



Rialto White Paper:

The Leadership Six Pack

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1. Introduction

The current business and economic climate is causing many business organisations to reassess how they perform on a daily basis. Over the past few decades a great deal of money has been spent on leadership and management development programmes but we now have to ask ourselves what we do next.

The established approaches of leadership development which often reinforce the command and control approach to leadership just do not work anymore in most business settings. In physical fitness terms we often talk about gym programmes helping us to develop a strong 'six pack' through exercise. What we need now is the equivalent of a planned exercise programme to develop our leadership performance 'six pack'!

Leadership is a complex aspect of human behaviour often said to be the most researched but least understood aspect of how human beings operate. It has been argued countless times that there is no one way to develop effective leadership ability. We have seen the development of the understanding of the subject from the leadership qualities and traits approach, through situational approaches, then the behavioural models from the US research and the functional model of John Adair in the 1960s through to Goleman's Emotionally Intelligent Leadership.

Finally, today we have what has been defined as the sustainable global approach leadership. Sustainable leadership is the ability to handle complexity and other real world issues as the world evolves and the global aspect recognises that the world in which we live is getting smaller, at least in communication and travel time terms. In short we need to learn to interact with a range of other cultures rather than just with people like ourselves. What we now need is leader capability in six specific areas and to translate this capability into practical operating strategies to accelerate business performance to enable the Western World to compete in the global market place.

2. The Key to Accelerating Performance

My Research with Rialto has identified six key leadership issues which need to be addressed if organisations are to survive and grow in these tough times. Together they constitute a significant change in the way managers and leaders operate, focusing on developing the capability of their organisation by unlocking the potential of its people.

The aim is to develop sustainable global leadership capability that will enable the organisation to prosper and to move forward. Before expanding on these six key factors, however, it is useful to take note of some recent research from Roffey Park, a well-known management and leadership development institution.

3. Some current leadership research

Roffey Park has recently suggested that there are four key areas where organisations need to develop capability. These areas are the environment, performance issues, working together/team working and unlocking employee performance through effective engagement.

Firstly, in assessing and understanding the external environment there appears to be no respite from the current economic pressures. Fewer staff combined with other on-going cost saving measures seem to be accelerating this year and bureaucracy seems to be hindering international teams. Understanding your context and business environment more clearly is a key to survival and growth.

Secondly many organisations do not seem to be improving in terms of performance despite relatively positive perceptions of leadership performance within the organisation largely due to leaders engaging more effectively with their people.

Shared values producing a sense of collective purpose is important. However, aligned change initiatives need to be better followed through. Talent schemes and leadership development at all levels are attracting interest but there is still considerable variation in how organisations deal with these issues.

Thirdly there are mixed views on manager performance and effectiveness from work teams and there is recognition that underperformance is not often addressed effectively in performance management programmes.

Fourthly at the individual level, employee engagement remains stable highlighting the importance of values driven leadership. It is noted that individuals report working longer hours which may be a by-product of this engagement or increasing work pressure.

We can link development in these four areas to the sustainable global leadership issues which we have identified in our recent work.

These are context, commitments, cultural awareness, complexity management, connectedness and capability development. If we are to move forward and make a real impact in terms of developing leadership capability in our organisations it is useful to create a development process flow, an integrated process to developing more effective leadership throughout the organisation.

4. Over view of The Leadership Six Pack Concept

Creating a 'success culture' to handle the economic & leadership challenges



Lateral leadership – influencing colleagues at all levels



Turning performance management into performance leadership



Gaining the creative edge throughout the organisation



Encouraging employees to be more enterprising



The expert business developer programme – winning business

5. Understanding the Leadership Six Pack Concept

A leadership development six pack checklist emerging from our recent research includes:

ELEMENT ONE: Creating a 'success culture' to handle the economic challenges

We need to create a success culture and protect all who work in the organisation against negativity. This 'negativity inoculation' programme is not just Pollyanna or 'motherhood and apple pie' but is based on sound neuroscience principles. There is research evidence to show that positive thinking produces different bio-chemicals in the neurotransmitters in the brain compared with negative thinking. This means we experience more neural connections and hence greater brain power and creativity.

Negative thinking seems to produce stress related chemicals which inhibit creativity and which also tend to have an impact on our conscious and unconscious efforts towards achieving our goals in terms of reducing motivation. Human beings need goals because we are all bombarded daily by hundreds, even thousands of stimuli and there has to be a selection process to ensure we are not overloaded.

This selective perception process is sometimes called the reticular activating system or RAS for short. The RAS seems to set up filters both in our conscious and unconscious minds to notice the occurrence of stimuli related to what we are thinking about. If we are thinking positively about a worthwhile goal then we start to notice opportunities related to that goal and possible opportunities to bring that goal into reality.

This focusing coupled with the feel-good factor of the positive thinking chemicals such as serotonin helps the individual stay on track to produce high levels of quality performance. The skills of positive psychology are training and development areas in which Rialto has considerable experience through its knowledge base in neuroscience, positive psychology, NLP and cognitive behavioural reframing skills.

ELEMENT TWO: Lateral leadership – influencing colleagues at all levels

Leadership used to be associated with hierarchy, command and control and 'getting a grip' on individuals and situations. In our ever increasingly complex world such simplistic, black and white thinking is no longer appropriate in many situations. Leadership problems are seldom simple.

One way of assessing the best way of handling a leadership challenge is the critical, tame and wicked approach to leadership problems. Critical problems require someone to 'take the helm' and navigate the organisation through the rough waters to avoid damage occurring either to the organisation or to individuals. These tend to be time critical.

Tame problems on the other hand are often not time-critical although it may be very important to solve them in the long run. Tame problems usually require the leader to identify specific resources and bring them to bear on the problem. There is usually a right answer and it is invariably possible to navigate through the various presenting issues to find that right answer. Wicked problems on the other hand have no one, single right answer. The 'right answer' depends on individual perspectives. If a supermarket chain wishes to put up the price of turkey to extract more profit from their sales then they are solving their problem but doing so to the detriment of the customer.

In addition, unless they increase what they are paying to their suppliers then they, too, may become disillusioned. So a seemingly simple situation which in 'the old days' might have attracted a 'black and white' command and control solution becomes complex when you take into account individual perspectives of the various stakeholders. One way to deal with complex and wicked problems is through the route of lateral leadership.

What we mean by lateral leadership is influencing and persuading others, particularly our peers, to our point of view rather than ordering them about in a dictatorial fashion. There is a specific skill set to be learned to operate effectively as a lateral leader and Rialto has a dedicated programme to develop that skill set in middle and senior managers.

ELEMENT THREE: Turning performance management into performance leadership

Performance management, for many managers, has a bad name. The annual appraisal review is feared by many employees and managers are often disinterested in carrying them out with their staff. The outcome of this is that often performance ratings are anything but accurate, tending to be on the high side (4 out of 5) to avoid upsetting anybody!

Rialto believes however that we have a major leadership opportunity with the performance review process provided the approach taken by appraising managers is professional and well prepared. The performance appraisal discussion should provide regular opportunities for managers and their people to talk through shared issues revisit the mission, vision and values of the organisation and engage in shared goal setting so that everyone is aligned and working in the same direction. This should happen several times each year, not just on the day of the dreaded formal appraisal date. Rialto advocates Performance Leadership programmes which are designed to simplify existing performance management programmes and convert them into real high value-added leadership processes.

A key issue in the performance leadership process is how goal and target setting is handled. Human beings need goals in order to focus their energy. They need to focus on 'meaningful specifics' rather becoming 'wandering generalities' in terms of what they are trying to achieve. The aim of the performance leadership process is to create an environment which will unlock the potential of the employees and fire them up into becoming passionate about doing their work and achieving their goals.

That environment will achieve this impact if it enables employees to feel connected, to feel a sense of certainty in terms of what they should be doing, to feel significant and have variety in their work. However, the real motivational drivers are feelings that they are growing as people and making a valued contribution to something worthwhile. If they also feel a sense of autonomy and control and that they are being treated fairly then they will indeed get a buzz from their efforts and experience a sense of motivated well-being at work. Above all, managers need to catch their people 'doing something right' as the One Minute Manager said all those years ago. Positive reinforcement and appreciation is a powerful force and the skills to develop performance leadership can be acquired through the appropriate training and development.

ELEMENT FOUR: Gaining the creative edge throughout the organisation

Human beings are incredibly creative – provided they have a motivated positive mindset and are not burdened with anxiety and stress. One of our biggest growth areas in training and development is visiting the processes that help individuals be more creative in whatever work they undertake.

Rialto teaches a process called ‘synvergent thinking’ which is blend of divergent possibility thinking and then following a judgement process we progress to convergent thinking to create specific solutions. Rialto has a real gift in enabling managers to become aware of what is holding them back in terms of creativity and idea generation. Once those blocks are identified the creative process can be unlocked. The next stage is equipping people with a set of problem solving strategies to address critical, tame and wicked problems as well as creative innovative activities to develop new products and services or develop existing ones.

We have learned much from the quality industry and use a number of these approaches and techniques in our training. The culture of the organisation is very important In promoting creativity in problem solving together with how the organisation deals with situations where solutions do not work out as planned. Do individuals get punished or is ‘failure’ treated as a learning situation.

It is vital to have a culture that accepts that people will not always be 100% right in what they attempt and to preserve their development process it is important to maintain their self-esteem and sense of purpose rather than destroying it through excessively negative feedback. I have never met anyone who went to work deliberately to fail or produce bad work. Such results are seldom if ever intentional.

ELEMENT FIVE: Encouraging employees to be more enterprising

There tends to be a real difference between the mindset of the average employee and the self-employed individual, particularly in terms of 'going the extra mile' to get things done. Employees often are just involved in their work during nine to five type working hours whereas self employed enterprising entrepreneurs tend to 'live their work'.

To them time is not an issue and it gives rise to the differentiation between bureaucratic time and entrepreneurial time. People with a purpose and a mission tend not to be clock watchers particularly at 5pm on a Friday night! We need to learn how to take various aspects of the enterprising entrepreneur and build them into our corporate cultures in our large public and private sector organisations if we are going to compete in the challenging and competitive world of the future.

Rialto has recently embarked on a series of in-house development programmes to enable organisations to help their people become enterprising entrepreneurs in the service of their organisation and very positive results are starting to be felt in those companies which have taken this leadership route.

Again the programme focuses on making sure that the basic motivational factors to create the right environment exist and then focusing on the positive attributes of each employee and adjusting their job positions to build one those strengths

ELEMENT SIX: The expert business developer programme – winning business

Finally, number six in our leadership six pack is to acknowledge that everyone in a business needs to be a sales person and a customer relationship developer for the business. For too long in the Western World we have looked on sales as something in which we would rather not engage. “I couldn’t possibly sell.” is a comment often heard particularly with the ‘professional’ and ‘academic’ members of our society.

However, this is not really a sensible attitude. We all sell whether we like it or not. We sell ideas, ourselves and the value we claim to add to our employer’s business. What is needed is for everyone to understand the principles of selling and then negotiation so that everyone can be a business developer and enjoy the process.

The present and anticipated business environment means that more and more people will have to look at ways of generating their personal income other than simply being an employee and doing what they are told to do. The writer Robert Kiyosaki has predicted that in the future more and more people will be small business owners, self-employed and investors. They will not be successful if they hang on to an outdated ‘employee mindset’ which is about keeping your head down and just doing what you are told to do at work.

We need to unlock initiative and personal leadership and the enterprising entrepreneur programme does exactly that. It is a great personal development tool which will help considerably in succession planning in the organisation – even if a few people do get motivated to leave and set up their own business along the way. Even if this happens, the organisation that developed them will still benefit particularly in terms of reputation and market perception as an organisation that ‘grows people’.

6. Conclusion

By building the content and the process of these topics into the fabric of your organisational culture the organisation will experience a culture shift and ensure that it operates on the principles of sustainable global leadership addressing the issues of the business environment, employee performance, working together across functions and developing individuals. It will turbo charge the organisation's ability to accelerate its business performance and leave competitors in the slow land.

So there we have the 'leadership six-pack. It is a set of six high leverage leadership fitness development events which may be taken individually or as a completed series.

These six one-day events available from Rialto will add considerable value to the operation of your organisation and yield an ROI of many times the investment

Rialto specialises in unique change management and business transformation solutions which deliver exceptional results.

Our services include:

Transforming the Performance Culture
Board Effectiveness and Governance
Strategies for innovation growth and innovation
Customer Insights and segmentation
Customer experience and capability alignment
Leadership Benchmarking – *Powered by RALI*
Leadership and Team Development
C-Suite Profiling & Assessment
Executive Search and Strategic Talent Mapping
Executive Coaching and Mentoring
Executive Career Transition

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