

# Q5

## New Leadership at Work

David Youell and Paula Downey  
**downey youell associates**

In light of the increasingly obvious paradox of social, cultural and ecological decline in parallel with apparent progress, many people are beginning to have doubts about the purpose and underlying values of their work. Q5 is a response to this challenge.

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We shape the world through our work. More than any other force, the processes and practices of organisations and institutions determine the shape of our lives - as employees, as customers, as citizens. However, in the light of the increasingly obvious paradox of social, cultural and ecological decline in parallel with apparent progress, many people are beginning to have doubts about the purpose and underlying values of their work.

### **A crisis of meaning**

*"Every day I go to work, a little piece of me dies."* HR and senior managers might well prick up their ears at this text message to a recent morning radio show. It is a cry for meaning, and an expression of the all too frequent gap between who we are as individuals and what we do with our time, energy and our professional expertise.

Evidence is everywhere. The Management

Agenda, an annual survey of 600 UK managers, shows 70% are searching for meaning in their lives. More than half report tensions between their personal values and their daily work.

A Common Purpose UK survey of 1,000 high-flyers - identified by their organisations as tomorrow's leaders - reveals a 'quarter-life crisis' among 25 to 35 year olds. The hunger for a sense of meaning and fulfilment is simply not being met in the workplace. And it isn't going away. Instead, people are increasingly looking elsewhere, job-hopping or dropping out of the corporate fast-track altogether, in an attempt to satisfy their desire to make a difference. Many of those who stay, survive by disengaging.

Ironically, the crisis - and it *is* a crisis - is happening at the same time as the source of financial value is undergoing a radical shift, migrating from *tangible* bricks and mortar and the mechanical hardware of the industrial economy to the *intangible* value of human capital that is generated by willing hearts and

open minds in the creative, knowledge economy.

Indeed the outcomes most organisations say they want and need today - co-operation, creativity, commitment, innovation, flexibility, productivity - depend absolutely on the nature and quality of employees' relationship with their work and workplace.

If we are to address the urgent issues facing society, we're going to have to transform the institutions and organisations whose shaping influence is so pervasive. But organisations don't change. People change. And they change by *learning* - learning about the wider context in which they work, about the global impacts of what they do, and by exploring new ways of thinking and behaving. Over time, through new experiences, their worldview changes, opening up the possibility for their workplaces and organisations to change too.

The problem is, the issues many people care deeply about are totally absent from everyday workplace conversation. They might even be consciously avoided, for one reason or another. The point is that work isn't typically a place where people can ask deeper questions, or engage in conversations that might open up new pathways to a different future. And so they remain silent in the face of what appears to be an overwhelming support for the status quo.

They may feel isolated and alone, however people who question many of the assumptions and beliefs that underpin our current ways of working, living and being together, belong to the fastest growing social group in the western world. And they're in all walks of life - they're in business and the professions, in education, in the medical and legal world, in government and in non-profit and community organisations.

### Creating a new dialogue

*"At dya we believe it's important to give people the opportunity to break the silence, and that's why we've created Q5 - New Leadership at Work,"* says David Youell, partner at **downey youell associates**, an organisational

development practice that works with communication, values and culture from a whole-systems perspective.

## The Q5 Agenda:

- 1 The culture challenge
- 2 Ways of seeing
- 3 Connectedness, relationship and balance
- 4 The language of living systems
- 5 Communcology
- 6 Power and the status quo
- 7 Change: paradox and potential
- 8 Taking it personally

*"Conversation matters, not just because of our basic human need to socialise, but because our organisations and our wider society are fundamentally shaped by the conversations we have, and the ideas and language we generate and perpetuate. Q5 will be an opportunity for people to reflect on their relationship with each other and with the wider world."*

**Q5** is a learning group for people in professional life. Combining new insights and fresh perspectives with participation and exploratory dialogue, it is a unique foundation programme on which to build a whole new understanding of the dynamics underpinning the complex issues of our time, and explore the implications for individuals, groups and organisations.

In a series of eight modules, which together form a coherent programme of learning, reflection and inquiry, people will come to understand how the issues of our time are connected, how living systems work, the relationship between values and culture, how power works, why things stay the same, and critically, how things change.

**Q5** is a liberating perspective on the implications of the choices and decisions we make at work, and in our lives generally. Its

wider intention is to foster a community of like-minded people who see themselves, their work, their workplaces and their organisations as instruments of change, capable of making real difference.

**Q5** is available as part of an in-company development programme, as a public programme, and or to stimulate reflection in professional associations and networks.

### about the authors

*Paula Downey and David Youell* are partners at downey youell associates, working with issues of organisation, culture and change through the lens of living systems.

Paula has a Distinction in Communication Studies and a Masters with Distinction in Responsibility and Business Practice from the University of Bath and has studied Systems Thinking at the Open University. David is a qualified Cultural Assessment Practitioner.

They are co-authors of *Exploring the Communication Dynamic: 301 Building Blocks to Enrich your Working Relationships*. They have also created *Q5 - New Leadership at Work* to prompt a movement for personal and organisational change, in which each of us begins to see our working and professional life as an opportunity to address the critical issues of our generation.

Both speak and write on the challenges and opportunities of system change.

### downey youell associates

is a service for leaders and change agents who want to take a living-systems approach to organisation, culture and change.

### CultureWork - for a world in transition

is our unique resource - a suite of concepts and practical processes designed to support the work of transition in organisations and in the community.

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a: 123 Lower Baggot Street  
Dublin 2  
Ireland  
p: (353 1) 661 2636  
e: [mail@dya.ie](mailto:mail@dya.ie)  
w: [www.dya.ie](http://www.dya.ie)