

Former Tesco boss Sir Terry Leahy urges businesses to be more proactive overseas

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The former boss of Tesco issued a rallying call in Manchester for British businesses 'to take on the world' to help drive economic growth.

Speaking at the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development's annual conference at Manchester Central, Sir Terry Leahy urged firms to be more proactive overseas.

He said: "Today as the economy looks to rebalance itself the key message is to look outward.

"Britain is a trading nation that is welcome around the world. We need more of our businesses pitting themselves against the best in the world, learning from that and taking on the world.

"We would do very well if we did that, but if we don't get into the contest we are not going to win it."

Sir Terry also gave delegates an insight into his approach to leadership during more than a decade as chief executive of Britain's biggest supermarket chain, whose transformation he described as 'the most unexpected turnaround in British business history'.

He said: "The definition of leadership that I like is that a leader will take you further than you could have got on your own.

"Leadership is about stepping forward and taking responsibility. You want thousands of leaders in your organisation.

"The key ingredients for success in business are trust and confidence; you have got to work on everyone in your organisation to make them feel better about themselves and their ability to contribute."

Sir Terry was damning about the management style displayed by Lord Sugar on his hit television series, saying: "The Apprentice is great entertainment but it has nothing to do with good management."

He also gave his view on the lack of diversity in Britain's boardrooms and why business needs more women in top jobs.

He said: "I remember a time when there were no women store managers at Tesco.

"That has changed a huge amount. What you have to do is create a culture in an organisation where everyone feels welcome. You have to make sure women and people from different cultural backgrounds feel at home. You need role models coming through to inspire people, but you also need wider society to allow that to happen. It's about more than just what happens in the workplace."

He was the keynote speaker on the opening day of the three-day conference.