

## Organizational Performance by Ron Crossland

The entire July-August issue of the *Harvard Business Review* concerns the “High Performance Organization.” What struck me about the titles and the articles themselves is how they all directly, and in some cases, deeply, addressed leadership. For example, in Robert Quinn’s article, “Entering the Fundamental State of Leadership,” he states:

“My colleagues and I have found that when leaders do their best work, they don’t copy anyone. Instead they draw on their own fundamental values and capabilities - operating in a frame of mind that is true to them yet, paradoxically, not their normal state of being.”

The article continues in this fashion, with Quinn’s thoughtful and interesting insights into what operating at a fundamental level means.

Claudio Fernández-Aráoz, partner at the prestigious and highly respected executive search firm, Egon Zehnder International, wrote a persuasive article concerning mediocrity at executive levels for the summer 2005 edition of the *Sloan Management Review*. His argument is based upon twenty years of research. At one point he states that management scandals like those found at Enron, Worldcom, or Parmalat garner headlines, but the more insidious problem lies in “...the huge scandal that nobody talks about is the multitude of cases in which top positions are filled with mediocre people...I am convinced that the problem of poor appointments is serious, pervasive and highly dangerous.” His evidence is provocative, and his experience is impressive.

Masao Inoue reported on the twenty years of change in the Japanese industrial relations arena, cataloguing the changes in perspectives, paradigms, and processes for evaluating the hard to pin down issues of labor and management. Writing in the June, 2005, issue of the *Asian Business & Management*, he suggests that the issue of “humans managing humans” is as much philosophical as pragmatic requiring a societal as well as organizational contextual understanding.

The July 23rd issue of *The Economist* has two articles concerning the ratio of women in executive ranks and runs through what should be, by now, familiar data concerning the number of qualified women available for top executive jobs and the paucity of women occupying those jobs. As the article articulated different scenarios in Europe, North America, and Asia, it seemed clear that, despite the various practical steps taken over the past twenty years to remedy this lack of balance, it still existed.

“Imaginative leaders are the ones who have the courage to fund new ideas, lead teams to discover better ideas, and lead people to take more educated risks,” reports Jeffery Immelt, CEO at GE, in the August 1 issue of *BusinessWeek*. While this article revolved around innovation, it shed light on many of the topics concerning leading innovation covered by this newsletter’s previous issue.

What’s the thread through this series of articles and research studies? It’s not simple, but it’s not new, either. In our Six Sigma oriented world where leaders are often criticized for not getting to the bottom line, it appears that getting to the bottom line may require skills never developed at MBA schools or necessarily learned from practical experience either. The following list of ideas by article may stimulate your thinking about your own leadership ability.

Quinn, HBR: Values, moral influence, elevated level of community

Darling/Parry/Moore, HBR: Learning the same mistakes again, conducting “more than a postmortem,” not let-

ting the boss waffle

Fleming/Coffman/Harter, HBR: Emotions frame the encounter, leadership is local, Human Sigma is tough to measure

Fernández-Aráoz, Sloan: The qualities of top-notch executives, psychological traps of mediocre executives, casting wide nets to find talent

Inoue, Asian Business: Social change drives organizational change, how cycles of relationships influence paradigms, “labor with management” rather than “labor versus management”

The Economist: Talent pool, work-life balance, job satisfaction, gender biases, emotional/logical intelligence

Nussbaum/BusinessWeek: Creativity, design, storytelling, imagination, risk

The ideas of values, character, ability to learn, emotional intelligence, the inner workings of the leader, social change, context, talent, creativity and innovation, risk taking, and storytelling have long been linked to leadership. It seems we keep studying the old through new paradigms. They are classic because they are cyclical. The fact we continue to write about them, analyze them, and study them through each generation is very good in my opinion. Each age must distill its own sense of what works and doesn't. Each generation must test for itself the validity of the claims of its predecessors precisely for the purpose of learning and renewing. It occurs in all categories of the human experience and, in the case of leadership, needs to be explored more fully.

Fundamentally we are not learning much new about leadership in general. What we are doing poorly, at least in the opinion of these articles, is applying the lessons well in order to sustain an initiative of perpetual leadership.

Ron Crossland [roncrossland@bluepointleadership.com](mailto:roncrossland@bluepointleadership.com)