ARTISTS, CRAFTSMEN & TECHNOCRATS

In today's challenging times, emotion is at the heart of leadership.

For more than three centuries, emotion has been banished to the wings while cognition has monopolized center stage in the drama of leadership. Since Descartes wrote, "I think, therefore I am," we have been led to believe that the less emotion enters into our judgment, and the more objective and rigorous our thinking processes are, the better our decisions will be. A high IQ has been the path to power.

Science and the scientific method have now turned Descartes's assertion on its head: "I am, therefore I think." American neuroscientist Antonio Damasio based his watershed book on brain functioning, Descartes' Error, on that new theorem. What emerges from Damasio's research is a view of humankind quite different from that of cold automatons in pursuit of objectivity. What Damasio reveals is not that emotion is somehow better than thinking, but that thinking is based on emotion. Good judgment and rational thought are vitally dependent on emotional signaling; pain, remorse, guilt, fear, empathy, doubt, and pride help us learn, change, and grow. Without those emotional signals, our thought processes rigidify. We get stuck in the present, unable to learn from the past or to envisage a better future and strive for it.

What, you might well ask, does all this have to do with leadership? A lot. In the Descartian view, what you need to be a great leader is high IQ: You need to be bright. In the new view that
recognizes the value of emotions, leaders have to be bright--and tuned in. We've learned that intelligence without emotional savvy doesn't get you very far. Let me give you a glimpse inside one global financial services company that ignored the new view.

In the mid 1960s, a man in his 40s took over a medium-sized, general-insurance company operating in a regional market. He had a dream--a big dream. His dream was to build a global corporation operating in general and life insurance, banking, trust, and investment services--in short, an integrated financial services empire spanning the world, at a time when insurance was insurance and banking was banking, and never the twain shall meet. Some people thought he was a nut. Fewer thought so 15 years later when his corporation had grown to $20 billion in assets and was operating in all segments of the financial service markets in North America, Asia, and Europe.

What was that company founder like? Anything but a calculating machine. I call him an Artist. Here's how his colleagues described him: warm, generous, people-oriented, imaginative, emotional, unpredictable, open-minded, visionary, inspiring, intuitive, daring, and funny. How did those qualities contribute to his success? you might ask. The characteristics warm, generous, funny, and people-oriented, helped him attract and keep great colleagues and investors. The emotional and inspiring traits made his enthusiasm infectious. In being daring, intuitive, unpredictable, and visionary, he created his dream and the winning strategy to make it a reality. Being open to new ideas helped the founder and the corporation evolve, and helped the Artist keep very different kinds of people around him. That ensured that no single view of the world would prevail in the company.

During those years of building, the Artist surrounded himself with talent, and he let that talent find expression in a decentralized power structure. His key executives ran their own shows. The founder sat on their independent boards and asked questions but didn't interfere.

The other executives were a mixed group. There were two other Artists who shared the founder's qualities and character, such as being visionary and funny.

Six other executives were described by their peers as well-balanced, trustworthy, reasonable, sensible, and realistic. I call them the Craftsmen. Craftsmen know their business down to their fingertips. They know what works and what doesn't. They are not amateurs. They are not theoretical; they are practical. They demand a lot from people, but they're realistic enough to know that human beings make mistakes and learn from those mistakes. Craftsmen also know that if you drive out error, innovation goes out the door with it. The Craftsmen at this corporation helped the Artists make the founder's dream come true in the concrete, day-to-day environment of a complex world.

There were six other men involved with the company. I call them the Technocrats. Here's how they
were described: intense, determined, uncompromising, hardheaded, cerebral, and analytical. Often, they were described as brilliant, stiff, and distant. Technocrats are cold. Their interpersonal relationships lack depth. They tend to misread the people around them and think others like them or at least respect them. Technocrats think they're realistic and sensible, even imaginative, but no one else does.

Technocrats are often analytically brilliant but make bad judgments about people, and about situations and markets. Technocrats don't learn from their mistakes because they don't think they make any. Mistakes are always someone else's fault--predecessors, employees, governments, stock markets. The answer to mistakes is to fire the guy who made them, right?

Technocrats don't feel much emotion. Well, that's not completely true. They seem to feel anger, especially when contradicted. But they don't seem to feel pain, sadness, guilt or remorse. But why should they? Nothing is their fault.

By the early 1980s, our Artist and founder had decided it was time for someone else to take over the company. He said, "Sometimes one can stay too long in an organization. It needs fresh air, a new approach." So, he turned over the reins to his second-in-command. Whereas the Artist was self-taught, the successor was educated. Whereas the Artist was intuitive, the other man was "a professional." Whereas the Artist was warm and generous, the other was stiff and distant. In short, the new leader was a Technocrat. He would run a tight ship--right onto the reefs.

**When intuition, experience, and analysis clash**

What are the first things any manager thinks about when taking over a big new job? First, Is the strategy right? Are we doing the right things? Second, Do I have competent people in place to get the job done? Although the answer to the second question may be yes, the leader's nature hamstring him or her. If a leader is cerebral, analytical, uncompromising, and brilliant, he or she will find decentralization messy. People can do all kinds of foolish things, so the leader will want to bring more order to the organization. He or she will start to centralize decision making. And that's what the successor did.

The new leader started to strip the independent subsidiaries and boards of their discretion in such areas as marketing, technology, finance, and planning. A new head-office position was created to steer strategic planning, and all subsidiaries had to conform. The Artists and Craftsmen running those subsidiaries resisted. Gradually but systematically, they were all fired. They were replaced with "competent professionals"; that is to say, cerebral, analytical, stiff, and uncompromising (but often brilliant) Technocrats. By 1992, every single position of power was held by a Technocrat. Three years later, the organization was dead. Twenty years to build, two or three to destroy. Pretty bad ratio. And yet....
The Technocrats were brilliant. They had very high IQs, no doubt about it. But, as we learned from Damasio, high IQ is not enough. Alone, it doesn't make people loyal and dedicated. High IQ is no substitute for 20 to 30 years in a business. High IQ might help you analyze the past, but the future isn't always based on the past. The future is always surprising and, for one reason or another, it's the Artists who seem to be able to read it better.

If you have no respect for the emotional qualities that come in the imaginative package, you drive out the peculiar vision of an Artist. If you equate "experienced" with "outmoded" or "old-fashioned," then you drive out the Craftsmen, who are the organizational glue, who inspire the loyalty and the dedication, and who know what making widgets is all about. If you fire people for making one mistake, nobody's going to go out on a limb to make any. Innovation stops. An organization without loyalty, dedication, skill, and dreams can go downhill very fast.

No one leader can be all things to all people. Running an organization is so tough, so complex, so multifaceted that it needs all kinds of perspectives--even the cerebral, analytical, and uncompromising. The Artists and the Craftsmen can live with those different perspectives, but the Technocrats cannot.

**Nature and nurture**

This story (and others like it all over the world) inevitably raises the age-old controversy between nature and nurture and its organizational corollary, selection versus training. If the characters Artist, Craftsman, and Technocrat are born and not made, then selection is the key: Pick the right character for the job at hand. If, on the other hand, those characters are malleable, then training has a role to play.

Teachers and trainers have a vested intellectual interest in the nurture argument, headhunters in the selection argument. But posing the question in such simple terms prevents a sensible answer.

One of the most fascinating aspects of Damasio's research is that it promises to put an end to the artificial and misleading polarity between nature and nurture. Science seems to be telling us that we are born hard-wired with certain genetic, physiologically based predispositions. We know, for example, that heredity plays an important role in depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and obsessive-compulsive disorder. It's pretty safe to conclude that many personality disorders, including narcissism, will also soon be linked to genetics. Few people would now subscribe to the theory that we come into the world as a tabula rasa.

Our neural circuitry, then, is laid down at birth. The connections between our emotions, which are primary, and our thoughts, which are secondary, are innate. Our reactions already take certain channels and not others. As we grow, new situations provoke new emotions and new neural circuitry is laid down. New channels of reaction between emotions and thought are created.
Therefore, people are a product of both nature and nurture.

Then, the real question is not Can the person change and grow? but How much can he or she be expected to change and grow? It's a question of degree, not of kind. The answer to the question is therefore not yes or no, nor even an answer at all, but more questions: Who are we talking about, in what context, and how much change can be expected? If I apply that to my character types, here is the answer I come up with.

It is no accident that I applied the label Artist to some of the men in our story. Increasing scientific evidence shows that often a depressive or manic-depressive base underlies the artistic personality. Therefore, the quality of imaginative gets coupled with emotional and unpredictable. That is the artistic character. It's untenable to try to "train out" the unpredictable quality in order to conserve just the imaginative. If addressed in early childhood, there may be a way to moderate an Artist's predisposition, but not by the time he or she has reached adulthood.

Similarly, the Craftsman character includes reasonable and sensible qualities. It's a waste of time and counterproductive to try to teach such a person to become visionary or daring. We need people who are reasonable and sensible.

Last, Technocrats are closed-minded and uncompromising. How do you train someone who is cold, distant, and uncompromising to become humane, wise, or inspiring? You can't reach Technocrats because they're closed-minded and don't suffer. Suffering is the door through which change can enter. The narcissistic traits of a Technocrat are hard-wired.

Training and selection

How many Technocrats are there in the world? It's difficult to say with any precision. In the general population, both Artists and Technocrats are quite rare; probably each type makes up less than 5 percent. However, because of their talents--vision on the part of Artists and analytical brilliance in Technocrats--both are over-represented at the top of organizations. The higher you climb, the more of both you find. So, there's less margin for training at the top and selection is critical to the health of the organization.

At lower organizational levels, there's probably more possibility and potential for training to perform an important service. As a teacher, I see few Artists or Technocrats in my classes. My students, male and female, are usually Craftsmen. In my leadership courses, I see change taking place all of the time. If I didn't, I'd have to get out of the university; it would be too depressing.

What kind of change takes place? Not changes in character. Those future leaders change their attitudes, ideas, approaches, preconceived notions, priorities, and knowledge. Knowledge is still power. My job is to open people's eyes to the complexity of the managerial world and to the diverse talents necessary to navigate in that world. It's to open eyes to the reality of who they are.
My best pedagogical tool is using my students' emotional reactions to communicate with their minds. In the end, it's both their minds and their emotions that we have to count on for our futures.

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