



IS EFFICIENCY ERODING OUR MORAL OBLIGATION?

With a growing dependence on technology and a desire to become more effective and efficient, we are gaining time and profits but losing track of the moral obligation we have to our greatest assets - our people.

We live in a time where we favour metrics over conversations, prioritise processes over the people who implement them and try to sanitise something as emotionally messy as change in a bid to get back to business as usual as quickly as possible.

Are we caught in the efficiency trap? We solve one problem, but create another – and one with far greater ramifications that can't always be seen right away.

THE RUSH TOWARDS EFFICIENCY

There is no question that in the age of innovation we have to become more efficient to maintain our competitive edge. Our processes and procedures need to be outlined clearly for consistent management and knowledge transfer throughout our organisations. We look for ways to validate, quantify and measure our actions and value to stay ahead of the game. This is, and always will be smart business practice.

Actions taken to be more efficient can show measurable results – greater profits, greater productivity, greater sales, greater customer satisfaction, and the list goes on. But, like anything in life, there is a tipping point.

Efficiency can be addictive. With results clearly shown in the numbers, the numbers can begin to take focus. Actions are then motivated by metrics not by what is best for the people in the organisation – and this is where our moral obligation can start to erode. Instead of being people focused and process driven, we become numbers focused and process driven.

THE RISKS AND COSTS OF PRIORITISING PROCESSES OVER PEOPLE

When actions are determined by metrics, over time everyone loses out.

Feeling like a number, your customers leave or reduce their spend.

Feeling undervalued, your staff become disengaged and eventually move on.

And that line up of top talent once interested in working for you, head to your competitors.

When businesses develop a transactional culture instead of a relational one, staff lose their passion and purpose, customers lose their service experience, and companies suffer damage to their loyalty and reputation.

WHY HR NEEDS A MORE HUMAN AND LESS PROCESS APPROACH THROUGH CHANGE

This numbers focused, process driven approach is becoming even more evident through change. Attempting to 'sanitise' the process of redundancy and transition to try and remove all emotion out of the process and hasten staff exits, the results are only causing more conflict, resistance and disloyalty. Why?

Employees, your greatest assets, are made to feel as though they don't matter

Transition and redundancy can be very distressing for employees, particularly when they haven't seen change coming and have been with your organisation for a long time. By not breaking redundancy news with compassion, empathy and understanding, you can make their transition more difficult, their notice period more awkward and your work environment more strained.

Survivors of change will remember what happened

While survivors may feel relief for now that they still have their job, they will remember what happened to their colleagues and how disposable they were made to feel. The way your staff view your company and their leaders and managers can change, sometimes irreversibly. Don't think it won't take them long to realise that in similar circumstances they too could be treated the same.

Change can't be sanitised

The truth is people aren't numbers. They don't appear cleanly on a spreadsheet. They are living, breathing and emotionally messy beings. While you can streamline many HR policies and procedures, you can't streamline humans or their behaviour, and you certainly can't ignore or underestimate the importance of acknowledgement and compassionate and meaningful conversations.



This issue of companies measuring the performance of workers in real time and relying less and less on human intuition to make important HR decisions was raised by Associate Professor Uri Gal, from the University of Sydney Business School in the recent Sydney Morning Herald article *Is big data leading workplace management down the wrong path?*

Associate Professor Gal had this to say, "Human beings are extraneous to the decision-making process. Algorithms are not accurate because inherently what they try to do is to build a simplified model of complex human behaviour. It is just not accurate enough to replace human decision-making."

THE NEED FOR ADAPTIVE CAREER TRANSITION AND COACHING IN THE WORKPLACE

While there may be similarities between them, each member of your team is an individual and will deal with change and transition differently to others. For this very reason, there can't be a one-size-fits-all approach. You need to be adaptive as an employer and your career transition partner needs to be adaptive to the vastly different needs of impacted individuals.

Whether you are coaching an employee to take a different career path within your organisation or transitioning them out, every step of your process needs to be adaptive to make allowances for the different expectations and experiences of your employees.

More human. Fewer resources. That is what we need through change.