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Compassionate Creativity: The Progressive Renaissance of a Seasoned Concept

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In this article, I present the findings of a study conducted with 115 MBA students, who also were members of the workforce, about the qualities they would prefer to see in their managers and leaders. I first address the concerns of contemporary times by drawing an analogy between the main problems in business performance and those in business education, namely, a top-down approach, immoral practices, and stakeholder dissatisfaction. Based upon the results of the study, I then present the 10 Cs for leaders and managers, discuss their interdependency, draw a linkage with the foundational studies regarding relationship and task behaviors of leaders, and suggest a new perspective to include these behaviors in contemporary work settings.

Keywords: *business, change, compassion, creativity, education, leaders, managers, stakeholders*

Introduction

If one may believe some of the great thinkers of our times, there is a good chance that this is the last century for our species, given the trends that we have been following in the past decades. Some scientists (Leslie, 1998; Rees, 2004) even have predicted that there is a 50% chance that our species will not survive the 21st century. Rees (2005) presented his views in a mind-boggling speech on TED.com (Technology, Entertainment and Design), where he explained that although we are less than halfway into the lifespan of the sun, that is, 4.5 billion of the 12 billion years, it will not be our species, if any, that will witness the sun's end, but creatures as different from us as we are from bacteria. This viewpoint simply means that although planet Earth will remain as it has throughout the past couple of billion years, our species will become extinct.

One perfectly viable explanation for Rees's (2005) reasoning is that we have experienced a tremendous degree of progress in the past century that has been incomparable to our development in past millennia. This speedy development has jolted our entire performance as a species to a different level. Along with that development, however, have come side effects. Within a relatively short term, a shocking number of gasses, waves, metals, and other particles have risen up from our planet, affecting the atmosphere and the entire ecosystem that used to guarantee our existence. However, the ecological consequence of our progress is just one potential threat. There are others, such as the possibility of crucial nuclear information falling into the hands of an irresponsible person who is ignorant of the danger and who can cause our demise more by error than through terror.

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Toward Constructive Change: The Responsibility of Business Education

Although the reasons these aforementioned scientists presented for their estimates make increasing sense as we witness our day-to-day developments, we can still consider that on the bright side, a 50% chance to perish means that we also have a 50% chance to survive beyond the 21st century. Yet, is 50% such a hopeful number, considering that we have made such significant progress to get to our current state? It is beginning to look as if we have allowed our progress to run away from our capacity to handle its effects. With the many great inventions we saw in the 20th century (e.g., airplanes, television, cell phones, the Internet), we have accelerated our activities at such a pace that we may have forgotten to consider the preparatory requirements for the human psyche in all this. To put it more simply, we made giant developmental leaps with a collective mindset that may not have evolved to the same degree. Something will need to happen to further enhance the overall awareness level of our species so that we may realize the magnitude of our performance today.

It is not surprising that Rees (2005) pointed out in his TED speech that education is one of the key players in a possible turn for the better. It will particularly be up to business education to cultivate near-future corporate leaders to think beyond the bottom line and into the responsibility we hold as a generation toward our descendants. It is unspeakably important to instill the realization not only in every near-future entrepreneur and CEO but also in every middle and lower level manager that short-term thinking needs to be replaced by wholistic planning and that concepts such as workplace spirituality, corporate social responsibility, and ethical awareness can no longer be considered ethereal notions, but rather crucial practices for ourselves, our companies, and our entire species.

Lämsä, Vehkaperä, Puttonen, and Pesonen, (2008) agreed, noting that "the many corporate scandals that have occurred recently have made business schools around the world seriously contemplate on the role of business education in relation to such phenomena" (p. 45). They reflected on the concerning trend that has been maintained so far in business education, whereby students are mainly confronted with theories and models to maximize shareholder value and even to compete with their own stakeholders. Lämsä et al. drew attention to the amoral foundation of these teachings and the contamination it instills in these future leaders' mental programming. Lämsä et al. further explicated that the attitudes and beliefs that business students will embed in their characters and future corporate performances are instilled by and dependent on the values and practices of the business schools they attend.

As a logical consequence, Mohamed (2009) stressed the need for business education to become attuned to the needs of today's and tomorrow's societies, starting by becoming more responsive to the rapid spread of globalization and enormous developments in information technology (IT). He pointed out that business students require a multitude of skills to succeed in the contemporary workplace: analytical and intellectual skills, multi- and interdisciplinary skills, communication skills, awareness of global issues, computer skills, personal qualities, and critical-thinking skills. Looking more closely into the challenges facing business corporations and the possible role for business education therein, Lacy and Pickard (2008) noted, "The contract that business holds with society is now under more pressure than at any other time in history" (p. 141). Lacy and Pickard explained that this pressure is created on one hand by increased demands from various stakeholder groups (shareholders, suppliers, employees, for instance) for continuous rewards and, on the other hand, by growing awareness of the challenges of an uncertain environmental climate that requires more caution and responsibility in performing.

To alleviate this tension successfully and respond sensitively to the demands for more responsible behavior while still reaping the benefits of globalization, Lacy and Pickard (2008) recommended internal adaptation of corporations. They contended that decision-making processes, communication methods, knowledge exchange, company policies, and interactions between units in the organization will have to be overhauled and perhaps completely restructured. Lacy and Pickard saw an important opportunity for business educators to step in and assist with this immense change process.

Rose (2007) agreed with the need for a thorough revisiting of established practices and procedures in organizations. He clarified that corporate leaders are not always as greedy or hollow as outsiders consider them to be. Often, these leaders simply are victimized by their duties to the corporation and its stakeholders, which hinder them in expressing ethical or socially responsible performance.

Along similar lines as the aforementioned researchers, Marques (2010) referred to the painful lessons we have all had to learn in the first decade of the 21st century and called for "a collective effort toward increased awareness" (p. 74) that could be obtained individually but should definitely be included in business education to ensure broad acceptance. Marques identified some important strategic insights to be instilled into current and future business leaders:

1. Look at the bigger picture before making decisions at the organization level.
2. Embrace diversity, the unstoppable trend that has been accelerated through globalization.
3. Stay focused by regularly examining core principles.
4. Ensure a team of people with complementary skills for a well-rounded view.
5. Expand horizons to enhance creative and insightful thinking.

Banister (2009), finally, called upon those who can afford it in any way to enroll in an MBA program so that they can obtain the skills required to perform well when the economy changes again in the next few years. Banister summed it up by commenting:

> Business schools can play an important role in terms of developing the models and the knowledge that can help executives better understand how the new economy evolves, how one can build up more sustainable financial structures and leadership styles, and be part of it. (p. 3)

Problem With the Status Quo

Although some awareness obviously is being stirred and some positive change is being made, a closer view into contemporary business practices and business education reveals that much remains to be done. When one considers the issues that are addressed these days in business performance and business education, some interesting commonalities are detected. In the next section, I will first consider the issues and then look for common factors among these issues.

In a large number of today's business corporations, the following three main issues serve as performance obstructions:

1. Many organizations still lead from the top down, even if their workforce mainly consists of knowledge workers. Xavier (2005) commented, "A top-down management approach doesn't have a place on the playing field. Today, more than ever before, executives need to revise their game plans in order to adapt to constant change, reduce errors and play 'smarter'"

(p. 35). Xavier called for leaders to become more adaptable, engage in different thinking processes to find solutions for problems, and lead in a participative manner.

The top-down approach is considered a problem not only at the microlevel of organizational performance but also at the performance level of globally performing entities. Criticizing the leadership strategies of powerful global organizations such as the United Nations, Bretton Woods, and the G8, Schwab (2008) added the following alert to Xavier's (2005) comments:

> We need to realize that today's world is far more Asian and more African than the one that gave birth to these institutions. It is also a young world, with a median age of 28 years and new paradigms of virtual communication that reach across space and time. It is more complex, much more integrated, and bottom up rather than top down. And, above all, this new world is so interdependent that solutions for global problems require true global trusteeship. This means that the old ways of multilateral negotiation, which are based on defending national interests, are simply no longer adequate for addressing the problems of this rapidly changing world. (¶ 2)

2. Many corporate leaders engage in immoral and unethical practices, even though they have witnessed the consequences with others. Chen (2010) identified four determinants in unethical organizational practices: (a) the self-absorption of CEOs, (b) the tremendous financial stakes, (c) the demands from shareholders, and (d) the influence of the media. The interplay among these four actors has an important effect on a company's moral and ethical practices.

   Further focusing on the behavior of leaders in this regard, Esu and Inyang (2010) presented the following traits of unethical leaders: (a) callousness, which makes them insensible to the needs of others; (b) corrupted, which makes them disregard any other interests but their own; (c) insular, which makes them ignorant toward those whom they consider outsiders of their world; and (d) evil, which pertains to their acts of doing harm to others. Toor and Ofori (2009) emphasized that leaders who behave unethically can be "dangerous, destructive, and even toxic" (p. 533). Subsequently, Toor and Ofori commented on the grim reality of increased manifestations of unethical leadership in recent years: "The growing complexity of the businesses, escalating amount and speed of information flow, and greater pressure for performance have increased the probability of conscious—and sometimes unconscious—ethical slipups in decisions, actions, and behaviors of leaders" (p. 533).

3. Many workforce members are disgruntled, even if they are working in the jobs they always wanted. Shen (2008) listed failed or delayed payment, job losses, work-based accidents resulting from poor conditions, management corruption, and mismanagement as the dominant reasons for dissatisfied workers in China. Denning (2010) referred to the outdated approach of top-down management, discussed earlier, as one of the important instigators of employee dissatisfaction. He asserted, "Many studies have documented that traditional hierarchical management is increasingly counterproductive in an environment of rapid change that requires continuous adaptation" (p. 11).

In addition, Denning (2010) listed tightly planned work, inflexible human resource (HR) practices, growth strategies that are determined by past trends and market share, and incremental improvements on products and processes. Marques (2008) added the well-known phenomena of greater insecurity; more exposure to other religions, philosophies, and cultures; more diversity (i.e., women and minorities) in the workplace; and greater dissatisfaction with focus solely on the bottom line as important reasons for workers to reevaluate their workplaces and leaders, and become dissatisfied if they feel that their workplaces lag in efforts toward implementing greater quality of life at work.

When shifting attention to business education, one is confronted with the following main criticisms:

1. Management educators often still lecture their students in established yet outdated ways without paying sufficient attention to new techniques. Fenwick (2005) expressed concern about the discrepancy between a rapidly changing work environment and outdated theory-based teaching from management educators. Fenwick asked, "How can critical management educators ethically justify engaging learners in an orientation that may be impossible to enact in existing structures of practice?" (p. 35). Elmuti (2004), who shared the same concern, suggested that management educators should step away from mere lecturing and assessing through classic teaching methods and look instead for a variety of creative ways to communicate the topic, such as "case studies, guest speakers, tutorials based on current issues, business games, company-based research projects, and consulting projects" (p. 447).

2. Management students still perceive the path ahead as a quick way to financial affluence. This mindset is reflected in their perspectives on the courses in their curriculum. Singh and Shick (2007) reported on a survey that they conducted with MBA and undergraduate students at their university. The overwhelming majority of the participants considered finance and accounting courses the most important ones in their programs, closely followed by strategic management; they considered HR management one of the least important. Singh and Shick felt that these findings supported their assertions that management students still focus excessively on short-term profits and insufficiently on the human aspect. They stated, "These results are consistent with the trends that we discussed earlier. They point to the perceived importance of financial and strategic management over human capital management" (p. 352). Singh and Shick stressed that to change this mindset among management students, the way organizational behavior-related courses are offered will have to be altered toward the dynamic needs of today's world of work.

3. Management education is not preparing the future generation of corporate leaders sufficiently for the innovative climate of the contemporary business environment. Cavico and Mujtaba (2010) referred to the critics who claim that management education is still too focused on achieving the bottom line, which is not only an outdated concept but also makes business schools, the distributors of this education, important accomplices in the unethical explosions of late. To address this problem, the requirements from accreditation agencies such as the AACSB now include a process called assurance of learning in their accreditation requirements, which entails that business instructors assess whether business students actually learn what was intended. "These outcomes require innovative teaching techniques to improve learning and the use of direct and indirect assessment techniques to measure the level of actual learning" (Weldy & Turnipseed, 2010, p. 271).

Each issue in the following list has a counterpart in the equivalent number from the previous list:

- The top-down management approach in the majority of business corporations is a reflection of the outdated way in which many educators still teach management courses (Point 1).
- The immoral and unethical practices of many corporate leaders reflect the excessive focus of management students on finance, accounting, and strategy-based courses, and their disdain for organizational, behavior-related courses (Point 2).
- Disgruntled corporate workers, who despise the poor conditions and questionable practices of their managers, mirror the outrage of critics of management education who feel that this education still focuses too much on the bottom line (Point 3).

This similarity could lead to the question whether one is not simply a continuation of the other. Moreover, there is one overarching theme in all of these points: neglect. The word is loaded in the way it is interpreted here. Neglect, as used in this text, pertains to ignorance of the requirements that come with the changes that human society has experienced in the past decades, indicating that a long established order, in which a small elite ruled over a large mass of low-educated wage-earners through a top-down, self-serving, bottom-line based approach, has come to an end. As a human society, we have praised the changes, but we have not braced ourselves well for their manifestation. It may very well be that we have underestimated the magnitude of change that would be required with the shifts that have happened in recent decades.

Presenting a New Paradigm: The 10 Cs

Intrigued by the challenges that corporate workers and management educators seem to face simultaneously, as well as the important role of leaders and managers therein, I conducted a study on the perspectives of students regarding the behaviors they desired from their supervisors.

The Study

Over the course of 2 years (six courses), I collected responses from 115 MBA students, who also were corporate workers, in a course on organizational behavior. I presented these students with a question as part of a class assignment: "List the 10 qualities you would appreciate most from your manager at work." By placing the students in the shoes of an employee who would be subject to this manager's behavior, the students reflected on the treatment they would prefer from this supervisor. The response rate was optimal, that is, 100%, because the question was embedded in a mandatory assignment.

Analysis of the Data

The responses had to be submitted through Moodle (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment), an open-source e-learning software platform or course management system. All qualities mentioned in response to the research question were subsequently stored in an Excel spreadsheet. At the end of the sixth course, I reviewed the list of terms. In a crude form, the data delivered 48 listed qualities. However, among these qualities were many that had fairly similar meanings, such as compassion, care, and kindness (clustered as compassion), and honesty, truthfulness, and openness (clustered as candidness). Clustering of themes is a frequently used method in phenomenological studies known as phenomenological reduction, as explained by Creswell (1998). Although the study was mainly conducted in the style of a survey, which by nature is

quantitative, this system of theme clustering adopted from the qualitative discipline was a useful approach that I considered a pleasant piece of multidisciplinary application in study and data analysis methodologies.

Once the qualities were clustered, a list of 18 themes surfaced. I then extracted the 10 themes with the highest scores. I now faced the challenge of presenting these themes in a way that would be appealing to a larger audience. A review of the Thesaurus function in the dictionary was helpful in arriving at a common pattern for all 10 qualities: the 10 Cs. The final list is presented in Table 1. The middle section of Table 1 presents the originally listed words that were clustered in the Cs to the left; on the right hand side are the times these qualities were listed in percentages of the total sample ($N = 115$). As seen in Table 1, the 10 Cs can be related fairly well to the qualities initially listed. It has to be stated that some of the 10 Cs (compassionate, creative, composed, conscious, centered, and courageous) also were mentioned by some students in the initial submission lists.

Table 1: *Desired Qualities of Managers at Work*

10 Cs	Alternative Listings	Listed by Percentage
Compassionate	Understanding, kind, caring	61%
Creative	Inspiring, innovative	57%
Courageous	Driven, proactive, determined	50%
Candid	Honest, open, truthful	46%
Ceaseless	Perseverant, energetic	37%
Centered	Focused	33%
Composed	Peaceful, calm	30%
Change adaptive	Flexible, forward thinking, open to positive change	28%
Cheerful	Optimistic, sympathetic, humor	27%
Conscious	Mindful, alert, sensitive, respectful	27%

With consideration of the call for a more creative approach in reaching management students, Figure 1 was developed. Each quality is represented by a separate circle, but the interdependence between various qualities is reflected through the visible interweaving. In examining the themes and trying to capture them in the figure, it became evident that there were two main categories with overlapping values:

1. People-oriented or relationship-based qualities: A manager or a leader who is conscious of his or her responsibilities will have a greater likelihood of being centered, composed, compassionate, candid, and courageous. These qualities are further developed as a result of the improved interactions with coworkers.

2. Process-oriented or task-based qualities: Although the aforementioned relationship-based qualities are important, a leader or a manager still needs to adhere to the advancement of the organization and the effectiveness of the workplace. This is where values such as cheerfulness, change adaptation, creativity, and ceaselessness become crucial. These qualities are maintained and further developed through the implementation of processes.
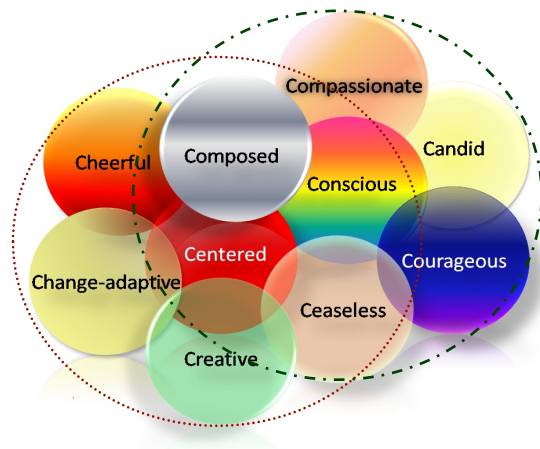
Figure 1: *The 10 Cs in Their Interdependent Reality*

The distinction between task and relationship orientation is not new. As scholars and students of leadership and management may know, this distinction dates back to the 1940s, when separate studies from the Ohio State University and the University of Michigan delivered the concepts of task and relationship orientation for leaders around the same time. "The essence of [those studies] was that leaders are production oriented (as they concentrated on planning, scheduling, coordinating) and relationship oriented (showing respect, trust, confidence, understating followers' needs)" (McLaurin, 2006, p. 98). Pierce and Newstrom (2008) asserted that the Ohio studies resulted in several behavioral classifications, such as "1) maintenance of membership character, […] 2) objectivity attainment behavior, [… and] 3) group interaction facilitation; [as well as] 1) Consideration, […] 2) Initiating structure, […] 3) Production emphasis, [… and] 4) Sensitivity (social awareness)" (p. 172). Regarding the Michigan studies, Pierce and Newstrom distinguished the following behavioral classifications:

> 1) Differentiation of supervisory role, […] 2) Closeness of supervision, […] 3) Employee orientation, [… and] 4) Group relationships, [as well as] 1) Providing direct need satisfaction, […] Structuring the path to goal attainment, […] 3) Enabling goal achievement, [… and] 4) Modifying employee goals. (p. 173)

The Ohio and Michigan leadership behavioral distinctions have led to several theories that are still widely used in management education, such as the situational leadership theory from Blanchard and Hersey and the managerial grid from Blake and Mouton (as cited in MacKenzie & Barnes, 2007).

Interpretation of the Findings and Conclusion

Within the scope of the qualities listed in this article, it should be underscored that there is a clear interplay between the qualities and that they are perceived as interrelated aspects of a larger whole. Although the original studies distinguished task and relationship qualities either as mutually exclusive or as two extremes on the same continuum, these findings, in line with the currently

required multidimensional application of thinking and acting, present an interconnected set in which both categories coincide. Through this synergistic application of relationship and task-oriented qualities, 21st-century managers and leaders need to perform consciousness-based and centered-based behaviors at the same time to elevate management to a whole new level.

The consciousness-based behaviors as well as the centered-based behaviors should have an underlying understanding of focusing on the well-being of immediate stakeholders while also keeping distant and future stakeholders in mind. When applied with close attention to an all-inclusive approach of the 10 Cs, relationship and task behaviors come together in a work setting where the three concerns presented earlier in this article are effectively addressed:

1. Participative approaches are honored, which ends the top-down concern.
2. Single-handed immoral practices from leaders and managers are ruled out.
3. Discontentment of stakeholders is abolished.

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