

Consciousness Is the New Currency

26/08/2010 "Consciousness is the new currency." So claims Georgina Barrick, the CEO and co-founder of Humanity. And before we get into the merits of the argument, let's debunk the 'C' word. Consciousness in this context is a collective for an increasingly important group of behaviours in leadership. These behaviours are: creativity, openness, trust, courage, self awareness, confidence, intuition and instinct, and Georgina contends that they are strongly and positively correlated to high performing leadership and business success in the fast changing environment of the 21st century.

Ok, we have your attention. Or at least, we probably have the attention of the better leaders amongst you. Or so a piece of research that Barrick would have us bring to your attention would contend. The research result, based on a sample of 486 managers and first published in 2006 *, strongly supports Barrick's contention that management styles which may well have sufficed, or even yielded positive results in an efficiency driven 20th century are less valuable, or even negative, for companies who now operate in a faster changing 21st century.

Again, before we examine the merits of what is surely for many a contentious stance, let's debunk the second 'C' word. What does she mean by 'currency'? The research she refers to found strong correlations between these 'consciousness' based behaviours and 'success'. In the context of this study, 'success' was the simple average of sales or revenue growth, market share, profitability or ROI, the quality of products or services, the state of new product development and a measure called overall performance. In all cases, the respondent managers performance was benchmarked against 'similar organisations' - in most cases the competition. Dare we say that this looks like a reasonable indicator of sustainability as well as 'success', or simple profitability, which may well have been the measure 15 years ago? If you agree, then the research results surely gain weight.

The results were important and astounding to say the least. As Bob Anderson, the author of the research concludes "The data strongly suggests that... the behaviours are highly predictive of leadership effectiveness and thereby business performance" So what does this all mean? According to Barrick, "we have to understand that in the context of a leadership role in a wireless and fast changing 21st century environment, that 'doing the right thing or making the right decisions' is becoming as, or even more important than 'doing things efficiently'. In high change environments, it is simply more important to be right than to be efficient. This is not to say that the 'efficiency consultancies' should be thrown out. It just means that in periods of increasing rates of change, having consciousness qualities (remember the collective description) that drive creative, effective solutions is more important than having management qualities that drive efficiency, and highly dynamic environments lead to reactive behaviour.

If you haven't stopped reading and you haven't torn these pages out to use as kindle to burn this new leadership evangelist at the stake, you will be interested to know

that her views are endorsed by Brian Khumalo, chairman of the newly established Human Essence group which owns, amongst other things, Leaders Unlimited; the leading executive search and leadership development business. Brian has long held the view that "while infrastructural, systems and process assets have been actively managed to maintain competitive edge, the human element is not being optimally or even adequately addressed" This thinking is at the core of his establishment of Human Essence.

Back to Georgina Barrick, "After working as a consultant to Brian for 6 months and having been exposed to his thinking - that the basis for the evaluation of a candidate in the 21st century had to be fundamentally different to the way things were being done in the recruitment environment - we decided to launch Humanity, and to develop what has become a ground breaking and world first recruitment technology driven methodology."

The thinking is compelling. For a long time the methodology of the recruitment world has not moved on. And maybe this was justified; after all, there are some famous consulting groups who have earned a sizeable proportion of their income driving efficiency and the low cost producer concept through large organisations. The recruitment industry thrived in their wake, on a production line mentality that sought to match people's CVs (detailing functional competencies only) to the boxes that were to be filled in organisations, so that these juggernauts could lumber on. But the world has changed. The principles that underpinned an industrial and even a computing age are changing fast. Few companies that populated the Fortune 500 50 years ago still have that honour. Agility, creativity and flexibility have become the watchwords of the biotechnology age. That's why the research Barrick quotes makes sense. How long have we heard the contention that as Humans, we only use 10% of our brains? And why, if we know this, have we not done more to access the other 90%?

If consciousness really is the new currency then how do organisations access it? The answer to this question is something that both Khumalo and Barrick agree on. Firstly they say, every company, and every position is different. If the research proves one thing, it is that in the leadership role, (which in a changing environment has a requirement for higher levels of creativity, intuition, courage, openness etc,) 'consciousness' is positively correlated to 'success'. But not every job or even every company has the same requirement for this new set of behaviours. It is clear that in some industries where the pace of change is slow, or in some jobs, where efficiency is still the most important output, it may be preferable to have team members who exhibit lower levels of consciousness based behaviour to make a more perfect match. So the key to leadership development for Khumalo in Leaders Unlimited, or to accurate and successful placements for Barrick in Humanity, is not so much in the ability to identify high consciousness individuals and to place them, but rather in the ability to assess in leadership teams or in jobs, the exact need for functional competence on the one hand, and behavioural competence on the other. Then to be able to place or develop individuals into these positions so that they are more perfectly matched and are therefore enabled to perform greatly.

This ability to predict the performance of candidates in prospective positions is key to Barrick's Humanity offering. Unsurprisingly, it is also central to the Khumalo's Leaders Unlimited's claim to be able to help organisations create competitive advantage through strategic leadership development processes. At the core of both these claims is that if one places a person in a job they are perfectly suited both functionally and behaviourally, they will be happier. They will whistle on the way to work and as Barrick says "Imagine a business, or a team filled with people who love their jobs. Imagine the creativity, imagine the collaboration and imagine the invention. Imagine the success that such an organisation would have in the marketplace, and imagine the opportunities that this very success would create in time for the very people who are members of the team. And the secret to this value creation is that leaders will increasingly need to fill their organisations with people who are perfectly suited to, and who love their jobs." She continues "These kinds of organisations are going to make their mark on the 21st century. It is a time where the differentiators between good and great for companies will come from the synergistic creativity of individuals who are perfectly matched to their jobs.

So how does this affect productivity? Well, it affects it hugely. Having people perfectly matched to jobs means that organisations will have efficient people in efficiency jobs, creative people in creative jobs, agile and flexible people in jobs that need an ability to roll with the commercial challenges of the day. Teams will be more balanced, and people will be happier and more productive. It sounds pretty basic, but if one looks around the corporate landscape and assesses how the most sustainably successful organisations are constructed and compare them to their less successful peers the wisdom of this thinking really becomes apparent.

So how have these businesses managed in the absence of tools that Barrick and Khumalo are hailing as breakthroughs? "Well," Barrick explains "great leaders are highly evolved people when it comes to these consciousness skills. The research confirms it. They are mostly able to, in interview situations with equally matched candidates from a functional point of view, choose the candidate most suited to a job from a behavioural or conscious functionality point of view. They use an age old human capability called 'gut feel.'

Everybody has this capability built into their DNA memory. It comes from the accumulated wisdom that we are all born with. It's what makes antelope stand up minutes after birth. It's what makes them know where to find their mothers milk. It's what made the early hominids survive when other competing and closely related species didn't. It's what research is now telling us distinguishes good from great leaders and what Barrick contends will distinguish companies that thrive in uncertain times from those that fail. "The breakthrough here is that we have found a reliable way to assess the functionality required for a specific job in a specific company culture, both from a functional (skills, experience and knowledge) point of view, and from a behavioural point of view. We then search our database of candidates who have all been pre-assessed on the same basis and search for a match so that we leave less to chance. The leader would then be selecting from two or three perfectly matched candidates and they can bring their gut feel to the table to measure nuance."

The proof of the pudding is always in the eating however and it will be interesting to see if these concepts bear the fruit that Barrick and Khumalo believe they will. Early indications are however astounding. The Humanity business is relatively new to a very overcrowded market, but the level of response from potential candidates is overwhelming. "Our existing database swells by 1000 new and fully assessed candidates every time we place a days worth of advertising" says Barrick "and we have enthusiastic engagement from industry, with appointments coming in from many ALSI 40 companies in our first month."

The secret to their early success may be found in the words of a listed company MD who said in an email to Georgina 'at last somebody who gets it. I have been waiting all my life for somebody to do this'

Source: www.humanitysa.co.za