



# THE LEADERSHIP CONTEXT

Case Study -  
Education Business

## Context

The organisation is a privately owned founder led that was 10 years old when we got asked to help the leadership team. The education sector is in the top three export sectors for Australia with Asia as the prime customer geographies. Australia is considered to be in the top ten countries that offer quality tertiary degrees along with England, the USA, France and Germany.

## Client Description

The organisation, known as PE for this case study, specialises in teaching English as a foreign language to overseas students and offers a Professional Year program, designed to assist undergraduate students to find employment in Australian businesses as their first post-graduation job role. Their clients are universities and privately paying students as well as multi-national organisations.

PE has offices in three states with the head office in Sydney. The business operates a seven-day schedule with education programs delivered in a range of rostering schedules.

When we met the CEO, he was considering selling the organisation. He has recently hired two senior executives to his leadership team. Both executives had experience in working for publicly listed organisations and had joined PE in order to work in a fast growth sector in a privately owned business. The CEO is a charismatic exciting leaders who genuinely inspires potential employees to join PE.

## Business Case

When the two new executives joined PE, as the CFO and CHRO, they found a solid business that had lost its profitability in recent years. Leadership wise the CEO was finding it difficult to scale his business which as a result had plateaued and was heading backwards financially. The CHRO had worked with our Managing Partner in a previous organisation and asked that we run an upcoming leadership retreat.

The initial leadership retreat was designed to help the leadership team to gain alignment on their direction as a leadership team and to steer the organisation towards profitability again.

## Assignment Structure



The initial leadership retreat was a two-day meeting focussed on the direction of the organisation and the quality of leadership needed to enable that. An LCS assessment was administered prior to the retreat and debriefed on day two of the session. This enabled an honest and vulnerable conversation to take place.

The graph (Fig 1) suggested to the leadership team that:

- They were contained in their decision making
- The CEO was quite controlling
- As a leadership team they were not clear what they stood for
- Some of the team were seeking empowerment and were nervous they were not receiving that
- The CEO was nervous in letting go of the control he had been used to
- Collectively they decided they needed to change if they were to lead the organisation differently

Post the initial retreat we agreed to set up a collective leadership development program that had a dual focus, one on one coaching for the CEO and four leadership team retreats over a twelve-month period.

As a collective team they agreed to focus on:

- Inspired by the book 'Scaling Up' by Verne Harnish, they developed a clearer operating rhythm that allowed the team to have a series of meetings where different decisions took place, rather than by the CEO in isolation.
- The CEO and CFO would work together in relationship building with the external Board of Directors as this had deteriorated in recent times
- The Sales Director and CHRO take the lead on focussing on ACHIEVING as a key culture component within the organisation, particularly with the next level of leadership below the executive team
- The CEO to free up 20% of his time in order to spend in "purple time", i.e. blue sky opportunities, new business development opportunities
- Collectively, all leaders to focus on leading with one voice (AUTHENTICITY) and to learn to be vulnerable together

## Subsequent leadership retreats



The overall agenda for this organisation had more of an emergent flavour than a rigid design as this suited the personalities within the leadership team. It also aligned very strongly with their desire to self-determine how to lead the organisation together.

The second retreat focussed on developing three key leadership team 'agreements'. These are a set of behaviours, values or focal points. They include:

1. Be Brave enough
2. Progress Over Perfection
3. Respect, Care & Trust

Each of these were developed to include a set of explanations per guiding stars, distinct wording, visuals and the leadership team actively use them in their most important meetings as a guide for their interactions together.

In subsequent retreats these three agreements were used to develop content for leadership development programs focussed on the NLL- i.e. the next level of leaders.

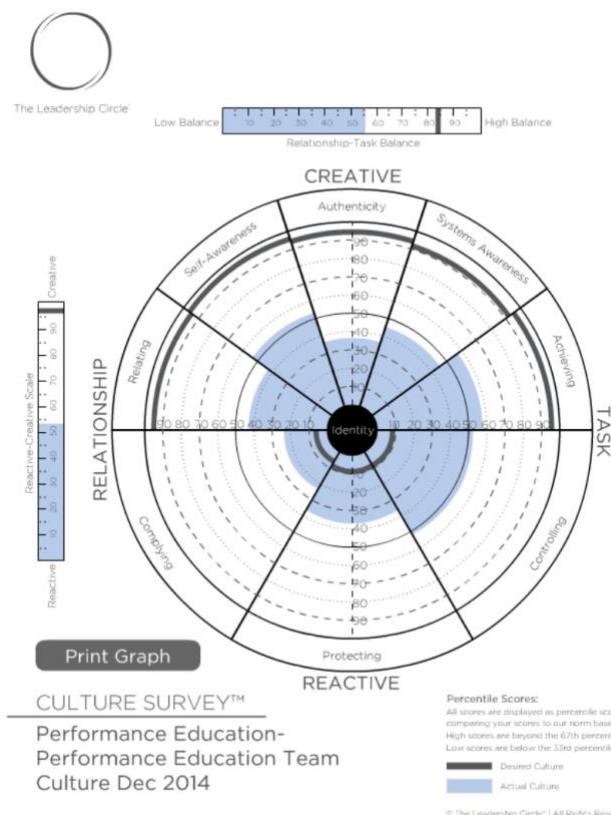
## Outcomes

The CEO and leadership team have decided not to sell the organisation and went through a Board restructure to reflect that decision. The organisation has had it's best ever trading years in 2015 and 2016 with stellar profit achieved in 2016.

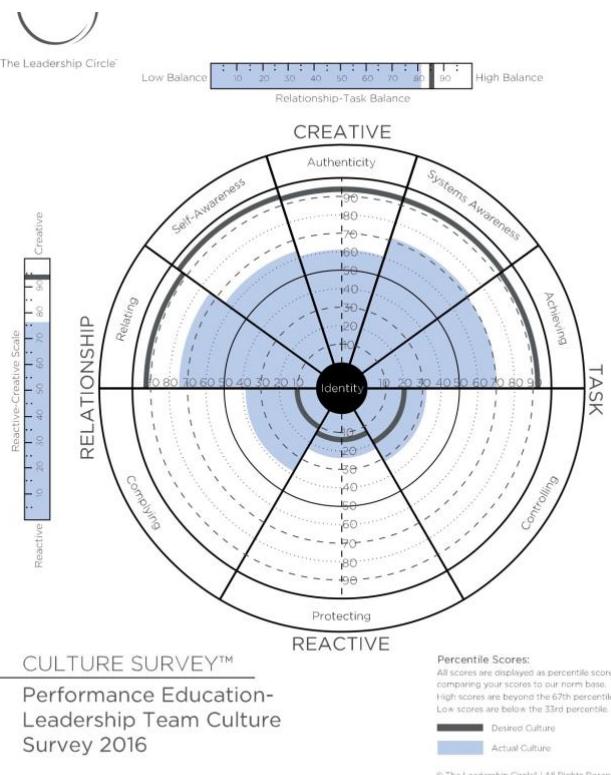
At a personal transformational level the CEO took his wife on their first overseas holiday in 2015 and managed to leave his phone at home indicating that he was comfortable in trusting his team and they have stepped up to lead the organisation without his involvement. The leadership team members have individually and collectively stated that this two-year period has been the best in their own careers ever.



**Figure 1**



**Figure 2**





[theleadershipcontext.com](http://theleadershipcontext.com)

