Leadership 4.0

The age of top-down, order-from-the-CEO-which-must-be-obeyed leadership, is dead. Here's how leadership thinking is changing

Barbara Walsh, one of the founders of leadership development consultancy Metaco, says that there are still many 'old school' leaders out there, militaristically issuing orders and expecting strict compliance – and wondering why their tried and trusted ways of getting things done are no longer working as well as they once did. That's as much a management failure as it is a leadership failure. 'Management is concerned with the achievement of plans through such processes as planning, delegating, project managing, reviewing etc. The focus is on control and problem-solving,' says Walsh. 'Leadership, on the other hand, is about aligning people to a common direction – obtaining their commitment to the realisation of the vision. The focus is on motivating and inspiring. Managers are often not leaders, whilst leadership can reside anywhere in the team or organisation.' ➔

Established organisations find themselves being forced to adapt to a new way of working in a bid to stay alive in a world of disruptive startups. With things growing ever more matrixed and agile, working across boundaries and collapsing silos has become increasingly important. 'This isn't set to change, with outsourcing, digitalisation and robotisation becoming evermore mainstream,' says Walsh. 'However, the fact is that in today's complex business environment, organisations are expected to do far more, in less time, at higher quality, with fewer people and less resources, more profitably, more innovatively. Raising the collective organisational capability and capacity to respond to the complexity, and to connect all of these points, is beyond the ability of any individual CEO, no matter how competent.' What does that mean for the future of leadership? To be successful, leaders will have to partner with many more stakeholders than was necessary previously. They have to be able to win the hearts and minds of all of their stakeholders – including people who don't report to them and are often even outside of the organisation.

Metaco's Danny Tuckwood, a strategic leadership consultant, says that, thankfully, traditional leaders who embrace new ways of doing things, and who have the right development and support, can 'learn' new ways of leading in the modern business environment. 'We have seen amazing transformational change in senior leaders, and their delight as things start to work better for them is rewarding to witness,' he says. 'Leadership isn't something that can be taught in a classroom – it's relational and is developed experientially through the willingness to try, fail, learn and reflect – to be vulnerable, open and communicate

authentically. It is possible for anyone to develop the attitudes and skills required.'

While technology is driving massive organisational change, there's also the increasing role that millennials play in any organisation – and adapting to manage a new generation is as important a skill to master. Professor Peter Hawkins, Metaco chair and professor of leadership at Henley Business School University of Reading, says that millennials are already making up the majority of employees in many companies – and that their hunger for progression within those companies requires a change of tack. 'They are our future leaders and they want to get ahead fast. They don't buy into traditional "do as I say" or "carrot and stick" management paradigms,' he says. 'Millennials typically want to be constantly learning at their jobs and are invested in their own personal development. They want frequent feedback, delivered

Metaco has been acquired by the Comair Group, which is in the process of establishing an Aviation, Leadership and Technical Academy. Metaco will become the leadership and people development wing of the Academy, and will assume a new name and branding later this year. *metaco.co.za*

constructively, to help them improve. They want to be involved in relevant, meaningful work that makes a real difference – they want to understand the company's purpose and impact, how they contribute to solutions and the value of their contribution. They value trust and integrity. Personal conversations and dialogue are important to help them create and navigate their learning journeys – they highly value coaching and mentoring.'

This generational view on the working world will also change the leadership function in the future, as millennials assume leadership positions in established organisations. 'It's a generalisation, but millennials tend to be more socially minded and expect their companies to be making a positive difference in the world. This generation when the workforce has often had it easier growing up than their parents did, and so competition for turf and maximisation of profits at any cost is not top of mind,' says Professor Hawkins. 'They push ➔

back against policies that don't make sense to them and they prefer flat structures to complex hierarchies. They are not the ones switching off the office lights at 2am – flexibility and work-life harmony are highly valued. But, at the same time, they are productive and have little time for talk without action.' Walsh says that millennial leaders of the future will have broader experience, having worked in a number of different companies, in many different roles, and will have changed career altogether, several times. 'They will be technically adept, globally networked and connected, flexible and innovative.'

In the absence of an organisational environment that fulfils their needs, many millennials will strike out on their own, forming startups which target the spaces traditionally occupied by big corporates – but which are able to disrupt industries much more easily. Walsh's advice for establishing effective leadership structures in the startup space is to invest in a business coach. 'It is crucial to have someone assisting you to navigate

the multi-faceted dynamics of startup businesses and be the non-judgmental sounding board that provides crucial support and advice, to help you get through the really tough times,' she says. 'The question is not "Can I afford a coach?", rather it's "Can I afford not to have a coach?".'

What, then, is 'success' in leadership? Tuckwood says that leadership does not reside in leaders alone. 'Leadership (collectively) or leaders (individually) can be measured by how much added value they co-create with and for all their stakeholders. This includes the extent to which they enable their teams and their people to collectively achieve more than they could by themselves,' he says. Regardless of the generation, mentorship remains a key component of successful leadership. 'Great leaders develop leadership in others. Leadership development is actually a key aspect of every leader's role.'

'Mindfulness' has now found a place in the business lexicon, as has 'mindful

leadership' – a process of slowing down and pausing to think. 'Mindful leadership is about coming into the present moment to reflect before making decisions,' says Walsh, 'before having important or difficult conversations about what the key priorities are – rather than scrambling to get everything done.'

It's also about considering the broader impact of behaviour. 'In the fast-paced world of business today, taking the time to reflect is often considered a dispensable luxury – in spite of the fact that this is one of the most powerful enablers of personal, team and organisational learning. There is a huge cost to neglecting individual and collective reflection time.'

While the hope is that technology will automate many taxing processes which eat up valuable time in the modern business environment, there's also a place for employing mindfulness when considering how to apply tech like artificial intelligence and robotics in an organisation. 'AI, robotics and other technologies are already able to handle the data-driven processing of facts and information, leading to a reduction in the need for deep expertise,' says Tuckwood. 'Hard skills will continue to be eclipsed by smart machines, while developing soft skills will become ever more important.'

Tuckwood says these developments mean that leaders will have more time to focus on building important relationships across functional departments and geographic territories. 'Great leaders will be inspiring and motivating their people, connecting with all their different stakeholders, and engaging them in a shared purpose. With more time for reflection, they can anticipate disruptors, connect dots, and be more visionary, and apps will assist them to do this more effectively.' ■

Words: Trevor Crighton; Pictures: bizvector/shutterstock.com