

Sources of Inspiration for Successful Management

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Our biggest challenge is to manage affairs both at home and at work, when we are free of invalid conventional thinking and learn instead from worthy up to date thought.

On worthwhile learning from science, nature, art, history and family.

The End of the Assembly Line

There is an old saying that «prophecy was given to fools only». Still, getting ready for the future is critical for all of us, and we can develop such skills for ourselves, our families and the organizations we lead. However, the old tools, which in the past assisted us in a much more stable world, are for long not valid anymore; it is still uncertain whether they were ever valid at all or perhaps 100 years of «Scientific Management» was fed by models that were initially ineffective.

For instance, one of the leading sources of inspiration in the industrial age was the production floor in factories. The highlight of that era was the well-known Ford assembly line with a specialization up to the point of a single screw that a single worker turned next to a machine. This organizational structure carried along an organizational culture which expected the employees to come to work, but leave their minds at home.

A specific focused task was the essence of the employees work, and they were of course not allowed to change anything in the task expected of them. But is this the path to higher productivity? For example, Volvo has proven already in the last quarter of the 20th century that to assemble a car by a team is much more productive, all the more so in the age of Knowledge and Information, when the fundamental added value created within organizations is done mostly by brain work and not by manual labor which is constantly being replaced by machines that are becoming more and more intelligent.

Today even on the manufacturing floor, a worker solves problems on his own while his productivity is a result of his own free will and capabilities, some of which were developed before he was recruited to his job, and some in the workplace, but all are human capital – the employee's own property, and nobody can force him to contribute it to the workplace if he doesn't wish so.

How then does one run a business in such a reality? This is the big question standing before us, and in order to solve it we must first of all forget assumptions that are no longer valid, and possibly never have been, and look for new sources of inspiration for management.

What we can learn from Nature

The biggest challenge for all of us, is how best to organize and manage our business both at home and at work, while being liberated from obsolete conventions and open to learn from worthy ones.

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Science is developed by people who have full freedom to practice what they are intrigued and excited by. Science is a primary source for inspiration for management in at least two aspects. First, there is much to learn from how scientists organize to do their knowledge work, leading to new knowledge, which in no way reminds the organization of the traditional production line! This in

itself is good food for thought and a source for best practices: i.e. more freedom, more autonomy will most probably provide better results also in organizations which are non-academic - schools, business, hospitals and anywhere we expect people to do their job with dedication and enthusiasm.

Beyond that, thanks to scientists, we learn more and more about the evolution of the world around us. We can learn from nature how to manage in order to be successful in growing our organizations. New breakthroughs in the natural sciences inspire the social sciences, including new theories of organization and management, like Complexity Theories. The perception that living organisms are an outcome of a long co-evolution with the environment, and that sustainability demands harmonic growth with the environment, while adapting to constant changes, inspire new management thoughts, for example, the need for diversity.

In nature it takes male and female to create the future. More diversity is apparently what we need most in organizations today. We can witness such development in the academic world – more multidisciplinary research, establishment of new institutes that weave scientific disciplines together. This trend began outside the established academic world in independent research institutions such as the well-known Santa Fe Institute in New Mexico USA, and is now being developed in universities and colleges all over. In an interconnected and complex world problems are complex too and they require complex solutions. These need diversity in order to be created - just as creation of new life needs both male and female!

What can be learnt from the Arts

Another source of inspiration for management today is the world of art. Art tries to capture the essence, the spirit of things and their truth. The ability of art to expose something hidden from the eye is its strength. It can touch the core of an era with a poem, a play, a piece of music, a painting or a sculpture. Anything complex, the artist manages to see and feel better than others. We learn from artists and from how they organize too. As management consultants we learn from culture institutions such as theaters, opera houses and orchestras, because healthy knowledge based organizations become more and more like an outstanding dance group, a theatre ensemble, a great jazz band or a philharmonic orchestra. Musicians, dancers, and actors are in no way to be managed by methods of the industrial era but by leadership which is inspiring, exciting, enabling and sensitive.

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Things to learn from families

Certain characteristics of this approach remind us of the way families grow. Scientists, artists, and what Peter Drucker, the Father of Management Theory, called «Knowledge Workers» should be raised like children, with warmth, tender, love and care. And so we can go back and learn from outstanding parents, teachers, and educators how to be good managers. We believe today as consultants that a manager should be provided with training skills, because «the manager as a guide» is probably a better management approach in knowledge organizations than the old «manager as supervisor». It is important really to understand how people learn in order to do it successfully. So there it is pedagogy as another important source of inspiration.

What we can learn from history

Here too the potential for inspiration is rich. There is always room to learn from the history of the organization itself: how to lead it to success in the future by learning both from stories of success and from failures. This is an important message to managers as well: the power of history in management!

It is also possible to learn from others' history, especially from that of great leaders of the past, whenever we think of strategic management in organizations. I always like to think of Moses when I speak of humble leadership, as the leader who knows his limits and understands that management requires team building. Being tongue –tied Moses joined his brother Aaron in a co-leadership to the point that Aaron became his mouth. Isn't it time to bring back modesty as an important value in the world of management?

Of course there is the element of courage in leadership, courage not to miss a great opportunity – even if it involves risk taking. Such as the cases of Abraham Lincoln and Winston Churchill who are both a great source of inspiration whenever we look nowadays for true leadership in all fields including politics, education and security. Why is it so hard today to find leaders of that caliber? Maybe because we don't draw enough strength from history, maybe we are not acquainted with it enough and maybe it is time to make use of historians in organizations in order to help us get the right inspiration?

What we can learn from culture and philosophy

Another source of inspiration still untapped in my opinion is philosophy. In a world where we all are linked to one another and just as well copy from one another and everything is done in a constantly growing pace, the source for sustained competitive advantage lies in what is hard to copy, and above all culture! Culture is very hard to copy, and fortunately we, Israelis, have a national culture with a great competitive advantage

in the age of knowledge and innovation: Entrepreneurship is what motivates many of us and is also the engine of our economy.

«Culture eats strategy for breakfast» taught us Peter Drucker, whose strength was philosophy of management. Strategy can be changed more easily than the norms of behavior. The philosophical discourse about good versus evil, truth versus lies, essential compared to nonessential, must be an important component of management. Victor Frankl taught us that «man searches for meaning» and I believe that we seek meaning at work as well. In order to succeed in creating an enthusiastic team of employees we will have to deal with issues of mission, values and ethics, and philosophy is an important source of inspiration.

And thus managers can expand their competencies by looking for new inspiration beyond MBA. Hopefully, the content of MBA will include in the future these multiple sources of inspiration too.