

The Cultural Leadership Challenge

There is a new generation of Executives and Managing Directors on the horizon bringing with them a new level of understanding and expertise in Cultural as well as Functional leadership in organisations. The current generation relies heavily on promoting "functional" expertise, an aspect of business, ie. Sales, marketing, finance etc., into general management roles. They succeed primarily when they have also brought a well-developed people 'nouse' with them. They are considered to be intuitive in their leadership as well as competent in their function.

Many would consider that the problem is in finding the right "intuitive", hiring him or her, and "Bob's your uncle!" And that little else, really, can actually be done. It's a bit like a horse race, you do your best to pick a winner, back 'em and you could be lucky!

We know that there is much more to it than that, and a lot of people already in general leadership, MD, GM, EO 'roles' (as opposed to 'functions') have intuitions that are telling them so. They know that there is something to all the 'culture business', but they find it very hard to pin down. And, I hasten to add that there are some very good reasons for that difficulty.

The topic of Values has been one of the more accessible tips of the "iceberg" (culture), but it is only a small piece of the amorphous puzzle that constitutes Organisational Culture.

For example, if our mindset is "functional" ie. we see organisations in terms of functions (sales, marketing, finance, operations, HR, PR, legal etc.) and we end up with the problem of trying to see culture as a function and wonder where and how to fit it in. That is a left brain dilemma.

Because culture is not a function, the problem can not be solved within that mindset. In a strictly functional mindset, the organisation and the business are virtually synonymous.

If, however, we take a step back and separate the Organisation from the Business, it is easier to see that an Organisation, similar to the brain, has two spheres, the Business sphere (left brain – functional - intellectual / task) and the Cultural sphere (right brain – relational - intuitive / creative).

The right brain dilemmas are about the relationship and power problems that grow and thrive (or fail to) on, around, between and among the business activities, processes and structures. They can create strangle holds in some places, they may balloon like cancers in other areas or they may support a robust health in the business processes, keeping strengths and weaknesses in check and various powers in balance. A good intuitive leader can go a long way in handling this productively, but we have to be lucky and then lucky again when it is time for succession.

It can be a lot easier and more secure than that.

With the help of so many of the relationship sciences, we are in a position to fill out the 'right brain' side of an Organisation's potential by adding cultural leadership (relational - right brain) to business leadership (functional - left brain).

Generally speaking, current Organisational leaders (coming from a functional background) who are already installed and invested in their roles see a tough challenge if they attempt to extend their mindset from primarily functional, (left), to functional + cultural (left + right) in situ. Learning while in the spotlight is not easy even for the most confident of leaders.

For this reason, Cultural Leadership Catalysts and Coaches work in tandem with established business leaders IN the context of their teams and tasks to bring about the added cultural capabilities naturally, organically.

The whole team grows into more of their potential, leader and team together, in facilitated exercises, which are also getting on with their business tasks. Coincidentally, their work performance improves in concert with the improved strength of their relationships, and there is a marked demise in the infamous tell-tale, time consuming communication problems. Leaders and team members gain mutual respect and influence (power) with each other. More efficiency, more effectiveness.

The Intuitives are the best candidates because they already know, on some level, that the future of Organisations is going in that direction, broadly speaking. Their intuition sharpens their interest, which is what identifies them as providing the best potential for developing cultural capability.

Consequently, the businesses which move early to invest in their cultural potential will be able to advance into their business potentials with new power sooner. This will appear mysterious to those who will still be flogging their functional mindset in an attempt to generate the proverbial "blood from a turnip".

They will eventually catch on and the distinguishing character and power of the strong culture organisation will become more commonplace. The experienced leaders, however, will be further down the track, evolving the new faces of business to come.

Because the stakes are high for a leader who is already in place, it is of prime importance for that leader and the Culture Catalysts and Coaches to achieve an unequivocal mutual understanding and support in their relationship. This is the key to keeping the organisation stable, on course, and doing a thriving business while opening up its new potential.

It means that Leader and Catalyst / Coach will have to invest in getting to know each other well enough to TRUST the integrity, values, vision, and intent of each other. This is using cultural principles to establish cultural practices, in other words, values 'live and in living colour!'

This primary relationship is also the seed of the power to come, where a culture of strong, multifaceted relationships provides the power base for an Organisation's resilience, creativity, flexibility, commitment and sustainability even as it generates new levels of success and potential for everyone associated with it, all it's stakeholders.

The equation is simple and I'm sure you will know this well.

- Potential without Interest is as good as no potential.
- Interest without Potential is courting disaster.
- No Potential, No Interest, No Brainer.
- Potential + Interest = GO!

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