

ENTELECHY

Entelechy n, [LL *entelechia*, from Gk] 1. the vital force or principle directing growth and life.
2. a realisation or actuality as opposed to a potentiality.

On leadership and change

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The rise of the "new" leadership

The inaugural issue of this newsletter introduced the eight levers of change which leaders must activate to implement a "sharing responsibility for success" management philosophy and practice within their organisations:

- Strategy
- Leadership styles
- Structure
- Shared values and beliefs
- Systems
- Staff
- Skills
- Work practices

This newsletter focuses on one of these levers -- leadership styles.

Leaders or managers?

Much has been written recently about leadership and leaders, and about what distinguishes leaders from managers.

Managers are now viewed as disciplined planners and implementers, process-oriented linear thinkers whose function is to make organisations perform as intended. Abraham Zaleznik [1989] * painted an unflattering picture of the "professional manager", which included these characteristics:

- Managers assume that progress comes from perfecting processes. This is for the purpose of better controlling

employees' behaviour and performance. Here process is defined as the mechanism which ensures that people perform their assigned roles.

- Managers cherish objectivity. They delude themselves into believing that solid methods will always produce solid results. They admire the capacity to deal with conflicting points of view without becoming emotionally involved in other people's joys or pains. They seek to apply indisputably logical analysis and to use what they believe to be quantitative tools to solve a broad range of work-related problems.

Managers dread chaos and revere order. In fact, one of their most satisfying experiences is to be able to get things done in an orderly fashion and according to plan. Managers tend to be cautious, even risk averse. They dislike impulsiveness and favour a disciplined approach, that is, the ability to function within predictable contexts and clearly defined cost/benefit calculations.

Managers, especially business school graduates, have been led to believe that a critical ingredient of success is to pay attention to **how** things get done, **how** decisions get made, **how** plans are carried out, and **how** communication flows within an organisation.

For all these reasons, managers favour (and are most comfortable in) a stable, unchanging environment in which everyone knows his/her place, top-down decision making is the rule, and "being a team player" is preferred over individualism.

Given the opportunity, managers create and maintain the conditions within organisations that reflect their deepest desires irrespective of what in fact may be required.

While there is little doubt that managers are essential to the functioning of organisations, the philosophy of hierarchical power and control that has dominated organisations for several decades

has created the politics of compliance, which is at the heart of the “professional” managerial culture.

Compliance vs. commitment

In the rush to define an organisation’s purpose and then get everyone to buy into its goals, the fundamental distinction between commitment and compliance is often overlooked.

Compliance has to do with giving the appearance of “playing by the rules” or of “being a good soldier”. It involves doing just enough to get along and stay out of trouble, thereby maximising the chances of keeping one’s job. Commitment, on the other hand, means taking full responsibility for one’s behaviour.

In many organisations, people have never been asked to commit to anything. They’ve only ever experienced compliance. That’s the only way they can behave at work (even if they have also learned to parrot the language of commitment).

Wherever a management culture predominates, a climate of compliance is likely to flourish. For commitment to exist, effective leadership is required.

What may be most difficult for a leader to accept is the notion that commitment cannot be demanded of another. Commitment must be freely and deliberately made by the individual. At best, a leader can only create the conditions conducive to commitment.

The essence of the “new” leadership

Recently, as numerous organisations which enjoyed uninterrupted success for years, found themselves facing disaster, the realisation grew that traditional management culture constituted a big part of their problem.

The new leadership culture now emphasises “soft”, difficult-to-measure attributes, such as initiative, interpersonal skills, the ability to perceive patterns and relationships where none seemingly exist, and the capacity to foster commitment on the part of those being led.

John Kotter* and other researchers stress that, instead of operating “by the numbers” or “by the book”, a leader today must, at the very least:

- Develop and articulate coherently and precisely, what the enterprise is trying to accomplish, and where it is headed
- Inspire others to follow, and motivate them to break through barriers that may be holding them back.
- Create and maintain the conditions in which individuals can figure out for themselves what needs to be done, and then go about doing it to the utmost of their abilities.

This means that an effective leader must focus on **what** and **why** rather than **how**, on substance rather than style, and on reality (current as well as potential) rather than process. This is what makes the new leadership conceptual rather than actual and tangible.

Phrases such as “being a strategic thinker” or “making sense out of nonsense” convey the essence of the new leadership --- the antidote to the professional managerial culture.

J.P. Kotter 1988, *The Leadership Factor*, The Free Press Division of Macmillan, Inc., New York.

Some key implications

The new leadership, because it does not operate in familiar, linear patterns, complicates the issue of accountability. A linear view always implies a direct cause-and-effect relationship, which leads to straightforward assignment of responsibility. When things go wrong, linear thinkers need go no further than to look for someone or something to be held responsible. “This is what (or who) is to blame!” This approach has the added advantage of conferring blamelessness on the part of whoever is doing the finger-pointing!

That’s an example of what Peter Senge* describes as “event thinking”. An event explanation, most common in organisations where a reactive management style prevails, is concerned with describing who did what to whom (how and why are usually of secondary importance). In contrast, conceptual thinking focuses

on identifying the structural causes of organisational behaviour.

Moreover, the conceptual perspective of leadership implies that everyone **shares responsibility** for the ways in which the organisation behaves. While not everyone involved in an organisation can exert equal leverage in changing those behaviours, everyone CAN (in fact MUST) contribute to the solution.

Above all, the “new” leader must focus on **genuineness**. For the leader, the expression of a genuine self (through self-disclosure) comes to be most widely associated by others with honesty and integrity. Without these attributes, the leader’s capacity to energise and retain followers is severely curtailed.

In subsequent newsletters, many of the topics touched upon here are explored in detail.

P.M. Senge 1990, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, Doubleday, New York.

A. Zaleznik 1989, *The Managerial Mystique - Restoring Leadership in Business*, Harper & Row, New York.



