

THE MACRIS GROUP

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From Dean's Desk:



Prologue

Several years ago we characterized the issues facing businesses as puzzles. We stated that few mysteries remain in the business world, but there are many more puzzles. Shaping the pieces of the puzzle and fitting them together into a cohesive effective organization is the real challenge. The issues are typically known, or can at least be identified. Rather than mysteries, which contain unknown components, what businesses face are puzzles. The pieces are usually there, but most likely need to be re-shaped so they all fit together. We use the concept of Landia to highlight the selection and shaping of puzzle pieces into an effective, vibrant organization. The mechanism to shape the organization with all its pieces and Landias is Contextual Leadership. While our discussion of Landia started a light hearted representation, it is a very real challenge to leaders. Applying the concepts of Contextual Leadership is the focus of this article.

Leadership Landia and Organizational Environment

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Introduction

In our last article in a rather tongue and cheek manner we introduced the concept of one's "Landia" ("Portlandia", e.g.). Over the past several years, we have been writing about leadership, particularly Contextual Leadership. If we examine the two concepts of Landia and Contextual Leadership together and couple them with organizational environment, we see how leadership can affect the culture and effectiveness of an organization.

A brief refresher on Contextual Leadership:

Contextual Leadership differs from the historical view of leadership development and/or leadership training as what seemingly successful leaders or celebrity leaders do.

Contextual leadership attempts to understand the dynamics of leadership and leadership responsibilities. Unpacking these dynamics and becoming aware of how to maximize the tangibles, leaders can begin to recognize how to respond successfully and lead their organizations.

Contextual leadership is a framework to build upon. It recognizes that various situations may have different contexts from the expected norm or one's previous experiences.

Contextual leaders are those people who are able to:

- Recognize and understand the culture of the organization and its people
- Use their attributes and apply their experience and competencies in an enlightened and effective manner to achieve positive results for the organization, its people, and its stakeholders
- Not do blindly what may have worked for them before in some other context!

For more on this please contact us or visit our website Newsletter button, you will find detailed articles on Contextual Leadership.

First, despite the light-hearted approach we took to the concept of Landia, Landia is real. Each and every one of us has our own Landia. Landias can overlap and Landias can be distinct and different with little commonality. We see them

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everywhere and every day. Sometimes this perception is conscious and sometimes unconscious. Consider entering a social event where you may or may not know people. The first thing we tend to do is look for someone we know, then someone who we may perceive as having some common characteristic with whom we can begin building rapport. Once we start talking we are looking for overlapping Landias. When we identify the Landia overlaps, barriers come down. In contrast, if through initial conversations we see little overlap in our Landias, we tend to move on and begin the process again. This example was simplistic. Now if we believe we can expand our perspectives by seeking people whose Landia is different and then work to bring the two together in a manner that begins building rapport, a synergistic effect can happen. People too often look for common Landias and overlook the opportunity to expand the discussion and expand their own horizons by engaging with different Landias. So let's translate these examples into an organization.

Balancing Landias – a leader's responsibility

In past articles we have discussed using tools like Myers-Briggs to identify "personality types", recognize different types, and make those types work together productively. It is the same with Landias, perhaps to a greater extent, since they are more diverse and not as easily categorized as an MBTI grid. However, those Landias come together in an organization and must function to advance the organization. If an organization had only similar Landias it would not only be boring, it would eventually stagnate. There would be no one to challenge ideas and bring different perspectives into the organizational thinking.

The leader of an organization must recognize that he/she needs different Landias, different perspectives, and different thinking to build a productive and progressive organization. The challenge for the leader is to find those different Landias and then mesh them into a cohesive unit.

You want enough overlap in the right areas and sufficient diversity to ensure broad perspectives and thinking consistent with the Vision and Mission of the organization. This diversity, however, does often create some conflict and head-butting between staff members whose Landias are divergent. Leaders have to seek different Landias, but then must monitor and control the diverging Landias to create a cohesive unit. Easy to write, but not particularly easy to do. Instead of focusing solely on the mission, but leaders must put equal-and sometimes more-effort into the human interactions within the organization.

The imperative for leaders is to create an environment that understands different Landias exist and appreciates their value to the organization, to realize that Contextual Leadership provides insights into effective leadership in order to build an organizational culture that respects varying Landias, and to utilize those contextual qualities, attributes and experiences to achieve the mission of the organization. While this concept is certainly not new, it suggests that the dynamics of Landias provide a fresh way of looking at building a cohesive and well-functioning team.

Creating culture and changing culture

Organization culture is often misunderstood and dismissed as a "foo foo dust". But it is real and critical to an organization intent on achieving its mission and thriving. The culture of an organization develops over time. Culture is influenced by the leader, more or less, depending on his/her leadership traits and personality. Just to shed a bit more light on the topic, the type of organization plays a tremendous role in a leader's ability to affect a cultural change. We use this example in our presentations. As a former nuclear submariner, I experienced a few changes of command. As one Captain physically leaves the 'boat' and the new Captain boards, the culture can change almost as quickly. The hierarchical chain of command, the closeness of the physical environment, and the criticality of mission and potential danger of operating a nuclear submarine all have a significant influence on culture. Hence a new Commanding Officer can rather readily, and almost immediately, affect culture change. Contrast that with a Not-for-Profit organization that has both employees and volunteers. A leadership change has a completely different impact and effect. It can take years for change, much less cultural change, to take place.

Culture is also influenced by the members of the organization and the history of the organization. The various Landias within impact that influence. The impact can be positive or negative depending on how the Landias interact and are managed. Building a positive and healthy culture is one of the biggest challenges for a leader. The mission is the goal, but achieving that goal requires an effective organization that recognizes the goal and is committed to working together.

Workforce planning – hiring for culture, and balancing Landias

Perhaps one of the costliest and potentially disruptive functions within an organization is planning human resource needs and then hiring people. Planning a workforce is complex and a long term initiative, and hiring the

right people can be even more difficult. With current employment laws, when hiring goes awry, significant direct and indirect costs impact the organization. A person may fulfill all the technical requirements of the position description, possess the requisite education and experience, but if that person does not fit the organizational culture no one is happy. It is important to note we are not suggesting the IBM Gray Suit model. Cloning people is typically not in the best interest in any context. We recognize certain expectations exist within any culture, and if those expectations are not communicated at the onset, current employees and new hires can potentially clash, or at a minimum, experience unnecessary stressors in the workplace.

When a Not-for-Profit organization engaged our services, as part of that work we modified their overall hiring process. The team of employees we were advising became aware of how culture was impacting their hiring and retention process; consequently, they realized the financial (and disruptive) impact bad hires had on the organization. We systematically changed their process into a “Hiring for Culture” context.

Landia plays a major role in the success of a Hiring for Culture strategy. The goal is not to have a Landia diagram that is neat, symmetrical, and overlapping uniformly. (That is something that is probably impossible.) What this concept strives for is a balance of Landias, where people bring unique and special skills, knowledge, experience, and attributes to the organization all within the context of balance. For this diversity to be successful, the people within an organization must also be aware of the concept of Landia, learn to respect differences, realize the benefits of differences, and also realize that healthy conflict is part of a healthy organization. The negative impact of Group Think is extremely serious.

The onus is on the leader to be aware of Landias and how they can interact both positively and negatively. In addition, the team members must recognize people are different and not everyone thinks or acts like they do. And to achieve the mission of the organization and to help the functioning of the organization, they must accept differences and be willing to learn to work together. Such a transition will not always be smooth. Differences can be frustrating and lead to friction. The leader must take the different Landias and point them in the same direction and lead the effort to overcome the differences to achieve the goals.

Clearly, workforce planning is a key to helping the leader

find and nurture diverse team members and instill a common goal and direction. He/she must always be aware of Landia interactions to keep the team functioning and headed toward the organizational goal. To do so requires the leader to expend more effort on the human aspects of the team than on the technical aspects. For some, especially in technically oriented organizations, human interactions are not a “normal” focus and can take a concerted effort, bringing context into the discussion. The context created in a technical organization is different than the context of a marketing or sales organization.

Conclusion

We continue our discussion on Landias by reintroducing contextual leadership. Each individual’s Landia is unique, while individuals in an organization contribute to its culture. Divergent Landias are a necessary part of a successful organization. A key aspect—and challenge—of building a high-functioning organization is for the leader to find and nurture divergent Landias. Taking each of the individual Landias, building on strengths and meshing them together into a productive unit may be one of the biggest challenges a leader faces.

Wishing you the best for the upcoming Holiday Season, and don’t hesitate to call or write when the puzzle pieces don’t seem to fit or if different pieces will help fill-in the gaps.



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