Driving Culture Change through Co-Creative Change Leadership

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All significant organizational transformations require some level of culture change. And all culture change requires leaders to lead differently. In general, these changes are moving away from traditional command and control, where leaders set rigid requirements, lead through fear, and people attend to the needs of their silos over those of the enterprise. Command and control cultures often limit employee satisfaction and performance, and promote conflict between silos that hurt both organizational results, service to the customer, and change.

The direction organizational culture is slowly going—but needs to go in earnest to survive in the dynamic 21st Century marketplace—is toward co-creating. Simply stated, co-creating means "working together across boundaries in pursuit of Win-win-win outcomes." By Win-win-win, we mean outcomes that are best for the *larger systems* (i.e., the enterprise and customer) as well as the smaller systems (you and me; or your department and mine). This requires an "up and out" leadership perspective, not the "down and in" turf-perspective many leaders have.

To operate co-creatively, your leaders and people need to put their first priority on the needs of the customer, and to align as an enterprise team that works collaboratively across internal boundaries in service to that customer. You need people to trust each other enough to stop defending turf; they need to open the line of collaboration and communication with each other. This is where innovation, speed of change, and esprit de corps occur.

Most of today's large change efforts need the shift to co-creating to occur to realize their intended ROI. ERP and CRM implementations, supply chain enhancement, merger integration, performance management—all succeed or fail based on the mindsets and behaviors of leaders and

workers. Success requires people to give up self-interest and collaborate across boundaries in service to both customers and the enterprise. People need to be empowered and confident enough to leave their ego defenses in the hall and contribute as full enterprise players.

Most people are stuck in "either-or" thinking. Their mindsets are win-lose: "I either pursue what is best for me, or for you, or for the company, or for the customer, but all of us cannot win simultaneously." This seems true when people think and react through their win-lose lens. Shift their thinking, however, and new possibilities arise.

Let's be real here. Operating from a Win-win-win perspective is a fundamental shift in mindset requiring significant personal growth and awareness. This level of mindset and behavior change does not occur overnight. However, it *is* possible, even one person at a time. With the proper development, support, rewards, and follow up, all driven by business strategy requirements, people's behaviors, decision-making and actions do shift.

There are numerous strategies you can use to promote the co-creative, Win-win-win way of being in your organization. Some are long-term and require significant investment. Others are simple and easy to implement.

The most profound strategy is offering multi-day leadership retreats cascaded through the organization. These retreats blend organization performance (business strategy imperatives, enterprise focus, customer service, systems dynamics) with a focus on personal growth (self awareness, emotional intelligence, behavior change,) and relationship skills (communications, teamwork, collaboration, conflict resolution). Making co-creative leadership and Win-win-win the integrating themes of this type of retreat profoundly impacts

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participants because they directly experience how their mindset influences success: personally, inter-personally, and organizationally. We have run many of these retreats and they are remarkably successful at shifting leaders' thinking and style.

Another approach is through clarifying your company mission, strategies and goals, and cascading them down through the organization. This can powerfully influence people to look "up and out" from a Win-win-win perspective. But only if each level of leadership understands how to support the "larger good," and works collaboratively with the levels below them to identify how they can collectively contribute to the whole.

Refocusing the company's mission and goals is fairly common. Many organizations attempt this type of realignment through communications, but few provide the personal and management development required to see it put into action on real work. Communication alone does not accomplish this level of culture change. Success requires training, follow up, monitoring and coaching, skills few organizations have mastered or built into their change efforts.

You can help leaders learn how to coach their people to promote co-creative behavior and Win-win-win thinking. Most leaders habitually provide the answers to problems their people encounter, and most subordinates expect that from their leaders. Instead, teach your leaders to present their people with the Win-win-win outcome to achieve, and then coach their people to co-creatively figure out how to achieve that result *themselves*. This requires subordinates to think and engage differently and to work across boundaries. Over time, they will begin to operate that way automatically. The key with this strategy, of course, is developing your leaders' coaching and listening skills, and their own Win-win-win perspective.

Co-creating is an essential ingredient and focus of culture change. Build in strategies to introduce, teach, and support Win-win-win in your executive ranks, throughout middle management, and on the ground. There is no more powerful a culture changing strategy than having executives do the level of personal change required to model this to the organization as central to your business transformations.