

How complex change can be tackled at a team level: a practical example of Nestlé Purina

What do performance, leadership, cognitive diversity and psychological safety have in common? If you don't immediately think of something concrete, don't worry. In this business case, we will tell you how these concepts are all connected. We do this by means of a practical example. In this article, you can read all about the consulting process that Nestlé, the largest food and beverage organisation in the world, is currently undergoing to improve performance and sustainability. Our business partner, Michael van Eck, consultant in Switzerland and France and managing director at Learning Partners, is currently working with the management team of Nestlé Purina in Veauche to achieve this.

Lack of involvement influences performance

Michael van Eck was approached by Nestlé's Purina International Headquarters. The factory had been struggling to generate yields and to innovate for some time. A new factory director was appointed and when that person started at the company, it became visible that the employees were not involved; neither at work nor with each other. They did not propose solutions and did not work proactively. Performance and results lagged and some people were disengaged.



Michael van Eck
Coach & Facilitator

Was leadership affecting the organisation's dynamics?

It is widely known that the type of leadership has a huge influence on performance, results and the atmosphere that prevails in the workplace. This is also reflected in the bestseller, 'Turn the Ship Around!', the true story of a former nuclear submarine commander, David Marquet, who is currently a keynote speaker and a consultant. In his book, he shares how, within the US Navy, he successfully transformed the USS Santa Fe from the worst-performing to the best-performing submarine in the entire fleet. How? By using a very different leadership approach than the one regularly used in any marine ship or in similar environments.



L. David Marquet
Commanding Officer US Navy
Bestselling Author
Keynote Speaker



Traditionally, in national defence institutions like the army, hierarchy and rank play a huge part, the role of leaders is telling others what to do and the information is filtered depending on the expected results of each person. In Marquet's book, he calls this the leader-follower approach.

Marquet had a different view on leadership and the dynamics of people in organisations; the leader-leader approach. This approach focuses on opening communication flows at all levels and nurturing awareness, intention and engagement in daily decision-making. Marquet's true story shows how to succeed at creating a workplace where crews were encouraged to take responsibility for their actions while being engaged and happy.

A leader-follower approach is not unique to military institutions; this approach is still in the core of many production companies that strive for high performance regardless of people's engagement and well-being. In our practical case, Nestle Purina production company, a leader-follower approach had traditionally been the modus-operandi. The factory director was in charge, the managers 'managed' and the workers carried out the instructions. This changed with the arrival of the new factory director who believes that everyone has the ability and potential to lead and improve their own work and that of the team. In Marquet's words, this person was looking to develop a leader-leader dynamic within the organisation.

Shifting from a leader-follower approach to a leader-leader approach

The leader-leader approach recognises that everyone has the ability and potential to lead. It promotes leveraging individual potential at all levels, reducing reliance on a single leader, and ensuring sustainable performance and growth. The aim is to apply this approach at any level within an organisation.

The factory found itself dealing with innovation and optimisation challenges; production had to rise, new production lines needed to be created and almost 22% of employees were only employed temporarily. Each challenge required a different way of working and thus different profiles and teams to achieve the expected results. The factory needed to change from one person leading everything to teams leading their work to achieve results. This dimension of organisational change is often called Culture Change.

Making it practical: Culture change is a process, not a project

What completely overlaps the leader-leader model is Peter Robertson's practical concepts and tools for innovation. In his book, Always change a winning team, Robertson explains how complex changes require a different way of working than normal project changes. "Moving from one situation to another requires a long series of actions, all directed in the same direction."

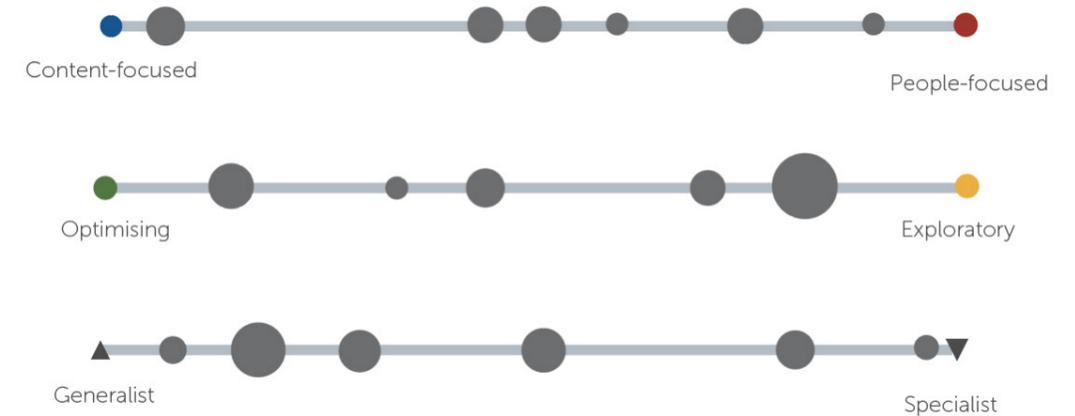


Peter Robertson
Organisation-Ecologist



Resistance to change and fear of less-than-stellar results were also a worry at the cat food production factory. Michael van Eck realised this in his consulting work all too well and thus started taking steps to change with the managing team: "Starting with a team can make larger change possible".

The first step was enabling better communication based on the key result areas of each individual in the team. The goal of the first steps was having this team get to know themselves and each other first. What do you naturally contribute to? What are your talents? Who is more capable of innovation and who wants to maintain the status quo? Through DISC and the AEM-Cube, he mapped the diversity of this group, which can be seen below.



The strategic diversity level in the managing team, measured by the AEM-Cube, was healthy. Still, a lack of awareness of each person's strategic strength was present, which impeded the team to make the most out of themselves. This caused people to misunderstand each other; suggestions were seen as criticism, rather than as an expression of their natural contributions. While Michael is still working to improve collaboration within this group, with enough knowledge of diversity, and open communication with each other, this team can begin to think strategically about their short-term and long-term contributions.

"The team needed to go a step further. And what could be better than the AEM-Cube? Because the AEM-Cube ties it all together. We needed to know how everyone contributed to the team and to the strategy. So there could not have been a better moment to do that."

Michael van Eck

Managing Partner at Learning Partners Int.



The value of open communication

One of the key elements in the process of cultural change is communication; if no information is given (or that information is insufficient or tardy), people will not be able to understand the different stages of the process of change. People who find themselves in a situation where they feel they are receiving insufficient information will start looking for that information themselves; they hope by doing this to reduce the number of unpredictable variables and strengthen their grip on the environment.

The value of open communication lies in the creation of safe places to speak about the aspects that make you vulnerable; people should be able to talk openly about their feelings and fears, the routines and the behaviours arising in the organisation. To do that, attention must be given to making channels of communication that are psychologically safe and consistent with each other.

At the international cat food production company, the members of the managing team are now aware of how each person prefers to behave and contribute to growth and innovation. In addition, Michael promoted transparency by disclosing everyone's agendas and connecting them to the personal or team's result areas. These two parts of the process are the stepping stones for all the next steps necessary for the company to start working on their priorities while taking care of people's well-being.

If you are interested in learning more about Michael van Eck's approach to consulting and the tools he used, contact Human Insight.

Literature

Marquet, L. D. (2015). *Turn the ship around!* Portfolio Penguin.

Robertson, P. (2005, May 1). *Always Change a Winning Team: Why Reinvention and Change Are Prerequisites for Business Success*. Cyan Communications.

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