

Leaders! Who needs them?

Professor Eddie Obeng

You're on a training course - An experiential training course. One of those courses where the tutor set up an exercise, something like one of those ranking exercises - you're lost in the desert - stuck in the arctic - crashed on the moon. You and eleven other colleagues have to put in correct order 20 random objects. You have 30 minutes.

A week later - It feels like a week but it's only 45 minutes later - you are suffering the acute embarrassment of watching yourselves on the play back of the CCTV video. It's a shambles and there is real evidence. What went wrong?

Now the tutor is waffling on some stuff about leadership and how, by not being clear on your roles and accountabilities and by not having a leader to help to define the goal, you have gone off track. Some stuff about how the leader who leads focusses the team on opportunity and helps them avoid risk. On the flip-chart he writes something unintelligible about misleaders damage the organisations' reputation.

One of your group comments that you are all colleagues and so it would not feel right to have someone bossing the rest of you about.

The tutor is trying to explain some semantic difference between a boss or manager and a leader but you are lost in

your own thoughts. You are thinking leadership is bunk. At work, in the real world, the manager simply manages. The systems processes and methodologies you use when doing anything significant or new provides the manager with a steering committee and a project board of very senior people, which takes all the decisions and makes sure that every one does what they are supposed to, period.

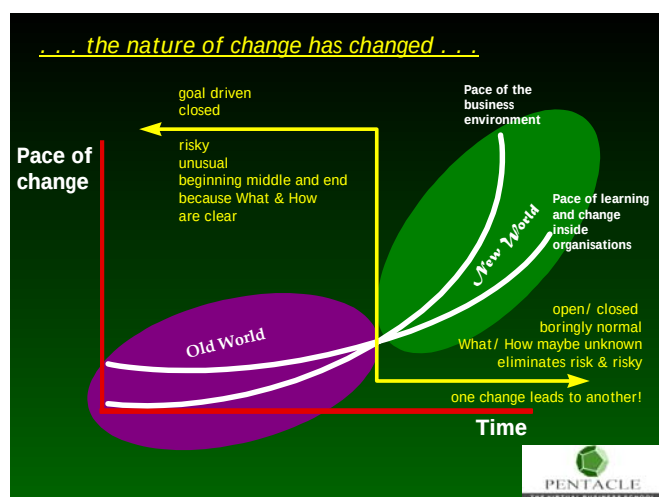
Anyway, only last month your organisation's best project manager was fired for doing this leadership stuff. For the past three years they had been responsible for a series of expansion projects, opening a series of new offices and branches across Europe. Nine months ago they were given a smallish project on 'web-enabling' the organisation. This was seen as their 'opportunity to demonstrate people leadership qualities'. Nine months later six key staff had quit complaining of 'bullying' and a 'lack of creativity and an opportunity to explore the issues.' a situation which was reported in the industry press. On top of that the consultants who put the detailed implementation plan together had left the company £250k richer without any delivery

No, you're not convinced. Anyway you read somewhere that leaders are born that way. So you are either a leader or you're not. Fortunately for you the tutor

has stopped blowing hot air and it's time for your coffee break.

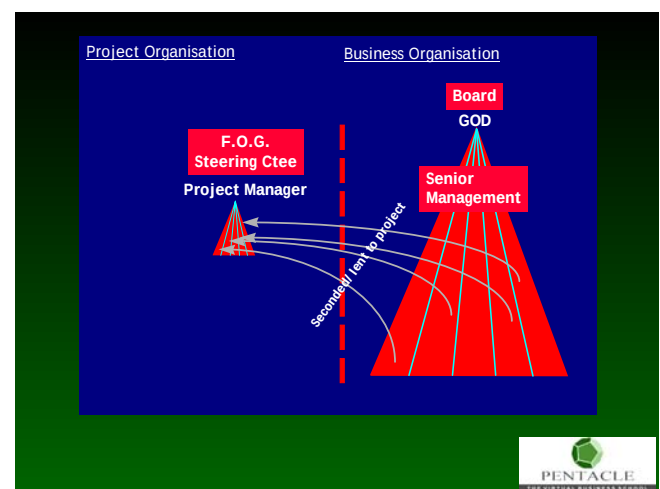
Leaders! Who needs them? Well, actually, we do if we are carrying out 'New or Big Change', change involving several other people in an organisation in this ever changing New World or to get us Back On Track when something major happens.

In the Old World most organisations could learn and adapt faster than the world was changing. Change tended to be an unusual and discrete set of events. Most of business activity was focused on maintaining and delivering more of the same. The net result was that we built organisations which were compartmentalised in simple hierarchical structures with the most experienced people at the top controlling the actions of all those below through a linear command and control system. When a change was required it was common to be clear on What was to be achieved (Outcome) and How it was to be done (Method/ Technology).



Because yesterday looked like tomorrow looked like today most effort was

focussed on efficiency. Setting up clear processes which eliminated all the challenges of business was the best way to succeed. And because it was easy to learn from the past it was obvious what things might go wrong and with what certainty. Risk management was more about predicting the probability of an event than worrying about the impact. For the organisation as a whole it kept its presence felt through its strong brand. This mode of thinking extended right through the organisation even to the way projects were set up mirrored the way the organization was set up. The project organisation was made up of representatives from the organisation with the Project leader as the boss and a steering group or F.O.G. (otherwise known as friends of God) to keep the project manager on the straight and narrow.



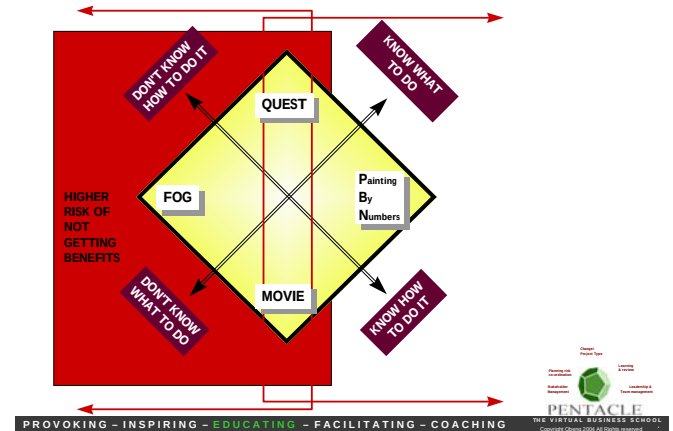
This brilliant approach measured that the most experienced people had the most say over the biggest risks and the systems and processes prevented anyone without decision making power from fouling the nest! This approach is still used today. However the world in which it is applied has altered dramatically. The pace of

change outstrips our ability to learn and change. Often as managers we are unsure of the What or the How or both! The ability of the members of the F.O.G. to really understand and therefore take the right decisions on behalf of the whole organisation is severely diminished - sometimes the expertise lies well below the senior levels.

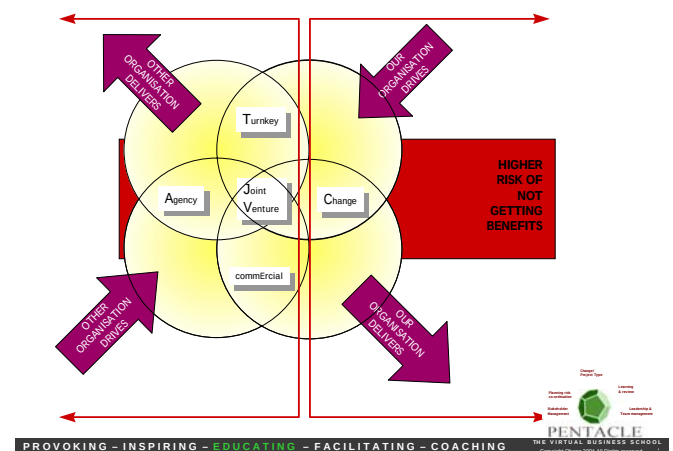
In addition, the organisation is complex and geographically or globally spread and their ability to impose their will on all the people affected by the change is severely reduced. The list of people extends to customers and clients, suppliers and the supporting communities and media. People can appear to be complying whilst actually resisting the change. Many of the changes introduced are unfamiliar and cause people to react to them emotionally rather than entirely logically. In short there are many stakeholders throughout the organisation all of whom need to be aligned if the project is to deliver the benefits sought. Stakeholders who help the effort of the project and those who have to live with its results and alter their own personal behaviour and actions in order that the benefits can be reaped. Finally, there are a whole host of projects required and it is unlikely that there will be enough 'most senior' people to manage them. This means that most project managers will have to move, emotionally engage and influence stakeholders who are senior to them or even in other functions/ departments of businesses, stakeholders they cannot manage.

The final twist in the tale is that the change you have to lead has also altered.

The proportion of situations where either the goal (WHAT) or how it is to be achieved is unknown, has also grown significantly. Unfortunately this adds to the risk.



IN addition the plethora of stakeholders begin to interact iwth your activities - in particular thorough partnershipa and joint ventures, all adding more risk



This is when leadership starts to be relevant. Because you can only manage people you have authority over but you can lead anyone. Think of a good movie you have been to lately. The director isn't your boss but somehow they make you behave a certain way - sit in the cinema for almost two hours following

the twists and turns of their plot. (In a bad movie you walk out/ day dream etc.)

So what is the difference between management and leadership? Is there one?

How did you become a manager? I guess for most people, they hang about in the organization. Eventually another manager approaches them taps them on the head and says 'Thou art a Manager. Now arise and take your car keys.' And they become a manager. **Other managers** make **you** a manager.

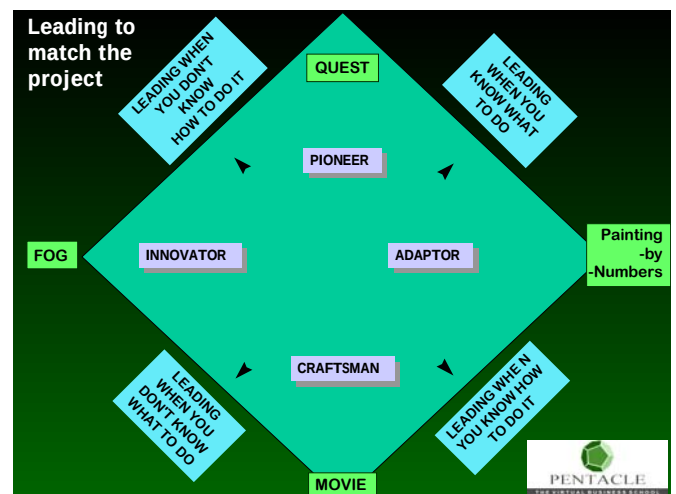
How do you become a leader? Do other leaders make you one? Do you decide that you are one and then you become one?

Two short scenarios. One of your colleagues turns up for work wearing a bright blue and orange suit with shoes to match. The next week a dozen more of your colleagues turn up for work dressed exactly the same way. One of your colleagues turns up for work wearing a bright blue and orange suit and spends all day telling everyone that this is the height of fashion. Everyone laughs and no one is ever seen wearing anything even remotely as ridiculous. Strange, but it is the action of **other people** deciding to follow you that makes **you** a leader

But what exactly makes people follow? In the Old World people would follow you because of your position in the organisation, status, birthright, or simply because you were the only game in town. The New World has made this more

complex. In many organisations employees are empowered which means that they get a say in who they decide to follow.

So how do you make them follow you? The secret is that people follow a leader's behaviour far more than what they say or where they sit. In the New World a **leader (you) goes into their world and works out how they would like to be led** and then thinks about the actual situation and **selects behaviours which are more likely to magnetise them in any situation.**



Selecting the wrong behaviour in the situation is likely to lead to failure. Someone who had led several 'Painting-by-Numbers' type projects would probably have created a set of habits and behaviours for leading people in that situation. When presented with a 'Lost in the Fog' type of project such as - web-enabling the organisation - the same structured, ordered and directive behaviours which work in the 'Painting-by-Numbers' situation are completely inappropriate.

Now are you convinced? You can see how leadership works on anyone, how it works, how it can be learnt and when different behaviours should be applied.

Maybe that tutor wasn't talking such hot air after all.

Leaders. Not only do we need them - but we also need YOU to be one.

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