



Going Beyond the Façade: Leadership is a Mindset

***“Leadership cannot really be
taught. It can only be learned.”***

*Harold S Geneen, past President of ITT, 1959-1977, and
business author.*



**Executive
Development**

“Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.”

John F. Kennedy, 35th President of the United States

Leadership and its critical role to organisational success has been a recurring theme on the annual surveys of CEOs [1] and those responsible for Learning and Development [2] in organisations for the last few years.

That leadership has become a perennial issue on the organisational development agenda should not be a surprise, for organisations have found that developing leadership capability is costly, complex, and challenging with very mixed results.

In 2016 the consultants Deloitte reported that some \$25 billion was spent globally in 2015 on leadership development [3] but that organisations were not getting a good return on their investment: ‘For in the most part, the learning doesn’t lead to better organisational performance, because people soon revert to their old ways of doing things.’ [4] Additionally, there is also the ‘mismatch between leadership development as it exists and what leaders actually need that is enormous and widening.’ [5]

Many organisations make a major mistake about leadership; they look at it as a set of competencies, techniques, and tools. Leadership is actually personal, for it is about the mindset of the leader: the beliefs and attitudes about self, others, and how work gets done.

Mindset

Mindset is extremely influential, for it determines how an individual thinks about and interprets situations; their emotional reactions; the decisions they make; and actions they take. It determines the quality of their relationships; the interactions they have; and crucially in this context, the way they lead.

Sports psychologists have for some 40 years understood the impact of an individual’s mindset on the efficacy of a person’s performance.

The first Olympic Gold medal attributed to mindset development was won by the American, Lanny Bassham, in the 1976 Montreal games [6]. At the same games, the Russian Olympic team found that the best incremental improvement in performance was by those athletes who focused 75% of their time upon the mental aspects of competing [7].

The Russians had recognised a simple human facet of mind, that an individual’s attitude towards their performance—their mindset—is the direct result of their past experiences filtered through a perception of the current situation influenced by their beliefs. Whilst a person cannot change the past they can change the beliefs and attitudes that underpin their mindset through which they can greatly enhance their capacity to perform.

The Russian team went on to top the 1976 Montreal medal table.

With neuroscientists today informing us that a person has some 50,000 thoughts a day (a thought is a belief) of which some 40,000 are negative, the high performers recognise the importance of developing their mental capacities through a positive mindset and a thorough and



ongoing understanding of how the many beliefs they experience each day can impact their performance.

As an outcome of this knowledge and learning; the high achievers in sport today think differently.

High performance, achievement, and success today is not just the domain today of top performers in sport but also many other fields of life and work. Leadership is no exception and organisations ignore this to their cost.

Changing Mindset

It is important to recognise that people develop many of their beliefs and attitudes early in their life and very often these form into habits of which they are unaware. It is important to understand that an individual's beliefs:

- Are their best current thinking about something;
- Can and may often change naturally;
- Are frequently generalisations they have concluded from events or have been 'given' to them by parental figures or influential 'others' from their past;
- May be 'conscious' but are most commonly 'unconscious' to them – they are 'out of their awareness';
- Can be 'positive' and empowering' but frequently 'negative' and disempowering;
- Are one of the main 'filters' of what they perceive of, and determine from, events;
- Have different intensities;
- Define their 'model of reality' from which they operate; and
- Impact on the behaviours, skills and abilities they have.

Since all of a person's beliefs are shaped through learning and expressed through their attitudes and behaviour, negative attitudes can fortunately be 'unlearned' and behaviour changed with insight, knowledge, commitment, support and time. Importantly, it is possible to also build upon positive beliefs and attitudes.

Changing beliefs, however, is not easy for as humans many people find 'change' difficult; it may involve 'loss', something humans are 'hardwired' to avoid. Additionally, many people may also have beliefs about change in itself that they need to examine before they can consider other beliefs that they need to change.

'Leading of Self'

"If you want to lead, invest 40% of your time in leading yourself."

Dee Hook, founder of VISA

Past behaviour is a good predictor of future behaviour because the beliefs and attitudes underlying this will remain consistent over time unless the beliefs that underpin the attitudes are addressed and changed.



This requires data and begins with information, insight, and a commitment to the leading of self. In the context of leadership this is fundamental, for if an individual cannot successfully lead themselves how are they able to effectively lead others?

Through research, experience, and work into the mindset of high performers from both sport, business, and other fields of human endeavour over twenty years eight constructs—distinctive attitudes—were found to be strongly associated with high performers:

Self-Belief: The confidence an individual feels about their skills, their abilities, their capacity to perform, and their behaviours.

Self-Control: An individual's capacity to control and regulate their behaviour in order to achieve their goals.

Self-Discipline: An individual's capability to organise, manage, and motivate themselves towards achieving their goal or goals.

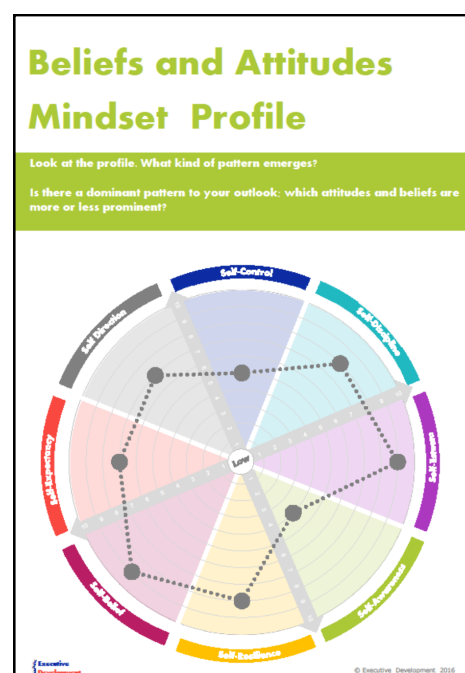
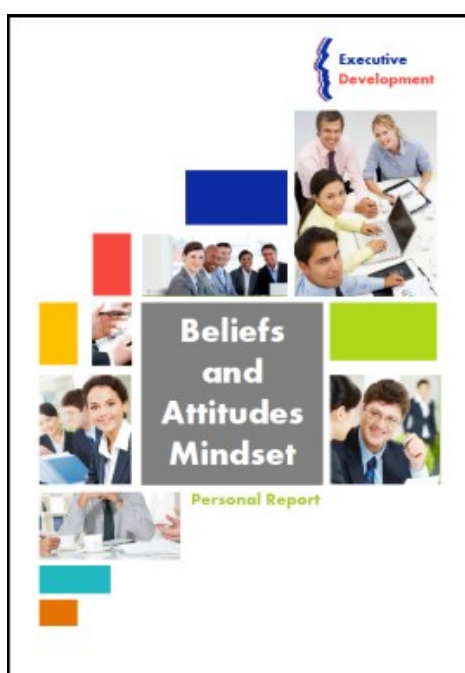
Self-Esteem: An individual's subjective emotional evaluation of their value and worth – a judgement of one's self.

Self-Awareness: An individual's conscious knowledge of their strengths, motives, and limitations.

Self-Resilience: An individual's capacity to adapt and 'bounce back' in the face of adversity, difficult experiences, and failure.

Self-Expectancy: An individual's expectation of what they want and their desire to make this happen.

Self-Direction: An individual's capacity to make their own decisions and focus their efforts towards achieving their desired goal or goals.



With the need to understand and challenge personal beliefs as the key to behavioural change, the 'Beliefs and Attitudes Mindset Questionnaire'© was created based upon the eight attitudes (psychological constructs). The aim of the questionnaire is to encourage personal learning through the causal development sequence of:

- Feedback that provides crucial insight;
- Insight that identifies priorities for personal change;
- Priorities that can be translated into action plans for development; and
- Implementation of action plans that will result in change that leads to improvements in personal performance.

The feedback from the completed questionnaire is presented in an in-depth personalised 19-page report with in depth analysis on the eight attitudes.

The eight attitudes are interdependent with one attitude impacting not just another but others as well. For instance, self-awareness is at the core of self-leadership, and the leading of others, being built upon a combination positive levels of self-belief, self-control, and self-discipline. Low scores in one or two of these attitudes will impact the quality of self-leadership and the leading of others.

From an organisational standpoint, an individual with positive self-awareness, self-esteem and self-belief is likely to make both a good team player and a leader. High achievers—those driven by goal achievement—possess positive beliefs over all of the eight attitudes.

The report includes a complete guide to aid Action Planning along with a Personal Action Plan.

More Information

If you would like to understand more or have any questions, please contact Howard Betts via email howardbetts@xecdevelop.com

You may like to read further related articles and information as well as our regular blog please visit www.execdevelop.com

References

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