



Creating Relevance in Your Region

Organizational Leadership Briefs for RDO Executive Directors

This brief is part of the seven-part series *On the Road to Success: Organizational Leadership Briefs for Executive Directors*.

These briefs cover a wide range of issues important to RDO senior leadership, including:

- Creating Relevance in Your Region
- Building and Nurturing Relationships
- Developing Revenue Strategies
- Doing More with Less
- Executive Director Qualifications
- Financial Reporting
- Preparing for Effective Board Meetings

The full set is available online at: www.nado.org/leadershipbriefs

These briefs were developed by the NADO Research Foundation with the support of the US Economic Development Administration Chicago Regional Office. Contributing editor, Steve Etcher, Manager Location Strategies at MarksNelson.

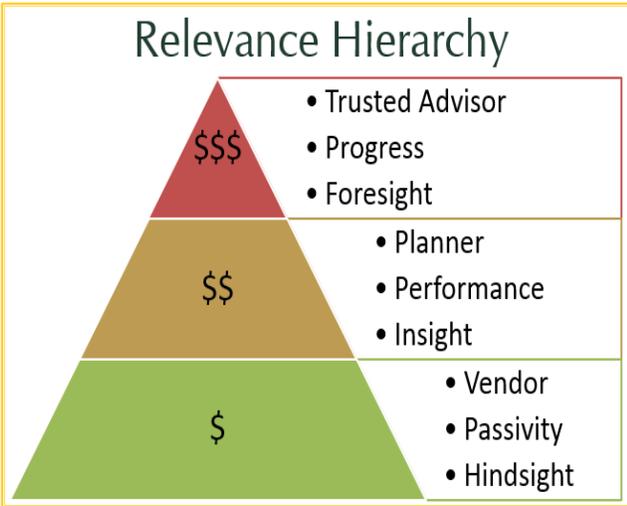
To maximize success in today's climate and to create a sustainable organization, regional development organizations need to focus on three key areas:

- Relationships
- **Relevance**
- Revenue

The sustainability of your organization is largely dependent on your organization's relevance to and reputation with your communities and constituents, your state, and your funders.

As you contemplate your own and your organization's relevance, place yourself on the "**relevance pyramid**" and identify areas you can improve.

Think about three key areas to define you or your organization's position on the pyramid:



- Your perspective
- Your focus
- Your role

(cont'd)

PERSPECTIVE

First, consider the perspective you provide, or perhaps more importantly, the perspective you are *asked* to provide:

- Is your perspective HINDSIGHT? This means looking back and making sense of data and trends and observing what has already happened.
- Is your perspective INSIGHT? This means looking at data and understanding the current trends and providing direction based on what is currently happening.
- Is your perspective FORESIGHT? This means looking at the potential of what is likely and helping direct what will happen in the future.

PURPOSE

Another way to evaluate your ranking on this pyramid is to look at the focus of what you do - your purpose:

- Is your focus on PASSIVITY, or compliance on reporting what has happened?
- Is your focus on PERFORMANCE, executing a plan to achieve anticipated results?
- Is your focus on PROGRESS, moving the needle, raising the bar, and moving the organization beyond what has happened and what will likely happen to what you *want* to happen?

ROLE

A final way to evaluate your ranking on this pyramid is to evaluate the role you serve with your customers (clients, constituents, funders, etc). Ask yourself, what is the role that I or my organization fill?

- Are you merely a VENDOR—providing a service for a prescribed fee?
- Are you a PLANNER—helping your customers plan and anticipate for the future?
- Or are you a TRUSTED ADVISOR—helping your customers” realize their full potential and what is possible?

The role you play has a great deal to say about the relevance of you and your organization.

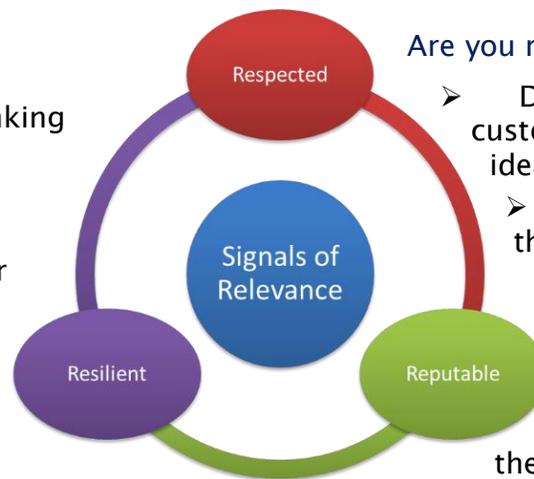
The higher on the pyramid you are, the more impact you are making, the more value you are providing, and the more funding you can derive from your services. The goal is to be at the top.

RELEVANCE

As we talk about relevance, let’s recognize there are a number of areas within which we can measure relevance.

- The relevance of you as a leader
- The relevance of your organization within the region, state, and nation

To help you evaluate your relevance here are a few questions for you to ponder:



Are you respected?

- Do your peers, staff, board, and customers respect your thoughts, ideas, and opinions?
- Are you invited to be part of the problem solving team?
If not, you should question whether you and your organization are relevant in a particular area.
You will then need to change the respect level. This can only be done through hard work, delivering results, exceeding expectations, and adding value.
- What has been the history of the organization, and is the past tainting your present and your future?
If so, you may need to rebrand your organization, invest in a public information campaign, and/or polish your image.

Are you reputable?

What do people say about you and your organization? What is your reputation in the region, the state, the nation?

- Are you a change agent?
- Do you deliver what you promise?
- Do you add value?
- Are you trusted, honest, and transparent?

Or are you viewed as:

- Complacent
- Bureaucratic
- Unnecessary

If your reputation is not solid, you will struggle to maintain relevance. Changing your reputation and perception takes time, hard work, and results.

Are you resilient?

Are you steadfast? Are you in it for the long haul? You may say you are, but what is the perception?

Do you convey a sense of commitment to the region, the organization, and the customers?

Below are some indications you may not be resilient (reliable in the long term):

- High turnover rate in the staff—particularly your highly valued, competent, professional staff. The marketplace observes turnover and questions why it is happening.
- Not seeing ideas through to completion. Getting things started but never actually finishing. Don't be that contractor that is always just 95 percent done.

Only doing things that produce revenue versus build value. If you are only chasing dollars, the perception will be that when the dollars are gone, so are you.

Every day you should ask yourself: "How is our organization adding value to our local governments, communities, funders, and state and federal officials?"