BUILDING LEADERSHIP CAPACITY AND SUPPORTING THE EMERGING LEADER

By: Michelle Chambers, M.Ed, CHRP, CTDP. © CCH Canadian Limited.

Leadership is widely recognized as a key success factor in individual, team, and organizational effectiveness. Many aspire to leadership positions, and when they are promoted they see it as a celebration of success and a reward for high performance. It is a chance to be part of the leadership team and to make a difference. However, emerging leaders who, for the first time, are in the role of supporting others to support strategy too often struggle to do well.

Often, these leaders are promoted based on their technical ability, as the organization may not have a framework to evaluate leadership competencies. This can prove challenging for the new manager or emerging leader, as well as the organization, as the expectations of being a successful manager and leader are often not clearly defined. Often, emerging leaders struggle to provide adequate support to their people. As humans, we often focus on our areas of strength and with what we find comfortable. Hence, new managers or leaders often tend to focus on their technical area of expertise and on achieving short-term objectives rather than focusing on longer term strategy and people support, and on engaging their people in achieving team and organizational objectives.

Also, many new leaders are left on their own with little support to help them transition into their new role and engage with their team, or to further develop their leadership and managerial competencies. Some organizations have not even defined their leadership strategies, developed leader or management development practices within their organizations, identified leader competencies, or reviewed their performance management process to reflect the opportunity to assess and develop leadership in a different way. Yet we wonder, after sending a new leader to an external leadership development course, why we are disappointed with the lack of transfer of learning back into workplace performance. So what should an organization do?

Organizations should examine and define what "leadership" means within their organization. Leadership is demonstrated through behaviours and competencies – it is not just represented by a more senior title within the organization. Organizations should try to develop systemic-based approaches to cultivate and build leadership capacity and embed leadership throughout the whole organization. This is not an easy undertaking. It involves building leadership capabilities and ensuring they are sustained by connecting people, practices, and organizational processes to elicit meaningful performance.

To effectively build leadership capacity, it must be viewed as a source of sustainable competitive advantage and must demonstrate a high degree of senior executive ownership. Everyone is responsible for leadership – not just Training or HR departments. Many organizations start by defining the role of leadership within their organization and by defining a leadership framework. A key starting point is to involve the organization in defining core leadership behaviours that support the organization's desired culture. This involves discussing what constitutes a successful leader within the organization. Focus groups or interviews with high-performing leaders may be conducted to help gather this information. Also, culture or leadership assessments and competency dictionaries can assist you in defining key behaviours that are critical for success. Examples might include emotional intelligence, decision making, supporting and developing people, etc. Furthermore, it is important to define what sets your culture apart from that of your competitors. This is critical understanding

required for successful recruitment, retention, and organizational branding initiatives.

Leadership development courses are an effective way of transmitting information on key practices and theories of leadership, and even offer an opportunity for leaders to question their own behaviours. Many organizations outsource and send their leaders to workshops, only to find that their return on investment is poor. Why? Because leadership development occurs within the context of the organization. It is much more than professional development. That is why leaders may gain insightful information at a workshop or seminar, but often find it particularly challenging to apply their new knowledge and skills back in the context of their workplace.

Leadership development programs do have a valuable place if they are internally developed to reflect the practices and culture of the organization, and if the models developed are easy to understand and tied to business strategy. They can be extremely valuable for new leaders, especially for those transitioning from the outside, to help them understand the challenges, culture, and politics of the organization. For example, do you provide a leadership or management orientation program in addition to your core orientation program? By ensuring leaders' participation within two months of their assuming their role, such a program can be helpful in communicating expectations of a leader, introducing leaders to others and building productive relationships, increasing knowledge of key strategic objectives and business units, and communicating information about practices such as performance management, reward and recognition, financial management, transition strategies, organization culture and values, and desired leadership behaviours. Do you offer support to new leaders and their teams by offering coaching and transition support? This can be extremely valuable in ensuring a fast and effective start for the leader in creating momentum and inspiring others, building coalitions, and establishing realistic objectives.

Leadership development must be supported throughout an organization through its culture and values, practices, mind set, and behaviours of existing leaders. Thus, organizations should closely examine the value of opportunities to practise leadership while serving on committees, task forces, and special project teams. Job rotation programs and interim or acting leadership roles also provide opportunities to develop leadership skills before full responsibility is assumed. As well, providing mentoring and peer coaching to new leaders will enable them to develop, reflect, and learn while on the job from high-performing leaders within the organization. Other practices that support leadership development include succession planning and promoting from within, leadership development

programs based on business unit objectives in which participants develop job-related skills, sharing of culture and values during selection and recruitment processes, and policies that support leaders and desired behaviours.

Once leaders know more about the culture and desired behaviours of the organization, it is time for them to assess their own behaviours. Assessment tools such as 360-degree feedback can be extremely insightful, since feedback is provided from the individual's support person or supervisor, several peers, and several direct reports. Timing can be critical, and thus new leaders should have an opportunity to demonstrate their performance within their team for at least 12 months before getting feedback from others. Personalized coaching to help interpret the feedback and develop an action plan is most valuable. Of course, it should also be included and measured in the individual's objectives as part of the performance management process.

Performance management is also key. Does your organization simply reward performance based on achievement of objectives? Or does it also look at behaviours and values exhibited by leaders in the attainment of those objectives? This can take considerable time, but is well worth the effort.

Finally, leadership development efforts must be aligned with business strategies and goals to maximize performance. Too often, leadership development initiatives are cut back due to poor alignment with business objectives. In the end, emerging leaders must be supported – it makes good business sense. Leadership development is an investment in human capital, and the more comprehensive the efforts, the better the financial results will be in critical measures such as employee engagement and retention, shareholder returns, and revenue generation.

Michelle Chambers, M.Ed, CHRP, CTDP is Principal and Organizational Development Consultant at Chambers & Associates, specializing in leadership development and coaching, team development, change management, process facilitation, and customized learning. See www.chambersandassociates.ca.

EDITORIAL

Stretched to its Limits? The Meaning of "Employee" in the Context of Human Rights

Prepared by Andrea Raso Amer of Fraser Milner Casgrain LLP's Vancouver office. © CCH Canadian Limited.

Is the individual an employee or an independent contractor? This question has given rise to much discussion in the courts and administrative tribunals. The distinction is critical in determining whether an individual attracts the security provided by labour and employment legislation. The distinction is also pivotal in determining whether an organization is potentially liable for failing to afford those protections to those whom they've deemed to be independent contractors.

It is trite law that the label given to a worker is irrelevant in determining whether that worker is in fact an employee or an independent contractor. In making the determination as to whether an independent contractor is really an employee, the four-fold test is most often applied:

1. What is the degree of **control** that the employer has over the timing and manner of performance of work?

2. Does the worker **own** his or her own tools, supplies, and equipment?

3. Does the worker have a chance of **profit**?

4. Does the worker have a chance of **loss**?

The essential question is: Whose business is it? This question is often referred to as the "integration test" or "business organization test" and is answered by considering a wide variety of factors including (but not limited to) whether the individual in question:

- receives regular, consistent remuneration;

- is eligible for group benefits, vacation, and holidays;

- has the authority to bind the organization by, for example, having signing authority;

- attends at the workplace on a full-time basis;

- utilizes the organization's physical and human resources;

- works solely for the organization; and