TALENT LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING COMMUNITY EVENT:
GETTING REAL ON LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT: WHAT'S WORKING AND HOW CAN WE IMPROVE?

On 28th June 2023, CRF hosted an online discussion where members shared their experiences and approaches relating to leadership development. Chaired by CRF Research Director Gillian Pillans, this session focused on how participants are updating their leadership frameworks to reflect future business challenges, what really works in developing leaders, and how these insights can be applied in practice. This summary shares key insights from the discussion.

CRF'S NEW PARADIGMS FOR LEADERSHIP POST-PANDEMIC

Gillian Pillans shared CRF's framework, New Paradigms for Leadership Post-Pandemic, noting that it focuses on emerging leadership capabilities rather than ongoing foundational aspects of leadership. The key themes from this paradigm are outlined below:

How Leaders Set Direction

- Outside in thinking: it is more important than ever that leaders bring what is happening externally into the organisation.
- Adaptive strategy anchored to purpose, which needs to happen at an increasing pace.
- Making sense of complexity: the business world is becoming more complex and leaders have to play an important role in sensemaking for the organisation.
- Leading in an age of activism; leaders increasingly need to respond to social trends on behalf of the organisation.

Building the Organisation Infrastructure for Rapid Execution

- Building capacity for agile capability, such as thinking about how decision making can be delegated to be as close to the customer as possible.
- Developing a culture that enables experimentation and learning, underpinned by psychological safety.

The New Relational Skillsets:

- Leading remote and hybrid teams, which continues to be a challenge for organisations, with high levels of turnover in organisations where employees are asked to return to the office.
- Leaders as enablers of others. There is a continued demand for leaders to adopt a 'coaching' style which brings out the best in people, rather than being the person who always has the answers to the challenges the organisation is facing.
- Fostering inclusivity and wellbeing, where people feel they belong, have a voice and are able to contribute.

Participants then reflected on the above paradigm and discussed what they are doing in their own organisations to develop leaders. Key points from the discussion are shared below, followed by three case studies.

- **Leadership is increasingly about driving and inspiring good performance,** rather than delivering on behalf of other people.
- **Leadership is not only for the most senior leaders.** Several respondents shared that they have created new leadership frameworks or development programmes which include all employees.
- **The 'right' mindset enables leaders.** One respondent shared that there was a greater improvement in capabilities when they also explored the mindset of leaders (particularly fostering outside-in thinking, humility and curiosity). Another participant shared their multi-year journey in encouraging a growth mindset amongst their leaders (further detailed below).
- **Creating a psychologically safe environment is a critical part of leadership.** Respondents shared they are conducting interventions related to psychological safety and encouraging people to be their best selves at work.
- **It is important for leaders to bring in external experiences,** with one participant noting that they send their leaders on 'learning expeditions' to explore new areas and bring their knowledge back into the organisation and their role.
- **Organisations should have realistic expectations of leaders.** Whilst there may be ideal models and frameworks, organisations need to work with leaders at the level where they currently are and account for differences in personalities.

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- **Taking a more 'human' approach can be helpful.** One respondent shared that they approach their leaders as ordinary people for whom models, theories, and frameworks may not always resonate. They have therefore taken a 'back to basics' approach, centred around encouraging leaders to have good quality conversations and check in with people. They want leaders to be perceived as people, and create an environment where employees want to perform, rather than feeling like they 'have to perform.'
- **Leadership is context specific;** different businesses and different parts of the business have different leadership needs. For example, one participant in the hospitality sector shared that, as their industry generally has high turnover, it's important that their leaders make sure that people feel included. Leaders will also naturally have different personalities and preferred styles, which should be accounted for.

CASE STUDY:

FOSTERING LEADERSHIP IN AN INSURANCE BUSINESS

One participant shared that their organisation had conducted a large piece of work on defining and articulating leadership capability, aiming to shift assumptions about what leadership should look like. This was linked to a transformation the organisation was undertaking towards becoming more agile and digital. As a result, the organisation created a leadership framework focusing on three areas:

- Creating a shift towards a more empowering 'servant' type leadership (rather than top down, hierarchical leadership)
- A focus on purpose-driven leadership, where leaders can articulate the 'why' and link to other people's purpose
- Fostering inclusive leadership

The participant emphasised that this was not only targeted at the top leadership community, as their organisation believed that everybody should be demonstrating leadership in their own ways. This could mean leading the business, leading networks, or leading themselves. Since then, the model has also been updated due to contextual changes, including the growing need for leaders to balance empowering others to act with providing direction when needed.

CASE STUDY:

CREATING A PEOPLE LEADER FRAMEWORK AT A PUBLIC SECTOR ORGANISATION

One respondent shared their organisation's drive to create a new definition of leadership, borne from a new vision of their organisational values. Post-pandemic, the organisation has increasingly put people at the heart of their approaches and adopted a more 'servant leader' approach. This included creating a new people leader framework, relevant for all colleagues and based on the following five principles:

1. Encourage everyone to connect to theorganisation's purpose
2. Drive and inspire good performance
3. Create a caring and inclusive environment
4. Collaborate to support others
5. Continuously develop and adapt

Launched in 2022, this framework has been embedded into the organisation's performance process and will soon also be embedded into recruitment.

CASE STUDY:

INCREASING GROWTH MINDSET AMONGST LEADERS

One respondent shared their multi-year approach to encouraging a growth mindset amongst their leaders. This process began with the top 150 leaders and is being cascaded throughout the organisation. This involves providing consistent messaging on the importance of learning, growth, experimenting and curiosity. It also includes providing leaders with ideas for quick wins, such as shifting conversations through asking for 'advice' rather than 'feedback,' as well as tools to create psychological safety and trust.

crf **SAVE THE DATE**

The next TL&L Community event will take place on 13th September 2023 with the topic to be confirmed.

If you have any further questions or comments, please contact Senior Projects and Events Executive, Will Pemberton, *will@crforum.co.uk*

These community event summary notes were prepared by **Jo Nayler, Senior Research Executive at CRF.**