How To Create Leadership Team Agility For 2019

The Window Of Opportunity

It's busy, really busy. Back-to-back meetings, relentless workload and constantly juggling three big leadership challenges:

- **Deliver** today's performance
- **Transform** the ways of working
- **Engage** with stakeholders from staff to customers to owners

In those precious distraction-free moments in the evening and at weekends, you've been scanning articles and listening to podcasts about enterprise agility.

You've heard how organisations are leveraging agile collaborative ways of working to develop products five times faster, make decisions three times faster, and shift resources like never before (McKinsey & Co. Smet, Lurie, & George, October 2018).

You know that could be you. If only your leadership colleagues could find the time and the way to really set up as one team to make agility a reality in 2019.

Are Leaders To Blame?

It's a complex, fast changing and unpredictable world.

On a personal level, new technologies make shopping, banking and keeping in touch so much easier, however, the same technologies are also empowering your customers and unleashing new competitors.

At a business level, you know most 2018 organisations are too siloed and slow to keep pace with these constantly shifting customer expectations and market changes. Planning processes are inflexible, decision making hits up against hierarchy and people feel frustrated and blocked by conflicting priorities and outdated budgeting and performance practices.

Everything just adds to complexity, while leaders get the blame. However, 2019 doesn't have to be that way.

There is a light on the horizon and it can be brighter because there's never been a greater need or opportunity for leaders to inspire and coach their people.

How?   By forging new ways of working and leading guided by principles of agility and working as one team.

One Team meets Agility

We've invested most of the past decade working with brilliant leaders from across the world in search of impactful ways to build one team enterprises.

People like Jon Westover, former Global Head of Operations for Carl Zeiss Vision and now Jurlique:

> *'The Think One Team approach was a key plank in helping Global Operations to drive rapid and effective change across multiple sites around the world. This approach has enabled us to invest in people while getting a business result at the same time.'*

We've learned a lot about collaboration within and between teams, however like our clients, the need to adapt to meet the need for agility led first to writing the book **First Be Nimble** (John Wiley & Sons), and more recently to creating a simple solution which combines agility and one team principles and practices.

We've learned from the world view of clients like Martin Bean, Vice Chancellor of RMIT University, who called it clearly in his strategic message:

> *'The one certainty is more, and greater change, in every industry and every location.'*

Like most leading-edge enterprises RMIT are embracing agility and one team in their values and ways of working.

While refining our approach to what we called 'one team agility', we've heard many questions from leaders:

- How do we deeply embed agility into our Executive and leadership teams?
- Can we do this as part of business as usual and not a training program?
- What's our leadership role in sponsoring and coaching these new ways of working?

So, we set out to discover what was possible, guided by a slight paraphrase of Oliver Wendell Holmes' brilliant quote as our guide:

> *"I seek the simplicity on the far side of complexity'.*

Simplicity with Substance

Our first look into the world of 'Agile' development (meaning the use of Agile methodologies for software development), raised lots of excitement, and an equal share of hesitation.

We observed three things:

> **First**, the methodologies of Agile were never created for leadership teams but the core principles are consistent with performance psychology research into high performance teams

> **Second**, the world of leadership teams isn't anything like the world of software or product development teams (where mainstream Agile produces its best outcomes)

> **Third**, the make-or-break of the transformation to enterprise agility is leadership unity and adaptability, so the need for leadership team agility is compelling

We needed to find a way to embed the principles and practices of one team and agility into leadership teams, because, without leadership team agility there would be little chance of an enterprise acting as an agile and adaptive team-of-teams.

We searched outside mainstream Consulting and Agile fields, and quickly created lots of complexity, but like any good adaptive process, this evolved to three remarkably simple steps now being embraced by leadership teams across enterprises as diverse as Universities, Banks, Emergency Services and Technology start-ups.

Why not make these three steps your journey in Q1 2019?

Step 1. Start the Year with a Fresh Mindset

One team agility is essential because the business challenges are adaptive.

We make this point because in the stampede to embed agile ways of working, many organisations think they're embedding a process when the real need is mindset and culture change.

Therefore, the opening conversation with your leaders must confront the harsh reality that traditional organisations are designed to solve technical problems, and yet your significant business challenges of 2019 will be complex and adaptive i.e. they won't be solved by experts in silos directed by a hierarchy of managers.

Of course, your leaders will hear the rational case for one team agility, but emotional 'squirm' is key.

The quest for new ways of working and leading in 2019 will fail unless leadership mindsets shifts from control, certainty and risk avoidance towards creativity, co-creation and optimising risk.

This shift requires a well-designed learning environment because leaders who are accustomed to relying on hierarchies, silos and detailed business plans won't shift to nimble collaborative ways of leading and working just because it sounds like the right thing to do!

Absolutely start with the compelling case for a fresh mindset. Then get set up to learn by doing (and by intelligently failing a few times). Leaders learn like anyone else.

Step 2. Shift from Linear to Loop

One exciting piece of news is that business isn't the only domain where agility and collaboration are needed.

Emergency medicine, professional sport, performing arts and special military services have been experimenting with different ways of leading and teaming for decades.

A body of knowledge in performance psychology has developed which highlights a particularly simple, compelling insight:

> *The 'secret' to nimble high performing teams is the way they 'Align – Collaborate – Learn' (ACL) at pace and to a rhythm suited to their environment.*

These teams embed this simple, yet incredibly powerful learning loop (ACL) in a disciplined and repeatable way and supported by shared tools.

For example, an Emergency Medical Team trained in one team agility will continually **A**lign around core purpose and roles, **C**ollaborate by sharing the load, and **L**earn and adapt by pausing regularly.

Place the Emergency Medical Team in the wider team-of-teams of an emergency services organisation, and you can trust the teamwork and agility between teams because they have a shared and disciplined approach to alignment, collaboration and learning (supported by shared tools and practices).

This simple ACL loop is observable in any high performing team or team-of-teams, and therein lies the simplicity on the far side of complexity to underpin your 2019 journey towards leadership team agility.

Step 3. Spin the ACL

Enterprise agility seems complex or abstract when viewed through the 2018 lens of a large, hierarchical organisation with lots of conflicting priorities, so that's why it's time to pivot the focus of your team on one thing: a robust and agile ACL operating rhythm.

Your operating rhythm ensures the quality and pace of alignment, collaboration and learning.

By end of Q1 2019 your team can transform its impact on the business by embedding a substantially different operating rhythm.

Here are three examples of what might be happening:

- The principle of transparency means 'air traffic control maps' in the form of a Team Wall showing strategic outcomes, priorities and sequencing of key tasks. Frustrations of 2018 will be replaced by conversations about what 'priority' really means, what 'done' means, and what 'accountable' means
- The principle of small teams means small fast empowered teams are delivering progress at a pace inconceivable in 2018
- The principle of chunking work into small pieces means working in sprints, with brief meetings focused on problem solving instead of the boring information sharing of 2018

To get underway, bring your team together late in 2018 for a 'chemistry check' in the form of a two-hour workshop to discuss and experience how one team agility gives immediate benefits. Then form a small fast team to coordinate the process.

To reserve a chemistry check facilitated by Think One Team or to get other help or resources just contact us at www.thinkoneteam.com.

2019 – Is It The High Road Or The Low Road?

Leadership teams will make-or-break enterprise success in 2019, which makes the decision to commit to enterprise agility and collaboration a critical decision.

Without one team agility, the pace and complexity will likely see a workforce increasingly frustrated by leaders hanging onto power, reinforcing silos and preventing the organisation from fulfilling its potential.

On the bright side, the commitment to one team agility will see an enterprise delivering value to customers by prioritising what is most important and deploying and empowering people to deliver on those priorities.

That's a workplace which has replaced overwhelming complexity with an operating rhythm sponsored, coached and modelled by leadership teams.