

A Model For Leadership Success

The primary purpose of leadership is to facilitate change by moving people to action. Without change there is no need for leadership. The way in which we approach a leadership role strongly depends on our personality, the situation, current and emerging issues and our responses to them, our values, the way in which we perceive others, how we perceive ourselves, and a myriad of other factors. Are people naturally good leaders, or can leadership be developed? This is the equivalent of the 'nature or nurture' argument in human development, and I believe the answer is yes to both sides of the question. There are some people who possess characteristics of leadership and have the ability to move people as a natural strength. However it is also true that a person can grow and develop as a leader. I maintain that the journey of self-discovery and self-mastery is a key to unlocking personal power and developing a greater capability to lead others, regardless of any natural talent. *If I can lead myself, I am better able to inspire others to follow me; if I cannot lead myself, why would anyone but a fool follow me?*

Parallels exist between the processes of pursuing personal (self-discovery and self-mastery) and organisational potential. Anyone who has developed understanding of the personal process will have an improved understanding of the issues involved in working with an organisation. There are some specific skills that only come through the journey of growth and development within us. Goleman et al (2002) identifies competencies across four areas of emotional mastery, divided into personal and social sets which, as leaders develop them, will increase their capability and effectiveness. These provide a framework for identifying key areas to develop, and a means for assessing current strengths and weakness. However, the inner journey is more than emotional/mental, covering all aspects of the soul – physical, emotional, mental and spiritual.

Organisational Effectiveness Model

Achieving organisational effectiveness is the subject of many books and articles. The processes are well understood. The importance of articulating a clear vision

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Abstract

Leadership requires vision and clarity and an ability to move people so they are with you at the end. As leaders we work within organisations and with individuals. There are four aspects that need to be functioning effectively and aligned for optimum effectiveness within both organisations and individuals. Examples are provided of how the model applies to organisations and individuals and how it may enable better results.

Keywords

Communications; emotional; facilities; Five whys; governance; leadership; means; mental; mission; organizational leadership; physical; planning; spiritual; strategy; vision

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and the leader inspiring and moving an organisation to adopt it is well recognised. There is strong connection and parallel between the processes for an organisation establishing vision and direction, and consequently creating change, and an individual developing and aligning with their life purpose.

Figure 1 briefly outlines the aspects that must be attended to for developing capability and effectiveness in different contexts. The model applies to groups, whether a formally incorporated company, a group of hobbyists or friends, a family, and also to an individual. The four levels will now be briefly introduced.

Level 1 – Spiritual (Why?)

In the context of this model, **Spiritual** relates to purpose for being. This deals with identifying with the potential of

the organisation or individual, and the legacy that might be left as a result of achieving that potential.

When an organisation answers ‘Why?’, it gains clarity on its vision, mission, purpose, values and culture. Developing clarity in these areas can be used to engage and unify those involved with the organisation, and may then act as a motivator for those who develop connection with and ownership of that purpose. This set of ideas comprises the core (fixed, unchanging even in times of turbulence) and operating (adaptive cultural traits dependent on short to medium term conditions) ideology of the organisation.

When applied to an individual, the spiritual aspect requires them to recognise and connect at a deeper level with their inherent value and purpose for being alive. Not everyone is interested in delving into their inner self, whether to discover their purpose, or become aware of the reasons and mechanisms they have for responding to what life offers them. Many may fall into that category and then some significant event propels them into a journey of self-discovery; and understanding their purpose becomes important, developing greater consciousness and awareness. Yet others have seemingly always held an interest in understanding themselves, developing and improving, and consciously striving for their potential. I believe those who do seek to develop self-awareness, and greater consciousness of who they are and of their value, are in a stronger position to make a powerful contribution and leave a significant legacy. They are also better positioned to understand the impact and effect of change on other individuals and

on organisations, and therefore offer leadership as an extension of their own internal processes.

Within a project context, being clear on the purpose of the project, knowing what the objectives and desired outcomes are, and the measures of success are fundamentally important to success. Failure to gain clarity over and commitment to these items dooms many projects to failure. A project manager who clearly establishes the project objectives, with all the supporting drivers and justifications for the project significantly improves their likelihood of effectively communicating with stakeholders, inspiring the team and leading the endeavour to success.

Being unable to answer the ‘Why?’ question exposes individuals, projects and organisations to confusion and to being immobilised by their circumstances. In a very simple manner I saw both sides of this when I founded the PMI New Zealand Chapter. Several years earlier a group had attempted to establish a project management association in New Zealand, but were unable to answer ‘Why?’ and become embroiled in debate on the nature and purpose of a professional association in New Zealand. When I initiated the founding procedures I invited everyone to join a chapter of the Project Management Institute. The answers to ‘Why?’ were obvious and people had a choice (join something or not) rather than a problem to solve (what if anything do we want to set up?). As a result we gained charter very quickly and were one of the fastest growing components of PMI in the world at that time.

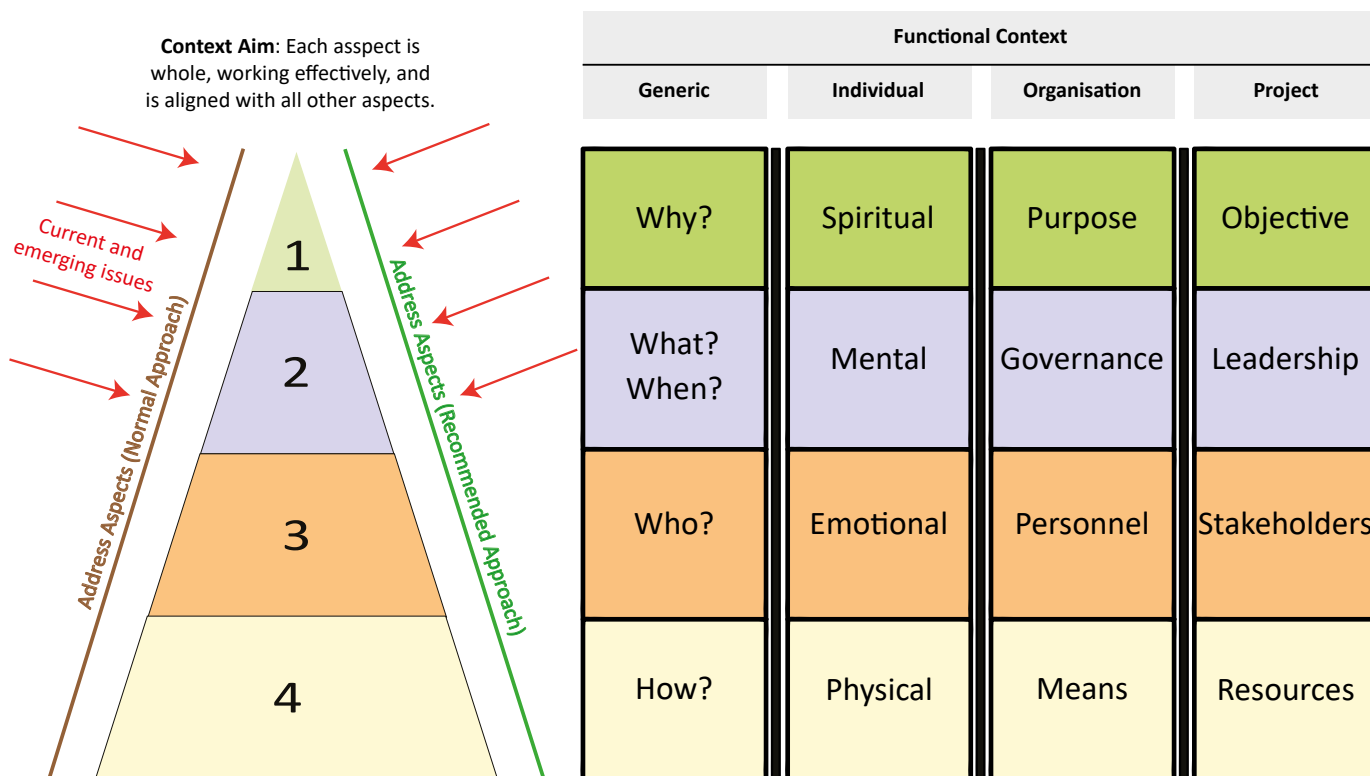


Figure 1: Organisational Effectiveness Model

Level 2 – Mental (What and When?)

The **Mental** level focuses on ‘What and When?’. This is the governance function of developing and maintaining an organisation, project or individual. It is the process of defining and establishing the processes that deliver on the purpose or Spiritual aspect.

For organisations and projects it involves such activities as governance, leadership, management, planning (whether strategic, tactical, operational and project), communicating with stakeholders, information gathering, problem solving and decision making. It includes all the activities and capabilities required to uncover, define and facilitate the implementation of the answers to ‘What and When?’

With individuals, it is our mental processes and capabilities that we bring to bear on functioning in life, being able to pursue our purpose. It includes determining personal goals, time frames, and managing ourselves to those ends. It covers the same functions as in an organisation. It is simply the scale that differs.

Too often this function is short-changed. Organisations operate without clear strategies, poor leadership, ineffectual communications, or fail to ensure their plans are aligned with their purpose. In projects poor planning is a significant contributor to failure. So much has been written on how to plan, organise and lead projects and organisations, yet the sad reality is this function is often skipped or not fully implemented. Reasons vary, but often insufficient time is blamed, or because ‘doing’ work is judged as valuable while ‘planning’ is considered a waste of effort. And so many endeavours fail, and the results are blamed on unexpected issues. Of course they were unexpected if time was not taken to create a considered approach.

And look at how we operate as individuals. How many of us, if we set goals, fail to follow through and ensure we achieve them? How many of us allow distractions to take us off course from where we say we want to be, and do not manage ourselves back on track, failing to provide ourselves the inner leadership we need?

The mental aspect is also significantly impacted by the schema or patterns used. Schema are simplifications, models for interpreting life (like the one I am presenting here), that enable us to function without processing every detail that is presented to us from our environment. They enable us to function without becoming so bogged down in the overload of minute detail that would otherwise occur. They are essential in order for us to function and respond to our environment effectively. They provide filters which offer us only the information that experience has taught us are to be important. An example of this process not functioning

appropriately in an individual is Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), where the filtering mechanism in the brain is not functioning appropriately, and they have information overload and hyperactivity is the attempt to deal with this overload. Though powerful and necessary, the drawback is that our schema or patterns cause us to also miss/filter information that does not fit our pattern, exposing us to misperceptions of reality, relying on what may become faulty patterns of behaviour as our circumstances or environment change. [The business equivalent would be having a business process that no longer suits the environment in which we operate]. Effectiveness in the mental area is not only about ensuring we have answered ‘What and When?’ but have also taken appropriate steps to ensure we have taken into account all the information we need, not filtered out or excluded important detail, and that we minimise our vulnerability to blind spots, so we can govern effectively.

Level 3 – Emotional (Who?)

In an organisational or project context the **Emotional** level entails engaging the people who are involved and/or affected, working through any issues and obstacles that arise from their various interests and desires, and ideally taking them with us. It is the team building, motivation, conflict resolution and other activities that facilitate engaging, influencing and motivating our people to follow us and adjust to changing conditions. It is affected by our leadership style and approach (a mental element), and the level of consideration and support we offer our stakeholders. Each action we take relative to our stakeholders has a consequence regarding the level of resistance we may encounter and have to overcome. We may select an approach that pushes a change through quickly, but that results in longer term resistance to other initiatives. Or we may choose a more consultative approach. It is a balancing act. If you consider each person as a separate emotional contributor to the organisation or project, with their perspectives, fears, desires, attitudes, behaviours and interests creating unique forces on our endeavours, it is obvious we can never have every person completely happy and comfortable, but there are things we can do that maximise alignment and ease resistance across groups and individuals. For example, in organisational decision making processes we may choose to announce the results of a decision to those affected rather than involve them in the deliberation process and engage in dialogue. Dialogue is often perceived as too dangerous, carrying the threat of derailing the initiative or at least of slowing it down, although research indicates dialogue has a better success rate in terms of both deliver time and ultimate acceptance/adoption (Nutt, 2002). If you experience resistance it may be active resistance from a vocal few (hopefully) or passive resistance, less visible and perhaps more of a problem. Both forms are natural

responses to change, and appropriate mechanisms ought to be used to help defuse it.

As individuals we have our own emotions to work with. Change is met with grief, and that may be a significant process in itself, with anger, denial, and other well known emotional stages. We have our fears and other emotional reactions to our environment, and the protective mechanisms developed throughout our lives to shield us against real or perceived threats. All these inhibit our natural, open expression of self. We have the physiological responses (e.g. anger and the associated chemical and other changes in our bodies) to recognise, monitor and manage (the basis for the Self-Management competencies of Emotional Intelligence (Goleman et al, 2002)). As we develop consciousness of these mechanisms within ourselves we are better able to neutralise those that make us ineffective, and tap into our innate power so we manifest ourselves with increased authenticity. Then we are able to work through our own issues with integrity to and respect for ourselves. We are also better able to understand, appreciate and support others who are dealing with their own issues. The issues faced by others may be in direct reaction to our initiative, or due to personal circumstances outside the business environment. Regardless of source, the ability of a leader to recognise emotions in others, empathise with them, and assist them in channelling and transforming 'negative' emotion into positive results, is a powerful leadership skill that can make a major difference between failure and success.

There is also the natural confusion that comes with uncertainty introduced through change or from an unresolved problem. At this point direction is unclear, and each of us has a different tolerance to this fog of ambiguity and uncertainty. Creative processes and problem solving necessarily introduce or magnify fog. A leader who is comfortable in 'not knowing' and is able to assist and support the team with being comfortable in confusion, can have a positive impact on results and the type of experience the team shares.

Level 4 – Physical (How?)

The final aspect for attention is the **Physical** level, the means by which we can accomplish and materialise the purpose for being of the organisation or of ourselves as individuals. This is where 'How?' is answered.

For an organisation it includes facilities, infrastructure, processes, systems, equipment and other assets that enable our plans to be implemented. If you have clearly and fully understood why an initiative must occur, and worked through the 'What and When?' to establish the plans for action, and have communicated with and engaged the support of stakeholders (or at least

understand where they are lie with respect to the initiative), then the 'How?' question is much easier to answer. It takes care of itself. Focus is then on the technology, processes, facilities, and other material characteristics of the undertaking.

As individuals, this aspect relates to our physical body, how we care for it and what we do to ensure it is functioning optimally. This enables us to apply ourselves to our purpose, enacting our planned actions, and managing our emotions to achieve our potential.

External Factors

With all the focus on ensuring each of the four aspects is whole and effective, we must also remember we are not operating in a vacuum. The world about is constantly changing. The environment continually presents new threats and opportunities that require us to respond and adapt. Each external factor distracts from our tranquillity. We are necessarily part of the world about us, so whether considered from an organisational or individual stand point, we must be flexible and adaptive to our environment, while still maintaining focus on our objectives. It is not a matter of control. This evokes the illusion that we can manage the events that occur, where the reality is more that we choose how we respond to them. Control is based on a fear of being overwhelmed, and is reactive. We seek to operate as a traffic lights system and have external forces 'stop', 'slow down' or 'proceed with caution', and 'go' on command. Rather, we need to be responsive to our environment. I prefer the metaphor of a Monarch butterfly, a small, insignificant creature that can fly thousands of miles to its destination (purpose, if you like) but cannot fight the forces of nature. It accepts the buffeting of the natural forces, flows with them, and adjusts its course in response until it achieves its desired outcome. In the organisational settings and in our personal life, our ability to act like a butterfly depends on how well we have developed each of the four aspects, how aligned they are, and how capable we are to work with what our environment offers us.

Alignment

We can have each of the four aspects working effectively, but if they are not aligned, and if the interfaces between them are not functioning cleanly, we will still be in trouble. Consider the person whose head says one thing and heart says another. They are torn between the two. They are not effective at that point in pursuing their objectives, no matter how well the head and heart are independently functioning.

So many organisations run into difficulty because rather than take the time to work through each of the four aspects they seek short cuts. Rather than becoming

clear on why an initiative is to be performed, what must happen, when, and who will do it, they start at the very bottom, at the physical level, and say, "We have a problem. How will we fix it?" Without understanding the root cause, they focus on some symptom of a deeper illness, perform organisational triage, and time, energy and people's commitment is wasted. When there are too many of these experiences and we lose the commitment and support of our people, the emotional aspect, and have a breakdown in trust; a disintegration of the interface between the mental and emotional aspects. There can also be an increase in energy from competing groups, such that there is an organisational emotional breakdown.

The person who has not learned to connect with who they are, identify their purpose and importance in this life, has not set goals and realistic plans for achieving them, and who does not have the passion and drive to achieve them, is less likely to succeed in taking an organisation the same route.

Conclusion

The role of the leader is to facilitate the development of each of the four aspects, for the organisation, for the project, and for themselves, and potentially assist others achieve this, so that change can occur in a positive environment that maximises the likelihood of success. It is not essential that a leader has gone through a personal, inner journey, and mastered themselves across

all aspects to be successful, but it helps. Also, if a leader has become incredibly self-aware, mastered their inner world, but has not the skill in manifesting this externally to inspire others, they will not succeed. However, when we couple consciousness and mastery of self with an intimate understanding of the forces and processes required to move an organisation or to successfully deliver a project, and then draw in, engage and involve others, so they feel integrated and significant in the endeavour, chances of success increase.

I have presented a model for viewing an organisation and an individual, and demonstrated parallels between the two. It is a schema, or simplification on reality, but also, I believe, a reasonable model that can help us establish and follow processes that enhance our ability to succeed, both personally, and in group/organisational endeavours. It expresses well known but often overlooked concepts. As we connect with our inner selves, take our personal journey of self-discovery, we enhance our ability to lead others and create success for ourselves, our teams and our organisations.

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For more information related to themes in this article, refer to chapter 10 (Purposeful Forward Movement) of: Harrison, S. G. (2012). [*Appreciate the Fog: Embrace Change with Power and Purpose*](#). Auckland, New Zealand: Xlibris Corporation.

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