Research report
May 2014

Leadership

Easier said than done

WORK WORKFORCE WORKPLACE

Championing better work and working lives

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Leadership – easier said than done

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About this report

Last year we published research evidence that suggested that organisations may be looking in the wrong places when trying to improve leadership capacity (CIPD 2013c). While the *capability* of individuals is growing through training and experience, their *ability* to lead is not always realised, where an organisation's context is not set up to meet the need for leadership.

In this report we are looking in more detail at the barriers to leadership and good people management in practice. Our insights are based on over 120 interviews and focus groups with managers, employees and HR practitioners in seven large organisations.

We observe that the need for leadership has changed following the global shifts in the ways we work today. While organisations are seen to be better at understanding leadership at the highest levels in the hierarchy, many are now seeking to devolve leadership down the line, expecting more junior managers and employees without managerial responsibility to treat the organisational agenda as their own.

We then consider whether the internal organisational environments are fit for the demands placed on managers and leaders facing external challenges. This research argues that there is a mismatch between the rhetoric of improving leadership capacity, and the organisational context (including people management systems and processes).

While organisations have traditionally focused on developing the capability of individual leaders and managers, we recommend that they give greater consideration to two sets of factors that impact on the *ability* of individuals to apply their skills in practice. Practitioners can make a greater difference by taking the next step from training individual leaders to improving the leadership capacity of the organisation as a whole, by focusing their efforts on understanding what leadership their organisation needs and whether the organisational context is aligned to support it.

Introduction

Surveys repeatedly indicate that organisations attach a strong priority to identifying and developing leadership and management skills to respond to the external challenges (Henley Business School 2014). However, our research also shows dissatisfaction with the state of leadership and management, particularly at the middle and front-line manager level, despite considerable investment in training (CIPD 2014a).

The deficit of visible 'leadership' at all levels in organisations has been for some time attributed mainly to the lack of capability of *individual leaders*, with academics and practitioners prescribing the behaviours that individuals need to exhibit in order to empower, motivate and engage people; or to develop and implement a strategic direction (Day et al 2014). Interventions to improve leadership and people management would then focus on giving individuals specific knowledge and skills, with some organisations failing to recognise that leadership is a process that exists in the context of the organisation's processes, as well as the external trends in the way we work today.

It has been argued that 'heroic' leadership is not the model that would fit the fast pace of the change in the world of work (CIPD 2008; Raelin 2011). In order to succeed today, organisations are highly dependent on the abilities of their workforce to embrace new ways of working (CIPD 2013a). In turn, managers are required to support fast-moving organisational strategies, and to bring the people along, delivering greater productivity more quickly and at a lower cost. Even employees without formal managerial responsibility are now expected to treat the organisation's agenda as their own, lead from the front line and do 'the right thing' for the customer and for their employer, sometimes without time to consult up the organisational hierarchy.

At the same time, developing the skills of individual leaders does not necessarily grow the capacity of those individuals to engage in effective collective leadership processes. Even where individual managers and employees have the required *capability*, their *ability* to put this into practice can be affected by the surrounding context, including external circumstances and informal aspects of the work environment and culture.

In order to explore the context in which leaders and managers operate today and understand whether some of the current leadership development efforts are misplaced, we conducted interviews and focus groups with managers, employees and HR practitioners in seven large organisations.

The impact of external pressures

The volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) context of the modern world is having a major impact on how we work. The global consumer market and narrower profit margins are fuelling a search for business efficiencies. Public sector organisations are being asked to cut costs and are struggling to retain the quality of service with fewer resources available. More open forms of working have created opportunities for innovation; however, failures are becoming public, making it more difficult for organisations to recover trust after they have made mistakes (CIPD 2013a).

In light of the prevailing lack of trust in senior leaders, organisations are starting to gain a better understanding of how leadership at the highest levels in the hierarchy can support the external challenge. There is a broad consensus that those individuals have a clear responsibility for leading others as part of their role, and various leadership styles have been considered to be effective for leading organisations (Henley Business School 2014).

The need for leadership throughout the organisation has only recently been acknowledged, mostly as front-line and middle managers have been asked to support continuous organisational change and generate discretionary effort by staff, as well as to apply informal leadership techniques in order to influence internal and external colleagues who do not report to them directly.

'Pressure to deliver on target can drive supervisors to adopt a hands-on approach, although they may have learned in the classroom that they should achieve results through empowering and developing their teams.'

Four trends in the external environment contribute to the need for leadership in organisations today and shape what leadership is expected to look like:

- *Frequency and pace of change.* For many organisations in the UK and beyond, change has become the 'new normal'. Quicker information-sharing and stiff competition have called for decisions to be devolved down the line and for every employee to 'buy into' their organisation's agenda and to make decisions on behalf of the business.
- *Greater transparency and global consumer choices.* The public nature of many operations today raises an organisation's risk of losing customers to a competitor. There is a greater impetus to ensure that 'how' work is done adheres to a standard of behaviour that is consistent across the organisation and that, first and foremost, employees are doing 'the right thing'.
- *Collaborative working.* Flatter organisational structures and external partnerships mean that sometimes individuals need to influence others without having formal (managerial) authority over those colleagues. For example, this is the role of team co-ordinators or project managers who set direction and monitor progress of colleagues at the same job level. Equally, leadership behaviours are expected when negotiating priorities and creating a common vision together with a partner organisation.
- *Workforce diversity.* Wider societal transformation has changed the reasons why people come to work today, when and where they prefer to work, and the amount of effort they are prepared to contribute. Leaders need to find individual approaches to these employees and engage them for greater performance, no matter what their individual motivations to come to work are.

The role of the organisational context

While external trends have been calling for greater leadership within businesses, the structures and processes of organisations have not always been adapted to facilitate the ability of individuals at the middle and front-line levels to lead. An employee said:

> *When I lead on a project I would still ask for my manager's approval because I wouldn't want her to feel that I've gone over her. If she couldn't help me or if she was absent, then yes, I would go to another member of staff.*

Specifically for those in managerial roles, organisational context at times is not aligned with their people management responsibilities (developing and empowering others), which are necessary to enable leadership at the organisation's front line. Our earlier research (CIPD 2013c) suggested that even those managers who had leadership and management training and development might find it difficult to satisfy the strategic direction flowing from the top, on the one hand, and the day-to-day needs and interests of their people, on the other hand.

In a YouGov survey, 28% of respondents with responsibilities for managing others said they face situations where they frequently have to put the interests of the organisation (for example achieving an objective) above the interests and/or well-being of their team members (CIPD 2013c). For example, one respondent said:

Taking a systems perspective

Systems thinking and complexity theory are approaches to understanding how elements of social organisations interact with each other, the environment and the wider context. They consider the relationships between the parts of the system rather than the elements on their own. In turn, the systemic leadership approach (Tate 2013) treats the organisation as a system which impacts upon the quality of leadership delivered. It begins by identifying the organisation's need for leadership and considers how leadership performance – at the organisational and the manager level – can be encouraged (or discouraged) by what surrounds individuals.

Figure 1: Leadership in an organisation viewed from a systems perspective

The global trends impacting the world of work today may call for quicker decisions, bottom-line mentality and it is unlikely that organisational practitioners can reverse macro-level transformation. At the same time, they can make a difference by adopting a more systemic approach to identifying and fulfilling organisations' needs for more effective leadership throughout the business.

Pressure to deliver on target can drive supervisors to adopt a hands-on approach, although they may have learned in the classroom that they should achieve results through empowering and developing their teams.

If something needs doing yesterday, then under those circumstances it's probably not appropriate to spend time getting someone to come along. In an ideal world, I'd like to say, 'You do the job and I will coach you, and work with you through it, and I will help you when you need help.' But there are occasions when, because of pressures on the company you just don't have the opportunity to do that. You need to do it yourself because it needs doing now.

So, even where individuals possess the *capability* to lead, organisational factors may affect their *ability* to respond to the external context. These factors are:

1. **Hierarchy and bureaucracy** undermine devolved, front-line leadership.
2. **Short-term, bottom-line focus** overshadows priorities of delivering quality.
3. **Individualism** in reward and accountability hinders collaborative working and creates inertia.
4. **'Us' and 'them' mentality** obstructs the potential benefits of workforce diversity.

These contextual factors are interlinked in practice; for example, organisational hierarchy can lead to greater focus on individual gain and competition for promotion. Equally, the focus on short-term, bottom-line outcomes in systems that reward individuals rather than teams may mean that people become more compliant and avoid risky innovative practices that could compromise their immediate achievements and individual record. Ability and willingness of individuals to embrace workforce diversity, rather than adopting an 'us' and 'them' mentality, is a critical contextual factor that impacts on how the other challenges play out.

The impact of the organisation's environment on individuals' ability to lead means that simply training them in leadership and management skills is not enough. Instead,

> *Organisations need a far deeper understanding of the organisational environment, as well as of the wider customer context in which their employees operate.*

To help practitioners grasp the opportunity, in the following sections we describe **four key organisational systemic factors** present in some organisations today and explain how the ability of individuals and teams to exercise leadership is affected by them.

Challenge 1: Hierarchy and bureaucracy

- Despite the rhetoric of devolved leadership and courage to make independent decisions, individual suggestions or challenges to the top–down decisions are often dismissed. Some genuine mistakes are penalised because of the consequences to the external reputation of an organisation, while other individuals can get away with more severe cases of misconduct.
- Existing top–down communication channels are not suited to provide adequate support to staff and speed up adaptation and learning.
- There is a split in the perceptions of the quality of leadership and management between 'operational' and 'strategic' parts of the business, which is indicative of the lack of communication and joint priorities between the more senior and the more junior managers.
- The decreasing average tenure of senior leaders means a new round of changes is sometimes brought in before the previous ones have settled.
- When implementing the fast-moving change agenda, managers don't always have the buy-in themselves, which undermines their ability to gain trust and credibility from their staff.

The increasing complexity of how information and knowledge is produced and shared in today's organisations means that all employees – not only those in managerial positions – often have to lead their peers, or even external partners, when collaborating on a project. They are also expected to challenge their superiors where they see a more effective solution to the problem at hand.

The ability of the front-line employees to make independent decisions that support wider organisational interests is welcomed by many organisations. According to the CIPD *Learning and Development* survey 2014, at least 40% of organisations name accelerating change as a key reason for planning leadership development activities. One HR representative said:

> *In terms of managers, we're looking for somebody who is quite democratic in their approach. But because we are going through a change programme [we need] somebody who can be quite a pacesetter as well and say, "Okay, this is the programme that we've got, these are the steps that we're going through".*

At the same time, not all individuals at middle and front-line levels feel supported by formal organisational structures to follow the rhetoric of devolved leadership, as the organisation's hierarchy can act as a barrier to leadership that is devolved to the line.

Procedural bureaucracy discourages initiative

One of the key inconsistencies in messages received by the managers is the conflict between a call for more leadership on the one hand and clear decision-making hierarchy on the other hand. Managers noted that they are quickly discouraged from making their own decisions after their initiative is reprimanded the first few times.

> *If you try and interpret [the procedure], you will get a lot of resistance to that, and you do feel that it's not worth your effort to try and make your own opinion heard because people aren't interested in it. If you try and do it differently, you get told "No, don't be naughty, that's not how we do it, it needs to be done like this." So you give up after a while.*

When the hierarchy discourages distributed leadership and innovation at the front line, it can also slow down collaborative working between departments, where individuals defer decisions to the higher level in the hierarchy. Of course, more senior managers may not, in turn, have the freedom to make decisions themselves, with

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everyday decisions being pushed up for approval.

> *There's a very clear hierarchy involved when it comes to very simple decisions. They've looked at it, and really, it should be within their remit, but just in case, they check it with their director. Sometimes, the director will check it with their executive director before a final response is given.*
>
> *People will consult you because it says in a policy document somewhere that they need to consult someone of your specialism or level. People already know the answer that you are going to give because they are experienced in their role, but they still go on: 'The policy says that I have got to ask you because on page 43, 10 years ago, it says, I should.' I am quite happy, as a superior, to manage the risks that go along with that, but actually, what value am I adding to that discussion? Very little.*

The failure of senior managers in an organisation to streamline ideas coming from the front line may act as an obstacle to the new, more efficient ways of working. Some front-line supervisors admit that good ideas about operational aspects of service delivery come from those who face the customers directly.

> *A lot of the people that I supervise have really good ideas about how to progress something. And they show, really, leadership styles by coming forward and researching something and presenting it. And I think that's where the future leaders start off with coming up with these good ideas and presenting them and, sometimes, progressing with those ideas.*

Communication channels are not suited for sharing information quickly enough

There is a very clear split in the perceptions of the quality of leadership and management between managers with primarily 'operational' and 'strategic' responsibilities. Similar disconnect is present between the managerial levels and front-line employees. Senior managers can sometimes perceive operational departments to be resistant to change and lacking the understanding of the strategic needs of the organisation. As a result, they are more likely to adopt a command-and-control approach in the circumstances of change and uncertainty, as directive leadership is expected to bring greater performance results more quickly (Lorinkova et al 2013). One HR representative said:

> *When we managed change previously it was a lean approach but it was very much bottom–up, so you did your empirical research, you responded to that research, you identified change, and you involved people in all of those processes. Of course, in a time of austerity, things need to happen in, perhaps, a more dynamic way. So, consequently, we've drifted into a much more top–down approach.*

An added challenge for change management is the decreasing average tenure of senior leaders (Kaplan and Minton 2012), who provide strategic direction for change. While the overall organisational objectives may stay

the same, the 'how' of achieving those objectives changes as the thinking of the senior leaders evolves or as new senior managers arrive. If the next round of changes is put forward before the previous programme settles, managers may feel they did not have enough time to learn new behaviours and to develop them among staff. Reflecting on this challenge, one senior manager said:

> *Of course, my brain can run away with the next good thing, but for my team to deliver yesterday's good thing, I need to give them a couple of months to sort that out, possibly, depending on how big of an idea I have had. People will get sick of your brilliant ideas, if you have had one every day, by the time you have even got to Friday in your first week. They can't change things fast enough to keep up with them.*

When the directive approach is applied to staff with experience, lack of consultation can undermine engagement and cause frustration. From the point of view of operational staff, the senior leaders appear to be divorced from the realities of day-to-day working and, therefore, often make uninformed decisions, translated into unrealistic targets.

> *The people who make the decisions don't actually really understand what we do. And I think there are a lot of leaders in our department who work in the department up to the level of supervisor. Above that, you've got the management team. If you want something to be done, you have to almost go above them. The operational managers haven't been given enough power to have an influence. They are here to run the team and that's it. To account for what we are doing now and that's it. Not to be involved in the changes, not to be involved in how we evolve. And I think that is where it is, possibly, breaking down.*
>
> *I sometimes think that arbitrary figures are set at government level and they are twisted beyond all recognition by the time they get down to grassroots level. People do things without really knowing why they are doing them or whether that's what the public want.*

A frequent concern of middle and front-line managers, as well as front-line employees, is that, despite being close to operations, they are not always consulted on the feasibility of new targets. In turn, senior managers explain, they do not have time to communicate change sufficiently, as they themselves are under pressure to meet the agenda of the top leadership team.

It seems that where experienced managers and staff are expected to embrace and implement change quickly, and without being involved in shaping the direction of change, they might not have the buy-in to the purpose of the change programme themselves. It can then be particularly difficult for line managers – as leaders – to communicate the direction meaningfully to their direct reports. Trust becomes a particularly acute issue in change, as the organisation expects its people to embrace uncertainty (CIPD 2012b).

> *We are treated like children when it comes to [communication]. Nobody from management has ever said 'Look, times are hard, we haven't got any budget, and we will have to do the best we can. We're sorry about this.' All we ever get told is, 'The public wants this, we're doing this for the public,' and it's lies basically.*
>
> *The knock-on effect of the changing direction is that there's very little consistency for our teams. How on earth do we explain that the priorities have changed – again – when we're saying, 'This is what you've got to do now.*

What are organisations doing in practice?

- removing managerial levels and allowing employees to operate within a collegiate structure
- training individuals to take responsibility through small things at first – assigning team members with informal leadership responsibilities: taking the lead on reorganisation of the seating plan, updating team page on the intranet, and so on. Ensuring this is aligned with their interests and is a stretching task
- identifying good role models among senior managers who tackle the blame culture and encouraging them to speak courageously of the examples of challenging decisions made at the more senior level
- using the mission command model to empower independent decisions – this model (developed in the military) allows decentralised application of power, by ensuring that front-line staff understand the intentions of the top leader, their own missions and the required outcome of those missions. They can then decide how to achieve their missions
- putting additional or expanded roles in place to oversee and facilitate internal information-sharing
- planning ahead for change, involving the individuals affected in the change process, whenever possible, and genuinely showing that their contribution has been taken into account
- identifying and supporting informal influencers within your organisation
- setting up cross-functional teams on work-based projects, set around operational and organisational strategies – this can sometimes be supported by flexible resourcing models, where individuals are assigned to projects in response to changes in priorities
- developing in-house training solutions that take into account the organisational need for leadership and are more responsive to ongoing change
- investing in succession planning to close the gaps between strategy-focused senior leaders and operations-led front-line managers
- providing in-house mentors and coaches.

Challenge 2: Short-term, bottom-line focus

- In practice, performance management and promotion processes focus on task-related success, even though, according to some performance management frameworks, individual behaviours should be counted as part of their performance score.
- There is a lack of measurable indicators for people management and leadership behaviours. Where individuals are promoted into managerial roles because they are good performers, rather than for their people management and leadership potential, they are more comfortable with the delivery side of their role and adopt a hands-on style instead of coaching their team through tasks.
- Scrutiny of managers increases at times of underperformance or crisis, and senior managers tend to adopt a command-and-control style in that situation rather than coach middle and front-line managers through it. The need for frequent reporting on performance against (quarterly) targets takes time away from developing staff.
- Increasingly demanding performance targets do not always take into consideration the human and technological resource capacity, as well as the limited opportunities in the external environment. Resource constraints make it difficult for managers to remain flexible to staff needs, while some cost-cutting solutions only add more processes to manage (for example managing contractors).
- Failure to allow time for forward planning reduces opportunities to seek bottom–up feedback. It also causes managers to operate primarily in the firefighting mode and apply directive management styles.

Following some of the notorious examples of leadership failures in the banking and public sectors, more organisations are seen to be orienting their strategy to sustainability of performance, rather than the immediate balance of costs and profits. To embed this strategy in day-to-day operations, some have introduced behaviour and/or value frameworks, which intend to give equal weight to the 'how' alongside the 'what'.

At the same time, competition for customers in private companies and for funds in the third sector, coupled with the constraints of the regulatory environment, can lead some of those organisations to set heads of services with increasingly demanding performance targets. Similarly, in the public sector, targets are driven by the political agenda and the opinions of the general public, requiring greater levels of service – often at a reduced cost. This is not always matched by the human and technical capacity of the functions at the operational level.

The message that individuals may be actually receiving through the formal performance management processes, and through the informal aspects of the organisational culture, can make it difficult for individuals to juggle competing short-term performance priorities with the long-term imperative for leadership improvement.

> *Our job is … instead training and developing others. But it's all too easy to turn round and say, 'I know I can do this job in three hours. If I give it to somebody else, it could take them all week. It's quicker for me to do it myself.*

Performance management systems reiterate priority of business objectives over developing people

One of the most powerful contextual factors shaping individuals' decisions about how they meet the performance requirements is the performance management process that includes delivery and/or behaviour objectives. The process is in place, first, to set individual targets and monitor progress against those. Secondly, it can be used specifically to ensure that those in managerial roles do approach people management in a sustainable way, developing their direct reports and maintaining employee engagement and well-being.

Even where behaviour frameworks are in place to guide sustainable leadership and people management behaviours, individuals admit that 'at heart' they know they will

'a 'halo' effect of good performance allows individuals to get away with poor behaviours.'

primarily be judged on how well they meet their targets. In fact, some respondents suggested that as long as they could manage the expectations of their bosses, they would achieve good performance ratings.

> *When the business is going well, it is the best thing in the world. When it is not going so well, it is the worst. So if I know that we are having a difficult week, and I can get to [my manager] before he gets to me, that pressure disappears somewhat.*

Reward mechanisms linked to short-term performance, for example, are one reason why individuals can adopt a more directive approach when aiming to hit short-term performance targets rather than empowering their staff. Managers – at all levels – believe that *'you don't get the freedom to exercise leadership if you're not delivering on performance'*.

On some occasions, the achievements of high-performers become so important to an organisation that the behaviour failings of such individuals may be overlooked (CIPD and Tomorrow's Company 2011). In a YouGov survey (CIPD 2013) 58% of managers said that their people management skills are either less important than delivery targets or are not considered at all in their performance review. One HR representative said:

> *The managing director has a natural style of command and control, which doesn't really sit with the rest of the company. But he brings in profit. So it works.*

One possible reason for prioritising operational performance targets in the performance management process is the lack of measurable indicators for individual behaviours (in those cases where they are part of performance review). A common measure of managers' leadership skills is their ability to develop others; however, in one example this was expressed in a 'measurable' objective of the number of courses their team members have attended. Instead of being a meaningful behaviour, people development then becomes another box to 'tick' in a manager's performance review.

The focus on individuals' ability to perform the task extends into succession planning systems. Even where frameworks try to embrace leadership skills, in practice a common belief is held that if individuals are good at their job, they can be trained to manage others. On occasions, a 'halo' effect of good performance allows individuals to get away with poor behaviours. It is often forgotten that the 'job' of managers is radically different from completing operational tasks: their primary role is to organise and influence others and requires a different set of skills. In a survey of CIPD members, 48% of HR professionals said performance is the most important factor when promoting individuals into managerial roles.

> *We have found in many parts of the organisation that longer-term employees, or employees who have been very good at their job, have been promoted perhaps out of their comfort zone, or perhaps out of the desire for more money or career progression, to a position of manager. I think it always tends to be a case of, 'Well, they can do the job, we can teach them how to manage [people].*

The issue with promoting good performers into managerial positions without considering leadership potential is that the new managers are much more comfortable with the delivery side of their role and tend to revert to completing the task themselves rather than coaching the team through tight deadlines and difficult decisions, and improving leadership in an organisation as a result.

On the other hand, where a fast-paced change agenda has put more pressure on managers to have difficult conversations with their staff about underperformance, redundancies and employee exits, individuals who have been good performers but are less comfortable with the people management side of their role can cause more dissatisfaction through their poor people management practices.

Managers adopt hands-on command-and-control style in crises

The focus of the performance management process on operational targets is reiterated in some organisations by the increased demand on front-line staff and on managers to report the latest performance against set objectives. Some of the supervisors explained that, while they realise that developing people is their responsibility, their ability to manage the task, or to do their 'day job' in the words of many, is under far greater scrutiny from the top management and requires frequent reporting on the latest operational targets.

> *What is important is performance. And, in order to validate an individual's performance, you have to do the admin. So what's important in the end is the numbers on a bit of paper that you are then giving to buyers of your services. Therefore, there is a lean toward compliance. Now, if you had a spectrum of compliance and quality, people do what they have to do but the quality of what they are doing is poor.*
>
> *People are getting hit by targets, and that's why they micro-manage. Not because they want to be in control but because they want us to focus on those targets. Instead of them saying to us, 'These are the issues, these are the targets. I will support you in these, but you need your team to do that because you know your team better.' I think it's probably the big stick instead of the carrot sometimes.*

Curiously, across all sectors individuals agreed that they mostly receive attention from their superiors when performance is falling. Some managers considered distancing themselves from the operations as a way of empowering their staff when the performance is stable. They believe that by allowing people to get on with the workload they are giving their direct reports more autonomy. While many are happy to be left to their own devices if they are meeting the targets, lack of senior managers' contact with the front line highlights a missed opportunity for coaching and development of the managers during more stable times.

Once the crisis hit, however, an increased attention from the top bosses in one area creates a sense of panic, pressuring employees to resolve the situation as soon as possible, with quick-fixes rather than sustainable solutions.

> *The learning [over past mistakes] doesn't happen. If it did, in two years' time or three years' time, the business would be much healthier. In terms of competition and everything else, we'd be in a different place, because we would be looking at only value and efficiencies and therefore from a commercial point of view, we'd be positioned easily to defend ourselves and we would have the time and space to think, well, 'What's the next way we're going to defend ourselves?' Working the way we do now, we don't have the time or space to create a platform for dealing with competition. All you've got is knee-jerk panic reactions going on.*

The resources are shrinking but we are not working smarter

Operating a model focused on bottom-line figures can sometimes lead to resourcing pressures. Reducing staff numbers is the quickest way for many organisations to reduce costs. Although ideally the efficiencies can be made through 'smart working', it is rare that managers have the time to plan and develop new ways of working, spending most of their time and effort cutting expenditure and dealing with the challenges of a reduced resource bank.

> *I think that most of us are that busy doing what we are doing that we don't take the time out to analyse where the strengths and weaknesses of the teams are and then do something about that. I think there is that much of a task focus that there is no time to do that development work.*

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> *Sometimes, things can just go out of the window in terms of the leadership models we would want to have, longer term. I guess, in terms of performance metrics, if we are under pressure there, the leadership style is dictated to where your performance is. If you are performing well, you tend to be able to take a bit of a longer-term view on some of the leadership things; whereas, if you are in a bit of a mess, you don't.*

Low resourcing levels and a lack of mechanisms for smarter working can present supervisors with a threat of underperformance if a member of staff wants to take leave, go on training or if they leave the organisation. Lack of time is one of the reasons why releasing individuals away from the front line for training is unwelcomed by managers (Sheffield Business School 2013). Similarly, the support systems (IT, equipment) are not always fit to cope with the increasing performance demands, as back-office and maintenance costs are frequently the first ones to be cut.

> *We had an incident recently where a member of staff wanted to take some time off in the middle of the day, and then come back later on. It's not okay because we are struggling with customers at lunchtime, and we would struggle to let her leave.*
>
> *The targets are fine. It is just having the understanding of the lead times to be able to achieve those with managing the change at the same time. I told HR I need to recruit over the established numbers, because I only recruit in batches of ten and we lose one person a month. I need to be ten people over now to then, throughout the year, be under. But they said I can't because I have only got that many places.*

While stretching work objectives support engagement and optimal performance levels, time and upfront investment is necessary to change people's behaviours, train them to perform new tasks and build sufficient capacity of equipment and other resources. Leaders at the middle and front-line levels – even where they have the individual capacity and experience to drive change – might be struggling against the legacy of organisational cultures that do not traditionally support lean and agile working. This can be particularly pronounced in the public sector, where many admitted that the agenda for change has arrived only a few years previously. One respondent noted:

> *There are new business opportunities that come up and we have to react to those very quickly. Making sure that everybody is engaged and on board and understands can be quite a challenge. That's something for us to think about as an organisation: how we manage that tension between wanting to do more, wanting to grow, but, at the same time, thinking that people react to change very differently and react at their own pace and in their own way and some people take longer than others.*
>
> *Some staff make it difficult because I feel that they're not buying into what we want the organisation to move towards. They*

would like to work for the organisation as it was five years ago. [They feel] resistance to change… resistance to having their roles altered. There are no jobs for life these days.

Unfortunately, even senior managers who recognise the strategic need for a time of consolidation after a round of changes admit that external pressures do not allow them to slow down. For that reason, many managers at the front line are in the vicious circle of lack of planning followed by firefighting. Some individuals admit they feel guilty spending time reflecting, as that can be seen as 'not doing anything'.

What are organisations doing in practice?

- using balanced scorecards to measure performance; ensuring that performance management forms are appropriately completed
- using objective measures of staff development levels (for example, number of high-performers per team, customer feedback); making the balance of delivery-based versus behaviour-based components of reward visible
- encouraging managers and employees to book out protected time to reflect and plan by giving direction and through senior managers and leaders setting an example
- introducing skip-level management meetings between a manager and the employees two levels below them, in order to collect the staff feedback on their supervisor
- 'doubling' management – one manager leads on the project and manages the processes, another is responsible for managing performance and well-being
- using role-play and action learning sets in training; including reflective 'so what?' elements into learning
- providing leadership and management training that is tailored to the role/position in an organisation.

Challenge 3: Individualism

- Faced with competing priorities, individuals are likely to focus on those aspects of their role that are directly linked to their individual performance in order to avoid sanctions.
- If specific individual targets do not 'add up' to the common goal, employees pursue activities that support their personal performance and career goals over other priorities that can improve the performance of the team as a whole.
- Respondents highlight that judgements on how appropriate their decision is can be subjective and prefer to 'err on the side of caution'.
- A company's overall vision is not always clearly translated into specific objectives for individuals, resulting in competing priorities in cross-functional teams.

'in their time in a particular position, individuals are likely to…aim for making a visible contribution to the working process – not necessarily considering the longer-term effects of change…'

With competing demands on individuals' time to deal with performance and development priorities, it is inevitable that they have to make choices about their current priorities and about the ways they approach tasks. Within the context of the organisation's environment, individuals' choices are sometimes dictated by the 'survival mode' in which they operate. Blame culture and perverse incentives may focus efforts on what is likely to serve individual performance objectives and prevent penalties, rather than on longer-term and company objectives. One manager said:

> *'The problem with targets is everything is focused towards hitting that target and you lose sight of everything else you should be doing. You lose your ability to lead because you're being pressured into doing stuff. And that's when the career-limiting stuff comes in: if I don't deliver against those targets, I will never get promoted.'*

On the other hand, it has been shown that psychological collectivism and improved quality of relationships within a team facilitate propensity of individuals to take charge (Love and Dustin 2013) and can, therefore, support shared, devolved leadership.

Perverse incentives privilege individual achievements over the team

If individuals in an organisation are aligned in their values and interests, it is likely that they will work towards a common goal that meets the collective priority. On the other hand, if the pool of rewards is small and incentives are strongly linked to individual contributions, they are likely to refocus people on their own interests, setting them against their team members in performance ratings.

In the context of low profit margins and cost-cutting, the performance management process in itself has acquired negative connotations in some organisations, as it can be used as a punitive instrument when staff are not meeting their objectives. The steep performance 'curve' present in many organisations to differentiate performance levels also reiterates the need for managers to find

flaws in performance, rather than celebrate successes.

> *Particularly at a low level, you'd end up having league tables. At your professional development meeting you'd be going, 'Right, where are you on the league table? You, you're not doing too badly, but you, you're right at the bottom so you're going to have to get this sorted out.*

At the supervisor level, although it is understood by many middle and front-line managers that – in theory – they should have been achieving business outcomes through managing people, many of them explained that they could risk individual interests (such as promotion opportunities, performance ratings and even their jobs), if they were to compromise delivery for staff empowerment and training.

> *There's a lot of posturing and the usual ego. I think that gets in the way sometimes of doing [the right thing], unless you are very strong-willed and say, 'Well, I'm going to do it anyway.' Of course if we disagree, it's, 'Well this is your job, if you don't do it then there are other people who will do it.*

Respondents noted that the more senior you become in an organisation the more likely you are to focus on specific objectives needed to move forward in your career, as there is greater competition for promotion at the higher levels in an organisation's hierarchy. This means that in their time in a particular position, individuals are likely to identify and aim for making a visible contribution to the working process – not necessarily considering the longer-term effects of change that might be achieved only after the individual has moved on to the next role.

Lack of trust and blame culture reinforce risk-averse approaches

The way the performance management process is set up can also be conducive to potential leaders making safer decisions, as they fear penalties in case of mistakes. Some individuals note the blame culture that was present in their organisation or department. Respondents highlight that the judgement on how appropriate their decision is lies with their supervisor and it is not always clear what kind of mistakes would be penalised and what could be addressed informally. This tension is particularly prevalent where the decisions of individuals could expose the organisation to regulators, with many respondents admitting they would mostly choose to 'err on the side of caution'.

> *We've got that extra level of governance from outside, which directly affects some of the things that, perhaps, in other parts of the company, the manager would not have to do. For example, post: every single piece of post that comes in or out of the team has to be checked by a supervisor solicitor. We can't get out of it. With the best will in the world, I know these people, I know they can write a letter but I've still got to check that they've written a letter correctly and that there are no issues within it, because they can come and audit us at any time.*
>
> *If a police officer transgresses for whatever reason it is instantly communicated to a very wide audience. The impact on people's perception of the police is therefore more greatly magnified. There is a far greater expectation around their behaviour, their professional conduct, and one of the things that I emphasise to our staff all the time is someone's always watching you. Somebody's always got a camera on their phone. That places quite a degree of pressure on individual officers.*

Cross-functional teams lack clarity on the direction from the top

If the top–down lines of communication are not consistent, the lack of clarity over the interpretation of the direction can create conflict for those roles that involve leading across a span of functions. Front-line leaders, who are managing such cross-functional teams, have little scope for creating a common vision, where individual team members are chasing different sets of targets and incentives to meet individual priorities. Resistance of some individuals to challenge the decisions bottom–up is exacerbated by a blame culture.

> *We are confused at the moment because we had an email out and it instructed to go back to the old procedure. So I'm in control and I'm making these decisions according to that procedure. And then we've got the officers down on the street who, obviously, haven't had the message we got relayed to them. And it was so embarrassing the other day where we had our supervisor saying one thing, the sergeant saying the other thing, and we were in the middle. And it was the most cringing moment of my career. Because who is in control of the jobs?*

There is a particular tension between the operational side of the business and central functions, such as legal, finance and even HR. On the one hand, individuals in customer-facing roles are encouraged to take risks for the benefits of their client, to innovate and to make quick decisions. On the other hand, it appears that 'back office' functions are geared strictly towards risk-aversion and suffer from the lack of planning on the operation side to remove procedural blockers. This creates internal tensions, as some parts of the organisations are deemed to focus on a completely different set of priorities.

> *We're trying to sell something that is integrated. Actually we haven't set the organisation up to be able to do it in an integrated way because the teams are not set up to work together.*

> *You get an email from one director who says, 'As we wind down for Christmas…' and I'm thinking, 'He's not working for the same organisation as me!' Because this is our busiest period. I think that's the frustration that people don't know what we do, and there is no planning. And, therefore, we're not all working on the same priority at the same time. So we get a job to do and then we need advice, instructions from our internal customers, but they're on something else and we can't get them together.*

On reflection, respondents admit that while the overall vision and mission are relatively stable, the *interpretation* of that general purpose is more difficult for employees who are concerned with the blame culture. Allowing less confident individuals to lead on tasks and projects contributes to multiple interpretations of the strategic direction, set at the top, and, ultimately, inconsistencies in the behaviours across the organisation. Naturally, some employees would soon begin to take advantage of inconsistent practices, with others frustrated by the unfairness of the situation and losing trust in their managers.

> *Personally, I take [the organisational vision] with a pinch of salt. We've got this phrase now, 'Doing the right thing.' Well, what is, 'Doing the right thing'? It's great having that as a saying, but does it really mean anything? Who's interpreting the 'Doing the right thing'? Because that's so ambiguous, I think. Does that, really, give clarity to someone?*

What are organisations doing in practice?

- actively tracking managers' span of control to maintain an optimal number of direct reports per manager
- providing training on ways to manage remotely and also providing appropriate support systems (IT and so on) to facilitate this to enable frequent one-to-one contact
- allowing teams to complete their PDRs (performance development reviews) collectively and to contribute to the ratings of each other's performance in a safe environment
- placing individuals into 'acting manager' positions to allow them to try out the job and to collect feedback on their performance as managers – however, ensuring that the experiences are not scheduled 'on top' of the day job so that individuals have adequate time to make use of their development opportunities
- designing roles of senior leaders in such a way that they act as organisational stewards and measuring their performance on the predicted long-term effects of their decisions
- facilitating top–down translation of organisational objectives into departmental and individual goals at *each* level in the hierarchy through the performance management system; expecting 'back office' functions to work to the same high-level objectives as the strategic side of the business and having to demonstrate the value of their contribution by sharing information across departments
- creating opportunities for front-line managers and employees to have frequent contact with the end client and obtain direct feedback from them.

Challenge 4: 'Us' and 'them' mentality

- Organisations fail to benefit from workforce diversity by continuing to use unduly subjective methods of selecting and rewarding staff.
- By aiming to eliminate undesired behaviours, organisations can create frameworks that restrict the scope for discretion and unconventional judgement. For example, organisations introduce people management systems aimed at fairness of outcomes (for example, pay and reward), but the mechanisms to ensure that managers apply the procedure fairly and consistently are ineffective or absent.
- Managers are limited in the range of instruments they can use to motivate a diverse workforce. In the absence of robust behavioural indicators, achievement of operational targets is the main objective factor that differentiates individual performance.

The final challenge for organisations, leaders and managers today is embracing workforce diversity. Diversity comprises not just the differences in people's demographic characteristics (gender, language, culture and so on) but also work styles and opinions. Although diversity has been shown to bring organisations clear benefits in the form of greater innovation potential and an improved customer experience, people management processes (for example lengthy and rigidly enforced behavioural frameworks) can inadvertently favour 'sameness' over the desirable level of variety in local teams and corporately (CIPD 2005).

By sending individuals formal and informal messages about which behaviours are rewarded, organisations continue to shape the culture, which – some may think – preserves the organisational DNA, but could also reinforce lack of innovation and unconventional thinking.

> *Whilst I might not believe in what they're doing and I will say to my boss, 'I think you're wrong,' ultimately that's what I'm being held accountable for, so I have to do it. I think there's a real risk there because it doesn't allow you to focus on innovation.*

Performance management and promotion processes reinforce 'sameness'

The criteria used to reward and promote individuals appear to be contributing to the lack of diversity within the organisational culture and affecting leadership capacity. For example, respondents often thought that individuals would receive rewards or be promoted based on how well they can convince their higher-ups that they are acting in alignment with the organisational values rather than on the objective basis of their skills. This was also noted in previous research (CIPD 2012a) highlighting the need for more objective and more rounded assessment in the selection process rather than picking individuals based on unconsciously noted similarity between the assessor and the recruit.

The need for 'sameness' is reiterated by the social norm, described in group psychology as 'us' and 'them' thinking. It is known that humans strive for belonging. Therefore they can adopt behaviours that are not consistent with their values but are characteristic of the majority in their social surroundings, so that they are not isolated and are accepted as part of the group. This is illustrated in the case of falsified police evidence at Hillsborough (Tate 2013). One front-line supervisor said:

> *A challenge for our business is: when you are developing people, how do you develop a person who is not exactly like you? How can I develop a person who is completely the opposite of me, but who delivers the same results or even better results? That is where our people, including me, sometimes, are not so comfortable. There is a personal preference of creating a 'Me 2' to become a leader someday.*

'The lack of capacity of the people management processes (including recruitment, performance management and succession planning) to match workforce diversity puts a lot of pressure on managers to have difficult conversations with staff about how well they fit in with the organisation.'

On the other hand, due to flatter structures and budget restrictions, managers have few opportunities to reward and promote staff on the basis of their performance. This is particularly evident in the difference of attitudes and expectations between the younger and the older workforce. Some supervisors feel they cannot retain the new talent if they continue to present them with challenging targets but cannot offer appropriate reward for it.

> *What I look forward to is to learn to manage the newer generation, the Gen Ys. I have got a lot of those who are below the age of 26 in my team. Their thinking is a bit too different from how we look at things. It is not really job security that they are looking for. It is about how quickly they can progress in the corporate world.*

The inability of managers to motivate employees by individual performance-related pay is also less possible in unionised environments, where, in some cases, collective agreements discourage individual performance reviews. From the supervisor's point of view, a lack of scope to influence individual performance makes one-to-one performance management redundant; as a result, they rarely have conversations about performance with their direct reports. To circumvent that, senior managers and HR need to work together to equip line managers with skills to have challenging conversations within the boundaries of collective agreements. One senior manager said:

> *I have been strategic in my approach in saying, 'Actually, from a supervisory point of view, I need you to sit down and have a one-to-one discussion with your worker.' That has never happened in a unionised environment before, as you are not allowed to performance-manage: talk to people on a one-to-one basis.*

Focussing performance reviews on achieving challenging targets can make it difficult for managers to motivate the proportion of staff who are not aspiring to achieve 'exceptional' ratings or to get promoted, even where 'leadership' behaviours are part of the performance review. Few employees in the research see their performance review as an opportunity to discuss lateral development opportunities, and think of their PDRs as tick-box exercises if their performance is satisfactory. Managers in the research differ in their views on approaching less ambitious employees:

> *Those individuals who are interested in promotion will have a copy of the behavioural framework because it tells you what you need to have done to get to the next rank and what you need to work towards. If you have someone who is quite long in service, who hasn't got any aspirations to be promoted and who may not be responsible for staff, then there's no real value in them knowing too much about this, other than the fact that their supervisor will be telling them to do it.*
>
> *Some of our staff have joined us because they want a job, and I say this quite clearly to our staff, 'If you don't subscribe to this and if you don't buy into it,*

you're in the wrong job. You really need to go and get a job somewhere else.' Some people, when we explain this to them, and when we set this out to them, you can almost see a light bulb moment where they get it.

Overly prescriptive frameworks restrict scope for discretion

Our previous research has shown that managers find it most challenging having difficult conversations with staff and are at times uncomfortable applying performance management systems and competency frameworks. This can be due to the lack of skills in conducting the process, but may also be associated with the set-up of the system itself.

Managers in the study explain that they often experience tension between the blanket policy that should be applied to staff to ensure a standard of organisational behaviour, on the one hand, and their need to allow for the variety of circumstances that require individuals to make independent decisions. Previously, Bolden and Gosling (2006) have shown that competency approaches have been criticised, among other reasons, for being overly universalistic or generic, rather than situation-specific.

The policy is clear. It's just that individuals aren't always clear, and situations aren't always clear. And there is no standard situation.

It's about how you explain that to people but also give them the discretion to go out and do their job. I don't want to tie people's hands but I don't want complete chaos and people choosing what they do.

The tension between the organisation's standards and the individual becomes particularly prominent in judging employees' behaviours – 'how' the job was done as opposed to what has been achieved. Managers explain that although they are instructed to take staff behaviours into consideration when rating performance, those behaviours are difficult to measure objectively, which is why they have to rely on delivery targets to differentiate individual performance.

When you look at the nature of a lot of the work here, it's not always measurable easily in terms of output. Certainly, a lot of the issues are linked to perhaps attitude or willingness to perform, and it's very difficult to proceed on that basis with regards to performance itself.

The lack of capacity of the people management processes (including recruitment, performance management and succession planning) to match workforce diversity puts a lot of pressure on managers to have difficult conversations with staff about how well they fit in with the organisation. A common belief of respondents is that even where they want to lead on challenging situations, the policy again does not support them, as the process of managing underperformance or employee exit is too lengthy and cautious.

I'll give everybody their fair chance. But there are sometimes occasions where people take more and where you feel that enough is enough. The processes that we have in place are so lengthy and complicated to deal with, that managers at the lower level…I think they sometimes wonder whether it is worth it, if it is going to get anywhere because they don't ever see probably an end result.

They know it's a lengthy process, and I think that puts them off actually undertaking the capability. I think they want a quicker, more convenient way of dealing with underperformance.

A similar issue can emerge when managers are applying a blanket approach to staff policies. A common example is sickness absence management of staff, where managers think the procedure is too rigid to apply to each particular situation. Some respondents feel they need to act in a 'corporate' way if they are to succeed with their careers.

Say a member of staff is off sick. I know this is genuine sickness and the reasons for it. While the powers are saying to me, 'You've got to put that person on stage whatever.' I know that I have to represent the corporate side and [follow the policy]. But I know that's not the best thing for that person. I know that a lot of leaders would do corporate things to make themselves look good for the higher-ups.

Despite the rhetoric of achieving organisational outcomes through people, the perception inside some organisations is that the 'corporate' interest is different from the interests of individual employees, similar to the tension between the strategic and operational sides of the business described in the first section.

> *It's always difficult when you become a manager within your own department. At the end of the day, you are one of the 'chiefs' and not the 'indians' anymore. And, although you like to be friendly with the staff – you've been there and you know what their position is – you're a manager as well.*

What are organisations doing in practice?

- mapping the needs of the business to individual roles and producing behavioural profiles for them; overtly taking these behaviours into consideration when recruiting and promoting individuals into managerial positions
- introducing 'technical' grades for progression of non-managers
- challenging succession planning decisions of senior managers through review meetings of the completed performance reviews, where performance against targets and against behaviours is benchmarked and calibrated across the roles of the same level
- giving managers and employees exposure across a range of roles and departments to help them understand the bigger picture (this can be achieved through secondments or work on special projects); however, ensuring that the experiences are not scheduled 'on top' of the day job so that individuals have adequate time to make use of their development opportunities
- allowing room for flexibility in organisational policies, so that managers who are confident in applying discretion can make use of it, within clearly defined parameters, and not avoid having difficult conversations
- considering a range of motivators for individual performance and the implications of differentiated reward for fairness.

Improving leadership through developing organisations

Despite the growing capability of managerial and leadership skills in individuals, the collective ability of organisations to make use of individual skills is sometimes limited by misaligned organisational structures and processes. An unsupportive organisational environment can act as a barrier to leadership in two ways:

- directly affecting the ability of individuals at all levels of an organisation to act as leaders
- affecting the ability of those in managerial positions to develop and empower others, to enable leadership in their teams.

In order to break the cycle of systemic deficiencies, organisations need to shift their focus from solely training individual leaders and managers and consider the system in which these individuals operate, while they continue to develop their capability.

Organisations are likely to differ in the goals they need to achieve through leadership and management. However, we believe noticeable changes can be achieved if an organisational development approach is applied to improving leadership capacity through three key steps.

1 Define the leadership and management you need and where an intervention is appropriate

It appears that there are a number of objectives that organisations are trying to achieve through leadership and management development. Some may be looking to grow the next generation of senior leaders and, therefore, are interested in identifying and developing strategic leadership potential among front-line employees and junior managers. Other companies are keen to achieve greater employee productivity and devolve decision-making responsibility.

In the CIPD *Learning and Development* survey 2014 we asked L&D professionals about the key purpose of leadership development in their organisations. The results show that companies expect leaders to meet various organisational objectives, which can inform how they plan for people's training and development.

We recommend that HR practitioners begin by identifying the challenges their organisation is facing today and in the future, and what leadership and management needs to look like to respond to those challenges. Some aspects of the organisational design to consider are (Connor et al 2012):

- processes
- organisational structures
- performance measures
- technology
- physical aspects (for example, ergonomics)
- psychological aspects (job satisfaction, politics and culture, communication)
- external systems.

However, when the need for leadership and management is defined, organisations think of more systemic solutions rather than only developing the capabilities of individual leaders and managers. They should consider all the stakeholders in the process: the leaders themselves, but also the followers, their specific needs to be led and managed in a particular way, as well as the context in which the leaders and followers, managers and their teams interact.

Table 1: Purpose of leadership development activities (% mentioning)

Producing a common standard of behaviour/changing organisational culture	57.4
Developing high-potential individuals as future executives	42.3
Improving staff engagement levels	42.0
Accelerating change within the organisation	40.0
Developing innovation and creativity to improve business performance	32.3
Addressing the current underperformance of managers	27.6
Addressing the current underperformance of staff	17.6

2 Understand the psychological and social barriers to the leadership and management your organisation needs

Ideally, training of leader and manager capability should be aligned to the organisational need, as described above. However, HR practitioners should also look wider at the factors hindering learning and impacting individuals' ability to apply skills acquired in a classroom setting.

First, they have to understand the individual psychology of learning. They need to overcome resistance to change, the power of habit and 'groupthink', but take advantage of the psychological enablers of behavioural change: curiosity, brain plasticity and adaptability. We comment on those in our work on learning and development (CIPD 2014b).

Second, they have to understand the social context in which behavioural change is expected to happen. They need to consider whether the formal systems and processes (for example, performance management and succession planning) shape the desired leadership and management behaviours in the context of the challenges facing their organisation. They also need to identify the barriers within the informal organisational culture (for example, blame, risk-aversion, 'yesmanship'), which may act as perverse incentives for managers to cut corners and prioritise their own interests over those of the group.

3 Identify and influence the key players with the power to change the status quo

Finally, on its own HR is unlikely to break the barriers to leadership and management in organisations. Even if the formal processes for identifying, training and monitoring leaders are in place, the informal power dynamic can still act against individuals demonstrating leadership behaviours. HR needs to understand where the levers of change lie and use those levers to shift the organisational culture to be more supportive of the need for leadership.

The HR business partner model has been introduced in an attempt to bring more strategic thinking within operational parts of the organisation. However, the competing priorities of the operations and of the forward-looking top team mean that in reality HR business partners are more likely to carry out one-directional roles: either supporting bottom–up operational issues with employee performance and well-being, or implementing a top–down strategic agenda (CIPD 2013b).

Where business partners need to improve is in understanding both the operational and strategic agenda and in challenging top–down attempts to overrule decisions with authoritative power. One senior manager said:

> *'You've got to look at it from two sides, as I said. You've got to look at it to that individual, but you also need to look at it as how that would benefit the organisation to a point, or not cost the organisation, if you like.'*

HR then needs to find a suitable solution that takes into account both short-term and long-term outcomes of that decision, by:

- being business-savvy
- conducting needs analysis rather than simply monitoring progress
- adopting systemic thinking in considering the organisational environment and culture
- proactively sharing information and mediating the two perspectives
- identifying levers of influence, both through formal and informal people management systems and processes.

Next steps

Over the next year, the CIPD will produce a series of resources to help practitioners improve leadership in their organisations by addressing the organisation's context. We will publish:

- a separate report on leadership in the SME context
- a series of case studies illustrating how organisations of various sizes improved leadership through changing aspects of the organisation's context
- a report on organisations' ecosystems that support trustworthy senior leaders
- a practical toolkit for practitioners to identify what leadership needs to look like in their organisation and which aspects of the organisation's context act as barriers or enable such leadership
- a paper on the link between leadership, management and productivity.

Appendix: Research method

We adopted a mixed-method approach to exploring barriers to leadership in organisations.

Interviews and focus groups with managers and employees

Seven organisations from the private, public and third sectors participated in this research. Each organisation employs over 1,000 people and so belongs to the 'large organisation' category. At the beginning of the research we conducted scoping interviews with senior HR, OD and L&D representatives in each organisation to understand its approach to leadership development, as well as to identify some of the contextual barriers to leadership behaviours.

In each organisation we then identified two to three departments, where we conducted face-to-face interviews with senior, middle and junior managers along the organisational hierarchy. In addition, we conducted focus groups with employees without direct managerial responsibilities who reported to the front-line manager/team leader at the bottom of the hierarchical line. Additional interviews were conducted with HR business partners and/or HR advisers supporting respective departments. In total, over 120 interviews and focus groups were conducted.

Survey of L&D professionals

Quantitative data was collected as part of the CIPD *Learning and Development* annual survey 2014. The survey was targeted at people in HR/learning and development or in senior roles as the questions required specific knowledge on learning and development practices and policies. These respondents were asked to reflect on a set of questions covering contextual factors impacting leadership behaviours, as well as the interventions that their organisation puts in place to improve leadership.

In 2014, we received 1,081 responses to an online survey exploring opinions about the state of learning and development within organisations. Over three-quarters (76%) reported they are responsible for, or involved in, determining the learning and development needs of their organisation. The vast majority of respondents work in HR, talent management or learning and development, while 15% are other senior managers/directors/CEOs, and 6% are line managers.

As part of the survey, we asked L&D professionals to explain how their leadership and management development activities take into consideration the organisational context in which individuals operate. We used their responses to provide an indication of what organisations may be doing in practice to account for contextual impacts on leaders and managers.

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Notes

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