

Creating feminine values in organisations

by Norman Chorn, AIMM

FEMININE values are not about women. It is about how we create feminine values inside organisations to enable them to perform more effectively in the emerging competitive environments in Australia.

Like *yin* and *yang*, we need feminine values in organisations to balance the traditional masculine values.

What are feminine values?

Using the classical Jungian definitions, "masculine" and "feminine" values are described as follows.

Masculine	Feminine
compete	collaborate
hierarchies, rules	networks, alliances
infiltrate	adapt
explain	explore
independent	interdependent
firm, unyielding	flexible, compromising
single-minded	understanding
tough	discussion, openness
achievement	relationships
disciplined	learning

These values are also recognisable as the Confucian value set of *yin* and *yang* and exist in everyone to differing degrees.

Traditionally, organisations have been dominated by the so-called "masculine" values, which have emphasised competition, independence and discipline.

A shifting competitive environment

Based on observations made over the preceding ten years, Stalk, Evans and Shulman [1992] assert that in the USA a different set of factors are seemingly associated with competitive success. These views are supported by Australian research conducted by task force for the Karpin Report *Enterprising Nation* [1995]

Emphasis on the organisation's strategic capabilities will become the basis for developing competitive advantage. The major findings in this regard are

- There will be a shift away from using business units and products to generate competitive advantage towards developing integrated organisational processes.
- Competitive success will depend upon transforming these processes into strategic capabilities that produce superior customer value.
- These capabilities are created by investing in integrating infrastructure which links the different functions and business units across the organisation.
- Because the capabilities transcend traditional departmental and functional boundaries, the chief executive will play a key role in providing the integration and

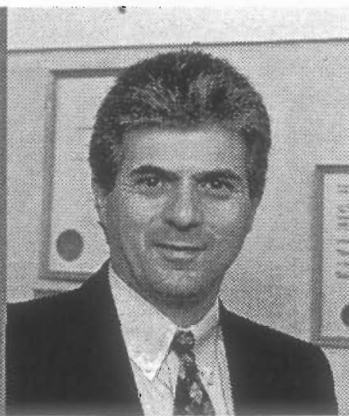
strategic direction across the organisation.

Feminine values, which encourage collaboration, exploration and interdependence, are better suited than masculine values to integrating the various processes into strategic capabilities.

The presence of strong masculine values and behaviours can produce many of the less desirable attributes in organisations, for example:

- The competitive ethic that tends to cause unnecessary political power struggles inside the organisation.

“Leaders are expected to be both *tough* and *tender*, as the situation demands.”



- The need to have water-tight explanations for, and answers to all questions before attempting any new activity or venture. This prevents the organisation from exploring new areas and consequently, retards the learning.
- The strong sense of independence that many leaders display may appear to be a sign of strength and resourcefulness but can prompt sub optimal solutions by the desire to “go it alone” and refusing to seek help.
- Single mindedness will often be a great asset when the going gets tough, but it can limit the degree to which diverse opinions or perspectives are tolerated.
- A disciplined approach to managing and leading the organisation is

likely to constrain the degree of experimentation and, consequently, the learning that occurs in the organisation.

The presence of these masculine behaviours will preclude the conditions for the development of the new competencies required by organisations in the future.

The leadership imperative

Integrated strategic capabilities require a totally collaborative approach to leadership. Leaders have to be “twin citizens”, as Handy [1995] terms it, in order to view the

organisation from the dual perspective of their own area of responsibility and the organisation as a whole. This requires a high level of collaborative behaviour and a strong recognition of the interdependence between the various parts of an organisation. In many cases, it demands that you “share the glory”, or sometimes not be noticed at all!

Bringing together diverse parts of the organisation in order to produce integrated processes and capabilities, will often mean a great deal of coaxing and cajoling.

Leaders will be expected to compromise and show flexibility in order to achieve the organisation's desired outcomes, particularly as they cut across traditional boundaries and lines of authority.

More than ever, the development of appropriate values in organisations is the domain of leadership, in its widest definition. In this sense, many people in the organisation have a role to play in ensuring that the appropriate balance between masculine and feminine values exist.

If we are to develop the integrated processes and strategic capabilities which transcend the traditional boundaries within the organisation, there are a number of guidelines we should follow in our own leadership behaviour.

Share your vision and principles generously. Leaders should, wherever practical, share what's on their mind and their overall intentions. This may seem like exposing yourself – particularly if things do not work out, but how else can you expect your colleagues to act in the best interests of the organisation if they do not understand your vision?

Engage your people. This means that you have to do things with them, and get involved in their work. We are not suggesting that you micro-manage them, but simply that you show an active interest in what they are doing and make yourself available to give them ongoing guidance and encouragement. Leaders are expected to be both *tough* and *tender*, as the situation demands. This is not inconsistency on your part, but rather an attempt to show direction from within the group rather than as a distant outsider.

Argue strongly with your colleagues. At first, leaders may shy away from the notion of arguing with their colleagues. After all, we don't want to encourage conflict unnecessarily! However, arguments are an opportunity for leaders to express their opinion, to stand up for what they believe in and to achieve real consensus.

How else can this be done if leaders are not prepared to disagree

openly and sensitively, with their colleagues?

The issue is to stimulate conflict and disagreement so that people are compelled to put their assumptions on the table.

By stimulating disagreement and conflict of views, leaders can assess the range of assumptions people hold and this provides the basis for real consensus on moving the business forward.

It is important to remember that these discussions should not be personalised. The focus is always on the assumption, opinion or principle being expressed, rather than an attack on the individual who may hold a counter view. This requires a trusting relationship with staff so that arguments are contained within the relationship and serve to build further trust and mutual respect.

Know when to be a follower. The important counterpart to leadership is followership. Without followers, there can be no leadership. Knowing when to follow is an important attribute of a successful leader.

A reason why some leaders are reluctant to follow, is the notion that they are somehow expected to know everything, or always be right. Clearly neither of these attributes are realistic in a modern organisation with high rates of change and complexity.

Moreover, even if the leader does always know best, the organisation will not learn and develop its competencies, because no one, apart from the leader, gets any opportunity to make decisions.

Accept failure and tragedy as part of the route to success. Increasingly, the leadership of our organisations will include the need to experiment and learn in a "real time" manner. Conditions will change so rapidly that we will rarely have the opportunity to conduct full scale analyses and

answer all the questions before we proceed into new territory.

Mistakes will signal that we are trying new things and innovating, rather than doing things incorrectly and should be seen as a necessary part of the pathway to organisational success.

Seek time out and learn about other cultures and value systems. Because successful leadership in Australian organisations will require integrating many diverse abilities, needs and perspectives, individual leaders will need to understand better their own values and those of others and be able to express them.

First of all, seeking time out to be on your own is an important way of getting to understand your own feelings and values, to reflect and gain insights of yourself.

Taking the time to learn another culture will help in understanding the importance of value systems in shaping behaviour and the danger of viewing incidents from only your perspective.

Learning about the Japanese, for example, has more value than simply allowing you to market to them more effectively. It allows you to understand how another group of people interpret and make sense of a common experience in a completely different way.

Use storytelling to empower your people. Storytelling is a way of communicating the history and folklore of the organisation and building a common frame of reference. It is, in fact, the weaving process that creates the fabric of the culture and demonstrates who are the role models and heroes, and the values and behaviours that the organisation expects.

Storytelling is also a way of developing future organisational strategies. Out of stories about situations that have happened, say with clients

or employees, strategies emerge.

By involving staff in stories, they feel empowered to contribute to developing and implementing the organisation's strategies through understanding the context in which managers act and the organisation's future direction.

Both sides of the coin are valid

We have argued that "feminine" values of collaborative behaviour, exploratory decision-making and an open approach to learning are aligned to developing the integrated, cross functional capabilities of the modern organisation.

We are not suggesting that all the traditional masculine values should be swept aside. Far from it. They have all contributed much to the success of our organisations. It is just that they need to be complemented by another set of values that have so much to offer for the future.



References

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about the author

Dr Norman Chern is a strategy practitioner and director of Centre for Corporate Strategy, North Sydney. Using a range of approaches that have been developed through research and practical experience, Norman advises top management to identify and analyse their competitive situation and to evolve appropriate strategies, culture and leadership style. He has assisted a number of local and overseas organisations in improving corporate performance.