



Curiously...

Despite the demand for innovation and continuous improvement, many firms have failed to grasp the importance of curiosity as a critical leadership competency. In a previous article “Why the C in C-Suite stands for curiosity”, we explored the necessity for top leaders to demonstrate curiosity in order to enable substantial breakthroughs for their organisations. However, as many firms are now learning, when curiosity flows through all ranks of a business and is embedded in organisation culture, it can have a profound impact.

Francesca Gino is a behavioural scientist and Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School. Gino describes how, to foster curiosity, organisations must transition from the implicit message that asking questions is an unwanted challenge to authority. She shares that leaders at every level of an organisation must nurture their employee’s curiosity to fuel learning, improvement and performance.

In a recent HBR article entitled The Business Case for Curiosity, Gino describes the multiple benefits of fostering true curiosity. These include i) Fewer decision-making errors – decision makers being less likely to fall prey to confirmation bias or stereotyping; ii) Higher levels of innovation and positive changes in both creative and non-creative roles as the role holders are more stimulated to identify workplace

improvements; iii) Reduced group conflict as team members are encouraged to place themselves in one another’s shoes; iv) Significantly improved communication - through increased sharing of information and more careful listening.

Despite the best intentions of firms, the development of curiosity as a core competency can be restrained by placing too much focus on efficiency to the detriment of exploration. Gino suggests that to accelerate the growth of this competency, organisations should hire for curiosity and demonstrate that curiosity is a desired behaviour by asking questions of and listening to the answers of employees. Leaders should emphasise learning goals within their organisations while challenging Managers on how they are facilitating growth and learning in their reports. Gino shares it is key for companies to encourage employees to broaden their interests.

John Dore, Programme Director for Senior Executive Programmes at London Business School explains that companies and their leaders need to move on from emotional quotient to developing curiosity quotient (CQ) in their employees. He describes CQ as a series of behaviours that see leaders actively invest in a growth mindset by continuous knowledge acquisition from a broad range of sources. He cites formal

education, reading of journals, quirky social media and attending networking events amongst the habits that leaders with high CQ engage in. Such executives he explains, are always scanning for new ideas, tend to be early adopters and noticeably enjoy experimenting with new ways of working or approaching assignments.

Curiosity is no longer a nice to have for firms, it is an essential element that feeds competitiveness, differentiation and effectiveness. For leaders and indeed professionals at all levels, curiosity may soon become the number one facilitator of long and healthy career paths. A McKinsey report entitled “Jobs Lost, Jobs Gained: Workforce Transitions in a Time of Automation” suggested two years ago that as a consequence of AI, current technology adaptation and changing consumer and industrial patterns, up to 375 million workers may need to switch their occupational category. That startling number is enough to make anyone curious.