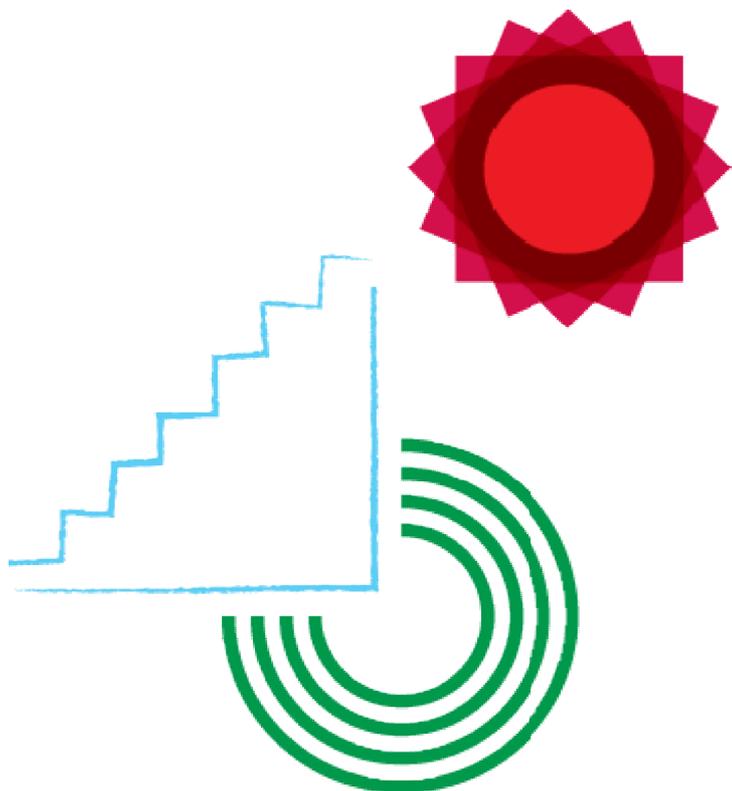


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The Four Obsessions of an Extraordinary Executive: A leadership fable

Book review by Gloria Lombardi



BOOK REVIEW

If you are looking for ways of fostering sustainable success within your organisation, whether it is small, medium or large, this book will prove to be very insightful. Throughout a leadership fable, bestselling author Patrick M. Lencioni describes the leader's crucial role in building a healthy organisation.



According to Lencioni, there are four underlying factors that would make any organisations healthy. Often they are overlooked by executives. However, they are essential elements of business life that lead to sustained success.

What are The Four Obsessions of an Extraordinary Executive described in the book?

1. BUILDING AND MAINTAINING A COHESIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM

Building a cohesive leadership team is critical to enabling the other three disciplines. It requires considerable interpersonal commitment from an executive team and its leader. The essence of a cohesive leadership team is TRUST. This is marked by the absence of politics, unnecessary anxiety and wasted energy.

According to the author, the most important activity for building trust is getting to know one another at a level that few groups of people ever achieve. It is important that team members get comfortable letting their colleagues see them for who they are.

For cohesive teams, meetings are vital. They are forums for asking difficult questions, challenging one another's ideas and arriving at decisions that everyone agrees to support and adhere to, in the best interest of the company. Cohesive teams fight about issues, not personalities and have the capacity of moving on to the next issue without residual feelings. No one should leave the meeting with unspoken resentment.

2. CREATING ORGANISATIONAL CLARITY

An organisation that has organisational clarity possesses a SENSE OF UNITY around everything it does. The result is focus and efficiency. Behaviourally, it requires an executive team to demonstrate commitment and courage. Employees in these organisations have great levels of autonomy, they know what their boundaries are and when they need guidance from management before taking action. The ability to make decisions by themselves creates an environment of empowerment.

One of the best ways to achieve clarity, Lencioni says, is to answer six questions pertaining to the organisation:

- Why does the organisation exist and what differences does it make in the world?
- What behavioural values are irreplaceable and fundamental?
- What business are we in?
- How does our approach differ from that of our competition?
- What are our goals this month, this quarter, this year, next year, five years from now?
- Who has to do what for us to achieve our goals this month, this quarter, this year, next year, five years from now?

Key to achieving organisational clarity is focus on the essence of each question, since all of them are important and carry their own challenges. Without those answers confusions and hesitation invade an organisation.

3. OVER-COMMUNICATING ORGANISATIONAL CLARITY

Once the executive team has achieved clarity, it must communicate that clarity to employees. In healthy organisations, Lencioni elucidates, employees are not being kept in the dark about what is going on.

According to the author, effective communication requires repetition in order to take hold in an organisation and simple messages – what employees want from their leaders is clear uncomplicated messages about where the organisation is going and how they can contribute to getting there. Finally, since employees have preferences about the way they receive information, it is important the use of multiple mediums to convey messages to them.

4. REINFORCING ORGANISATIONAL CLARITY THROUGH HUMAN SYSTEMS

Any company, Lencioni says, has to build the sense of clarity into the fabric of their organisation throughout processes and systems that drive human behaviour. The challenge, the author elucidates, is to do it without creating unnecessary bureaucracy.

When an organisation adopts human systems properly it maintains its identity and sense of direction – even during time of change. It ensures that employees are hired, managed, rewarded, recognised and even being moved out of the company, for reasons that are consistent with its organisational clarity.

Why is it so critical for leaders to address The Four Obsessions of an Extraordinary Executive?

“Because”, elucidates Lencioni, “there is nothing more important than making an organisation healthy to make it successful over time.

Regardless of the temptations to occupy themselves with other issues extraordinary executives keep focused on their organisation's health". The results are less politics and confusion, higher employee engagement, higher morale, higher productivity, lower turnover and lower costs.

The book:

The Four Obsessions of an Extraordinary Executive: A Leadership Fable, by Patrick M. Lencioni, 2000, Jossey-Bass A Wiley Imprint, United States of America

About the author:

Patrick M. Lencioni is founder and president of The Table Group, a management consulting firm that specialises in executive team development and organisational health. As a consultant and keynote speaker he has worked with thousands of leaders in many different types of organisations - multinational corporations, entrepreneurial ventures, the military, the sport industry, universities and nonprofits. Lencioni is author of nine business books with over three million copies sold worldwide.

