

Despite operating under intense scrutiny, inspired leaders can breathe a new passion and effectiveness into public service organisations.

Inspired leadership under the spotlight

Jane Allen, Director of Public Service

Provision at Harthill Consulting, acknowledges the current pressures facing public sector leaders; “In key areas performance is highly scrutinised and senior people need confidence to maintain their direction under the current spotlight. It is appropriate that a public service organisation is accountable, but the weight of scrutiny, reinforced by media attention, tends to create a blame culture. There is an imperative that meeting performance targets is the platform from which to be creative: the challenge for leaders is how to generate and sustain a sense of focus, purpose, and passion.”

“Senior leaders need clear space to think about what they are doing. They need to hold their nerve and discipline in the face of uncertainty and inspection, whilst maintaining their vision, energy, and purpose. Clearly, if you are not feeling inspired then how can you inspire others?”

Inspired leadership extends beyond senior management to infect the whole organisation. “You need people further down the organisation to lead by being imaginative, enthusiastic, and having courage whilst at the same time being good managers and keeping the organisation efficient. Leadership isn’t about just ticking the boxes, it is also about giving others encouragement to do their best. Staff need the chance to get their hearts and heads around what they are doing.

It is essential to make sure that people don’t feel strangled by processes, procedures, and performance and have the breathing space to keep their sights on the experience of their ‘customers’. Customers are increasingly demanding and public servants find themselves having to stand up and be counted. Inspired leadership involves learning and recovering from such events; putting different actions in place so that mistakes are not repeated. Attending



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skilfully to the things that have gone wrong whilst preserving the confidence of staff and the public they serve is probably the most difficult thing to do. Jane Allen comments, “Harthill provides leaders with reflection and stimulating input in equal measure – we see this leading directly to an increased capability for timely and effective action; that’s where the leverage for change arises in the way organisations work.”

Public sector organisations not only

require excellent leaders they also need efficient and effective structures beyond the well planned hierarchy. This enables people to work across functions collaborating within their own organisation and with other relevant organisations with which they do business. “Part of what we do is noticing where processes work well and where they fail. People tend to work quite well through the hierarchy but often not as well across functions. The mechanisms for integrating individual, team or group and organisational learning all need attending to in order to facilitate system wide change that stands up to scrutiny – no matter how fierce.” Developing the skills and confidence to work in partnership, both within and without their own organisation in a true spirit of collaboration, is critical. **CJM**

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