

Higher Performance with a Higher Purpose

Creationstep Inc.

Introduction

Organizations who choose to emphasize co-alignment with its employees at a higher purpose and identity level will gain emotional engagement that drives higher performance with social and environmental responsibility.

High performance and co-alignment

Organizations exist to benefit greater society while giving people the opportunity of dignified work. Throughout the ages however, many organizations lost their wider mission and became self-serving machines that ignored the long term sustainability of the environment. The mechanistic nature of these ventures in turn required people to function in highly controlled environments and reduced their contribution to machine like activity. These organizations relied heavily upon predicting the future through analyzing trends and learning ways to condition the responses of employees. Eventually many people lost the pleasure and dignity of work and the modern dream lost its momentum. New innovations emerged and a highly unpredictable environment came into play forcing corporations to rethink why they exist and how they motivate people.

According to Tom Peters (2003) many of the new challenges facing business and corporations are similar to current military challenges, and in the words of General Shinseki, "If you don't like change, you're going to like irrelevance even less." Flexibility and adaptability have become essential attributes to survival and growth for people, groups, and

organizations alike. The study of individuals and groups in organizations has therefore become interesting and valuable to corporations and business leaders who face the reality of changing or dying. Studies in organizational behavior have played an important role by helping leaders and managers realize that people are an organizations most important asset. Terms like intellectual/emotional capital, and long-term sustainability have become common and are slowly becoming aligned with financial capital goals within organizations. This emerging holistic perspective is making room for employees to have a voice and a shaping influence within their industry.

As employees of all rank have gained influence in organizations, a new paradigm of relating to the organization as an organism has surfaced. This organizational metaphor has begun to lead organizations away from the mechanistic domination of the modern era and towards the possibility of thinking, learning and changing together. This has become a utopian dream of the new economy. Organizations have become recognized as entities within themselves with the capacity to become more than just the sum of their parts. These organizational entities are organisms seeking to adapt and survive in a changing environment. Similar to any living system, the DNA of every organizational organism eventually manifests itself into a unique identity of the interconnected systems that sustain it with a purpose to contribute to the wider system. According to Gareth Morgan (1998), this organizational metaphor "suggests that

different environments favor different species or organizations based on different methods or organizing and that congruence with the environment is key to success.” This suggests that the success of an organization transcends goals, structures and efficiency. In this paradigm, the responsibility of a leader is to appreciate the identity and responsibility of the organization while ensuring its behavior is aligned and congruent with its people and the environment.

If we choose to perceive the whole organization as a system then we can recognize that it is comprised of subsystems within subsystems. Just as any organism is made up of smaller entities, an organization does not exist without the people. The process of nurturing synergy between the various systems (people, groups, and the organization) is the challenge of organizational leadership. Without this effort the organization can become incongruent or introspected, missing the dynamism of a self-learning and self-managing environment. According to Coffman and Gonzalez-Molina’s compilation of Gallup research (2002), the hope of sustained growth and real profit increase for business is found in developing emotionally engaged employees. In addition to this, Harvard Business Review’s work on the customer service profit chain has revealed that companies who focus on the satisfaction and motivation of their staff are demonstrating long term gain and exponential business growth. Emotionally engaged employees demonstrate higher energy, deeper commitment, and a greater retention with custom-

ers. Organizations intentionally designed to bring out the best in people and create extraordinary organizational capability have been defined by Schermerhorn et al (2003) as high performance organizations (HPO’s). It makes sense then, if emotionally engaged employees are committed and motivated organizational members, that learning to gain and sustain this attribute must become high on the responsibilities of a leader.

Assisting team members to discover their unique commitments and become emotionally engaged goes beyond standard financial reward systems which tend to focus on the bottom layers of Abraham Maslow’s theory of motivation. Organizations need to be able to help their employees discover creative and effective ways to align their identity and purpose with that of the organization. This in turn can bring a corporate congruency where high performance is realized. Discovering processes to bring this level of organizational alignment has become a significant challenge to organizational leaders. The effort to integrate the needs and contributions of individuals and organizations has a significant challenge due to the continuous change of both.

By serving the needs of people and removing the prescriptive and directive measures that have been prevalent in most management theories based on predictable futures, organizations can become dynamic enough to capitalize on the unpredictable and turn it to their advantage. This is what Margaret Wheatley (1999), refers to as working with the forces

of change. This stands in contrast of attempts to manage or control them. This level of adaptability and co-evolvement is what will separate HPO's from its competitors.

As organizations face this transition the role of the change agent is to help employees consider issues like, diversity, power, leadership, empowerment, ethics, beliefs, boundaries, vision, values, culture, communication, and innovation. Many consultants and leaders have chosen to focus their attention primarily on structures, strategies and goals. This has brought limited results but in many cases has not been able to lead the organization beyond its current boundaries. This begs the question: if it is approached at a higher level will the response be more favorable?

Higher levels in this context can be defined as vision, identity, and beliefs. The anthropologist Gregory Bateson (1972), identified several fundamental levels of learning and change, each being more abstract yet having a greater degree of influence on the system. Robert Dilts (1996) interpreted these into the following list:

1. Spiritual
2. Identity
3. Beliefs
4. Capabilities
5. Behaviors
6. Environment

The thinking behind these neurological levels is that if one changes something on an upper

level it would in turn influence change on the levels below.

While the emphasis throughout modernity was on the lower levels the emphasis in the postmodern era needs to be on the higher levels if organizational leaders desire co-alignment and innovative environments. A common struggle for organizational leaders dealing with this suggestion is the process of how they can state and direct the organizational goals down the hierarchy to ensure execution. This perception misses the point of the shift to higher levels and lacks the framework to understand how the job will get done without managing the goals and objectives. Gareth Morgan (1998) introduces the image of organizations as information processing brains. He highlights that the intelligence of the human brain is not predetermined or pre-planned but rather evolves through the experiences of its environment. This challenges the top-down approach to management and encourages better feedback and learning systems that allow for the emergence of effective behaviors and actions.

William Ouchi, in his book Theory Z (1981), compares and contrasts how American and Japanese managers view the issue of goals differently. It appears that American managers have a strong macro perception of goals and the need to define them, whereas Japanese managers tend towards a meta perspective of how their organization and behavior relates to the wider system and therefore shapes their decisions and allows objectives to emerge.

The latter relies more on the presence of limitations and boundaries instead specified goals and directives. This in turn can give rise to a more creative, intelligent and innovative environment.

Dilts (1996), connected the various neurological levels to organizational leadership and change. This framework can be used to help organizations, groups and individuals answer the fundamental questions necessary for co-alignment:

Spiritual	Vision and Purpose	Who Else
Identity	Role and Mission	Who
Beliefs	Motivation and Permissions	Why
Capabilities	Perception and Direction	How
Behaviors	Actions and Reactions	What
Environment	Constraints and Opportunities	Where

By focusing on the two upper levels, a leader or change agent can emphasize the commitments and contributions of the multiple entities involved in order to gain synergy. Alignment at this level can allow people to respond from the core of their being. The energy that can surface in this process can influence and shape all the other levels without the need for directive leadership or management by objectives. Employees aligned with the organization at this level quickly become emotionally engaged stake-holders who demonstrate team spirit.

Leaders of organizations like this in turn become service providers and facilitators for their employees. As emotionally engaged team members begin to work, the need for new tools and resources quickly replace the prior requirement of direction and control.

According to Schermerhorn et al (2003), the total power within the organization can increase in this process as the concept of power is reframed to get things done instead of being used to rule over one another. The need for limitation becomes more important than objectives as restraint is more of an issue than motivation. The emphasis of ethical decision making is elevated as team members choose the most effective way forward within their own paradigms or maps of the world. Self-directed education begins to replace organizational training as individuals can evaluate what they need most for any given situation more than the CEO.

This style of organization aligns itself to Douglas McGregor's Theory Y assumptions that people like work, are naturally creative

and accept responsibility. This stands in contrast to his Theory X assumptions reflected in many classical management styles, that people basically dislike work, need direction, and avoid responsibility. HPO's like this function on high levels of empowerment and trust by delegating authority and well as responsibility. They decentralize control and emphasize involvement and participation at all levels. The Decision making process recognizes the limitations of the classical approach where bounded rationality and cognitive limitations of human beings are unappreciated. Alternative methods like that of the Vroom and Jago decision process flowchart make more sense as they make room for intelligence at all levels of the organization. According to Schermerhorn et al (2003) this process helps people analyze the situation for themselves while assisting them with options to choose the most appropriate decision-making method.

The process of transition for organizations that want to move in this direction is usually slow and expensive. This of course depends on the current size and nature of the organization. Surveys and analysis assist the change agent in the process but involvement at all levels is necessary for co-alignment. The more people who find themselves aligned with the vision and mission of the organization will define the level of corporate congruency and power. The strategy towards a transition of this style will be dependant on the size and spread of the organization. Some begin this transition by modeling it within a sub-group while others initiate it by gathering representation by the

main influencers from various departments and teams.

The latter approach seems effective for many organizations because of the systemic nature of an organization. When key influencers change and discover the co-commitment of their personal mission and that of the organization they can assist those within their sphere of influence to experience the same. The discovery and articulation of the organizational vision and mission needs to coincide with the process of personal discovery with employees in order for them to have something to negotiate against or they could easily begin to believe that the organization exists only to serve them instead of it being a vehicle for them to express themselves within.

According to Fradette & Michaud (1998), the five key tasks of leaders in a transition like this are:

1. Set the companies strategic purpose.
2. Establish boundaries within which that purpose may be pursued.
3. Provide mechanisms whereby workers can challenge those boundaries.
4. Champion market and customer events.
5. Make decisions in real time.

Google (according to Business 2.0, June 2004), established its strategic purpose to become an internet search engine or gateway into the boundless world of the web. It was clear about what it would be from the outset. Instead of defining clear goals and objectives it established clear boundaries such as it should never be “evil”. In other words, it defined what it would not do from the outset. This simplicity enabled it to stay focused in comparison to competitors like Yahoo, Alta Vista, and Excite who branched out beyond technology and lost market share. In addition to this the founders invested a great amount of trust in their staff by fostering a risk-taking environment. They encouraged a context for

engineers to spend 20 percent of their time working on personal projects that may or may not benefit the organization. This process allows their staff to be creative and in return it has benefited Google through new discoveries of employees that developed ideas within the boundaries suggested by the founders. Google, with astounding revenue growth of 437,115% since 1999, tops the list of innovative companies. It reported revenue of nearly \$1 billion in 2004 and has now become the world’s biggest search engine. It would appear that they have discovered something important about innovation and high performance that other organizations can learn from.

Conclusion:

The opportunity for organizations to rediscover their true purpose while giving people the opportunity to express their identity and creativity for societal benefit is more real than ever. As more leaders and managers recognize the true potential of people in their organizations the possibility of a new era of innovation and invention will be birthed giving more dignity to people at work. The impact of this on our society is worth considering. As more people find fulfillment in what they do the negative forces of our culture will subside allowing new generations to dream of a compelling and sustainable future.

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About Creationstep

Creationstep is a company committed to drawing out the best of people and the world around us.

We are a collaborative group of professionals who enjoy working together and supporting companies through chaotic and unpredictable times. We come from diverse cultural and experiential backgrounds bringing a unique perspective and creative view on the projects we accept. We have a team of experienced project managers who can lead a task force efficiently within each of the industries we service. We take the time to listen to our client's needs and requirements and then build the team necessary to deliver the results on time within the

given boundaries. We have a strong emphasis on the development and emotional engagement of our employees. It is our ambition to help each person be connected in a role that best suits their gifts and plans for their future. We draw out the best in our people through hands on experience and by investing in their education and life skills. It is our intention to connect the right people in the right places for the right reasons. Then everyone is happy and the job gets done.