



The Creative CEO

Executives are learning fast that the rules for good leadership are changing. Criticaleye finds out what this means in practice and how directors are rising to the challenge

Running a business is the easy part for a chief executive. Apart from charming investors, being fluent in finance and attuned to HR, there is the need to communicate smoothly across multiple media channels. It all amounts to a business lingua franca that has to be grasped fully as nowadays no CEO can afford to be lost for words.

Peter Cheese, Chief Executive of The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, says that, by and large, it is about being “aware of who you are, what you stand for and allowing that to come across in an authentic way – that is one of the things that good leadership is about”.

He explains that a clear message has to be relayed: “All these new channels need to be understood, embraced or effectively used by business leaders. The people that they are trying to reach, such as their employees, customers and other stakeholders, are using these channels and they expect therefore to

be communicated through them. Another challenge is to ensure that the messages being delivered are consistent. It is easy to confuse the messages when you have lots of different channels and ways of communicating.”

Whether it's a badly handled crisis, a rogue tweet or an overly casual text to a business associate, it is clear that lapses in communication can result in a deluge of negative publicity. **Sir Stuart Rose**, Non-executive Director at real estate investment trust Land Securities, says: “Because everything moves so fast you need to be a multi-tasker, to have even better communication skills and good emotional intelligence – antennae that can pick up nuances and threads from all sorts of places and inputs.”

Beyond that, comes the ability to assess the numerous sources of financial and strategic data that are now available. **Jo Sellwood-Taylor**, a Founding Director at executive recruitment firm Mullwood Partnership, says: “The CEO's role has changed. It has become much more about collaboration and you need your top team and leaders to be able to constantly work together – gone is the egocentric CEO. They need to work far more collaboratively, even outside their team and [usual] network and they've got to be someone who is transparent, genuine, humble and approachable to allow that to happen.”

Graeme Yell, a Director at management consultancy Hay Group, says: “What a lot of people do is still based around the ‘Superstar CEO’ and developing individual capabilities beyond everything else; I don't think it necessarily takes into account the types of behaviour that leaders are going to need to display in the future as much as it should do.”

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

The need to interact internally with transparency and clarity is increasingly important too. **Richard Ackroyd**, CEO of Scottish Water, says: “You have to tell and inform people [in an organisation] more rather than less. Historically, too many organisations have worked on a need to know basis and my experience is that the more you tell people, the better it is because what tends to happen is that they understand where they fit in the big picture and what their role is in relation to others.”

Peter agrees: “Given the range of communications expected from leaders, you need to be able to use all these channels in the right fashion. It does go two ways and the challenge as a leader is to have the time to use

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these channels effectively as it is all coming at you. Of course, the more you use these things the more you are going to get back, so it becomes a growing challenge in terms of the management of your own time.”

Within all of this comes a greater sense of responsibility and broader awareness too of the material and emotional impact a business may be seen to have on people's lives.

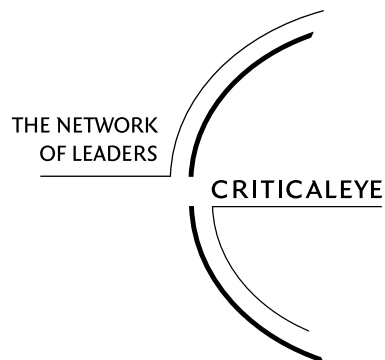
Martyn Fisher, Executive Vice-President of Industrial Europe for Veolia Water Solutions & Technologies, says: “When the economy is a bit tougher, people are scrutinised over their creativity and strength of leadership. There is a healthy scepticism that we see in the press about highly paid leaders getting bonuses, and a general perception that business is easy to do most of the time.

“Business isn't easy to do in a recession and that puts leaders under a microscope in terms of not just their strength of character and the quality of their communication skills, but also in their creativity and invention.”

Valery Katkalo, a Criticaleye Thought Leader and Vice Rector at St Petersburg University, says: “When you progress up in a business you have more responsibility for the whole organisation's image. This is where real leaders are making the difference today [...] being able to look broadly at what businesses can do to address the issues that society is concerned with.”

All in all, CEOs trying to get ‘the big picture’ of their organisation's health and purpose will have to be brave and break new ground to determine what information streams to delegate, what to ignore, what to own and to admit what could and should be done better.

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Featuring Commentary From:



Richard Ackroyd
CEO, Scottish Water



Peter Cheese
Chief Executive, The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development



Martyn Fisher
Executive Vice-President, Veolia Water Solutions & Technologies



Valery Katkalo
Vice Rector, St Petersburg University



Sir Stuart Rose
NED, Land Securities



Jo Sellwood-Taylor
Founding Director, Mullwood Partnership



Graeme Yell
Director, Hay Group

Contact the contributors through www.criticaleye.net