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sowing seeds

Leadership and Organisational Transformation

Creating synergy between self
and system

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Introduction

Most, if not all of us, join the public sector because we feel deeply that the services offered are important in society and we want to contribute to and be part of organisations that make a difference to people's lives.

However, in our increasingly complex and busy world, where the demanding pace of work feels faster and harder than ever before and the size of the task feels overwhelming, we can feel disconnected from each other and our work, unsure of how we are adding value in what we are doing and we can lose sight of the difference we are trying to make.

Remembering we are not alone, re-connecting with each other and our sense of shared purpose can transform our organisations. The leadership we offer can make the difference.

This edition of Sowing Seeds offers a perspective on personal development practices that can transform our leadership, enabling our re-connection and so transform the organisations in which we offer that leadership.

Seeking further personal understanding

To seek a better understanding of ourselves, our beliefs, motivations, values and how they influence and manifest in our behaviour is a key part of our leadership journey. Insight into our 'inner world', the way we make meaning and understanding, can reveal why we react defensively or protectively when faced with an anxiety provoking situation.

This increasing awareness of our self-limiting assumptions enables us to make different choices to increase the effectiveness of the leadership we offer and in turn impact on the performance of our organisations.

“Our deepest calling is to grow into our authentic selfhood, whether or not it conforms to some image of who we ought to be. As we do so, we will not only find the joy that every human being seeks – we will also find our path of authentic service in the world.”

(Parker Palmer, 2000)

Development theory is based on a well-researched body of evidence that adults continue to develop their meaning-making capacity through their life

experience. The work of William Torbert (1987) and Suzanne Cook-Greuter (2004) has been particularly influential. They refer to this development process as taking place in stages they term as 'action logics'. In the context of human development, we can refer to both lateral and vertical development.

We are most familiar with lateral development and growth through the acquisition of skills and knowledge from schooling, training and life-long learning.

Vertical development, or 'action logics', is a less familiar concept and it refers to how we see and interpret our world, how we meaning-make, that is: make meaning of what we experience. The transformation from one stage to the next involves learning to see the world through new eyes, changing our interpretations of experience and how we transform our views of reality and sense-making towards broader perspectives. Each meaning-making stage is more comprehensive and more effective in dealing with complexity than its predecessors and so given our increasingly complex workplaces and world it seems an important area to investigate further.

Most development theories divide the full spectrum of human consciousness into four paradigms of thought:

Pre-conventional thinking	Which is egocentric, focusing on me , my unique desires and ambitions
Conventional thinking	Which is socio-centric, focusing on us and attending to task, aim and mission, which collectively relate us, with our own unique desires and yearning, to the widening contexts of the systems with which we engage – the family and organisation to which we belong
Post-conventional thinking	Relates us beyond, to the tribe, nation and onwards to the globalised world
Transcendent thinking	Action logics thinkers write of this last, as the domain of the spirit

(Bazalgette et al. 2009)

A pivotal point seems to be the shift between conventional to post-conventional thinking. At this point we shift our awareness from an inward focus, just thinking about what we need within the context, to one where we consider what the context requires from us.

An increasing awareness of our impact on our environment through the decisions we make and actions we take. Otto Scharmer (*Scharmer and Kaufer, 2013*) refers to this as a shift from ego-system awareness that cares about the wellbeing of oneself to eco-systems awareness that cares about the wellbeing of all, including oneself.

Action logics

Only about 10-20% of adults demonstrate post-conventional action logics. This is not surprising as society requires functioning at all levels, however increased organisational performance has been associated with the presence of leaders and managers who operate at the later stages (*Rooke, 1997*).

There are nine stages of action logics described, focussing on adult meaning making, reasoning and behavioural responses to their experience. Of these nine there are seven that are most commonly encountered in the corporate world.

Paradigm of thinking	Action logic	Main focus	Leadership strengths	Possible weaknesses	% adult population (approx.)
Pre-conventional/ conventional	Opportunist	Own immediate needs, opportunities, self-protection	Good in emergencies and in sales opportunities	Forcibly self-interested and manipulative. Rejects feedback and externalises blame	4.3
Conventional	Diplomat	Socially expected behaviour, approval	Good as supportive glue within an office; helps bring people together	Avoids conflict, rigidly conforms and status-driven. Sees negative feedback as punishment	11.3
	Expert	Expertise, procedure and efficiency	Good as an individual contributor	Critical and dogmatic. Chooses efficiency over effectiveness. Resists subjective feedback	36.5
	Achiever	Delivery of results, effectiveness, goals, success within the system	Well suited to managerial roles; action and goal oriented	Can be over-driven to achieve self-chosen objective standards. Blind to complex subjectivity	29.7

Post-conventional	Individualist	Self in relationship to system; interaction with system	Effective in venture and consulting roles	Can be a maverick, an outsider or rebel. Their independence can work against collaboration	11.3
	Strategist	Linking theory and principles with practice, dynamic systems interactions	Effective as a transformational leader within large contexts such as organisations	Tempted by the dark side of power. May not employ their skills in a given context	4.9
	Alchemist	Interplay of awareness, thought action and effects, transforming self and others	Good at leading society wide transformations	Personal suffering may obstruct the use of their skills	2.0

(Rooke and Torbert, 2005) (Cook-Greuter, 2004)

In general, human development theories share the following assumptions (Cook-Greuter, 2004).

- Development theory describes the unfolding of human potential towards deeper understanding, wisdom and effectiveness in the world.
- Growth occurs in a logical sequence of stages or expanding world views from birth to adulthood.
- Overall, world views evolve from simple to complex, from static to dynamic, and from ego-centric to socio-centric to world centric.
- Later stages are reached only by journeying through the earlier stages. Once a stage has been traversed, it remains part of the individual's response repertoire, even when more complex later stages are adopted.
- Each stage includes and transcends the preceding ones.
- Each later stage is more differentiated, flexible and capable of dealing with more complexity.
- A person's stage of development influences what they notice or can become aware of, and therefore, what they can describe, articulate, influence and change.
- As development unfolds, autonomy, freedom, tolerance for difference and ambiguity, as well as flexibility, reflection and skill in interacting with the environment increases while defences decrease.

- A person who has reached a later stage of development can understand earlier world views, but a person at an earlier stage cannot understand the later ones.
- Development occurs through the interplay between the person and the environment. It can however be encouraged and facilitated by appropriate support and challenge. For example, a post-conventional level coach or manager.

Transitioning between stages of action logics

“Man is asleep, he has no real consciousness of will, he is not free, to him everything happens, he can become conscious and find his place as a human being in the creation, but this requires a profound transformation.”

(Gurdjieff, cited page 45, Rowson, 2014)

Acquisition of knowledge is part of horizontal growth, however learning about developmental theory is usually not sufficient to help people to transform. Only specific long-term practices, self-reflection, action inquiry, dialogue with a post-conventional coach, or interacting with others further along on the developmental path have been shown to be effective.

These long term practices investigate our inner world, the unconscious assumptions that drive our behaviours, developed mostly in response to our early life experiences. Only when we become conscious of these assumptions can we choose a different response and start to operate from a different world view. The enquiry is one of integration of mind and body.

Personal development practices supporting transformation between stages of action logics include:

Self-reflection

Spiritual inquiry

Action inquiry

Action learning

Coaching

Mindfulness

Theory U

Self reflection:



Time to think. This is holding up a mirror to yourself and your actions and really seeking to gain further understanding.

Asking questions like:

- why did I take that action?
- what was my real intent?
- what happened as a result of my action?
- how could this be different?

Spiritual inquiry:



Connecting to our inner stillness, our inner place of knowing.

Asking questions like:

- who am I?
- what is my nature?
- what is life calling of me?

Action inquiry:



A moment to moment way of living where we attune ourselves through inquiry to acting in an increasingly timely and wise fashion as illustrated in the writings of William Torbert (*Torbert, 2004*).

Action learning:



Learning with others, working through real problems as a small group providing high challenge and high support. This has emerged as a powerful tool to develop effective leadership (*Marquardt, 2000*).

Coaching:



This is usually a 1:1 relationship between a coach and a coachee. The coach acts as sounding board, awareness raiser, and challenger designed to help the coachee to gain further insight in the journey to improved performance.

Mindfulness:



The intentional, accepting and non-judgemental focus of one's attention on the emotions, thoughts and sensations occurring in the present moment.

Theory U:



This powerful methodology offers a process of open mind, open heart and open will. Presencing and sensing the future that wants to emerge. This concept is offered by Otto Scharmer (*Scharmer and Kaufer, 2013*).

Exploring the synergy of personal and organisational performance

“Individual and organisational purpose go hand in hand. One needs the other to flourish.....when they enter resonance and reinforce each other, extraordinary things can happen.... It feels like we have grown wings. Working from our strengths, everything feels effortless and we feel productive like rarely before.”

(Laloux, 2014)

Organisational stages of development

Our view of how organisations function is changing, from an old Newtonian paradigm that viewed organisations as mechanistic

systems that could be adjusted predictably to deliver desired outputs, to more of a living organism model continuously and sometimes unpredictably adapting to its environment to survive.

Organisations can be understood as systems; ‘human activities within a boundary, which differentiates them from other systems in their context’ (*Bazalgette et al., 2006, page 31*) created to achieve a **purpose**. They exist as complex networks of people rather than cogs and wheels.

“The true genius of organisations, they can lift groups of people to punch above their weight to achieve outcomes they could not have achieved on their own.”

(Laloux, 2014)

From a post-conventional viewpoint the sustainability of all organisations depends on their ability to interact, learn from and relate to the context, the political, economic, social and technological environments in an iterative, reflexive way rather than just responding to the context. This is represented by an increasing awareness differentiating between the **outputs**; tangible products and **outcomes**; the way the outputs impact on the context *(Bazalgette et al., 2006)*.

“The critical challenge humanity faces is how we can individually and corporately take responsibility for the world we have contributed to creating, making decisions as to the action we will take to heal and transform our world.”

(Irvine, 2006)

The work of both Otto Scharmer *(Scharmer and Kaufer, 2013)* and Frederic Laloux *(Laloux, 2014)* articulate a relationship between levels of organisational development and the evolution of human consciousness, that is to say that each major shift in paradigms of thought came in response to the need to devise different solutions to the principle problems facing society at that time. Both also hold that *“problems can’t be solved by the same level of consciousness that created them”* *(Laloux, 2014, page 5)* ‘as they are no longer in touch with the complex challenges and demands of our time’ *(Scharmer and Kaufer, 2013, page 13)*.

Laloux recognises five paradigms of development for organisations each tied to the prevailing world view and consciousness. As with action logics, each stage includes and transcends the preceding one and is more able to deal with increasing complexity.

Organisation	Current examples	Key breakthroughs	Guiding metaphor
Red Constant exercise of power by chief to keep troops in line. Fear is the glue. Short term focus and highly reactive.	Mafia, Street gangs, Tribal Militias.	Division of labour Command authority.	Wolf pack
Amber Highly formal roles within a hierarchical pyramid. Top-down command and control. Stability valued above all. Future is repetition of the past.	Catholic Church, Military, Government agencies, Public school systems.	Formal roles (hierarchies) Processes.	Army
Orange Goal is to beat competition, achieve profit and growth. Innovation is key enabler. Management by objectives (command and control).	Multinational companies, Charter schools.	Innovation, Accountability, Meritocracy.	Machine
Green Within the classic pyramid structure, focus on culture and empowerment to achieve extraordinary employee motivation.	Culture driven organisations e.g. Ben and Jerry's.	Empowerment Values driven culture Stakeholder model.	Family
Teal Self –organising teams. Coaching and advice. Organisation as a living entity with its own evolutionary purpose. Concept of competition irrelevant as 'competitors' are embraced to pursue purpose.	Buurtzorg – healthcare, FAVI- metal manufacturing, Patagonia – Clothing.	Based on sense and respond. Best response emerges from collective intelligence.	Connectedness

(Adapted from Laloux, 2014)

Each stage has brought great improvements in human collaboration, however current experience of organisational life for many is one of disillusionment and being stretched to its

limits. The current challenges facing public sector organisations require us to develop new ways of working and not to continue 'collectively creating results that nobody wants' (Scharmer and Kaufer, 2013).

So how can we create more effective and connected organisations?

- In the leadership we offer we need to seek transformation of ourselves
- Role-model post-conventional leadership behaviours
- Learn to tame the fear of our egos, which makes room for exploring deeper questions of meaning and purpose
- Be willing to show our vulnerability in service of purpose
- Create mutually beneficial transformational partnerships
- Listen, listen and listen some more
- Encourage shared visioning, team learning and discovery of productive, fulfilling and meaningful work
- Explore and inquire into our organisations' creative potential, to contribute something valuable to the world
- Offer learning leadership that creates learning organisations continually engaged in the transformation process

Our invitation to make a difference

We have chosen to work and offer leadership within the public sector for a reason, we want to make a difference to people's lives.

Personal transformation of our leadership can unleash our potential to transform our organisations, into more connected and collaborative workplaces where personal and organisational purpose are hand in hand.

Through our eco-system leadership, shared purpose can be integrated throughout public sector services ensuring the whole of society across Wales and ourselves thrives.

“Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven't found it yet, keep looking. Don't settle. As with all matters of the heart, you'll know when you find it.”

(Steve Jobs)

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