The 80/20 Rule or How to Change a Dysfunctional Organizational Culture

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One of the most difficult challenges faced by any organization is to change (permanently) the organization's climate and culture. This type of effort is seemingly impossible for organizations that are steeped in a deep history of accepting the most dysfunctional aspects of its existence. This is further complicated for organizations where recruiting and selecting top performing members of the workforce is not easily accomplished because of internal constraints.

The critical components in overcoming a dysfunctional climate and culture in any organizations includes three key aspects of determining the future course for potential success for the organization. These critical components include: leadership, communication and creative and transparent problem solving.

Leadership must be new. The concept of 'new' could include continuing lower level leaders not previously in positions of authority or control promoted to executive roles. However, it is more likely that all leaders will need to be 'new' to the organization in order to design and support a completely re-designed organizational environment. Leaders coming from outside of the organization can create a trust based organization more easily than any internal 'new' leader explaining and re-explaining the baggage left behind by failed leadership.

Communication must be mastered at all levels and on all topics. Forms of communication must be multi-faceted and must reach every level of the organization proactively. Reactive communication often equates to 'no' communication. It is simply the confirmation of failure after the fact. The most effective tool in the design and delivery of affirmative and proactive communication is use of the 80/20 rule. Spend 80% of your time as a leader listening/processing/and clarifying what others are telling you about every facet of what members of the workforce can and are willing to provide in relationship to their areas of expertise. Use 20% of your time designing and leading the workforce to make the best informed collective decisions that support the mission of the organization. Then revisit your workforce on an 80% basis seeking continuous feedback and evaluation on plans and decisions just implemented.

Creative and transparent problem solving requires resilience as well as an appropriate sense of humor. Effective problem solving also requires an accurate assessment of what the organization is capable of in terms of business contributions. Invest time and resources in organizational strengths. Acknowledge weaknesses and seek partners that can provide support in bridging these gaps. Gaps can include talent deficiencies, lack of economic resources and fractured delivery systems that are inauthentic and not based upon best practices in any industry. Gaps can also include previous/current leaders manifesting leadership realities that are unethical.

An organizational climate is created by the internal team. It is representative of the maturity and decision making systems that are chosen for use inside the organization on a daily basis. It can and must be fluid to make course corrections that are in the best interest of everyone being impacted by each decision that is made. Is your organization positioned to achieve and maintain a high performing culture? If not, (specifically) why not? What can be done to correct the deficiencies? How will these new choices be continuously measured for affirmative outcomes?