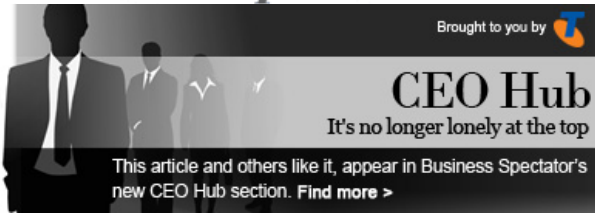


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Leadership: Intellectually simple, behaviourally complex

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Leadership is not clouded in mystique. In a 'market-driven, culture-led' business, it is the market, or customer, that determines what to do; and it is the company's culture that shapes the 'how'. So far, so good.

From this, effective C-suite executives synergise what this means for their business (direction); prioritise what needs to be done (focus); know what they need to do within, across, and outside the organisation to achieve this (connectivity); and then lead with positive impact with his or her own teams (engagement).

The issue is that leadership may be intellectually simple but it is, behaviourally, complex.

It is not only intellect that determines leadership – after all IQ is not EQ. Effective leaders usually understand, deeply, the significance of symbolic action. True leadership also demands certain qualities. If we define leadership as "getting things done through people", most of us would want to add that leaders:

- Act ethically, morally, and responsibly
- Create a cohesive, inclusive and well-functioning team
- Foster trust in the leader and the organisation
- Enable people to enjoy, belong and be fulfilled
- Bring shared success to the business and its people

Leadership is highly individual and leaders make important business decisions in their personal way. Leadership reflects who you are, enacting persona. It relies on listening to your moral voice, following your inner compass for success and contentment, while leveraging your strengths.

Peter Drucker, in *The Effective Executive*, said: "making strengths productive is, fundamentally, an attitude expressed in behaviour. It is, fundamentally, respect for the person – one's own, as well as others. It is a value-system in action. But it is again 'learning through doing' and self-development through practice. In making strengths productive, the executive integrates individual purpose and organisation needs, individual capacity and organisation results, individual achievement and organisation opportunity."

Yet, because leadership is so personal, there can be unintended consequences. As we know only too well, people pay attention to what the leader actually does; and the consistency between 'say' and 'do' sends a range of signals. This can be both good and bad. How many times has a casual remark by a CEO had an effect – both up and down the organisation? Have you seen situations where an executive's strengths are so overused that they develop into weaknesses or blind spots?

The question then becomes: how to overcome leader blind spots and resistance to change. I have found that people do not resist change, as such, what they actually resist is loss. They cling to mindsets and practices (often unconscious, and not necessarily, rational) to protect their view of what has led to their success, or protect their position. They can be successful despite certain factors, not because of them.

To break down defensive or personal patterns may require a degree of 'pain' for the executive that, then, sets the change process in motion. When the value of the prospective change outweighs the value of doing nothing, the issue gets attention.

Frank and constructive feedback, from carefully selected, respected colleagues, is often the catalyst to gain the executive's attention. What follows, with the right guidance, is reflection and the testing of new behaviour.

As Erich Fromm said, "You have to stop in order to change direction."

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