

La philosophie : un instrument de la libération des organisations

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The innovation

After a very diversified career so far with some significant achievements as a leader and manager Laurent Ledoux now combines an activity as:

- a sole trading consultancy for organizations which want to embark on innovative ways of functioning (cf. the works of Isaac Getz and Frédéric Laloux, among others)
- the co-presidency of PhiloMa (Philosophie et Management), a Belgian-based association aiming to create bridges between the world of philosophy and that of management.

The innovation proposed by Laurent Ledoux fits in with the following UN Goals:

- Good health and well-being
- Decent work and economic growth
- Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
- Sustainable cities and communities.

The elements below have been gathered during one working-session with Laurent Ledoux on a common client assignment then during an interview on Sept 27, 2017.

The innovation lies in the contents of the interventions L. Ledoux proposes to his clients in terms of organizational development as well as in the practical emphasis put on what might generally be considered as 'peripheral' dimensions of a consultant's work.

1. The contents of the interventions. With an approach very similar to the one he implemented in his former position at the Ministry of Transports, L. Ledoux selects and supports his clients (he might say that his clients actually select him) on the basis of a genuine commitment to place the respect for people as well as people's autonomy and growth as core drivers. And this might cover aspects such as decision-making (even for the most strategic decisions), the sharing of information, the ergonomics of the working space and equipment, HR strategies, the smart use of technology as a vehicle for enhanced engagement and efficiency. It could even involve organization-wide 'whistle-blowing mechanisms' complemented with the setting-up of small autonomous working groups which would come up with proposals for solving-problems.

L. Ledoux's actions, whether in his previous positions or in his current responsibilities, are based on long-lasting core leadership beliefs and principles, among which:

- A strong role-modeling dimension, particularly supported by the drive to make changes very tangible
- Coherence – in areas such as aligning people's required autonomy and sense of accountability within the teams as well as aligning own values and actions (including cases where the consequences could be unfavourable for the person)

- A deep belief that empowering approaches are beneficial for the organization and its members
- A search for objectivity, particularly through acknowledging the vast range of biases which exist throughout an organization and seeking to develop the broader possible picture of the challenges at hand
- Acting in a 'distant' facilitating and enabling way so that the organization transforms itself rather than '*someone transforming the organization*')
- Combining letting go and engagement/commitment
- A strong sense of the common good, as exemplified in P Polman's (CEO of Unilever) words @ the 2017 Leaders Summit (UN Global Compact) – '*It takes courageous leadership. That's where the breakthrough comes from: from people who understand that putting the interests of others ahead of their own is actually in their own self-interest.*'

2. Possibly more 'peripheral' aspects

- The reason for being of PhiloMa (www.philoma.org), the association which L Ledoux co-chairs) can sound as an intention to place 'education' at the heart of possible transformations, in this particular case the transformation of management practices to bring about benefits for organizations and their members. Through providing monthly philosophy seminars for managers around specific topics (such as, for instance, the foundation of liberating leadership), PhiloMa aims to feed and support managers' reflections around their practices as a contribution to creating a better world. PhiloMa does not aim to provide 'ready-made' answers but to help managers reach a tipping-point thanks to disseminating inspiring inputs from a wide range of sources. PhiloMa offers space and time for challenging the existing ideologies with the aim of creating the ones which will support the transformations the planet requires.
- A different way of looking at and managing results or performance indicators is badly required if people are expected to fully engage in their work and reconcile their professional and personal selves. As a number of players in the new paradigm of liberated and liberating organizations, L Ledoux insists on escaping from the potentially harmful and counter-productive of excessive quantitative approaches of measurements and of excessively time and energy-consuming practices in indicators-monitoring. With his clients he will insist on challenging the nature of the (necessary) 'traditional' measurement selected. Which ones can really account for what highly-satisfactory service or finest product really mean? What should be the appropriate cocktail of qualitative, broad and most of all systemic indicators so that these remain resources, rather than becoming enslaving instruments?

At a personal level and in his own personal 'business-model' this also translates into basing the selection of his clients on criteria which position genuine intention to transform and readiness to challenge ingrained practices above the search for profitability.

The impacts

In line with his deliberate intention to go for more meaningful indicators for observing and experiencing the impacts of his interventions, L Ledoux can quite easily position the latter against the People / Profit / Planet framework. A few examples could be:

- People – in the organizations he used to manage or now advises, the absenteeism and LT sick leave rates are seen to have dwindled/to dwindle. Similarly, surveys on staff well-being (cf. '*Great place to work*' programmes) show improvements
- Profit – the pursuit of the principles Ledoux advocates (self-direction, personal growth and respect) also contribute to increasing people's engagement and productivity, hence performance. In his most recent assignment, the company's sales grew by 34% in six months while costs remained the same
- Planet – Ledoux's experience is that care for employees also leads to care for clients and for society. For example the transformations at the Ministry of Transports led to a 50% reduction of office space and a 30% decrease in km/year/employee.