THE PURE WAY TO CREATE LEAN AND EXCELLENT ORGANIZATIONS

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An excellent organization is not only the best place to work for, but also an agent of positive social change. Apart from excelling in what it does, such an organization is capable of reducing waste, uplifting the human spirit, and having its influence felt for generations.

There are several well-known approaches to achieve this seemingly impossible dream. Lean thinking and the Toyota way (Liker, 2004; Liker & Hoseus, 2008; Liker & Meier, 2007; Womack & Jones, 2003) offer promising pathways.

David Koichi Chao, President of Lean Sensei International, made a bold and visionary statement in his book *Lean Reflections* (2009): “I believe in the power of lean to transform the world in a way that we cannot even begin to imagine” (p.1).

Mr. Chao went on to say that the lean principles involve three things: changing people to improve teamwork, changing the process to reduce waste, and changing the mindset to enhance the culture. Thus, transformation of people is the first step towards transforming the organization and culture.

The positive psychology movement (Crabtree, 2004 a, b; Linley et al., in press) offers another promising approach. Positive affects (Fredrickson, 2009; Lord et al., 2002), psychological capital (Luthans et al, 2004), and signature strengths (Hodges & Clifton, 2004; Peterson & Seligman, 2004) are all also linked to job satisfaction and productivity.

The Meaning-centered Approach to Positive Organizations

The meaning-centered approach (MCA) complements lean thinking and positive focus by exploring the vital role of meaning as a major source of intrinsic motivation to inspire and energize workers. It emphasizes work as a calling (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997), and work as an achievement of excellence and ethics (Gardner et al., 2001). It also provides a framework to reduce wasteful spending, and remove toxic elements from the workplace.

MCA has its roots in humanistic-existential tradition of Carl Rogers, Rollo May, and Abram Maslow. It emphasizes the importance of humanizing the workplace (Montuori & Purser, 2001), and the existential courage to confront uncertainty and hardships (Maddi & Khoshaba, 2005).

In this brief essay I will make the case that MCA offers the best way forward in today’s difficult and uncertain financial climate.

According to the Chinese saying, while navigating upstream, if you don’t keep moving forward, you will go backwards. In other words, every organization either grows or atrophies; if it stands still and becomes stagnant, the inevitable result is decline. The challenge before us is how to develop and main-
tain sustainable growth against the turbulent tides of recession and chaos.

MCA is inherently lean and positive. It is lean, because it aims at eliminating any activity that does not contribute to the primary purpose and mission of the organization. It is positive, because it focuses on strengths, personal growth, active engagement, and passionate pursuit of worthy goals.

**Meaning = PURE**

The best way to define meaning is PURE: Purpose, Understanding, Responsible action, and Enjoyment/Evaluation. These are the four essential components for living a meaningful life and doing meaningful work. The PURE strategy provides a road-map for both assessment and development of organizational excellence.

The meaning-centered approach (MCA) to management is based on the application of Viktor Frankl’s logotherapy (1985) to the workplace (Pattakos, 2008). The philosophy behind MCA combines idealism with realism, sustainable growth with lean.

MCA believes that individuals matter, every person possesses some strengths, and all people have an innate need for meaning and significance as well as the propensity towards personal growth. But it also recognizes the dark side of the human condition -- greed, pride, prejudice, egotistic tendency, and the potential for destructive acts. That is why MCA seeks to bring out the best as well as repairs the worst in people.

MCA believes in the potential for growth and creating a better future, but it also recognizes the need for continued improvement and pruning. This two-pronged strategy enables us to stay grounded and at the same time pursue an ideal dream. Armed with this mentality, we will not be devastated by bad news, nor will we be carried away by success.

In sum, MCA attempts to develop a corporate culture that emphasizes sustainable growth in individuals, organizations and society, and an unrelenting effort to reduce waste and corruption.

**The PURE Way to Flourishing**

PURE represents one of the several meaning-centered intervention strategies (Wong, 2010). The PURE strategy can be used as a framework of motivating the work force, transforming the corporate culture and assessing progress.

**The Imperative of Purpose**

Purpose is about motivation – both the directional and energizing dimensions of motivation. This is what drives you. This component recognizes the need for a compelling vision and mission in order for people to be motivated and united behind a common goal. In practice, we need to ensure that team members and partners share the same clearly articulated purpose and objectives. The lean principles of continued improvement and reducing waste are not sufficient – they need to be reinforced by additional sources of intrinsic motivation such as serving a higher purpose.
To be effective, the purpose has to go beyond the bottom line as illustrated in Figure 1. A higher purpose entails serving something bigger than oneself. Companies dedicated to transcendental values will contribute money and efforts to enhance the well-being of all people and protect the environment.

A purpose is clear when it is concise, concrete, focused, and measurable. Lofty and ambiguous ideals may sound good, but they cannot be easily translated into an action plan.

A purpose is compelling when it resonates with all the stakeholders and workers, and appeals to their intrinsic motivation and values. A compelling purpose or mission never fails to inspire and energize workers to be actively engaged and passionately pursue the common goals.

A purpose is consistent when it remains the guiding principle for decision making and daily practice, across departments and over time. Consistency also refers to the degree the purpose of a department is congruent with the mission of the organization.

A purpose is collaborative when it emphasizes team work, collaboration and partnership, rather than competition within the organization.

Each of these four characteristics can be rated from 1 to 10. The total score collapsing across the 10 levels and four dimensions of purpose reflects the strength and scope of the organization’s purposefulness. We can predict that the higher the score, the greater the morale and productivity.

Figure 1 Levels of purpose:

1. Vision and mission statement
2. Transcendental values
3. Societal values
4. People development
5. Efficient process
6. Quality product
7. Long-term goals
8. Short-term goals
9. Projects
10. Tasks

At each level, the purpose can be rated in terms of four characteristics: clear, compelling, consistent and collaborative.
Table 1. Assessment of the strength and scope of purpose

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A PURE coach will help organizations develop all 10 levels of purpose. If the leadership can buy into the importance of serving a higher purpose beyond the bottom line, they will not only earn support from the general public but also inspire employees.

**Bridges of Understanding**

Understanding involves making sense of what happens and knowing oneself. Having a sense of coherence and a clear concept of self-identity are important for meaningful employment and optimal functioning.

In an organization, understanding is also the key to building bridges and creating a community. All kinds of barriers can prevent effective teamwork and slow down the production process. These gulfs can come from cultural differences, miscommunication, personal biases, and the built-in walls in a highly hierarchical organization. Territorial instincts, tribal mentalities, and power struggles can further cripple an organization in poisoning the work environment and creating divisions.

No organization can survive and flourish without building bridges of understanding that connect people and develop trust.

We need to have an objective and deep understanding of the current business environment, macro-economic forces, technological breakthroughs, relevant economic data, available options, strengths and weaknesses of the company, threats and opportunities, risk/benefit analysis of different choices, and pros and cons of competing ideas.

Leaders need to make sure that all team members feel that they are being heard and understood, even when the final decision is not the same as what they have advocated. This emphasis on understanding also demands openness, transparency and integrity from the management, thus, reducing the likelihood of corruption and conflict.
It is not uncommon for organizations to have two groups of people: those on the inside and those on the outside. The inner group knows what’s going on and how things are done. The other group is kept in the dark. This two-tier system creates a barrier within the organization. The lack of transparency generates mistrust and conflicts. The PURE model favors flat, flexible and collaborative organizational structures.

Figure 2. The wheel of understanding

1. Philosophy and culture
2. Purpose, core values, and principles
3. People (includes leadership, colleagues, and customers)
4. Process (due process and operational process)
5. Product (goods and services)
6. Personal role in the organization
7. Prevailing conditions of the economy and the organization

Understanding is important for several reasons. First, lack of knowledge and understanding can lead to misunderstanding, distorted perceptions, alienation, and disengagement. Second, a lack of understanding of due process among workers makes it easier for managers to abuse the process for personal gains. Third, a good understanding of the operation of the organization not only increases worker engagement but also reduces errors.
The Power of Responsible Action

This component recognizes the importance of making the right decisions, and doing the right thing in light of our purpose and understanding. We have the responsibility to all stakeholders to do what is right, even when decisions may not be popular, and may even be costly in the short run.

Responsible action will include setting up the right decision making process, hiring the right people, developing the right product, selecting the right marketing campaign, and eliminating wasteful practices and unnecessary obstacles. Sometimes, it takes courage to do restructuring and retooling in order to survive turbulent times.

The action component is where the rubber hits the road. Only through action can we realize the purpose or mission of an organization. Often, leadership or management can ruin an organization through misguided, risky actions. Often, managers can alienate the subordinates when their actions are perceived as biased or abusive. The PURE model emphasizes responsible action, and attempts to eliminate harmful or toxic actions.

According to Figure 3, everyone in an organization has four areas of responsibility: a leader to someone who may be a less experienced person, a subordinate who reports to some authority, a partner to colleagues or affiliates, and a worker who serves the company, society, and above all the customers. Therefore, each person is responsible and accountable in all four areas.

Reducing toxic elements in the workplace. Unfortunately, the work world is full of toxic people – liars, backstabbers, steamrollers, bullies, and control freaks, who can suck the life from workplace (Sue, 2007). For example, a high-performance manager resigned from his company, and he explained to me why: “In this place, the crap is knee-high. I told the CEO that we need many shovels and a truck in order to clean up all the crap before we can get something meaningful done.” He then added: “I don’t have the time and energy for shoveling crap everyday.”

What does CRAP stand for in the organizational context? It may serve as a fitting acronym for the four common toxins in a dysfunctional organization: Corruption, Relational problems, Abuse of power, and Politicking to advance self interest.

Typically, managers equate waste in terms of inefficient operational process, poor quality control, human errors, defective products, etc. But the most serious and insidious waste is caused by psychosocial factors and toxic people at the workplace. If the most important resources are human resources, then the most serious waste is the loss of precious time, energy, or talents.

Any company can die a slow death, if decisive steps are not taken to purge the CRAP in order to stop the draining of emotional energies and the loss of the most gifted employees because of a toxic work climate. Kusy and Holloway (2009) have made a convincing case that for an organization to prosper, it has to know how to manage and control toxic personality.
In the non-manufacturing sector, such as governments and non-profit organizations, CRAP represents the most serious threat to their survival. From the PURE perspective, to decontaminate an organization from toxic elements is even more important than improving operational efficiency.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the strategies and methods of identifying and removing toxic elements from the management and the rank and file, but we can always start with a check list of Dos and Don’t to promote responsible actions and discourage toxic activities. The following lists are by no means exhaustive, but serve to illustrate the kind of good and bad behaviors an experienced coach or I/O psychologist can readily pick out after spending sometime with an organization.

The Do List. To effect lasting positive changes, both management and workers need to do the right thing as a way of life. Here is a partial list of the Do’s.

Please Do:
1. Continue to suggest ways of improvement.
2. Stand up for what is ethically right.
4. Be willing to sacrifice self-interest for the common good
5. Stay positive, even when things go wrong.
6. Tell the truth, even when it hurts.
7. Welcome the challenge of problem solving and innovation.
8. Take responsibility for mistakes and failures.
9. Welcome the challenge of solving problems and overcoming difficulties.
10. Express gratitude.
11. Practice positive and non-defensive ways of communication
12. Be willing to apologize for mistakes.
13. Be eager to give others credit but slow in laying blame.
14. Recognize other people’s contributions and give them credit.
15. Promote good harmony by nurturing relationships.
16. Be a good team player, even when your proposal is not accepted.
17. Congratulate and celebrate other people’s successes.
18. Show empathy and support when others experience setbacks or difficulties.
19. Resolve conflicts rationally and amiably.
20. Keep on finding ways to improve the process and product.
21. Communicate frequently and honestly.
22. Clarify misunderstanding as soon as it arises

Some items of the do-list have to do with maintaining a positive attitude. Another major area of the do-list is concerned with maintaining and improving relationships. The rest of the list has to do with good work habits that contribute to lean principles and productivity.

The Don’t List. Here is list of subversive and toxic activities that can fatally harm an organization. Churches and other non-profit organizations which depend on volunteers are particularly vulnerable to such activities:

Please don’t:
1. Put self interest above the common good.
2. Waste time in power plays and politicking.
3. Make excuses for wrong-doings or poor performance.
4. Allow personal vendettas to interfere with decision making.
5. Allow personal biases to cloud your judgment and decisions.
6. Blame others for your own inadequacies.
7. Exaggerate your contribution and claim undue credit.
8. Engage in backstabbing and character assassination.
9. Jump to conclusions based on hearsay.
10. Attribute malicious motives to others.
11. Scapegoat others for your personal problems.
12. Say things that are hurtful or derogatory.
13. Engage in subversive activities to destroy your rivals.
14. Willingly bypass the due process for personal gain.
15. Expel or destroy those who don’t agree with you.
16. Engage in cliquish and divisive activities.
17. Gossip and spread rumors.
18. Create obstacles for others.
19. Discriminate against those who are different from you.
20. Hold grudges or resentment.
21. Look for faults in other people.
22. Lash out against others because of your own inner pain.

Most of the above items in the don’t-list have to do with guarding against bad attitudes, ego-trips, and unprofessional/unethical behaviors. When unchecked, some of these unacceptable behaviors can pollute the workplace like toxins.

The above do and don’t lists can be helpful for self-examination in order to improve one’s attitudes and behaviors at work. Any responsible leader and worker will do self-reflection to determine whether they are practicing the Do list or engaging in the Don’t list. Continued improvement involves increasing the frequency of Do’s and decreasing the frequency of Don’ts. Counselors and coaches are needed to intervene for those who continue to practice the Don’ts. A healthy productive organization is related to a high prevalence of positive behaviors and a low prevalence of negative behaviors.

**Areas of responsibility.** All of us at certain points are accountable to those above us, alongside with us, and subordinate to us. We are also accountable to our own conscience. In short, we are involved in all four areas of responsibility: Leadership, Followership, Partnership and Workmanship.
Leadership or management is primarily responsible for setting the right strategy, which is based on economic reality, built on past success, and guided by innovation, vision, and imagination.

To dream is to imagine the impossible and explore uncharted territories. Visionary leaders create a climate that encourages creative thinking, striving for excellence and dreaming the impossible dreams.

Followership refers to being trustworthy and committed subordinates with the right attitudes. They follow instructions well, attempt to exceed expectations, but are not afraid to express their opinions for the common good.

Partnership extends to relationships with colleagues, affiliates, customers, and community organizations. A good worker is accountable to stakeholders and society at large. Responsible partnership is evident in enduring relationships and civic virtue.

In responsible workmanship, workers take ownership and pride in what they do day in and day out. They are intrinsically motivated to perform optimally and strive for conti-
ued improvement. There are always jobs for good workers which are in short supply. Elsewhere I have described what makes a good worker (Wong, 2007a), but being a responsible, conscientious and trustworthy employee is a minimum requirement.

The converging dynamics of these four areas of responsibility will increase the likelihood that people will make the right decisions and do what is right on a daily basis.

**The Fruit of Enjoyment**

Feeling good from doing good is a common experience known for ages, reflecting the innate moral nature of being human. But it is less known that doing good can also mean good business. When an organization practices P, U, and R correctly and consistently, the inevitable result is success and high morale.

Different from the traditional job satisfaction measures, the PURE model differentiates between intrinsic and extrinsic sources of motivation. When work is meaningful, it will be reflected in high intrinsic scores.

The PURE model predicts that both extrinsic and intrinsic sources of satisfaction are important for job satisfaction and productivity. However, at both the low end and high end of salary scales, intrinsic motivation becomes most important. We could give a score of 1 to 10 for each level of intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction. The scores will provide important information about areas for improvement in order to boost the wellbeing and productivity of workers. Low levels of enjoyment is sufficient ground for re-evaluation of purpose, understanding, and responsible action to determine areas that need radical change or gradual improvement.

**Figure 4.**

![Intrinsic sources of work satisfaction](image)

**Figure 5.**

![Extrinsic sources of enjoyment](image)
Applications of the PURE Strategy

The above four components of PURE can be taught through workshops, modeling and on-site coaching. They can also be measured qualitatively and quantitatively. More importantly, progress can be measured by increased profit, productivity and morale as well as decreased waste and absenteeism.

Figure 6 shows how the PURE model moves an organization forward in good times and bad. As mentioned earlier, leadership is a key to organizational excellence. Effective leaders set the standard of competence and integrity. Effective leaders are also able to inspire and motivate others, and develop the right strategies to move the company forward.

One does not need to be lean and mean. There is no need for “McDonaldization” (Ritzer, 2004) in order to achieve the efficiency and standardized operation procedures. The PURE strategy seeks to humanize the drive towards efficiency and meaning. It capitalizes on the basic human needs for fulfillment and significance in the larger scheme of things.

If the lean principles aim at building muscles and reducing fat, the PURE approach aims at providing balanced nutrients and detoxifying the human systems. While lean is primarily concerned with the manufacturing process, PURE is primarily concerned with management and human resources. PURE is also important for large, international collaborative projects where differences in culture and miscommunication often result in misunderstanding, conflicts, and delay in production.

Figure 6. The PURE way to move forward

Servant Leadership

Leadership is of ultimate importance in the PURE way of organizational transformation. Elsewhere, I have emphasized servant leadership as an ideal leadership style for the 21st century (Wong, 2007b). The leader sets the tone and provides a role model. Only the leader can ensure that the PURE and lean principles are being implemented systematically at all levels of the organization.

Servant leadership is an ideal model for MCA because it emphasizes such qualities as integrity, humility, serving a higher purpose, fulfilling a mission, and the need to develop and release the creative potential of all workers. I have developed two instruments for
self-assessment of servant leadership (Page & Wong, 2000; Wong & Page, 2003) as well as 360 degree assessment of leadership (Rude, 2004).

In sum, the PURE way is not only lean but also humane and virtuous. PURE provides a conceptual framework and procedures to eliminate waste and toxic elements, and build up the full potentials of individuals and the organization as a whole.

Reducing Wasteful Spending

In today’s economic climate, all levels of government are trying to reduce deficits by eliminating wasteful spending. Non-profit organizations and religious institutions are struggling with the problem of shortfall in donations. The PURE model provides a strategic and systematic way to reduce waste in financial and human resources.

PURE is strategic, because it is guided by rational and fiscal analysis regarding what is most essential to an organization in the long run. It is systematic, because it is applied evenly across the board rather than targeted to selected departments and units based on expediency or biases.

Firstly, every organization, or department needs to come up with a clear mission statement. The purpose assessment tool (Table 1) can be used to prioritize the purpose, objectives and projects of each operational unit. Anything not essential to the stated mission would warrant a closer scrutiny.

But no organization can survive on purpose alone. A sound business model is also essential. Both purposefulness and profitability need to be included in the equation. The challenge is to develop a workable formula to reduce waste and enhance productivity of each unit.

This formula will yield a Value Index involving appropriate weightings of Mission Value and Financial Value. Some departments may load heavily in Mission Value because of its contribution to the mission and purpose of the organization, but contribute little financially. The reverse may be true for some other departments. Any unit with an overall negative Value Index does not deserve to exist.

The same strategic and systematic PURE thinking can be applied to trimming the payroll. The practice of “last hired first fired” is non-productive, because some of the new hires may have the talents and expertise most needed by the organization. The policy of tenure and seniority can also be counterproductive, when it protects individuals who no longer make useful contributions or generate toxic elements.

The second step is to consult with and communicate to all stakeholders to ensure that everyone in the organization understands the need to cut spending and the due process of reducing waste. It will take negotiation and compromise to develop fair, transparent procedures to eliminate non-essential operational units and lay off non-productive members.
The third step is that all levels of the organization, from the CEO to the most junior employees, take personal responsibility to ensure that due process is being carried out fairly and effectively. Great care is taken so that people who lose their jobs as a result will be compensated fairly and given the opportunity for career counselling and assistance to secure another job.

Responsible action may also include merging some units or creating new ones to reduce costs and generate new revenue streams. PURE will even imagine the impossible in envisioning a better future for the organization.

Finally, the benefits of reducing waste and reviving a struggling organization will be enjoyed by all stakeholders. More importantly, the result of reducing wasteful spending may have a positive rippling effect on society.

Creating a Positive Culture

When you walk into a positive and successful organization, you can feel the difference the moment you step into the door. The atmosphere is inviting, and there is a distinct sense of dedication and energy about the people working there.

Ultimately, a positive cooperative culture is essential for sustainable growth. MCA has been applied to transforming culture (Wong, 2002a; Wong & Gupta, 2004), restoring integrity (Wong 2002b, 2004) and improving team work and cooperation (Wong, 2005, 2006). It would take the most time to transform a corporate culture, which cannot be done without a leadership totally committed to positive change.

Every organization is made up of a collection of individuals, with their unique combinations of genetic make-ups, cultural, and family backgrounds. Conflict is an inevitable aspect of organizational life. Emotional upsets are also unavoidable. The psychosocial dynamics involved are complex and intricate. It requires positive management skills to transform negative emotions into positive motivational forces, and mold different personalities into a cohesive, cooperative high-performance organization. More importantly, it requires good leaders and a positive culture to make good things happen.

Wong and Gupta (2004) have also identified four characteristics of healthy corporate cultures: (a) Progressive-adaptive culture, (b) Purpose-driven culture, (c) Community-oriented culture, and (d) People-centered culture. These four organizational characteristics contribute to intrinsically motivated high-performance and high morale employees, because they meet people’s deepest needs for meaning, community, spirituality and agency. The most successful companies, such as Synovus and Toyota, have all four healthy cultural characteristics.

The PURE strategy is most important at the cultural and philosophical level. PURE can be readily applied to people, process, and product only when the organization has embraced the lean and PURE philosophy.
The Need for Decontaminating the Workplace

The fastest ship will not go very far if there is a leak in the hull. The PURE model not only improves the speed but also repairs the leakage. In other words, PURE brings out the best and repairs the worst in leaders and workers.

A systematic implementation of the PURE strategy will greatly reduce toxic elements, such as nepotism, cronyism, fraud and mismanagement, while increase efficiency, productivity, innovation, and job satisfaction.

The examples of waste due to toxic people and toxic activities have been well documented (Frost, 2003; Sue, 2007). The urgent need to decontaminate the workplace has been emphasized by experts in management (Kusy & Holloway, 2009; Sue, 2007). Elsewhere, I have described a real case of scandalous waste and proposed a meaning-centered solution to resolve the problem (Wong, 2006).

The various assessments described in the previous section can help identify problem areas. Frequent auditing of time spent in completing a particular task will help pinpoint unusual deviations from the standard or norm. This will lead to discovery of the source of questionable activities. At this point, corrective steps must be taken to remediate or remove the toxic elements.

The assessment and remediation can be carried out either by an external consultant or an internal HR expert who is given the authority to do whatever is necessary, even when the offender belongs to the senior management. Decontamination is an essential PURE principle to reduce waste and increase productivity.

There are two streams of training in the PURE strategy. The basic stream consists of six modules: Meaning of work, MCA, Purpose of work, Understanding and communication, Responsible actions, and Evaluations. The leadership stream consists of four modules: Servant leadership, Assessments, Interventions, and Cultural transformation.

In the next section we will present the case of Synovus Financial Corporation. In the midst of scandals and bankruptcies involving so many banks and investment services, Synovus stands out as a shining example of why the PURE way is the best way for enduring success.

A Case Study in Organizational Excellence

Synovus Financial Corporation (www.synovus.com), recognized as the best company to work for by Fortune magazine more than once, is a good example of the power of meaning. Synovus employees find meaning and satisfaction through serving customers, fulfilling their potentials and working under caring servant-leaders. The PURE principles are clearly at work throughout this organization.

A Brief History of Synovus

Synovus started as a savings bank along the Chattahoochee River in Columbus, Geor-
gia in 1888. Now, Synovus is one of the largest financial institutions in the Southeast, with headquarters in Columbus. But the real success story of Synovus is that it began as an act of kindness to serve the need of a single distraught mill worker. More than a century later, Synovus remains a continuous act of kindness to many communities throughout the world.

The spirit of valuing and serving people has been passed on from the founder to succeeding generations, as the story of kindness is retold over and over again. The inspiring narrative has become a legend, which takes on a life of its own; it continues to serve as the guiding light for developing “a culture of the heart.”

**Culture, Philosophies & Values**

A culture of the heart is a priceless possession and a beauty to behold; it springs from the core value of kindness and service, and the sincere desire to bring joy to others. What sets Synovus apart from others is this intangible and yet powerful heart virtue.

Synovus’ culture of ‘people-first’ is a key to their success. The value inherited from the early pioneers of the company and forged down through the years remains unchanged. It emphasizes the imperative of treating each worker, stakeholder and customer with kindness and respect because every person matters. Such unwavering commitment to serving others generates stability, loyalty and enduring success.

Their relationship-based philosophy dictates their values and defines their future. Their culture of service over self is clearly reflected in their customer covenant. The same philosophy is also applied to each team member. They want each employee to feel that they have an opportunity to contribute, to grow and to benefit from the company’s success. They aspire to “become the employer of choice in every market we serve. Creating a great workplace is the foundation of every Synovus strategy. Team member enthusiasm yields higher productivity and profitability” (Quoted from Page, 2000).

**Servant Leadership**

It does not take any stretch of imagination to conclude that only servant leadership can fit in a corporation devoted to serving others. “I am convinced,” writes William Turner as chairman of the Executive Committee of Synovus Financial Corporation, “that servant leadership will be the way to manage in the future, not only because it brings personal fulfillment to everyone in the organization, including the boss, but also because it can deal with change quickly and effectively” (Turner, 2000).

Figure 7 summarizes the expectations of leadership in Synovus (www.synovus.com), stated in very clear and specific terms. This well-defined leadership profile will readily expose anyone who does not really embrace the culture and values of Synovus,
Shared Vision and Purpose

“The vision must have meaning,” writes William Turner, the chairman of the Executive Committee of Synovus Financial Corporation, “because man cannot live without meaning. The vision must be holistic and congruent, encompassing the church, the family, the community, and the institution. If it doesn’t, values and priorities will conflict” (Turner, 2000, p.83).

Given Synovus’ meaning-centered vision, one can readily detect the PURE principles in their policies and operations. The purpose of serving customers with enthusiasm and excel-
Tolerance is so ingrained in all workers that it has become a habitual practice.

Their interest in the professional and personal growth of each team member has led to a variety of career development programs. Their focus on facilitating individual development and coaching for optimum performance further enhances the meaning of work, because employees feel that they are able to grow and fulfill their potential within the organization.

They are also unabashedly dedicated to the higher purpose of improving the quality of life in the communities they serve. Community service is entrenched as an integral part of the company. In 1996, they formally codified their community outreach projects under an umbrella effort called REACH: Recognizing and Encouraging an Atmosphere of Community and of Hope.

REACH encourages and enables their team members to give back to the communities. “The creation of the foundations [for community service] was the beginning of servant-leadership in our company,” writes William Turner (2000), “I believe a servant leader should meet the needs of the people who work with him -- at work, at home, and in the community” (p.139).

**Implicit and Explicit Understanding**

It is hard not to understand the principles of serving, when the culture of the heart permeates everything they do from the top management to the cleaning staffs. All the policies and decisions convey the same message of people first.

Explicit understanding of the values and purpose of Synovus is reinforced by their customer covenant which reads in part:

“We pledge to serve every customer with the highest levels of sincerity, fairness, courtesy, respect and gratitude, delivered with unparalleled responsiveness, expertise, efficiency and accuracy. We are in the business to create lasting relationships, and we will treat our customers like we want to be treated.”

**Engaged in Responsible Actions**

The consistent message is to treat people right, to do the right thing and to give your best in everything you do. There is no exception, no excuse. The ethos of Synovus is conducive to responsible actions. When the work is intrinsically motivating and meaningful, people are more likely to be engaged and passionate about what they do.

Their customer covenant further enhances a sense of responsibility: “We will offer the finest personal service and products delivered by caring team members who take 100% responsibility for meeting the needs of each customer.”

Their philosophy of serving the community rather than maximizing short-term financial gains empowers them to do what is right and what is in the best interest of the customers and communities. Thus, they are
constantly improving their policies and procedures of risk management to reduce bad loans. They also make sure that they build up sufficient capital asset in order to be prepared for the unexpected. By being proactive, they are able to protect their customers against future losses.

**Enjoying High Morale and Productivity**

Synovus is the envy of other banking and financial services. They are consistently ranked as one of the best companies to work for, and they are able to survive the recent financial crisis unscathed. Corporate success and individual growth combine to increase the sense of enjoyment and satisfaction.

**Conclusions**

What is the take home message from Synovus? What can we learn from their success regarding the best ways to achieve organizational excellence? In what ways does MCA contribute to a culture of the heart? How is meaning related to intrinsic motivation, business ethics and civic virtue? In what ways do PURE and lean complement each other? Why is servant leadership essential for developing a corporate culture that is both lean and humane?

We can be no more successful in codifying ethical conduct than we can in legislating morality. We also know that no business system is perfect, when it is managed by imperfect human beings. Given the human condition, the best we can hope for is to build up the work force according to lean and PURE principles.

In this brief article, I have introduced MCA and the PURE strategy as a way of motivating the work force, reducing wasteful spending, and decontaminating the work place. I have also emphasized the vital role of meaning in creating a positive, collaborative culture, and transforming society. My hope is that the International Network on Personal Meaning (www.meaning.ca) will play a leading role in promoting PURE principles.

If you are interested in learning more about meaning-centered approach to management and the PURE model, or have any comments on my article, please write me (drpaulwong@gmail.com). Finally, I invite you to become a member of INPM and help create a LEAN and PURE positive society; you may register online (www.meaning.ca).
REFERENCES


