



Managing Quality in Architecture

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A Handbook for Creators of the Built Environment

Practice Leadership and Managing Quality

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Chapter Reference: 4.1

This is the full text of Ray Andrews' original paper written for MQIA, first edition, and incorporated into Chapter 4.1.

Stresses and Strains on Leaders

Leaders.

Who'd want to be one!

Everything starts at the top.

But, it's lonely at the top. Tough, too.

Of course, leaders aren't made - they're created at birth... or so "they" say.

We all know that the buck stops with the leader. The leader is ultimately responsible for everything.

And when you're the leader, there's only one way to go. And that's not up.

Yet, so many of us want the job. We spend much of our working lives competing for it - positioning and pruning ourselves for the first opportunity to come our way to be the big boss.

Then one day we make it. We're part of the leadership group. Perhaps we're even the CEO, Managing Director or Managing Partner. We're a "leader". Or, as the Collins Concise Dictionary describes it, we're now "a person who rules, guides or inspires others". We're the "head".

Some think that the word "leader" is derived from the shorter "lead". Not the "show the way" verb, but the heavy toxic bluish-white metallic element that is highly malleable. The noun. Lead.

That way they find it easier to understand why they suddenly feel leaden, after they've been appointed the leader.

It also explains why so many bosses see a lead shield as an important office accoutrement - to shield them from office politics, complaining employees, large creditors, unnerved clients and public speaking appointments.

Of course, we all know that leadership is nothing like that at all in the 2000's. We have triple bottom lines, top-down/bottom-up strategic planning and process re-engineering to help us. We have the internet, highly sophisticated networked systems, zero-based budgeting, reputation management, TQM, client relationship management and broad-based taxation systems to make life "easier". Then there are personal professional development programs, sometimes called training, and a host of other things we need to be on top of or heavily involved in ... to say nothing of having to ensure the client or customer is understood, with expectations met or exceeded.

And we also have quality management.

So, leaders have all of these tools at their disposal, ready to be used, in one way or another, to inspire everyone in the organisation to greater success.

In short, today's leaders have an abundance of reasons – some might say excuses – why they cannot, and even should not, be the pinnacle, the motivating force and the example-setter for the next great thing the organisation has going.

Today's leader is mostly a very busy person, with a mindful of conflicting work priorities ... to say nothing of the personal demands placed on us outside work, in the fast-paced 2000's.

The very thought of adding another, somewhat idealistically-driven, office responsibility to the leader's already high, but perilously tottering, stack of duties is generally an unwelcome one.

Help from Emerging Leaders

Why does everything have to start at the top?

Aren't there plenty of other people in our organisations who are capable, educated, intelligent, ambitious, success-oriented ... for both themselves and the organisation? Aren't tomorrow's leaders there somewhere in the organisation, just busting to be seen, to demonstrate their ability and therefore their credentials to lead?

If there are these people presently within our organisations, why don't they spring to the fore, show real leadership ... and take the running and responsibility for new initiatives within the organisation? What's stopping them?

The fact that they are not the CEO, that's what.

It's all too often career limiting to be seen to be the maverick, the show pony, the egomaniacal "loose cannon" - the self-centred go-ahead type who seems to have no regard for consensus, or the priorities and the sensibilities of others. In any event, it's even more definitely career limiting, in fact career stopping, if such an attention-seeker gets it wrong. The risks are high.

For those who really do aspire, and legitimately so, to be members of the leadership group one day, the challenge is more about showing potential leadership capability, than it is about being seen currently as the organisation's visionary, who inspires all others in the organisation to follow them. It's not about being the de facto CEO.

This is not easy to achieve, because every person who is not CEO, nor in the leadership team, has a full-time job to do carrying out their own responsibilities to the very best of their ability. That is generally challenging enough, without trying to be a champion for a cause that the leadership group might, or might not, endorse.

In addition, shareholders, no matter how many, drive boards. Boards drive CEOs or managing partners. CEOs or managing partners drive the executive or top team. Get out of sync with that and a lot of people are going to start asking questions – either directly or indirectly.

Bucking the boss, or being seen to be running a show of your own, is no certain way to the top.

So, what about delegation? Cannot a CEO hand over responsibility to someone else for implementing a major new idea, philosophy, policy or initiative? Can't the leadership team just appoint a responsible person to carry out its wishes, and, with the overt support and encouragement of that top management, have the person succeed? What's there that's likely to impede such an approach?

Well, nothing really. Provided that the normal rules of delegation are followed. The person given responsibility for the program needs, as a minimum:

- ❑ a desire to be appointed to the challenge;
- ❑ a clear brief, with objectives and/or targets;
- ❑ all the relevant skills ... or a suitable training program to remedy any skills deficiency;
- ❑ appropriate and timely supervision;
- ❑ authority commensurate with the task;
- ❑ the time to perform what's required;
- ❑ a sense of what priority the task has, both within the organisation, and vis-à-vis their own other responsibilities; and
- ❑ the public and private support of the person's supervisor, at least insofar as the task is concerned.

However, some tasks cannot be delegated. The assessment of what can and cannot be delegated is mostly made by intuitive judgement, where the first and most important criterion is magnitude. The question that needs to be answered is what magnitude will the effect of the program or task to be potentially delegated have on the organisation. For instance, strategic planning is seen by most as a role the CEO or managing partner cannot delegate.

Parts of strategic planning might be, such as research. But delegating the determination of the future of the organisation as a whole to others is unimaginable to all but the most courageous. Consult? Yes. Involve others? Yes. Encourage all employees to make a contribution ... and to own the resulting strategy. Yes. But delegate the task of coming up with the organisation's vision and mission, aims and objectives, values, key strategies and the like? Unlikely.

Chief communicator for the organisation is another function most leaders would retain zealously for themselves. Chief brand establisher, and possibly head lead generator for the organisation are other roles leaders are inclined to retain for themselves. Main builder of the leadership team is another.

What other non-statutory functions must a leader personally embrace? Ultimate financial responsibility? Of course. What else?

Leaders should probably only personally be responsible for those things that, by themselves or in combination with others, are of such magnitude that the CEO or managing partner cannot delegate to others, because, well, they are so important.

Where does all of this leave us? To summarise, should leaders be helping groom future leaders within their organisations? Absolutely. Should they be assisting them to prepare themselves? Yes.

Those who wait for, or expect, tomorrow's leaders to do the running today are abdicating their responsibilities, and should probably abdicate their positions as well. They should consider handing over to tomorrow's leaders today.