

TALES OF CONTRAST IN TWO COMPANIES: LEADERSHIP SUCCESS THROUGH GESTALT CONCEPTS

By

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Dark economic clouds have gathered over the past several years, developing into a storm that has dispensed angst and turmoil throughout the business corporate world. Management, responding with a battle cry and often unprepared for the turmoil, resorts to downsizing, mergers, restructuring, and cutting overhead by reducing staff: all weapons of survival against the economic storm. These weapons leave in their wake confusion, mistrust, and undefined goals with often a loss of stability and lowered perceived value for the enterprise. Undefined goals signify an uncertain future.

Today's world economy is in the midst of massive transformation at almost every level including labor utilization, productivity, finance, the structure of business organization, marketing, energy, the environment, and affordable housing; to name a few critical areas. Solving these momentous challenges will take new unconventional approaches and innovative "out of the box thinking" that might have been never utilized before to solve them.

Imagine the following economic scenario:

Managements are generally under increased shareholder and Wall-Street pressure to protect the share value. Declining economic liquidity causes a global bear market to develop. The company's stock price has seriously declined. The pride and confidence that employees once had has crashed because their stock options are now underwater and hope for improvement is tentative.

Corporate Example #1: Philosophy "Survival: Save the Bottom Line"

Yielding to shareholder pressure, management becomes fixated with response to only the bottom line. Significant layoffs have cut overhead down to the bone. Any expense that does not translate immediately to the bottom line is prohibited, including new product development. Confused and in fear, leaders do not know what to develop for the future. Employees, already demoralized, live in fear of the next layoff.

Management praises itself for dramatically increased "productivity" and an improved bottom line, but in fact the "productivity" gain is an illusion. People are working long hours and are hanging on in fear. Employees feel trapped, bound to hold onto employment.

Corporate leadership is challenged to improve their bottom line, holding costs as they struggle for continued growth. Growth requires investment, and in the short term investment subtracts from the bottom line.

The failures of leadership in this example are manifest: the top line is sacrificed to the obsession for the bottom line; communication with overstressed employees for goals and inspiration, even in management, is minimal; hope for growth in the future is muddled since survival is the only perceived goal.

The sum of all components of the business operation and organization are in effect, less than the value of the employees who are only trying to survive with their work-ethic confined.

Corporate Example #2: Philosophy “Opportunity: Prepare for the Future”

Management recognizes the challenge of the significant stress presented by both the top line and the bottom line. The economic decline is obvious to everyone and reports of layoffs and downsizing by competitors seems as ominous signs for the future.

Rather than jumping into a reflexive action to “save the bottom line,” the leadership in management senses the weaknesses in the market and the downsizing of competition as an opportunity. By analyzing the balance sheets and activity of each department/division, a concept of reorganization to promote the most efficient operation of the business for the future is developed. *The leadership of this corporation embodies the principles of Gestalt!*

A corporate-wide meeting is called for all employees. The harsh reality of the times is presented in terms everyone understands. Employees are notified of a reorganization plan that will avoid corporate-wide layoffs, position the company for the future, and this brings common-purpose and inspiration throughout the enterprise.

The reorganization goal positions staff to develop new products, services, and marketing strategies. The bottom line is reduced while remaining mildly positive. Because of the commitment to succeed, employees are motivated, and as they adjust to the new reality of their circumstance, they are inspired and work toward a common-goal. The sum of all components is greater in combination than the individual efforts.

Results: Fast Forward to the Future.

Corporation Example #1

After the economy stabilizes and liquidity moves to the upside, the Example #1 Corporation experiences no growth in the top line. Management fixation only on the bottom line has left the remaining employees demoralized and unmotivated. The corporation has survived, but people have been worked into the ground and would jump to another company as soon as possible. The top line has suffered immensely, and now with economic recovery at hand, Example #1 has nothing new to offer – they are marketing the products and services of the past. The decline never recovers to the former position.

Corporation Example #2

Example #2 Corporation is on a roll to a great future. The top line starts to greatly improve since they are prepared for the new upturn with the right products and services at the right time. The bottom line soon follows up, just as promised. The expectations of growth are sensed by the analysts of Wall Street, and stock options are no longer underwater. Employees are jubilant, motivated, and inspired. The business achieves a new ramp of growth, and they use the growth to increasingly stay on top of market-customer directions with a parade of new products and services.

The corporation is moving forward as a whole with common-purpose, intact, and inspired with optimism. This positive motion, actualized, is the result of synergy. The pathway to synergy is through a process known as Gestalt!

The Role and Implementation of Gestalt: Approach and Concepts

Gestalt theory holds that psychological, physiological, and behavioral phenomena are irreducible experiential configurations not derivable from a simple summation of perceptual elements such as sensation and response. Gestalt psychologists found concepts to be perceived as a pattern or a whole rather than merely as a sum of distinct component parts. The parts often derive their nature and purpose from the whole and cannot be understood apart from it. A corporation can be viewed as a purposeful cloud formed for inspired common goals put into motion by the inspiration of leadership, orchestrated in harmony through Gestalt processes. A Gestalt Leadership, guiding and navigating, offers a unique perspective and new leadership approach to frame today's very complex business challenges, so that they can be most effectively solved with accountability.

Similar to how Einstein's simple mass-energy equivalence equation $E=mc^2$ was conceived, only through new levels of thinking, breakthroughs and new understanding we call Quantum Physics were necessary to solve finally comprehend the magnificence Einstein's theory of Special Relativity . So, by projection in today's very dynamic technologically driven global economy, new approaches to leadership and management are necessary to prosper and be competitive. The success examples of entirely new industries and their leaders like GOOGLE, Facebook, Zappos, and Netflix happen because of inspired vision, creating businesses that did not exist before. The same Leadership and Management approaches that worked successfully in optimizing vertical marketing and production organizations in the 1980's-2000's will be marginally effective in leading change when immersed in a social media cloud connected globally as wireless internet infrastructure of amorously connected virtual entities and organizational structures.

GESTALT: THE PROCESS

The individual pieces comprising the whole of your business activities derive their nature and purpose from the whole – your mission statement. In that context, they cannot be discerned apart from it. To capture the vision of the whole, you must first perceive your mission and roles to accomplish the whole, and then what effectively contributes to actualizing that mission.

Corporate leaders, managers, designers are sometimes fixated into details within the mission, neglecting the purpose of the mission (the whole) itself. This is analogous to inspecting the leaves of a tree and failing to recognize you're in the wrong forest. Vital pieces to review include your moral compass, ethics, mission, vision, purpose, commitment, and then the same for each component (teams, departments, segments or individuals). Evaluations are sequential, looking for patterns that impact the total embodiment of your growth and progress.

Discoveries are directed toward yourself as a leader and manager, and then toward your operations. There is a progressive sequence: accurate perception of each person's needs and of their world view (mission, purpose, constructs) becomes vital to balancing experience.

Embedding the concepts of Gestalt has the result that the whole evolves to be more than the sum of its component parts. By heightening awareness and directly confronting fears, you as a leader can by example, evolve a natural, integrated, harmonic balance, bringing value to yourself, your customers, and your staff.

GESTALT: THE SEQUENCE

Development of synergy is formed through a Gestalt sequence that starts with evaluations and discoveries that exhibit a pattern. The pattern then leads to actionable decisions and structures as typically described in the following increments.

1. Explore & Evaluate Ambience

All corporations and businesses operate in an envelope of ambient culture that is unique to them. All members of management in corporate staff, all employees, are immersed within this ambient environment. The ambience tends to be set by the founders of the operation that linger on. Resets in senior management, mergers and acquisitions can change the culture, though that can require a long time in a large corporation with high inertia and momentum. Consequently, for an advisor, mentor, consultant or coach to be effective, the ambient culture must be explored, evaluated and understood in terms of both efficiency and compatibility with human dynamics.

Decision point: Is the ambient culture conducive to efficient and effective business operations? Is it burdened with excessive overhead and inefficient processes?

Action Item: Implement plans to align ambient culture to actualized success.

2. Discover Attributes & Impediments

Following the organizational flow of responsibilities and functions, the trusted advisor extensively engages with each individual active in the management tree. The goal is to bring to the surface recognized attributes, and impediments, that are extant in their interpersonal and organizational approaches.

Action item: Discover characteristics that are not necessarily apparent during this discovery phase that work in efficient or inefficient ways to promote or impede the value of the organization.

3. Form Composite Profile

Action Item: Based on the information gathered, form a composite profile of attributes offset by impediments, with particular emphasis in search for “patterns” that may be systemic to the operation.

If specific patterns are not found in the systemic sense, develop profiles of more limited scope derived through discussions.

4. Build Consensus: Common mission, value and focus.

Action Item: Using the patterns and profiles discovered and delineated through discussions, bring to the attention of the individuals, teams, or groups involved, the profiles and patterns evident in the processes of the related operation while protecting the privacy of each individual.

A consensus builds synergistic value to facilitate ideas and devise methods to seek common-purposes about how the positive and efficient attributes can be used optimally to remove impediments with the goal of increasing synergy. Then, formalize “agreements” with individuals, teams, or groups to define their roles to actualize change or modification to enhance effectiveness and efficiency for themselves and for the corporation.

5. Periodic Advisory Monitoring

Action Item: Accountability.

The results of the process outlined above result in a actionable plan of modification that requires monitoring for accountability. Monitor and advise on the progress of the plan, emphasizing individual and group accountability during the forward motion of implementation on a periodic basis. Individuals, teams, or groups may be mentored during this phase of progression

At each step of the way, explore the psycho-dynamics of interrelationships, build relationships with people as a mentor that often endure for decades.