

Think great leaders are enough? *Dan Hammond* reveals why organisations need great leadership more than great leaders

Senior leaders in global organisations tell us that the demands on them and their organisations have never been greater. They say it's because:

- Speed of execution is important to stay ahead of the competition.
- Innovative solutions are mandatory as the environment and customer needs change.
- Collaboration and the communication that enables it are critical to capitalise on the power and potential of complex matrix organisations.

To meet these challenges, successful organisations will depend less on a few leaders at the top and more on leadership at every level to get things done. We propose that leadership is enabled by Organisational Leadership Architecture™, which creates the conditions in which every individual can make a successful contribution to

achieving organisational outcomes.

Our analysis indicates that leadership today requires two key elements. First, a requirement to ask the right questions; and secondly, to create the conditions for success.

The three key questions which comprise the foundation stones of Organisational Leadership Architecture™ are:

- What are we trying to achieve and why?
- Where are we now?
- What will we do to close the gap?

Associated with each question are the critical conditions required for success.

These are clarity, climate and competence. Clarity is about direction and approach; climate concerns practical tools, processes and culture; and competence is about equipping teams and individuals with the behaviour, attitude, knowledge and skills to do the job. Thus it is important to answer each of the fundamental questions in association with each condition:

- What are we trying to achieve with clarity, climate and competence?
- Where are we now with clarity, climate and competence?
- What will we do to close the gap with clarity, climate and competence?

This view changes the shape of how leadership is sometimes regarded: from the few to the many, from disconnected to holistic and from cumbersome to agile.

Lessons from the military: empowerment, not command and control, enables rapid response

"No plan survives first contact with the enemy" – *Field Marshall von Moltke*.

An elite team of soldiers moves forward toward their objective under the cover of darkness. As they perform their final reconnaissance before attacking, they discover a different objective; one not mentioned in their orders or known to their leaders.

They have a choice. They can complete the plan as ordered, or decide if this new objective is a better one and attack it instead. They cannot do both. They cannot ask for direction as any communication will betray their position. Make the right decision and they may save many lives, including their own. Get it wrong and the feedback will be immediate and permanent. They have little time to consider their options; speed of execution is critical. How do they decide?

Military organisations have developed an effective and instinctive approach to the issue of rapid response. The basis of this is to understand the 'higher intent' of the broader organisation. In other words, every soldier needs to be really clear about what the organisation is trying to achieve, and why. In our example, the team has been told the overall objective, strategy

and plan for the wider organisation. They are in a position to decide whether the original objective or the new one best meets the higher intent.

They have been told what their area of operation is and that they have the freedom to change the plan within understood set boundaries in order to better achieve the 'higher intent'. They have complete 'clarity' of the overall objective and their role in achieving it.

Contrary to popular opinion, military leadership is developed at all levels. Not

proposes that the bedrock of an effective military leadership system is 'collaboration' underpinned by the values of reliability, versatility and resilience.

There is a culture of empowerment that is critical to rapid response and speed of execution, both of which are essential to success and safety.

This concept of values and behaviours that support the higher intent is instantly applicable for any organisation – describing 'how' an organisation goes about its business and providing the

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only are individuals at every level allowed to make decisions, they are required and trained to do so.

The 'climate' is thus established within which individuals can make the best decision for themselves and the organisation. Of course, the climate is not just about processes and common language.

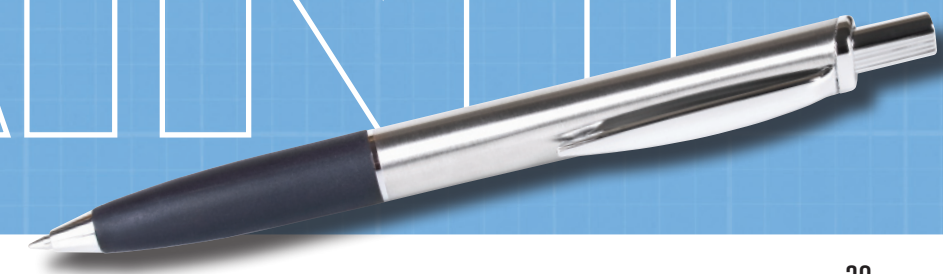
It is also about culture. Dr Nick Jans of the Australian Defence College is an acknowledged expert in the field of military leadership and originator of the expression 'command architecture'. He

people within it the behavioural guidelines required for success.

So, our intrepid heroes understand the higher intent, they are empowered to make a choice and know how much latitude they have to change the plan. But, do they know how to properly analyse the situation to ensure that 'B' really is a better option than 'A', and then make a plan to successfully attack it? Do they really know where they are now, and what they will do next? Quite simply, yes. Military organisations have a process for both tasks and everyone is thoroughly rehearsed in their use.

Creating the leadership

BLUEPRINT



They are provided with tools and checklists, similar to those used by pilots, to enable rapid application under any circumstances. So everyone in the team has the clarity of what is to be achieved, a set of processes that they must use and the competence to carry out the tasks.

Central to all this is the core principle that leaders and followers at every level see themselves as subordinate to the overall purpose and mission. This is clearly understood by all and provides a guide for decision making.

Lessons from business: communication and collaboration to ensure sustainability

“Leadership not Leaders is the key ... it is the actions leaders take as a group to build the leadership within the organisation,

not the personalities of the individual leaders that are critical” – *Mt Eliza, 2002, Australia's top 199 organisations.*

A business unit within a highly successful financial institution sets its objective to double profits in three years with a maximum 35% increase in staff. They achieved this goal in less than three years with a key focus on staff, risk and productivity.

So what did they do and how did the actions of the senior leaders develop a legacy of success which sustained the business even during the GFC?

In looking for the solution, the senior directors decided to take an organisational approach to developing leadership within their business unit which would build the capacity of the business beyond the boundaries of a few leaders, and which harnessed talent right the way to the frontline through collaboration.

The first step was establishing clarity. This was developed around an inspiring

vision which determined not only what they were trying to achieve but, most importantly, why (or the purpose), and by doing so gave a greater sense of meaning and engagement to the staff.

Experience shows us that many visions fail to deliver. Similarly, those who are meant to be motivated by that vision, are often not. So how did the senior directors create clarity of information and, critically, clarity of understanding?

They communicated compelling key messages to their staff in a national road show with the aim of creating a workforce which was engaged and motivated to explore new ways to work together.

This communication used energetic, authentic and ‘out-of-the-box’ methods to generate high levels of passion, understanding and genuine desire to make it happen. The communication was repeated in different ways, often soliciting feedback to ensure everyone understood.

Often enthusiasm fades and the vision dims once everyone returns to the office. Not in this case, where the working climate was stimulated by a radical redecoration of the offices.

The purpose, vision and values literally became a part of the working vista as a bright and stimulating environment became a daily reminder of the business’ direction.

Investment was also made in back-office processes. Organisational and individual cultural and leadership style diagnostics were carried out for feedback of the business. This generated greater awareness, encouraged development and supported the cultural transformation by building accountability at every level of the division.

There were rewards, too, where collaborative behaviours and outcomes which supported the business along its journey were regularly awarded to deserving individuals and teams. Senior directors sacrificed profit share to enable staff promotions, and financial rewards were given lower down in the ranks. The leaders were building and creating the leadership below.

The senior directors also led the way in terms of developing all levels within the organisation. In driving the ‘what do we need to do to close the gaps’ question, competence was developed at every level to innovate and collaborate as the business grew. With aligned leadership skills and competencies, common approaches to decision making and planning became systematised within the business. This developed a common language which encouraged delegation, enabled fast and adaptive actions, and built trust through the use of a rigorous approach.

Common threads

We have established that the three key leadership questions and the creation of clarity, climate and competence are paramount to success across the two different perspectives. Everyone is

which is challenging. Leaders at the lowest levels identified ‘defining organisational direction’ as their biggest challenge. This suggests that strategy is not being communicated in a meaningful way and that clarity is not shared at every level. This does not augur well for the implementation of a strategy.

From both perspectives, shared purpose, vision, values and clear strategies act as the ‘light on the hill’. However, if the climate includes a common language of leadership and leaders are competent to use it, then there is a realistic chance of alignment around the direction at every level. For example, in our successful business, leaders relied on ‘common language’ and a culture of collaboration, as well as skilled communication to deliver messages that resulted in not only clarity but tight focus and alignment at every level.

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equipped to use this architecture enabling leadership at every level, regardless of formal authority.

In a broader organisational context, people in every location use the system to understand what needs to be done, why and how. It enables rapid decision-making, empowerment and the flexibility to succeed even when the situation changes. The language and leadership processes used are the same, thus avoiding ambiguity and miscommunication. This is critical in complex matrices where success depends on people operating remotely.

How then does this apply to the challenges outlined by our senior leaders and how is this reflected in recent research?

Speed of execution

Our survey tells us that for senior leaders, “Setting the strategy is easy... executing is a greater challenge.” It seems that it’s not the ‘what’ of strategy but the ‘how’

Developing innovative solutions

Let’s assume that there is a common understanding that innovation is key to sustainable success. Clarity is not enough. Developing an enabling climate, through creating a common language or ‘wiring’, and a culture that encourages risk taking and learns from mistakes will enable all levels to innovatively adapt to changing needs and requirements.

Paradoxically, innovation is enabled by common decision-making processes, systems and culture that provide the structure to enable innovation by enabling people from different countries, departments and functions to talk the same language. For example, musicians are by nature creative; pushing the boundaries for their art and the enjoyment of the audience is what they do. But they, too, work within a framework of the music. The culture is one of individual creativity and

also teamwork to support the endeavour. Herein lies the paradox: working within a framework gives them complete freedom.

Communication and collaboration become critical to effective operation

Do clarity and climate, in place and understood at every level, guarantee an effective operation? Of course not. We can be clear and motivated, equipped with the necessary tools and support, as well as having access to a common language of leadership, but there is no guarantee that we will use any of them unless we know how.

All leaders must develop their competence in a way which is appropriate to their own level of the ‘Leadership Pipeline’. It is the competence of the leader that creates the clarity, climate and competence for those that follow.

Finally...

In business, it is the example set by senior leaders which dictates what other people will do. As Cisco Systems CEO John Chambers said: “The days of being vertically integrated and having everything within your control will never return. The entire leadership team, including me, had to invent a different way to operate. It was hard for me at first to learn to be collaborative.” (*Harvard Business Review*, November 2008)

As leaders transition through the ‘Leadership Pipeline’, they must examine what behaviour must be embraced and what is left behind – the leadership architecture remains the same. Developing a leadership architecture to achieve performance is fast-becoming the number one priority of successful organisations. It is ‘core’ to the organisation’s function rather than an ‘elective’. **HC**

About the author

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