

The Leadership Transformation Challenge

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If we take the people out of our organisations what we have left is mostly just stuff.

People often join and leave an organisation without there being any discernable interruption in its existence. There is therefore room for the illusion that there is life in an organisation that does not depend on people. The truth is, however, that no matter how great the idea behind the organisation is, how good its processes are, or how well resourced it is, nothing meaningful or sustainable happens without people.

If we think carefully about this then, it is important to acknowledge that organisations are really communities of people. This is something that we hear many Human Resources (HR) and Organisation Development (OD) practitioners saying these days.

It takes people behaving in a particular way that makes our organisation productive and profitable around its reason for being. These behaviours matter a great deal to how well an organisation performs. Some behaviours are simply better than others.

People friendly, constructive cultures tend to produce these better, more productive behaviours – the kind that make the difference between producing bad, mediocre, merely good and great results.

The impact of organisational culture (another way to describe the way we behave in organisations) was well illustrated by a study released by John P. Kotter's and James L. Heskett in 1992.

Culture and Performance		
Kotter & Heskett: based on a study of the performance of 207 organisations over an 11 year period as reported in their book: <i>Corporate Culture and Performance</i>		
	Non-adaptive cultures	Adaptive Cultures
Revenue	166%	682%
Stock Prices	74%	901%
Nett Income	1%	756%

The figures in the table above seem to indicate that some cultures not only produce better top line results but that they are also less expensive to run. Add to this the fact that leadership style and behaviour has the largest

The Leadership Transformation Challenge

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impact on factors that form culture within organisations and we begin to understand why leadership transformation should be a high priority within any organisation.

It is not surprising to learn that organisations who have developed highly productive cultures are led mostly by leaders who know how, and want to, have a constructive impact on those they lead. Their leadership has a balanced focus on developing people and teams on the one hand and inspiring commitment to high quality and excellence in performance in the organisation on the other. Very few of these leaders arrive 'ready made'. It takes purposeful leadership development to become a great leader.

True Transformation Required

How then do we grow better leadership? How do we lead in ways that create the opportunities for and inspire these 'better' behaviours in organisations?

It is not as if we do not know what is required. We live in extraordinary times where a vast wealth of understanding is available about what great leadership looks like, and yet a considerable gap persists between the real and the ideal.

The greatest leadership challenge is still in the doing rather than in the knowing. At the heart of the answer to these questions about becoming better leaders then, is the need for processes that produce true leadership transformation – authentic, positive and sustainable change in leadership style and practice.

Traditional approaches that depend heavily on the transfer of specialised information (training, consulting, etc.) simply do not go far enough to produce the level of transformation required. These approaches have a valid role to play, but this is not it.

New Breed Leadership Development

Fortunately such transformational processes do exist, like the new breed of leadership development process that we see emerging. One of the most innovative amongst these is the Nine Conversations in Leadership™ process developed by Worldsvie™ Consulting.

Nine Conversations in Leadership™ begins with each participant affirming their choice to be a leader and to develop as a leader. This produces a foundation for true transformation to take place. The Nine Conversations in Leadership™ then takes participants through a self-directed learning process that enables them to interpret and put into practice the best global wisdom available on leadership.

The Leadership Transformation Challenge

What is unique about the Nine Conversations in Leadership™ is that it not only delivers on leadership development. It also delivers this in alignment with the organisation's purpose, vision, values and strategy, and the participant's leadership role in that context. This is achieved through a carefully crafted combination of engaging with leadership theory, assignments and facilitated exercises.

The result is a process that does not mean time away from work in the same way that traditional leadership training does. The Nine Conversations in Leadership™ is actually 'work'. Although time is set aside for this process, each participant is actively working in that time at doing what they do in the organisation better.

The fact that they do this in collaboration with some of their colleagues leads to strengthened relationships, more aligned communities and a shared language around the leadership challenge. This also means that the leadership conversations and transformation will carry on long after the facilitated process is over.

Coaching for Transformation

Another process that is producing the kind of transformation required to grow great leaders is coaching delivered by properly accredited coaches. Coaching is often seen only as a goal focused or a remedial intervention. It is actually more often a transformational processes that helps us make significant internal adjustments. These, in turn, help us become better at identifying meaningful goals and thinking and acting in a way that we achieve those goals. What we take away from a coaching process is far more than goal achievement. We also take away exactly the kind of transformation that is authentic, positive and sustainable.

A coaching journey is therefore a very effective way to improve our leadership impact. It focuses us on how we can grow in order to make the leadership impact we desire rather than on how to get people to do what we want. In other words, it is about the transformation required for me to become a better leader rather than about changing the behaviour of others. What is true, of course, is that great leaders empower and inspire great behaviour in others.

Besides engaging in a coaching journey for themselves, leaders are increasingly learning to employ coaching in their management and leadership style. Here organisations like Results Workplace Coaching have made huge strides in helping organisations introduce a coaching culture into their way of working. This is cascading the transformational impact of coaching into organisations in ways that executive coaching and leadership coaching cannot do on their own.



The Leadership Transformation Challenge

Better Places to Live and Work

There is nothing new about the need for good leadership. Neither is there anything unique about the particular times in which we live that creates a need for good leadership. Organisations and communities of all kinds will always need good leadership, regardless of the season or their purpose for being.

The desire for better places to live and work is universal and timeless. Leadership is always going to play a key role in determining the extent to which that desire is realised. In that lies the opportunity for each one of us to be a great leader in the context in which we lead.

In a paper published by Human Synergetics International (HSI) in 2002, Janet L Suzmal wrote:

“The essence of leadership is in the impact a person has on the thinking and behaviour of others and the culture they end up creating as a result.”

We intuitively know how this leadership impact should look. Research done by HSI over the last 35 years in surveys that plot the ideal culture as seen by thousands of participants bear this out. An extract from their website posted in 2002 reads as follows:

When a total of 9,432 senior executives in more than 900 organisations across New Zealand and Australia were asked to describe the culture they preferred to see in their organisations (they clearly) indicated a preference for constructive cultures. The specific key behaviours identified were Achievement (set goals, pursue a standard of excellence), Self-Actualising (be creative, learn and grow), Humanistic-Encouraging (be supportive and helpful to one another) and Affiliative (build relationships with one another).

Those we lead are, however, as aware of the disconnect between the ideal and the real. The same article has the following to report:

When 132,543 employees across those same organisations were asked to describe the way they perceived the actual culture in those organisations, the culture profile looked quite different: (their response indicated that leadership) showed a preferences for aggressive and defensive cultures. The specific key behaviours identified were Conventional (don't rock the boat, follow rules, make a good impression), Avoidance (shift responsibility to others, avoid blame), Oppositional (oppose ideas and be critical of others), Competitive (compete with co-workers rather than co-operate), Perfectionistic (work long hours to complete narrow objectives).

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The Leadership Transformation Challenge



The point made earlier bears repeating: the greatest leadership challenge is possibly always going to be in the doing rather than in the knowing. All the more reason then for leaders in communities and organisations (and HR and OD practitioners) to ensure that they identify and engage in true transformational processes to meet this need.

Imagine what would happen if we truly focused on building purposeful communities that are led by constructive leaders, rather than primarily on ROI or profits? Case studies of organisations who have invested this way show that the payoff includes measurable ROI and improved profits, but the benefits go significantly further than this. The payoff also includes an improved quality of life for all stakeholders as well as improved organisational stability.

This is undoubtedly a worthwhile vision, and one that is possible to achieve, but only if we embark on the journey to transform ourselves as leaders. To become leaders whose impact on the behaviour of others, and on the resulting culture, is such that together we are able to create better places to work and live.

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