core group
theory & practice

With the publication of Art Kleiner's recent book Who Really Matters, The Core Group Theory of Power, Privilege and Success, Art shows that a "core group" isn't just the people at the top of the hierarchy; it is that group of people in any company, whose interests and priorities are taken into account by people who make decisions. **For more on core groups go to www.workecology.com/thoughtleadership.html.**

What the Talent Wants from the Core Group

In August, I met with alumnae of the Graduate Program in Communications Management of Simmons College to learn from this talented group what they view important for Core Group Leaders to consider in formulating their HR Strategies. Unlike Simmons MBA program, this program is coed. Most of the students who attend this program do so while working full-time.

As a result, these graduates achieve a professional development experience while testing on the job skills and competencies in these 5 focused areas:

• Managerial communications
• Organizational change
• Communications technologies
• Multiculturalism and global communications
• Basic financial principles

Participants for this focus group were drawn from the 2003 graduating class.

The names and the companies represented are not noted to protect the confidentiality agreement offered to participants. A list of sample companies that employ these graduates is available at the Simmons Graduate School website **www.simmons.edu/gradstudies/communication management/**

As promised in my last column www.workecology.com/resources.html, I have begun to interview portfolio to learn what are the critical factors to consider in managing the performance of this talent pool.

This first focus group that I conducted was drawn from a Simmons Alumnae group that had work experience spanning 8 to 11 years. What became obvious in planning and conducting this session is that these alumnae/portfolio workers are emotionally intelligent individuals with positive attitudes. They exercise strong interpersonal skills that they use with each other to and explore their professional life in balance with other things that really matter to each of them.

I discovered in the Q&A and discussion that followed that this cohort are where they are professionally because they want to work hard at what they love to do. Individually they each operate out of a clear personal mission and understanding of what they want as a guide for choosing jobs and the companies they work for. This has grown both out the individuals and the dialogue they sustain with each other about work and life that began through their interaction in classes and study groups while students.

These graduates showed real appreciation for the realities of today in shaping their careers that have been reported by many professional pollsters, e.g. Hudson, Gallup and Harris.   They know most people in this economy find it difficult to find bosses, leadership and corporate cultures that empower job satisfaction, professional development and work/life balance; yet they empower each other to counteract this norm by supporting each other to network in companies that have a federated culture and strong value for dialogue and participatory corporate culture.

A Synthesized Strategic View

It's interesting how freely members of this group offered their view summarized here:

> **"We want to work for companies that operate out of a clear and realistic business strategy where our performance and talent can make a difference to shareholder value and the bottom line. We do not want to be workers that are disposable and vulnerable to layoff as a result of poor leadership decisions and direction from the Core Group. We have learned that the values and intentions of the Core Group leading the company are also reflected by the actions or inaction of the human resource department." --.**

Each of these graduates has organized their career making conscious decisions on how they want to work and who they would like to work for and with. They leave jobs very quickly when their organizations are in a downward spiral and are constantly carrying out intelligent networking to find out where their talent will be respected and compensated well.

They also consciously made choices to work within more conservative or slow to change corporate cultures trading off higher replace opportunities to work more innovatively or to have more control over their personal lives.

The list of do's and don't that grew out of this focus group can be a guide to any core group or social network who is exploring factors that contribute to an optimal work environment.

For the Core Group - The DO's -

1. Insure that you author a clear business strategy that provides clear direction and integrates with your human resource practices and operations;
2. Recognize people for jobs well done; (This recognition should be part of the daily interaction and does not have to be for major activities)
3. Set up a system for welcoming new people by making certain from the first day of work they have working tools (computers, phones, office supplies) from the moment they report to work;
4. Introduce new talent to people that can make a difference to their success and guide them thoughtfully through their first days so they learn the business strategy and can understand who is in their social network that can help them succeed;
5. Select managers that can effectively sell their subordinates ideas that are innovative and draw from our talent, even when the leadership has no first hand experience with our expertise;
6. Set up a career system that is responsive to people; permit talent to slow down when needed for work/family balance by organizing this within their teams so the work is covered;
7. Provide benefits that support the talent needs for work/life balance that is respectful of any intimate familial arrangement outside work and protect the professionals health needs;
8. Implement compensation systems that pay these professionals well. Compensate for results and give everyone the opportunity to earn as well as managers and people in the hierarchy;

9. Make my performance the focus of our discussion and not how many hours I can work or do work.

If Core Group Leadership want to manage this talent pool well, this group is very clear <u>they don't want</u> to experience

1. <u>**Yelling as a mode of communication: (**</u>Today's talented worker wants civil dialogue: The right to disagree and work out conflict with respect and dignity. (this comment one of the strongest statements made).
2. Layoffs and downsizing as your HR strategy creating a culture of survival and threat;
3. Work in a company that promotes people solely for loyalty and longevity;
4. Be assigned to report to a boss that is less competent than me and pay this person more than me;
5. A leadership that behaves like an ENRON OR WORLDCOMM.
6. Stereotyping the talented worker as aggressive, when the worker is clear s/he is presenting innovative ideas to improve our bottom line, employee morale or over all company performance.
7. Being discarded if they cannot work a 24/7 schedule. (Measure me for the ROI, I contribute to).

In retrospect, these professionals are prepared for small knowledge boutiques that provide intelligent services to national global companies or a larger corporate structure that has a federated organizational structure like what I described in a previous article, **Jobs, Layoffs and Productivity** in my profile of IDG at www.workecology.com/resources.html.

For the latest on Core Group Theory and its associated practices go to:

About the Author

Lavinia Weissman, Author, Capacity Builder and Leadership Coach

Lavinia is a self-generative learner and collaborator. As a capacity builder and leadership coach, Lavinia mentors teams of people and leaders to the accomplishment of goals, measurements, and objectives and effective leadership of interdisciplinary teams.

Lavinia's enthusiasm for Core Group Theory as it fits with her own practice has grown out of extensive research by asking "What could we put in place to help organizations engineer the kind of core groups that could really make them work and how can we actually be much more deliberate about the kinds of core groups we engender? And if we could, would that make us more powerful?" And Lavinia's saying, "Yeah, you bet it would." And that's her work.

To learn more about WorkEcology and Lavinia Weissman click this link: www.workecology.com