

UNITED FRONT SEEKS WORLD-CLASS LEADERS



PARTNERS: Representatives of the bodies that organise the annual Lead On conference, left to right, Gwyneth Stroud, Wales Management Council; Richard Houdmont, Chartered Institute of Marketing; Barbara Chidgey, Chartered Management Institute; Christopher Ward, Wales Management Council; Karen Jones, Chartered Management Institute; Henry Gilbert, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development; Kath Collis, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development and Pam Heneberry, Institute of Leadership and Management

UP TO 80% OF A COMPANY'S WORTH IS LINKED TO THE CAPABILITY OF ITS STAFF. THE QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP DETERMINES HOW THIS ASSET TRANSLATES INTO MARKET SUCCESS, WRITES **CHRISTOPHER WARD**, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF WALES MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

The ability to get people performing at the very top of their game is, without doubt, the most important skill needed in Wales today.

The case for building world-class leadership skills among our managers has been fully accepted by the Welsh Assembly Government and now lies right at the heart of strategies for the nation's future economic health.

Effective management demands a huge reservoir of complementary skills, covering both technical competence and the ability to use financial, technological and human resources to maximum effect.

But, as we enter a new global economy, where the rate of change is reaching unprecedented levels, we need more focus than ever on human resources.

Research indicates that 80% of a typical company's worth is tied to the capabilities of its workforce and the quality of leadership will determine how much of that worth is translated into market success.

The need for better leadership in business was identified by the Wales Management Council report, 'Tomorrow's Manager', published four years ago. This has been reinforced consistently since then in documents published by various partner organisations engaged in boosting management standards.

In March this year the Chartered Institute of Management stated in its report 'Management Futures – the World in 2018': 'The working population will be more diverse. Changing expectation of work and the impact of new

technologies will require a new range of skills that focus on emotional and spiritual intelligence, judgment and the ability to stimulate creative thinking to improve productivity'.

In other words, the major skill required by managers will be the skill to bring out the best in staff who are increasingly empowered to take initiative, think for themselves and work in new and flexible ways.

As a skill, leadership comes into its own when organisations are in need of change and greater flexibility. In the current circumstances more companies will find themselves in this position and consequently more managers will need strong leadership skills.

As a general rule, we can describe leadership as being about establishing direction, aligning people to the vision and motivating them to produce the necessary change. The emphasis is clearly upon gaining staff commitment and unlocking their creativity.

These skills are particularly vital for enterprises moving through different stages of development, from start-up phase through expansion, maturity and diversification. We certainly need more Welsh firms to make that journey and establish themselves as national and international players.

Leader-managers are the critical link between people and performance, and persuading more Welsh businesses to recognise this must be our highest priority.

That is why Wales Management Council recently published a report entitled 'Leadership and Management – What's it

Worth?' making the case for investment in these essential skills.

Of course many enterprises are already doing this. Our research estimates that Welsh firms invest around £138m a year in management and leadership training, with the average manager receiving 6.5 days training over a 12-month period.

However the enterprises least likely to invest in this are smaller firms that don't yet seem to accept that spending on managers' skills will improve their bottom line.

Many will only invest in such skills if the public sector foots all or most of the bill.

Changing this attitude is now a pressing priority. Over the past few years Wales Management Council has taken a lead in bringing partners together to promote the 'leadership' message across Wales.

The high-profile 'Lead On' conference, which is now in its fourth year, provides a valuable forum for representatives of both public and private sectors to gain new insights into the mechanics of leadership under the guidance of top Welsh and UK speakers and facilitators. A complementary annual conference for North Wales – 'Spotlight North Wales' – is now in its second year.

The Leading Wales Awards, now in their fifth year, provide an annual showcase for the skills of role model leaders from organisations of all sizes. Likewise, the Leaders Forum enables senior figures from various sectors to meet and consider how they can hone their own leadership skills..

Recently the Women in Management

network, chaired by Sian Rees of Wales Management Council, was created to support women in leadership roles and enable them to share good practice and innovation.

All of these initiatives involve forging partnerships between bodies with complementary experience and expertise who can give real momentum to the drive towards better leadership across Wales.

The current downturn in the economy may have affected short and medium-term prospects for growth, but it doesn't change the fundamental diagnosis and prescription. If anything, the need for more sophisticated leadership skills in the hands of a greater number of Welsh managers is more urgent than ever. ■

Christopher Ward is chief executive of Wales Management Council, an employer-led body funded by the Welsh Assembly Government to promote the development of managers in the private, public and voluntary sectors in Wales. www.walesmanagementcouncil.org.uk

