

Executive Case Study

The Monochrome Executive: When Perfectionist Excellence Becomes Organisational Exhaustion

THE SITUATION

Executive: Chief Marketing Officer, European Technology Scale-up

Scope: €180M marketing budget / 350+ professionals / 12 markets

Context: Leading post-Series D transformation while integrating acquired marketing teams

Day Count: Day 72 of CMO role when engaged

The Precipitating Event

Six executives around the boardroom table. CFO breaks protocol: “T., we need to discuss something. The entire leadership team feels like they’re constantly under interrogation. Your intensity is becoming unsustainable.”

The Stakes

- **Personal:** First C-suite role, reputation as “the perfectionist CMO” solidifying
 - **Financial:** €180M budget, IPO roadshow in 9 months requiring CMO credibility
 - **Organizational:** Marketing team burnout indicators at 40%, three director-level resignations pending
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THE DIAGNOSIS

Surface Symptoms

What everyone could see:

- Every meeting ran at “11/10 intensity”

- Team describing interactions as “exhausting but brilliant”
- Stakeholder meetings becoming adversarial despite agreement on objectives
- CMO seen as “all drive, no appreciation”

Hidden Architecture

What our assessment revealed:

Primary Pattern: The Intensity Override (Monochrome Leadership)

The Real Problem: Not perfectionism itself, but emotional monotony. He operated with a single colour—intense perfectionist drive—when leadership required a full spectrum. His metaphor during diagnosis: “I was very monochrome in that meeting rather than having all the colour.”

The Integration Failure: The perfectionist part had colonised his entire executive presence. Other parts—gratitude, happiness, curiosity, the observer—existed but were locked out of the boardroom. He was a Formula 1 driver using only fifth gear.

THE INTERVENTION

Phase 1: Parts Mapping (Days 72–90)

- Identified the internal boardroom: Perfectionist (80%), Driver (15%), Others (5% combined)
- Discovered “Gratitude” and “Happiness” hadn’t appeared in professional settings for 18 months
- Key insight: “The perfectionist was driving the car” in every interaction

Phase 2: Emotional Range Expansion (Days 91–130)

- Introduced “Parts Protocol”: Consciously invite different aspects to each meeting
- Implemented mid-meeting state checks: “Who’s driving the car right now?”
- Practice sessions: Running relaxed strategy sessions (felt “wrong” initially)
- The breakthrough: “If gratitude had surfaced, I could have said ‘we’re doing well here’ instead of just pushing for more”

Phase 3: Orchestrated Leadership (Days 131–180)

- Developed meeting-specific emotional strategies (board: 60% drive, 40% appreciation)
 - Created “Victory Moments”: Five minutes of celebration before identifying next improvements
 - Demonstrated range: Led acquisition integration with curiosity rather than intensity
 - The integration: All parts working together rather than perfectionist dominance
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THE OUTCOME

Day 100 Metrics:

- **Performance:** Team burnout indicators dropped from 40% to 12%
- **Relationships:** 360 feedback: “Still demanding but now inspiring”
- **Retention:** Director resignations withdrawn, team stability achieved

Day 180 Position:

- Successfully led IPO roadshow with “remarkable emotional intelligence” (analyst feedback)
- Marketing performance: 23% above targets with 30% less team stress
- Invited to join Group Executive Committee as youngest member
- Personal transformation: “I have access to all my colours now”

The Executive’s Words:

“I thought intensity was my superpower—it’s what got me to the C-suite. But Francisco showed me I was playing a symphony with one note. The revelation wasn’t that I needed less intensity, but that intensity without gratitude is exhausting, drive without happiness is grinding, and perfectionism without curiosity is brittle. Now I can still be intense when needed, but I choose which colour serves the moment. My team no longer feels interrogated—they feel led.”

THE PATTERN

For Other Executives Facing Similar Challenges:

This case demonstrates that executive effectiveness isn't about maximum effort but optimal emotional selection. The highest performers don't operate at constant intensity—they match their internal state to external requirements.

The Critical Insight: When an executive learns to consciously select which part of themselves leads each interaction, organisational resistance transforms into organisational energy.

THE METHODOLOGY NOTE

This transformation employed three core elements of Executive Integration Architecture™:

1. **Parts Recognition:** Mapping the internal boardroom and identifying who's been excluded
2. **Emotional Repertoire Building:** Expanding from monochrome to full-spectrum leadership
3. **Contextual Deployment:** Matching internal resources to external situations

The intervention required 24 sessions over 180 days, with measurable inflection points at Days 90 (awareness achieved), 120 (range demonstrated), and 160 (integration stabilised).

ROI Calculation:

- Investment: €45,000 (6-month architecture program)
 - Quantifiable Returns: €3.2M (retention savings), €8.4M (IPO valuation impact from team stability)
 - Multiplier: 258x within first year
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PATTERN RECOGNITION FOR EXECUTIVES

You may be experiencing Monochrome Leadership if:

- Every meeting feels like a performance review
- Your team respects but doesn't enjoy working with you
- "Relaxed" feels like "unproductive"
- You interpret requests for appreciation as weakness
- Your only speed is "urgent"
- Success feels exhausting rather than energising
- You win arguments but lose allies
- The phrase "emotional intelligence" triggers skepticism

The intervention isn't about becoming "softer" or less driven. It's about having access to your full range—being able to deploy gratitude as strategically as you deploy intensity.

THE BEHAVIOURAL EVIDENCE

In our diagnostic session, when asked who else could have shown up to his board meeting, his initial response was telling: "I thought about gratitude, but..." The word "but" revealed the pattern—he knew other states existed but couldn't access them under pressure.

The transformation moment: "If gratitude had surfaced even a bit, I could have come across as 'okay, we have this discussion, let's continue talking' rather than Germanic intensity on everything."

This shift from unconscious monotony to conscious selection changed not just his leadership but his team's entire experience of work.

This executive's journey from monochrome to full-spectrum leadership illustrates a fundamental truth: At C-level, the ability to modulate emotional frequency determines organisational harmony. When executives operate with their full range, they create

psychological safety while maintaining performance standards.

For executives recognising themselves in this pattern, the question isn't whether you're intense enough—it's whether you have access to anything else.

Francisco Baptista specialises in Executive Integration Architecture™ for senior leaders navigating complex transitions. Working exclusively with executives managing €50M+ P&Ls, he systematically expands leadership range when single-mode excellence becomes organisational liability.