



Already into the 7th edition – a very biological one – so mobilize your brains, burn off the toxins, and lend an ear. Yet this edition is also a very practical one: managing change is always current and nods in this issue to e-mailing and concierge services! Enjoy.

ARTICLE SUMMARY AND VIEWPOINT

**Mobilize minds
“from within”**

Organizations often neglect an important factor when it is time to mobilize minds: people's inner life or psychic reality at work. Workers' daily lives are shaped by different perceptions and emotions that can affect their motivation at any time.

**Inner Work Life
Understanding
the Subtext of
Business
Performance**

Teresa M. Amabile et Steven J. Kramer, *Harvard Business Review*, May 2007. pp. 72-82

Amabile and Kramer, professors at Harvard University, wanted to understand how the dynamics of perception, emotion and motivation affects knowledge workers. 238 professionals, in 26 teams working on different projects kept a daily diary during the whole cycle of their project. The researchers were thereby better able to understand the dynamics of the inner work life, its effect on employees, which directly affects the organization as well. The results of the study revealed the existence of a particular set of dynamics, which corroborated research carried out in neuroscience.

The dynamics involved work as follows: certain daily events at work set off a cognitive, emotional and motivational process. From then on, the brain starts to rationalize and understand why a particular event happened and what the implications are. These perceptions feed emotions that spawn new impressions. Depending on the impact of these emotional cognitive dynamics, motivation can change in either a positive or negative fashion, either of which will affect a worker's performance!

Among other things, the behaviour of one's supervisor can be an irritant or a motivator. **Everyone has their own psychic reality**, which cannot be perceived by others, or even by oneself, which creates communication problems. So employees can observe their supervisors' behaviour but cannot necessarily decode their supervisor's inner lives, nor do the supervisors have insight into the inner work lives of their employees.

When comparing the best and worst days recorded in the daily diaries, **the discriminating factor is the subjective feeling of being able to advance one's work**. Resolving problems, finishing a task, reaching one's objectives always bring satisfaction and even joy at work. The worst days – the ones that are really frustrating, sad and stressful – are characterized by a reversal at work.

The study shows that most events that affect the way you live your inner work life stem directly or indirectly from management style. Two managerial qualities stand out: human qualities and the ability to develop their employees. **Management style has a very strong influence on the personnel's inner work life**. For example, a reading of one of the participant's diaries shows her to be very enthusiastic and even transported by the fact that the team is working closely together. Also, she feels more valued as an individual and as a worker when her colleagues, and especially her project director, tell her how skilful she is. These perceptions, and the emotions they generate, are obviously very motivating for this employee. If employees are sad or angry about their work, they will not care if the work is done conscientiously or not. But, if they are happy and enthusiastic, they will apply themselves to their work, sparing no effort. The same logic applies to perceptions: if people feel they are increasing the value of the work they are much more motivated!

Some proven management practices for efficient employee development are: collaborate with

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and help the team, be available, provide sufficient support (training, materials, information, deadlines etc.) and give feedback with a view to personnel development as opposed to personnel evaluation. Setting clear and precise individual and team objectives is also important. People make more progress when their managers clarify what the value added part of the work consists of and indicate how the employee can make a difference through the quality of his or her personal contribution. Finally, **the main engine of a good quality inner work life is the recognition managers give to their employees when underlining excellent performances.**

A positive "inner life" can have a good effect on performance. The result of this study show that:

- The link is strong and positive: people perform better when their work stimulates positive emotions, responding with an inherently strong motivation, positive perception of their work, their colleagues, their team, their superior and their organization.
- When teams have to work closely together, optimum performance depends on four factors: creativity, productivity, commitment and cohesiveness.
- Positive emotions influence creativity.
- Intrinsic motivation reinforces creativity. People are more creative when they are doing meaningful work, when they are enjoying themselves, when they are satisfied with and challenged by their work, than when they are enticed by monetary incentives or subjected to external pressures.

SECOR's point of view is centred on the motivation dimension of the mobilization model, and this article demonstrates the full impact of management style on employee motivation and performance, especially with respect to creativity.

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no news ≠ good news, meaning : listen to the sounds of silence

Taken from an article by Jacinthe Tremblay, published in *La Presse Affaires* on October 9, 2007

A recent study revealed that one out of three victims of organizational injustice chooses to stay silent, in spite of help offered by those organizations (human resources, EAP or an ombudsman).

Even if the reasons for the silence are not all to do with organizational issues, managers should not necessarily think that a silent employee is a happy one! In most cases, people remain silent out of fear, namely of reprisals, especially if the victim has any doubt about the confidentiality of the redress process. Some also fear that their complaint will not be followed up and that, in the end, nothing will change. However, you have to distinguish between **healthy silences**, which indicate that attention has been paid to a healthy work environment, and **unhealthy silences**. Let's take the example of a manager who is unhappy that none of his employees have said a word during meetings for the last six-months. However, the employees actually had a lot to say, in particular about the behaviour of the said manager. The reason for their silence was the fear they had of the unrelenting rise of the manager's performance expectations.

Silence is also an instrument to exert power and control others; for example in the case of psychological harassment where the harasser tries to hide information, avoids contact or looks daggers at the victim. The victim starts to doubt his or herself and loses confidence.

SECOR's viewpoint: Organizations are not aware of how extensive the silence may be because they are convinced they have done everything to listen to their people. In addition to the negative impact on people (unnecessary stress, for example), unhealthy silence has a negative impact on the organization's performance: demobilization, resignations, deviant behaviour, etc. managers should therefore ask why there is silence and never just assume that silence is good news. In line with that approach, internal mobilization surveys can provide clues as to the answers, provided that the employee is



comfortable with the methods used (confidentiality), to questions concerning management style. Then there are the open questions that give employees a chance to really let loose and break the “omerta” or code of silence (if necessary)!

¹ Karen Harlos, teacher specializing in organizational behaviour and employee silence

Respecting deadlines is the preferred asset looked for among team members.

A recent survey of over 100 top Canadian company executives done for Accountemps, shows that 39 % of executives believe the most important character trait of a team member is his or her ability to meet deadlines. The next most important thing is that the person be easy to work with (31 %).

To the question, “What is the most important characteristic you think a team member should have?” executives responded:	
Meet deadlines	39 %
Easy to work with	31 %
Support his/her supervisor	17 %
Not into power tripping	10 %
Don't know	3 %
TOTAL	100 %

Max Messmer, Chairman of the Board at Accountemps, explains: “team spirit” has become such a cliché that it has lost all meaning. Essentially, it covers people who fulfill their obligations and support their colleagues. Those qualities have always been important but they are especially so now that co-operation, or teamwork, is such a critical part of work these days.

SECOR’s viewpoint: an adjustment back to efficiency, an 8-point difference for meeting deadlines over a nice personality, which is significant. Let’s still be nice but it is not our only byword; it is important but it is in second place. This problem comes up often in OMI questionnaires in reference to needless delays, which are almost invariably linked to a lack of co-ordination between teams and sometimes within teams.

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Driving radical change

By Josep Isern and
Caroline Pung
The McKinsey Quarterly, 2007,
number 4

Bringing about major changes within an organization is a huge challenge. Success stories are rare and the upheavals that follow are often disastrous. And there numerous recipes for implementing change: this is yet another article, published in *The McKinsey Quarterly*, to add to the list of those highlighting two fundamentals of change management:

1. It is important to clearly define the goals/vision of the change project
2. It is vital to mobilize the troops, maintain energy levels and generate ideas

What are the prerequisites for radical change?

Successfully implementing radical change means that the goals must be defined, communicated and understood at all levels of the company.

- These goals must be concretely linked to which functions or ways of doing things will be affected by the changes and how. This clarification and communication exercise reduces the level of organizational anxiety that is naturally raised by any change project.
- Short-term initiatives and objectives must be tangible. People affected by radical change should have an idea of how the company is going to evolve over time, and be able to refer to short, mid and long-term objectives. Identifying mid-project goals anchors the changes.
- The aspirations and initiatives have to be part of an inspiring story. This story should be repeated in all the communications. The use of metaphors and analogies is recommended.

In addition, beyond a clear and shared vision, major change projects have to be supported by **organizational energy and strong mobilization**. Just as gasoline powers an engine, organizational energy moves the change engine. How do we accomplish this?

1. Maintain the pace of change. Radical change translates into multiple change initiatives that have to be implemented simultaneously to sustain an active pace.
2. Make the changes as highly visible as possible.
3. Personalize the change for everyone at all levels of the organization.
4. Develop organizational competencies in order to adapt to the change.

SECOR's viewpoint: this article illustrates to what extent understanding the reasons for change and feeling involved in them are so important to mobilizing workers, especially by giving meaning to these changes! This is nothing new, just a reminder of solid, healthy principles to be applied again and again and again. You don't think so? Just look at the results from question 17 of the OMI.

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KICKERS

Say hello to no-e-mail Fridays

Le Devoir.com
October 7, 2007

Wednesday morning, first thing to do at the office: check your e-mails. Ten new e-mails came in overnight, most of them from colleagues sitting five meters away.

The stunning fact is that e-mails are replacing face to face contact. Faster, yes, but more efficient? Nothing could be less sure.

To fight this growing trend, some American companies have inaugurated no-e-mail Fridays. On Fridays, staff are asked to communicate directly in person or by phone. This interesting test is helpful in assessing peoples' preferences as well as seeing to what extent we can return to less impersonal ways of communicating!

SECOR's viewpoint: getting back to basics every once in a while. Communicating is just as much about the relationship as the content. E-mails transmit content efficiently, but do they help reinforce the relationship? It is really not clear that they do.

Thanks for the concierge services!

LaPresseAffaires.com
October 1, 2007

How much would you be willing to pay to have someone find you a repairman after 6 pm to come and fix your washer? How much is it worth to have someone take your clothes to the cleaners or to make 25 phone calls to find a daycare in your neighbourhood? Priceless? These are the kinds of personal services certain employers are willing to provide to attract and retain their staff. Some companies allow their employees to bank offer "Commodus" points to be exchanged against quality-of-life services, save time or enhance peoples' well being.

This is something that is already widely implemented in France. The success of these initiatives has to be based on an enticing tax structure, both for the employers and their employees.

What a way to advertise as an employer of choice! For more information: www.commodus.ca

Filter those noxious toxins; we will all be better off!

Emotions in the workplace and the important role of toxin handlers par Peter J. Frost, *Yvey Business Journal*, November/December 2003.

Leaders inevitably create emotional pain, through the toxins that are a by-product of their actions; those toxins are the negative emotional reactions of employees, inevitable side-effects of the leaders decisions; people must become aware of them and learn what to do the fend them off, and toxin handlers are the ones to help them do it.

Who are these toxin handlers? People who detect psychological stress or negative emotions in their colleagues and act to correct the situation by blocking the blows or by diminishing the negative consequences. The author gives the example of Savannah, a manager in charge of a new promotion program based on performance rather than seniority and which was getting very mixed reactions from managers in the organization. How did she handle the toxins? For example, she intercepted an insulting memo addressed to one of her team members by a senior manager. She responded by asking the manager in question to send all future correspondence directly to her. In another instance she prevented a manager from having her team move into smaller, less attractive space. That was a preventive action. However, sometimes a toxin handler has to repair damage. That is the case of Michael, who spends a lot of time just listening to colleagues who were chewed out by the CEO, an impatient man. **Handlers are people who are interested in the well being of both people and the organization.** They know that their work is not

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recognized but take satisfaction in knowing they are helping others.

The 5 techniques of toxin handlers:

1. **Listening:** means being available and take the time needed (not always that long).
2. **Holding space for healing:** providing a private office, a different office or at another location, or in lightening the workload.
3. **Buffering pain:** as Savannah did when she intercepted the insulting memo.
4. **Extricating others from painful situations:** for example, transferring someone to a more motivating work setting.
5. **Transforming pain:** the example given is that of a former HBC (Hudson's Bay Company who helped his staff through difficult changes by encouraging them to create an action plan that would help them through stressful times at work and to find time to take care of their personal lives as well.

However, being a toxin handler is a **dangerous occupation** that requires a game plan some el:

- **Keep fit:** do aerobic and relaxation exercises.
- **Stay positive:** look at situations as learning opportunities and not as toxins, do not take things personally, be patient, keep your sense of humour and accept that some things cannot be resolved to everyone's satisfaction.
- **Say "no" more often:** toxin handlers who are too empathetic have a hard time saying no and have to learn that nor does not mean "never" or "no, I can't help you," but can mean, "not right now, but how about tomorrow," or "no, I can't but I know someone who can," or "no, I can't do that, but I could do this ».
- **Create a sanctuary:** as an example, Ronald Heifetz of the Center for Public Leadership of the Kennedy School of Government (Harvard) spent five minutes every day reading an e-mail from a friend, who was a religious scholar and mystic, and meditating on the philosophical issue therein.
- **Manage the message:** toxin handlers have to make it clear to the organization that their work helps others and is beneficial to the organization as a whole over time.
- **Leave the site:** sometimes the situation becomes so toxic that the toxin handler has to leave.

SECOR's viewpoint: this is an old but still very relevant un article. The toxin metaphor is also very relevant, the toxin handler acts like a set of white corpuscles or the kidneys of the human organism, and organizations have a huge need for such people and take good care of them!

BY THE NUMBERS

Does it pay to mobilize workers?

Yes, yes and yes if we are to believe the latest worldwide study by Tower Perrin querying 90 000 people around the world, including 5 000 in Canada.

Preliminary Findings: in companies where the mobilization level is high, the bottom line rose 13.7 % whereas it diminished by 3.8 % where mobilization was low. Mobilization is therefore a performance catalyst! To be continued in the next issue of INFO OMI.