

FIRST TAKEAWAY

BE PURPOSE LED

by Cherielyn Leong

CSC Visiting Fellow Peter Hawkins, Emeritus Professor of Leadership at Henley Business School, Chairman of Renewal Associates, co-founder of the Global Team Coaching Institute is a leading consultant, coach, writer and researcher in organizational strategy, leadership, culture change.

He visited CSC recently and conducted an Organisation Transformation Clinic for OD and Transformation practitioners. Among several key points he shared, three stood out particularly in association with the OD community's work in our Public Service Agencies.

If you missed the Clinic, no worries. We distilled three takeaways and will elaborate further with research references on the topics to support practitioners to apply the insights to work. Read on to find out.

Prof Hawkins shared that as change practitioners, we need to be purpose led in our work. The question he asked all to consider was **"what can our team/Organisation do that is unique to our system?"** This question is meant to trigger thought on the purpose of the Organisation. Notice that the key is not to start by asking what is the change needed? Instead, it is to ask what is your Organisation's value-add.

For a start, practitioners can consider what is the purpose of the Organisation and if there is alignment to this purpose. Purpose is most effective when there is alignment. This alignment creates an energy to motivate people throughout the organization to change the way they operate. This change is to support the manifestation of the Organisation's true purpose.

Several studies done with Organisations revealed that a powerful purpose contains these aspects;

- 1** Employees are able to understand, identify with and contribute to the Organisation's purpose
- 2** An effective purpose also must be dynamic. From time to time, ask "how are we living our purpose?" and "how can we do better?"
- 3** Purpose can be impactful only if the senior leaders thoroughly embrace it and are prepared to make changes to align daily operations to the purpose.
- 4** Purpose must be aligned to the Organisation's strategies and targets. A purpose – based business strategy makes explicit the shared value that both stakeholders and employees can achieve together.

MIT Sloan Management Review published a recent article¹ to share three processes where Organisations can adopt to incorporate purpose into daily operations. These processes are, **purpose knowledge, purpose internalization and purpose contribution**. If you are looking for a fresh way to engage employees for more meaningful connections with your Organisation, these processes may help.

If you are working with Change Champions in your Organisation, you would know that Change Champions are important resource people to transmit information about the Organisation's purpose and promote or even embody change. Let's see how these processes apply to help OD practitioners working with Change Champions.

¹ De Nalda, A.L., Montaner, A., Edmondson, A. and Sotok, P. (Jun 2022), "Unlock The Power of Purpose", MIT Sloan Management Review, Summer 2022 edition, <https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/unlock-the-power-of-purpose/>

PURPOSE KNOWLEDGE is about understanding how purpose connects to Organisation strategy. This understanding is bolstered by communication from senior leaders to clarify how business decisions are made based on the Organisation's purpose. Facilitate the direct sharing of these examples and stories between leaders and Change Champions. This way, Change Champions hear directly from the leaders. In turn, Change Champions can help transmit the purpose and accompanying change messages to their peers and fellows. It is highly motivating when employees know (with help from the Change Champions and leaders) how their work contributes and aligns to the Organisation's purpose for existence.

PURPOSE INTERNALISATION is stage two of knowing about the Organisation's purpose. Internalising purpose refers to empowering employees to connect with the Organisation's purpose with their own values. Employees who can share how their individual work attitudes and values are aligned with the Organisation, are able to connect to the purpose and find meaning for themselves.

For the Change Champions, this may translate to asking them why they join (or accept the nomination) to be Change Champions. Create a psychologically safe opportunity to talk through why they join or take on the Change Champion role and what they feel is their purpose serving the Organisation as a Change Champion? We often miss out hearing from our Change Champions on their aspirations, their personal values and what they think and feel their presence can bring about to the initiative. If we do this consciously before going straight to tasking them to do change work, we may have better engagement outcomes.

PURPOSE CONTRIBUTION is about measuring the performance of processes and outcomes in reflecting and alignment to the purpose of the Organisation. This helps the leaders check whether the existing or newly designed processes and systems actually match, or help in manifesting the Organisation's purpose.

The reward and recognition system that rewards employees for fulfilling the Organisation's purpose is a useful example. When purpose is aligned with the reward system, practitioners show up to support the Change Champions as they execute the change work. Find a way to tell them how their change effort has made a difference and how it has pushed the Organisation's purpose forward with stakeholders. If Change Champions see themselves as real catalysts for driving the Organisation's purpose, and not just doing a CCA role, they are more likely to be successful in their role. In turn, the corresponding measurements for Organisation change will shift, as a result of the initiative shown by the Change Champions.

Circling back to Prof Hawkin's original question, we can ask "what can our Change Champions do that is unique to our system?" Practitioners can consider how your Change Champions are fit for the purpose of the Organisation and what it would look like with them adding value to change conversations within your Organisation? Change Champions achieve their purpose with critical senior leadership support, periodic reviews of the Organisation's purpose and meaningful conversations about purpose and values alignment among employees.

As practitioners, we could challenge ourselves to enable the conditions for success, starting with supporting our allies, the Change Champions in a purposeful way.

Learn more about psychological safety with our new e-learning programme - "Thriving Together: A Practice Guide To Build High-Performing, Cohesive and Resilient Teams"



Look out for our next two takeaways from Prof Hawkins' Clinic coming up.