Powering Performance, Preserving People: Key Factors for Success in Times of Challenge

To manage our way in these challenging times, we need to foster a performance-oriented culture. Driving accountability and a clear focus on continuous improvement cannot though, come at the expense of employee engagement and team cohesion.

Last month, we talked about staying resilient amidst resistance to change. Often resistance can come from teams who are more comfortable with the status quo or who are experiencing anxiety. This can have a terrible effect on teams, leading to low morale and even delays in projects or deliveries.

Getting below the surface to find out what is blocking the system involves more than change management tools. It involves open-hearted and playful conversations to create a common understanding of performance culture and the metrics that drive it. Without this radical focus on people, the system slows down and stays stuck.

What might be draining the system

At LEAD Forward we have been in the business of helping clients overcome challenges by directly connecting the mission of the business with their everyday work. Here are the top blockers we find most often:

- **Unclear goals and metrics**: When teams lack clear line of sight to performance metrics, it becomes challenging to align employee efforts with outcomes and objectives, leading to inconsistent results and accountability issues. But they need not be overwhelmed with dashboards!

- **Insufficient leadership support**: When senior leaders become cynical at yet another 'new' initiative they can undermine transformational initiatives, causing confusion and reducing momentum among teams.

- **Communication barriers**: People are messy and so are relationships. Frequently frustration at conflicting metrics creates breakdowns. At its worst, this leads to siloed operations and misaligned priorities.

- **Remote work dynamics**: Effective communication does not create trust if teams do not spend quality time together. The hybrid model is great and it requires a conscious management of online and offline meetings.

- **Lack of trust:** Change and refocusing our work and tasks can be met with initial doubt. It is important that leaders enjoy utmost trust from employees to be able to try something different – even if first successes may take longer to manifest.

- **Not celebrating success**: Without enough reasons to celebrate, the joy simply drains away from teams.

Innovation, Playfulness, and Creativity at scale

The performance culture that emerges when the system gets unblocked is vibrant, agile, and highly adaptive. We have been able to observe shifts in mindsets in organizations that were forced to rethink performance during challenging times due to targeted and smart interventions. We want to share two examples with you here:

CASE EXAMPLE ONE

A large global technology player in agribusiness asked LEAD Forward to help shift the culture from a project-centered approach towards a product organization. Put simply the organization had outgrown its current way of working and technology. Poor customer performance led to internal frustrations, which in turn created a cycle of missed deliveries.

We co-created and implemented a lean transformation journey consisting of Agile Lean Management and systemic interventions. Collapsing one silo at a time, we were able to co-create interdependent teams and redefine roles from project management to product ownership. Ongoing training with a focus on mentoring and coaching supported the leadership to focus on flow.

This led to an increase in the speed of product-to-market, the engagement of leaders, and even the notion that Agile is fun!

CASE EXAMPLE TWO

A player in the automotive industry asked LEAD Forward to help them work together in a more collaborative, creative way to support the organization through crisis.

In a tough market where supply chain price inflation and long lead times led to market pressure on prices we co-created and implemented a system of performance hacks. These were aimed at making the organization more agile. For example, starting with the leaders we kick started activities that sparked a performance mindset. Addressing hot topics such as sharing resources, reducing processes, meetings and tasks meant finding smarter, more efficient ways to work together and tackle the difficult challenges.

As a result, more collaboration drove aligned prioritization and heightened energy levels in the team.

Developing and maintaining a performance culture is ongoing. Encouraging honest communication, creating spaces for sense-making, and not shying away from difficult topics is how we go on together. **It is all about learning how fun and performing can go hand in hand**. It is all about knowing its potential to be an approach that is joyful, inclusive, and effective. To find out more email: Scott.Goldner@lead.berlin

Resilience Over Resistance: Mobilizing People to Transform in Turbulent Times

In the rapidly evolving landscape of today's business world, change isn't just inevitable—it's essential for staying ahead. Yet, even with the most robust strategies and systems, one invisible force remains our greatest challenge: human resistance to change. It's the silent saboteur of progress, often overlooked, yet capable of derailing even the most well-intentioned initiatives. The cost of unresolved resistance is not just a short-term obstacle; it threatens a company's long-term viability and competitiveness. This month's brief aims to normalize human resistance to change and empower leaders to proactively address and overcome it, so your organizations can fully realize the benefits of transformation.

Expect resistance to change, keep a pulse on it, & understand what is underneath it

Over the past decade, LEAD Forward has assisted numerous leaders in implementing change, where encountering resistance has been a common frustration. We recommend that leaders expect resistance (it is a completely typical human response) and think of it as a signal; much like pain indicates health issues, resistance can alert you to underlying issues with the organizational change process. We also recommend proactively keeping a 'pulse' on how the change is landing in the organization and where resistance to it might be surfacing. You can monitor resistance actively through employee surveys, change groups, informal polls, and anonymous feedback. Identifying resistance is only the beginning; understanding the roots of resistance is the real key to unlocking progress. By delving beneath the surface reactions, we unearth the fears, the unspoken challenges, and the unacknowledged losses that people experience with change.

Go below the surface and get people unstuck so they can perform!

The traditional models of managing change, focusing primarily on structures, processes, and systems, are increasingly proving insufficient. We know that if resistance and ways of working don't shift, transformation efforts will fail and the status quo will remain. LEAD Forward partners with companies to identify and shake up those beliefs, practices, and fears that are blocking people from performing their best. We want you to feel less bogged down by resistance, openhearted to explore what's beneath it, and empowered to playfully transform it so you can unlock your company's potential! Below we share some examples of how we've seen resistance to change happen on the surface in organizations, what was really causing it, and the specific actions we took together with our clients to get to the root cause and effect transformative change.

Dissolve resistance: Proven LEAD Forward practices from our clients

Resistance seen on the surface In organizations	What we don't see beneath the surface	Activities that address what's beneath the surface and get people unstuck
Managers are not communicating the new strategy to the next level in the organization and people start to create misaligned stories about the change.	"I am uncertain about the future and scared of how it will affect my own role and day-to-day."	▪ Define future vision, current state, and gap with compelling storytelling & a gallery walk ▪ Host a storytelling slam where next-level leaders write the change story for their role and team's day-to-day ▪ Invite employees to small 'Ask me anything' sessions with leaders ▪ Provide clear targets and support departments to create aligned, localized priorities and targets ▪ Acknowledge what you may be losing and highlight what the organization and individuals are also gaining
People push off implementing new projects to a later date, often citing technical reasons (budget, IT, capacity, workload).	"I will lose the security that I am comfortable with and I don't want to lose my sense of control, expertise, or status."	▪ Make new behavioral norms tangible with leadership principles and recognition awards ▪ Role model new ways of working and share your learnings and mistakes ▪ Infuse fun into practicing high performance behaviors with energetic, gamified challenges ▪ Incorporate the transformation into individual and company performance success measures
People disengage and look toward authority instead of taking ownership of the change themselves.	"I have no control over this change and it is happening to me, not with me."	▪ Tap into 'change agents' with strong opinions se a good sense of others' to give feedback ▪ Empower individuals to own or join change projects and let go of micromanagement ▪ Utilize workforce expertise in design sprints or hackathons ▪ Create cross-functional joint problem solving or decision making spaces so people are working toward shared goal

Ready to unlock progress and truly transform your organization?

To learn or exchange about overcoming resistance, motivating your organization to embrace change, or enhancing performance to meet transformation goals, reach out to alexandra.saba@lead.berlin, vic.perez@lead.berlin, or maj.seider@lead.berlin.

Your partners in transformation,

LEAD FORWARD
YOUR TRANSFORMATION COMPANY

Visit our website!

The LEAD Forward February Brief

Leading Through Change: Building Cohesion and Resilience with Meaningful Conversations

Leadership teams are feeling the strain of economic shifts, team uncertainty, and project overload. Facing the relentless everyday pressure can leave teams and key managers feeling more than a little worn out. We have heard just some of the pressing challenges our clients are facing, that both directly and indirectly affect team cohesion and overall organizational health.

Most Pressing Challenges:

- <u>The Challenge of Speed:</u> As companies have become more global, there is no doubt this brings complexity. Undeniably, complex systems create diversity in the supply chain. Often leaders centralize control systems, which often don't work as well together. The paradox of the need for control and for speed and agility can bring tension.

- <u>Financial Constraints</u>**:** Most companies are expecting a tough year, especially in the more established markets. Key Performance Results are an effective and well-used tool to manage costs. But what happens when the KPIs start to compete across divisions and mis-communications arise in the relationships between senior leaders?

- <u>The rise of AI:</u> The rise of AI has brought with it a wave of automations that affect the whole workforce. From transforming the way customers interact with products and solutions to changing whole supply chains. Naturally AI can help solve some of even the most wicked of problems. Yet, the impact on the workforce needs to be managed with a carefully thought-through strategy to mitigate unplanned risks.

- <u>Geopolitics:</u> The rise of extremes in political views can polarize emotional reactions and individual responses to power relations. The uncomfortable reality of an increasingly fractious world is impacting a changing workplace. Without surfacing and discussing the tensions in a healthy way, views and opinions can come into conflict with the values of the company.

Considering what is going on for leaders, the last thing teams needs is another pointless meeting on their already overflowing calendars. Like many of our clients, you are probably looking for a way to make your leadership offsites not just another item on the agenda, but a pivotal moment of real impact and change. We often receive requests for support from top leaders to create dialogue which has real, lasting impact. The request is clear: this one must be different. It must count. It must have the right mix of the hard business updates and human connection. Offsites are not just an investment in relationships, they are a strategic imperative to equip leaders to face the pressing challenges of today's challenging business environment. Here are some of the examples of how clients face some of their most pressing challenges

- **Creating meaningful connections**
  Transforming leadership dialogue which ignites change, enhances communication, and strengthens connections within teams. We can support the way budget owners blend essential business focus with an approach to tackle difficult and often complex social issues.

- **Ensuring clarity**
  Through innovative formats like Silent Leadership Walks, Feedback Circles and Communication Slams or customized strings of Liberating Structures, facilitation can ensure a shared understanding and commitment to action.

- **Tackling difficult conversations**
  Allowing difficult issues to be addressed in a respectful, inclusive way. The conversations that many leaders avoid just because they might bring conflicting views are the very ones we can support to happen.

- **Offering new perspectives**
  Stepping away from only the KPI dashboard, with an experienced facilitators offers a fresh lens through which leadership teams can view challenges and opportunities, with a new way of looking at how impact is created.

Our role at LEAD Forward is to facilitate strategic business dialogue from mundane to monumental, and create bigger impact. Together, we can create outcomes that not only meet but exceed your expectations, setting a new standard for what leadership conversations can and should achieve.