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A study on the growth mechanism of Burger King based on dynamic models of success and failure of businesses

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Abstract

Purpose – This study is to propose a creative idea for constant business growth and development by examining characteristics of business outcomes by phase, which are “growth” and “erosion and stagnation,” respectively.
Research design, data, methodology – It is necessary to identify an occurrence of crisis and its diffusion with a dynamic model in order to identify a success and failure of businesses in an organic way, not on a binary structure. The static perspective is to understand a crisis as a simply one-time event or as a linear causation. Thus, it has a limited understanding of the overall situation and has limits to investigating a foundational cause and developing long-term countermeasures. On the contrary, the dynamic perspective is to understand the crisis as circulation process of the overall system. Thus, it divides elements of the crisis as external and internal ones to understand it as the causal relationship of each element.
Results – During the growth period of Burger King, the company promoted its brand very successfully with aggressive and creative marketing activities. However, due to the founder’s disposal of management rights and the following changes in the management, the company had no choice but to lose focus on its business philosophy and brand management, and eventually it had to face the big crisis (resonance) which was delisting from the stock market because of the external threat; well-being trend. However, Burger King resumed lifting on the stock exchange by making great efforts to clearly identify the current issues and seek solutions. Under the spirit of “perseverance” and its slogan “Have it your way” the company is now going head to head with McDonald’s in the North American region and emerging countries.
Conclusions – Then, what is the most crucial factor in the success and failure of businesses? Answers may vary, however, as learned from the case study of Burger King, corporations should inspect the present and focus on developing a long-term strategy for the future and actively fulfill the actions. McDonald’s may not be able to innovate by itself in the future as it may become routinized to the growth. There will be chances of winning if we change conditions of individuals or organizations to an organic system in terms of being creative. There is a hopeful message here that an individual or small business may have more advantages in the era of the idea and innovation.

Keywords: Fast Food, Growth, Erosion, Stagnation, Resonance, Success and Failure of Businesses, Dynamic Model, Franchise.

JEL Classification Code: C12, I21, L66, M48.

1. Introduction

Why is a strong country which has gained supremacy in the world being collapsed by an incomparably small tribal state? Why is a conglomerate which has dominated the market left behind the small business? Couldn't it be probably that the world powers or big companies are caught in a trap where they can no longer make new ideas and innovations? In the world history, there has been found the same pattern in the rise and fall of one nation; businesses are no exception. Where Good Ideas Come from, one of the New York Times Best Sellers in Business Books of 2012, highlights the pattern in the preface as follows: "Living things, when they are creative, have tendency to be attracted to a certain repetitive pattern. And this pattern appears repetitively in an obviously recognizable way." In summary, we can discover and plan creative ideas from patterns, and the patterns of successful companies can be found on case study and case research. This study is based on Burger King to propose a creative idea for constant business growth and development by examining characteristics of business outcomes by phase, which are "growth" and "erosion and stagnation," respectively.

2. Theoretical Consideration of Study on Success and Failure of Businesses and Dynamic Models

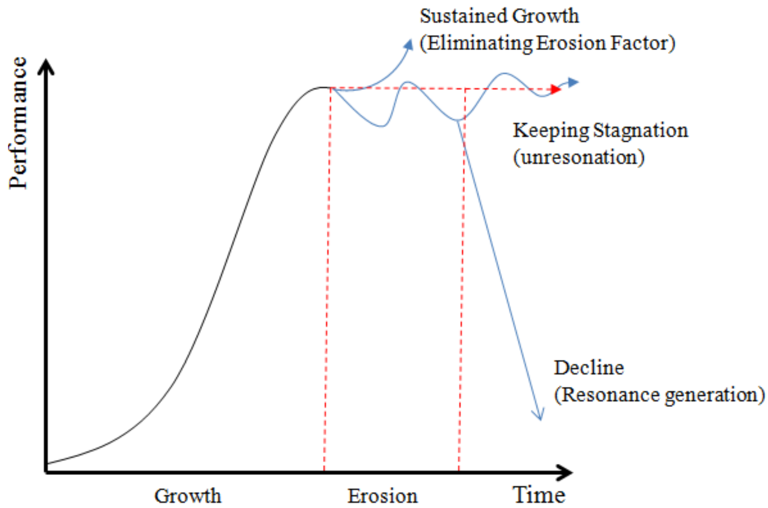
Promising management theorists have found out the same pattern, which is the formula for business success, by analyzing cases from successful and failed businesses. The study results on success and failure of businesses by representative scholars can be shown on Table 1.

Table 1: Study on Success and Failure of Businesses

Scholar	Contents
Peters & Waterman (1982)	Extracted eight success factors in 1982 from 43 selected companies. Two third of the companies fell within five years. - Provided eight proposals, including contradiction management, customer adherence, focusing on core business, simplifying organizations
Collins et al. (1996) Collins (2001)	Proposed eight factors of successful corporations (1996), however, later estimated that these factors are useless as they lack practical alternatives (2001)
Christensen (1997)	Proposed that the cause of super companies' failure is the collapse
Hamel (2000)	Discovered that even the existing/established world-class corporations are falling due to the emerging promising business - The recession of Motorola in the mid 1990s could be found in the sudden rise of Nokia which was newly entered the communication business market from the pulp industry

Source: Kim(2007).

However, their efforts turned out to be fruitless because they simply tried to identify the rise and fall of businesses in a binary way which was simply based on success and failure. In fact, successful businesses face a crisis due to lowered competitiveness internally, and their fate (whether to be leaping again or decline) largely depends on how they respond to the crisis. In the end, on the other side of the success and failure exists the turning point, which is a crisis, and as a result of challenging the crisis from in and out they either become successful or failed. Therefore, it is necessary to identify the occurrence and diffusion of the crisis on a dynamic model to avoid the binary thinking, but to be organically organized in the thinking process. According to the "Dynamic Understanding of the Success and Failure of Businesses" published in 2007 by SERI, the success and failure of businesses can be analyzed largely by dynamic and static perspectives. The static perspective is to understand a crisis as a simply one-time event or as a linear causation. Thus, it has a limited understanding of the overall situation and has limits to investigating the foundational cause and developing long-term countermeasures. On the contrary, the dynamic perspective is to understand the crisis as circulating process of the overall system. Thus, it divides elements of the crisis as external and internal ones to understand the crisis as the causal relationship of each element. Considering that a crisis is caught in a viscous circle and triggers a chain reaction amid the internally accumulated fear factors interacting with the external threat-causing ones, there is no option but to take the dynamic perspective which is more valid than the static one in organically identifying the success and failure of businesses.



Source: Kim (2007).
Figure 1: Dynamic Models of Success and Failure of Businesses

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In the dynamic model of success and failure of businesses, the "growth" means the virtuous cycle, where the strength of corporate system enhances management achievement/performance, which consequently reinforces the system capacity. Next, the "erosion" is the stage where the growth loop goes habitual and loses suitability, which progresses with the growth loop at the same time. "Resonance", which is the pre-stage of the decline, is where both internal erosion elements and external threat factors interact, which leads to deterioration of corporate performances and disturbance of the system. Lastly, the "decline" is the changing process where the shock from the resonance goes beyond the absorption and control capacity of the initial system, which becomes vicious circle from the virtuous cycle.

3. Analysis on the Success and Failure Mechanism of Burger King based on the Dynamic Model

In a business strategy of companies, when there exists a strong No.1 business, the No.2 follows what the No.1 does, which is so called me-too strategy, which is helpful in terms of business management. Burger King would have become no. 2 in the market position if it had followed what McDonald's had done. However, even if the company has an excellent strategy, if external threat elements are not to be overcome by the internal capacity, the company would fail as the case of the fall of the Roman Empire, including the fall of noblesse oblige, decline of citizenship, relaxation of military mentality, which led to the movement of the Germanic people and the inflow of Christianity, which were the "external threats." Burger King had to experience the erosion and stagnation from repeated listing and delisting in the stock exchange, through four-time changes in the founder and management to the private equity firm. The characteristics by phase are as follows:

3.1. Growth Period – Focusing on Burger King's system capacity

3.1.1. Entrepreneurship with challenge and ambition

James McLamore, the founder of Burger King, persuaded his alumnus from Cornell University, David R. Edgerton, and acquired a license to operate an Insta-Burger King in Miami, Florida in 1954 when he was 28. The Insta-Burger King was a franchisee founded in 1953 in Jacksonville, Florida, which used a cooking device known as the Insta-Broiler that could grill 12 patties at once. After a great deal of efforts in study, McLamore designed the gas grill to retain more gravy from patties than the Insta-Broiller and devised the "Whopper" in 1957. McLamore acquired the Insta-Burger King's entire business license in 1959 when the headquarter was in financial trouble. The company operated only 40 stores at the moment. Once acquiring the management rights, he eventually could expand the company to over 250 locations in the United States in 1967, which was six times increase in just eight years. He introduced the concept of "local business license franchise," where he sold the business licenses locally and localized versions of stores were open. This strategy was a great success, which become the driving force of the rapid expansion of stores both in the U.S. and around the world. The company expanded its stores outside of the U.S. in 1963 with a first overseas store in Puerto Rico. It was the overseas expansion four years ahead of its rival, McDonald's. McLamore sold the management rights to the Phillsbury Company in 1967. He retained his post as CEO until 1970 and his position as chairperson of Burger King for six years until he left the company. From becoming the founder at the age of 28 and increasing the stores up to six times more, to launching the Whopper 10 years ahead of its rival's Big Mac, he showed great business ability and skills. When McLamore was in office, Burger King was fiercely competing against McDonald's in the market, while Burger King was walking the paths of glory with aggressive marketing strategies and differentiated branding in terms of product development and franchising.

3.1.2. Differentiated product and franchise strategy

What contributed the most until Burger King launched the Whopper? It was the very development of gas grill in 1954 that could retain more gravy from patties. Without this gas grill, the Whopper could not have been created. The year 1957 when Burger King introduced the Whopper to the world was as many as 10 years ahead of the Big Mac's appearance. The Whopper was a quarter-pound beef hamburger with its initial price of 37 cents. The taste of the Whopper was improved to best suit customers' taste. The size of today's Whopper is a third bigger than the original one, which is known for the commercial on the Burger War between the Burger King and McDonald's. Burger King used several variations of franchising to expand its operations, which was opposite to the strategy of McDonald's. The manner in which the company licensed its franchisees varied depending on the region, with regional franchisees being responsible for operations, known as master franchises. On the contrary, McDonald's used a 'long-term rent' strategy in which the headquarter opened a store to operate for certain period and handed over the store to a store owner. It guaranteed a stable business to the franchisees and made profits in franchising, materials, and rental as well. In the beginning of opening a franchise, Burger King continued to expand its operations in a rapid manner, however as years went by the manner McDonald used gained superiority which pursued stable profits to both the franchise owner and the headquarter as well.

Table 2: Burger King and McDonald Franchisees

	Burger King	**McDonald's**
Countries	73	119
No. of Stores	Approx. 12,000	Approx. 33,000
No. of Staff	Approx. 38,000	Approx. 400,000
Franchisee Ratio	Over 90%	Over 75%

Source: "Big Mac or Whopper Marketing Geniuses who Kindled the Burger Battle," by the Korea Economic Daily, Feb. 2, 2012

3.1.3. Brand identity

"Have it your way" is the slogan or brand identity of Burger King, which means a customer order a customized burger, thus differentiating its service level and participating customers in the process of creating values through making changes in production method. This difference could lead to maximization of customer satisfaction. Considering that the brand identity is the designed reminder and collection of significance to customers, experiencing the "Have it your way" service in the store could be the most efficient communication tool.

The "Have it your way" is worth more than the customer service, reflecting the philosophy of the company. This tells us that the management policy of Burger King well reflects customers' opinions in providing services, which is part of the management strategy that could increase customer satisfaction. Burger King started the TV commercial under the slogan of "Have it your way" in 1970 and this created a great sensation. However, the new management team lost interest in the slogan, which was being forgotten. Later, Burger King was purchased by TPG Capital in 2002 and Burger King returned to the "Have it your way."

Figure 2: "Have it your way" TV Commercial in 1976

3.2. Recession (resonance) - Internal crisis and external threats Burger King had to face with

3.2.1. Internal crisis: Frequent replacement of the management

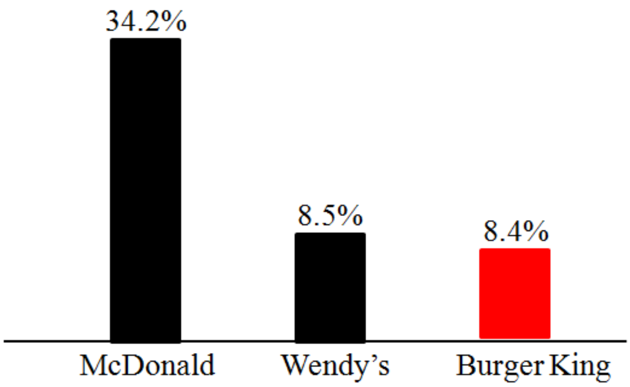
After McLamore handed over the management rights of Burger King to the Pillsbury Company in 1967, Diageo, alcoholic beverages company, purchased the management rights in 1989, followed by private equity firms led by TPG Capital in 2002, 3G Capital in 2010, and Justice Holdings in 2012. This is opposed to the case of the McDonald's where its founder Ray Kroc protected its business for 20 years. Burger King was gradually behind in competition with McDonald's due to its frequent changes in the management. Fortune, the multinational business magazine, evaluated Burger King, mentioning the 13 times changes in its CEO for the past 23 years, saying that "the frequent replacement of CEO confused Burger King, meanwhile McDonald's strengthened its top position in the fast food industry."

3.2.2. Internal crisis: Marketing myopia

Burger King has been in a fierce battle since the Burger War with McDonald's in 1982. The then Burger King mentioned the rival company's name, McDonald's, on its TV commercial, claiming that McDonald's patties were 20% less in beef contents. It was an obvious attack against another company in the fast food business. It stirred up a controversy because most of the fast food commercials never mentioned rival's name, just giving a vague hint. McDonald's immediately sued Burger King and the agreement was made with closed doors next year.

McDonald's dropped Heinz Ketchup after serving 40 years because the new CEO of Heinz Ketchup was from 3G Capital, which owned the management rights of Burger King. This shows that the two companies were in deep-rooted conflicts. Burger King more focused on the war with McDonald's than its customers, which only aggregated Burger King's situation. Burger King concentrated only on its burgers, while McDonald's had put great efforts to increase its sales by launching various menu portfolios (McCafe, McBrunch, etc.) since the mid 1990s. Burger King focused on the Whopper only, its main product, and just tried to find a way of diversifying Whopper menus only. Despite its fierce competition with McDonald's, Burger King had to face a rapid decrease in its sales.

Figure 3: The First Comparison Commercial of Burger King Mentioning the Real Name of its Rival (McDonald's) in 1982 (Burger War)



Source: Aggressive management of Burger King, even left behind by Wendy's, the Korea Economics Daily (April 5, 2012)

Figure 4: Market Share Ratio by Company in 2011

3.2.3. Internal crisis: Lack of future strategy

The frequent replacement of the management rights and management team of Burger King led to burying the company under short-term profit creation. Generally, when a company purchases the management rights, it gets busy trying to create profits to collect proceeds from sale. Thus, it is not easy to stablish a long-term strategy for the future investment. Burger King had no choice but to stick to its cash cow, the Whopper menu. As Burger King was hungry for short-term profit creation, it lost its overall consistency in product portfolio strategy, only to develop the high-fat and high-calory menu, Monster Whopper (966kcal), which disregarded the customer trend in the market. As there were many customers concerned about their health, they started to pay attention to the dark side of fast food and preferred the well-being products than the fast food. Burger King's attitude going against the new emerging trend was disregarded by many customers. In addition, Burger King was insensitive to the market and customers. The company tried to expand its market with the cheapest $1 cheese burger targeting the young people in their 20s and 30s. This lowest price strategy was to attract those young people who had lost their jobs. However, an unexpected problem occurred. Its franchisees stood against this strategy, arguing that they could not make profits with the $1 burger. This went through the court battle and forced Burger King into a corner. Burger King had to suffer greatly from the recession, while McDonald's drove on without a stop by developing a well-being menu and coffee brand. This means that the strategy Burger King implemented was a serious failure of judgment that could not properly read the market situation.

3.2.4. External threats: Customers preferring slow food to fast food

According to the research presented in February 2013 by the Hudson Institute, those restaurant chains in the U.S. which reduced calories from their menus achieved sales increase. The institute analyzed the menus and sales of 21 fast food chains and quick service restaurants in the U.S. including McDonald's, Wendy's and Burger King from 2006 to 2011. The analysis result showed that the overall sales were decreased while the sales of low-calory menus increased. Particularly, there was a 28% decrease in sales volume for the main products of Burger King and McDonald's which were the products with more than 600kcal. This implies that customers prefer low-calory products and have a dislike of the high-calory fast food. McDonald's added an alternative choice to its customers by providing more menues such as salads or fruits instead of french fries, while Burger King launched the high-calory Whopper in addition to the fries menu, whose strategy was quite difficult to understand. This lack of marketing strategy could be greatly attributed to the management who could not read the environmental change. As a result of disregarding the well-being trend, Burger King was acquired to another private equity company, 3G Capital in 2010, was listed on New York stock exchange in 2006 and was delisted in four years, which was the worst case of Burger King.

3.3. Revitalization – Based on Burger King's marketing strategy

The essential of the Burger King's brand strategy is the above stated brand identity, "Have it your way," which means the company customizes its products to customers and interact with them. This philosophy is the basis of the Burger King's brand marketing strategy. Russ Klein, CMO of Burger King Global Marketing, launched the "Subservient Chicken" campaign, saying "Interacting with characters in the games is way more fun and even more significant than watching the super bowl commercials just leaning on a couch. There definitely should be a possibility to create something big, new and unique if we want to make people interact with our marketing, or in this case, literally persuade them "play" with our brand." Like this, the Burger King's brand marketing always provided newness, pleasure and surprise. Let's take a look at those three cases from successful brand marketing cases of Burger King; Subservient Chicken campaign which caused sensation in 2004 in the online interactive area, Whopper Sacrifice in 2008 which is a famous Facebook advertisement, and Whopper Virgin campaign which provoked a pros/cons controversy in terms of authenticity marketing.

3.3.1. Interactive marketing – Subservient Chicken

Burger King opened its website, www.subservient.chicken.com, on April 8, 2014 to increase sales of its chicken sandwich. The website got an immediate response and went viral. Users could type 300 more commands on the website, from "Peck the ground" to "Walk like Egyptians." Then a guy with chicken costumes appeared on a screen and acted as the command typed by user. More than 14 million visitors visited the website in the first year, and they stayed on the website for average seven minutes. Most importantly, this affected sales volume.

Figure 5: Subservient Chicken TV Commercial

Within a few weeks of the launch of the commercial, sales volume of the chicken sandwich increased to 9%. According to the sales report of October 2004, after the sales increase for the nine consecutive months, sales of the same store increased to 6.4% year on year and those of the entire stores increased to 12.3%. This Subservient Chicken commercial helped Burger King to write a chapter in the pop culture, not just the growth in sales. Those people who believed that Burger King was behind the fashion and could not catch up with McDonald's started to think that Burger King's brand was a brilliant, mischievous and very unique. Up until now since several years have passed, this website still attracts many visitors and numerous parodies.

3.3.2. Facebook marketing – Whopper Sacrifice

The Whopper Sacrifice campaign, which was the Facebook marketing, is one of the successful cases of the viral marketing. Burger King started the Facebook marketing in January 2009 using its character, the King. The purpose of this marketing was to provide a free Whopper coupon when Facebook users delete their 10 friends, which was quite embarrassing but interesting at the same time.

Figure 6: Whopper Sacrifice Facebook Marketing

Table 3: Subservient Chicken Commercial

Category	Summary
Overview	- Idea based on "Have it your way" - Opened the website (subservientchicken.com) in April 2004 where visitors give orders to chickens by putting many words - Subservient Chicken created the image that the brand of Burger King is cheerful and pleasing
Contents	- Over 300 commands to be inpug, including "Peck the ground" and "Walk like Egyptians." - A guy with chicken costume appears on a screen and moves according to the commands
Achievement	- 46,000 visitors within a week of its launch - Selected as the Advergame of the Year by Billboard 2004 Digital Entertainment Awards - Sales of tender grilled chicken burger increased for nine consecutive years since the launch of the commercial

This unprecedented and bucking the trend marketing had a great ripple effect, where approximately 60,000 Facebook users deleted 234,000 friends within a week of the start of the campaign. As Burger King was threatened with warning and legal actions from Facebook, the company had to end this marketing just in a week. The core of this campaign for customers was to receive a free coupon after receiving a message, "Your friend has chosen the Whopper over you." This is one of the representative viral marketing cases that could create a sensation, becaise customers had to accept the 'fact' that 'I prefer the Whopper to the friendship.'

3.3.3. Authentic marketing - Whopper Virgin

Burger King carried out the blind testing in 2008 to introduce that the Whopper is more delicious than the Big Mac in an effective manner. People tasted the Whopper and Big Mac with their eyes covered and raised their hands for the better one. This strategy was quite worn-out, however, its targets were different. They were the virgin, who never had tasted hamburger.

Table 4: Whopper Sacrifice Campaign

Category	Summary
Overview	- Devised the Facebook marketing in January 2009 using its character, the King - Created an event to offer a free coupon upon users deleting 10 Facebook friends - A premise was to explain the reason to delete friends to get a free coupon - That unfriended friend to find out s/he is unfriended through the message "Your friend has chosen the Whopper over you."
Achievement	- Within a week of the event launch, approx. 60,000 Facebook users deleted 234,000 friends - This campaign ended upon warning from Facebook - One of the viral marketing cases that greatly caused a sensation

Figure 7: Whopper Virgin TV Commercial

The project team delivered the Whopper and Big Mac to the tribes living out in the wild area such as Thailand, Greenland, and Rumania. The candid images of those people who even did not know how to eat hamburger tasting both burgers and choosing one were revealed through the TV screen realistically. Some of them responded there was no big difference in the taste but the majority of them took the side of the Whopper. This commercial was criticized that it was insulting the culture of the Third World. At the same time, the commercial was favorably received for effectively delivering the message of "delicious hamburger" by describing the extreme fact comparable to a documentary show. This showed the brand's authenticity to customers in that it realistically described the subjective topic, the taste, through the most objective method.

Table 5: Whopper Virgin Commercial

Category	Summary
Overview	- Blind testing carried out to effectively introduce the Whopper is better than Big Mac to customers - Targeted to those tribes in the wilds from Thailand, Greenland and Rumania - Their candid and wild images of choosing one after tasting the Whopper and Big Mac aired to the customers without any edits - Majority took the side of Burger King

Achievement	- Criticized for insulting the culture of the Third World - Effectively delivering the message of "delicious hamburger" by describing the extreme fact comparable to a documentary show.

4. Conclusion

Justice Holdings of Great Britain which acquired 29% shares in 2012 from the Brazilian private equity firm, 3G Capital, took the aggressive strategy by introducing the new menu and public relations, and was delisted from the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) in 2010, however it regained its global standing in the world's No.2 hamburger chain by resuming listing to the NYSE within two years, in June 2012. The company revealed that it would focus on boosting the company value through actively investigating in some regions in the North America and emerging countries such as Russia and China. In Korea, Burger King was first introduced in 1984 by Hyubjinyanghaeng and later stores were operated under direct management by SRS Korea of Doosan Group.

However, Burger King was sold to Vogo Fund, Korean private equity firm, at KRW 100 billion in November 2011 and Vogo Fund revealed that it would switch to the franchisee system as the same case of the U.S headquarter. Vogo Fund also added that it will expand its domestic operations up to 300 stores in 2018 to go head to head with McDonald's and to eventually expand its market share in Korea. As learned from above so far, companies grow, erode, stagnate and decline or constantly pursue to grow through repeated revitalization like a country.

Burger King in its growth period was successful in branding by carrying out aggressive and creative marketing activities. However, due to the sell-off by its founder and the following replacement of the management, Burger King had no choice but to pay less attention to retaining consistency in business philosophy and brand management, resulting in facing a great crisis (resonance) which was delisting from the stock market due to the external threat (well-being trend).

However, Burger King resumed listing by clearly identifying current problems and finding solutions and is now getting ready to go head to head with McDonald's under its initial slogan, "Have it your way" in the regions in North America and emerging countries which the company has overlooked so far. Then what is most important element in determining success and failure of businesses? There could be multiple answers to this question, but the thing is that companies should always examine the present and focus on establishing a long-term strategy for the future and actively put it into actions.

McDonald's may lose the power to innovate itself in the future if it becomes routinized. There will be chances of success if individuals or organizations switch to the creative and organic network. In the era of idea and innovation, there is a message of hope here that individuals or small businesses may have more advantage over big ones.

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