

ACHIEVING TRANSFORMATATIONAL LEADERSHIP RISING TO THE CURRENT CHALLENGE

By Karen Wisdom

According to recent media coverage, there is a 'crisis' in the public sector's leadership and management capability. Is this fair criticism or are all public sector organisations being 'tarred with the same brush?'

In Ipsos MORI's experience, it's not all bad news. Some organisations are demonstrating best practices, whilst others are focusing hard on improvement.

The link between leadership capabilities and organisational performance has been well documented. Whilst there is room for improvement in perceptions of leadership's confidence and future vision, it is apparent that views of these are limited by low levels of awareness and a lack of contact. Our employee engagement surveys for the public sector often show significant proportions of staff 'fence-sitting' and this is mainly caused by a lack of knowledge.

Of course, it is not humanly possible for senior management teams to have contact with all of their employees every day. However, there remains scope for many senior management teams to communicate more effectively with their employees (especially those in more remote work locations) and to actively demonstrate a greater interest in their people and the challenges they face. Initiatives such as 'walking the talk', attending employee forums, participating in 'Meet the Management' or Q&A type sessions and generally adopting a 'back to the floor' approach to staff communications can reap measurable returns on the time invested.

It is said that the focus for the future must shift more to frontline managers, in addressing the issues brought about by funding shortfalls.

Our experience shows that whilst line managers perform well on the technical/



job skills, some still lack the essential 'people' skills, most notably in managing change and poor performance. This latter point presents a challenge in a sector under great pressure, but ironically one where poor performers are more likely to display intentions to stay.

What we are seeing is a growth in talent management activities, with a focus on developing high potential employees and growing future managers and transformational leaders. These will have a strong impact on individual, team and organisational performance, significantly develop their people and will be regarded as more effective and satisfying to work for. It is no longer a sufficient option to recruit and promote purely on the basis of skills in the role. But it is necessary to take into account candidates' skills (and their potential) in people management, leadership and change management.

Overall, these skills are regarded as fundamental to the achievement of government's objectives for the future. A greater future responsibility for line managers is clear. Although their own skills development remains high on the agenda; the potential risk is for managers to be empowered with greater responsibility, without the relevant skills to support it.

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