



# The Human Dimension

## ***THE LEADER WITHIN***

***August 2007***

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*"We help both people and productivity flourish by developing a positive culture of shared leadership."*

We find improved performance is the reward for your investing in people.

The emphasis in THE LEADER WITHIN is on the changes and growth we make within ourselves, as leadership is basically a personal growth experience over time.

*'For things to change first I must change.'*

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### ***Shaping the Culture of Business Teams:***

In a recent coaching conversation with Tim, a member of a senior management team, he asked me how he could help shape the culture of his business team. Even though he does not lead the team he saw significant opportunities to improve effectiveness and performance and was wondering what the process might look like. Remember the culture is defined as 'the way we do things around here', is often assumed and is what really happens when no one is looking.

Here are some of the challenges Tim identified:

- Lack of trust, openness and limited communication.
- Working independently from one another.
- No time spent on strategic matters - a lot of crisis management.
- Too process-oriented and unclear about future destinations.
- No personal ownership of a current change process underway.
- Dissatisfaction with the prevailing leadership style.
- Reacting and using 'develop a paper on that' to progress important business issues. Decision-making is often focused on the short term and there is duplication of effort.

There were other challenges, but you get the idea. Do any of these resonate with you?

Tim asked me if I could provide an article to show how he might be more proactive in contributing to the solution and to creating a very different business team culture. I did provide some reading material and also thought

this newsletter would help him and perhaps others of our clients and colleagues facing similar challenges.

Here are my thoughts on how you approach this situation.

1. Start with the end in mind (attributed to Stephen Covey). What is it that you want to create? What do you expect things to be like when the process is over? What kind of culture do you wish to have?

2. Recognise that you are wanting to change things about the way the group functions and does its work. Not everyone is going to welcome your ideas and enthusiasm to make 'improvements' nor will everyone want to collaborate. Therefore, identify others who can recognise things could be different and begin to share your perceptions of what is not working.

3. Establish the principles which will form the basis of the proposed change in the way work is performed in the senior business group. For instance, principles like:

a. The process adopted must reflect the intended outcomes. For instance ... there is little point if you want a collaborative culture if the process and approach you adopt is highly directive.

b. Walk the talk. Understand the way you behave needs to reflect the adopted values of the group. Trust, for instance, needs to be built in your interactions and communication if you wish to see others become more engaged over time.

c. For things to change, first I must change. What might you need to change? For instance it might be something like ...

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If you are feeling agitated, annoyed or frustrated and this guides your interactions, the result will be more conflict, disharmony and lack of unity.

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What about your own approach? Do you need to change the way you communicate or convey your ideas? Do you listen really well and understand the needs, concerns and feelings of your colleagues? Do you have the energy and commitment to want to make a difference?

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How are you seen by your manager/colleagues? Do they trust you? Are you valued as a positive contributor? What is your current reputation and how will this impede or assist you to be an agent of change?

4. Identify what the gap looks like at present. How big a task is it to create a different business team culture? One effective way to do this is to ask others their perspectives - such as "How well do you think we are working as a team?" "Are there any things you think we could do better?" Once you have a sense of the current gap and begin the process of finding out the perspectives of your colleagues, the next step is to develop a plan.

The plan might look like this:

a) Find or create an opportunity to share your views on the current situation. Extend this as an invitation for others to contribute, share ideas, debate and explore. Avoid asking for, or giving, solutions at this first part of the plan for change. Quick solutions are often an attempt to fix something or avoid potential conflict, when there is no agreement on the underlying causes.

b) Find out the current level of willingness for change. Who thinks what? What you are working towards is an agreement (although not everyone will necessarily want to move at the same time - this is OK), that we could do better. You will want to know how much willingness there is in the group to spend some energy improving things. Of course you volunteer to contribute, but without creating the impression you are going to tell everyone what to do or that because it is your initiative it is something to improve your status!

c) Ask for input and check what others on the team might think about the current situation. The more you understand what each person thinks about the current situation before you share your views publicly, the more likely it is you will communicate in a way which accounts for the varying degrees of willingness to change the current status quo.

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### **Call to Action:**

If you want to explore the need for change with your colleagues in your business team ask these five coaching questions and then listen carefully and respectfully to their responses for the underlying causes.

#### 1. The situation:

Describe the different aspects of the current situation as you see it? Identify the leadership, management, team and personal challenges being faced in this management group (and other work teams) at the present time.

#### 2. Problems and current challenges:

What specifically are the problems you/this team are currently facing? Explain in detail the specific nature of the main areas of concern to you.

#### 3. Goals and shared aspirations:

What are some of your important goals and strategies you think are important?

#### 4. Success:

What would you expect things to be like in the future, if an effective response was made? How would you expect things to have changed and what would be different?

#### 5. Costs to you:

What is it costing you/this team to leave the situation as it currently exists? Think in terms of money, time, resources, people, energy, results or opportunities lost.

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