

● Leadership in the age of AI

Recent organisational developments triggered by an increased adoption of AI in core business processes have led to a shift in the way we view leadership. This article explores the new and surprising need for more sophisticated leadership on what has until been considered a lower tier of the organisation.

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The advancement of technology, particularly through automation and artificial intelligence (AI), is fundamentally transforming organisations by partially replacing the traditional roles within the middle management layer.

Historically, this layer has been instrumental for translating strategic goals set by senior leadership into actionable plans for operational teams. As technology increasingly takes over these functions through data driven decision making, it increases significant voids within the organisational structure. This leads to a challenging gap between the strategic planning undertaken by senior leadership and the execution tasks performed by operational teams.

This transformation underscores the urgent need to focus on developing leadership capabilities within the operational layers, effectively bridging these emerging gaps and shaping the discussion around the evolving landscape of organisational leadership.

• The Unanticipated Future of Leadership: A Shift to the Front Lines

In an era where technology is dramatically reshaping our workplaces, a surprising shift is emerging: the future's most pivotal leadership roles are migrating to the operational layers of organisations. This evolution challenges long-standing norms and prompts us to reconsider our perceptions of leadership within the corporate hierarchy.

A Shift Away from Conventional Wisdom

Traditionally, middle management has been seen as the linchpin of organisational strategy and execution. However, as automation and artificial intelligence (AI) lead to more data driven decision making and process control, the spotlight turns to the operational teams. Here lies the unexpected frontier of leadership in the digital age.

Operational Layers: The New Arena for Leadership

The operational level, often viewed as the realm of execution rather than strategic decision-making, is poised to become the centrepiece of organisational leadership. This transition underscores a profound change: operational teams will not just implement strategies but will be instrumental in vetting and shaping them, requiring a new breed of leaders equipped with a mix of technical savvy, strategic foresight, and emotional intelligence.

The Surprising Qualities of Tomorrow's Leaders

Leaders within these operational teams will need to exhibit adaptability, digital literacy, and an innovative mindset. These qualities, once attributed to the upper echelons of management, are now essential at the operational level, where the real-time application of strategic vision meets the road.

Redefining Leadership Development

Organisations must pivot, focusing on nurturing leadership skills where they've been least expected. This involves creating pathways for growth and learning that empower operational team members to take on roles of greater strategic importance, blending their technical expertise with leadership acumen.

Embracing the Unexpected Shift

This surprising shift in the locus of leadership will challenge traditional organisational models and opens up new possibilities for innovation and agility. By recognizing and investing in the leadership potential of those at the operational level, organisations can harness the full power of their teams in a technology-driven world.

Conclusion

The future of leadership lies in the operational layers of organisations, a reality that may come as a surprise to many. As we navigate this shift, the opportunity to redefine leadership and organisational success in the digital age is immense. Let's prepare to be surprised by the potential that lies in empowering the leaders of tomorrow, where they are needed most.

How we help companies respond

As leadership consultants focusing on the evolving landscape where operational layers become central to organisational leadership, Cribb and its sister organisation The Boathouse Consulting jointly offer a range of services tailored to equip businesses and leaders with the skills and strategies needed for success in this new paradigm.

1. LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS FOR OPERATIONAL TEAMS

We design and deliver customized training programs that develop leadership skills at the operational level, including strategic thinking, decision-making, and innovation. These programs focus on cultivating the unique blend of technical, emotional, and strategic competencies required for leadership in a technology-driven environment.

2. CHANGE MANAGEMENT SERVICES

We work with businesses to help manage change, with a focus on the human aspects of transitioning to a new model of leadership. At the core of this service, we help organisations develop strategies to overcome embedded inertia, manage resistance, communicate changes effectively, and ensure a smooth transition to a structure that places greater emphasis on leadership at the operational level.

3. TALENT IDENTIFICATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Our assessment specialists help discover potential leaders within your operational teams and identify the development areas to equip them to take on leadership roles. This involves creating competency frameworks, assessment tools, and career development paths that recognize and nurture leadership talent where it has traditionally been overlooked.

4. STRATEGIC ADVISORY SERVICES

Our partners and consultants provide strategic advisory services that help senior leaders understand the implications of a shifting focus towards operational leadership. We help guide them in reshaping their organisational strategy and culture to support and benefit from this change, ensuring alignment with business objectives.

5. LEADERSHIP COMMUNICATION WORKSHOPS

Since effective communication is key to leadership, especially in contexts where traditional hierarchies are flattened, workshops aimed at improving leaders' communication skills, both vertically and horizontally across the organisation, can contribute greatly to overall success.

6. STEWARDSHIP

Organisations frequently rely on consulting and coaching partners to help them navigate the challenges and opportunities of digital transformation. We work with your partners to ensure that they are aware of changing paradigms in leadership and emphasise the critical factors for this change.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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Dwight Cribb studied business administration and psychology in Scotland. He founded Cribb Executive Search at the start of the dotcom boom and has ever since aided both tech companies realise their full disruptive potential and traditional companies build the requisite skills and strategic capabilities to respond to changing markets and competitive landscapes.

He is an expert at working with boards, investors and family shareholders to help create strategic opportunities by facilitating exceptional hiring decisions.

Dwight divides his time between Hamburg, Munich and the UK, and can in summer or winter be found in the open water or in the mountains.

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