



Leadership choice

The Thrive White paper

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 White paper

Over the years working in the field of leadership development, we have come across many inspiring concepts and definitions of leadership. Our experience is that these concepts often don't build on each other and often create confusion and misunderstanding. What is leadership really?



We have developed an ambivalent relationship with models and concepts ourselves. On the one hand, we like to use, quote, connect and explain the mystery of leadership through these models. On the other hand, we realise that the 'map is not the territory'. No single model or concept ever does justice to the complexity of leadership. Leadership is more than four colours, five characteristics, 9 types, 10 tasks, or however many behaviours.

In the large organisations we work with, we often experience that leadership development is hindered by the time and energy spent on models and definitions. New executives want new models. Corporate HR wants one consistent language. Regions or businesses may want local adaptations. Functions claim new models based on their new ways of working. Consultancies proclaim the value of their model. Core values are defined during corporate strategy development but the connection of these values to the leadership model is often not quite clear.

In the midst of all these dynamics, the actual development of leaders can easily get lost. All attention goes to the definitions of leadership above the proverbial waterline of the iceberg: the leadership behaviours. Which is a pity because the real struggle and development happens below the waterline.

// In everyone resides a leader who chooses, beyond self-interest and personal needs, to inspire others in achieving a higher purpose.

It is our thoughts and feelings, (irrational) beliefs, personal norms, values and needs that keep us from developing at all. The countless new year resolutions that evaporate by mid-January show that more is needed to change behaviours than clearly defined new hopes. If these hopes are not rooted in changed beliefs and needs, that will block the long-term development of new behaviours. We have 'uphill hopes', but we try to achieve them with 'downhill habits' from the past. (Maxwell) We personally experience how beliefs from our childhood, can still hold us back in our development today. We know where we want to go. It is tough to let go of our old patterns and live the new. The work of Eva Eger (Choice) has been a real inspiration. She works with her 'tragic past', confronting the behaviours we developed to protect ourselves in our early days. It is an astonishing account of personal leadership, redefining the way we lead our lives.

Maybe we've made leadership too complex? It might just be about the choices we make every day. We can choose to show leadership behaviour in the way we bring up our kids, we love our partners, have fun with our friends, volunteer in our neighbourhoods and collaborate with our colleagues, clients and partners. No one is a leader at all times and in all aspects of their life. Calling someone a 'leader', appeals to our need to keep 'heroic' illusions about other people and ourselves alive. However, in everyone resides a leader who chooses, beyond self-interest and personal needs, to inspire others achieving a higher purpose. It ranges from teaching someone to tie their shoelaces to ending world conflicts and everything in between. What is your choice? It is not only about the big choices in life. It is about the 10 – 20 choices you make every day.

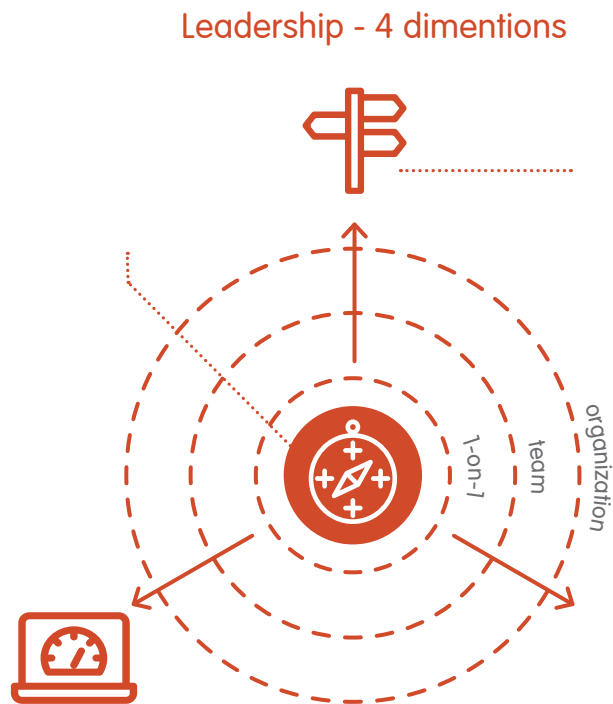


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1.0 Our leadership framework: it's just a model

In this article we connect the models and concepts that have helped us understand the world of leadership development. We developed our own leadership framework over the years, shown in the picture below. We have used this framework to structure this article, without getting overly attached to it. It is just a model. :)



This leadership framework claims that providing direction, developing people and driving results are the three main things a leader needs to do. We developed the framework as a result of working with our clients and their leadership models. In the early years, our first instinct was to start comparing models. We would adapt our framework to fit the client world, or the other way around. In all instances, the focus was on the visible leadership behaviours above the waterline: the bullets underneath provide direction, develop people and deliver results in the framework above. We were mirroring our client's orientation. Overtime, delivering hundreds of leadership development programmes in our networks and companies, we kept coming back to the same question: how do we make newly learnt skills and behaviours stick? Or in other words: What enables leaders to transform in such a way that they don't return to their old behaviours?

Clients often pressured us to focus on the visible leadership behaviours; Keep it practical, simple and do not go into the 'soft stuff'. Simultaneously we started to realise that programmes that connect the visible behaviours to the introspective elements make more impact. To understand how we choose and behave every day, we must take the journey inward. Seeing, feeling and acknowledging what's below the waterline.

The core leadership development work (bullet one) is the work to understand ourselves better as leaders: our personal strengths, emotional drivers and purpose. We call this: Lead from within. The second bullet, understanding your emotional build up, allows you to understand how you can improve relationship building, a crucial ability for every leader. The third bullet calls upon you to foster a unique and colourful leadership style leveraging your personal strengths through complementary teamwork. The fourth bullet is the driver of all transformation: ‘experiment and develop a reflective muscle’ with new leadership behaviour. The reflective muscle empowers a leader to greater positive self-awareness, but it needs to be connected to the activation of new leadership behaviours above the waterline for it to be effective. The first part of the article zooms in on all these four elements of leading from within.

After that, we will come back to the three main behavioural focus areas of a leader (above the waterline): providing direction, developing people and driving results. All these three areas have some inherent attributes and dilemmas that make it hard to embrace the visible behaviours. In the final three paragraphs we focus on these elements.

2.0 Lead from within



So, the heart of the leadership development journey starts with what we call ‘Lead from within’. It is the continuous fostering of your self-awareness, including your emotional build up, through self-reflection and conscious choice to pursue the higher purpose of your family, team, or organisation. Let us start with self-awareness.

2.1 “Being yourself more, with skill” The nature – nurture debate

One of the simplest (not easiest!) explanations of leadership is: ‘being yourself more, with skill’. (Goffee/Jones). The beauty of this five-word sentence is that it encapsulates the endless academic debate whether leadership is innate or learnt in just one sentence. The answer is: both. It is both nature and nurture. The ‘being yourself’ part refers to the inborn characteristics that enable leadership choice. The ‘... with skill’ part refers to the skills part of leadership that can be developed through reflection, practice and feedback. Of course, there is a vast grey area between the innate and developmental part of leadership. Very often you will find academics and consultants coming up with solutions that will tilt the debate to one side. Over the last 100 years, this has never proven to hold ground for long.

‘Being yourself’ is easier said than done as we are social beings, who grow up in cultural contexts with all sorts of norms and expectations. Families, schools, sports clubs, churches, armies, mosques and last but not least the organisations we work in are social contexts expecting us to behave in certain ways. We all intuitively know how to behave at a cemetery or in a football stadium. That behaviour has little to do with who we are as a person. One could argue that social contexts are on-going ‘civilization processes’, which demand people to fit in, rather than express who they really are. Over time and after having been part of different social contexts people may wonder: who am I really? This becomes vividly apparent at life stage changes: from child to adolescent, adolescent to adult and adult to elderly. For example: in adolescent years, children want to define their unique identity, separate from the family they grew up in. For some this is a quiet transition, for others it is a ‘wild river’ with many dangers. It is also typical for people who have been with the same organisation for a long time. The identification with that organisation and its social norms, makes it harder to distinguish what is personal. Throughout life, people keep asking themselves that very same question: who am I really?

There is a whole industry of psychometric instruments, training and coaching that help people answer that personal question. Psychometrics and their scientists battle for reliability and validity of their instrument and claim to have the best tool to help people understand themselves. My colleague at London Business School Ginka Toegel put this battle back into a humbling perspective: The best academic psychometric explains 25% of all variance, which means 10% of all human behaviour. These numbers provide some wise lessons: not two extroverts in the world are exactly the same. No one is a 100% portrayed by any psychometric instrument, not even 50%. And social context as described above has a huge influence on how we behave. Therefore, a good consultant with a bad questionnaire is more likely to help someone gain some self-awareness than a great psychometric with an ill-equipped consultant. Tests and questionnaires contribute to self-awareness, but: doubt the consultant that reads too much into it.



The best psychometric explains
max 10% of all human behaviour.

So, what are alternative ways to understand ourselves better? Leadership development programmes may use reflective tools such as a personal biography, stages of life, transformation tools, vision quests, or storytelling to help people reflect on their past, present and their next level leadership. Systemic work, voice dialogue, coaching and counselling can enlighten people's understanding of themselves. More than anything else, reflection on life experience is a great way to get to know oneself better. Heifetz uses the imaginative metaphor of the 'balcony and the dance'. Great sports players are able to play the game from where they are and from above the field looking down. This ability is valuable for everyone who wants to understand his or her leadership choices better. Wide spread understanding nowadays is that 70% of all leadership development efforts should take place directly in the workplace setting. As much as this notion is valuable, it relies on the person's ability to reflect thoroughly on real life interactions. Our experience is that coaching, shadowing and peer coaching are instrumental to take the reflective process to a deeper level. Of course, partners, friends and family (kids) can provide that supportive and challenging mirror as well. These interactions with others bring in important data-points, which softens the personal bias (positive or negative self-illusion) we all have.

In the definition of "being yourself more, with skill", the word 'more' provides subtle encouragement to be less socially acceptable and bring in more of your personal values and colourful style in the work you do. Carl Jung says: the first part of your life is about getting in tune with your surroundings, the second part is about getting in tune with yourself. Leadership choice is about the daily choices to purposefully fit into the social fabric you are part of, or step up to change the existing social structure.



Leadership choice is about the daily choices to purposefully fit into the social fabric, or step up to change the existing social structure.

Then the skills piece: the hopeful part of leadership development. There are skills that enable you to show leadership behaviour more often. These skills can be trained, just like a muscle to become more skilful. There is a whole range of skills around listening, empathising, collaboration, coaching and facilitating all geared towards building (better) relationships. There is another range of skills that emphasises the task related leadership skills: setting objectives, providing direction, giving performance feedback, clarifying accountabilities and having courageous conversations. The more complex business skills require a combination of task and relationship behaviours, such as negotiating, conflict management, dilemma reconciliation, performance management and inspiring through a vision.

The fields of situational leadership and dilemma reconciliation show us that combined task and relationship skills are a better answer to many situations than just task or relationship skills only. Leadership choices constantly navigate the complex reality of building relationships and delivering results through others simultaneously. Wise leadership choices are the ones that can find, articulate and hold both sides of the dilemma: assertive AND receptive, visionary AND pragmatic, analytical AND holistic, challenging AND supporting. This is particularly challenging in a world that prefers categories of this or that, simple judgements and opinions.

Many academics came up with phrases which emphasise both: ‘tough empathy’ (Goffee/Jones), ‘care to dare’ (Kohlrieser), ‘reflective action’ and ‘empathetic challenge’. Leadership choice means to assess the situation, sense within and respond: what leadership behaviour is required here? How can I apply myself best and empower others to make the most of the situation in support of the higher leadership goals the team or the organisation pursue. Meijer & Meijers devote a whole book (Leadership Agility, 2018) to describing the leadership paradoxes leaders need to reconcile in every situation.

2.2 “Your greatest asset is your biggest liability” Strengths and weaknesses come together

As people come to know themselves better, understanding their unique strengths, they inevitably also encounter the shadow side of their strengths, as their greatest personal assets are also their greatest potential liability. Someone who is unflappable, who does not experience negative emotions very often, may be able to stay calm in chaotic and crisis situations. Likewise, this person may struggle to show sensitivity for other people’s feelings in change leadership situations. Extroverts may do well in creating a positive atmosphere. They may also overpower others and not get the best out of other people. Pragmatic people may be great at getting things done and ill equipped to imagine an inspiring bigger picture. For instance: A unique strength of Elon Musk, founder of Tesla and rocket company SpaceX is his boldness. Bold innovations and a great ability to make innovations happen. Boldness influences his leadership choices directly. His unique weakness is his boldness as well. He appeared on the recording of a podcast smoking marijuana, which led the Tesla shares to drop by 9% after his appearance. Late September 2018, he was forced by the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to step down from his chairman’s role in Tesla after his tweet to take the company privately.

The first big step in your leadership development is to understand your personal strengths & weaknesses. A huge next step is how you relate to others and how emotions play a role in this process.

2.3 “Leadership is a relationship” Leadership implies followership

‘Leadership is a relationship’ as a definition provides some sound insights into leadership. Since leadership is a relationship, you cannot own it. Not as a job title or role, nor claim any power that may be perceived, related to it. Relationships are dynamic and require followership as much as leadership. In fact, there is no leadership without followership. Many people may find followership easier than leadership as the latter requires to stick out your neck. Leadership choice is a risky choice. There has been quite some research as to what followers expect from their leaders: Hope, meaning, inspiration, belonging and challenge are mentioned time and time again. Therefore, leadership behaviour often shows around starting something new (entrepreneurship), renewing something fundamentally (innovation), transforming an organisation (change leadership), creating a sense of safety and belonging (community leadership), mobilising people to activate the strategy, helping people grow and deliver results and creating a shared sense of direction.



Leadership is a relationship, you cannot own it.

Much of the relational work is influenced by the vital role emotions play in relationships. Let us explore the emotional side of relationships in leadership choice more fully.

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Unleashing the
energy in others
through using
your emotions

- Richard Boyatzis

3.0 Lead from within - understanding emotional build up -

3.1 “Great leaders unleash the energy in others through using their emotions” Leadership and emotions

As leadership is all about how leaders connect, emotions play an important role. Emotions connect and disconnect us from others. Emotions are contagious: If people around you are happy and positive, it will influence your mood. If people around you are sad or anxious, it is likely to affect your mood as well. In customer service jobs (stewardess, waiter, call centre agent) people are expected to be friendly and positive, knowing that it is likely that this will make their customers more positive as well.

Leadership choice is the ability to read the emotions in the room and understand how the emotional atmosphere can be honoured, strengthened, or weakened. Boyatzis describes this as the ability “to unleash the energy in others, through using your emotions”. Emotions are energy in motion. Moments of great happiness such as winning a championship, graduating from a degree programme or the announcement of positive annual results, are vital moments to reinforce the positive energy through communication, celebration and personal speech. Moments of loss, for example after a crisis or disaster, are crucial moments to reinforce togetherness, hope and meaning. Timing, tone and emotional resonance of the message are all a matter of leadership choice and ability.

Emotional intelligence is a term that was coined by three academics (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso) who studied the topic for over 10 years. Daniel Goleman simplified their concept into four skills that can be learnt: emotional self-awareness, social awareness, self-management and social skills. Goleman’s accessible concept got the topic of emotions well accepted in the business community. For consultancy purposes it is helpful that these four skills can be measured and trained. From a leadership development point of view, it deserves more nuance.

We have come to believe that one’s emotional build up is connected to personal characteristics (e.g. negative emotionality, extroversion and agreeableness) and to childhood experiences. If someone was brought up as a child in a loving and safe environment, this has had an impact on her/his emotional well-being later in life and on the ability to navigate emotions. If someone was brought up in an unsafe/not loving home or school environment, that is likely to have had an effect on their responses to perceived threats.

The rational part of the brain, the neocortex, is still far from fully developed during childhood. The amygdala however, is already very active early in life. This is the emotional ‘unconscious survival centre’, which responds to perceived threats. The amygdala is fast, not accurate. Later on in life it may still respond to perceived threats based on childhood experiences (danger, abuse, bullying) through fight, flight, or freeze. It is an important leadership journey to understand your emotional responses and their origin: do you respond to perceived threats through fight, flight, or freeze and where does that response originally come from?

It is possible to develop the ability to pause after a threat and not let the amygdala response rule your behaviour based on a childhood pattern. However, this is not as simple as developing a skill. It is a transformational process through adult life, based on understanding your life journey, especially the phases of childhood and adolescence. These phases often form us until today, especially in relation to dealing with emotions, upsets and moments of stress. Viktor Frankl’s inspirational quote: “Between stimulus and response lies the freedom to choose”, has become a cornerstone to deal with the worst of circumstances based on his time and reflection in German concentration camps. It was a place of constant threat and the majority of people had no choice but fell prey to their fight, flight, or freeze responses, which inevitably meant death. Fight, flight and freeze responses are seldomly wise leadership choices. In fact, they are not choices. They are better described as a hijack of the mind. Fear driven choices are reactive behaviour instead of pro-active behaviour.

When I became a father in 2009, I faced some deep reactive responses. I found myself getting disproportionately angry at my son, even after minor events. Children do not just respond in the way you expect them too. I had to get used to that. So, I faced my own frustration and anger, when things did not go my way. More deeply than ever before. Of course, various people around me had told me about my anger before, but I could not really hear it earlier. It started a long process, which is still ongoing today, in which I learn to be less in control and more open to the responses coming towards me. I explored what had happened in my childhood years that had led me to use anger and control to survive. Now I recognise my automatic response signals better than before. I have learnt to pause, see my anger and respond based on what is needed in the moment, rather than based on my impulse. Anger or control can still be part of that, but I can more and more choose the response, rather than being ruled by my emotions. - Gert-Jan van Wijk

In many workplaces, fear is the least discussed emotion even though it has, in our opinion, the biggest impact of all emotions. In many societies, fear drives our restrictive and punitive thinking, for instance in many election campaigns. Fear contains important information. It requires to take a step back to understand the message and think through a more constructive way forward. Behind our fears lies the path for true development. What’s holding you back? Fear of being wrong, fear of failure, fear of rejection, or the fear of emotional discomfort. Leadership choice is also about being afraid and acting anyway, outside of our comfort zone.

So, the management of your own emotions and the influencing of the emotions of others is instrumental to leadership choice. A large part of making organisations a more human place, is creating an environment where all emotions are accepted. People can bring their whole self to work, as emotions affect people and bring livelihood to the workplace. When certain emotions need to be suppressed, they do influence people's performance and engagement. We like to use the phrase, the unspoken rules the relationship. Because if we don't make things explicit, we cannot change it. This results in bad choices and weakened connections between people.

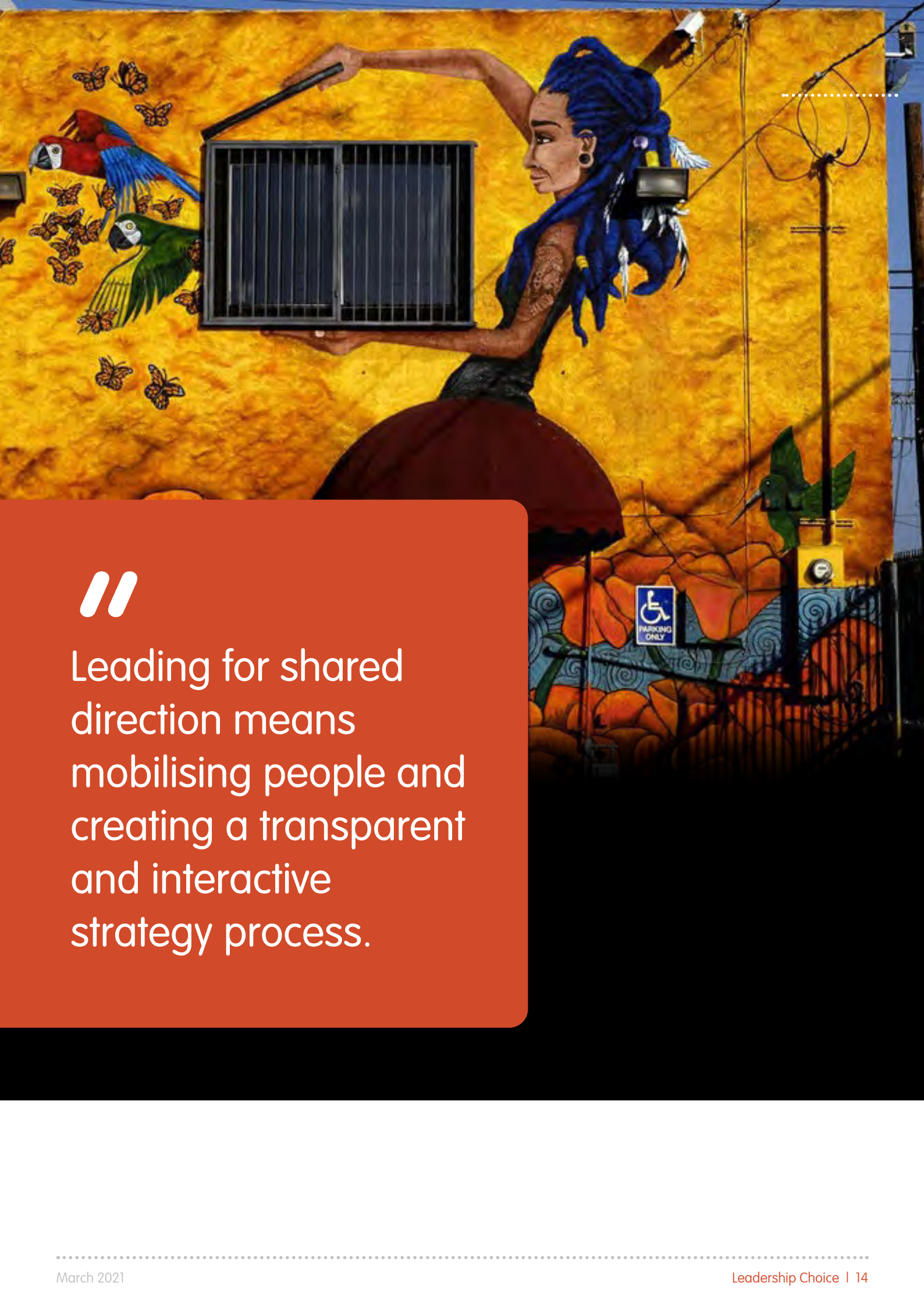
With the knowledge of one's personal strengths and weaknesses as well as an understanding of one's emotional build up, the next step is to foster a unique and colourful leadership style. That does not mean 'perfect', but real and human. It implies a good understanding of the attached weaknesses and an ease around being with oneself. Leadership choice is also the continuous process of gathering self-knowledge and the ability to decide how to best apply oneself in different situations: where do I thrive, where do I need help or practice in advance? What is the bigger cause I strive for?

4.0 The inherent challenges of leadership behaviours

Now that we have explored the essence of 'Lead from within' and its development, it is time to turn to the behaviours and outcomes of leadership. Ideally, leadership choice leads to better decisions around the creation of a shared direction, people growth and the delivery of better results. We have experienced that, even with full attention to the inner leadership elements, all these three outcomes have their own inherent challenges and dilemmas. The inherent challenges are connected to what people often project onto their leaders. Followers come to believe that their leaders know it all, are invulnerable, are perfect. Research (Conger, Sternberg) shows that these three are among the biggest derailment risks for executives. So, it is important that leaders do not start to believe these somewhat attractive projections which please the ego. Let us explore.



Foster a unique and colourful leadership style.
That does not mean perfect, but real and human.



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Leading for shared direction means mobilising people and creating a transparent and interactive strategy process.

4.1 Leadership for shared direction Leading through embracing your 'not knowing'



People who lead teams, business units, or organisations are expected 'to know where to go'. It is what they are selected and appraised for. It is projected onto them. So, followers look to their leadership to provide direction. However, this is not quite the same as knowing the direction on your own, nor knowing it at all.

We have come across many executives who struggle with the topics of vision and strategy, because of these expectations of others and themselves: 'I need to know it all and all by myself'. They tend to lock themselves up in an ivory tower, behind closed doors, or avoid strategy topics all together. It takes courage and self-confidence to show that you don't know it all and that you rely on others to bring in their points of view.

You show your vulnerability by saying: 'this is the incomplete picture; can you please help with your insights?'. Yet, herein lies the real opportunity: the 'not knowing' allows to shape and co-create a shared direction together. Strategies that have included more people, get more buy-in as well. Leading for shared direction means mobilising people and creating a transparent and interactive process, in which as many people as possible can bring their insights and get excited. Leaders encourage others to participate. Ultimately, leaders do make the strategic decisions about the shared direction, having understood all perspectives, insights and trade-offs. These decisions should echo the higher purpose of the organisation and the contributions of people involved in the strategy development process.



The not-knowing allows to shape and co create a shared direction together.

As external consultants, we are called in for our thought leadership around leadership development and strategy activation. We are asked to share our knowledge and point of view. It is a fine line to balance. If we answer: 'I don't know', it is unlikely we will be successful to create a client relationship. If we are overly confident and pretend to know it all about leadership development or our clients' business, we isolate ourselves as well. Can we provide direction and be open to our client's ideas?



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Can we see the raw talent much earlier before others see it, whilst still experimenting and making mistakes?

4.2 Leadership for people growth

Leading through embracing your vulnerability



The inherent challenge of growing people in the organisation has to do with the ability to let others shine. The natural opportunity to learn this, is when you become a parent. The centre of the world shifts, simply because there is someone who is fully reliant on you. In organisations this is less self-evident. Somehow, decisions around development are not given the same priority and attention as people give to these topics for their children. Few people would cut the budgets for their kids' education, if the budget becomes tight. But the real challenge is not just in allocating budget, but in giving your full attention to people's development. Inspired by how you would give attention to (your) children: Starting from a loving perspective (empathetic, if love is too big a word). Seeing their full potential before it becomes apparent to the world. Everyone can see the potential of a football player after a 50 million+ transfer. Everyone can see the potential of the finalists of Britain's Got Talent. But can we see the raw talent much earlier before others see it, whilst still experimenting and making mistakes? Leadership for people growth requires a willingness to help the other grow into their full potential, based on their personal vision and the impact they want to have. Goethe once said: "Treat people as if they were what they ought to be and you help them to become what they are capable of being." So, it requires a different way of looking at people. Seeing what they can potentially become instead of what they are doing now.

Too often we see executives trying to 'fit' people into the organisation, like pushing a square peg into a round hole. Few people like to 'be changed'. The perspective of 'being developed' is more inspiring and meaningful. The difference is subtle and profound. And this requires vulnerability. When you understand your own vulnerability, it is easier to accept and deal with the vulnerability of others. Embracing your vulnerability allows executives to empathise with others and develop them into their full potential. Therefore, the projection onto senior leaders that they must be invulnerable might be the riskiest one of all. Research shows that these competences, understanding & developing others, are a true challenge to master at senior manager level. That may well be connected to illusion of invulnerability.

As development consultants, our work is often very personal. Our clients tend to favour us as a person, less so for the organisation we are part of. This is reality for many professional service jobs. It is potentially dangerous from a 'growing people' perspective. It can be reassuring to think 'I am the best person to this' and 'the client only wants me'. It is detrimental as soon as we want our practice to grow. Can we truly delegate and allow the other to shape the work in a way which they believe in? Can we stay close to support them where needed, especially if choices are made which we would not make ourselves?



Leading while embracing your imperfection means accepting that things go wrong, take longer or do not work at all.

4.3 Leadership for better results

Leading through embracing your imperfection



We have worked with many companies with a strong result focus, particularly in publicly listed companies. These companies have created a clear focus on deliverables and seem to consistently match objectives and performance. The world of dashboards, smart objectives and traffic light reporting systems seems to be a world of predictability and control.

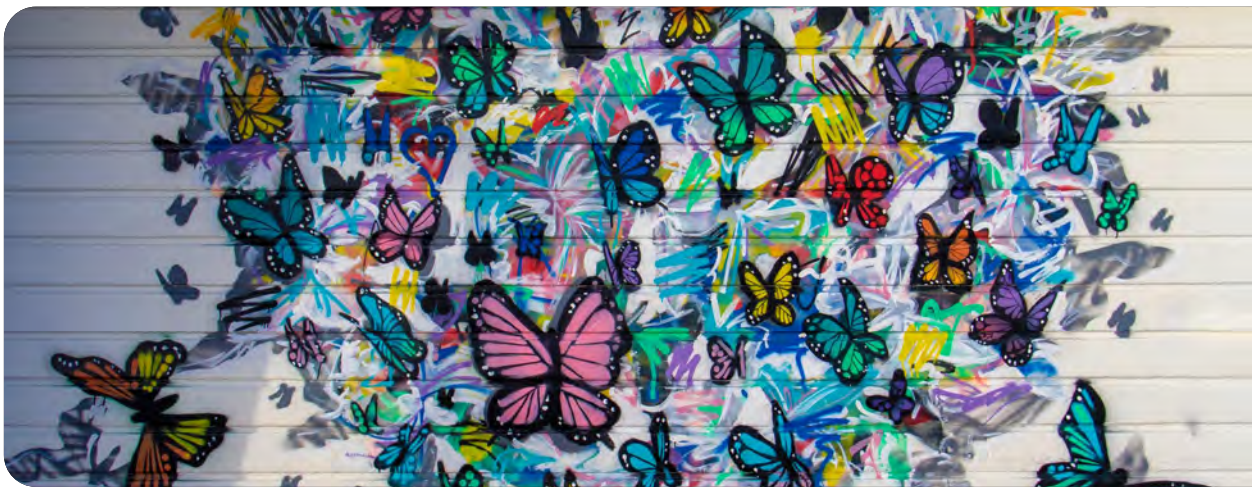
Executives in these organisations can appear to be fully in charge of performance, as if they can control and perfect the organisation. They think they can ‘do it all and rule it all’. People in the organisation may strengthen this illusion by withholding their feedback or ideas, because of the power of the executive. Thereby the position power potentially distorts the points of view of executives. Little prevents these executives to do or decide as they like. Those who get tempted by the illusion of perfection or omnipotence may easily overstep their abilities or responsibilities. Tempted by personal interests or impulses from their ‘shadow’, they may cross the lines of integrity, sustainability, honesty, or trustworthiness. It is what happened to many country presidents (Clinton, Trump), artists (Spacey), sportsmen (Woods, Armstrong), scientists (Stapel) and CEO’s (Enron’s Jeff Skilling, BP’s Tony Hayward, VW’s Martin Winterkorn). They all struggled to embrace their imperfections.

The inherent challenge for executives who lead for better results starts with admitting own mistakes and saying sorry. Leading while embracing your imperfection means accepting that things go wrong, take longer or do not work at all. It also means understanding that others know better than you do in many respects. It requires reconciling some deep paradoxes: fostering a culture of real experimentation, quick failure and thorough learning, whilst delivering consistent results. Balancing delegation and performance management. Balancing supporting and challenging people simultaneously. It’s about getting people to do what is necessary to achieve results instead of just following the (un)written rules. It’s about creating a ‘play to win’ culture instead of playing not to lose. This all starts by acknowledging the fact that we need a different kind of ‘control’ in our organisations. Combining excellence in execution with ambition driven exploration.



We need a different kind of control in organisations: combining excellence in execution with ambition driven exploration.

In large scale transformations there is a tendency to make all deliverables and timelines explicit and measurable, through clear KPI's. The uncertainty in transformations is that the speed is dependent on how quickly people are developing, which is difficult to predict. Clear goals and outputs are necessary to implement our plans, driving our activities. But at the same time, we need to activate ownership and new behaviour to get to the new results we envision. We've seen a lot of transformations fail because of rigorous follow up on perfect execution, instead of positive reinforcement of the small steps activating new routines. Can we bridge the paradox between implementing a plan and activating people? Is the perfect way the way where we learn from our imperfections? How can we dismantle the illusion of perfect execution?



5.0 Lead from within: Personal transformation: towards purpose through choice

The butterfly is the iconic symbol of how an organism can transform itself. With all the genetic information inside, the larva can ultimately release itself from the heavy cocoon, spread its wings and fly. The symbol is an inspiration for how human beings can develop and transform: We can get to understand our strengths and weaknesses deeply and build a colourful leadership style. Colourful meaning: unique and at ease with the uniqueness. Humble about our personal strengths, knowing there is always a next level to aspire to. Light hearted and mild about our weaknesses. Knowing what emotions make us and the people around us tick and go off track. Knowing how we can use our emotions to get others in motion for a shared purpose. Leading from within requires being grounded in yourself, whilst others project perfection, invulnerability or 'know it all' onto you.

Taking courageous leadership choices every day, rather than owning the term 'leader' as a title. Making choices, which enable other people to contribute to the higher cause of the organisation, the ecosystem and the world.

About the authors



Erik-Jan Hoekstra, The Thrive

Erik-Jan is partner and co-founder of The Thrive. He loves the purpose of The Thrive: Humanizing the world we work in. He works with leaders and their teams to activate their strategy and transform their leadership.

“It pays to energise your strategy before implementing it. I believe in unleashing an unstoppable intrinsic drive of people to boost the organizations strategic ambition and realising their own personal mission at the same time. Generating business results beyond expectation”.

Gert-Jan van Wijk, The Thrive

Gert-Jan van Wijk is initiator and partner at The Thrive. He works with management boards and top teams on team development, strategy activation and leadership development. Before this he led his own international firm in Executive Development for 15 years. Humanizing organizations starting at the top, is his motive.

“Thriving leaders who work on thriving teams with the goal of humanizing and transforming organizations to take it to a higher level gives me great satisfaction”.

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“Are you a shaper in your organisation, industry or ecosystem?”

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