

## 'SURFING' THE WAVE OF PRODUCTIVITY

Within this article I will endeavour to use a popular Barbadian rally driver – Paul “The Surfer” Bourne – as a model of the behaviour that is necessary within the pursuit of productivity and quality. The idea for this article came after my fiancée and I entered an Independence Day charity event, which raised funds for The Challenor School, by offering drives (on the Vaucluse track) with some of the island’s best rally drivers.

Productivity has been interpreted (Gray & Jurison, 1995) as a measure of how efficiently an organisation manipulates its resources/factors of production (human, capital, materials, energy, knowledge etc) within the production of goods and services. Similarly, Mr. Bourne has had to capitalise upon the resources at his disposal, within his pursuit of speed and driving prowess.

***Training/Skills Development:*** Most of us cannot jump into a rally car and successfully manoeuvre it along a course, at speeds in excess of 80 mph, without damage to life or limb. Like any profession/vocation, rally driving requires a certain level of mental and physical acuteness that can only be fully harnessed (all pun intended for those rallying minds out there) through significant practice and learning from the good examples of others. The skills development process often warrants particular conditions. Within this vein Mr. Bourne believes that better motoring facilities must be developed in Barbados, if there is to be any significant improvement in rallying.

From a corporate perspective, management scientist – Donald E. Westmore – articulates, “If any of us continues to do what we do the same way, within five years most of us and our organisations will become obsolete. Why? Because our competitors are helping their people to become more effective through training. If we look closely at companies that are doing well in the long run, they almost always have in place a well thought out and executed training program for their people. They understand that the price for not training is the real expense of training”.

***Utilisation of Quality Assets:*** A high-performance, reliable automobile is an important foundation upon which the rallying success of “The Surfer” is built. A fundamental issue that is highlighted by the rallying scenario is the necessity for a maintenance programme that guarantees the sustainability and quality of organisational assets. The quality, suitability and sustenance of one’s assets (whether financial, human or physical) impose a significant influence upon the level of productivity, customer satisfaction and competitiveness that is achievable.

***Financial Procurement:*** Like all business initiatives, the adequacy of funding greatly determines the ultimate ability of the rally driver to pursue and reap success. The purchase of the rally car, the maintenance programme that is necessary to ensure that it delivers peak performance and withstands very intense operating conditions; all require substantial financial resources. The rally driver can satisfy some of these financial obligations via sponsorship; in the case of ‘The Surfer’ such help comes from Banks,

Texaco, Pirelli/Michelin, Williams Industries Inc., Sikkens and BS&T Motors (agents for Subaru).

***Awareness of Your Environment:*** The rally driver must be keenly attuned to the course and have an intimate knowledge of its twists and turns; such is fundamental not only for beating the competition but also for ensuring the preservation of one's life. Similarly, to at least survive within today's highly competitive business context, leaders must position their firms to be cognisant of and responsive to the externalities (political, environmental/ecological, economic, socio-cultural and technological) that impact upon the successful and sustainable operations of said enterprises; as well as to the effects that the business has upon the environment in which it operates.

***Knowledge of Your Competencies and Limitations:*** During a rally, Mr. Bourne has to determine how to push himself and his Subaru Impreza to a level of peak performance, which at the same time does not unjustifiably jeopardise his safety and that of others. 'The Surfer' enjoys being pushed to perform better, as occurs with strong competition. Within a similar vein, the business should conduct a situational analysis that allows it to determine 1) its current competitive context; 2) what it wants to achieve; 3) the opportunities and threats posed by its competitors; 4) the inherent strengths and weaknesses that its capabilities render vis a vis the competition and 5) how to proceed in light of the aforementioned issues.

***Professionalism:*** I cannot recall the source but I agree with the concept, which proposes that the term 'professional' represents someone, regardless of his or her field, who carries out his or her calling with such skill and competence that it look effortless, despite the obvious fact that everyone could not duplicate such results. 'The Surfer' controlled his car on the Vaucluse track with such an appearance of ease, that if my brain did not have difficulty computing what my body was undergoing through the twists and turns, I may have actually thought that such (what he and other rally drivers do on a regular basis) was easy. However, I think not! Businesses must also seek to dazzle customers with their performance (the "wow" effect).

***Teamwork:*** Like any business, rallying requires the contribution of many people, working as a team towards the achievement of success. Sponsors, rallying associations, course officials, medical officials and rally team members all play important roles. Paul Bourne's life rests in the hands of his mechanical team, and likewise the sustainability of the firm depends on the efforts and commitment of the employees (managerial and non-managerial).

***Social Responsibility:*** Several rally drivers expended time and money on November 30, 2001, in order to raise funds for the 'special children' of the Challenor School in St Thomas. More organisations need to be conscious of their social responsibility as part of an interdependent socio-cultural system. This system not only determines organisational livelihood and sustainability but is also affected by the actions of the organisations. Some may see 'acts of social responsibility' as no more than corporate public relations,

which to some extent may be true, however, societal upliftment is desirable no matter how lacking in philanthropy the motivation may be.

***Contingency Planning:*** In light of the uncertainty associated with life, it is always necessary to plan for events that you believe might occur. The rally cars are modified with special safety equipment for the protection of the occupants, in the event that a high-speed collision or loss of control occurs. In the event of injury, medical teams have to be easily accessible. The mechanical team has to be ready to deal with any problem that occurs during the rally. Similarly, the business must implement a system that facilitates an appropriate response to eventualities by its complement of skilled employees and managers.

***Perseverance:*** The ‘Surfer’ alluded to the difficulty associated with obtaining sponsorship when starting out as an unknown in the sport. However, he argued that it is necessary to do your best to gain competence, create a good reputation and budget accordingly until better circumstances present themselves. This approach can serve as a good example for businesses, especially smaller ones. Businesses are increasingly faced with challenges in the pursuit of their goals but the only way to achieve anything is to persevere through the difficulties that occur along the way. ‘Try and try again’.

***Customer Satisfaction:*** I believe that most of us who patronised the Vacluse charity-event left with a feeling that we had received an experience that was worth the monetary contribution. A participant actually bought a pre-purchased \$25 ticket for \$30 from another fan, just so he could enjoy the experience. It is not easy, but if the organisation satisfies customer needs by the appropriate tailoring of its products and services, it too can speed ahead within the race for competitiveness.

Like any productive sector, rallying provides employment and skills development of Barbadians and has the potential to generate foreign exchange when regional and international drivers (and their entourages) are attracted. I would like to sincerely thank Paul “The Surfer” Bourne for his willingness to allow me to mix the business of my writing with the pleasure of indulging myself in my love for cars. Hats off to all the rally drivers and business persons in Barbados who strive to be productive in their own right.

**Calvin Husbands,  
Economist I,  
Barbados National Productivity Council**