

Concentration, please!

The ability to concentrate, to focus one's attention, has always been considered a key competence for executives. But what concentration are we talking about? How do we tell if something is worthy to make us focus or concentrate on it?

The Focused Leader, as the *Harvard Business Review* publishes this month, in an article by Daniel Goleman, raises the ideas of focusing and executives' behaviours related to the concentration on their tasks.

I do not want to restate the entire article written by Daniel Goleman, a highly respected author and, as always, a keen observer able to investigate performed behaviours, starting from an approach based on emotional intelligence, I would rather discuss what parts of this analysis work in our experience.

Meanwhile, let's bring up the relevant points of view of Goleman's thoughts: if in a leadership role, one is required to be able to focus his attention on the important issues. Usually, when we talk about focus we mean to eliminate distractions, to totally concentrate on a single element, to isolate from external disturbances. Is this what we need today, when we are involved in a fast and turbulent environment, in which inputs constantly arrive from all over?

Goleman groups focus on three points: on oneself, on the others and on the outside world (wide world). His thesis is that the first two focus points are directly related to the emotional intelligence, whereas the third is related to the ability to "read" the outside contexts and to define the right strategy to steer complexity, to generate innovation and to manage organisations. Thus, the idea is that one should improve his capability to keep the attention on those three focus points, that each one of them is relevant on its own and that the energy and resources balance put on those three drives towards a better ability to manage the overall situation, his own role and the organisation.

Goleman insists a lot on the need to start from the self-awareness as the primary basis of understanding, the first necessary step that one must get clear about before trying to understand the others. Well, what can we say about this? In our experience, how many times do we focus on ourselves in order to understand our feelings, our deep perceptions?

Measuring the importance of this ability to be connected to ourselves is proven by scientific reports about correlation between professional success and this capability of internal control.

This behaviour produces the perception of authenticity of a person and to be authentic means to be the same person with the others as well we are with ourselves. Goleman defines self-control in a particular aspect, the ability to allocate one's resources in achieving goals without getting distracted, by using willpower.

In this direction, Goleman also refers to Walter Mischel's study, and his famous Marshmellow test. Further New Zealander studies move in this direction, so as to assert that the ability of self-control has a high correlation with professional success and not only with that. The interesting thing is that Mischel says that this ability is composed of three different abilities and can it be developed with training.

With regards to the focus on others, Goleman points out that the behaviour of executives that possess this ability makes them immediately recognisable. They are those who always find a common ground, who care about people's opinions, and ultimately, with whom people (want)love to work.

At this point, Daniel Goleman enters in his most characteristic field and reminds us that empathy is the dimension that makes the difference. Most importantly, he reminds us of the subdivision in the triad Cognitive Empathy, Emotional Empathy and Empathy Concern.

In essence, the ability to express oneself with self awareness and authenticity giving a meaningful sense to our transmitting ideas, the ability to deeply connect with others and the ability to understand and sense what others feel, what they expect from us.



Finally, Goleman examines the meaning of focusing on the outside world, stressing how the ability to receive and analyse input streams allows us to understand how we can be proactive and manage trends, while foreseeing and intervening in the future. This is an essential skill for those who must think strategically.

There is nothing strange in mentioning how all these abilities to focus are important to be able to manage complex organisations as we know them today. The executives are challenged to become proficient on all three fronts, interior, towards others and towards the outside world. Instead of being extremely focused, blind and deaf to what is around them, staying in one only task, they need to focus on the specific task while being permeable to stimuli generated by these three dimensions.

This is a challenge that, in these times of turbulent markets, stressful innovative dynamics, demand saturation for many products and markets, becomes a starting point in the process of construction of one's leadership skill, which, as Phil LeNir says, is in the process of construction, of evolution that makes sense and quality, not so much in the achieving of a goal for a model of efficient leadership, that, being a model, stays as an hypothesis that is unlinked to the acting context and personality. Any good book on leadership provides guidance on how one should be in order to be a good leader, 7 behaviours, 10 qualities, 21 suggestions... The fact is that only throughout the long and challenging creation process of our managerial profile, we have the opportunity to learn how to adapt the best instances, the best viewpoint, the best abilities to our personality, to learn and interpret at best a role that becomes more complex every day, that is modified daily, and that experiments changes to which we have to adapt dynamically.

The innovative factor is that we can pay more attention to how to enhance the specific development of these skills and support executives with rapid and effective "training" programs, to, first, develop the awareness of this need, then to set them up so they can develop the contemporary focus on the three areas.

Not only emotional intelligence and not only cognitive skills, but the possibility of combining the two dimensions in a experience-driven challenge that fosters quick, long lasting learning dynamics.



This is also why the Coaching technique has been so successful. A good session with an Expert Business Coach allows you to stimulate the targeted development of people's improvement areas whilst strengthening their areas of excellence. Coaching has proven to be effective. The limitation is that the work is conducted with one individual at the time, making these sessions very costly and time-consuming.

A good solution comes from an innovative model of group sessions, in which attendees are guided to do a job on themselves, as proposed by Phil LeNir, a way that allows to organise sessions with a high degree of change to improve skills, staying in protected but challenging contexts.

