (McKeown, 2010, p. 84). Lastly, organizations in the Predictable Success stage have effective cross-functional teams that enable the company to operate at total capacity without any silos maximizing team engagement and profits (McKeown, 2010, p. 86).

The last three organizational life cycle stages are "Treadmill," "The Big Rut," and "Death Rattle." In these stages, the organization is in decline (McKeown, 2010, p. 16). These stages happen because of an overdependence on systems, exhibiting rigidity at every level and needing reinvention if it is to survive the decline stages.

In the Treadmill stage, organizations become overdependent on policies, systems, and procedures created during the Whitewater stage (McKeown, 2010, p. 20). When an organization slides into Treadmill, it loses to some degree the ability to innovate, grow, and share the truth regarding sharing bad news or learning from mistakes (McKeown, 2010, pp. 102-103). If organizational leadership understands they are in Treadmill in a timely fashion, the organization can transition back to Predictable Success by reintroducing creativity and risk-taking (McKeown,

2010, p. 111). However, the company is also one step away from falling into the next decline stage (McKeown, 2010, p. 105).

The Big Rut is the second organizational life cycle stage of decline. At this point in the organization's history, it turns its focus from results to processes and administration (McKeown, 2010, p. 21). In addition, the organization shifts its attention inwards instead of the customer (McKeown, 2010, p. 118). Due to amassing resources in the growth stages, the organization will often live off the surplus, sometimes extending this stage for decades if the right capital is in place (McKeown, 2010, p. 121). Unfortunately, unless a seismic event occurs, such as new legislation impending on current business, or another significant event, the organization will remain complacent and keep declining (McKeown, 2010, p. 123).

The last organizational life cycle stage is Death Rattle. When organizations get to this stage, they will not survive (McKeown, 2010, p. 21); the stage in which management could have prevented Death Rattled was back in the Treadmill stage or the Big Rut stage – though that is often unlikely (McKeown, 2010, p. 126). The end happens either by bankruptcy or fire selling its assets (McKeown, 2010, p. 128).

Lastly, the author proposes three phases for organizations to remain in the Predictable Success stage. In the first phase, the organization needs to create a decision-making system by creating alignment, cross-functional teams, and a fluid organizational chart that adapts to make the systems necessary to go from Whitewater to Predictable success (McKeown, 2010, p. 192). Second, once an organization has gone into the Treadmill stage, it must install the correct people to dismantle its over-systematization (McKeown, 2010, p. 192). Finally, the organization must create and foster innovation and risk-taking at the lowest levels of the organization (McKeown, 2010, p. 192).

EVALUATION

The author makes a case for the viability of the principles in Predictable Success because he has installed them repeatedly in many organizations. Because McKeown has launched and managed so many different companies, he has familiarity with serial entrepreneurship and thus speaks from experience. The reader could perceive the content from this book differently if the author had not had many failures. But because the companies that McKeown has led have had many shortcomings and successes in launching and staying in Predictable Success, he speaks from experience about each life cycle stage. McKeown also has international experience in his business dealings, making his advice applicable across geographic and cultural barriers.

The author assumes that most people reading the book might be unable to differentiate when their organization crosses each life cycle stage. His assumptions are legitimate, as most organizational leaders focus on their business's day-to-day operations and seldom assess their organization's health from a structural and strategic place. Nevertheless, the author does an outstanding job of breaking down his points of view, examining each argument, and answering criticism that could arise from his opinions.

Predictable Success principles provide vital insights for growth in large or small settings. Although McKeown's central realization that the right people are the key to success (McKeown, 2010, p. xiii) is not revolutionary, the way he arranges that key component around his framework is significant. As Christians, we know of the value of humans because of *imago Dei*, so it is worth reading when a business book emphasizes the importance of people over systems. In the end, Predictable Success is about placing the right people in the right roles and letting them make strategic decisions based on the main organizational goal. The treatment of the subject has real depth, as the author examines every life cycle stage down to micro components. The author also

proposes an in-depth solution for organizations struggling to reach Predictable Success. Readers can apply the principles from this book in a wide variety of settings. These insights will particularly benefit leaders new to conversations on organization culture and health. Many of the main concepts in the book apply directly to the struggles churches face, as the author mentions how these principles apply in non-profit organizations.

INTEGRATION

Because leading an organization through the life cycles presented in Predictable Success involves dealing with people, the leaders undertaking the task of leading an organization to the optimal stage of Predictable Success need to work on themselves first. Self-aware leaders know how their shadow affects their interactions with others (Scazzero, 2015, p. 80). Therefore, organizations that reach Predictable Success need self-aware people who spend quality time looking beneath the surface of their life. Ministry leaders who cannot control their insecure behaviors, such as comparison, competition, compulsion, excessive control, and similar others, will inevitably implode under the weight of trying to take their church to peak organizational performance.

Congregationally, pastors and ministry leaders can apply the principles of Predictable Success to create a new values-based culture. The principles in this book could help churches remain focused on what is essential and encompass the church's mission, the Great Commission. So often, churches in the Treadmill stage are there because they have created many disjointed ministry offerings in their quest to reach people. Instead of using all their ministries to pull forward towards one unified objective, every ministry and group inside the church pulls their way, creating sideways energy. By assessing their ministries, churches can streamline what they offer to their faith community to grow, thus concentrating on less but more effective ministries.

Of course, everything included in this book cannot apply to all churches' varied circumstances. Still, the principles outlined in Predictable Success are a great starting point for assessing organizational culture and knowing what changes bring the organization to optimal performance. It is of the utmost importance that churches learn to apply these principles because they do not deal with mere sales; they deal with people's lives. Suppose businesses working through economic challenges use these teachings. They only care about the financial aspect. How much more should the church embrace these principles? Churches could benefit by creating greater effectiveness if they focused on applying these principles to develop optimal organizational performance to bring people to Jesus.

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Deeply Transform Your Church, Team, and the World (Special edition). Zondervan.