




Finding Insights that Aren't in Plain Sight

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Have You Looked Beyond the Obvious?

Have you undertaken a strategy development process that included the typical situation analysis, research on competitors and customers, Porter's five forces, perhaps even built scenarios, but felt that true insights were lacking? And have you considered that your competitors likely had access to the same research and data that you did? And that in this uncertain world, the foundational research and data you rely on is, at best, unreliable, and in the worst case, horribly wrong? Are you in danger of getting blindsided?

In this strategy brief, Peter Bryant, Partner, and Satish Rao, Principal, present a unique approach to challenging conventional wisdom and injecting insights and external perspectives into your strategy development process.

Insight Programs

Challenging Conventional Wisdom

Insight Programs have been developed by Clareo Partners as a unique way of injecting insights and external viewpoints into a company's strategy development process. They bring together a diverse group of external experts, many from outside the industry, together with company executives and key stakeholders to explore a central theme of interest.

Structure is managed by breaking the central theme of interest into discrete parts or program tracks, around which the external participants are selected, and by going through a facilitated "Harvest, Insight, and Synthesize" process, explained later in this brief.

Each program track includes sufficient time for free form dialog and conversation, as well as facilitated smaller group breakout sessions to identify implications and generate insights. These Programs also include networking opportunities to build relationships, and a creative "infotainment" event that blends the arts and sciences to pique the human senses and creative spirit in a unique manner. As a result, the program is totally immersive, engaging both the left and right sides of the brain!



Role in the Strategy Development Process

Companies have many different approaches to making strategic decisions, ranging from the very structured that tie into annual strategic and operating plans to the ad hoc, and from central / corporate led to distributed within business units or regions. But what all of these approaches have (or should have!) in common is that they try to build an understanding of the market place they compete or want to compete in.

Where we have seen companies falling short is in how they build this understanding. Companies typically rely on a combination of secondary research reports and primary research by talking to their direct and end customers / consumers, and evaluating competitive strategies. Some undertake the extra effort of talking to their suppliers and partners. A few build scenarios and devise strategies to excel in many or all plausible futures. All of these

measures bring in very valid external perspectives, however they can be limiting in some circumstances.

It is Certain That We Live in Uncertain Times

In industries that face significant uncertainty, have been slow to change, or face cyclical volatility that always seems to come from nowhere, such a traditional strategy process creates insular thinking that is linear. It projects current thinking into future strategy timeframes and fails to recognize that innovations and breakthrough technologies often jump from one industry to another in a blaze of creative destruction, obsoleting incumbents and bringing about new business models and paradigms. To put it mildly, we term this getting “blindsided”.

Equally damning may be scenarios that have been built on the foundation of data and information collected through traditional means.

Insight Programs are designed to be highly collaborative, totally immersive, and fast paced. They balance the structure required to meet program objectives, with a free form that allows exploration and serendipity that leads to insights.

You only need to look at industries such as consumer electronics (music players, cameras, and television), energy, telecommunications, and healthcare in the past decade to see how the landscape has changed, and how inadequate any secondary or even primary research may have been about the nature and pace of the seismic change that actually took place.

Clareo's Insight Programs

Insight Programs are our way of designing a robust strategy front end, bringing together a diverse group of experts from academia, venture capital, technology, and experts from other non-competing companies and industries who are interested in the same central theme that is critical to your company's strategy.

External participants find Insight Programs equally rewarding in expanding their own horizons and opportunities to network.

Insight Programs are conducted over two to three days, with typically two program tracks per day. Each program track goes through

the following "Harvest and Insight" process, followed by a half day for the "Synthesize" step.

Harvest: Gain knowledge and understanding of theme and focus areas through presentations, panel conversations, and task driven exercise with experts from different backgrounds. This session is designed to be fast paced and "PowerPoint light".

Insight: Craft insights and apply to relevant implication spaces that are identified ahead of time, using breakout sessions and incorporating perspectives from the experts.

Synthesize: Apply insights and implications to the company's situation; review insights through industry and company lens and identify strategic principles to take forward to the strategy process. This Synthesis step is conducted with company stakeholders after the external participants depart.

We have found Insight Programs to be of great value in situations where industries and companies face significant uncertainty in the nature and pace of change, and where learnings from other industries are often very relevant, but typically ignored.

These programs offer joined up perspectives from within and outside the industry that are often missed when a company adheres to its traditional research and

Best Practice ...

"In our experience, and as we advise our clients, the best companies regularly bring in external perspectives to challenge conventional thinking. They include views from outside their industry to supplement the existing due diligence done through traditional research and customer outreach."

Peter Bryant,
Partner at Clareo



“Clareo’s Insights Program reduced our strategy development and approval process by half. We were able to educate and inspire our Top 50 executives across a diverse business portfolio, as well as generate rich offer development territories which are expected to drive our growth agenda for the next 10 years.”

Polly Flinn, Vice President, Global Marketing, Castrol

competitive analysis, or when analyst reports get obsolete almost before you purchase them. Insight Programs seek to build on critical knowledge present in the minds of leading thinkers and practitioners in such situations where published reports and conventional thinking aren’t just unreliable, but also very misleading!

Case Study

Insight Programs at Castrol



Castrol, a leader in the world of automotive, industrial, and marine lubricants, began a long range strategy process, looking to retain their dominant market position and identify new growth avenues into the next decade. Clareo designed and executed three Insight Programs, exploring the future of the key end industries they serve – Automotive, Manufacturing, and Shipping.

Each Insight Program was designed to connect Castrol executives and stakeholders with experts within and outside the industry. The futures that Castrol developed jointly with these outside experts aligned everyone internally and energized the organization into understanding and acting on the implications for

their own business – from potential obsolescence to opportunities made possible.

The Insight Programs and its outputs, the futures and implications, became the foundation for the long range strategy development process that later included regional ideation workshops to identify and develop a portfolio of opportunities against these futures.

These programs provided the forum for wide executive engagement (Top 50), education, and a common language that shortened the support and approval of the strategy. They have also provided rich insight that in conjunction with the usual research of the market and trends, enabled Castrol to put together a portfolio of offers with a diverse risk profile that will provide new sources of growth.

Insight Programs Can Help Your Company

Clareo can bring external perspectives through Insight Programs – your own roundtable of strategy knights – to help inform and shape strategy when you are faced with uncertainties and the data and information you have from traditional sources is, at best, unreliable, and at worst, horribly wrong. We can design Insight Programs to challenge your conventional thinking, as a one off injection of “outside in” perspectives, or you can choose to retain and nourish these relationships in an ongoing manner as a means to refresh your views in this ever changing and uncertain world.

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About Clareo Partners

Founded in 2003, Clareo Partners is a strategic consulting firm that helps companies, governments, and non-profits achieve transformational growth. The Clareo team consists of successful real-world business and academic pioneers with a global network of experts and thought-leaders anchored in the Kellogg Innovation Network (KIN) at Northwestern University. Clareo strategically and directly connects its clients to this diverse and global network, allowing each client personal access to the most innovative ideas from the world's top business thinkers and practitioners. Through its highly collaborative methodology, Clareo works with each unique client to deliver breakthrough, innovative thinking, a practical, clear roadmap, and the customized toolset to reach its long term goals. Clients range from blue-chip firms to start-ups and include Kraft, Hewlett Packard, Alticor, Fulton Innovation, Microsoft, Zaharoff, and Castrol. For more information, visit www.clareopartners.com.