The only way is up!

Boosting performance and
change with collective,
positive, paradoxical leadership

OCAIonline

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Introduction

What do you see when you get your organization's profiles after using the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI)? You might notice a discrepancy between current and preferred culture, with a large shift to the upper two quadrants of the OCAI model. It's a strong tendency in our assessment database.

Some people are not pleased at all. They thought they were finished with changes. They updated procedures and defined a new strategy for the next five years. They made some adjustments in the structure and divided tasks. They used the OCAI to align culture with the changes and stumble upon this gap between current and preferred situation.

Management teams, CEOs, or consultants that initiated the assessment sometimes react as follows: "Welcome to reality…! Everyone wants more flexibility, of course, but we can't all do as we please at work. We have to meet our performance targets and deliver reliable services and products in an efficient way."

Research* by professor Mathieu Weggeman also shows that particularly higher educated professionals prefer more professional freedom and responsibilities. From time to time, they appreciate more attention from their managers and colleagues.

Intrinsic motivation and passion for your profession is much more effective than external control, procedures, and targets. It will give the best results. Professionals have chosen their profession for a reason and like to be good at it and tend to work hard. Knowing this it's interesting that there's a movement toward more external pressure, control, and management. In many industry groups, we see increasing regulations. Governments and society demand good public governance, transparency, and accountability.

Demanding customers want good, cheap products and services that are delivered on time and on demand. To meet these outside requirements, organizations and executives thrive on the lower two quadrants of the OCAI model: they emphasize and appreciate Hierarchy and Market cultures. That's the opposite of what professionals seem to want. . .

So what's next?

So far, the topic doesn't [entail] revolutions in organizations. Professionals might complain or grumble about it, but they stay focused on their work for clients. Though in some European countries, like the Netherlands, there's a tendency to quit your job and sell your services as an independent outside professional.

But most professional workers stay with their organizations. They adapt to the rules and start to dislike their managers with their Excel sheets trying to keep track of output and results. Professionals leave their passion, their creativity, and their innovative ideas at home.

That's a pity! Imagine what it would be like if you could utilize this great potential. There's nothing like intrinsic motivation and passion. It's a great, powerful feeling to come up with great ideas and deliver the best performance, smiling all the way.

A preferred upward culture shift from 6–10 points in your organization's profile could be interpreted as strong dissatisfaction. But look at it this way: it means people are more than willing to change. … Utilize this power to improve organizational performance.

How? That's what this paper is about.

People's desire for more professional responsibility and freedom to execute their job in their personal manner has been evident for some time.

Marc Lavine and Kim Cameron investigated what organizations can do in such a situation. On the one hand, the call for more governance, reliability, efficiency, and measurable high-quality performance stand out, while on the other hand professional workers crave more freedom, flexibility, innovation, human attention, and exceptions to the rules.

They researched an exceptional story: the cleanup and closure of Rocky Flats. This heavily contaminated nuclear weapons plant had to be cleaned up and closed down, regulated by more safety procedures than you can imagine. Because of the dangerous and specialized task, they needed professionals who would lose their jobs once the project was accomplished. How would you keep them motivated?

In this case, it was done! The professionals' performance even exceeded expectations. The secret: an abundance approach, positive leadership, and managers who were able to manage in four quadrants. They combined care for people (Clan culture) with high-performance targets (Market culture). Together with staff, they created an inspiring vision (Adhocracy culture) and made it "smart" to achieve step-by-step tangible results (Market culture). They used the Competing Values Framework and effective paradoxical leadership.

Utilize this amazing story to bridge the gap between stability and flexibility in your own organization and start using the power of your professionals.

Plutonium and positive leadership

Making the Impossible Possible (Cameron & Lavine) is the book that covers the cleanup and closure of the Rocky Flats site. It was the largest nuclear weapons plant in America, dating from the Cold War period. Kaiser Hill, the company that was awarded this enormous and dangerous project, achieved incredible results. Cameron & Lavine determined and analyzed the key enablers for this success so that other organizations can learn from them.

Cameron: "You don't want to make mistakes using plutonium. Yet Kaiser Hill achieved innovation and exceptional performance by effective and collective leadership. This

example is usable by all industry groups where you need efficient, safe and reliable results but where you work with highly educated professionals who have a tendency to do things in their own way…Positive and collective leadership is really the answer."

The Rocky Flats story

Rocky Flats, America's biggest nuclear weapons plant, had to be closed down.

The U.S. Department of Energy had estimated that it would take 70 years and $36 billion. But Kaiser Hill managed to finish this challenging task 60 years ahead of schedule and $30 billion under budget. The soil was 13 times cleaner than it should be according to federal criteria. In just 10 years (1995-2005), 800 buildings (!) and facilities were cleaned up and taken down, and the site is now on its way to becoming a wildlife refuge.

How did they do it?

Kaiser Hill used an Abundance Approach instead of the usual problem-solving approach. That resulted in "positive deviance": extraordinary performance. The abundance approach is focused on opportunities and chances instead of restrictions and problems. The basic assumption is that people can reach their greatest potential (instead of overcome problems).

Kaiser Hill faced many challenges at the start. No one had ever taken down a plutonium facility before. There was no experience to build on. Second, the workforce on-site was represented by three unions that maintained bad relationships with management. The highly trained and specialized workers of the plutonium plant formed a proud, closely knit workforce. They were the only people skilled enough to take down their own plant, where they had worked for 25 years or more and where they had expected lifelong employment. A culture of secrecy and concealment was dominant at the facility. The workforce was strongly opposed outsiders and resisted any change.

The environment (it's close to Denver) wasn't happy with the dangerous place. The Department of Energy had taken years to decide to shut down the plant, and morale was low.

But Kaiser Hill achieved incredible results. Not only did they finish the job 60 years sooner than expected and $30 billion under budget, but they also improved relationships with the unions, and politicians, as well as nearby departments and cities.

While almost 7,000 people were working at Rocky Flats in 1995, this number had diminished to just a few people ten years later. This had happened without any strikes. Employees worked hard to make themselves redundant and left feeling proud to pursuit new careers supported by the Department of Energy.

The abundance approach

Kaiser Hill used an unusual abundance approach to change the situation and facilitate this collective peak performance.

Most management theories focus on the problems and challenges one encounters when it comes to organizational change. It is assumed that to achieve a goal, all kinds of obstacles must be overcome. Leaders learn to recognize and solve problems.

The usual problem-solving approach consists of the following:
1. Identify and analyze problems
2. Generate alternative solutions
3. Evaluate and select the optimal option
4. Implement the solution

Following this usual approach means getting out of trouble and reaching a "normal" situation. The organization is changed, reengineered, and operates smoothly again. The abundance approach supplements this traditional problem-solving approach by going beyond the normal situation to reach an excellent situation.

So the basic assumption is not to solve problems but to enable everyone's highest potential to be reached. Isn't this a bit too optimistic? Not per se. Research shows the "heliotropic effect" of abundance. It's an upward positive spiral of improvement. When you expect more, you achieve more. This is a fascinating effect that works within individuals (believe in it, feel more positive and confident, and actually achieve it) and within groups.

Research by Marcial Losada** shows that people in excellent organizations make five times more positive than negative statements (think of compliments, encouragement, trust, and optimism). John Gottmann *** discovered the same patterns. Positive communication will produce positive results. It is a reinforcing circle.

This effect also works the other way. Downsizing and laying off employees will produce negative performance. Interpersonal relationships are finished when people leave; trust and loyalty diminish, and secrecy and duplicity increase. When a negative spiral has started, performance will deteriorate.

Abundance has amplifying effects. The benefits grow because positive emotions are developed, social capital is formed, prosocial behavior is demonstrated, and resilience is created.

Collective, positive, paradoxical leadership

Let's go back to the case of Kaiser Hill. Their success story at Rocky Flats is a story of leadership success.

Complex changes derive from a combination of factors that are often difficult to discern separately and are certainly difficult to repeat. But the Competing Values Framework leads to some clues about this success.

Kaiser Hill brought 50 managers to the project. They excelled in leadership. Cameron & Lavine state that the one-strong-leader story is actually a myth. Effective change is produced by many formal and informal leaders. They tell and show the same message over and over, each one of them in their own authentic way.

It doesn't depend on one man or woman. Their successors take over after they leave. Effective leadership is a strong collective with shared values and goals. To align so many leaders into a coherent way of thinking and acting, you need a clear and inspiring vision. These leaders actually share a leadership culture that gives continuity and consistency to the organization.

It was found that three leadership roles accounted for the change from a bureaucratic, secret, and closed culture to an innovative, enthusiastic organization:
♦ The idea champion who articulates a motivating vision, thus energizing the others
♦ The sponsor who helps acquire resources and support and who encourages the vision
♦ The orchestrator who bring people together for implementation of the vision

These three roles are a prerequisite for every big change, but they are seldom found in just one person. Great and sustainable change demands multiple leaders, consistency and continuity in the long term, and these three roles. So, in fact, effective leadership comes from multiple individuals and multiple sources.

Moreover, Cameron & Lavine concluded that what is needed for success and successful change are really conflicting, paradoxical strategies.

That's where they used the Competing Values Framework, which was developed by Quinn & Cameron from 1983 to 1988 in an attempt to explain effective organizational performance. It identifies the basic orientations that emerge in almost all human activity. That is, all organized human activity has an underlying structure that can be categorized into four quadrants, based on the two polarities of (a) flexibility versus stability and (b) internal processing versus external positioning.

In order to achieve success, you often need all four quadrants:
1. The Clan culture to collaborate
2. The Adhocracy culture to create
3. The Market culture to compete
4. The Hierarchy culture to control

This was also the case at Rocky Flats in order to change from a predictable, safety-obsessed and efficient nuclear plant into an innovative and effective shutdown project that resulted in an environmentally clean site.

In summary, this extraordinary change required the following:
- Collective leadership, executed by multiple individuals in multiple ways
- Positive leadership departing from an abundance approach
- Paradoxical leadership: the pursuit of simultaneously conflicting strategies from four quadrants and utilizing all three necessary leadership roles for change

So, what exactly did the trick at Rocky Flats? Or, as Cameron & Lavine put it, what were the key enablers to make the impossible possible?

Key enablers from Adhocracy Culture: Vision, Innovation, and Symbolic Leadership

1. Making and confirming a clear, shared vision of the future (while you focus on possibilities, not on restrictions!) No one got motivation from "70 years & $36 billion." But the new goal was a breakthrough: a visual image of a clean environment, a beautiful spot in nature (for the right brain) and "10 years & $10 billion" (for the left brain). And leaders who believed in it, of course, keeping the image vivid.
2. Symbolic leadership activities; the effective articulation of the new goal is dependent on visual images and symbols. So they changed the site's name, demolished the administration buildings (management had to work near the workforce), and took down the high fences.
3. Innovative ideas: the CEO exemplified and modeled the attitude of innovation and learning. He was fine with being told "no" and moving on, coming up with a new idea. "No" became a trigger to think of better alternatives. It became a challenge for the workforce. In spite of mistakes and disappointments, people created more than 200 innovations, learning from this huge project, finding out new ways, and getting better along the way.
4. Creating meaningfulness: people started unmotivated, discouraged, and without purpose or meaning. Management's challenge was to come up with meaning and enhance motivation. The new meaning went beyond personal profit. By taking down Rocky Flats, the workforce actually protected two million people in Colorado and created a wildlife refuge. That did it!

Key enablers from Hierarchy Culture: Stability, Discipline, and Process Control

1. Specific goal clarity; the goal was specific and was constantly clarified. Priorities were discussed when necessary, and some adjustments were made.
2. The complex project was divided into three main activities. These are projects themselves: they have a beginning, a middle, and an end. This kept things well organized and not overwhelming.
3. Measuring; anything you measure gets attention. You also need to define processes clearly before you can measure anything at all. A few key success factors turned out

to be a stimulus for action: people corrected processes because they were measured.

Key enablers from Clan Culture: Relationships, Human Capital, and Collaborative Culture

1. Addressing the organizational culture; it used to be a traditional, patriotic, proud, and life-time-employment culture. The preferred new culture was innovative, with people open for change. Two thousand employees were laid off in the first two months because they were redundant. That was shocking. The new goal (10 years and $10 billion to turn the site into a wildlife refuge) made clear that this old culture wouldn't succeed. Change was the name of the game. No day would be the same.
2. Intensive collaboration and communication with all engaged parties, such as the federal and state agencies, the communities in the Denver metropolitan area, and the unions who represented the workforce. It took a lot of time but also earned goodwill and solidarity. Parties united in shared values; everybody wanted safety and a clean environment. Collaboration was also enhanced by letting people share their workspace.
3. Management worked systematically on building trust and credibility. When a manager promised something, they would make sure to live up to that expectation. "You can count on me." They communicated openly and honestly. Executives shared as much information as possible at an early stage.

Key enablers from Market Culture: Politics, Incentives, and Rigorous Performance Standards

1. Managing the external political relations to ensure budget and goodwill with the state and federal agencies and Congress. This included an extensive dialogue with external stakeholders.
2. Management took bold action if necessary, demanding timely results, expecting performance, and requiring measurable outcomes. Supervisors who didn't meet expectations were removed. Employees rated their supervisors. Poor performers didn't belong at the new project.
3. They implemented an innovative incentive system. It was a bit like a game, a mild competition—who could accomplish most or who would be most innovative. It was about people's professional reputations. It became a challenge to prove something was possible, even if others had said it wasn't. The workers got it sooner than the managers. Find out how you can make things work anyway.

Employees shared in the profits, which boosted revenues. Benefits were established at above-market levels. Bonuses and stock options augmented the closer to the target or the nearer the end of the project they got.

Also, Kaiser Hill negotiated a new contract with the U.S. Department of Energy. This performance-based contract stated what needed to be done by when rather than how it

was to be done. This approach avoided a "phone book" full of instructions and detailed procedures that would hinder timely results and enhance bureaucracy.

In the old contract, a $40 million profit was calculated. The new contract was based on $20 million profit, with a $20 million bonus if it could be completed on time and an extra $20 million if it was completed before the scheduled deadline.

Employees earned much more than in regular jobs by sharing in the profit. The bonuses also boosted motivation and career opportunities.

Inspiration for you

The Rocky Flats and Kaiser Hill story is exceptional. So what's in it for executives and workers? Can we repeat this success? Of course!

Collective, positive, paradoxical leadership is the answer, as we have seen above. You can surely do it too. So when you see the outcome of your cultural assessment and realize that participants want a lot of change, you know how to work on it.

Often, you'll see a shift to the upper two quadrants: people prefer a culture that values flexibility and adaptability.

It's almost as if people are saying, "Just let me do my thing. I'm good at my profession. You managers may worry about overall results and procedures. I just want to be good, do it my way, and enjoy a nice work climate with my colleagues."

We can only guess why this trend is so strong. Maybe it's a reaction to the mature organizations people work in, which have become so large in order to stay in the market, that work is arranged and fixed with procedures and targets. The older or more mature an organization gets, the more culture "falls" into the two lower quadrants of Hierarchy and Market Culture. Maybe people want to get back to a more human approach with more creativity and flexibility.

The trend could also derive from the higher levels of education and training that modern professionals obtain. We are no longer simple craftsmen or industrial workers. We have learned to think for ourselves. We are professionals who deliver high-quality and complex services and products. We want to use these abilities at work, and we don't like to be controlled by managers. We want to be respected and trusted.

Professionals can get very frustrated by the measure-and-control cultures that we see around us. Organizations use these controls to meet the social trend for more public accountability and transparency and good governance. And to please their demanding customers who want proven quality, on time, at low cost. And to satisfy shareholders with as much return on investment as possible.

The financial sector may have enjoyed too much freedom, so they are now tied. This

means new procedures, more rules, more controls, more bureaucracy. Though it's understandable, for the individual financial professional, this may mean less satisfaction at work and more frustration. More external controls and targets instead of internal motivation, spontaneous performance, and creative solutions to problems. Maybe less effort and less power to utilize. That's a pity, as stated before.

These are all just suggestions, but in the Netherlands, some research has been done on this subject. Why are professionals not satisfied? Why do they want more freedom? And why will organizations not give them what they need?

The upward shift is not only visible in OCAI Online's database (with all the assessments so far) but was also found by the Dutch professor Dr. Mathieu Weggeman, whose book has not yet been translated into English (title: Don't manage professionals!).

In his opinion, professionals and organizations would be better off if managers would stop telling them how to do their jobs and would restrict themselves to telling professionals what needs to be done by when—just like the new contract Kaiser Hill negotiated. It gives more freedom and more responsibilities, but professionals are well trained and can live with that. To ensure quality, performance, and reliable, efficient production, Weggeman still advises a strong collective ambition and peer reviews, with colleagues checking on each other's work. It's a thought.

For now, make sure to apply the positive, collective, and paradoxical leadership that Cameron & Lavine advise. It's your way for achieving excellent results and change, even when people think it can't be done. Use the abundance approach, use it with multiple leaders, and use the various leadership roles, behaviors, measures, and interventions from all four quadrants!

Some final advice:
- Effective change means emphasizing the achievement of positive goals instead of avoiding negative outcomes. It means going beyond "good enough" to the extraordinary and the excellent. Use the abundance approach.
- Giving people feedback on what went well and what they did right, causes 1 to 5 times more productivity than just giving feedback on what they did wrong.
- Develop excellent leadership in your organization. Since cultural change is the collective change of meaning, assumptions, and human behavior, you need leaders to exemplify the change, repeat the vision, and encourage others. Create a collective of leaders who are able to play the three distinct leadership roles for change. All executives must be able to switch between the four quadrants. They must repeat the vision in their own way: the way that is authentic and makes them believable. They must show what they mean. Action speaks louder than words!
- Invest in leadership. We cannot state this enough. A mediocre manager will not get you there. An excellent executive always pays off.

Utilize your organization's profile! Start the dialogue about results. What is behind the upward shift? How can we change and make this successful? How do we need to enhance excellent leadership? If you want to know more about leadership's roles, also check out Robert Quinn's book Becoming a master manager, which is based on the four quadrants.

And don't miss Cameron & Lavine's book. They tell you so much more than we can discuss in this paper. They're worth reading.

Good luck! We are looking forward to your results and reactions.

Notes

* Weggeman, M. prof.dr.ir. Leidinggeven aan professionals? Niet doen!—the Netherlands, Scriptum, 2008, ISBN-13: 9789055943524

** M. Losada, Heaphy E. (2004). "The role of positivity and connectivity in the performance of business teams" – Journal of Applied Behavioural Science 47: 740-765

*** Gottman, J.M. (1994). Why marriages succeed or fail. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Recommended further reading:

Making the Impossible Possible
Leading Extraordinary Performance: The Rocky Flats Story
Kim Cameron & Marc Lavine
ISBN 1-57675-390-5 Berrett-Koehler Publishers inc.

Becoming a master manager: A Competing Values Approach (Paperback)
Robert E. Quinn (Author), Sue R. Faerman (Author), Michael P. Thompson (Author), Mr Michael McGrath (Author), Lynda S. St. Clair (Author)
ISBN-10: 0470050772
ISBN-13: 978-0470050774 Publisher: Wiley

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