

Why Do Organizations Lose Their Dynamism?

by Peter Arthur-Smith, Leadership Solutions, Inc.®

‘Ironically, the pervasive emphasis on harmony does not serve organizations particularly well. Unanimity leads rather quickly to stagnation, which, in turn, invites change by non-evolutionary means.’ Warren Bennis in his book ‘Why Leaders Can’t Lead’ (Jossey Bass).

What does Bennis mean by “non-evolutionary means”? He’s probably alluding such *management tools* as mergers, acquisitions, restructuring, downsizing, right-sizing and so forth to overcome inertia or the status quo, which are the result from too much harmony.

He’s also alluding to our preoccupation with expecting that those, “...who do not share the common set, the common point of view, are by definition deviant, marginal outsiders.” No doubt this is his keen reference to those who do not fit neatly within a typical “command and control” structure.

Additionally, he pointed out, “...the organizational deviant, the individual who sees things differently, may be the institution’s vital and only link with some new, more apt paradigm... Most organizations would rather risk obsolescence than make room for the non-conformist in their midst.”

Bennis, with an ironic twist, adds the thought that, when we’re looking for new product names or whether to establish a new branch in Preoria or Oskosh (his choices), dissent is reasonably well tolerated. But, when the choice is between reform or status quo, real growth or incremental change, heterarchies (market focused organizations) or hierarchies, new business principles or traditional business processes, dissent is something to be frowned upon (or feared) within an organization.

“Unanimity, or at least the public show of it, is so valued within an organizational context that it often carries more weight with an individual than his or her conscience,” is Bennis’s continued refrain.

It’s important to note his reference to “organizational context” because it’s well known within American society that its citizens are relatively compliant at work, whereas in their private life freedom of speech and action is highly prized. In Europe it’s more the reverse, where people can be rather outspoken at work but relatively conformist within their non-work worlds. Some attribute this to the high degree of job security in Europe and rigid culture norms.

While getting everyone on the same page has much value, it should not be at the expense of innovation and progress. How can organizations balance this need for reasonable consensus against a similar need for inventiveness? Three immediate suggestions come to mind:

- **Be viewed as an “Outside-in” organization** – Make it perfectly acceptable to propose activities that will give *all* stakeholders (including customers, suppliers, alliances, personnel, leaders, owners, shareholders) an exceptional experience. “Inside-out” organizations are primarily focused on the owners/shareholders, which in the final analysis is self-defeating. We are all familiar with those companies which are more interested in getting paid than in giving due service; as promised.
- **Place a strong emphasis on “effectiveness”** – Put a higher premium on “doing the right things”: such as offering fresh or faster value, and investing resources in *breakthroughs* rather than savings. Efficiency is clearly helpful, but it engenders bureaucracy and bottlenecks, whereas effectiveness eliminates both. Ultimately, you cannot be more efficient than being effective (especially if it’s the right thing, first time).
- **Welcome more inclusive decision making** – By using a technique called option solving (www.optionsolving.com), it naturally gives the best results when you involve others. Since it involves out-of-the-box thinking, new ideas are encouraged and stimulate the best solutions for all key decisions. Conventional problem solving aims to preclude choices as quickly as possible, to simplify decision making, at the expense of allowing the widest range of options. Our desire to have a simple *this* or *that* solution. Option solving enables to use our intuition to survey all options.

With each of the above suggestions smart thinking will be permitted and therefore more effective decisions are likely to emerge without squashing inventiveness. What better way to produce harmony than agreeing on optimal solutions and doing what makes sense for *all* the stakeholders involved? Try utilizing these suggestions and you’ll quickly notice the difference within your organization.

If you wish to learn more about making your organization much more dynamic, please contact:

Chris Garratt –Europe- (+352) 2631 3384 or chris@lse.lu

Denise Lalonde – New York- (212) 974 1438 or denise@ileadershipsolutions.com

Ed Frontera – Florida – (561) 715 0447 or ed@ileadershipsolutions.com

Holly Duckworth – Oregon – (503) 887 4112 or holly@ileadershipsolutions.com

Jim Leonhard –California – (415) 482 7766 or jim@ileadershipsolutions.com

Olger Draijer –Europe-(+352) 45 88 35 or olger@lse.lu

Paul Schonenberg – Europe –(+352) 621 23 3131 or paul@lse.lu

Peter A. Arthur-Smith – New York- (212) 332-8907 or peter@ileadershipsolutions.com