

# TURNING MANAGERS INTO LEADERS



'We live in an age of turbulent and unpredictable change. With the political and economic uncertainties which often surround us this is producing a tentative response from managers to almost all significant situations, which in turn is breeding insecurity in those they manage. Unless we reinstate leadership as a management pre-requisite, and model it ourselves as senior managers, our businesses will flounder and fold'.

So wrote the chief executive of a major corporate in the company's latest annual report and accounts. Talk to managers about leadership these days and you'll probably hear something like '...it's difficult for me to lead confidently; no one really knows where the organisation is going or the strategy to get there!' Yet the requirement for a clear vision of the future, an efficiently managed operation and a confident, competent manager persists as ever from most employees.

So, the dilemma, when it comes to turning managers into leaders, is that when life is uncertain and chaotic people want the security of leadership more than ever, but it's at just such times that it's all the more difficult for managers to be confident about what they're trying to achieve!

Effective leadership and management at the same time. Is it a paradox? Is it achievable? Do the times in which we live allow for it?

There are five main issues which organisations need to take into account as they seek to turn their managers into leaders.

## THE BUSINESS CONTEXT

Leadership is always rooted in what exists at present. The leadership task of the manager is to create a 'preferred future' and to lead people towards it. But this has to be done as their organisation cuts costs, restricts resources and expects a higher level of output from fewer people, using increasingly sophisticated technology. The simple fact is that this is a balancing act which is hard to achieve.

## THE MANAGEMENT CHALLENGE

Today's managers are responsible for taking their teams forward into the future. They have to. They can't stand still and they can't go back. To do this they have to manage day to day activities which deliver the corporate objectives. These tasks involve objective setting, organising resources, establishing financial and quality controls, and then implementing and reviewing plans.

In order to succeed, they need to lead a team of people. Leading a team is about empowering people to take on increased responsibility, equipping them with relevant competencies, fostering an attitude of continuous improvement and learning, and helping team members to meet their diverse personal motivation needs.

In essence, today's managers need to be both managers and leaders. The difficulty is that each aspect of the role calls for different attitudes, insights and skills.

## THE SCHIZOPHRENIA TRAP

Ask most managers what their organisation requires of them and their reply will illustrate the paradoxical nature of their role: '...be objective and deal with facts; be subjective and respond to people; use reason and rationality; be intuitive and sensitive; be conservative and avoid risks; take risks and be creative...' No wonder some think we live in an era of schizophrenic management requiring contradictory managerial disciplines and personal leadership skills at one and the same time.

The question is no longer 'should managers be either managers or leaders' but 'how can we help today's managers become both?' Most managers accept this uncomfortable role: they accept the need to balance objective, measurable 'task' orientated aspects of their work with more subjective, less easily measurable 'people orientated' facets. Their main problem is having to get to grips with managing and leading others who can't or won't accept this 'split personality' role.

## EITHER/OR THINKING

Most managers dislike ambiguity. It requires thought, judgement and a balanced response, and because they are under such pressure these days, managers would rather do one thing or another. Today's business environment does not permit this; a 'both/and' response, skill or judgement is called for.

This makes managers uncomfortable. How do you: maintain quality, get it right first time, yet encourage new ideas and risk-taking; meet short term targets yet seek longer term competitive advantage; approve and encourage individualism yet grow teamwork; marry corporate and individual objectives; take initiatives in the market place and yet be highly responsive to events?

This is a genuine cry from the heart. Managers want leadership insights and skills but are often frustrated in their pursuit of them. Why? Very often because their organisations let them down with fickle corporate behaviours.

## FICKLE CORPORATE BEHAVIOURS

If you want to know why today's managers struggle with their leadership responsibilities, look at the fickle behaviours of their organisations.

Because of the erratic and unpredictable behaviour of today's markets, organisations could be forgiven for not wanting to be too explicit about their future goals; for ignoring people's needs when pushing hard for results, and valuing them only when they perform; for spreading doom and despondency when conditions turn against them, and becoming euphoric when they favour them; for complaining when there is no growth, and for complaining when there is astronomical growth!

Managers are constantly on the receiving end of confusing and inconsistent signals. They often don't know if their views, judgements and actions will receive backing. They often don't know what they have to do, against an ever changing back-drop, to demonstrate leadership. Small wonder that many give up in their attempts to become leaders as well as managers, they

perceive the struggle is too great.

What can organisations do? There are five major questions they need to ask themselves in order to respond meaningfully to the five issues outlined.

### MINI VISIONS IN SCARY SCENARIOS

Is there a clear, shared vision within the team/department/division or organisation that acts as a focus for activities and energies?.

A manager's world used to be under his or her control.

Nowadays, in a world that is both rational and irrational, how is it possible to establish any sort of control? How can managers exercise the practice of envisioning people against a background of ambiguities and uncertainties? The answer is that they must educate their people to love the predictable and to be excited and fascinated by the unpredictable. When sharing their vision of the future they need the confidence to know what is possible yet at the same time prepare their people for set-backs, disappointments and changes in direction.

In other words, as well as a statement of a longer term vision (which nowadays needs to be more than a statement of intent), managers need to focus on what is going to be different over shorter time frames. The achievement of mini visions towards a larger vision can sustain people's energies far more effectively because there is quicker proof of success, and people will only continue to follow leaders who are seen to be succeeding.

Today's managers need to re-think their approach to strategic planning. Unless they can think differently about how they intend to deliver their vision they'll either be too optimistic or too black and white in their envisioning. This can produce a subsequent loss of confidence from their people when their plans fail to materialise.

### VALUES AS A PLUMBLINE

Is there an explicit set of values which act as an arbiter and guide when decisions need to be made. Are these values 'lived out' and reinforced by senior managers? The 'living out', reinforcement and reward of corporate values are perhaps the most powerful ways of turning managers into leaders. They state the behaviours and attitudes every manager should exhibit when dealing with others. In short, they're the corporate plumbline. Leaders know that people take more notice of what you do than what you say. Many forward looking organisations now build their whole leadership development, succession planning, performance appraisal and compensation schemes around their corporate values. Managers quickly get the message that vision and values must go hand in hand.

### MANAGEMENT SKILLS

Do managers possess the necessary management skills to achieve results? Managers can only manage and lead if they have both management and leadership skills. Sounds obvious, but too often organisations provide insufficient training in both.

Unless managers can understand the basic disciplines and processes of management they will not have the confidence to lead, nor will they be respected or trusted. Today's managers need to be both specialists and generalists who understand and can manage both the micro and the macro issues and are comfortable at doing both.

### LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Do managers have the required leadership skills? There is ultimately one measurement of whether or not managers are leaders-'Is there anyone following them willingly?' A recent survey revealed that employees most want their managers to be; honest, forward-looking, inspiring, competent, fair-minded and supportive in their role as leaders. These are useful pointers for would be leaders, but they're not enough.

Today's managers also need exceptional interpersonal skills. As a result, organisations are putting more and more emphasis on self-awareness; coaching and counselling skills; facilitation skills; presentation skills; influencing skills; innovation and creativity skills; relationship building and team working skills.

Ultimately, success comes to leaders when they work with and alongside their people. Leadership can be taught. Organisations which are serious about their managers becoming leaders recognise this and invest as much time in leadership skills as they do in management skills.

### REWARDS AND PENALTIES

Are leadership, as well as management skills, rewarded or penalised by the organisation?

It's often said that what you reward is what you get. Yet so often there is a mis-match between corporate reward and compensation schemes and the results or behaviours sought. If organisations are serious about turning their managers into leaders there needs to be obvious reward for those who embrace and use leadership thinking, attitudes and skills, and penalties for those who disregard or go against them.

One way of communicating this is via the organisation's performance management scheme. If there are corporate values and a corporate mission, the individual's behaviours and achievement of objectives should be appraised in the light of them. If leadership is important for managers to exhibit, it must be appraised. The message should be clear: 'This is what we want to see as an organisation. Do these things and you'll be rewarded. Ignore them and you'll go unrewarded or even penalised'.

In today's hostile, competitive and ever changing markets, organisations need more from their managers than simply another day's work. This can only happen if organisations take seriously the issue of turning managers into leaders, so seriously that it is seen as the most important factor in their future success-which quite simply it is.