

Situationally speaking

In the last issue I suggested that we should spend far more time out of our offices, 'wandering around', than is currently normal. At least, that is, if you have any slight interest in what passes for your 'customer front-line', and some genuine interest in trying to help your hard-working employees improve that on some sort of continuous basis. If you don't, then just carry on sitting there.

However, I did also emphasise that this wandering has to be genuine:

'Managing by wandering

around (MBWA) is unlikely to be effective unless perceived by staff as part of a broader, genuine belief by management in the continuing importance of giving time to listen to, and understand, the feelings and problems of staff' (Mullins, 2007: 458).

If it isn't, many staff might not welcome their manager's presence as they could perceive he/she is just checking up, and doesn't trust them to do their job properly. For those of you, however, who are genuinely interested, I

John Chamberlin suggests how Situational Leadership can be linked to other good theories to assist in the process of management and change.

KEN BLANCHARD'S SITUATIONAL LEADERSHIP® II

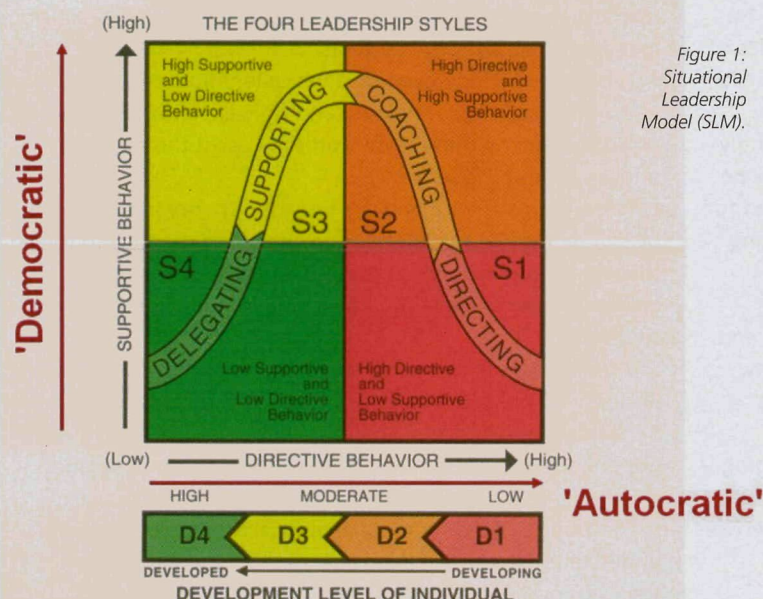


Figure 1:
Situational
Leadership
Model (SLM).





"The need for change frequently only becomes apparent when the company or organisation reaches some sort of crisis point where definite – possibly radical – action is needed."

also suggested that a good theory to help solidly underpin your behaviours would be Blanchard et al's (1987) Situational Leadership Model (SLM), Figure 1.

In this issue I suggest how this model can also be linked to a few other good theories that might assist this process of management, leadership and change.

I'll take the last one first; change management. It's hard. It frightens people. And the need for change frequently only becomes apparent when the company or organisation reaches some sort of crisis point where definite – possibly radical – action is needed. Action that might result in a certain amount of career planning amongst employees, and, for some people, that might not be within the same organisation. The perceived need for reductions in head-count are frequently the prime mover for any sort of radical change, and even if not, they often do form part of the effects of that change.

Sadly, though, such reductions are often the instant/knee-jerk reaction to reductions in income or a perceived need to cut costs. However, whatever the reason, in most cases if this is handled professionally and sensitively, it need not cause the amount of fear and uncertainty that is often experienced.

Case study

Two decades ago BT, the company I was part of, went through a six year major downsizing programme which resulted in the 250,000-person organisation being approximately halved in size. The company was hugely over-manned – mainly in telephone exchanges and repeater stations, etc – because of the tremendous advances in telephone and digital technology.

Yet, throughout the period 1991-1996, the records show that not one person was made compulsorily redundant. This was aided by very attractive early release packages, combined with a massive internal retraining and redeployment programme, as well as consistent communication and management throughout the company.

The process is quite simple:

- Tell people what needs to happen, and why;
- Work very closely with your people, plus their unions or staff representatives, while they go through the difficult process of getting used to the idea that their 'world' is going to be different;
- As they do get used to it, give them some freedom and space to learn for themselves how best to cope with and progress in this new environment;
- Leave them to get on with their new lives.

(NB This final point might seem somewhat idealistic and at odds with the way most companies manage major change. After all, if the management has never trusted its staff before, why would they start now? However, good theory starts with taking a positive view of your people. Why wouldn't you?)

Not only can you see Kurt Lewin's (1947) 'Unfreeze-Change-Freeze'* model running alongside this, you can also see distinct parallels with the SL Model in terms of the requirements for your own behaviour at each stage. (*Often misquoted as 'Refreeze'.)

Stage 1 – Directing

'Tell and show' people why the change is necessary for the survival of the company or organisation. Be honest, clear and direct. Duck no questions. Brook no argument. The new future is better than no future. No-one is unaffected, at any level. Everyone is at risk. Everyone has opportunities.

Stage 2 – Coaching

Work closely with people throughout the whole organisation and at every level while this new reality is assimilated by all. GOYA! MBWA!

Stage 3 – Supporting

Cut people a little slack as they begin to accept that there might, just, be some positives in this new world, if only they'd stop fighting it and start trying to make it happen. Remember, if you're not at the table, you're part of the meal. Not everyone will get to this stage at the same time, so be aware ('Be There', Go to Gemba) and respond to each person's/team's needs accordingly, and at their

pace. Remember Blanchard and Johnson's (1982) closing comment in their first book: 'There's nothing so unequal as the equal treatment of unequals.'

Remember also, there will be some people – albeit a very small number – who just don't (or won't) get it, and do not want to go to this new place. However, if you can't change the people, you have to change the people. It's hard, but it's true, and it's necessary.

Stage 4 – Delegating

Get out of the way. Let your front-line people run with the ball.

So, the main 'intuitive' concept that has clear parallels here is Scott and Jaffe's (1994) 'Transition Grid', see Figure 2, above.

The parallels might not immediately be apparent, so let's look at these two concepts alongside each other, in simplified form, Figure 3.

Now, let's rotate the SLM through 180° and see what happens, Figure 4.

Now you can see the parallels; the green arrows make the tangible links between the 'stage' of the DREC curve and the relevant, required behaviour on the SL Model. Taking these in order:

- Denial: the likely instantaneous reaction to any major change announcement is; 'No', 'This can't be true', 'You cannot be serious' (remember him?), 'They can't do this to me/us', etc. This is where and why the consistency of the 'case for action' message (Hammer & Champy, 1993: 154) is so important, so clear, and company-wide. There has to be no doubt. No alternative. The behavioural style is 'Directing – Tell and show'.
- Resistance: the fights start. Often (though not always)

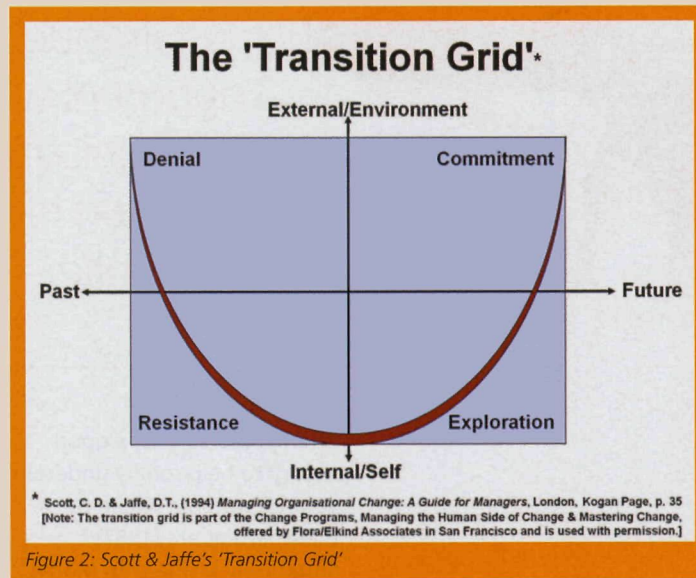


Figure 2: Scott & Jaffe's 'Transition Grid'

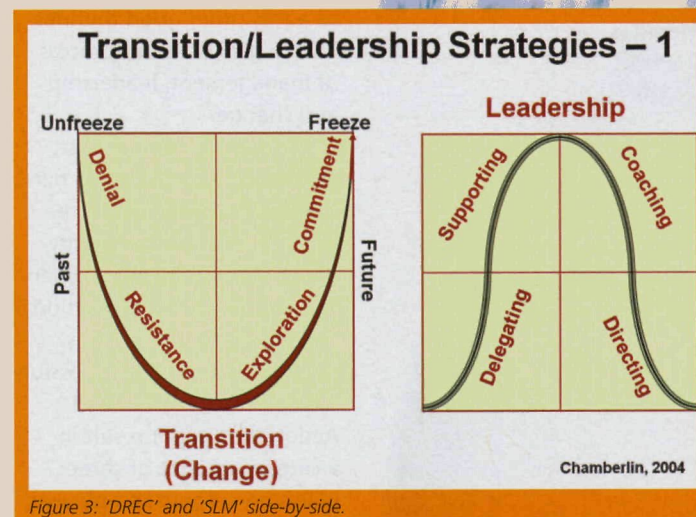


Figure 3: 'DREC' and 'SLM' side-by-side.

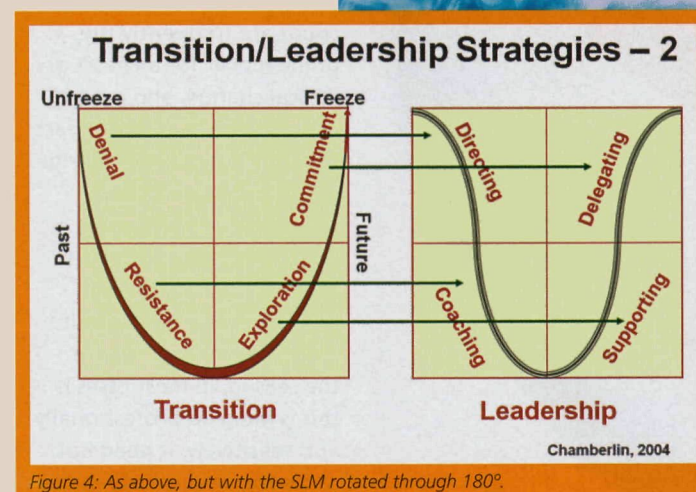


Figure 4: As above, but with the SLM rotated through 180°.

union-led, this 'we will not let this happen' response is ultimately futile, so the sooner and least harmfully that we can get through this stage the better for everyone concerned. People's energy is far better spent in co-operation than conflict. The behavioural 'style' is 'Coaching'. Again, it's GOYA! MBWA! Go to Gemba. 'Be there'! The more effort you put in here, and the sooner you do it, the more you'll save later – in spades! As pointed out in the previous article, this stage will require more 'on the pitch' effort from you, personally, but remember also, the denial battle has been won, so this is progress.

- **Exploration:** In this stage of the transition process the mindset starts to shift to the positive, the upward slope. People begin to recognise that not only is this change essential, but that there might, just possibly, be some positives in it for them also. The behavioural style required here is 'Supporting'. Encourage your people to experiment with the new situation, to try out the new kit, or location, to see if they can make it work better than you can? Support them while they do that, but begin the process of backing away. Help them gain the confidence they need.

- **Commitment*:** The job's almost done, so delegate it. Get out of the way and let your people begin to flourish in their new situations. The bulk of your role is done, you simply observe as they become independent learners.

(* NB Sometimes referred to as 'Acceptance'.)

However, let us also be realistic here; most people might well go along with the change out of a 'self preservation' need, ie, they

need a job. They might, in due course, accept the change, but more out of necessity rather than any ideological commitment to this new world, but that will not matter.

Behavioural change frequently precedes attitudinal change. However, if people have been genuinely engaged and involved, then they are more likely to become positively committed to make the solution work well, because they have been part of it.

Good theories

This is not meant to make this process sound easy, but it is intended to reinforce the point made in the previous issue, that if your behaviours are solidly-based on good theory, then your chances of a successful outcome are dramatically increased. What this (above) does do, however, is link a couple of these good theories in ways that you won't find in the textbooks. I don't know why, though, as it clearly makes good sense to do so.

"People begin to recognise that not only is this 'change' essential, but that there might, just possibly, be some positives in it."

For this reason I've shown below a couple (at least) of other good theories that I maintain can equally and tangibly be linked to this SLM; see Table 1.

What I am suggesting here is that those same four stages – those four behavioural styles – of the SLM can be equally helpful in (at least) a couple of other instances also; eg, group (ie, team) formation, and marketing.

Take the next one, for example, Tuckman's (1965) stages of group development. This is exactly redolent of project start-ups, where the team is brought together for the first time – its forming stage; 'Who are



SLM and Others?

SLM and other...	SLM 'Style' No:			
	1	2	3	4
... 'Good Theories':	Directing	Coaching	Supporting	Delegating
Scott & Jaffe's (1994) 'Transition Grid'	Denial	Resistance	Exploration	Commitment
Tuckman's (1965) Stages of Group Development	Forming	Storming	Norming	Performing
Marketing's 'AIDA' Model	Attention**	Interest	Desire	Action
Deming's 'PDCA' Cycle	Plan	Do	Check	Act

(* NB Also known as the 'DREC' Curve)

(** NB Also referred to as 'Awareness')

Table 1: SLM and other 'good theories'.

you?', 'Why are we here?', 'What's this thing we've got to work on?', 'What does this mean for me/you/my career/etc?' Etc, etc. And the behavioural style required? 'Directing – Tell and show'.

Storming? Same thing; get out there and amongst it. Behavioural style required? 'Coaching'. Be there, on the pitch, while this is happening. Look up Tuckman and Jensen's (1977) comments on this and the other stages in Huczynski and Buchanan (2001: 298, Fig. 9.8), and you'll immediately see the parallels in the descriptors that those authors suggest, and those of the same stage (eg, Resistance, here) in Scott and Jaffe's model.

Norming? Begin to pull back, cutting right back on the directing component whilst maintaining support – behavioural style required? 'Supporting', of course. It's a confidence thing now, not competence.

And finally, performing? Take note of that previous reference and you'll see clearly that this is the only stage in which there's a team; in all the previous ones they are still called a group. These people now know what they're doing, and why, and they are both competent enough to be left alone and confident enough for you to do so. If they need you, they'll ask. Behavioural style required? Delegating. They 'have the Con'. Butt out.

The third one I've suggested in Table 1 is that fairly well known marketing model, 'AIDA'; 'Attention' (sometimes shown as 'Awareness'), 'Interest', 'Desire', 'Action'. Work this one through yourselves. You're in 'selling' mode, the sole aim of which is to convert the customer into money:

- Gain the prospect's 'Attention' – 'Roll up! Roll

up!'. Make them aware of your product (or service) offering – 'Tell and show!' Direct them to your offer.

- Secure their Interest. Get them to try your new food-slicer, or drill-bit, or chocolate, and see for themselves how good it is. 'Let 'em try'. 'Coach' them while they try. 'You've done this before madam...'

- Encourage their Desire. 'Support' the soundness of their decision to buy, the logic of their thinking.
- Action – 'How would you like to pay?' Delegate – it's theirs, now. 'Who's next, please?' And so on...

Easy, isn't it? Structure your required behaviours for one theory, based on the solid foundation of another. Why wouldn't you? Or do you prefer a life of continuous experimentation based on the 'poke and hope' theory?

The final suggestion I've thrown in is a little more lateral, but possibly worth a thought; Deming's (1986) PDCA Cycle – Plan, Do, Check, Act. Think about it. You might disagree but I think there could be parallels there also:

- Plan – 'OK folks, this is what we need to do, here's the plan.' Direct operations.
- Do – once again, work with people while they get stuck in, coach them. Is the 'plan' being followed as agreed? No-one gets it right first time. The best laid plans of mice and men, and all that...
- Check – 'OK, how did that go?' Did it match the chosen theory (the plan)? Or, is there something else going off here that needs to be described in a new way? Support the thinking process – the distribution of brains in a team is one-per-member, not one-per-manager.
- Act – to standardise, or try something else. Delegate the independent learning?

That's not a perfect fit, I

realise, but the point is to be aware how, in each of those parallel models, that it's your behaviours that need to change, as the learners progress through those various stages. You're trying to create independency here, not dependency.

Conclusion

To conclude with another reminder from last time, Situational Leadership is a 'pull' system. Arnharter and Malayeff (2005) defined it as follows: 'The term pull is used to imply that nothing is made until it is needed by the downstream customer, and the application of a make-to-order (MTO) approach whenever possible';

...and therefore it focuses on the situational (ie, instantaneous) needs of the worker/ subordinate/ learner/ etc. The leader (manager, in most cases) provides exactly, and only, what is required at the time, and in the current situation.

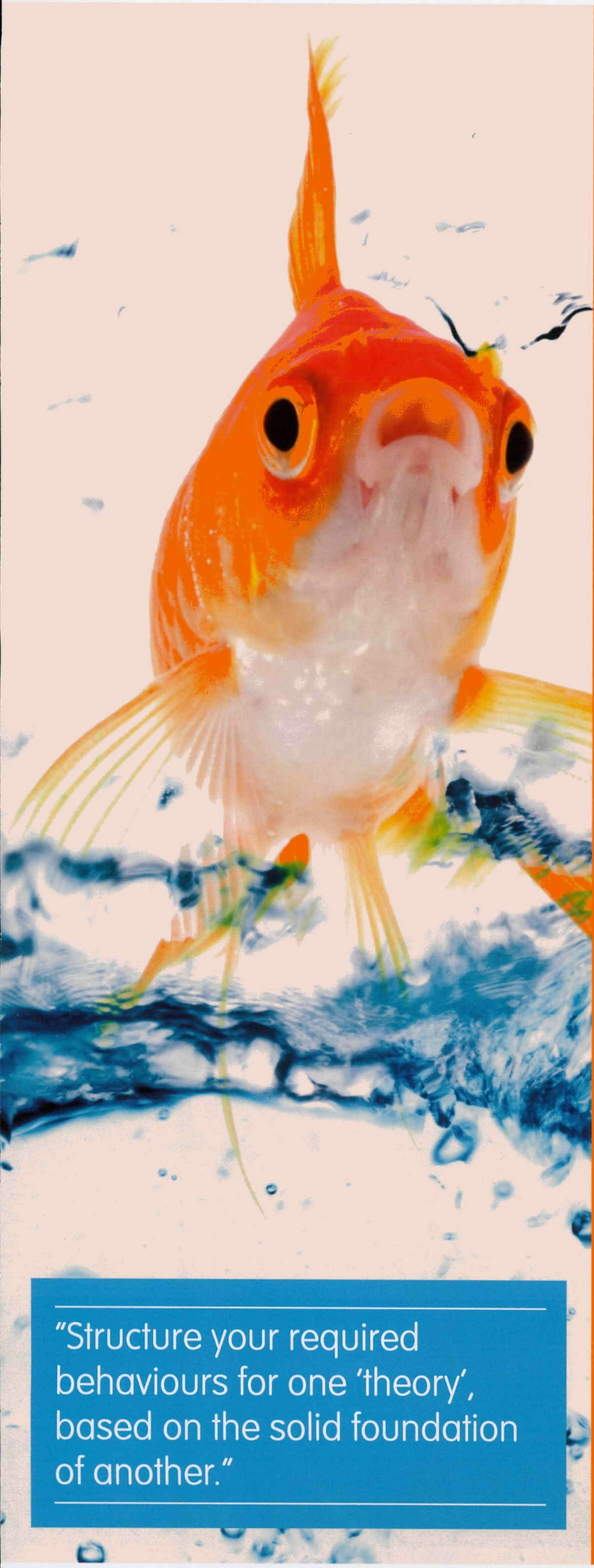
As a final example, and not related to business or management at all, myself and a fellow club coach are currently basing a series of sea kayaking beginners' courses on the same 'SLM' concept.

We're structuring each of the three weekends on those first three stages – Boxes 1, 2 and 3 – recognising that it is our behaviours that have to change, for each weekend in turn.

The intention is that by the end of the third weekend away, the learners will be competent enough to paddle on the sea (as a new kayaking environment), and confident enough to (either) join others on their trips, or plan their own excursions without our input – 'Box 4'. Their independency.

It's a good theory. We think so, anyway.





"Structure your required behaviours for one 'theory', based on the solid foundation of another."

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About the author

Until recently Dr John Chamberlin was a senior lecturer and pracademic at the Derby Business School (DBS), within the Faculty of Business, Computing & Law (BCL) at the University of Derby (UoD).

In 1996 John took early retirement from BT after 34 years in the company, the last 10 years of which he was a senior operations manager with an external workforce of up to 200 engineers and responsibility for the installation, maintenance and repair of BT's external network; copper, co-axial and optical-fibre, covering 6,000+ square miles of the East Midlands.

Within a year of leaving he had signed on for a full-time MBA at UoD, graduating in 1999 with a Distinction (only two were awarded that year), and with the only Masters' Level Prize for 'Outstanding Performance'. He subsequently joined the teaching team in the Derby Business School. In 2005 he again became a full-time student to undertake his PHD entitled, *Reengineering Corporation Street – An Empirical Study of Business Process Reengineering (BPR) in Two Local Authorities*, graduating in January 2009.

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