Sustainable Culture-Transformation is key for Business Excellence in times of Digitalization

The SUMIT-Mindset for HR-Leaders in the Digital Age

Successful leadership in the light of accelerating digitalization means, that HR-leaders need to break with cherished habits of HR management, to strike out new (often unconventional) directions and to be courageous for evaluating the impact of planned HR policies by oneself, à la Facebook Inc., Yahoo and Google LLC. In order to make these HR experiments a real benefit for the organizations and to ensure that the top-management ‘buys in’, HR Leaders need to actively put these values into practice, i.e. walk the talk for a ‘real’ cultural transformation and enact evidence-based HR management strategies. This article presents the SUMIT Mindset for leaders, an easy-to-implement guideline with tricks and activities, leaders should follow in order to make the cultural transformation in the digital age a sustainable success to the good of both, employees and business excellence.

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5 Habits of an Evidence-Based Manager or the SUMIT-Principle. Please ask yourself a question:

Would you consult a doctor who openly admits not to be up-to-date on the latest medical insights, treatments and techniques? Probably not! It is a fact, that most people want their surgeons to be experienced and knowledgeable at the same time! Apropos, most surgeons live up to these expectations themselves as well.

Yet, while we know a lot about evidence-based medicine, much less is known about evidence-based management. Thankfully, surgeons mirror managers in at least one principle: managers are better leaders, if they rely on experience and on new insights of management science, too. Thus the crucial question is what habits should evidence-based managers display? In the following, the ideal SUMIT-Manager is presented:

In short, the SUMIT-Manager keeps on track with recent scientific progress, is open-minded and has not the ‘we’ve always done it like this’ mindset. Finally, the SUMIT-Manager lives evidence-based management and serves as a bridge to mitigate the much quoted gap of science and practice.

Strike new paths for the root-causes of problems. Most of the time, Business School education applies the ‘think in solutions, not in problems’ dogma. Evidence-based managers, however, should better follow the dictum of Henri Kaiser ‘Problems are only opportunities in work clothes’. By the way, a good technique to get at the root-cause of problems is Toyotas’ “5-Why-
Method”, which encourages employees to ask ‘why does X lead to Y’ at least five times.

**Update yourself on management science.** Keep updated about management sciences! I admit that most scientific journals appear swotty and make the read tedious. But make it a habit to read at least the “Academy of Management Annals” – a yearbook that provides a systematic overview on the state-of-the-art knowledge about relevant managerial topics. Additionally, read one of the below journals regularly: Academy of Management Perspectives, California Management Review, Sloan Management Review or Long Range Planning. As a rule of thumb: Articles or books that do not provide details on the data and analysis used and/or do not cite the work they rely on cannot be considered as evidence-based.

**Fig. 1: The Anatomy of a SUMIT Leader**

**Manage your reading habits.** Be a reading manager! Forget about airport business literature! Better spend your time with books, which help you sharpen your analytical skills. For instance, prefer one philosophic book per year (e.g. Josef Pieper’s ‘Leisure the basis of Culture) over six ‘how-to-whatever’ books, which promise quick-wins. Again, the ‘5-Why-Method’ reminds us how flawed quick wins may be.

**Invest in experimentation.** Allow your employees to make mistakes! There is no shame in making a mistake – it’s only a disgrace to make the same mistake twice. Treat your organization as a prototype. Experiment with new instruments and practices and track the impact carefully. For instance, before your role out a new compensation system, check it out in one unit and carefully compare before/after results in comparison with a unit where things are left unchanged.

**Top of stats.** Be on top of stats. It is amazing what insights can be gained from data, regardless whether it is BIG data or the traditional employment survey. Make sure you understand the basics of stats. Use new software tools to facilitate your analysis and offer students to re-check your analysis as part of their degree theses. Just to let you know: University professors love such data access and be sure, you’ll get much more out of your data, than you might dream of. A win-win situation for all parties.

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*P.S. This text is based on ideas of Jeffrey Pfeffer and the evidence-based management movement. Find more here: [www.cebma.org](http://www.cebma.org)*