



6 LEADERSHIP ASSUMPTIONS BELONGING TO A REALITY THAT DOESN'T EXIST ANYMORE AND THAT ARE DAMAGING YOUR PERFORMANCE.

Here are 6 obsolete assumptions that unconsciously still guide leaders' thinking and the way they act but that ultimately end up impairing their performance.

Obsolete leadership assumption #1 :“The leader is paid to have the solution to every problem”.

This consolidated and widely shared assumption among leaders forces them to come up with a solution even when they have no specific knowledge of the new problem and its causes.

The fact is coming up with a workable solution for today's highly diverse and complex challenges requires broad cross-functional and cross-industry expertise impossible to find reunited in a single person, no matter the experience or the hierarchical level they have.

Being that the situation is only obvious that the role of leaders is not to provide themselves the solution, but instead to identify and engage the different people and competencies needed in order to generate the most adapted solution.

Certainly, this might a hard to swallow truth for some leader's Ego but ultimately the negative side of it is nothing compared to the continuous accumulation of bad decisions and consequent poor results they will face if they decide to persist with the old assumption.

It's time to abandon this “leader as a hero” assumption in leadership.

There is another connected point that is highly relevant. Indeed, we must always remember that the leader sets the tone, give the example for their entire organisation. If the senior leader shows the way by abandoning the “leader as a hero “assumption, all the other leaders and managers will take note and possibly follow the example because they now know what is expected from them and even more importantly what they are going to be evaluated on.

Today we have a wealth of research on what makes a cultural change program successful and we know that one of the key element for a positive outcome is the example given by the top management.

Too many leaders take the position of supporting cultural change or another way of saying it is they “sponsor” the change. But the only effective way of making things change is for the senior leader to “role modelling” the new cultural change you want to see happening in your organisation.

So this is the difference between ‘sponsoring’ “oh ya, I'm for this change, I strongly support it” but I actually you are not making any change to your behaviour and instead the “role modelling” where as a leader you are the first to change and give the example.

Obsolete leadership assumption #2: “Leaders’ experience is always a reliable asset to face new challenges”.

Certainly, without experience we would be condemned to reinvent the wheel each time we face a recurring problem.

But relying blindly on what we have learnt in the past can be extremely dangerous when the new problem, based only on a superficial analysis, seem somehow comparable to past events.

It’s certainly normal and as part of the human nature to simplify our life and reuse to the same solution for similar problems so to save time and focus.

But when the new business challenges begin to significantly diverge from past events, we must humbly recognize that our experience could be misleading us into believing that we already have the right solution and jump directly to some erroneous decisions.

But how can we know if our past experience can be useful to solve a specific new challenge?

What you can do is ask yourself, with the help of your team or any other diverse group of people, this question: “can we think about any single reason, that make our past experience not applicable to the new challenge we are facing today?”

The answer could be no. You might have not found any specific reason for the past experience not to be used for the challenge you are handling today. In this case the advantage is that you can be more confident in your choices and decisions and more determined in their implementation.

But it might also be that there are some good reasons to think that the solutions applied in the past would not be effective today. Some key factor has changed making the cumulated experience not useful anymore.

May be some major event or competitor’s action has completely changed the context.

So, If your answer is affirmative, it’s in your interest to investigate its validity further and eventually start looking for a completely new approach and solution to the new problem you are facing now.

Again, it is understandable that this process can be sometimes highly uncomfortable with the ego of some leaders.

The fact that for decades, hard-earned experience, has been one of the key elements that distinguished the senior leader from younger employees and justified their high salaries, doesn’t make the choice of abandoning this leadership assumption easy for most senior leaders.

But again, is a choice between two evils, not a moral or intellectual debate.

Think about the alternative. Piling up bad choices and bad results won’t benefit the senior leader in any way.

Peter Drucker, the great management expert, said it best “the greatest danger in times of turbulence is not the turbulence, but it is to act with yesterday’s logic” (slide)

Obsolete leadership assumption #3 :“Leaders must be the most knowledgeable person in the group”.

We have already seen how the shelf-life of knowledge is getting shorter and shorter because of the today's fast evolution of the business environment.

As technologies, social expectations and geopolitical tensions among many other disruptive factors evolve, no leader is capable of keeping up with all the new knowledge that their role would require, not even in the specific domain they have evolved and succeeded.

They instead must recognize the different reality and accept the idea that they will not be the most knowledgeable person in the room in a constantly increasing number of situations but, at the same time, the good news is that, this is not what is actually expected from them.

Outcomes is what their organisation expects from their leaders.

If you are able to leverage the specialized, UpToDate knowledge of your team members to deliver these outcomes, that's what will make you an high-performing leader.

Granted, again some leaders' Ego could be impacted by the realisation that they are not the most knowledge person in the group, but they nevertheless still have the option of refocusing on what is really the added value of their role as leaders and what they will ultimately be evaluated for: effectively select and engage team members and thanks to that being able to deliver solid results.

Obsolete leadership assumption #4:“Leadership is about telling people “What” to do and “How” to do it

Decades ago, when the business environment was substantially more stable than today and the types of challenges were consistently similar, it made a lot of sense that the leader could instruct their teams with both the “what” (the priority the team must work on) and the “how” (the steps the team must go through to get to the expected result).

That was made possible by the fact that the leader could easily anticipate the outcome and activities necessary to reach it relying on what their past experience taught them.

But that mostly “stable” world doesn't exist anymore.

We have seen before how Today's challenges continuously emerge in increasingly diverse and sometimes very far away industries and from political, social, and economic fields the leader is hardly knowledgeable of.

In this uncharted situation, it becomes impossible for leaders to instruct the team with the “how” when facing never-met-before challenges since they cannot anticipate the outcome and even less the right steps their teams should take to get to there.

Thus, today leaders should rather focus on their critical task of priorities definition (the What) while leaving to their teams' cross-cultural and ideally highly-diverse expertise to come up with the best “how” to reach the objective.

This approach is perfectly embodied in the concept of “Agile teams”. These are highly autonomous cross-functional, and self-managing teams, with a broad decision-making power, accountable to deliver results that meet the assigned goal.

Leaders provide the agile team with a clear definition of the expected outcome and leave it to the team to define “how” to get there and how to organize their work. During the process, leaders are there to help the team to overcome major barriers and they never impose their take on how the project should be implemented.

Obsolete leadership assumption #5 :“Leadership development is for those below me”.

This comes from an outdated idea of immutable, everlasting leadership skills.

Leaders consider that if they have arrived at their current position of responsibility it means that they already have what it takes to be a performing leader.

No need to learn more, to improve their leadership capabilities.

In their eyes, their current position legitimates and validates their leadership capabilities.

Consequently, when is the occasion of talking about leadership development and updating leaders’ skills it could only be for their subordinates.

But as we have seen, a continuously shifting business environment calls for evolved leadership capabilities.

This doesn’t necessarily mean to completely reinvent the leadership skill set you possess but rather discern which, among the leadership skills that you already have, are more apt to support leadership performance in rapidly changing realities and once identified, scaling them up.

As I mentioned at the beginning, we are going to focus later in this course, on 4 key leadership capabilities that is scaled up, in accordance to the Pareto principle, the 80/20 rule, remember? will most contribute to move the needle in your performance.

Obsolete leadership assumption #6: “ ‘Sticking to a decision’ is a timeless trait of good leaders”

There is a story about that.

In the last decade the US governments funded advanced research about the ability of people to anticipate world events. It is called “the Good Judgment Project”.

Contrary to everybody’s expectation, the project has indeed revealed that few people actually have extraordinary abilities for better seeing into the future.

Imagine if, as a leader, you could become a better forecaster. Would be it a nice competitive advantage in today’s rapidly changing business environment? For sure!

So, what makes these “super forecasters” as they are called in the research, able to outperform anybody else in anticipating what is going to happen?

They found out that better forecasters are not attached to a preconceived idea they have to prove or disprove.

Rather they start without any dogma and even more importantly are open to change their forecast as new information appear, without caring about what changing idea can be perceived by others.

Since they are not attached to one particular narrative they are able to adapt their viewpoints to incorporate any new information, unlike the “consistent thinkers”, who often force new information into a pre-existing mental framework, or discard it if it seems to contradict their initial view.

That’s unfortunately what many leaders do once taken officially and publicly a decision: they don’t change it and ignore any new evidence that doesn’t support their decisions.

This is not to say that leaders should change decisions every other day, but that It's only logic, to avoid facing inexorable problems down the road, to change idea when more significant information is available rather than stick to our first decision .

It's a dangerous game to wanting to appear consistent over time even if we know the conditions have changed and the probabilities of our first prediction to be accurate is compromised.

How leaders who see extreme consistency as a virtue, think their credibility and their business acumen will be judged next time if they continue to stick to catastrophic decisions?

Credibility as an honest and transparent leader has no price and certainly more valuable than short-term consistency.

Keep your mind open and ready to change if the evolution of reality you operate in!

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