

11

Virtuous Competency

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AS I HAVE BEEN EXPOSED TO THE ANCIENT THINKING around the four Cardinal Virtues as articulated primarily by the Catholic Church, it has been amazing to see how complete and elegant these virtues are in describing a particular kind of *competency*. I will call this particular kind “*virtuous competency*.”

Oversimplifying, if a person or organization knows what right ends to pursue (i.e. justice), is able to devise effective means to reach those ends (prudence), is not deterred by external threats (courage) and has the internal fortitude to overcome personal reluctance or temptation (temperance) that person could well be called competent, even virtuously competent. The elegance of these virtues is that, taken together, one who is successful in living out all four must be effective (competent) and good (virtuous).

Now, if the intent of an organization is to do “good” in the sense of making a positive contribution to the people and communities that it touches, would it not make sense to measure itself against these four cardinal virtues? Would it not also make sense to measure its leaders against the cardinal virtues?

SESSION V : CONSIDERING VALUES, PRINCIPLES AND VIRTUES

Seeing Things Whole (STW), an organization devoted to closing the gap between intended “good” and actual performance in organizations, has developed a “three-fold model” of organizational life. STW contends that to make significant contributions to the “common good,” an organization must pay attention to and be effective in all three areas. They are called Identity, Purpose (or Mission) and Stewardship. I will not provide a description of this conceptual framework because it is available in detail on the STW website, www.seeingthingswhole.org.

I would propose an evaluation tool that can be used to rate the *virtuous competency* of an organization or an individual in the three areas of competency according to the STW Three-fold Model and against four characteristics of competency according to the four Cardinal Virtues.

This attached matrix is, I believe, self-explanatory. In order to illustrate the manner in which the tool may be used, I have made a *superficial* rating of our company. An actual rating would be more comprehensive.

NAME: Reell

DATE: July 11th, 2005

PURPOSES >>	Identity	Mission	Stewardship
VIRTUES	Co-workers/Community	Customers	Shareholders
<p><i>Justice</i></p> <p>Knows, discerns and defines "good ends" that serve the "common good" and lead to right relationships</p> <p>Rating</p>	<p>Reell is uncommonly good at paying attention to the personal needs of Co-workers. This has, however, had the negative consequence of creating an attitude of entitlement in some. We need to give more attention to accountability without becoming inattentive to legitimate needs in the lives of people.</p> <p>4</p>	<p>Reell consistently meets its commitment to customers and goes "the extra mile" in those cases where commitments are not met. Furthermore, Reell consistently goes out of its way to meet customer needs even when a commitment has not been made. We fall short, however, in having sufficient contact with customers to become aware of their needs prior to establishing a project or a purchase order.</p> <p>4</p>	<p>As we have evolved from Founders as the sole shareholders to a larger shareholder constituency, (we have not reexamined our obligations to ESOP participants, other Founder family members and managers. I believe that our distribution of profits is put of balance. The strong commitment to Co-worker needs has to some degree resulted in a weaker commitment to Shareholders.</p> <p>2</p>
<p><i>Prudence</i></p> <p>Knows and devises the "means" to accomplish "good ends"</p> <p>Rating</p>	<p>Reell has many policies in place that serve the common good by providing flexibility in meeting the needs of people both in and outside of the work place. We do not have good means for holding people accountable to performance commitments.</p> <p>3</p>	<p>Reell is very good at the "above the water line" issues (e.g. quality and delivery) surrounding meeting customer needs. Often these means are effective but not so efficient and the cost may tend to threaten sustainability. Furthermore, due to a lack of intimacy with customers we often lack the information required to devise effective means.</p> <p>3</p>	<p>This is the place in which a great degree of creativity and entrepreneurship is required. We have been blessed by the longevity of our products and customer relationships but have not developed consistent progress toward the development of new customers and products.</p> <p>1</p>
<p><i>Courage</i></p> <p>Has the fortitude to persist in pursuing "good ends" in the face of external threats</p> <p>Rating</p>	<p>Reell is uncommonly persistent in living according to its values and principles in the face of financial uncertainty. This has a hallmark throughout its 35 years. However, many of us shy away from confrontation when confrontation is necessary. Others are over-aggressive and abusive when confronting others even when confrontation is appropriate. We have a great need to learn to name performance failures in a timely and considerate manner.</p> <p>4</p>	<p>On a technical level, Reell has been very courageous in holding to viable design concepts even when encouraged by customers or cost considerations to "cut corners." We sometimes, however, lack the courage to stand up to customer price pressure and wind up with projects that are financially unsustainable.</p> <p>2</p>	<p>I am not aware of external threats to Stewardship other than competitors. So, on the positive side, we are not deterred by external threats. On the other hand, we may tend to move forward with insufficient awareness of potential dangers.</p> <p>3</p>
<p><i>Temperance</i></p> <p>Has the self-control to overcome internal temptation, fear and reluctance that hinder the pursuit of "good ends"</p> <p>Rating</p>	<p>Some of us have a tendency to avoid unpleasant tasks (e.g. travel, cold sales calls, tedium). This, combined with weak accountability results in the avoidance or late delivery of needed results</p> <p>3</p>	<p>We often fail to pursue projects with sufficient diligence, energy or commitment. This may be the dark side (entitlement) of the positive attitude of empowerment.</p> <p>2</p>	<p>We are too quick to let personal feelings, priorities and/or preferences take precedence over those activities that may be necessary to meet our stewardship requirements.</p> <p>2</p>
Totals	14	11	8
Average	12	12	12
Plus/Minus	2	-1	-4