
Volume 8, Issue 3 /2006 - Personnel Management

Collective Intelligence

Author:

Françoise Bacq

Consultant in Change Accompaniment,

Certified Coach "Coach & Teams" CT ®

E-mail: francoise@sherpa-international.be

www.sherpa-international.be

We must Learn to Learn

Faced with the unpredictability, dynamic complexity and plentiful information resulting from new technologies and globalisation, new methods of management are emerging, stemming from the theory of "chaos management" and from systemics.

This is the case for "collective intelligence management". This approach is imperative each time the organisation navigates in turbulent waters, dealing with the complex and unforeseeable. For example:

- Far from simple questions on the ground, the stakes concern strategic questions, such as the formulation of a long term vision or adaptation to a technological or competitive environment;
- The tasks of the organisation are pluri-disciplinary, at the risk of compartmentalisation.
- The organisation is joining or leaving a larger group or a network.
- The problems are largely immaterial, such as communication, the sharing of information or marketing of the activity.
- The situation brings a certain degree of uncertainty or vagueness.
- More generally, each time a step in improvement or an organisational change encounters resistance, giving rise to comments such as

"Despite our efforts, nothing has changed", or "It had started off so well, and yet it is beginning to stagnate", or even "It only works if pushed, it's not really suitable..."

"Learning attitudes": a way of being and culture more than a tool Collective intelligence management gets underway by means of a "learning" step, consisting of *learning to learn, through others and with others* and how to resolve complex and dynamic organisational problems. It is based on five interacting attitudes – which are not given here in order of importance or priority – inviting a posture of active, flexible and firm vigilance at the same time, like a surfer on a wave.

1. Opting for Permanent Calling into Question

This attitude tends to flush out the certainty and generally accepted ideas of reasoning. To develop errors and experimentation. To ask questions rather than give replies. To broaden the outlines of thought to discover hidden opportunities¹. It opens the door to dialogue² rather than arguments.

2. In a Problem Analysis, Exceeding Linear Causality³,

which pushes for the restrictive search of external causes of events, and therefore "culprits", even scapegoats. In complex systems, the retroactive fullterm effects on causes via a feedback mechanism is circular causality⁴. More subtly still, a problem can be considered as a reflection of a manner of acting. This is recursive causality⁵, rich in diagnostic hypotheses.

3. Paying Attention to Interactions Rather than Individual Elements.

© For personal and private use only. Reproduction must be permitted by the copyright holder. Email to copyright@mindbyte.eu.

From the moment each actor sees himself as an integral part of the whole, rather than as an autonomous element, he becomes more attentive to the links that between them unite the variables of a problem. Similarly, he looks for combinations of efforts rather than personal talent. Finally, he becomes more attentive to deciphering secondary effects, vicious or virtuous circles, and other snowball effects⁶.

4. Signing up for a Long-Term Prospect⁷.

The greater the number of variables, the more the effects of our acts are distanced in time or space, and the more the developments are slow and gradual. It is the “delayed effect” which can at full term lead to an effect diametrically opposed to that which was sought⁸. Moreover, since personal implicit visions and other “hidden agendas” in the organisation constitute as many inevitable resistances change⁹, it is better to integrate them in the construction of shared visions, bringers of sense and values, and which will stir people into action in the long term. Finally, it is from the distance between this vision, a representation of a desired future, and a lucid analysis of reality (see the permanent calling into question) that a *creative* tension will be born – much more buoyant than the emotional tension that non-learning organisations are used to.

5. Entering into Partnership with Colleagues.

Since interactions are even more determining than individual elements, being all carriers of the group's DNA, it becomes logical to want to involve all the actors *from the time of* the reflection and strategic development. It is not a question of demagoguery or of direct democracy, but of shared visions, proposed to be enriched by the contribution of all. Rather than top-down and a follow-my-leader attitude, learning management will give greater importance to co-responsibility. Upon delegation, it will prefer subsidiarity, dialogue to argument.

The Step is Focusing on Coaching the Leading Team...

A key aspect of successful implementation is *congruence*, coherence between the principle and the action. The step is thus set up by the very application of the principles it claims to have: neither “top-down”, nor “bottom-up”, but focusing on the leading team, a reduced model of the organisation. The process develops in a rigorous “learning” manner: attention to interactions, permanent calling into question, partnership, etc.

The start up is done through a double process of coaching. Collective mentoring of the leading team as a micro-system, via operational meetings (realignments, feedback, modelling), specific times for formative contributions, and regulation of interactions. Individual mentoring of each of its members, in order to facilitate their cognitive integration and the behavioural control of the five

learning attitudes, and to enable them to sharpen their vigilance of the processes underway – both within the team itself and at the head of their respective teams downstream. It is a question of mild, non-interventional mentoring, which is noted in duration in order to be able to detect the “delayed effects” of the company step.

Shared visions, integrative consensus and autonomy at the service of the group are all a capacity of alliance – in the sense of a sufficiently strong commitment to the shared vision to maintain relations despite the inevitable tensions and frustrations – which are slowly being built.

...and on Coaching the Leader, a Keystone of the Step

Upstream of this transformative work of the leading team, it is the leader himself who will have to agree to let himself be transformed. The challenge is primarily one of identity. How will he gradually adapt his style of leadership to the development of his team? How, in a concrete manner, will he avoid finding himself trapped by “hierarchical temptation”, which can belong to a narcissistic need for recognition or a difficulty with trust? How will he manage the multiple human paradoxes linked to his role? How will he incarnate and modelise, on a daily basis, the changes underway?

If the challenge is enthralling, it is not heavy: it always concerns learning together, in interaction, one and the others. The leader is not alone. But it is only insofar as he can accept this training for himself that he will be able to accept it for his colleagues. It is the famous challenge of humility and intelligence...

It is only after a period of maturation, once the team has really adapted to the learning step and each member is ready to carry the group's DNA, that deployment can be done.

By dissemination.

Published on : Mon, 24 Jul 2006