



## Bridges

A bi-monthly newsletter from Meridian Consulting, Inc.

*Building Bridges to Success*

July/August 2005

### In This Issue:

- **Featured Article:** *Is Your Organization MAD—Making a Difference?*
- **Book/Article Review:** *The Age of Participation*
- **Featured Service:** *Training Services*

### Quote:

*"I think everybody should huddle-up every 30 seconds to see how everyone is doing and to make a new plan."*

**Steve Young, Hall of Fame Quarterback**

### Forward: *Are You Making a Difference?*

At Meridian, we have spent the last ten years working with organizations and the people in them, and there are two lessons that have been reinforced time and again: your people affect your organization more than any other variable AND your organizational systems affect how people work.

Business is a uniquely human endeavor; it exists for people, is conducted by people, and it occurs between people. Your organization's success depends on the constructive interactions and interdependence of individuals AND your people depend on your organizational systems to facilitate their efforts. When these two critical variables are synchronized, you create commitment, accountability and a sense of shared ownership among your people—this is the essence of *Authentic Participation*.

Creating participative work environments AND promoting collaboration among individuals doesn't happen by accident. It requires that leadership align the organizational systems to support constructive, interdependent business relationships, and to help individuals to develop personal mastery. In the next three articles, we will expand on the following topics:

- *Is Your Organization MAD— Making A Difference?*
- *Are Your Work Relationships MAD— Making A Difference?*
- *Are You MAD— Making A Difference?*

We hope you enjoy this series. As always we encourage your participation through comments, observations, and suggestions.

---

## **Featured Topic: *Is Your Organization MAD—Making a Difference?***

*"If each individual does not make a personal decision to be accountable for the success of the organization, no amount of automation, appraisal, or pay will produce what we require."*

**Peter Block, forward to The Age of Participation**

When people authentically participate in the business of their organization, they are more productive, have higher levels of job satisfaction, and take personal responsibility for the reputation of their organization. *This establishes a distinct competitive advantage.*

### **What does it mean to participate authentically?**

People can participate at an authentic level when they acquire “emotional muscle.” This is demonstrated when individuals act with self-confidence, operate in and sustain an environment of trust, have the ability to create and maintain clear agreements with others, and have the ability to manage disagreements in a manner that promotes learning, improves innovation, and honors diversity.

### **Aligning internal AND external strategies, improves organizational capability.**

People will only develop and sustain that *emotional muscle* if the work environment supports that behavior. In other words, leadership must learn to flex its *strategic muscles* to include the *intent* and the *action* to build internal capability. When your external and internal strategies are aligned and integrated, you improve your ability to set and achieve your organizational goals.

Your organization can and does **Make A Difference** when it expands its *strategic muscle* to focus on building the internal capability to contribute, along with the external ability to compete. Nurturing internal capability builds an environment of authentic participation.

Inadvertently, your organization may communicate the opposite message when your people interact daily with the bureaucracy in the form of checks and balances, procedures, policies, and rules. In addition, certain management actions and reactions can communicate the wrong message, creating the environment for apathy and causing people to shut down.

When people are not fully engaged in their work, they are not motivated to contribute fully and they fail to participate in an authentic way. In short, *they just show up and do their job.*

### **How are people showing up in your workplace?**

The workplace is a complex web of interdependent relationships. Developing the *strategic muscle* to build internal capability allows your systems and the management team to increase its flexibility and learning, to support the authentic participation of every, single individual.

There are an infinite number of approaches to making this happen and that is as it should be. Your organization is a unique community of individuals with your own history, your own set of core competencies, and corporate strengths.

There are four dashboard indicators  
of an environment rich in *Authentic Participation*.

1. **Independent Relationships** – Business is a uniquely human endeavor conducted by people, between people, and for people. All of us are in the *relationship business* and *interdependent relationships* are the *emotional muscle* that provides drive and stability in the organization. There are three elements of a culture that fosters solid, interdependent relationships:
  - An organization that promotes self-awareness and encourages self-management builds self-confidence and has a tendency to identify and leverage individual strengths and talents.
  - When trust exists between people, they will assume that others are acting in good faith and they are more open to influence and less entrenched.
  - When agreement is lacking or priorities are unclear, apathy grows and commitment is tenuous.
  
2. **Cultural Fabric** –The culture is a reflection of the personality and profile of your organization. Regardless of your organization’s profile, when your organization engages the minds and spirits of its people in the expression of that identity, you create a unity of purpose and a pride that leads to successful results. A cultural fabric that promotes the authentic participation of its people is manifested in three ways:
  - Pride—it is the natural outcome from people who are fully engaged in meaningful work; and where individuals have the continual opportunity use their natural talents in the pursuit of that meaningful work.
  - Accountability—when it is visible from top to bottom, it creates an atmosphere that is free of blame and one that focuses upon solutions.
  - Ethical practice—people create value both inside and outside of the organization; each individual within your organization impacts the organization as a whole, just as your organization impacts a larger community.
  
3. **Distributed Leadership** – This has to do with how power and authority are distributed and applied within your organization. Organizations that have a distributed power structure tend to have more leaders at more levels—people contributing because it’s the right thing to do—creating a distinct competitive advantage. *Distributed Leadership* is demonstrated by the existence of the following conditions in the organization:
  - Development of strategies and the “walk-the’-talk” implementation that encourages the authentic participation of each individual, and honors that contribution.
  - The leadership capability of each individual is encouraged and supported. This results in less competition and more collaboration—because leaders are there to support, provide resources, and remove or minimize obstacles; because leaders model the behavior they want to see in others; and because that behavior serves the goals of the organization.
  - The organizational systems reward leaders at ALL levels who act with *Confidence*, *Character*, *Competence*, and *Compassion*, and impose consequences on those who don’t.
  
4. **Structural Fabric** – This is the infrastructure of policies, procedures, and rules that govern day-to-day actions. This is sometimes referred to as the organization's system. In a study conducted by Coopers & Lybrand and George Washington University in 1993, they found

that companies that were identified by their peers as being “successful” had one thing in common—they were characterized as having *open* operating systems. An *open system* promotes innovation, encourages the exchange of ideas, and is more informal.

- Flexible organizations find ways to eliminate silos and adapt to rapidly changing circumstances. In general, the organization views change as an opportunity for growth, and people have the ability to perform many tasks, and employees are often exposed to many facets of the organization and rewarded for doing so.
- Management and employees are not separate groups, but instead, members of the same community with the same values and goals. Employees have access to all levels of the hierarchy, are included in decision-making, and executives are both visible and approachable.
- Open systems demonstrate a strong commitment to individual initiative and learning. The organization makes an effort to minimize the number of rules and policies that it employs, instead developing processes for standardization and agreements to ensure compliance, and developing processes and agreements for resolving disputes between individuals (regardless of rank), teams, and departments.

A growing bank of research data supports an organization’s commitment to creating an environment of authentic participation—the results are long-term, sustainable success. A 10-year study by Dennis J. Kravitz (1996) found that companies that engaged in progressive people management practices that promote participation, had better financial results than those that did not employ these progressive practices.

- Sales growth 7.4% - 16.1%
- Profit growth 4.4% - 18.2%
- Profit margin 3.3% - 6.4%
- Growth in earnings per share 4.7% - 10.7%
- Total return (stock appreciation + dividends) 8.8% - 19.0%

Organizations that *Make A Difference* pay as much attention to the strategies of building authentic participation, as they do to the strategies employed to compete in the marketplace.

*Is your organization MAD—Making A Difference?*

If so, how do you know? In our next edition we will expand on the interpersonal skills and behaviors that promote collaboration and authentic participation between individuals who are interdependent.

---

## **Book Review: “*The Age of Participation*”**

*By Patricia McLagan & Christo Nel*

The authors of this book make a compelling case for why *Participative Management* practices in organizations are a viable means for competing in a global economy AND for creating a rich environment where people can *make a difference*. This book addresses what’s needed to “bridge the gap between intentions and actions...this challenge is a human dilemma, not just a management dilemma.”

The book is reader-friendly, blending theory and practice, with numerous examples from over 200 organizations on their respective journeys to building participative work environments. They describe what workers, managers, executives, labor unions, customers, and suppliers can do as

part of a participative enterprise. More importantly, they confront the tough issues that can derail organizations from moving to a participative work environment, and deflate the fears and misperceptions that can sabotage those efforts.

They offer clear and concise methods for engaging the fundamental elements that are required for creating a participative environment:

- Values
- Relationships
- Structures
- Competencies
- Leadership
- Controls
- Management
- Pay systems
- Information

This book addresses what it really takes for organizations to secure the willing commitment of its people.

---

### **Featured Service: *Training***

Contact us to learn about the training programs we offer that can help your organization and the people in it—*Make A Difference*.

- Influence Without Authority: *Building Powerful Interdependent Relationships*.
- The Persuadable Mind: *Helping Individuals Make A Difference*.
- Building Strategic Muscle: *Developing Organizational Strategies that Promote Authentic Participation*.
- What To Do When Things Go Wrong: *Managing Disagreement and Getting the Work Done*.
- Giving Valuable Feedback: *Focusing People on Things You Want Them to Keep Doing, and Things You Want Them to Improve—Every Day*.

Helping your people acquire right the skills, behaviors and tools saves time, reduces costs, increases the quality of your products and services, and improves customer loyalty.

Contact us today for a *free* consultation to discuss your training needs.

**Tel:** (925) 258-0304

Email: [info@meridianconsultinginc.com](mailto:info@meridianconsultinginc.com)

**Visit us on the web at:** [www.meridianconsultinginc.com](http://www.meridianconsultinginc.com)

---

**The Small Print:** Copyright © Meridian Consulting, Inc., 2005. All Rights reserved. Please feel free to print this eZine, we only ask that you give Meridian credit for the content when you share it.

If at any time, you would like your name removed from our monthly eZine, simply send an e-mail to [info@meridianconsultinginc.com](mailto:info@meridianconsultinginc.com) with the word “unsubscribe” in the message box. Your address will never be sold, bartered, traded, or in any other way shared with any other person.