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**MANAGEMENT
PERSPECTIVES**

Organizational Wellness

From the Editor

Albert Einstein always said that when he was given a problem and an hour to solve it, he would spend 55 minutes understanding the problem and five minutes solving it.

Our society is always looking for quick fixes and fast solutions. Most times we jump from the problem to the solution before any questions are asked, any thinking is done, or any analysis is completed. Not only that, we wonder why the situation is the same the next time we look.

In the hubbub of life, we should remind ourselves that we need to take the time to fully understand the challenges we are trying to overcome. Not only that, we need to have a systematic process to solve problems, from the definition of the problem, right through to the implementation and evaluation of the solution.

At LIVE Consultants, we help organizations design and implement problem-solving processes through education and development programs.

Marilyn Baetz, editor

About the Author and the Article

The week before a doctor's appointment is the time when worry about my wellness moves me to eat properly, to exercise most days, and to get enough sleep. I jump back on the wellness band wagon.

I realize how great I feel and wonder why I don't behave this way the other 51 weeks of the year. Inevitably, good intentions get moved aside by tasks that need to get done, NOW.

Organizations can neglect their health too. Neglect shows itself in unhealthy employee response or dysfunctional behaviour. Not only do we need to know how to diagnose how well we are, we need to know what creates dysfunctional behaviour. Stephen Baetz, the author of this article, discusses four factors that can contribute to organizational wellness.

Stephen Baetz is a principal of LIVE Consultants Inc., the organization sponsoring this publication.



Stephen Baetz

Working Well

You're doing what?

Taking a couple of management science courses this summer.

Impossible. Totally impossible.

It isn't. I got a six-week leave of absence from work so I can finish the last two courses on my degree.

In management science?

Yes.

Impossible.

I tell you I got the permission. They're not as unreasonable as you think they are. Half of it is how you ask.

You're probably right. But I still say it's impossible.

I did. I just ...

You can't do courses in management science. No one can. 'Cause management isn't a science, never will be. Maybe in the cloistered environment of a university it can get away with calling itself that ... probably has to in order to get funding ... but management is an art, pure 'n simple.

Splitting hairs are we?

Not really. I think it's just being accurate.

As one would need to be in a science.

Precision isn't owned by the scientist alone. Predictability perhaps. But not precision.

So you're real point is ...?

Management is the greatest of all arts for its medium is human talent itself.

You stole that line from ...

I'd prefer the word borrowed.

You borrowed that line from McNamara ... the guy who went to the World Bank after he was in the Kennedy administration.

You do know your artists.

Why this game?

Game?

Point and counterpoint on science or an art. Does it really matter?

Only if one really believes that humans or the organizations that we live in are totally predictable, that all one has to do is apply a simple formula and the outcome is assured.

Understood. But it seems to me that as managers we do know what causes people to want to make outstanding contributions or what

are the characteristics of a healthy organization.

I wonder.

You even question that?

Well, do we? Do we know what are the characteristics of a healthy organization or do we just know what will cause people to act in dysfunctional ways?

Dysfunctional? Really.

I thought if I sounded like a scientist I might have more credibility.

Artful.

Back to the point. I think we know what will cause people and teams in an organization to give less, to be disruptive, to mess up ... but if we take care of all those things we still have no guarantees of outstanding contribution.

We know what can make us sick — your argument is — but avoiding those things doesn't automatically give us health.

Yup.

Strange language we are using.

How so?

*We keep saying **things**. What are we really talking about? Factors? Components? Ingredients? Things seem too vague ... for either an artist or a scientist.*

Fair point. Let's put the question another way: What do organizations do to create unhealthy responses by the people who work in them?

What causes dysfunctional employee behaviour?

Same question it seems to me.

So?

So what?

So what's the answer?

The answer?

I forgot. The artist is never confined by a singular perception.

There is nothing more dangerous than a person with a singular answer.

Who said that?

I did.

No. I mean someone who is famous.

Would it have more credibility then? Would it appear more scientific?

Just more precise. And credit could be

given where credit is due.

Credit is due to those who remember.

We divert. What creates dysfunctional behaviour?

At the top of my list? Activity without purpose. What frustrates me the most is being asked to act when there is no clear purpose.

Or a purpose with which you disagree?

Perhaps. At least in those situations I can rationalize my activity and work to make a change in the goal. But when purpose does not exist I have been reduced to a rat on the treadmill.

A tad dramatic?

Not if you're an artist. Just think about it for a minute. How many people have a clear sense of why they do what they do? Or do they just fit the pattern of activity and do what they do because it has always been done that way?

As much as that exists, there is confusion about roles and responsibilities. Some people don't understand who owns what and how they are expected to contribute.

And in the face of ambiguity, the safest option is to ...

... is to either claim you own nothing and expect the boss to make all the decisions or ...

... or blame someone else for the confusion that exists.

Exactly.

Here's another one: not providing information. Why in heaven's name we do it, I don't know. It's sort of like taking a person to the top of a mountain, blindfolding them and then expecting them to come willingly to the next mountain. The reality is that if they have any mental health at all, they won't take a step. With no information, we ought to be cautious.

Ironically, we often label those people as change resistant or, even worse, marginal.

Bang on. In some ways to resist movement when we are information poor is far from inappropriate, it's healthy.

So activity without purpose, confusion about roles and responsibilities, and lack of

information is what creates dysfunctional behaviour.

In part.

There's more?

Always.

And ...

And lack of integrity. If leaders and managers don't do what they say they are going to do, employees won't contribute like they could.

This is the walk the talk stuff.

Is that the current jargon?

Practise what you preach.

Now I understand. What can I say, I'm an old-fashioned ...

... artist.

Fair enough. But there is something more to integrity than merely doing what you say. It also has to do with ignoring contribution.

Say what?

I'm not sure of everything I mean but hear me out on this one. If I don't reward the contributions that I say are important ... if I don't back people who are making honest efforts in the direction of our common goals, then it seems to me that I am lacking integrity. I'm not putting my money where my mouth is.

I haven't heard that one in a long time ... but you're right just the same.

So what do we have? Four on the list?

Activity without purpose, confusion about roles and responsibilities, lack of information, and lack of integrity. They exist and individuals and teams will not make contributions.

And by the same token, you're saying that if purpose is clear, responsibilities are well-defined, information is provided, and there is integrity, it still doesn't guarantee organizational health.

For sure ... but it goes a long way to minimizing the chances of dysfunctionality.

You like that term, don't you?

I'm not sure I like it as much as it sounds so ... so ... scientific.

Impossible.

What?

For you to sound scientific.

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