



Stand Out Above The Crowd

A Summary from The Learning Key®

“I work in a flattened organizational structure”... a phrase that many wish for, but few understand. Often this term casts working groups into extremes, where confusion arises, where the term “leadership” becomes dark and foreboding, where an expected nirvana in equality of authority leads to unrealistic expectations, abuse of power, and a sense that everyone is the leader, “standing out above the crowd.”

What picture do we need to draw to more accurately represent an environment where people can “stand out”, using the flattened structure, creating opportunities for empowerment, respect, and healthy interdependence through accountability?

The singing group UB40, in their song “Stand Out”, identified characteristics that, when clarified, define components of a flattened organizational structure. Combined with an engaging rhythm, this group points out components that encourage functional group dynamics, based on mutual benefit. Consider these components and how they can encourage people to practice their rights to participate, to partner, and to check perceptions, balanced with their responsibilities to weigh the ramifications of their behaviors on the health of individuals and the organization and to act in the best interest of both.

UB40 sings...

*“Stand out, above the crowd,
even if I have to shout out loud,
til mine is the only face you see,
gonna stand out,
Til You notice me.”*

So, how does “stand out, above the crowd”... “til you notice me,” help us define a flattened

organizational structure?

Empowerment Through Shared Leadership

Aren't we all interested in being recognized, being in the forefront, able to participate fully in what we have chosen as a career, being valued as a vital part of the work that we share.

Flattened organizational structures allow people to “stand out” but without the need to shout. A good leader who facilitates shared leadership, creates opportunities for everyone to be heard and for people to learn how to hear to understand, to gather information, and finally, to share ideas that help to make fully informed decisions. Flattened organizational structures demand active listening with an attitude of interest, not fear; courage to embrace differences and see them as valuable in arriving at fully informed decisions; encouraging subject matter experts to step up for that moment, that topic, that situation that needs their knowledge, skills and abilities. Shared leadership allows all to be seen, heard, and valued in the broadest sense, creating partnerships of truly mutual benefit.

UB40 challenges people in their song, ...
*Don't “settle for typical things,
living all your lives waiting in the wings,”...*

And how does that challenge help us define a flattened organizational structure?

Respect

Flattened organizational structures depend on respect; giving the benefit of the doubt, expecting the best, demonstrating empathy and understanding, rather than judgment, seeking solutions, rather than blame. And what does respect create?... confidence and

the courage to counter the norm, challenging one another and the organization to act with honor, integrity, balance, and a harnessed ego.

And then UB40 sings...

*"If the sticky wheel always gets the grease,
I'm totally devoted to disturbing the peace."*

Ah, but at what price? How can we "disturb the peace" without our actions being myopic, and self-focused? How can we consider the best for the organization if our intent is to "disturb the peace"? If we challenge the status quo ("disturb the peace") in a flattened organizational structure, what must we also do to assure the best interests of all the organization are kept at the forefront...

Healthy Interdependence Through Accountability

Flattened organizational structures depend on individuals seeing the larger picture, integrating efforts toward the overall vision. Clear goals help to guide decisions, prioritize tasks, and build a sense of confidence in growing healthy interdependence... that mix of working independently when it is best for the project, while being cognizant of the ramifications of actions on the larger whole.

Flattened organizational structures provide opportunities for greater and greater levels of critical thinking, and with that, greater and greater levels of confidence in knowledge, skills, and abilities. And, because we are human, the opportunities to step up and lead offer greater and greater opportunities to build our self-esteem.

UB40 sings what many employees yearn for...

*"ALL I NEED IS HALF A CHANCE,
A SECOND THOUGHT,
A SECOND GLANCE.*

To prove I got whatever it takes..."

"To stand out, above the crowd"...

Left unchecked, ego can create divisions and conflict. With clarity about desired behaviors, and subsequent consequences (both rewards and corrections), flattened organization allow individuals to consider the consequences associated with their decisions. A deliberate process provides consistency in delivery of these consequences (again, rewards, as well as corrections), builds confidence and competence in healthy decision-making, and grows healthy interdependent teams.

A flattened organizational structure is NOT...

- Leaderless
- Driven by consensus (absolute agreement) each and every time
- All leaders and no followers

A flattened organizational structure IS...

- Empowered, through shared leadership
- Sustained through deliberate acts of respect
- Mature, demonstrated through accountability, balancing rights with responsibilities

In this time of flattened organizational structures, we can create confusion, or we can help employees "Stand Out Above the Crowd" through empowerment and shared leadership opportunities. We can help subject matter experts to stand out, using their expertise in respectful, mutually beneficial ways to further the vision and goals of the team. And, we can work as a team, "above the crowd, through demonstrating accountability for outcomes and interactions. The choice seems simple!

Pam M.K. Farmer, Ph.D., SPHR

*An associate of The Learning Key, Inc. and
President of Pam M.K. Farmer Consulting,
LLC.*