

# CORPORATE BLENDING MACHINE

WHERE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT, EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND BUSINESS STRATEGY HAVE BEEN CONSIDERED SEPARATELY, IT IS SIMPLY INSUFFICIENT TO TRY AND FORCE PEOPLE AND BUSINESS STRATEGIES TOGETHER AND HOPE FOR THE BEST. BLENDING YOUR PEOPLE AND BUSINESS STRATEGIES, IS NOT A FRUIT SMOOTHY, IT IS A STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE.

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The interconnectedness of a complex organisation is closer than has previously been appreciated. Ultimately, in a trading business, or a service organisation in the commercial or non-profit sector, people are all you have. All of the company's resources are worthless without the intelligent, cooperative effort of the people you appoint, and the need for continual reinvention is arguably increasing. Established ways of working can become redundant without adaptation and innovation, especially in the light of rapid changes in IT, transport, communications and so on. Moreover, with a whole generation entering the workplace that has grown up with social media, expectations are high of an engaging leadership style. Millennials are accustomed to communication through conversations, not receiving orders. They expect feedback, encouragement and teamwork. The result is that leadership development, people development and business strategy need to be fully integrated, and considered as a whole.

High levels of engagement give a company essential competitive edge, but are ineffective unless the strategy and systems are sound. This is more than just a bid for a 'Best Place to Work In' award, though you might find yourself winning such an accolade, all the same. The logic is supported by empirical evidence on employee engagement; and by scientific findings in the emerging discipline of social neuroscience. Initiatives such as 'Engage for Success' among many others show the commercial returns from an engaged and well-equipped workforce. At the micro level, renowned authors in the field, such as Daniel Goleman and others, have demonstrated that

highly effective leaders literally alter the chemistry in their own and in the brains of people around them, unleashing people's energy, commitment and creativity.

My own studies have come to the same conclusions. After years of research and application in businesses, I have developed a method of assessing the level at which organisations, and individual leaders, operate: from Level 1, which corresponds to apathetic or destructive behaviours, through to Level 5, which is unbounded and passionate. A particularly significant shift occurs between Level 3 - orderly 'command and control'; and Level 4 - high-engagement and performance. To move to this elevated level of operation, leaders need to behave in a way that fosters this culture. For some, this will come naturally; for others, especially those brought up in a 'command and control' mentality, the necessary shift can be profound. The latter will have to listen patiently; learn from the mistakes of a direct report, rather than chastise him or her for it; accept that not everything can be measured or anticipated, and encourage teamwork and a wider sense of purpose. At each level, there is a typical language and set of keywords people use. It will not be possible to operate at Level 4 when Level 3 narratives are dominant in one's mind.

At Level 3, still quite common among business managers, common internalised scripts include: "I should be in charge, I should take control, I cannot delegate as no one is as capable as I am". Level 4 is characterised by thought processes such as: "I have a purpose in my life, I feel energised

when interacting with my colleagues, I make a difference in the world by serving others". The role of the HR director in this new paradigm is central. It's a thoroughly commercial role, but it is not a move away from a focus on people and relationships. Quite the contrary, the latest research directs us towards a deeper understanding of the human dynamics that lie at the heart of a successful enterprise. The opportunities are considerable, but so are the responsibilities. It is becoming increasingly possible, through internal analytics, to assess the organisational impact of leadership programmes: of the people appointed, and of the development that they have been through. HR directors will properly be held to account for what can be quite significant investments. ●

Professor Vlatka Hlupic is the author of *The Management Shift: How to Harness the Power of People and Transform Your Organisation for Sustainable Success*.



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