

Toby Stuart, Professor of Innovation and Entrepreneurship at the Haas School of Business, discusses how he works with corporate clients to customize programs to fit the needs of their organizations.

Toby Stuart: The global environment is more complex, the competitive environment is moving at a faster pace, the nature competition is changing a lot, there's some unfamiliar looking competitors on the horizon for a lot of major corporations -- how does a senior leadership team deal with those kinds of challenges?

As strategy scholars, as an academic but also as practitioners of strategy in a corporate context, I think many of us are confronting those kinds of issues right now. When I do large-scale custom executive education, it almost exclusively tends to be around agendas of senior leaders. I'll spend a bunch of time with senior executives of the company, I'll understand their language, I'll understand their agendas, so we'll work with them to understand what the primary challenges the company faces are and then we'll design a curriculum around that that when it all works well folds into a broader change initiative that's underway inside of the organization.

So when you get into many organizations and I'll always do this when I'm starting to work with a company, you have the experience where I ask a CEO and then the direct reports to the CEO and then the twice removed direct reports, "what is the corporate strategy, what is the competitive strategy"?

And you'd be pretty amazed when you do that how often you get different answers to that question just within the top three levels of the organization. So we're not talking about sort of understandings down at the front line or the rank and file of the organization. We're talking at senior levels of the organization there's often discord or misunderstanding about what the actual strategy of the company is and at the end of the day I think that means the company doesn't have one. Because if people in an organization are not working together towards the same objective, it's in that context not so clear what strategy actually means.

Once you're into the very large enterprise context and we think about the role of a

partner like Berkeley-Haas, in a large enterprise there are kind of two concerns that I would say tend to loom very large: the first one is growth so there are many many many companies that face growth challenges and that's an underlying theme in everything that happens in the corporation is how to think about and generate growth when you're already a large enterprise. The second one is up-skilling senior leadership. The company is bigger, the company's more complex, I think the pace of change is accelerated to an almost astonishing level and that then becomes a new strategic reality and something that many many many companies have to deal with.

And there are a few industries that are that appear to be relatively protected from what's happening in tech and what's happening in the startup world but I think most companies are genuinely experiencing the world as being in a phase of transformation that's probably historically unprecedented. To execute a strategy well involves identifying with the organization, finding a higher purpose in it, believing in it, and working beyond yourself toward a greater good.