

Lack of leadership skills in current generation

The web democracy has an impact on the leadership capabilities of our younger colleagues, not only in business but as you will agree, also in politics. The Web enables everyone to have any kind of information at any time. There is a catch though. Information is available abundantly but there is no one telling what the exact quality of that information is. The Web also enables me to criticize everyone instantly: through web logs, websites and other online media. For most politicians this is a real nightmare, especially when it concerns communicating long term politics, normally also not an MP's favorite area. It seems impossible to explain a strategy in detail since the media normally only will print short sound bites. So the public is mostly asking for some kind of strategy on affairs and a personal vision. Leadership is about "what", management is about "how". Obviously the first is the most difficult question and needs some kind of vision, and nowadays very few people are actually taught to have this. What is behind this diminishing capability and why is it connected to younger generations more than with others.

In a recent survey we did in the Pharmaceutical industry where we assessed a total of 136 operational managers and directors and supposed high potentials in the age range of 28 to 51 years old. The results were alarming. When we ranked the results measured, ranging from competencies like: communication, driving results, innovation, strategic thinking (in total 11 competencies), Leadership was ranked lowest. In this sample 26 percent was considered competent and only one considered a role model, the rest had a development need and even 23% had leadership as a "major weakness". Highest ranked were Customer orientation (with 57 percent above proficiency level, so 43 percent under) and "drive for results" with subsequently 51 percent above and 49% below proficiency level. Lowest, next to "leadership" were "building teams" and "innovation" with roughly 68% under proficiency level. The main components of strategic vision according this model are: Innovative thinking (Creativity, innovating and "out of the box" thinking), Business understanding and Long

term vision and planning. All of these competencies in this sample were in the lower half of competencies measured. In all, these results are quiet alarming considering that in Employee surveys held in Western Europe one of the main issues with concerning management when asked to employees is: (you've guessed it) lack of company vision.

The Baby boom generation (born roughly between 1946 and 1964) obviously lived in a different world. Their world was dominated by the "Cold war", Civil rights, 1968, the race to space, whereas the Dotcom generation deals with issues like world poverty, environment and treats technology as a toy. For my fathers generation work was all about conformity, long hours and loyalty. Nowadays my younger colleagues are basically working on their personal marketability, always open to change for a bigger challenge or a new opportunity. "Stretching" is the keyword. The virtual epicenter of changing perceptions is the annual performance review, one of Jack Welsh's favorites. Whereas dad was gradually promoted year on year for loyal performance, nowadays employees want to be mentored. Another important factor is real buy in to the company's values. Haven't we all given lip service to our company values like: integrity, empowerment and responsibility? When interviewing now, graduates will explicitly ask for these values, and they better be concrete and demonstrable! The sunny side of people making a deliberate choice for their employer on the basis of values and vision is that employees tend to stay longer if properly managed according individual competencies. and company values overlap with personal ones. The stronger the company's demonstrable values the longer people tend to be loyal. On the other hand studies show that retention can be increased by 34% if the top driver of executive intent is described as: "My manager cares about employees", hand in hand with: "I am able to realize my personal potential".

The main issue concerning the lack of leadership in current management is the way we hire.



Weak managers rather hire skills than talent, skills are easier to verify. And it is talent that we so desperately need when we want to create people with a vision. So why do managers hire skills rather than talent? Answer: managers won't hire talent if they don't know how to develop and deploy it. Remember; weak managers hire skills, strong managers hire talent. To avoid talent shortages, hire talented managers. And the key is; mentoring. Mind you though, talent needs to be "fed" consistently by experience, ethics and controls. Since "Enron" a company famous for hiring the top MBA talents available, we know what can happen when talent turns to the dark side of business. The last item I want to mention is work/life balance, or as I tend to refer to it: the "work life blend".

Technology enables us nowadays to connect to company systems from home. Acceptance of more flexible working hours has grown over the last decade. Experiences in international consultancy firms where working from home was adopted in an early stage show that working from home is often even more productive than working in the office (Employees are more conscious about their working hours at home and there is less time spent drinking coffee with colleagues.) It is striking to see how some companies rather would lose talent (most often women not able to cope anymore combining career and family) than to adjust their views on working hours. Maybe it's time to create a better vision on that issue as well.

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