

Transformative Leadership: In Search of TEST Values

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ABSTRACT

The article is based on the book “EmpowerUs: From Crisis to Strategic Harmony” [Kaufman I, Srića V. (2020)].¹ It discusses the Strategic Harmony as a new mindset or a mental framework for dealing with the main global problems and issues. In other words, it is a “fix society” model based on transformative leadership. It starts with an attempt to rediscover the core values that should drive leader’s behavior and lead to better outcomes. We call them the TEST values (Trust, Empathy, Sustainability and Transparency). They should be combined with Transformative Love as a tool to overcome any discord, organizational conflict or other source of broken institutions, and relationships involving humans. Also, the TEST values should be applied together with Transformative Power, the passion and commitment to one’s values that potentiates and increases the potential for transformation that leads to Strategic Harmony. Global transformation starts as self-reflection aimed to find innovative ways to unify around completing goals and achieving Strategic Harmony. A new generation of leaders driven by TEST values and transformative love and power could serve as catalyzers of needed global changes.

SAŽETAK

Članak se temelji na knjizi “EmpowerUs: From Crisis to Strategic Harmony”. U njemu se raspravlja o strateškoj harmoniji kao novom načinu razmišljanja ili mentalnom okviru za suočavanje s glavnim globalnim problemima i pitanjima. Drugim riječima, to je model “popravka društva” koji se temelji na transformativnom vodstvu. Počinje s pokušajem ponovnog otkrivanja temeljnih vrijednosti koje bi trebale potaknuti ponašanje vođe i dovesti do boljih rezultata. Nazivamo ih TEST vrijednostima (povjerenje, empatija, održivost i transparentnost). Treba ih kombinirati s transformativnom ljubavlju kao alatom za prevladavanje bilo kakvog neslaganja, organizacijskog sukoba ili drugog izvora poremećenih institucija i odnosa koji uključuju ljude. Također, TEST vrijednosti treba primijeniti zajedno s transformativnom moći, strašću i predanošću vlastitim vrijednostima što potencira i povećava potencijal za transformaciju koja vodi do Strateške harmonije. Globalna transformacija počinje kao samorefleksija s ciljem pronalaženja inovativnih načina za ujedinjenje oko ispunjavanja ciljeva i postizanja strateškog sklada. Nova generacija lidera vođena TEST vrijednostima i transformativnom ljubavlju i moći mogla bi postati katalizator potrebnih globalnih promjena.

Keywords: Empathy, Strategic Harmony, Sustainability, TEST, Transformational leadership, Transformative love, Transformative power, Transparency, Trust, Value.

Science, Art and Religion (2022): 10.5005/jp-journals-11005-0024

INTRODUCTION

The article is based on the book “EmPower Us!: From Crisis to Strategic Harmony” that I published with Ira Kaufman as a coauthor (<https://empowerus.world/>). In his introduction to our text, Philip Kotler, “the father of modern marketing,” wrote: “There are many how to “fix society” books. This is one of the best I have read.”

In another “fix society” book,² a Lebanese American scholar, Nassim Nicholas Taleb, noted that “humanity has never faced such deep social and economic problems, and at the same time, was equipped with such a low level of understanding of the scope and reach of these problems.” It is not even necessary to point out that we are surrounded with striking examples of these interrelated and conflicting realities: shareholder against stakeholder capitalism; liberal democracy versus autocratic societies; coronavirus disease 2019 and depression pandemics; ecological dead-end street.

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How to cite this article: Srića V. Transformative Leadership: In Search of TEST Values. *Sci Arts Relig* 2022;1(2–4):149–155.

Source of support: Nil

Conflict of interest: Prof. Velimir Srića is associated as the Editorial Board Member of this journal and this manuscript was subjected to this journal’s standard review procedures, with this peer review handled independently of this Editorial Board Member and his research group.

Why, despite our access to powerful technological innovations, are we unable to address most of these burning issues? Why are we still pursuing questionable goals, trusting

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the same unsustainable pathways, and accepting the old excuses that block purposeful action?

The problem lies in our deteriorating values and unwillingness to empower them. In the meantime, we allow the health and direction of our planet to deteriorate, even though we have the potential to reverse this process.

Strategic Harmony: A New Framework

Today, most executives (businesses, nonprofits, and government) feel uncomfortable and struggle with the exponentially changing and uncertain environment. Some researchers used to call it VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity) because it is nicely described through VUCA. In our book on Strategic Harmony, Kaufman and I suggest addressing the VUCA reality with an appropriate PACE (purpose, agility, collaboration, and elasticity). It means that each problem faced by the decision-makers can be resolved with appropriate practical steps. More specifically, volatility should be balanced by purpose, uncertainty calls for agility, complexity can be overcome by collaboration, and ambiguity should be addressed with elasticity, as presented in the following Table 1.

Let us take a closer look at the transition from the VUCA realities to a PACE reset. We already mentioned that there is an opportunity in every crisis. In this case, it means that we should see the realities as assets. Here is a short description of the four steps of the PACE reset.

- Purpose: Because constant change fuels volatility, it is imperative that leaders focus their team on the purpose of a clear vision of the future. The purpose (reflected in the values and mission of an organization) gains power as it is adopted and integrated across all organizational units. Purpose rebalances volatility.
- Agility: Today's leaders facing uncertainty and volatility must be agile to deal with changes rapidly, flexibly, and ethically. Even though strategic plans and forecasts can be useful, they should be abandoned when they impede innovation. All organizations must maneuver and act quickly to leverage opportunities or to respond to threats without rigid adherence to bureaucratic procedures. Agility integrates uncertainty.
- Collaboration: In the face of complexity, the organization must refine and expand on "collaborative teams" who are able to address the new forces and challenges. Collaboration within an organization (between its departments and functions) and externally between the organization and its partners (clients, customers, suppliers, academic institutions, and even competitors) is the key driver of innovation. Using the vast opportunities for connectivity, organizations that are open to collaboration will be able to leverage innovation to drive exponential growth. Collaboration diffuses complexity.
- Elasticity: Organizations and businesses facing ambiguity must expand beyond their reactions to the new realities. The leaders must be resilient to develop a better understanding of the needs and expectations of all

Table 1: Transition from the VUCA realities to a PACE reset

| <i>VUCA realities</i> | <i>PACE reset</i> |
|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Volatility | Purpose |
| Uncertainty | Agility |
| Complexity | Collaboration |
| Ambiguity | Elasticity |

stakeholders. This includes clients, customers, employees, partners, and community, to ensure that the four Ps of sustainability (people, planet, profit, and prosperity) are met. Elasticity allows for ambiguity without reactivity.

In our opinion, the journey must begin inside by rediscovering the core values that should drive our behavior and lead to better outcomes. If afraid or unsure whether we were hit by the virus, we had to be tested. This book proposes a value TEST for the whole of humanity. It means building trust, propelling empathy, igniting sustainability, and living transparency. Also, this book advocates two basic forces that define what we are, why, and how we act, and they are power and love. By TESTING power and love, we can get closer to our final goal, Strategic Harmony.

Successful transformation requires a realignment of values, purpose, and mindset. It is a spiritual commitment to change the way we think and manage, and it takes courage. It is a high-risk operation because traditional executives do not have experience in changing values or letting go of control. The needed spiritual change is threatening to the soul, ego, and relationships; equality reigns, and myths are broken that support their past actions.

Let us examine how strategic interfaces with harmony and why we use that expression.³ We call it "strategic" because it is driven by a specific intention to create a values-driven plan that is inclusive, trusting, empathetic, sustainable, and transparent. We call it "harmony" because it is a congruent combination of diverse elements and mindsets, resulting in unified and collaborative outcomes, shattering our status quo (Srića, 2014).

The Solution: Address the Gaps with Strategic Harmony

What is Strategic Harmony? Poetically speaking, it's a balance between the five Hs. We need to reestablish full harmony among what we think with our heads, what we do with our hands, what we feel with our hearts, and what we hope for (our purpose). Pragmatically speaking, it is a mindset helping us to realign our ethical compass and redesign the broken world by bridging the gap between cultures, nations, companies, generations, leaders, and the people they represent. Basically, we need a better set of values, models, and practices to build a more sustainable and harmonious future.

Strategic Harmony looks through new lenses at the challenging conditions and mobilizes radical yet collaborative solutions to assess and evaluate our impact on the future.

We must self-reflect on how we live our core values and how our leaders direct our institutions. Change begins with



transforming the mindset and continues through good leadership practices.

As far as the core values are concerned, we are and do what we believe. Our core values-driven mindset leads to action and creates outcomes. If we reject the outcomes, we must question the values, beliefs, and mindset. As Albert Einstein⁴ noted, “we cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.” It is obvious that the values we preach are not the values we live by. John Steinbeck⁵ clearly defined the gap, “...the things we admire in men, kindness and generosity, openness, honesty, understanding, and feeling, are the concomitants of failure in our system. And those traits we detest, sharpness, greed, acquisitiveness, meanness, egotism, and self-interest, are the traits of success. And while men admire the quality of the first, they love the produce of the second.”

As far as leadership practices are concerned, most executives, politicians, businesspeople, administrators, and managers don't interact with or listen to the stories of their constituencies. They do not have the courage and flexibility to act upon what they see, hear, and feel. This one-way and top-down communication is creating a gap in trust between elected leaders, citizens, executives, and their stakeholders. The Edelman Trust Barometer 2018,⁶ supports these conclusions, as it reveals reduced trust across the institutions of government, business, media, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). The credibility of leaders dropped to an all-time low of 37%, plummeting in every country studied. Trust in media is at an all-time low in 17 countries, while the government is the least trusted institution in half of the 28 countries surveyed. There is a steep decline in the United States, with a 37-point aggregate drop in trust across all institutions. At the opposite end of the spectrum, China experienced a 27-point gain. The gap is the discrepancy between public trust and trust in Chinese brands abroad. These statistics reveal a growing polarization between citizens and the market economy.

We are surrounded by conflicting realities and linked dualisms, for example, polarized citizens protecting their turf versus electors striving for harmonious/sustainable solutions, egotistical leaders versus empathic “servant leaders,” concentrated wealth versus efforts to reduce poverty, escalating unemployment versus expanding high-tech jobs, radicalized youth versus inspired millennials, and exploding technologies healing the planet versus destroying the world order. By connecting and linking these opposite forces, we accept their divisive nature as the norm that continues to influence our thoughts and our actions. These less-than-value-neutral dualities and polarities accentuate the gap in our minds, hearts, actions, and intents, widening the gap in our society between leaders' promises and people's actions.

In each case, the different situations are outcomes of conflicting values and mindsets that drive behavior.

- If we want new outcomes, we need to transform our mindset.
- If we want organizational transformation, we must acknowledge and challenge the gaps between our words and actions.
- If we want to build systemic change, we need to challenge the linked polarities in society that have become the norm and the myths they have created that underpin our thinking.

We believe that the journey toward transformation must begin internally with rediscovering power and love as drivers of transformation and the TEST values—trust, empathy, sustainability, and transparency. Also, we strongly believe that the basic forces that define relationships are to be power and love. These forces, combined with our values, are drivers of action and change, serving as the foundations for Strategic Harmony.

As for power, we live in the age of global shifts that are dramatic, with the old being challenged by the new. According to Heimans and Timms, the old power works like a currency. It is held by few, and when gained, it is jealously guarded. The powerful have a lot to store and spend. So, they keep it closed, inaccessible, and leader-driven. It enslaves and captures and makes the powerless majority feel miserable and unhappy. On the contrary, new power operates like a current. It is available to many; it's open, participatory, and peer-driven. It empowers and connects. It is not supposed to be kept and abused but channeled and distributed.

Heimans and Timms⁷ focus on how to make power work for building movements and spreading ideas. The old power favors exclusivity, competition, and authority, while the new power rests on open-source collaboration, sharing, and crowd wisdom. The old power is protected by discretion and confidentiality, while the new power requires radical transparency. The values associated with the old power are managerialism, institutionalism, loyalty, and long-term affiliation, while the new power relies on self-organization, networked governance, conditional affiliation, and participation.

Power affects each stage of the strategic transformation process. We build on their work, as we see transformative power as a tool based on self-reflection, values, and ethical compass used to transform culture, mindset, and decision-making. This integration is essential in shifting from old power to transformative power.

Old power is derived or gained from resources, status, and position in the organization. One strives to gain “capital” of money and rank. It generates a competitive social order and a win-lose work environment. Transformative power is based on values of trust, empathy, respect, and openness to change, and it is earned from relationships with all stakeholders through a loving, open, and two-way channel. Capital is earned in facilitating understanding, creativity, and solutions among coworkers instead of power over somebody. According to Abraham Maslow,⁸ “the more influence and

power you give to someone else in their team situation, the more you have for yourself.” Transformative power is based on “equal” sharing of power and being responsive to other stakeholders’ needs. This model challenges the competitive “win-lose model” in favor of a collaborative approach—if one partner wins and the other loses, both lose—because the loser always makes the winner pay.

Old power is based on scarcity, derived from closed relationships, resources, status, rank, and position in an organization. It is cold and calculating, forcing a position and point of view. It is negotiated, promoted, defended, anchored, and tied to its scarce source and self-interest. It reflects strength, influence, money, and might. Like capital, it is owned, coveted, and protected. Old power is control over someone or something.

The world is mostly broken because of such use of power. To fix it, traditional leaders must be willing to give up that exclusive control to encourage inclusive participation and nurture transformative power. In contrast with the old model, the new one is driven by abundance, earned from open relationships, accomplishments, and ethical actions; it’s based on respecting people, networks, and entrepreneurship; and it is driven by the consistency of one’s values.

Why are we still enslaved by the forces of old power? In a Zen story,⁹ a horse suddenly came galloping down the road. It appears that the rider had somewhere important to go. The crowd standing alongside shouted, “Where are you going?” The rider replied, “I don’t know! Ask the horse!”

Of course, the horse symbolizes the power of habits. We live at the mercy of our old habit energies, which are based on prevailing values and culture. Like the horse, an old power is pulling us along, making us run and hurry on our road to a local disaster or a global catastrophe. Our book aims at teaching us how to take back the reigns and use transformative power to fix the shattered institutions and the broken world.

But it’s not just habits; maybe it’s also human nature. According to Maslow,⁸ the person who seeks power is the one who is just exactly likely to be the one who shouldn’t have it because he neurotically and compulsively needs power. Such people are apt to use power very badly.

What is transformative power? If you “Google it,” there are many descriptors of the venue that has it (e.g., storytelling, declaration of independence, education, and environment), but no explanation of what it is, how to access it, how to accelerate, or increase the power. We define it as the passion and commitment to one’s values that potentiates, and increases the power of the transformation that leads to Strategic Harmony. As an example, look at the former United States prosecutor and Central Intelligence Agency agent,¹⁰ who won a recent Democratic primary in Florida, United States, with 65% of votes over opponents. He based his success on values, explaining that voters are ready for honest leadership and a renewal of an American service ethic that really has the power to be transformative. He also

added that transformative power is something that can get us through a very difficult time. It has a power that has the potential to be unifying.

Transformative power comes from within because of self-reflection. The only problem is that most people are slow learners. Namely, at some point in time, we want to change the broken world but sooner or later give up. Our book points out that we can do it by changing ourselves. It’s never too late to start, especially if we are driven by transformative love.

Transformative Love

The word “love” has many different meanings depending on the culture, language, and context. Love has been limited to focusing on personal relationships, but its roots found in the texts of world religions convey a more expansive vision. For example, the Bible says, “We wish for others that we wish for ourselves,” and, “Do unto others as you do unto yourself.” Quran says, “Love for your brother what you love for yourself.”

In his already-quoted book on Management,¹¹ published back in 1965, Abraham Maslow defines love as the happiness of the other that makes you happy. The happiness of the other, including the broken world and its institutions, is the clearest reflection of transformative love.

Love is based on uniting with those that we respect, trust, are attracted to, and are committed to. We love whatever we are dedicated to, a mate, our creator, leader, friend, country, religion, favorite brand, sports team, film, book, idea, etc.

Love is based upon empathy, the ability to look at the world from other people’s shoes. It means caring and thinking of the other person as a priority. It’s about removing obstacles in front of another person. It’s about achieving trust, equity, justice, and equal opportunity in a healthy, secure, and sustainable environment.

Love can easily be abused as we rush into relationships for sex, sell unhealthy goods to make a profit, or make false promises to constituents to get their votes. These contradictions are the stuff of today’s market-driven economy and digital relationships throughout societies. We must not forget the power of feelings because people may support the best charity and the worse terrorist organizations out of love, passion, and commitment.

Like power, there are also the old and the transformative love. The old is selfish and controlling; the transformative is supportive and enriching. The old is like a chain; the transformative gives you wings. According to Nicholas Sparks, the best love is the kind that awakens the soul that makes us reach for more, plants fire in our hearts, and brings peace to our minds.

Transformative love is realized through values of compassion, empathy, and understanding—with clients, employees, and other leaders. Even the human body is designed to thrive on love.¹² It’s a feeling that makes people more positive, resilient, optimistic, persistent, healthier, and happier. Conversely, the body’s biochemistry is negatively affected when it’s not received.



Transformative love is a solution and salvation to any discord, organizational conflict, or other sources of broken institutions and relationships involving humans. It starts as self-reflection, aimed to find innovative ways to unify around, complete goals, and achieve Strategic Harmony. As such, it is a vehicle for achieving better collaboration. Transformative love is placing others above us, putting our purpose above proving to be right, or above our desire to achieve something.

Transformative love has many faces and can be seen as the love of purpose and values, love of the mirror or feedback, love of the challenge, love of our constituency and other people's needs, love of right action, and love for change. Transformative love is based on passion, commitment, heartfelt energy, and openness. As a creative expression of harmony, it provides a model in emotional and romantic relationships to use that force for tolerance, compassion, and understanding in driving transformation. It is based on the inner trust and confidence of just being you with no masks. This translates to your message being genuine, authentic, and deserving of trust.

Transformative love is based on abundance. It is realized from mutual interests and shared purpose with consumers, citizens, clients, employees, and team members. It creates a collaborative environment, stimulates innovation, and generates outcomes beneficial not only for an organization but for all its stakeholders. Transformative love opens transformative solutions and drives advocacy.

A critical key to Strategic Harmony is the transformative power of love. We need to create a mindset of love for all stakeholders. Customers must love our products and services, employees must love the culture and work environment, suppliers/wholesalers/partners must love and feel engaged with the distribution of the product, the community must love and support the business's local impact, and investors must love and thrive on the sustainable outcomes of the business.

Transformative love can change the global culture through a passionate commitment to one's values and purpose. It means to love the opportunities generated by high-velocity exponential change. It means to love the equality of opportunity for all people. It means loving honest, open, and accountable communication as the basis for trust in relationships. In the end, it means to love, and tolerance for all people experienced through compassion and relationships.

Transformation starts when an organization manages to pass the TEST. These values must be aligned with an ethical standard, a compass that goes beyond local and cultural morals. The TEST integrates values and ethics to benchmark the strength and potential of an organization to bring forth change in the marketplace or society. The values of each team member should be congruent and harmonized to build and sustain the organization's culture.

The first value that seems to be disappearing is trust. At the last World Economic Forum, 86% of global executives suggested the world is facing a major leadership crisis—

with executives having <50% confidence and trust in the leadership of the business, media, government, education, and religious institutions.

As far as the average trust in national governments of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development countries is concerned, it has declined every year between 2009 and 2014, from 44 to 38%. The 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer finds that two-thirds of the countries under the survey are "distrusters." It means that under 50% of their population trusts the mainstream institutions of business, government, media, and NGOs to do what is right.

In order to achieve that consistency, the leadership team should regularly TEST seven areas for values consistency.

- TEST your mindset.
- TEST your culture.
- TEST your innovation process.
- TEST your business model.
- TEST your execution strategy.
- TEST your day-to-day operations.
- TEST your sustainable impact.

Trust

Imagine a world in which two people decide to work together and they know they can completely trust each other. It means that they openly discuss everything and exchange all information. They deliver what was promised and always tell the truth. The outcome is that they need no contracts, lawyers, or courts to settle disputes. They are quick, efficient, and transparent, not to mention the low costs of "unnecessary legal infrastructure."

According to recent studies, trust is quickly becoming the global—and most valued—currency of modern times. Trust generates the power to transform stakeholders and institutions. If we are not working to build and demonstrate it, then the future might be about to leave us behind.

Trust is a form of energy that changes over time. It is something committed to one's care for use or safekeeping as a responsibility. Trust is both an emotional and logical act.

We feel trust. Emotionally, it is where we expose our vulnerabilities to people, believing they will not take advantage of our openness. Emotions associated with trust include confidence, companionship, friendship, love, agreement, relaxation, and comfort.

We sustain trust. It is the ultimate human currency. It impacts our environment at every level, from values to community sustainability. It transcends relationships, institutions, and markets.

We build trust. Trust is built on intent or motives, actions, capabilities, and results. In a business model, we access forms of energy that are exchanged, aggregated, augmented, and leveraged. Energy can come in the forms of money, trust, resources, and harmony (people). When energy is harmonized and aligned, its direction is focused and provides more power. In the case of a trust, the individual's and organization's objective is built upon to develop value.

Reputation is built on trust. Leaders require trust to lead and govern. A start-up must generate trust in the company, the team, and the business model to attract investors.

Trust builds harmony. Trust is the basis for movements, religions, and political parties. Trust in one's mission and business model is the force behind all institutions, organizations, and businesses. Trust in mindset facilitates change. Trust in products and services generates value. Trust in people builds relationships. Trust in customers, employees, and managers builds powerful business systems. Trust in technology builds networks and online communities. Trust in customer experience drives advocacy and champions. Trust in organizational culture builds employee loyalty and productivity. Trust between departments generates collaboration and innovation. Trust within a supply chain develops efficiency and generates performance. Trust between stakeholders generates results and sustainable outcomes. Trust in economic relationships drives the sharing economy.

Trust is mutual and binary in nature. It's like virginity or pregnancy. One cannot be a little pregnant or a little virgin. Look at the following story. There was a farmer who sold a pound of butter to a baker. One day the baker decided to weigh the butter to see if he was getting the right amount, only to find out that he wasn't. Angry, he took the farmer to court.

The judge asked the farmer if he was using any measure to weigh the butter. The farmer replied that he had a scale. He explained that every day when the baker brings him a pound of bread, he puts it on the scale, and gives in return the same weight in butter. If anyone is to be blamed for the wrong weight, it is the baker.

Typically, business organizations are built on such "mistrust." They require an extensive net to control every facet of economic, public, and private life. Due to its complexity, the net lacks logic; it becomes inconsistent and hard to implement. In principle, it stems from the idea that everything is banned if not specifically permitted. Defiant employees are not trusted. They must be controlled.

Empathy is defined as the ability to get in tune with another person and learn to be in their shoes. It is the capability to feel and comprehend others' emotions while imagining what someone else is feeling. Empathic people listen attentively to others and can facilitate communication. They tend to be more generous and concerned with others' welfare.

Empathy

In our broken world, "radical empathy" is gaining traction as a deep commitment to changing the world, one person at a time. It is getting to the root of relating to and caring for each other through shared experiences. It generates a more compassionate and connected world.

Empathy is the core ingredient in designing and sustaining a purposeful brand. Companies must be obsessively focused on user experience to build successful and responsible

brands in our transparent world. Also, empathy is trending as "essential learning" at major business schools (e.g., Harvard) and has become critical in developing a purposeful business. Companies focused on actively listening to employee and customer feedback and developing sustainable relationships based on employee loyalty and customer experience. Empathetic boards incorporate company values in expanding return on investment to include both profit and social impact.

Here is a Zen story on empathy. Dissatisfied with his progress, a student decided to leave the temple, situated at the top of Ping mountain. One evening, he knocked on his teacher's door to say goodbye. Leave if you want to, but let me accompany you tomorrow on your way down the mountain, responded the teacher.

When they set out in the morning, the teacher asked the student to look around and tell him what he saw. I saw the valley, encircled by mountains, in the center, there is a lake and an old city said the student. When they were halfway down, the teacher repeated the question. I see the walls of the city, the brown rooftops, the port, and many boats sailing on the lake answered the student. When they arrived at the city walls, the teacher repeated the question. I see dogs and children playing, a group of traders taking livestock to the market, a few sailors loading wooden boxes onto boats, and a bunch of noisy children throwing rocks into the lake answered the student.

The path to knowledge is like a journey down the mountain, said the teacher. Wisdom can be attained by understanding that what we see from the top is not identical to what we see from the midpoint or from the bottom. Knowing this helps us reject prejudices, opens our minds to learning, feel compassion for others, and teaches us to respect what we don't see from where we stand.

Empathy is essential as the ability to look at the world through the eyes of others, as well as to reconsider and change one's point of view. It is rooted in humility.

Sustainability

Once the organization is functioning in harmony with its values and its stakeholders, it is on the journey to sustainability. This involves a commitment to sustainable principles across all the business interfaces with the external environment, including purposeful design, community, and impact.

What does sustainability really mean? The Great Law of the Iroquois (American Indians) states that the decisions we make today must benefit our children seven generations into the future. Few people on the planet will disagree with the requirement to meet today's needs without compromising our common future. However, there are many different facets of sustainability, how it is interpreted and critically how it is applied.

Sustainability is living within the resources of the planet without damaging the environment now or in the future. Sustainability is creating an economic system that provides for quality of life while renewing the environment and



its resources. In a sustainable world, everyone can have fulfilling lives and enjoy a rich level of well-being within the limits of what nature can provide. Sustainability means taking a long-term view of how our actions affect future generations. Therefore, it means living a life of dignity in harmony with nature. Still, another definition of sustainability focuses on using resources efficiently, working to preserve cultures, protecting natural ecosystems, raising aspirations, and extending opportunities for all. Finally, “sustainable relationships” are the foundation of brand and employee loyalty, as well as sales and financial interactions.

Sustainability is both a value and a behavior. It interconnects all ecosystems and how they affect each other. It is based on a spiritual view of the circular use of all resources, mental, physical, environmental, financial, and social. Initially, we temporarily borrow resources from nature and use them as goods and services, and then return them to the natural environment through a continuous circular process. Basically, sustainability creates a positive future for the climate, our planet, our organization, and our life.

Transparency

For many years, transparency was a term used in science to denote a material that one could totally see through. As the financial crisis hit the global markets, major financial institutions were confronted with their breach of ethics, hidden data, information, and the illegal actions of some executives. Transparent financial transactions and governance were demanded. During the same period, social media began to thrive based on open, candid exchanges and content sharing. Every connected individual could publish content and influence the connections in the network. Thus, by design, social media requires transparency.

Every person’s honesty and credibility are transparent when it is established in the eyes of others. The prospect of being open and vulnerable is expected and a necessity for survival in the digital age. For some organizations, the transition to digitalization and transparency is a major benefit, but to others, it threatens their culture and business model, generating a threat and greater risk.

Transparency invites trust by revealing there is nothing hidden or altered. It allows objects, data, information, and people to be seen clearly through the medium of integration. It reveals all facts and actions taken, even when some of them are uncomfortable. It enables open dialogue in areas of disagreement to facilitate mutual understanding. Transparency calls for the “democratization of data,” expanding access to business information from traditionally coveted sources, and providing the tools to analyze it for a broader audience.

A culture of transparency requires a purposeful and methodical system-wide process with real-time monitoring and open dialogue. As such, transparency is the cornerstone of trust. It ensures accountability, as it makes people and their

skills, knowledge, and ideas visible and accessible to all their colleagues. It helps to build interpersonal trust, which is vital for people to share and collaborate with each other.

In today’s ever-changing environment, it is essential that organizations make full use of their assets—information/data and people—to improve their responsiveness, productivity, and ability to innovate constantly. It is easy to use social software to increase “technical transparency” across an organization. But to create a culture of transparency requires changes in mindset and the related behaviors and practices.

The global environment of social connectivity and real-time news updates increases external and internal pressure on organizations to become more transparent. This pressure is not only coming from customers and employees but also from stakeholders (investors, media, community, and government). In such a setting, the culture of transparency is the only sustainable strategy.

It is obvious that the four TEST factors are not independent, as the values interface and augments each other. The result is synergistic (e.g., two or more agents work together to achieve something either one couldn’t have achieved on its own). Synergy, of all the four TEST values, is a powerful benchmark for individuals, organizations, and even governments engaged in transformation. It’s the concept of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts.

If you want TEST, live it on every occasion.

CONCLUDING NOTES

We believe that the broken world requires these four values to achieve sustainable transformation. If they are lived consistently in our organizations and personal lives, we should experience major transformation and realigning of our institutions.

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