

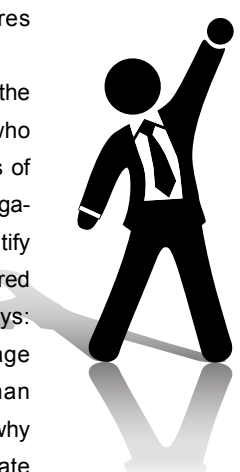
Why companies should value passionate leaders

by David De Cremer

In times of corporate scandals, companies have a strong motive to create ethical awareness among their employees and increase the effectiveness of fairness policies. Many companies agree with the idea that when establishing an ethical climate, the right type of leadership is needed.

But what exactly is the right type of leadership? Many companies seem to employ leadership styles that are controlling in nature and have an underlying rational decision-making strategy in which values are promoted by means of calculated financial incentives. However, for employees to be convinced that moral values are the ones to pursue, they need to feel intrinsically motivated to embrace these values rather than being told to do so by the leader. What may also be needed is leadership that stimulates and energises staff by means of a contagious enthusiasm. In other words, to be passionate about ethics requires leaders who lead with passion!

In fact, one could even say that the best leaders around are those who leave their footprints in their areas of passion. Looking at some of the mega-brands around, we can easily identify passionate leaders who have inspired their employees in amazing ways: Steve Jobs (Apple), Larry Page (Google) and David Neeleman (JetBlue). But if passion matters, why does it matter? How is passionate



leadership linked to more ethical and fair organisational climates?

My own research shows that asking employees to recall encounters with passionate leaders (i.e. those who are energetic in their work and stress the importance of what they do) subsequently influences their minds in a way that automatically activates a sense of morality and concern for fairness. Specifically, recalling such experiences makes followers more attentive to, and more aware of, moral values. The implication here is that, when being supervised by such leaders, employees will intrinsically be more concerned about moral values and thus be more motivated to watch out for and ultimately report ethical misconduct. In this way passionate leaders may help in shaping a climate that supports whistle-blowing and the reporting of wrong-doing.

My findings also show that fair decision-making procedures have a stronger impact on employees when implemented by a passionate leader. Companies have recently recognised that to promote the legitimacy of

management and intrinsically motivate employees to comply with their directives, they need to use decision-making procedures that are perceived as fair, give a voice to employees, and encourage leaders to be consistent in their treatment of people. However, how such measures are brought into play does seem to matter. Indeed, the implication here is that policies instilling fair and ethical decision-making procedures are more easily accepted and perceived as legitimate when coming from leaders who set examples in passionate ways. These leaders not only increase our moral awareness, but also facilitate organisational initiatives aimed at increasing or restoring fairness within the company.

Creating ethical climates is crucial to effective and sustainable business, particularly in times of crisis. Although passion may have been dismissed in the past as a distraction in organisational settings, it is clear that in light of contemporary efforts to create moral awareness, passionate leaders represent a valuable resource to companies.

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