

A time to think again about Leadership

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Contents

- 02 Challenging assumptions
- 03 So what does it take to be an outstanding leader today?
- 05 The six vital areas of exploration

Challenging assumptions

There is much discussion in these turbulent times of the need for strong leadership. And there is a growing understanding that whilst managers often surrender to the increasingly ambiguous surroundings they find themselves in, leaders are distinguished by their ability to conquer those very surroundings that often appear to conspire against them.

A very real challenge for many leaders is therefore to give up the need for certainty, control and direct influence on which much of their past success as managers has been built.

Moreover it is important to appreciate that many of our ideas about what it takes to be a great leader derive from a far off time when life was more predictable, and when we knew very little about the inner workings of the human brain and how it responds to different stimuli.

In an era where cultural capital is increasingly the source of competitive advantage, which

some are describing as a Consciousness age, it is questionable whether many of the ideas which we have about what it takes to be a great leader, which originated in the Information (or even the earlier Industrial) age, are relevant to our future on this planet.

Perhaps its time to challenge many of the assumptions that we hold about what it means to be an effective leader today and in the future.

Indeed, over the last 50 years thinking in the world of science has moved radically. Once quantum theory became the dominant force, physicists had to dramatically rethink their notions of such basic concepts as space, time, matter and cause and effect. And today neuroscience is revealing fascinating new insights into the way in which the human brain works that have profound implications for the way in which we realise our full potential and that of others.

So what does it take to be an outstanding leader today?

The new hard stuff

It is now clear, in a way that we might have only speculated a generation ago, that the intangible aspects of organisational life such as culture, values, and vision have a direct and critical impact on organisational vitality. And it is also becoming increasingly clear that the quality of relationships and the very conversations that we engage in as leaders have a fundamental influence on the culture we create. We are discovering that 'working smarter' is at least as much about who we are being as leaders as about having a clever strategic plan.

Shifting expectations

Alongside this new understanding, we have a new generation of people who we are seeking to lead. It is becoming ever more apparent that this new generation wishes to work for an organisation that not only treats them with dignity and respect, but that also acts in an ethical manner and does the right thing by society. They want meaning from their time at work and even to make a difference in the world in a way that appears to have become increasingly possible with our all-pervasive social media.

Maximising profit at any cost is rightly not the name of the game that either they, or a growing number of consumers, are prepared to play. An earlier generation that might once have accepted being led by fear, control, and status, has rapidly been replaced by a generation to whom equality, openness and transparency are fundamental needs.

New leadership skills

The skills to succeed in this emerging environment are very different than those of an earlier era. They are truly the domain of leadership rather than what we might have previously described as management. No longer is our role as leaders to ensure compliance, by emphasising the how and the when, but to gain commitment by focusing on the what and the why.

As leaders our core skills will be in making meaning, shaping purpose, tapping energy and creativity, building truly collaborative relationships and inspiring others through our own authenticity.

To do this as leaders we must learn to listen in new and profoundly different ways; we must learn to establish conversations which deliberately open up that part of the brain which encourages creative thinking; we must become aware of the impact that our intention, not just the words we utter, has on others and their motivation at an unconscious level; and we must provide the kind of coaching that can enable self discovery and fulfilment.

Leading with 'higher intent'

To be truly effective tomorrow's leaders need to lead from a place of higher consciousness and intent in a way that connects deeply with the people they lead.

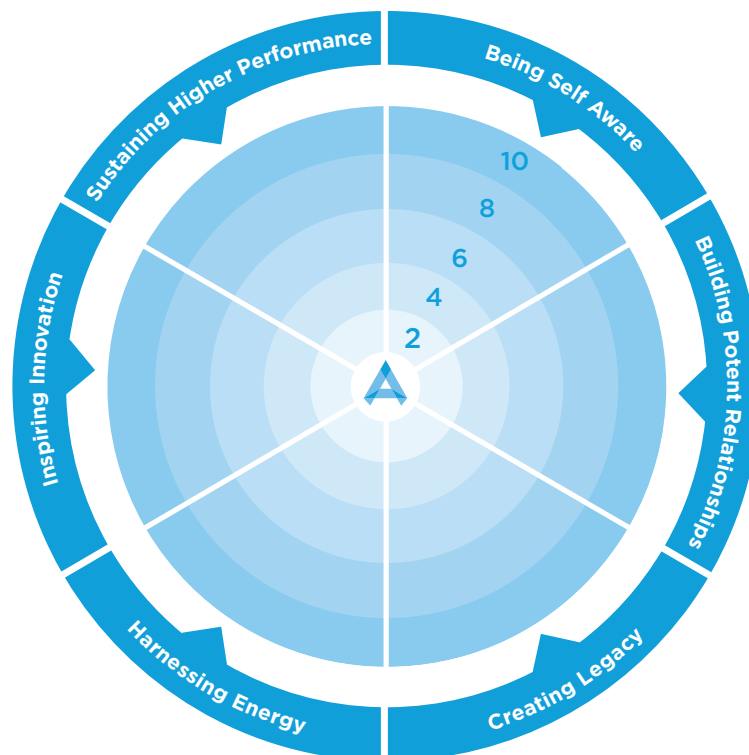
As the most powerful institutions on the planet, businesses, and in particular their leaders, have both the opportunity and responsibility to help create a sustainable future for humanity. This demands leaders who imbue their organisations with meaning, and a meaning that both inspires today and endures tomorrow. And this requires leaders who have a visceral sense of their own personal purpose and values, and create a deep sense of trust by their commitment to living authentically in alignment with their most deeply held beliefs.

The six vital areas of exploration

The context of leadership needs to move from not only being the 'best in the world' but also the 'best for the world'. Leaders will therefore need to find a way of balancing the often-competing expectations of their employees, their customers, their shareholders, their communities and the planet. The focus of leaders needs to shift from a self centred 'I' to an all embracing 'We'.

To help to navigate this enormously challenging, uncertain and complex environment, there are six vital and powerful enquiries for leaders to engage with in order to make the contribution that only they can, and must, make.

The Higher Intent self assessment wheel



Being self aware

The starting point for all leaders is their degree of personal self awareness. If the leader is to lead with a 'higher intent' then they must have a highly developed sense of themselves, what provides meaning and how they would define their leadership purpose.

Questions for higher intent leaders:


- How aware am I genuinely about myself, my limitations, the presence that I bring, the inspiration that I provide, the role model that I am, and my own story and its influence on my purpose as a leader?
- Am I bringing my best self to my work and life every day?
- Do I know how it feels working with me?

Creating legacy

Higher Intent leaders are clear about the legacy they wish to leave. They are effective in shaping the story of the organisation in a way that provides meaning for others so that people feel connected and excited about what's possible. Here the leader shines the focus on more than profit by emphasising the multiple stakeholders he or she is accountable to.

Questions for higher intent leaders:

- What is my vision for the future of the organisation?
- How effectively am I shaping the meaning of the organisation in a way that really resonates?
- Is it obvious from my own behaviours that doing the right thing is more important than doing things right?
- Am I creating a future that is sustainable and can continue to create value beyond my 'watch'?



“Alexander led the introduction of performance coaching to the business world in the late 1980s and is today the chosen provider of Executive Coaching, advice and Leadership Development for many of the world’s leading organisations.”

Harnessing energy

An organisation that has meaning, purpose and focus has energy. Yet that energy is rarely constant. New challenges arise, energies are depleted by everyday hard work, set-backs and external interferences from, for example, competitors, regulators or shareholders. The higher intent leader recognises this and consciously leads the organisational energy to achieve their strategic objectives.

Questions for Higher Intent Leaders:

- Am I thinking strategically about leading the energy of the organisation?
- Does my own energy inspire or deplete others?
- How effectively can I pick the organisation up and get it back on track when stuff happens?

Inspiring innovation

The organisation that is actively aiming to satisfy the – often competing - needs of multiple stakeholders is the creative organisation. And this creativity comes in many shapes and guises. Thought leadership ensures the enterprise is shaping it's environment, rather than being shaped by it. Internal processes, systems, technologies and cultures are challenged for new levels of value creation. And a core of people are freed up to “dream of future possibilities”.

Questions for Higher Intent Leaders:

- Do I have the courage to abandon those things that our past success has been built on?
- How open am I to the opinions, challenges and ideas of others?
- Am I spending enough time anticipating tomorrow's potential disruption, what is my strategy for shaping the market rather than reacting to it?

“Alexander brings to bear an unrivalled track record of over 25 years of partnering with CEO's and Executive leadership teams in enabling them and their teams to go beyond what they thought was possible.”



Sustaining high performance

The organisation that has meaning, energy and innovation has the key ingredients for high-performance. Yet sustaining performance requires continuous learning and developing the leadership talent for the future. It also requires the capacity to make tough calls when things are complex and ambiguous.

Questions for Higher Intent Leaders:

- Do I really know how enabling I am of others?
- Do I provide the balance of high challenge as well as high support that causes high performance?
- Am I genuinely creating the next generation of leaders to drive our business forward?
- What are my strategies for navigating change, encouraging continuous learning and making decisions with imperfect information?

Building potent relationships

Engines don't run without oil and organisations don't operate effectively without strong relationships and interconnected communities. The higher intent leader recognises this and forges positive and productive links with all key stakeholders and influencing groups within the enterprise. This principle extends to his or her own team. Here the leader ensures that relationships are trusting, honest and two-way – allowing key things to be said without fear and with genuinely open listening.

Questions for Higher Intent Leaders:

- What do I do to encourage deep and effective relationships?
- What are my strategies for building profound levels of trust?
- How comfortable am I with being vulnerable with the people I work with?
- How genuine am I in the feedback I provide, and how much do I really know about the lives of those I lead?

It is these questions that tomorrow's leaders must ask in order to develop the necessary self awareness to be able to lead from a new place, to lead with Higher Intent.

The future belongs
to those leaders
who dare to create it.

“Alexander is committed to helping leaders, their teams and their organisations, to grow, change and renew themselves in order to fully realise their potential within the new and emerging environment.”

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