

FEATURE: SKILLS & TRAINING

Leading lights

BOB HUGHES, chairman of the Forton Group, explores the changing needs in leadership training and the management of talent

Like it or not, competition coming from Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) impacts on all businesses, whether they are trading locally or globally. We have to show more creativity and imagination in how and what we produce. To achieve this, we must change the way we lead and the way in which we recruit, retain and motivate our people for greater innovation, higher performance and better results.

A 'command and control' style of leadership will no longer work. People are better educated, on all rungs of the ladder; they think for themselves, and could, if encouraged, come up with more efficient ways of working – whether it's running the assembly line or responding to customer needs. The role of leadership is to create an environment for success: where people feel safe about taking responsibility and being innovative.

We need new styles of leadership. The leader that believes they are in charge, has all the answers and needs to show authority, is out of date. It may have been the right once upon a time, but it's not right for the people we need to recruit, retain and motivate today.

Leaders need to release creativity, innovation and entrepreneurial spirit from their people for three key reasons: recruitment, retention and talent management.

Despite the recession, recruitment is still a major issue. At best it's an uncertain and unequal playing field; at worst it's a battle ground. With companies actively hunting down your best talent, the investment is increasing while the return is dropping.

Another factor is what's been dubbed "Generation C". Gen C people are not expecting a job for life and so their loyalties are not tied to one employer. Whilst they are with you, employers need to get the best out of them. When they leave they need to speak well of you so that others join on their recommendation, reducing your recruitment costs. And, when you're looking for your next CEO somebody who understood your business a few years ago, gained maturity and experience elsewhere, could be perfect.

Gen C is not an age group, more a social type. It could describe someone born in 1946 or 1996 who:

- Loves complexity, digital media, involvement with content creation
- Actively engages with communities and shares ideas
- Wants to be in control of their lives; work in creative industries and be less restricted by rigid social structures.

Their creativity will seed the products and services for the 21st century economy – but clearly, a 'command and control' style of leadership just wouldn't work. Creative people require an 'affiliative' style of leadership, where relationships are fostered and where people network. These people want to be consulted and when you do inspire and motivate them, they'll give you their all. Above all, they need you to coach them, not dictate to them.



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Another current trend is continued uncertainty in the workplace. Talented people want stimulation and new opportunities. In the old days, before downsizing and de-layering, you'd just promote them, or provide a better package. Now, in order to retain our best people, we have to find challenges to inspire and motivate them.

Investing in talented people's leadership potential is a great way of doing that; unlocking it for the benefit of your organisation and, at the same time, making them feel valued.

We see a lot of companies investing in leadership development, even during the recession. As the economy starts to pick up smart organisations recognise that this is the best time to invest. Organisations that invest at a time when things may appear to be at their worst survive and thrive. Investing in equipment, expertise and in people, enables organisations to be ahead of the game.

Leadership isn't just about people at the top of the organisation chart; it's about everyone taking responsibility and ownership. People thrive when their leadership qualities are unleashed, especially when they have access to a range of leadership styles and methods.

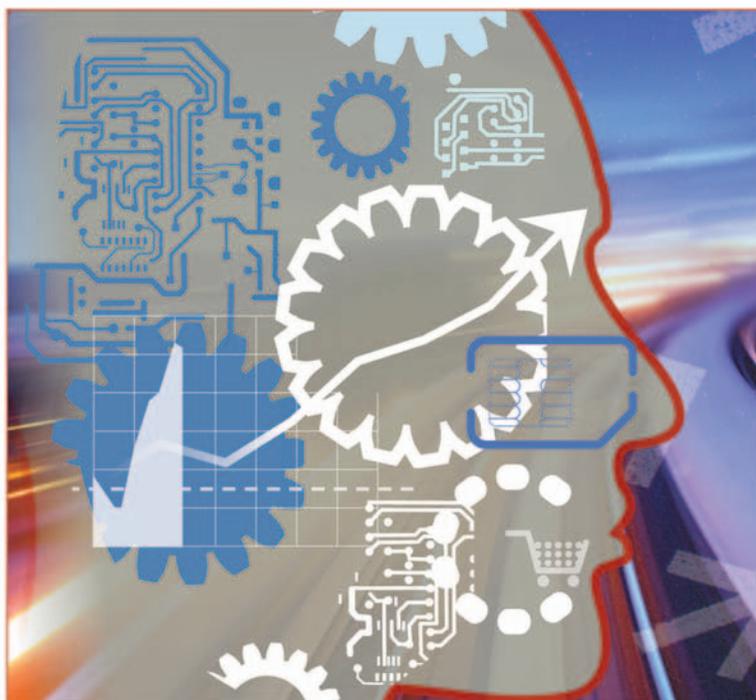
The best way of achieving this is through a blend of development options: not just traditional classroom training. These include self-learning by reading books, going online, taking e-learning courses, one-to-one development with professional leadership coaches, group action learning and peer support. The digital world offers a range of new methods such as teleclasses to support the application of learning back in the real world.

The world of work is changing: companies that invest in leadership today are tomorrow's leaders.

For further information, email bob.hughes@thefortongroup.com or visit www.thefortongroup.com

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