

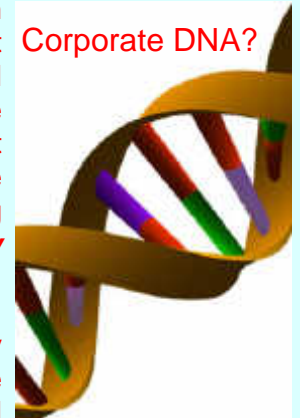
4 working magic

Companies Performing Extraordinarily

A brief, 2 page glimpse of at least some of the difference that makes a difference when companies perform extraordinarily well.

There's something different about those people and companies who regularly breach past boundaries of performance and achieve the extraordinary, something different about those who are already accomplished and yet raise they're game still further. All this when so many others wait for that crisis that they say is needed in order to change – *"things only really change when there's a crisis!"* What, then, is the difference that makes the difference? Is it something inherited, a matter of genetics or 'corporate DNA'; or is it just good fortune - luck - that starts one down the path of a self-reinforcing dynamic? The key question is: **What is it that serves to release the extraordinary in people and companies?**

Corporate DNA?

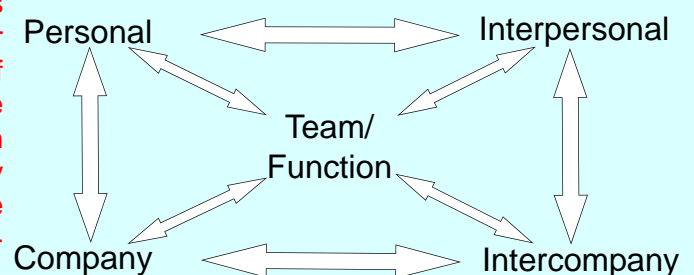


It may be said that performance levels are simultaneously enabled and limited by underlying patterns. Attempts to change performance without in any way shifting the underlying pattern provides at best only short-term benefit and at worse no real change other than greater scepticism. What, then, constitutes the underlying pattern?

On a technology level it clearly varies from industry to industry, yet at the human dynamics level there is something in common between extraordinary companies that separate them from the ordinary. Peter Senge alluded to something similar when, he appreciated the basic premise upon which his best seller *The Fifth Discipline* had been written, namely that *"organisations work the way they work because of how we work"*. He proceeded to argue that if you want to see any profound change in a company then it necessarily embraces a shift in the way we work at the personal and interpersonal level.

Many of us are extremely well trained and conditioned in the ways of the ordinary and frequently expert in arguing for our own limitations as well as the limitations of our respective companies. *"That's not possible here"* and *"I can't do that here!"* come to mind as examples. And the pattern goes deeper, for we are often concerned to prove ourselves right in the matter of our opinion rather than interrupt the established pattern for the possibility of a different level of result. This conditioning tends to be cultural and operates at many levels. What it means in practice is that we often unwittingly collude in mediocrity, we go along, we comply, with acceptable levels of performance given an appreciation of the limitations in the 'way we work'. It's all very reasonable and well-reasoned: *"What else can you expect given the way that we are!"* or *"This is just about as good as it's going to get in this company!"* We create a compelling case for not being extraordinary!

The point is that it is only when we transform our own 'workabilities' at the personal and interpersonal level that we breach the boundaries of the underlying pattern and create an envelope for new levels of performance. The workability we are practiced in is simultaneously habitual and cultural and, fundamentally disabling to a different level of result and quality of life. If all we do is add formal or explicit enablers on to what are already powerfully tacit or intangible disablers, then all we will do is neutralise the enablers. We must get at the underlying pattern or conditioning that is the more limiting to result. To do this one has to first make it visible so that we may grow in our awareness and proceed to unlearn much that we have learned, we must engage in some discontinuous learning This is key in order to overcome what Argyris has termed our *'skilled incompetence'*. When we are free with much of this deeply embedded learning that serves to limit, we can then discover and practice a new workability within and between ourselves and enable the extraordinary within our companies. We might then start to appreciate the interconnections between the personal, interpersonal, team, the company and the intercompany.



Will things really change *beyond* the personal and interpersonal levels in the absence of change *within* these levels?

All this will, of course, come as no surprise to many of us. For there are many strategies for compensating for our limiting workabilities, many of which involve dehumanising the workplace. We attempt to design highly structured and sometimes sterile environments where, through practices of 'policy proliferation' and 'manual mania', we tend to make everything so highly prescriptive that there's hardly any room left for human action. It is as though all we seek is mechanical compliance. There's little room left for the contribution of human workability – for better or worse! The extraordinary is not born out of such bureaucratic ways. It is as though we have lost the distinction between human action and reaction. What difference if we could but design and practice an extraordinary pattern to the way we work, one that is not designed around limitation but more to the release of potential to wholly new levels of possibility? Might we then start to create something in the background culture of our enterprises that grants both competitive advantage and that is not easily transferable?



To speak of that deeply embedded 'learning that limits' and of our 'skilled incompetence' sounds, perhaps, like a threat to some fragile egos. Yet the real learners of this world and the really resourceful people have tremendous humility. And it is that humility that helps them to be learners.

We choose to put on the agenda the possibility of extraordinary companies made up, in part at least, of extraordinary people. People who have unlearned deeply embedded 'ordinary' or limiting ways and shifted their culture. I suppose, for many of us: *"That's simply not possible here!"* Thus it is that we participate in something less than extraordinary and help to co-create the very thing of which we are so often critical.

For info or contact:
Ray Shaw
4workingmagic Limited
+44 (0)1737 242895
Mobile: 07740 091823
Ray@4workingmagic.com