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## September 2007 Editorial

### Organizational Authenticity

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PERFORMANCE  
REPORT

Through my research, extensive literature reviews and work with organizations in different sectors, I have begun to realize that the concept of organizational authenticity is emerging as best practice and am seeking ways to conceptualize and measure it.

Organizational authenticity is a system of benchmarked practices, some tacit, some explicit, that result in measurable organizational behaviors and characteristics in the realms of accountability, branding, and coherence. Authenticity is a process of engaging in corporate behavior that is demonstrated as a collective expression. These benchmarked practices are not a checklist of attributes, but rather are a system of characteristics, that taken together comprise authenticity. Hence, authenticity can be better understood examining this set of characteristics: Accountability, Brand Clarity, Coherence. In previous editorials, I have described these characteristics in more detail. In this editorial, I would like to bring them together under the umbrella of organizational authenticity.

**Accountability**-this characteristic of organizational authenticity exists on two levels: public and internal. *Public accountability* involves translating accurate performance results and continuous improvement processes to external stakeholders. *Public accountability* relies on the demands and expectations of its external stakeholders to determine appropriate performance levels. *Public accountability* is the coagulation of externally-based economic, financial, political and societal demands faced by an organization. *Public accountability* focuses on results obtained and how the external stakeholders perceive those results. *Internal accountability* involves an ongoing identification and problem solution process used with internal stakeholders. *Internal accountability* seeks alignment of conceptualizations of organizational performance with actual performance by examining significant differences and then relying on solutions from internal stakeholders.

**Brand Clarity**-this characteristic of organizational authenticity includes an interactive process of organizational and customer “meaning making” on two levels: competitive and endurance. *Competitive branding* is an integral part of organizational success, driven by the forces of capitalism, the global market economy, consumer choice and marketplace diversification. *Competitive branding* allows organizations to gain success in the ever-changing marketplace, where current success has no relation to the past. *Competitive branding* involves reaching a target in an extremely fragmented market by creating relevancy as a perception of truth in the minds of customers. *Branding for endurance* is different from branding for competition, where identity by comparison is a guaranteed short life. *Branding for endurance* embraces a long-term, sustainable approach to organizational identity. It allows for the time it takes for transformative experiences to take root with employees and customers. It is more broadly focused than competitive branding, and is more resistant to fickle changes in the marketplace because it is based on symbolism, rather than current markets. *Branding for endurance* develops as an organization remains clearly focused on its founding purpose.

**Coherence**-this characteristic of organizational authenticity includes provisions for systemic collaboration where networking, connectedness, multiple constituents’ views and corporate responsibility are valued. Developing *coherence* requires an understanding of how to combine organizational goals and human interactions in a way that brings forth unrealized institutional potential. *Coherence* is considered a new level of organizational performance, a way to reinvent an organization to a new and distinctive dimension of competition and cooperation. In other words, *coherence* provides new standards to operate under in order to pursue corporate goals in ways that broaden the participation of stakeholders and benefits to the organization. Coherence can be examined in two spheres of organizational activity: knowledge-based activity and values-based activity. These two spheres of knowledge and values should be equivalent and aligned in the form of organizational intelligence development and performance management work.

What is organizational authenticity? It is about the collective effect of trying to improve and care for your organization so that it has a tacitly accepted “true north” sense of itself and a demonstrated set of explicit and aligning behaviors. Accountability, both public and internal; branding, both competitive and endurance; and coherence, both knowledge-based and values-based; are the benchmarks for corporate behavior in developing organizational authenticity.

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