

The era of cross cultural leadership gives rise to new breed of company captain

Debbie Goodman-Bhyat, IRC South Africa | Oct. 29, 2015

This dearth of captains who can steer the ship in calm waters and equally navigate the treacherous oceans of our volatile global and inter-connected economy can be seen from the rise in the leadership development industry worldwide. This, to support companies throughout the world who wrestle with the ongoing challenge of ensuring they have the right people driving their businesses forward.

And their concern is not misplaced.

Various research studies and surveys have consistently confirmed the importance of having leaders who can motivate, inspire and effect positive change. Recent research from one of the top global business institutions, London Business School, indicates that organisational performance is directly impacted by the mindset of the leader. And findings from Jack Hammer's latest annual Executive Report, conducted among a large representative sample of senior executives across a range of industries, confirmed that the vast majority of them would consider changing jobs to get away from a poor leader. Considering the sometimes desperate measures required to retain top talent, this should throw up a flashing crimson light.

More than 97% of respondents in the Jack Hammer research said it was of the utmost importance for them to respect and work well with their direct superiors in an organisation, and that leadership concerns would definitely contribute to a decision to look at career options elsewhere.



Leadership as a determinant of the success of a company has never been more pronounced than it is today, and it is crystal clear throughout both the public and the private sectors that bad leadership is a recipe for bad business and dismal performance.

91% of respondents said organisational culture such as work cohesion, teamwork, trust and collaboration – or rather the lack thereof – would be cause enough to consider alternative job opportunities.

Great leaders earn great reputations and attract great people. This ultimately translates into the bottom line, which is

why there is a clear commercial imperative for great leadership. A leader who is not able to galvanise a team will soon see productivity, motivation, retention and business suffer.

It is all good and well to know what your company needs. But in an environment where great leaders are few and far between, and come at a premium, how do you ensure that your company does not perish under the guidance of a drunken sailor who is the captain in name only?

Can great leaders be made?

The number of leadership development programmes on offer globally is almost as big as the actual pool of leaders, and one can be forgiven for harbouring a certain amount of scepticism about the effectiveness of these programmes. Although they have responded to (and are profiting from) the obvious need in the market, still the questions linger: Can great leaders really be made, or is leadership a serendipitous accident of DNA and circumstance? Will investing in such leadership development not merely amount to a costly exercise with little to no result in the long run? Will enrolling your prospective

leaders in such a programme actually turn them into competent – and hopefully excellent - leaders?

The changing leadership paradigm

The answer to these questions can be found in the common denominator of most of these programmes: almost without exception, they develop the skills and provide the tools which enable individuals with the underlying potential to be transformed into people who can harness the collective talent and skills of an organisation and create a snowball effect.

But these programmes also indicate a marked shift in who is considered a leader. Gone are the days of the autocratic bosses, who commanded from their ivory towers and struck fear into the hearts of the minions. With the workforce being more empowered and aware of their rights and options, today's executives are called upon to be leaders in the true sense of the word. And certainly, these kinds of leaders can be developed given the correct vision and the right tools.

"Leadership is unlocking people's potential to become better." - Bill Bradley

Leadership development trends

That there is very clearly a recognition that great leadership skill is a top priority for organisations globally.

In response to this need and the imperative to create a new generation of leaders, not "bosses", Leadership Development Programmes are seeing an upswing in popularity. In most multi-national corporations, the increase in the number of sponsored MBAs and Leadership Development programmes at various business schools are an indication of the long term investment that companies believe will yield dividends, and then there are a plethora of shorter workshops, and 3 – 5 day courses, offered either in-house or at tertiary institutions.

Globally, some interesting approaches are emerging.

- **ENDOGENOUS RESOURCING** is premised on the idea that leaders are empowered to unlock the hidden strengths of their teams. Power and decision-making are transitioned from being the sole responsibility of the leader, to the responsibility of the wider team.

- **MULTIPLIERS OR THE MULTIPLIER EFFECT** is a style of leadership which seeks to harness the wisdom, insight, knowledge and strength of the broader team. By leveraging that, the entire team becomes stronger and more powerful. It points to specific styles and behaviours that either multiply or diminish behaviour of others. When diminished, a team will operate beneath its capacity, with members stressed and afraid, and only doing as they are told without feeling empowered to contribute their ideas.
- **SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT** moves from control-and-command style to a more democratic style of leadership.
- **360-DEGREE FEEDBACK** is described by the Center for Creative Leadership as a method of systematically collecting opinions about an individual's performance from a wide range of co-workers, including peers, direct reports, the boss, the boss's peers — along with people outside the organisation, such as customers. The benefit of collecting data of this kind is that the leader gets to see and is then able to respond to a panorama of perceptions rather than just self-perception, which affords a more complete picture. Ultimately, the approach helps organisations create a common leadership language and a consistent, sustainable feedback process at multiple levels through the company.

“All the tools are heading in the same direction: Leaders are no longer expected to be superstars. Instead, they must be the creators of superstar teams.” – Debbie Goodman-Bhyat

Genesis of the leadership revolution

This change in our approach to leadership became necessary as a result of the vastly different context in which we find ourselves in 2015. The world has changed so radically, and so much more is expected of leaders who need to be able to juggle several different generations working together, as well as the demands for not only technical expertise, but also mastery of the long-neglected, now so highly prized 'soft-skills'.



In the past decade or so, the success of organisations and leaders has been analysed and studied to within an inch of its life, and data is increasingly and consistently emerging about how great leadership is a definitive and key determinant of the overall growth and achievement of organisations.

To reduce the gap between the ideal of 'optimal' leadership and the reality of scarcity and lack that exists across the board in all sectors, an entire industry of leadership development programmes and courses has been born. And it is growing because there is a real belief and understanding now that real leaders are not simply dropped on this Earth, with innate qualities which automatically reveal them as the anointed few.

Instead, leaders are created just as any high-performance athlete, artist and professional is created – through hard work, dedication and training. As with these top performers in their respective fields, leaders may be born with an underlying talent, but unless this talent is honed and trained and enabled with the correct tools, its potential will never be realised. For those born with leadership qualities, if they don't become self-aware to know what specifically it is that they do or need to do to make them great leaders, theirs will be a missed opportunity to either cultivate their own leadership or replicate it in others.

Conclusion

It has been proven beyond any doubt that great leadership is the key variable for individual and organisational success. It is not merely about shareholder return and value, but about realising the individual potential and opportunity of all in our society. It is

in everyone's interest that there develops a greater understanding around leadership, and that we cultivate and work on leadership as a developmental skill.

If we can transition from understanding a leader to be the smartest person in the room, the one with all the answers and the brightest ideas, to the one who is able to leverage the capacity of a team, we will be creating a new momentum on a micro and macro scale. Ultimately, the really good news in a country where not a day goes by without the dearth of our leadership capacity being bemoaned, is that leaders can be developed. An entire industry has been created to do just that, and to provide those with the potential with the skills and tools to make a real difference.