



## WHAT LEADERS DO - AND OTHER FAMILY MATTERS

Leaders act in different ways: encouraging, deciding, facilitating, laying down the law. To describe this we use shorthand 'images': leaders as heroes, transformers (no! not the characters in Hollywood sci-fi films ! ), policemen, generals and polar explorers.

We reckon all these descriptions and images miss a core point, and in a recent series of filmed interviews we discovered a lot of other experts feel the same way.

Let's use the framework which underlies much of Human Insight's work. In our analysis a leader has to guide an organisation through predictable stages in the business cycle.

Designing the future
Upscaling the business
Operating the business
Stretching the current cycle
Closing down the current business model
Jump and transform

*For more detail on what each of these stages mean see our interactive S-curve at <http://www.human-insight.com/humanInsight/en/Tools-Techniques-and-Learning/The-S-curve/S-curve-challenge.html>*

Each stage demands specific capabilities and competences. As Nick Roy of Ashridge Management College points out: *'Leaders are becoming more focused on these financial, operational or technical competences. This is a good thing in itself but I discriminate between these sorts of leadership competence and "Style".'*

"Style" describes enduring components of behaviour which underlie leadership competences. They are more to do with interpersonal relations than with numbers and things.

The first element of style is the *ability to organise people in the right way to meet business cycle challenges*. Leaders know when to give creative people their head, when to foreground stable, systems-oriented staff. They know when to do this, especially towards the end of the business cycle when the decision to close down a successful model and radically change has huge implications for stakeholder confidence, staff morale and results. *Leaders are like fishermen*, knowing when to act and when to wait.

Nick Roy identifies another element of style. *'Leaders deal with uncertainty and ambiguity. In particular they shouldn't be seduced by the idea they have to know all the answers: they should ask their team for advice and control their own anxiety.'* This latter point is important, as we'll see.

Nick suggests that some traditional models of leadership (heroic, transformational and charismatic for instance) simply don't cope with this issue, which is particularly important in turbulent times. Leaders have to supply firm direction – that's a given – but those models tempt them to supply answers to every question – even if they're not sure they're right.

Martin Ewart of Logica emphasises the need to build *trust*. *'I see trust as two-way: you earn it and give it. You create that two-way street by actions, not by talking a good talk.'*

Martin stresses that it takes a long time to earn trust and a moment to lose it. Say you trust your staff and then introduce expenses systems that imply they'll cook the books unless someone quintuple-checks every line of their claim and trust will walk away very, very quickly.

There's another component to this emerging model of leadership. Peter Robertson of Human Insight calls it **Consistency**. This doesn't mean doing the same thing all the time: it involves acting in a way which:

- is *predictable* – staff know who's going to walk through the door each morning, not be unsure whether it's their best friend or a dictator. Nick Roy's point about controlling your own anxiety becomes critical here; the leader is not suddenly derailed by internal doubts;
- *reflects what's said*; behaviour reflects what the leader says is the case and not just in the big things. If the leader says honesty is essential then he or she must act honestly consistently.

Consistency is about the day by day (minute by minute) way in which leaders interact with their colleagues and this, as Peter Robertson argues, is the key to organisational values. Customer-centric, for instance, can't be instilled by putting the two words on a PowerPoint. It emerges if people consistently act in a customer-centered way.

Ian Florance of OnlyConnect describes seeing this happen in a private hospital for which he worked: *'If a person looked lost or was in trouble in the hospital the nearest person – senior consultant or cleaner – dropped everything and personally made sure that person got to where they needed to be. There was no hint of leaving someone where they were or going off to ring "the person responsible". And the reason they did that was that the Hospital Manager did it consistently.'*

Drawing on these kinds of ideas, Peter Robertson uses a different image of leadership: the leader as *good parent*. At first this might sound somewhat soft but any good parent will get the implication after a moments thought. Good parents create a safe environment for their children. They direct but they increasingly create trust for independence. They instill values. They do what they say and they say what they do. They model how they want their children to act.

The sorts of words used above - consistency, trust, the ability to wait until the time is right, the importance of minute-by-minute behaviour, organising people with understanding – highlight the critical point here, one which is central to Human Insight's approach to leadership.

Traditional models of leadership emphasise the big "heroic", "transformational" things leaders do: fundamental restructures, acquisitions, risky innovations, flying round the world at short notice to clinch the deal! These are, of course, part of the job description and a justification for leadership salaries. But our model emphasises the importance of behaviour in the day to day activities and handling of critical issues, which is essential if the leader is

going to create a successful organisation – one which is greater than the sum of its parts and is going to be able to cope with fundamental change the “big things” imply.

Does this make leadership sound easy and- well- small scale. In our experience it makes the job even more challenging. Concentrating on a product innovation or an acquisition project requires skill, knowledge, decisiveness. Trusting your colleagues when you're feeling anxious, adapting your behaviour to embody values when you've got big issues on your mind requires huge reserves of self-discipline and self-awareness.

The idea of the leader as a good parent has huge implications which Human Insight examines in its work. But one of its attractions is that you can grasp some of the essentials anywhere: in the High Street, at a friends house, in your own home.

You can hear some of these points discussed in more detail in the following Human Insight videos:

[Introducing the S-curve](#)

[The Wider Issues Facing Leaders Today](#)

[Building Leadership Trust](#)