

How our current culture will prevent the Belgian football team from ever winning the World Cup.

About strategy, strategy implementation, leadership and culture transformation.

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The Belgian Red Devils lost to France in the semi-finals of the World Cup. Of course, I was sad, like so many of my fellow country-men, women and children. And, to echo the words of Flemish sports journalist Hans Vandeweghe¹: yes, I did have my doubts about the Belgian team, but the game against Brazil was a turning point. True, luck was a determining factor during that game. But, for fortune to smile on you, football – like all sports – requires you to give the best of yourself every time you play. Never ever have we played in the final. The 2018 World Cup was a first-in-a- life-time opportunity. It was in 1986, in Mexico, that we got to the semi-finals for the first time. This was 32 years ago! But we Belgians know how to keep our spirits up, and after playing against ‘Les Bleus’, we summarised the game as follows: *the French team won the match, the Belgian team won our hearts*. The bad news is: it is very unlikely we will ever reach the final. And culture is the culprit.

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But let us put our emotions aside for a moment and summarise what we can learn from the Belgian team and their games, not just in Russia, but over the past three decades.

There are many lessons we can draw from (Belgian) football that we can apply to organisations. Let us look at four of them that are key to success.

Lesson 1: Success starts with unconditional trust on the part of the leadership team.

For the first time, nothing leaked to the press from the Belgian camp in Russia. This was unprecedented in our footballing history. And not because Roberto Martinez, the coach of the Belgian team, and his staff told the players not to do so (*actually, in an insecure environment, tell people ‘not to’ and they will*), but because they did not feel the need to leak information. They focused on the upcoming games and were not busy with group politics and personal gain. All of them felt individually accountable. But unconditional trust among the leadership team (the coach and his staff) is necessary but not sufficient. The leadership team should put their trust in the whole organisation (the players) and get trust from it in return. And that is exactly what Martinez and his staff did. Coach Martinez, who was interviewed after the game against France, summarised it as follows: *‘The attitude of*

the players was great before, during and after the match. They played with character, style, eagerness and togetherness.' Martinez and his staff made a team out of a combination of prima donnas and lesser gods while the Belgian supporters and journalists kept a very critical eye on them. For 32 years, we Belgians have been hoping for more and almost every time the match has turned out to be a disappointment.

But a trusting team (= among themselves) that creates trust in an organisation (= giving trust to and receiving trust from employees) is never a goal in itself. So, forget teambuilding and woolly tree-hugging activities, as well as many soft skills training initiatives such as leadership and team dynamics courses, including the 'I-am-blue-and-you-are-red' colour

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models² for understanding your colleagues better, which are unscientific and which have been heavily criticized by experts [see footnote 1]. In most cases they are money down the drain. Mainly because they are of poor quality, have

little or no connection with the actual business, are not based on sound research (evidence-based) and are the result of an abdication of responsibility by managers in the organisation, who hardly ever follow up on these training courses anyway, or show exactly the behaviour that the employees were sent on the course to change.

The trusting and trusted environment created by Martinez was possible thanks to a clear strategy and sufficient patience for the strategy to be executed as intended (=a strategic implementation plan) in order to be ready for the World Cup. He had to break a culture of individualism and complacency earlier Belgian coaches had allowed or even created. This is the reason why the Belgian football association hired a foreigner, unknown to most supporters, who had to start building a team from scratch. But conversely, too, the trusting and trusted environment that was created also helped to move from strategy to strategy implementation, two important but distinct concepts. While his strategy was translated from theory into practice by a strong team on the football field, coach Martinez wanted to make sure there were no troublemakers who could put a spanner in the works. Thus, he decided not to take *enfant terrible* Radja Nainggolan (formerly of AS Roma) with him to Russia. [see footnote 2]

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Lesson 2: Strategy is necessary but not sufficient

In organisations worldwide, strategy implementation is a big challenge. A famous quote from Martinez summarises this point very well: *'My strategy always wins, it is the implementation that makes the difference.'* It is never about

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strategy only but mainly about strategy implementation. Strategy is necessary but not sufficient. Strategy is the theory, implementation is practice.

Moreover, defining a strategy is not that difficult: generally, you have a group of smart board members who work well together (see Lesson 1) and involve - where appropriate - content experts from within and outside the company. Although a strategy should be inspiring and strategy development can be a creative and fun undertaking³, building a

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strategy is an analytical and rather dull process in most organisations. Rational, usually intelligent (in IQ terms), men and women define their strategy with the help of rational, intelligent (again, in IQ terms), process-driven employees and consultants, sitting in board rooms and off-sites, discussing PowerPoints that require magnifying glasses to read. A road show summarising the two- or three-day off-site in one hour concludes the strategy process. At the end of his/her inspiring speech during a town hall meeting, using the beautiful and clever slides prepared by the marketing department, the CEO asks the audience whether there are any questions. Questions are hardly ever asked, apart from those that have been prepared beforehand so as not to embarrass the CEO.

There is nothing wrong with a road show or town halls, of course. But they are communication. Communication is indeed necessary but not sufficient. Communication – and this is something many leaders and managers forget – is not engagement. Engagement is about the relational side of an organisation and goes hand in hand with empowerment. Well-managed engagement and empowerment leads to genuine accountability. The rational strategy process described above and the communication around it, is about information and helps to ‘install’ the strategy ‘in the head’ i.e. people understand it or, at least, say/think they understand it. But these discussions and slides seldom touch ‘the heart’ of the members of the leadership team, let alone the whole organisation: do the board members really believe in the strategy? And are they able and willing to engage and empower the whole organisation around it (EQ and empathy)? Hence, it is unlikely that the strategy will be ‘in hand’ i.e. that it will lead to excellence in execution as intended. When interviewing functional board members individually (not the CEO – his/her role is different), I regularly ask them if they can briefly summarise the story (mind the word!) of their strategy? A typical reaction is that they take their computer and say: ‘*Wait a minute, Peter, it is somewhere on my computer*’. First of all, this shows that the strategy is not top of mind for most board members and does not lead to the much needed debate about the company strategy within the leadership team. Secondly, it confirms that the CEO - who usually knows the overall strategy very well - is the glue between the different departments. And this is an issue. Thinking and working in silos starts here. Every leadership team member should know, embrace and breathe the complete, cross-functional organisational strategy. And as a team they should be fully aligned around it. Of course, every board member knows his/her functional strategy very well.

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In short: when working on strategy implementation, leadership team members and their senior managers should put on their corporate hat first, and their functional hat second. Secondly, the inform(ation) part should account for around 30% of their time and the engagement and empowerment part around 70%, and not the other way around as is the case in most organisations. Thirdly, a good balance between a rational approach (the strategy) and the relational part (the strategy implementation) is key. The more or less constant change in behaviour necessary for the strategy to be implemented as it is intended, is more likely to happen if these three conditions are satisfied consistently. What is at issue here is not so much change (a better strategy, structure, processes and systems), as transformation (adapting culture and, hence, behaviours).

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Back to the Belgian game against France. Coach Martinez based himself on a clear strategy and 'big' data before and during the match and the right, eager talent was deployed. The Belgian team was praised in the press for playing their most attractive game. But the execution failed. It was 'just' a corner that made the difference, a disappointed Martinez said in an interview after the match. Martinez, his staff and his players did do some things very well on the football field: the open way they played, the attacking position they assumed and a far better way of organising their defence (their weakest point for years). So was there good implementation? Well, the rational functional strategies may have been

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brought into action well, e.g. the defence (functional) strategy and the attack (functional) strategy. Also, a more relational functional strategy was a success: in comparison to the games before the World Cup, the team felt mentally liberated and played without complexes. But the cross-functional, overall

strategy failed. We did not play our own, joint game. Our strategy implementation was an accumulation of loose, incoherent functional strategies, some of them, in their silo, well executed. What was missing was not only the aspirational dot on the horizon – the joint dream to fight for -, but equally important, the connection between the (functional) dots.

After the thriller match against Japan during which the Red Devils turned a frightening 0-2 score for Japan into a 3-2 win for Belgium, Martinez changed his strategy, structure, process and system. The usually weaker Belgian defence was simply brilliant against Brazil. But we still lost to France. And culture is the culprit.

Lesson 3: It's the culture, stupid.

Unless we change our behaviour as Belgians, it is very unlikely we will ever reach the final. And culture is the reason why. We define culture - for our purpose here - as: the sum of the behaviours of all individuals in an organisation. Attitude and behaviours – the relationship between the two concepts is complex and not always straightforward⁴ - are based on mental frameworks. Mental frameworks consist of beliefs, values, experience and emotions.

Every individual has his/her own mental framework. Mental frameworks operate in many instances sub- or even unconsciously. One of the reasons is that we tend to associate with people who think like us. Or as the French say it (more nicely than they play football – but as always very efficiently): *‘Qui se ressemble, s’assemble’* [‘like seeks like’]. So, people working for an organisation for many years, adjust their mental framework to the mental framework

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of the organisation (= its written and unwritten artefacts) and hence, change their behaviour (not always consciously) when they arrive at work. It is quite possible for someone to behave differently in one ‘organisation’ (e.g. at home, with his/her friends) versus another (e.g. the company he/she works for). Let us briefly discuss two

examples to clarify this further. Research⁵ shows that academically stronger students change their behaviour (and their narrative) once they enter the school gates. The culture (= their behaviour) at school is different from the culture (= their behaviour) as youngsters, because what is expected (the mental frameworks) in the two environments is substantially different. Students who are less academically strong, on the contrary, have been observed to continue their behaviours and narrative once in school. The result is that teachers working with the latter students struggle to keep discipline in the classroom because they are not willing to adjust their mental framework and behaviours to the needs of these students. The second example is about an acquaintance of mine who is the town’s carrillonneur. In this role – a hobby of hers – she is an innovative and very creative musician, well respected by everyone who happens to pass by and hear her play the organ. To earn a living, she also works for a big bank. Once she enters her company’s front door, she loses her ability to take the initiative and be creative and innovative. The bureaucratic culture of her organisation is so strong that it ‘sucks’ her in and impacts some of her key competencies negatively.

So, the success of a strategy and strategy implementation largely depends on getting the culture right [see footnote 3]. Precisely because this is so hard – especially for incumbents, in the case of mergers and acquisitions, and in family businesses – we call it transformation. Change is about a better strategy, better structure, better systems and better processes. This is the comfort zone for many organisations as it relates to the rational side of corporate life. Culture transformation is a different kettle of fish, as it is all about the relational side of an organisation, something most leadership teams and managers shy away from. In order to manage culture/behavioural change, they choose to do Lean Manufacturing or certify for Six-Sigma. And if Seven-Sigma, Eight-Sigma or Nine-Sigma existed, they would spend (too much) money on them too. And if all of these process interventions do not deliver the expected benefits, they continue to add extra key Performance Indicators to the already long list of KPIs of the employees concerned. There is nothing wrong with Lean [see footnote 4] and Six-Sigma as such, but if they are used to change culture and hence people’s behaviours, then these practices should be stopped immediately as they will then do more harm than good.

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Changing culture in organisations happens through the creation of Powerful Learning Environments (PLEs)⁶ and with the help of the Positive Deviance Approach (see Lesson 4 below). The concept of PLE stems from instructional psychology, which examines how people in general and students in particular learn and, hence, how teaching/training (= leadership) should be organised. The problem with learning and training/leadership in organisations is that it is primarily information-driven and very little about engagement and empowerment. As a result, transfer on the job is dramatically low. Moreover, research shows that after a presentation or a lecture, people remember on average 4.5%, and after two years, students forget 50% of what they have learned at school or university⁷. Leaders

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and managers fail to take account of the fact that people have a passion for learning, whether they are the CEO of a company or a blue-collar worker. The learning style and interests of a CFO and a machine operator may differ, but the passion to learn is very similar. Most managers in organisations and teachers in schools have no idea how to ignite that passion⁷. The field of educational sciences in general and instructional

psychology in particular helps us to understand the point of view of the other (the learner, the client, the patient) and to choose the appropriate didactic methodologies to help people believe that transformation is necessary ('believe' refers to the individual's mental framework) and to support them with how they can adjust their behaviour, which in turn will enable the change in culture needed to implement the strategy. Didactic methodologies, applied in the right manner by leaders and managers, are the holy grail of culture transformation, as they perfectly balance the rational and relational side required to make strategy implementation successful [see footnote 5].

How, then, is culture responsible for Belgium not winning the European Championship or World Cup in the future, unless we Belgians change our behaviour?

The short answer is: a national football team is part of a larger culture i.e. its country culture. The culture of a larger organisation devours the culture of a smaller one. This is why it is notoriously difficult to change the culture when a bigger company is acquired by a smaller one and the latter wants to impose its ways of working. There are no equals in mergers and acquisitions.

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Two years ago, entrepreneur Bart Verhaeghe, president of Bruges football club and vice-president of the Royal Belgian Football Association was on a mission. As a business man, he believes in dreaming big and putting his money where his mouth is. He speaks up and does not shy away from telling others how he sees things. He is known to show leadership, to be tough and to never give up. He fought hard to hire Roberto Martinez as the next Belgian coach. Very few football fans had ever heard of the man. Since 1960, the Red Devils have been trained by Belgian coaches with the exception of the Dutchman Dick Advocaat whose tenure lasted a little over six months (01/10/2009 - 15/04/2010). But Verhaeghe definitely did not want another Belgian trainer, let alone a foreign ego-tripper, as a leader. He, very consciously, chose for a discreet, amiable and softly spoken man.

In an interview⁸ a few minutes before the game against France kicked off, Verhaeghe said: *'Two years ago we started a project. We wanted to become world champions. We had a dream of winning the World Cup with the help of Martinez and Thierry Henry [former French*

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international].' He continued: *'In the process of interviewing Martinez for the job, he showed healthy ambition. He dared to dream.'* And now it comes: *'This is very un-Belgian.'*, Verhaeghe said, looking straight into the camera and sending his message into every living room in Belgium. He and

his colleagues of the Belgian football association did not want to tell anyone in Belgium about their ambition. *'The culture in Belgium is such'*, Verhaeghe continued, *'that if you stand out from the crowd, you get shot.'* Turning again to all Belgians watching, he said: *'Whoever you are, whatever you do: dare to dream, stand out from the crowd, follow your ambition.'*

Without using these exact words, Verhaeghe was probably referring to a form of acquiescence, prudence and consensus-driven mindset which can result in mediocrity. Trying to keep everybody happy and not fighting for your rights may help you to avoid conflicts, but it does not necessarily bring you where you want or need to get. Take Hazard and De Bruyne towards the end of the game against the French. They deserved a free kick after a foul not too far away from the French goal. But they did not challenge the referee's judgement. Any other team would have screamed and shouted and would have contested the injustice done, especially with 10 more minutes to go in the game and 0-1 on the scoreboard. That's not us. We do not want to rock the boat. We prefer to keep quiet and keep the peace. We want to do things by the book. We follow rules, we don't break them. We help others to

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be successful. Would it not have been a better idea to lose to the English in the group stage so that we could play against an easier opponent? No, of course not. That's not us. We want to play football and win, we do not calculate our odds [but also, we do not want to be criticised for choosing the easy way, which was probably the right thing to do to get into the final]. Although we scored 16 times during the World Cup, not a bad result at all, we could have scored many more goals. But our players also offer - gentlemen as they are - another team member the possibility to score (a noble gesture but not if your own odds of getting a

goal are higher). And we try to do as many tiki-taka passes as possible because we try to 'dance' the ball into the goal (great to watch, but not very efficient). The closed way of playing of the French was not nice to watch, but it was bold and provocative. The Belgian team did what they were paid for: playing brilliantly in pockets but otherwise falling back for the most part into 'academic football', as Jan Mulder controversially said on Flemish television after the game against France. The Belgians play by the book, he continued. They colour inside the lines. [Jan Mulder is the only Dutch - and hence outspoken - commentator who was allowed to enter Belgium during the World Cup]. Upon reading an earlier draft of this article, a Brazilian friend of mine challenged me and wrote: '*Were you really so afraid of dreaming big? In my view you [the Belgian football team] were respectful but confident*'. The latter is probably true. However, being (too?) respectful and (misplaced?) confidence are two very important behaviours but they are not the same as 'thinking big' and 'being bold'.

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Our perceived mediocrity is the consequence of many elements in our Belgian and individual mental frameworks (= beliefs, values, experience and emotions). Apart from the examples given above, our Belgian social dialogue model is interesting to look at briefly in this context. Many foreign countries praise our model according to its intentions: fairness, respect and equality in our society through dialogue. But its execution - and hence the impact on Belgian culture and the individual mental frameworks and behaviours of Belgians - not only confirms our 'keep-your-head-down' culture, as Verhaeghe put it, it also affects it negatively. However impactful our social dialogue model could be, if it was implemented well, today it is a euphemism for a lack of courage. The politicians and the representatives of civil society off-load the responsibility to take decisions onto one another. They negotiate for so long that the outcome of the discussions is watered-down. Moreover, their interpretation of these watered-down conclusions is different every time so that the same topics have to be re-discussed time and again. The representatives of civil society work together when it serves their purpose and ask the politicians for more money if they disagree amongst themselves. It is not the concept (= theory) of social dialogue that is wrong, but its execution and the lack of talent heading up these organisations. The men and women currently in charge are old power⁹. The consequences are that (1) progress in Belgium is slow, (2) people dialogue topics to death, (3) we do not challenge enough because we do not want to rock the boat, and (4) we think: '*it will see me out - Change won't happen in my life time*'.

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Belgium is a fantastic place to live for many reasons, and Flemings, Walloons and German-speaking Belgians are friendly, hospitable people. But this very good life makes many of us doze off and live our cosy lives. A big dream is not necessary. And it is the opposite attitude - 'grinta', doggedness, perseverance -, consistently applied that our Belgian football team were lacking. The Belgian trainers before Martinez's arrival failed because they were an

integral part of this Belgian culture. Had they been the coach of the Red Devils in Russia, their strategies might have been better than Martinez's, but it is very likely that the execution (strategy implementation) would have been (far) worse. The fourth place in 1986 in Mexico was a flaw in the system. The exception that confirms the rule. Moreover, back then, the tensions between cliques of players and with the coach and the staff in the camp were notorious and violated Lesson 1 discussed above in this article.

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In the conversation with my Brazilian friend after the Belgian team lost to France, she wrote to me the following, which sums up this third lesson well: *'Just before the Belgian team's game against the French, we were watching TV and they were showing how the French were having fun throughout this World Cup. And I told my husband that this is the main difference between the French and Brazilian teams: we [Brazilians] are not supposed to have fun! We MUST win. The golden cup hangs like a sword of Damocles over the heads of our Brazilian team. It is such a huge responsibility, of national importance, that, if they had fun like the French, the whole country would criticise them for not being motivated and/or focused. That is when the cultural and historical aspects win!'*

One may still wonder why, then, our prima donnas play better in the Premier League or its Spanish, Italian or French counterparts? Precisely because they are part of a local club with a winning spirit, a fight-and-never-give-up mentality, with a clear ambition and the conviction to triumph. The club, the coach, the staff and players are not afraid to talk about or share their dreams. Since we are not talking about a national football team in this case, the English, French, Italian or Spanish culture has little impact on the club culture.

Lesson 4: Treat your lesser gods well.

The gods of Belgian football, players such as Eden Hazard, Kevin De Bruyne, Vincent Kompany, Moussa Dembélé and Thibaut Courtois - to name just a few - can have an off-day or even an off-period. This was the case for Dembélé and De Bruyne and - to some extent - for Hazard in the game against France. A team should never consist of gods only, as they are dependent on lesser gods to function well. Moreover, they never play consistently well.

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Argentinian Lionel Messi (Barcelona) and Brazilian football-god Neymar (Paris Saint-Germain – PSG) are examples. Their performance during the World Cup left a lot to be desired. The Red Devil player Thomas Meunier (PSG) – a lesser god – was key for the

Belgian team during the World Cup. Two yellow cards in the previous games (against Japan and Brazil) led to him missing the semi-final against France. Meunier's way of playing was very good - and consistently good - throughout the World Cup and in his games just before it. We will never know, of course, but he might have made the difference in the match against the French.

It is important that the lesser gods in organisations are appreciated for the role they play in the team and that there are sufficient such high potential people in the talent pipeline. But all the other employees also deserve the leadership's attention, support and respect. They are not deities, key talent or high potentials, but they are necessary to implement an

All other employees also deserve the leadership's attention, support and respect. They are not deities, key talent or high potentials, but they are necessary to implement an organisation's strategy successfully.

organisation's strategy successfully. A football club without supporters, a stadium without safety stewards or people behind the ticketing desk makes the sports so many of us love watching impossible. These employees should not only understand (= the rational side) but also feel (= the relational side) that leaders and managers appreciate their competencies, that they need them and that they are willing to

invest in them so that they can be effective. A success in the organisation should be a success for everyone, not just for key talent. It is not only the players on the football field who win a game, it is also their colleagues on the bench, the staff at home, the players in the regular competition, the kids who love to play football and some of whom are our future gods, it is the supporters, it is all our compatriots.

As mentioned earlier, coach Roberto Martinez did not select top player, rebel and supporters' pet Radja Nainggolan to join the team in Russia. After all, it is already difficult enough to build a trusting team with gods and lesser gods. Add a superstar God – fantastic player, no rules – to the team and you get an explosive mix. He gets all the attention from the coach and his staff because he is very difficult to manage. The supporters worship him and the press fills pages with the juicy stories about him. In short: whatever the strategy of the coach, Nainggolan's unpredictable behaviour determines how the team will play the match and hence implement Martinez's strategy. His personality is potentially destructive for the trust and the execution of the strategy. However, on the 'culture' side, he may score very high. He is not afraid to make bold, daring moves, both on and off the field. And we Belgians are very happy for others to do this, which is why so many of us adore him.

Nainggolan's unpredictable behaviour determines how the team will play the match and hence implement Martinez's strategy.

The 'Nainggolan effect' is very different from what is called in sociology the 'positive deviance approach'¹⁰⁺¹¹⁺¹². Positive deviants are people who also rebel, but their drive and objective is the betterment of others, not their own ego. The typical example used in the

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literature to explain the 'positive deviance approach' is female circumcision in Africa. After staying/studying in the Western world,

young women who were circumcised in their childhood, have gone back to the places where they grew up to try to convince the tribal chiefs as well as mothers with young girls - who actively maintain the culture - to stop this mutilation. Many of their courageous campaigns have been successful because they fundamentally believe that these wrongs should be stopped and they are deeply convinced that they can make a difference. Identifying, educating, stimulating, supporting and protecting 'positive deviance' employees from inside and outside the business may help organisations to transform their culture.

However much I love to see Radja play, organisations should never hire the Nainggolans of this world. They may sometimes make a difference, but the destruction that may go before and come after is hardly ever worth the bet. Such characters may make a good consultant, though, or be of great value in a start-up, for some time.

Conclusion

The digital revolution – SMAC technologies (Social, Mobile, Analytics and Cloud), artificial intelligence, augmented reality and big data (the fuel for these technologies) – offers a wealth of opportunities. Sports coaches in general, and football trainers in particular, are making more and more use of new technologies to try and make the difference when developing or implementing their strategies.

Belgian coach Martinez used ‘big data’ to analyse a myriad of parameters that could give him information and insights to increase the chances of Belgium winning its matches and, ultimately, the World Cup. The hoped-for triumph eluded him, unfortunately. He did do many things (much) better than his predecessors.

We discussed them above. And using new technologies and big data can be of great value, but only if you get your house in order first. At the heart of the organisational house is the golden triangle: vision, leadership and culture. Leadership

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is at the core of the triangle as it is the leadership team that defines the draft vision, strategy and strategic plan and engages their direct reports (first) and the rest of the organisation (next) in order to create commitment for results. It is this approach - which we call ‘The Leadership Experience’ - that enables employees to assume accountability for the execution of the strategic plan as intended by the strategy. The second - equally important - responsibility of the leadership team is to define the current and the preferred culture in line with the preferred future (vision). It is important to recognise that culture transformation is not the consequence of a well-implemented strategy, but rather it is a major condition for success. Hence leadership focus and interventions by senior management to drive culture transformation are as important as managing the change required to implement the strategy.

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We Belgians and our Red Devils had better not rely on data only. Here is why. Playing in the third-place match is sometimes the precursor of playing in the final four years later: nine of the twenty-six teams that have lost in the semi-finals since 1966 have played in the final four years later¹³. That is roughly 33%. However, it can also be a bad omen: one out of four such teams has been unable to qualify for the next World Cup (25%). Six of the teams that played in the third-place match (23%) won the tournament later on, and on average they needed just under 12 years to do so. Based on these numbers, our football team can sit and wait until fortune comes their way. Or they can do something about it. Culture is so important

that it makes or breaks strategy implementation. And it all starts with not being afraid to dream, to think big. The Belgian football team's ticket to the final is now in the hands of all Belgians, and that makes us as responsible for our future success as the players. Or, as we have all been cheering throughout the World Cup: *'Tous ensemble, tous ensemble! Hey! Hey!'* [see footnote 6].'

Footnotes:

[1] There is no reason for organisations to cancel their annual barbecue or team events as yet. If well thought-through, appropriately organised and properly managed (three important conditions), they may serve a purpose. But in the "wrong" organisational culture, these happenings do more harm than good: the same people (usually those who work with each other) stick together or form cliques; colleagues talk about one another rather than to each other; and, of course, many bosses are discussed. Using such events to improve the culture of an organisation, and hence change individual behaviour, usually fails if no other more 'serious' interventions are undertaken to transform the culture (see Lessons 2 and 3 in this article).

And what about the build-a-raft-together type of team exercises? Well, some like them, others simply hate them. That is the first challenge. And yes, people with big egos will be easy to spot, as will the quieter characters. Yet, back in the office, they will still have the same big ego or quiet personality, however many of these exercises you organise. And sure,

Using such team events to actually transform the culture of an organisation is very likely to fail.

the trainer will have plenty of opportunities to show the group which team behaviours worked well and which ones need to be improved. But very little of this feedback is evidence-based. Moreover, transfer on the job is close to non-existent. The paradox is: if you have the right culture in your organisation (i.e. a genuine culture of engagement), these types of team events may actually have some effect and bring people closer together. That is exactly what Martinez did: he patiently took the time to change the team culture of the Red Devils first. How? By working with them on-the-job, individually, in subgroups and with the whole team, as was needed. Once he got closer to his objective, his off-field team events became more effective. But using such team events to actually transform the culture of an organisation is very likely to fail. They will confirm rather than change the behaviours you want to see adjusted.

[2] Radja Nainggolan is a Belgian-Indonesian midfield football player. He left AS Roma in July 2018 to join Internazionale.

[3] When a strategy confirms the existing culture, then its implementation will go faster and more smoothly and it will potentially be more successful. However, in today's global, digital and fast-changing world, every good strategy will require culture transformation. The strategy consists of the vision - the aspirational dot on the horizon - and the preferred future, which is best defined as follows: if you know today how to achieve your preferred future, it is more likely to be a business plan, rather than a

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preferred future. Since the early nineties, when strategy thinking and strategy development became more and more top of mind (including in business schools), the tension between strategy and organisational culture has been well known and documented. Hence the famous words attributed to Peter Drucker: *'Culture eats strategy for breakfast'*. Strategy implementation, which is getting more and more (research) attention today – fortunately – is the connection between strategy and culture, as it combines these two key elements, together with others such as talent and leadership-in-action.

[4] In a well-written article, *'Does your airline still cross seat belts? A ten-point lean checklist for leaders.'*¹⁴ Alex Dichter and his colleagues from McKinsey&Company describe very well what it means to apply a lean approach and how organisations can benefit from it. It is interesting to note that they only make one, very high level reference to culture: *'But businesses that have truly embraced lean see it as more than a matter of posters, one-off productivity fixes, and cost cutting: it is a mind-set, a culture, that systematically seeks and eliminates sources of waste, variability, and inflexibility in operations.'* (p.2). There is no further mention about culture in the 5 page article. If well-designed, well-managed and well-implemented, a Lean approach may help indeed to optimize existing or introduce new processes or procedures. However, in order to execute these, no change in the mental framework and hence no change in behaviour is needed (of course executing the adjusted or new processes or procedures may require you to change the way you implement them), nor will performing these adjusted or new processes or procedures bring about a change in the mental frameworks and behaviours of the employees and the organisation. Hence, there is no culture transformation. If, on the other hand, the organisation wants to change its culture to create a *'mind-set, a culture, that systematically seeks and eliminates sources of waste, variability, and inflexibility in operations.'* (p.2), then a series of interventions will be required that focusses on the culture change itself. Moreover, the initiative to do so, should come from the leadership team and should become one of the strategic actions of the organisation.

[5] According to Argyris¹⁵, learning is not just a body of knowledge you acquire that can be tested (learning is defined as a change in long-term memory¹⁶), but learning should also lead

Learning should lead to a more or less constant change in behaviour.

to a more or less constant change in behaviour. In that sense, didactic methodologies are very similar to behavioural change techniques (BCTs), as the former help learners to learn and hence to change their behaviours.

According to Lorencatto, Stanworth and Gould (2014)¹⁷,

BCTs *'are the observable and replicable components of an intervention that are designed to alter or redirect causal determinants of behaviors (i.e., the proposed "active ingredients" of interventions). Examples of BCTs include setting goals, making action plans, and providing feedback on behavior or outcome of behavior.'* (p. 2588).

[6] Tous ensemble (French) = All together.

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