

## A Lesson of Leadership

By Uwe H Kaufmann

A couple of months ago, I was having lunch with the Chairman of a medium-sized contract manufacturing company in Singapore. When we made the appointment, we agreed to meet at a posh club in the centre of the city-state. After arriving there I found myself in the middle of his management team. He had brought MD and CFO along.

The team had just come back from their annual study trip. This year's topic was on Strategy Deployment, presented by a well known Harvard Professor in Boston/MA. They found the lesson learnt impressive enough to try inviting this Professor to Singapore to the benefit of their staff. As they mentioned, every year they visit one of the think-tanks to keep track of new developments in modern business management. This has brought great benefits to their organisation.

I find three points worth mentioning:

Firstly, this management team seems to be "detached" from the daily business – in a nice way. The topic on the table for discussion was around going the next steps with their company, finding a way to expose their staff to a new methodology, getting their staff's opinion and buy-in as well as making it happen. There was no obvious need to do so. The company was and is in a very healthy position. The only objective I could recognise was the focus on continuously renewing their company and making or keeping it fit for tomorrow.

Secondly, they were not only talking about the new method. Instead, they put people matters above it. They were very serious about adopting it. They discussed not only the "technical" aspects of the change but also the consequences on their staff. These leaders raised concerns, elaborated the advantages and disadvantages in detail even before they presented their idea to their team. They seemed to champion this kind of change and they were (and are) trying to instil this ethos into their company.

Lastly – a side-note – they really took their time for building and maintaining rapport with each other. Neither Chairman nor MD or CFO gave in to the annoying habit of taking "important phone calls" at all. This management team seems to be one of a few I have ever met that is able not to touch the phone for a couple of hours without having their company getting in serious trouble. I do not even know whether they possess phones. I had the pleasure of enjoying this conversation in a perfectly polite atmosphere. – I really dislike it when my conversation partner takes a call.

Contrary to popular belief their behaviour and mind-set has brought about the best ROI for business travel one can think of.

### Conclusion

Leadership is much more about continuously improving and renewing the business than running the daily show. Instead, it means having competent people you trust to do the latter with excellent quality. Supporting improvement and renewal activities with change leadership makes the difference.

Whilst this is not really a brand-new discovery, how many leaders walk the talk?