

Successful change leadership starts with you

The success of change depends on the leadership capability of individuals as well as organisations. For some time now, we have been developing and perfecting a Change Leadership Practices Questionnaire that helps individuals to understand and thus improve their leadership capabilities.

This article coincides with the launch of the questionnaire as a service to our clients at a number of levels ...as a simple **self-assessment**, right through to 360° assessment, full feedback and coaching. We explain here some of the things we learnt along the way.

But, why is leadership so important in the first place?

From our research and practical experience we have learned that it is the **leadership** of change that has the biggest impact on change success (52% of the impact). We discovered some deceptively simple but powerful insights:

- Leadership that is too **leader-centric** ...what we call “**shaping**” leadership ...can get in the way of successful change. This shaping style is all about how you express your views and feelings, and set the pace for others to follow.
- With what we call “**framing**” leadership, there is more likelihood of success. You’ll be setting boundaries and a frame within which people can be free to contribute.
- In what we call “**creating capability**”, there is even more likelihood of success, given sufficient time. This is about creating individual and organisational capability in change leadership.

Our research and practice went on to identify four Change Leadership Practices (CLP) ...what we call **Attractor, Edge & Tension, Transforming Space** and **Container** (see our book: Sustaining Change. Leadership That Works).

While these practices are individually important, we looked at those leaders who made a **combination** of all four approaches more effective. Some common patterns emerged:

- They could see the change in a broader organisational context and enable others to be aware of that broader context.
- They built capability into their leadership teams - and focused on the underlying systemic issues impacting behaviours as much as on the more obvious and visible issues.
- They challenged, yet were still patient with people, recognising that people needed time and space to be able to contribute.
- They seemed to display quite a lot of self-awareness about their leadership and what they were doing and saying, and were aware of the measures & metrics used to track progress.

Going deeper, we saw **behaviours** associated with each of these four Change Leadership Practices. We learnt that they can have a “dark side”. It may be un-intended, but an “Attractor” can actually become a seducer ...attracting people to the leader not to the change. “Edge and tension” can become abusive ...pushing people too hard ...challenging

in, perhaps, an unsympathetic way. "Containing" can become constraining, overprotective and even manipulative.

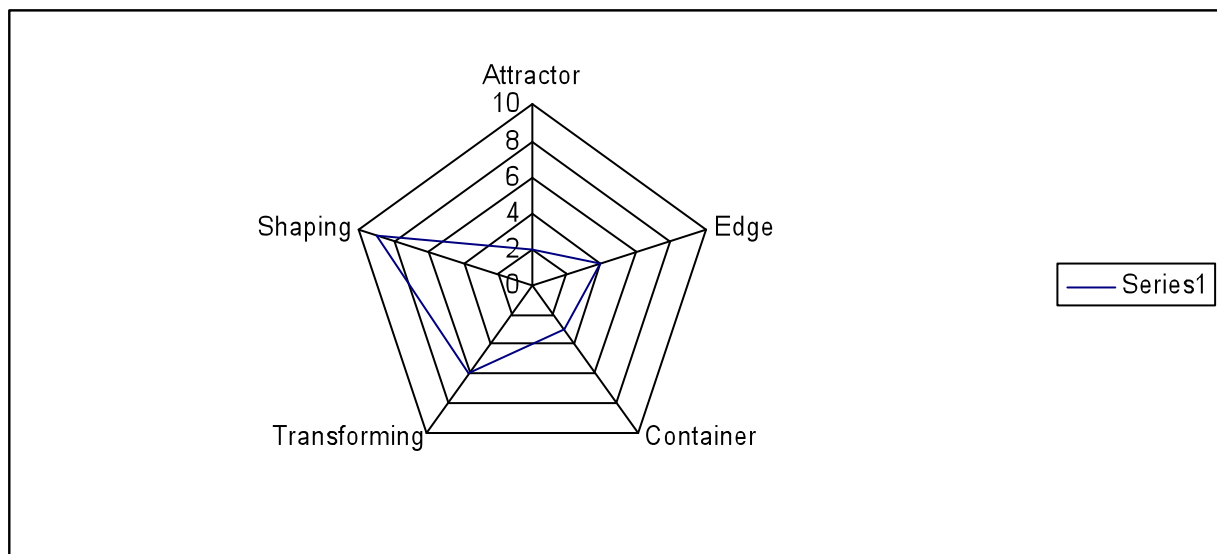
All of these findings played into the construction of the questionnaire, a diagnostic tool to enable individuals to assess their change leadership performance through self-assessment and with the help of colleagues in a 360° format.

Perfecting the questionnaire

We've been using our questionnaire successfully with clients for some time, but there were some questions which we weren't sure were giving us reliable input or measures. So we decided to test it with a further sample of 100 leaders. The outcome included two seminars at which participants were given feedback on their own leadership characteristics, and joined in a conversation about questionnaire results.

At the seminars, we set the context of the "CLP" questionnaire and confirmed the increased reliability in the questionnaire.

We then discussed the personal feedback reports (which each participant received) which included a summary of their profile and a spidergram showing their performance against the norm (see sample below).



Their profile was measured against the "norm group" of 100 people (which had been standardised into a normal distribution). Each received commentary on their balance of the four practices, particular strengths, areas to consider further, plus some thoughts and ideas on developing the practices. The seminar discussion moved on to cover related topics including:

a) The "norm group": This was over 100 (the "magic number" for robust analysis) and comprised those who we felt would be most likely to understand the context and meaning of the questions. Therefore, the composition was relatively senior line managers and those

from organisations going through highly complex or radical change. We plan for this norm group to grow and widen with usage, bringing in broader cultural and hierarchical diversity.

b) Focus of the questions: These are on the 4 change leadership practices - plus "shaping" behaviour, as our original hypothesis was that "shaping" would detract. We found "shaping" to be a negative element, particularly if over-played. When used sparingly, shaping can be useful as a way of bringing in the leader's own views and beliefs.

c) Impact for individuals and teams: Ideally, each leader would be well rounded in all four CLPs. Teams also require this, highlighting their overall profile and any common areas for development and focus. With top teams, we offer individual "behavioural event interviews" which are transcribed and coded using the CLP framework. This, combined with a self-assessment and 360° feedback, is incredibly powerful.

d) Self-assessment or 360° feedback: There was general agreement that, if at all possible, the ideal is to combine the self-assessment with the 360° feedback, particularly with people who understand the model.

In closing the seminars, there was a real sense that the questionnaire is now more robust, and could make a real difference for those leading significant change efforts.

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