

**ARIV**

International Journal of Business

Paper ID: AIJB11012020

Issue 1 Vol1 2020

Lifting the LID on your organization

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How do managers create positive cultures that release value into the organization? 'Smart Leadership, Wise Leadership' (C D Steed, Routledge) articulates three principles for people to flourish in the workplace. This book has translated into a leadership course, now available.

The present climate

The modern workplace is a highly driven, stressful environment. For highflyers and for millions with mental health problems alike, it is an insult to body and soul. If you can't handle the stress of working in a low-pay world, it is always and only your fault. It's time that presumption changed. Culture is fundamental. Businesses with positive cultures enjoy larger profits, better performance, and happier employees. But how do you create this kind of culture? The zombie workforce, an army of employees who're failing to find inspiration at work, are the 'working dead', haunting offices and factories where once they were valuable staff members, full of life and great ideas. There are legions of them. According to a annual studies by the consultancy Aon Hewitt, less than one-quarter of the world's employees are classified as 'highly' engaged in their jobs, while only 40% admit to being 'moderately so'. Disengagement among workers seeps out to infect society at large. When engagement levels among employees are low, businesses report a higher staff turnover, greater absenteeism and lower customer satisfaction. Turn that round and 5% increase in staff engagement results in a 3% increase in revenue (Aon Hewitt, 2017). Lack of dignity and respect also has strong impact.

The world stands at the dawn of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. It is a transition to a network economy that has become social; to networked individuals; to a new set of systems, bringing

together digital, biological and physical technologies in new and powerful combinations. Much will change fundamentally in the emerging network economy, including organizations and the role of their leaders to nurture enabling environments. The challenges of our time require strategies and solutions that span private, public and civil sector spheres. Digital technologies are unleashing new economic and social dynamics. A country's industrial might no longer determines its future. The prizes will go to highly adaptive leadership; leadership with spirit; leadership with purpose.

“The leadership for this day and age is the leadership of cross-sector experience and collaboration. But where will we find these leaders when our universities still offer siloed professional programs such as business, engineering, law or medicine? (Fulcrum Capital, 2016)

Equipping organizations to tackle the future will require a management revolution no less momentous than the one that spawned modern industry. As Gary Hamel described in his *‘Moon shots for Management’*, most of the fundamental breakthroughs in management occurred decades ago (HRB, 2009). Workflow design, annual budgeting, return-on-investment analysis, project management, divisionalization, brand management—these and a host of other indispensable tools were all part of the application of scientific principles to management. Yet management, like the combustion engine, is a mature technology that must now be reinvented for a new age. In an enormously volatile and unforgiving environment, how in an age of rapid change do you create organizations that are as adaptable and resilient as they are focused and efficient? How in a creative economy where entrepreneurial genius is the secret to success do you inspire employees to bring the gifts of initiative, imagination, and passion to work every day? To successfully address these problems, executives and experts must first admit that they have reached the limits of the industrial age paradigm built atop the principles of standardization, specialization, hierarchy, control, and primacy of shareholder interests. Tomorrow's business imperatives lie outside the performance envelope of today's bureaucracy-infused management practices. Chief among the tasks of revisiting the philosophical foundations of management is the reality that in tomorrow's interdependent world, highly collaborative systems will outperform organizations characterized by adversarial win-lose relationships.

As a Harvard Business Review points out, *“Leaders find it tough to ensure that their people adhere to values and ethics. The prevailing principles in business make employees ask, “What’s in it for me?” Missing are those that would make them think, “What’s good, right, and just for everyone?”*

The notion of ‘the wise leader’, not just a ‘smart leader’ is receiving more attention today though hardly mainstream (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 2011). People behave less ethically when they are part of organizations or groups. Common rationalizations, such as that you are acting in the company’s best interest, or justifications, such as that you will never be found out, lead to misconduct.

Business can be a positive agent in society. Business is not neutral. It is the arena in which most of us make a living and find the work that sustains life. As the Shared Value business initiative proclaims, to do well, business must do good. What is a good place to work or be in? What does it mean to be a good person? What are enduring qualities and not just transient skills? How do societies nurture the empathy and creativity that industry leaders say will survive the technological weather? These are valid questions because they undergird how human societies work. The perspective in this article is that the value and worth of human beings can be operationalized; ‘given legs’ as it were rather than just function as ethical aspiration. What does this mean for the culture of an organization?

Lifting the LID- a construct

It is the task of leaders to facilitate a workplace culture where the value of people is best expressed. Our term for this will be an ‘environment of value’, an organizational ‘community of practice’ that draws out the inner value of its participants and translates that into external, added value for the enterprise. It acts as a catalyst for the conversion of internal value into the purposes of the organization. It seeks to build value precisely because it works with the conditions by which a valuing environment can be cultivated. An environment of value therefore digs into motivational drivers because it mobilizes the factors that encourages people to give of their own sense of worth. Because of this, it adds value to an organization.

Some years ago, I engaged in a research exercise that illuminates the factors that generate inner worth being drawn out and harnessed (or shut down as the case may be). Crucially, looking at

issues of human worth through their contrast – what it means to be devalued or trashed in the workplace- lent greater analytical clarity. Through empirical observation in therapeutic contexts and organizational study of both the popular and academic literature, the outcome is that circumstances giving rise to reports of feeling devalued can be summed up as threefold:

- *Lack of purposeful engagement (Indifference)* – not being seen, noticed, recognised or listened to;
- *Not honouring our humanity (inequality)* – the experience of being diminished rather than enlarged, ranging from discriminatory practice to not having one’s full humanity included: i.e. the politics of insult. Lack of either involvement or inclusion results in a deficit of significance that people look for in the workplace;
- *Being invaded (indignity)* – the politics of assault or being set aside, generating indignation.

There is much good management and leadership out there. Nevertheless, experience shows that people keep coming back to these same factors **again and again**. Moreover, statements in practitioner literature indicate that these can be replicated. There is an issue not just with narcissistic managers but with the culture of many organizations. It is the culture and practice on the ground that negates ‘official’ strategy and makes it practically irrelevant. Discerning such negative factors for disvaluing environments leads to turning these backs on their head ‘to lift the LID’ on an organization, release dynamism and address disengagement through a positive workplace culture:

- Honouring our humanity - **Look**, learn and listen
- Engage with **purpose** - **Involve** and include to elicit significance.
- Set up a non-intrusive environment - **Dignify**

This awareness translates into direct benefit to leaders and managers to understand how to build a strong culture in their organization in which people can flourish. Using these principles, ‘Smart Leadership, Wise Leadership’ has translated into a seminar series used at an MBA Graduate College. It is therefore useful knowledge precisely because it goes with the grain of what makes for human flourishing. There is psychological theory here relevant to our inner motivations and the circumstances in which people thrive. The grounded theory is:

- That there is a strong association between the sense of inner world value held by staff or workers as they participate in an organisation **AND** the added, external value they generate that furthers its purpose, whether financial or not;

- That wise leaders understand it is in the interests of the organisation to optimise those factors (proposed here as essentially three-fold) that enable a valuing environment to translate inner value into added value.

At first glance, this is about how organizations flourish. There is, however, a construct being developed here that potentially provides a lens on the drivers of human action (motivation theory). Getting the best out of people, not just extracting the most, requires attention to the circumstances in which their sense of themselves and their value is translated into their projects.

I argue elsewhere that for the future societies to work, we need to address our endemic emphasis on what work and jobs mean to our self-worth (Steed, 2016). Perhaps the very nature of work that allowed families to prosper and individuals to build a sense-of-self is under attack. Work might be losing its value to people. Yet it is certainly a sphere from which human beings derive huge value (or not).

Even in a high-tech age, leadership remains vital. As the developing Fourth Industrial Revolution transforms the technological foundations of global enterprise, the phenomenon of firms growing at extremely rapid rates has become unprecedented. What is labelled 'hypergrowth' has moved out of Silicon Valley and gone global; from high-tech start-ups to companies both old and new. Yet from talent shortages to regulatory impediments, growth challenges are a consistent management priority. According to *Mastering Hypergrowth*, the World Economic Forum's study of nearly 200 companies around the world, over half (55.6%) of CEOs say that finding, motivating and keeping the best people is one of their most pressing challenges (WE Forum, 2016).

How can we ensure that organizations are engaging places- not the kind of toxic environments that are all too frequent? (James, 2013). And how can we continue to ensure that organizations are humane places when the future of work is an issue that becomes hugely challenging in the wake of the gathering flood of what may well be the job-killing Fourth Industrial Revolution. What kind of Smart Leadership is needed to cultivate the human dimension in a digital era? What does it mean to cultivate 'leadership with spirit'? Can wise, ethical and responsible leadership that is not off-balance become the default position and not just 'smart leadership'? Leaders should be wise, lifting organizations to a higher dimension than just technocratic though engendering

environments that, under certain conditions, best translate the value of people into their collective endeavors.

New perspectives on creating positive organizational changes are much needed. Siemens have offered a report about the reasons for the Productivity Puzzle in the UK. Workers seemingly produce for longer hours than the US or European counterparts, but their output is up to 20% less. Siemens suggested that 75% of the deficit is due to poor leadership and practices that do not make the most of the potential of their staff (BBC, 2014)

In the digital future, environments of value will be different than the old industrial era institutions that created public services. It will not solely be the case that if an organization is well managed, it is well led. Future organizations will not just be cranking out quantity but quality. Creativity and empathy have not been really needed except for the creative or caring industries. In the future, they will be vital for all enterprises. The leadership needed to foster such environments will be different from the old top down style where instructions are given. They will be open transformative processes, where we not any longer speak about bosses and workers, processes based on subject-object relations but creating space for all involved if not in equal relation then in creative dialogue. This is surely the workplace of the future; not old hierarchical models but where creativity and empathy fuse to generate all-round shared value. The future of work will still entail successful organizations being those employing worthwhile people doing worthwhile jobs and tasks.

Axiomatic in what follows is that human beings are strongly shaped relationally, by their social environment and by forces that structure their life and work, not just their own agency. A workplace is a very particular form of social environment. If the circumstances and context are right, people will give of their inner value. That seems commonplace until it is realized that the experience of so many is that the organizational environment and culture is not conducive to human flourishing. Rather than engendering engagement, it is de-motivating and devaluing.

Evidence?

Understanding the circumstances in which people feel valued or disvalued is vital for nurturing the strong association between inner and external, added value. Is there, however, any evidence

for this proposition? The notion of organizational culture is cast in terms of 'environments of value' within which value is released. Clearly, there are differing metrics for the assessment of value. Organizational culture is shot through with the human dynamics that wise leaders need to understand. At its most basic, within the environmental conditions of that organization, low motivation leads to poor performance. By contrast, building the right kind of culture is a vital ingredient of success. A positive climate adds to the bottom line.

Some evidence for the link connecting what happens within the lived experience of participants and the quality of the work they do is suggested by the following:

- Reports showing that the more positive the experiences of staff within an NHS trust, the better the outcomes for that trust. The quality of patient experience, as measured by inpatient satisfaction in acute trusts, is strongly linked with engagement and other aspects of staff experience; indicators of staff well-being in hospitals and MRSA infection (Boorman, 2009) (presumably because staff with higher psychological well-being behave differently (Robertson & Cooper, 2011));
- In a Report related to Global Reporting Initiatives by the Harvard University Business School Investor Responsibility Research Centre Institute (IRRCi), Beeferman and Bernstein demonstrated 'The Materiality of Human Capital to Corporate Financial Performance'. *'We conclude that there is sufficient evidence of human capital materiality to financial performance to warrant inclusion in standard investment analysis'*. Investors are largely unaware of this (Beeferman & Bernstein, 2015);
- A large scale 2015 study by the polling organisation Gallup full-time workers in the US about their engagement in the workplace (n=24,000) showing that less than one third were engaged. It was clear that those who have high individual wellbeing are more likely to see their workplace as positive, productive, and engaging. Only one third (32%) of workers in the US could really be said to be engaged at work. The research categorised workers into engaged, not engaged or actively disengaged. People who are engaged at work use their strengths, know what is expected of them and believe their job matters (Harter, 2015);

- Clear concern for employees came out highest in a study of eight predictive factors to do with the climate within 42 industrial companies linked to productivity gains measured by financial value of net sales per employee (Patterson, et al 2004);
- In the service sector, where staff well-being is higher, they are more likely to 'go the extra mile' and fix problems that affect customer satisfaction (Moliner, et al 2008);
- Positive relationships between psychological well-being (PWB) and job performance (a better indicator than job satisfaction). An increase of 1 on an ascending scale of 1-5 measuring PWB is associated with an 8.8% boost in productivity (Wright & Cropanzo, 2000)
- A large-scale study from nearly 8,000 separate business units in 36 companies showed a significant relationship between scores of well-being on an employee survey and such business level outcomes as customer satisfaction, profitability, employee turnover and levels of sickness and absence (Harter, et al 2003).

'Environments of Value' are those that draw out the value and worth of their participants and translate that into added value. This is the first element of a construct proposed in these pages. It can be constructed as the translation of labour into capital. Two types of value are in the frame here. They seem on the surface to pertain to two different, incommensurable realms. Yet there is no essential dualism between the inner felt value of human participants in an enterprise and the externalized value that becomes measurable and that contributes to the purpose of an organization. At issue here is how the workplace can be productive environments; productive not because of the output per se but because the conditions are in place for people to flourish. Can you have the former without the latter? In the first wave of automation when the emphasis was on brawn power, you probably could. Factory output did not depend on the workers being happy. In the digital revolution undergirding the wave of automation that is already upon us, almost certainly it is contented and creative cows that give the most milk.

It does of course depend on the forms of value that an organization generates. When it comes to the production of other forms of value, there is a considerable variation as to what this means in practice. How does one compare the value of a work of art with educational benefit or other forms of value that are not tangible? A not-for-profit organization or faith-based community will try to

generate things that are worth something to a great many people, but which are less susceptible to market evaluation. There are a whole range of services rendered against which it is far harder to affix price than tangible goods. The production of value differs between organizations.

The manufacturing industry – here there are measurable outcomes. Value is added at various stages of production or processing, subject in most instances to Value-Added tax.

The financial services industry – where the value generated through transaction derives from lubrication of the whole production economy.

The knowledge industry – educational institutions or those involved in cultural production such as broadcasters attempt to generate results that can answer the question, “is this activity worth it?”

The creative arts – where value is sharply dependent on the perceived worth of the artist;

Community and faith-based organisations – where social value or spiritual impact is vital.

To varying degrees, the external value generated in each of these spheres of activity depends on the active engagement of the human participants. Economics is about value, how it is generated through work and profits and how prices are determined that reflect what something is worth at any one time. I am arguing that there is a different form of value - ‘value-in-oneself’ – the drive for which is fundamental both to social processes and to the success of organizations.

A theory is needed of the link between how these different forms of value coming together. How can workplace environments be productive? As soon as we ask the question, ‘what is the way to be a human being and not just homo economicus?’ we are catapulted into issues of value. Hard-headed companies do not just endeavor to create a sense of value amongst the workforce because of a social mission such as schools might have. Policies have to create value for the firm. It is a common enough observation in the Western management literature. Even though management practices are culturally constructed, it is well-established that low motivation leads to poor performance.

It is in the self-interest of organizations generally to fathom the conditions that unlock the inner value their participants have so that it can lead to value added and productive environments. These

considerations become sharply accentuated as computers take over routine brain jobs and despatch countless people to the dole queue.

If Environments of Value are those that mobilize the worth of participants, it begs the question. What are the inner ingredients of that sense of value and worth that can be aroused and recruited?

Look, Learn and Listen (v indifference)

The first factor in an environment of value is for leaders to set up micro-cultures which are the contrast pole of not being seen, noticed, recognized or listened to. "All my ideas and efforts were never recognized; I was never given credit for them.... when building a team, listening is crucial" (Author's Client notes).

Anecdotally, where participants experience a sense of being heard, it is more likely to generate positive outcomes. Where participants feel ignored, they are more likely to be disgruntled and engage in further protest or become further disengaged. Recognition is vital. George Davis - former fashion designer at Marks and Spencer - had a celebrated row with a senior manager that reverberated around the City of London at a time when M & S were struggling to recover from years of poor performance. A resignation letter was written, though not acted upon. The row was said to be about lack of recognition George Davis was receiving for his work to turn the ailing ship around (BBC, 2007)

An environment of value is an environment in which participants can learn from failure and move on. How organizations deal with failure is crucial. It involves cultures where, rather than the corporate blame game, reflecting on past performance and knowing how to improve are embedded in practice. This is redemptive. It is also wise.

Solicit employee ideas and incorporate them into workplace well-being initiatives. Strongly encourage participation in well-being activities when setting job expectations. Let employees choose the well-being activities that are best suited to them based on their individual well-being goals. This approach simultaneously promotes clarity about an employee's role and a culture of well-being, and it does both while honoring each employee's unique talents and interests. In the

management literature, this is the emphasis of, for example, of 'Flying High', the story of the US airline JetBlue. Its founder, David Neeleman, worked hard at understanding what customers really need (Wynbrandt, 2004). Though CEO, he would regularly perform management by working on the ground, walking about and talking with staff and customers.

Strategic listening is key to incentivization (Faruqui, 1997). Listening is vital to success in the workplace. This is because, as Hybels notes, 'facts are your friends'. Clearly, leaders can help drive learning environments; that is, fostering a climate of experimentation in which people can experiment, though in a prudent way (Hybels, 2008)

Modern business or organizational leadership is a highly complex operation. Establishing a culture of learning from what happens on the ground is crucial to success. Reflecting and adapting is vital to operating in a demanding and multi-layered environment. To ensure that something is learnt from mistakes or things that did not go well, does, however, requires that leaders gather together those involved while it is still fresh and distil any learning and that they have equal voice. Approaching such a review without recrimination or playing the blame-game is an environment of value in practice. Listening and watching are powerful ways of learning, of driving a journey of continuous improvement, of adaptation to fast-paced evolutionary change.

There is growing realization that, in the new game of work, learning beats knowing. In the management literature, an emphasis on constant learning being more important than mastery is the theme of for example of a best seller, 'Rookie Smarts'. Wiseman contends that in a rapidly changing world, experience can be a disadvantage; knowledge and skills become obsolete and irrelevant. Innovation can stop and strategies grow stale. What counts is an unencumbered mind (Wiseman, 2014).

Involve and include

Another dimension of a valuing environment is one that involves and includes. Through its After-Action Reviews (AAR), the US Army works hard to build climate of openness and candour. It is salutary that most corporate efforts to adapt this model do not foster a living, organic process to

identify what went wrong but end up writing a report that stays on the shelf. An essential aspect to such post-mortems is 'Seek maximum participation'.

"Opinions count" is a central component of an engaging workplace. Asking employees to contribute well-being ideas is a great way to galvanize them and make them feel they are a part of the well-being movement. Employees also will have excellent feedback about which well-being programs are working and which aren't -- and how they can be revised, or new programs added. By such means as including well-being goal-setting and milestones in work review and progress meetings, research has shown that engaged employees are much more comfortable than other employees in discussing their well-being goals with their manager.

In the days when Management by Objective was in vogue, the guru Peter Drucker argued in a similar vein that staff setting their own goals is vital to modern business (Drucker, 1964). People need to feel part of the decision-making process. There seems to be growing awareness of the importance of helping people gain greater influence over their environment (Miller, 1993)

The contemporary emphasis on diversity and equality in the life and times of contemporary organizations is testament to growing awareness of countering inequality in the form of unequal treatment. Almost every public sector organization has a diversity and equality officer of some sort. Yet it begs the question. If Environments of Value are those that mobilize the worth of participants, what are the inner ingredients of that sense of value and worth that can be aroused and recruited? The motivation to be treated in a non-discriminatory way, to be included in the conversation runs deep into the human psyche. Involvement is about matching the gifts and talents people might have to the tasks that need to be done. There is much wasted talent; gifts by the million lie underused, amongst women and minorities.

Famously, Sachiro Honda understood the way a team works. Crucially for this perspective on organizational culture, he treated others as equal. That ethos pervades the Honda way. Employers are associates. They are regarded as people of worth which will generate value to the company. Today, Honda is doing well in a difficult climate (Industry Week, 2012)

The success of the British retail giant John Lewis owes much to the co-ownership values of its founder, John Spedan Lewis, who handed control and ownership over to the employees in two trust settlements beginning in 1929. In the US, in 2015 the top 100 employee-owned companies employed more than 626,000 people. America's top five stock market performers have all been included in the annual 'Employee Ownership 1000' (Employee Ownership, 2016)

Expanding gender participation in the workforce and smashing the glass ceiling is clearly part of this emphasis. So too is the focus on successful economies such as Germany to spread economic democracy through worker participation on company boards. The degree to which people have control over their work has been found to impact considerably on chronic stress and therefore a determinant on health outcomes (Theorell, 2003)

Dignify

The third factor in the typology is that a valuing environment is one that counters disrespectful, controlling or bullying behaviour. Instead it respects the sacred space of the person in a non-invasive way. The narcissistic behaviour of leaders conditions the former: respectful managers foster the latter.

Be our Guest" is the title of the staff guidebook to perfecting the art of customer service at the Disney organisation in Orlando, Florida. "The service standard of courtesy", it is urged, "*requires that every guest be treated like a VIP- a very important, very individual person.*" This means more than treating guests how 'we would want to be treated'. It means "*treating them the way they want to be treated, with recognition and respect for their emotions, abilities and cultures.*" (Disney Institute, 2001). The importance of value and worth is not just about customer service. It runs through the culture of staff engagement and motivation and into the value added in the company. Conflict in industry or strikes are not just about pay and conditions, they are a demand for respect. Industrial relations seem to be bedevilled by management practices that fail to engage staff or confer appropriate recognition on workers and their grievance. As in inter-personal life, when grievances are not responded to with appropriate recognition, it becomes an attack on the workers. Comments by two UK leaders experienced in industrial relations perhaps indicates the point. "*Until employers realise that respect is at the heart of modern industrial relations, we will be in*

conflict.” (Hattersley, 2009). “*Lack of respect for the workforce, bullying and intimidation by management lie at the heart of this dispute*” declared a UK Trade Union leader in an air-line cabin crew strike (Woodley, 2010). These statements seem to be obvious truisms. Yet experience shows that, often, the culture of contemporary organizations – despite being enlightened with management wisdom- does not reflect them being translated into operating principles.

What is being conceptualized here are the factors that nourish engagement, whether it is of staff, workers or volunteers. To understand what fosters engagement, it is helpful to discern what drives disengagement. This is fundamentally an issue of enlightened management. If such an association exists and is strong, then it is in the self-interest of leadership, especially at senior level, to use that knowledge and put it into practice. Leadership insight to build positive cultures which can catalyze self-respect or dignity of labour, however that is understood, is vital.

Conclusion

Environments of Value considers briefly the ingredients that drive disengagement or poor morale in an organization that lead to staff or workers feeling disvalued. It develops a construct of how leaders can build cultures in their organization that enable inner value and worth to be translated into external, added value. Arising from client and organizational observation, lifting the LID on your organization requires attention to three ingredients that contribute either to valuing environments within which we flourish, or, when absent, to environments that erode our sense of self and produce disengagement. I suggest this is best approached negatively to begin with so as to provide greater illumination. Factors that drive engagement are illuminated by the factors that drive disengagement.

What advantages are there to employers, to leadership in commercial, non-profit or faith-based organizations in setting up work environments where it is not all about making money and optimum performance? After all, the law does not say leaders must look after your staff and make them feel valued. Yet it is surely a strategy of self-enlightenment to discern what are the ingredients of a high-value environment? Even when ratios of capital to labour shift, about 90% of the overheads of an organization are still staff salaries. People continue to matter- both to the workforce.

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