

# Leadership Development

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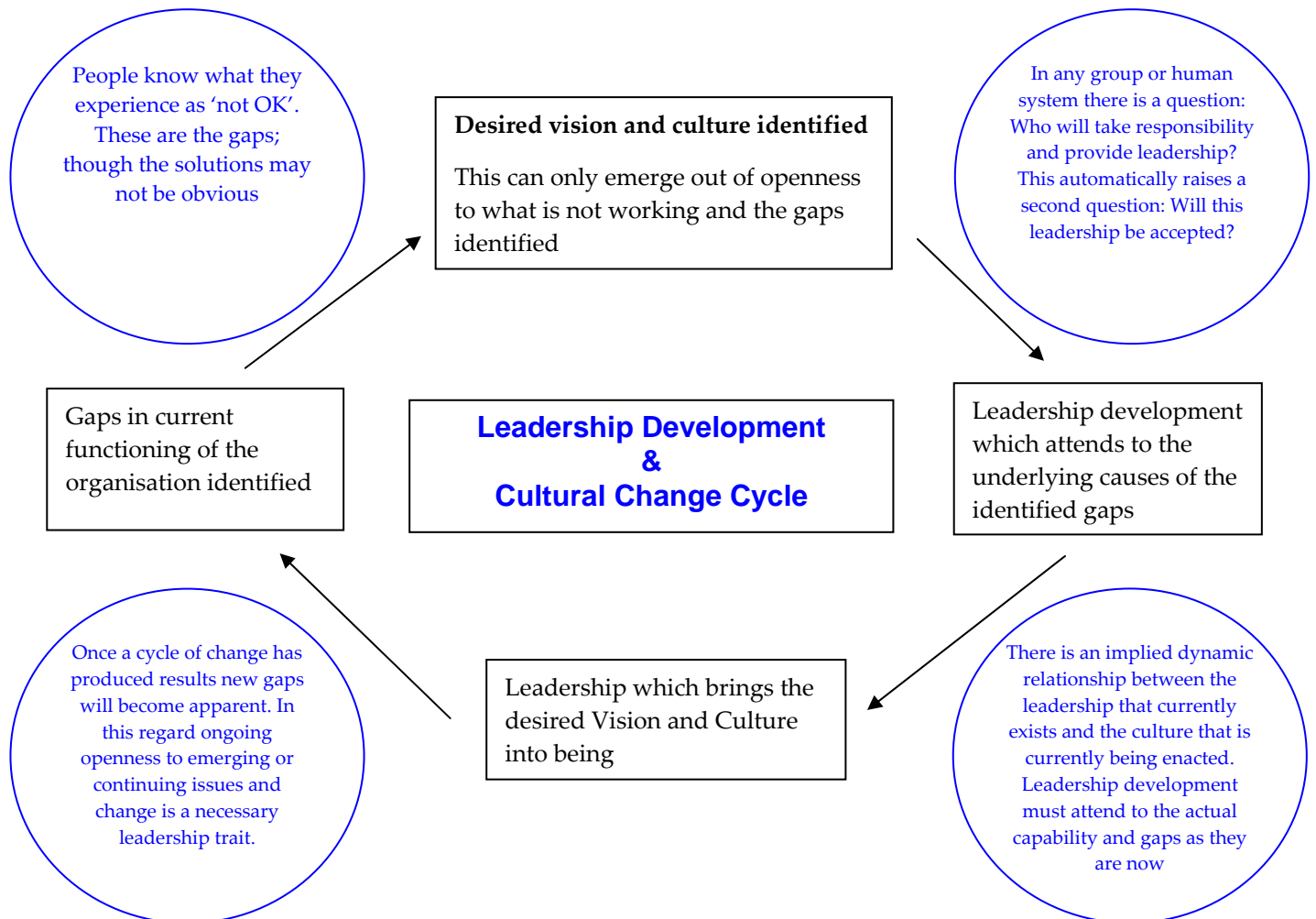


Figure 1: The relationship between leadership development and cultural change

For some time in my work with a range of organisations I have been reflecting on the relationship between leadership and cultural change. I have been noticing culture as an emerging force with teams and organisations which can be healthy or destructive. While the effects of culture are felt by all and affect everyone; often what causes the culture to change and develop seems to go unnoticed.

I have been finding it helpful to consider that culture is what develops as a response to the way we go about achieving results and often negative or unhealthy culture develops as an unintended consequence of our actions. In fact the actions of each person within a social system create the culture we experience and this also creates an opening for leadership. Every person is

responsible for the culture that exists and can take leadership in creating something different. However I as have been working with this notion I have noticed that invariably when the culture is not healthy an element of this is that people do not feel like leaders, they are more likely to feel trapped and impotent. This dynamic is most obvious when working with issues like workplace bullying where the cycle of heavy handed management intended to push for results creates a sense of victimisation and an increasing inability to function effectively which in turn provokes the response of heavy handed management.

It is very common when studying culture, in for example management training, to be introduced to the idea that organisational culture is very hard to change. Very often culture is seen and experienced as a complex many headed beast which no one can control and which runs up and down the corridors causing havoc and unhappiness. Two related approaches which assist people in organisations to create health are facilitation and leadership coaching. Very simply facilitation in this context is about assisting the team, who don't like the way the culture is, to notice much more specifically what goes on currently, what is desired and what leadership is required to move in the desired direction. It is very helpful to have a notion of culture as a non linear force that is influenced by everything everybody does. Very often people will be unaware that what keeps the culture static are particular ways of doing things that get repeated each time certain conditions are present. In this context leadership coaching is about working with any person to assist them to notice and change the things they do that have unintended consequences that create unhealthy culture.

I have found that it is also essential to believe that people almost never intend to create negative dynamics; they are applying the skills they have to achieve what they are committed to. Moreover if they could create healthy culture at the same time they would.