



Industry Forum

Business Excellence Through Inspired People

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Equipping Executive Leaders and Their Teams to Meet Today's Challenges

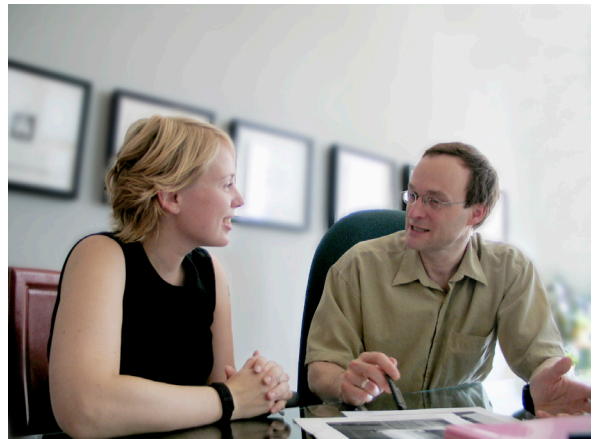
We all recall the financial crisis and indeed it is now long enough ago to be falling into popular history, but its effects rumble on around the world. Pundits variously predict a further five years of austerity, but many business leaders worked out early on that business as usual was probably never going to occur again and they had better prepare for a different future.

What would that future be like? Who would be the winners and who would be the losers? What could any leader hope to do in the face of such a new, varying and confusing business environment?

An interesting insight into this situation was contained in a report from the Conference Board published in late 2010 'Go Where There be Dragons. Leadership Essentials for 2020 and Beyond by Mitchell and Learmond'.

Based upon the contribution of many leaders and CEO's across a wide range of sectors and geography the consensus was that the 'CEO as Rock Star is dead' and that the business world needed a 'leadership correction'. Gone would be the 'excess of arrogance and scandal, a dearth of flexibility, trust, worldliness and diversity of thought. The

next generation of leaders, and those charged with their development, would face a significant challenge-keeping pace with evolving economic, social and technical norms, would require additional competencies, an understanding of a diverse and fragmented world, and a keen sense of self-awareness and humility'.



There is much in the report and you can read more at www.conferenceboard.org

From an Executive Leadership perspective there is therefore much to address. Business as usual will not be sufficient and leaders will need to be better equipped to know themselves, know their teams and colleagues, know their business and its environment, and know and participate in the society in which their business operates. How to prepare Executive Leaders for such challenges?

Preparing Executive Leaders for Today's Challenges

Self-Awareness

Executive Leaders are dealing with more uncertainty, change and risk than the generation before. They will need a keener self-awareness in order to be robust about decision making and be well 'grounded' in their decision making.

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It is evident that you cannot lead others until you can lead yourself. Understanding yourself and how you prefer to behave in certain circumstances and what you might do to modify those behaviours are critical competencies to be a successful leader.

One to One Executive Coaching assignments provide a useful route to addressing understanding of self-awareness and the behaviours that go with that, together with managing to deliver outcomes in different scenarios. Assignments can be supported with the use of approaches and tools such as the Myers Briggs Type Indicator® and there are well defined matrices of leadership styles e.g. Hay Group Inventory of Leadership Styles. The goal is to understand your preferences and then be able to flex to meet different circumstances.



Teams

Most teams underperform versus their potential. As most Executive Leaders operate through teams and indeed are part of a team themselves the importance of operating in and with teams becomes a critical leadership skill. The more networked world in which we are operating, the deployment of enabling technology, and the development of more virtual teams across value chains all increases focus on team working. Given the rate of change in the external environment members of teams will need to be operating at peak performance and focused on team goals to better achieve business success.

Becoming a High Performing Team is underpinned by research that shows that the best teams have:

- Clear purpose
- Aligned goals
- Consistent behaviours
- Effective processes
- On-going development

Executive Coaching and Development interventions can be transformational to team performance. Many leaders will be familiar with the Belbin tool concerning team roles. Using the Myers Briggs Type Indicator® or the Margerison McCann Team Management Tool can provide further insights into team roles and how to optimise team interactions. Importantly the evolution of a team through various distinct stages can also guide actions as the team matures. Patrick Lencioni's 'Overcoming the Five Dysfunctions of a Team' provides an insight as to how to drive up team performance. At the base of all good team performance is Trust and for a good reference here is 'The Extra Mile. How to Engage your People and Win' by David Macleod and Chris Brady.

Blending the above approaches to meet the specific requirements of a team can help transform an ordinary team into a high performing team.



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Groups

Members of a group do not necessarily share all of the same goals and objectives. However groups in a business are guided by the over-arching objective of that business and at the same time will address goals closer to their respective team base. Within the diversity of the group there are common leadership and team skills that need to be mastered by Executive Leaders.

Executive Group Leadership Development programmes and initiatives are designed to address these challenges and deliver clear outcomes. For example following significant growth of a business, or after a restructuring plan has been initiated, it becomes clear that a wider group of leaders other than a specific team will need to 'step-up' and take on new responsibilities that they have not assume beforehand. Interventions used in Executive Team Coaching and Development can be helpful in energising the development of a wider cohort of leaders in a business. Many of the techniques deployed for teams can be useful for groups allowing for the diversity of interests present.

Deployment

Many great initiatives founder on the rock of 'non-alignment' with the rest of the organisation either before or after completion. It is therefore important that initiatives are aligned with business strategy, goals are defined, target audiences identified, and budgets and resources etc. secured.

Learning and Development can be varied, flexible and fun according to the needs of the client and as learning occurs in different ways for individuals a variety of approaches can be useful. Traditional classroom based learning can still be useful, but additionally one can consider:

1. Coaching either of individuals, teams or groups. Coaching classically delivered will leave the content with the person, team or group whilst the coach looks after the process. Coaching works because ownership by the client is high and learning and retention is then much enhanced.
2. Action based learning programmes based upon receiving information and then acting on that information to embed the learning. There is a significant improvement in learning and retention over traditional classroom based learning.
3. Experiential learning. We all recall 'mother's cooking' and if one can link learning to an evocative situation or memory then learning and retention can be very high indeed. In the business context think of the benefits of linking team performance with what flying Apache attack helicopters?
4. Distance learning tools and approaches which become more 'realistic' as technology develops

Industry Forum has extensive experience of improving workplaces using coaching team working and problem solving as a foundation. This approach improves the quality of output and the total output relative to the size of the team is also significantly enhanced. The success of the automotive sector in the last decade reflects significant investment in this approach.



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