Building the capability to lead change in a way that delivers discernible impact – how to set the initial "frame" for success

Have you wondered: how do you build the change leadership capability of your leaders in "real time" – i.e. *while* they are busy leading the implementation of the important work of the organisation? So often, capability building is seen as something which is separate from doing the real work in a programme or process, that is "extra" to their work. Our approach is the opposite.
We firmly believe that the best results comes from leaders applying their growing change leadership capability to their work – as they lead/deliver their organisation's business agenda - and doing it in a way that is discernible and measurable.

This article is a first article on how to go about "real time" change capability building, and focuses on getting the initial groundwork set for success.

So, where do you start?
Agree the initial framework of high priority work – linked to your strategic ambitions – and then agree who is accountable for delivery

Then, building change leadership capability would be in the context of enabling delivery of that work.

In working with one of our clients, their first task was for the Board to select the highest priority work that was critical to delivery against their organisation's strategic ambitions. Key projects were then chosen which were focused on delivering that agenda; agreement was also made on the prime "sponsor" (accountable to the Board) for each of these projects.

While criteria were initially developed for selecting the projects and those accountable for delivery, over time these criteria have been refined/strengthened and applied more rigorously. It has become a key determinant of success. Criteria now used are as follows:

Criteria for selecting projects and those accountable to lead/enable delivery:

1. People are chosen based on the high priority work required of the business. They are NOT chosen based on who the company feels needs development. For the high priority work/project, there is a clear line of sight from this piece of work to the strategy – it makes sense to everyone working on it "why" this piece of work and why now.
2. Those selected are to play an active role in creating, leading, designing and implementing that work; they are not there to simply advise or project manage.

3. People may volunteer, but must then be confirmed/nominated by the work/project sponsor, and agreed by the Board; their participation is seen as vital for leadership /delivery of the work, as well as for their own personal development.
4. They will be active in this change work throughout the duration of the project.
5. The individual wishes to be part of the work.

The criteria were then extended to consider the important aspect of project/ work teams to be established:

1. Ideally teams should be no more than 6 or 7 people.
2. The purpose of the team (remit, scope, deliverables and so on) must be clear; those leading the work/project must provide a clear project charter (setting out the goals of the work and expected impact) for approval.
3. Roles of each team member need to become clear at the beginning of the first meeting (note: they may evolve, but clarity at the beginning is required).
4. It must be made explicit (by the sponsor and/or by the team) who the leader of the team is.
5. For the change capability building offered:
   - whole teams should attend a series of workshops extending over a number of days interspersed over a period of about 9 months.
   - teams must attend the whole set of workshops; it's a commitment on behalf of the whole team not the individuals in it
6. Cross functional, cross Board area teams can work well when the rationale for them is clearly understood at the beginning

Learnings gained
A clear learning with our client is that a clear "frame" from the outset is of vital importance. This frame must be business-led (focused on the business deliverables and outcomes required) and agreed with the line sponsor/the Board from the beginning. There was clear evidence of accelerated progress when that clarity was in place, and the opposite in those instances without it (where teams spent weeks, and in some cases months, making insufficient progress).

Our client also learned hard lessons when team membership wasn't thought through carefully enough – where people on the teams weren't clear about their role, or why they had been appointed into the team. A hard look was then needed to change team members, a process which was sometimes difficult and/or painful. In a couple of instances, the needed decisions about the team weren't taken, which led to frustrations and less-than optimal performance of the team. This is no longer the case – with greater care being taken in ensuring that all team members fit the criteria when being appointed to the team.

How important setting the "frame" at the outset is!   As we have found, it's a requisite, solid platform to then build the change capability of leaders who are leading the work.
For more critical success factors – we refer you to future issues of Front Foot!!