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An aid to strategic thinking

# The David Rigby Triangles Model

■ Based on its experience in the technical textiles and nonwovens industry and its markets, DRA has developed a simple but very powerful method, the Rigby Triangles Model, of describing the strategic situation of businesses in the sector.

The *Rigby Model* has the following strengths as an aid to business strategic thinking:

- it can be applied at several levels within a company: for the total company, for each strategic business unit (SBU) and for each product/market segment (PMS);
- it is easily understood by business managers, working alone or in teams;
- it leads quickly to an initial strategic assessment of a business and its likely future possibilities;
- it identifies clearly the high priority areas for which further and more detailed information on the business and its markets is needed;
- it highlights those parts of the business for which more complex strategic thinking and more sophisticated business models are required.

## Details of the Rigby Triangles Model

The model asserts that a technical textiles or nonwovens business is, or should be, organised mainly around one of the three basic *Driving Forces* shown in the triangle diagrams in figure 1: production, product, market. In each triangle diagram, the heavy point indicates where the driving force is located, and the width of the triangle at each level indicates the relative complexity of the business in terms of the number of technologies, products and markets involved.

- The *Production Driving Force* is typical of high volume/low cost producers of a small range of standard, often undifferentiated, products.



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- The *Product Driving Force* characterises businesses which develop products to solve specific end-use problems using a variety of materials, components and technologies.

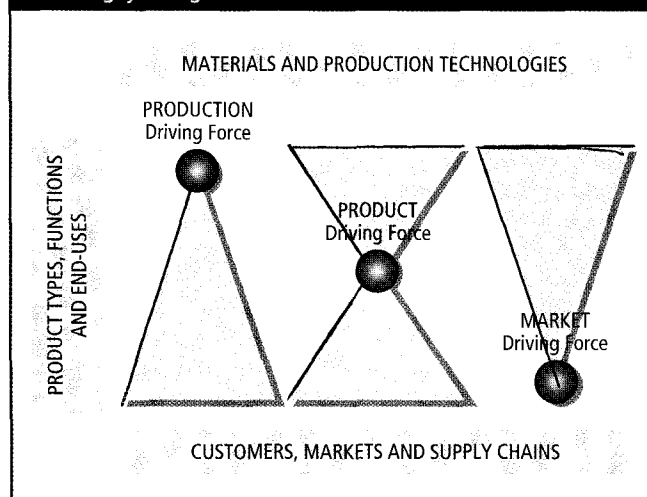
- The *Market Driving Force* is adopted by businesses using relationships and supply chain membership as vehicles for supplying several different products (some non-textile), using a range of production technologies, to a chosen customer type or market segment. Typical characteristics of businesses in each *Driving Force* category are shown in more detail in figure 2, where examples of companies in each category are also given. It is clear from these descriptions that businesses with different *Driv-*

*ing Forces* will have different objectives and priorities in terms of such things as: capital investment, product and market development, technical capabilities, cost reduction, make or buy decisions, acquisitions, supply chain membership, customer relationships, etc. They will also need different mixtures of personality types and skills among their employees, and their managers will have different beliefs about the key success factors for their business.

## Industry and business evolution

The technical textiles industry has changed significantly over the last few years; markets have grown quickly, but the major impetus is now the «pull» of market needs, articulated by increasingly knowledgeable end-users, rather than the previous «push» of technical capabilities seeking out end-use products and markets. Today, many technical textiles businesses have too many

1 The Rigby Triangles Model.



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products and markets, having grown in an unplanned and opportunistic way in the growth markets of the past; some other businesses have not evolved adequately their products and services to adapt to

the increasing power of customers. It is an observed fact that there is a natural tendency for technical textile businesses to move over time towards a *Market Driving Force* in response to market pressures as

shown in figure 3. For example, *Freudenberg* has recently organised its business around seven distinct end-use market segments rather than around nonwovens production technology as previously; *Smith &*

*Newphew* have, over time, evolved from weaving bandages and other products (production), to producing multi-component wound management systems (product) to supplying a wide range of medical goods including artificial hip joints (market). There are, however, counter examples among mature companies: *Scapa Group* has recently moved, by disposals, from a largely *Market Driving Force* (supplying the highly cyclical paper industry) to a *Product Driving Force* (speciality tapes), which it feels will produce more stable profits and growth.

2 THE RIGBY TRIANGLES MODEL three alternative driving forces		
PRODUCTION Driving Force	PRODUCT Driving Force	MARKET Driving Force
COMMON BUSINESS CHARACTERISTICS		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Based on one material (eg. polypropylene).</li> <li>Based on one production method (eg. weaving).</li> <li>Streamlined, low cost operations: long runs.</li> <li>High capacity utilisation.</li> <li>Centrally planned.</li> <li>Strong compliance with norms.</li> <li>Hate waste, reward efficiency</li> <li>A few standard products.</li> <li>Few customers.</li> <li>Adding value by low cost, high quality.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Based on a type of product (eg. geotextiles) or a product function (eg. filtration).</li> <li>Focus on innovation.</li> <li>Problem solving approach</li> <li>Several technologies.</li> <li>Many customers.</li> <li>Some surplus capacity.</li> <li>Flexibly organised.</li> <li>Encourage individuals, back up by teamwork.</li> <li>Results driven.</li> <li>Tolerate failure.</li> <li>Adding value by combining materials to solve problems.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Targeting the broad needs of an end-use segment (eg. agriculture) or a type of customer (eg. auto manufacturer).</li> <li>Several products.</li> <li>Several technologies.</li> <li>Supply chain membership.</li> <li>Relationship management.</li> <li>Collaborative product/service development.</li> <li>Delegation of sales and product development to market focused teams.</li> <li>Source products if necessary.</li> <li>Some non-textile products.</li> <li>Adding value by creating the required product/service packages.</li> </ul>
TYPICAL BUSINESSES		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Avgol (nonwoven roll-goods).</li> <li>Amoco (carpet backing).</li> <li>Kordsa (tyre cord).</li> <li>Plaspac (warp knitted nets).</li> <li>Acordis (industrial fibres).</li> <li>Coating Applications (coated fabrics).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Luckenhaus (engineered woven products).</li> <li>Lantor (engineered nonwovens).</li> <li>Frenzelit (high temperature textiles).</li> <li>Schappe Techniques (technical yarns).</li> <li>Pall (filtration products).</li> <li>Johnson Controls (car seats).</li> <li>Quintas &amp; Quintas (ropes and cords).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Milliken (auto components).</li> <li>Growing Technologies (agricultural products).</li> <li>Seton Scholl (medical products).</li> <li>Voith (paper industry consumables).</li> <li>DCTA (military textiles and clothing).</li> </ul>

**The Rigby Triangles Model in practice**

In applying the model in strategic assessment projects within client businesses, we start by using the readily available information on the target business and its markets to produce, in collaboration with client staff, quick answers to the following questions:

- What is our current driving force?
- How well are we implementing it?
- Who are we competing with?
- Do we have the right driving force?
- If not, what should we change it to?
- How, and how quickly, could we do this?

The process of producing some initial and often quite coarse answers to these questions is found in practice to produce a high and shared level of strategic awareness and understanding among those involved. This in turn leads to the framing of more complex but highly focused questions about the business and its environment, which can be pursued by targeted research. More sophisticated strategic descriptions of the business and its potential usually result from this. The *Rigby Triangles Model* is therefore best considered as a simple and effective entry point into the tasks of understanding the strategic complexities of a technical textiles business and of producing objectives, strategies and action plans for its profitable future development. ♦

3 Businesses tend to evolve toward a Market Driving Force.

