



# Leading in Difficult Times: a Leadership Master Class

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# Leading in Difficult Times: Leadership Master Class

Dr Caroline Cole, Dr Oliver Couch

Creating Critical and Reflexive Leaders

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## introductions

- Dr Caroline Cole
- Dr Oliver Couch
- Practitioners, DBA graduates and Visiting Fellows at Sheffield Business School
- our interest and experience:
  - leadership in practice
  - the emotions of individuals during strategic and organisational change

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## leading in difficult times ...

- ... is not just about doing more with less
- developing professional understanding
- what is leadership?
- bringing together professional practice and unashamedly academic ideas
- creating critical and reflexive leaders
- practical challenges
- we must be prepared to be surprised ...
- ... by taking familiar approaches a step further
- ... by keep asking “what does this mean for me?”



## what do we mean by reflexivity?

- thinking about thinking
- interpretation at several levels
- aim is to deepen and improve understanding



## what is leadership?

- “... currently at least 100 accepted academic definitions ...” (Manz et al 1992)
- “... competing theories abound ...” (Kets de Vries, 1990)
- “... beset with conceptual weaknesses ...” (Yukl, 1989)
- 419 articles a month (Bolden, 2004)



## Northouse 1997

- trait – born not made
- style – behaviour rather than personality
- situational – the situation has a big influence
- contingency theory – task focus in crisis and steady state and people focus during change
- path-goal – individual employee motivation
- leader member exchange – in-groups and out-groups
- transformational – ethics, values, morality
- transactional – social employee motivation
- team – unmet needs of the group



## transactional

- social employee motivation
- probably the basis on which you work with your staff and your line manager
- is it enough in times of difficulty?



## transformational

- changes individuals – about ethics, values, morality - Ghandi, Florence Nightingale, JFK
- “raises the level of morality” in both leader and follower (Northouse, 1997:131) ...
- ... or, subordinates “individual wants to the needs of the organisation” (PIU 2000: D10)
- is this the course in times of difficulty?



## constitutive

- what counts as situation and “appropriate” leadership are contestable issue
- leaders “... shape ... the truth ...” (Grint, 2003:3)
- leaders “... manage meaning ...” (Goleman, 2003:8)
- who shaped “the truth” over 25% budget cuts?



## complexity

- dominant discourse suggests we know how leaders should lead ...
- ... collapse of investment capitalism suggests the opposite
- does organisational change emerge from local ideological conversations ...
- ... and not from “scientific” plans (Stacey 2010)?



## how to start a movement ...



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## stocktake

- three types of leadership, complexity and how to start a movement
- how could you use some of these ideas?
- do all your dealing need the same approach?
- would your colleagues appreciate different approaches – staff, boss, stakeholder, contractor, elected members, etc?



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## inspirational leaders



- ... who are yours?
- ... why are they inspirational to you?
- ... there is no one ideal





## is leadership a matter of emotion?

- leadership is all about emotion (Fineman, 2005)
- leaders inspire people in different ways
- “there is a thin dividing-line between leader as hero and leader as villain” (Fineman, 2005)
- epic stories or a sense of the dramatic inspires individuals and influences what they ultimately do (Gabriel, 2000; 2004)
- “... individuals liken themselves to courageous leaders, saviours, double agents, and people advocates” (Cole, 2007)
- wise after the fact? – or emotionally competent when it matters?



## leading in difficult times

- not easy to predict how individuals will react ...
- ... simply because they are unique
- the web of interdependencies is different for everyone
- the informal, often unspoken psychological work contract
- nuances of individuals emotions; partially revealed, not fully understood; not recognised ...
- ... or not even on the radar
- “the organisational collective” (Cole, 2007)



## when knowledge isn't enough

- Schein (1988) advocates the importance of knowledge, and human characteristics to bring about change
- but there are difficulties ...
- ... consider leadership in practice where different people have the same perceptual evaluation and the same cognisant response, but where their emotional responses are different
- what are the challenges for leadership?



## a leadership challenge

- everyone experiences change differently
- change invoke emotions
- emotions are embedded in stories
- individuals' views of the "what is" is influenced by their life experiences and by their emotions (Gabriel, 2000)
- "self-images fuse with their jobs" (Fineman, 2005, pp 122)
- leaders need emotional sensitivity
- without emotional competence do we have not just have an illusion of leadership?



## leaders and followers

- do you know how the people you are leading view the world? ...
- .... do they know how you view the world?
- emotions obscure a true way of seeing the world
- emotions complement and improve our understanding and knowledge by opening up and introducing aspects of ethical and moral values
- leaders need emotional sensitivity – but so do followers (Fineman, 2005)
- what are the implications for leadership?



## emotions and leadership

- there are many different theories about emotions
- what we can say is that emotions ...
- define the nature of our relationships - "... the prime medium through which people act and interact" (Fineman, 2005, pp.1)
- shape coalitions, conflicts, negotiations
- can be defined, masked and abused
- what we share and how we engage depends on the "safety" of the social context and on the nature of communication; nuances and language and ...
- ... the nature of leadership



## leadership in practice



managing key stakeholder expectations

- underestimated the emotional response of stakeholders



"... 1.4 million people are facing an unexpected tax bill ..."



## leadership in practice



innovative ideas ...

employees have a great deal of faith in him and find him inspirational ...

... listens rather than tells ...

"we have a say in what we do and how we do things"

... makes a difference



"... challenges ... and flies in the face of the ban..."



## leadership in practice



Passion rules !  
... you need wisdom ...  
... and a focus on “why”



“... an end to weeks of speculation by unveiling its tablet device ...”



## what does this mean for you?

- consider: one man’s bureaucracy is another man’s efficient and effect process
- how do leaders... you...change “I’m being done to!” to...
- ... “I’m engaged in!” ..... for everyone !
- how do you influence others?
- do you think emotional leadership has a role to play in a “doing more with less” environment?
- leadership infers a right to control – or does it?



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## taking this forward

- how much of what you have heard do you think you might be able to use?
- what other skills, experience can you bring to bear as leaders in difficult times?
- what challenges do you think you will face?



## Thank You

We will be delighted to hear from you if you would like to continue the debate or if you have any questions to ask

Please contact us at

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