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People who are high in competence but low in sincerity may perform well in the short term, but end up damaging the long term viability of their organization.

Organizations hire people to perform tasks to achieve goals, while hoping that those employed will be competent and of good character. To this end, checks are usually carried out by employers through a variety of means, including routine references. As soon as a candidate is on board, the real challenge begins. Does the individual live up to expectations? Can s/he be trusted to deliver on commitments?

The aim of any self-respecting organization is to find people who are credible and can be relied upon. This remains a challenge to this day. It is relatively easy to assess an individual's requisite skills and knowledge needed to perform tasks assigned. However, determining essential qualities in a candidate, such as sincerity and commitment remains an in-exact endeavor. It usually takes time to develop comfort on this score.

People with competence in relevant tasks, coupled with sincerity to themselves and their relationships, are credible. They are believable. They can be trusted. They inspire confidence in others and strengthen the corporate brand through their conduct. Why is it so hard to find people who are credible? The answer lies in you, and in your organization's culture. You will only attract the kind of people you value.

It is a rare treat to come across managers who are known for their credibility based on their competence and sincerity. Unfortunately, there are more instances where either one or the other quality is more evident. "He is such a sincere and devoted lad, pity he can't deliver the results we need. I wonder who hired him?!" Says a disgruntled manager about one of his newly inherited subordinate, soon after taking charge of a department. Here we have the classic employee who is considered polite and trustworthy, but is quite a liability in terms of performance.

While we may like to believe that poor hiring is rare, the opposite is true, particularly in large public sector organizations, and many local companies. Multinationals are not entirely immune. It is common knowledge that political pressures; or nepotism; or ineffective staffing (right person for the right job) due to favoritism, are some of the factors that harm credibility.

I was once describing the nature of our

work, which is to help improve efficiency and effectiveness of organizations, to a senior government official. On hearing this he laughed aloud, and said, "People like you are bad for us. We deliberately *create* inefficiencies to provide jobs!" Such toxic thinking doesn't benefit either the individual or the organization. No wonder we find gross examples of public sector organizations that are being propped up by the few tax payers we have in the country. One only needs to look at what's happening in government run schools and hospitals. Declining standards of performance that we witness can only be due to callous neglect and mal intent.

The flip side is sadly very prevalent too. It was alarming to hear a senior manager of a large commercial bank say, "It's been two months since I took charge of the operations of this bank and I am still not clear about what to believe. Are the figures being presented to me, assets or losses!? They are all so damned articulate and intelligent that facts get distorted by their slick presentations." The kind of concern highlighted here almost a decade ago by a manager of a large bank in Pakistan, has contributed to the biggest economic crisis the world faces today! We have slick communicators, sophisticated products and spin doctors who are great at using their gift of the gab to either make an impression, get out of trouble, or present data in a way that conveys a rosy picture of a bad situation. Such people are usually very competent in their field and possess the street-smarts to secure business. The fall of Lehman Brothers was only the tip of the iceberg. The huge mountains of debt are threatening economies in North America and Europe. This has placed the entire global economy at risk.

People who are high in competence but low in sincerity may perform well in the short term, but end up damaging the long term viability of their organization. Organizations are often guilty of retaining managers on the basis of their performance alone. Character and integrity must never be overlooked. It is plain to see that high performers are valued by organizations as they positively impact the top-line and bottom-line within months. Such expedience is perilous, if it ignores principle orientation. Glaring examples of major corporate failures serve to highlight the value of integrity in business. Enron, Worldcom, Anderson Consulting and Baring Brothers are just a few well publicized cases where intelligence and greed of a few have led to the eventual demise of the entities they led. In Pakistan we saw corporate scandals like Coop banks and Taj Company to name just a few.

The point is that integrity in people leads to superior and sustainable business performance. Trust enables empowerment. Only credible people can be trusted to deliver ethically and efficiently. Trust deficit leads results in increasing the burden of regulation, checks and balances, which add to bureaucratic delays and further magnify the cost of supervision to a level that makes an organization uncompetitive in terms of quality, price and speed.

How the nature of international travel for Pakistanis has changed in recent years illustrates the point I am making. Back in the 60s and 70s going abroad was a pleasant experience, with exchange control regulation being the main source of frustration. Obtaining visas, checking-in and boarding planes without suffering the ritual of intense security screening, clearing immigration - all this was quick and easy. Today, obtaining a visa is an extremely slow

and demeaning process. Just talk to anyone who has tried to apply for a US visa lately. Extra checks and scrutiny at embassies have been necessitated due to several cases of false claims and bogus documents being presented by our nationals. As a result of the conduct of some crooks, Pakistanis in general have lost credibility in the eyes of the international community. Consequently genuine people suffer delays of all sorts while transacting international

business.

ISO 9000 certification was one way of ensuring that companies would 'do what they say' and 'say what they do'. Sadly, only a few organizations that have obtained such certification truly practice the spirit behind ISO. Others simply window-dress and prepare just in time for annual audits to retain the certification.

I have known a retired captain of 747s who served PIA for a number of years. He was director flight operations when he left PIA to join Singapore Airlines in the 70s and flew their Jumbos, finally retiring to come back home. He is very familiar with the workings of both the airlines. I asked him to describe the difference between both the airlines. I asked him why Singapore Airlines was one of the world's leading carriers today. His answer was simple. He said that they had twice the fleet of aircraft and half the number employees compared to PIA. And while their manuals were very similar in content to ours, they lived by the creed; whereas PIA personnel mostly paid lip service to guidelines. People in Singapore Airlines were held to account for their misdeeds. In PIA this rarely happened. People at Singapore Airlines were evidently high on both competence and character, while in PIA it was not so.

Achieving desired results at any cost is not the answer. Selecting credible people is of the essence. We need both competence and sincerity for organizations to produce admirable performance on a sustainable basis.
