



Successful leaders create the working culture they want to see

Leadership essentials for the changing world of work

Good leaders celebrate success and create an atmosphere of trust where new ideas can be embraced



Kevin Empey

It is not an easy time to be a leader at any level today. In an age of increased pace, expanding possibilities and disruptive competition, leaders are faced with rising expectations from all fronts – from boards, executives and shareholders as well as from staff, business partners and customers.

On top of working flat-out to run and grow the current business, we are told we need to transform and prepare our organisations for emerging technologies, rapid change and the so-called future of work. And all this doesn't look like slowing down any time soon. So, how do we deal

with this as leaders?

Slowing down to move fast

The temptation is to speed up ourselves, trying to keep up with all the moving parts and control them. For most, that will be a sure bet for more stress and burnout – features of modern working life that are becoming far too common as it is.

Surely it would be preferable to be able to thrive and adapt to this changing world of work rather than just cope and lurch from one always-on weekend to another? And wouldn't this also make life better not just for ourselves and our teams, but for those who live with us outside work?

One place to start is to acknowledge that this is an issue and that your own leadership model that has served you well so far may need an upgrade for what lies ahead.

As Marshall Goldsmith

wrote in his book of the same title, "What got you here, won't get you there."

Be yourself, with skill

There is a temptation to think that there is some perfect leadership style or persona out there and that you need to somehow change your DNA that has formed the person and leader you are today. Trying to copy others wholesale is not sustainable and people will see through it, adding to your complications.

Being aware of your own leadership strengths and skills as well as being open and mindful of your blind spots and emotional triggers is a necessary place to start.

It is much easier to manage stressful situations when you are acting in a deliberate way as your self-aware self.

You don't need to have all the answers

You won't have all the answers with the pace things are moving, so let's dispel the illusion that we do, or that we need to pretend we do. We are in the age of the authentic leader and this should help some-

what in ending the pretence

of perfection and in having all the answers for everyone demanding them of us.

Showing vulnerability and openness is an essential building block of trust and will invite others in to share the load. Followers will respect rather than doubt you and, most importantly, they will follow your example.

This will create a safe environment where problems as well as innovations and opportunities will be aired freely without the fear of ridicule or blame. Change will be something that is embraced rather than avoided.

Show the way and let them get on with it

Being vulnerable does not mean being weak or unclear. The adaptive leader sets clear ground rules and parameters, clarifies and explains the purpose and direction, and then lets their teams get on with it. In a supportive environment of trust and clear goals, employees will respond and thrive.

You need other leaders and employees around you that will seek and accept autonomy and accountability be-

cause you simply don't have the time to be everywhere and on everyone's case.

With some space and process provided for regular review and open, safe feedback, the team can course-correct and hold each other to account, often without you in the room. This agile and accountable team working culture will reduce the time you spend on supervision considerably, allowing you to focus on other things.

Identify your own 'best boss' habits

What are the simple human behaviours and habits that made your own best boss memorable and motivating to you? What would your team say to the same question?

Identify these trademark habits that come naturally to you and use them often. Encourage other leaders working for you to do the same and you will be creating leaders to help you deliver your goals as well as creating the working culture you want to see.

Show appreciation and provide feedback

To reinforce an agile, account-

able and trusting working culture, feedback is essential.

There is no time for problems to fester and develop. Celebrate success and shift the balance to reinforce the behaviours you want to see rather than over-dwelling on what you don't want to see.

People will soon figure out what is the right way of doing things under your watch.

Generate a climate of enablement and empowerment rather than control and compliance – this shift alone will unleash talent, performance and engagement in your teams.

These 'future of work' nuances required for leadership today, combined with what we all know from experience about the age-old and enduring qualities that make up what it is to be a 'good boss', will help leaders thrive in the new landscape and allow others in their care to do the same.

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Creative individuals force organisations to ask the big questions

The three circles of creativity

In today's volatile working environment, an innovative and creative culture will help your business survive



Gareth Jones

It has become commonplace to assert that we live in a period of unprecedented change. This is an argument that quickly falls flat in the societal sense if you take even a cursory glance at the History Channel, but in our professional lives the case is strong.

What is certainly clear is that the pace of scientific and technical change is almost exponential. In addition, consumers' tastes change more frequently than before. What gave you competitive advantage yesterday won't work today. Businesses need creativity at the heart of their DNA if they are to survive and thrive.

Organisational creativity

We can think of creativity at three levels: individuals, teams and cultures. What do we know about creative individuals? They have high autonomy needs – they don't like being told what to do. They have low structure needs – they like lots of free space. And finally, they don't want to be leaders or led, but be left to pursue their obsessions.

In other words, they are not easy organisational people. Yet organisations need people who don't quite fit in, who ask awkward questions. They will trample on the organisational sacred ground.

At PwC, they may ask: "Does auditing have a future?" At Unilever, they provocatively ask: "What is the synergy between food and soap?" They may be wrong, but they force organisations to ask the big questions. You don't need too many people like this, but you need a few.

Collective innovation

So while creative individuals matter, innovation is nearly always collective. Creative teams are largely self-selected – they find each other. It is a good idea to make free time and space for people to explore new ideas collectively.

Teams that are consistently creative are diverse. Creativity increases with diversity and declines with sameness. And they are volatile, expect high levels of cognitive conflict – high performance innovation teams are rarely cosy.

At the cultural level, organisations need to encourage entrepreneurialism. One good test of this is to see what happens when things go wrong. In dysfunctional cultures, the question is: "Whose fault was it?" In really dysfunctional cultures, the question is: "Whose fault can we make it look like it was?" In healthy, innovative cultures, the question is: "What can we learn

from this?"

Perhaps the most contradictory thing chief executives have been saying to their people is: "Be entrepreneurial" and "Innovate continuously", combined with one last message: "Don't fail."

Innovation attracts

To be successful, you need to be attractive to the most talented people – those who have the capacity to create disproportionate amounts of value. Such individuals only want to work in organisations where they can be their best selves. So organisations need to work hard to become beacons for talent. Chief executives should be asking themselves: "Why should anyone work here?"

Does this organisation provide talented people with opportunities to grow and be challenged? Will they have the opportunity to work with others who will spark creativity? Kill off structures and processes which stifle initiative.

Recruiting creativity

It is not always easy to recruit creative people. Yet recruiting staff is the most significant investment organisations ever make. Here's a couple of suggestions for getting better at it.

Identify talent scouts who will scan the labour market for people you might recruit. Be really curious about who at the competition could make your organisation stronger. Don't just think about the known competition, but potential new disruptors.

Don't leave recruitment entirely to HR; make sure senior line executives are fully involved throughout the process.

Pay and rations alone will not suffice to attract talent – for the best people the competition will match your offer. Instead offer development and excitement. Creative people want to work on projects that will get them out of bed in the morning with a spring in their step.

Great innovative leaders inspire people to exceptional performance. And in today's volatile environment, exceptional performance is not a luxury, but a survival technique.

If innovation is key to your sustained success – and there are few businesses where this isn't the case – then you will need leaders (not just at the top) who will encourage innovation and resist the temptation for control, hierarchical power and short termism.

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You can't control purpose – you need to sell it

How do we control our children when they go out to nightclubs? Do we send spies and hide in the shadows, or simply follow them, looming behind them with every step?

For most parents, the likelihood that their child would allow themselves to be escorted to a nightclub is a remote one, and the prospect of hiding in the recesses wouldn't conform to the values that they've lived their life by. And for Costas Markides, it is in those very values where the control comes from, and a lesson that should be applied to business.

"How do you control your children?" asked Markides. "It's trust! It's values! We teach the children the difference between right and wrong very early on, and then we let them loose, we give them autonomy."

The difficulty for employees is that the environment they are in does not match what they are being asked to do.

They have been taught all their life to conform, but then are asked by their leaders to think creatively and innovate. They've spent all their time in life being competitive – from the playground to university – and then are asked to collaborate when they walk into work.

"We need to create an envi-



Costas Markides

ronment that allows our people to question things, even to challenge you as leaders," said Markides.

"In many organisations, people know what they're supposed to be doing, but don't do it. They are not going to change their behaviour simply because you tell them to, or even if they agree with you. To do that, you need to make the change emotional."

Your purpose is not to make money

One of the key leadership theories of the last few years revolves around "purpose".

It is one of the organising principles that leaders can use to create an emotional bond between the employee and the business, orientating them towards a strategic outcome without micromanaging each step.

While purpose is excellent in both theory and practice, often leaders are distracted by the shinier object of "making money". This is not a dere-



liction of duty, but rather an outcome of pressure they themselves receive.

When it comes to the next board meeting, most leaders will choose healthy financial numbers over evidence that their employees are collectively working towards a shared purpose.

However, it is next year's board meeting where purpose plays such a role – leaping from one quarter financial results to the next will result in a slow strangulation of the organisation.

"Your purpose should not

be to make money," said Markides. "Your purpose should be to make products and services that consumers fall in love with and, if you do that, you will make money. Making money is a by-product. So, if you focus your mind on the right thing – to make a difference in the world – you will make money."

The specific purpose, of course, will vary from company to company. It is defined in its authenticity and should be a central part of every part of the business. How though can leaders imbue their em-

ployees with this purpose?

The answer is relatively straightforward: you do the same thing you do with your products or services – you sell it.

Sell your purpose

Some purposes are more compelling and motivational than others. Some feel genuinely exciting and are used in case studies around the world, confounding those leaders whose companies do not try and change the world each and every day.

Some are bland and gener-

ic, updated every few years with new statements that could apply to any workplace, and stuck up on the walls to act as motivators.

"What makes purposes compelling and motivating is not the purpose itself said Markides, "but rather if people have bought into it. In other words, the strength of a purpose lies in your organisation's ability to 'sell' it."

"People are not going to buy into anything unless you sell it to them first. And that is the leadership task here – how can I sell my purpose so people believe in it?"

For leaders in organisations today, it is not enough to simply define a purpose and watch it spread throughout the layers of bureaucracy. It is incumbent on them to sell the purpose to their employees like they sell their products to customers. In this way, they can allow their employees to work with autonomy towards innovating their company into a new future.

As for parents, if you really do want control, it might be better to hire a spy.

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