

The Excitant Manifesto

**Putting Human Beings back into
Performance Management.**

Strategy as a Learning Process.

**Improving the Quality of
Conversation and Action.**

**Plain English in Strategy &
Performance**

**Phil Jones
Managing Director
Excitant Ltd
08456 809 209**

Phil.jones@excitant.co.uk

© Copyright Excitant Ltd 2011

This document is published by
Excitant Ltd.
© Copyright Excitant Ltd 2011

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1 Why a manifesto? 3
- 2 Our manifesto 3
 - 2.1 It is about human beings..... 3
 - 2.2 It is about the Quality of conversation 4
 - 2.3 Organisations are living, social, entities: It is about learning & growing..... 5
 - 2.4 Performance management: It is about behaviours 6
 - 2.5 Plain English in business Language 7
 - 2.6 It is about Leadership with management 7
- 3 Developing our own expertise 8
- 4 Our approach to delivering consultancy 8
- 5 Contact us 8
- 6 References 8

Excitant Ltd.
08456 809 209 or +44 1780 784 887
For more information contact us at
info@excitant.co.uk

1 WHY A MANIFESTO?

As many writers and thinkers have pointed out, if you know *why* you are doing something, then *what* you do and *how* you do it become obvious.

It is what you believe. It is that sense of purpose that drives the clarity of action.

We have always provided our consultancy from particular points of principle, viewpoints and beliefs in how organisations operate and where problems often lie.

When we have stated these views, our clients have appreciated the clarity this brings.

This manifesto puts a voice to that thinking.

2 OUR MANIFESTO

In summary, our manifesto:

- 1) It is about Human Beings
- 2) It is about the quality of conversation
- 3) Organisations are living social entities: It is about learning and growing
- 4) Performance management: It is about behaviours
- 5) Plain English in Business Language
- 6) It is about leadership with management

The following sections detail our thinking and the campaigns that support it. It also describes how we develop our expertise and our approach to delivering consultancy.

From this manifesto we have developed four campaigns that we apply during our work

- 1) The campaign for plain English
- 2) Performance Management should treat people like Human Beings.
- 3) Treating Strategy as a Learning Process.,
- 4) Improving the Quality of Conversation and the Quality of action: At every level, within the organisation, and outside.

These campaigns are part of our fourth Generation Balanced Scorecard approach.

2.1 IT IS ABOUT HUMAN BEINGS

- 1) Organisations are made up of human beings. Customers, suppliers and partners are human beings. When we forget this, we fail as an organisation. When we remember, we can outperform others.
- 2) Financial capital is a commodity to be exploited. We don't have human capital but human beings: Human beings needs to be fed and nurtured to get the best outcomes.
- 3) Human beings work more effectively, individually and as a team, when they are engaged in what they are doing, believe in its importance and feel they can make a difference, for themselves and for others.
- 4) People are not stupid. People are intelligent. People are interested in your strategy and plans and should be trusted with them. What may appear as 'stupid' behaviour is often caused by the context in which people are working: a context created for them by others. It is our duty as employers and managers to avoid such a context.
- 5) Human beings have conversations. They communicate in language that is natural, open, honest, direct, funny and sometimes shocking. Whether explaining or complaining, joking or serious, the human voice is unmistakably genuine. It can't be faked.ⁱ

Our Campaign:

- 1) ***Putting Humans beings back into performance management.*** *This is part of our fourth generation balanced scorecard approach, helping organisation put human beings back into strategy, transformation and performance management.*

2.2 IT IS ABOUT THE QUALITY OF CONVERSATION

- 1) *Quality of conversation* is at the root of many problems and the source of many sustainable solutions. This quality of conversation occurs: Within the board room and management team, Between managers and their staff; Amongst staff; With customers; Amongst customers; With and amongst investors, regulators and others with a stake in the organisation
- 2) Quality of conversation is about understanding what people believe and why they believe what they do. At the root of many problems is a failure to explain things the thinking and beliefs behind our actions.
- 3) Conversation is a two way process. Quality conversation involves careful listening and asking the right questions.
- 4) The biggest mistake is to think you have already communicated? The second biggest mistake is to assume that you have been understood.

- 5) Many popular ways of meeting, reporting and managing stifle the quality of conversation.
- 6) It's tempting to think that we can control the conversation within, and outside, the organisation, but we can not. The social network and rumour mill communicates faster than the organisation.
- 7) Clarity of thinking and listening precedes quality of conversation. Quality of conversation leads to learning amongst all parties to the conversation.

Our Campaign:

1) Improving the quality of conversation within teams and organisations

2.3 ORGANISATIONS ARE LIVING, SOCIAL, ENTITIES: IT IS ABOUT LEARNING & GROWING

- 1) The ability of an organisation to grow and develop its culture, knowledge and capabilities is a fundamental driver of its operations, strategy and results. The ability of an organisation to learn and adapt faster than its competitors may be its only sustainable competitive advantageⁱⁱ.
- 2) Much learning in organisations is often accidentally discouraged and unintentionally stifled. Some organisations even exhibit what would be described as a learning disability in an individual. In organisations these symptoms can be reversed. Everything we do provides a learning opportunity.
- 3) Strategy is a learning process: *Strategy formulation* is the interplay between a dynamic environment and bureaucratic momentum, with leadership mediating between the twoⁱⁱⁱ. *Strategy implementation* is a persistent pattern of behaviour to create and maintain bureaucratic momentum, with leadership learning from the strategy, and refining it, as it is executed. [do we need a quick explanation of 'bureaucratic momentum' here?]
- 4) The implementation of strategy and transformational change in organisations is primarily a social activity. Social pressure and peer pressure trumps power and logic every time.
- 5) Strategy does not exist in plans. Ambition does not live in measures and targets. Budgets are not the capability of an organisation. These are narrow, one dimensional, versions of what we mean, want to achieve and how we intend to get them. We need to get past these one dimensional descriptions.
- 6) All plans should be burnt: The strategy that matters is the one that is in people's heads: the one they execute every time they make a decision; every time they interact with colleagues and customers. Your strategy exists in the behaviours of your organisation.

Our Campaign:

- 1) **Strategy is a learning process.** Helping organisations to treat strategy formulation and implementation as a learning process.

2.4 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT: IT IS ABOUT BEHAVIOURS

- 1) Good organisational governance recognises the need to manage different aspects for different reasons. Good governance keeps an eye on all aspects. Imbalance in governance at the top often causes imbalance throughout the organisation.
- 2) “What gets measured gets managed” is true, so poor choice of measure leads to poor management. Poor performance management approaches lead to poor management. Too many approaches focus simplistically on measures and targets, rather than the behaviours they encourage. These are a crude mechanism of influence and change. It is about behaviour.
- 3) It is about judgement *and* evidence. You cannot run an organisation on measures alone; otherwise we would employ computers instead of experienced managers. Good managers use both. Good managers develop both in their staff.
- 4) The ‘discipline of performance’ precedes the ‘culture of performance’. A successful organisation needs both. The discipline of performance includes clarity of action.
- 5) Too often individual measures act as a divisive tool that undermines the joined up nature of an organisation. If you want to upset the whole system, measure only a part of it. If you want to manage a whole system, monitor the whole system and its context.
- 6) KPIs do not manage organisations, people do. The language of KPIs, measures, targets, indicators, scorecards, gets in the way of good management. There are no golden bullets with measures and KPIs: even if you find them they will only tell part of the story.

Campaign:

- 1) **Part of our “Treating people like human beings”** approach which is embedded into our Fourth Generation Balanced Scorecard thinking and practices into organisations.

2.5 PLAIN ENGLISH IN BUSINESS LANGUAGE

- 1) We believe in plain English. Too much of the language of strategy and performance is wrapped up in jargon. Too many phrases have lost their meaning. Too many words are used to mean the same thing with no distinction between them. This causes mis-understandings and is the root of many problems.
- 2) Jargon should be between consenting adults in private. If you are not consenting adults, and not in private, then jargon should be avoided.
- 3) When jargon fails, use the simple meaning of the word in English. When two words have different meanings plain English they should have different meanings in business.

Our plain English campaigns

- 1) **The campaign for plain English in strategy.** Strategy as an over-used, and misunderstood, word. It should even be banned, so people have to clarify what aspect of strategy they are actually talking about.
- 2) **The campaign for Plain English in Performance management:** “Indicators merely indicate whereas measures actually measure”, is a part of our plain English campaign.

2.6 IT IS ABOUT LEADERSHIP WITH MANAGEMENT

- 1) Leadership is about creating the space for people to perform. Management is about ensuring they can perform and do perform.
- 2) The behaviour of leaders at the top of an organisation ripples down through the organisation. Management teams should look to themselves before they look to their staff. If managers want an organisation wants to change, often the first place to start is to look at themselves and their behaviours.
- 3) The culture created by individual leaders leaves a lasting impression on the organisation. It might not be the impression you expected. It might not be obvious. An organisation’s culture is the often the reflection of the personality of an individual who has long since left, but whose impact still affects the organisation.
- 4) You do not have all the answers: your staff and customers often do. The question is: how do you tap into this resource?

Our campaign:

- 1) **Our strategic learning approach:** Connecting leadership and management in a framework that helps organisations learn from their strategy.

3 DEVELOPING OUR OWN EXPERTISE

- 1) Our consultancy combines what works from experience and our research. We shamelessly research what organisations are doing and how they are being successful. We talk with successful managers and practitioners. We also recognise our clients have been some of our best teachers. We learn from clients even when we are helping them.
- 2) We read within and around our subject: Our consultancy is informed by the best authors, consultants, practitioners and academics in our field. We read around and outside our subject.
- 3) We look for the simple principles and deeper explanations. We pass these onto our clients.
- 4) We continually refine and develop our approach, using what works and making refinements depending on the client situation.

4 OUR APPROACH TO DELIVERING CONSULTANCY

- 1) We know that our clients understand their business far better than we do. Our role is to help you manage your business better. So we bring subject matter expertise, the ability to listen to your particular problems and impartial advice to help you succeed.
- 2) One size does not fit all. Best practice is often common practice. Common sense is not always that common.
- 3) We have a network of trusted associates we have worked with before. They have particular expertise that we can draw in as necessary. If we don't have the expertise, we say so.
- 4) We believe in teaching our clients to fish, not catching fish for them. We give you our knowledge and experience so you can continue to use the approach, and maintain the change, without us. Selfishly, this also means you become a good reference site for us.

5 CONTACT US

Excitant is a management consultancy business. You can contact us:

Office: 08456 809 209 or +44 1780 784887

info@excitant.co.uk

6 REFERENCES

ⁱ Adapted from "The Cluetrain Manifesto". We are grateful to their clarity of thought, language and insight

ⁱⁱ Arie De Geus, The Living Organisation.

ⁱⁱⁱ Mintzberg, Tracking Strategy