

Do you know what Oyas are?

Oyas (or Ollas) are microporous ceramic pots that are buried near plants and filled with water. Moisture gradually escapes and thus irrigates the plants nearby. This 4-time Millennial irrigation system is economical and ecological: it makes it possible to make great water savings (from 50% to 75%) and to reduce the number of water inputs by 2/3.

Oyas have recently been brought to the liking of the day by a small French company, Oyas-Environnement (www.oyas-environnement.com) nearby Montpellier which has embarked on a real ethical and environmental approach by setting up an artisanal and environmentally friendly French manufacturing plant. On the website of Oyas-Environnement, one can read: "At Oyas-Environnement, we do not sell pots ... we try to change the world".

It is still quite astonishing to see this company put forward the very negation of its primary activity, the one that makes it live to claim a universal and quite ambitious goal. It is a perfect example for me, because it is screaming and assumed, of the difference between the **identity** of a company and its "**raison d'être**".

Of course Oyas-Environment is a pottery maker! And on its website, the company clearly proclaims its technicality, its expertise to make these pottery. It is its **identity**.

But its activity is part of something that goes well beyond its technical manufacturing skills. Oyas-environment does not manufacture pots to make pots and sell them afterwards. Oyas-Environment wants to change the world and this is an aim much more exciting, much more motivating for its collaborators, its customers and its suppliers. This is his reason "**raison d'être**", its **mission**.

Identity is the foundation, it is what a company knows how to do well and which allows it to ensure its durability. It defines its place in the global market. If Oyas-Environnement disappeared, people would regret the oyas but the world could be changed anyway (or not). Identity can also be called the DNA of the company. It is expressed by the verb "to be".

The "**raison d'être**", on the other hand, is the company's superior ambitions, the meaning it wants to give to its actions and the footprint it wants to leave in the world. It serves as the engine for the identity to which it gives movement, direction and frame. In general when it is expressed the reason for being is accompanied by a verb of action such as "Changing the world (Oyas-environment)", "Making sports accessible to the greatest number" (Decathlon). More than a statement, the "**raison d'être**" is an energy that carries the company's community and business model. The bigger the plan ("Changing the world"), the more energy will be alive.

It is when the distinction between these two concepts is unclear and when the company devotes itself to its mission forgetting what is its DNA that the difficulties appear.

If Oyas-Environnement only thinks of changing the world, the company might very well want to become an organic produce farm, but it would ask her potters to become farmers, at a cost that certainly creates significant difficulties.

Turning around a company requires to deal with its identity issues; that is to say, to operate on a core base of activity which corresponds to what the company can do (and do well). This core base must be aligned with its mission. Turning around a company is helping the company to know itself and to distinguish between identity and mission. It is only when the company knows itself well that it will be able first to recover and later to grow.

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