

## Introduction to Connections Leadership

“Connections Leadership” is being revised and updated in 2020. The subjective feeling of ‘psychological safety’ is the place which enables people to perform at ultra-high levels.

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The necessity for closer, more productive working relationships is needed for individuals to be fully engaged. This is possible when people feel securely grounded and actively seek reasonable risks with one-another. The subjective feeling of ‘psychological safety’ is the place which enables people to perform at ultra-high levels.

Unfortunately, many individuals experience disconnections when they contribute to business success, but their participation is demanding, stressful and filled with personal compromises. Level Up at Work offers a set of interpersonal leadership skills and practices. This directly impacts your sense of workplace meaning, identity and belonging. And your employer likes this too because it provides a win-win for you and the organization.

*Connections Leadership* breaks down the leadership skills and practices taught by Level Up at Work. It is your guide for navigating all of the above that supports active progress being made in your professional (and personal) life.

The challenge in all organizations is that interaction takes time and valuable resources. Interaction has an economic cost. Level UP at Work’s approach dramatically enhances the engagement of people in the workplace. As a result, organizations’ plans, projects or priorities are typically implemented faster and with better quality.

We believe that most people in organizations want to make meaningful contributions to the goals of the company. Our services acknowledge that the dynamic of people in organizations is challenging and continually demands new forms of coordination. Level UP at Work helps

improve the way the organizations achieve their goals, plans, projects or priorities with and through their people.

This is what modern leadership is all about; create settings of trust and support, a workplace where all members of staff are motivated and share a purpose with their peers in a common effort to reach the company's goals and enjoy success.

We hold that leaders and teams of people can be coached to higher levels of engagement. And we hold that leaders who consciously practice 'Connections Leadership skills' (even without a coach) consistently strengthen the interaction of people in their organizations. Connections Leadership focuses on three primary skill areas:

1. Outstanding Individual Contribution
2. Key Workplace Relationships
3. Team Performance

It is through these three Connections Skill areas that the interaction between people in organizations is transformed. The following table briefly outlines our model:

## Connections Leadership Model

**Outstanding Individual Contribution**

**Key Workplace Relationships**

**Team Performance**

Each of these areas will be described with primary reference to common needs: Meaning / Identity / Belonging. In many ways the satisfaction of these three human needs is fundamental to well-functioning organizations (so fundamental that they are as basic as needing food and shelter). Unfortunately, that also means they are often overlooked as key variables in the quest for improved organizational performance. In our view, however, organizations which choose to no longer neglect the human need for meaning, identity and belonging can expect a remarkable upturn in organizational performance.

In other words, when organizations support the basic common goals of human beings, company goals are afforded far more attention and focus.

**MEANING:** We continue to search for meaningful experiences, jobs and ways of living that can make a difference. We want to make our mark. In the workplace we all need to feel we matter.

**IDENTITY:** We continue to get to know ourselves, how our relationships affect our lives, how we react in different situations, what we are empowered and able to do throughout life. In the workplace this comes through with trust and being supported by others.

**BELONGING:** We continue to seek out others. Wherever we may move to, work or socialize, relationships ebb and flow, but we want to know our place in and among the people in our lives. In the workplace this is through the sense of having made a contribution.

These are three inseparable, different and sometimes competing aspects of being human. As organizations embrace these 'common goals' as fundamental to their business, they can completely transform the interaction of people in the workplace. But organizations where the individual does not feel trusted and supported, where the individual does not feel their contribution is recognized, or even that they are making a meaningful contribution at all, will just as surely suffer the consequences of this costly squandering of their human potential.

An engaged workforce is essential to executing all business plans, regardless of the technology it uses or the sophistication of its operations. Workforce engagement is present in all organizations to a greater or lesser extent. But when leaders and members of their team learn Connections Skills and put them into practice, organizations can to a 'greater extent'

tap the resourcefulness of their people and correspondingly the business model with its supporting structures.

Connections Skills are the key to this transformation.

In my life, and especially my professional life, I have come across a number of metaphors, stories, poems and beliefs that have stuck with me as reminders of how connected we all are: individuals and organizations, across the city or around this world. They hold true regardless of cultural background, education level, roles in an organization, amount of experience or success in a career.

While the words used may be different it seems to me that the longing for meaning, identity, belonging crosses every human barrier, wall and border that seems to separate us so. People of all backgrounds—regardless of age, gender, sexuality, race, class, religion, level of education, career, country, language, lifestyle, hobbies, and family structure—are all very similar in this sense. In our own contexts, and within our own daily working lives, we all seek the same basic experiences. And in a world where we focus so much on our differences, knowing this is somewhat refreshing. What we long for, search for, and discover actually unites us. As organizations strengthen the ties that unite all human beings, they stand poised to reach their potential. And those basic experiences we all seek in the workplace are:

- To make a meaningful contribution
- To feel valued for who we are and what we do
- To feel part of a cohesive whole

These basic human needs have to be met in the workplace!

Level UP at Work helps leaders to enhance their ability to meet these needs.

**MEANING:** *We continue to search for meaningful experiences, jobs and ways of living that can make a difference. We want to make our mark. In the workplace we all need to feel we matter.*

As human beings, we continue to search for meaning in our private and working lives. This is deeply personal. Meaning can take different shapes and forms for different people (because we all have different world perspectives and values), but in some sense or another, we long to make an impact in our careers. We look to make a difference, sometimes in a one-time, short-term manner, and yet at the same time, we want to experience meaningful work. Work does matter to how you live your life, and we all know it.

The individual who does not feel they are doing meaningful work is not fulfilled, and not surprisingly less than motivated. When not motivated, people tend to be complacent or at best compliant on the job. The ultimate expression of this lack of motivation is when someone simply hands in their notice and leaves. Perhaps only then does it become obvious to their manager that they had been starved of meaningful activity.

**IDENTITY:** *We continue to get to know ourselves, how our relationships affect our lives, how we react in different situations, what we are empowered and able to do throughout life. In the workplace this comes through being trusted and supported by others.*

Identity is created with and through others, and is expressed in the choices we make (clothing, choice of neighborhood, lifestyle, etc.). In the workplace our identity choices include our profession, role and contributions both formally and informally. Our careers and work life are inherently collaborative. As long as we feel we are truly seen by others, we have a sense of identity we are comfortable with. Deep down, everyone longs to be seen and recognized for our uniqueness and individuality. Sociologists call it “the looking-glass self”, the notion that identity is always in relation to another, and it can sometimes be difficult to come to terms with.

In our careers the journey of exploring one’s interests, role in an organization, abilities, values and contributions takes time, while we are constantly evolving an identity in relation to others in the workplace.

In many respects what other people say and how they act towards me affects the way I think about myself. Even for the most self-assured and confident people, this still applies to a

certain extent. In parts of South Africa, identity is called “Ubuntu”: I am who I am because of our relationship.

The individual who does not feel they are trusted or supported usually does not have an identity they can live with. When the sense of their own identity does not match the feedback they receive from others, people again tend to be less than committed to their work. Not surprisingly, we frequently define ourselves as being a part of something else, such as our family, our country, our employer, our career, our job description (I’m an engineer, I’m a Protestant, I’m a volunteer, I’m a parent, I’m a valuable employee). All of these rest on having an identity in relation to others that is consistent with how we see ourselves. When the identity is not consistent we usually seek work elsewhere, or are requested to do so.

**BELONGING:** *We continue to seek out others. Wherever we may move to, work or socialize, relationships ebb and flow, but we want to know our place in and among the people in our lives. In the workplace this is through the sense of having made a contribution.*

In our private lives and the workplace we flourish best when we are not alone, when we can rely on other people, interact with each other and learn from each other. Belonging to a group whose goals, values and beliefs we share provides us with a sense of reciprocal obligation and mutual support, which prompts us to do our best and engage fully for the good of all.

Human beings are social and relationship oriented. Although it may not always seem that way, we need community. It is human nature to seek belonging. It could be to a certain group of friends, a team, a company—anytime there are two or more people involved. We all need to feel we belong, regardless of the activities that take place or the type of group it is.

Without finding belonging with others, we feel empty, lonely, not good enough, rejected, which can be a dangerous thing. We long to know that there is a place for us in this company (or this community), and that we in fact do belong to something that makes a difference. There is a great sense of peace and satisfaction that comes with ‘being part of the herd.’

And so from these needs, Connections Leadership has emerged. It is about living and working with much more purpose. The rewards include the freedom to tap into more of your potential, and to experience new forms of success with others and the organizations you belong to.

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