

WHY LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT FAILS AND HOW TO FIX IT!

Background

Worth more than \$50 billion globally, leadership development is big business. Good leadership is critical to organisational success and the mental and physical health of its employees. In 2018¹ only 7% of 500 global executives surveyed believed that their organisation develops their global leaders effectively.

This research reviewed more than a decade of academic and practitioner research to explore the reasons why leadership development fails and identifies how we can make it more effective to help individuals and organisations thrive.

Issue 1 – There is a problem with the way we conceptualise 'leadership'

- We all have our own definitions of what leadership is and how to do it
- There are too many theories and models for leaders to remember and apply
- There is no blueprint for success as a leader
- The C Suite sets the tone for leadership in every organisation meaning that their styles predominate and filter downwards
- Global and public leaders seem to be fundamentally flawed
- Poor leadership continues to be rewarded
- Whether we like it or not, it's still a 'masculine' concept

Issue 2 – People's expectations of leaders has both changed and hasn't changed

- We still want 'heroic' leaders to be warriors / rescuers / protectors, and yet we want compassion, authenticity and love as well
- We seemingly want the impossible – intelligence, morality, ethical judgement, humility, courage... and many other 'virtues'
- We need inter-connected globally thinking leaders, and yet we promote locally with leaders looking inwards not outwards
- Historically many leaders and organisations have 'stolen from the future', thinking in the short-term and creating problems for future generations and future leaders²

Issue 3 – The vast majority of leadership development trainings are flawed

- Learning, application and habit change takes time; most leadership development programmes are days long not weeks or years – they are too short
- Leadership trainings are fragmented – a bit here, a course there, rather than holistic and integrated with lived experience
- Leadership is seen as operational rather than strategic – organisations pay for the 'now' rather than investing in the future of their leaders for the longer term

Issue 4 – Despite understanding how people learn, we still don't...

- Apply psychological concepts effectively such as social identity theories, the psychological contract, psychological safety or nudge
- Make self and others' awareness the cornerstone of development
- Value discomfort and help leaders to s-t-r-e-t-c-h themselves
- Lead change or do change management effectively or well
- Make learning or change easy when it can be

Issue 5 – Organisations don't understand results from all perspectives

- There's an over-focus on the 'easy' numbers and metrics
- 'Soft skills' are under-valued, especially by those who lack them
- How people feel is related to everything – from productivity to emotional and physical health to customer satisfaction, to retention and even longevity, and yet leaders still ignore the power and importance of emotions – both their own and other people's
- Engagement surveys are often used very poorly

We must stop stealing from the future!²

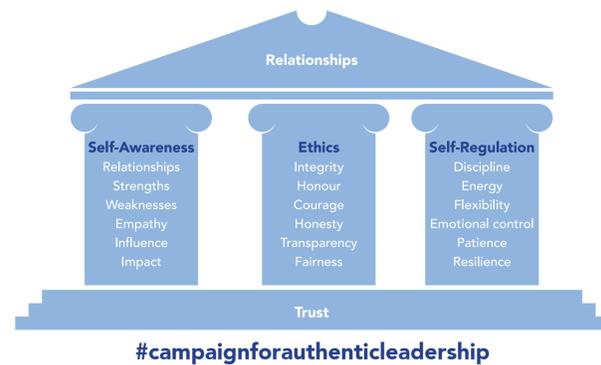
- Every unethical decision any leader makes creates problems
- Only by leaders (locally, internationally and globally) collaborating together rather than competing is the human race going to be able to survive
- All organisations and their leaders need to understand 'systemic thinking' – how every system is inter-connected to every other system: plastics, water, global warming, food production, tectonic plates, tourism, finance, economics, aging, decarbonisation, media, leadership, digitisation etc.

A 2015 US organisational leadership survey found that 71% of respondents said their leaders are not ready to lead their organizations into the future³.

"The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn." **Alvin Toffler, US writer and futurist**

Is Authentic Leadership^{4,5,6} the answer?

Arguably, it is, as it encourages leaders to be their 'best selves' and lead ethically with courage and compassion from a position of self and others' awareness.



Effective Leadership Development Programmes

1. Are long enough – 1 to 3 years
2. Understand how people and performance are related, every day and in every way and in every interaction a leader has
3. Take a systemic, inter-connected, global approach to issues
4. Help leaders to 'be' (their best selves) as well as 'do' leadership
5. Understand that emotions are critical and focus on developing emotional and social intelligence as well as cognitive intelligence. The concept of 'cognitive fitness' embraces all of these
6. Think of leadership development as being like a physical fitness and nutrition programme: it's daily, ongoing and lifelong
7. Invest in leaders for the longer term – not just for present needs
8. Encourage collaboration with other organisations
9. Build in other skills and knowledge such as psychology, neurology, leading change, finance, marketing, motivation and engagement
10. Find ways of measuring and valuing all knowledge, skills and experience, inc. 'soft' skills

What is Cognitive Fitness?

Flexibility



Different Strategies

- Practical / Theoretical
- Positive / Negative
- Collaborative / Competitive
- Strategic / Detail
- Creative / Logical
- Different Time-frames
- 'Through other people's eyes'

Agility



Speed of Response

- Planning
- Problem Solving
- Contingencies
- Self-Awareness
- Self-Regulation
- Alternative Scenarios
- State Management

Strength



Courage

- Mental Toughness
- Resilience
- Vulnerability
- Attitude
- Generosity of Spirit
- Acceptance
- Forgiveness

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This poster is available as a PDF from www.cognitivefitness.co.uk

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