LEADERSHIP: EVOLUTION OR REVOLUTION?

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Leadership: Evolution or Revolution?

Critical questions explored in this presentation:

• How is leadership defined within Australian organisations?
• What is perceived as ‘leaderly’ behaviour’?
• How do these constructs influence our view of what a leader looks like?
• What’s the impact on organisational effectiveness?
Leadership: ‘The State of the Nation’

- Traditional notions of leadership no longer deliver what they promise.
- Profound loss of faith in our leaders.
- A mercenary, anti-social model dominates.
- Outdated archetype: leader as solitary hero engaged on journey of relentless trials.
- Myth: Teams and people don’t deliver success - only the boss acting alone and taking tough decisions.
- Leader as hero that saves, a god that redeems.
Example of the myth in action

‘Fortune’ magazine on Raymond Gilmartin, CEO of Merck, Sharp + Dohme.

“When Merck’s directors tapped Gilmartin, 56, as CEO 4 years ago, they gave him a crucial mission: Create a new generation of blockbuster drugs to replace important products whose patents were soon to expire, Gilmartin has delivered.”
Some peculiarly Australian obstacles to changing leadership construct

- Research highlights masculine character of Australian organisation culture.
- AFR review: Boards prefer a “particular breed of white Anglo-Saxon men” at the top.
- Leaders seen as competitive, individualistic, rational-linear, tough, rather than collaborative and inclusive.
Some peculiarly Australian obstacles to changing leadership construct (cont.)

- Effect: people not perceived as demonstrating those behaviours evaluated as lacking ‘leadership potential’.
- This means some men, many women and many people from other cultural backgrounds excluded.
- Pressure on them to ‘manage like a man’ ie. become a slightly extrovert Anglo Celt male.
All this sheds light on why so few women at the top

Some facts and figures

- Women’s average weekly earning 66% of men’s (a larger gap than 10 years ago).
- One female premier.
- No female in High Court.
- Of top 20 companies, one run by a woman.
- Very low number of women in senior roles – about 13%.
All this sheds light on why so few women at the top (cont.)

• Lower number of women in senior roles than in North America or Northern Europe, despite 20 years of legislation.
• Female dominated fields undervalued, underpaid.
• Evidence of widespread indirect discrimination.
• At this rate: 177 years to achieve equality.
Implication

Men and women don’t interact as equals when they meet in the workplace.

Goal:

We need to broaden the pool from which future leaders are identified, developed and selected.
Exploring the Problem

Research overview:

- Data collected as filmed evidence (more compelling, harder to dismiss).
- 70 hours of workplace meetings.
- Focus on 2 ‘critical sites’ where leadership potential is evaluated – regular meetings and performance reviews.
The findings at a glance

- Generally, men and women are quite similar in the way they communicate as leaders.
- Culture, personality, status, profession and the nature of the task all influence communication.
- The differences between men and women – although not immense – are significant.
- When women meet without men, they tend to run their meetings differently.
- When men and women meet together, the typical male way of running a meeting tends to prevail.
Some more findings

• Male managers interact with male and female team members differently.
• Difference is often viewed as inferiority.
• Perceptions and attitudes matter: even when women communicate just like men, they can be seen as behaving differently.
Features of women’s style from the data (tendencies only)

- Informal style - fuzzier boundary between personal and work lives.
- Negotiate decisions and directives.
- Collaborative problem-solving.
- Meetings often non linear – illuminate the point – topic shifts.
- Use of humour as a bonding mechanism.
- High energy, friendly, interactions with frequent laughter.
What kind of leadership does this style add up to?

Characteristics

- Comfort with ambiguity and complexity.
- Ability to resolve conflict.
- Cooperative, inclusive, collegial.
- Participatory leadership.
- Team emphasis, not ‘lone white knight to the rescue’.
Could this be an asset?

It seems it could be a problem for remediation!

“Literature suggests that women and men possess different leadership skill sets. Whereas men are more apt to act alone and take risks, women are more likely to act collaboratively as part of a team. Leadership development programs should focus on helping women make decisions …”

CLC 2003
But could it be an asset?

Let’s look at some emerging leadership models

Conclusion

• Changing how we think about leadership and leaders will open up the talent pool to include people who (because of their gender, culture or personality) may not have been considered previously.

• Perhaps more significantly, it will also move us away from that self-centred, anti-social model where we leap from one failed hero to another.

• We need leadership not ‘a leader’.