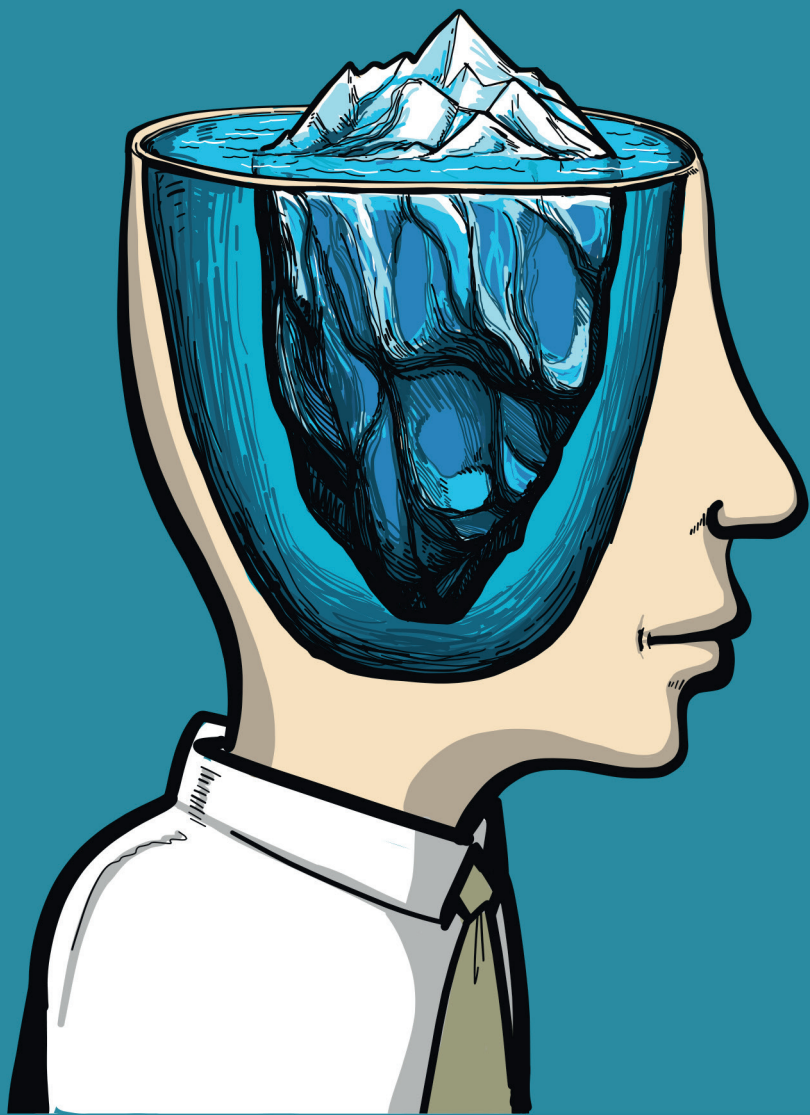


DevelopingLeaders

MAKING ORGANIZATIONS MORE HUMAN

Leadership and the Nature of Human Nature

Thought-leading articles to catalyze
your leadership practice





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How Can We Shift From Charismatic To Conscious Leadership?

Steps To Unveiling The True Potential Of Self And System

So much has been written and said in the name of making corporate leadership more human. But because we are yet to see the seismic shift needed in our systems and organisations, it is hard to feel what is being achieved in leadership development is enough. It might even be on the wrong track. So how do we cultivate the deep awareness and embodied behaviours that will allow us and our organisations to flourish?

Charismatic leadership relies on the strengths of individual personality to influence and transact with others. In this article we will explore the limits of this leadership style, and how the presence and awareness of the conscious leader allows for unlimited potential in others and the system to emerge. This shift can be explained using the metaphor of the orchestral conductor. The strong personality of the maestro, in his white tie and tails, is evolving into a modern, self-directing band of instrumentalists, learning how to listen and follow each other, guided by the music. **The world of ego and identity falls away to reveal a collective consciousness that will lead us into a sustainable future.**

There isn't anything that co-creation and collective wisdom can't achieve, we just need leaders to facilitate this possibility

From our experience, we have seen that International Coaching Federation (ICF) best practise coaching works powerfully as the foundation for a conscious leadership style.

The ICF cite 11 key competencies and skills which make up the essence of coaching practise. These include building trust, co-creating the client relationship, coaching presence, active listening, asking powerful questions, drawing awareness to what is real, direct and challenging communications, meeting ethical guidelines, and facilitating learning and action. In our work, we see that when these potentialities are known by the leader as coach, they generate more meaningful workplace interactions and pave the way for organisations to reinvent themselves. **The consciousness generated in the coaching space is the starting point for our interpersonal systems of the future.**

But what is the resistance to the “awareness and presence”

at the heart of the work which could lead us intuitively into a better future?

This shift first requires us to recognise our conditioned thinking and the old assumptions that we hold on to as truth. We need to realise that our downloaded auto-pilot behaviours are preventing leaders and systems from reinvention and growth. Yes, the free market has generated more monetary wealth and innovation than ever before, but when profit and progress steal the headlines over the demise of our well-being (people and planet) we must reflect. As Tomas Bjorkman and Joe Ross write in their paper *Learning to Talk; or The Message of Medium*, “We think that our planetary boundaries are up for negotiation but that our socially-contracted money market is not.”

We can't lead ourselves, let alone others, into a better future unless we realise what it is we do, and the source of why we do it. There is deeper self-inquiry required here.

“I Am Not My Strengths”

Let's start at the beginning. Benjamin Zander in his book *The Art of Possibility* talks about personality as something we *do* that allows us to survive the insoluble challenges of childhood. This “personality” is not who we *are* in our wholeness, but a conceptual identity we have created that takes the form of a particular behavioural archetype. The roles we play here include the clever one, the driven one, the people pleaser, the ruthless one. Psychometric testing calls these our strengths. But within the false choice of strengths and weaknesses is our longing for wholeness. The disconnection between personality and self manifests as imposter syndrome, anxiety, restlessness, or low-level dissatisfaction, all endemic in executive life, as we have seen in our coaching practice (and in our own experience). We know that



some type of reset is required. The strengths of our personality that have served us well in our transactions are not who we are in our essence, and our work is about realigning what is out of sync. A participant on our leadership development programme shared her own a-ha moment with the cohort, when she exclaimed, “You mean I am not my strengths?!”

The combination of personality born out of an emotional deficit, and the post-Cartesian mantra, “I transact successfully, therefore I am”, (both attempts for fulfilment), has become the perfect storm for disillusionment. In fact, our coaching practice has shown us that corporate life has assumed an identity so far removed from our true potential as human beings that deep learning and development is required to bring renewal to the reasons why we go to work at all.

The work in hand is firstly about helping executives become aware of their conceptual identity, “I am this or I am that”, to soften their attachment to it. In so doing, consciousness, with its awareness and intuition, is unveiled and becomes the heart of great situational leadership and decision-making.

We must also reflect on the fact that within our hardwiring lies the idea that the answers are at the top. This is etched in our thinking, and began with god-fearing religion, then parents and teachers who “knew best” - all of which contribute to the idea that power and expertise is reserved for those in positions of authority. Today, **charismatic leaders make their made-up answers as appealing as possible, and then sell the dream to convince followers.** As we know, this doesn't always work well and is exemplified by the binary “beauty parade” of today's party politics. We vote for the most appealing option, and then feel betrayed when everything we hoped for doesn't come to pass. When we project power and hope onto those at the top, we give something of our own potential and self-responsibility away. Transactional corporate leadership hands out rewards to those worthy supplicants that bow at the altar where bonuses are handed out, whereas conscious leadership relinquishes the assumptions of power, and pays homage to the “music” and “instrumentalists” in the system itself.

Conscious Leadership – Self-actualise First

We all need to feel powerful in our self-actualisation– to be masters of our own destiny. The conscious leader recognises the need to self-actualise first, and then their responsibility is to support others to do the same. Hierarchical systems trade successfully on compliance, and control resistance but this limited and fractured structure could be different. **When we wake up to the fact that we are all unlimited and interconnected, things begin to change. In fact, there isn't anything that co-creation and collective wisdom can't achieve. We just need leaders to facilitate this possibility.** This shift we hope will take what Otto Scharmer describes in Theory U as, “An open mind, an

open heart and an open will.” Conscious leadership is less about “doing” and only about “being”.

Finding Stillness And Safety

The conscious leader begins by stopping. Finding stillness within is our reminder that we breathe long before we transact. In a recent interview, Yuval Harari, the social psychologist and author of *Sapiens*, speaks about his own experience of sitting in stillness and meditation. “If I can’t sit for 10 seconds and observe without distraction the breath coming into my nostrils, how can I possibly observe what is really happening in a global economic system?” Sitting still and being the observer gives us unparalleled data about what is really going on, in and around us. Conversely, a metrics-centric leader’s approach tries to understand “reality” in the same way that A E Housman describes “drunkards using lamp-posts, not to light them on their way but to dissimulate their instability”. Some teams in modern organisations begin meetings with a few minutes of stillness and silence. When we know what is really happening in ourselves and around us, we set off on the right course.

“Be authentic” is often top of the list of leadership hacks in whichever publication you read. But what does this really mean? **Authenticity in conscious leadership is less about dropping one’s professional guard and sharing personal stories that denote vulnerability, it is more about being present and unscripted.** *I let go of the content of MY experience and the roles I play, and cultivate a 360-awareness of reality, not lost in my own version of it.* As the empty vessel of presence, we allow what is real to emerge from within and without, which is where intuition (deep knowing), creativity, and leadership are found. And when you know that I am present and open-minded, you too

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bring openness to our non-judgemental space; in so doing there is safety - probably the most crucial starting point for any interpersonal process. **Psychological safety allows for openness, and openness allows for creativity.** Fear of saying the wrong thing in the boardroom and meetings is commonplace. This fear is born out of what we think is expected and disallows a space where we can sit with the unknown - the fertile void of possibility.

When, in the unscripted space of authenticity, we let go of an attachment to our conceptual identity, powerful and intuitive responses emerge.

Gerry Gaetz the former CEO of Payments Canada came from a rural upbringing on the Canadian Prairies and brought to the workplace and his leadership, humility, and openness. He spoke in a podcast interview about his very first role as a young manager when faced with his new, and older team, he simply said what was real and required. "I am younger than all of you. You all have more experience than I do, and I have plenty I can learn from you. But I am humbled to have this role and I hope that we will do great things together." Conversely, a young manager, the head of department in a logistics firm we coached last year, ran away from his own discomfort, and failed to state the same with his older colleagues. One of whom, twice his age, had applied unsuccessfully for our coachee's HOD role. The young manager questioned why he was met with resistance within his team



and why he struggled to get commitment from his obstructive colleagues. Noticing what is real and leaning in towards it is the essential behaviour needed in modern leadership.

Inner Purpose Versus Chasing Outcomes

The pursuit of transactions and outcomes is another aspect that sets limits to charismatic leadership. We chase results, thinking they are something out “there”, rather than sitting with the purposeful stillness out of which all good things emerge. Why? Because we equate stillness with emptiness. This frightens us and we avoid it, desperately holding on to this and that, thereby allowing what is “true” and “meant to be” unrealised. The striving for external reward means we miss the point of our primary purpose as living sentient beings. True purpose manifests through us, and it is leadership’s responsibility to create and hold the space for this to unfold. In fact, the space through which creativity emerges is so deep and unlimited that one of the reasons we may be avoiding it is because of its power. How unfortunate that

Listening with presence and without any past-held assumptions

our systems and leaders keep a lid on this, when the potential to fundamentally change our situation (the depletion of our natural world, political division, conflict, mental and physical ill-health) is available, if we choose to connect with it.

Listen Deeply

Trust, creativity and change all emerge when the conscious leader listens deeply. Stephen Covey in *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* writes about how defensiveness in others drops and creativity emerges when we listen empathetically. We have also experienced the power of generative listening in a workshop example of Nancy Kline's *Time To Think* practice, where non-judgmental, environmental listening produces breath-taking results. In a problem-solving listening session, we witnessed a participant's neurotic and conflicted thinking transmute into an intuitive and creative action plan. What if this individual's experience became a regular practise in an organisation, or was taught in schools?

Listening well doesn't come easily, mainly because we are too attached to our sense of identity. "How does what this person is telling me affect Me?" As charismatic leader-listeners we assume we are the centre of the world – the world we are supposedly trying to reinvent! Mindfulness meditation is a crucial tool to help us become better listeners. Here we learn to observe our thoughts rather than getting lost in them, or even believing them, and to practise shifting from seeing the world through our own lens only, to sensing the potential and possibility around us.

Listening with presence and without any past-held assumptions, the conscious leader uses open questions to paint a picture of what is real now, and what could be in the future. The practise of asking simple open questions is also in the conscious leader's toolkit. Closed questions shut the world down with a yes-no answer or force the outcome with embedded answers. "Don't you think you should do it this way?" Open questions don't invite the answer *per se*, but instead generate curiosity and creativity. What we already know or think is less helpful for reinventing our world, than what we don't know yet. We can't solve the climate change crisis with the same mindset that created the problem in the first place. Instead, we need to ask better questions. Alan Watts said, "Problems that remain persistently insoluble should always be suspected as questions asked in the wrong way." Hal Gregersen at MIT has turned the leadership art of asking good questions into an institution. In his "Question Burst" exercise, the leadership team brainstorm for questions rather than ideas.

Pressure to generate ideas creates competition not creativity, whereas a flurry of intuitive questions about the unknown, in themselves paint a new picture of a future perspective.

Leaders could stop telling people what to do or what they think is right and ask questions that harvest collective wisdom, generating vibrancy within the system

So, if leadership is about holding the space for the wisdom and intuition of the self and system to emerge, who is to say that when we all become conscious self-leaders, that leadership will no longer be reserved for individuals but for WE ourselves; self-responsibility and self-leadership becomes the collective consciousness.

In Theory U, Otto Scharmer describes a shift from ego-system to eco-system. Here, the charismatic leader lets go of their story and begins to intuit what is already alive in the system.

Conscious leadership then becomes a facilitative process; the beekeeper that trusts the purpose of the worker bees and fine tunes what is natural and flows, or the orchestra players themselves who co-create with commitment and accountability to the music and each other. This is Frederic Laloux's vision in *Reinventing Organisations: Inspired by the Next Stages of Human Consciousness*, where self-organisation and its self-managing teams is the leadership, and where traditional leaders might even become obsolete. Laloux regularly refers to natural organisms and the self-regulation that is inherent in their design. Opening our senses to these natural systems and being conscious of what is around us could be a game-changer. As Harrison Owen writes in *The Power of Spirit: How Organizations Transform*, "Up until now, some of us actually thought that we created and organized the systems in which we work. But should it turn out that natural systems are truly self-organizing, much of that effort was wasted."

Our zeitgeist is calling for a paradigm shift in leadership style. This shift will be fully realised when we let go of our attachment to personality-led leadership and allow consciousness to guide us to our true purpose, whatever that may be.

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DevelopingLeaders

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