

Public Sector Leadership

Whatever differences there may be about a precise definition of leadership, it is clearly about people as followers and the extent to which they can be motivated to behave in particular ways. (Rose and Lawton, 1999). Adair, speaking at a conference in 1996 for public sector managers talked of twenty-first century managers requiring vision, empathy and concern for people and issues, lack of reliance on position and rank for status and the ability to be a team builder and team maintainer.¹

John Monks, former General Secretary of the TUC expressed the view that leadership was about listening, inspiring and morale building. One public service manager, quoting Rose and Lawton,

promotes the CHILTERN principles of leadership: communication; honesty; involvement; listening; trust; enthusiasm; results and no games!

The 2002 Strengthening Leadership in the Public Sector report highlighted some real deficiencies in leadership development with the sector. It concluded, as did the Review of Public Administration in Northern Ireland, that the sector faced new challenges including:

- Modernisation with much better customer focus
- Higher and increasing public expectation for quality of service
- More opportunities and requirements for partnership working within and across sectors
- Pressures to harness ICT and deliver services electronically.

Although the report acknowledges examples of excellence it concludes that:

- The public sector is not attracting and keeping the best leaders
- Leadership development does not give enough emphasis to working across boundaries and learning between sectors
- Potential leaders are not being given the freedom to lead.

The report also highlights the difficulty created by having many and often contradictory interpretations of theories of leadership. This can lead to confusion about what works and doesn't work and makes it difficult for leaders to transfer their knowledge to others.

Leading the Way, a new Management and Leadership Development Strategy for Northern Ireland (MLDSNI, 2006)² has published a cross-sectoral strategy:

¹ Rose, A. & Lawton, A (1999) Public Services Management p153-158, Essex, Pearson Education Ltd.

² Coordinated by the Management and Leadership Network and available on www.mln.org.uk

to create a cohesive and comprehensive approach to building world class management and leadership capabilities aligned to the vision for Northern Ireland...

Against the background of the Review of Public Administration it was reported that:

Research in each sector, combined with the number of 'strategic objectives' dependent upon these factors, point to a need for a significant and urgent effort to address a 'management and leadership deficit'.³

The policy drivers for the MLDSNI strategy include: Corporate Plan and New Skills Strategy (DEL); Corporate Plan and New Economic Vision (DETI); Positive Steps (DSD); RPA (NICS & NILG; and linked to the UK agenda through Management and Leadership Corporate Plan (SSDA).

Research and feedback consistently highlights the integration of strategy and the management role in implementation as a key issue:

In a recent CIPD survey, 86 per cent of respondents said that the biggest challenge for organisations was "integrating management development with the implementation of organisational goals."⁴

Whilst the Mabey Report (2005) is more positive, saying that organisations are now taking the issue of leadership and management more seriously. Focusing more closely on Northern Ireland, the MLN Survey of NI Top 100 Companies (2004) concluded that:

Encouragingly more than 80 per cent stated that they have a formal written business strategy but almost half indicated that this didn't include any reference to management development.

The cross-sectoral challenges for organisations in Northern Ireland appear to be:

- Lack of investment in leadership development
- Promoting leadership and not functional management competencies only
- Getting senior managers to see the link between development and performance
- Increasing the very small pool of high calibre people
- Increasing the number of qualified and experienced coaches and mentors
- Getting people to learn and exchange knowledge across sectors.

Peter Shaw (2006, p25), who has spent most of his working life in senior public sector management roles, believes strongly in the servant leadership model and he recommends a balance between:

³ Council for excellence in Management and Leadership (CEML) Report and Government Response 2002 & Skills Sector Development Agency (SSDA) Corporate Plan 2002

⁴ Developing Managers for Business Performance – Key Findings (CIPD, November 2005).

leading from the front in terms of taking direct action and enabling and serving others to fulfil their own visions and providing a healing role in building and renewing relationships.⁵

He references a very practical and real model of leadership (applied by AstraZeneca, one of the world's leading pharmaceutical companies) that he believes the public sector could learn from especially where it seeks symmetry between the vision of the organisation and that of individuals within it. The six global leadership capabilities promoted across the organisation are:

- Clarity of strategic direction
- Commitment to vision
- Focus on delivery
- Build relationships
- Develop people
- Demonstrate personal conviction.

⁵ Shaw, Peter, (2006) The Four Vs of Leadership Chichester, Capstone Publishing