



## HIGH PERFORMANCE IN A COMPLEX WORLD

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### Some dimensions of high performance in 2011

#### 1. Strategy

Recent research shows that consistency between stated philosophy and business strategy is a key performance differentiator. Those that “walk the talk” do much better than those who don’t. The same can be said for behaviour of executives. Also, high performers ensure their people understand the strategy and how that translates to their roles.

#### 2. Leadership

Communication is a key leadership element that differentiates high and low performing organisations. High performers also have leaders who ensure that programs support desired organisational culture. As well, top performers engage their people in innovative ways, are excellent decision makers and have a deep understanding of their customers. Remember though that while good leadership is necessary it is not sufficient!

#### 3. Organisational Culture

Organisational culture has always been challenging. However, globalisation has made it a lot more complex. Different national cultures value different attributes. Yet, shared organisational values are vital to success. Overall, high performers have cultures of resilience and agility – capacity to change abounds.

#### *Going nowhere, slowly!*

The review seemed to be dragging, Jenny felt. The news wasn’t good – targets hadn’t been achieved. The team was already under pressure to deliver. It’s credibility at stake.

Leadership was seen as the major cause of performance problems in the business unit. The leadership development program they had run, in close collaboration with management, had been a big hit with participants at all levels. Yet, the business hadn’t managed to stem financial losses. Adding insult to injury, many of the most capable leaders had either left the company or tendered their resignations. What more could they have done to avoid this disaster?

#### *High performance in a complex world*

All too often potential clients contact UGM because the approach they’ve used to tackle a pressing problem just doesn’t gain traction. Sometimes, they’ve even wrestled with particular challenges using a few different methods, but fail to reach the outcomes expected or required.

Looking back on those engagements, we note that in every case the integrated approach that UGM introduced was critical to successfully resolving the business challenge. The multi-lens model that we use has served our clients very well. We almost always end up considering aspects of strategy, leadership, culture, talent and change (diagram below).



UGM Multi-Lens Model

Quite coincidentally, these core elements of the UGM multi-lens problem-solving model have been identified as core components of high performance by the Institute for Corporate Productivity (ICP). It is these factors which differentiate high- and low-performing companies. Successive studies have reached the same conclusions.

It is interesting to know that each of the dimensions has an impact on high performance outcomes. However, the most important research finding is that

greatest value is achieved when the dimensions are aligned – rather than being pursued piece-meal. Piece-meal efforts get piece-meal outcomes. Aligned efforts, on the other hand, deliver synergy. Considered together, the ‘whole’ truly is greater than the sum of the component parts. Or, as the ICP put it, “*high-performance is like a delicate entrée based on a confluence of core ingredients, any one of which, if left out or of inferior quality, will ruin the entire dish*”.

#### *Strategy and high performers*

The strategies of high performers are better thought out. They’re also clearer and better communicated. Unsurprisingly, performance measurement is also closely linked to strategy. Finally, strategies of high performers are consistent with stated philosophies.

#### *Leadership in high performing organisations*

Leaders in high performing organisations have a much greater people focus than leaders in their lower performing counterparts. These leaders are described as clear, fair and talent-oriented. They make performance expectations clear and are also committed to people development. Expectations (and development) are well aligned with strategy.

#### *The talent approach in high performing organisations*

High performing organisations take a holistic approach to talent management, making decisions on the basis of data-driven information. There is a close alignment between the understanding of what drives value and what the talent needs are to realise it. Workforce planning takes a strategic approach.

#### *Organisational culture and change*

Organisational culture is a key aspect of high performing organisations. They’re seen as good places to work. High performers are also committed to innovation, supported by a culture that embraces and thrives on change.

#### *A recipe for success*

Strategy, leadership, culture and change are each pretty substantial areas of organisational endeavour. So extensive and complex, in fact, that often different groups of people are responsible for the various areas. Add to the mix that they are also all intangible and rather difficult to isolate and measure, it’s little wonder that many more organisations trip up than triumph. Tripping up means lost value and ultimately has bottom-line implications

To succeed, it’s crucial to see these dimensions as an integrated whole and to act on them in a carefully coordinated way. Research shows that organisations that are able to do this are the high performers. Those that don’t, have to settle for second best. How does your organisation stack up?