

# Weaving a vision into the fabric

An organisation that wants to reach the top needs a leader capable of bringing cultural change

PADMA IYER

ON the face of it they are simple rules. But together the seven guidelines form a demanding framework that separates the wheat from the chaff, in organisational terms.

They are the seven habits that differentiate high-performing organisations from low-performing ones. They have been identified by Insync Surveys through its alignment and engagement survey, which elicited responses from 100,000 employees from 200 organisations.

Leaders in high-performing organisations focus their time and energy on these seven habits, "month after month and year after year, no matter what the circumstances", notes the study, *The Seven Organisational Habits That Drive High Performance*.

"To be truly considered as habits they must be so deeply ingrained into the culture and DNA of the organisation that they become its way of life.

"The seven habits cannot simply be initiatives that are piloted or adopted for a season."

Insync Surveys chief executive Nicholas Barnett says: "It's a journey. Unfortunately too many organisations are trying to look for a quick fix, the fad, that is going to fix their problems tomorrow so that they can report a higher profit the next quarter.

"The stuff we are talking about is sustainable high performance.

It's not just for three months."

The Insync study, which Barnett describes as one of the most wide-ranging in the country, included 91 measures of high performance. The seven habits were distilled from the responses and confirmed through interviews with 10 chief executives.

Although the study title echoes Stephen Covey's classic work, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, it has nothing else in common with it. It is about organisations, and not about individuals, says Barnett. It describes high-performance organisations as "the top 25 per cent of organisations that have achieved and are committed to achieving financial and non-financial results that are better than their competitors or peers over a sustained period".

Sustainable performance is hard to achieve, says Barnett, who has written a book on the subject, *GPS for Your Organisation: How to Energise Your Employees and Build Sustainable High Performance*.

Reaching the top involves a cultural change, which can take many years.

"With the right leadership and commitment, it can be done," Barnett says. "The bigger organisations are pretty good at putting in new computer systems and new things. They are not good at putting a program around changing culture and organisational habits. They should use the same ap-



Insync Surveys chief executive Nicholas Barnett says high performance is hard to achieve but possible with the right leadership

## Ignore the obvious at your peril, and watch them walk

THERE are seven things that separate the best organisations from those that want to be the best without putting in the required effort.

They underscore everyday activities, weekly planning and big-picture strategic views, says Nicholas Barnett, chief executive of Insync Surveys, which has developed the seven-habits compass for high performance.

They are:

**1. Live an inspiring vision.**

Hanging a vision statement on the wall won't do.

**2. Communicate clear strategies and goals.** The more you say, the less people hear, says Barnett. People may remember the vision statement a lot better if it is three carefully chosen words, rather than a 50-page document.

**3. Develop your people.** The Insync Surveys study observes that many executives are reluctant to develop their employees as they believe the investment will be wasted if they leave. "The concern should not

be 'What if we develop our people and they leave?' but 'What if we don't develop them and they stay?'"

**4. Go out of your way to recognise your people.** It often costs very little to thank the employees and recognise their efforts.

**5. Genuinely care for your people.** Insync Surveys emphasises the notion of the unwritten psychological contract between employers and employees. "If employees perceive that this contract has been broken, their trust in — and commitment to — their employer will be diminished."

**6. Listen and adapt to customer needs.** High-performance organisations take a long-term view about customers and are more likely to partner with them on programs of mutual benefit.

**7. Continually improve your systems.** Inadequate systems can be a hindrance.

The first six of the seven habits are about soft skills, says Barnett.

Despite this, 80 per cent of organisational training is about the harder skills, which explains how easily organisations can ignore the self-evident.

PADMA IYER

proach that they use for a major technology change program."

Cultural change is about the soft stuff, the intangibles that involve engagement and relationships. "It's about what I call the tri-

angle at the bottom of everyday activities," Barnett says. "You move up through weekly and quarterly plans and at the top is the vision and values of the organisation. The soft stuff is at the top

of the triangle. It is about the vision, the authenticity, the purpose, the meaning. The bottom of the triangle is all about putting one brick on top of another, and the top of the triangle is about 'we

need the best cathedral in the land'." The organisational values have to seep through the everyday activities to get the best out of the workforce. "If people are more engaged and believe there is mean-

ing and purpose to what they do, they put in more discretionary effort and organisations are more productive, they are better places to work and they are more profitable," Barnett says.

High performance does not mean people have to work harder, he says. It will be counter-productive to be "too operationally focused". Whether staff members obsess about the bottom of the triangle, which is about the everyday activities, to the exclusion of the top of the triangle, which is about the vision and values, depends on the culture, leadership and the level of messaging within the organisation.

Leaders have to build vision, resilience, flexibility and diversity into the fabric of the organisation.

"Flexibility can take an enormous pressure off people. Some organisations get it and others don't get it at all," Barnett says. "A lot of companies are getting an enormous value out of flexibility."

Diversity delivers benefits that the better managed companies leverage. "If you don't have a diverse team, you are going to have problems. Different perspectives, different outlooks make for much better places to work," Barnett says. "Much better places mean far less burnout."

Programs for high performance require a show of belief. Authenticity should be an important part of it. "If leaders drum up some purpose just to make people work harder, it won't work."

Good leaders, on the other hand, can change the way the staff see their work. They can infuse more meaning, purpose and energy into everyday activities.