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# Lead Through Resources

*Include people, technology, and organization.*



by Terri Griffith

THE GLOBAL ECONOMIC situation pushes us all to make do with less. Many leaders are grappling with years of slow growth with continued high expectations for performance. The pressure is on to lead to the “next big thing,” without more people or supporting resources. Leaders are challenged to *squeeze water out of a rock*—and it’s a rock that has been squeezed for a long time. I do see hope, however. As Jim Kouzes notes: *Challenge is the greatest opportunity for greatness!*

He also mentions *the ability to look ahead*. This can mean the next step in the direction we’re going, or alternatively, looking at what we have and seeing if we can take future steps to get more value. For decades we have known that *threat pushes people to focus on their expertise*: people respond to threat by becoming more rigid and set in their ways. There is great value in being able to break free from this tendency and instead to lead through all your resources rather than those with which you are most comfortable.

Leadership often focuses on people, yet the ability of people to achieve extraordinary things requires that they have access to appropriate tools and processes. Employees can’t leverage all their resources if their leaders aren’t thinking about how to mix together people, technology, and process.

Our technology leaders are often blinded to the need to use more than technology to approach a problem or opportunity. *If you have a hammer, then it’s easy to see everything as a nail*—yet technology alone is seldom the solution. Technologies can be powerful enablers, but they must be in tune with the human capabilities and organizational processes to be effective.

*Silver or magic bullet approaches are common.* “If we implement this new tool . . . , if we provide this training . . . , if we hire this new person . . . , then something wonderful will happen.” Unfortunately our world is too complex for single-dimension approaches to work. We must work with all three dimensions, people, technology, and

process—in concert—to be successful. Leaving out one will mean you aren’t using all your resources. Similarly, working with just two dimensions and expecting the third magically to adapt is also unwise. Working with all three dimensions at once means the main leverage point gets support or at least reduced interference from the others.

*Consider Intuit, the company known for Quicken, Turbo Tax and Quickbooks.* Founded in 1983, Intuit found in 2007 that their cherished Net Promoter metric (percent of customers who would certainly recommend less the percent of those unlikely to) had stalled. Scott Cook realized that the company he co-founded was filled with *innovators* who could take the company to the next level if they could find ways to *support innovation* throughout the company. Intuit’s



current environment includes the *Design for Delight* process (including 10 percent unstructured time), the role of *Innovation Catalysts*, *Entrepreneurship Days* to bring in ideas and possible partnerships from the outside, and an on-line social network called *Brainstorm* to help people share and develop ideas.

*Intuit uses all its resources to support its challenging innovation goals.* Scott Cook exemplifies *leading through all resources and learning from all sources*—he is deeply invested in learning how other organizations put together their mixes rather than *selling his perspective*. Cook and his team are focused on how they can leverage all of their resources.

## Follow Three Practices

Successful organizations follow three practices as they leverage their people, technology, and organization.

**1. Stop, look, and listen to understand the options in the three dimensions.** We sometimes jump to a seemingly simple solution because it’s cool, shiny, new,

or powerful, but such approaches will fail us. We need to begin a change effort with a full understanding of our *available and possible resources*. We need to *stop and look* to see what the options are across the three dimensions of people, technology, and process, and then *listen for feedback* as we take each step.

**2. Next, find a good way to mix options in the three dimensions.** The three dimensions must be put together in a way that makes sense for the people and the organization. A virtual team of highly trained and experienced engineers may be able to use a complex collaboration tool with little training. A less experienced team would need either a simpler tool or more focus on collaboration and technology training. Understand your options and then put together the best mix of people, tools, and techniques you can.

You can develop skills with these practices through broad experience. Often, leaders describe careers or education that crossed multiple types of work. For example, *Earl Lawrence* of the Experimental Aircraft Association believes his ability to lead aerospace teams and projects is partially due to experience with his mother’s catering business. Lawrence had learned at an early age how to manage complex systems and that skill carried over into his complex future employment.

**3. Mentor people who don’t have such rich career and life experiences to see the value of leading through people, technology, and process.** Rhonda Winter, CIO of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, suggests *thinking aloud to share leadership values*. She says, “This helps make clear that it’s okay to make a mistake—you can play with ideas out loud; the first idea may not be best, but it’s the conversation starter.” Sharing strategies for leading with all resources can be a catalyst for great ideas. Winter often increases her own learning as she listens to responses from others.

In *The Leadership Challenge*, Barry Posner and Jim Kouzes write: “Leadership can be strengthened, honed, and enhanced, given the motivation and desire, along with practice and feedback, role models, and coaching.”

The most effective individual contributors, team members, and leaders will join with their colleagues to have the expertise to lead through all their *people, technology tools, and process*. LE

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**ACTION: Use all your resources.**