The Creating Competitive Distinction Series:

Part Three

Seven Leadership Challenges to Gaining Competitive Distinction

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Introduction

The Seven Deadly Sales Dilemmas and the Seven Can-Be's that we discussed in the first two articles describe the tensions between *"what is"* and *"what should be"*. Remember, *"What should be, can be!"* But, *"Can Be,"* requires corporate and executive bravery.

Corporate and Executive Bravery

The first step in bravery is to *"walk and talk - - - the same talk" constantly.* Alignment between attitude, philosophy and actions is key! That consistency is hard to find, particularly since producing a payoff in change is often more about emotion and intuition than it is about analysis and logic. Where's the bravery you ask? Try making emotional and intuitive decisions which may or may not be born out by analysis and logic!

It's a good bet that your company operates on a set of implicit beliefs and philosophies (e.g., no one discusses them). We know that your culture can create its own distractions which interfere with what seems right, intuitive and obvious.   Many times, discussing this tension is repressed so that "we don't take our eye off-the-ball," or so we don't offend others. Consequently, leaders often focus on the seemingly "urgent" and let the critical issues slide.   They take refuge in "safe" financial performance targets that can't be easily disputed. These targets rarely support desired behaviors or intuitive outcomes.

If you look at successful companies, they have varied strategies, structures and systems. However, their leaders do have something in common. They share surprisingly consistent philosophies.

These successful leaders have moved away from over-reliance on very formal ways of running their organizations (like articulating strategies, building structures and developing systems). They have moved toward using more organic ways of managing like:

- Engaging people in defining a purpose

- Implementing through defined processes and developing people).

So what does this point out? It goes to the root of why so many change initiatives fail (60% +) even after overdosing on business re-engineering and other scientific management techniques. Many Leaders manage what is easy to manage (like managing numbers and not people). They've been trained in the scientific disciplines. They forget they are managing an "organism." They dismiss the small and gradual steps associated with real change for grandiose strategies

So, let's put this into perspective. Successful leaders recognize that an organization's purpose is more important than short-term outcomes. Why?

Outcomes change — the purpose does not!

Their focus is on how they can create committed members of a purposeful organization. Putting purpose above outcomes, allowing new improved outcomes to take precedence and promoting different things to be done takes bravery.

The Seven Challenges

It takes bravery for leaders and executives to address these seven critical challenges. Without question, addressing them is about not acquiescing to "legacy tendencies" but about incorporating "what now works" into the development of "tomorrow's legacies"! Bravery is about doing "different things," not about making excuses as to why you can't do different things.

1: Embedding Purpose

Undefined or Conceptual ⟷ **Clearly articulated & translated**

So, you've written and articulated the corporate purpose! But, do the troops actually understand what this means to their everyday behavior and actions? So often the organization states its purpose without regard to whether or not it has created any ownership in that purpose.

Essential Questions:

- How will you gain widespread organizational support for your purpose?

- How will you ensure new activities, actions and behaviors invigorate your purpose?

- How will you ensure your expectations are aligned with what people assume is expected of them?

2: Removing Distractions

Unidentified ⟷ **Identified and Managed**

There are always distractions that deflect an organization from its "appointed" tasks. If these distractions go unidentified, they grow stronger. Distractions don't just miraculously disappear. The longer they last the more they clog corporate arteries. Executives need to lead the "charge" in identifying and eliminating distractions.

Essential Questions:

- How will you convince people to dismiss actions, operations and processes which stimulate doing old things?

- How can you eliminate duplicate processes and reports that slow the organization down?

- Who will oversee the distraction-elimination process; and, what authority will they have?

3: Creating Differentiation

Vulnerable ←——————————→ **Differentiated**

If you feel like you're the same in the marketplace, odds are that's how the customer sees you. As a leader, you are responsible for creating a climate of differentiation.

Essential Questions:

- How will you ensure that customer contact people and others connect with one another to develop differentiable approaches?
- How will you measure the degree and profitability of differentiation?
- How will you leverage differentiation to lead your market place?

4: Coaching

Isolated ←——————————→ **Cascaded**

We know; we know … your people coach! The real question is do your people coach with the right intensity and frequency to replicate successful behaviors? Or, is coaching infrequent, informal and isolated?

Essential Questions:

- What will you do as a leader to establish your coaching cascade?
- What is the right intensity and frequency of coaching needed under present competitive conditions?
- How will you know that coaching is effective?

5: Aligning Organizational Expectations

Defused & Misaligned ←——————————→ **Focused & Aligned**

Over and over again, employees say, "I wish someone had told me exactly what was expected." Have you ever considered that others' *assumptions* of "what is expected" might be counter productive to your purpose or outcomes? Are people doing what you expect or what they *think* you expect?

Essential Questions:

- What are the key words that reveal your organization's direction and success?
- How will you translate these words into actions, competencies and behaviors that can be managed?
- How will you measure the degree of alignment with your purpose, and what evidence of alignment are you looking for?

6: Replicating Success

Using Lagging Indicators ←————————→ **Using Leading Indicators**

The words, "best practice" seems to have permeated the corporate world. Your people undoubtedly have their own practices of choice, honed by years of personal experience.   Often corporate rewards go to these people rather than to those who demonstrate the "best practices" that everyone can adopt and benefit from.

Essential Questions:

- What will your *real* best practices look like?
- How will you tie best practices to behaviors which can be evidenced and replicated without alienating the productive, "lone rangers?"
- How will you use your "language of leaders" to make managing easier and more measurable?

7: Rewarding Change

Historical & Slow ←————————→ **Related & Responsive**

If the recognition and reward systems of your company run on "legacy," it will only encourage doing things differently, not "doing different things!"   To change, you need to consistently reward the new behaviors, not the "reward legacies" of the past.

Essential Questions:

- What proportion of people's compensation should be tied to adopting the new behaviors?
- How will you measure and reward those who support your purpose?
- How will you "raise the bar" so that over time people demonstrate excellence in the new behaviors?

Where do you go from here?

Ensure that your *"walk and talk"* are consistent. This relates to your language, how you reward excellence, how you coach and how you react when things go wrong! Bravery means displaying an attitude of distinction.

Create a cascade of conversation and coaching that gets above the "white noise" of legacy…that's doing different things!

Align the expectations of the organization. Bravery is found in exposing misalignments and distractions for immediate correction.

Need some examples of showing your bravery?

1. *Create a leadership language* that is simple and manageable; and, one that emphasizes doing different things, e.g. rewarding expected behavior; not isolated outcomes.

2. *Create a cascade of concepts,* communication and coaching where the management chain can demonstrate consistency in the use of the language and behaviors.

3. *Agree on evidences of change* that are consistent and create alignment within your management team. Build on and expect these evidences to embed change throughout the organization.