

The Biggest Challenge in Management

Por Oscar Motomura*

In all my years leading Amana-Key, working with innovation in the management of complex organizations – either private or governmental – I have seen the human element at the center of all the greatest challenges in organizations.

In planning, the challenge of the human dimension is found in the mental models of the people who most influence strategic choices. Is the mental model (the “software”) that prevails that of financial specialists, specialists in marketing, technology, or production? Or is the mental model that of specialists in human processes? Are the strategic choices fragmented or do all “specialists” operate in an integrated network, in which all are systematically connected, in service to a single goal? Is the integration merely a matter of appearances, a formality, for the record (whereas “behind the scenes” each person seeks to maximize the results of their own department, even to the detriment of others) or is it genuine, honest, transparent?

From a financial perspective, the challenge of the human dimension resides in the inherent dilemmas of an organization’s identity and purpose. What does the word “result” mean to each person in the organization? We exist to produce what kind of result? Do we only take into account the interests of shareholders, or those of all “stakeholders”: clients, suppliers, the community, society, government...? Are we only thinking about short-term results, or also about medium and long-term ones? Do we assume responsibility even for future generations? Where do questions of ethics enter when we try to maximize short-term results, often “playing against the future?” Does “Balanced Scorecard” only signify “measurement of results,” or does it refer to something greater in which the key lies exactly in the concept of equilibrium, or balance? A balance, furthermore, that honors results that are intangible, not quantifiable, and not just the measurable ones?

From a production perspective, the challenge of the human dimension lies in the quest for balance between technology and the preservation/evolution of the human – all that happens in an organization and all around it. It lies as well in questions such as: What creates motivation? Is the quality of products and services being defined by a genuine orientation of service? Or is quality something merely “utilitarian,” even a kind of manipulation?

Is the pursuit of technological excellence leading to a disruption of the human, producing a cold environment that devitalizes (but which is full of pseudo-motivation created by constant pressure and stress)? To what extent could high productivity be leveraged and maintained (in a sustainable manner, not in spasms) if the human dimension were always considered first? To what extent does all of this impact the relationship between everyone in an organization and its costumers? At what point does an

organization’s own marketing become incoherent and even dishonest if production is not carried out with the genuine well-being of customers in mind?

From the point of view of an organization’s senior leadership, the human challenge lies in the organization’s very reason for being: Are we serving society by fulfilling its most essential needs, or are we creating products that are, in fact, a disservice?

From the perspective of senior managers, the human challenge exists in questions that involve power, conflict of interest, and problems with comfort zones that can weaken an organization and compromise its future. The challenge of the human may reside in a necessary cultural change leading toward a very different world (compared to the present) that lies ahead and about which we know very little. Are we educating future leaders to be like our present ones, or are we preparing them for unprecedented challenges (for which our current knowledge will be powerless)? What essential skills will these leaders need in the future (to deal creatively with challenges that are yet to appear)?

From the perspective of human resource specialists, or better yet, the “people who best understand people” in organizations, the human challenge lies exactly in those spaces in which HR has not been performing all these years... And in those unprecedented challenges that the future will bring. Is it in these spaces and areas of unprecedented performance that the “people who best understand people” are most needed in an organization? Or is it in the connections between departments within organizations (that are still very fragmented today)? Or could it be in connections with society, developing new levels of social responsibility for the sake of the evolution of the greater whole? Or is it in the pursuit of “high performance” through the promotion of connections – not between equals, people who already have much in common – but exactly the opposite, between people from different cultures, with radically different mental models? Doesn’t the key to a more harmonious form of globalization lie exactly in this challenge, through which everyone can evolve? Isn’t this the real result that all of us – as humanity – seek? Doesn’t the essence of the theme of the next Global Congress on Human Resources Management* – “Connections that Produce Results” – lie exactly in challenges like these?

* *The Global Congress on Human Resource Management is the largest international human resource convention. The next annual gathering will take place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in August 2004. (Fazer o que com essa explicação do Congresso – que tem asterisco no artigo?)*

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