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Preface

With thousands of books already published on the topic of leadership, why one more? And with so many books on your desk waiting to be read, why should you read this one first? In this preface we'll explain why and we'll summarize the key points of this book, but allow us to start with a short detour to more vividly make our point.

A few years ago, we were invited to speak at a leadership conference in Amsterdam. Afterwards, the social program consisted of a canal tour through the city, ending with a dinner at the magnificent Rijksmuseum. As we boarded the tour boat, we were welcomed by Herman, who introduced himself as our guide to the city. After his warm reception, we set off down the Prinsengracht, listening to Herman explain about the rich history of the place. But within ten minutes Herman was finished with his quick background sketch and turned to his audience to ask them where they were from. Hearing that some were Belgian, he explained how Amsterdam had risen to prominence after the arrival of refugees from Antwerp in the sixteenth century and he pointed to the luxurious residences these business people had built along the canals. In the same way, Herman connected the city to the history of the Italians, Germans and Americans on board. Asked by a Brazilian professor whether there was any link to his home country, Herman stunned him with a story of the Amsterdam merchants who had financed a Dutch fort in Recife on the Brazilian coast, and he promised to show the professor their houses as soon as we passed.

When after an hour Herman sensed that interest in his tales was starting to wane, he again surprised us by sharing that he had done a bit of reading up on the topic of leadership, because he had been told he would be stuck with a boat-load of experts. He went on to describe how the VOC, the first multinational company in the world, was run and he skillfully related this to what he had read about leadership. A fascinating debate unfolded, cut short by our arrival at the dinner location. As we disembarked and thanked Herman for the inspiring tour, two colleagues asked whether they could sail back to the hotel with Herman after dinner instead of taking a taxi back. Herman graciously agreed and sure enough, two hours later we were all back on board.

That is leadership. No one appointed Herman as our leader; he stepped forward and we embraced him. *And that is leadership agility.* Herman didn't use a standard script, assuming it would fit; he sensed what was required to connect with this particular group of people and he attuned his guide behavior to their needs.

As this example of Herman shows, to be an agile leader requires three specific qualities. First, you must be *flexible*. Flexibility is the capacity to switch between behaviors and not be rigidly stuck in one particular mode. To be flexible, a leader needs to have a broad repertoire of ways to engage people and the ability to smoothly switch between them. So, just as an agile tour guide like Herman can engage others by switching between different stories and different ways of telling them, an agile leader also needs to be able to nimbly switch between different engagement styles, for example, changing over from being challenging to being encouraging. We call this *leadership style flexibility* – having easy access to a broad repertoire of leadership behaviors.

Second, you must be *adaptable*. Adaptability is the capacity to acquire and master new behaviors, to further strengthen the existing repertoire. Herman could have tried to wing it using his existing range of stories, but he realized ahead of time that his repertoire didn't exactly fit with the group he wanted to guide. So, he had to go to the trouble of reading up on leadership and coming up with new stories to complement his familiar ones. This not only required conscious effort, but also forced him out of his comfort zone, to explore unfamiliar leadership theory for the first time in his life. The same effort is required of leaders who want to exhibit *leadership style adaptability* – the ability to add new leadership styles to their current portfolio. They, too, must move beyond their comfort zone, to acquire new knowledge, build new skills and practice a way of behaving that is opposite to the routine they were used to.

Third, you must be *responsive*. Responsiveness is the capacity to be acutely aware of the situation you are in and rapidly react to it. That means being sensitive to the needs of the audience you are trying to influence and swiftly adjusting your behavior to what is required. Herman understood this art of connecting to the people in his group as no other. He was quick to figure out the different nationalities on board and tweak his story line to appeal to their interests. In a similar manner, he was attentive to the fading concentration after the first hour and shifted his story-telling approach to adapt to the unfolding situation. Leaders must do the same, exhibiting *leadership style responsiveness* – judging the situation and swiftly adjusting their leadership style to match, either by flexibly accessing an existing style or adaptively learning a new one.

So, could you be a good tour guide if all you knew was the script given to you by the canal boat company? We would argue that this limited repertoire would make you a ‘one trick pony’ – you might be successful under very specific circumstances, but in all other situations you would be mediocre at best. Some tour groups might politely clap and even give you a small tip, but you would be memorable to few and no one would ask you for a ride back. For leaders, the same is true if you have a fixed style repertoire that you repeat over and over again – in some circumstances it might just work, but in all other cases there will be a misfit. It is for this reason that we believe that leaders need to be agile – *have the capacity to flexibly switch between leadership styles, and adaptively master new ones, in rapid response to the specific needs of the people and situation they want to influence.*

Entering the Age of Agility

As this example of a tour guide illustrates, the need to be agile is not limited to organizational leaders. In all areas where a person can’t afford to be rigid, but needs to quickly adjust to the particular – and changing – needs of the environment, agility is essential. Darwin would immediately recognize this argument. It’s actually ‘survival of the fittest’ in different words. People, and all other life forms, prosper if they are best suited to the environment and have the ability to rapidly follow shifting circumstances. So, for example, mice and rats are very flexible when it comes to their dining repertoire, eating more or less anything they find, while panda bears are almost extinct, largely due to their dietary inflexibility. Mice and rats are also very adaptable, learning new behaviors to live side-by-side with humans, while polar bears have neither adjusted to humans nor to their dwindling Arctic habitat. In this sense, leaders are more like rats than like either type of bear – their agility allows them to swiftly adjust their behavior and effectively respond to the specific demands of the situation.

While the need for agility is not limited to leaders, neither is it new. Leaders have always had to quickly adjust to circumstances to be effective. Leadership researchers initially thought that some personal traits would make certain people great leaders under all conditions, but very soon these ‘trait theories of leadership’ⁱ were displaced by ‘situational leadership theories’ⁱⁱ that recognized the importance of alignment between leadership behaviors and the specific circumstances. Central to all these theories is the Darwinian idea of ‘fit’ – leaders must be aligned with their environment and must evolve along with it.

So, is there nothing new that justifies fresh attention to the topic of leadership agility? Why should we suddenly care more about leadership agility than before? It is because there is definitely something new going on, at a very fundamental level – we have entered the *age of agility*, in which Darwinian survival of the fittest has been shifted up a gear. Just as in the natural environment, where evolution has been turbocharged and millennia of changes now happen in decades, so too in the organizational environment has evolution gone into hyperdrive. The situational pressures on leaders have become exponentially more complex, as their environments have become faster changing, more diverse and more demanding. All this means that leaders must make a step change in their capacity to be agile, or accept living on an ever shrinking sheet of ice.

There are many factors shaping the age of agility, of which four megatrends stand out as crucial influences on the need for enhanced leadership agility. The first megatrend is the pressure towards more *organizational agility* – leaders need to be increasingly agile because their organizations also need to be. We all know about the fast pace of change in many markets, driven by factors such as digitalization, customer-centricity, the energy transition, urbanization, increased connectivity, the

circular economy, demographic shifts and the like. It has been argued by many authorsⁱⁱⁱ that disruption is sweeping many industries, while no sector is immune to constant innovation and improvement, requiring continual organizational adjustment. This in itself would already pose quite an organizational change challenge, especially as the pace of industry evolution seems to have picked up. Yet, what complicates the ongoing organizational adjustment is the unpredictability of which business model changes will be successful. The more unpredictable the market, the more unpredictable will be the success of an innovation or improvement, which means that companies must experiment more and can execute less. We call this the need for *strategic agility* – the capacity to quickly shift along with the market, not on the basis of long term forecasts and extensive business plans, but on the basis of rapid trial and error, and scaling up of what seems to work^{iv}. Such strategic agility (as opposed to strategic planning) requires an organization that is agile, quickly and flexibly reacting to an unfolding new reality, while also learning new skills and developing new ways of working, depending on the business model that seems to be superior. For leaders this means that their organizations are constantly changing in unpredictable ways and that they need to change along with them, sometimes driving the change, sometimes adjusting to it.

The second megatrend driving the age of agility is *organizational diversity*. Organizations are becoming internally increasingly varied, making it more and more difficult for leaders to take a ‘one size fits all’ approach to leadership. This diversity is showing up in many ways. At the level of individuals, organizations are seeing growing variety in the type of people employed. More women are in the workforce and accepting jobs that were traditionally male-dominated. The cultural and ethnic background of employees is also broadening, as companies hire more people from minorities, recruit more people from abroad and often send employees out to foreign subsidiaries themselves. At the level of teams and units, organizations are also seeing growing variety, due to the differing environments in which each needs to operate. As globalization continues, organizations increasingly work across borders, but are also becoming more sensitive to differences in national environments, making units more distinct. At the same time, units are often moving at different evolutionary speeds and in different directions due to the required strategic agility mentioned above. All this means that leaders must deal with an increasing diversity of people and units, requiring them to nimbly adjust to each to achieve the best possible fit.

The third megatrend driving the age of agility is the rise of *employee empowerment*, or stated differently, the withering of hierarchy. We are at the start of a paradigm shift from thinking of organizations as hierarchies to seeing organizations as groups of cooperating people. Josephine Green has coined the phrase ‘from pyramids to pancakes’^v as a catchy way of summarizing this fundamental transition. For decades organizational theorists have lamented the mechanistic view^{vi} that organizations are places where people work (more aptly, where they are human resources). Yet in practice most people accepted that organizations were some sort of apparatus, with systems and processes, into which people could be slotted as cogs into a machine, much as Charlie Chaplin depicted workers in his famous movie *Modern Times*. As cogs don’t need to think, neither do human resources. They only need to be managed – told what to do and disciplined by those one step above them. Of course, these people in turn need to be managed, all on the basis of formal authority, leading to multiple layers of management and a pyramid-form hierarchy. In each position at each layer, the behavior of people was predictable and didn’t need to be adjusted to specific individuals. In the new people-centric view, organizations are groups of people working together towards a common goal, with some systems and processes to support this. The fundamental assumptions are that employees need to take ownership of their work, need to find ways to collaborate productively and can be facilitated in this process. In other words, in such flat organizations it is about empowering employees, not controlling them. This shift to more flatness has a huge impact on the need for leadership agility. As employees start seeing themselves less and less as human resources, but more as individuals, they also expect leaders to treat them as such, creating even more diversity to which leaders must adjust. At the same time, employee empowerment will not move at the same pace across individuals, units, organizations and countries, again creating more diversity for leaders to handle and a higher need to be agile in adjusting to different speeds and directions of change.

The fourth and last megatrend driving the age of agility is *career diversity*. There are still people who work their way up the corporate ladder within one function in one company, but they are becoming ever more rare. It is far more common for people to hop between companies multiple times

during their careers, but also across functions, across sectors and across borders. Career paths are also becoming less predictable, with people taking sabbaticals or career breaks, but also leaving to set up their own company or being acquired by another firm. Many people don't even have a fixed job, moving from 'gig to gig', always on a temporary basis. All this adds to the earlier mentioned organizational diversity, but for the people making the switches it means that they will likely have to make several huge adjustments as leaders throughout their working lives. The more agile they are, the bigger the chance of a successful transition to a new environment.

All four megatrends together are making it impossible for leaders to rigidly hold on to one set of leadership styles and be successful. Moreover, these trends are not one-off changes that leaders only have to adjust to once. Organizational agility, organizational diversity, employee engagement and career diversity all require leaders to become permanently more flexible, adaptive and responsive. That is why we boldly speak of the age of agility. And that is why it is the intention of this book to empower leaders to further develop their leadership agility.

Developing Leadership Agility

Back to Herman. It is impossible to become an agile tour guide without a lot of practice and the same is true for leadership agility. But there are a few steps before extensive practice where this book can add value. It starts with giving an overview of all major leadership styles and mapping where your current preferences are. The core of this book consists of ten opposite pairs of leadership styles and on each one of these ten dimensions you probably already have a preferred style. We call these your *default leadership styles* – these are the styles that constitute your comfort zone. In each chapter one dimension will be explored, focusing on the two opposite styles at the ends of a continuum. You will quickly recognize at which pole of the continuum you like to hang out and how difficult you find it to cover the entire continuum of styles. In each chapter there will also be a discussion around the strengths of both opposite styles, as well as the potential downsides of each style, if it is used incorrectly. We suspect that you will recognize which strengths of each style you have been able to capture and where improvement is possible, but also where you have tumbled into the pitfalls of each style and will need to avoid them in future.

After mapping your current leadership styles and recognizing strengths and downsides, the last chapters of the book will guide you towards the styles you need to work on to develop your leadership agility. These 'stretch' styles can be those you use but don't yet master, or they can be styles that are quite new to you. To support you, and to make it more interactive, you can also download the accompanying *Leadership LEAP* (Leadership Enhancement Action Plan) app for tablets.

Before starting on this journey, the first two chapters will stake out the terrain. Chapter 1 will dig more deeply into the question of what leadership truly is, which is not an unimportant issue, given the multitude of views and the inflation to which the term is subject. Chapter 2 will give an overview of the various styles and explain how they differ and are linked to one another. Based on the map of styles presented (the '*leadership style rose*', with 10 dimensions and in total 20 styles) the next 10 chapters will subsequently review one set of opposite styles per chapter.

It is not necessary to read chapters 3 to 12 in this particular order, nor is it necessary to read them all at one go. Using the leadership rose in chapter 2 as a map, you can easily pick out the leadership styles that interest you most and read those chapters first.

Before you get started, one last thought. Some of you might be thinking "wait a minute, why did Herman have to be so agile? Why didn't he just specialize in one script and let the canal boat company match him to the right audience?" Fair point. The world is full of one trick ponies that are nicely align with a particular niche. Liver transplant surgeons are not very agile, specializing in one skill, but generally extremely good at it. Olympic figure skating champions are undeniably world class at what they do, but generally don't dabble in speed skating or ice hockey, not to mention table tennis or liver transplantation. Isn't it better to be an excellent 'one trick pony' than a poor 'jack of all trades'? Shouldn't we build on our strengths and specialize, instead of constantly adjusting to the outside world, attempting to do things we are not good at? Maybe Herman should have focused on

only guiding leadership experts through the canals of Amsterdam and let the audience be adjusted to him, instead him having to do all the adjusting.

Do you recognize the two sides to this argument? On the one hand, there is advantage to specializing in one type of behavior and getting very good at it, particularly if it fits with your strengths and your identity. Yet, on the other hand, there is advantage to being highly agile, capable of quickly and effectively responding to a wide variety of situations. These are two opposite demands on people, pushing them in contradictory directions. We call such tensions between conflicting requirements ‘paradoxes’ and you will encounter them at the heart of all of the chapters that follow. This particular one is *the paradox of authenticity and adjustment* – focusing on a few leadership styles that are close to the genuine you, as opposed to developing a broad repertoire of leadership styles to be able to adjust to a wide variety of situations.

So, what is the best avenue to take? How agile do you really need to be as leader? Do you need to be highly flexible, adaptable and responsive, or should you lean more over to the side of specialization, genuineness and predictability? It is a fundamental leadership issue to which – you shouldn’t be surprised – there are two opposite leadership styles. Leaders who emphasize authenticity and limit their leadership agility, sticking to a fixed set of leadership styles, have what we call a *consistent leadership style* (actually it is a meta-style – a style for dealing with leadership styles). Leaders who stress the importance of adjustment to various circumstances and strive towards high leadership agility, have what we call a *responsive leadership style*. This is such an important leadership issue that an entire chapter has been dedicated to discussing it. This will be chapter 12, the last chapter reviewing opposite leadership styles.

Now, time to start the tour. Let’s see if we can live up to the standard of engagement that Herman set.

ⁱ The classic example is Carlyle, T. (1849), *On heroes, hero-worship, and the heroic in history*, Boston: Houghton-Mifflin. But also see Galton, F. (1869), *Hereditary Genius*, New York: Appleton.

ⁱⁱ The first theory to be called ‘Situational Leadership’ was by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard. See: Hersey, P. and Blanchard, K. H. (1977), *Management of Organizational Behavior: Utilizing Human Resources* (3rd ed.), New Jersey: Prentice Hall. But other theories at the time also suggested that effective leadership styles were dependent on the specific circumstances, such as contingency theory. See: Fiedler, F.E. (1967), *A Theory of Leadership Effectiveness*, New York: McGraw-Hill; Vroom, V. H., and P.W. Yetton (1973), *Leadership and Decision-Making*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

ⁱⁱⁱ Of course, this argument goes back to Schumpeter, J. (1942), *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, New York: Harper & Brothers. Since then the argument has been further developed by authors such as D’Aveni, R. (1994), *Hypercompetition: Managing the Dynamics of Strategic Maneuvering*, New York: Free Press; Hamel, G. (2002), *Leading the Revolution*, New York: Plume.

^{iv} See Weber, Y. and S. Y. Tarba (2014), “Strategic Agility: A State of the Art. Introduction to the Special Section on Strategic Agility”, *California Management Review*, Vol. 56 No. 3, Spring, pp. 5-12; Lewis, M., C. Andriopoulos and W. K. Smith (2014), “Paradoxical Leadership to Enable Strategic Agility”, *California Management Review*, Vol. 56 No. 3, Spring 2014, pp. 58-77.

^v See <https://vimeo.com/18669177>

^{vi} The term ‘mechanistic organization’ was coined by Burns and Stalker, to refer to a specific type of organization that is hierarchical, structured and bureaucratic. See: Burns, T. & Stalker, G. M. (1961), *The Management of Innovation*, London: Tavistock. Since then the term has often been used to refer to organizations that behave ‘mechanistically’ and to theorists that treat people as rational actors, such as supporters of transaction cost economics. For a famous example see Williamson, O.E. (1991), “Strategizing, Economizing, and Economic Organization”, *Strategic Management Journal*, Vol. 12, Winter, pp. 75-94.

Chapter 3

Interpersonal Steering: The Paradox of Activities & Conditions

The new App prototype looked fantastic. Stylish and professional, this was something you could proudly show to your business clients and not look like you were stuck in the 20th century. And the features were exactly what the insurance sales team needed – the App would be able to calculate the monthly premium that a client firm would need to pay for an insurance package precisely tailored to their needs. Putting this App in the hands of the insurance company’s business-to-business sales people just might help them to reach their goal of achieving 10% sales growth in the coming year. No wonder that Ralph, the commercial director, had led the development of the App prototype and was now pushing for the App to be built in the coming months, using an external IT company to get the work done quickly.

Awkwardly, Belinda, the head of IT, had only recently heard about an App being developed by the commercial department and now finally got to take a look at the prototype. As she suspected, the App would not be as stand-alone as Ralph was suggesting. There would need to be significant integration between the App and back office systems to constantly upload the necessary information into the App and keep it up-to-date. To the question where he saw the App in two years time, Ralph enthusiastically sketched a picture of the App moving beyond premium calculation, to real-time credit checks, quotations and deal-closing. Calmly listening to Ralph’s vision, it was clear to Belinda that integration with the rest of the IT infrastructure was going to be inevitable.

As head of IT, Belinda realized that formally the App was in her domain and that practically she would need to do a lot to ensure its success. Therefore, her first instinct was to immediately take control of the App project. Clearly, Ralph had little understanding of IT architecture and limited experience in running IT development processes, so the whole project was a disaster waiting to happen. Moreover, when eventually things would go wrong, Belinda knew who would get the blame – more than once naïve business people in the company had eagerly started revolutions that got bogged down in IT reality, for which the IT department was then held responsible. By taking hands-on control of the App project, Belinda would be able to steer it in the right direction, keeping constant tabs on implementation progress and being able to troubleshoot where necessary. It would still be Ralph’s project, but Belinda would head the Steering Committee, allowing her to closely supervise all necessary activities.

Yet, the more Belinda thought about it, the more she started to doubt whether tight control was the best way to get Ralph moving in the right direction. Ralph was passionate about the project and had a strong sense of ownership, so he would not be keen to give up control, especially because the IT department didn’t have the reputation for getting things done quickly. Moreover, in many ways Ralph knew much better what needed to be done from a commercial perspective, making it difficult for Belinda to competently call the shots. Not to mention that it was a priority for Ralph, who was willing to make the time available, while Belinda already had her plate full and had little appetite for micro-managing yet another project.

Maybe Belinda needed to ‘nudge’ instead of ‘shove’ Ralph in the right direction. By creating the right conditions, maybe Ralph could make the App project a success on his own after all. Belinda would need to facilitate, ensuring that Ralph got the right support, had access to the necessary resources, was better informed about the overall IT strategy and was given timely feedback about IT issues. If all of these circumstances could be created, Ralph would be empowered to drive the App development process himself, with Belinda indirectly controlling direction in the background.

As she thought about it again, reflecting on whether she should take more direct control over the project, it struck her that the issue wasn’t the project, it was Ralph. She shouldn’t be thinking how much guidance the project required, but how much guidance Ralph could use. How could she best help him to succeed? This insight helped her to get the issue straight, but as she drove home she still wondered whether Ralph was best served by hands-on supervision or hands-off facilitation.ⁱ

The Task of Interpersonal Steering

*Though good might come of practice, this primal truth endures:
The first time anything is done, it's done by amateurs.*

Art Buck (unknown)
American folk poet

Do you recognize Belinda's predicament? She has to work with Ralph, but deep down she would prefer to do the project herself. On IT, she's more knowledgeable than Ralph and has a better idea of where the project should be headed. But most importantly, if she did it herself, she would be fully in control. She's not a control freak, she just wants to make sure that projects in her area of responsibility are a success, which works best if she is not dependent on too many others.

Yet, alas, full control is impossible. Belinda is stuck with Ralph, who feels he owns the App and has significant knowledge vital to the project. Ralph is even reluctant to get Belinda involved at all, as her credibility has been tainted by past failures of the IT department, and Ralph wants a quick and clean implementation. Moreover, she doesn't have the time to get deeply involved.

While Belinda can't be in full control, the opposite option isn't realistic either – she can't ignore the App project and distance herself from Ralph, because her IT department will eventually be impacted. So, she is stuck between the opposite poles of full control and no control, with neither extreme being particularly attractive. She can linger around the pole of 'no control' by leaving the initiative to Ralph, letting things happen and then hoping for the best, but 'hope' is a sorry alternative for leadership.

Therefore, she needs to take the lead and steer Ralph in the right direction. Between 'full control' and 'no control', she can have 'some control' over the behavior of Ralph, by exerting influence on him to follow a particular course of action. This is referred to as *interpersonal steering* – one individual being able to guide another to move in a certain direction. Interpersonal steering is about getting other people to do what you think is necessary. As such, this is the basic building block of leadership. Fundamentally, leadership is about deliberately influencing the behavior of other people – not leaving it up to chance or people's own fancy, but consciously directing their behavior towards a desired outcome. Leadership is about exerting control.

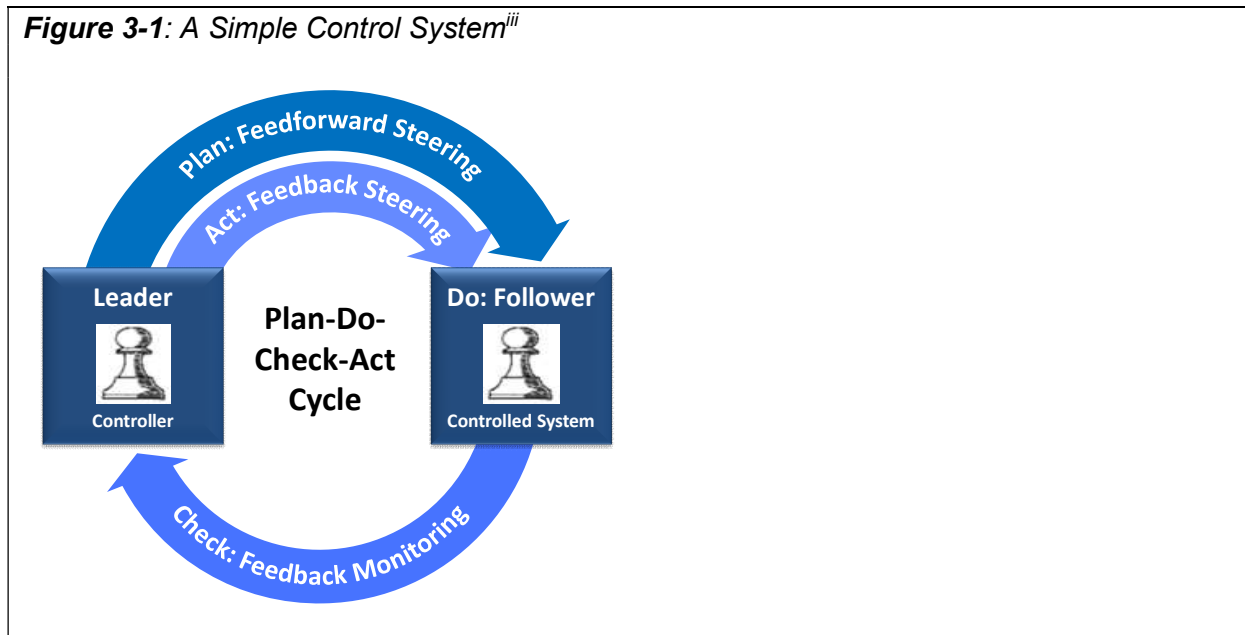
The word 'control', like the word 'power', has a bit of a negative connotation to many people. "I am seeking power to control you" sounds so much more ominous than "I am seeking influence to lead you", largely because the words 'power' and 'control' imply that it is done *to* you, not *with* you. 'Influence' and 'leading' suggest that followers have some say in the matter, *letting* themselves be influenced and led. Leadership is accepted and influence is permitted. Yet, strictly speaking, the concepts are not that distinct. If you influence, you have power, and when you lead, you exert control. Usually not absolute control, but some measure of steering along an intended path.

The question for Belinda is how best to control Ralph's behavior – how to steer him towards the best possible performance. To answer this question, it is useful to take a short detour to cybernetics (the study of steering systemsⁱⁱ), for a quick peek at the basics of control. In figure 3-1, a simple rendition is given of the relationship between a controller and the controlled system. If the controller only steers on the basis of plans, but does not monitor, this is called feedforward control or feedforward steering (only the forward arrow is used). But usually the controller steers and then monitors the performance of the controlled system so that constant adjustments can be made ('act'). This is called feedback control. So, if you (the controller) are riding a motorcycle (the controlled system), you open the throttle and race away, but check on the speedometer every once in a while to see whether you are exceeding the speed limit too liberally. You literally move the steer of your bike left and right, monitoring the edge of the road and other traffic participants. So far, so good. The control system works and you understand the simple principles.

Now you get off your motorcycle and on to a horse. Not so different you might think. Instead of a throttle, you need to use your heels, and instead of a steer, you need to use the reins. But as you put the horse 'into gear', you notice that nothing happens. Maybe it's out of fuel or maybe it's broken...or maybe controlling a horse is fundamentally different than controlling a motorcycle. Of course, the latter is the case. The big difference is that a horse is willful. Just as with humans, horses are not soulless machines that can be controlled without consideration of their motivation. Controlling

the behavior of a horse does not mean breaking its will and turning it into an automaton, but recruiting its will, finding ways in which it wants to do what you have in mind.

Figure 3-1: A Simple Control Systemⁱⁱⁱ



With a horse you can get quite far tapping into its extrinsic motivation, literally using a carrot and a stick, to get it to move in the right direction (although anybody who rides horses or who's seen the movie *The Horse Whisperer* will know that connecting with a horse is also very important). Yet with humans, their will is even more complicated. People can be just as headstrong as horses, not liking to have someone 'on their back' telling them what to do, but people's intrinsic motivation can be deeper and more diverse. Being able to tap into this intrinsic motivation offers enormous potential to unleash energy and achieve high performance^{iv}.

People's willfulness is important. People generally want to be self-steering, not steered. People want to be masters of their own destiny, not puppets on a string. They want to have the ability to make a difference and have the autonomy to do so in their own manner. In other words, people want to be empowered. People feel empowered when they have enough freedom to make their own decisions (room to maneuver) and enough resources and capabilities to implement the decisions they have made (sufficient means). To a certain extent, then, this can be at odds with a leader's desire to actually steer people in a particular direction. Therefore, the big challenge is how to steer behavior without squashing people's motivation. How can a leader, like Belinda, control performance without disempowering a person like Ralph?

The Paradox of Activities and Conditions

A leader...is like a shepherd. He stays behind the flock, letting the most nimble go out ahead, whereupon the others follow, not realizing that all along they are being directed from behind.

Nelson Mandela (1918-2013)

South African revolutionary and president

To better understand the challenge of controlling without disempowering, the analogy of controlling traffic at an intersection might be illuminating. There are basically two ways of guiding drivers to ensure that they don't crash into one another. The first way is to directly control the drivers' *activities*, which is commonly done by means of traffic lights. Putting an installation at an intersection influences traffic by regulating which activities should be carried out ('stop' or 'go'). Drivers *have to* obey the lights, otherwise they will be fined, but generally they *want to* obey the lights, as they have been

convinced of the efficiency and safety of the control system. They accept being told what to do as useful guidance and don't feel that their freedom to maneuver has been seriously impinged.

The second way of avoiding 'intersection Armageddon' is to create the right *conditions* under which drivers will be able to self-regulate, deciding when to 'stop' or 'go' based on their own judgment. A common way to influence drivers to make the best choice themselves is by rearranging the intersection into a roundabout. On such a circular intersection, the design of the roads actually aids the driver to gather the necessary information to make an independent decision. So, while the driver determines which activities to undertake, the prearranged conditions 'nudge' the driver to do the right thing. The driver feels self-steering, but is indirectly controlled by the designers of the intersection. Or as Mandela puts it in the above quote, the drivers never realize "they are being directed from behind".

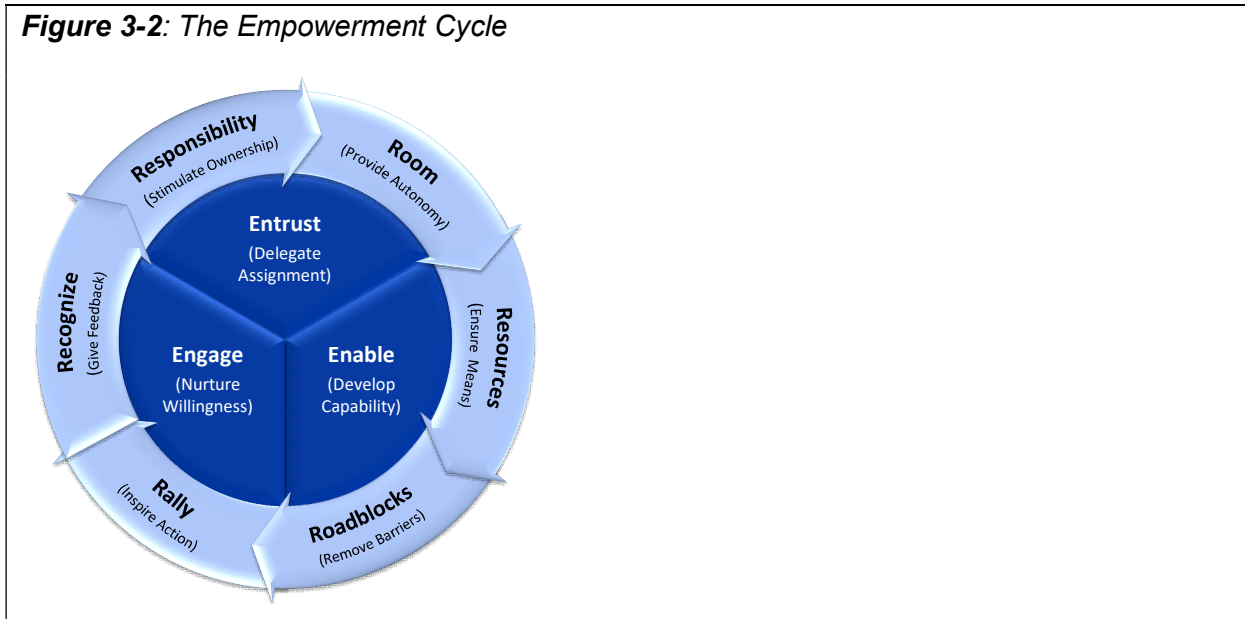
These two ways of controlling traffic – direct control by regulating activities and indirect control by arranging conditions – are not only opposites, but to a certain extent they are even at odds with one another. Who wants to have a roundabout with traffic lights? The same is true when we transfer these insights to the realm of leadership. Activities and conditions are two distinctive *levers of control* and it is questionable whether you want to pull both levers at the same time.

As became clear from the traffic example, activity-oriented control is very direct and straight forward. The controller steers by determining which activities need to be carried out and sometimes even the way by which they need to be done. After this initial steering, performance is monitored and adjustments are made. This is the closed 'plan-do-check-act' cycle outlined in figure 3-1. Most people will recognize this as a goal-setting, reporting and review cycle, by which agreements are made on what should be done (activities, broadly or narrowly defined), followed by reporting on performance (via performance indicators) and review meetings to discuss progress and potential corrective actions (i.e. additional activities). This direct control cycle can be carried out at very long intervals (yearly, quarterly or monthly plans and review meetings) or on a much shorter cycle time (weekly, daily or even continuously). The choice of how often to check up on performance will depend on the person being controlled and on the circumstances, but fundamentally the method of control is direct and activity-based (sometimes also called using *hard controls*).

Conditions-oriented control is indirect and literally 'roundabout' (sometimes also called using *soft controls*). There is no closed 'plan-do-check-act' cycle, but a looser 'entrust-enable-engage' loop, that we call the *empowerment cycle* (see figure 3-2). It starts with entrusting people with certain responsibilities and ensuring that they take true ownership of the tasks delegated to them. With this responsibility comes a measure of autonomy to carry out the tasks in the way people see fit themselves. Once entrusted with responsibilities and room, leaders need to determine the conditions that will enable people to make the right decisions themselves. People will need to have access to key *resources*, such as information, knowledge and connections, while being competent in their use. Furthermore, *roadblocks*, such as rules, dependencies and competing objectives, will need to be removed, so people can forge ahead unimpeded. Besides these enabling conditions, that make people more *able* to self-steer, it helps to have engaging conditions, that make people more *willing* to steer in the direction preferred by the leader. Typical engaging conditions that '*rally the troops*' include a deep belief in the mission and strategy of the organization, a feeling of belonging to a community, a strong team spirit and sense of commitment to colleagues, an embrace of the shared values and culture of the organization, and having confidence in its leaders. Engagement can be further strengthened by getting *recognition* via constructive feedback from inside and outside the organization and witnessing the impact of one's own decisions and actions. With these enabling and engaging conditions in place, leaders can slowly start to let go, entrusting people with more responsibility and autonomy, while increasingly operating without the 'plan-do-check-act' three ring circus. Leaders can gradually further empower people as time goes by, while still retaining indirect control.

While these two levers of control – activities and conditions – are not entirely mutually exclusive, they are highly at odds with one another. 'Holding on' and 'letting go' don't blend very well. Each of the levers is based on a fundamentally different control philosophy – active steering vs. empowered self-steering – that represent opposite ways of influencing people to move in a certain direction. It is for this reason that we speak of the *paradox of activities and conditions* – focusing on activity-oriented steering conflicts with the use of conditions-oriented steering and vice versa. So, it should come as no surprise that leaders usually don't easily flip between the two, but exhibit a preference for one side over the other.

Figure 3-2: The Empowerment Cycle



The Supervisory Leadership Style

Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do and they will surprise you with their ingenuity.

George Patton (1885-1945)
American general

Where leaders have an inclination to steer by directly controlling the activities people carry out, it is said that they have a *supervisory leadership style*. These leaders know what needs to be done and want to ensure that the required activities are executed correctly. They usually agree on a plan with the people they lead and then literally supervise (‘oversee’) implementation, monitoring whether the performance is according to expectations. By using this ‘plan-do-check-act’ loop they can delegate work to others, while still being able to direct activities and get people to move in the direction they want.^{vi}

But if you remember Belinda, she struggled with the challenge of controlling performance without disempowering followers. For her the question would be how to supervise a person like Ralph, who might not be so keen on being directly controlled. Generally, supervisory leaders adhere to four guidelines to keep people motivated while still directly steering their behavior.

First, the ‘plan-do-check-act’ loop shouldn’t be made to feel like a noose – it should be loose enough to give people room to maneuver. As Patton suggests in the quote above, don’t “tell people how to do things”, but rather give them the autonomy to make their own decisions within a directional framework. The ‘plan’ in ‘plan-do-check-act’ shouldn’t be too detailed, giving people plenty of leeway to ‘fill in the blanks’ as they see fit. The amount of leeway necessary will then depend on each follower’s experience, capability and learning ability. In the same fashion, the ‘check’ in ‘plan-do-check’ shouldn’t be too frequent, giving people plenty of leeway to accomplish the activities in the order and speed they see fit.

Second, the plan should be something people can buy in to. If the leader can win hearts and minds, and followers embrace the set direction, then ‘do’ and ‘check’ will not feel like disempowering control, but as necessary activities to realize the shared plan. Some supervisory leaders are extremely talented at selling a plan to people, convincing them of its urgency and potential for success. Other supervisory leaders don’t pitch the necessary activities to people, but develop the plan together with them, giving them a say on what the plan will be. This, too, can increase engagement, making plan deployment and performance reporting feel like an acceptable form of control.

Third, during the ‘doing’ people should feel that the supervisory leader is with them, accompanying them in action, ready to support where required. Having the leader close by, informed and involved can give people a feeling of not being on their own, but being backed up by a committed and accessible leader, who cares about them and cares about the results they achieve. If people sense that the leader can be counted on to assist them, guide them and fight for them, then it is more likely that the hands-on supervision will not be seen as disempowering meddling, but as powerful backing, advice and ‘air cover’.

Fourth and last, the ‘checking’ shouldn’t feel like an interrogation, with the leader looking to find fault and assign blame. If people feel that the ‘plan-do-check-act’ cycle is a correctional instrument, intended to punish anyone who strays from the path set by the leader, then they will come to dread it and see it as a means of enforcing obedience. But if the supervisory leader uses the ‘checking’ as a way of paying attention to the efforts of people and jointly learning what went well and what could be done better, then reviews can be highly motivational. Where leaders check in to see how they can help to improve performance, correct errors and solve problems, it is more likely that their hands-on supervision will not be seen as disempowering scrutiny, but as helpful coaching.

Adhering to these four guidelines can make the steering of willful people more successful, making it acceptable that supervisory leaders directly control the activities performed. But the underlying reason why supervisory leaders want direct control is usually not because the followers want it or accept it, but because it is necessary. Leaders supervise because results are needed. They take the lead and control activities because problems need to be solved, a certain level of performance is required and/or external stakeholders expect them to be in control.

The Facilitative Leadership Style

When you find a man who knows his job and is willing to take responsibility, keep out of his way and don't bother him with unnecessary supervision. What you think is cooperation is nothing but interference.

Thomas Dreier (1884 – 1976)
American editor and writer

Leaders more inclined to steer by indirectly controlling conditions, instead of directly controlling activities, have a *facilitative leadership style*^{vii}. These leaders don’t want to regulate, but to stimulate – they don’t tell a plant how to grow, but rather, they create the optimal circumstances under which a plant can grow by itself. They strongly believe that people should be self-steering, taking ownership of their work and responsibility for their performance, while the role of the leader should be to facilitate – literally ‘make easy’ – that people take the best decisions and exhibit effective behavior. Instead of taking over and telling people what to do, the facilitative leader develops and equips people to be able to determine their actions themselves^{viii}.

At the basis of the facilitative leadership philosophy is the assumption that people will only be fully committed to the activities they carry out if they have bought into them by their own free will. Only when people have the feeling that they are deciding themselves will they become truly engaged and perform to their utmost ability. People’s ‘will’ is a source of great energy that should not be broken or harnessed, but should be nurtured and tapped into. Facilitative leaders respect people’s yearning for self-determination and actively stimulate them to take control over their own destiny.

But unleashing people’s energy through self-steering is only half of the facilitative leader’s task – you can light a fire, but how do you keep it from going in all directions? The other half of the facilitative leader’s work is to canalize people’s energy, nudging it towards a certain course. As a canal guides water to flow in a certain direction, leaders can create conditions that will assist in letting people’s energy flow along a set path. So, as mentioned earlier, besides ‘entrusting’ (unleashing people’s energy by giving them responsibilities and autonomy), leaders also need to ‘enable’ and ‘engage’. Facilitative leaders typically enable by making sure that people have all of the ingredients required to make an informed decision (i.e. strategic insight, up-to-date information, experience and the necessary education) and the means required to carry out the decision (i.e. budget, competent colleagues, connections and time). But enabling also means supporting people’s decision-making by

answering questions, acting as a sparring partner, offering advice, expressing confidence and helping to sell decisions to other stakeholders. Facilitative leaders typically engage by making sure that people feel part of the team (i.e. have a sense of community membership, team spirit and cultural affiliation), buy in to the same overall direction (i.e. embrace the mission, strategy and development objectives) and have confidence in the leaders of the organization.

Shaping all of these favorable conditions is actually a form of feedforward – the leader steers by pre-determining the circumstances under which followers will perform. This means that facilitative leaders need to do most of their work diligently up front, not quickly in response to feedback about people’s performance and potential need for adjustment. Facilitative leaders have to think further ahead to develop most of the enabling and engaging conditions. Such conditions as a shared culture, strategic insight and confidence in the organization’s leaders are not built up overnight, so facilitative leaders need to take a longer term view before being able to ‘let go’ and trust that people will make the right decisions themselves.

It should be noted, however, that facilitative leaders don’t solely control by means of feedforward, but also actively promote feedback loops. Without feedback there would be no learning and no adjustment in behavior along the way. Yet, instead of the leader being the one driving the learning and correction process, facilitative leaders encourage people to self-evaluate, going through a plan-do-check-act cycle themselves and asking for feedback from the people around them. Where people don’t operate as independent self-steering individuals, but as self-steering teams, they can go through the plan-do-check-act cycle together, giving each other feedback, jointly learning and adjusting along the way. Sometimes facilitative leaders are asked for their feedback, or they proactively offer their feedback themselves, but they will always do such as input for other people’s own decision-making, not as direct control measure. As such, facilitative leaders discuss a lot with the people around them, but it is seldom in the form of checking up or reporting.

Figure 3-3: Differences between the Supervisory and Facilitative Leadership Styles

| | Supervisory Leadership Style | Facilitative Leadership Style |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Emphasis on | Activities over conditions | Conditions over activities |
| Motivating people by | Accompanying them in action | Creating favorable circumstances |
| Control should be | Hands-on and directing | Arm’s length and nudging |
| Orientation towards | Showing personal involvement | Giving freedom to act |
| Basic attitude | Trust is good, control is better | Control is good, trust is better |
| Core quality | Directly improving performance | Empowering people |
| Intended impact | Deliver as agreed | People take ownership |
| Underlying conviction | Stay close for the best results | Make way to bring out the best |
| Guiding principle/motto | You can count on me! | I’m counting on you! |
| Preferred tools | Real-time performance reports | Self-evaluation systems |

Qualities and Pitfalls of the Supervisory Leadership Style

The best executive is the one who has sense enough to pick good men to do what he wants done, and self-restraint enough to keep from meddling with them while they do it.

Theodore Roosevelt (1858 – 1919)
American politician and president

Neither the supervisory, nor the facilitative, leadership style is inherently superior. Each side has its own qualities. These distinctive strengths will appeal to different potential followers, under different circumstances and at different moments in time. Likewise, both opposite styles have their own looming pitfalls, into which the overly confident leader can easily tumble. These shadow-sides are

typically due to the danger of overdoing a good thing (the threat of exaggeration), but can also be due to using a style at the wrong moment (threat of misfit) or in the wrong way (threat of misapplication).

When it comes to the qualities of the supervisory leadership style, there are many. First and foremost, this style is all about ensuring performance. Supervisory leaders are focused on getting results. They know what needs to be achieved and mobilize people to deliver. They set objectives, outline the activities needed to reach these goals and then work through people to realize them. People are the means, performance is the end. As such, supervisory leaders can be counted on to get things done, in the right way, on time, on budget.

Having a supervisory leader on top of things can be very powerful. When results *must* be delivered, when execution *must* be precise and then things *mustn't* go wrong, having someone in direct control is vital. Having a plan that externals can count on and then delivering on that plan, that is the key quality of the supervisory leader. Of course, the more specific the required output, the tighter the deadlines, the bigger the crisis, the more complex the coordination, the more crucial the performance and the more menacing the negative consequences, the more it is a relief to have someone in direct control making sure that everything works. Trust is good, but control is often better.

Supervision can also be efficient. Even the most experienced people might not always know which activities they need to undertake and how to complete these activities effectively and efficiently. Instead of letting these people muddle through, a supervisory approach can help them to structure their work, can give improvement advice and even show them how it can be done. By accompanying them around the plan-do-check-act cycle, the supervisory leader can help them to perform and trigger them to learn at the same time, in a master-apprentice type of way. By being involved and knowledgeable about their specific challenges, the supervisory leader can ask the right questions, reframe assumptions, offer feedback and give suggestions, all helping people to develop further while simultaneously jacking up results^{ix}.

The supervisory leader's impact on confidence should also not be underestimated. Having the impression that someone is in control can already boost morale, particularly if the supervisory leader is perceived as being competent and having a successful track record. Confidence can be further reinforced by having a hands-on leader willing to get in the trenches and fight when needed. Getting close to the action and showing how things should be done can be a powerful way for leaders to exhibit commitment and demonstrate that they care.

Yet, in their willingness to get their hands dirty, supervisory leaders might be tempted to go a step too far, pulling activities out of the hands of the people around them. In their drive to control performance, they often go off the deep end and become control freaks. Instead of listening to Roosevelt's advice in the above quote and having the self-restraint to let people carry out the defined activities themselves, many supervisory leaders constantly meddle in people's day-to-day execution. They descend into micromanagement, closely supervising every activity, constantly looking over people's shoulders, always knowing better, never trusting people to do it right. People start to feel like a dog on a very short leash.

As control-addicted micromangers, feeling the burden of personal responsibility for delivering the results, many supervisory leaders work excessive hours and suffer from high stress.^x Before they know it, they are caught up in the spiral of disempowerment – in their drive to ensure performance, they try to control people too tightly, people leave or become disengaged, results slump, leaders need to do more of the work themselves to compensate, financial incentives and punishments are brought in to motivate the disengaged, people learn to minimize their efforts and the leader needs to do yet more work to compensate.

Even where supervisory leaders are not outright micromangers, the threat of disempowerment is constantly lurking. What the supervisory leader sees as necessary reporting, many people will experience as time-consuming bureaucracy or even Big Brother surveillance. What the supervisory leader intends as useful guidance, many people will view as useless disturbance or even as condescending interference. The supervisory leader might think that the plan-do-check-act cycle is not too tight, leaving plenty of room to fill in the 'plan' details and abundant time between the 'check' moments, but often the people being supervised will experience it as a straight-jacket. More 'heavy-handed' than 'hands-on'. 'People-sitting' as the grown-up version of baby-sitting.

Maybe the worst pitfall into which the supervisory leader can fall, is to start treating people like human resources – only as means to an end. In severe cases, supervisory leaders even forget other

people's needs and motivations, treating them as tools or 'agents'^{xi}, to be used and discarded at will. With such a strong focus on results, the supervisory leader will want people to perform as needed and not make unnecessary mistakes, while worrying less about how people feel about the experience. Yet, people can't learn if they are only allowed to do what they are already good at and are not given leeway to try things out and make mistakes. Sometimes the supervisory leader needs to sacrifice short term efficiency and effectiveness to let people develop, but this is a form of 'letting go' that is often psychologically hard to accept for those in dire need of having a tight grip.

Qualities and Pitfalls of the Facilitative Leadership Style

Liberty means responsibility. That is why most men dread it.

George Bernard Shaw (1856 – 1950)

Irish playwright and critic

The facilitative leadership style, on the other hand, is all about growing people. The key quality of the facilitative leadership style is that people are helped and prepared to take responsibilities themselves. Facilitative leaders realize that they are just like football coaches – they can't score themselves, nor can they tell their players on the field which activities to do to score. Successful football coaches put almost all their effort into developing their players and their teams, so they can score themselves. Only if the players 'own' the game and take responsibility for their play, will they win. The players need to be self-steering, as they can't be directed from the dug-out. Yet, this doesn't mean coaches are powerless. Coaches can enable their players, by developing their skills, improving their tactical insight, practicing their moves and building their stamina. Coaches can also engage their players by strengthening team spirit, reinforcing trust in each other, engendering a winner's mentality, and building self-confidence. And then they have to let the players learn, creating the right conditions to speed up their development, such as playing practice games, but also allowing them to try things out during a real match. Constantly, good coaches will nudge talents to grow in the right direction and only seldom will they shout from the side-lines what to do next.

The facilitative leadership style's emphasis on empowering people to self-steer is not only highly motivating for followers, but is also highly suited to the common situation that most leaders' don't know which exact activities need to be carried out. Many of the people that leaders want to guide are specialists in their field and it is next to impossible for leaders to directly control them because of a lack of sufficient knowledge about their work. In the same manner, it is very difficult to supervise people who need to be inventive, creative or adaptive, because it is unknown in advance what these people should be doing. Leaders can't use a plan-do-check-act cycle when no plan can be drawn up and people need to flexibly respond to the context as it unfolds.

Empowering people to self-steer is also efficient. Initially, facilitative leaders need to invest time and effort into enabling and engaging people to be more self-steering. Yet, once people can work more autonomously, they can respond more quickly to issues themselves and require less face-time with the leader.

Furthermore, while supervisory leaders are good at breeding confidence, facilitative leaders are good at breeding self-confidence. Supervisory leaders are present and interventionist, which under the right conditions can build confidence in the leader, while facilitative leaders are more entrusting and enabling, which can help self-confidence to grow among followers. Giving people a mandate to make their own decisions, learn from their own mistakes and, most importantly, realize their own successes, triggers pride, increased commitment and a stronger belief in their abilities to succeed in future.

However, just as supervisory leaders can easily become over-the-top micromanagers, facilitative leaders can quickly fall into the trap of 'macromanagement' – creating broadly positive conditions that don't really give any sense of direction, while at the same time abandoning people and letting them fend for themselves. The typical macromanager hangs back and lets things happen, preferring to stay at 30,000 feet, retaining a 'big picture' overview, but not getting their hands dirty. In their belief that people should be entrusted to take ownership of their work themselves, macromanagers throw people into the deep end and then let them sink or swim^{xii}. Sometimes this

extreme hands-off attitude is rooted in the conviction that people need to have responsibility thrust on them and will self-steer and self-organize if pushed to do so. More often, this excessive level of *laissez faire* is due to leaders' lack of knowledge of what to do – they have little idea of how to influence people to move in the right direction, often missing vital insight into the people, the function, the company and the business. Many leaders who have moved to a new position, firm or even industry don't have sufficient understanding of which conditions will nudge people along the best course of action and therefore resort to macromanagement, hoping that people will be able to figure it out themselves.

Figure 3-4: Qualities and Pitfalls of the Supervisory and Facilitative Leadership Styles

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Qualities of Supervisory Leadership Style</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Leading from the front 2. Directly steers behaviors 3. Drives result-oriented activities 4. Ensures that people perform 5. Disciplines people to deliver responsibly 6. Steering allows leader to be in control 7. Guiding people increases their clarity 8. Accompanies people during learning 9. Engages through sense of partnership 10. Instills confidence in the leader | <p>Qualities of Facilitative Leadership Style</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Leading from behind 2. Indirectly nudges behaviors 3. Creates supportive conditions 4. Empowers people to perform 5. Enables people to take responsibility 6. Self-steering allows follower to be in control 7. Growing people increases their potential 8. Supports people to learn themselves 9. Engages through sense of ownership 10. Instills self-confidence in followers |
| <p>Pitfalls of Supervisory Leadership Style</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Disempowering micromanagement 2. Demand for excessive reporting 3. Constant interference by know-it-all 4. Feeling like errand boys for the boss 5. Insufficient room to experiment and learn 6. Quick to blame and punish for lack of results 7. Direct steering degenerates to commanding 8. Dependence grows on interventionist leader 9. People misused as means by leader 10. Lack of self-confidence among followers | <p>Pitfalls of Facilitative Leadership Style</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Disorienting macromanagement 2. Lack of sufficient interaction 3. General neglect by know-too-little 4. Feeling like lost boys without a boss 5. Insufficient feedback on learning situations 6. Slow to evaluate and correct to get results 7. Self-steering degenerates into anarchy 8. Sense of abandonment grows thru absent leader 9. Leader misused as means by follower 10. Lack of confidence in leader's steering ability |

The result of such a 'you're on your own' approach, is that people feel there is no leadership at all. They often feel *lost* (with no sense of direction) or *loose* (following their own direction)^{xiii}. As people start wandering off in different directions, an atmosphere of virtual anarchy can take hold, further undermining any confidence people still might have in the rudderless leader.

Even where facilitative leaders are not outright macromanagers, the threat of losing control remains ever present. In their willingness to sacrifice short term performance for the long term development of people, they sometimes run a high risk of not delivering the necessary results. They sometimes misjudge people's ability to learn quickly and fail to supervise them sufficiently, leading to lagging performance. Even worse, sometimes the mistakes made are difficult to correct and can damage confidence in the team.

In their willingness to trust people to do the right thing, facilitative leaders are also strongly susceptible to the threat of 'moral hazard'^{xiv} – people will be tempted to serve their own interests at the expense of the organization. By giving people autonomy and not regularly checking up on what they are doing, there is a significant risk that people will abuse the situation, doing what is best for themselves, even when it conflicts with the interests of the organization. Such misuse can range from simple free riding behavior to the more destructive undermining of other people and units. In some

cases people interpret the invitation to ‘take ownership’ just a little too literally, varying from taking home office supplies to defrauding the company.

Finally, at a fundamental level, the question is whether facilitative leaders are right to assume that people prefer to be self-steering. Maybe George Bernard Shaw was right in the quote above, in observing that people dread the responsibility that comes with autonomy. What if the individuals who desire autonomy and responsibility make up a small minority, with a large majority of people inclined towards strong guidance? It just might be that the easiest pitfall for facilitative leaders to fall into is that of projection, assuming that others are motivated in the same way as they are. Facilitative leaders prefer to be facilitated and tend to treat others as they would prefer to be treated themselves.

Profiling Your Leadership Style

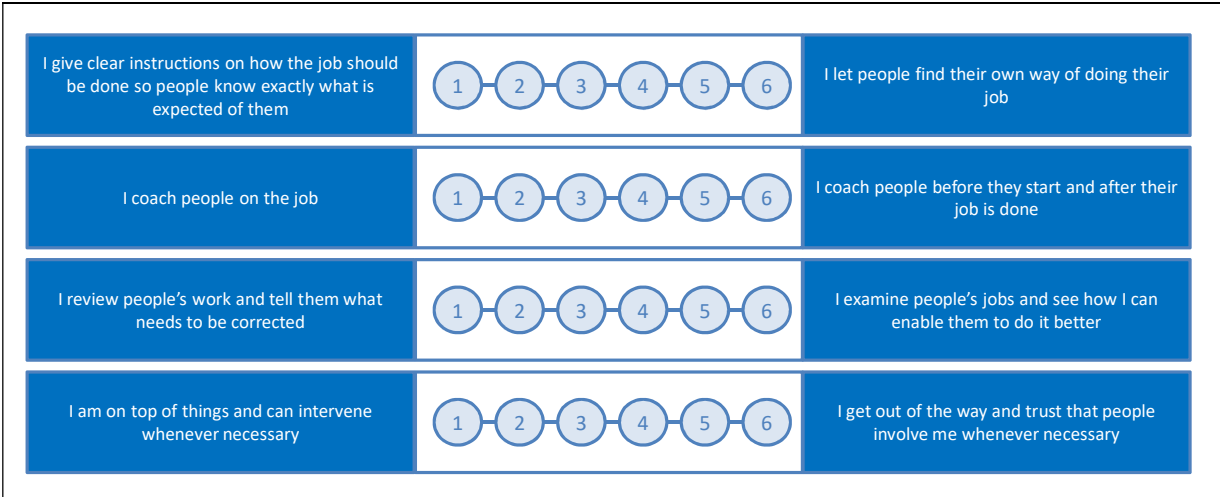
The most dangerous leadership myth is that leaders are born – that there is a genetic factor to leadership. This myth asserts that people simply either have certain charismatic qualities or not. That's nonsense; in fact, the opposite is true. Leaders are made rather than born.

Warren Bennis (1925-2014)
 American scholar and consultant

While reading through this chapter, you were probably asking yourself which approach you generally take. Did you pick out typical behaviors that you exhibit and strengths that you have? Did you also recognize some of the pitfalls that you sometimes fall into?

It would be surprising if you exclusively use only one of the two styles. Most people will have at least occasionally employed both, but hardly ever equally well and equally comfortably. Most people will feel more at ease at one side of the style continuum than at the other. We refer to the style that is in your comfort zone as your ‘default style’ – this is the style that you generally go to first and costs you the least effort. Moving to the opposite style feels less agreeable, sometimes even awkward, and costs much more energy. More often than not, this is because you are less proficient at using that style productively.

Figure 3-5: Profiling Your Leadership Style: Interpersonal Steering



At this moment, your first task is to identify your default style. As a quick aid to determining your current style preference, figure 3-4 offers you four opposite statements, with a continuum between them. Set a mark along each of the four lines and then calculate the average. It's not rocket science, but this should give you a first indication of your leadership profile. You can also find this profiling tool on the app accompanying this book (*Leadership LEAP*).

It also helps to already ask yourself two further questions. First, how good do you think you are at your preferred style? Do you use it successfully under all circumstances and towards all people

around you, and when do you experience some of the pitfalls? Second, how good you are at the opposite style and how easily you switch over to it – how do you judge your leadership agility? These are the two areas for further personal growth that will be discussed in later chapters – how do I improve my current preferred style and how do I gain better access to its opposite?

As for Ralph's App, have you already decided what you would do if you were in Belinda's shoes? Would you lean over to the supervisory leadership side and take more direct control of the project, steering Ralph in the process? Or are you more inclined to hang out on the facilitative leadership side of the spectrum, empowering Ralph, while retaining indirect control? What type of conditions would you use as soft controls to nudge Ralph in the right direction? If you are interested to hear what advice other people would give Belinda regarding Ralph, you are invited to go to www.leadership-agility.com to read their views and maybe to share your own.

ⁱ The names in all cases have been changed to protect the identity of the protagonists.

ⁱⁱ Beer, Stafford (1974), *Designing Freedom*, Chichester: Wiley.

ⁱⁱⁱ This diagram blends two theoretical traditions, Cybernetics and Total Quality Management. In the cybernetic tradition (carried on into General System Theory), control systems are picture by showing the controller, the controlled system, a forward arrow indicating the input and an output arrow looping back indicating the feedback (see Ashby, William (1956), *An Introduction to Cybernetics*, London: Chapman & Hall). In Total Quality Management the Deming circle is the central concept, with its four steps, plan-do-check-act (see Deming, W. Edwards (1982), *Out of the Crisis*, Cambridge: MIT Press). From a cybernetic point of view, act and plan are not distinct and sequential, but both control/steering activities, distinguished only on whether they are based on feedback or not. Therefore in our diagram these two activities are placed next to each other instead of behind one another.

^{iv} Sprenger, Reinhard (2010), *Mythos Motivation: Wege au seiner Sackgasse* (The Motivation Myth: Escaping from a Cul de Sac, in German), Frankfurt: Campus.

^v Thaler, Richard H. and Sunstein, Cass R. (2008), *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness*. Yale University Press.

^{vi} We prefer the term 'supervisory leadership style' over the more commonly used label 'directive leadership style' because the leader literally supervises along the way to achieve the intended direction. The term 'directive' is fuzzy and can easily be misunderstood. One way in which it is confusing is that it suggests that there is also non-directive leadership. Yet all leaders are 'directive' in the sense that they lead others in a certain direction. In the very definition of leadership lies the quality of giving direction, making 'directive leadership' an oxymoron. Another way in which 'directive leadership' confuses is that it muddles the *setting* of direction – i.e. decision-making – with the *steering* in a certain direction. Throwing these two leadership tasks on to one heap doesn't increase conceptual clarity. We prefer to separate the two and will deal with the setting of direction in chapter 6. For the classic distinction between 'directive leadership' and 'supportive leadership' (an equally blurry concept) see House, R. J., and Mitchell, R. R. (1974), 'Path-goal theory of leadership', *Journal of Contemporary Business*, Vol. 7, No. 3, pp. 81–97.

^{vii} This label was first used in Schwarz, R. (2002), *The skilled facilitator: A comprehensive resource for consultants, facilitators, managers, trainers, and coaches*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. We prefer this term over the more commonly used name 'supportive leadership' because the leader literally facilitates people to self-steer. Just like 'directive', 'supportive' is a muddled concept, throwing together a number of feel-good qualities such as friendly, helpful, respectful and just darn nice. As such, it is not the opposite of directive (or supervisory for that matter), as leaders can easily be supportive in combination with any leadership style. Implicitly what the term 'supportive leadership' suggests is that directive/supervisory leaders don't support, but are unfriendly, unhelpful and disrespectful, which is an unfair and counterproductive characterization. This distinction between directive leadership and supportive leadership is a classic 'bad style – good style' false dichotomy that neither helps our understanding, nor encourages leadership style agility.

^{viii} This argument is made by many authors, e.g. Kanter, R.M. (1989), *When Giants Learn to Dance: Mastering the Challenge of Strategy, Management, and Careers in the 1990s*, New York: Simon & Schuster.

^{ix} Some supervisory leaders will argue that there are people who are not intrinsically motivated to work towards the organization's objectives. Whether due to 'nature or nurture' these people are impossible to engage and will minimize their work-related effort if not adequately supervised. Without direct control performance will immediately suffer, making the supervisory leadership style the most effective. This view of people's motivation

is widely known as *Theory X*, based on the publications of Douglas McGregor. See McGregor, D. (1960). *The Human Side of Enterprise*. New York: McGraw-Hill Education.

^x A classic article on the overworked supervisory leader is by William Oncken and Donald Waas, "Management Time: Who's got the Monkey?", *Harvard Business Review*, Nov-Dec 1974.

^{xi} To a certain extent, the leader-follower relationship can be seen as a 'principle-agent' relationship. Leaders as principles want to achieve certain aims and recruit agents to work on their behalf. In agency theory the challenge of getting agents to do what principles want is described. But the relationship can be problematic in both directions; not only can agents act against the interests of principles, but principles can also neglect the interests of the agents; see Eisenhardt, K. (1989), "Agency theory: An assessment and review", *Academy of Management Review* **14** (1), pp. 57–74.

^{xii} See Muczyk, J.P. and Reimann, B.C. (1987), 'The case for directive leadership', *The Academy of Management Executive*, Vol. 1, No. 4, pp.301-311.

^{xiii} In an interesting twist, Chris Argyris has argued that there is another pitfall, namely fake empowerment. He states that many leaders send mix messages, along the lines of "do your own thing – but do it the way we tell you". This half-hearted facilitative leadership actually leads to disempowerment and cynicism. See Argyris, C. (1998), "Empowerment: The Emperor's New Clothes", *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 76, No. 3, pp. 98–105.

^{xiv} Moral hazard is a common term in economics where people (often referred to as 'agents') are tempted to behave in a risky and/or self-serving manner, as their bosses (often called 'principles') have insufficient information about what they are doing. Paul Krugman describes it as "any situation in which one person makes the decision about how much risk to take, while someone else bears the cost if things go badly." See Krugman, Paul (2009), *The Return of Depression Economics and the Crisis of 2008*, New York: W.W. Norton Company Limited.