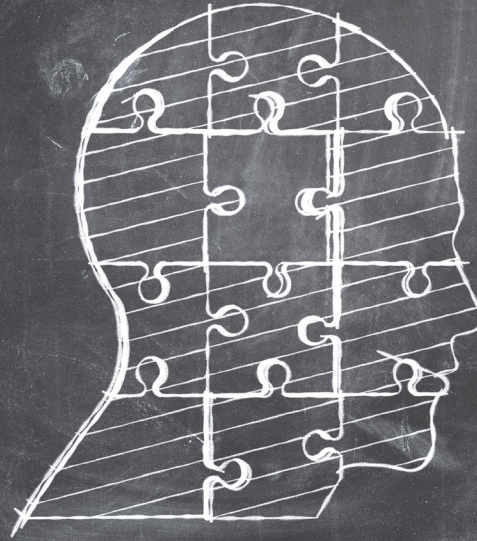


Solving the Dilemma of Leadership Malaise

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Introduction

We've taken a break but are back with our 2019 UPDATE series. From a highlights perspective, this year we continue to focus on leadership, and as we have discussed in the past, the ongoing revelation that little progress is being made in tangible leadership improvements. Consistent with this dilemma, we continue to ponder both why surveys such as DDI's Global Leadership Forecasts and others point to this phenomenon but more importantly what can be done differently. Is there some missing aspect that the industry as a whole is so busy doing its thing that it does not see a critical Achilles heel? So this year we will explore some background but focus on our thoughts for making palpable changes.

Our First Issue we take another rear-view mirror look at the past 20 years or so, and where all the gurus have gone – It's almost 20 years since Y2K chatter and a proliferation of self-help/leadership/elixir of leadership books and theories; and where are we – apparently not much further down the road according to many leadership assessments. Believe us, we are getting a bit tired of harping about the same thing, so this year we are focusing this issue on the wrongs of leadership, in the context of actually taking a constructive relook at how we feel a difference can be made.

Management Gurus. We have seen the books and seminars by the various management gurus over the past 20 years. Tom Peters, Max DuPree, Michael Hammer, Warren Bennis, Peter Drucker, Steven Covey, Peter Senge – and the list goes on. We have years of bestselling books, but surveys reveal we still don't have improved leadership. What have all the gurus done for the world

except line their own pockets? Most have had excellent ideas but the business world shows a spike of interest in each new guru but then quickly settles back into business as usual. How do we break this cycle of management malaise?

Jack Welsh. Considered a management guru and famous for being the CEO of General Electric where he determined that unless a division was number 1 or 2 in the field it would be sold and equally well known for the philosophy of eliminating the bottom 10% every year. (Of course, this required an honest system of feedback which most managers cannot or will not do, so it becomes hacking off people whether they deserve it or not.) Time has proven that a lot of what Jack Welsh accomplished was due to his larger than life personality. General Electric is now a mere shadow of its former self. Subsequent CEOs, while probably capable business leaders, were not Jack Welsh and could not carry on the Welsh momentum.

Our Second Issue focuses on ending the insanity. You all know the definition – keep doing the same thing and getting the same outcome. That gig is up. Let's look at the core of the malaise. We all know the basics, but how does one actually drill down into their specific situation or organization and determine the best way for the organization as a whole to move forward.

The Third Issue sets the stage for real human performance and leadership improvement. The activity trap tends to make people (managers/leaders) think they are doing something; and something

is better than nothing. The problem is activity expends resources both human and financial and is like going to a concert or show. Activities are events, feel-good things. Taking a higher altitude perspective yields great opportunities, but those opportunities are like space travel, they take lots of hard work, planning, and a leap of faith; that, for some reason, leaders and managers have a very tough time making the leap. Risk and insecurity and loss of control. We'll examine these effects and how taking that leap of faith can yield huge results.

Finally our Fourth Issue, we intend to present examples of successes, and perhaps some not so successful examples to contrast. We are thinking we will highlight success stories as case studies. It's always good to see those crazy ideas actually work. So we hope you enjoy this series and we also hope we can expose some creative thinking on how to turn this very large vessel on a course of improving leadership.

The 20 Year Rear-View Mirror

In the past 20 years or so we have seen major advances in technology. Our phones now have more computing power than our desktop computers did back then. So much technology and so much information are now available to all levels of the organization including top levels. And yet we still see the annual surveys showing a decrease in management effectiveness. If technology has advanced so much why hasn't leadership? Let's take a look at a couple of factors:

Management Gurus

We mentioned this above. Throughout modern times there have been so-called management gurus. But in the last 20 years, we have had an abundance of them and they have written best-selling books and gone around the world conducting seminars espousing their theories. Most became wealthy and their efforts were celebrated throughout the business world. Many were brought in to consult with big and not so big companies. They were the latest and greatest – until the next guru came along with a new book and new theories. To wit: Tom Peters with “In Search of Excellence”, Michael Hammer with “Reengineering the Organization”, Steven Covey with “Seven Habits of Highly Successful People”, Peter Senge with his tomes on the learning organizations. Each of these and the myriad of others over the recent years had good ideas and, we'll allow, noble goals to help improve organizations. Has any of this stuck throughout the business world? Yes, there are some companies who bought in on one or two of these theories and are probably better off for doing so. However, in general, these were the ‘flavors of the year’ and eventually life would go back to normal in the organization and expected improvement was forgotten and it would again be business as usual. But each year there would be a new guru with new ideas and theories and excitement would build and then life would go on as before. A sad commentary isn't it?

A personal example from one of your authors: Working in a major division of a large company we learned that the company was undertaking a major reengineering effort corporate-wide. Locally learning of this excited many managers and frightened some. The

rollout included a video kickoff by the CEO and was to inspire total buy-in to the program. The video was a monotone ‘talking head’ by the CEO, which was about as inspiring as a monologue on growing grass. Those who did not want to see this program succeed or even take hold saw this video as proof that the CEO really didn't believe in the program. Even in implementation the CEO remained on the sidelines and took no active role. So why should the local managers actively support it? Yes, they gave it lip service and minimal support but knew, in the long run, this too would pass. They identified some local improvements and a few were half-heartedly implemented, but without full buy-in, the program eventually limped off into the sunset with the only real benefit being to the consulting firm that was helping implement it.



Another example is the design of a very strategic leadership development program for an international engineering and construction company. The design required a three-tiered approach, starting with the lowest level of management, followed by the middle managers and finally the Executive Team. The President kicked off the project, and it started. Level I and Level II were actually successful in their own right. Participants took what they learned back into to workplace. There they ran into resistance from senior people. Now was the time for the Executive Team to start their part of the program, only to find that ‘they were too busy’ and didn't need to spend the time in the classes. Wow, talk about driving a stake through the heart of a program. Needless to say, the only benefit realized was the personal take-aways individuals gained. Organizationally, all the good words and chatter early on was for naught. The Executives truly did not believe there was a benefit for them. They were just fine.

These examples are typical; and when an organization attempts to adopt a guru proclaimed methodology without context or believe the leadership is immune to a leadership malaise, the end result is doomed. The ideas may be sound and potentially high value to the organization but the momentum within the organization just naturally resists change. It is like trying to turn an aircraft carrier. It doesn't happen quickly or easily. Overcoming organizational momentum requires a full management team to want to make the change and actively work to make that change happen. This takes effort and a recognition that things could work better and that results yield improvements. It is so much easier to accept that the current situation is OK and believe OK is good. If true change is going to happen it requires changing the three aspects of an organization – people, processes and procedures/technology. That is a lot of work. The guru or the consultant can provide the concepts and ideas and 'how to,' but the changes must be made internally. There must be a concerted effort to overcome organizational momentum. Building that effort is very difficult. People, in general, are resistant to change and don't like change. It is so much easier for things to just stay the same with making small tweaks occasionally. Don't rock the boat is really the corporate mantra for way too many organizations.

Management Malaise

Much as been written about management and leadership, including us over the years. It really can be boiled down into a question of the competence of the people leading an organization. So much is expected of a leader. They must be attuned to dealing effectively with people, they must understand and embrace the latest technology impacting their organization, they must respond to the demands of those above them, they must focus on the

customers, they must focus on improving the bottom line and the stockholders, as well as many other demands. Is it reasonable to expect so much from an individual leader? There are some, such as Jack Welsh, who can do all this successfully, but there are very few Jack Welsh's in a lifetime. We are going to delve more into this management malaise in our second issue of 2019.

Drilling Down

In order to delve into the phenomenon of this apparently continuous leadership/management malaise, we believe we must drill down into it and not take a thin slice off the top. Interestingly it is not one drill point either. We must identify as many of the points as possible. Each point will have different considerations and hopefully will provide more insights. At one point in our consulting history, we did assessments in three categories, Individuals, Teams and Organizationally. This is another way of categorizing people, processes and procedures/technology. People, processes, and procedures were fairly commonplace 20 years ago, today technology is a game changer, and as we wrote last year, Artificial Intelligence adds a whole new human factors dimension. In order to make sense of all this, and how organizational leadership must adapt requires us to drill into this these issues. One other phenomenon non-existent 20 years ago is the social media world, as well as, the fact that information is literally traveling at the speed of light, and no one is immune. All one has to do is follow some online news feeds. So while the old challenges remain, new and even more challenges present themselves.

Stay with us on our journey to make sense here.



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