LEADERSHIP TRANSFORMATION: CREATING ALIGNMENT FROM THE INSIDE-OUT

Abstract

“Most leaders have noble intentions; I am yet to meet the leader who aspires to destroy shareholder value, irritate customers and alienate staff. Unfortunately, while we judge ourselves based on our intentions, everybody else judges us on our actions.”

- Dr. Peter Fuda

Our shelves are flooded with books and articles declaring the characteristics of great leaders; level five leadership, charismatic leadership, servant leadership, results based leadership, quiet leadership, all the way through to ‘leadership Sopranos style!’ Our dilemma is that in more than a decade of working with CEOs and senior executives, we have never met the ‘perfect’ leader described in these texts; just a lot of honest human beings doing the best they can under ever increasing pressures.

In this paper, we shift the debate from the characteristics of ‘great leadership’ to focus on the process required to actually become an effective leader. Over the last decade of professional practice and five years of doctoral research, we have been obsessed with answering the question: “What does it take for a traditional manager to transform into a contemporary leader?” In this paper, we outline the learnings that have resulted from this quest, and present them to the reader in the form of seven metaphors. We also illustrate how to use this approach to leadership transformation as a means to transform your organisation from the ‘inside out.’

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QUOTES ON LEADERSHIP

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WHAT YOU CAN DO
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LEADERSHIP TRANSFORMATION: CREATING ALIGNMENT FROM THE INSIDE-OUT

Most efforts at organisational change and transformation begin with a focus on the competitive environment, and discussions of vision, strategy, metrics and the like. We call this the ‘outside-in’ approach to transformation since it starts with the strategic context and gradually works its way in to target leadership change directly. Figure 1 below illustrates how we conceptualise the outside-in approach to transformation and you can read our detailed white paper on this approach at ‘Organisational Transformation: Creating Alignment from the Outside-In’ (click here).

Through research and practice, we have identified 11 significant levers that leaders can pull to align their organisation to their aspirations. These levers represent the red thread in our Transformation Model™ in Figure 1 (left), and are expressed and defined in Figure 2: TAP Alignment Factors and Definitions™ (below).

In our white paper titled ‘Organisational Transformation: Creating Alignment from the Outside-In’ we propose that for transformation to occur, each of the 11 levers must be aligned to an organisation’s aspirations; that is, the purpose, vision and overarching goals. Importantly, we differentiate between the terms ‘transformation’ and ‘alignment’, wherein transformation represents the outcomes the organisation aspires to, and alignment represents the process by which the outcomes are achieved.

Of the 11 levers, five can be classified as so called ‘hard’ levers, and five ‘soft’ levers. The hard levers can be likened to the ‘bricks’ of alignment...
as they provide the foundation for transformation efforts, while the soft levers represent the mortar that holds the bricks together. Over the past ten years, our case studies of transformation have taught us that the impact of leaders is as important as all ten alignment levers combined; hence it sits at the very centre of our approach to transformation.

The ‘inside-out’ approach to transformation begins with a focus on Leadership Impact and works its way out to affect many or all of the other 10 alignment levers described in Figure 2. This Leadership Impact driven approach to transformation asserts that when leaders are individually effective, and collectively cohesive, it is much easier to drive alignment throughout the organisation and achieve transformation.

Supplementing practice with research

Between 2005 and 2010, in an effort to better understand the leadership driven business transformations we were supporting and witnessing, we invested in five years of doctoral research with the Macquarie Graduate School of Management on the subject of ‘leadership transformation’. This major research study sought to answer the question: “What does it take for a traditional manager to transform into a contemporary leader?”

The research was an intimate study of the journeys of several leaders who had each driven organisational transformation, in large part, through the transformation of their own leadership. As each leader’s journey of transformation was unique, we used a narrative-based research method in order to appreciate the subtleties and complexities inherent in each leader’s experience. We then extracted the core themes for leadership transformation in the form of seven ‘generative’ metaphors, each designed to inspire reflection, conversation and purposeful action. In Section Two, we provide a detailed overview of the seven metaphors.

Since the completion of our research, we have applied the seven metaphors in consulting, speaking and teaching engagements to thousands of people around the world. Based on these experiences, we have come to the conclusion that applying the seven metaphors can not only accelerate leadership transformation, but can also promote organisational transformation ‘from the inside-out’.

100 years of leadership theory

The notion of impact is central to our philosophy of leadership, and underpins both our research and practices. As outlined in Figure 3, Leadership theory has evolved through four major philosophies over the past 100 years.

1. **Trait theory** represents one of the earliest forms of leadership thought. Originating in the 20th century, this theory was based on the contention that great leaders personify certain innate traits. Trait theory was verified by pointing to the likes of Eisenhower, Churchill and Henry Ford.

2. **Charismatic leadership** is a particularly prominent offshoot of trait theory that is still prevalent in modern Western culture; however the theory holds little credibility today. History has shown repeatedly that in a professional context, highly charismatic leaders are equally likely to damage an organisation as they are to help it succeed; witness Enron and WorldCom in the USA, and One-Tel and Babcock and Brown in Australia.

3. **Behavioural theories** enhanced our understanding of human motivation and behaviour significantly. These theories are limited, however, in the sense that they focus on individual inputs or qualities rather than outcomes. For example, substantive research has demonstrated that highly achievement-oriented leaders can produce dependent followers. This is why the very best football players are often failed coaches but mediocre players may become highly successful coaches.

4. **Situational and contingency theories** contend that leaders change their approach depending upon the person and situation requiring leadership. In this sense, there is no ‘one best way’ of leadership and the onus is on the leader to constantly adapt. While this approach is of some tactical value, it creates problems of consistency and authenticity. Ultimately, the leader is being led.

5. **Leadership Impact** is a contemporary approach that contends that a leader’s effectiveness can only be defined by his or her results. In other words, it is concerned with the consequences of a given leader’s leadership. The principles and process for Leadership Impact are expanded upon in the following pages.

Figure 3: Evolution of leadership theory
Leadership Impact Principles

In our approach to transformation and alignment, Leadership Impact is a central strategic lever. When deployed correctly, this lever simultaneously advances individual and team effectiveness toward the organisation’s aspirations.

When leaders are asked to articulate their vision for their impact, they generally articulate a desire to motivate and encourage team members to reach high levels of achievement, approach their work with creativity, develop others and work effectively as a team. Most leaders, however, are unaware of their impact. As human beings, we tend to judge ourselves by our intentions and everyone else by their actions.

The Leadership Impact lever provides a simple and understandable link between leadership and business performance. It is squarely focused on business impact, as opposed to personality or behaviour.

The Leadership/Impact™ tool

The instrument we generally use to measure a leader’s impact in our client engagements, and also the tool we used to measure the ‘transformation’ of the leaders in our doctoral research, is a tool developed by Dr Rob Cooke called Leadership/Impact™. Dr Cooke is Associate Professor Emeritus of Managerial Studies at the University of Illinois, and Director of Human Synergistics International. His tool is considered a highly valid and reliable instrument for measuring a leader’s effectiveness across 12 dimensions that are grounded in a comprehensive review of applied psychology theory.

The tool leverages strengths rather than just focusing on remedial issues and uses a lexicon that senior leaders understand; impact, effectiveness and strategies.

As represented in Figure 4, the Leadership/Impact approach contends that a leader’s effectiveness is created by his or her impact which, in turn, is created by the strategies that the leader is using.

Leadership/Impact relies on a participant set vision or ideal, not an ‘expert’ established benchmark, so defensive reactions to challenging feedback are less frequent and quicker to resolve. A ‘Constructive’ impact is the one most desired by leaders, as is reflected by the predominance of the colour ‘blue’ in the average ideal impact in Figure 5. As can be seen from the average actual impact data, leaders’ ‘espoused theories’ are generally quite different to their ‘theories in use’, a notion that forms the central thesis of prominent organisational theorists Chris Argyris and Donald Schön.

We initially used the Leadership/Impact tool to quantitatively define a sample of CEOs who had ‘transformed from traditional managers into contemporary leaders’. Figure 6 (overleaf) depicts the aggregate actual shift in impact between these leaders’ first and final measures. At the outset of their journeys, the leaders’ aggregate data was less constructive than the average. Upon their most recent measures of impact, the aggregate data places the leaders within the top 10% of ‘Constructive’ measures within the 40,000 cases in the database.

Through our research, the tool emerged as an important element of leadership transformation in its own right and this finding is explored in detail in the 3rd metaphor (Master Chef) later in this paper.
In the following section, we provide a short summary of our learnings from the doctorate. These findings are presented to the reader in the form of seven metaphors.

What does it take for a traditional manager to transform into a contemporary leader?

This research question, as stated above, organically developed out of a misalignment we perceived between the leadership literature, and the reality that we were witnessing daily with the leaders and organisations we worked with. Specifically, most of the books we were reading depicted an idealistic image of leaders; heroic, forever confident, all-knowing, and all seeing.

Our dilemma was not so much with the content of these texts; they described characteristics that many would aspire to; such as integrity, courage, vision and discipline. It was just that after many years in the field, we had never met the superhero they described. Moreover, we could not find the text that described the process by which mere mortals transformed into superheroes.

Demystifying ‘leadership transformation’ through narrative

One of the forefathers of leadership thought, James MacGregor Burns, famously declared that “leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth”.

In modern times, ‘leadership’ has emerged as a significant priority in organisations, particularly as human capital has become one of the greatest sources of competitive advantage. Yet over the past two decades, it has remained somewhat of a black box, with almost as many different definitions of ‘leadership’ as people who have tried to define the term. In fact, according to leadership gurus Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus, there are over 350 definitions of leadership, each accompanied by a competing model, schema or classification.

With our cases of leadership transformation, it appeared that we were in good stead to offer the 351st definition of leadership. Yet as we commenced our research, we quickly realised that leadership transformation could not be reduced to a simplistic, elegant formula for change.

Instead, we adopted a narrative research method that allowed us to appreciate the subtleties and complexities inherent in each leader’s journey. Drawing on deep relationships with these leaders, and collaboration with a broader community of research, we developed reflective narratives to provide insight into the character and context of each leader’s journey from ‘traditional manager’ to ‘contemporary leader’.

Seven Metaphors for Leadership Transformation

The narratives were interpreted by way of seven metaphors. Figure 7 provides a pictorial summary of the metaphors, and Figure 8 comprises a short description of each.

Essentially, the metaphors are sense making devices that are designed to promote meaningful reflection and purposeful action. The forthcoming pages provide a more detailed explanation of each metaphor.

Importantly, the metaphors are intended to be used in a ‘generative’ fashion; to stimulate further insights into leadership transformation beyond ours below.

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Figure 6: Aggregate Impact Data for our 7 CEOs - First Measure Vs Final Measure

In the following section, we provide a short summary of our learnings from the doctorate. These findings are presented to the reader in the form of seven metaphors.

While the CEO narratives are not the central feature of this paper, we are happy to provide the reader, on request, with a DVD of live presentations by four of the seven CEOs captured at the 11th Australian Conference on leadership and Culture. A short five-minute grab can be viewed at our website: www.tap.net.au.

“Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth.”

- James MacGregor Burns
In this respect, the seven metaphors have already been exposed to many thousands of senior executives through our consulting work, speaking engagements, teaching and media commitments, and we are delighted that they have since taken on a life of their own.

NB. From here onwards, to distinguish between our use of the seven metaphors inherent in our Leadership Transformation Model™ and general usage of the terms, we employ capitals when referring to the former.

**METAPHOR 1 - FIRE**

The motivational forces that initiate and sustain transformation efforts; including a burning platform and burning ambition, as well as personal and organisational reasons for change.

‘Fire’ is an often-used metaphor to describe motivation, where ‘heat’ represents emotional intensity in various forms such as anger, passion, love, urgency and desire. It was the two seemingly opposite applications of ‘urgency’ and ‘desire’ that granted us our first significant insight into the phenomenon of leadership transformation.

In the business context, the metaphor of fire has typically been used to denote urgency. Harvard Professor John Kotter (1996) popularised the concept of the ‘burning platform’ as the critical prerequisite for successful change efforts. The origin of the burning platform derives from a story about a man working on an oil platform in the North Sea. Following a large explosion, he jumps from the platform, 100 feet into freezing cold water. When asked why he jumped he replied “better probable death than certain death!”

The apparent application of this story to a business context is that fear, survival instincts and extreme urgency are not only necessary, but desirable motivators for substantive change. While we did find some evidence of the ‘burning platform’, our research suggested that it was in fact a ‘burning

“The seven metaphors are sense-making devices that are designed to promote meaningful reflection and purposeful action.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ALIGNMENT FACTOR</th>
<th>DEFINITION</th>
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<tr>
<td>FIRE</td>
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<td>A virtuous snowball of accountability that propels the change effort forward; starting with the leader, and building momentum as others are ‘swept up’ in the journey.</td>
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<td>MASTER CHEF</td>
<td>Artful application of the ‘leadership science’ (frameworks, tools and strategies), which enable a leader to advance from amateur cook to ‘master’ chef.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COACH</td>
<td>A team of consultant(s), colleagues and supporters that collectively coach a leader toward their aspirations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MASK</td>
<td>Concealment of imperfections, or personification of an identity, which is misaligned with a leader’s authentic self, values or aspirations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOVIE</td>
<td>Processes of self-awareness and reflection, which allow a leader ‘edit’ their performance, and direct a ‘movie’ in line with their leadership vision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RUSSIAN DOLLS</td>
<td>A complimentary set of journeys that interact with a leader’s personal journey of transformation.</td>
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ambition’ - a strong desire-driven motivation – that enabled the leaders to accelerate and sustain their transformation efforts.

At the outset of the research, we asked the leaders two questions only; ‘Why did you embark on a journey of leadership transformation?’, and ‘How did you transform?’ Originally the why question was to understand the context in which the actual changes took place, but we soon came to understand that the leaders’ motivation revealed far more significant insights for change.

Beyond the burning platform – burning ambition dichotomy, there was an additional nuance to the leaders’ responses; their motivations spanned both organisational and individual imperatives for change. To make sense of the apparent dichotomies, we developed a four dimensional matrix (Figure 9) to represent a motivational shift that occurred in the leaders over time, and the effects of these motivational forces on leaders’ ability to transform.

Quadrant 1 represents the Organisational Burning Platform. Consistent with Kotter’s research, the leaders articulated a compelling list of fears, and in some cases crisis-driven imperatives for change at the outset of their journeys. Here, we draw upon excerpts from the leaders’ narratives to exemplify the point, which from herein will be identified by indented quotations:

> I could see big storm clouds on the horizon... our financial trajectory was poor... our competitors were becoming more and more aggressive... our customers were squeezing us... [and] staff engagement was at an all-time low.

It is perhaps no surprise that the organisational burning platform was the first type of motivation articulated by the leaders given the pervasiveness of this metaphor. All of the leaders also had to justify a large investment in his or her leadership agenda to key stakeholders, and the burning organisational platform represented a compelling way to justify that investment.

Over time, as we partnered with the leaders on their transformation journeys, they began to open up about their personal fears, challenges and insecurities, which are represented as quadrant 2 of the matrix; Personal Burning Platform.

> My reputation is on the line. I’m afraid I will look really stupid if I can’t build a company of substance... Everyday I try out a different approach, but nothing seems to work... I’m physically exhausted; I can’t keep going like this.

In most cases, these motivations were originally concealed beneath the organisational forces for change. Uncovering the personal burning platform was contingent upon the building of trust. As each leader directed their attention inward, their motivation for the leadership transformation journey increased considerably. It was a point of no return for many of them.

Yet it was quadrant 3, Personal Burning Ambition, where the leaders’ commitment and personal accountability for change really began to accelerate. As opposed to running from a fire, this was a fire that ‘burned from within’.

As each of the leaders came to reflect on their unique purpose, vision, values and goals, they created a far more empowering context for their journeys. For one leader, it was about living a big and authentic life. For another, it was about increasing balance and happiness. For another, it was about fulfilling his leadership potential.

Simultaneously, each leader experienced a shift in energy, away from expressions of insecurity and perennial urgency, to a calmer, more deliberate and disciplined execution of the agreed actions that would realise his or her aspirations.
I definitely got kicked into this journey... by a burning platform... a kind of internal crisis... My deep hope is that that's the last time I will ever be compelled to action in that way. Now, for me, it is always about burning ambitions...In the modern business context you can always find a crisis to respond to if you want... that's why there are a lot of these the arsonist fire-fighters... That kind of stuff really gives me the shits...these days I definitely much prefer to move towards something than away from something.

The motivational ‘fire’ burned brighter still when the leaders’ personal burning ambitions transcended into ambitions for their organisations. This is the fourth quadrant of the matrix, Organisational Burning Ambition.

One leader not only wanted to transform the culture and leadership of his company in Australia, he wanted to effect positive change in the corporate parent globally. This culminated in the organisation being awarded a prestigious ‘Top Ten Employer of Choice’ award. Another leader was motivated to connect the creative energy of his advertising agency to worthy social causes. This ultimately manifested itself in ‘Earth Hour’; one of the world’s largest social movements of recent years.

To summarise our learnings from the Fire metaphor, the leaders have taught us that the shift from a burning platform to a burning ambition is critical. Transformation is not sustainable with a fear-driven mindset; at some stage, leaders must re-imagine what they are doing in a positive context in order to sustain energy and effort throughout the process.

In addition, it is vital for a leader to not only articulate the organisational reasons for change, but to delve deeper and establish very compelling personal motivations for change.

As philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche famously said: “He who has a why to live can withstand almost any how.” In this respect, a leader’s motivation for change, or the ‘big why’ becomes a crucial part of ‘how’ leaders transform. For this reason we place the Fire at the centre of our seven metaphors – because if the flame goes out, all other factors become redundant.

**METAPHOR 2 - SNOWBALL**

A virtuous snowball of accountability that propels the change effort forward; starting with the leader, and building momentum as others are ‘swept up’ in the journey.

The ‘snowball’ metaphor is often used to describe the process whereby something small and potentially insignificant builds upon itself over time, thereby becoming large, powerful, and even unstoppable. In popular culture, such as cartoons and modern theatrics, snowballs are a common cliché. For example, Road Runner cartoons have featured Wile E. Coyote being swept up in a snowball as he careers down a mountain. So what does this unlikely metaphor have to do with leadership transformation? One of the leaders led us to this metaphor to describe a cycle of accountability and momentum that developed between the leader, his subordinates, and eventually the entire organisation.

Imagine this scenario; a leader has recently undergone a 360 degree feedback process in conjunction with his executive team, and is waiting to be debriefed - in a group forum. The results are represented visually in a model containing three colours; blue, red, and green. The leader hopes his profile is a ‘sea of blue’ – a ‘Constructive’ impact. Instead, he receives the profile depicted in Figure 10; quite possibly the single worst profile in the database.

At the debrief session, the facilitator asks: “Who will be first to share their data with the team?” This is a rhetorical question – the answer is the leader.

This is every leader’s nightmare and one that became a reality for one of the leaders in our study. As he contemplates the ‘horror story’ staring at him in the face, he briefly contemplates ‘firing the bastards’ that have given him such feedback. Instead, he swallows his pride and follows through on...
his commitment to openly share his feedback with the team. He jokes “I think the printer has run out of blue ink!” Nervous laughter ensues. He then continues, “This is my profile, but this is not what I aspire to. I’m committed to change, and I would like you to hold me accountable”.

Each of the leaders within the study faced a similar moment of truth; each of them chose to share, and each demonstrated their commitment to achieving a Constructive Leadership/Impact. This openness and humility that was demonstrated by the leaders had several implications.

Firstly, they created a safe and open environment for discussion and feedback on their impact, which helped them to accept their data very quickly. Secondly, by declaring their intent to change, the leaders encouraged their teams to give them the benefit of the doubt as they made their first, often clumsy attempts to change. Thirdly, making themselves open to feedback had the practical impact of enlisting a host of coaches from their executive teams who helped them align their actual impact with their ideal impact.

Finally and most importantly, the leaders’ actions came with an implicit expectation that every one of their team members would mirror their commitment to change. And the majority of them did, in fact, follow the leaders’ lead. The leaders each created a snowball of mutual accountability with the leader at the center, compacted by his or her team, all aligned to the same agenda. By relinquishing positional power, they unwittingly acquired an even stronger power with which to lead. That power was a genuine and mutual commitment to the principles of Constructive leadership.

A snowball grows as it cycles on itself. Each leader’s ‘snowball’ picked up momentum when the next layer of leadership was introduced to the transformation agenda. These inclusions came with the same undertones of accountability. As one leader recalls:

There is a need to show people that this is a big deal, that it’s a serious business imperative...I told them that no one would be crucified for having poor feedback.... but that they would be held accountable if they did not take steps to improve it.

With multiple layers now embedded in the snowball, everyone was accountable to each other regardless of their position. Consequently, the direct reports of the leader now found themselves sandwiched between their leader and their own direct reports. The result was an exponential increase in momentum.

By engaging my executive team in the benefit of ‘Constructive’ leadership, I set up an expectation of the kind of leader I aspired to be and one that they hold me accountable to. But by engaging the second level of leaders, they hold my executive team accountable as I do from another direction; and so it continues. It’s like a massive snowball rolling down the hill, with me trapped in the middle.

Momentum of the snowball increased even further when accountability to the principles of ‘Constructive’ leadership was embedded in organisational systems and structures. At this point, the snowball became bigger than any individual agenda, and there was no avoiding being ‘swept up’.

In several instances, the momentum of the snowball was undermined by friction or drag, in the form of team members who did not commit to the leadership journey. Each of the leaders made difficult decisions to exit such team members, which was even more challenging when these individuals were responsible for a large part of company financial performance. The results were surprising. Far from creating financial instability, each leader found that their snowball actually picked up pace when they shed the ‘flakes’ that were creating such friction. The message that ‘values and shared standards were now as important as financial performance’ proved to be very powerful.

Some of the leaders not only faced friction but also major obstructions that threatened to smash the snowball into pieces. One leader hit an obstruction when his company was acquired and he was forced into early retirement. Another was confronted by his international parent company who threatened to stop the leadership agenda altogether. Surprisingly, in both instances, there was enough momentum for the snowballs to ‘crash’ through the obstructions with the leadership agenda intact.

To summarise our learnings from the Snowball metaphor, we drew insight from the very leader whose story we shared in the beginning:

Confidence and momentum are fascinating things. Some of it’s deserved some of it not, but you take it anyway. And that helps fuel the success that you’ve had.

When this leader tentatively revealed his ‘horror’ story, he had no idea of the positive energy his actions would unleash. The Snowball metaphor has taught us that a leader’s personal journey of transformation is contingent upon gaining a critical mass of leaders who are each mutually accountable to one another, exiting those who are not committed, and embedding effective leadership in the organisation’s systems and structures. At this point, the snowball becomes an almost unstoppable force.

“There is a need to show people that this is a big deal, that it’s a strategic business imperative.”
METAPHOR 3 – MASTER CHEF

Artful application of the ‘leadership science’ (frameworks, tools and strategies), which enable a leader to advance from amateur cook to ‘master chef’.

A ‘master chef’ is a person working in the culinary arts. Culinary arts have inundated popular culture of late, elevating cooking from its humble origins of human sustenance to a social phenomenon, through the likes of celebrity chefs Gordon Ramsay, Jamie Oliver and Anthony Bourdain to name a few. The Master Chef metaphor has granted us many powerful insights into leadership transformation. Firstly, it helps us to understand how the leaders transitioned from the equivalent of amateur cook to chef, or culinary artist. Secondly, the idea of transcending ‘food science’ to ‘culinary art’ enables us to explore how the leaders in our study moved beyond the leadership ‘science’, to a more ‘artful’ application of frameworks, tools and strategies in order to bring about transformation.

Firstly, we turn to the notion of frameworks, which we liken to the chef’s recipe. In much the same way an amateur cook takes comfort from a recipe, the leaders in the study took comfort from a carefully crafted framework of milestones, interventions, timeframes and commitments. Such frameworks provided structure, discipline and rigour for each leader’s journey and made the esoteric concept of ‘leadership transformation’ more tangible. This was particularly appreciated by the more left-brained, rationally-oriented leaders.

It was starting to bring some discipline back to the team...We just followed this closely... down this fairly thorough approach, and that was kind of the intersection of the theory into practice – and a miracle happened, it worked, which was fascinating to be part of, for myself and the team.

The frameworks were rarely less than 12 months in duration based on our experience that transformation does not happen at a two-day off site with abseiling in the middle. The frameworks included a regular rhythm of team and individual activities with clear outcomes, roles and commitments.

Ironically, while the leaders drew comfort from the apparent stability of the frameworks, it was the more fluid and ‘artistic’ application of the frameworks within a changing strategic context that helped the ‘amateur cooks’ accelerate their transformation journeys. Much like a chef is constantly altering a recipe depending on the season or the ingredients available, we would regularly change the timing, content or sequence of interventions to capitalise on the changing context of each leader’s environment. In fact, we would also rarely plan more than a three month horizon in any detail.

Like chefs, leaders have many tools at their disposal that can assist with the job at hand, in this case, transforming their impact. Popular choices include tools that profile a leader’s behaviour, strengths or personality. In particular, the leaders within our research universally emphasised the Leadership/Impact™ tool, which we had used extensively with them in our consulting engagements, as a critical success factor in their transformation.

The single, most influential tool was the Leadership/Impact instrument. It provided a baseline; I would always come back to that as something because I like facts, I had data and I couldn’t dispute it. It had been tested 4000 times, so I was stuck with it. So that was the kind of bed rock from a personal perspective that I knew I needed to do things differently.

The Leadership/Impact tool provides a valid, reliable diagnostic that allows a leader to identify the gap between his or her ideal and actual impact. Despite our positive predisposition toward the tool, we initially questioned whether the tool itself was a significant factor in the leaders’ marked transformations; Leadership/Impact is broadly available to change agents around the world, and yet case studies of transformation are relatively rare. But again, we discovered that it was the artful application of the tool that enabled the leaders to rapidly accelerate their outcomes.

One artful application was the manner in which the leaders created an empowering story around their feedback. Such stories did not characterise the leaders as ‘good’, ‘bad’ or any other type. Rather, they enabled the leaders to see how they were either aligned or misaligned with their personal visions. The ultimate objective was not to create ‘more blue’, or a perfectly ‘Constructive’ profile. Rather, the objective was connecting ‘more blue’ to the leaders’ most important individual, team and organisational outcomes.

The ability to create an empowering story was aided by the tool’s emphasis on impact. Unlike tools that centre around personality, preferences or values, impact sits at the very outer layers of human experience. As a result, emotionally charged responses to feedback tend to be less frequent and less intense.

A second artful application of the tool was the manner in which the leaders used it to create a shared language for change.

A lot of the real richness came in the conversations that followed, and when...
my team and I started to get a common language, it just gave us a way to talk about it. And even to this day - more than two years after I’ve been introduced to the tool, me and those around me I’ve been working with, we still use that language on a day-to-day basis.

The sense of shared language was further enhanced by the three colours which are used to graph a leader’s impact on a circular disc; blue (Constructive), red (Aggressive-Defensive) and green (Passive-Defensive). Of the 80 pages in their Leadership/Impact folders filled with theory, methodology and detailed statistical data, it is this one ‘picture’ which seemed to occupy the leaders’ attention during their journeys. Yet it was the other 80 pages that allowed the leaders to trust the one page.

This experience taught us that for a feedback tool to be effective, it must strike a balance between complexity and simplicity. There must be enough complexity and rigour underpinning the tool to establish credibility with the leader, but enough simplicity to enable action. In order to take targeted action toward their vision for effective leadership, the leaders employed several strategies that were associated with the Leadership/Impact tool. These are the chef’s equivalent of cooking methods; our third application of the Master Chef metaphor.

Not all 360 degree feedback tools contain strategies or guidance for action; often, a leader is left to his or her own devices. Within the Leadership/Impact tool, there are ten strategies that a leader may use prescriptively (to enable, guide or direct), or restrictively (to control, limit or constrain). In the case of the leaders within our research, the strategies provided a useful and immediate way of moving from acceptance of their data to action.

The thing that was really good about the Leadership/Impact tool is it gave me a few simple strategies... it seemed intuitively obvious that I should at least attempt them... I mean I wasn’t completely bloody stupid! ...if the strategy is there, and it does actually help ... then you should actually try it.

Underpinning the leaders’ use of the strategies was the giving up of control. To continue the chef analogy, the leaders learned over time to ‘fry’ less and ‘steam’ more as they shifted toward more empowering leadership methods that had a more ‘healthful’ impact on their staff. For example, several of them used methods such as open-ended questioning, and even silence, to encourage their teams to step up and fill gaps they had previously filled with ‘leadership wisdom’.

Just like a chef cooks with more flair, creativity and spontaneity as their techniques become second nature, the leaders’ use of leadership strategies also become less planned and more intuitive over time. Despite this, each of them would revisit the theory periodically - much like a chef sharpens her knives and revisits her recipes to continually evolve her technique.

A quote by legendary French chef Marcel Boulestin helps us to summarise our learnings from the Master Chef metaphor succinctly: “Cookery is not chemistry. It’s an art. It requires instinct and taste rather than exact measurements.” In order to effect leadership transformation, it is our learning that we need to move beyond the leadership ‘science’ to a more artful application of the frameworks, tools and strategies that cater to the unique, ever changing context of a leader’s journey.

METAPHOR 4 – COACH

A team of consultant(s), colleagues and supporters that collectively coach a leader toward their aspirations.

The word ‘coach’ originates from the ‘Kosc cart’, a large Hungarian carriage used to transport passengers. The metaphorical interpretation of the ‘Kosc cart’, or ‘coach’ as it translates in English, is a person who transports people from a state of ignorance to one of knowledge.

Importantly, the metaphor of ‘Coach’, as it applies to our understanding of leadership transformation, is not about the leaders becoming a coach. It is about how the leaders enabled themselves to be coached, or transported to a place of knowledge by others.

Within this metaphor, we use a sporting analogy, which allows us to picture the leader as the captain of a team. In sports, the coaching takes place in both public and private forums, and there is almost always a clear distinction between the roles of captain and coach. Beyond the coach, the captain often receives coaching and support from a variety of sources.

The leaders identified three distinct stakeholder groups who they felt were critical to their transformation. The first is the external consultant(s), which we liken to the head coach or coaching staff. Effectively, this is the role that we played in each leader’s journey of transformation, and we were equally humbled and intrigued to explore the perceived value of our role.

One of the key elements the leaders valued from the coaching staff was the provision of leadership content and expertise, or what may be referred to as the ‘playbook’.

“Cooking is not chemistry. It’s an art. It requires instinct and taste rather than exact measurements”.  
- Marcel Boulestin
You gave me insights and useful tools. You could nearly say they were small seeds planted, the concept of the acorn. And I think that’s what it was all about; it was planting small seeds that were useful.

The paradox here is that the playbook the leaders valued so highly was initially more like a brochure. It was, and remains, a work in progress and has actually been developed with their help.

What the leaders seemed to value even more than the playbook was how it was put into action. As legendary basketball coach John Wooden once said “A coach is someone who can give correction without creating resentment”. Each of the leaders revealed that receiving very direct and confronting feedback was a crucial part of their transformation.

The power of those interventions – [my coach] really inserted [himself] in my mind quite aggressively. I honestly believe, and I don’t think I am exaggerating, left to my own devices, I really think it would have taken me fifteen years to never to make the changes that those interventions created in a couple of profound giant strides.

The giving of direct feedback required the provision of some very difficult messages to leaders whom we highly respected. Yet rather than cause offence, these interventions were appreciated, partly because they interrupted unhelpful patterns, and also because they saved the leaders time and energy by getting straight to the heart of the matter. Perhaps more interestingly, our very direct feedback increased our standing with the leaders because they felt we had spoken the ‘truth’ when it would have been easier not to.

I considered you to be people of high integrity; you delivered everything you said you would. In fact, you went a step a further and spoke the truth to us when it would have been easier not to.

To be clear, we are not advocating that change agents, armed with nothing but good intent, go forth and dump a barrage of abrasive insults on their paying customers or bosses. With each of these leaders, the permission to provide direct coaching was always established before it was ever given. In collaboration with the leaders, we discerned that for direct feedback to be well-received, it must be predicated by very high levels of trust. That is, the coach must have perceived credibility, demonstrated integrity, and assumed good intent in the eyes of the recipient.

In addition to the coaching staff, the leaders were adamant that they could not have transformed without the contribution of their team, who comprised the second stakeholder inherent in the Coach metaphor.

At a practical level, the leaders spent far more time with their teams than they did with their coaches. The leaders’ respective teams were vital in terms of motivating each other to change, providing feedback, and sharing learnings and insights. This required a great deal of mutual trust and respect from each party, and a great deal of humility on the part of the leader to reach out to subordinates in this way.

A leader, in transforming themselves, cannot do it in isolation, cannot do it just with a coach; they really do need the people they’re leading to respond so that you’re getting some form of feeling that when you push in the right direction, you’re changing.

In this respect, the Coach metaphor helps expand our definition of ‘coaching’ from the often held assumption of two people behind closed doors, to dynamic interactions involving multiple people in both planned and emergent situations.

The sporting analogy allows us to consider a third stakeholder group that was vested in the leaders’ respective journeys of transformation – supporters. We generally think of supporters as passionately cheering their team on; players rely on their supporters for encouragement throughout a season or tournament. The supporters give the players a reason for turning up to each game, and a reason to keep going when times are tough.

This was certainly evident in the case of the leaders in our original research; most relied heavily on the support of their spouses and significant others in order to sustain their momentum and energy throughout the journey. But supporters sometimes critique their favourite players when they feel performance is substandard, and this was also true for several of the leaders.

When I took my feedback home and showed my wife, she said “blue is good right”. I said “yes that’s right dear, blue is good”. My profile had almost zero blue. She looked at me and said “actually – that feels about right... you can be a real dickhead sometimes!

To summarise our insights from the ‘Coach’ metaphor, we draw inspiration from a quote by Hunter S. Thompson: “He that is taught only by himself has a fool for a master”. Judged against this quote, the leaders in our research were no fools.

Based on our learnings, we actively encourage any leader seeking to undergo a similar journey of leadership transformation to involve all three stakeholder groups - that is - consultants, colleagues and family. Perhaps most importantly, we have learned that the coaching is most powerful
when all three groups identify mutually beneficial outcomes from the leader’s transformation – and create a trusting environment for that coaching to take place.

**METAPHOR 5 – MASK**

Concealment of imperfections, or personification of an identity, which is misaligned with a leader’s authentic self, values or aspirations.

Masks have been prevalent in many cultures since the Stone Age and have been used in a variety of ways. In a theatrical context masks are sometimes used to conceal a character’s identity, or to allow the actor to adopt a certain persona. It is these two notions of concealment and adopting a persona that further enhanced our understanding of leadership transformation.

The metaphor of the ‘Mask’ as it applies to our research originated from a confession from one of the leaders, who at the outset of his journey felt like an imposter.

> I felt insecure in my promotion to such a big job so I tried to bluff my way through... I thought, “Ok, I will be the tough guy. It is working for my boss; he is seeing the hell out of me.” But this didn’t work, so I tried a different approach, “I’ll be the nice guy. Thank you for saying thank you! Oh, what a wonderful idea that is!” And that wasn’t working either. I was guessing and making it up as I went along. I was a bit of a fake.

We draw a parallel between the leader’s masking and that of the Phantom in Andrew Lloyd Webber’s musical adaptation of ‘The Phantom of the Opera’. In the musical, the Phantom wears a mask to conceal his physical imperfections.

And while the Phantom presents a perfect, porcelain face to his audience there is a certain irony present. It is starkly obvious that the mask is not real. The Phantom knows he is wearing a mask, the audience knows he is wearing a mask, and the Phantom knows that they know. Even still, he prefers to maintain a façade rather than reveal the man behind the mask.

Just like the Phantom, the leader in the above example knew he was wearing a mask, he knew his team knew, and yet there was an implicit understanding that no one was to talk about the mask! This notion also held true for several of the other leaders in the study. One leader attempted to maintain the image of a ‘golden boy’ while internally having a crisis of self-doubt. Another maintained an exterior of perfection whilst privately feeling exhausted by keeping up the façade.

In our research, we found that the wearing of a ‘mask’ by the leader undermined trust, and created fear, doubt and anxiety in others. Rather than accept what their leader said at face value, subordinates spent valuable time and energy trying to second guess their leader’s true intent. They were motivated by a desire to please their leader rather than achieve organisational outcomes.

While we found evidence that each leader was masking in some way during their leadership journeys, we discovered that not all of them were wearing the ‘concealment’ mask of the Phantom. To explore a second application of the ‘Mask’ metaphor, we use Chuck Russell’s 1994 film ‘The Mask’ starring Jim Carey. In The Mask, Jim Carey’s character Stanley Ipkiss is a shy young man who works in a bank until he discovers a mask by the sea. This mask channels the Norse God of tricks and deception, Loki. When Stanley brings the mask near his head, it integrates with his face and transforms his persona into a confident, aggressive and outgoing green-faced ‘superhero’. In this state, Stanley becomes the man he thinks he needs to be to succeed in life. In contrast to the Phantom, people perceive Stanley as the mask rather than someone hiding behind a mask.

In a similar manner, several of the leaders adopted a certain persona at work in an effort to be successful. For example, one leader originally took pride in leading a team that was regarded as the ‘Special Forces of the public sector’. While this had served him well early in his career, his extremely aggressive behaviour increasingly damaged relationships and created enemies. Just as Jim Carey’s character realised that the mask isn’t all it’s cracked up to be, this CEO realized that the authoritarian persona he had adopted was at odds with his deeply held values as a leader and as a father.

Despite the two apparent variants of the ‘Mask’ metaphor, the common theme is that the wearing of a mask created poor outcomes in the leaders’ professional and private lives, and inner conflict with the leaders’ values and aspirations. Each of the leaders reached a point where they wanted to ‘de-mask’ as they realised their mask was no longer delivering success, or had become too heavy a burden to uphold.

While each leader’s experience of de-masking was different, there were some common enablers. The pain being experienced by several leaders increased their readiness to drop the mask. There were also several instances where the leaders endured pressure to accept their failings from subordinates in a group forum. At some point in their journey, each leader realised that there was incongruence between the mask they were wearing and their deeply held values or aspirations.
Once the leaders dropped their masks, they needed to rebuild their leadership identity quickly to promote what the scholar Edgar Schein termed ‘psychological safety’. This rebuilding process entailed exploring each leader’s aspirations, values, strengths and most important roles. In this way, the leaders were able to craft more meaningful and congruent leadership identities. In each case, the new identity was not only aligned to the leader’s vision for their leadership, but also to their life as a whole. With the dropping of the mask, leaders sent a message that ‘being authentic was far more important than appearing perfect’.

To summarise our learnings from this metaphor, we draw inspiration from a quote from Mahatma Gandhi, who said “Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony.” Gandhi’s quote speaks to the positive impact of a more congruent self on the individual. Many of the leaders in the study already knew this quote, and all of them felt that it resonated with their journeys of increasing authenticity and congruence.

Perhaps equally profound is an insight from one leader who, in response to Gandhi, outlined the impact of a more authentic ‘self’ on those he led.

The power this congruence unleashes is practically atomic in scale. You get more done, you build more trust, your interactions with people become more enriching, you feel more fulfilled, and on it goes.

METAPHOR 6 - MOVIE

Processes of self-awareness and reflection, which allow leaders to ‘edit’ their performance, and direct a ‘movie’ in line with their leadership vision.

The word ‘movie’ is a derivative of the term ‘moving picture’ and is used interchangeably with the words ‘motion picture’, ‘cinema’ and ‘film’. Louis and Auguste Lumiere are credited with screening the first movie in 1895; a 20 minute piece titled ‘Workers Leaving the Lumiere Factory.’ Movies have come a long way since these humble beginnings; from Hollywood to Bollywood the movie industry is now a multi-billion dollar enterprise. Supporting this industry are many sub-industries including writing, casting, staging, producing, acting, editing and directing.

Specifically, there were three applications of the ‘Movie’ metaphor that enhanced our understanding of the leaders’ journeys; the notion of ‘acting’ in a repetitive movie, viewing footage of one’s impact in the ‘editing suite’, and finally, ‘directing’ one’s own movie in accordance with one’s leadership vision.

Firstly, we turn to the notion of acting. At the outset of their journeys, the leaders were ‘acting’ in a repetitive movie – similar to Bill Murray’s character in the movie ‘Groundhog Day’. At 6am every morning, Murray’s character wakes up to Sonny and Cher’s ‘I Got You Babe’ on the radio and the dreaded realisation that he is doomed to repeat the same day over again. He is trapped in Groundhog Day.

In a similar fashion, each leader woke up and lived a similar reality, day after day. One leader woke up and prepared himself for battle with his global parent; the ‘Prussian Empire’. Another woke up with a dreaded feeling that, no matter what she tried, the day would be a struggle. Like Murray’s character, the leaders did not comprehend that they were perpetuating their Groundhog Day through their own actions and impact on others. This is because they lacked the time, the space and the reflective capabilities to plot an escape.

This leads to our second application of the Movie metaphor, the notion of the editing suite, to describe the manner in which the leaders turned their attention inward, and became increasingly aware of their impact. In an editing suite, the raw footage is reviewed in order to discern its value to the overall vision for the movie.

The biggest realisation on this journey is that if you want change, the first thing that’s got to change is yourself. You’ve got to have a damn hard look at yourself... Standing outside of yourself and looking back at yourself as though you are seeing yourself replayed on video is very powerful.

One of the key mechanisms for taking the leaders into the editing suite was through our regular one-on-one coaching sessions. There were also times when we brought the leaders’ entire executive team into the ‘editing suite’ together as a group. Over time, the leaders increasingly took themselves into the editing suite without our involvement at all. Following a review of their ‘footage’, the leaders then set about making changes that were more aligned with their vision of effective leadership.

Our observations of the ‘editing suite’ are synonymous with Donald Schon’s notion of ‘reflection-on-action’. Reflection-on-action occurs after a given situation has unfolded, whereby the ‘practitioner’ reflects on an event alone or through conversation with others. These reflections then inform future situations where the practitioner now has expanded choices or theories to draw upon in a given moment.

As the leaders’ reflective practices were honed into a habit by their many visits to the editing suite, they became more and more proficient at the
third element of the Movie metaphor – that is directing their own movies - in real time.

I realised half way into a team meeting that I was actually facilitating competitive behaviour among two of my direct reports – sales versus marketing. I caught myself in the moment and corrected the behaviour. Both of them were quite amazed at how I did that, and it became a powerful learning experience for me and the whole team.

This type of reflective processing is what Schön calls ‘reflection-in-action’. Reflection-in-action entails looking to our past experiences, connecting with our emotions, and challenging our habits and behaviours - in real time. This heightened level of reflective capability emerged later in each leader’s journey, and only after they had systematically practiced reflection-on-action for some time.

We liken their ability to reflect in action to the metaphorical equivalent of slowing their movie right down. As the leaders effectively expanded the space between a given stimulus and their response, they were better able to draw upon their learnings, and their ever expanding repertoire of tools and strategies, to direct a movie that was more aligned with their leadership vision.

In order to summarise our learnings from the ‘Movie’ metaphor, we draw inspiration from one of the leaders.

My mum used to say all the time in her wonderful Manchester slang ‘I wish the Lord the gift he gee us, to see ourselves as others see us’. The translation is basically I wish that I had the gift of seeing myself as others see me. I used to think ‘yeah mum, whatever’. Turns out she was spot on!

The notions of self-awareness and reflection are so widely associated with change processes that they could almost be considered truisms. Despite the pervasiveness of these concepts, reflective practices were not something that the leaders were habitually practicing when they were stuck in ‘Groundhog Day’ at the outset of their leadership journeys. And even as they did begin to realise that they were in ‘Groundhog Day’, they lacked the time and space to reflect on how they could get out of it. From our research, we have learned that it is the very act of disciplined reflection that allows a leader to understand how he or she may be perpetuating a repetitive movie, and eventually direct a movie that is more in line with their leadership vision.

METAPHOR 7 – RUSSIAN DOLLS

A complimentary set of journeys that interact with a leader’s personal journey of transformation.

Russian dolls are made of wood, similarly shaped, and typically contain three to eight dolls sitting neatly inside one another. When you pull the doll apart, another one, slightly smaller, sits inside. Russian dolls can also be used metaphorically, as a design paradigm known as the ‘Matryoshka principle’ or ‘nested doll principle’. This principle denotes a relationship of object within object, similar to the onion metaphor where one layer is peeled back to reveal another smaller layer.

Our use of the ‘Russian Dolls’ metaphor for leadership transformation emanated from the leaders’ struggle to isolate their own leadership transformation journey from the journeys of their team and organisation. The more we learnt how intertwined the various journeys were in the minds of the leaders, the more difficulty we had trying to isolating the leaders’ individual journeys of transformation, which was the expressed focus of our research. Eventually, we began to understand the interconnectedness represented a powerful learning for leadership transformation rather than a methodological hindrance.

The leaders initially spoke of four interconnected journeys; their leadership journey, the journeys of their executive team, their extended leadership team (direct reports of the executive team members), and the broader organisational change journey.

The journeys were so intertwined I don’t think I could separate them. I needed my team to be successful and we were on the journey together, taking the organisation along that similar path.

But there later emerged two other important journeys, or Russian dolls. The first was the up line environment, or the outermost doll. For some this was an international parent company, for others it was a board of directors, and for another it was parliament. This outer doll was sometimes an enabler, sometimes a hindrance, and sometimes interchanged between both.

One leader managed the outer doll by keeping a low profile until he could show tangible outcomes from the leadership agenda. These results created a ‘pull’ from his up-line environment such that he is now revered as a leadership ‘guru’ in his global organization, and his bosses are now engaged in a similar journey. By contrast, another leader tried to fit the outermost doll into his smaller dolls by pushing his agenda onto them, and
that was met with the inevitable pain that this metaphor might suggest. This led us to understand that the outermost doll has the capacity to swallow up all of the other dolls at any given moment.

The sixth and final doll was the very personal journey that appeared to sit within each leader’s leadership journey – in effect, the inner most doll in the set. Several leaders were inspired to make changes in their personal lives off the back of their leadership learnings. One leader committed to a transformative health regime, while another revitalized his spiritual practice.

The ‘Russian Dolls’ metaphor helped us to understand that when all of the dolls fit neatly within one another, they have the potential to travel well together. Assuming this observation is sound, then it would stand to reason that whenever one doll tries to pull in a different direction, its proximity to the other dolls ensures that it doesn’t get very far.

Beyond the ‘object-within-object’ application of the Russian Dolls metaphor, there was a second striking application of this metaphor to our research. Russian dolls tell a story through imagery painted on their exterior. Similarly, the ability of the leaders to accelerate their leadership journeys was enhanced by the use of imagery, story and metaphor. One leader described his transformation as “going from a white belt to a yellow belt”. Another likened his journey to that of “an ugly duckling becoming a swan.” Another described it as moving from “darkness to light” while another poetically framed it as the gradual process of “leaves changing colour.”

While all of the metaphors are quite different, there are two themes that were consistent. All share an undertone of metamorphosis, that is, a gradual progression from one state to another, over time. The other theme they share is the notion of navigating various terrains in pursuit of a desirable destination.

To enhance our understanding of the ‘colour and movement’ of each leader’s journey, we asked them to describe their journey as one of six story types being epic, drama, tragedy, comedy, fairytale and romance; and their responses were both enlightening and entertaining. No one chose the two extremes of romance or tragedy. The most commonly chosen story type was drama in reference to the human conflict present in each leader’s journey. The second most common story type was comedy – this related to the moments of humour and lightness that often offset the drama.

Although each of the leaders in this study can rightfully claim ‘transformation’ based on their 360 degree data, each of them are adamant that this is a life-long journey. This notion is captured neatly by one of the leaders who expressed:

You don’t suddenly wake up one morning and go, oh my God I have changed! I’m cured! It is a journey. It doesn’t end.

We have just described our seven metaphors for leadership transformation, which are depicted in Figure 11; the Leadership Transformation Model™. We wish to communicate only two simple ideas with this model.

Firstly, that all of the metaphors have a fluid relationship to one another in the process of leadership transformation. And secondly, that the ‘Fire’ provides the context, purpose and leverage for all of the other metaphors.

SECTION 3 - APPLYING THE LESSONS - SOME NOTES OF CAUTION

We have just described our seven metaphors for leadership transformation, which are depicted in Figure 11; the Leadership Transformation Model™. We wish to communicate only two simple ideas with this model.

Firstly, that all of the metaphors have a fluid relationship to one another in the process of leadership transformation. And secondly, that the ‘Fire’ provides the context, purpose and leverage for all of the other metaphors.
Leadership transformation occurs in a context of organ' transformation

In an attempt to convey the key learnings of our doctoral research, the bulk of this white paper has been purposefully focused on the transformation of leaders, in particular through the seven metaphors. It is important to reinforce, however, that all leaders within the research sample were also engaged in a deliberate journey of organisational transformation, as outlined in the Russian Dolls metaphor.

Leaders in this study began with a focus on the broader vision and strategy of their organisations, before progressing into focused leadership work. In other words, their work on vision and strategy identified a need to shift the impact of their most senior leaders. The remaining leaders in our study began with a singular focus on leadership, but each expanded their transformation efforts to include several of the other 10 alignment levers (Figure 2 on page 3) within a period of six months. In other words, their leadership work identified broader inhibitors to transformation such as their organisations structures, systems, metrics or symbols.

The experience of the leaders in our study reflects our broader client engagements over the past ten years; that is, leadership transformation occurs more frequently, more quickly and more sustainably when it is part of an integrated and systematic process of organisational transformation.

Leadership transformation is not a “program”

In recent times, we have seen a boom in “leadership development programs”, as organisations become more enlightened to the value of their human resources. Yet despite this positive intent, in our experience, leadership development programs generally do not produce a sustainable change in the effectiveness of senior leaders. Furthermore, there is seldom a correlation between participation in leadership development programs and a transformation in the organisation’s results.

It may seem like semantics to differentiate between “leadership development” and “leadership transformation” but, in our minds, the two notions are founded on very different principles, beliefs and assumptions. In Figure 12 on the right, we have attempted to distinguish between these two notions of leadership development and leadership transformation, the latter of which underpins our core philosophy and approach.

Concluding thoughts

It is our hope that in exposing the learnings from our doctoral research, change agents and senior leaders are better equipped to achieve a demonstrable transformation in the impact of their leaders, and to leverage that shift toward a sustainable transformation of their organisations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPICAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM</th>
<th>A LEADERSHIP TRANSFORMATION PROCESS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Context</strong></td>
<td><strong>A critical business process with a direct line of sight to the organisation’s most important commercial outcomes and strategy</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• An initiative designed to increase leadership and organisational capability</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Measurement of Success</strong></td>
<td><strong>Demonstrated shift in leadership effectiveness</strong> and <strong>Shift in commercial outcomes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Number of people through the program</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Increased leadership capability</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ownership</strong></td>
<td><strong>CEO and executive team</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Human Resources (often Organisation Development unit)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Core Philosophy</strong></td>
<td><strong>Socially constructed approach balancing ‘leadership science’ with ‘leadership art’</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Positivist approach focused on ‘leadership science’</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Focus</strong></td>
<td><strong>Aim is to shift performance of the organisation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Aim is to shift behaviour, often toward a narrow and predetermined list</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Heavy emphasis on tools and frameworks</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Language</strong></td>
<td><strong>Key words are results, growth, performance, accountability, impact, action and effectiveness</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Key words are ‘development, capability, tool, assessment, intervention and program’</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Discerns ‘right versus wrong’</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Interventions</strong></td>
<td><strong>Discerns ‘aligned versus ‘misaligned’</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Periodic interventions detached from core business rhythm</td>
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<td>• Infrequent team interventions, more frequent individual interventions</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Cross functional work groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Leaders are removed from business environment to attend program</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Coaching Model</strong></td>
<td><strong>Organisation is the client and the coaching relationship is largely transparent</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Coachee is the client and the coaching process is largely confidential</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Coaching aims to realise coachee set goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Feedback may be optional and guided</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Accountability</strong></td>
<td><strong>Coaching aims to realise organisational goals</strong> and <strong>feedback is expected and direct</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Attendance may be mandatory or optional</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Progress may or may not be assessed</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Limited recognition for positive change and often no consequences for inaction</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sustainability</strong></td>
<td><strong>Group and peer coaching are used to encourage transparency and accountability</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Any changes are dependent on individual leaders</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Energy dissipates with change in leadership</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Figure 12: Contrasting a typical ‘Leadership Development Program’ Vs. a ‘Leadership Transformation Process’</strong></td>
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“Everyone thinks of changing the world but no one thinks of changing themselves”
- Leo Tolstoy

“Leadership, like swimming, cannot be learned by reading about it”
- Henry Mintzberg

“I always wanted to be somebody, I should have been more specific”
- Lily Tomlin

“You do not lead by hitting people over the head - that’s assault, not leadership”
- Dwight D. Eisenhower

“Talent wins games, teamwork wins championships”
- Michael Jordan

“I don’t look to jump over 7 foot bars, I look around for 1 foot bars that I can step over”
- Warren Buffet

“You can’t soar with eagles when you are surrounded by turkeys”
- Anonymous

“The final test of a leader is that he leaves behind in others the conviction and will to carry on”
- Walter Lippman

“Courage is the first of the human qualities because it is a quality which guarantees all the others”
- Winston Churchill

“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy”
- Martin Luther King Jr.

“To believe in something, and not to live it, is dishonest”
- Ghandi

“When leaders take back power, when they act as heroes and saviors, they end up exhausted, overwhelmed, and deeply stressed”
- Margaret J. Wheatley

“You can’t talk yourself out of a problem you’ve behaved yourself into”
- Stephen Covey

“The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn”
- Alvin Toffler

“You are what you repeatedly do. Excellence is not an event, it is a habit.”
- Aristotle

“Are you good enough to get better?”
- Coach John Wooden

“The most effective measure of leadership is the performance of the team in your absence”
- Anonymous

“Where the willingness is great, the difficulties cannot be great.”
- Machiavelli

“Charisma becomes the undoing of leaders. It makes them inflexible, convinced of their own infallibility, unable to change”
- Peter F. Drucker

“Management is efficiency in climbing the ladder of success; leadership determines whether the ladder is leaning against the right wall”
- Stephen R. Covey

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