



maclaren



Mike McCulloch

Mike McCulloch, General Manager at Maclaren Europe Ltd, has been an advocate of the SCQuARE process for business planning ever since he went on a course whilst business development manager at the toy company, Hasbro. Since then, he became Hasbro's business head in the UK and Ireland before taking up the reins at the baby equipment company in January 2002.

The ubiquitous Maclaren buggy was the brainchild of the British inventor and former test pilot, Owen Maclaren, who had the inspiration for a lightweight, foldable buggy whilst pushing his US-born grandchild around in a traditional and unwieldy pram during a family trip to Britain.

Owen Maclaren, who had been involved in the design of the undercarriage for the Spitfire fighter plane before World War II, applied his knowledge of lightweight, load-bearing structures to produce a prototype foldable buggy, weighing just 6lbs, by using tubular aluminium. Patented in 1965, the concept has since become the 'must have' accessory for parents around the world.

When McCulloch arrived at Maclaren, he was keen to introduce his new management team to the SCQuARE process he had learnt at Hasbro. One of his first tasks on joining the business was to put together a strategic plan to move the business forward. He sent three key individuals, the company's European sales manager, its European marketing manager and its sales administration manager, on a SCQuARE course.

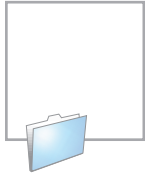
The rationale was to create a tool for joint planning. "I wanted a tool that we all understood and believed in so that when we sat down and did planning together, which I think is the most powerful way to do any kind of strategic planning or account planning, then we would all know what we were trying to do and how we would go about it."

"The feedback from them on the programme was very strong. We could immediately sit down and get on with some planning. It was actually the first time we had used SCQuARE in the business. We set out to identify how we were going to develop the Maclaren

business through 2004 and beyond. This helped us to produce a two/three year plan for Maclaren in its totality. It not only addresses customers and the market, but it's a comprehensive strategic plan covering all aspects of the business. SCQuARE provided us with the framework to get the thinking going, to do the analysis and come up with the strategy. The plan sets out how we can grow the business significantly not only in the UK but also in Europe over the next two to three years.

When drafting the plan, we asked ourselves 'is it bullet proof?' When the board comes up with the questions, will we be able to come up with the answers? The advantage of the process is that you don't have to debate how you do it, it becomes part of the

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culture and, therefore, it has a really integrating effect on the business.”

It was Alistair Richards, now Chief Operating Officer at Guinness World Records, who first introduced McCulloch to the SCQuARE process when he sent a number of Hasbro executives on a tailor-made course specially prepared for the toy company.

“We weren’t good at strategic planning,” explains McCulloch, looking back at his time at Hasbro. “Not only the longer term planning, but the shorter term planning as well. Things like putting together good account plans, marketing plans. We didn’t do that sort of thing very well and the reason for this was we didn’t have a rigorous thinking process or a good tool to use that would enable us to do the analysis and come up with the key strategies to take us forward.”

A number of McCulloch’s colleagues went on the programme and, as McCulloch confesses, both he and his fellow managers were somewhat sceptical before they went.

“We were all booked up to go several times and cancelled each time. We’ve all been on training courses where you’re wasting time, looking at your watch thinking you could be somewhere else or doing something more productive than sitting in a classroom,” he explains.

“A number of us wondered if it was really worth doing, but I have to say it is probably one of the most intense

pieces of training and learning that I’ve ever been through in business life.”

However, it was also the ability to put the process into application immediately afterwards that most impressed McCulloch. “It’s one of the few tools I’ve learned where you can go away and start using it straight away. It has all sorts of applications, big or small. Once you’ve learnt it, it tends to shape the way that you think about everything.”

He also found that the process accelerated and aided creative thinking. “It provides a fantastic framework to shape what you do. If you just sit around a table doing some brainstorming or blue sky thinking it’s a complete waste of time if there is no structure or framework to it. SCQuARE helps you to get to a conclusion by getting you to sift through what is relevant and identify the real issues that need addressing.”

The three immediate applications were the development of the annual strategic plan for the business, the production of the annual marketing plan and key account plans. McCulloch says that the priority was to get the strategic plan done first. This covered a range of issues including proposals for developing relationships with new and existing customers, brand priorities, the allocation of budgets, the setting of budgets for growth, the identification of possible new distribution points and a review of new product development. The rationale for doing this plan first

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was that it could then be communicated to the relevant sales and marketing managers so that key points, especially in relation to the company’s customer strategy, could readily be incorporated into their plans.

Hasbro also used the SCQuARE team as the facilitators for a two or three day planning session, which was usually held at a hotel or an “out of office” conference facility, during which senior management would address the key issues facing the business, the main market complications and the opportunities it could capitalise upon.

McCulloch says that the SCQuARE process provided his managers with a real sense of direction and gave them more confidence in their dealings with outside parties and other parts of the business. He also says that the business produced sharper business plans which, in turn, resulted in better relationships with customers and improved sales.

“I always like to judge things on the basis of results. The SCQuARE process helped us grow the business and make it more profitable, so you really can track its value,” he says.