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Challenges for Tomorrow's Management

The Resilient Leader a resource of optimism in the post-Covid era

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Abstract

At the end of an organizational crisis such as the one triggered by Covid-19 and several weeks of global lockdown, the role of managers and leaders with their teams will be even more crucial than in ordinary times. In the post-Covid era, employees will demand both proof of meaning, reassurance and a proactive clear-sighted attitude from their managers. This will require them to adopt a series of concrete attitudes on a daily basis that will truly produce collective resilience.

Keywords: Post-crisis management, Optimism, Resilience, Positive leadership

The Resilient Leader: A resource of optimism in the post-Covid era

At a time of major organizational upheavals triggered on a global scale by the Covid-19 pandemic, it is incumbent on those who are steering to keep the ship and the players on course in the hope of a better tomorrow. Whether one is a political player, a sports coach or a business leader, the ability to generate responsible optimism remains at the heart of any process of collective resilience in any post-disaster era.

In the organizational recovery phase, the leader's optimism represents an unparalleled asset for any human organization, whether in terms of enthusiasm, motivation or energy; an asset to be protected, of course, but also to be nurtured. What we are looking for, in a post-crisis period, are not only people who are optimistic by temperament; but above all professionals capable of establishing with others (colleagues, collaborators, clients, subcontractors, suppliers, etc.) a mode of relationship oriented towards a dynamic of resilience and reconstruction. Here, interpersonal skills are combined with know-how, through the application of behavioral principles that generate inspiration, energy and enthusiasm.

The current political, economic and social situation - after several weeks of a lockdown unprecedented in recent history - generates a lot of anxiety for a large number of actors. Slowdown at all levels, loss of old points of reference and short-term visibility of the future, fear of the obsolescence of "old" skills and professional disqualification, fear of the unpredictable in all its forms, these are the ingredients of doubt and loss of confidence in oneself and in society, the breeding ground for post-Covid collective pessimism.

Faced with this, inserted in a world that demands ever greater performance from them, what do we expect from those who lead us? Let's propose three expectations that are quite simple in fact, but which will always be common to nourish the dynamics of organizational resilience, whether of individuals or teams.

1) In a period of post-crisis uncertainty, the first expectation of social actors probably concerns the regular provision by their leaders of *proof of meaning*, i.e. a subtle emulsion combining a reminder of the direction of the change (objective, goal, line of sight), the usefulness of what is expected from them (contribution) and the place occupied by them, as individuals, in this process (recognition).

2) The second expectation is also that of *signs of reassurance*, whether this relates to the competence of the leader or to the confidence placed in his own action and that of his/her troops, and in their ability to face the breaks and challenges of the moment in a determined and creative way.

3) The third expectation, finally, is that of a climate that is truly adapted to periods of change and reform, a climate that could be described as *positive and proactive lucidity*. Faced with the tensions arising from the challenges of confinement and a situation now marked by the scarcity of means and resources (financial, material, human, etc.), the atmosphere maintained by the leader must indeed allow his team to face difficulties without risking doubt or a feeling of powerlessness, or even despair.

What does one recognize in a resilient leader? First of all, the fact that he is... a leader like any other, that is to say, a leader who tries against all odds to achieve objectives - political, economic, sporting, entrepreneurial - through the mobilization of others. The resilient leader, like any leader, must therefore ensure the success of a human community that has been shaken by the crisis, i.e. help its members to achieve the objectives set (even if adapted), make them more autonomous in the face of the consequences of the ordeal and, in the long run, enable them to evolve in a world with new rules of the game.

It is therefore not on the finality of his action that the resilient leader will make the difference, but on his principles and methods of action. Generally speaking, such a leader can be recognized through four fundamental attitudes:

1) The resilient leader concentrates the essence of his action on strengths, i.e. on the qualities of structures and people, as well as their potential for evolution and change.

For a resilient leader, the people around have two types of resources for action in the face of change: strengths to be cultivated and strengthened, and possibly points of effort on which there is room for improvement and progress. Concerning the weak points (major defects, structural deficiencies, etc.), they are an objective reality but cannot be used sustainably to produce performance, whether industrial, sporting, societal or other. We can therefore only ignore them, "deal with" or even neutralize them by compensating for them, for example through an extreme development of certain other strong points.

2) The resilient leader knows how to favor effective solutions, even partial and temporary ones.

Some, especially at the top, like to feed off meticulous analysis of the causes of failure and the reasons for defeat. In doing so, they almost always produce resentment and regret around them in the long run, inevitably leading to justification and the search for culprits. Pessimistic leaders, under the guise of realism, also like to test the perfectionism in them by searching - often in vain - for ideal solutions that are perfect in every respect and that would solve all the problems at once. They even end up admitting, more or less openly, the impossibility of any change or reform.

The resilient leader, on the other hand, sees things differently. Knowing "why" it has come to this point, especially in the case of major difficulties, is certainly interesting; but the search for causes - especially in complex situations - is often a waste of time. Faced with the "why" of the analysts, the resilient manager will always initially focus on the "how to", on the immediate search for alternative paths or new opportunities arising from the difficulty encountered. Great leaders don't need to know the origin or who is responsible for the obstacle in front of them and their troops in order to start exploring ways around it.

3) The resilient leader tracks down "small victories" and capitalizes on them.

Everyone likes to be congratulated after winning. But because every day is a new day, just because you are congratulated today does not mean that you will be more motivated tomorrow, or that you will win for sure. On the contrary, it is the fact of being encouraged while you are making an effort, of making your contribution to the collective challenge, that helps to maintain our self-confidence, our desire to continue the effort and our optimism about future success.

The resilient leader certainly keeps his eye on the line of sight of the reconstruction to be completed. But he never loses an opportunity to celebrate with his troops a milestone victory, a game won, an obstacle brilliantly overcome, an effort that has paid off, a technical breakthrough or a new contract. In short, the resilient leader likes to catch those he leads in "flagrante delicto" of success, however modest this success may be. It is on these occasions that the leader can train people in the practice of the "optimistic style", by analyzing with them how this success is due to their own action, how it illustrates lasting skills possessed by the community and how it is destined to be reproduced as soon as possible...

4) The resilient leader encourages perseverance and risk-taking.

"Success," said Winston Churchill, "is to go from failure to failure without losing your enthusiasm". While pessimistic leaders systematically anticipate and fear failure, whether for themselves or their teams, optimists - and therefore the most resilient - know that failure - no matter how unpleasant - is part of life and - as such - is only one ingredient of success like any other. Perhaps a little more bitter, and still... Being prepared for setbacks and failure, for a resilient leader is both knowing what you will do - and what the team will do - if things go wrong; and it is giving yourself the right to try again, to try your luck again.

And what better fuel for a leader's resilience than optimism? What better than this extraordinary ability to put reality under positive tension? For if optimism is such a powerful factor of success, especially in post-crisis periods, it is essentially because it creates the individual and collective conditions for rebound and perseverance in the face of the hazards inherent in every "day after". An optimistic leader is therefore, in all cases, a leader who grants (and grants himself) the right to make mistakes, as long as these mistakes can be analyzed and represent a source of collective learning. An optimistic leader, at the time of reconstruction, is also one who gives those around the permission to innovate, to move the lines.

An optimistic leader is finally the one who can be said: "In the face of the turbulence born of trials and difficulties, he/she made us want to try, allowed us not to succeed right away, and pushed us to start again until we finally win the part of the transformation! ».

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