

Consciousness: The next leadership metric?

What if there was another way of finessing the evaluation of people that most people cannot see?

There are bodies of work that study the development of consciousness—sometimes called levels of development. These studies can describe the degree of expansion present in the personal lens through which individuals see the world, and could well be a valuable leadership metric in the near-future.

Those with a more expansive worldview will see opportunity where others see threat. Purpose, where others see objections. Long-term, where others see only short-term. Expansive lenses see the world as a whole, whereas others can only see divisions. There is more self-awareness where others tend to defer to blame. And lastly, there is choice where others see no choice.

The expansiveness itself changes perspective. One by-product of this is that individuals with a higher level of consciousness will react defensively far less often than most people would. This is because their brains, not seeing a threat in such situations, do not release the chemicals which produce the common 'flight or fight' mechanism (also known as the amygdala hijack).

A simple example

If my worldview of career is that there are limited opportunities, and it will be very hard to get another job if I lose this one, then I will perceive my colleagues as a threat. If, on the other

hand, I see infinite possibilities for creating interesting work – and would be quite comfortable if circumstances cause me to choose to leave or be asked to leave my current organisation – then my colleagues are instead a source of inspiration, curiosity and support.

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When we examine the behaviours that most organisations want – and in our line of business we see a wide range of these – most of them require this lack of reactivity if they are to be practised consistently.

Up until now, we have not come across organisations that are directly measuring levels of consciousness in their people. Nor have we seen businesses using it as a criterion for selection of key executives. But we

predict that this will come. The practice of mindfulness is now becoming acceptable in corporate circles, and mindfulness expands a person's worldview. Most types of personal development do the same.

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There is one challenge and it is this. We can only recognise worldviews that are less expanded than our own. Anything that lies outside our view of the world is usually invisible to us. Because it would be very hard for someone to understand a worldview more expanded than his or her own, it could be more challenging to measure it effectively.

I predict that we will see increasing focus on how to measure and build the level of consciousness in leaders. With more conscious leaders at the helm, organisations become more enlightened places, guided by individuals with the wisdom that comes from an expanded worldview.

Bring it on.

This article originally appeared in March 2016 on Culture University, a workplace culture educational site where the top workplace culture experts in the world share their insights.

Some of my favourite authors on levels of consciousness: Ken Wilber, Suzanne Cook-Greuter, Dan Seigel, Robert Kegan, Frederic Laloux