Leadership and BPM

Last February one of the most influential Leadership gurus in the world came to visit the Netherlands to speak about his motto, “Lead Without Title.” You may have heard about him or his books. His name is Robin Sharma. He has written a number of successful books like The Monk Who Sold in Ferrari and The Greatness Guide: Powerful Secrets for Getting to World Class. I’ll be honest, I was not too familiar with his work but, as it happens, I was introduced to Robin’s work at the end of last year on the same day I was to meet with Peter Fingar (you may have heard about him too☺). We briefly talked about Robin’s view on Leadership, and, afterwards, Peter sent me this great quote:

Robin’s message on leadership goes to the core of what it takes to become a process-managed enterprise. Command-and-control leadership gives way to connect-and-collaborate, where every member of a business team is a "leader." In a process-managed enterprise, leaders don't give commands, they transmit information, trusting the team members' competencies and gaining accountability through transparency. True leadership is about cooperation, not control. It's about acting on opportunities, and letting others lead the leader when they know best about getting stuff done.

With the help of this great statement I was able to introduce Robin’s views on Leadership to the local Dutch BPM community. A number of us attended his one-day workshop along with a large number of professionals and the occasional guru-groupie. First of all, Robin was able to entertain the audience throughout the whole day with numerous anecdotes on Leadership. Leadership begins with making the issue easy. Take away the complexity and drill down to the essence of the issue. The best Leaders develop their environment and their colleagues. In other words, they build, develop, and coach the best possible team and facilitate teamwork. Great Leaders are also dreamers. They have a long-term vision of a future that has not been implemented yet. How do you become a Leader? According to Robin it’s all about “Lead by example”: You get what you give. But also, it’s about an absolute focus on your objectives, choices, and desired results. Aim to get better by making small daily 1% improvements. This will lead to great results over time. Do keep in mind this constant change may disrupt an organization. Sound familiar?

Was it all worth it? Did Peter make the relevant link for the average BPM-professional? I think he did. Although Robin’s workshop was not about becoming a process-oriented organization, it was, in essence, about change management and personal effectiveness. How can any individual in an organization influence his environment to support cooperation and communication? Basically, implementing a Business Process is about implementing cooperation, teamwork, and reducing complexity.

This is all great news for the average employee but, where does this leave most current leaders, aka the average manager in an organization? These managers are mostly brought up in a Command-and-Control driven world. With special thanks to Frederick Taylor who has given us the scientific organization in 1911 and the accompanying personal/individual KPIs, a lot of these managers get their (professional) self esteem from how big their department is or how many
people they manage. How many managers do you know who will gladly make the following statement, “Last year I was managing over 100 people and I had to make all the decisions on my own, but now, I’ve improved my position as I now manage just 50 people and I’m part of a team.” Not many managers I know would make this statement gladly, but, as a matter of fact, this is what we often promise if we talk about implementing BPM. A lot of BPM marketing collateral and white papers talk about FTE reduction and creating a supply or value chain, i.e., placing the manager somewhere in the business process by connecting him with colleagues. Basically, BPM is attacking the ego of the average manager! BPM is taking away your freedom, and BPM is making you smaller – in my experience, something a lot of BPM consultants and vendors are not aware of, or are just beginning to realize.

So, are we moving to a Connect-and-Collaborate world? To put it differently, can your average manager put a stop to all this “BPM nuisance”? He may want to, but there is a whole new generation of individuals out there who think differently. Who are they? They are the “Generation Einstein.”

The term Generation Einstein comes from the book, Generation Einstein: smart, social and superfast by Jeroen Boschma. The first version was published in the Netherlands in 2006 and won the PIM Marketing Literature Prize for 2006. The book asserts that, since World War II, the current generation of 12 to 16 year-olds is the first to exceed their parents’ generation in a number of positive qualities. They are – amongst other things – socially minded, co-operative, bright, and involved in ways their parents were not. They have the ability to absorb and digest a high amount of multi-channel-provided information. They share experiences directly through blogs and wiki’s without the interference of a management layer. They are directly connected 24/7. Just think what will happen when this generation joins the workforce and becomes our colleagues or clients. It is safe to predict that they will demand a connect-and-collaborate world without silos. The hierarchical structured (siloeed) organization – again, thank you Frederick Taylor – will most likely become an anachronism.

So, the Great Leaders or dreamers to whom Robin Sharma is referring might well be dreaming of the Connect-and-Collaborate world that has not been implemented yet. How do we get there? I don’t know, but I’m glad that there is a new group of future, generation Einstein, leaders out there who will be there soon to help us to make it a reality.

If you get the chance, I strongly recommend any BPM-professional to attend one of Robin’s workshops. Check out www.robinsharma.com.