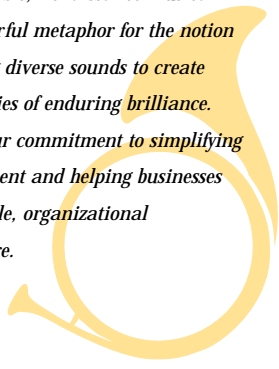


THE CLARION CALL



The Container Effect

The clarion is a musical instrument of the Renaissance. Renaissance music brought people together, helped solidify communities, and reflected optimistically upon the future. In ensemble, Renaissance musical instruments were a powerful metaphor for the notion of community, combining diverse sounds to create focused, harmonic melodies of enduring brilliance. The clarion symbolizes our commitment to simplifying organizational management and helping businesses build dynamic, sustainable, organizational communities for the future.



*Bill McKendree, President
The Clarion Group*

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The Container Effect

We are living in very tumultuous times. Many practices of the past are no longer relevant as recent events have dramatically changed the course of the future.

For business leaders, the challenges ahead are formidable and far-reaching. The long-standing corporate quest for profits and shareholder return has been overshadowed by an upwelling cry for greater purpose. Many executives and employees now find themselves questioning whether what is right for their company is right for them.

At The Clarion Group, our work with executives has given us insight into this disconnect, which has been exacerbated by recent calamitous events and also by the current market. We have termed it "The Container Effect." Simply put, it is the consequence of people embracing corporate value structures that inherently overlook or conflict with their individual belief systems.

The workplace has evolved for many as a container with very thick walls, limiting and sometimes preventing us from connecting with our inner sense of what's truly important. Seemingly, the workplace container has become a vacuum-sealed pack.

Our contention about the Container Effect is this: We need to reestablish a connection between our work and our larger sense of purpose. Perhaps the real purpose of work is to bring meaning to life.

Organizations need to shift beyond the level of the marketplace and to reach to greater heights in naming their true purposes. By doing so, they will give permission to their employees to do the same. Instead of profits, speed and efficiency, consider the personal significance of, for example, responsibility, mutuality and freedom.

In our work, we interact with CEOs and other executives to find answers to difficult organizational and strategic issues that challenge their businesses and test their futures. As we work together, a level of trust and intimacy develops. Often our discussions take on a personal dimension. It is surprising how frequently executives say things like:

- "I am losing sight of what I believed in most."
- "I have been so absorbed by this business that I now find myself in a place I never intended to be."
- "I suppose we have done the right things because our results have been good. Yet there is something missing for me that I think I need to find."
- "Work has become too artificial for me. I want to make a real difference."

At The Clarion Group, we see these as symptoms of the Container Effect, and they are not limited to the executive level. People throughout organizations are feeling the same things. To break through the walls of the container it will be up to you, as leaders and as individuals, to help yourselves and your employees find meaning and relevance in the work you do.

Recently, I described the Container Effect at a business presentation. The response was overwhelming.

In this issue of The Clarion Call, we have put a name to an elusive challenge. Our hope is that by naming it, we will help people release themselves from their containers.

The Container Effect concept was developed out of our work with clients and is rooted in the 3Cs (*The Clarion Call*, Fall 2000), which provides a framework for understanding the individual capacities needed to survive in a turbulent environment.

We hope you enjoy this issue and, as always, we welcome your feedback.

A Fundamental Concept

As human beings, we are community-oriented by nature and seek out the companionship, comfort and security of being with others. We also seek order. In an effort to achieve both, we find membership in structured groups. Our families, our businesses, and our communities each provide unique structures that become intrinsically linked to who we are as individuals. In essence, each of these groups is a virtual container.

By definition, a container is a physical object that holds something, confining it in a certain space and protecting it from outside intrusion or interference. For people in business, the workplace is a virtual container. Through mission statements, pay systems and cubicles, the workplace container provides the values and structures that focus our attention, set our priorities, guide our behavior, and coordinate our activities.

Over the years as companies have aligned themselves with "values" such as profit, speed and efficiency, individuals adopted these principles within the organization and began extending them to their personal lives. In this extreme, the Container Effect colors individual beliefs about what is important in life with what is best for the organization. When this happens, our sense of purpose is gradually minimized, or even forgotten. Our container becomes our purpose, and we are ultimately left feeling disconnected and unfulfilled.

The Container Effect has become more apparent as businesses have grown, becoming more complex and impersonal. People are finding fundamental disconnects between the "values" of their organizations and their own sense of what is important. They are coming to realize that the values fostered within their workplace containers in fact may not be values at all.

The Values Misnomer

Companies issue value and mission statements pro-forma. Businesses have their credos posted throughout their organizations. Words such as profit, speed, growth, efficiency, customer service and shareholder return are sprinkled liberally throughout. While these are all important business goals, they are not values. When individuals accept these words as guiding principles, a fundamental disconnect begins to develop between what they know intuitively and what they want to believe for the sake of the company.

When this happens, the Container Effect has taken hold. Individuals within the workplace container begin to suppress their own values and adopt those of the organization. While this may appear on the surface to be a good thing, it actually has dire consequences for the organization. Without a clear sense of self, individuals eventually begin to feel disconnected, unfulfilled and wanting. Often, they may not know why.

As leaders, executives need to recognize this reality and reconnect their businesses to a deeper sense of purpose. The best way to start is by redefining corporate "values" from profits, speed and efficiency to more essential and compelling beliefs such as responsibility, respect, and freedom.

Values reflect the heart and soul of a business. To the extent that values are based on compelling fundamental truths, the business can connect to a higher purpose and make a meaningful difference.

A Historical Perspective

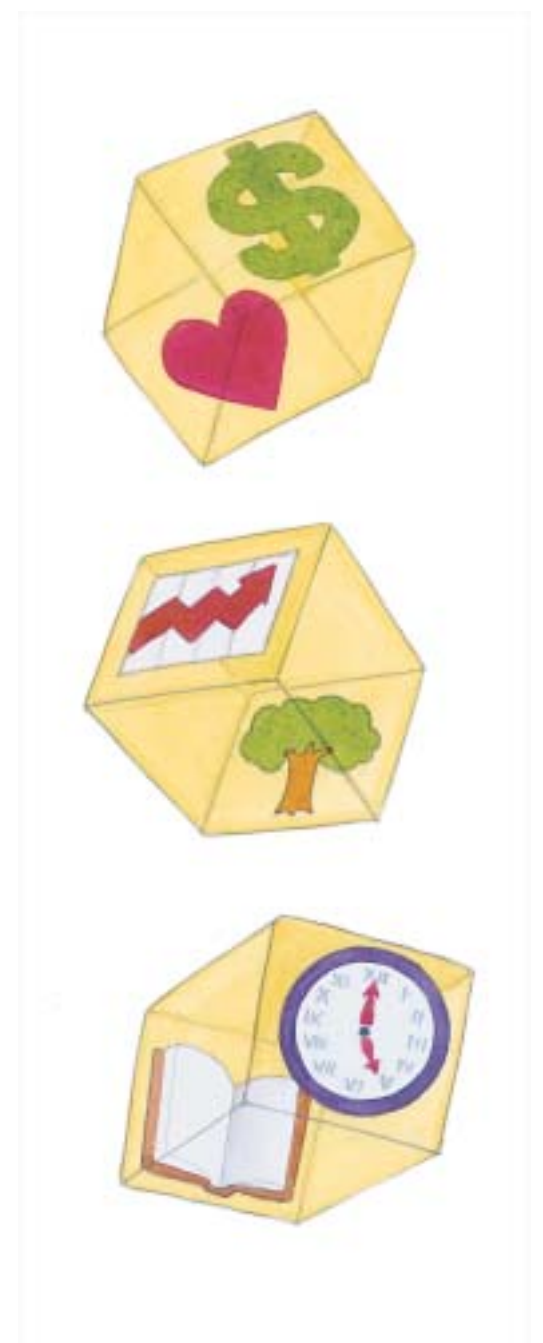
The workplace as we know it today did not exist before the Industrial Revolution. For the most part, work before that time was done individually or in small groups focused on the manual tasks required to survive. In pursuits as diverse as farming, medicine, teaching, and haberdashery, people defined and carried out their work based on their own sense of what was right.

During the Industrial Revolution, work became organized around mechanical processes. The use of complex equipment led to the need for production lines and standardized work activity. Shaped by externally imposed procedures, the guiding values of the workplace container began to migrate toward the organization and away from the individual.

In time, the new workplace container – the organization – became increasingly sophisticated. It developed a multitude of mechanisms to reinforce its walls. Incentive and stock option plans. Performance based pay. Perks tied to job level. Self-created "benefits" designed to draw people deeper into the workplace container. The more they were drawn in, the more they envisioned a pay-off of security, wealth and well-being.

This mindset lasted until the early '90s. Since then, mergers, downsizing, cost-cutting and other corporate actions have eroded this implicit sense of well-being. For many people, September 11th further lifted the lid off the container.

Individuals within the workplace container begin to suppress their own values and adopt those of the organization.



The Effect of the Container

There are clear indications when people within an organization have adopted the ways of the container. Role playing develops as a means of self-preservation. Electronic isolation contributes to an overall feeling of disillusionment and detachment. The result is a gnawing question: What is my purpose?

■ Role Playing

Even when individuals feel a disconnect between their work and real self, they nonetheless want to succeed within their workplace containers. They reconcile the situation by assuming self-created roles.

When they enter the workplace, they put on personas that they believe are important for career advancement or to be who their colleagues and managers expect them to be. The eager pupil. The cutthroat competitor. The over-achiever. The steadfast realist.

These roles may be inconsistent with who people actually are. As evidence, just think of how often you have met colleagues outside of the workplace container and are taken aback when you see an entirely new side of them.

■ Electronic Isolation

Technology has changed the nature of business. People spend long hours at work and days traveling on the road. Email, the Internet, and pagers have replaced voice-to-voice and face-to-face interaction. Even when individuals are physically with their families, they are working on laptops and talking on cell phones.

The nature of digital communication is such that it drives more tactical and task-oriented communication. As a result, we have fewer opportunities to talk with others about issues of deeper value. The irony is that the technologies intended to bring us together have left us feeling isolated and less connected in any meaningful way.

■ The Question of Purpose

Ultimately, when the vacuum-sealed pressure within the container gets too great, the internal equilibrium is disturbed and a shift begins. People start to question their motivations and greater purpose. They realize the fundamental nature of their inner conflict and come to understand that they have lost sight of their personal connection to a deeper set of beliefs and values, in other words, their personal sense of purpose.



Lifting the Lid

Over the last few years, executives have begun to sense this growing unease. In response, many have tried to build more meaning into the workplace by such things as redefining the employee relationship or changing management practices. Some may have also tried to help employees find greater meaning in things outside of work through volunteerism or corporate giving programs. But, ultimately, only by pursuing their own process of introspection can individuals come to terms with the Container Effect.

From a business perspective, taking the time for introspection is viewed by many as self-indulgent. To the contrary, it could be argued that leaders have an obligation to themselves and their organizations to lift the lid of the workplace container and establish their own meaningful imprint on the organization.

By merging what's important to us as individuals with what we do and who we are at work, we find meaning and relevance. We are more fulfilled and productive. In turn, the people who work for us sense that authenticity and are inspired to bring greater intention and meaning to their portion of the business.

What's more, reconciling our personal selves with our professional lives has far reaching implications for leadership effectiveness. When we feel connected, we're able to participate more fully. We're able to listen and collaborate with an open mind. By setting the example, executives can encourage employees to connect with a deeper meaning and, in turn, create a work community with a deeper sense of connectedness and commitment.



Our clients value what we offer them. Call us at 860-232-3667 so that we can discuss your needs and put you in touch with satisfied business leaders who have worked with us.

