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Contemporary Issues in Management

Leadership, Ethics, and Organisational Change

"Who Leads the Change?"

Week 10

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THE FINAL QUESTION

Who Leads the Change?

We have studied what corporations promise, why they retreat, and how culture becomes a battlefield. But who decides when an organisation changes course... and who gets to say no?

THE PROMISE

When a corporation adopts ESG and pledges carbon neutrality, who decided that was the priority?

THE RETREAT

When it quietly drops DEI targets and removes diversity pages, who decided the retreat?

THE BATTLE

When culture becomes a battlefield and products become political statements, who chose the weapons?

Leadership is not neutral. Every decision to act, retreat, or stay silent reflects power, ethics, and interests.

Where We Have Been

1

THE QUESTION

What is management for? Why does it matter?

Week 1

2

THE LENS

CMS framework. Power and its hidden dimensions. Strategic thinking.

Weeks 2–6

3

THE REALITY

Stakeholders, sustainability, corporate citizenship, and the culture war.

Weeks 7–9

4

THE SYNTHESIS

Leadership, ethics, and organisational change: who decides, and for whom?

Week 10

The module ends where it began. After ten weeks, has your answer to "Why are we here?" changed?

Two Models

TRANSACTIONAL

Burns (1978)

- Exchange-based: reward for performance
- Manages through incentives and compliance
- Maintains existing systems and structures
- Corrects deviations from the plan

TRANSFORMATIONAL

Burns (1978); Bass (1985)

- Vision-based: inspires shared purpose
- Intellectual stimulation and individual care
- Challenges and changes existing systems
- Develops followers into future leaders

The textbook preference is clear. But CMS asks: transformation towards what? For whose benefit?

What the Textbook Doesn't Say

CMS critiques of transformational leadership (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012; Tourish, 2013)

1

Hero worship

The model centres one individual as the source of vision and change. It ignores structural factors, team dynamics, and luck. Organisational success is attributed to the leader; failure is blamed on "resistance."

2

Assumed virtue

"Transformation" is treated as inherently positive. But transformation can mean mass layoffs, cultural erasure, or value extraction. The model never asks: positive for whom?

3

Power blindness

Followers' "willing participation" may reflect Lukes' third dimension: they want what the leader has shaped them to want. Eaton, Bridgman & Cummings (2024) showed Bass stripped Burns' original political intent.

Tourish (2013): The Dark Side of Transformational Leadership exposes how charisma can silence dissent.

Ethical Leadership

"The demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers."

Brown, Treviño & Harrison (2005)

MORAL PERSON

- Integrity and trustworthiness
- Fair decision-making
- Concern for others' wellbeing

MORAL MANAGER

- Visible role modelling of ethics
- Rewards ethical behaviour
- Communicates ethics expectations

CMS asks: "normatively appropriate" according to whose norms? What counted as ethical in 2020 became politically costly by 2025.

The Lukes Connection

How leadership operates through the three dimensions of power (Week 3)

1st Dimension

Leader decides

→ *"We are restructuring the department."*

2nd Dimension

Leader controls the agenda

→ *"DEI is not on the board agenda this quarter."*

3rd Dimension

Leader shapes beliefs

→ *"We all agree: shareholder value must come first."*

The uncomfortable question: *If transformational leadership works by changing what people believe and value, how is it different from manipulation?*

The Textbook View

Kotter (1996): Leading Change

1 Create urgency

3 Form a strategic vision

5 Remove obstacles

7 Sustain acceleration

2 Build a guiding coalition

4 Communicate the vision

6 Generate short-term wins

8 Anchor changes in culture

CMS asks: This model assumes change is planned, top-down, and desirable. It treats resistance as an "obstacle" to remove (Step 5). But who decided the change was needed? And what if the resisters are right?

Two Views of Resistance

THE MAINSTREAM VIEW

"Resistance is an obstacle to overcome"

- People resist because they fear change
- Management must "unfreeze" old habits (Lewin)
- Resistance signals poor communication
- Success = overcoming resistance

THE CMS VIEW

"Resistance is voice"

- People resist because they see something the leader does not
- Resistance may be the most informed response
- It signals whose interests the change serves
- Success = listening to what resistance tells you

Ford, Ford & D'Amelio (2008): "Resistance to Change: The Rest of the Story" showed management research has been systematically biased toward change agents and against resisters.

The DEI Retreat: Three Lenses

Applying this week's frameworks to the cases from Week 9

LEADERSHIP

- Who led the retreat? No CEO articulated a transformational vision for rolling back DEI.
- This was transactional: pressure in, reversal out.
- Companies that held firm (Apple, Costco) showed more leadership clarity.

ETHICS

- "Normatively appropriate" shifted in five years: what was ethical in 2020 became costly by 2025.
- Were leaders who reversed course pragmatic or inconsistent?
- Brown et al.'s model: moral person without moral manager courage.

CHANGE

- Kotter assumes planned, internal change. The DEI retreat was reactive and externally imposed.
- Employees resisting the rollback: obstacles or voices?
- Ford et al. (2008): resistance reveals whose interests the change serves.

The same event looks different through each lens. That is what CMS gives you: not the right answer, but better questions.

Your CMS Toolkit

The frameworks you now carry from this module

Power

Lukes (2005)

Three dimensions: decisions, agendas, beliefs.
Who shapes what people think they want?

Stakeholders

Freeman (1984)

Who is the corporation for? Whose interests count, and whose are invisible?

Leadership

Burns (1978); Bass (1985)

Transactional vs transformational. CMS critique: hero worship, assumed virtue, power blindness.

Ethics

Brown et al. (2005)

Moral person + moral manager. But "normatively appropriate" is culturally contingent.

Change

Kotter (1996); Ford et al. (2008)

Planned vs emergent. Resistance as obstacle or resistance as voice?

The CMS Questions

Always ask:

Who benefits? Whose voice is heard? What is hidden? Who decided? For whom?

Why Are We Here?

Week 1

"To learn about management."

Week 10

"To question management. To ask who benefits, whose voice is heard, and what power hides in every decision we make."

The job of a critical manager is not to reject management, but to practise it with open eyes.

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