



Who is behaving positively in your organisation ?

I remember once, when I worked for Procter and Gamble in the UK, that our VP Supply Chain issued a letter to all the managers in the organisation which went something like : " I had a meeting today and, whilst I enjoyed the general pleasantries and chat exchanged in the 7 minutes that it took for all the participants to arrive, this was 7 minutes out of a busy schedule which we should not be in the habit of wasting in general chatter. In future, I request that you arrive on time and ready to start at the prescribed hour. This is a matter of simple respect and courtesy, as well as efficient time management". 7 minutes!!!! How many times do we turn up 7 minutes late for meetings? NEVER!!! We always turn up 10 – 15 even later – for meetings. 7 minutes. It seems ridiculous. But positive organisational behaviour is also about respect for others and not wasting others time, and even 7 minutes, is not so positive. Our director was seeing the start of slippage in the way people behaved and chose to address it before it became the new behaviour of people. We were all astounded when we got the letter, but we reverted to arriving on time! For a while. ☺ I don't recall a second letter.

Is this an organisational issue? Yes, it certainly affects the organisation. But it relies on the individual responsibility to change. So organisational behaviour is about individual behaviour.

Over 20 years ago, when I was recruited as a young manager to Procter and Gamble. no-one talked to me about positive organisational behaviour. No-one said to me – "elaine, we have positive organisational behaviour here, see what it looks like, can you do it ?" – No one even told me how to behave. But in general there was something in the air. There was an unspoken rule around certain things that you do and certain things that you don't do. The letter from the VP Supply Chain was not typical. In general, people just behaved in a certain way. They didn't talk about it much.

Is there such thing as positive organisational behaviour? One view is that organisations do not have behaviour. And that the term organisational behaviour is a quick reference to relate to the collective dominant behaviours of the individuals in any organisation. But in the same way as our language often defines our mindset, so the term organisational behaviour defines a way of thinking about organisations which ignores the fact that we really should be thinking about people. As a Manager, an HR Professional, and a consultant to people and organisations, I would rather see us focus on individual behaviour in organisations. It may take longer to say, but it describes the only real approach to developing a collective organisational culture which is driven by similar behaviours of individuals in organisations. Individuals in an organisation can make or break the positive behavioural culture – the sum of the behaviours of individuals in the organisation.

Take Enron. We have all heard of Enron. Enron had a code of conduct, competency models and some world-class processes. BUT, it wasn't enough. There were a few key individuals who destroyed the fabric of that company. Positive organisational behaviour therefore must be comprehensive - all employees in all matters. Developing a critical mass of positively behaving individuals is not enough, because outside of that critical mass is the potential to destroy the Company.

The Potential of Positive Individual Behaviour in Organisations

This approach fits with the philosophy that unleashing the potential of all organisations, businesses, communities, whatever, ultimately relies upon unleashing the potential of the individual. To the extent that all individuals are able to unleash their potential, the organisation will be able to unleash its collective potential. My hypothesis is that if you



work on unleashing the potential for positive behaviour of individuals within the organisational context, you create positive behaviour in organisations.

See the Potential Wheel of Positive Organisational Behaviour – FIG 1

Fig 1

Positive behaviour of individuals in organisations has the potential to:



Individuals behaving positively in an organisation have a much greater effect than the direct effect of their positive behaviour. When individuals are given the opportunity to work in organisations which gives them space to unleash their true potential, they actually support the creation of new positive behavioural norms in the organisation.

What is positive behaviour?

Positive behaviour in the organisational context is behaviour which is aligned with the organisational values – relating to integrity, excellence, quality, team-work, development of people , open communication etc – whatever the organisation defines as its core values. Positive behaviour also is that which moves the organisation forward along its business strategy to achieve its business goals. Performing excellently in a role is positive behaviour, provided you are doing the things that are advancing the business. Sound obvious, right ? ☺ Behaving in line with the organisational values promotes and perpetuates those values.

How do people know what positive behaviour is ?

In order to behave positively, individuals need to know what positive behaviour is expected. They need to know what the values of the organisation are, and what the business strategy of the organisation is.



Below are 4 possible ways to help people understand what positive behaviour looks like:

1. Competency guide

Many organisations have created Competency Guides – supporting the definition of their key values, they have developed a list of observable behaviours. Unilever, where I managed the Human Resources function in Israel for nearly 8 years, has such a guide. It includes 11 distinct competencies and 82 distinct behaviours that constitute positive behaviour of leaders.

Take Developing Others for example – a key leadership behaviour described as “Outstanding individuals invest time, money and energy in self-development and in developing others, thereby building Unilever’s capability for the future. They take personal responsibility for coaching and mentoring future leaders and are enthusiastic about seeing others grow. “

The things this guide says we should be able to observe at the most basic level are:

Actively seek opportunities for self-development and learning. Willing to learn and set an example by investing time and effort in their own development

- Recognise own specific development needs by seeking feedback from others
- Pursue new opportunities to develop or enhance own experience and capabilities
- Evaluate what went well and what didn’t, and learn from these experiences
- Support the development of colleagues

At the most advanced level, the observable behaviours are:

Create a development mindset across the business, personally taking accountability for building organisational capability

- Build coaching and mentoring processes to speed the development of future leaders across the business
- Encourage others to take risks in order that they, or others, can learn
- Create a climate which encourages entrepreneurial behaviours and learning
- Are effective coaches to future leaders

This is all fine.

But how many of us walk around behaving by numbers?

“I sought feedback on my behaviour from others today. That’s Competency 5 Behaviour 6. Good!!”

“You adapted your own actions for the good of the team last week. That’s competency 9 Behaviour 65. Well done!!”

“Did you see Moshe last week? He was a perfect example of Competency 7 Behaviour 3!” ☺

“errr... you constantly set challenging performance standards ... is that Competency 3 or Competency 6 ? Is it behaviour 23 or 54 ? “ Bit confusing, right ? ☺

And how can you keep so many guidelines in your head at any given time ?

In practice, most competency models are far too complex for most people in organisations to digest, and they provide a nice piece of theory but do not extensively support the development of true positive individual behavior. The paradox is also that many organisations who have competency models do not place emphasis on communicating business strategy, so the opportunity to contribute to the organisation’s delivery of objectives is often limited.



2. CODE OF CONDUCT

A code of conduct is a behavioural guide for individuals in the organisations, usually construed in the context of defining the ethical framework of the business. These can often be very detailed and prescriptive in the types of behaviour that are acceptable or not – ranging from

areas of conflict of interest to how many personal photocopies an individual may make on the company photocopier. The Code of Conduct only goes so far however; it is divorced from business strategy and divorced from the competency types of behaviours organisations expect from their employees. However, it does cover areas which are not generally included in a competency model.

3. ROLE MODEL

Another way for people to know what positive organisational behaviour actually is, is simply to do it. Positive behaviour is easy to recognise. The thing about behaviour is that you SEE it. It's not something secret and mystical. You SEE the way people behave. And of course, this behaviour must be modeled at the very top levels of the organisation and at all subordinate levels, in a consistent way, so that it becomes a way of life. When the boss turns up on time for a meeting, people see that. When the top team supports each other, people see that. So role-modelling is one of the most effective ways to demonstrate positive organisational behaviour.

4. PERSONAL STORIES

The extension of role modelling is the use of personal stories to reinforce values and behaviours. When senior managers describe the sort of dilemmas they have faced, and the evolution of their personal thinking in addressing business decisions and other “soft” issues, they are in fact influencing others to adopt the same type of positive behaviour. The telling of personal stories in the right way in the right context is one of the single most effective ways of influencing behaviour. A culture of personal storytelling creates openness and commitment, and supports the perpetuation of the behaviours described in the stories.

All of the above are not exclusive, indeed, one might argue that all are necessary for the most comprehensive understanding of all employees of the positive behaviours required to drive the organisation forward.

MOTIVATION to POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR

People do what they believe is right. So it stands to reason that the key to positive individual behaviour in organisations is ensuring that those people in the organisation believe in the strategy and values of the organisation. This has to be largely self-driven. People working for a business where a value is team-work, must be team players by nature. They can be taught some of the basic techniques of working effectively in teams, but they must naturally appreciate and find interest in team working. If they do not, they will find it very difficult, if not impossible, to align their behaviour effectively. Working in an ice-cream business, for example, would fit my values perfectly 😊

The organisational context

The organisational context means the business strategy and the values of the organisation. People cannot behave positively in line with their potential if (1) they don't know what the organisation they are working for stands for and (2) if their own life strategy and values are not aligned with those of the organisation.

So the first challenges in creating positive organisational behaviour are

- (1) define the business strategy clearly and concisely
- (2) define the values that the business will uphold clearly and practically



- (3) demonstrate how the values are translated into behaviours via the methods described above
- (4) RECRUIT the people to the organisation who have the right aptitudes and matching values
- (5) DESELECT those who do not align with the values

IN SHORT

1. Positive organisational behaviour is the collective term for positive behaviours of individuals in organisations. Unleashing individual potential is the key to unleashing the potential of the organisation.
2. Similar behaviours can be supported through the use of competency models, codes of conduct, role modelling, and personal story telling , demonstrated at all levels in the organisation, as well as the clear communication of organisational values and business strategy.
3. Positive behaviour must come from the right motivations, which are often natural traits, so the importance of the recruitment and development process cannot be underestimated.
4. Positive organisational behaviour must be consistently observed at all levels at all times by all individuals.
5. So who is behaving positively in your organisation? ☺

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One who wishes to sing will always find a song.

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