

# Leadership Update

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## Special points of interest:

- our brains are able to shift resources away from the red zone
- What causes us to shift resources to the blue zone is the presence of another human being who respects us, who believes in us, who listens to us
- These are key outcomes – it is humans who engage humans and engagement builds blue organisations

## Red or Blue?

Group 8's work in the education sector has lead to the realisation that much of what cause problems in society can be simplified to an approach we call "red or blue".

We define leadership as **creating an environment which optimises the probability of success**. This requires the implementation of two distinct but related activities – the work of individual leaders (ie. "leaders leading"), and the shared responsibility of everyone in an organisation to provide leadership.

It is nothing new to point out that:

- Our mental state impacts significantly on our ef-

fectiveness as leaders. Helping teachers to understand and use this is having a significant impact on schools in Australia and England. Over the past few years in Australia schools in both the Victorian state and the catholic education systems are finding that applying this knowledge is having a very positive ef-

fectiveness as leaders.

- When we are worried about the past, anxious about the future, or pre-occupied with the present we are less effective than we might otherwise be.

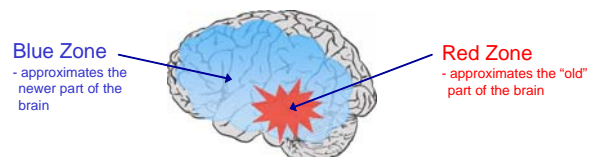
We have found that "Blue Zone" – "Red Zone" is a useful shorthand for think-

ing and talking about the mental states of both ourselves and those who we lead.

Operating in the "blue zone" provides us with brain resources that are otherwise not available and frees us up to explore different approaches and become more effective.

## Our brains ...

- Account for 1-2% of our body mass
- Use about 20% of our food intake energy
- Energy usage is more or less fixed (+/- 1%) i.e. for one subsystem to use more another must use less
- We find it helpful to identify two main mind/brain states:



fect on such crucial issues as student engagement, classroom management, and the overall learning by children and young people. It is having an impact also on the way in which teachers relate to each other as well as on the overall culture of individual

schools. In England a wide variety of schools—many in traditionally "hard" areas are now finding the same results.

This, of course, is really all about leaders leading, leadership, and, ultimately about a proven approach that brings about high quality results.

## It's a red world!

The financial meltdown which has recently hit the USA, Australia, and other parts of the developed world is a worrying reminder that our world today is dominated by “red zone” thinking. So too, at least in Australia, is the behaviour exhibited by some of our prominent sports people and politicians.

Let me explain.

The red and blue zones have their own characteristics. These are as shown in the diagram. In the simplest

### Blue & Red Zones: Characteristics

- |                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| <b>Adaptation</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Affiliation, generosity, goodwill</li> <li>•Multi-dimensional learning</li> <li>•Options considered</li> <li>•Slow/resource intensive</li> <li>•Manages impulsive desires</li> <li>•Labels emotional states</li> <li>•Reflective</li> <li>•Not 'fully functional' until adulthood</li> <li>•Seat of 'happiness'</li> </ul> |
| <b>Survival</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Centred on self/survival mode</li> <li>•Narrow-dimensional learning</li> <li>•Status quo/resistance</li> <li>•Fast/efficient</li> <li>•Engages impulsive desires</li> <li>•Threat aware</li> <li>•Highly developed at birth</li> <li>•Seat of pessimism</li> <li>•Draws metabolic resources from the blue zone</li> </ul>  |



adaptation and growth. From earliest schooling onwards, we are taught skills that relate to survival—do as you are told, conform to authority, be on time, work hard, and be competitive because it's a “dog eat dog” world out there.

terms, the red zone is all about survival and the blue zone is all about

because it's a “dog eat dog” world out there.

## Some examples

There is nothing inherently wrong with “red zone” activities and approaches. We need the red zone in times of danger and we also need it in order to do repetitive activities (habits) effectively and efficiently.

The problem arises when the red zone precludes significant usage of the blue zone. The red zone is designed to recognise threat and react to threat—it doesn't matter whether the threat is physical, psychological or emo-

tional—real or imagined. So, if the red zone is active almost to the exclusion of the blue zone, a footballer might swing a punch that takes out a player on the other team even when that player is not providing any form of threat. Similarly a politician might over react in a restaurant when he or she feels the service does not recognise who they are or give due deference to their presumed importance.

Our societies seem to be based on

**There is nothing inherently wrong with “red zone” activities and approaches.**

adversarial principles. Each group believes it is “right” and sees anything that challenges their view as a threat—the red zone is in control. So it is that we can have a war on poverty, a war on terrorism, a declared “axis of evil” etc that shows we recognise the threat and are doing something to confront it but without ever addressing the cause.

## Its beyond politics

Changing political parties or the leaders of such parties doesn't make any difference. Is Australia much different under Labor and Kevin Rudd than it was under the Liberal-National Coalition and John Howard? No. Is the United Kingdom any different under Gordon Brown than it was under Tony

Blair? No. Will the USA be much different under either Barak Obama or John McCain depending on who wins the Presidential elections? No. Similarly in organisations. Does a change in CEO or Board bring about significant change in its emphasis—usually, no. The red zone remains dominant. SWOT analyses (by any name) are still done and actions are taken to counter

any threats.

Tragically we see this as being normal. We have been seduced into thinking that the red zone is where we should live and, accordingly, we become resistant to any change that isn't initiated by ourselves—especially if it means we may have to fundamentally alter our approach to society itself.

## Blue Leaders

We define “blue leaders” as people who understand this issue of “blue zone-red zone” and who also understand how to manage up the blue zone while managing down the red zone in order to bring about organisations and societies that can be truly creative and in which potentials can be reached without exploitation.

Right from the earliest days of Group 8’s research in the education sector it was clear that about 10% of teachers did not have problems in classroom management and their students achieved far more than many other teachers (and often parents) believed was possible. It is also true that outside of the education sector about

10% of managers across the board are able to achieve results with people who are totally committed to their organisation and what it is trying to achieve.

The challenge has been to understand why this 10% was different and to learn how to increase their numbers to the point in which “blue leaders” are the norm rather than the exception.

What we found was that the critical

### Blue & Red Zones: Triggering the different states

Safety  
Unconditional respect or love  
Being listened to  
Clarity  
Permission  
Authentic attention  
Acknowledgement  
Trust  
Inclusion  
Generosity  
Vulnerability

Physical threat  
Fear/Anxiety/Guilt  
Rejection/Exclusion  
Ambiguity & lack of clarity  
Perceived unfairness  
Not being listened to  
Sarcasm  
Being told how to think  
Being judged



issue was one of engagement with others in such a way that the leader showed unconditional respect for other people as individuals regardless of the appropriateness or otherwise of their behaviour. From this point of respect, performance and learning issues can be positively addressed.

## Blue Leadership

Blue leadership, then, becomes the shared activity of “blue leaders”.

Group 8’s work with schools across every socio economic group in Australia makes it clear that where there is a critical mass of teachers who operate primarily in the “blue zone” the school is significantly more productive and many problems once considered virtually unsolvable are capable of positive resolution. The secret is blue leadership—that leadership which leads to enhanced engagement of students with both teachers and content.

Outside of the education arena this is also true.

In my own work experience I have had the privilege of working with

bosses who understood how to engage me as a person in such a way

that I became committed to achieving desired organisational results. In my work of teaching, training and consulting I have always found that most people with whom I interact have had similar experiences. The concern is that, for all of us, such experiences are the exception rather than the norm.

Imagine how different the world could be if our political leaders sought to engage the leaders of Iran, North Korea, Georgia, the Palestinian Territories, etc in open, honest dialogue that sought a positive, truly negotiated solution rather than one side seeking

**The secret is blue leadership—that leadership which leads to enhanced engagement**

to impose its “right” solution on the other and being prepared to use sanctions and force in order to do so. Under such circumstances we could actually put the billions of dollars now used for “red zone” activities into “blue zone” activities that would create a better world.

Similarly in organisations. We know that the cost of labour turnover is not less than 500 times the hourly rate paid to each person replaced. What if the norm was blue leadership that engaged people with the organisation so that labour turnover was optimum and desired results were achieved?

# How and In What Way Can We Help You?

## D G Long & Associates Pty Ltd

P O Box 459  
Lindfield  
NSW 2070, Australia

Phone: 0412 029 754  
Fax: (02) 9988-3354  
E-mail: douglas@dglong.com

The past we must accept; the present we live in; the future we can change

<http://www.dglong.com>

Disclosure:

D G Long & Associates Pty Ltd is a 33.3% shareholder in Group 8 Management Pty Ltd (Group 8) and Douglas Long is a founding director of Group 8 Management Pty Ltd.

Douglas G Long & Associates provides the following services:

- 360<sup>0</sup> Leadership Surveys using the Australian developed Diamond Leadership Approach
- Organisational surveys, analysis, and development
- Change Facilitation
- Leadership Development Workshops & Facilitation
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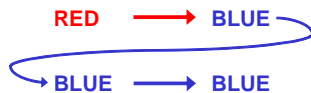
## The Blue Organisation

... a learning organisation – a “Blue Zone” environment

Research shows that:

- directing attention away from what is not useful to our development optimises OUR growth (e.g. all forms of meditation and contemplative prayer have this effect)
- directing our freed up attention towards another person optimises THEIR growth (human development research)

... win-win and the basis for a learning organisation



The “blue organisation” is possible—perhaps not yet at the level of international politics but certainly at the level of local organisations.

This leads to the whole issue of organisation culture and culture shift. In Group 8’s work with schools it has

become clear that to obtain a “blue school” there needs to be a shift in attitude and behaviour from the top leadership team down to that of individual teachers. Once the leaders have made this shift then the culture of the organisation also shifts

and desired results become more readily achieved. Leaders can make this shift by focusing their attention n those things that optimise their growth—and the culture shift occurs when they are then able to help others make the same shift. But this cannot

occur when leaders operate in the red zone.

We have talked for years about the need for learning organisations and we have struggled to obtain them. The problem, it is now clear, was a failure to understand and apply the “red zone—blue zone” concept.

State and Catholic schools in Victoria, Australia and schools and academies across England are now benefiting from this new knowledge. We are seeing the rise of “blue schools”. Isn’t it time we saw the rise of “blue organisations” so that in the future we may avoid the problems currently being faced internationally because of our “red world” and “red organisations” cultures?