

# Michael's story

Growing teams from the roots up

## What was the context?

To enable a bold new strategy, Michael invested heavily in team coaching and development, and individual development of team members.

Michael said to "I knew my team needed support to change their skills sets, the way they worked with each other, and the way they led their teams."

## What was the challenge?

Michael wanted his team to develop a "modern leadership philosophy based on trust and collaboration, rather than traditional managerial effectiveness."

However, Michael's own leadership style was out of step – more directive, hub-and-spoke - not the collaborative approach he envisaged for his team.

## Why was it important?

Leaders have a disproportionate level of influence in a team - even in well-established collaborative teams. They are also the most significant role model of what is expected of others. Leaders are like the roots of a tree from which everything else grows.

Without changing his own leadership style, Michael's investment in team development - and the success of the strategic plan - was at risk.

## What was the benefit?

Like any change process, Michael's journey had its highs and lows. His strong commitment, together with support from the team and myself, were crucial.

A significant "high" was the creation of a bespoke leadership model. Michael said in the past he had "applied a consistent, authentic leadership style in all situations. This work helped me realise I had five leadership styles. The key was building self-awareness to enable me to select the style that most appropriately matched the circumstances."

Michael's shift in leadership style not only benefited his team but also positively influenced others he worked with, including his C-suite colleagues.

Fast forward several years, and Michael's leadership approach is now benefiting other organisations he has joined. He reflects "My leadership style has shifted from directive to firmly collaborative and coaching-driven, though I have had to adapt my pace and approach depending on organisational maturity." Michael continues to reinforce the importance of self-awareness and flexibility in leadership – at the core of his own bespoke leadership model.

## What happened?

My role was to help bring the team's strategy to life, by supporting their collective and individual development.

While work with the team progressed and deepened – initially Michael resisted focusing on himself, continuing with his go-to directive approach!

Over time, the collective team's knowledge, trust, and psychological safety grew. There were other changes to:

- 1) Tension and frustration increased - within the team and with Michael.
- 2) Understanding improved - team members understood their own roles better, how they worked with each other and stakeholders, and their leadership needs.
- 3) Clear messaging - the team were able to clearly articulate what they needed from Michael in a safe and collaborative way.

After almost a year resisting, Michael made the decision to focus on his own leadership style.

Michael's shift was like moving a rootbound plant into rich soil. The team had space to flourish. New ideas took root, problems were solved collaboratively, delivery improved, and stakeholder feedback was great. Best of all, previous frustrations turned into shared understanding and collective resilience.



My understanding of the critical role that a team leader plays in high performance and team change is one of the most significant things I learnt from this experience.

**Michael, team leader.**