



# Finding Future Leaders

*Many organisations underestimate what is required to forge individuals who can drive and deliver outstanding results. Criticaleye investigates how some are developing top talent so they can thrive in the most demanding of situations*

**T**raditional leadership and development programmes are dead in the water. In order to identify and nurture individuals with real potential, a heuristic approach is required that is driven with passion and commitment by the top team and tailored to a company's specific needs and values. It's surprising how many organisations have failed to grasp this and remain hopelessly out of date in their thinking.

**Howard Kerr**, Chief Executive at standards and training provider BSI, comments: "Time is always the biggest barrier, but it can be about budgets too. The question might be: 'Can we really afford to invest in another round of leadership development, where we'll have managers off on a half-day course or taking time out for coaching others?'"

"When the desire is to meet quarterly targets it's very easy to get mired in the short-term and therefore lose sight of the bigger picture... [But] it's the role of the CEO to make sure the organisation takes time to look further forward and develop its people, not just for the next job, but to ask instead: 'Where could those individuals get to?'"

**Mike Tye**, CEO of Spirit Pub Company, has no doubts over who should be driving leadership development: "One of the few prime accountabilities of the role of CEO should be that there are enough good quality leaders in the organisation."

A similar point is made by **Craig Donaldson**, CEO of Metro Bank: "CEOs should absolutely be at the heart of leadership development. That means being

part of the programme, working with people that are identified on it to make sure they understand what is being put in place, challenging where necessary and making sure it's all fit-for-purpose."

## NEW DIRECTION

Given how organisations are radically changing, what are the leadership traits needed to be successful?

"To me, what defines a leader is somebody that's prepared to embrace a challenge," says **Howard**. "Of course, it's important that an organisation supports that person but it comes down to people accepting increased personal responsibility."

For **Craig**, a strong character is essential. "I look for intellect, interpersonal skills and

grafters. If you've got the skills and the right work ethic, you get on. That means people who are driven, challenging, and who are willing to push themselves and the business forward, but also people who'll bring others with them – it's very important that leaders have that ability – as once they've set the vision, others will follow."

So the task is to devise programmes that bring these qualities to the fore. **Ella Bennett**, Human Resources Director for the UK and Ireland division of global IT systems and services provider Fujitsu, says: "We have a young entrant graduate intake which we see as having high potential at that point, then we have a group called Future Leaders, who may be in their first really challenging role, through to development that is focused more for senior leaders, who we'd expect to be sponsored by more [experienced people] within the organisation... The more senior you are, the more tailored the development."

## GET REAL

There's also the question of understanding what works country by country. **Anne Stevens**, Vice President of People and Organisation at Rio Tinto Copper, says: "There is no point in trying to take someone in Indonesia, for example, through a formal... [UK] business school programme because it may not make sense to them. You need to be tuned in to the environment they are working in and there are very different requirements based on what the people need and what you need your leaders to deliver..."

"The key point is knowing what it is you're looking for. What is it that your business needs and how do you help your people identify with those

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competencies and develop them to build their leadership capability?"

Time and patience will be needed before the results can be appreciated. **BB Roy**, Vice President of Strategy and Business Development at American Express, comments: "Some people are of the opinion that immediate and obvious successes will follow after rolling out [leadership] programmes. Developing a leader is not just sending someone on a course – it is a journey that combines many forms of coaching, so getting the content right is crucial..."

"Once the goals are agreed the development team needs to clearly understand what the content and approach should be and ensure that this forms part of a continuous roadmap."

**Ruth Cairnie**, Executive Vice-President for Strategy and Planning at Shell, says: "Historically there's been a lot of focus on just going on a type of 'sheep-dip' leadership training programme for a couple of weeks, but you need a more experiential element to your development as a leader to really practice those core skills..."

"The challenges that leaders face are ever more complex, so the set of skills that are needed must be honed. You can't build strong collaboration skills, both internally and externally, in a classroom, you have to learn by doing. Whether it's with customers, regulators, governments or suppliers, to really drive breakthrough opportunities and change you need to be able to build those relationships."

## MIX IT UP

A common theme to emerge is that individuals who show promise should be thrown into a range of different situations. **Nandani Lynton**, Criticaleye Thought Leader and Adjunct Professor of Management at China Europe International Business School, comments: "Overall, cutting-edge programmes need to be experiential and hands-on, exposing the participants to contexts, roles, information and interactions that are unusual for them."

"This engages their hearts and guts as well as their heads. It then needs plenty of reflection time and extremely good debriefing for participants to distil learning, apply it to themselves and their current challenges and – hopefully – to do a trial application of the learning."

It's about taking people out of their comfort zones. "One of the big things we do is involve [potential leaders] in critical business issues," says **Ella**. "We'll stretch them by putting them in cross-organisational projects, where they are involved in some of the nuts and bolts of the real issues that face leaders in the organisation..."

"For example, there might be a particular issue around how we learn lessons both from bids that we have been successful ▶

on and where we were unsuccessful: how do we integrate those lessons back into the organisation? We have a group taken from across the business looking at those issues and thinking about how we might solve those problems differently.”

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**Gary Kildare**, Chief HR Officer for Global Technology Services at IBM, says: “Our Corporate Service CORPS programme takes our leaders and potential leaders out of their day jobs for six weeks, puts them in groups of 20 and moves them around the world to work on a specific pieces of work, whether that’s commercial, charity, or with NGOs in emerging markets... It’s experiential leadership alongside their international colleagues, working with them in a locality to solve a real problem in the time that they are there.”

For the most part, a programme has to be practical as it’s the only way to discover how somebody reacts and adapts under pressure. **Craig** says: “You need to allow people to grow and put them into environments where you know they are going to be stretched and you can support them through it.

“For example, we’ve just made a 31-year old a Regional Director, which is pretty senior... We took him out of his day job and put him

into a six month role where he received intense development in commercial lending. After three months, he’d done really well so we gave him the region to manage.”

## PEAK PERFORMANCE

The best companies invest in people and see the value in putting a structure around nurturing high performers. Others fail to see how putting time into individuals, so their business and people skills are set on a foundation of values-based behaviour, is a recipe for long-term success.

**Yvonne Sell**, Director and Head of UK Leadership and Talent at consultancy Hay Group, says: “An issue in many organisations is the availability and consistency of feedback for people on their leadership behaviours. It’s a lot easier to have a conversation about whether or not you met hard objectives, like delivering on sales targets, rather than assessing whether you managed your team in the right way...

“Organisations that do this well give a broad range of people the capacity to engage in leadership roles early on in their career. They understand that not everyone strives to be a leader and help people to recognise where they are going to be most satisfied and can do their best.”

Programmes have to come from the top, be customised, collaborative and embedded so that what’s learned doesn’t get forgotten once immersed in the day-to-day of regular work.

As **Gary** says: “Developing the right leadership talent remains one of the hottest challenges facing organisations today. It’s critical to have the full commitment of the senior leaders so they can be the role models of behaviour, to offer their time to

be coaches and to be personally invested in the future of the business through the development of new leaders.” ■

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### Featuring Commentary From:



**Ella Bennett**  
 HR Director UKI  
 Fujitsu



**Ruth Cairnie**  
 EVP Strategy and Planning  
 Shell



**Craig Donaldson**  
 CEO  
 Metro Bank



**Howard Kerr**  
 Chief Executive  
 BSI



**Gary Kildare**  
 Chief HR Officer  
 IBM Global Technology  
 Services



**Nandani Lynton**  
 Adjunct Professor of  
 Management  
 CEIBS



**BB Roy**  
 VP Strategy and Business  
 Development  
 American Express



**Yvonne Sell**  
 Head of UK Leadership and  
 Talent  
 Hay Group



**Anne Stevens**  
 VP People and Organisation  
 Rio Tinto Copper



**Mike Tye**  
 CEO  
 Spirit Pub Company

Contact the contributors through:  
[www.criticaleye.net](http://www.criticaleye.net)