Life is Great!

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Using Tribal Leadership to change company cultures

Life is great, isn't it? It sure is; if you are empowered, there is a wonderful atmosphere at work and you are working towards a goal that you passionately believe in. On the other hand, if that is not the case, you may feel like your life truly sucks.

by Juhana Lampinen

The challenge

Do you find yourself in the downward spiral of reporting, filling in figures on various sheets and applications, having meetings and teleconferences to discuss the same issues over and over again? Do you feel like a small mediocre cog in a large machine? Do you consistently feel numb, brainless and uncreative? If so, don't fret; there are plenty of people like you out there. If not, you can consider yourself lucky.

Many medium and large companies exist in a factory culture and in deep mistrust. This has resulted in overblown command and control structures and related reporting. Sometimes it goes so far that there is not much time left to do something productive, or creative, that would have a positive impact on the bottom line – the profit. What do the mistrust, ego-driven decisions, overblown reporting and control do to your business? They cause extensive damage. At least, some of the following might happen:

— A culture of mistrust and blame develops.
— Motivational problems occur.
— Proactivity disappears.
— Major obstacles to innovative thinking appear.
— Employees focus on doing the absolute minimum.
— Management argues about minor things, instead of doing something to improve the situation.

So what can be done to prevent the above mentioned circumstances from happening? ►

Every group of people in every setup can be seen as a tribe.

Advancing to the next level

A very powerful tool for understanding the current state of your business, defining your goals and providing tools for achieving the goals is called Tribal Leadership. Tribal Leadership is a concept designed to change your company culture. It claims that every group of people in any setup (country, city, town, company, department or even family and friends) can be seen as a tribe. The members of your tribe are the people who you would probably greet if you met them on the street. You may also share a set of common beliefs, attitudes and values or you are on the same mission that connects you to the same tribe.

The Tribal Leadership concept divides the tribes into five tribal stages, which are defined by commonalities like the atmosphere, language and expressions that people use, as well as behavior typical of that group or »tribe«. The stages range from full-blown anarchy (stage 1) to working towards a common noble cause (stage 5). In between, there are levels such as just doing the very minimum, self-promotion and real teamwork. The whole point of the model is to provide you with an easy tool to recognize where you stand today, as well as to give you simple practices and tools to help you advance to the next level.

Why would you like to advance to the next level? The research done by the Tribal Leadership authors proves that over a longer period of time the higher levels always outperform the lower ones. This simply means that the companies at higher levels make better profit and have more satisfied employees. As we all know, satisfied and happy people are more creative, innovative and stress-resistant, which most of the time leads to better performance.

The most interesting thing to know about the Tribal Leadership model is that globally, around 75 percent of the businesses are at levels one to three and only 25 percent at levels four and five. In other words, by reaching stage four, which can be done by simply focusing on your company culture, you leave 75 percent of the competition behind.

Would you be willing to hear the truth about your business? Would you be ready to change your company culture?

Understanding your current cultural stage

Practically, the work starts with understanding your current stage, i. e. which tribal stage you are currently in. If your company is relatively small, say fewer than 50 employees, it could be that you have only one tribe inside your organization. However, it is also possible that there are several. The different tribes within your company may even be in different stages. In larger companies, there are always several tribes, which almost without exceptions, are in different stages. The key to success is finding the dominating stage of your

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company and understanding which stages the individual internal tribes are in. Then you need to work on a development plan, focusing on a common goal.

Setting the goal, getting there

Now that we know which tribal stage your company finds itself in today, it is time to set the goals. For most businesses, the realistic goal is to reach stage four or stabilize the whole culture in stage three first. The cultural change does not happen overnight; this requires taking baby steps. The Tribal Leadership concept claims that it is only possible to advance one stage at a time, so be realistic and patient.

Depending on the goals and individual needs of the tribes, we use leadership tools such as Leadership Simulations, Natural Tendencies Analysis, Emotional Intelligence Profiling, Dialogic 360 and many others to advance to the next stage. These tools give your employees see-feel-change experiences and a feeling of trust and involvement, which are the building blocks of a successful cultural change. However, the processes and management practices of your company must support the new culture, too. This may mean introducing changes like evolving your monetary and non-monetary incentive programs towards more team-orientation or going towards more empowerment and distributed decision-making. Or it may mean implementing recommendations to always meet customers

in groups of three, or even simple things such as moving to an open office space in order to boost interaction between people.

Following up

If you would like your cultural change to really happen and stick, there is probably nothing more important than following up, adjusting the goals and reviewing. I would even bring it to the next level and create a constant cultural adaptation that calls for continuous improvement and change. It could be summarized simply with the saying of the Chinese philosopher Confucius: »The journey is the destination«.

The first phase of cultural change is the awareness that there is room for improvement. Most people perceive their own culture as more or less ideal. However, there is always room for improvement. Tribal Leadership and our practical leadership tools give you a simple and structured means to change your company culture and make the change stick. ●

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If you wish to read more on the topic you can download my Tribal Leadership tips and tricks e-book to your iPad here: http://iobic.de/tribal-leadership