changingorganisations: The Newsletter (No 3: April 2009)

Hi there,

This is April 2009's newsletter, changingorganisations, for my clients and other professionals interested in organisational change.

This month's topics include:

- Making Business Change Happen
- Hot off the Blog – A Critique of Competencies
- Milestones

Making Business Change Happen

As a manager, your business is important to you. You want to make change without your team flipping out. To be effective in making changes to your business, it is important to have effective ways of thinking about your business. No doubt you already consider your targets and goals, staff, budgets, important stakeholders such as customers and funders, and those you yourself report to.

Your business or organisation has certain legal rights like those of a person - the right to own property and other assets, and to enter into contractual commitments. In addition to this, your business is constantly changing. So it is tempting to think of the business as a thing that exists, perhaps a living being, with a heart (or soul) to express the essence of the business (that would be team spirit and cooperation), a brain that thinks for the business (no doubt that would be you, the manager) and hands to get things done (that would be your team).

While your business has these legal rights, it is actually composed of people who have to relate to each other in specific roles that are defined to a greater or lesser degree. And people are not like the heart or brain or hands of a person. Unlike your heart or your hands, people have their own choices, intentions and consciousness, all interacting with the others in your organisation and with customers and other important people like suppliers.

As you will be well aware, you cannot control the people and their interactions in the way that the brain of a person controls the hands, or the way the forces of mechanics control whether a building will stay upright or not. You cannot press a lever and manoeuvre all the people into place like a machine. In reality, it is not actually that helpful to think of your organisation as a thing, a mechanism or a living system. Instead, think of it as patterns of relationships –amongst your staff, customers, suppliers, shareholders, partners and yourself.

These myriad interactions cannot be controlled by any one person and yet they are not random – they have patterns. You cannot play god and design the future interactions that will take place in your organisation. As a human being, even as a powerful senior manager, you can only participate in conversations with others.

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With this in mind, what is the best way to foster the change you want? Here are three ideas which may seem counter-intuitive.

1.   Be involved enough to have a great feel for your business so that you are influencing communication – with stakeholders such as customers, funders, suppliers and others. Make sure your managers are doing the same.

2.   At the same time, be detached enough so that you can observe your situation in ways that are congruent with reality. If you are too involved you will miss vital aspects of the world around you. You must be involved and detached at the same time. Your goals and intentions for the future will always guide your participation with others.

3.   Pay attention to how people are responding to you and how they are responding to each other. Discuss what you are noticing with your most trusted team members. It sounds simple, but this is powerful!

The key to change in your organisation is for you to develop your own changed perspectives and insights. The key to changing your own perspective and gaining new insights is listening to your people. And the key to listening is to notice how others are responding to you and how you in turn, are responding to them. Reflect on what you are noticing, and, when you have the opportunity, discuss this with your team and your own boss.

Hot off the changingorganisations Blog – A Critique of Competencies

The blog's December series of posts critiquing competencies and their approach for leadership development has become popular enough that searching on the term "competencies" and "Lominger" are now in the top 5 ways people find their way to the blog. Which seems strange given that I am critiquing competencies, not praising them. And the blog hardly mentions Lominger at all – but maybe this is a sign of the development of Lominger's monopoly on competencies.

Basically, I think that having competencies doesn't necessarily make you competent. Leadership, like great musical performance, requires interpretation, improvisation and interaction. Competencies, on the other hand, being free of context, are like scales, or musical exercise. Competencies are also seen as properties of the individual so that success is attributed to the individual regardless of any collective effort or contextual factors that were involved. I also wonder whether it is possible to build a complete 'whole' performance from fragments of behaviours.

I have other critiques as well, such as the assumption that what has worked in the past will continue to work in the future, or whether those who excel in the same role do actually exhibit the same behaviours. If you are interested you can read them by clicking here or searching the blog on "competencies."

Milestones

March was a month of milestones.

We received notification that this newsletter was one of the top 50 for the last 30 days by bestezines.com, who in turn are very fast growing on Twitter. More info here.

On the blog, the first 1000 hits took four months to achieve. Now it's getting 1000 hits a month. The first 2000 hits took six months, the second 2000 hits took two months. The blog seems to be growing exponentially if you will pardon the pun.

March also saw the 100th article posted on the blog.

These times are not the same as they previously were. I wish you great insight into your own organisational situation – take seriously your own experience and what you notice going on in your organisation. Thanks for your interest in our work.

Regards,

Stephen

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"... Stephen has a nice, calm way of delivering messages but with an authority that builds respect...."

          Fleur Murray
          Formerly Manager Organisational Capability
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