Becoming a 'World Class' Organisation

(High Performance, High Commitment and Continuous Learning)

Successful organisations today require a culture that is capable of radical or breakthrough change coupled with continuous improvement. There is much literature on radical change and on the concept of companies turning themselves into 'Learning Organisations'. Alchemy of Coaching believes that the two concepts should be looked at together by management teams who are serious in their drive to become 'World Class'.

The challenge

There aren't enough companies in the UK which can be described as world-class. The health of the nation needs many more.

Changing an organisation is difficult and takes time. There are problems finding time and resources to manage the necessary changes to become world class. Today's commercial problems and opportunities compete for management time, outweighing efforts to focus on tomorrow.

There has been too much concentration on well known change processes rather than the more difficult area of changing behaviours and cultures. Every individual in an organisation needs to feel able to contribute as close to their current potential as possible. Change processes need to release the potential of all of the people all of the time.

The characteristics necessary for success

Organisations which are ....

Led by visionary enthusiastic champions..... *who*

Know their customers..... *and strive to*

Unlock the potential of their people..... *so that they can*

Deliver products and services that exceed their customer expectations ..... *and*

Continuously introduce differentiated products and services.

Many change processes work on the organisation in its current state, polishing and refining existing products and services. The concentration is usually on cost reduction, market share and process improvement. The organisation which will be successful tomorrow has to raise its sights and be prepared to create the markets of the future ahead of its competitors.

This level of performance requires as much focus on the interests of all stakeholders as on the bottom line. Customers, suppliers and employees - as individuals and groups - operate in an effective network which allows learning to take place and which values the contribution of everyone. Such organisations focus on employees, customers and stakeholders as the means to create shareholder value.

What needs to be done?..... over

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The steps for success

- Get started
- Create and communicate a clear vision
- Focus on the longer term together with quick wins to build confidence
- Involve all levels of the organisation - value everyone's contribution
- Be prepared to integrate across the whole organisation

These are the key findings of research carried out by Transition Partnerships into 'Getting the best from IT-related change' (1995). A list of 100 best practice ideas were developed from this research which included interviews with senior managers, who have real practical experience of managing change projects and programmes. These findings are supported by other research in Europe and the USA. (see references)

Using outsiders to help

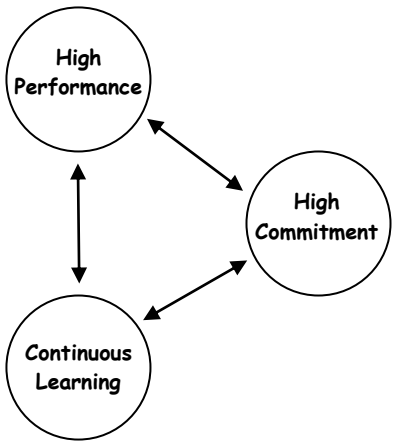
Change needs to be done with the commitment and enthusiasm of those in the organisation. Outside helpers must be willing to...

- focus on people
- work in a learning partnership with the organisation
- take a holistic or 'whole company' view of the change
- review achievements and amend plans rather than rigidly sticking to a fixed timetable or budget
- recognise that ultimate control is in the hands of the organisation

Professor Coulson-Thomas, in the COBRA (Constraints, opportunities in BPR. Experience and practice) report, highlights the inappropriate nature of many 'mechanistic' models of change. It is important to select outside help with care rather than on an inflexible approach linked to some proprietary model.

Potential outcomes

All this is aimed at becoming world class - a high performance, high commitment and continuous learning organisation. This means...



- people creating increased value added at every level of the organisation
- measured improvements in customer service levels - delighted customers! e.g. product cycle times dramatically reduced
- radical change (breakthrough thinking) *and* continuous improvement
- measuring improvements in all areas to build on success
- the organisation is viewed holistically - people the most valuable asset

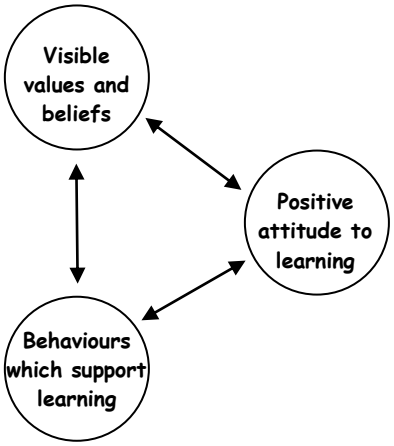
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The missing elements

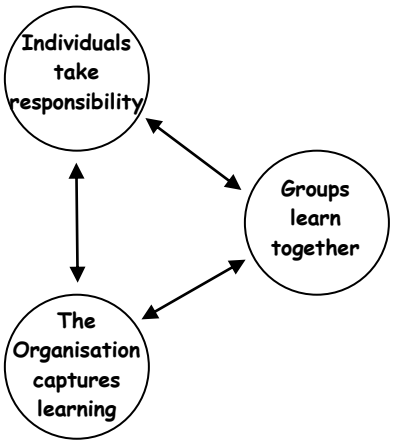
Achieving these dramatic improvements is not easy. It requires time and commitment over a number of years to make the initial changes and sustained effort to maintain them. It's easier to make short-term changes which seem to get somewhere by cutting costs. Research indicates that successful companies achieve these results by becoming 'high performance, high commitment and continuous learning organisations', displaying the characteristics shown below.

Becoming a 'High Performance, High Commitment and Continuous Learning Organisation' requires a culture that recognises learning as fundamental to success



This means an environment that includes

- Espoused values and beliefs, visible and delivered - not just a set of words on a wall
- A positive mindset and attitude towards learning - its importance and value at every level
- Behaviours that support, encourage and maximise every possible opportunity for learning and development



And fosters learning at each of three different levels

- Individuals, who take responsibility for their own learning and development
- Groups and/or teams of individuals who need to work and learn together
- Organisations, who find ways of capturing learning so that it is widely available to add value and help the whole organisation move forwards

Do it this way ..... over

Commit to becoming an organisation that wants to learn and develop its potential to succeed

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Personal change as the driver to success

Becoming a high performance, high commitment and continuous learning organisation isn't easy either. It needs everyone, especially the top team, to be seen to put 'developing the people and the organisation' as a high priority. It must not drop off the list because "we are busy".

Transition Partnerships works with many tools to facilitate change. At the top of the list, however, are the key characteristics of personal change, without which organisational change will not deliver lasting returns.

- A willingness to change myself
- Personal awareness
- Having a coach/mentor
- Seeking and acting on feedback
- Working at relationships
- Networking - making best use of all contacts
- Active learning - developing the habit of listening and learning from our experiences

All these need regular measurement and review. A recent example from a director in a manufacturing organisation would not have been possible a few years ago.

"We undertake to measure progress in our agreed behaviours by meeting every Monday morning for 30 minutes with one agenda item only - 'how are we doing against our 6 critical behaviours'"

For the top team of an organisation to commit to focusing on their behaviours rather than the tasks in hand is what it takes to make a difference.

References

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Alchemy of Coaching is continuing to develop its ideas and models round the subject of Learning at the individual, group and organisational level. We welcome any comments or suggestions that move this topic forwards.

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