

THE OXFORD REVIEW

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The Oxford Review
Volume 1 Number 03

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What develops a new employee's commitment to the organization?

A paper just published in the Journal of Organizational Behaviour looks at what makes a difference to new employees' commitment to the organization.

Organizational commitment

Organizational commitment has been positively associated with a range of outcomes like productivity, intention to stay, engagement in organizational citizenship behaviours, for example. A number of previous studies have shown that new employees' organizational commitment tends to decline significantly over the first few years. However a small number (about 30%) of employees actually strengthen their commitment to the organization over the first three years of their employment.

The question the researchers wanted to answer was what was it that contributes to the growth in commitment to the organization for this minority of people. Was it something that the organization was doing or has this phenomenon got more to do with personal characteristics and personality?

The researchers from universities in Brazil and the Netherlands looked at 154 new employees and

followed their progress over three years.

Older new employees

The first thing they found was it was the older new employees that had a higher commitment to the organization at the end of the study, with the younger new employees tending to be the first to reduce their commitment to the organization. Not only that but it was also found, somewhat counter-intuitively, that older new employees also had lower levels of what is known as 'work centrality'. What this means is that the older employees tended to view work as just a part of their life as opposed to work being a dominant force in their lives which is seen as a factor in growing organizational commitment.



Skills

The researchers also found that the more the person's skills and

experience matched the role (high person-job fit) and the more that the tasks and jobs undertaken challenged the skills of the individual the more likely their organizational commitment would grow instead of decline. However there is a balance to be struck because it was found that employees who feel overloaded and overwhelmed by the amount of work with no mechanism for managing the workload correlates with rapidly declining organizational commitment. This last issue, it was found, centered around their relationship with their direct manager. Good managers can have a significant impact on organizational commitment.

Own initiative

Next they found that people who are more likely to work on their own initiative (and where the organization allows them to do so), who make decisions and who feel that they can be productive are also most likely to develop a growing commitment to the organization.

Progression

Lastly people who have a sense of progression (promotion or

specialization) also tend to have a strengthening commitment to the organization.

So if you are employing people who are in the 30% of employees who strengthen their commitment to your organization over the first three years go for someone:

1. Who is older
2. Who has outside interests and doesn't live, eat and breathe work
3. Whose skills fit the role closely and is likely to find the job challenging without getting overloaded and
4. Who can work on their own initiative.

But you have to *allow* them to work on their own initiative and provide good management, not micro-management.

Reference

Maia, L. G., Bastos, A. V. B., & Solinger, O. N. (2016). Which factors make the difference for explaining growth in newcomer organizational commitment? A latent growth modeling approach. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*.

Link:

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/job.2096/abstract>

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Conflict Management Protocols In Management

In almost all organizations there will be a level of natural and inherent conflict. Conflict is a natural part of human existence.

People have different perspectives and different ideas and sometimes those ideas and perspectives change or create conflict. At some level, particularly in creative environments the tension provided by conflict is a good thing as it provides the spark for the creativity. However, conflicts can get out of hand if those on the different sides of the conflict become entrenched in their views and treat the conflict as a problem, rather than the basis for creativity. This then can impact on the organization as a whole. A happy organization is a productive one, and so the opposite is also largely true – the unhappy organization can be and often is unproductive and things like staff turnover increases, which in turn increases cost.



A paper just published in International Journal of Economics, Commerce and Management

looked at the case of a bank and found that 'conflict management protocols' can help to prevent conflict becoming problematic.

Types of conflict and where they're likely to emerge

The authors identified three situations where conflict is most likely to arise:

1. Change. This is unsettling to all involved in the process and can cause ructions in an organization.
2. Conflicting goals and objectives with different values and priorities
3. Limited resources. Where bodies within the organization are competing for the same resources this can lead to problems arising.

The authors also identified five types of conflict within an institution:

1. Structural conflict or conflict arising out of the need to manage the interdependence and flow of work between different organizational sub-units.
2. Role conflict, which is conflict arising from sets of behaviours prescribed by the organization or the culture and the behaviours

- needed to actually get the job done
3. Resources conflict, resulting from competition for limited resources.
 4. Communicational conflict, where misunderstandings arise between parties
 5. Personal conflict, meaning interpersonal conflict which arises from things like conflicting personalities or conflicts in values or beliefs.

Good conflict / bad conflict

Certain types of conflict are productive, for example challenging poor behaviour or each other's ideas for example can help to prevent failure. Additionally conflict within a buzzing organization full of creativity where people disagree over how to achieve similar aims helps keep people sharp.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT



However when conflict starts to cause turbulence and negative behaviours like avoidance or aggression for example, then the conflict needs managing.

Conflict management means implementing strategies to limit the negative aspects of conflict and to increase the positive aspects of conflict.

Methods of dealing with conflict

The researchers identified five methods organizations tend to use to deal with conflict:

1. Competition. This is a version of 'the strongest wins and the conflict goes away. However, as there will be one winner and one loser in the conflict, this can cause hurt and resentment to one side and help to create bad atmosphere.
2. Accommodation. This is considered a lose / win approach where both sides give way and accommodate as far as possible or where one side acquiesces to 'keep the peace'. Again this can have unfavourable consequences.
3. Avoidance. This is very common and is where both sides withdraw from the point of conflict and never deal with it. This rarely resolves the issue and sets up an avoidant culture. This is widely regarded as the worst means of tackling a problem.
4. Collaboration. Collaboration is seen as the best means of tackling an issue, with both sides trying to "honestly seek new and common higher grounds". This can take time and a considerable measure of emotional maturity.
5. Compromise – conflict resolution. Negotiation and a high degree of flexibility is required by the manager

and both sides. Both sides will get some of what they want while giving ground in others. This is more of a trading game. It can manage the conflict and *may* result in a reasonable solution.

Conclusions

The paper found that having a range of overt conflict resolution protocols that people are consciously aware of is key to resolving different types of conflict within the organization. Smaller, less heated issues could be dealt with through competition. Where things have escalated and a trade union is perhaps negotiating hard for better pay and conditions the collaborative or compromise – conflict resolution models should be considered.



The idea is to deal with the conflict before it becomes a detractor or turbulence in the business. In tackling the conflict before it reaches a critical stage, allows the organization to work productively and when conflict does arise it gives the antagonists the tools to resolve issues quickly and effectively. It is the lack of awareness, fear and a lack of a protocol that helps conflict to become disruptive.

Reference

Ajike EO, et al (2016) Effect of conflict management on the performance of financial service organization in Nigeria: an empirical study of Access Bank PLC. International Journal of Economics, Commerce and Management UK Vol III Issue 7
Link:
<http://publication.babcock.edu.ng/docs/BAMK/ajikee/1444675368.pdf>

Evidence Based Practice – from theory to reality

The concept of Evidence Based Practice has been around for over 20 years, yet it has still to penetrate the culture of many organizations, even though it is used extensively in clinical and other professional arenas. A new study by researchers at the Centre for Evidence-Based Practice at Bergen University in Norway has come up with some interesting findings about embedding evidence based practice.

Evidence Based Practice

Evidence Based Practice is central to the working practices of organizations like the UK's NHS. It forms the central basis of its core practice and strategy. The study looked at how students and practitioners viewed their ability to apply evidence-based practice and their perceptions of what constitute necessary conditions to implement evidence-based practice.

With Evidence Based Practice practitioners are expected to build decisions upon solid evidence. This requires that decisions are based on the best available, current, valid and relevant evidence from research, informed by clinical expertise and patient values. A good conceptual map of Evidence Based Practice can be seen in figure 1:



Fig. 1 Model of evidence-based practice (EBP) [51]

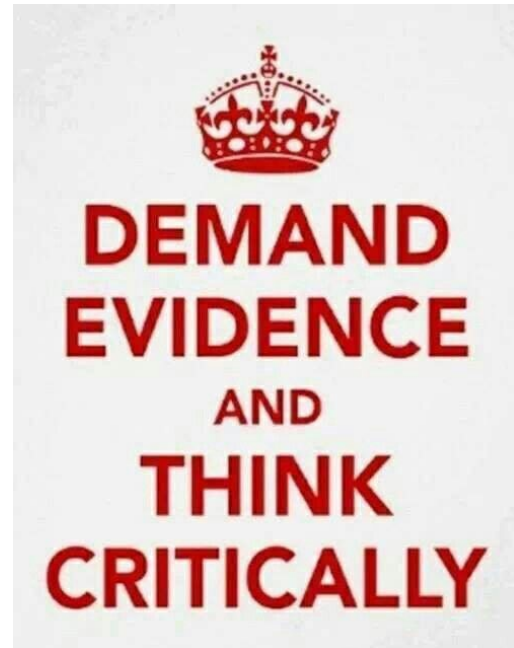
It was found that an overall necessary condition for evidence-based practice to occur in any workplace is the existence of a 'readiness for change' both at an individual level and at the organizational level.

This means that in order for evidence-based practice to really take off in any organization there are two primary precursors for readiness to change to be evident in the organization:

1. That the organization is a learning organization. This means that leaders:

- a. understand the nature of evidence based practice
 - b. are committed to developing a learning focussed, evidence based practice culture and
 - c. can develop evidence-based networks
- 2. That staff have developed the knowledge and skills to be change agents. This means that employees:
 - a. have a level of self-efficacy or have the self-belief and confidence that they have the knowledge, capacity and capability to engage productively in evidence-based practice
 - b. need to have the 'analytic competence' and the cognitive and other tools to productively participate in evidence based practice.

Importantly the research found that there needs to be a well thought through strategy for implementing and rolling out evidence based practice.



Reference

Hole, G. O., Brenna, S. J., Graverholt, B., Ciliska, D., & Nortvedt, M. W. (2016). Educating change agents: a qualitative descriptive study of graduates of a Master's program in evidence-based practice. BMC medical education, 16(1), 1.

Link:

<https://bmcmmededuc.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12909-016-0597-1>

What creates the conditions for successful shared leadership?

Shared leadership is increasingly being used in certain sectors. Broadly speaking, this is where the team is jointly responsible for a task and no one person is responsible for the successes or failures of the team. In other words it is where leadership is broadly distributed, such that people within a team and organization lead each other. Research into shared leadership has now shown that there are a number of components that help with the formation of shared leadership.

1. The internal team environment
2. Task cohesion
3. Shared leadership principles
4. Shared task satisfaction

Internal team environment



Previous research has tested and revealed that shared leadership is enabled by an overall team environment comprised of

1. Shared purpose
2. Social support, and
3. Voice

This internal team environment fosters team members' willingness to offer leadership influence as well

as relying on the leadership of other team members.

Shared purpose is where team members have similar understandings of their main team objectives and focus on the accomplishment of the collective goals.

Social support is where the team dynamic allows people to give each other support within the team, perhaps helping one another out as the task gets particularly difficult.

Voice is defined as the level of internal communication throughout the task. Voice is a feeling that you can speak up when you need to and that challenge is valued.

Task cohesion

A team doesn't have to gel well to get a job done. Everyone has probably been in situations in their work life where they wouldn't go to the pub with someone but they would 'sail through the Gates of Hell' with them as they were considered to be good at their job. Task cohesion is a group's shared attraction and commitment to the group goal. A significant number of studies suggest task cohesion is more closely related to work performance than interpersonal cohesion.

Shared leadership

Shared leadership is about the team conducting themselves with no one person being tasked with coordinating and leading it. Everyone takes their responsibility

for their element of the task and jointly for the task as a whole.

Another study defined shared leadership as 'a dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both'. It is in essence the collaboration of professionals each taking responsibility.

Task satisfaction

Task satisfaction is essentially the group's perception of the completion of the task in much the same way as individuals perceive their jobs through job satisfaction. Task satisfaction is a group-level counterpart of individual job satisfaction and previous studies have defined it 'as a group's shared attitude toward both its task and the associated work environment.'

The paper, published in The Leadership Quarterly, found that when dealing with creative tasks the internal team environment and task cohesion predicts and tends to

lead to shared leadership which, in turn, determines task satisfaction.



Reference

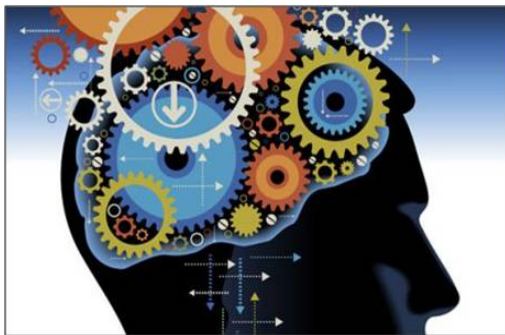
Serban, A., & Roberts, A.J.B., (2016) Exploring antecedents and outcomes of shared leadership in a creative context: A mixed-methods approach, The Leadership Quarterly.

Link:

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1048984316000102>

Using Critical thinking cards as part of training

Many professions use a mixture of practical hands-on skills learning with more academically based theoretical learning and teaching approaches. The problem with this approach is that students frequently have difficulty joining the practice with the theoretical. The medical and nursing professions are classic examples where there are large amounts of classroom work that are taught alongside the practical skills elements. Many other examples are professions like the legal professions, the military, construction etc.



Researchers from Wright State University in Ohio looked at using critical thinking cards in an attempt to bridge this gap. The idea of developing them was so that students can be asked questions during their practical training that help combine their theoretical knowledge with their practical skills.

Active learning

A considerable number of research studies have found that active learning strategies engage students and produce better learning outcomes than the more traditional passive, lecture or presentation based training sessions. Active learning, which involves student engagement

rather than passive acceptance, is one concept consistent with teaching strategies that promotes retention of information, critical thinking, and clinical decision-making.

The researchers found that when a student is engaging in practical skills activities and being asked questions about the application of the theory, it tends to underpin and reinforce the practical activity as well as provide an evidential basis for the actions they are undertaking. In engaging with the theory in this way, the students tend to tie things together better and consequently can better understand how the theory underpins their work.

Coaching the theory during the practical skills experience is a powerful facet of active learning. The paper continued, "Faculty coaching is essential when teaching students how to think critically and apply knowledge to clinical problems. Coaches use their clinical expertise to provide guidance because the student is actively engaged in solving real-life problems."

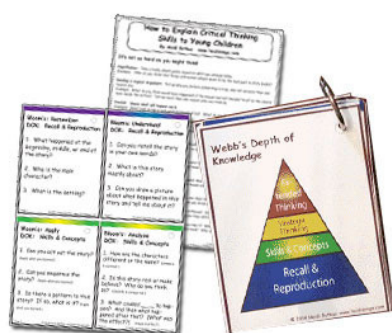
The final element to active learning is the so called 'think aloud approach'. As the student is going through a process so they are encouraged to say what they are thinking as they make the relevant decisions so the tutor can hear what they are doing and what has made them take certain actions.

Critical thinking cards

Critical thinking cards are playing card sized cards which combines the use of questioning, coaching and the think-aloud methods.

For example in nursing a card might say something like “What are the differences between physiologic and pathologic jaundice? What treatments might you want to use for each? At what points would you want to involve the consultant before continuing with treatment?”

The idea is that as the student is engaged in the practical elements of the course the trainers can get the student to choose a card based on the area of practice and has to engage in the activity on the card. The researchers found that “It allows for faculty to extend student learning as they continue to delve deeper into the student's knowledge base and ability to connect knowledge and practice.”



The paper explains how these are used in practice: “Faculty used critical thinking cards at various times throughout the clinical day to provide opportunities for students to demonstrate application of classroom knowledge to actual patient situations. Students randomly selected a card from the

deck then responded to the question or situation, which often led to more interaction and discussion. If the student struggled to provide an answer, faculty used coaching to assist in providing the correct solution or learning how to find the correct response. Faculty also used the think-aloud method to help the student process information and make sound decisions.”

Conclusions

The paper concluded that this novel system, with a few tweaks to improve its usability, could be a very good way of effectively improving the learning experience in almost any setting that has to mesh theory with practice and was found useful by both the students and tutors alike. It stated, “Critical thinking cards are certainly seen in a positive light by students that experienced their use in the clinical area. Students felt that the cards were useful in helping them learn basic concepts and helping them understand how to apply knowledge in practice situations. Faculty who utilized the critical thinking cards during clinical also felt that it was a good use of their time and that it benefitted students.”

Reference

Holland, C, Ulrich D, Critical Thinking Cards: An innovative teaching strategy to bridge classroom knowledge with clinical decision making (2016) Journal of Teaching and Learning in Nursing

Link:

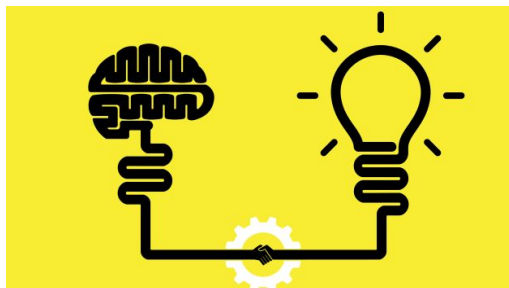
<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1557308716000093>

Links found between emotional intelligence and creativity, however....

A new study just published in the journal *Business Perspectives and Research* looked at whether there is a link between employees' creativity at work and their general level of emotional intelligence.

The study

The study looked at 250 employees at all levels in two public service sector organizations. The researchers used a form of analysis called hierarchical regression analysis which looks at the relationships between a series of factors with participants who are organized into different levels.



The researchers wanted to find out what the relationship is between emotional intelligence, as measured by a validated tool called the Wong Emotional Intelligence Scale (WEIS). This is a self-report emotional intelligence measure. WEIS is a scale based on the four ability dimensions described in the domain of emotional intelligence:

(1) appraisal and expression of

emotion in the self

(2) appraisal and recognition of emotion in others

(3) regulation of emotion in the self

(4) use of emotion to facilitate performance

Findings

The study resulted in a number of findings:

Firstly, that there is a positive and significant relationship between emotional intelligence and creativity at work.

However this is not a straightforward relationship of the nature emotional intelligence = creativity. The researchers found that emotional intelligence tends to lead to creativity if two conditions are present.

Two conditions

Firstly that the individual has a 'proactive personality'. Most research and tools like the MBTI for example are based on the 'big 5 personality traits'. However a 'proactive personality' is a bit of a hidden gem. It has been shown to correlate very closely with a series of factors like entrepreneurial success for example.

Proactive personality

There are 6 dimensions to a proactive personality:

1. Biased towards action
2. They find and solve problems
3. They take personal responsibility
4. Perseverance and persistence
5. Change and uncertainty tolerant
6. Oriented towards personal development

A study published in the journal *Human Relations* in 2012 found that individuals with a proactive personality were significantly more likely to 'craft' their own job (increase the scope and role of their job, build better structural and social job resources and increase their job challenges) compared to people who had a more passive personality.

Organizational climate

Secondly that the organizational climate is

1. Cooperative,
2. Supportive
3. That there is a good degree of job autonomy
4. Involvement is encouraged and
5. There is a trusting environment

Conclusions

The study concludes that there is a

link between creativity and emotional intelligence if:

1. The individual has a proactive personality and
2. The work environment supports it.

Both conditions need to be present.

I go into a wide range of organizations where the management is exasperated that the staff are not more creative. Usually they ask for workshops on creativity for their staff. Workshops are not going to help if the organizational climate doesn't support people and it doesn't encourage proactiveness, preferring instead to hire, retain and promote passive and compliant rule followers.

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Jafri, M. H., Dem, C., & Choden, S. (2016). Emotional Intelligence and Employee Creativity: Moderating Role of Proactive Personality and Organizational Climate. *Business Perspectives and Research*, 4(1), 54-66.

Link:

<http://bpr.sagepub.com/content/4/1/54.short>

What kind of leader do we want? Well it depends...

Research just published in The Leadership Quarterly looking at how we decide whether to approve of a leader or not has come up with some interesting results.

It is often assumed that endorsement of a leader depends on personal preference and mutual 'fit' of style. This study suggests otherwise.



Leadership endorsement is critical, especially in difficult situations as emotions and stress run high and the followers need to have confidence in their leader. Leadership endorsement also leads to confidence and belief in action and direction and willingness to follow.

The defining characteristic for leadership endorsement is "whether the particular strategies that a leader adopts are perceived to be effective by the group members".

The study

Through a series of social experiments and surveys the researchers from the London School of Economics and Political Science in the UK and the University of Queensland, in

Australia looked at a range of business and political situations, and examined:

1. The type of situation encountered
2. The strategies used by leaders for dealing with the situation and
3. The level of endorsement of the leaders

The researchers were using the backdrop of social identity theory to construct the study. Basically social identity theory is a way to explain behaviour within and between groups. One of the founding principles of social identity theory is that a person's sense of who they are, their status and pride for example is based on the groups they are members of. Further, that this sense of identity comes from comparing the group they are a member of with other 'out-groups'. In effect people are comparing the status of their group with other groups they encounter. Depending on the specific nature of the circumstances, social identity theory proposes that group members will engage in different identity management strategies in order to try to regain a positive social identity.

What the researchers discovered was:

1. In a situation where the in-group perceives that their group or team has lower status than the out-group and the social situation is perceived as unstable (they

feel insecure), a competitive leader tends to be preferred.

2. Where there is a higher perceived in-group status and the conditions are perceived as being stable (they feel secure), a cooperative leadership style tends to be preferred.

The researchers summed this up: "...the findings from our first two experiments corroborate our main hypothesis that group status and the perceived stability of intergroup relations interact to determine support for a leader who wants to fight the out-group rather than make peace with it."

The third study in the paper looked at the prototypicality (seen as an exemplar or model of the group – 'one of us') of the leader and showed that in each of the scenarios the group would prefer to choose a leader they identified as 'one of them'.

What this all means

Looking at leadership in business, political and even military situations throughout the ages, one can identify divisive leaders and cooperative leaders. Churchill was chosen to fight World War 2 after the cooperative Neville Chamberlain unsuccessfully tried to make peace with Hitler. After the war ended, however, Clement Atlee was swept to power in a General Election landslide to create the Welfare State and NHS and Churchill was unceremoniously pushed aside.

The social groups who rid themselves of Chamberlain, selected Churchill and then rid themselves of Churchill were the same electorate but the context had changed. The conditions were ripe in 1939 for a competitive leader; high levels of instability and lack of security and an out-group that saw itself as superior.

Once the war had ended the situation had changed. It was now one of greater stability and the social identity of the nation was more secure, enjoying high status compared to the old out-group.

Similar dynamics can be seen in business and organizational life. A behemoth such as Marks and Spencer would choose a cooperative leadership where an up and coming business looking to knock M&S off its perch would choose someone who is divisive and combative in outlook.

A startup company in IT will have a team of energetic young professionals who want to change the world, where a 'Churchill' would be prototypical of the management team. As the company levels out as a market leader, they would require a more stable, less divisive leader - a better administrator to help the company maintain its position.

Reference

Gleibs, I. H., & Haslam, S. A. (2016). Do we want a fighter? The influence of group status and the stability of intergroup relations on leader prototypicality and endorsement. *The Leadership Quarterly*.

Link:

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1048984315001496>

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An exploration of the 'dark side' associations of conflict, power and dependence in customer – supplier relationships

All of us have probably had issues with a telephone or utilities supplier at some point. Some of the larger companies frequently have very poor customer service reputations and this does impact on their ability to retain business. Another common case is how utility customers feel when they know that the price of gas is at an historic low yet their gas supplier drops their retail price by only a few percentage points - and still far above the cost when wholesale prices were last comparably low.

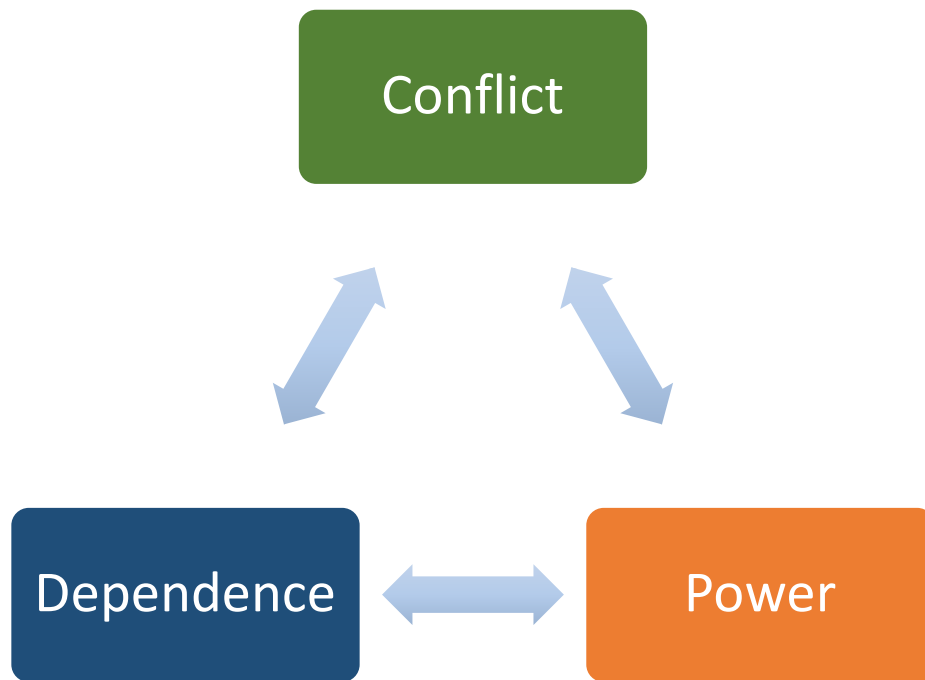
How does the balance of power affect your relationship with a supplier or customer? Are there resentments or contradictions between you? A paper just published by researchers in France looked at the component parts of the 'dark side' of customer – supplier relationships.

Management analysis

When things are going well, management usually pays little heed to what is going on between themselves and their customers or suppliers. It tends only to attract their attention when things change for the worse or there is a complaint. The researchers contend that this is too late and "For managers it is critical to consider and think over where they stand on the relational continuum and where they want to stand" .

The researchers discovered that there are three interrelated issues in most relationships between companies:

1. Conflict
2. Power and
3. Dependence



Conflict

Conflict can arise between organizations in any number of areas. What this research found was that conflict, contrary to popular belief can have both positive and negative aspects. For example they found that conflicts arise most in 'high involvement' relationships compared to 'low involvement' relationships where things are kept at arms length and there is little or no investment in the relationship. Conflict is a natural part of all relationships and is only a real problem when it becomes dysfunctional. Unresolved and continual conflict often results in a termination of the relationship. This is not always negative.

There are a range of issues that generate conflict like:

1. Lack of role clarity
2. Relationship uncertainty
3. Product uncertainty

4. Differences in business practices
5. Cultural differences

What the research identifies is that asymmetric relationships tend to accelerate conflict situations. These are relationships where there is an unequal distribution of power and they frequently result in conflict as the stronger or more powerful organization prioritises its own needs in the relationship.

Power

Having power in a relationship does not necessarily lead to conflict on its own. The researchers identified that there is a difference between having and using power. Where the organization in power is trying to win, then the power is being used and will likely result in

conflict. This includes forms of coercive power. However where the organization in power is trying to achieve a fair and equitable result (win/win) almost any conflict is likely to be voiced and resolved.

Power imbalances often lead to opportunism and less cooperative resolution tactics. However usually, these result in the eventual breakdown in the relationship.

What this is saying in effect that it is beholden to the organization with the power to listen and respond for the long term health of the relationship.

Where a utility company is refusing to give you better rates for example, you can usually just walk away and these days many do. What happens is that most customers are too small for a utility company to care either way about.

What this is saying is the way relationship asymmetry is managed, particularly by the most powerful member of the relationship, will tend to dictate both the level of conflict inherent in and the longevity of the relationship.

Dependence

Dependence in any relationship automatically gives power to the non-dependent member of the association. As such this is often another source of conflict. In effect the dependent party, particularly in a supplier relationship has their freedom to operate restricted to those defined by the non-dependent side of the relationship.



It has also been found that this often severely restricts and reduces supplier innovation for example, and rarely enhances the relationship if the non-dependent member uses its power

for its own ends, at the expense of the other.

Additionally an unbalanced relationship, one where one party is dependent on the other, might at first appear advantageous for the non-dependent party. However this study shows that in fact it promotes distancing within a relationship and engenders the non-dependent party to use their power with all the aforementioned problems associated with this scenario.

Whilst this study looks specifically at what the authors termed 'the dark side' of customer-supplier relationships, many of the findings appear to have significance beyond this environment.

The 'dark triad' of relationships

However this is a useful triadic framework for all businesses and organizations to use to consider the nature and consequences of their relationships externally and internally.

The paper concludes that, “Our ...review should draw practitioners' attention to the fact that the “bright” side of a relationship can turn to the “dark” side and relational benefits attached to a specific relationship should not be considered as an outcome but as a resource that needs to be nurtured and developed.”

In short, relationships that develop over time into unequal and unbalanced associations are largely unhealthy and likely to result in breakdown at some stage. The dark triad of relationships; power, conflict and dependence are interlinked and unless handled

honestly and with the intent of fostering better relations by the party with the power, tend to be doomed to ever worsening dynamics.

Reference

Johnsen, R.E., & Lacoste, S., (2016) An exploration of the ‘dark side’ associations of conflict, power and dependence in customer – supplier relationships, Industrial Marketing Management

Link:

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0019850115003260>

What do CEOs really learn when undercover on frontline roles?

Following the TV series Undercover Boss, researchers spoke to 13 Chief Executives (CEOs) to find out what they really learned from going undercover on the frontline of their own businesses. This differs somewhat to that which was presented on the TV series – which only focused on the human side, whereas the research focused on the impressions given to the CEOs from their businesses' point of view.



Background

One of the problems that senior management find in running their business is that they are a step above what is really happening. They operate in a bubble and for a series of different reasons may not understand what is really happening at the frontline of their companies. For example, how do changes of policy hit their ground level employees? Are their staff genuinely happy with the work they do?

The idea of the TV show, was to enable bosses to see what is really happening in their companies. CEOs went undercover at the bottom rung of their businesses. The TV show producers arranged everything including a back-story to hide their true identity and purpose

of being there. Only a few select members of the CEOs' teams were allowed to know what their bosses were up to. Finally, the CEOs were not allowed to see the final cut of the show until the day on which the TV show was aired so they would not influence the final cut in any way.

It should be noted that what the TV viewers see after editing is often not aligned with the actual experience and impressions gained by the Chief Executives.

Findings

Two themes emerged from the study, just published in Human Resources Development Quarterly. The CEOs were all left with two sets of impressions or outcomes:

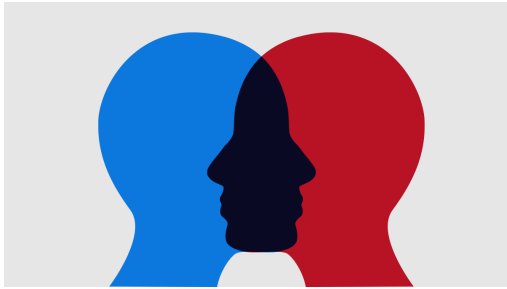
1. An increased level of empathy with their workers, and
2. A better understanding about the real culture of their organization.

Where the TV series tended to focus on the human, empathetic side; the major changes enacted by the CEO's after the undercover experience were made to the organizational culture of the companies.

The researchers reported the following:

Increased empathy findings

One comment made by a Chief Executive was, “It’s much more challenging than I ever imagined being on the frontline, and doing the work that they have to do.” Similar comments were made by all the bosses.



Another set of comments came back as to the nature of their workforce in terms of demographics. The paper reported, “Several commented about their surprise when they found that many frontline workers who earn minimum wage were not young and single. Some found that their employees were parents trying to support their families on minimum wage.”

Organizational culture findings

All bosses found that there were issues that either negatively affected their organizations or would cause problems soon. According to the paper these were:

1. How poorly employees were treated by managers, peers, and sometimes customers;
2. Expectations to work without adequate equipment;
3. Limited or no knowledge about resources available to assist them in their jobs;
4. The assumption that all

ideas dictated from above can be executed effectively on the frontline;

5. Lack of proper training;
6. No or little support for career development;
7. No or inadequate mechanisms designed to gather employee ideas or feedback; and
8. Poor leadership and management by direct supervisors.



Conclusions

The researchers were emphatic that going undercover to your frontline is a very good thing for a Chief Executive with very real learning about what is really happening in their own organizations.

The paper stated, “We suggest that by expanding CEO networks to include vertical interactions with lower-echelon employees, there is hope for redressing simmering discontent, isolation, and marginalization of workers.”

The level of detachment between executives and their staff in most companies tend to increase instability, risk and discontent within organizations and this is often accompanied by a lack of empathy and understanding, which harms the employees and the organization.

Reference

Cumberland DM, Alagaraja, M “No place like the frontline: A qualitative study on what participant CEOs learned from Undercover Boss” (2016) Human Resources Development Quarterly.

Link:

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/hrdq.21252/pdf>

In the world of technology business, there is a lot of Darwinist evolution taking place where even the largest businesses can be toppled by a new kid on the block. A paper just published in the Journal of Global shows why the dominant mobile phone maker Nokia died a sudden death while Microsoft was replaced by Apple as the world's most profitable company.



Smartphones have been around for over two decades now but were largely limited by the bandwidth available to the phones themselves. It was all very well having a phone with a slide out keyboard that a student could tap out their essay on, but they weren't attractive on a mass scale.

use were not brought together in a consumer friendly device.

In 2007 Apple came out with the iPhone, which is arguably the most important gadget developed this century so far. It had a very user friendly operating system and used third party apps that allowed other developers' imaginations to make the iPhone an extremely desirable tool. Finally, it streamed video and music. 3G and the smartphone were tied together and Apple's stock shot upward in value.

Google rushed in, offering its very user friendly Android OS for free to phone manufacturers and from its launch in 2008. This act would ensure that Google had 80% of the smartphone operating system market by 2014. Apple chose to combine its operating system with its hardware as a luxury item while Google maintained its search engine market share through Android.



At the time the iPhone (2007) was launched, Nokia was the big brand on the block, with its Symbian operating system working on over 60% of the world's mobile phones. Within seven years it would be dead.

The authors of this paper found that in 2007 Nokia chose to ignore the new kid on the block and carry on with business as usual. Realising too late that Apple was a threat, they reacted the wrong way. Nokia chose to focus a most of it's efforts on hardware upgrades while they generally reacted slowly in terms of both new product launches, software operating system and app updates, which made them loose a lot of ground in the important APP marketplace for smartphones. As the authors note "they had completely underestimated the new technology."

Microsoft had a wobble which it only survived due to its vast cash reserves and grip on the global PC operating system market. From being the dominant company in the computer world it lost significant ground to incomers such as Google, Apple and more recently Facebook.

In buying Nokia's mobile technology business it got a tiny foothold in the mobile technology market with its Windows operating system. Whilst Microsoft is by no means a problem like Nokia were and Blackberry now are, it has lost significant ground in the rapidly growing mobile market. It did not keep up with Apple and Google so didn't catch the wave of profits on which its two rivals now surf.

To quote the paper, "the examples with Microsoft and Nokia shows, that deep pockets do not seem to be neither important nor a precondition for success in markets with a high level of innovations." Both Microsoft and Nokia clearly had the means to finance whatever initiative they wanted to launch, but they did not address the user

experience technology in time.

So what is this all saying?

Apple took the risk and leapt into the smartphone market with a new vision. It smashed its way into the market with a disruptive technology. Its giant rivals in the mobile phone arena focused on the other hand "on the development of useful incremental innovation or adaption of the products they already have on the market and which have a clear and measurable return rather than allocate resources to some disruption technologies which have a much higher risk and unpredictable return."

The authors continue, "That is what Steve Jobs did, but he did not have to ask anybody else."



In previous papers in The Oxford Review I have looked at the issue of organizational ambidexterity; the ability of an organization to operate both with incremental and disruptive innovations at the same time.

The paper makes some suggestions as to how the Goliaths of today may survive the disruptive Davids' of tomorrow:

One is to give R&D researchers and employees more individual freedom so that they can and are allowed to allocate more of their time to their own creative ideas and projects which have no short-term measurable outcome.

This means that the management also have to learn to accept and take higher levels of risk. Likewise companies need to get used launching some of the new products at the forefront of innovation and face the consequences of possible disruption to their own market.



The paper concluded, “the large incumbent firms are focused too much on incremental innovation of their products which have a more clear calculated short- term return and a suggested solution of this

problem is to focus less on short-term efficiency and allow the individual researcher to follow their own ideas to a larger extent.”

Reference

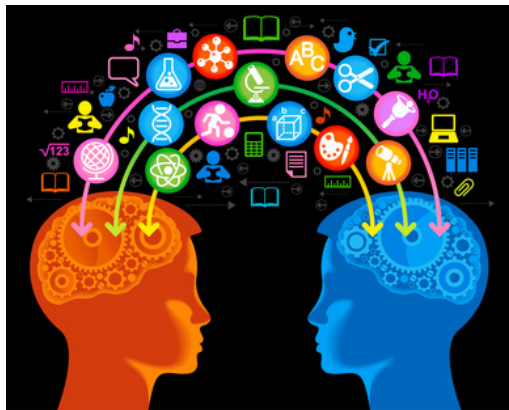
Simon, H. (2016). Disruptive Technologies and Networking in Telecom Industries. Journal of Global Economics, 2015.

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<http://www.esciencecentral.org/journals/disruptive-technologies-and-networking-in-telecom-industries-2375-4389-1000165.php?aid=65836>

Why you *have* to get learning and knowledge management sorted in your company

Collective knowledge and the ability to learn and unlearn in an organization are critical assets in improving organizational performance, increasing profitability, and ultimately creating and maintaining a competitive advantage.



However, uncertainty over how exactly knowledge management affects organizational performance creates a problem. A paper just published in the Journal of Industrial Management & Data Systems has found that this uncertainty creates a situation where leaders in both the public and private sectors don't understand how best to allocate resources to capitalise and develop knowledge management processes. The issue is that for continued support and investment, knowledge management initiatives must demonstrate clear and direct value to stakeholders.

Previous research has shown quite clearly that organizational learning culture, a specific type of organizational culture that integrates organizational learning, is a critical success factor in the

success of knowledge management.

This paper looks at the connections between organizational learning cultures and the use of knowledge management systems.

Whether focusing on cost cutting and efficiencies or moving product development in the most effective way through a supply chain, the knowledge behind these movements and transformations are key to the success of the operations. The management of this knowledge in all organizations is a key asset to improving these processes and gaining or developing a competitive advantage.

Organizational competencies

Alongside its resources and products, the capabilities and competencies an organization maintains, retains and develops are critical to its success. The researchers from Auburn University in the US and the US Air Force Institute of Technology found that overall there are four sets of competencies which are required for effective knowledge management. The researchers make an interesting point in that they view competencies as repeatable and non random ability to render competitive output. This gives competencies a wholly strategic focus.

The paper highlights three major issues surrounding the knowledge based competencies organizations need to develop:

1. Managerial competencies.
These are the general leadership and management competencies most organizations prize. However, they also need to include the competencies of leadership and management of learning and knowledge management. An area not often dealt with in organizational L&D programmes.
2. Organizational learning and knowledge management issues at a strategic level. This includes information flows and feedback mechanisms.
3. The ability of the employees to use and contribute to the learning / knowledge management systems of the organization.

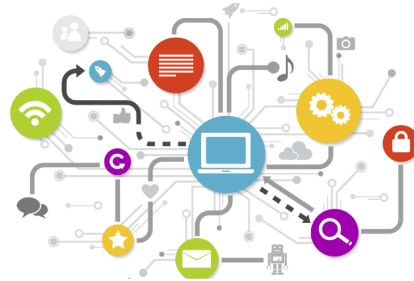
These, according to the authors of the paper, “include all assets, knowledge, skills, and capabilities embedded in the organization’s structure, technology, processes, and interpersonal relationships. These organizational competencies have the potential to yield sustained competitive advantage.”

Knowledge management

An organization’s competitive advantage is increasingly being recognised as direct product of their ability to learn, unlearn and develop and manage knowledge in sub-optimal and rapidly changing market conditions.

As the authors of the paper point out, “The importance of knowledge management has been equated to the importance of natural resources in previous generations wherein

strategies that companies once devoted to optimizing capital and labor are now being applied to maximize the productivity of knowledge resources.”



Where management should know how to lead an organization, they cannot know the whole business in all its intricacies to the very bottom. This is why learning should be promoted throughout the organization. The paper states, “The results provide evidence that organizations enhance performance when they foster and promote learning.”

The paper concludes, “This research showed that knowledge management and learning culture are capabilities that can evoke organizational performance and play a positive role in the development of human capital.”

Reference

Cooper, A. L., Huscroft, J. R., Overstreet, R. E., & Hazen, B. T. (2016). Knowledge management for logistics service providers: the role of learning culture. *Industrial Management & Data Systems*, 116(3).

Link:

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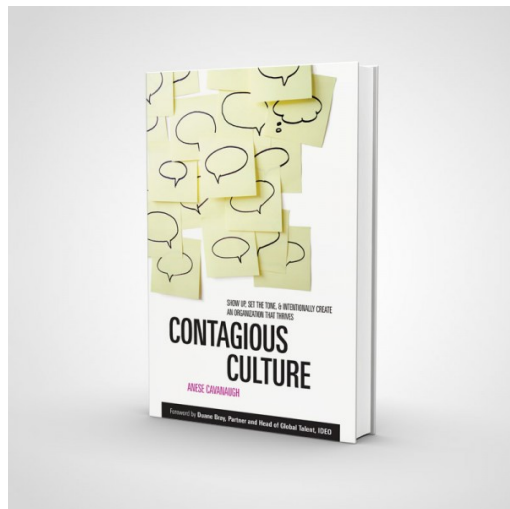
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Book Reviews

Contagious Culture: Show Up, Set the Tone and Intentionally Create an Organization that Thrives by Anese Cavanaugh

I was looking forward to this book. Just the title was enough for me and once I discovered that an IDEO team member has written it, it went straight onto my must read book. So what did I find?



The first worrying sign was that Anese Cavanaugh spends the introduction and the first couple of chapters selling the book. Why it's so important and how it will change your life etc. Call me cynical, but this kind of self-aggrandising writing behaviour makes me a little suspicious, particularly when it's not written by other people. Reviews and comments by others are fine and often add new perspectives to the book, but constantly being told by the author how important and vital a book is makes me wonder.

So what's it about and what is it saying?

Well it is basically saying that culture starts with you and how you show up, that we are all contagious, for good or for bad. To be honest I struggled with this book. Firstly there is little to no research or practice foundation to it. Everything is presented as 'well it's just true' statements without much evidence to back it up. Yes it contains generalised vignettes but they feel made up (although the author insists on a couple of occasions some are real life stories). They don't feel like it.

This is a bit of an odd book for me. It's not that I disagree with anything the book is saying, it is more that there is nothing really new in it. It feels like a series of personal development blogs strung together with some culture stuff thrown in at the end. If you have been around the personal or organizational development arenas for any length of time I can't imagine you are going to go "Wow this is new" or "I hadn't thought of it in that way", which is a shame. It contains what is, I suppose, a summation of the popular understanding about personal development and culture. The problem with a fair amount of the popular understanding about personal and organizational development is that

it lacks detail and rigour.

For example much of the popular thoughts about manifesting success is included which I know the more cynical may struggle with. The book is also prone to bland advice like this from Chapter 8 - Setting yourself up for success. "Show up and let your wisdom guide you."

Well, okay, but we already know that many people (yes, including us/me) do things that aren't particularly considered to be wise and that the number of people we identify with as having wisdom is probably not that great. I like the sentiment, however this kind of advice isn't very useful or practical when you don't know what to do next, are scared, worried or when things feel risky.

Having said all this there are some useful thoughts around the idea of 'presence', 'being present' and counsels about our energy and behaviour. It is a feel good book and it appears that this is its aim. Many of the examples are a little polarised and general, you really do get the feeling Anese just made them up, as she was writing, to emphasise the points she is making. Oddly for a feel good focussed book, many of the examples are negative 'how awful' illustrations of how not to do it.

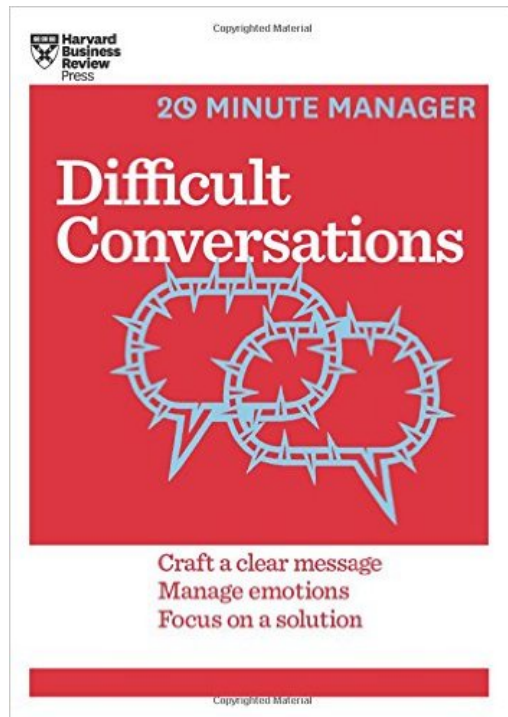
Sadly this book which offered much, will have to be consigned to my 'not much new with some useful bits' pile. It is most definitely not an evidenced based deconstruction of how to build a good culture a work. It is a popular and general look at how to 'show up and be present' in the hope that that builds a positive and constructive culture. There are genuinely useful parts to the book around developing focus and presence and some pretty useful lists of popular thinking about this. Although I'm not too sure how practical some of the things are. I can however see training courses and workshops arising from this stuff and people liking them as the contents are pretty formulaic. As to what difference they would actually make I less sure about.

One test as to how seriously a book is being taken is to see whether or not other authors and researchers are referring to it. Contagious Culture has no citations and isn't even listed in Google Scholar.

Cavanaugh, A. (2016) Contagious Culture: Show Up, Set the Tone, and Intentionally Create an Organization that Thrives. McGraw-Hill Professional. ISBN-13: 978-1259584572

Difficult Conversations (HBR 20-Minute Manager Series)

Part of the Harvard Business Review 20 Minute Manager Series, 'Difficult Conversations' is a short practical guide to dealing with those hard conversations we all need to have from time to time.



The book is entirely focused on practical tips and strategies for handling tricky conversations at work. In essence this is a compilation of hints and strategies from other sources, however there are a few things I haven't come across before. The majority of the ideas in the book are down to earth and practical however there are moments it does lapse into slightly idealized hints that I suspect may

have the other person looking at you wondering what you have been smoking. You do have to sort out the genuinely practicable from the 'I can't imagine that working in my work place'. On the whole though it is relevant with useful strategies. It would also be useful if you are building a course on this topic as there are some handy exercises for training events.

One gripe is like a lot of HBR materials is that it only makes reference to other HBR books and papers. More than a little manipulative and egocentric. Also like the majority of HBR materials it doesn't make use of the substantial body of research available. It just presents things as 'facts' and the way to do things. My advice is try the stuff out that this book contains before using it in anger.

Apart from that it is useful and really gets you thinking about how to handle those difficult conversations.

Reference

Difficult Conversations (HBR 20-Minute Manager Series)

Harvard Business Review Press
(26 Jan. 2016)