

# Razor Sharp: What Are You Leading With?

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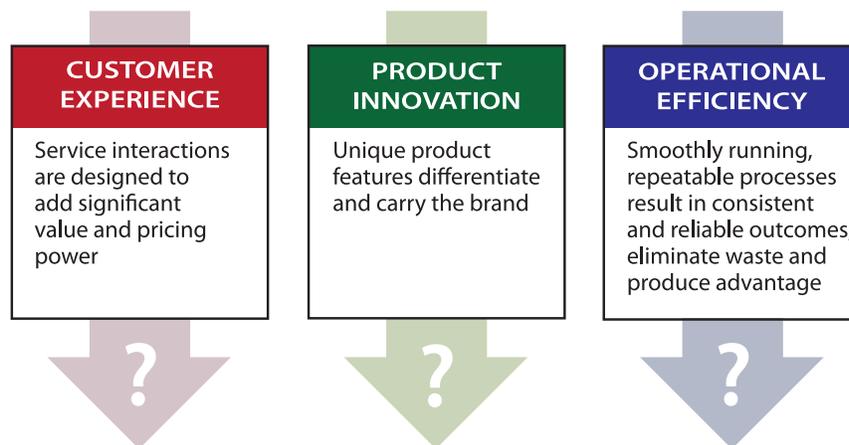
In *Worlds Apart*<sup>1</sup> we introduced a new way to envision and generate positive outcomes in your business by aligning company strategy and talent. Razor Sharp explores the first step toward creating this exceptional alignment, or what we call the Alignment Threshold™.

## Where's Your Focus?

Winning organizations channel a disproportionate amount of time, money and attention into their strategic platform to create competitive advantage. It's our view that alignment between strategy and talent is established when two questions can be clearly answered at each leadership level: What are you leading with? What are the implications for your talent strategy?

In the diagram below we identify three different strategic platforms upon which organizations may base their business models. We'll take one of these and drill down into how a platform drives choices and how these choices can either nourish a company's human talent or tear it apart.<sup>2</sup>

*What Are You Leading With?*



A razor sharp focus on talent and resources requires making choices. In recent years, businesses have experimented with choices like outsourcing and off-shoring. Outsourcing tasks can free you up to focus on your market strategy. The potential advantages of getting rid of business processes and talent pools that are not differentiators, but important to your brand's overall performance, are fairly well known.

We argue that this practice is not enough for a business to reap increased brand equity. The cost reductions achieved by outsourcing will not, in themselves, increase your brand position or grow top line revenue in relation to your peers. To do that, your talent selection and development must move into clear alignment with your chosen strategic platform. This addresses the common question of how talented people should be managed. Winning long term requires zeroing in on the skilled people—the critical talent pool—required to bring your strategy to life.

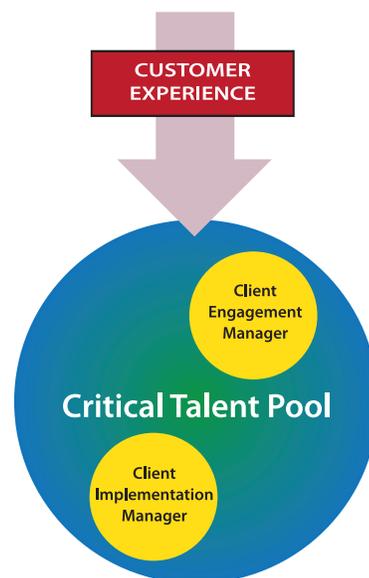
## Where the Action Is

In *Worlds Apart* we asked three provocative questions:

1. What roles unquestionably drive your long-term competitive advantage and revenue growth?
2. What roles are unique to your organization and at the heart of your brand's promise?
3. Do you have the talent you need to execute well and achieve your business strategy?

A hypothetical example illustrates these questions:

*You are the CEO of a large, multinational financial services provider where the business is built on a strategic platform of customer experience.*



*This means your organization must be a global solutions provider and have a service orientation. These capabilities are defined by employee skills clustered into two key roles: the Client Engagement Manager and the Client Implementation Consultant. The people in these roles and their teams form your critical talent pool.*

*Your product developers make sure your financial services solutions are at parity with those offered by your competitor. Your operations team works closely with your outsourcing provider to make sure your solutions are delivered on time and accurately at the lowest possible cost. But will you be perfectly focused in making sure you have top talent in the Client Engagement Manager and Client Implementation Consultant roles? You should, because they provide the superior customer experience that sets your firm apart from your competitors and drives revenue growth.*

When operating in The Alignment Threshold™, your critical talent pool receives a significant amount of company time and resources in the form of continuous recruiting, development dollars and assessment. In this context, we use the term “assessment” to mean much more than a gut feeling about someone’s ability. Here it describes a fair, objective and tested process. You will be making key “build” and “buy” decisions about your critical talent pool based upon assessment results.

### **Assessment in Action**

The following real world example illustrates how one organization used a skill assessment process to attract, develop and deploy a decidedly improved talent pool:

*A leading provider of enterprise market information solutions and services introduced a comprehensive employee assessment process as part of a broad transformation initiative. Senior business leaders first reviewed the workforce requirements for key roles in their largest client-facing division, which was also the division contributing most to the firm’s revenue and profits. New skill sets were identified for this critical talent pool and an assessment program was created to measure the presence of the new skill sets among the 300+ employees in related roles at the time.*

*At an aggregate level, the results indicated that this organization did not have adequate talent on hand to achieve its business strategy. Assessment data were combined with other HR metrics, and the enhanced information served as the catalyst for an aggressive, targeted recruiting campaign and a comprehensive customer-centric learning program. Employees who scored well in the assessment were already strong performers overall and considered of high future value. They received robust development plans so they could be placed in increasingly responsible positions in 12 to 18 months.*

This process took over a year to complete and required bold leadership from senior executives and line managers. The firm’s business metrics indicate the assessment program was well worth the effort. Revenue per employee increased in the now leaner division while the accuracy and timeliness of client deliverables improved.

### **What Are You Leading With?**

Firms operating in The Alignment Threshold™ recognize the importance of selecting a strategic platform and cultivating a critical talent pool around the strategy. A razor sharp focus on talent recruiting, training and development assures that mission critical roles are skillfully filled. Courageous, focused leadership is the organizational glue that binds it all together.

C3 has unique capability and deep expertise in talent strategy. It is just one of the many integrated solutions we provide our clients. Working closely with our clients, we create custom approaches using tested processes and tools.

Do you know what you're leading with? C3 would welcome the opportunity to help you become razor sharp. Please feel free to contact us to discuss further.

1. For a copy of *Worlds Apart* use this link: <http://www.c3corp.com/pdfs~/WorldsApart.pdf>

2. Our emphasis on these three leadership foci resonates with Michael Tracy and Fred Wiersema's three "Disciplines": operational excellence, product leadership, and customer excellence. But our focus expands on Tracy and Wiersema's model; we emphasize talent strategies as the axis of both company culture and generating value.

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