

Leadership Based on Values

Marco Túlio Zanini

Many executives and scholars from organizations I know agree that many companies are going through serious difficulties related to low motivation and lack of purpose. Currently one of the most significant dilemmas in corporate life is nurturing bonds of trust in work relationships that translate into spontaneous cooperation and motivation, a task which is usually assigned to leaders. But this dilemma is not only confined to organizations, it is also present in modern society. We live in a hedonistic, individualistic and selfish society, with fragile bonds (in work relationships, marriages and friendships). Modern life provides more independence, but also secludes us from society. In the corporate world less dependent work relationships have ruled out bilateral agreements of loyalty and fidelity. The perspective of short term relationships threatens the construction of feelings of belonging, responsibility towards your tasks and effective commitment to collective results, and consequently reduces the possibility of building a standard of excellence to provide value. Organizations that manage to create a sense of belonging and meanings in the pursuance of day-to-day tasks acquire a social capital that becomes a fundamental pre-condition for them to become more competitive.

Therefore, the role of leadership must not be understood merely as a personal quality or a special individual attribute, but as a collectively built path to open spaces for new initiatives. It may emerge from an organization's excellence in governance or from the quality of the ethical pact established between its staff, where coherent and well structured processes are created, and once these are implemented by competent parties within the organization, they create bonds with strong perceptions of justice, meaning, enthusiasm and motivation for work. Case studies such as the Albert Einstein Hospital, the Bope and Natura are good examples.

Recently the perception of leadership based on values has increased, thanks to the fact that damages caused by financial meritocracy systems which award short term results, with no commitment to quality in the work place and organizational sustainability have demonstrated their lack of efficiency. This factor showed the need of finding an element, a mechanism or a process which builds and encourages virtues and provides new meaning for collective work. Leadership based on values is precisely the missing link in modern organizations facing the void produced by new social configurations and an economy based on short term demands, lack of trust and predominance of exchanges based entirely on self-interests. A leader whose actions are based on values is a leader who sees different possibilities and creates room for meaning, ethics, accomplishment and excellence where other people only see room for short term results and cost reduction. This leader is an individual who, denying fatalism, complaisance and pessimism finds new spaces for mobilizing people in order to build new and very much needed alternatives.