

Towards understanding the importance of organisational culture and climate – Dr Rica Viljoen

Dealing effectively with diversity and change presents an immediate challenge to leadership today. Business leaders, strategists and Human Resource practitioners tend to ignore the salient role played by the culture of an organisation in ensuring the success of true organisational diversity, and give little credence to the reality that attitudes toward human diversity develop through generations of psychological, social and cultural conditioning (LeBaron, 2005).

There seems not to be much concern that different employees may have different perceptions about human differences, and will, thus, hold varying attitudes in respect of diversity within the typical organisational climate (Thomas, 2005). A culture conducive for Inclusivity may assist organisations in managing change efforts successfully and in unleashing the benefits of diverse environments.

Everything is subject to change. People's lives, the communities and societies in which they live, and the organisations in which they work, are all affected by waves of change. Some changes are gradual; others traumatic; while some are of the own making, and many are beyond control. The effects of global recession, globalisation and technological transformation involve changes of an unknown scale and complexity (Senge, Scharmer Jaworski & Flowers, 2004).

All these changes generate human reactions to change - for individuals, for organisations and for societies (Nel, 2003). Living systems thrive when they balance the need for stability with the imperative to change (Senge, 1993). In order to manage resistance effectively resistance must be understood in terms of the effort on the part of individuals to regain the equilibrium that has been disrupted by change.

Organisational Development initiatives such as change resilience interventions are often viewed as ineffective with benefits that are only temporary and, thus, this topic becomes very relevant (French and Bell, 1999). The realisation that different systems (e.g. different individuals or groups) act differently when confronted with

uncertainty and ambiguity can lead to an enhanced leadership ability to deal with transformation dynamics.

Any strategic effort to change the fundamental functioning of an organisation will result in a climate change since people will be required to behave differently or will be encouraged to adopt new mental models (Viljoen, 2008). Companies that possess the ability to adapt to change more quickly than their competitors will gain a competitive edge (Senge, 1993). In this respect, it thus becomes necessary to understand the change dynamics of individuals, teams and organisations. It becomes important to ensure that the capacity to renew itself must be built into the organisational culture as a core competency that can lead to differentiation.

In order to come to a comprehensive understanding of organisational culture and climate, the individual, the team, the organisation dynamics and contextual domain dynamics, in relation to each other, should be studied. It could greatly benefit an organisation to gain an understanding of the diverse dynamics and strengths of individuals, the dynamics of groups and the essence of the organisation concerned, since optimisation of these dynamics lead to increased engagement that could give rise to a climate conducive for growth on all different levels. Ultimately, when new behaviours are cemented into the way that things are done in the company – the culture - sustainable competitive advantages can materialise..