

# Leading Performance Change

## RFLC in conversation at Tate Modern

### Chapter III: Three RFLC Intervention Stories

**Nancy Clay, Senior Consultant:** We thought we'd now take a bit of time to share some of our stories about actually operationalising this change leadership work. I'm going to talk about how we've applied it to support leaders as individuals; Roger will expand on this a bit and describe how this is evolving to help shift a whole organisational system. And then Deborah will then talk about this work supporting a leadership team.

The story I'd like to share is the story of someone who'd really like to be here, but is unfortunately in Montreal instead. His name is Gavin, and he works as the Head of the Home Loans business in XXXX [bank in South Africa]. Now Gavin's a very excitable man and when I asked if I could tell his story he said, "Oh please! Please tell them – and that I would like to be there and that I'm really there with them..." So please imagine that I'm Gavin at the moment!

The way this started was that Roger and I were working in the organisation over in South Africa - a place we've come to know quite a bit over the last year - and they aligned around a desire to build a higher performing organisation. As we interacted with the Learning and Development Group within XXXX, the question became: given that we want to become a higher performing organisation, and given that we understand leadership makes so much of a difference, how is it we currently lead? How might we make sense of how we're leading as it is – and then understand how this might shift?

Well, one of the things we did in our research process was – having coded the transcripts of all these leaders' interviews – we offered them one to one feedback. Not only did we want to give something back to those who had generously given us their time, but we wanted to understand the extent to which our 'lens' made sense and provided something of value.

So we suggested to XXXX that we did some behavioural event interviews, just like we'd done in our original research – transcribed these, coded them, and then used these to begin a conversation. These conversations occurred at a one to one level, but also resulted in a larger conversation about the leadership approaches and behaviours that seem, already, to be potent in the XXXX context and that they wanted more of, and where they saw gaps or the need to shift gears around other behaviours.

So initially we conducted 19 interviews among senior people from different parts of the business, transcribed and coded them – and this wasn't just leaders in South Africa, but those working in other parts of Africa as well.

**Roger Bellis, Senior Consultant:** And it was really good fun! Once we'd got the transcripts, we sat there with a flipchart and wrote up things that seemed to work. And I then did the usual thing of clustering the things that seemed to be really important, and what we did is we used this as a kind of screen to review what we'd come up with via our Framcap work. And actually, the really amazing thing is that there was about an 80% overlap, with a little more emphasis on the need to create capacity, which perhaps isn't surprising on the continent of Africa.

So from this, we created an emergent framework, including practices described in their own language. So it wasn't in any language that we had brought, it was in a language that had been seen to work in different parts of Africa.

I was then told: well we have a project team who are managing all of this, and the project team wants to know how you're going to roll this out... And then one of the leaders approached me and said, 'Roge, how are we going to roll this out?' And I said: Well, we could do something a bit different. How about not rolling it out?! Because the problem when you roll it out is that every leader then gets hung by not behaving like that every single day - and I've been bitten by that before.

So we decided on another approach, which was to expose the leaders to it in a more personal kind of way: interviewing them, giving them their feedback – the idea being that they would learn about it in terms of the feedback that they got, and hopefully would then start to behave differently. So the first bit of rollout might be considered to be when people start to notice some difference! So we've now actually interviewed about 50 people – followed by coding, giving feedback and so on. So the big thing about this rollout is that it isn't one!

So, this process is ongoing. Of course, some people say 'what the hell's all this' – and a very few reject it. But the vast proportion, once they get engaged, start to see this as something that enables a shift that needs to happen for them, and a shift that needs to happen across the organisation...

**Nancy:** Meanwhile, a couple of the initial 19 leaders whom we'd interviewed, Gavin in particular, were very impatient for their feedback. He said he'd given his time, the exercise had felt valuable and now I want my feedback – and I want it now!

So, we went through his transcript and gave him his feedback and he listened very carefully. There were things in there that he recognised, and some things that were new and that he thought that he really needed to work on. He wanted to shift, and he said: I need this! I need this for me. I need this for my team. And, in order to create this higher performing organisation, I need this for my organisation. And I'd like it now! And at the end of our hour together he said: "This is the most valuable hour I have spent in my business career." That was quite moving!

Gavin's a very energetic man; he moves quickly - and when I was with him last week he just plotted out everything that he has done along the way since. He began by saying to himself: 'this is a shift and it's going to change everything I do in every way that I do it....' The first thing he did was take the frame and our coding to his team and he told them all about himself - given the insights these had provided. He said: This is the kind of leader I am, this is what I've been told, this is what I want to work on, and I need you!

So this was new language for them. The HR business partners supporting the team got quite anxious because suddenly things were moving and they hadn't quite got it yet. But they knew they wanted to support the team, so they got trained quickly. Roger and I were suddenly going out there more often than we had intended, because he wanted to build the capacity to provide structural support for him and his people to take each step. And he wanted a sense of feedback, he wanted to have coaching from the organisation, but he also wanted it from his team.

When I talked to him about it last week, he showed me the funnel that he'd drawn to somehow get across to his people 'how everything that we do goes into this funnel...' He showed me how he is being very clear about his priorities, and the key milestones... and being quite specific with his team

about how they're going to lead each piece along the way. And he showed me a systems map they've just done – about how they could unlock their leadership. They were looking at their strategy and how they do it, their talent and how they do it, and even where they sit. He's very proud! They're moving offices this week, and he couldn't wait to take me there, because they're going open plan, in an organisation which is highly hierarchical.

So, what he was trying to express is that he's taken this work, and through it and the support that he's been getting from us – from coaching to strategic and tactical advice - he's wanted to re-look at every aspect of his business and the way that he leads it.

In the six months that we've been working with him, Gavin's business has really grown. He's very proud of his business and how he's not just worked on his leadership, but the visible impact he's making on his business – which is just incontrovertible. It's just so strong.

I asked him what this work meant to him and found myself writing down what he said. He said: "if we hadn't gone on this journey, my business would not have survived". And then he added: "You know, if I had known what it was going to require of me personally, I might not have done it. It was really hard. It required more of me than I ever imagined."

He said how he'd felt alone, because he was out there trying to break new ground and the whole organisation wasn't with him. He also said that he hasn't had a weekend off in a long time.... I'm not sure that that's quite the support he has needed, so we're working with him to help build that!

So anyway: this is essentially a story about how this 'Framcap' work can shift things at an individual level – but if felt important to also give you a sense of the energy and the ripples that it's creating way beyond just him, largely because of the advocacy role that he took in relation to it.

**Roger:** So, moving quickly back to that system level: working at this scale, you do start to see repeating patterns and hear similar core messages. And one theme that has emerged very strongly is powerlessness. This is an organisation that is culturally, as well as organisationally, a power hierarchy. The culture of Africa and South Africa – and this is a bit of a generalisation - is one of hierarchy. And the people at the frontline expect to be powerless. So the conversations that we've been engaged in very recently are around what kind of intervention could you devise which, at the organisational level, would start to shift the paradigm of how we think about how work gets done, and how the organisation gets managed.

What we have started to do with them is co-create some ideas about that. The main part of the idea is to give people a chance to experience the current paradigm and how it might shift 'live', as it were, in a focused way. What we're realising is that we have to recreate the power and powerlessness in the room. So the centrepiece of the intervention that we're creating is going to be – I hesitate to use the word simulation – but it's going to try and represent the system that exists in the room, so that people can experience it. It will be multi-level. So it may be that those who are in a powerful position can experience powerlessness, including powerlessness in terms of status. And it may be some people that experience powerlessness at the moment can experience what it's like, actually, to struggle with having the power but not being able to make anything happen, and start to expose some of the structures that reinforce that...

Because what are starting to see in these leadership frames that we've developed is that they do start to challenge some aspects of the hierarchy, and the structures of power and powerlessness. The powerlessness at the top, which is: "I can't make anything happen" - and the powerlessness at the bottom which is, "I haven't got any authority to serve the customer."

And so what we're looking to create in rapid succession is a series of simulations - so a large number of people can have a 'diagonal slice' experience of what the issues are, and then start to see possibilities for redefining them in a way that supports, and is supported by, a shift in leadership. It boils down to shifting even how they think about leadership, so that this organisation can almost reinvent itself.

Whether we'll do this, I don't know, because our problem is going to lie in how we create enough of a container. This is because the edginess of what we're addressing is a societal issue, not just an organisational issue. But that's where we're at, and this is really emergent thinking for us, so in conversation with any of you, I would not pretend to have the answer here. Each time we encounter this sort of question or request, our approach is - much like Lynn Elsenhans from Shell earlier today - to say 'Let's see if we can figure this out together'. So this intervention - which is more formally described in your folders - has come out of our 'Let's see if we can figure it out together' mode. And I don't think it's properly figured out just yet either. So that's a story about using this 'Framcap' work in service of an organisational intervention.

## RFLC interventions suite – summary

	Diagnostic	Changing
<b>Organisation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing a tailored leadership frame &amp; coding diagnostic</li> <li>• Climate/underlying beliefs survey</li> <li>• Impact assessment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leading for Performance Change Organisation</li> <li>• Leadership Scorecard</li> <li>• Short Leader Programme (2-3 days)</li> </ul>
<b>Team</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collective Leadership Diagnostic</li> <li>• High Performing Team Assessment</li> <li>• Individual feedback</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leading for Performance Change Leadership Team</li> <li>• Profile feedback &amp; team coaching</li> <li>• "In the moment" Team Coaching</li> </ul>
<b>Individual</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Story Coding</li> <li>• 360 Degree tool</li> <li>• Leadership Aptitude Assessment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leading for Performance Change Feedback &amp; Coaching</li> <li>• Dialogue &amp; Inquiry Skills Development Programme</li> <li>• CEO Retreat &amp; Development Experience</li> </ul>

**Deborah Rowland, Chief Executive, RFLC:** I'm just going to say a few brief words, aided and abetted by Colin who's sitting here, because you've been on this journey with me Colin... So this is an example of how we can use Framcap at a leadership team level.

I've been working with the Global XXXX Leadership Team in YYYY - and Colin's a member of that. We've been working on a strategic change challenge and the leadership within that. So this is just a real quick story – and I'm really wanting Colin to embellish as we go from an end-user perspective... How was it for you?

But let's just start with the context, because this leadership work is all for a purpose – it's not something that just exists in isolation. I don't know whether I can say this Colin, or you can validate it, but the business challenge that you guys had was enormous, in terms of the NIAT, the net income after tax that you were actually trying to shift in the business, and your goal – I don't know if you can release it – but when we met at Windsor, you set this at £200 million?

**Colin:** £300m in those terms – but it's changed as our accounting process has changed.

**Deborah:** So this was a newly formed leadership team having to work in a newly global context - where they couldn't actually physically touch all their organisations - in a system where a lot of core processes were going to be standardised... So one question was: how can we as leaders inspire our organisation to get to that goal? It was a very tough business challenge, it was global, it was virtual, and the last vital piece of context: you had a team leader, Ruth, who really placed an emphasis on leadership.

So Ruth from the very outset knew that leadership makes the difference - going back to our research statistic: accounting for 47% of the difference between success and failure. So she had a belief and, Colin, I think your leadership team was almost primed for an approach along the lines of: we're not just going to work a business here, we're actually going to work our own leadership in the team as well. So one of my learnings, I think, is that the sponsor of the team has to really be curious and want to invest time and energy in this level of leadership work.

So that's just a bit about the context. Then I think the initial conversation we had with the team, was a conversation around what is the change challenge we face here as a team? How big is it, what's the scale and what kind of change approach do we want to use in the organisation?

We haven't talked very much about change approaches today. We've talked more about leadership. But I think initially the team decided: we're going to create this vision together and establish the case for change – yes Colin? And we had three flipcharts: Why do we need to change? What's going to change? and, How are we going to do it? And we came up with this story that we thought was really going to help the organisation...

This then ended up on three PowerPoint slides and went around some of the organisation and the language turned into rather boring management speak – and you got feedback along the lines of 'This doesn't particularly inspire me.' So I think your leadership team made a conscious decision to move away from quite a directive, tool-kit type of approach to change, to one that worked more with the complexity inherent in any change process, and engaged the organisation quite differently.

So you set out the business challenge, but then also made a conscious choice to change the organisation in a very, very different kind of way. My sense is that you learnt that we couldn't shape and direct this change – and you went from PowerPoint slides to using an artist to help create three pictures, which produced an **Attractor** energy in the organisation, something that continued to work when you weren't physically there, in a way that PowerPoint slides couldn't.

With these pictures you created a story in pictures to create a new sense of what this global organisation actually had to do, and these were sent around the company. So we considered how this could act as an attractor... But within those pictures you've got one called 'Stretch' showing a group on a boat, and you've got them leaning out, as if you're trying to race a yacht as fast as you can. So here was **Edge and Tension** as well... They weren't just pretty pictures – they were actually shifting energy...

**Colin:** And they weren't just made up by the leadership team, but with the participation of probably about 400 or 500 people around the world, all having some engagement through focused, creative sessions.

**Deborah:** So that's a good example, perhaps, of doing this in a way that had some qualities of **Transforming Space**. The process actually was part of the outcome, because it created a change energy that we could work with.

So what we did in the leadership team then was, say: well, if that's the change process we want to follow, then what are the leadership behaviours we need to demonstrate the change we're seeking? So I think it was in Frankfurt, that I came along as the team coach and introduced these four different leadership factors: **Attractor, Edge and Tension, Container** and **Transforming Space**. And I think how it was introduced - and Colin please embellish the story - I tried to observe what I had seen this team doing already... So I shared the practices relating to these four factors in the context of what I had already seen them doing, illustrating with little stories around that. And then the leadership team broke into pairs, I think, and actually went away to say okay, if I look at these four factors: where do I think my strengths are? And where are my weaknesses? And they got some mirroring and feedback from their colleague. Then they came back and, very openly, the team shared where they each stood in relation to these four leadership factors. I don't know whether you want to add anything to that particular point in the story, Colin?

**Colin:** Well I think this was about a year and a half ago as you were developing this - and we all intuitively liked the model. I think each one of these factors and descriptions you can kind of get your head round. So what we've actually done - in fact, ever since then - is we've used them in our vocabulary in talking about leadership. And we've actually now taken it further, because each time we meet as a group, one of us takes a turn in a kind of a hot seat and gets personal feedback from the rest of the team. So, for about an hour, we talk about the leadership behaviour of one of us, and that person is present but not allowed to speak - which is quite a freaky experience, I can assure you! I did it about two months ago myself. And we've ended up taking to this vocabulary very naturally... Of course, everybody has a bias on this grid - which they do naturally and probably a bit too much - and they'll be another of the factors which they need to remember to build into the balance of their leadership. So it's become part of how we talk about leadership and how we're leading in the organisation.

Nick Mayhew also was involved in this. When we had our extended leadership team meeting last March, we decided to take it a stage further and actually have some of those 1:1 feedback-type conversations with each other in front of our extended leadership team of about 120 - because we wanted them to understand the sort of discussions we were trying to have about our leadership. So we actually set up a couple of these feedback sessions and had them a bit staged, but not rehearsed as such, in front of 120 people. And that had a mesmeric effect on the organisation.

And to take it one stage further, I think it's important to say about the business that I'm in, that it's not just about delivering our own bottom line, but we're part of a much bigger organisation, and it contributes to the delivery of the wider organisation's part as well. And I actually asked one of my counterparts in our supply chain organisation to come up on the stage with me and have this conversation in public as well. And she was brave enough to agree to do that... So I think that one afternoon, which was about two hours, has had a massive impact on the culture of the organisation that we're trying to run - not just in terms of delivery of our own business goals, and the type of organisation we want to be - but also on our role in the wider system in the organisation. And it was quite scary. Well, not 'quite' scary, it was actually bloody terrifying - but we came out of that on such a high, that our feet couldn't touch the ground for about three days! It was fantastic. So that's what we've been trying to do and we've been trying to sustain that going forward. Nick, you were there, perhaps you have a slightly more objective perspective on it.

**Nick Mayhew, Senior Consultant:** I remember it very well - and you're right, the atmosphere in the larger group was electric. And they really engaged, because once you'd done that on the stage, the larger group was then asked to pair up and have a similar conversation there and then in the hall - and they all really went for it. It was very powerful. I also remember very well the day before the event started, and the whole team was there and I insisted on a little practice session, where you had to just try out how your dialogues might go. And I really appreciated the amount of edge and difficulty there was in that room - for all of you as leaders - and we just had to kind of push through... And Ruth's role was critical, of course, saying - when many of you wanted to just wing it - 'Yes, come on, let's try this now'. So there was **Edge and Tension**, and **Container** and, in fact, the whole lot, running all the way through. Very powerful.

**Deborah:** So, a bit like Nancy, you are saying that you can work with this as an individual leader - but actually, it has a wider effect than that. I think this story is actually about as a leadership team, you looked at it individually, and as a collective - but then also took it out in different ways to the wider system as well. And it's had a big impact. So just to finish the story: you're, what, 40% above plan at the moment?

**Colin:** Yes.

**Deborah:** Of course that might be down to lots of factors - such as the market, for one.

**Colin:** Yes, there's clearly market circumstance behind that. But, in terms of people's energy and commitment and this feeling that you're lined up around a clear purpose, that certainly helps when it comes to delivering.

**Deborah:** And I also think, having worked with a lot of leadership teams, the spirit that you have in that leadership team is quite phenomenal. In fact, we did a leadership team climate survey this year and compared that to the survey results of last year and the scores had gone up very, very significantly... Anyway, that's just a quick story about how you can maybe catalyse conversations about personal leadership in a team context, in a way that not only shifts the team's dynamic, but does this in a way that can impact the wider organisation and produce a lift in overall performance.