

Shaping Business Transformation: Recession-proof Leadership

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The effectiveness of how a companies deals with change is fundamentally down to how people are led and managed – so that any investment in shaping Leadership behaviour will translate immediately to bottom line results. In this article Philip Atkinson states “you cannot have too much leadership in your business” and identifies a speedy, cost effective, performance driven Leadership style to drive significant bottom-line improvement.

Recession Proof Leadership

Let's be clear: you cannot have too much focused Leadership when faced with a recession. The average business has too little. I have yet to hear of any business going belly up because of a clearly articulated strategy for new business equipping managers with superior Leadership skills. What's more, if the engine behind this is a team of focused, challenging and inspiring leaders who take thoughtful action and empower others to do likewise, you can only succeed.

Instead, too many businesses are driven by indecisive, risk-averse managers who are fearful of change and moving out of their technical comfort zone. They are frozen by a lack of action and seeing beyond their functional responsibilities. Out of these two examples in which business would you prefer to reside?

Poor Leadership Culture	Powerful Leadership Culture
Leadership exists by default or by accident	Leadership is a defined process specifically designed around core behaviours
The causal link between the leadership culture and business performance is poorly conceived	The decision to create a leadership culture is based on growth as well as consolidation
Little causal link between strategy and behaviours of staff in leadership positions	Core values in business strategy drive leadership behaviour
Behaviour of leaders is un-moderated and business results are unreliable	Leadership behaviour is instrumental in achieving business results
Inconsistent style confuses as to what behaviour is valued and rewarded	Consistent leadership is the norm and performance is predictable
When key Leaders move 'on' or 'out', does performance markedly founder?	Search and staff retention is focused on leading improved performance
Leadership culture is never driven and barely maintained	Leadership culture is continuous, and stimulated and managed positively
Confusion about what behaviour is encouraged	Alignment on behaviours encouraged, performance managed and rewarded
Role models are inconsistent and performance is not managed	Clarity of Leadership and team working is the fabric that forms the culture
The silo mentality rules, and matrix organisation never becomes a reality	Working in matrix across the business is as important as performance in the function
A cocktail of unfocused leadership cultures prevails	Firm alignment in forming a leadership culture throughout the whole business
While some manage well others do not – no or little consistency in behaviour	Leaders encourage staff to drive change, challenge and take ownership

The Time for Change is Now

If there was ever a time when strong Leadership was required, it is now as we move into the unpredictable economic cycles of 2009 and beyond. With difficult times forecast for the economy, business people are wondering what change initiatives will tangibly strengthen their enterprise by driving new customers and business to them. Without a 'sale' and without 'paying customers' there is no business at all.

This is what will drive many businesses to the wall. So is there a solution to those businesses which are currently at risk? Yes! The solution is not to wait to see what others do, but to take decisive action after reflection and analysis of current opportunities. The immediate problem for many is how do we get through the next four quarters and come out with a stronger, leaner, more competitive culture that is playing to organisational strengths and core competencies.

"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy." Martin Luther King

Not Taking Action is Not an Option

You cannot, not take action. Your inactions have huge ramifications for loss, your future and your business survival. The very act of being indecisive is a reflection of pessimism and a preference to follow the herd mentality of 'wait and see'.

Indecisiveness and inaction sends the wrong message to staff and customers. Alternatively, channelling and focusing your energies to find and implement a better way to lead and inspire others is a magnet that gives others confidence.

Imagine You Can Turn Your Fortunes Around

Just suppose you could turn around the fortunes of your business? For a moment just frame this thought. What one element of your business is going to make the difference? What commitment if made today could really impact your business for the better in the short and the longer? What one aspect of behaviour, when instilled in others, could make the difference between survival or joining the business failures of 2009 and beyond?

Leadership Starts with the end in Mind

What is going to make a difference to your business? Is a luck or is it shaping your future the way you want it? If you are waiting for luck, you will be waiting a long time as the pessimists gather together to shelter from reality. If you are bright and positive you will know that in difficult times resilient people shape their own future and survival.

Move from Managing Business to Creating a Legacy of Leadership

Leadership and the transformation of business will achieve a performance culture at all levels. Furthermore, when designed and managed into the culture through core behaviours, has the impact on the organisation to be continually self renewing. It should come as no surprise that to do this requires a shift in strategic mindset from running a business, to creating a legacy of Leadership that will continue long after the architect of that change has moved on.

There is no finer accolade that can be bestowed on any manager or business leader than to have created and sustained an organisation that can weather difficult economic recessionary times – no matter how harsh, fierce or intense.

Creating a Legacy in Requires Vision, Energy & Action

Change in Leadership behaviour takes you as long as you want it to take. Legacies can be created quickly if you have a vision of what you want, the energy, personal stamina and resilience to see it implemented and the uncanny ability to taking action until you get the results you desire.

Some Help in Changing the Leadership Mindset

You cannot do it alone. You need assistance in diagnosing where you are currently, assessing what you want to move towards and the gap that separates 'current reality' from the 'desired future'. You need to partner with an expert in 'organisational change' to ensure it is implemented speedily. By doing so, you can guarantee that results will flow from your actions.

Two Drivers that Shape a Leadership Culture

The two most important factors in shaping any business culture are both derived from the behaviour demonstrated by those who lead and control the business.

The **first driver** is 'to what Leaders pay most attention'. If you as Leader invest in your people and ensure, deliberate and precise action to acquire new customers, and provide exceptional service excellence to existing customers, that's what your people will receive. That's the beacon to emulate your behaviour.

However, if you fail to develop your people and instead spend too much time on the 'little things' to the detriment of employee, customer relations and corporate performance that's what will be clear to everybody. It signals what is important – and that which is not.

The **second driver** is 'how leaders respond to critical organisational incidents'. If there is a major loss or threat to your business – how you as Leader respond will strongly signal what constitutes a priority. Leaders and senior staff still don't know that people are 'boss watchers'. Leaders often fail to recognise that 'grapevine comments' are generated, circulate and grow because of what others interpret from their behaviour and actions.

Corporate culture and morale can be seriously affected through the perceived behaviour of key players.

People are Boss Watchers

Everyone does it – most of us spend time observing the behaviour of others more senior to us and we make our mind up whether they are living the values they espouse. But be careful, because others will be observing your behaviour. 'Doing what you say and saying what you do' are critical in establishing a consistent leadership style which will spread throughout the organisation.

Sales Leadership

If a Sales Manager fails to drive the importance of customer retention and customer focus, it's a clear sign to all those who report to him or her of what is important. If referrals and customer visits are the order of the day with a direct intention to drive rapport with existing and potential customers – that is what the salesmen will see and emulate.

Look in the Mirror

The acid test for you as a Leader is take a good look in the mirror and see what it is like to receive your behaviour. We streamline the Leadership behaviour examining the dominant behaviours presented 'top to bottom'. This establishes the behaviours leading to significant bottom-line performance and differentiates them from those which do not.

Dominant behaviours from the top levels of the business determine the style of management that will flow throughout the organisation. What you focus on personally as a Leader is what you will attract.

Effective Leadership is based on Self Awareness

The Leader who knows their strengths and can differentiate them from their limitations, and takes actions to build on her or his strengths has the leading edge over others who are only partially aware of how their behaviour impacts others.

Any reference to the Gallup's organisation research mirrors our own research into Leadership behaviour. Those without critical self awareness and a desire to take action to improve will never make it to the Leadership Hall of Fame. They will continue to delude themselves and never arise beyond their lack of personal insight to be honest with themselves.

Leadership behaviour is what is received – not that which is sent

Most behaviour is 'unconscious'. Although people are conscious of what they are doing, they may not be conscious of their motives and the impact this has on others. They may not be conscious of how their behaviour is received unless they have a high degree of sensory acuity and seek feedback on their behaviour.

This can be quickly through our patented 360 degree Leadership process. We know the behaviours which lead to significant performance and enable you to model these to best effect.

This activity is an excellent method to assess the potential of managers and Leaders and is a powerful way to structure a succession process within an organisation. Huge returns can be experienced when tailoring training and all development activities towards adding value to all team workers. Often this exercise will generate a whole list of questions – here are the top four.

Who is a Leader?

Anybody who has responsibility for the performance of others is a Leader. Leadership has a major impact on the performance of businesses and teams. Solitary technical people with no direct reports cannot get off the Leadership hook either. They interact with others in an internal supply chain and should demonstrate strong team leadership behaviour when required. When you influence how others operate, you are Leader even if only for a few hours per week.

You can be young, mature, male, female – you can be a technical expert of a customer facing associate – there will be times in your role where Leadership is required. So find out more about it.

Is there a difference between a Manager and a Leader?

Yes, you know there is. Managers sit behind desks, don't interact and generally administer processes and people. There is a major and fundamental difference with Leadership. Managers tend to be more transactional in nature – dealing with processes, protocols, administration of the system. Leadership is about transforming challenging, inspiring others to outstanding performance improvement. This requires enthusiasm, creating a strong vision, inspiring achievement and building strong teams of people to work across boundaries and silos.

Can you have too much Leadership?

Are you joking? I have yet to find an organisation which does. And there are plenty of businesses which are making great strides in how they drive for change. The real focus should be on 'what can we do better, quicker, in a more customer focused manner?' A Leadership culture can soon be created and the effect of a strong Leadership programme will be instant.

- Just think now – in your organisation, what percentage of those who manage others are Leaders? Now consider if it was possible to increase that by a factor of 10 -15%, would that have impact?
- What would happen if I could show you how to double your capacity to lead in a variety of business processes?
- What would happen if we could improve your Sales Leadership by 100%?
- What if we could improve your process improvement Leadership to create those with the attributes to drive sustained change and improvement – what effect would that have on your business performance?
- What would happen if we could harness leadership in your management of technology and channel delivery by 50%

What are the Characteristics of Effective Leaders?

We all know that effective leaders pursue transformational type behaviours, but what specifically do they need to do more and less of in terms of driving change through team work? We call these the top 5 E's based on the GE Model.

Energy

Leaders must be able to energise themselves. They must display a high degree of energy to demonstrate their resilience and their ability and stamina to contribute in a demanding business. Energy means being positive. It is unlikely that someone who displays inactivity and a lacklustre desire to improve things will have the resilience to handle challenging projects. Successful leaders generally achieve more with less, and never give up.

Enthusiasm

Self-confidence is central to effective Leadership. Failing to display self confidence and positive self esteem is unlikely to inspire others to superlative performance. What holds people back from achieving their potential is their self-limiting beliefs.

'Whether you think you can or you cannot, you're right'. Henry Ford

People with low self-esteem will not wish to move as readily out of their comfort zone as those who generally believe 'life is going to turn out okay'. The organisational challenge of the recession is the opportunity for the organisation to really commit to the development of the potential of your people.

Energise

As Leaders we actively motivate others to emulate our commitment and our behaviours. Those who are too independent and energised will only be partially successful. Those who energise and motivate others demonstrate a strong role model which others can emulate. The Leader who understands how important it is to get the team to express themselves confidently will commit to help them improve their interpersonal skills.

Execute

Leaders have to be rigorous in analysis, decisive in their actions, execute and implement and sustain any changes. Experience is a great teacher – indecisiveness teaches nothing. Experience is based on learning from poor and good decisions. Risk aversion in execution is based on fear and residing in the personal zone of comfort. When we reflect on the quality of personal Leadership experience you will find that the most learning took place when decisions did not go as expected.

Leaders who fail to make decisions until they have every piece of the jigsaw puzzle – will never make anything happen.

Leaders who are decisive have to be equally good at ensuring that others understand what is expected of them and the methods for implementing and sustaining change from the decisions made.

Here a leader who is committed to rigorous decision-making will know precisely how much support he or she will have to give their people to help move them the next rung up their own personal performance ladder.

Edge

The top ten percent of people in any profession or business will never be in need to look for a job – they will always be in demand. Living on the cutting edge is being the best and most self aware in your field.

Always alert and always open to new ways of working is what characterises sharp people who live on the cutting edge. They challenge the way things are done to improve performance. They are wise in how they use their time to best effect.

There are many other behaviours which are pivotal to Leadership performance but our experience is develop the person 'inside out' - so that the benefits accrue to both the person and the organisation very quickly.

Summary

Leadership is the critical issue for most businesses right now.. Leadership is not in abundance – it is a scarce resource. Competition will intensify for the best people. Those Businesses that can implement strategies for continued and sustained improvement will be those peopled by high flyers.

High flyers don't just happen by accident – they have to be developed – 'Leaders are made not born'.

Organisations with the passion for developing their people leaders will realise their vision for their business.

Personal style is critical. If a team Leader cannot instil in others energy and enthusiasm, then it may be time for that Leader to let someone else take charge.

If Leaders are not part of the solution, they are part of the problem and a Leader who fails to commit should move on.

Many organisations still fail to commit to investing in their most senior people – those who lead others. What is critical is a real thirst to drive for change.

When your business establishes a strong leadership style it will sustain any drive for change you wish to consider, and guarantee a competitive edge and legacy second to none.

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