Back to the future
of leadership

IN UNCERTAIN TIMES, ORGANISATIONS MUST SEEK NEW WAYS TO NAVIGATE THE CHANGING BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT. HOWEVER, DEVELOPING EXISTING RATHER THAN NEW CAPABILITIES COULD PROVE THE MOST EFFECTIVE APPROACH

Business leaders often refer to a quote from Wayne Gretzky, the Canadian hockey player: "skate to where the puck is going, not where it has been". Yet the relatively short lifespan of many Fortune 500 companies reminds us that it is not easy to either see the need for change or to make the change happen. And the larger and more successful the organisation, the harder it can be to change, and change successfully.

In their excellent book, Leadership 2030 (2014), Vielmetter and Sell use a PESTLE framework to identify the environmental factors which will create the business environment of 2030. They describe the following 'megatrends':

- Globalisation 2.0
- Environmental Crisis
- Individualism and Value Pluralism
- The Digital Era
- Demographic Change
- Technology Convergence

These megatrends are creating huge disruption, with consequent opportunities and threats for existing, successful business models. Organisations are being compelled to make bold decisions and embark on the challenging journey to take future-focused strategies from the whiteboard to reality.

EVERYONE IS A LEADER
To deliver the change required – organisations are becoming less hierarchical and more agile, with many 'management control' tasks handled by automation and AI. Leadership is therefore becoming a necessary skill for managers and specialists at all levels – a significant part of everybody's role being to create value for the organisation and to keep the rate of evolution ahead of the market.

But do we need new disciplines of leadership to deliver in this new reality? The requirement for leadership development will certainly expand to ensure competencies are available to all. As we automate

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more and more routine tasks, there will also be an incentive for people to show how they add value in other areas – expanding their influence into activities such as innovation and relationship building – contributing and "selling" high-quality ideas from bottom-up.

WHAT WE ALREADY KNOW

The critical issue in creating useful change is gaining commitment from others to support and drive this change. However, as the business environment evolves at a faster rate, the rate of human evolution lags. In terms of leadership development, this is perhaps good news. In our pursuit of the new, and our need to involve more people in organisations, we can rely on some tried and tested concepts and competencies.

If we cluster the attributes from Vielmetter and Sell's research, we are left with a familiar list of competencies:

- **Contextual Thinking:** Contextual awareness and conceptual thinking, creativity, intellectual openness and curiosity, digital wisdom, living with uncertainty, innovating ethically

- **Collaboration:** Cross-collaboration and new forms of collaboration

- **Manage Diversity:** Create diverse teams, connect generations and cultures

- **Lead Change:** Adapt people and organisation, shape culture, visionary communication

- **Loyalty:** Create and redefine loyalty, remote leadership, manage extended networks, work virtually

- **Integrity:** Integrity and reputation management, walk the talk

Looking at this list, only 10-20% of these competencies are 'new'. To get back to basics, what do leaders need to provide so that their colleagues can give their best and be motivated? Anthony Robbins built upon Maslow's well-known hierarchy of needs to define six human needs:

- Certainty
- Variety
- Significance
- Love and connection
- Growth and contribution

If we believe that these needs will continue to evolve slowly, then existing leadership lessons and models will endure. 50 years ago, Peter Drucker thought so, writing in The Practice of Management:

"The earliest writers on the subject, in ancient Greece or ancient Israel, knew all that has ever been known about leadership. The scores of books, papers and speeches on leadership in the business enterprise that come out every year have little to say on the subject that was not already old when the Prophets spoke, and Aeschylus wrote. The first systematic book on leadership: the Kyropaidia of Xenophon is still the best book on the subject." The business environment has certainly changed, but have human needs changed so dramatically since Drucker's statement?

BACK TO.........

Of course, the world is changing. The puck is on the move, faster than ever before. However, organisations are still filled with humans, with enduring human needs. Therefore, while leadership is becoming more pervasive and less hierarchical, we don't need to start from scratch to succeed. Instead, we can build our focus on developing more people with the ability to demonstrate known core competencies of leadership in order to create useful change together.

To find out more about how to enhance the performance of your leadership, email Paul Blackhurst at **pbl@mannaz.com** ∎

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