

## Questioning Aloud – 3

### Do your senior leaders really ‘practice’ the qualities that they ‘espouse’

- **The single most important difference: Exceptional organizations V/S Ordinary organizations**

In the ideal world, all organizations would have an inspiring work culture and they would be a force for goodness that generates long term value for all it’s stakeholders. But building such a ‘virtuous’ organization in the real world is an extraordinarily difficult challenge. The tremendous power of limiting and negative forces that resides in all individuals and groups ( Explore <http://shaileshdeshpande.in/did-you-defeat-your-death-drive-today/> to learn more about this ) keeps pulling us down and results in creation of very ‘ordinary’ organizations – that are political, bureaucratic , stressful and unimaginative.

- **Self-diagnostic** : If you are truly interested in building a virtuous organization, a good place to begin is to critically and honestly review the gap between values and competencies ‘espoused’ by your senior leaders versus those actually ‘practiced’ by them. Suggested below is a checklist that you can possibly use for this. Selecting and developing leaders who have leadership character and competence to practice the espoused values is the ONLY way to build a virtuous organization.

|                                   | <b>Espoused qualities – that if practiced, build Virtuous organizations</b>   | <b>Actually practiced qualities – leading to Ordinary organizations</b>  |
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| <b>Primary operating model</b>    | <i>‘ Always do what is right for the long term well being , vitality and performance of the organization ’</i>  | <i>Always do what maximizes your own personal gain – financial, personal brand, accumulation of power, while creating an appearance that you are doing it all for the organization</i>   |
| <b>Ownership</b>                  | Take complete ownership of all your decisions and work areas - accept responsibility and consequences for failures and lapses, hold yourself strongly accountable and role model standards of excellence  | Do not drive any work area independently and by yourself – identify sincere and competent team members and exploit them.<br>If the work is successful, showcase it as result of your sponsorship and guidance – if the work is not successful, stay silent and distance yourself.<br>No need to develop competence or expertise any specific area          |
| <b>Building and Leading teams</b> | Do everything you can do to hire and promote the best talent your organization deserves, in every single role – hire and develop people who are much better than yourself and allow them to push the bar higher.<br><br>Take the tough people decisions that are needed to protect and grow long term well-being of the institution | Be driven by self serving considerations while hiring and promoting people – focus on hiring people who praise you, tow your line and will be more loyal to you than to the organization, build a coterie.<br><br>Even if this means having people who lack leadership character and/or competence – still cultivate them for your long-term personal gain |

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| <b>Influencing and Collaboration</b> | <p>Be a social force in the organization that drives the right behaviours , values and capabilities. Fearlessly advocate things that matter for the long term well being – even if it means facing social and political resistance.</p> <p>Collaborate across functions and hierarchy to maximize value for organization ( even when it means personal difficulties and lesser/no credit for your own work/function )</p>  | <p>Build comfortable collusions with other like minded senior leaders – have an implicit (or sometimes even explicit) understanding that ‘ I will take care of you if you take care of me’. Do not raise hard and tough issues about others – in exchange of the same favour being returned to you.</p> <p>Collaborate only when there is personal gain / visibility for your function. Disengage with colleagues who ask you tough questions but partner with colleagues who help your selfish causes</p>                  |
| <b>Building external reputation</b>  | <p>Focus on doing exceptional , path breaking work and on developing great practices and leaders – which will eventually build strong professional reputation and respect for the organization.</p> <p>Participate in select , credible external forums to share the learning with the external world . Build a high quality network of a select group of professionals who share your values and are driven to do great work</p>  | <p>Focus on building your own ‘personal brand’ – operate with a belief that personal brand is all about appearance and visibility, with no connection whatsoever with actual expertise or quality of work done by you.</p> <p>Participate in every single forum that gives you visibility and awards (irrespective of their credibility and rigor ). Build a network with everyone who can help to raise your social media profile and connect you with more such other professionals</p>                                   |
| <b>Long term strategic thinking</b>  | <p>Be very thoughtful in identifying right , long term priorities with maximum leverage. Define and frame problems well – be mindful that most important problems often do not have simple , linear , standard solutions. Factor in the system level interlinkages of your decisions. Carefully define and launch initiative with appropriate sequencing and integration – so that the total impact of the initiatives is bigger than the mathematical sum. Once the strategic plan is defined, stay on the course for reasonable period of time, unless there are exceptional reasons to change</p> | <p>Keep looking for the flavour of the month – be ok to chase many of the latest external trends, fads without critically evaluating their relevance for your context. Be ok to change the agenda frequently just because your senior stakeholders have mentioned the need. Launch range of initiatives that may or may not have interlinks and don’t think too much about the right sequencing. No need to think about system level interlinks – take isolated decisions at pace, that may even contradict each other.</p> |
| <b>Integrity and Courage</b>         | <p>Express your independent views openly and clearly – stand by them. If you change your thinking about something, proactively acknowledge the change and explain the reasons.</p> <p>Do not be afraid of going against the crowd – express your views even if they are totally against the majority opinion</p>   | <p>Do not take firm stands – sit on the fence as long as it is practically possible. Wait to see how the senior stakeholders are thinking – then quietly tow their line.</p> <p>If your team members are facing criticism about ideas that you have reviewed and approved – change your stand without taking any ownership of those ideas , so that you don’t have to defend the ideas or team members.</p>   |

*In ‘Questioning Aloud’, I hope to think and question aloud about things happening in the world of work and leadership. As a student of human behaviour, I want to ask myself and to all others who are interested, a few questions that will hopefully help all of us take a pause, reflect and act to make the world of work better.*

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