

Values and Leadership

Leadership and decision-making in the 21st century is a dynamic and emerging field. As we increasingly learn that the management wisdom of the past no longer well serves the complexity and ever-changing landscape of the future, one powerful element stands out as essential for successful leadership—the ability to understand, communicate and live from our values.

In the January 2008 issue of Harvard Business Review, the entire content of the “Centennial Issue” is devoted to leadership and strategy. Harvard faculty member Rosabeth Moss Kanter asks the question, “What enables a big business to be agile?” (p. 43). She interviewed 350 leaders from 5 continents about what makes them successful in a large organization.

The key, I’ve concluded, is that a decisive shift is occurring in what might be called the guidance systems of these global giants. Employees once acted mainly according to rules and decisions handed down to them, but they now draw heavily on their shared understanding of mission.... Authority is still exercised and activities are still coordinated – but thanks to common platforms, standardized processes, and, *above all, widely shared values* [italics added] and standards, coherence now arises more spontaneously. (p. 44)

Kanter goes on to say that “Values turn out to be the key ingredient in the most vibrant and successful of today’s multinationals” (p. 45). If the folks at Harvard are even partly right, we all have much to understand about how we explore and become more aware of our own values, and then engage with our values in collective action.

At Saint Mary's, we help leaders explore and understand their values, as the root of their unique leadership and contribution to the world. The "decisive shift" articulated by Kanter is what Hall (1994) describes as a new level of leadership consciousness. As people begin to move from the hierarchical and problem-solving world of the past, as characterized by the industrial revolution,

[W]e begin to develop an independent sense of ourselves.... We begin to honor our own judgment rather than trust the correctness of the rules and regulations.... This is the phase where we begin to be self-initiating.... [With this new leadership consciousness] the world is a creative project in which I want to participate.... Authority is viewed as coming from within ourselves. (p. 54)

As Rosebeth Moss Kanter has demonstrated in her research, values, and an organization's congruence with those values, is what makes for success across both local and global organizations. However, people increasingly talk about the importance of values without having any systematic way to understand the terrain of values, and how engaging our values can lead to greater effectiveness and practical, action-oriented results. We know values are important, but how do we bring our awareness of value priorities to our individual, team and organizational contexts? As a part of the executive leadership coaching session, you will be exploring the values priorities you bring to your life and work.

To read more about the Hall-Tonna Values work, please see:

<http://www.hthall.com/sub/ValuesAdvantage.pdf>