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By G.A. "Andy" Marken

The New Communications Challenges for Business

Soften Organizations' Edges; Open the Lines of Communications

Whether it was the financial maneuverings of Enron and Tyco, the tortured merger battle of HP/Compaq or people around the globe suddenly realizing success involves the total person, there has been an increased demand for responsible and responsive management.

Answering this call is a new breed of senior managers who will be challenged by all of the organizations' stakeholders. They, in turn, will challenge the total spectrum of an organizations' communications capabilities—internally and externally.

The new breed includes Harry Kraemer of Baxter Int., Henry McKinnel of Pfizer, Jeffrey Immelt of General Electric, IBM's Samuel Palmisano and Joseph Tucci of EMC. Intel and Microsoft also have shifted to the softer style of management with Craig Barrett and Steve Balmer (respectively) rather than the "tough love" approach that served the companies for many years.

GE's Jack Welch was a hard line, in-your-face manager who worked well with his people but aggressively challenged employees, business partners and even governments. Lou Gerstner came into IBM at a critical period. He slashed staffing, reshuffled business units and demanded performance and interaction while limiting his contacts with the press and financial community.

Relying less on the personal approach than a position of power, Andy Grove at Intel and Bill Gates at Microsoft moved aggressively with customers and business partners and were even confrontational with governments around the globe. HP, which had an almost mythical history of soft-touch management, was shaken to its foundation when Carly Fiorina became president, forcing changes by dictate and the will of her convictions.

During the HP/Compaq campaign, Fiorina mirrored the hardball approach that had worked so well for IBM's Gerstner and GE's Welch. In what some have

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referred to as a good cop/bad cop routine, Compaq's Michael Capellas balanced Fiorina's tough statements and black/white decisions. He quietly and confidently worked to reassure customers, partners, employees and shareholders that the two organizations were getting inputs from all parties to develop an integration program that encouraged and respected their inputs and recommendations.

Capellas never shied away from focusing on the bottom line and shareholder value. His credible approach softened and humanized the possible management team that could emerge if the merger is successful.

Unlike their predecessors, the new CEOs are more personable, more accessible,

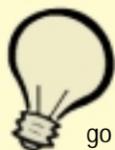
more open and more in touch with employees, business partners, the press and the financial community. Rather than use their authority to force change and progress, they work at suggesting, influencing and guiding by example. They are focusing on interpersonal skills, encouraging constructive disagreement and placing a premium on openness in all of their relationships.

The shift has a profound effect on how we support our companies and management teams if they are going to rely more on open communications internally and externally. Now that managers are realizing that they don't own employees and partners, you will be called on to help craft and communicate this message throughout the organization. Your guidance and recommendations also will be tested.

If your organization has progressed beyond "my way or the highway" management to one where senior management wants and expects inputs and recommendations on goals, strategy and specific communications efforts, your workload has dramatically increased. Suddenly you have to think rather than simply react. If you establish the communications strategy and tactics, it also means you are responsible for carrying out the programs and for their success.

The new management style, which is more art than science, requires that public relations develop activities that show that management wants to reach out internally and externally for information and inputs both positive and negative. If the company has emerged from—or management wants to shift from—the "just do it" style to one that says "how should we do it," change won't happen overnight. **WQP**

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