Leader-Led Change

Planned organisational change may be driven by many factors. Examples include seeking efficiencies and greater productivity, addressing dysfunction and conflict, revamping inadequate processes and systems, merging with a business partner, or setting your mark on the organisation as a previous manager has departed.

Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie McKee in their Harvard Business Review Primal Leadership article in December 2001 wrote: "A growing body of research on the human brain proves that, for better or worse, leaders' moods affect the emotions of the people around them." However, leaders not only set the mood and have a direct impact on the emotional worlds of their people, as the article describes, but also set the culture and behavioural tone and norms of the organisation. So, when considering change, what do you need to change about yourself and how you function for your organisation to perform better?

W. Edwards Deming, the quality guru, suggested that 85% of the responsibility for quality rested with management, to provide the appropriate tools, training,

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Abstract

As a leader you often have the opportunity and responsibility to change your organisation to create a more effective working environment. As part of that change process, consider your own contribution to the environment, and which of your own behaviours may require change.

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processes and other enablers, and after all that was provided, 15% of the responsibility rested with the workers. I believe that also applies to the mood, attitudes, behaviours and norms of the organisation as a whole.

Enormous energy is exerted in organisational restructures. Poor performance is identified and rooted out. Ineffective systems replaced. Reporting structures are adjusted. However, for all the effort a significant and often poorly addressed issue is the cultural and behavioural conserve held among the management team. While the

Have you got what it takes to lead change?

organisation is being driven through significant and often unnecessarily painful change processes, the attitudes, behaviours, and cultural norms within the management team remain unchanged, unrecognised as contributing to the overall organisation's performance. The decision makers are able to say "the problem is out there" and rarely take a critical look at their own contributions.

Consider:

- **What do you do to set the tone and culture within your organisation?** Are your words and actions aligned?
- Do you demand and expect *respect* without extending the same to those who report to you?
- Do you demonstrate the *loyalty* you expect of your team? Or do you excuse your choices and actions that perhaps sideline and disenfranchise individuals, while calling for everyone to engage fully and authentically, and wonder why there is a disturbance within the rank and file? Do you permit others' to spread rumour and conjecture, or undermine the work of those in your team?
- Do you provide a *high performance environment*? Do you cleanly delegate work, providing clear boundaries on how the work should be performed and what the measure of success are, and allow the team member to grow and develop in the role? Or are you a control freak, driven by fear, who micromanages and strangles growth potential? Do you honour the established boundaries around agreed packages of work or do you allow scope creep to erode the authority of those under you? Do you then also hold them responsible for failure to perform?
- Are you *professional* in your behaviours and relationships? Do you excuse angry outbursts, unreasonable demands and other corrosive behaviours because you're busy and under stress? Do you meet the commitments you make? Do you hold yourself to the same standards you expect of others? Do you walk your talk?
- Is your *decision-making* clear, calm, fact-based and rational? Do you expect this of your team, but when faced with a decision you rely on management imperative to make a rushed "gut" decision, rationalising it is from your years of experience, flying in the face of all you claim you want practiced within your organisation? Worse, do you then change your decision when next posed with a new opinion (perhaps without informing those impacted)?
- Do you provide *clear direction and leadership*? Have you noticed the puzzled expression, or disdain, across your team as you issue instructions? Do you lack clarity, such that you are not able to understandably express what you want? Or have you changed direction yet again? Do you respond openly to questions seeking clarification or do you expect subordinates to read your mind (perhaps even when you can't)?

It has been my observation from a couple of decades of consulting that these and other such issues are frightfully common. Why? Because leaders are human and no one is perfect. The problem is when a leader chooses to avoid checking on their way of being. In my opinion it would be ideal for the leadership of an organisation to honestly assess their behavioural and attitudinal contribution to the performance and mood of an organisation as part of any change process. Obtaining valuable, truthful feedback takes more than demanding it. Few leaders are blessed to be surrounded by people willing to say, "You are not wearing any clothes", so obtaining such insight requires time, a sense of safety among those asked for input, and trust that negative feedback will not jeopardise the position of the person offering the feedback.

As a leader, are you leading from the front, enabling others to follow? Have you assessed your own short-comings in relation to the direction and practices required within the organisation and established a roadmap for your own development? Or are you metaphorically barking instructions through a megaphone on what the team should do, and excusing yourself because you're a coach, not a player.

If you want to create positive change, be part of the change process, not separate from it. Ensure that your capacity as a leader and manager is maturing and developing, and that you have made some conscious, positive changes to your style, that you're not as you were ten years ago. If you are not emulating the behaviours you expect your team to portray, get real with yourself and stop excusing your own poor performance.

Options available to you include coaching and mentoring, personal and professional development, primarily targeted at the long-overused patterns of behaviour and attitudes that hold you and your team back from truly excelling.

Coaching can support you create the best outcome when working with areas covered by this article. Follow these links for coaching information:

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