

Measuring the X-Factor: Leadership's return

Never has the need for the human touch in leadership been more important for business performance. Covid is not today's problem in the business world. It's merely the catalyst which surfaces the problem.

And at last, there's a way to measure the benefits of such "soft skills": a tool to quantify leadership effectiveness and employee wellness. Via the lens of Psychological Safety (a lead indicator of individuals' behaviour), it's based on the latest neuroscience research, with a direct link to organisational Key Performance Indicators ("KPIs").

For several decades now, the cult of the leader has become core in organisational life. It's time for leadership to make a return, ie organisations creating the environment to deliver outstanding performance, with all leaders encouraged and rewarded to support employees with compassion and genuine curiosity.

Why the demise of leadership?

Despite the continued march of the information revolution, the last 10-15 years have seen the curse of the micro-manager-leader emerge across industry sectors, the notion that leaders need to get more and more involved in the detail to be seen (by their own micro-managing boss) to know what's going on. Delegation has become an upward, not downward, facing skill with employees' individual contributions diminished consequently.

Great leaders are rare. It is difficult to think of role models, be that in business, politics or the church. And research from Gallup suggest that only one in 10 people possess the skills to build relationships that create trust, open dialogue, and transparency. With burnout on the rise and stress and anxiety a leading cause of ill-health absenteeism, the emotional health of employees becomes particularly important.

At a time when government policies are struggling to find a balance between lives, liberties and livelihoods, recent analysis from McKinsey suggests that improving employees' job satisfaction could be the most important thing bosses can do to create enormous shareholder and social value.

The pandemic's impact on individuals' wellbeing and mental health is increasingly chronic

At all levels, anxiety levels have risen substantially in the last 6 months and are widely forecast to increase:

- 35% of people in work describe their mental health as being poor or very poor (Mind, 2020)
- 78% of employees say the Covid pandemic has negatively impacted their mental health (Oracle, 2020)
- 76% of workers believe their company should be doing more to address the mental health issues of their workforce (Oracle, 2020)

Industry level responses are emerging:

- A new ISO standard, ISO: 45003, will focus on psychological health and safety at work (to launch in 2021) to complement the well-established standard ISO:45001 for Occupational Health & Safety.
- RSSB, the railway standards board is developing wellbeing KPIs for the rail industry by end 2020
- A recent letter to The Times from 33 leading organisations (Unilever, global banks, energy companies, the CBI and others) pleaded for other companies to prioritise Psychological Safety, as well as physical safety.

The scale of the human challenge for organisations

Many companies have advanced strategic, operational and technical capabilities, to run business successfully; they're perfectly capable of reacting to operational emergencies, including regular changes to government policy.

Very few, however, have expertise in dealing with the human challenge of the current pandemic. The constant layering of anxiety and change (economic uncertainties, Covid wave 2 worries, lockdown's rollercoaster constraints) coupled with the fact that many of our normal stress relievers are curtailed (access to family, sport, entertainment, etc) feels to many people like a marathon with no end in sight. Ann Maston, University of Minnesota, concludes that many of us are now operating in a constant state of low trauma, needing to find new ways to maintain our "surge capacity" and positive mental health.

Neuroscience clearly demonstrates that when operating from a place of threat our health suffers and performance drops. Improving Psychological Safety is thus an urgent priority for companies. If one really believes that business is about people, then looking after its most valuable resource is self-evidently essential.

The importance of Psychological Safety

Google's Project Aristotle (2012), building on the work of Amy Edmondson, Harvard University, confirmed the critical role of Psychological Safety for high performing teams. The importance of feeling able to speak up and put ideas on the table without fear of recrimination or humiliation has since been reinforced further through various research studies across different geographies.

A psychologically safe environment enables all employees to maximise their contribution at work, liberating untapped potential, feeling confident, valued and understood by leaders. And feeling good at work is a key component of personal wellness and positive mental health to cope with life's broader challenges.

The best leaders are responding well in Covid times; organisations much less so

The best leaders maintain morale, increasing their communication, showing empathy and support for individuals' circumstances, especially with remote colleagues.

Strategically, however, most organisations are unsure how to respond beyond relying on those leaders' individual efforts. The usual way of dealing with new challenges (ie analysing the problem, quantifying the current status, planning / taking action, and measuring progress) hasn't been available for matters of a psychological nature.

But it is available now. At last there is a way of measuring wellbeing and quantifying the impact and benefits of a positive leadership style.

Prioritising Psychological Safety

Bringing business understanding, data analytics and practical leadership enhancements, our consulting offer Prioritising Psychological Safety helps organisations to achieve their strategic objectives, by:

- Understanding the Client's strategy, context and key opportunities and implementation challenges
- Measuring Psychological Safety across the organisation and for specific teams, providing lead indicators that drive behaviour, using the Conductor Survey*
- Creating a direct link between Psychological Safety and business performance, analysing Key Performance Indicators and correlating them with specific teams' Psychological Safety scores
- Recommending action plans to enhance business performance and individual wellbeing
- Monitoring the effectiveness of leadership interventions
- Uniquely, the survey is based on neuroscience's latest research; it provides clear signposts for leaders.

To underpin your organisation's performance, what action will you take to prioritise Psychological Safety?

Award winning expertise combined

With a common focus on business and individual performance, Minerva Engagement and Accelerating Experience have joined forces, bringing insight, intelligence and practical application, to prioritise psychological safety and focus on the human experience within business.

The two organisations bring Award winning track records. Minerva Engagement's expertise in neuro-leadership, communication and engagement coupled with Accelerating Experience's know how in business leadership and the boardroom, create a wealth of experience to enhance the business performance, organisational mental health and individual wellbeing of their clients.

**Minerva is the fully accredited UK partner for the Conductor Survey, a statistically validated measurement system.*

Accelerating Experience



Best Consultancy
People



People and Performance
Organisation and Change

Contact: Mike Taylor

Co-Founder

E: mike.taylor@acceleratingexperience.com

T: +44 (0)333 666 7890

Minerva Engagement



Minerva Engagement

Best Business & Personal
Performance Support
Specialists - London

Contact: Deborah Hulme

Managing Director

E: deborah.hulme@minervaengagement.com

T: + 44 (0)7768 398698