## case study: Research in motion

**Research in Motion: Blackberry Battles Back**

Nearly a decade ago, Mike Lazaridis, co-CEO of Research in Motion, handed out Blackberrrys to various corporate officials in order to create some buzz. From those beginnings, RIM has dominated the $12 billion smartphone market in the US, doubling its global market share in 2008 from 7 percent to 14 percent.The BlackBerry is a preferred by many IT managers, and RIM has a strong position in the marketplace. However, given the lightening strike advances that occur in technology, no company can assume that its position in the market is safe. Success in advanced technologies requires active offensive strategies as well as turf protecting defensive ones.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The assaults on RIM’s dominate position are coming from several fronts. The company must compete with Apple, Nokia, and even Google in the consumer market. The competition has laid siege to RIM’s turf and the company needs new products and new weapons to defend itself against the onslaught. BlackBerry has battled back with three new smartphones: the Pearl Flip the Bold and the Storm, a touch screen phone aimed to compete directly with Apple’s iPhone.

BlackBerry has responded to the competition in the corporate market, as well. To make itself more indispensable to its corporate clients, RIM has produced software that lets the client seamlessly move between the office phone and the BlackBerry. A call that begins in the car can end in the office with no one being the wiser. Good news for RIM is the number of CIOs and corporations that have passed up the iPhone because of security issues.

There are companies that pursue success through a process of diversification. There are other companies that pursue success through a laser-like single-mindedness. RIM has pursued the latter strategy under the guidance of co-founder and co-CEO Mike Lazaridis. The company has a singular vision. The focus is BlackBerry, just BlackBerry. RIM is not distracted by any notions of diversification. While some people would say that this is a weakness, Lazaridis’ view is that RIM has nailed a trend judging by the growth of smartphones in today’s world. The company is clear, focused, and on track with its singular vision.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Singular vision is only one of the ingredients for success according to Lazaridis. Another is the encouragement not to be afraid of taking an unconventional path. Being different may be a very good characteristic, enabling a person or a company to standout based on a distinctive competence or set of characteristics. Another success factor looking into the future, which requires dreaming, and rigorous research and analysis. These elements lay the foundation for smart risk taking.

Smart risks can pay off nicely in the marketplace. Lazaridis believes that RIM’s singular vision is the firm’s key strength and a key contributor to the growth of the BlackBerry smartphone. From great vision and big dreams followed by the hard, concrete thinking through research, analysis, and planning came RIM’s success in the marketplace. RIM is not complacent however. The company contributed $150 million in venture capital to the Toronto-based BlackBerry Partners Fund to spur new software development. RIM is still on the move.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. RIM encourages its employees to be different, to take an unconventional path, and to look into the future. How is this emphasis likely to be received in other cultures?
2. RIM has a singular focus – the BlackBerry – and little concern for diversification. How might this organizational focus hurt technological innovation within RIM?
3. Suppose that a RIM researcher invents a product that promises to revolutionize personal communications, but which would involve a fundamental departure from the BlackBerry model. How would you deal with this conflict as a manager?

1. J. Hempel, “BlackBerry Battles Back,” *Fortune* (November 24, 2008): 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A. Abkowitz, “The BlackBerry Boss,” *Fortune* 159(8) (April 27, 2009): 20; G. Marchial, “Betting on the Blackberry,” *BusinessWeek* (Issue 4128) (April 27, 2009): 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)