
Preface

To nail down a competitive advantage, your organization needs to do or create something distinctive that customers find valuable. In other words, you can't be great if you just do what everyone else does—you have to do something unique and out of the ordinary. If you want to stand out above your competitors, you can't just be “normal.”

Nowadays, most organizations claim that their *people* are their competitive advantage. But most organizations build workforces that really are not very different from their competitors'. Most organizations, it turns out, treat their people just about the same as most other organizations. In fact, companies deliberately benchmark their people practices to the industry average. Not surprisingly, there is nothing particularly distinctive about most organizations' workforces and nothing the organization produces is particularly noteworthy from a customer standpoint—nothing very strange.

Put these together, and what situation do you have? You have organizations hoping to achieve extraordinary results with a solidly ordinary, normal workforce.

Pssst. Listen. I'll tell you a secret since you took the time to read this preface. If your competitive advantage depends on your people creating something valuable and distinctive, then your workforce can't be normal. To get your extraordinary results, you are going to have to build yourself a workforce that is extraordinary in a way that customers care about. To build a great organization, you need to build a strange workforce.

This book tells you why and how you should build your strange workforce. I present an approach called the *Strange Workforce Value Chain*, which is useful for two reasons:

- To develop your story about how your workforce is going to make customers want to give their money to you and not your competitors.
- To measure and manage the extent to which your workforce is helping make your extraordinary story come true.

So, read this book to get both the vision and the tools for building a strange workforce and getting your competitive advantage. Here is how to read and use this book:

- Read it the whole way through once. You'll see lots of suggested activities and meetings along the way—just read them, but don't try to do them the first time through. Make sure you don't skip the last chapter on measurement. The processes in this book place a heavy emphasis on measurement and metrics, so to engage in the activities you'll really need a process for measuring fuzzy concepts.
- Once you read the book one time, you can see which suggested activities are what you and your organization need. You can think about who in your organization will help you on the quest for a strange workforce. Then you can go back and re-read the needed sections again and start to make it happen in your organization.

Just in case you are reading this book while standing in an airport right now and you need to put down it down to run and catch your flight, here is the most basic logic you need to move forward:

Great organizations possess a
Sustained Competitive Advantage



They get it by creating and delivering something to the market that is
Valuable, Rare, and Hard to Imitate



Creating and delivering this value demands the disciplined obsession of a
Strange Workforce



And the way to build and focus a strange workforce is by using
**Strategic Measurements and
Strange Workforce Architecture**

Figure P.1 The basic logic of a strange workforce: Why you want one, how you get one.