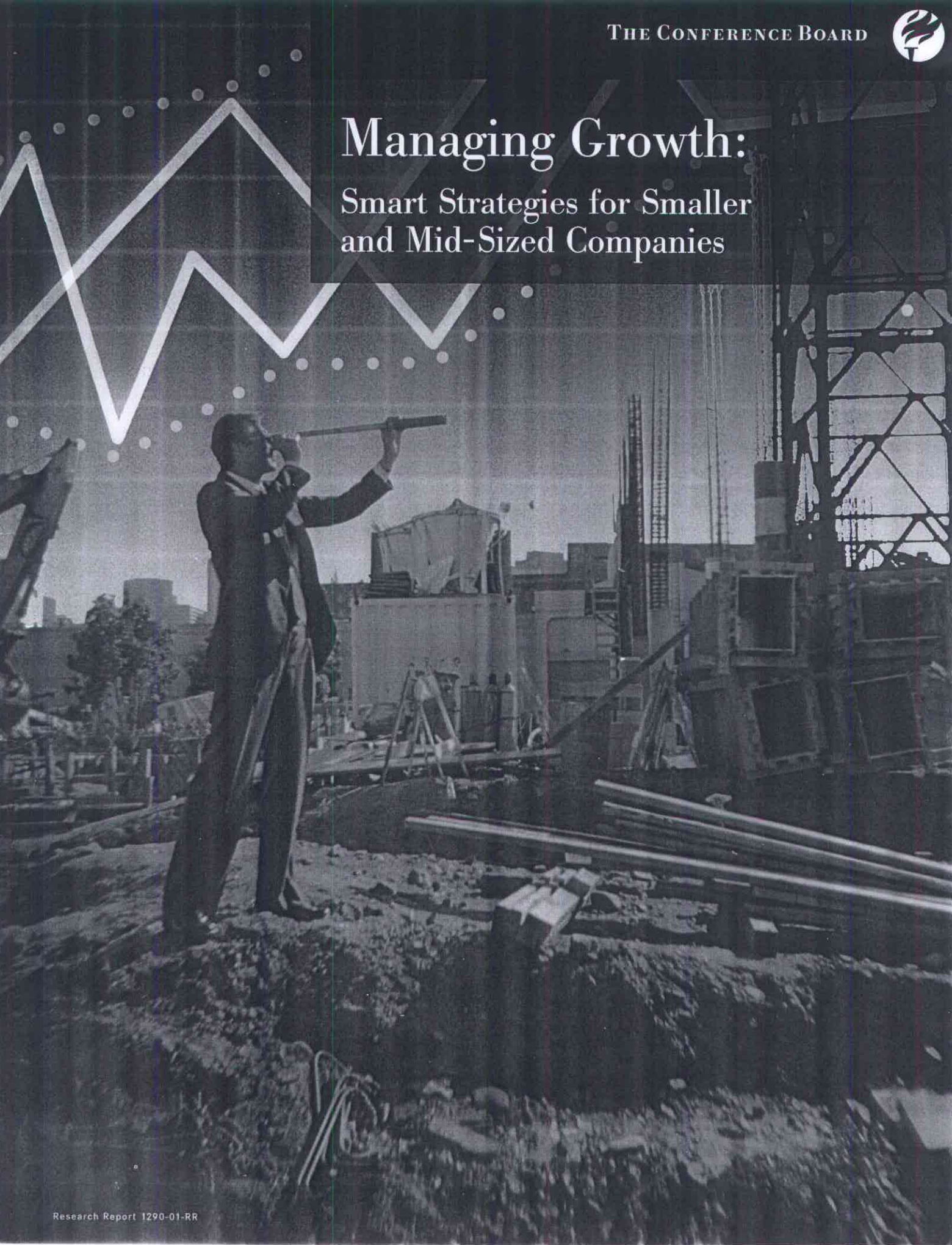




Managing Growth: Smart Strategies for Smaller and Mid-Sized Companies



Building a growth culture

Walker Parking Consultants was a small firm of engineers in the Midwest with about \$3 million in revenues in 1982 when a group of its senior members decided to buy out the founder and major owner. Today, Walker Parking is a \$45 million organization, with over 300 professionals who plan, design, and do studies of parking facilities for airports, convention centers, and shopping malls around the world.

The impetus for Walker's expansion, says chairman and CEO Frank M. Transue, was a sweeping cultural change that occurred in the early '80s. "After the buyout, we went from being a company with one person controlling everything to a much more participative management style," Transue says. "That was the real springboard to the success and growth we have realized."

To begin with, the firm no longer treated its local offices in the U.S. as profit centers after the buyout. Profit centers foster competition among managers for people and resources to meet the goals of their individual units, Transue argues. Eliminating profit centers improved cooperation and communication among offices, which helped to stimulate new business.

Walker Parking continued to grow, but by 1992 sales seemed to reach a plateau of \$12 million. Further expansion depended on a reorganization, Transue concluded. "We were a firm of eight or nine offices, with one person—me—overseeing all of them. I was spread too thin." So the company was divided into three regions, with a senior vice president in charge of each. Now, each of the regional leaders oversees four or five local offices and is responsible for bringing in \$12-\$17 million of new business annually.

With the reorganization, Walker Parking was once again opening new offices and expanding geographically. The firm's vision is to be "the premier parking consultant worldwide." It has planned and designed parking facilities at an airport in San Juan, a mixed-use development in Dubai, and other projects from Beirut to Barcelona. Three years ago, it bought out an architectural and engineering firm in Wroclaw, Poland (the former Breslau), where it now has 10 people consulting on projects in Eastern Europe.



Frank Transue
Walker Parking Consultants

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| Business: | Plans, designs, restores, and does feasibility and market studies for parking facilities around the world |
| Headquarters: | Chicago, IL |
| Employees: | 315 |
| Annual sales: | \$45 million (2000) |
| Year founded: | 1965 |

Emphasis on training

Walker Parking's culture takes its inspiration from W. Edwards Deming's 14 points of sound management, which stress such things as "driving out fear" and "constancy of purpose." ("We don't have a 'management-method-of-the-month,'" says Transue.) These values are constantly reinforced by managers who are, for the most part, homegrown and steeped in the company culture. The three regional vice presidents typically spend one week a month in local offices guiding newcomers in those values. "We are not control people," says Transue, an engineer and project manager before becoming CEO. "We are a federation. The managers in our various offices have a lot of latitude, but they work within agreement on what our values are."

Training and retraining is critical to growth in organizations of professionals such as Walker Parking, which often have to teach negotiating and managerial skills to people from technical backgrounds. "We have project managers that deal with client accounts," says Transue. "To bring them up to speed fast enough really spreads our management. This year, we had two- and three-day training programs for our project managers by outside consultants. We're spending a lot of money on this. We realized that we had to."

Transue, a graduate of the Owner/President Management Program at Harvard, has an unusually broad view of his own role in what is still a relatively small business. "I believe in working on the business and not in the business," he says. "I'm not much of a hands-on person. I do a lot of client maintenance and marketing-type stuff. But I don't interfere with the experts in our company who are doing the work. I try to look over the business from 50,000 feet up, seeing how we can run it better and make the right strategic moves."