Strategic leadership and matching context

Organisational contexts and adaptations

The strategic context

One of the key facets of the leader is to have the vision to drive the organisation forwards. In fact, Lynch (2006) defines leadership in this strategic context.

> *Leadership is the art or process of influencing people so that they will strive willingly and enthusiastically towards the achievement of the organisation's purpose.* (Lynch 2006)

However, this may be easier said than done. Strategic leaders may have the vision, but they will find themselves in contexts that will impact on how they approach strategic change.

Contextual factors in strategic change

One factor often highlighted in strategic change is the resistance the leader may encounter to it. The importance of resistance to change as a strategic contextual factor for leaders was well expressed by Beckhard and Harris in their 'change equation'.

D x V x S > R

(Dissatisfaction with the current situation) x (Vision); (first Steps towards the vision) must be greater than (Resistance to change) if change is going to work (Beckhard and Harris 1987)

Resistance to change is an important factor, but there are other factors. There are eight listed in the following diagram (see the middle circle).

The change kaleidoscope
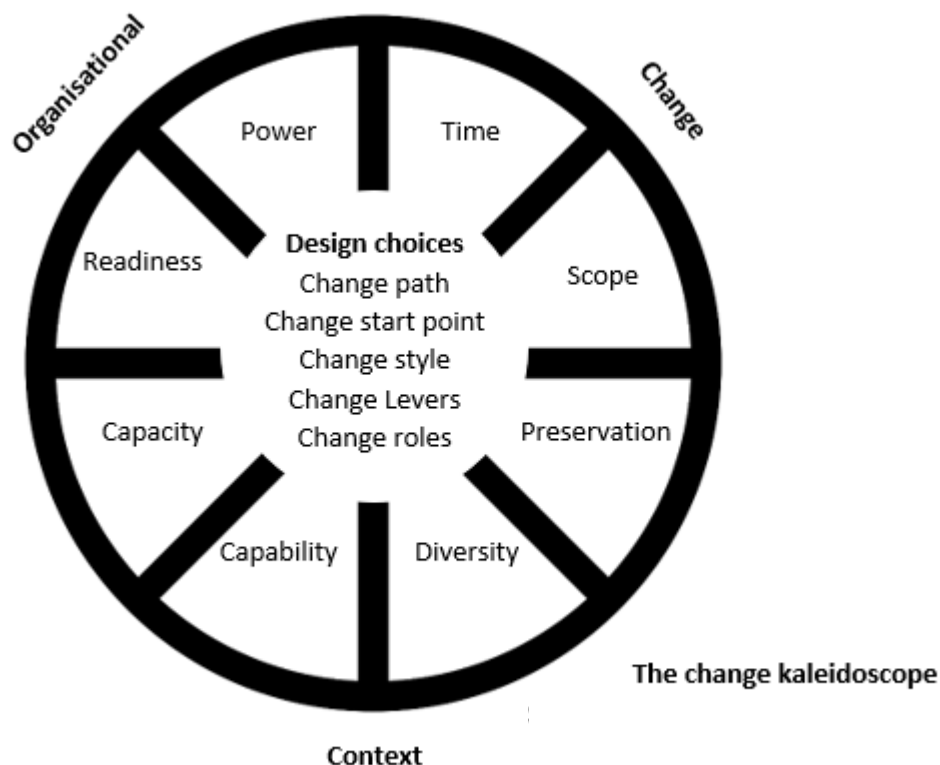
Hope-Hailey, V., & Balogun, J. (2002).

The implications for leaders of these contexts are huge. Whatever your vision as leader, you may have to adapt it to your organisation's capability, its readiness for change (resistance), your own limits for enforcing change, the limitations of your workforce, and so on.

For an example of an analysis of these eight contextual factors within the change kaleidoscope framework, read the article 'Strategic change' by Julia Balogun.

Strategies for change

Kotter and Schlesinger considered the implications for managing change in terms of different approaches that may be necessary depending on the context. They identified six: education + communication, participation + involvement, facilitation + support, negotiation + agreement, manipulation + co-optation, and explicit + implicit coercion.

Approach	Commonly used in situations	Advantages	Drawbacks
education + communication	Where there is a lack of information or inaccurate information and analysis	Once persuaded, people wilt often help with the implementation of the change.	Can be very time consuming if lots, of people are involved.
participation + involvement	Where the initiators do not have all the, information they need to design the change, and where others have considerable power to resist.	People who participate will be committed to implementing change, and any relevant information they-have wilt be integrated into the change plan.	Can be very time consuming if participators design an inappropriate change.
facilitation + support	Where people are resisting because of adjustment, problems.	No other approach works as Well with adjustment problems.	Can time consuming, expensive, and still fail
negotiation + agreement	Where someone or some group wilt clearly lose out in a change, and where that group has considerable power to resist.	Sometimes it is a relatively easy way to avoid major resistance.	Can be too expensive in many cases if it alerts others to negotiate for compliance.
manipulation + co-optation	Where other tactics will not work or are too expensive.	It can be a relatively quick and inexpensive solution to resistance problems.	Can lead to future problems if people feel manipulated.
explicit + implicit coercion	Where speed is essential, and the change-initiators possess considerable power.	It is speedy and can overcome any kind of resistance.	Can be risky if it leaves people mad at the initiators.

Strategies for change: overcoming resistance to it - Source: Kotter and Schlesinger (2008)

Evolution or revolution?

One of the key factors in strategic change is time. Is change needed quickly or can it be incremental? There are two basic ways at looking at the development of strategic change: evolutionary (incremental) and revolutionary (transformational). It's important to assess contextual strategic factors affecting leadership within these types.

In terms of resistance to change as evolutionary or revolutionary, consider the diagram below (Strebel 1997), which analyses conflicting approaches and attitudes in change situations.
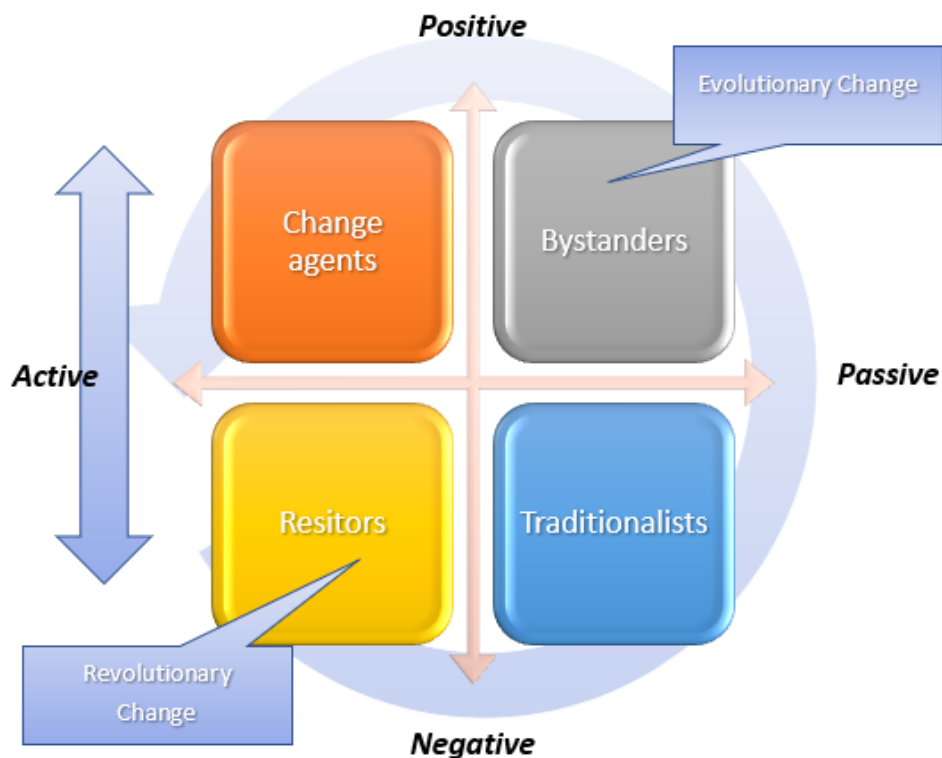
The politics of change

Source: Adapted from Strebel (1997)

For a leader looking at this:

The top-left quadrant is where they would ideally like their followers to be (change agents) as they are active and positive supporters of change.

- The top-right quadrant followers (bystanders) are usually positive, waiting to be convinced before they come on board.
- The bottom-left quadrant contains the least desired followers (resistors) as they have an active and negative attitude to change.
- The bottom-right quadrant contains followers who are passive but likely to be negative once they understand more about the change.

Revolutionary change is likely to produce more polarised opinions - conflict between change agents and resistors - because of the timing issue, whereas evolutionary change enables communication to take place to convince those with a more passive stance. So, in the revolutionary model, it may be necessary to use a more coercive approach to overcome resistance but supported by efforts to

educate about the need for change. Margaret Thatcher's attempt to reinvigorate conservative values in the 1980s is a good example of the coercive style of revolutionary change. Those in her government were either 'one of us' - they ascribed wholeheartedly to the Thatcher creed - or they were outside her trusted circle. Remember the 'wets' and the 'drys'?
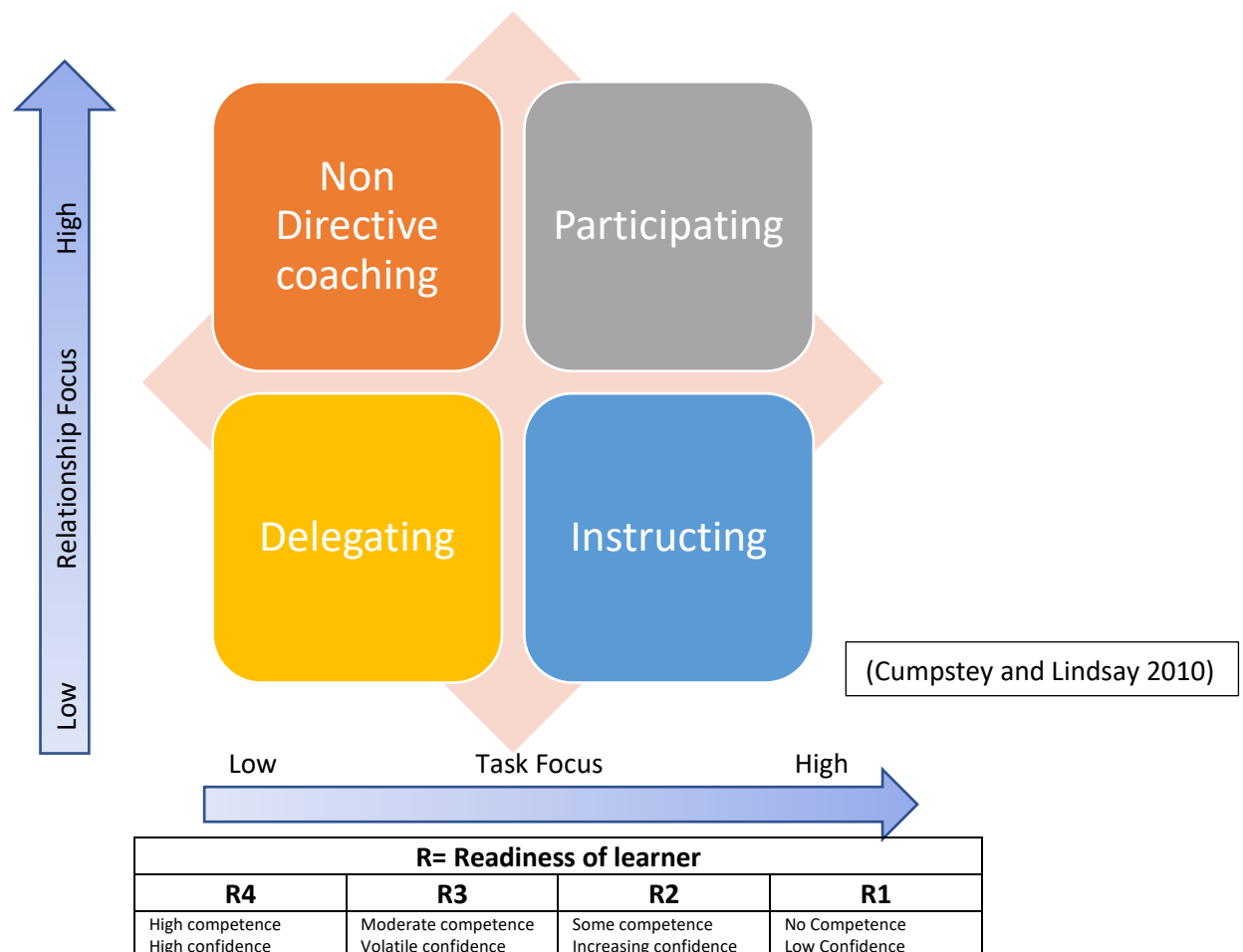
Questions to ask yourself

How might the eight contextual factors in strategic change hinder your role as leader, Time, Scope, Preservation, Diversity, Capability, Capacity, Readiness including resistance, and Power?

Which of the six approaches to change - education & communication, participation and involvement, facilitation & support, negotiation & agreement, manipulation & co-operation, and explicit & implicit coercion - would be appropriate for a change initiative you are involved in now?

The situational context

One very well-known theory of contingency leadership was developed by Hersey and Blanchard and is called 'situational leadership'. The basic premise underpinning the original situational leadership model is that leaders should use different styles with followers depending upon the current situation. In this case, the situation includes the tasks that followers are required to perform and their varying competence and confidence to achieve them to the required standards. The version of situational leadership shown below has been adapted from Hersey and Blanchard's work following further experience and research by Peter Cumpstey and Philip Lindsay.

Alternative version of situational leadership

(Cumpstey and Lindsay 2010)

R= Readiness of learner			
R4	**R3**	**R2**	**R1**
High competence High confidence	Moderate competence Volatile confidence	Some competence Increasing confidence	No Competence Low Confidence

The model identifies four leadership styles:

Instructing: The leader focuses primarily on providing instruction and directions on how to complete the task using their experience and expertise to develop the initial competence of the follower. The leader essentially guides and controls the follower's task achievement and provides relatively less in terms of supportive behaviours.

Participating: This leadership style is also focused on ensuring and guiding goal achievement. It provides more advanced information and guidance to help the follower further build their capabilities. Equally, it provides a recognition of skills learned and progress achieved in combination with building confidence and giving encouragement so that the follower learns more and performs more effectively.

(Non-directive) coaching: With this style, the focus is much less upon directing the means to achieve tasks and more to do with supporting and encouraging the follower to find their own ways to deliver the desired performance and overcome issues. This style is denoted by the leader's predominant use of questioning and listening, providing feedback on what the follower has said and giving guidance tips when required. Confidence is described as 'volatile' in this phase as relatively minor errors can undermine the follower's belief in their own competence.

Delegating: This is the most hands-off style where the leader checks that the follower understands what is required in terms of task performance and feels capable of delivering it. They then allow the follower to take responsibility for progressing and achieving the desired outcomes.

Situational leadership: implications for leaders

There are several implications of situational leadership for the leader:

- The ability of the leader to produce desired results is largely dependent upon the confidence and competence of the people they expect to implement the vision.
- Leaders need to align their use of the different leadership styles with the 'readiness' levels of their followers - individually as well as collectively - to be as effective as possible. Effective leaders pay attention to their people and what they need.
- Followers may need development support from their leaders to move forward and achieve task requirements. Some need more task direction to build competence while others may need more encouragement and support to build confidence, or crucially to sustain confidence in the face of errors or mistakes.
- Different followers will need different quantities and blends of direction and support to meet their performance needs.
- Leaders need to be flexible, tuning their leadership approach to best supply the needs of their individual followers.

It sometimes seems as if this focus on aligning styles to meet the requirements of specific practical situations and people is more a management approach than a leadership one. While there is some truth in this, there are opportunities for leaders to focus on the development of employees in certain settings, particularly core micro ones, such as project leaders who have to adapt themselves to the various developmental levels of their team, or a (EO working with a board. At the very least, the model provides an excellent metaphor for the whole process of examining and responding to the specific situational context in order to select or adapt the appropriate leadership approach.

Question

In what settings has or would situational leadership become useful to you?

The cultural context

Edgar Schein (1985) defined the organisation of a group as follows:

> ... a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way you perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.

He identified three major levels of group culture:

- artefacts - words and gestures, dress, myths, stories, rituals, products, value statements
- espoused beliefs and values - strategies, goals, philosophies, initially started by founder and then assimilated
- underlying assumptions - unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts and feelings, the ultimate source of values and action.

Hofstede (2005), whose work was particularly concerned with national cultures, defined culture as being collective but often intangible, consisting of two main elements: internal values and external elements such as rituals and symbols. He developed indices for nations to reflect their cultural characteristics. Typically, he saw culture as divided into five dimensions:

- Power distance: The extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally.
- Individualism: The degree to which individuals are integrated into groups - loose ties = individualism; strong, cohesive groups = collectivism.
- Masculinity: Defined as an assertive, competitive society as opposed to a modest, caring one (femininity).
- Uncertainty avoidance: The extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations. Where they do, there are strict rules; the opposite being more tolerant societies.
- Long-term orientation: This was a dimension added later by Hofstede. It refers to long-term values, such as thrift and perseverance, as opposed to short-term values such as respect for tradition, fulfilling social obligations, and 'protecting one's face'.

With the rise in global business, many people are working with, or managing, individuals and groups from cultures other than their own. Hofstede's dimensions are an analytical tool to help us understand intercultural differences. For example, the practical experience of many multinationals in building international teams can be explained in terms of Hofstede's framework.

Hofstede's analysis of the UK shows us as being very high on individualism and reasonably high on masculinity, and very low on long-term orientation and quite low on power distance and uncertainty avoidance.

Question

Look at Hofstede's analysis and think how far you would say his results are an accurate reflection of your own organisation's culture?

Culture and leadership

Identifying the type of culture, you have, has important repercussions for leadership in your organisation. Going back to the contextual factors in strategic change, the factor 'readiness' or 'resistance to change' in many cases is a cultural factor. As a leader, if you introduce a new change or strategic initiative without understanding the cultural context, you may find, as many other organisations have found, that the change will be resisted and fail. (You might like to reflect on any examples from your own experience.)

In a study of the relationship between culture, leadership and organisational effectiveness in the public sector in New Zealand, where the rate of change was considered more turbulent than the private sector, it was found that transactional organisational cultures inhibited the display of leadership and made their organisations less effective, whereas the opposite was true where the culture was transformational. Not that transactional culture isn't important - and, indeed, most organisations carry both - but where change is a priority, the transformational culture will free up the leader to make the organisation effective.
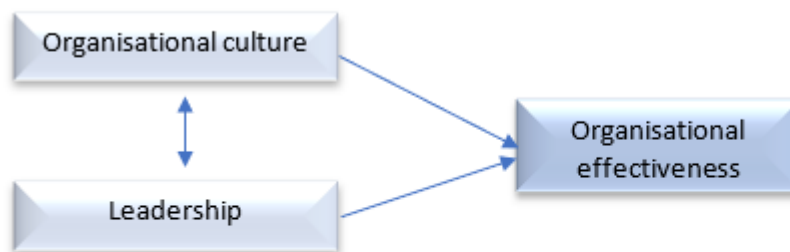
The interplay of organisational culture, leadership, and organisational effectiveness

Source: Adapted from Parry and Proctor-Thompson (2003)

The implications of this are as follows:

- Where change is not a priority, a transactional culture will support a transactional leader.
- Where change is a priority, a transformational culture will support a transformational leader, in both of these cases, leadership may be seen as adapting to what is already-there in order to create organisational effectiveness.
- Whatever the priority for change, where the culture or leader are not supportive of each other, conflict will emerge which may lead to less organisational effectiveness.

In the latter case, something has to give if the organisation is not to fail, either the leader changes or the culture changes. Note that if a leader chooses to use a transactional style, then employees tend to behave that way. But evidence shows that higher performance can usually be obtained in the longer term through transformational approaches. How the leader may change the culture is the subject of the next topic.

Questions

What is the relationship between your organisational culture and your leadership?

In what aspects does your leadership style reflect the culture and in what aspects does it not?

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