

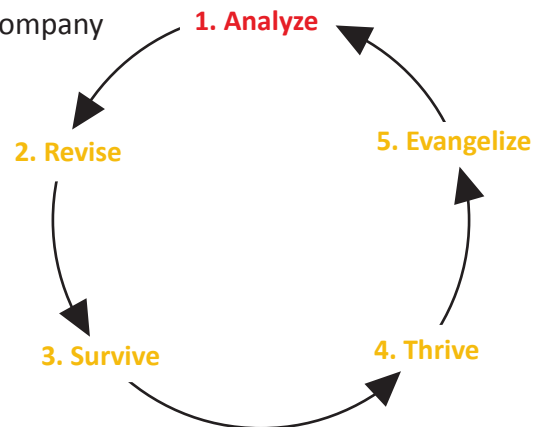
## The Stranger in a Strange Land Series:

### Five Steps to Services Leadership in a Product-Centric Company

#### Step One: Analyze

By James A. Alexander, Ed.D.

*Successfully leading a professional services organization in a product-centric company is not for the faint of heart. Learn what works.*



Just the facts, ma'am, just the facts.\*

Whether you are in the throes of a startup or your PSO has been around since the days of analog, you gotta have facts to effectively run your business. Ideas, hunches, and past experience can get you by for a time if you are lucky, but current hard data drives decisions, and in the end, finalizes your fate.

The right information is especially important if you are the Stranger in the organization—the head of services in a product-centric world. Here you must not only continually justify your value, but also your very existence. Credible information is the prime component of creating your professional services business case and building your personal credibility.

Quality information will help you to:

1. **Improve your PSO:** By better understanding your highest potential clients and discovering your highest potential offerings, you can fill priority gaps and direct your capabilities where they will create the biggest impact.
2. **Enhance business alignment:** A deeper understanding of the marketplace and the key stakeholders in your company can help you to better align your PSO with the overall business strategy and better contribute to accomplishing your mission.
3. **Build personal credibility:** Believe me, you will gain the most respect when dealing with your product peers and the product-thinking folks who run your outfit by making your points through credible data. Ranting and raving, pleading and praying have their place, but most of the time they don't do much for building esteem. Let the information make your case by showing the best value proposition for the business.

So, wherever your PSO is on the maturity scale, a “must do” is a regular (I suggest yearly) assessment. Here is what you need to know, track, and base decisions upon:

#### 1. Outside

- What your top clients want, need, and expect.
- How you stack up against your best competitors.
- What your PSOs brand awareness and brand quality is.

#### 2. Inside

- How well your internal capabilities match marketplace needs and global best practices.

- Perceptions of your PSO from the PSO team, product, sales, product marketing, and senior management team.

Three methods are the most appropriate for getting information inside your company.

1. The tried-and-true method of one-on-one, face-to-face interviews with the key players in the organization is a must. Develop a core group of questions you will ask everyone, yet leave room for plenty of expansion—you want people to tell you what they think, and why.
2. A second, less-used approach is focus groups. Done correctly, you can gather a lot of good information fast.
3. A simple survey aimed at the people inside the PSO and others in the company (such as product sales and marketing) can yield good quantitative information. Here are some examples of comments you might hear:

Product Salesperson: “Giving services away helps me to close deals.”

Technical Consultant: “I see lots of opportunities onsite at the client’s, but I don’t know what to do about them.”

Corporate Marketing: “We have a professional services group?”

See what I mean?

The information you will learn can help you improve for a small investment in time. More importantly, though, (and assuming you act upon their suggestions) is that by involving people in thinking about the issues of your PSO, they are already buying-in to future changes. This is a critical cornerstone of change management...and change management is a critical skill of all Strangers.

Looking outside, there are numerous ways to gather marketplace information. However, one approach is by far the most powerful. (Experience has made me very biased here!) That method is Voice of the Customer research. This term gets tossed around a lot and used in different ways, so let me explain what I mean: True Voice of the Customer is personal, in-depth, face-to-face interviews with key people in key accounts—those organizations in which you already have a solid relationship. It takes an in-depth look at their current perceptions of you and your top competitors. What they like and what they don’t like. Their critical issues, wants, needs, and expectations. The current services they use, who provides them, and how important they are. The emerging needs they envision, and the potential services they are considering. Thoughtfully done, some pretty good estimates can be made about what they will pay for these services as well.

Bob Yopko, former vice president of global services for Emerson Electric, believes in using customers to sell the rest of the organization:

“Executives will question your views, but it is pretty hard for them to vote against what their best customers say they need. Use the voice of the customer to build your business case for professional services.”

So invest the effort to get facts—credible, real-time, in-depth information with the stakeholders that mean the most to the fate of your PSO. Many things will be confirmed. A few important surprises will arise. Involvement will build understanding for your PSO's issues and build your credibility as a services leader and executive peer. This is the first important step in leading a services organization in a product-dominant company. Remember: Just the facts.

**Reference**

\*This was the oft-repeated comment of Detective Joe Friday in the 1950s TV cop show "Dragnet." His intent aligns nicely with the premise of this article of making decisions based upon hard data.

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*Jim Alexander is founder of Alexander Consulting, a management consultancy that creates and implements professional services strategies for product companies. Contact him at 239-283-7400, alex@alexanderstrategists.com, or visit [www.alexanderstrategists.com](http://www.alexanderstrategists.com).*

