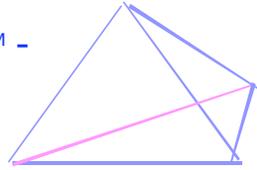EMPOWERMENT PYRADIGM™ -
Organizational Case Review

About the case

This case review is a summary of work done by a multi-national group of senior managers in a global organization. They represented both manufacturing and service operations. Given cultural differences within and between their organizations, the issue they wanted to address was to find ways of building and sustaining motivation, productivity, commitment, and common sense of purpose. The Pyradigm™ below was a central product/effort of their work together.

We are offering this Pyradigm™ case because we think it can be helpful in different ways. You can use it:

- As a descriptive illustrated example of how components of a Pyradigm™ are created and fit together;
- To get a picture of how a group of senior managers can work together to create a Pyradigm™ that can guide their organization;
- As a model to use in your own organization, if empowerment is one of the issues/challenges you are addressing. (If this is the case, we strongly recommend that you not adopt or try to implement this until you have worked together to complete your own process of creating and implementing a Pyradigm™ in your organization.)
- To develop or strengthen awareness of Second Level Learning Points, which are appended after the description of how this Pyradigm™ was created. This section also includes comments about using Pyradigms™ to identify organizational "dna".

Building the Pyradigm™ -- Identifying the Cornerstones

The managers traveled from different countries to meet in a common location. After some discussion of their issues, they agreed that empowerment was a common concern and decided to work on that.

To begin this phase of work they broke into subgroups. In each group people recounted episodes of their work lives to each other. These were episodes they were particularly proud of, and during which they and those working with them felt engaged and productive. Each group then decided on a few stories to tell all the others.

After everyone heard each group's key stories, they decided on three they would continue to use to further their efforts. In subgroups, again, people talked about and noted on paper what behaviors on these projects led people to act and feel the way they did. Among the things they identified were: clear expectations, demonstration (particularly by leaders) of concern for the people as well as the project, direct and open communication – especially a lot of listening, "open door" behaviors, praise, no punishment, being given adequate resources.

Next they considered how they and others felt during these projects. Responses included: respected, valued, passionate, connected, stimulated, energized, effective.

After sharing all their results in the whole group, the managers considered what key elements/characteristics these experiences shared. This was not a simple "list it" activity, but a genuine discussion and attempt by all to understand the issues and understand each other. The intended work outcome of this discussion was to narrow down (or synthesize) what they had been talking about to aspects that represented core or critical elements to having or creating empowerment in a group or organization.

They generated several candidates, and in narrowing things down further they agreed that the most critical was "Heart," a sense of personal meaning/mattering. This became the apex of their pyramid (like their Northstar™).

Insert picture here of "phantom" pyramid, w/"solid" apex, labeled: "Heart"
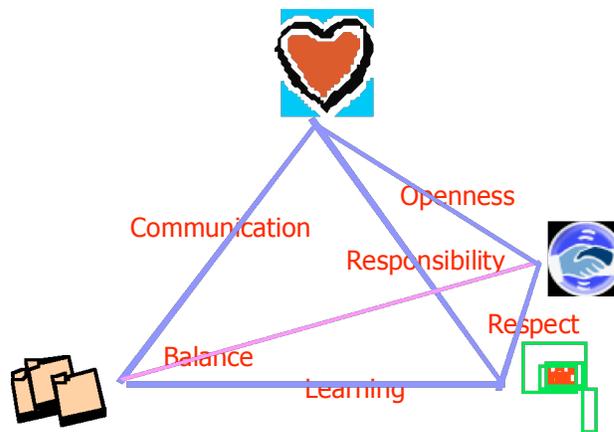
HEART
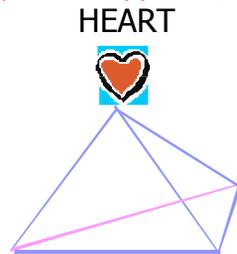
They then considered other items they still thought were core to empowerment. After more discussion and trying things out on a pyramid, they added Trust, Information, and Knowing Boundaries as the remaining cornerstones.

insert picture here of "phantom" pyramid, w/"solid" cornerstones w/appropriate labels.

HEART

TRUST

INFORMATION

KNOWING BOUNDARIES
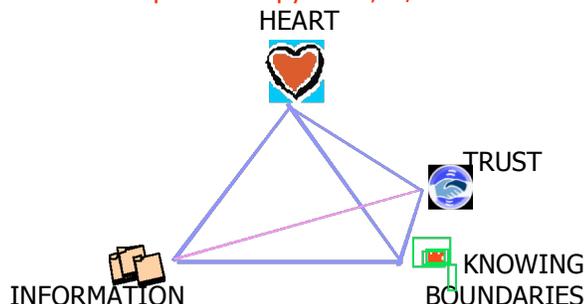
Once this group identified and established the cornerstones, they then turned their attention to the edges, i.e. What needed to be put in place to connect the cornerstones? What behaviors would work best to help express and strengthen the relationship between a pair of cornerstones?

They broke into six sub-groups, and each group worked to identify the edge between a particular pair of points. This work involved both consideration of ideas "tossed out" by members, and discussion and understanding of several of the potential edges for any two points. Some of the edges were identified quickly, some not. The each sub-group presented its work to the others. After all had been heard, including comments and questions, their pyramid looked like this:

Optional Learning Integration
You may want to pause for a moment and look again at these connections. Presented differently, they are:

Cornerstone	Edge	Cornerstone
• Heart	Communication	Information
• Heart	Openness	Trust
• Heart	Responsibility	Knowing Boundaries
• Information	Balance	Trust
• Trust	Respect	Knowing Boundaries
• Information	Learning	Knowing Boundaries

Consider how each of the words in red indicates what must be present to make an effective link to the words in black. The edges are organizational (or, at least, interpersonal) capabilities. Imagine the dynamics differently to see if you can find a better overall "fit." (For example, could demonstrating understanding form the edge between Heart and Information? If so, what might be different?) It may help clarify the overall nature of the edge relationships for you.

As their final step in completing the outside of this pyramid, the managers, again first in subgroups, considered what Scenarios would result in an organization based on having the cornerstones and edges they identified. These Scenarios are represented as the faces of the four triangles. They saw the following four results for people in such an organization:

Cornerstones	Edges	Scenarios .
Heart, Knowing Boundaries, Information	Responsibility, Learning, Communication	Ownership
Heart. Knowing Boundaries, Trust	Responsibility, Respect, Respect	Self Esteem
Heart, Information, Trust	Communication, Openness, Balance	Shared Vision
Knowing Boundaries, Trust Information	Respect, Learning, Balance	Understanding

Completed Pyramid/Pyradigm™
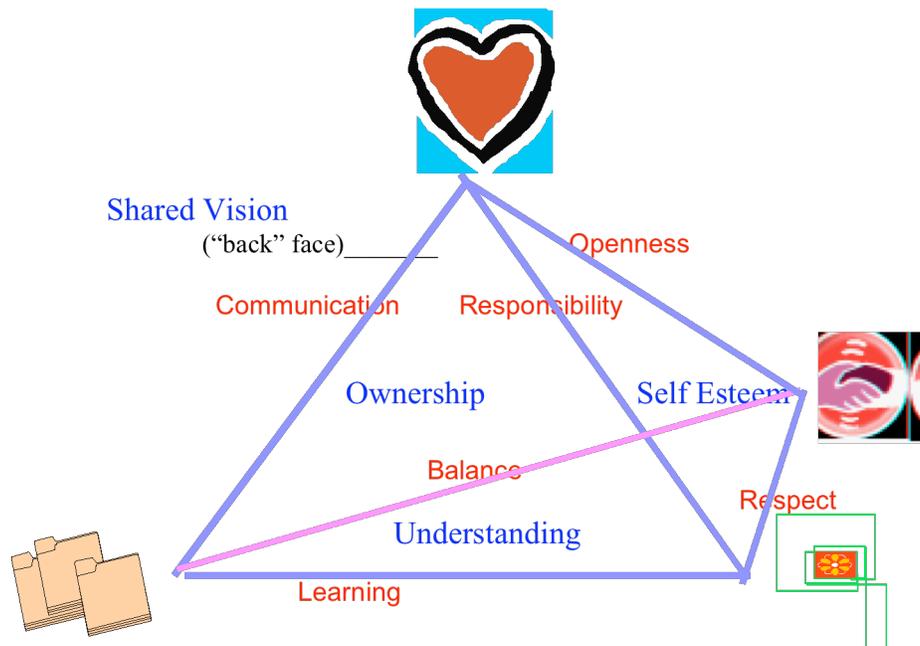
Each scenario represents the result that is likely/possible if the elements of that triangle are present in the organization or group. Empowerment results when all triangles are sustained at the same time. This means that all elements of the pyramid must be attended to. To illustrate this, and show why it is no part of the system can be relinquished, consider the following:

- If any cornerstone is missing (totally absent, e.g. zero trust), then the pyramid collapses from a three-dimensional system, to only one two-dimensional triangle. The same reduction in potential outcome occurs if one of the edges (capabilities) of the organization is absent.
- When only one scenario exists what is lost is not just the initial missing element, but all the others that connect to it.

Optional Learning Integration

If the Scenarios are not clear to you, focus on one triangle and its three Cornerstones. For example, the Scenario/triangle face for Understanding is bounded by Information, Knowing Boundaries, and Trust. The Heart cornerstone is absent. Imagine an organization without heart (e.g. without caring, personal meaning). Whatever space/possibility remains is devoid of emotion or emotional investment. If people honor and trust each other to respect boundaries, and to provide and exchange information accurately, it is possible for them to develop common and shared understanding of organizational issues (tasks, roles, responsibilities, plans, etc.), but without any common investment or passion.

Take any other Scenario from this Pyradigm™, and consider the elements and dynamics that shape it. (Note or discuss what you see.)

With this Pyradigm™ in place (conceptually) the participants able to reflect on the organizations they managed. Situations were different in each location, but each manager now had a useful lens to see their organizations differently. By comparing what was missing in their organizations with the Pyradigm™ they had constructed they could identify what was missing (or actually weak) back home. This allowed them to construct preliminary plans to have their employees become more empowered by implementing ways to strengthen, introduce, broaden, etc. what was weakest in their own organizations.

Second Level Learning Points

Culture and Organizational DNA

This Empowerment pyramid is not definitive. It is based on elements identified and selected by a set of managers in a particular company. It does, however, have evocative and provocative elements and is workable.

It is also not business plan relevant. It is about the culture of the workplace, not about its business outcomes. While empowerment may be connected to how an organization performs to achieve business outcomes, it has only to do with an organizationally internal context. There are other Pyradigms™ that are constructed quite differently. They incorporate a desired outcome as a Cornerstone (the Northstar) of the pyramid, and help guide an organization and its leaders to what needs to be done to achieve that outcome. The pyramid expressed here articulates what needs to be present to be empowered.

While an organization can plan to be empowered, what is different is that this pyramid is like molecule for a DNA structure. If it is present (if the conditions and elements all exist), then the organization is empowered, and the same pattern can be replicated (e.g. in other divisions), if it does not already exist there. By contrast, "Northstar" guided pyramids are instrumental in nature. They connote a direction to move in (and an arrival point), and are, ultimately, time-bound by relationships or achieved outcome. Examples of these kinds of pyramids include strategic plans, project management, new product development, etc.   By contrast DNA – cultural – pyramids represent part of the core life of an organization.

Complexity and Synergy

As you understand already, in a system a change in one variable can have a powerful, multiplier, effect. In the pyramids, you have seen how removing one element affects several others. Similarly, when a pyramid sound (all the elements in solidly in place), there are other dynamics that take place. One such dynamic relationship occurs when considering the interaction effect of a given Scenario (a triangle) and the "missing" cornerstone.

For example, the Empowerment pyramid shows the "base" triangle resulting in Understanding. The missing cornerstone is Heart. If you add/merge Heart to a situation that has well developed understanding, you get Intrinsic Motivation. Understanding is now supplemented by caring, affect, etc. This results in a sort of meta-result.

For the Empowerment pyramid, these synergistic relationships are:

Understanding	+	Heart	=	Intrinsic Motivation
Ownership	+	Trust	=	Teamwork
Self Esteem	+	Information	=	Improved Decision Making
Shared Vision	+	Knowing Boundaries	=	Increased Productivity

This may be easy to see, but it will enhance your own understanding and insight, to go to one of the diagrams above (or draw for yourself) these interactions.

While they are represented geometrically (as are all the components of the pyramid), the geometry is merely an aid to represent the systemic connections and interactions that take place. All organizations are complex and have interacting parts. Most of these interacting parts are abstract (e.g. communication, understanding, motivation), and may be more complex than a pyramid can represent. A pyramid (tetrahedron), however, is the simplest way to represent concretely the abstract parts and connections of an organization. This, in turn, dramatically increases ability to see, understand, communicate, and manage complexity.

While one could construct more complex forms, a certain elegance is lost, and the number of relationships are likely to be too many to keep track of in one's head. More complex understanding can be built, however, by connecting or embedding pyramids in other ones. For example, if empowerment were a cornerstone of a different pyramid, it would be possible to "magnify" that cornerstone to the pyramid demonstrated here. Also, pyramids can be externally connected, as in different divisions of a corporation. It is not the purpose here to go into how these relationships are constructed, but merely to point out additional possibilities.

Working as a Team

In the case of this Empowerment pyramid, a group of managers created it via facilitated discussion, dialogue, and problem solving. While individuals can and do create organizational pyramids, there is much greater power in building one together. An executive team (and not their proxies), a project management team, a task force, etc. will not only get a richer, better fitting pyramid. They will also gain new understandings of each other and how to work differently. If you are concerned about the conversations breaking down, SelfCorp has software to facilitate your processes, or you could use a trained and trusted

facilitator. In part, it is the diversity of perspectives in the organization that leads to a pyramid that realistically represents the organizations ambitions.

Again, it is not appropriate here to give a comprehensive manual for facilitating group dialogue, but to point out that such dialogue produces: better decisions, deeper understanding of issues and perspectives, a change in how people work with each other, increased competence for individual performers and for the team/group as a whole. The pyramid construction guides what needs to be discussed, stimulates insights, provides a coherent way to represent complex understandings, and yields a way to assess your organization and initiate action.

For additional information about this pyramid, or to learn more about how we can help you and your organization, call 408-871-0462, or e-mail pkaipa@kaipagroup.com. We welcome your inquiries, and your comments.