

# Leadership

*Leadership starts when you stop making excuses or blaming others*

## Introduction

- Are you concerned about developing the people to lead your organisation in the future?
- Do you stay awake at night wondering how to get your leadership team to work more collaboratively?
- Are you trying to find a way to mobilise leadership at all levels in the organisation so that you can create the future?



Over the past five years both the government and business have been willing to put more money into leadership development than at any other time in history. There has been a proliferation of leadership books and theories. Yet, it's not always easy to see what the cumulative effect on services and the bottom line has been.

## What we do and what our work has shown

So why is the BCG approach any different?

Firstly, because our international experience of working with leadership teams across business, public, and not-for-profit sectors persuades us that some *patterns* repeat themselves. We've noticed it's not uncommon for top leaders to feel overwhelmed by problems and issues coming up from below, while they look out to an environment that seems increasingly uncertain; for middle managers to feel pulled in different directions, where getting it right for one stakeholder means getting it wrong for another; for front line staff to feel disengaged and for customers to feel neglected and unheard. This suggests to us that often the problems are a consequence of the way the system interacts rather than the failure of any specific individual or level. So when we are asked to help with leadership issues we always try to work with the *whole system*, to understand the dynamics and to consider the collective leadership capability, rather than simply how to improve the skills of a particular group.

Secondly, we focus on the *relationships* between leaders, the followers who 'authorise' them and the purpose or challenge they share. Leadership is relational; without followers, there are no leaders and without a shared purpose there is no value to either. We stand right alongside you to experience the world as you do, then step back with you to conduct a genuine inquiry into what's working and what isn't. We don't refer to some idealised norm of leadership behaviour or practice, but work from your reality, the data about the ways you relate to each other.

Thirdly, we are different because of the importance we attach to 'behaving' leadership *in the moment*, not at some future date after the consultants have gone home. We work with clients in the heat of the issue to achieve the shift in the room *here and now*.

Our experience and expertise enables us to work directly on the quality of relationships in the system, recognising and changing the patterns as well as building individual and collective capability.

Our research shows that leadership development is most effective when it is:

- As close as possible to where the current challenges are happening.
- Focused not only on individuals but also teams, partnerships and organisations.
- Engaging thinking *and* emotions; action *and* reflection.
- Challenge led and not theory led.
- Driven by a clear sense of what capacities tomorrow's leaders will need, not by what made yesterday's leaders successful.

Successful leaders need to be thinking "How am I part of the problem, as well as part of the solution?" To be successful in the world of cross-boundary working they need to think flexibly about team, inter-team partnerships and business networks. This thinking needs to be matched by skills of influencing, tolerating ambiguity, generative rather than reactive mindsets and working with multiple levels of complexity.

## **Examples**

### **Canon Europe**

We are working with the senior leaders across Europe to increase their ability to engage and develop their people as well as improve cross-unit collaboration. The purpose is to help them create a strategic shift from being a successful organisation to being a great organisation. The approach is to work with cross-business groups of leaders, developing their personal and collective capability by helping them identify existing patterns, and coaching each other to take a lead in creating the shift.

### **RSA**

We worked closely with the executive team and the Board of the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce as it approached its bicentenary year, supporting and challenging them through a process of redefining their mission for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and aligning their governance and ways of working together to deliver this.