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Authenticity is the key to successfully leading change

Leaders need to gain a deeper understanding of themselves and their impact on others if they are to succeed at managing organisational change, says a Northumbria University, Newcastle academic.

Dr Johan Coetsee, Senior Lecturer in Organisation and Human Resource Management at the University's Newcastle Business School, interviewed 27 successful CEOs of multinational companies and public sector organisations in the UK and Ireland to find out how they managed institutional change effectively.

The research aimed to find out the reasons why the majority of restructuring efforts fail despite many change management models being available. These models outline the approaches required to transition an organisation into a desired future state.

Following wide-ranging interviews with business leaders, Dr Coetsee discovered that the authenticity and attitude of the leader was the crucial factor in winning the hearts and minds of employees in order to create successful change in an organisation, rather than the use of an existing change management model.

His research revealed the importance of leaders understanding their own mental models and personal beliefs about their organisation and their employees in order to see how they impact their organisation and how they can influence people's 'readiness for change'.

Dr Coetsee said: "Many managers are very good in terms of the technical aspects of change. They are able to identify the change to structure or implementation but they forget the softer side of change management – the employees.

"If a leader wants to create alignment between their vision and their people they need to ask themselves how they feel about change on a personal level.

"Successful CEOs place a high emphasis on being authentic, being themselves. People need to be able to trust you. If you're not a charismatic leader there is no point faking it as you will lack authenticity, instead you need to understand who you are and what your values are. Your attitude to change will influence how the change occurs and whether it will be successful."

Dr Coetsee's research and conclusions have been published in a ground-breaking text book, co-written with colleague Professor Patrick Flood, Professor of Organisational Behaviour at DCU Business School, Dublin City University, entitled *Change Lessons from the CEO: Real People, Real Change*.

"Although we have a lot of models of change management, over 60% of leaders efforts fail or fail to reach the intended objective," said Dr Coetsee. "Our book is unique as we don't suggest a specific model for business leaders

to implement. Instead we extract real change lessons from practice and provide leaders with tools to develop their own change model which is specific to the particular organisation, conditions and circumstances.

“Change is inevitable. Managing change initiatives successfully can be the difference between organisations and teams that thrive and those that come apart at the seams. For business leaders and students, our book offers practical and proven guidance for doing change right.”

Change Lessons from the CEO gives professionals and business students a unique guide to managing institutional change successfully. Endorsed by leading business people, company directors and academics from prestigious institutions including Harvard Business School and Boston University School of Management, the book is particularly relevant in the current economic and social climate that has seen many organisations and companies embark on significant structural changes.

The text offers solutions far removed from the standard one-size-fits-all business models, instead emphasising the importance of a manager or CEO gaining a true understanding of themselves, their organisation and their employees in order to create their own tailor-made model for change that will succeed. The authors aim to close the gap between change management theory and practice.

Through a mixture of theory, case studies and lessons learned from real-life experiences, *Change Lessons from the CEO* advises leaders to realise how people experience them as a manager.

The authors recommend leaders temper their ego, demonstrate humility and adopt a flexible and agile leadership that empowers their employees to implement the change effectively.

Dr Coetsee added: “Winning hearts and minds is key, as being good at managing a project isn’t the same as being a good manager of change. You need to create a sense of readiness for change.”

Change Lessons from the CEO: Real People, Real Change, by Johan Coetsee and Patrick Flood is published by Jossey-Bass.

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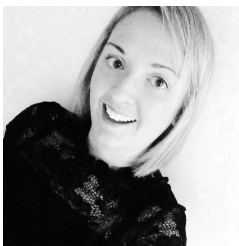
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