Insights into Leadership Development. A Practitioner's perspective

by **Simon James Day**

I have been part of a world that has seen considerable change in the last twenty years in my career. I have been fortunate to have worked within many different companies, cultures and sectors. Change is constant. What I have noticed are the same considerations apply regardless of the circumstance an organisation faces when leaders are wrestling with what they can do to drive business performance through its people. I call this 'Leader led Human Resources'.

This **does not** mean that I am positioning there is no role for HR to play in this ever changing world in which organisations aim to thrive, or just survive in. HR practitioners need to feel that they are part of the business. Much has been written about this. But what if we measure our success as subject matter experts in enabling our leaders to drive the HR agenda? This requires us (HR Practitioners) to be agile, knowledgeable and good leaders in our own right. I have seen, and been part of, too many HR agendas that are busy and full of expectation but, when you scratch the surface, have poor alignment to what needs to be worked on when it comes to making a real difference in business performance. Our profession focuses on lots of reactive 'stuff'.

This also applies to what a leadership development agenda should look like. Having a number of courses and programmes available is not a good measure of great leadership development…although unfortunately many people think it does! How 'development' is achieved fits amongst these other pieces in the puzzle:

1. Context.
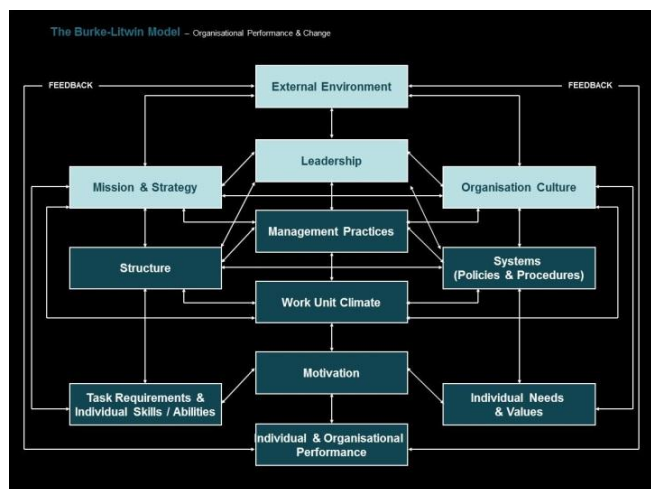
Understanding the world in which we operate is critical to success. I know this is stating the obvious but the thing about common sense is that it is not that common.

I have used various models in my practice to help leaders reflect on the challenges and growth plans that are due to be carved in stone for all to see. HR practitioners need to be at the heart of this. A model I strongly encourage further exploration on is the Burke-Litwin Organisation Change and Performance model. It may look complex but it is easy to use as a framework to ensure conversations are focused.

2.   Performance.

The aim of any Leader is to ensure that full performance is being generated from its people. 'Effort' is not contribution. The following table articulates what I believe constitutes full performance. This can be adapted for any level or role.

Category	Definition
Operating/Financial Results	Execution. *Targets, KPIs, deliverables*
Management	Processes. *Plans, prioritisation, delegation*
Leadership	People. *Vision, performance, development*
Relationships	Networks. *Internal, external*
Growth/Innovation	New stuff. *Methods, products, systems*

3.   Potential

I know there is a debate around performance being a predictor of potential but from my experience I think it is. I have used many psychometric assessments to assist Senior Leaders to identify its top potential but I would say there is a 90% correlation with what they would have on their list based on performance.

There are two additional filters that I have seen applied to review your high potential list further:

Filter 1: Leadership traits
- ✓ Hunger for knowledge and a willingness to learn
- ✓ Regular and frequent attempts to add value through innovation
- ✓ Willingness to tackle tougher and tougher challenges
- ✓ Put team results ahead of their own
- ✓ Open to ideas and improvements suggested by others
- ✓ Anticipates and avoids obstacles
- ✓ Develops talent

Filter 2: Stretch capacity
- ✓ Ambitious career aspirations
- ✓ Solid business/commercial acumen
- ✓ Strong relationships across the business
- ✓ Led delivery of additional work in current role

What I also encourage HR to review and work with Leaders to assess are the derailers of potential. Although high performance may be experienced the following may be considerations when looking at succession and development issues

Filter 3: Leadership traits
- ✖   Status is more important than contribution
- ✖   Does the work rather than leads the people
- ✖   Short term results are unsustainable or unrepeatable
- ✖   Resists productivity improvements or change
- ✖   Ignores boss, doesn't prepare for meetings with boss
- ✖   Not interested in business issues outside own area
- ✖   Not interested in development
- ✖   Uses a lot of manager's time
- ✖   Repeats the same mistakes
- ✖   Changes jobs too quickly
- ✖   Can't set priorities

4.   Succession.

Making sure you have the right people in the right place at the right time may sound straightforward but as we know there are many twists and turns when it comes to succession planning. I use the following benchmark to help identify where attention needs to go when looking at critical roles in the organisation:

Succession Benchstrength:

1:1:2 - Role: RN: LT

For each role there should be one ready now (RN) and two long term (LT) successors

RN: count how many ready now successors. Divide this by the total number of roles.

LT: count how many roles have no less than 2 long term successors. Divide this by the total number of roles.

Green zone: at least 70% for RN and/or LT successors and/or two LT successors

Yellow zone is 40-69%.

Red zone is below 40

5.   Development

The best development is where people solve business problems. Accountability drives development not programs or training plans. We know that most development happens on the job not in a classroom. The boss is never neutral, delegation has the biggest impact on development. Developing people is real business work. Good leaders do this constantly with their people.

Development serves two purposes, to:

1. **Improve performance** in current position, or
2. **Preparation** for next position

"Is there anything we can and should be doing to help improve performance in the current position to prepare the individual in time for the next anticipated move?"

You need to know data on **both** to make development meaningful and value-add.
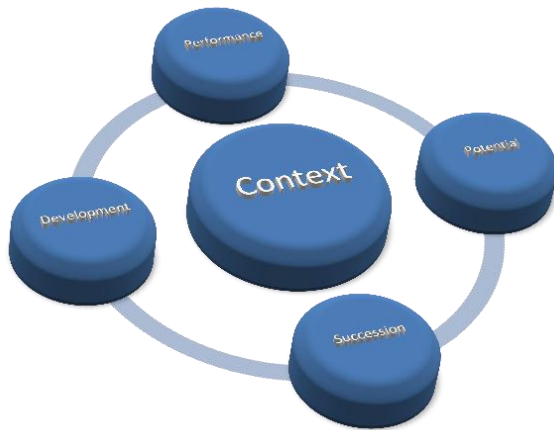
There is a lot more on each of these topics but the point I am trying to stress is that if we, HR Practitioners, put our leaders in the centre of what we do, our role enables them to drive the agenda and understand the impact on decisions that are being made in the boardroom. Surely the best way to get HR at the top table is to have our leaders own the HR agenda….Leader led HR!!

Biography:

Simon James Day is Head of Leadership Development and Succession Planning in Qatargas Operating Company, a post he has held for the last two years. He has over 20 years' experience in Talent Management working as an internal and external consultant to businesses that span a wide range of different business sectors including Banking, Pharmaceuticals, Media, Telecommunications and Energy. Simon has also worked in academia, undertaking a research project at Teachers College, Columbia University, New York. His Master's degree is in People and Organisation Development at Roffey Park Institute, where his thesis was on organisational change and performance.

He has created and facilitated many high potential talent programmes across the globe and has insight into the different ways organisations tackle the topic of 'leadership development'. Simon's approach looks at a variety of ways leaders in organisations can learn from other 'outside' influences and thinking. This has included working with the British Cycling team to incorporate their innovative philosophy in individual and organisational performance, and sending leaders to a Brazilian rainforest to understand the challenges and impact corporate decisions are having on the external environment. Recently this approach has enabled Qatargas leaders to work with student campus leaders in a local community to explore the meaning of 'what is leadership?'