

# The Leadership**Impact** Newsletter

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## CONNECTEDNESS

From *Changing the Role of Top Management: Beyond Strategy to Purpose* by Christopher Bartlett & Sumantra Ghoshal

“Strategies can engender strong, enduring emotional attachments only when they are embedded in a broader organizational purpose. This means creating an organization with which members can identify, in which they share a sense of pride, and to which they are willing to commit.

Defining a company’s objectives so that they have personal meaning for employees is hard. Most such statements are too vague to be useful ... and often they are too out of touch with reality to be credible.

There are few more powerful or public signals of what a company stands for than the ways it defines and measures performance. ... A target ROI will rarely galvanize an organization into action. If people are to put out the extraordinary effort required to realize company targets, they must be able to identify with them.

In the companies we studied that were best at achieving this new kind of relationship, top level managers ... recognized employees’ contributions, ... committed to maximizing opportunities for personal growth ... and they ensured that everyone [understood] how he or she might contribute personally to achieving [the company’s overall purpose].”

I was standing at an 11<sup>th</sup> floor window staring out at the Charles River in Boston the other night. I had a great view of the river between Science Park and the Longfellow Bridge. Of all the major East Coast cities, I know Boston least well. Therefore, despite the great view, I didn’t feel connected to it, the way I would have in NY, Philly, or DC, for example.

Being connected means you can see how the pieces fit together and how you fit into the overall pattern. In employment, another term for connectedness is engagement. It is a key aspect of both workplace satisfaction and performance. As I reflected on this, I thought of one of my favorite quotes about connectedness from an article by Bartlett and Ghosal entitled “Changing the Role of Top Management: Beyond Strategy to Purpose.” in the Harvard Business Review about 15 years ago:

***“In short, the objective is to change the relationship from one in which employees feel like they work for a company to one in which they recognize that they belong to an organization. It is the difference between hiring out as a mercenary and becoming a marine.” – Christopher Bartlett & Sumantra Ghoshal***

I have included some more excerpts in the sidebar to the left.

My great view came at a cost. I wasn’t in a hotel or office building, but in one of the patient care towers at Massachusetts General Hospital where I was being evaluated for a possible heart transplant. Nevertheless, being an old hospital administrator, I couldn’t avoid observing the staff at work from a professional as well as a personal point of view. Wow, was I impressed!

The staff who cared for me were not mercenaries. They were not engaged in a transaction trading hours for dollars. They identified themselves as part of a unit and part of an organization. I watched staff work together. I was especially impressed by evidence of direct communication among my many caregivers, something that is less prevalent in hospitals than you might imagine. Staff commented to me that the reputation of Mass General and the spirit and quality of other staff were largely responsible for them choosing to work on the unit. Good things lead to more good things.

I recalled a unit that had the highest patient satisfaction scores among the hospitals that were part of the system I formerly led. The nurse manager there said “We take care of each other, so we can care for our patients.”

Likewise, the doctors, nurses, and other staff I have met at Mass General exemplified the value of connectedness that supports pride and spirit, and that in combination with talent and dedication, raises it to a high level.

***“We don't accomplish anything in this world alone ... and whatever happens is the result of the whole tapestry of one's life and all the weavings of individual threads from one to another that creates something”. – Sandra Day O'Connor***

See Also Sidebar and Next Page.

## WEB OF RELATIONSHIPS

“IBM means ‘I’ve been moved.’”  
– Internal joke at IBM in former times.

When I consulted with Bell Communications Research, a spin-off of Bell Labs at the time of the AT&T breakup, I was struck by the web of relationships I encountered. People knew each other, or knew of each other, through prior assignments, lateral transfers, work in the regions, corporate positions, etc. Where one might have expected to find silos and boundaries, there were communities and bridges instead. As at IBM quoted above, this came about as a result of frequent moves, including lateral ones, that crossed geographic, functional, and organizational boundaries. Thus connections were made in huge corporations that penetrated more deeply than in other organizations that are restricted by artificial boundaries that only seem important.

I encountered the same thing when I did a joint presentation with a senior manager of the Dana Corporation. We met at his office for him to give me a tour and briefing. At that time (in the early 80’s), Dana was a \$3 billion power transformation and transmission business. However, it had maintained more values of connectedness than many small companies ever achieve. My colleague shared with me the Dana Human Resources policy manual. It consisted of both sides of a single sheet of 8½ x 11 paper. I recall the bereavement policy as stating something like: an employee will take paid time for bereavement consistent with the employee’s needs and what is fair to the company and co-workers.

Such an approach to policy is only possible where connections are felt on both an organizational and a personal level. It is both efficient and effective, but many companies prefer to pursue a much more cumbersome regulatory approach, because they lack the personal relationships that foster commitment.

Consider these items that were taken from the Gallup Q12 assessment of employee satisfaction and workplace engagement:

- At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.
- In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.
- My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person.
- The mission or purpose of my organization makes me feel my job is important.

- I have a best friend at work.
- This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.

These are all about connectedness.

See how these overlap with the headings from the Bartlett & Ghoshal article quoted on page 1:

- Capture employees’ attention and interest
- Get the organization involved
- Create momentum
- Build on core values
- Sow the message
- Measure progress
- Recognize individual accomplishments
- Committee to developing employees
- Foster individual initiative

Some writers have suggested looking at the CEO and top management as “Conductors” as in conductors of an orchestra, blending multiple, diverse talents to achieve a performance not possible by any individuals or subgroup. That is an excellent metaphor, but today I want to suggest another one – that of CEO and other management as “Connectors.”

- Connect employees’ values & the aspirations reflecting their better natures to the organizational mission.
- Connect leader and employee behaviors to organizational values.
- Connect employees to each other as individuals and as members of teams.
- Connect the dots, i.e. communicate the facts so that strategy and actions make sense and employees can contribute their efforts.
- Connect skills to the tasks to be done and goals to be achieved; i.e. connect inputs to outcomes.
- Connect recognition and rewards to performance that advances organizational mission.
- Connect development to organizational goals and employee aspirations.

60 years ago, Abraham Maslow produced his famous hierarchy of needs. You will recall that social needs fell only behind physiological and security needs. Whether you accept the hierarchy as literally true in terms of sequence, experience has demonstrated that belonging, confidence, achievement, and the respect of self and others are fundamental human needs and key to effective performance. Great leaders make the connections.

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