

SUMMARY TRIBAL LEADERSHIP

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Summary of “Tribal Leadership” by Dave Logan, John King, and Halee Fischer-Wright

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Learn How to Leverage Natural Groups to Build a Thriving Organization

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Introduction

Imagine each organization as a set of small towns. Think about the people in your small town. If you're not from a small town, well then imagine the following scenarios, "There are the business executive and the sheriff. There's the town scandal - the preacher's wife and the schoolteacher. There's talk of who will be the next mayor, who will move away, and the price of grain (or oil or the Wal-Mart starting wage). There's the high school, where the popular kid, the son of the town's sheriff, throws a party the weekend his father is away. There is the church crowd, the bar friends, the single people, the book club, the bitter enemies. There are also the ones who are natural leaders, who explain why the party at the sheriff's house seemed like a good idea at the time and how sorry they are for the beer stains on the carpet." Sure, not every small town is exactly the same, but there are many similarities. These small towns are called tribes. A tribe is a group of between 20 and 150 people. So how can you know if someone is in your tribe? Perhaps when you see this person walking down the street, you'd stop and say "hello." Your tribe members' numbers are likely programmed into your cell phone. In the business world, these tribes are incredibly important. Tribes in companies get work done, and they are the basic building block of any organization, they determine how much work gets done, and of what quality. While some tribes demand excellence, others are content with getting the minimum done. The difference in performance? Tribal leaders.

Tribal leaders build tribes. "If they are successful, the tribe recognizes them as the leaders, giving them top effort, cultlike loyalty, and a track record of success." Each tribe goes through tribal stages and acts as a conveyor belt. When the belt is moving, people naturally move from one stage to the next. A tribal leader's job is to guide their tribe through these five stages. So if you want to learn more about how to lead your tribe, then let's get started.



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The Role of a Tribal Leader

Every company needs a Tribal Leader. When it comes to Griffin Hospital in Derby, Connecticut, the two standout Tribal Leaders are President and CEO Patrick Charmel and Vice President Bill Powanda. When you enter Griffin Hospital today, you are greeted by a valet who squeegees car windows and knows many patients by name. As you walk through the front entrance, you'll first notice the piano music, both soft and elegant. Next, you'll notice the smell: fresh flowers and wood. Clearly, this isn't any ordinary hospital; in fact, Griffin has drawn so much international attention, it has been ranked fourth on the Fortune list of best places to work.

Back in the 1980s, Griffin was nothing like what it is today. The hospital had falling patient satisfaction and market share, and it was incredibly difficult to recruit staff and physicians. To figure out how to fix the problem, Griffin's board conducted a community survey and asked local residents, "If there is a hospital you'd avoid, please name it." Of those who responded, 32 percent handwrote, "Griffin." It seemed as if the hospital was going under and there was no hope.

Tribal leaders Charmel and Powanda were able to turn Griffin around by galvanizing a tribe of employees, volunteers, board members, and community leaders whose opinions mattered. The success of Griffin was a tribal effort. To begin, they began by asking what patients wanted. For young parents, they wanted things like a separate hospital entrance, double beds, a jacuzzi for pain relief, family rooms with kitchens, 24/7 visiting hours, and a spa-like atmosphere. To do this, the staff needed to become involved in the collaboration process as well. The staff themselves stated they too would want open visits, more information about their medical condition, and caring staff. Armed with this new knowledge, the hospital soon began its slow turn toward quality.

So what made Powanda and Charmel successful Tribal Leaders? Not only did they spend their efforts on building strong relationships among tribal

members, but they also nudged the organization to move through the stages of tribal leadership. “In a sentence, this is what Charmel and Powanda did: they built the tribe, and as they did, people recognized them as leaders.” They put their tribe first, and as they continued to do so, people began to respect and trust them. This is Tribal Leadership.



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Tribe Culture Determines an Organization's Success or Failure

Why is it that some people are more driven than others? In any workplace, you'll have those who work hard and perform their best while others are simply okay with doing the bare minimum. In other words, some tribes are more productive than others. That's because each tribe has its own tribal culture which is characterized by the relationships and attitudes of the members.

Each culture has its own way of speaking, or "theme" that appears whenever people talk, e-mail, joke around, or just pass one another in the hallway. For instance, Griffin Hospital reveals its tribal culture in several ways, like when the valet remembers people's names, and when the nurses introduce patients to doctors as if they were introducing an old friend. Each person takes on the responsibility to adopt the cultural language; as a result, each member of the staff works hard to make patients feel comfortable and safe. Of course, a tribal culture can also foster laziness and apathy. For example, if an office has an overall unproductive, indifferent culture, even an ambitious new hire will eventually become lazy. Even if there are a few skilled employees, the tribe won't function well if the tribal culture is unproductive.

Tribal culture can belong to one of five stages. Fortunately, most professionals skip Stage One, which is the mindset that creates street gangs and people who come to work with shotguns. The theme of Stage One is, "Life Sucks" and the language they use largely supports this theme. People at this stage are typically hostile, and they band together to get ahead in an unfair world. Only 2% of American professionals operate at Stage One, but if you've never experienced it, you've seen it on *The Shawshank Redemption*. Similar to prison, members of a Stage One culture feel stuck and believe life is not worth living. Another example would be the mafia, which typically consists of members who have no regard for rules and often fight with one another.

When consulting organizations with Stage One tribes, the authors found that one of them completely disappeared after a series of accounting scandals. Another had constant problems with employees stealing money and never feeling remorse. A third was so stressed that no one was even surprised when an employee showed up to work with a shotgun. As you can see, cultures can determine the overall productivity of an organization. When a culture uses hostile language and has negative attitudes, the negativity can trickle through the entire organization.



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Stage Two is More Common but Still Unhealthy

Similar to Stage One, a Stage Two tribal culture is also ineffective. Stage Two cultures account for 25 percent of workplace tribes. These members transition from “life sucks” to “my life sucks” and is characterized by apathy. People in this cultural stage are largely sarcastic and antagonistic. They cross their arms in judgment and they never get interested enough to spark any passion. If you’ve ever walked into a meeting and passionately presented a new idea, only to be met with snickers and passive looks, then you’ve walked into a Stage Two culture.

If you’ve never experienced a Stage Two culture, you’ve seen it when you watch *The Office* or walk into the Department of Motor Vehicles. In both instances, there is little to no innovation and almost no sense of urgency. We see it in doctors’ offices that make us wait forty-five minutes reading magazines older than we are and at airports when security screeners sit around talking while the line stretches out the terminal door, clearly oblivious that people might be missing their flights.

When we encounter a Stage Two culture, an outsider might ask, “Why doesn’t anyone do something about this?” and “How can these people be so stupid?” But Stage Two organizations are the second most common type of organization, behind Stage Three. You can even see this culture at the highest levels of government in Washington, DC and among bank executives or boards of directors of Fortune 500 companies. This culture can even be found in the hallways of companies praised as “America’s Best Places to Work.” Overall, we see Stage Two mostly when people believe they cannot be creative or innovate, where jobs are so mechanized that they feel like part of a machine.

In a Stage Two culture, we find people never hold one another accountable and employees won’t take initiative unless they have to; they are okay with completing the bare minimum. People tend to use phrases like “I’ll try,” “I can’t promise,” “I’m not sure what my boss will say about that,” “That’s not

possible,” “We can’t do that,” “It’s against policy,” and “I can’t make someone else do their job.” Additionally, people who cluster in Stage Two often discuss ways they’re being “screwed” by management. Managers who want to guide people out of Stage Two and into Stage Three must learn how to speak the language. In other words, they will need to be able to truly listen to the people and understand their concerns and grievances.

Next, managers will need to spot and work with a few members of Stage Two who want things to be different. Begin by explaining to each one individually that you see the potential in him, that you want to assist him in developing leadership. Some employees might believe this is a technique of manipulation, so your goal is to build trust in your intentions and confidence in his abilities. Additionally, you can use the power of three. “Bank shot people at Stage Two to Stage Three by finding a person they trust who is at Stage Three and set up a three-person meeting. If the trusted person is seen to ‘have the back’ of the person at Two, the meeting will have a stronger degree of trust from the outset.”



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Stage Three People Are the Most Common but Are Typically Arrogant and Selfish

A Stage Three Tribal Leadership culture is the most common in organizations, affecting 48 percent of American employees. This stage is characterized as the Lone Warrior and the theme of “I’m great (and you’re not).” Members of a Stage Three tribe have a mindset in which they only care about their own interests and seem arrogant towards others. Additionally, these people feel lonely and often view their colleagues as incompetent or lazy. But before we judge these people as having big egos, we should remember that society teaches this mindset.

Think about your childhood schooling, “the one who knows ' $2+2=4$ ' gets a gold star; then it’s our ABCs and a smiley face, an algebra test and an A+, SATs and admission into Stanford, letters of recommendation and an MBA, a great interview and a job offer, and an almost post-coital glow of success.” Like many professionals, our careers are largely spent in Stage Three where success is measured on an individual basis. People at this stage pride themselves on being better informed than others, winning is all that matters and winning is personal. They complain that they don’t have enough time or support and that the people around them aren’t as competent or as committed as they are.

For example, when interviewing a doctor about his work, he told the authors that nurses are only nurses because they aren’t smart enough or work hard enough to be doctors. The doctor sees himself as the Lone Warrior and believes his colleagues lack the intelligence to appreciate his work. Not only is this doctor being unkind and rude, but he is also negatively affecting himself. That’s because a Stage Three tribal culture fosters an unproductive workplace in which team members don’t want to cooperate or collaborate. While individual employees might benefit from this type of culture, collaboration is essential for the success of an organization. Unfortunately, Stage Three employees are simply too selfish and self-serving to collaborate effectively.

In fact, imagine the Stage Three doctor wants to develop a new suturing method. If he doesn't trust his colleagues and delegate responsibilities, it would be impossible for him to work on his suturing method and complete his usual daily tasks. This is why collaboration is key and why organizations can only succeed when tribe members graduate from a Stage Three mindset. Unfortunately, many people remain in Stage Three for their entire lives. But the key to moving employees to Stage Four is getting them to break competitive habits. When people view their colleagues as competition, they will fail to collaborate.

Language is important for making this transition. Stage Three people often use the term, "I," they need to move to "we" and view their colleagues as a tribe. Additionally, pairing a Stage Three worker with a Stage Four role model can help people learn the appropriate practices and mindset. But simply changing someone's vocabulary and pairing them with a role model will not move a person to Stage Four. Oftentimes, this transition requires the individual to undergo an epiphany or a sudden realization of the weaknesses of Stage Three. This sudden change in mindset may cause people to question their values and fear that their careers are going nowhere.

Luckily, you can guide Stage Three employees through these experiences. Help them answer questions like, "What have I achieved?" "How can I fix this?" "What's the real goal?" and "How does a Tribal Leader use power?" By working through these questions, people can successfully transition to Stage Four because they will now understand the power of their tribe and their tribe's value.



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Stage Four is Where Leadership Begins Happening

Stage Four is the stage that companies ultimately strive for. At this stage, teams are the norm and they are focused around shared values and a common purpose. There are 22% of tribes that work at this level and they adopt the mindset of “We’re great (and they’re not).” They are proud of their organization and members compete with other companies instead of one another. Tribe members are more devoted to their tribe’s cause than to their own success. For instance, a Stage Four surgeon has a genuine desire to help others versus earning fame or financial gain.

At this stage, value is incredibly important. Companies that put the values of their employees first are often the most successful. For example, the former CEO of Amgen once asked all of his employees to generate a list of what they valued most in the company. Amgen executives then used that list as a blueprint of values that the company always adhered to. Because of these shared values, collaboration comes easily and naturally in Stage Four. Instead of the two-sided relationships you see in Stage Three, people in Stage Four form three-sided relationships called triads. For example, the vice-chair of CB Richard Ellis will only speak in groups of three at business parties. This ensures that people in different fields meet and engage with one another.

A triad also leads to stability, that is when large groups work together to find solutions rather than relying on a leader to direct them. Stage Four also experiences more innovation because triads allow more diverse voices to brainstorm and provide the opportunity to address issues from different perspectives. Lastly, scalability occurs when colleagues view one another as partners, teaching one another versus telling them what to do. This might be where Stage Three individuals begin to feel out of place and intimidated considering they prefer to be experts on everything. This healthy collaboration is what makes Stage Four environments the most successful. They harness the power of each member, providing more opportunities for real innovation.

For example, in 2003, IDEO designed new buildings for the hospital group Kaiser Permanente. Before taking on the project, the two companies worked together in role-play situations, asking them to play the role of patients. By engaging in these hypothetical scenarios, they discovered that new buildings weren't entirely necessary; instead, it was more efficient to work with what they already had and rearrange the space. Their focus wasn't on expanding for the sake of growing, their desire came from their value of focusing on their patients. Furthermore, Stage Four organizations have what is called a noble cause, which is a tribe's supreme goal or what it desires to be.

If you aren't sure of your organization's noble cause, begin by asking yourself what purpose your activities serve. "What's working well?" "What's not working?" "What can we do to make the things that aren't working work?" and "Is there anything else?" Answering these questions will reveal your noble cause. Tribal Leadership will begin to form when tribe members start to ask, "What activities will express our values and reach toward our noble cause?"



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Stage Five Offers Incredible Innovation but Can't Work Long-Term

Stage Four is certainly ideal for most businesses, but Stage Five is where the magic happens. Once your company reaches Stage Four, it might be able to reach Stage Five. At this level, the tribe subscribes to the belief that “Life is great,” but fewer than 2% of tribes operate at this stage. The central cause is the only thing that matters to people at Stage Five; in fact, they don't work toward the goals of the company or themselves. Instead, they feel a religious sense of wonder or an “innocent wonderment” of possibilities and accomplishment.

For instance, at the height of their success in the 1990s, the biotechnology company Amgen was asked who their main competitor was. Instead of naming another company, they named diseases themselves. That's because their values weren't focused on being the most successful organization in their field. Instead, they simply worked hard at beating diseases like cancer and obesity. The Stage Five mentality is what leads to true innovation and success. In this mentality, people aren't concerned about their competition, allowing them to fully invest themselves in working towards their goal. For example, an engineer at Amgen once spoke about the billions of dollars Amgen had earned from their patents. He simply expressed his appreciation at having enough funds to search for cures rather than discussing the advantage Amgen had over other competitors.

To attain a Stage Five mentality, a company must question whether or not they have the right tribal strategy. Begin by asking, “What do we want?” This answer will help you determine why you are pursuing your core values and noble cause. Next, ask “What do we have?” This will lead you to the resources you need to pursue your goals. Finally, ask “What will we do?” This will identify the behaviors you and your tribe members must employ. By focusing on your noble cause, your organization can potentially attain Stage Five status. This tribal culture, however, typically occurs following a

great discovery or achievement, thus making Stage Five cultures quite unstable.

For example, the 1980 U.S. ice-hockey team moved to Stage Five when they unexpectedly beat the Soviet Union in the Olympic final. At this stage, your organization achieves the seemingly impossible and inspires others to pursue their own noble causes. Of course, this euphoria might not last long. Amgen, for instance, would transition in and out of Stage Five depending on the advances and discoveries they were making at the time. In the end, Stage Five organizations can change the world but are unreliable. For this reason, companies should strive for a Stage Four tribal culture to be more productive and successful in the long run.



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Final Summary

Tribal Leadership is the key to success for any organization. When a leader begins to view their colleagues or employees as tribe members, they can begin to foster each relationship individually to begin rising the ranks of the tribal stages. Tribal cultures in the higher stages are more efficient, innovative, and collaborative. It's up to the tribal leader to take on the responsibility of moving the tribe through the stages by encouraging particular behaviors, like changing language and forming new bonds and relationships. In the end, when an organization has a strong tribal leader, its tribe members will rise to the next stage, eventually moving to the ideal Stage Four culture or even the magical Stage Five, where innovation thrives and benefits society or changes the world.



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