Team Building the Future

Many leaders, managers and employees experience difficulties in working together effectively. One of the reasons for this is that they are often not fully aware of the underlying mechanisms of change that are going on in the world right now, a paradigm shift that affects leadership structures and styles as well. This article, which is the first out of a series about working and living in times of change, looks at some of these changes and focuses at future leadership trends. It opens up the reasons for team building and the expertise needed to handle future challenges and requirements.

Now and then, a comparison

If we go back just 200 years we can observe that the pace of things and people and how things changed in the world was slow compared to now. There were no cars yet, no airplanes. People moved about slowly and were more depending on and influenced by local circumstances and conditions, whilst today the world has become an inter-connected place in which what happens on one side of the planet is influencing other parts of the planet as well, and to a far greater extent than in the past, not in the least due to modern technology. The speed of information exchange, as an example, through the Internet, is enormously fast, compared to the postman on his horse two hundred years ago.

This increase of speed and the massive amount of exchange of information is however just one aspect that influences our perceptions, our feelings, and the way we go on, another is the break-down of traditional values, rules and laws that dictated the way we should live. Today we tolerate, as an example, a large variety of all kind of relationship forms, especially in the Western World, which was unthinkable in the more orthodox setting of different cultures and religions two hundred years ago (and is still in some today!). Even the Vatican is changing its seven deadly sins after hundreds of years to a new set of deadly sins that more match the time we are living in.

Another example is that if you would be born two hundred years ago, and you were the first son of a miller, you would most likely become a miller as well, because it was expected from you to take on the business. Not as long as 50 years ago many people would be working for one company their whole life and have a loyalty feeling towards their work, today people have the possibility to- and do shift jobs regularly. Today there is a far greater freedom to do what you want. The son of the miller can become a president, choose to become a musician or a cap-driver.

This greater amount of freedom has however also it's counter effects. Hundreds of years ago things were more fixed, but the traditional rules, laws and values offered at least a form of how to live one's life, it offered security, stability and a direction! Life was simpler, one didn't have to think and question that much (and those that did and questioned the set values, often got prosecuted by the authorities)!

Many people today do experience however a far greater need for direction, within the freedom of multiple choices, in which everything seems to be allowed and is possible, and they are looking for a new set of inner values, rather than a set of values that are put upon them by the authorities. And this search is stressful and confusing for many, and often collides with the rules and regulations set out by others, not in the least in a work environment!

Transitional Leadership Structures

Influenced by everything that has been mentioned so far, leadership structures are changing in these times. The classic pyramid leadership structures, where one person or a small group of people decide what others should do and think, are breaking down. More than ever people question authority, especially the younger generations. With the increase of information and the signal of the freedom of 'wanting to think for- and act out of oneself' comes a feeling and knowing as well that no-one has the ultimate truth. Even if someone would have it, that it cannot be oppressed. Apart from that, classical pyramidic leadership structures do often stifle the intelligence that is available in various individuals in groups or teams of people.
Pyramidic leadership structures worked well in times of uneducated masses, in which only a few were in the position to get educated and obtain leading positions. It doesn't work today, especially not in relation to the great challenges we all face in these times. Future intelligence is needed to forecast trends, read the runes of what is going on and solve bottleneck situations privately or at work, and this is why teamwork today has an enormous importance.

One could say that in the past there was a collective response to the leader of a group or tribe, but today the name of the game is becoming more and more "individual responsibility to the collective". The word responsibility talks about the ability to respond, and in relation to these times it might mean consciously, self-chosen, thought through actions that come out of a set of inner values that are not just promoting of self, but work for the greater good and collective. It also implies a flexible mind state that is open to change and search for new intelligence, rather than a mind-state that bottom-lines everything with convenient answers from the past.

In the past teamwork was easy, because each person knew his or her place in the hierarchy. Today various leadership structures are appearing, such as situational leadership, and they all seem to be stepping-stones to what can be called "group intelligence leadership".
Group intelligence leadership is a type of leadership where not one person is the head of "intelligence", but where each person, by their inclination and/or function, contributes to the gathering of intelligence in the group. Such a process calls for mature people that can listen to each other, who are not reactive, can be patient and tolerant to individual differences. That take the responsibility of what they say they will do and know what they won't do and that can be challenged. Such a process can only succeed if people come out from the collective or team needs and purposes, rather than from their own needs, as a first. As an example, when they gather, they have done the pre-work that is needed, they are concise and to the point when they talk, and stay within the objectives and perimeters of the purpose of the gathering.

This form of leadership might seem utopian, yet in this time of transition and paradigm shift, many people instinctively feel, that this is the way ahead and they will object to any leadership forms that are out of date. Yet, when the pressures rise and deadlines need to be reached (and there is no time to work things out together) a company or team often falls back on pyramidic leadership. This can create irritation and objection in members of the team to procedures, especially if members in a team do not understand the times we are living and that we are in transition of leadership forms. This will become even more apparent when members in the team have not yet done the personal development inside themselves to become mature and responsible team players in a group intelligence leadership situation.

They will reject authority, yet they will reject (greater) responsibility as well.

Teambuilding the future

This makes the job of being a manager or a leader not an easy one! How to handle the increasing need for team work on the one side, that is asking time and investment in the development of different individuals, in relation to rising pressures and dead-lines that call for immediate action. Today's managers and leaders need to be true octopuses. They need to be good people- and project managers, to know how to negotiate, to handle conflict and solve problems, to be creative, to make timely decisions, to know how to direct and delegate, to listen, to be patient, to plan & organize, to have good presentation skills, to have a good self-knowledge and an ability to size-up people, to be visionary and to build effective teams...

The list is endless!

Yet, the most important skill to be developed in a manager or leader and it's team of people is perhaps the one to forecast future trends and read the runes of what that is needed to match future requirements. Any good manager or leader today knows, at least to an extent, that authorative leadership is on it's way out and that true team building starts with the personal development of the members in a team.

This takes time and long-term expertise investment and there are no magical solutions or short cuts. An occasional team-building session will not do it, neither a set of outer rules or team values no one really wants to adhere to. The development needed to build futuristic teams and group intelligence leadership has to come from inside out in its members. It cannot be intellectualised.

And although this development might not give profit on a short term, it will pay of in the long run, humanity-wise as well, and in the forming up of capable teams that can face the future confidently!