

Lead to last

Christo Nel
talks to
**AMANDA
MATHEE**
about the kind
of leadership
that will ensure
sustainably
competitive
organisations.

Long ago, in the world of business, lines of responsibility were linear and progress was predictable. It was business as usual ... or so people thought.

The industrial age was characterised by cause-and-effect thinking. Back then, a slower evolution could be relied on and leadership was a top-down process. Now a shift has taken place in the business world – one which calls for a new breed of leaders and organic organisations. Today, individuals and organisations need to comprehend the demands of the new socio-economic environment and the new world of work. So says Christo Nel, senior lecturer extraordinaire at the USB.

“There has been an overwhelming body of research since the 1960s which demonstrates that for organisations in the private or public sector to be sustainably competitive and commercially viable the only variable is leadership. Those organisations that significantly outperform the others have the unique ability to develop positive authentic leadership. In addition, they follow a hierarchical approach to leadership and power, and they have the capacity to build high-impact leadership teams.”

Nel says, according to Peter Drucker, one of the

great thinkers of modern management, leadership can be defined as a process of perpetuating creative destruction and driving continuous innovation, and this could reside in the hands of minorities.

However, in today’s socio-economic environment work life has been radically transformed, hence the need for people in organisations to interface and interact across traditional boundaries – horizontally and vertically. As a result, organisations are more organic and volatile, and discontinuity is the order of the day. The organisation is therefore a complexity of webs of interaction, influence and relationships that supersedes traditional clarity and predictability. So, leadership can no longer resort in the hands of the minority.

“The core challenge is leadership across all tiers and not uniformity across the organisation. An organisation needs distinct clusters of accountability at these tiers.


“Research and experience show that in most organisations senior, general and executive management levels remain embroiled in work which should have been delegated to the operational level. As a result, senior leaders and managers do not have the time to immerse themselves in shifting socio-economic and competitive trends.”

This has led to the spectacular collapse of General Motors and Chrysler. People at operational level are not fully utilised, so they tend to recede in passive and apathetic attitudes. This poses a premier leadership challenge: How do you unleash energy and get people to contribute optimally at all levels and how do you ensure that

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the majority become pro-active leaders in their own areas of accountability?

Nel says to achieve this one needs to create a flywheel of sustainable competition. This requires four imperatives:

1. Establish an ethos of personal authentic leadership which engages individuals to understand their own special qualities and to leverage their strengths rather than focus on their weaknesses. This is the foundation of muscle-building in an organisation. This will only occur if the organisational culture encourages personal mastery from the individual and makes the art of leader-coaching-leader a core competence for all managers. Line managers from middle management upwards should be taught to teach leaders.
2. Make the development of high-impact leadership and teaming a pivotal building block of organisational design and people development. There is no such thing as a globally competitive organisation. There are only organisations consisting of high-performing teams that take charge of focused accountabilities and respond to challenges.
3. Entrench a high-performance culture and workplace practices. Leaders need focus and stamina to identify a critical mass of organisational practices and to develop the competence of the people to apply these practices in ways that are energising and drive sustainable competition. Typical practices include strategy as the art of execution, developing talent and spreading leadership across all levels.
4. Leverage optimum return on assets and resources. Sustainable, competitive organisations have all succeeded in creating and setting this flywheel in motion. What's more, they invest in ongoing energy to maintain and continually strengthen flywheels of sustainable competence. 



Christo Nel is a director and founder of The Village Leadership Consulting, a boutique consulting firm specialising in change management, leadership development and organisational development. He also lectures on Sustainable Leadership, and Leadership and Management Consulting on the USB MBA.

Plot your leadership profile

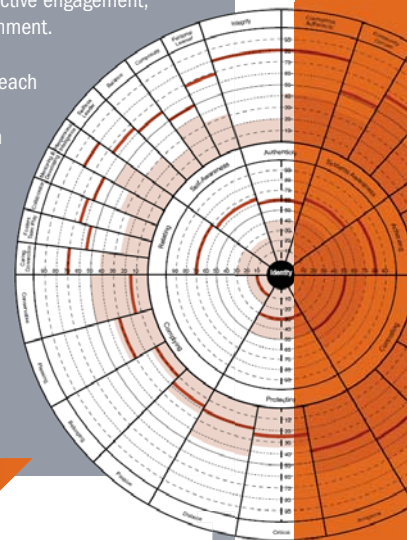
What kind of leader are you? A myriad of quizzes and questionnaires have been developed to help people discover their leadership strengths and weaknesses. Some are fun and take a couple of minutes to complete while others are formidable and take hours to interpret. Some of these tests are free, others come at a cost.

One of the new-generation leadership assessment tools and the one that is currently used on the USB MBA programme is The Leadership Circle Profile (TLCP) which provides a 360-degree profile of a person's leadership abilities. It is the first to connect competencies with the underlying and motivating habits of thought. In other words, it says why you do what you do. This enables leaders to make conscious changes and to move beyond the reactive to the creative stages through self-awareness.

TLCP also measures the two primary leadership domains – Creative Competencies and Reactive Tendencies – and integrates this information so that key opportunities for development immediately rise to the surface.

Creative Competencies measure how you achieve results, bring out the best in others, lead with vision, enhance your own development, act with integrity and courage, and improve the systems in your organisation. Reactive Tendencies are leadership styles emphasising caution over creating results, self-protection over productive engagement, and aggression over building alignment.

TLCP summarises the findings of each individual in a circle which plots aspects of the person's identity in terms of creativity and reactivity, and relationships and tasks. This gives an instant overview of the person's leadership profile.



Find more information
at www.theleadershipcircle.com