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# How to Institutionalise Your New Blue Ocean Leadership Practices



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**After identifying what leadership acts and activities should be eliminated, reduced, raised and created to achieve a step change in leadership strength in your organisation, it's time to institutionalise your new leadership profiles.**

With the new or To-Be Leadership Profiles selected for each of the three management levels, organisations are now ready to move to the fourth and final step of the blue ocean leadership process. Here organisations focus on institutionalising their new Leadership Profiles. To get started, the senior team spearheading the process should begin by validating the selected Leadership Profiles by conducting interviews with ideally all the same people that have been interviewed through the process. This is important as it ensures the decided on Leadership Profiles resonate strongly in the organisation, reinforces senior managers' respect for the views of employees at every level, and strengthens the buy-in that has already been planted throughout the process. While organisations may be tempted to 'get on with it' and skip or short circuit the validation interviews, we would strongly caution against it. This exercise in fair process lends huge weight to

overcoming residual cognitive, motivational, and political hurdles that often block the implementation of change.

**Broadly share and explain the collectively agreed To-Be Leadership Profiles.** Once the To-Be Leadership Profiles have been validated, the senior team spearheading the process should communicate them broadly to leaders at each level so they can be easily understood and acted on with speed and clarity. Here organisations distribute the new Leadership Profiles to the leaders at each level so that every leader has a clear view of what acts and activities they have to focus on in the future. The senior managers who participated in developing the Leadership Profiles then hold meetings with the leaders at each level to walk them through their Leadership Canvas, explaining what needs to be eliminated, reduced, raised and created to achieve the new Leadership Profile. As leaders throughout the organisation have been briefed on the key findings at each step of the process and their input has been sought, this step effectively reinforces the buy-in that has already been cultivated and built in the organisation for the new Leadership Profiles through their participation in the process.

**Hold leaders accountable for change.** These leaders are then to pass the message on to their direct reports and explain to them how the new Leadership Profile will allow them to be more effective leaders for them, their direct reports. To ensure that leaders make a habit of acting on the new Leadership Profiles, the To-Be Leadership Canvases are pinned up and put in prime display in both the offices of leaders and their direct reports. In regular bi-weekly or monthly meetings with staff, direct reports as a group are required to both give their feedback on how effectively their leader has shifted their actions to reflect the To-Be Leadership Profile and to explain the specific instances that led them to conclude that the leader was moving towards, or not moving towards, the new profile. Have they eliminated, reduced, raised, and created the acts and activities that would propel them to be high impact leaders? These meetings build strong motivation in leaders to get 'a move on with it', keep leaders truthful, and build enormous integrity in the process and in leaders' sincerity to change. Though a bit unnerving at first – both for the direct reports to potentially call leaders out and keep them honest and for leaders themselves who come under open scrutiny – it doesn't take long before the real meaning of being a team starts to emerge and for good old fun and mutual respect to blossom as everyone sees their game improve as the new Leadership Profile becomes the norm.

**Achieve a leap in leadership strength and performance.** Through the above process, BRG was able to build deep leadership strength that achieved high impact at lower cost. The turnover of the company's 10,000 plus frontline employees, for instance, dropped from about 40 percent to 11 percent, which in turn reduced both recruitment and training costs by some 50 percent. Including reduced absenteeism, BRG collectively saved more than US\$50 million in the first year. On top of that, customer satisfaction scores climbed by over 30 percent and leaders at all levels reported feeling less stressed, energised by their ability to act, and more confident that what they do allows them to make a greater contribution to the company, customers and to their own personal development.

We believe the success of the blue ocean approach to transforming leaders is due in part to the fair process way in which the profiles were developed and the win-win outcome in the Leadership Profiles. The blue ocean approach is neither about selling the Leadership Profiles in a top-down manner nor about creating buy-in based on a bottom-up democracy driven by employees. Blue ocean leadership follows a systematic process built on analytical tools that is driven by respected senior managers according to the three principles of fair process—engagement, explanation, and expectation clarity. It is about building collective wisdom on transforming an organisation's leadership practice to unlock the ocean of the untapped talent and energy of its people.

### **Unlocking a blue ocean in leadership**

We never cease to be amazed by the talent and energy we see in the organisations we study. Sadly, we are equally amazed by how much of this is squandered by poor leadership. Blue ocean leadership can help you stop that.

Blue ocean leadership is about providing a structured process for people to discover for themselves how they need to change in action terms as leaders to create a win all around. The Leadership Canvas allows the standards for success to be measurable. It provides a simple one-page picture that leaders at every level can quickly grasp, which shows their current or As-Is Leadership Profile and what acts and activities they need to eliminate, reduce, raise and create to deliver a leap in leadership effectiveness for high performance.

By engaging people in building Leadership Profiles, the blue ocean leadership process itself creates buy-in and plants strong seeds for implementation of the To-Be Leadership Profiles. Besides, we found that the Leadership Canvas itself also acts as a powerful reinforcing implementation tool that can be put on every leader's wall as a daily reminder of the specific actions that are required of them and what they need to stop doing as well as start doing.

While the practice of leadership will never be an exact science, the aim of blue ocean leadership is to help move it from soft amorphous values and traits to the acts and activities that managers can execute tomorrow and not work on for years before seeing results. The Leadership Canvases give people a language and visual roadmap to discuss the changes needed and how they need to improve to set leaders on the path to high performance by unlocking new leadership space and with it the ocean of unrealised talent and energy in their organisations.

Just imagine how much higher performing your organisation would be if you unlocked this blue ocean of new leadership space through action-based, market connected, distributed deep, blue ocean leadership.

*This article is an outgrowth of Kim and Mauborgne's study on Blue Ocean Leadership originally published in Harvard Business Review, May 2014.*

#### **Find article at**

<https://knowledge.insead.edu/leadership-organisations/how-institutionalise-your-new-blue-ocean-leadership-practices>

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#### **About the author(s)**

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