Operationalising your strategy-evolved mindset and leadership behaviours at the business end of transformation

The role of leadership in change and transformation

The role of leadership in the transformation of any business has typically been to present a vision that inspires and to direct the articulation of this vision into strategy and beyond. Think Sam Altman at OpenAI, Lisa Su at AMD, Rosalind Brewer at Walgreens, or Shey Segev at DAZN. Leaders often use evocative or abrasively pragmatic language to express the intended transformation journey which the broader workforce then strives towards. This nature of visionary leadership can serve as an effective centrally-driven catalyst and driving force for the full business transformation lifecycle. However, questions arise such as: how can we successfully affect transformation when a business has specific strategic, tactical, and operational needs that (rightly) do not directly echo its core vision or purpose in their simplest form?

We have observed an excessive reliance on central leadership teams and their voices in articulating the vision and maintaining ownership of strategy. This is severely limiting the effectiveness with which strategy can be translated into operational plans and transformation then delivered. There is a gap that needs to be bridged through the evolution of directorate, functional, and business unit leadership being empowered to guide and govern transformation. In order to be able to foster such behaviour, these leaders must be supported in developing mindsets that are focused on growth and in developing the ability to both set and deliver upon transformative agendas.

The problem with relying on central leadership teams to drive transformation

- High dependency on few individuals within single, central teams
- Lack of agility in sanctioning and executing pathfinder activity for the early testing of strategy and transformation plans
- Lack of opportunistic innovation
- Strong focus on high level messaging of the vision but articulation of strategy and its planned operationalisation often rushed
- Crippling delays to grounding strategy in the reality of the business
- Excessive focus on finding the perfect gold-plated solution rather than being agile
- Learning opportunities are limited or non-existent

In the Not-for-Profit sector for example the current, and critical, strategic needs of transformation in areas such as the embedment of ESG principles, operational efficiency, and commercial operating model redesign will typically be considered secondary to the core altruistic purpose and strategic vision. This results in greater challenge around ownership and delivery of the requisite transformation and change. Therefore, there is an even stronger need for enhanced leadership throughout the business where leaders must behave and operate, with more empowerment and autonomy and lead the transformation from their positions within the business.

The manufacturing sector offers another example. Here we are observing some of the medium to longer-term visioning around circularity being articulated with much more pragmatic, strategic intent. With a realisation that transformation will need to affect the full value chain, leading companies are starting to explore their approaches and the different points within the business at which leadership needs to reside in order to affect transformation and ultimately turn ambitious strategic intent into operational reality. The realisation is that rather than the agenda being centrally owned, a mindset of strategy and transformation leadership must now be more heavily nurtured within innovation, product, brand, and future ancillary service directorates, functions, and teams.

Mindset and behaviours

A shift in mindset facilitates an evolved approach to transformation and acknowledgment of the need for the development of leadership capabilities required to enable directorates, departments, and functions in owning, embedding, and successfully delivering transformation. Leaders must become better connected with both their role in delivering core purpose but also the supporting elements of transformation that sustain a successful commercial reality.

The criticality of a shift in mindset and leadership behaviours is to move away from traditional leadership with transformation sold as a need for the execution of the vision of an individual or central brain, away from fixed centralised decision making and transformation stewardship, and away from a reliance on central teams as custodians or stewards of transformation. The move is to the co-creation of the vision and embracing the autonomy that comes with the broader business leadership community taking ownership for and operationalising the strategy.

The challenge that businesses are increasingly facing is no longer the standard "doing transformation and making change stick." It is much more specific. Leaders from across businesses need to develop a growth mindset, sense of empowerment, trust and autonomy, and decision-making authority to effectively operationalise a new wave of strategies. This is the business end of transformation and a determining factor for successful change delivery.

Find out more

For more information, please contact us at info@clarasys.com