

Leadership

THE LEADERSHIP PARADOX by Kevin McKee

“The day people stop bringing you their problems is the day you have stopped leading them”
(Colin Powell, My American Journey)

When large organisations are asked about their supply of good leaders the reply is always the same. We have lots of decent managers but not leaders. Where can we get some more? How is it that year after year the famine persists?

Let me start by defining the terms “management” and “leadership”. The importance of doing so was underlined for me by statements in a generally excellent book about Gallup’s research on what great managers do. “Great managers look inward; Great leaders look outward” so the authors state. I think the Gallup view is a minority one. Most people when asked about good leaders they have known will list many of the behaviours Gallup attribute to “great managers”.

The distillation below was produced by my late colleague Colin Hutchinson. I have generally found that people in organisations can work productively with these definitions. So let us look at why organisations might be undersupplied with star performers in the “Leadership” column even though they claim to need more.

MANAGEMENT	LEADERSHIP
ANALYSING DATA /WEIGHING ALTERNATIVES MAKING DECISIONS SETTING OBJECTIVES APPLYING PRINCIPLES PLANNING MAINTAINING OPERATIONS CONTROLLING SOLVING PROBLEMS APPRAISING PERFORMANCE ORGANISING AN INTERVENTION SHORT-TERM RESULTS	MOTIVATING & INSPIRING CREATING A SHARED VISION COMMUNICATING SETTING OBJECTIVES SETTING AN EXAMPLE INFLUENCING & DIRECTING WINNING CONFIDENCE/ RESPECT SUPPORTING DEVELOPING SHARED OBJECTIVES (internal & external) ENCOURAGING LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS & NETWORKS A PROCESS LONG-TERM VISION
N.B. Needed to deal with COMPLEXITY	N.B. Needed to deal with CHANGE

A colleague of ours often says “What gets measured gets done”. Here I think is part of the problem. The activities in the “Management” column are overall much easier to pin down, analyse and quantify. In the cautious, backside-covering cultures of most organisations it is hardly surprising that the concrete actions of management are the safer bet for “getting on”. Indeed it often seems to me that the proportion of good leaders declines sharply up the management hierarchy. Associated with the problems of “measuring” leadership is often a sense that the whole issue is a bit “touchy feely”. Well, get used to it guys! A lot of highly empirical analysis indicates that hard business results flow from the personal behaviours of leaders and the emotional impact they have on other people. Let’s take two examples:

“Good to Great” – the authors studied businesses which turned themselves around (change!) to create sustained exceptional business results. Despite their efforts to ignore it as a factor the researchers encountered leadership as a key lever time and again. (Their description of “Level Five” leadership is compelling.)

“The Heart of Change” – John Kotter’s very latest research. He looked at major organisational changes which have actually worked, (which as we know is a tiny minority among the host of failures). As the cases and evidence demonstrate “People change what they do less because they are given analysis that shifts their thinking than because they are shown a truth that influences their feelings.” I would also include the Gallup research, relating management of people to “hard” business performance measures as part of the Business Case for Leadership.

So there we have it – to build enduringly successful businesses you need a good supply of leaders at many levels. Paradoxically those very leadership qualities are often ignored or actively discouraged in large organisations. Elsewhere in this edition we explore some aspects of leadership and how to develop better leaders.