

How can we lead differently in the 21st Century to accelerate social change?

Report produced by Peridot Partners
November 2018



The event was facilitated and based on leadership research by Within People

Introduction:

How can we lead differently in the 21st Century to accelerate social change?

Countless courses, books and articles discuss and dissect what makes a good leader. We didn't want to provide just another framework or another theory.

We wanted to hold a conversation. To talk about what's happening **right now**. Ask the people that we're working with, what leadership **means to them** and how it helps them to **accelerate change** and **social purpose** within their own organisations and environments.

And - what they need to be better leaders.

Every day at Peridot Partners we talk about leadership. We pride ourselves about getting under the skin of the organisations we work with, to understand their objectives, to provide a constructive and challenging sounding board and to deliver what they need.

We connect leadership to the purpose, values and culture of the organisation, so invariably in our recruitment our job is to create solutions for business needs – we do this in the form of recruiting the best people.

We start with questions: What do they want to achieve or aspire to? Who can lead much needed change? Who can take an organisation and develop it to do the best for the cause or people it's supporting?

So, unsurprisingly, for us leadership is about people. But what makes that person the 'one' for that organisation?

The organisations we work with are changing their communities and sectors for the better. The purpose and the vision may differ yet they all share a common strand - culture. Culture although different in each place, is at the heart of making things happen. And within that culture - supporting it, driving it and nurturing it, are their leaders.

These are the people who build and unleash human potential to accelerate societal change. We wanted to ask, what is it that helps them do this?

We work with amazing and driven organisations - whether they are supporting people living with cancer, developing the workforce of the future, supporting professionals in their chosen careers, or fighting poverty or addiction.

But we live in a time where the only constant is change. New technologies, flexibility in the workplace and an external environment which continually scrutinises impact and is judged by a 24-hour stream of media output, mean that as leaders we're always 'on'.

So how can leaders show up to lead greater impact in the sector? What is it that we might fear and could be holding us back from being authentic leaders?

And what do we value in other leaders?

We started with seven qualities and opened them up the room.

The Background

In early November 2018 in partnership with Within People, we invited a select group of CEOs and leaders to help us start a conversation about leadership.

Within People are experts in coaching people to find their purpose, and to lead and grow the organisations they love.

From extended interviews with leaders around the world, Within had noticed seven common qualities that came up time and again.

Starting with these qualities, we provided a safe and confidential space for our leaders, wherever they were in their leadership journey, to talk about what they identify in themselves, using these qualities as a starting base and opening them up for further discussion.

How it worked and what we talked about:



When I started in my career, it was much harder to be yourself. You felt you had to be a certain type, or you were fitting in with a certain culture. In the organisation I now run, I encourage people to bring themselves to work, rather than feel they have to be a certain way to fit in. I want them to be themselves.



Vicky Browning,
CEO
ACEVO

As our attendees arrived we asked them to pick one of the seven qualities - the quality that has best served them so far on their leadership journey.

And then we set the scene. An honest, open, safe environment to talk. ACEVO CEO, Vicky Browning joined us to talk about her leadership journey.

Vicky's honesty set the tone for the evening and allowed attendees to see a different type of leader in action. It gave the room permission to talk honestly about their own leadership experience and how they might lead differently.

The qualities of **vulnerability, empathy, curiosity, creativity, conviction, courage** and **patience** don't stand alone. They work together and our event allowed our attendees to discuss what each quality meant to them.

People felt validated by sharing experiences - being in leadership roles means that they 'hold a lot within themselves'. We talk about loneliness a lot in leadership and this resonated with the group and being able to talk to each other showed that they're not alone.

Overwhelmingly it feels like there aren't a lot of role models that people are able to connect with tangibly or reflect the type of qualities we talked about, in an authentic way.

The discussions have been captured and anonymised below to provide a starting point for how leaders can 'lead' differently to develop and grow their organisations.

The content reflects the perspectives of the brilliant people in the room and their experiences as leaders. This is **their voice** discussing how they can **lead differently** in the 21st Century to **accelerate social change**.

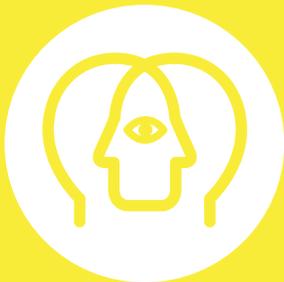
Seven Qualities of Modern Leadership in the 21st Century

These seven leadership qualities have been defined by Within People following conversations with leaders in the UK, Europe, North America, South Africa and Asia, uncovering key learnings about leading in the 21st Century that's different to past leadership.



Vulnerability

Being who you really are, open to uncertainty and emotional exposure.



Empathy

Understanding others for who they are and from where they are.



Curiosity

Enquiring with openness and objectivity, and listening for learning.



Creativity

Inspiring different ways of thinking and bringing out the creator in others.



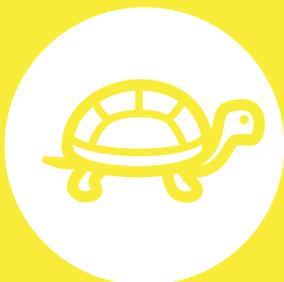
Conviction

Keeping the integrity of the promise that's been made – doing what you say you'll do.



Courage

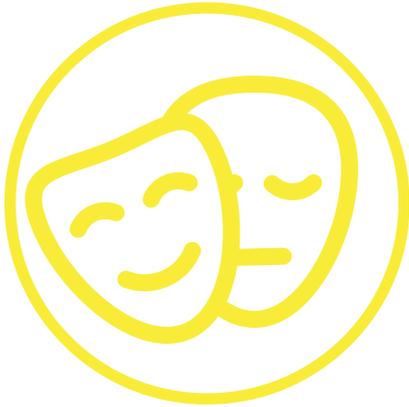
Accepting there will be fear and being able to work with it so it doesn't hold you back.



Patience

The calm needed to work with what is, and not rush to solve symptoms.

Vulnerability:



Discussion:

Vulnerability is closely connected to empathy and courage. To be vulnerable means being able to share part of who you are and in doing so present your authentic self. To be clear about your values. There is a distinction about being you – both at work and at home and how the two should align. ‘Bring your whole self to work’.

It’s not brave to be resilient all the time; it impacts on our physical and mental health. By putting up a front and ‘soldiering’ on, as leaders we open ourselves up to burn out. We also put ourselves in danger of role modelling behaviour that won’t support an open and transparent culture.

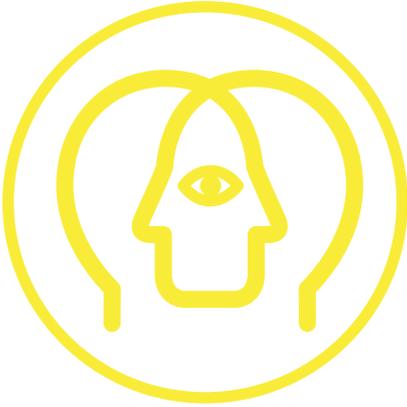
For many people, there is a direct link to the work that their organisation does and the power of being vulnerable. How being vulnerable can open conversations with beneficiaries and enable trust and empowerment.

There is currently a lack of role models who are authentic and comfortable sharing failures. Conversely, there is a fear of being vulnerable and how showing vulnerability could bring external criticism and attract negative publicity.

Summary:

- We need more role models showing this quality, particularly for new CEOs starting out.
- Resilience is overrated – we need to be who we are and be able to admit that we can’t ‘do it all’ all of the time.
- Acknowledging we don’t know everything leads to connection, information, support, sharing experiences and trust.
- As we get older, we become more comfortable sharing and being vulnerable.
- Understanding and judging the best time to show vulnerability can be powerful.
- The act of modelling vulnerability can bring about really positive interactions and reactions of teams, staff and service users.

Empathy:



Being empathetic has enabled an open culture within my workplace where staff feel empowered and can be honest. It's also allowed me to have a greater overlap between work me and personal me which for a long time were vastly different.



Discussion:

This is defined as the most 'people' focussed quality and the overarching idea is that if we don't understand people, we can't get the best out of them.

If organisations are about people, we need to understand their motivations and why they do what they do.

By learning to understand people, we also have to make ourselves vulnerable. Empathy is about developing a connection and trust. It means that we need to give some of ourselves and open up, to foster a culture of honesty and transparency.

We are fearful of empathy being seen as a weakness or a way for underperforming staff to manipulate situations.

Summary:

- We tend to think we're good at empathy, but it can be difficult to be authentic and show real interest.
- We should ask people about their 'story' rather than ask who they are as defined by their job description.
- Showing empathy means we need to be honest and show the 'human' side – admitting that we don't know everything.
- We need to recognise that expert leaders aren't always expert managers of people and might need help and support.
- We should manage empathy with conviction and not as an excuse for accepting under-performance.
- Showing empathy forces us to consider other perspectives which is critical for understanding our organisations.

Curiosity:



Discussion:

Curiosity is described as the bit before creativity. The way we try to understand the better ways of doing things. It comes with its own energy and is about exploring potential. It creates opportunities – for new business, for partnerships, for re-modelling services and questioning the status quo, among others.

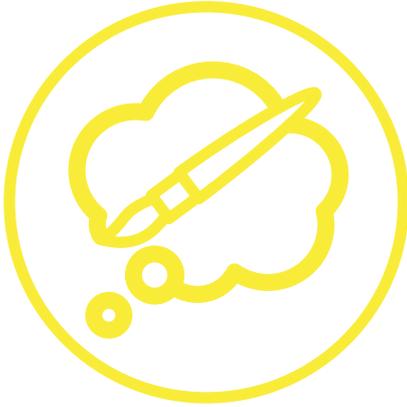
It allows freedom to ask questions, supports generative thinking and enhances organisations and the way they deliver their purpose.

As leaders, we can't know all the answers, we rely on and trust those around us to support us with their expertise. But we can bring our people together to channel and collaborate using their expertise to develop new ideas and products with a shared understanding and unique perspective.

Summary:

- There is a tendency to naval gaze.
- Curiosity can be disruptive if not harnessed on delivering core purpose.
- It enhances an organisation.
- We need to understand how we as leaders encourage curiosity at every level.

Creativity:



Discussion:

Overwhelmingly we agreed that we don't talk about our creativity in the sector, it's not championed. Yet everything we do comes from a need to support people, groups and causes to create a change whether on a local, regional or national scale.

The discussion focussed on diversity and how different experiences, backgrounds and people bring creativity to their sectors – and that we need to do more to encourage and embrace this.

We make a lot of assumptions that we don't always test because we think we know best – embracing an open, unburdened approach can help to drive innovation.

From social prescribing and people centred services, often sectors like not-for-profit are ahead of the local authority and government services, delivering excellent and innovative programmes. In this modern time, there is a shift in power from 'doing to' beneficiaries to 'partnering with' and creativity allows this to flourish.

Summary:

- We are experts in 'frugal innovation' – piloting creative ideas with little or no funding.
- We need to create the time and space for idea generation.
- Creativity is supercharged by diversity.
- There is value of bringing people in from outside our sectors to challenge ideas and bring new perspectives.
- Our assumptions can lead to ideas being blocked.

Conviction:



Discussion:

We want the best for the causes and organisations that we represent. Having social purpose needs conviction. Having conviction spoke to living our values. It's a driving tool to build teams and respect.

As CEOs, we need to manage multiple stakeholders, both externally and internally and balance their sense of the vision for the organisation. There can be a danger of becoming side tracked away from core purpose by competing 'convictions'.

Conviction goes hand-in-hand with providing clarity and a sense of purpose. It also links to courage and being confident with pursuing objectives that support the vision of the organisation.

Summary:

- Conviction helps to drive collaboration.
- Sometimes we just need 'sheer bloody mindedness' to keep on track and get things done.
- We need to develop the ability to manage 'everybody's conviction' and understand our own boundaries.
- We need to be OK with asserting the 'conviction' that helped us get the top job and trust our instincts.

Courage:



Discussion:

There is a perception that courage is typically ascribed to 'hero leaders'. The alpha presenting, directional type of leadership that is more command and control, more of a historical style – a way to lead a 'herd' rather than empower people.

With all these qualities, defining them means something different to each person. So what does courage actually look like? What does it feel like?

As leaders in the civil society, we show courage on a daily basis – standing up for the causes and services we deliver. Being the voice of those who cannot speak and advocating in our communities. How do we reflect this courage on a personal level?

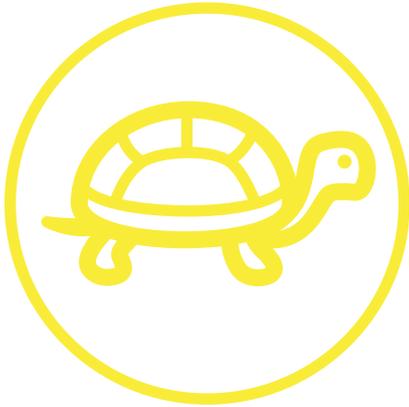
Admitting failures and having the ability to reach out and acknowledge when support is needed is a sign of courage. Sometimes we over think courage, perhaps it's just more simple that we believe?

Courage links to being comfortable in ourselves, our values and our boundaries.

Summary:

- It's ok to take risks and it's ok to fail.
- We need to make space to fail and learn and not be ashamed.
- We should challenge what courage means in a 21st Century world.
- We need to role-model 'courageous vulnerability'.

Patience:



We need to learn that sometimes being just 'good' is good enough and that constant pressure, particularly if self-directed, can lead to burn out.



Discussion:

We sometimes struggle with aligning patience to ourselves. As leaders, traditional thinking assumes that to be successful we need to get things done quickly. We all know about the concept of the 'first 90 days' and the push to achieve and create change fast from external influences and internal stakeholders (often Trustee Boards).

The 'quick fix' way of operating doesn't fit with the experience in the room. Patience is something that the leaders felt they had needed to learn, something that is at odds with the perceived 'dynamism' of being a leader. It links through to empathy and the ability to listen and fully understand what is happening within an organisation. Having the expertise, judgement and confidence to understand the times when impatience is needed, is also an important skill to develop.

As a new CEO, pressure for quick change can lead to unrealistic expectations and the pressure to jump to conclusions or solutions that might not fit the problem. The group thought we need to be more mindful of the consequences of impatience and the impact of saying 'yes' to everything.

There is a balance between giving direction but also empowering people to own their own ideas and strategies.

Patience is complex. Creating real sustained change takes time. It's not something that can be forced. It's constrained by the pace of individuals – how do we ensure that the early adopters and the general mass share the same journey?

Summary:

- We need to create space for reflection.
- It takes self-awareness to understand that it's not about setting unrealistic short-term targets.
- We need to take the time to understand the team that we lead (the skills / approaches and behaviours).
- We should encourage the value of diversity in styles.
- There are opportunities to create time for new and relevant experiences for ourselves and team members.

What next?:

The event and this report are the conversation starters. We're not going to define a leadership framework for the civil society. Leadership and organisations are too fluid and too individual to prescribe a 'one size fits all'.

What we want to do is offer a safe space to discuss what leadership looks like and how we can support leaders to discover their strengths and be comfortable in being authentic.

What we do next has to be practical and useful for current and inspiring leaders, at whatever stage they're at in their leadership journey.

We're motivated by creating a network of like-minded and progressive leaders, who might see themselves in some of these qualities and want to keep learning.

In 2019, we will focus on formalising our leadership promise starting with a Leadership Network. This is a community for curious people who want to accelerate social change within their own organisations. You can sign up to hear more:

www.peridotpartners.co.uk/leadership

Who we are:



We deliver better leadership to accelerate societal change. We hosted and brought together the leaders in the room as part of our commitment to supporting progressive leadership. We wrote this report to begin a bigger conversation. It is the first step in a bigger piece of work.

www.peridotpartners.co.uk

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Within People is an international partnership that helps people find purpose and grow using a coaching approach that builds clarity, belief and confidence.

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Thank you:

We couldn't have held this event without the honesty and engagement from the following leaders:

Vicky Browning - ACEVO - Chief Executive

Rose Caldwell - Concern Worldwide Executive - Director

Laura Doughty - Interim Consultant

Esther Foreman - The Social Change Agency - Founding Director

Jim Gardner - Kent Union - Chief Executive

Vanessa Harwood-Whitcher - Institution of Occupational Safety and Health - Director of Professional Services

Frances Longley - Amref Health Africa UK - CEO

Julie Nerney - Association of Colleges - Chair Designate

Nick Parker - Raleigh International - Director of Business Development

Lucy Peake - Grandparents Plus - Chief Executive

Martin Powell - Institution of Structural Engineers - Chief Executive

Julie Randles - Causeway Education - CEO

John Schless - Students' Union University of Greenwich - Chief Executive

Lauren Seager-Smith - Kidscape - CEO

Stephanie Talbot - Stoke on Trent College - Governor

James Thorne - Institute of Quarrying - CEO

Karl Wilding - National Council For Voluntary Organisations - Director of Public Policy

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