#BeingTheCEO Session 2; Reading & Resources

First of equals? Things CEOs should consider in building and leading high-performing executive teams

This article from Forum's CEO, Michael Pain, and Marketing and Resources Manager, Rachael Gacs, discusses how the CEO role requires a step-change in thinking about team leadership – moving away from being the driver of organisational success to being the facilitator or enabler. The article provides five 'top tips' for how CEOs can set the tone and direction of travel for their executive team so they can become strong and successful:

- *Create a shared sense of purpose and direction* – achieved by spending sufficient time clarifying purpose together, whilst respecting the vision and framework set by the board. CEOs should regularly protect time for their executive teams to discuss wider organisational purpose and to review their shared strategic plans and goals. Creating a strong sense of a shared agenda and ownership is critically important to team cohesion and alignment, to complement individual objectives each member of the team will have.
- *Develop collective 'self-awareness' as a team* - As CEO, it is up to you to model a commitment to self-awareness in your leadership, and to generate it amongst your team. Formal opportunities such as 360-degree feedback and executive team coaching can help to do this, but it is also about forging good relationships too – so do not underestimate the more informal ways of doing this.
- *Communicate and collaborate across silos* - When embarking on strategic initiatives, always begin with a view as to how executive team members can share responsibility and ownership where possible. Whilst they must have responsibility for their divisions and operations, strategic initiatives and projects demand strong collaboration and present an opportunity to deepen a collective sense of commitment and break down barriers.
- *Recruit based on values and behaviours, not just experience and expertise* - The recruitment of a new executive leader should involve the wider executive team and build in opportunities to assess commitment to the vision and values of the organisation, not simply professional expertise, and experience. Commitment to vision and values can often be assessed in a number of ways. Examples may include asking the candidate to present on their interpretation of the vision and how it motivates them; to ask them to provide a short coaching session to other team members; or to describe how they would respond and react to certain scenarios that put values and team cohesion to the test.
- *Enhance your own intuition through involving the team in key decisions* - Always, where possible, see the executive team as an extension of your own decision-making process, consulting them on those high-stakes and difficult decisions wherever possible. If you have a diverse, expert and values-driven team, you will gain greater and confidence at times such as these and will be better equipped to make the right call.

Further details can be found: https://forumstrategy.org/first-of-equals-things-ceos-should-consider-in-building-and-leading-high-performing-executive-teams/

#BEINGTHECEO – What does it mean to be an employer of choice in 2021 and beyond?

In this article, Forum Strategy's COO, Alice Gregson, considers how CEOs and their boards can cultivate a reputation as an employer of choice in 2021 and beyond. Alice reflects on the shifting demographics towards an aging population and the risk this poses to academy trusts in the competition for talent as they consider their recruitment and retention strategies. CEOs

and boards must understand the context in which they are now operating and the expectations of employees if they are to be able to compete for this talent with other professions and organisations.

The current pandemic has served to accelerate certain trends in relation to the workplace, in particular a greater reliance on technology and remote learning which became a necessity for so many. The article sets out the following emerging trends for CEOs and boards to consider as they set out their employer of choice strategies:

- *Remote working* – the rise in working remotely and people (and companies) has highlighted many benefits including greater work/life balance, a reduction in carbon footprints, reduced estates costs and much more. Many workers are keen to see remote working arrangements continue.
- *Flexible working* – many have seen the benefits of flexible working hours and patterns (as well as flexibility in location). Providing flexibility may support people with caring responsibilities, can enhance productivity and has clear links to greater work/life balance and mental health benefits.
- *Health and wellbeing* – the pandemic has highlighted not only the importance of physical health (i.e. how safe and clean the working environment is) but has also led people to consider how well their mental health and wellbeing is cared for and supported by their employer.
- *Agility and responsiveness to change* – As restrictions have impacted plans on a daily, weekly and monthly basis, it has been essential that organisations have been able to adapt and deal with change well and vitally, that staff feel confident in the organisation's response.
- *Virtual recruitment* – the need to recruit has of course continued during the pandemic and as a result, recruitment approaches have shifted from the vast majority taking place face to face to making greater use of virtual tools.
- *Employee engagement and voice* – as much as the lockdown restrictions have severely limited our ability to see and talk to people in person, it has also in many cases increased the visibility of leaders and the voice of staff, as we strive to check in on how people are doing and how they are adapting to this strange new world.
- *Diversity, inclusion and belonging* – the need for the workplace to become a place where people feel a sense of belonging and inclusion has never been more important. Recruiting and retaining a workforce who is as diverse in its thinking as it is in the backgrounds and characteristics of the people who make it up, has clear links to long term organisational success.

Further details can be found: https://forumstrategy.org/project/beingtheceo-what-does-it-mean-to-be-an-employer-of-choice-in-2021-and-beyond-member/

Staying in tune with your staff and getting the best out of people

In this article by our Resources and Communications Manager, Rachael Gacs, reflects on how leaders can stay in touch with the needs of their staff and get the best out of them. The article emphasises that great leaders are humble enough to know they do not have all the answers and recognise that they must find ways to capture the feedback, ideas and opinions of colleagues right across the organisation.

Visible, approachable, and accessible leadership is the fundamental foundation that enables fruitful communication with your staff. This requires groundwork - building a relationship of trust with colleagues across your organisation over time and demonstrating that you

genuinely care about what you are asking. Recognising that everyone on your organisation is an expert in their own area and creating opportunities to share ideas and innovations is vital for CEOs; and the use physical or virtual suggestion boxes can be one way to encourage all staff to contribute. Likewise, ensuring colleagues feel safe psychologically to share such ideas and take managed risks is essential to create the conditions for innovation. Finally, staff surveys enable leaders to regularly 'gauge the temperature' of the organisation and can also be used as a tool to instigate real and significant change, providing colleagues can see that leaders are genuinely listening and acting on the survey results.

Further details can be found: https://forumstrategy.org/being-the-ceo-why-harnessing-the-views-and-experiences-of-staff-is-essential-to-organisational-success/

Values-driven recruitment

This blog from the ACEVO discusses the recruitment challenge facing civil society leaders, especially when it comes to senior positions. To attract a candidate that shares your organisation's values, has the necessary skills and is willing to work for less money than they could get elsewhere, the author suggests it is necessary to create a values-driven recruitment process, with reference to the following characteristics of 'purposeful leadership':

- Vulnerability: acknowledging it's impossible to know everything
- Empathy: seeing others for who they really are
- Curiosity: someone who enquiries and is open to connections
- Creativity: interested in innovative approaches
- Conviction: true to purpose and a firm believer of the cause
- Courage: accepting fear and the possibility of failure
- Patience: avoiding the compulsion of doing things quickly

The blog states that it is also important to position your organisation as an employer of choice: showcase your diversity, your values and culture. Show that you celebrate different ways of thinking. To do that, you need to put yourself in the candidates' shoes and disseminate messages (not only job ads) in their world. In addition, if you are a leader that is not happy with the quality and values of the candidates you are currently attracting, this should tell you that there is something wrong with either the role description or the process. Repeating the same process will most likely yield similar results so don't be afraid to recruit a bit differently to find the person that can add the biggest value to your organisation.

Further details can be found: https://acevoblogs.wordpress.com/2019/03/21/values-driven-recruitment/

Leading on Diversity, Inclusion and belonging

This article by Forum Strategy comments that leadership has always required the ability to bring together people from a variety of backgrounds, and with different experiences, beliefs, and approaches. If suggests that academy trust CEOs – like all CEOs in today's context – must now see securing diversity at all levels as an imperative, not only for ensuring their trusts are more reflective of the communities they serve, but also as a profound opportunity to build better organisations.

Making diversity, inclusion and belonging a top priority is the right thing to do as a leader. It is not possible to understand and fully serve the needs of the diverse communities that make up today's society without looking inward and ensuring diversity is seen consistently

throughout the organisation. Staff and leadership teams of academy trusts should, as far as possible, reflect the demographics of the local communities they serve if they are to be credible, and build trust and engagement.

Harnessing diversity is also key to organisational success because having a diverse team brings a variety of different strengths and perspectives to the table, as well as different approaches to problem solving and innovation. Diversity in action also requires leaders to look beyond the quick fixes and move to a longer-term solution that looks at how people feel and thrive once they choose to join the workforce.

The article provides the following key takeaways for academy trust CEOs to consider:

- Make sure that your work on diversity does not stand alone, but goes alongside a commitment to inclusion and belonging, to ensure not only recruitment of a more diverse workforce, but also retention, and a positive culture of belonging within your trust.
- Encourage and challenge the trust board to make a commitment to diversity if this is not already one of their priorities and do what you can to ensure that the trust board itself contains diverse voices. Whilst not a panacea, ensure you monitor and measure your impact, and remain accountable to your communities and staff for progress.
- Get clear on *why* diversity is important to your trust, and to you as an individual, and get comfortable with articulating it regularly (if you are not already).
- Honestly assess where you are as a trust currently regarding diversity, set out where you want to be, and put together a roadmap outlining how you plan to get there.
- When you recruit, recruit intentionally and with the aim of attracting and bringing through diverse candidates. This will require a specific plan of action so you reach into communities that might not identify with the usual adverts you put out or access them in the usual places.
- Make the effort to have conversations and get feedback from staff from diverse backgrounds and engage in honest dialogue on a regular basis in order to increase your understanding and your ability to take carefully considered action on diversity.

Further details can be found: https://forumstrategy.org/project/leading-on-diversity-inclusion-and-belonging/

The CEO's role in culture

This article argues that, whilst an organisation's culture can't possibly all emanate from the CEO, the CEO nevertheless does have a disproportionate amount of power around culture, and so need to always demonstrate behaviours in line with the desired culture. Whilst as CEO you can't drive the culture in a controlling kind of way, the organisation's culture still needs the voice, or the imprint of the CEO on it for it to work. That is one of the core components of the CEO job – setting the basic vector of your culture.

Further details can be found: http://jamienotter.com/2018/02/the-ceos-role-in-culture/

The Kids Company Case and what it tells us about the law's position on the CEO/Board relationship

In this article, Forum's CEO, Michael Pain, discusses the recent judgement of the High Court in the case against directors and the former CEO of the Kids Company (in which the

defendants were absolved of any charges of financial mismanagement). This case has provided some interesting and helpful legal statements on the position of trustees and CEOs in relation to one another, and their respective roles within charities. Some of the key conclusions reached by Lady Justice Falk relating to CEO and board roles and relationships are set out in the article:

- CEOs cannot take the view that their financial directors are the ultimate responsible executives in relation to finance matters. Basically, the buck stops with CEOs.
- CEOs who are not formally directors, do not become de facto directors by virtue of their role as CEO. The facts of the case are important, and it would seem that where a normal CEO/Board relationship exists – where the CEO is subject to supervision and control by the directors – cannot give rise to the CEO being a de facto director. N.B. This will not be case in academy trusts where CEOs are also trustees. These CEOs will be directors and will be registered as such as companies house, meaning they are subject to directors' duties under company law.
- So therefore, existence of the CEO role does not absolve trustees of the responsibilities as directors, even when delegation is significant: Large charities will tend to be run on a day-to-day basis by a management team, including a CEO employed by the board; however, the board retains its responsibility, and the case sets out what that means where a CEO is in place.
- That said, directors/ trustees can be expected to rely on their CEOs and executive teams, where there is no cause for concern. This reflects the reality of the day-to-day operation and leadership of large charities. Essentially, it seems, directors can be 'hands off, eyes on' regarding their executives.
- This means it is understandable that CEOs attend board meetings. In order for the board to be appraised, to scrutinise, and to direct their executives, it is clear that CEOs need to attend many of these meetings (however, there are clearly exceptions where this will not be the case).
- The CEO title in itself has no significance. Essentially, a CEO could have another title, yet retain the role and responsibilities – the nature of which is most important, rather than the job title, in determining this.

Further details can be found: https://forumstrategy.org/project/the-kids-company-case-and-what-it-tells-us-about-the-laws-view-on-ceo-and-board-relationships-in-charities-members/

The board's role in strategy (and how it relates to the CEO)

This HBR article by Roger Martin (2018) explores the relationship between the CEO and the board when formulating strategy. It argues that where a CEO relies on their board to formulate strategy, this is 'prima facie' evidence that the board should fire the CEO. If a board that meets just a few days a year can do a better job of setting strategy than the CEO who is in the business 24/7, then the board has the wrong CEO.

At the other extreme is where the board simply declares "yea" or "nay" to the CEO's strategy; If 'yea', the board is not adding value, if 'nay', this is simply a no confidence vote in the CEO.

The right approach, it argues, is an iterative process in which the CEO is still in charge, because it is the CEO's job to formulate strategy, but the CEO wisely gets the maximum amount of advice from the board – assuming the board has useful insights.

The article sets out a helpful high-level framework for developing strategy in conjunction with the board: https://hbr.org/2018/12/the-boards-role-in-strategy