

Excerpt from

**New leadership for
innovative organisations
models, ideas and challenges**

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Introduction

'When you become a leader, success is all about growing others.' (Jack Welch)

The challenge

Leaders in every educational organisation are facing enormous and new challenges. What worked in the past won't work now, and increasingly when your staff look to you for the answers you can only respond with more questions.

In the new age:

- job security is replaced by rapid changes in policy and goals
- there is constant pressure to innovate whilst not losing control of the basics
- staff need to be helped to see a way through tighter financial goals and increasingly higher targets
- organisational survival can no longer be taken for granted.

The current climate is increasingly VUCA – volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous – and that requires new ideas and new skills in order to succeed and inspire. And not the established competencies that suited the pre-VUCA age.

If this description resonates, if you are finding motivating your staff increasingly difficult, and if you are looking for ideas to help your organisation take a fresh approach, then this book, and the associated workshops and leadership programs we offer, are for you.

Our approach

Our approach is based around action not theory, around living experience not abstractions, drawing on our extensive experience and research around the world about transforming organisations through new ideas and practices.

We have designed the book so you can use it in a number of ways. For instance, you may wish to read the book on your own, to stimulate your thinking about leading innovation. Or you may wish to use multiple copies of the book for in-house, structured professional conversations.

If you would like to use the book within one of our interactive workshops, details about our workshops and leadership programs are provided at the end of the book.

Acknowledgements

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We also wish to thank our colleague and knowledge management expert Clint Smith for his friendly and fearless advice.

We look forward to assisting you to develop your new leadership and improve innovation in your organisations.

John Mitchell & Nigel Paine

Engage staff, share knowledge, lead by acclaim

Some key ideas in this section:

Engage staff

- There are huge advantages to be gained from listening to staff and their concerns. (article 1.2)
- Engagement with staff, customers and visitors is a key indicator for success in this highly competitive twenty-first century economic environment. (article 1.2)
- Systems, processes and technology only get you so far. The critical difference is the difference between an engaged workforce and an indifferent one. (article 1.2)

Share knowledge

- Sharing insights and expertise is a positive reinforcement of how good you are, but increasingly it is the only way of keeping on top of change. (article 1.1)
- Try to empower some of your people, making them feel knowledgeable and significant contributors, and make others feel that they are part of an expert organisation that openly shares its expertise. (article 1.1)
- If knowledge is shared, people feel better about their company, performance improves, retention goes up whilst new talent is attracted to work for you. (article 1.1)

Lead by acclaim

- Become a leader by acclaim, not by appointment. (article 1.2)
- Leaders need to make it clear to staff what they as leaders believe in. (article 1.2)
- All leaders need to reflect on what they want to be known for and remembered for. (article 1.2)

Bringing your experts out of the closet

Nigel Paine

I read the McKinsey Quarterly (www.mckinseyquarterly.com/) regularly when it pops into my inbox. It is always interesting and insightful and sometimes fascinating. What impresses me is their access to thousands of companies all round the world to track trends, and the simple analysis that follows. We are left with the impression that this is an organisation that is global, knowledgeable and on the button. This is the reason why McKinsey's gives this data away. It also keeps the company in the forefront of the minds of tens of thousands of executives while enhancing their reputation. Advertising could not buy that!

If you read the small print you will notice that the contributors are consultants based at McKinsey's offices around the world. I would guess that this is all work in progress. What staff find out in the normal course of their consulting, is written up and shared. Tacit knowledge becomes explicit and everyone wins: the consultants get huge recognition; the extra effort is minimal; the company increases its credibility and authority in the business community, and the humble reader learns something new and useful. It is a great model.

Sharing expertise and knowledge

- All organisations know more than they realise.
- Sharing insights and expertise is a positive reinforcement of how good you are, but increasingly it is the only way of keeping on top of change.
- The trick is to get people automatically to share insights, ideas or market knowledge rather than to have to search it out.
- There has to be either reward or recognition for doing this.

It struck me that many other organisations could use the same logic for their own staff, and in return begin to generate a knowledge sharing environment at minimal cost and maximum benefit. For example, when a successful project finishes, ask a couple of the key players to jot down the major lessons for the company. If a couple of executives return from a major conference, get them to highlight the biggest products, the latest innovations or the key players.

If you like this idea then here are my ten top tips for making it work effectively.

Ten top tips

- 1 Give it some prominence on your intranet. Drive staff into this space if at all possible.
- 2 Make sure that the CEO makes a regular contribution: what are his/her top trends, which companies interest him/her, what are the products to watch? A quick Q and A can be the way in. It can be done in 15 minutes flat.
- 3 Highlight the contributors. They deserve recognition. If they get recognition, others will want to become contributors.
- 4 Pick the areas that are of interest to the largest number of staff as well as highlighting little known pockets of excellence and success.
- 5 Start a debate. Ask for responses; ask for staff with similar experience and knowledge to comment in the same space.

- 6 If a lot of comment is generated, edit it into a succinct summary that can be taken in very quickly and can be promoted as the latest and best information on a given subject.
- 7 Challenge different areas of the organisation to contribute, and plan the contributions as far in advance as possible. For instance if you know a major conference is coming up in several months, make sure that the key contributors are lined up and ready to respond long before the event, and get the information back immediately they return. You could also experiment by suggesting that they blog direct from the venue to give a sense of immediacy and drama.
- 8 It needs a highly committed but light touch editor to make sure it happens regularly. And the core messages should emanate from somewhere at the top of the organisation. If you do this, its significance is self-evident.
- 9 Keep it short and punchy. If it cannot be read in a few minutes then edit it down so it can.
- 10 Illustrate and decorate! Include photographs and the email address of contributors. Use a diagram or a chart to substitute for long-winded descriptions. Highline web or intranet links for those that want to follow up or explore further and include a place where immediate comments can be posted.

This is really about people not knowledge. You are trying to empower some staff by, making them feel knowledgeable and significant contributors, while making others feel that they are part of an expert organisation that openly shares its expertise. Therefore, there are huge benefits back to the organisation that are not obvious at first. Some of those relate to personal growth and development. Staff will stay in organisations where they feel they are learning and growing; they will leave companies where they feel this does not happen or no one cares if it does or does not. Staff who are part of a place that demonstrates its competence and expertise will inevitably feel better about belonging, and remain loyal.

It does need persistence and commitment, however, as most of the people who will make this happen will do it on top of the day job. You need that before you start, as beginning and then running out of steam is worse than not starting. This will build expectations and therefore it has to be followed through.

You could argue that this is the biggest win:win that it is possible to have. If knowledge is shared, people feel better about their company, performance improves, retention goes up whilst new talent is attracted to work for you. Shouldn't this be part of every HR team's agenda?

Questions and topics for discussion

- 1 How would you rate your current ability to share knowledge, insights and ideas?
- 2 What are the key pieces of knowledge that you think should be shared in your organisation?
- 3 What sort of knowledge sharing environment would best work in your organisation?

" The trick is to get people automatically to share insights, ideas or market knowledge rather than to have to search it out."

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