



By PALLE ELLEMANN KNUDSEN

Time is Running

Do you work 8 to 4 or 9 to 5? Or do you have flexible hours and come in between 8 and 9 and leave the office about 8 hours later? Time is still the main reference point in most workplaces even though many companies claim they are results focused.

If you are not making mistakes, you are not running fast enough!

You put in your 8+ hours every day, where there will be a few formal one hour meetings. By the way, why do 90 per cent of all meetings take 60 minutes? We are addicted to time. Some people use time as an objective reference point just to show that they have actually contributed something worth a salary. Other people will organize themselves to the minute to perform hundreds of tasks through the day. The clock is ticking – giving one the sense of achievement that another hour has been dedicated to work and reminding others that the deadline of another task is approaching.

RISK MANAGEMENT

Serious and integrated risk assessment is the point of departure for creating successful and sustainable businesses. Sustainability in this perspective is not “just” green sustainability, but rather the broader understanding of the term including both financial as well as non-financial risks. The course of the world shows that financial and non-financial risks are closely connected. And an increasing number of companies are doing integrated risk assessments to address and mitigate the risks that they are facing. The Brazilian beer producer AMBEV takes the broad and long perspective when assessing the risks of the business. The company expects to be around for the next 100 years, so this is the starting point for assessing risks and developing strategy. Even though water is currently plenty and cheap in Brazil, AMBEV is focusing on and investing in reducing water consumption in beer production. Clean water is already a huge problem in some areas of the

world and in the future it will become a global problem that AMBEV, with a long-term sustainability perspective, has realized it is important to address.

LEADERS MUST THINK FAST

In his book “Thinking, fast and slow”, Daniel Kahneman (the first non-economist to win the Nobel Prize on economics) explains the two systems that drive the way we think. System 1 is fast, intuitive, and emotional; System 2 is slower, more deliberative, and more logical. Most people would probably suggest that leaders are dominated by the fast and intuitive System 1 thinking. Leaders are often required to answer questions and take decisions, where there is no time to really analyze the situation. And because people expect leaders to know everything, leaders often respond based on intuition. Depending on how good a leader is at delegating work and making decisions, the leader will face this situation some or many times each day. Taking quick and intuitive decisions becomes like a drug to many leaders, because it makes them feel powerful. Employees can analyze an issue for days or weeks, but get five minutes in front of the CEO, who takes a decision on the spot. See, that is power. Speed and a sense of urgency can quickly become a value that the leadership of a company promotes to the rest of the organization. It makes sense: speed sounds like productivity and the leader’s main task is to squeeze out as much work as possible from employees. But most leaders forget that taking fast decisions will eventually – as Kahneman shows us – lead to more mistakes. And if there is one thing leaders tend not to handle

very well, it is mistakes made by employees. In most workplaces mistakes are like a taboo. People will focus on the positive achievements and ignore or just not talk publicly about mistakes.

MAKING MISTAKES AS A KPI?

Norwegian IT company TANDBERG, now acquired by Cisco, has no problem talking about mistakes and speed is one of the key values of the company. The company has acknowledged that mistakes can be the consequence of focusing on speed and there is a saying in the company guiding people to understand the value of speed: “if you are not making mistakes, you are not running fast enough!” Mistakes are discussed in the open, which also means that there is a clear expectation that the same mistake is not made twice. TANDBERG is part of the fast evolving video conference industry, where rapid technological development and the growth of the market require the players to move fast just to keep up. The company has tried to remove the obstacles that would normally slow down an organization. People have a wide extent of autonomy to make decisions and put new ideas into action. It is a very informal and simple organization with strong values, few procedures and clear goals. It works! TANDBERG has had tremendous business success and before being acquired by Cisco, the company was repeatedly recognized as one of the best workplaces in Norway. Other companies try to create a similar focus on speed, but fail to give employees the autonomy and the room to move. A focus on speed becomes a focus on time, where employees by





KEYWORDS

- In the long run quick responses result in mistakes
- Value the importance of results not presence
- Flexible hours and being result-oriented are still a fantasy for many companies
- Slow down a notch

the hour must show results. Using time as the key management tool is an easy way for management to operate, but it has negative consequences for job satisfaction and productivity. Lean expert **Lotte Elmann Wegner** from LeanCompany explains *“once – and unfortunately in some cases still – productivity was measured by the number of hours an employee clocked. Paradoxically, this does not work for either the company or the individual. The company benefits from the work being completed, not just the employee being present, and the employee needs the flexibility to leave earlier or later, as it fits in the life of a modern family. Therefore you often see that companies adopting a rigid schedule have low job satisfaction and even low productivity.”*

SURE WE ARE RESULTS-FOCUSED

Many companies would say that they offer flexible hours and results-oriented work, which technically may be true, but in essence these are not part of the culture. Because of traditional thinking, lack of trust, and lack of leadership competence, people – employees as well as leaders – stick to the easy solution of measuring contributions by time. Eight hours physical presence is the objective measurement that doesn't require too much interaction and brain activity to agree on. It can be very difficult for a company to move from a focus on time to a focus on results. The whole framework for work contracts and collective agreements is based on time and companies stumble with the challenge of setting goals in the organization and for each individual. It takes clear, realistic and operational goals on the organization-wide level to be able to break it up into achievable and relevant goals for each individual in the organization. It can take years to develop the competence and insight for the industry and the organization to be able to define individual goals that will benefit the organization

as well as the employee. Leaders losing the time management tool tend to overdo the goal-setting, because of lack of trust and leadership competence. Goals are broken down by the hour or day, because the leader essentially does not trust the employees to organize themselves for more overall or longer term goals. So, instead of controlling people by rigid schedules, they are controlled by micro-goals in short time-slots. The start and end time of the working day may have become somewhat flexible, but micro-goal management has maintained the control and reduced people's possibilities to challenge the fast System 1 thinking with the slower and more deliberate System 2 thinking, where you could see more analytical and innovative solutions. Our fast paced workdays have left people on autopilot or using their “intuition”, which in the best case is repeating experiences and in other cases is just guessing. Danish singer **Tina Dickow** says it brilliantly in her song, “Count to ten” *“sometimes it is the fastest way to get there, to go slow.”* Maybe we should relax and give ourselves some time to think, at least between 9 and 10. ●

Slow down. Lucas Foglia

(1983) was raised on a small family farm in New York and is currently based in San Francisco. A graduate of Brown University and the Yale School of Art, Lucas exhibits and publishes his photographs internationally. His work is in the permanent collections of the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Pilara Foundation and the Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Fine Art. *“From 2006 through 2010, I traveled throughout the southeastern United States befriending, photographing, and interviewing a network of people who left cities and suburbs to live off the grid. Motivated by environmental concerns, religious beliefs, or predictions of economic collapse, they build their homes from local materials, obtain their water from nearby springs, and hunt, gather, or grow their own food,”* says Lucas Foglia, they just like the article seems to suggest, slow down.

01. Jasmine, Hannah and Cecilia Swimming, Tennessee © Lucas Foglia 2010



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