

Managing the Impact of Climate Change: The Next Generation of Leaders by Dr. Seamus McGardle and Ms. Jill Bausch, MSc.

Climate change is the earth's most pressing environmental issue; with rising sea levels and global temperatures, warming oceans and shrinking ice sheets. The observable effects of climate change are already evident, as glaciers shrink and we experience changing weather patterns around the globe. Although the impacts remain uncertain, it is clear that in the coming years climate change will have a lasting effect on the economy and wider society. Sustainable economic development and green growth have never been of greater concern, and today's perceptive business leaders understand that in order to be sustainable, they must actively engage in the mitigation of climate change.

Climate change is likely to undermine the ability of companies to function normally in the future; through depletion of resources and indirect impacts. Therefore, in order to successfully tackle climate change, an ambitious approach is required. To succeed in developing and implementing a positive approach in the battle against detrimental climate change, thought leaders have emerged as a key tool within the field.

Thought leaders are individuals who are able to anticipate potential developments and challenges within the sector and set a course for others to follow, providing insight and perspective to the research and ideas currently in existence. To do this, thought leaders must challenge current best practices and seek to guide development in the right direction. They possess proactive, disciplined, resilient, passionate, confident mind-sets, but are still high in influencing skills. They have exceptionally well developed problem solving and trouble shooting skills, always seeking new ways to solve old problems. Company, corporation and industry responses to climate change and its projected trends are intrinsically linked to the employees of the company, and thought leaders find themselves in positions of great worth at an executive level.

It is important therefore, to understand the types of leaders required to make successful change. According to Stanford University Psychologist, Carol Dweck, there are two distinct mind-sets – fixed and growth. In a fixed mind-set, the individual believes their basic qualities, such as intelligence or talent, are fixed traits. They often believe that talent alone creates success without effort. This is clearly not the ideal approach when it comes to achieving success in a challenging sector such as climate change. Having a growth mind-set however, refers to those who believe their personal attributes can be developed through continued work and dedication. Those who have a growth mind-set are generally motivated and productive.

Growth vs. Fixed Mind-Sets

To make climate change mitigation a reality, growth mind-sets must lead and organisational leaders must invest in them. Therefore, how does a growth mind-set differ from a fixed one in core approach?

Individuals with fixed mind-sets:

- Say “we are our ability” and believe their weaknesses are a part of who they are and should be hidden.
- Believe in fate and think of climate change as a natural evolution.
- Prefer to remain within a comfort zone of previous approaches.
- Seek constant validation from colleagues.
- See a conflict as a fatal flaw.
- Feel threatened by feedback and respond defensively.
- Create a rigid environment.

- Are driven by a need for approval.

Individuals with a growth mind-sets:

- Say, “My weaknesses highlight areas where I can improve. I will therefore share them for collective and substantial improvement with a single group focus.”
- Take responsibility to mitigate potential destruction.
- Embrace the idea that growth occurs at the edge of panic, risk and unease.
- Have the willingness to risk this.
- Desire colleagues who challenge and encourage one another to find and implement new solutions.
- Recognise conflict as an opportunity to introduce new ideas.
- Are grateful for the chance to improve, will provide new ideas, but will allow the ideas of others to prevail when they could achieve greater effectiveness.
- Prefer an environment that is flexible and adaptive.
- Are motivated by a need to learn, explore and test new ideas to achieve a solution.

Real thought leadership in the context of growth mind-set provides an approach with increased longevity. It is the result of a deep understanding of the challenges faced within the climate change debate – defining what is working as opposed to what is not. Thought leadership, by definition, is transformative, often requiring the redefinition of old methods. Changing the way in which leaders in multilateral agencies, government and the private sector look at things can be considered thought leadership in action. Thought leaders are ‘go-to’ individuals, capable of holding a long term perspective, and are able to define the incremental steps required to make continuous improvement from one generation to the next. Being a thought leader involves developing as a trusted individual, capable of inspiring and innovating, as well as being adept in utilising intelligence, both intellectually (IQ) and emotionally (EQ), expanding the boundaries of current thinking.

Anyone can become a thought leader, but the process takes commitment and development in order to build up expertise in a particular niche. Thought leaders are people, not organisations, but very often an enterprise employs, encourages and embraces individual thought leaders, earning recognition as a ‘thought leadership hub’. Thought leaders, when sourced efficiently and employed smartly, are the catalyst in initiating the change required to mitigate and adapt to climate change and boost corporate reputation and engagement. Thought leadership, in relation to mitigating the effects of climate change is an essential requirement in management disciplines; leaders are unable to lead properly without it. Although leadership is intangible, thought leadership is incredibly influential; thought leaders are visionary advisors and experts in their field.

Thought Leadership and Executive Search

Attracting remarkable thought leaders is not just about finding remarkable candidates, it involves understanding the need behind the search and relating this back to the organisation’s needs in a continually evolving environment. Possessing a growth mind-set is now a key tool in change leading organisations, and therefore new hires demonstrating this trait are exceptionally valuable.

Smart organisations seek out advisors who have the ability to adapt to a complex situation, whether it requires a revitalised leadership team, implementation of a new strategy, benchmarking of internal candidates, redeployment of talent or, crucially, the identification of growth mind-sets.

SRI Executive’s search activities are, and always have been, distinctly different from those of many of our competitors. We focus, not just in the identification of a candidate for a role, but in our process.

We take the time to get to know our clients on a meaningful level, to understand their requirements, putting ourselves in a strong position to provide support and advice. We continue to offer support to our client and the successful candidate throughout the year post appointment.

Our consultants are experienced in facilitating the exploration of needs, motivators, desires, skills and thought processes to assist the individual in making a lasting impact on an organisation. In order to successfully coach a thought leader at this level, it is essential to use techniques that facilitate the individuals own thought processes in order to identify solutions and actions rather than take a wholly directive approach. Once the appropriate solutions have been determined, SRI Executive then assists the candidate in setting achievable goals and suitable methods of assessing progress. If required, our consultants will creatively apply tools and techniques which may include one-to-one training, facilitating, counselling and networking. We constantly focus on encouraging a commitment to action and the development of lasting personal growth and change.

Coaching vs. Mentoring

As talent management and search consultants, we understand that high level technical skills are only maximised when the ability to work within and manage teams can be optimised. We know that coached individuals almost always perform better through guided questioning. Almost every person can improve their transition from a fixed to growth mind-set, self-awareness, collaboration and negotiation skills through coaching and their own emotional intelligence. We have experienced this first hand, specifically in the climate change sector, through the coaching processes we deliver. Studies show that EQ (Emotional Quotient) is a far greater indicator of success both individually and as part of a team than IQ (Intellectual Quotient). As employers seek leaders in climate change, they often rank EQ higher than IQ in the qualities they seek. Growth mind-sets typically improve rapidly in their emotional intelligence, opening the door to better understanding of new ideas, more tolerance to risk, greater solidarity in team focus and better leadership.

Mentoring vs. Coaching

At times, due to the fact that thought leaders tend to be the drivers of change, mentoring is required as they navigate the required strategic changes. The top mentors maintain an unconditional positive regard for their candidate – both personally and professionally, to allow them the space and confidence required to support the solutions they create. The mentoring relationship is most successful where the experience of the mentor merges with the new ideas of the mentee, achieving personal and professional goals.

Strategy for New Hires to Increase Corporate Social Responsibility in Climate Change

1. Rigorously prepare those hiring to balance both growth and fixed mind-sets. Hire for both, and let the growth mind-sets lead, and the fixed mind-sets implement.
2. Recognise that individuals with growth mind-sets can learn quickly – it's the mind-set you seek, not the technical skills alone. Teach them what they need to know and let them 'spark off' to change old ways and achieve new outcomes.
3. Do not solely train, coach and mentor, but give time and dedication to the creation of a customised development plan for each individual with potential to create, affect and implement change.

Stem the tide of climate change using your best tool, the human mind, in a smarter way

Contact

Interviews and Media Enquiries

Ms. Sophie Moran smoran@sri-executive.com

Authors

Dr. Seamus McGardle smcgardle@sri-executive.com

Ms. Jill Bausch jbausch@sri-executive.com

