

# LEADERSHIP IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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What are the particular circumstances of the 21<sup>st</sup> century that demand a new style of leadership and how do leaders respond?

## Factors making a difference are:

### Data /Digital world

- with the internet making huge amounts of information (and disinformation) available to all, there is a risk of overwhelm.
- Email and social media trends show that we're receiving significantly more information and requests on a daily basis.
- Globalisation and collaboration mean that we have to manage multiple stakeholder relationships and each group demands information relevant to them.
- Young people entering the workplace have grown up digital and expect egalitarian interaction with others, communicating with their networks in an open way and tapping into this resource

### 24/7 and global time

- The pace of work has picked up through instant communications around the world
- The length of the day is longer, especially if you work globally.

- Demands for rapid turnaround push people into constant action, the time for quality thinking and planning is lost – people work on the Urgent and don't allocate enough time for the Important. There's a risk crisis management becomes the norm.
- Pressure is constant as organisations run to keep up and this is showing in the high incidence of stress-related absence, which adds more pressure to the team.
- Decisions suffer – both in quality and timing: data overload, time pressures and the commercial drivers vs the risks.

## Ways of working

- Matrix teams, based in multiple locations make communication more difficult – too much reliance on email means that the quality of the relationship is lost and there is plenty of opportunity for misinterpretation and inadequate communication.
- Diverse and multi-cultural stakeholders demand more care and time, not less...
- Flat, matrix organisations can result in a lack of clarity on authority, especially if combined with reduced budget control, decisions get pushed up, creating bottlenecks.
- Attitudes to work are changing and employees demand a flexible approach
- Commitment to the organisation comes with meaningful work and employees expect this or they disengage.
- There's no such thing as a career for life in a company and people move easily for more interesting opportunities

## Change / Innovation

- Organisations need to strive for innovation and/or streamlining and reducing costs continuously in order to remain competitive, which means that change is the norm.

- Innovation needs nurturing in a creative and entrepreneurial environment. This can be an anathema to organisations fixed on risk-averse and controlling management.
- A large proportion of people will be working on projects, this demands the ability to manage projects alongside business-as-usual, especially when the resources are shared.
- Change is disruptive and needs strong leadership to engage employees positively.

This list is not exhaustive and you may have other suggestions to add.

### What does this mean for today's leaders?



1. Develop a **strong vision and set of values** associated with that vision and communicate them powerfully, consistently and frequently. People need clarity of purpose and direction, especially in this fast-paced changing environment. If they know what they are joining the organisation for and how they fit into the organisation's purpose, they have a frame of reference for all decision and actions. To lead successfully, people need to know what you stand for and to see that you are true to that, if they like what they see, they willingly follow your lead.
2. **Explain** the organisation's purpose clearly, coherently and consistently as this forms the frame of reference against which people make business decisions. When people are clear on the purpose, they can quickly judge whether an action furthers this purpose or works against it. When they are aligned behind the vision/purpose they can act with agility and respond positively to business drivers.

3. **Empower** your people and delegate authority to the lowest level possible in order to facilitate action. Share leadership with your direct reports and this example will demonstrate how they can share their leadership with their teams.
4. **Enable** people to work in the way that both suits them and delivers the organisation's purpose. When people have a choice in this and managers know how to evaluate the ways of working and the achievements of their people, then you facilitate high performance. Enabling and empowering your people to do meaningful work will deliver **engagement**.
5. Critically evaluate what it is that **makes the difference** in delivering success and identify the relevant **KPIs**. Think systemically to ensure that the KPIs don't conflict with each other or generate unwanted consequences.
6. Create a positive **learning culture** to encourage innovation. Combine the KPIs with the culture to nurture collaboration and responsibility for high performance. Role model this in your leadership team.
7. **Lead yourself** to achieve high performance. Use emotional intelligence in managing your interactions to get the best out of yourself and others. Be aware of the pressures on you and any personal 'gremlins' that could throw you off-track, build your resilience in the face of adversity and focus on your wellbeing.
8. **Be aware of diversity** to minimise unconscious bias in yourself and in the organisation and keep an open mind on how to develop the ways of working that will get the best from a multi-cultural and diverse workforce. Don't let 'what we did in the past' dictate what we do in the future.

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