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Building structure & restructuring your brand

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First, I'll like to thank Pastor Tola Odutola for inviting me once more to speak at this annual seminar. It's an honor to be invited to share experiences and knowledge.

Today, we're going to be looking at structure. We shall also be looking at branding. Our topic of deliberation is, "Building structure and restructuring your brand." To be honest, it's hard to accommodate the two within a framework, and especially not in the amount of time allotted. In management science the two are hardly ever linked. I shall however be attempting the equivalence of a modern miracle by showing the logical linkage between the two. Let's begin.

The first thing you need to note is that structuring a business, or an organization is an imperative, it is not optional. Structuring goes to the very heart of the blueprint of an organization. It determines success, codifies failure and regulates growth. Simpliciter, structuring has to do with the clear definition of roles within an organization, the integration of the parts into a cohesive whole so the organization can deliver a set of objectives efficiently. That statement however assumes what I



term “unification fundamentals.” Think of a federal republic. The federating states must have binding fundamentals. There must be an agreement on concept and principles. Without it they cannot properly federate. Let me illustrate with a bit of my personal history.

In the year 2000, I fell terribly ill. Alder Consulting was very young at this time. The staffing was even younger. The company was inchoate. I had had a minor surgery, an appendectomy, which did go well. I was scheduled to leave the hospital within the week but then another ailment came calling. Diseases do that. A lesser disease often serves as John the Baptist to a more virulent disease, heralding the dawn of a new regime of sickness. The only problem was, we were now dealing with a ghost disease. Doctors and specialists couldn't define it. They couldn't agree among themselves. They battled over my diagnosis despite the copious amount of blood drawn for tests and analyses. Those doctors drew more blood than Dracula. I would end up spending three months in that hospital. I was so ill I sent an instruction to my lawyer to prepare my will. In search of therapeutic amelioration, I packed a bag and decided to travel the world. I needed rest for my soul. I travelled to London, and from London I flew to Rome. I recall vividly that



my hotel was right on the street where the police department dedicated to the Mafia was located. But I didn't meet any godfather. I went to the Vatican. I didn't meet the Pope either. While I was in Rome my best friend called me from Spain. He's a medical doctor and was vacationing in Spain. I flew to Alicante, spent a few days with him. From Alicante I flew to Bilbao to appreciate the deconstructivist architectural masterpiece by Frank Gehry, the Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao. From there I left for Barcelona. Then I flew to Athens, moved onward to Venice, freighted myself to Milan... I don't know how I did it, but I somehow found myself at a beach hotel in Accra, Ghana. I found the waves of the sea soothing especially at night. From there I flew to Senegal. I used Senegal as launchpad to Cape Verde. In Cape Verde I fell terribly ill and flew back to Lagos. From the Lagos airport I drove straight back to the hospital. I was so ill I never thought I'd return to Alder Consulting. I couldn't work for a year. I just couldn't.

But here's the miracle. Here's the point I'm trying to make, the reason I gave you my travelog. Alder Consulting survived despite my absence. The company survived because:



1. I wasn't the sole signatory to the account.
2. We had worked out a collegial system for handling briefs.
3. I was not the sole face of the organization.
4. The enterprise wasn't domiciled in me.
5. Everyone's role and function was well defined.
6. The company had a defined set of values and a corporate philosophy we all subscribed to – the ethos of the firm.

Without a proper structure the organization couldn't have survived. There was of course the grace of God, but consultants don't talk about God. We focus on reason and logic. Grace is not logical.

From the story I just told you we can take out a number of lessons. There is a mindset configuration those who lead organizations ought to have. It doesn't matter if the organization is a business, a church, or an NGO, you must be mindful of the following:

1. There is something called keyman risk. The scriptural principle relating to this is, strike the shepherd and scatter the sheep. There's keyman risk if without you the system cannot survive, and the organization goes down. You



must work towards eliminating keyman risk. Keyman risk is particularly prevalent in African organizations. Hardly do you have businesses that survive the demise of the founder. If you want your organization to survive you, don't be the Alpha and Omega. Don't be the Great I am, be the Great I'm Not. Have a vision for the future.

2. A leader must not be a bottleneck in his organization. You're a bottleneck if nothing can be done without your approval, if you have to sign off on everything, vet everything. Since the efficiency of a system is determined by the inefficiencies at bottlenecks within the organization, the leader's inefficiency becomes the organization's metric of efficiency. There are necessary and unnecessary bottlenecks. Necessary bottlenecks include quality control and accounting systems. But if the leader is an unnecessary bottleneck the organization can only go as fast as he treats issues. He holds up the entire system with his pace. Worse, a terrible culture will emerge from such a system. A sycophantic culture develops. There will be spies reporting on everybody in the organization. Local leadership will be undermined.



3. It is wise to encourage teamwork in your organization. The more silos exist in the organization the less effective the system is. I'll tell you a story.

As a young lawyer I was saddled with a case of a delinquent loan transaction of one of our clients, a bank belonging to the south western states in Nigeria. I needed documentation to build my case, so I went to the corporate headquarters. The building was four floors. I soon discovered each floor was an ethnic conclave, one ethnic group per floor. The Ekitis occupied one floor, the Ijesas occupied another floor, the Ondo another floor, the Oyo another floor. Each floor was manned by a general manager who refused to employ from outside his ethnicity. The loan documents were lost in the labyrinth of organizational ignorance and ethnic shortsightedness. The floors refused to work together. I had to go to the court archives to build a case from the filings of the defendant. Teamwork matters. Eliminate silos in your organisation.

4. You have to develop a management system. Leadership is not the same as management. Management does not rely on aura or persuasive skills. In fact, a good manager



may be absolutely boring. But he (or she) understands the system, abides by the system, follows procedure, is regulated by the system. His latitude is within the ambit of the system. The regulatory protocol of a system can be as simple as no letter goes out without a secondary signatory. That instruction as basic as it is, is at the heart of an ethics case that is threatening to drown the reputation of a leading law firm in Nigeria. Management is about proper function, risk management and efficiency. It's not about inspiration. How do we make this work in a predictable and consistent manner is the essence of management.

5. Clearly define the spiritual dimensions of your organization. By spiritual dimensions I mean the vision, mission, values, culture and philosophy or ideology of the organization. In consulting circles values are known as "soft issues." But history shows they're not soft issues at all but very hard issues wearing velvet gloves. If you violate ethical values for instance your organization may be at risk. If you doubt read up on corporate obituaries like Enron and Arthur Andersen. It was the so-called soft issues that killed those organizations, not want of strategy.



6. Build your brand into a factor of production. This is the linkage to branding. The factors of production in classical economics are land, labor, enterprise and capital. But there's a sixth factor of production: the brand. Proper branding will draw attention to the products of your organization. You will be less reliant on human intervention or propagation. I recall a particular year at Alder Consulting. We had just employed seven new associates – fresh graduates. We asked them to open a salary account and all of them without exception chose a particular bank. They were not marketed by the bank. They just tramped to the bank. That's what good branding does. Good branding reduces the cost of marketing. It works as a factor of production.

The Four Imperatives of Leadership.

Let me share with you four imperatives of leadership. These are things a good leader should be mindful of.



1. Biodegradability

A good leader recognizes he is a biodegradable entity. What does that mean? It simply means that with time your strength and energy reduce. So will your emotional capacity. It's the reason last borns are spoilt but first borns tend to be super disciplined. Jacob called his first born "strength of my youth". It's because he had physical, emotional and mental strength to bring him up. The same principle applies to running an organization. In your late fifties and sixties you're going to become tired emotionally, even drained. You've fought too many battles. You just want to rest, coast along and reward yourself. Moses in his younger days was a Fidel Castro. At 40 he was full of revolutionary zeal. That zeal had petered down at 80. The confident revolutionary became a reluctant nationalist. Mandela at 40 was not Mandela at 80 either. He smartly served one term before handing over to the young generation. You get tired. It can only be easier if you've groomed younger leaders and built management. They will pick up your lapses. Strength is inversely proportional to the arrow of time. $X(\alpha)^{1/y}$. We can also express it as $\text{Strength} = K/\text{arrow of time}$, where K is constant.



2. Generational impetus

A good leader recognizes generational impetus. What does that mean? Whether you like it or not a new generation soon takes over critical sectors of the economic and political spaces. As time goes on there are meetings you won't be able to attend. It's either you'll be too old for such meetings, or your profile is too high. You'll be age inappropriate. And there will be meetings you can't go without a younger executive in tow. I remember a meeting we convened at Aso Rock Villa on the Brand Nigeria Project. To those who don't know Aso Rock is Nigeria's White House. Seated around the table were a generational breed of bank executives. They were CEOs. They were mostly in their forties. But there was an age inappropriate executive at that meeting. He was in his early seventies. He was his bank chairman. He insisted on attending the meeting. Everyone wondered why he came. He was too old for the language being used, the ideas being shared, the issues being discussed. The people seated round the table were junior officers when he was CEO. He was too old for the participants around that table. It gets worse if you're a legend in your field. There are meetings legends don't go. They send representatives.

3. Spiritual totemism

A good leader over time becomes the spiritual totem of his organization.

There are four to five stages in the evolution of leadership:

- a. The leader as manager of ideas
- b. The leader as manager of men
- c. The leader as manager of systems
- d. The leader as manager of spirituality
- e. The leader as manager of the political

At the beginning of the enterprise your role as the leader is the development of the product or idea of the organization. At this stage you assume many roles.

Structure is primitive and relatively small. Indeed everyone takes on dual roles in the organization.

As the business or organization develops however, you must shift from managing the idea or enterprise to the management of men and women. You develop skill-based leadership. These will constitute management or qualify for management.

As these leaders emerge and develop you should begin to concentrate on managing systems. Atypical organizational systems include strategy, customer service, product



development, brand development. The executives you developed will be fairly competent at what they do, and so what you're looking out for is the seamless integration of structures and processes to deliver on the vision.

With time you will emerge as a spiritual totem of your organization. By this I don't mean prayer warrior or any such thing. The spiritual dimensions of an organization are the vision, the mission, the values and the culture. You become the guardian. You're less involved in day to day management. You also take on a mentoring role. Your contribution is more about wisdom rather than strategy. Indeed many leaders leave the organization at this stage. Some, like Jeff Bezos of Amazon opt out to do more experimental stuff.

The last stage is your political evolution. You manage very high-level contacts. You have a rolodex of the most important people in the country and beyond. Because of you six degrees of separation becomes two degrees of separation. You protect the enterprise politically. Golf becomes an option. Some leaders at this stage take on a charitable work to build equity for the organization. You take on mentoring role for the CEO designate.



Note that sometimes the spiritual and political stages are combined.

Your duty as a leader is to make yourself redundant with the passage of time. It's called self-redundancy.

In this last segment I want to talk to SMEs.

If you have to spell everything out to your staff in toto so they wouldn't make a mistake, chances are those staff are far too junior to you. You need someone in between you and them, someone you don't need to spell everything out to. The earliest symptom of this gap in your business is if you find yourself constantly screaming at your staff. You need an in-betweenener. There's a gap in your evolving organogram.

Some entrepreneurs think they're saving money by not hiring higher grade staff as in-betweeneners. They don't realize it but they're essentially declaring the missing staff's salary as profit. It's false profit, and at some point you're going to pay a heavy price for not hiring that higher grade staff. You need someone to hold the fort while you're away, someone who can reasonably deputize for you. You need someone who can



interface with clients in lieu of you. Let me illustrate my point with a business experience I had. With this I will bring the lecture to a close.

Before starting Alder Consulting, I ran a design firm. We designed and produced invitation cards, brochures, stationeries and the like. One day I got a call from a church. The church was hosting a program and wanted branded notebooks as gift for attendees. But the timeframe was short. Could I produce these notebooks under pressure, say two days, they wanted to know. I deduced I could and took on the job. I did the design, got it approved, took the design for lithographic work, etched the plates, bought board and paper, and printed. I employed a laborious production system that required direct supervision of subcontractors. It was the only way I could guarantee quality and schedule.

Everything was done except the spiral. But the spiral wouldn't take more than an hour and so I left instruction with my staff to collect the notebooks after the spiraling and take to the client before the program started. We were well within time. I congratulated myself on pulling off the miracle and went to my church for a music concert.

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After the concert I came out of the church auditorium, only to find my two staff sitting at the entrance of the church. They had the notebooks in front of them. They said they were waiting for me. According to them, the man doing the spiral binding had taken on another job as soon as I left. They were angry with him and fought him until he finally did our job. They were still seething with righteous indignation and had come to report to me. So why didn't you take the notebooks to the client, I asked. They had no answer. They were more interested in reporting the subcontractor. They didn't think of taking the notebooks to the client because the program would have started. We were supposed to deliver before the program started after all. They had been sitting down in front of the church for over an hour. I was livid. I packed the notebooks, put them in the boot of my car and drove like Jehu from Ikeja to Ikoyi. The program was in Ikoyi. As I was parking my car, the auditorium was vomiting the attendees. I saw the attendees coming out. The program was over.

I learnt an invaluable lesson that day, that if the gap between you and the next member of staff is too wide, you're going to pay an awful price. Structure at the most basic level is having

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someone who understands imperatives and can take good decisions to ensure service delivery.

I want to thank you for listening. I hope you've enjoyed the lecture.

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