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UNDERSTANDING CORPORATE CULTURE HACKING

A NEW-FOUND SOURCE OF PLEASURE AND EFFICIENCY IN THE WORKPLACE

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Corporate Hacking, a deliberately provocative term, underscores the radical nature of this innovation approach based on the refusal to accept that heavy corporate processes considered to be pointless cannot be changed.

Through their determination as well as their ability to choose the right targets, forge ties with effective contributors, and seek "extreme" simplification, players can use corporate hacking to produce pertinent solutions that win support. Hacking corporate culture is not however as straightforward as it sounds since the aim is not to destabilize, but rather to strengthen the company. This approach gives employees scope to use their own initiative and even act off their own bat, while the role of management is to authorize and support them.

TO REGAIN A SENSE OF PLEASURE AND ENHANCE YOUR EFFICIENCY IN THE WORKPLACE, AWAKEN THE CORPORATE HACKER INSIDE OF YOU!

You are an employee in a large company. You find that projects are time-consuming; that decisions are always being called into question; that even the smallest of tasks are always complicated to do. Everyone's been saying this for ages. Simplification projects have been carried out, audits conducted and recommendations made, but, despite all the effort, nothing ever works.

This observation is all the more frustrating given that the digital boom has radically transformed the working environment, with the emergence of open innovation approaches, as well as the creation of subsidiaries in startup mode and innovation units. Agile strategies have become widespread and terms such as lean startups, design thinking and hackathons are now part of the manager's vocabulary.

One could almost forget that many of the enterprises concerned are underpinned **by a top-down, hierarchical model with low error tolerance and insistence on reports; a system that generates processes for everything**. Although operating rules are of course necessary, is it enough to go on making new rules based on outdated methods under the pretext that these rules are not directly linked to the company's field of innovation?

Those wishing to maintain their ability to adapt – both externally, to remain competitive on the market, and internally, to boost staff commitment - **must revise the rules**. This observation has given rise to the corporate hacking movement which is based on the idea that all, or almost all, means are good to encourage everybody to work together to improve the enterprise. **Hacking one's own corporate culture is nothing to do with sabotage; it is rather an act that benefits the company and respects its fundamental values**. The difference here is that it allows employees to exceed their commitment and **give themselves permission** to go beyond the corporate framework in order to do things in a different way.

So why speak about corporate hacking when it is nothing to do with IT coding or malicious computer hacking?

/ Firstly, because the **transformation challenge for major enterprises involves digitalization**. Beyond the technological aspect, this is essentially an issue of corporate culture in which change requires adopting digital codes.

/ The hacker is a symbol of this culture. Originally, the hacker was not seen as a pirate, but an IT expert in open source computing. The corporate hacker is, therefore, a sort of pioneer whose goal is to **free the enterprise from its traditional corporate shackles.**

/ The hacker is also the person who, through his/her actions, behavior and words, will **"viralize" the main operating principles of digitalization**.

«Viralizing the digital culture»

COMBAT THE "KNOTTED CORD" SYSTEM

Refuse to waste time doing unnecessary tasks, refuse participants who bring nothing to company meetings, refuse superfluous steps (for instance, between the marketing department and client-advisor stages).

REDUCE TIME

Refuse meeting overload; refuse organizational silos imposing work schedules (requiring several meetings when one would suffice); organize work around sprints; refuse to produce unnecessary slides (when one reference document would suffice).

CHOSE WHAT YOU WANT TO PRESENT

Refuse to produce documents that will be neither seen nor read but use visuals: computer graphics, models, prototyping, video, etc.

REFUSE TO GET INTO A RUT, ALWAYS SEEK FEEDBACK

Get the client or final-user involved as early as possible; co-construct / show projects, and, above all, organize and take feedback into account ... but also get outside influencers involved.

USE WHAT YOU'VE GOT

"perfect is the enemy of good"! The less we have, the more inventive we are. You don't have to be a User Experience designer to make a model: you can just do a sketch or make a collage.

YOU WILL HAVE REALIZED THAT THE FIRST STEP IS TO UNDERSTAND AND ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE TASK AT HAND, RATHER THAN WAITING FOR PERMISSION.

The four golden rules to get into "hacktion" mode:

1 **Chose the subject of your hack without limiting it to your specific field of competence.** The fact that you are not in involved in a process or project and are unable to hack it directly does not mean you cannot hack it at all; you don't necessarily have to be directly in charge to initiate a hack.

At this stage, the main pitfall is wanting to rethink everything from A to Z or organize a «Grande Soirée».vA good hack is not a glamorous, grandiose gala event but rather a series of rapid success stories. First of all, look for the snags; those everyday hitches that must be addressed tactfully, one by one, so that you can gradually get your colleagues round to thinking along your wavelength.

2 **One for all and all for one.** The hacker is not a lone rider: your hacking efforts will prompt others to act. You should form a group of allies that will ensure your hack is a success. To do this, you need to look out for:

/ **«Musketeers»:** colleagues who will voluntarily help you to find new ways of doing things, who are open to new ideas and always willing to find time between meetings, if necessary, to exchange their views.

/ **«Soldiers»:** colleagues who are too set in the company mould to view change favorably and only feel at ease in a traditional structure. They include high-profile collaborators with extensive expertise that you must draw on to challenge and ensure the reliability of your proposals, and integrate to be sure that the changes planned will actually be implemented and adopted.

3 **Resist.** «What's bred in the bones comes out in the flesh». The Corporate-Culture Hacker is constantly confronted with the «knotted cord" system where you are obliged to go through multiple layers of corporate red tape, each with a defined format requiring you to start again from scratch, draft a list of specifications for the smallest demand, write memorandums, and prepare PowerPoint presentations, etc. It's up to you to resist.

An employee of a large group told us that since becoming aware of the system, she refuses to do meaningless tasks. "Last week, when I was asked to present information on my project, I agreed, but only on the condition that I didn't have to prepare slides! ».

This may seem very simple, but taken together all of these revolts go to show that these absurd requests are obsolete.

4 **Go viral.** If, at your level, your hacks improve efficiency and are fun to do, you have already scored a success. However, the overall goal is more ambitious since the aim is to transform the company as a whole, notably by multiplying and enhancing the hacks at all levels and by going viral in order to spread the digital message! You will therefore have to organize a relay to attract interest and explain how the system works to other staff members who, in turn, will be able to replicate your success, while lending each other support.

It is quite common for staff members in large French firms to organize an inter-segment employee community. They don't wait for the manager to set up the network as that would probably never happen. Two years after our employee community was set up, it boasted around 150 members who communicate via their private group Facebook page and organize series of conferences (think-tanks, etc.)

« WHAT CAN BE HACKED? »

Almost everything: scoping, process and project monitoring, information-exchange methods and staff and inter-departmental relations to comitology and the management approach itself.

While it is easier to start from scratch with a new project or process, it is possible to tackle existing models.

We helped a large group to address this issue and found examples of hacking in three areas: the professionalization of its customer counseling services, website management and IS alert processing.

LONG LIVE THE CORPORATE HACKER!

Let's be clear; the path of the hack is not exactly smooth, so be prepared for some of your hacks to fail.

These failures should be viewed as part of a test & learn process enabling you to measure the level of resistance, further develop your hacks and, if needs be, change direction, etc.

The failures will nevertheless provide information to strengthen your case, allowing you to identify new allies, get greater insight into problematic issues, and gain a better understanding of the arguments against you, etc.

One thing is certain; to convince the musketeers, get the soldiers you need on board, resist the superfluous and make your hack go viral, you are going to have to pitch your ideas. Being able to make a strong pitch is not a talent one is born with; it is one that, with some practice, can be acquired fairly rapidly.

In addition, the key to becoming a hacker and standing your ground is caring; caring about the company, about the managers, about your colleagues, Remember, the aim is not to destroy, but rather to build the company of the future.

GOING FURTHER

As a manager, do you need more agile operating methods and greater cooperation between your teams? Do you want to be more reactive in your decision-making? Do you believe that the **company stands to benefit from developing these "hacktions"?**

Organize a "license to hack". By letting your colleagues play an active role in the transformation process you are assured of achieving concrete change within four months.

3 key stages

1st stage: Launch the approach

/ Organize a brain-storming workshop based on anchor-points and working-method improvement.

/ With the participants, choose a limited number of processes and/or projects to be used for testing out new methods.

/ Select a leader per theme; the most musketeer-like of the participants, who will be responsible for conducting brainstorming sessions and forming his/her work group of 6 members (maximum).

2nd stage: Let go

/ Allow a maximum of one month for the team to come up with quick-success proposals.

/ Ask team members to co-pitch their target and explain how they intend to achieve it. Organize a fun event, such as a one hour stand-up show on the management committee.

/ Welcome all proposals and let the team test them.

/ Facilitate, to the best of your ability, the implementation of their proposals: foster relations with other teams, take time to test changes, do not draw premature conclusions and post information on the "hacktions" to make sure everyone knows what's going on. This will limit slowdowns caused by those who are not in the loop.

3rd stage: Reap

/ Draw conclusions after four months. Ask each team to prepare experience feedback on their scope of activity and approach, based on questions such as: What should the company retain? What should the employees retain? What should be adopted in the long term? What should be implemented on a large scale, adjusted or abandoned? Why and under what conditions?

/ Make your findings known; go viral. For example, one large company took the opportunity at its New Year staff meeting to hold a forum to present the results of its corporate-culture hacking approach. Another company organized a meet-up breakfast event for all of its employees.

At a time when bore-outs and burn-outs are making headline news, the «license to hack» is a real and powerful lever that has given rise to the "*manager jardinière*" (manager gardener), a new breed of enlightened manager whose role is to enhance staff commitment as well as corporate performance.

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