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The Flow of Leadership

**A fresh approach
to developing leadership capacity
in organisations.**

Good morning everybody, and thank you for your kind introduction Viv.

Who we are

Let me begin by saying a little bit about who 'we' are – the **nowhere**foundation and the work we are engaged in.

For the past six years or so we have been developing constellations beyond the framework of intimate systems where I originally learned and practiced it, finding its application and relevance to larger systems – social, educational, commercial and global. At the foundation we have now run four years of training consultants and leaders in organisations to help them develop this particular kind of systemic perspective – not so that everyone could be a constellator but so that the wisdom of the approach could be used for their many purposes, of which a major one is the development of leadership skill.

Ty Francis was a major source of start up inspiration and wisdom in this, as he was a director of the nowhere group at the time and he encouraged me to undertake this development. You will have seen the fruits of this if you have been to our workshops on our education project, or to hear Sue Abbotson, Jane James, Ali Barclay or Terry Ingham.

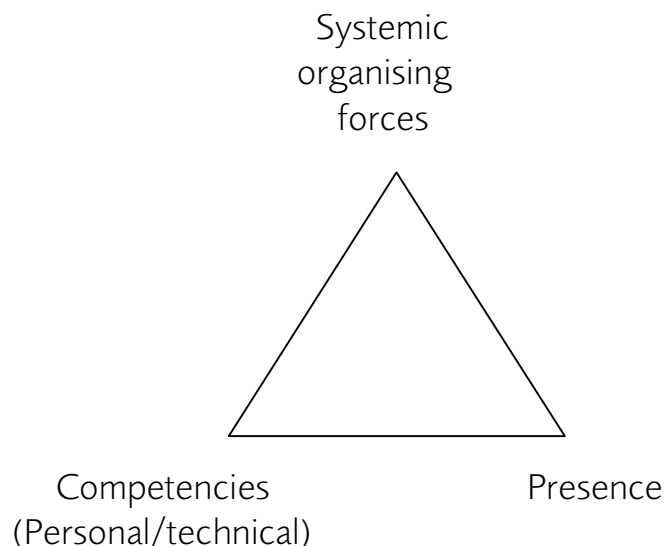
The nature of change and development

We understood from many sources that conventional leadership development hasn't been able to deliver what it promised. Change is now extremely fast and complex – in every field. No matter how much someone may have superstar abilities, there are many positions in organisations that when filled by these high fliers seem to have the quality of what Matthias Varga calls 'ejector seats', bringing repetitive failure at both a collective level and for the talented high fliers themselves.

We have been working to create a shift, from the development of individual leaders, to the development of systemic leadership skills and qualities. Perhaps it is endemic within the Anglo American culture to focus on the individual, but we believe we need to be supporting leaders to work with the deeper issues that shape organisational success, and that goes far beyond the individual.

We call our approach 'The Flow of Leadership' because of the essential importance to the leadership in organisations that all aspects of their system are in a healthy relationship to each other; enabling decisions, creativity, learning – money to flow – without the feelings of 'stuckness' and over-complication that so many organisations experience.

We have come to think of three aspects in the Flow of Leadership training we offer as particularly important (shown diagrammatically below)



1. Already emphasised by other kinds of training is the **mastery and development of technical and personal qualities**. They may be arduous to acquire but they are obviously important and specific – HR and finance skills (in coaching), good time management, a technical knowledge of their area of business or service, and so on.
2. To that we add a thorough **knowledge of the orders** that impact systemic life – those natural forces that shape the success and failure of relational dynamics. I imagine that's what you have been learning about during the last two days. It can be learned partly from reading but is taken in best by participating in, and actively creating many constellations relating to many kinds of issue, so that people acquire a deep sense of the ways these orders feel when they are respected or when alignment is poor. You eventually see ALL organisational life through that lens.

3. Emerging from these two aspects is the matter of **developing presence** – that elusive quality that powerful leaders have, without which even potentially excellent leaders can be ineffective. I'll come back to that.

Systemic perspectives in leadership

To focus on this particular systemic outlook as it touches on the issue of leadership. Here are some of the general themes we cover, and you may think as you listen about how much they are alive for you, or might be of value to you in your daily working life. Here are the components of the outlook as I see it in non-technical ordinary language:

1. First and most important is an understanding of **organisational orders** – the community creating forces of bonding and loyalty, exchange and social organisation. Set within the dimensions (the specific impact) of space and time, (of multiple loyalties and the dynamics of exchange. The understanding develops through leaders learning how to map the dynamics of any kind of system or situation, to create snapshots, read-outs and diagnostic maps of complex predicaments. The outlook develops a focus on solutions rather than problems, on what heals, gives direction and re-energises.
2. Allied to this is an understanding of the power of different kinds of **conscience** and the **loyalties** they engender, which provides a deep education in *respect* and *inclusion*, so that action is in service to purpose, and doesn't lose sight of beneficiaries and losers. It helps leaders to be able to see the relationships between the wider than organisational systems, the organisation itself as a whole, the sub systems within it, and the personal consciences guarding the behaviour of the individuals. All are core skills in managing the multiple loyalties inherent in organisational life. Because we work with what strengthens we may be able to help a culture turn from focusing on what goes wrong, and who can be blamed; towards one where people are treated with care and shown gratitude.
3. Learning to see the way that systems relate to each other, with some as nested, each carrying their own priorities and each capable of either supporting or undermining the other. It is very important to **carry a map of the larger whole** as well as the part of it you are navigating specifically – particularly when managing the development and implementation of strategy.
4. All organisations throw up issues of **power, competition**, and the ambiguities of ambition. The wrecking power of these can be immense. Often(times) power issues are a result of disorder somewhere else in the system, or they belong to people's personal systems. Easing the entanglements of these disorders cannot be dealt with at an interpersonal level. How often we have seen people inheriting a 'systemic

position', adopting the behaviours – and problematic issues – of their predecessors. Using a systemic approach, we have looked in depth at what's involved in developing a leadership style that is on behalf of the led. And in learning to create an energetic flow that travels up, down and across, so that everyone's contribution counts.

5. Constellations shed a wonderfully helpful light on **unintended consequences** and on learning to live and act within what is possible. They can illuminate what finishes unfinished business so that flow and energy is not trapped in unhealed places within a system. They can test ideas and decisions ahead of time, and can include other people's perspectives and needs. When leaders respond to a fast changing marketplace where the customer, the competitor, the technology, all keep moving, there is a constant kaleidoscope of change between winners and losers and good leaders need to be able to include that with their decision making skill. They hold a special place between past and future and looked at systemically, as change always endangers belonging, they have to be guilty, amoral, and lonely, for which they need **appropriate support**.
6. Since this is what surrounds us, it is important to understand and respect the implications and reality of the **culture of capitalism**, and its particular kinds of challenges – mergers, complex partnerships, multiple loyalties, working and travelling across many cultures. This is as important as carrying the flag for our sustainable survival or any other belief system.

Presence

Through applying a concept of *flow* to leadership training we have come to see that this sort of material in itself helps to develop presence, which goes beyond systemic thought, and is, as most people agree, the quality that great leaders need most of all.

Leaders with presence are responsive - they live their vision – they embody their values and ideals. Obviously, leadership can be looked at in terms of personal qualities – charisma, forcefulness, intelligence and so on: but these are qualities that draw attention to the leader rather than the task. You can't see leadership separate from context. There is **personal presence**, but there is also the way that **systems invite presence and bring it out** – or squash it. We obviously need to focus on both the person and the context.

Presence is the inherent awareness and intelligence of a condition or situation - in the moment. With it leaders are able to make good contact with people. Without it conceptual filters hinder their ability to relate to others. Part of what goes into presence is attitude – the way we carry ourselves, the way we act, but importantly it is also our state of mind and being.

There are no quick fixes here to acquire this kind of stance to the world. Many of us have to challenge deep seated ideas about objective reality, for example, before we can recognize how deeply contextual our own view of reality usually is. Or to agree to conflict as a source of development, to recognize patterns, to sense, see and think holistically. It takes time to develop trust and respect, to find a deeper impartiality and modesty alongside the holding of power, to be able to combine both distance and total immersion. That's why our training has a large element of personal learning, alongside the more general input. We see people develop over several years, rather than as a result of any kind of short course, however brilliant and inspiring.

Our belief is that constellations thinking can helpfully influence current decision making practices and the use of leadership energy so that leaders know where and how to invest their efforts, avoid burn out, and face into the REAL issues that stop the flow of leadership at work.

I want to do a constellation now, (hopefully) one that focuses on some current aspect of leadership that is important to someone. Then with a little good fortune (luck) there will be time for discussion afterwards.

Judith Hemming
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