

From New York with Love



She was told that she has a “portable career”. For the last 8 years, Olympia Mitsopoulou has lived and set up her business in three different countries. Olympia is the owner of Atom Wave (www.atom-wave.com), a Greek company specializing in coaching and mentoring with international client-companies.

Olympia is now based Lausanne but spent the last couple of years in New York. In this article she was asked to share her insights of where things are going in the area of Leadership Development.

The objective of this article is to communicate some of the international trends in Leadership Development, that I think are a mirror of some major changes in the corporate way of thinking. If I were to put all these trends under a bigger umbrella, I would describe them as a shift towards things that have a deeper sense of purpose, activities that self-actualize people and at the same time secure financial success.

1. CONSCIOUS CAPITALISM

In our era, Capitalism rules. According to its definition, Capitalism is «an economic system that is based on private ownership of the means of production in order to create profitable goods or services.» Although, most financially developed societies adopt a capitalistic economic model, people do not seem to be really happy with it. There is a sense that things have somehow gone out of control, a sense that instead of Capitalism serving the society’s interests, we people have somehow ended serving Capitalism itself. The «myth» of the yuppie/successful and happy executive is over. At the same time, giant corporations like Lehman Brothers are collapsing and huge financial scandals have been revealed in companies considered the cornerstone of capitalism, like in Arthur Andersen, Barclays, Siemens or Enron. Corporations no longer enjoy the best of reputation, more and more people consider them ruthless, greedy even immoral. People trust corporations less and less.

Within this framework, we have the emergence of a new form of Capitalism called «Conscious Capitalism», as an alternative way of managing a company. Its main belief is that sustainable companies will be those who beyond being profitable will have a higher sense of purpose, they will be contributing to a higher quality of life of the people in societies. Leaders are challenged to think of why their company exists and what is their role beyond just increasing the stock value.

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What is more interesting is that this concept is not only embraced by world renowned business gurus like Ken Wilber, Raj Sisodia, Fred Koffman, Michael Strong but at the same time there is an increasing number of successful «Best Place to Work» companies like Whole Foods, Container Shop, Trader Joe, that have co-shaped and apply in every-day management the principles of Conscious Capitalism proving that it is a realistic model.

2: NEED FOR SPIRITUALITY

More and more in the Management Development programs of the last years, I see titles like «Transpersonal Psychology», «Ontological Executive Coaching», I meet executives fleeing to the ashrams of India to recollect their thinking, not to mention the «Forgiveness Training» that a major US Bank trained its stockbrokers, with great success! More and more, as executive coach, I hear the question of «How compatible is my job with my personal set of values?» There seems to be an increased need from executives for more «spirituality» in business. We see spirituality no longer staying at a personal level but it is appearing as a need in the professional setting as well. Corporate employees need to function in professional settings that will be more ethical, more transparent, more honest.



A story mentioned by the famous writer and «social forecaster» Patricia Aburdene is in similar line of thought. It is the case study of a high-ranking Hewlett Packard executive Greg Merten (now retired) who was in charge of 10,000 people and all of HP ink production. Merten was a tough, results-oriented manager. At some point, he lost his son at an accident. This tragic event made him decide to review his approach to people. Amongst other things, he decided to devote time to the relationship with his team. So, every month, he allocated one whole day to just sit with his team and discuss their relationship, their trust levels, and the how to improve their communication. The result was impressive, this same team doubled the profits of the unit and increased the ink production plants from one to six.

For me the conclusion is clear. When people work together with trust and honest communication, then they are willing to offer their full potential, but not when they feel manipulated and exploited.

3. EMPHASIS ON POSITIVITY



The Solution Focused Approach, Appreciative Enquiry, Strengths Based Approach, Positive Psychology: there seems to be a cluster of new approaches that are around what works, about the resources of a person, of a team of an organization. This is a big change from before, when consultants were always about diagnosing and assessing gaps in order to fix what doesn't work. What is

more impressive is how much people in organizations are more and more ready to accept moving away from problem focused approaches to solution focused ones. Now we are moving towards the concept of an appreciative positive approach that will trace within the organization ways of improvement, extraordinary examples when things have worked above average, analyzing what there is instead of what there isn't.

One of the most rewarding moments in my Solution Focused trainings, was a story shared by one of the participants, a hard-core high ranking IT director. The evening after the second day of training, inspired by the Solution Focus, he went back to his team and gathered everybody around a table. He looked at them and said: «I want to tell you a very big thank you for all the great, high quality work you have done during the last 6 months. I know I have almost tortured you with work load and I apologize. I appreciate your patience, your resilience and the results you brought, thank you!» His whole team were looking at him suspiciously and when he said «that's all», somebody asked: «Are you on pills or what?» No he said, «I discovered Solution Focus!».



About Olympia Mitsopoulou

Olympia (Olympia@atom-wave.com) is the founder of Atom-Wave, a team of highly qualified Solution Focus practitioners specializing in supporting change through Coaching and Mentoring interventions. She has a 20-year experience in the area of Leadership Development and

has worked with more than 400 client-organizations all over Europe and in the US. Olympia likes to pioneer, she was the first to introduce the Solution Focused Coaching and Mentoring in Greece, and recently designed Train the Trainer for these programs. Amongst the client-companies of Atom Wave are: Alpha Bank, AXA, Eurobank, Hellenic Petroleum, IKEA, Intersport, Philip Morris International, S&B Industrial Minerals and many others. Olympia is an Occupational Psychologist, Associate Certified Coach by the International Coach Federation, Trained Assessor for the European Mentoring and Coaching Counsel, a member of the AXIALENT faculty. She is the producer of "Turning Problems into Solutions" animation about Solution Focus with more than 70.000 views in the last 2 years. Olympia is now based in Lausanne, where she lives with her husband and son.