

## Promoting an entrepreneurial culture

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In the current environment, change and innovation are critical. In the commercial world, companies that stay still die: they are eaten by other more aggressive organisations, those that are moving faster, or they simply run out of customers as others nibble away at their market. In local government, change is continuous, and the demands being made on services continue to grow. You have to innovate to stay alive.

Innovation and change can be driven from the top of the organisation. However, while system wide change has its place, often it is change at the business unit level that makes the critical difference. It is at this level that 'Ronin' play an especially important role. The term 'Ronin' come from Japan. Ronin were samurai who no longer were tied to a feudal lord – often because their leader had been defeated. Under Japanese feudal tradition, samurai were expected to do as they were told – trained fighters who fight as directed, and die in the service of their master.

However, the 'master-less' samurai, the Ronin, became independent – in thinking and in behaviour. Some travelled – even outside Japan. They found themselves in unexpected and unfamiliar situations, and they had to live by their wits, a long way from the comfortable world of living under direction. Many of those who travelled came back to Japan, and shared what they had learnt. They were an important source of change in Japan.

The comparison with modern organisations is obvious. Just as the closed society of Japan needed new thinkers, and people who were willing to follow an independent path, so do local government organisations today. They need people who are confident in their abilities – and are comfortable with new ideas, challenging the past, and unwilling to continue to do things "in the old way". Ronin in organisations are constantly questioning, and seeing if things can be done differently, done better. They make life uncomfortable – and they discover *new and effective ways* for organisations to operate.

In many respects, the world of the Ronin is both exciting and lonely. As the internal revolutionary, as the seeker of difference, as the person always willing to ask difficult questions, the Ronin always sits on the margin of the organisation. This means that Ronin have to ensure they have some degree of internal protection or support – to avoid being thrown out or excluded. In this regard, champions and mentors are of critical importance.

A champion is a supporter, and Ronin need champions. These are people within the organisation who are willing to ensure that the Ronin is protected, given resources, and even is kept 'hidden'. When some years ago Robert Greenleaf wrote about the idea of 'servant leadership', he recognised that some people came to be leaders by an unusual path – these were people whose initial motivation was to serve others, but as a result they then 'earned' the right to lead. Such servant leaders are extraordinarily

important in organisations. They are the source of nurture and protection for those who don't fit, and Ronin need to find the servant leaders in order to find the champions who will support them, as they seek to change the organisation.

Of course, a champion may be more than just a protector. They may also be an advocate, willing to speak out in meetings to promote the views and the ideas of the Ronin. However, while the servant leader as advocate is a very special kind of champion, they are even harder to find.

Mentors are also very important. They sit outside the organisation, and are a source of advice, counsel and encouragement. Because the mentor has no vested interest in the organisation in which the Ronin is working, they are able to provide an independent perspective on what is happening, and what might be done. A mentor is really a kind of sounding board – and ideally is someone with experience and wisdom about organisations and the ways in which they operate.

Are Local Governments dinosaur organisations about to be run over by the forces of change? Do they need Ronin? Would you support and assist the Ronin in your organisation? If you don't, you may find that the winds of change blow you, and your activities, away, for change is clearly in the air!