Leadership Archetypes: An Exposition
by
Manfred Kets de Vries

2005/75/ENT
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Manfred F. R. Kets de Vries*

* Raoul de Vitry d’Avaucourt Clinical Professor in Leadership Development, INSEAD, France & Singapore. Director, INSEAD Global Leadership Center.
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Abstract

In this article it is argued that an individualistic notion of leadership is inadequate, given the increased complexity of the work environment. Although the “Great Man or Woman” theories still linger, most scholars of leadership now recognize that successful organizations are characterized by a distributive, collective, complementary form of leadership. To further explore this form of leadership, eight leadership archetypes are proposed in this paper: Strategist, Change-catalyst, Transactor, Builder, Innovator, Processor, Coach and Communicator. These archetypes are representations of ways of leading in the complex organizational environment. They may be seen as prototypes that provide us with models for understanding leadership behavior.

In the discussion of each leadership archetype, specific characteristics and limitations are explored. In addition, some of the dos and don’ts of working for or managing people possessing these specific leadership behavior patterns are highlighted. These in-depth descriptions form the foundation for developing a Leadership Archetype Questionnaire (LAQ), a 360° survey instrument designed to allow leaders to identify their own leadership archetype characteristics.

Clinical research revealed that although individuals may “drift” toward one particular archetype, it is more common for a person to possess the characteristics of a number of archetypes; “hybrids” are the rule rather than the exception. It is important to keep in mind that each of these leadership archetypes will prove more or less effective depending on the organizational situation; therefore the ideal executive team should include people with diverse dominant leadership archetype characteristics. An executive team in which multiple leadership archetypes are represented should be able to cover all the leadership needs that are required, whatever the context.

Key words: Leadership archetype; leadership behavior; character; team; executive role configuration; leadership archetype questionnaire.
Introduction

If you want one year of prosperity, grow grain.
If you want ten years of prosperity, grow trees.
If you want one hundred years of prosperity, grow people.
—Chinese proverb

My grandfather once told me that there were two kinds of people: those who do the work and those who take the credit. He told me to try to be in the first group. There is much less competition.
—Indira Gandhi

Leadership is the ability to get men to do what they don't want to do and like it.
—Harry Truman

When the character of a man is not clear to you, look at his friends.
—Japanese proverb

There is a story about a general who was facing a formidable battle. He had three regiments and he needed the cooperation and commitment of the three colonels leading them. The first colonel was entrepreneurial, independent-minded and self-confident. The second colonel, although renowned for his ability to achieve the impossible, was also notorious for his abrasive and confrontational style. The third colonel was reliable, efficient and conscientious, but had very little imagination. The night before the battle, the general went to the first colonel and announced that he would be counting on him to lead the attack. Having given the order, he left and went to the second colonel. He told him that the coming battle would be a disastrous and hopeless endeavor. The second colonel disagreed vehemently: the general had it all wrong. He was sure they could win
the battle if he was allowed to take the lead. The general then moved on to the third colonel and gave him a highly detailed plan of attack. The next day, all three regiments attacked successfully, and the battle was won.

The general had a good understanding of the character and the leadership behavior of his three colonels, and used it to his benefit. He figured out how to get the best out of each of them. He knew that by identifying and manipulating the levers in their character structure, half the job was done. Their character would determine how they would lead the troops and face the enemy.

An increasing number of executives have realized the importance of understanding character and leadership style in selecting, motivating and developing leaders. In an environment characterized by continuous and discontinuous change, the assessment of leadership potential and the development of leaders has become top priority for every organization. To survive in this competitive, global world, organizations need leaders who can deal with the challenges of tomorrow; who can get the best out of people; and who can help people take the extra step to a performance that exceeds expectations.

Unfortunately, the ghost of the Great Man or Woman is still hovering around the domain of leadership studies. The notion that leaders are exceptional individuals, born with an innate capacity to lead, has never been very realistic, however. Just as there is no such thing as a baby without a mother, there are no leaders without followers, and no leaders without a context for leadership. Nature plays a role, but so does nurture. Leaders are not born. Leaders become leaders because of significant human experiences. Moreover, leaders never operate in isolation. All leadership activities take place in a specific context. So to understand leadership behavior, we have to consider not only the personal makeup of the leader—the leader’s character—but also the makeup of the followers and the specifics of a particular situation. The personalities of followers (and their values, attitudes, and beliefs), the strength of a group’s cohesiveness, and the situation (the nature of a task, the type of organization, corporate culture, national culture, industry factors, and socioeconomic-political environments) are all important factors in the leadership equation. Certain kinds of leadership behavior will simply not fit certain follower types or
situations. It is this interface between leaders, followers, and situation that makes leadership such a highly complex subject of study. (See Exhibit 1 for an overview of the leadership domain.)

Exhibit One: The Leadership Domain

It is clear that an individualistic notion of leadership is inadequate, given the increased complexity of the work environment. In spite of the obstinate survival of Great Man or Woman theories, a more collective view of leadership is required. However, this implies that all the roles played by senior executives in a leadership role constellation need to be considered. We need insight into the qualities leaders must have to be successful and to respond to different situations and contexts, and also to understand the leader's role in relation to the other people he or she works with. Executives need more than a fixed set
of generic leadership qualities or competencies in order to function at senior levels. Leaders can not do it alone.

Successful organizations are characterized by a distributive, collective form of leadership. At every level of the organization, leaders are successful because they know how to enlist the help of the right people. This finding suggests that in order to assess leadership potential in an organization, we need to clarify the various roles leaders must take on to be effective in different contexts. Specific leadership role configurations that contribute to greater organizational effectiveness need to be created. And to be able to engage in leadership design like this, we need to have a modicum of understanding of the interconnections between leadership behavior and character—as the general in our story realized. We need to know the qualities or competencies that leaders must have to be effective, and the roles they must play. Organizational designers have to appreciate the way these various roles complement each other. We also need to understand how these roles evolve. We need to understand character and remember that it is the foundation on which leadership qualities (or competencies) and roles are based. As the Greek philosopher Heraclitus said, “Character is man’s fate.”

A Question of Character

“Character” means the deeply ingrained patterns of behavior that define an individual. The word derives from the Greek word meaning engraving. And it is our character, sometimes referred to as our personality, that distinguishes us from others. It is the stamp impressed on us by nature and nurture that defines who we really are. It determines the final direction and outcome of our motivational needs, temperament, and traits. It is a composite of habits we choose and develop, but which gradually come to drive us. There’s a saying that warns, “Watch your thoughts; they become your words. Watch your words; they become your actions. Watch your actions; they become your habits. Watch your habits; they become your character. Watch your character; it will become your destiny.” And that’s not always good: as August Strindberg put it, “Man with a so-called character is often a simple piece of mechanism; he has often only one point of view for the extremely complicated relationships of life.”
Some students of psychology distinguish character from personality, maintaining that personality defines visible, superficial behavior, while character refers to the deep, underlying structures that make a person distinctive. In general conversation, character can have moral connotations: we talk about someone having a “good” or “bad” character. There is ample opportunity for confusion: here, character and personality are used interchangeably to signify the same thing.

Character, or personality, is central to the way people perceive themselves and to the way they present themselves in a public setting. It determines motivation and ambition and dictates the way a person relates to his or her internal and external world. It colors the nature and quality of our relationships with others and the way we pursue our goals in life. Character also affects an individual’s moral compass—that amalgam of moral, ethical, and motivational principles that guides us through life. And character determines leadership style. Heraclitus was right: character is destiny.

Personality traits are the most conspicuous features of an individual’s character. Temperament and early experiences simultaneously influence the development of emerging psychological structures and functions, in the process creating personality traits—salient, stable ways of functioning that are of long duration and characterize an individual’s inner theatre, the template of themes that influence behavior and action. And although the genesis of behavior, emotions, attitudes, and defensive structures can be traced to infancy, traits tend to become more prominent in adolescence or early adulthood. These traits persist throughout life and affect every aspect of day-to-day behavior.

Observations about leadership style need to acknowledge the concept of character, because character determines an individual’s leadership style and how it is perceived by others. Character traits also affect leadership competencies, and the roles an individual will play in an organizational setting.
Leadership Archetypes

Leadership roles

Effective leaders have two roles—a charismatic one and an architectural one (Kets de Vries 2001). In the charismatic role, leaders envision a better future and empower and energize their subordinates. In the architectural role, leaders address issues related to organizational design and control and reward systems. Both roles are necessary for effective leadership. As an architect, the leader has to implement the structures and policies that allow him or her to carry out the envisioning, empowering, and energizing duties of charismatic leadership. Neither role is sufficient without the other (although one role is often more dominant than the other, depending on the situation). These two roles have to be aligned in one way or another. But it is a rare leader who can fulfill both roles seamlessly. Usually, alignment is only achieved within an executive role constellation that enables the different members to take on the required roles. (For an overview of the Leadership Cycle see Exhibit 2.)

Exhibit 2: The leadership cycle
**The development of character: a detour**

From a conceptual point of view, we can discern a number of specific patterns in the evolution of character traits or behavioral dispositions (Millon 1996). One is the pleasure-pain axis, which assumes that all of our motivation is ultimately aimed in one of these directions. People will move toward situations that are attractive and positively reinforcing, while they move away from situations that are negatively experienced. Another is the active-passive axis. A vast range of behavior depends on whether a person takes the initiative in shaping the events in his or her life, or whether behavior is determined in response to events. In other words, does an individual feel in control of his or her destiny, or does he or she feel controlled? A third axis is subject-object, or self-other, which parallels Carl Jung’s distinction between introverts and extroverts (Jung 1923). Is emotional energy directed toward the self or toward others? Although these three axes form the basic behavioral matrix, many different permutations can evolve to determine a person’s unique imprint on the external world.

Certain types of personality trait cause interpersonal problems, or “character disorders” (American Psychiatric Association 1987; Kets de Vries and Perzow 1991; Carver and Scheier 2001; Pervin and Oliver 2001). Individuals with personality disorders have a tendency to blame others for their problems, as these traits have become an intrinsic part of their personality. Everyone recognizes stinginess, generosity, vindictiveness, arrogance and independence. They pervade a wide range of personal and social situations. If these traits become rigid and self-defeating, however, they can impair social and professional functioning. When they do, they are said to have become egosyntonic, meaning that the individual is unaware of what others see as dysfunctional behavior. If that is the case, a person may be suffering from a character or personality disorder, enduring inflexible behavior patterns severe enough to cause internal distress and significantly impair day-to-day functioning. Character disorders will have an effect on leadership style and this darker side of a leader’s behavior can contribute to organizational decline.
How to describe people

Character is made up of a constellation of character traits. These character traits can be used in a number of ways to describe people.

*Dimensional traits* Describing a person’s character in terms of dimensional traits is popular with personality theorists as it allows a great deal of flexibility. Using a set of traits means that inclusivity is always possible, whatever bizarre behavior a person may be showing. The problem with trait approach (a conundrum that also affects the assessment of leadership traits and competencies) is that there are almost as many traits as studies of traits. These studies draw on nearly all the adjectives found in the dictionary describing positive or negative human attributes, leading to clutter and inconclusive results.

*Configurations of traits* The other way of describing people is to construct configurations of traits. Personality theorists recognize that certain constellations of traits—archetypes—recur on a regular basis. The word archetype is derived from the Latin archetypum and the Greek arkhetupon (arch as in chief, and tupos as in stamp). It can be seen as the quintessence of a specific behavior pattern, a model with which other people can be compared. Identifying combinations of traits is a more finite process than compiling data on dimensional traits; it simplifies a highly complex world and provides some closure, enabling clinicians to make quick assessments about the best intervention strategy.

This approach to classifying people has not been without its critics, however. Some maintain that labeling is demeaning. They argue that it is too simplified a way of looking at people, and ignores the richness of personality. It is also more difficult to classify strange, infrequent or hybrid conditions that may not fit the established categories. These are valid criticisms, but archetypes can nevertheless be helpful, even if categories are more fixed and inflexible than traits.

Whatever approach is taken, any sensitive researcher of personality, psychotherapist or leadership coach realizes that people are far too complex to be summarized in a simple personality description, and the various taxonomies provide only provisional answers.
Archetypes are only the start of the descriptive process. Descriptions will be modified as more evidence becomes available. Nobody can be understood completely through either abstract configurations or dimensions of individual differences.

**From character to leadership archetypes**

So, in order to understand people we need to know something about character or character traits. This is an urgent requirement if we want to help people change some of their behavior patterns. Understanding character is a priority in analyzing leadership behavior. We have to remember that people are multi-layered, like onions.

In each individual we can find layers of the self. At the core of the leadership onion is a person’s inner theater—his or her character or character traits; in the next layers we find the values, beliefs and attitudes that have evolved over time to shape behavior; the outer skin is the individual’s actions in response to environmental pressures (see Exhibit 3).

**Exhibit 3: The leadership onion**
To go from the surface of the onion to the core can be an exciting but difficult journey. To understand a person, we need to make sense of his or her inner theater, the various scripts or behavioral dispositions that determine the person’s character and their character traits. Peeling this onion can be difficult, however. Many people are hard to decipher. But only by deciphering the scripts playing in a person’s inner theater, will we truly understand why people behave and act the way they do. We need to remember that underlying any leader’s behavior—whatever a person’s leadership archetype(s) may be—are character configurations or traits. We need to make sense of a person in a holistic way. If personal change and transformation are issues, piece-meal approaches will have only a limited benefit. Both surface manifestations and the inner core need to be dealt with. Consideration of all layers of the onion will make any change effort much more powerful.

The question is, how can we get a sense of this inner theater? Are there ways to make behavior more transparent? How can someone be encouraged to open up? Psychotherapy uses techniques of intervention to understand better a person’s functioning, including out-of-awareness behavior; personality tests can tap the deepest layers of an individual’s personality. Complete insight into what a person is all about will be the exception rather than the rule, but a start can be made. The safest method is to move from the surface of the onion, and then go deeper, by peeling layer after layer of the onion away.

Sometimes the underlying dimensions are quite clear from the outer layer, but in other instances this will not be the case. Further exploration will be needed to unpeel these underlying layers. Unfortunately, in many instances, we may not have the time or resources to embark on such an inner journey; and even if we did, the person under the microscope may not be prepared to undertake such an in-depth exploration. The timing might not be right. It might be too anxiety-provoking. But even if deep understanding is not possible, the person will probably be prepared to receive feedback about the outer layers.

Most people are motivated by a natural curiosity about how they come across to others. They may ask themselves whether other people’s perception of them is consistent with
their own. They may want to learn more about their effectiveness. They may want feedback for reasons of personal growth and development. They may want to know what steps to take to change for the better. They may want to understand why they function most successfully in certain situations or conditions. Peeling the outer layers of the onion is the beginning of a journey. When the patterns in the outer layer are revealed, the person studied may become interested in learning more, and be ready to further exploration.

Most leadership questionnaires have focused on the outer layer of the onion. This is unsurprising, given the strength of human resistance. They have not been designed to address the intricate matrix of connections expressed in leadership behavior. However, people who want to work on problem behavior need to understand the continuity between their past and their present. They have to understand where they come from, they need to make sense of their personal history, in order to change or reaffirm identity. They need to recognize their preferred defensive patterns, and how they deal with emotions; they need to understand their perception of themselves and how they perceive others. Merely dealing with surface phenomena can have a Band-Aid effect: problems are only temporarily suppressed, to pop up some time later.

**The Assessment of Leadership Behavior**

Most leadership tests have tried to identify certain recurring behavior patterns considered more or less effective in a leadership context. In the most popular of these tests executives are classified as being people- or task-oriented (Fiedler 1967; Blake and Mouton 1985; Bass 1989). In the people (consideration) orientation, leaders are concerned about the human needs of their employees. Such people are assumed to be more effective in creating teams, in helping employees with their problems, and providing psychological support. In the task (structure) orientation, such leaders believe that they get results by consistently focusing on the task to be done.
Another common approach found in leadership questionnaires is to assess whether leaders have an autocratic or democratic leadership style (Tannenbaum and Schmidt 1958; McGregor 1960; Likert 1961; Bass 1989). In the autocratic (directive) style, the leader tells employees what needs to be done and how to do it, without soliciting the advice of the followers. In the democratic or participative style, the leader includes the employees in the decision making process. However, the leader is still responsible for the decisions that are made.

A relatively recent distinction has been made between transactional and transformational leadership. The transactional leader works through creating structures that make it clear what is required of subordinates, and the rewards that will accrue through following orders. Transformational leaders, in contrast, seek to transform organizations, including the tacit promise to transform followers in the process. Supposedly, the result of transforming leadership is a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders. Thus while the first kind of leadership is more short-term oriented, focused on tactical issues, transformational leadership transcends daily affairs and helps release human potential (Burns 1978; Bass 1985; House and Shamir 1993; Bass and Avolo 1994).

Many variations on these basic themes can be identified, some more realistic than others. Classifying leaders in this way, however, frequently creates extremely simplistic two-by-two matrixes, presenting a number of leadership styles. But in spite of their oversimplified nature, these approaches have some merit, as their insight can point a person in the right direction. They can also help identify people configurations that will be more or less effective in an organizational setting.

**Behavioral observations**

Some leadership scholars have gone further, searching for richer descriptions of executive behavior. The work of Henry Mintzberg is very influential in this area. Mintzberg has suggested that executives must take on a variety of different roles simultaneously to meet the many demands of their functions. He identified ten roles that
most executives had in common: figurehead, liaison, leader, monitor, disseminator, spokesman, entrepreneur, disturbance handler, resource allocator, and negotiator (Mintzberg 1973). Not only did he arrive at a rich (and more realistic) description of roles, he also divided these ten roles into three groups: interpersonal, informational, and decisional. The informational roles link all managerial work, the interpersonal roles ensure that information is provided, while the decisional roles make significant use of information. These roles can be played at different times and to different degrees by the same executive, depending on the level and function of management.

Taking a very different angle, Meredith Belbin focused on the working of teams. Observing the way a business game was played by different student groups, he found that a team’s composition very much determined its effectiveness. He noted how individual differences in style, role and contribution would contribute to potential team strength. From his observations (based on student teams, unlike Minzberg’s sample of top executives) he distinguished nine team roles (linked to “the tendency to behave, contribute and interrelate with others in a particular way”): shaper, implementer, completer/finisher, coordinator, team worker, resource investigator, plant, monitor evaluator, and specialist (Belbin 1996; Belbin 2003). He suggested that balanced teams, made up of people possessing complementary behavior, would be more effective than unbalanced teams.

**Where to go from here**

A whole consulting industry has grown from studies like these, using tests based on various configurations, bipolar or otherwise. At times, however, the literature from consulting firms describing the merits of these tests is reminiscent of the sales pitch of a used car dealer: a lot promises but an unsatisfactory outcome. How solid are these tests? Do they describe the reality of leadership behavior? Is there any depth to these studies?

At the danger of sounding like a used car salesman myself, I want to introduce another new approach to assessing leadership behavior. I look at leadership behavior somewhat differently from others. In the first place, my work is based on observational studies of
real leaders. In contrast to most other studies, most of my observations come from people at the strategic apex of the organization, although the conclusions are also valid for executives at middle management levels. To return to our onion metaphor, I want the top layer—the behavioral manifestations of leadership—to be solidly grounded in reality. I want to retain a holistic perspective. Studying leadership archetypes, and focusing on the outer layer of the onion, I view the patterns that define each archetype as part of a much larger puzzle, which has at its base a number of deep-seated character traits. The descriptions of these leadership archetypes, however, are the end product of a complex confluence of the person’s inner theater (including examples set by authority figures earlier in the executive’s life), the examples set by other executives, and formal leadership training. At times, the antecedents of specific leadership behavior will be quite clear; at other times the connections will be more tenuous.

**Identifying Leadership Archetypes**

In developing this leadership questionnaire—studying the way executives behave in organizations—I repeatedly asked myself the following questions: Which leadership behavior patterns appear to be most prominent? Which are the leadership archetypes likely to describe successful leaders? What combination of archetypes in needed to be effective as an organization? Which specific contexts make leaders more or less successful? And what are some of the characteristics that contribute to the downfall of leaders?

**Development of the Leadership Archetype Questionnaire (LAQ)**

Over the last 20 years, while running leadership seminars at INSEAD, I have studied the behavior of executives from all over the world in a specially designed leadership workshop. This workshop goes beyond the common superficialities that characterize so much executive education. It creates a transitional, safe space—using the life case study as major vehicle—where executives are encouraged to unpeel many layers of the
Leadership Archetypes

personality onion (Korotov 2005). In the workshop, surface behavior and the underlying issues relating to character are put under the microscope. To supply additional data for further exploration, executives are given a number of multi-party feedback survey instruments and personality tests. In addition, they are put in group situations where they have to solve awkward problems. The dynamics occurring in these groups give further insight into person-specific leadership patterns and underlying motivation.

I consistently find that each individual’s specific leadership behavior is the outcome of a dynamic interpersonal process incorporating a wide array of cognitive as well as emotional competencies. As I stated earlier, no particular leadership behavior pattern occurs in isolation. There seems to be an intricate dynamic interface between leadership behavior and the organizational context (including the mindset of followers) in which the leader is operating. A leadership pattern that works well in one context can be less effective in another. In-depth study of these leaders does show, however, that there are a number of recurring ways of behaving that underpin their effectiveness in their organization. In addition—and this is often one of the reasons why executives take the seminar—a particular leadership behavior pattern that had been highly effective at one stage in their career proves increasingly dysfunctional at another stage. At times, there is a mismatch between a person’s habitual way of interacting and the organization’s stage of development. In many cases, I observe behavioral inflexibility as executives struggle to cope with new situations. I have also discovered (a finding confirmed by other studies) that a key factor in making a specific leadership archetype more or less effective depends on the complementarity of roles in the organization’s executive team. If an executive can build on his or her strengths, while the other members of the executive team compensate for the executive’s weaknesses, all is well. If that is not the case—and there is incongruity between the needs of the organization and the capabilities of the individual—this mismatch can have grave consequences. The success of an organization very much depends on the effectiveness of the team. These findings have been confirmed repeatedly during organizational interventions with groups of executives going through a high performance team building exercise. A leader may have the greatest collection of
individual stars in the world, but if they don't play together, the organization may go down the drain.

During these studies, I began to formulate a number of leadership “archetypes,” ways of leading in the complex organizational environment that make a specific executive effective. These archetypes represent prototypes for ideas, a template for interpreting observed phenomena, a way of understanding behavior. When I made these conceptualizations, however, I wasn’t looking for total inclusion. I didn’t try to contain all possible configurations. I concentrated on frequency of patterns and included the archetypes most typically found in a successful organization.

My observations revealed that although individuals may “drift” toward one particular archetype, it is more common for a person to possess the characteristics of a number of archetypes. “Hybrids” are the rule rather than the exception. Executives may drift toward a particular archetype, depending on the situation. Of course, ideally an executive team should be able to cover all the leadership needs that are required, whatever the context.

In trying to link the leadership archetypes with character typology, it has to be accepted that it is impossible to include all character types. The fact that my study sample is not a cross-section of the work population excludes that possibility. People in a leadership position, or aspiring to be leaders, are a self-selected group. Some people have character types less likely to be found at senior executive positions. For example, there were very few people in the group with a self-defeating, dependent, depressive or detached personality (Kets de Vries 2006).

From a triage point of view, I confirmed my observations with a number of my colleagues involved in clinical group coaching at the INSEAD Global Leadership Center (Kets de Vries 2005). These colleagues, familiar with the leaders in question, validated my conceptualizations and assessments. In addition, these archetypes were presented to a number of colleagues in the strategy area for further validation.

Following my observations I identified eight commonly found leadership archetypes. In identifying each archetype I have tried to explore its specific characteristics and
leaderships. I have also tried to list some of the dos and don’ts of working for or with people possessing these specific behavior patterns.

Each of these leadership archetypes will prove more or less effective depending on the organizational situation. They are not static. They can be changed to serve the needs of the individual, the team, and the situation if there is sufficient motivation to engage in a change effort. The leadership archetypes I identified are summarized in Exhibit 4, below.

**Exhibit 4: The leadership archetypes**

- The strategist  
  *leadership as a game of chess*
- The change-catalyst  
  *leadership as a turnaround activity*
- The transactor  
  *leadership as deal making*
- The builder  
  *leadership as an entrepreneurial activity*
- The innovator  
  *leadership as creative idea generation*
- The processor  
  *leadership as an exercise in efficiency*
- The coach  
  *leadership as people development*
- The communicator  
  *leadership as stage management*

**Leadership as metaphor**

Assessing a person’s predominant leadership behavior pattern will give the individual or executive team greater knowledge of the positive and negative aspects of each person’s leadership behavior. Acquiring this kind of self-knowledge will help the individual to adjust to the demands made by followers, the industry and the external socio-economic environment. Understanding one’s archetype(s) is also the first step in a personal change
leadership strategy. It enables the executive to take personal responsibility for shaping his or her own future.

**The strategist: leadership as a game of chess**

Strategists function best in turbulent times, when changes in the environment necessitate new directions. They have a long-term orientation. They can see the big picture and plan accordingly. They excel at anticipating future developments in the organization’s environment. They are very agile in response to change. Strategists provide vision, strategic direction and outside-the-box thinking to create new organizational forms and generate future growth. They are very good at abstract, imaginative thinking and enjoy solving unorthodox, difficult problems. As talented conceptualizers, they excel in simplifying highly complex situations. They are great scenario builders, very good at anticipating developments and changes in the environment, a quality that holds them in good stead when looking at the future. They think globally, and are usually extremely well-informed about the geopolitical environment. Strategists champion unconventional, lateral thinking and are talented at aligning vision with strategy. They tend to be more outcome- than process-oriented.

**Limitations**

Although strategists are very talented, they do not always make the best people managers. For various developmental reasons (interpersonal and otherwise) abstraction has a greater appeal to them than people. For some, the world of real people is too messy. Many hate to be caught up in complicated interpersonal situations. An oversimplified, causal examination of character development suggests that, at least to some of them, this outlook might have been a way of coping with difficult family situations during childhood. It might have seemed easier to withdraw into fantasy life than to find solutions to complex family difficulties. Although many strategists usually have a very high IQ, their emotional intelligence (EQ) may leave something to be desired. They prefer to ignore “softer” issues, avoid conflict, and task-driven as they are, continue with the work at hand, focusing on facts and figures, and abstract scenarios. Despite their talent for aligning vision with strategy, they are not always good at taking the next step, aligning strategy with values and behavior, as this would entail something
they are reluctant to deal with: awkward people interventions. This part of the leadership
equation may be left neglected as a result, and lead to problem behavior in the
organization. To compensate for this deficiency, strategists often join forces with coaches
(see Exhibit 4).

Strategists’ broad outlook towards the environment and their tendency to resort to highly
abstract thinking can contribute to communication problems. Their subordinates may not
always fully understand what they are trying to do, or what message they are trying to get
across. Because strategists are preoccupied with the big picture, they may ignore some of
the “micro” issues that warrant attention to keep the organizational processes on track.
And the devil is in the detail.

The strategist: a case

Several years ago, Tom Winters\textsuperscript{1} became CEO of a large global consumer product
organization. Largely due to his efforts, the company grew from a small local
manufacturer to being the second largest player in its market in the world. A number of
very shrewd and timely acquisitions had contributed to the company’s leading market
position, and Tom had driven the process. People who knew Tom well were in awe of his
capacity to process large amounts of information and identify interesting opportunities in
the market place. Although his reasoning was not always easy to follow, when presented
with a problem, he knew how to build scenarios in his mind that helped him understand
what needed to be done. Tom’s general method of work was to concentrate his personal
attention on the two or three things that mattered most at any given moment, and to give
to each of these issues all the time and attention that it merited. He had a remarkable
capacity for picking out the questions on which he could most usefully concentrate his
effort.

But although people complimented Tom as a world-class strategist, they were less
enamored of his people management skills. He didn’t seem to understand that knowing
where to lead people was not the same as convincing them to follow him. He seemed to

\textsuperscript{1} All names have been disguised.
Leadership Archetypes

forget that a leader needs to look back once in a while to make sure the followers are there. He failed to pick up elusive signals from his subordinates and had difficulty motivating them, notably omitting to compliment them on work well done. He was poor at controlling executive committee meetings, which tended to drift and failed to resolve conflicts. Although he never lost his cool himself, Tom was at a loss to handle disputes between members of his team. He preferred talking to his executives on a one-to-one basis, rather than dealing with messy group meetings. He relied heavily on his senior HR professional take care of most of the people issues, a strategy that seemed to have been effective in helping the team work better together. (See Exhibit 5.)

Exhibit 5: The strategist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Excellent at abstract, imaginative thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Long-term orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ability to see the big picture and plan accordingly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Great conceptualizers/presenting all the options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Talented at simplifying highly complex situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Capacity to think globally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ability to think laterally: groundbreakers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Great interest in undertaking new things/solving unorthodox, difficult problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Champion unconventional thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Agile in response to change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Excellent at aligning vision with strategy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Works best: in turbulent times, when changes in the environment require new Directions.*

Working for strategists

• Do not reject out-of-hand what appear to be bizarre suggestions.
• Be aware of the fact that strategists are not very good at aligning strategy with the behavior needed to implement action plans. Take on a complementary role to help them do this.

• Do not expect strategists to give you specific objectives or instructions. In dialogue with a strategist, assume responsibility for implementing these objectives or instructions.

• Realize that strategists’ abstract ways of thinking can contribute to communication problems. Help them to “translate” their ideas into more understandable language to be able to reach a broader constituency.

• Do not expect strategists to monitor your work in detail. Remember, they are much more interested in the broad outlines.

• Do not expect a strategist to compliment you on work well done. Strategists are not the cheerleader type.

• Accept that strategists are not always the best people managers. Be prepared to give them a hand in rectifying this problem.

• Talk with strategists on a regular basis. Seek their advice. It will give you a sense of where they are at with their ideas and may give you new ideas. Remember, strategists like to present their ideas to others.

• Provide them with market and product studies to confirm or question their vision.

Managing strategists

• Recognize and encourage their creativity. Do not expect them to be detail oriented.

• Spend a considerable amount of time listening to them. Help them shape their ideas, and try to make them more operational.

• Protect them from the executives in the organization who like to use a “cookie-cutter” approach to people management. Expect them to be different. Be responsive to their needs. There is always the danger that
their talent will be destroyed by overly bureaucratic practices. Too much structure may cause them to leave.

- Be patient with strategists. Because of their visionary thinking, concrete results are not always immediately forthcoming.

The change-catalyst: leadership as a turnaround activity

Change-catalysts function best in cases of culture integration after a merger or acquisition or when spearheading re-engineering or turnaround projects. They are also excellent at managing rapidly growing organizational units and at recognizing opportunities for organizational transformation. They are quick to identify and sell the need for change. They specialize in turning messy situations around and handling ambiguous predicaments. Change-catalysts are implementation-driven and very good at selecting executive talent to get the task done. They are always looking for new, challenging assignments, always prepared to take on risky tasks. They are tough minded and not afraid to make difficult decisions. They are very good at turning abstract concepts into practical action and creating new organizational “blueprints.” In whatever they do, they have a great sense of urgency. Furthermore, unlike strategists, they have the talent to align vision, strategy and behavior. They are both outcome- and process-oriented.

Limitations Change-catalysts can quickly grow bored in stable situations. They need to be given challenging assignments that provide feedback on how well they are doing. If they are not given challenging assignments, they may become irritable, difficult to deal with and even depressed. They are not suited to participating in small, incremental change efforts. They are performance driven. Many have a short-term time horizon, needing to see immediate results. Their motivation to deliver derives from the underlying anxiety of living up to their internalized standards (probably set by highly ambitious parents). Their developmental history frequently suggests that they need immediate results to feel good about themselves. If no challenging assignment is available, they may try to create one (for the wrong reasons) or become so miserable that they leave the organization.
Although many change-catalysts have a talent for people management, their sense of urgency may override their sensitivity to the human dimension and make them poor communicators. And effective communication is essential, particularly in a re-engineering or merger integration efforts. Because of their desire to get things done, they occasionally engage in callous, insensitive behavior; and because they are always in a hurry, they may not have the patience to deal with knotty, interpersonal situations. This leadership style can contribute to a culture of fear and abuse. Change-catalysts tend to have a starkly black-and-white view of what is right or wrong, and so may not always be sufficiently politically sensitive to handle complex organizational problems. As the “white knights” who clean up messy situations, they can create a different political mess for themselves. What they see as innocent actions can have disastrous consequences.

The change-catalyst: a case

Yves Klein, a high achiever all his life, had for many years been parachuted into places all over the world to clean up messy situations. He played a trouble-shooting role in all the company’s acquisitions and was seen as an expert in the field. But as he progressed in the organization, his success as a turnaround specialist had become to box him in. His career had stalled, as his expertise in one area blocked his next career move. Although Yves recognized that he thrived in the thick of action, he also realized that his seniority and career achievements should have brought him an executive board position. But it wasn’t happening. He put out some feelers, and discovered that the CEO and the other board members felt that he was not sufficiently diplomatic to take on the role. He was seen as a trouble-shooter, not a likely player in the political games that were inevitably part of functioning at board level. The information brought him up short: should he continue to press his case? Were the board members right in their assessment of him? Was he wrong to aspire to a board position? Would he be able to adjust? Or would he be happier to stay in his present position? (See Exhibit 6.)
Exhibit 6: The change catalyst

Execlutes for whom the change-catalyst archetype is the predominant modus operandi are very good at turning around messy situations. They are implementation-driven, masters at re-engineering. They know how to create new organizational “blueprints.”

Characteristics

- Recognizing opportunities for organizational transformation
- Great capacity at identifying and selling the need for change
- Talented at intrapreneurship: prepared to take on risky, independent assignments
- Good at turning abstract concepts into practical action
- Always looking for new, challenging assignments
- Possessing a great sense of urgency
- Ability to make difficult decisions: tough mindedness
- Very talented in implementation
- Setting high standard and monitoring performance
- Ability to align vision, strategy and behavior
- Aptitude in selecting executive talent to get a task done

Works best: in the case of culture integration after a merger or acquisition or when spearheading a re-engineering, turnaround project.

Working for change catalysts

- Change-catalysts have a short-term orientation, and can act hastily without fully understanding the implications of their actions. Be prepared to help them slow down, and help them see the consequences of their quick decisions.
- Because of their sense of urgency, change-catalysts can be insensitive and thoughtless.
- Beware of the dangers of a culture of fear and abuse establishing itself around a change-catalyst. Help them see the consequences of their actions and be prepared to take on a buffering role.
- Be prepared for action. Change-catalysts do not indulge in lengthy planning exercises.
- As change-catalysts are quickly bored with stasis, there is always the danger that they will initiate a transformation program for the wrong
reasons. Be ready to point that out, or try to stop them when that is the case.

Managing change catalysts

- Use them as trouble-shooters, to clean up messy situations in the organization.
- When they present ideas for a change program, ensure they can articulate their reasoning, to avoid change for change’s sake.
- Do not stifle their enthusiasm. Be open to their propositions and reframe what they plan to do in a constructive, positive way.
- Be sure to set boundaries whenever you give change-catalysts something to do. In their enthusiasm they may take certain projects too far, making it difficult to exert control.
- Try to develop their reflective side, to prevent them from becoming stereotyped as change agents and to enable them to take the next step on the career ladder.
- Point out to them that organizational change is more than structural change. Help them develop their emotional intelligence to take better care of the people involved in their transformation programs.

The transactor: leadership as deal making

Transactors like making acquisitions or other deals. They constantly identify and tackle new opportunities. Extremely dynamic and enthusiastic, they have considerable adaptive capacity, thriving on new challenges and negotiations. They like novelty, adventure and exploration and have high risk-tolerance. They are driven by the accumulation of wealth. Proactive in welcoming change and instinctive networkers, they are great deal makers and salesmen who know how to achieve closure. Transactors can be good readers of
people. They know how to lobby inside and outside the organization to get their point of view across. They are outcome oriented but not as effective at processes.

**Limitations** Like change-catalysts, transactors need constant stimulation, otherwise they can become very restless, which introduces the risk of their initiating ventures that make no economic sense. Bored CEOs can be extremely dangerous to their organizations. They can be seduced (often encouraged by consultants and investment bankers who smell the money) by the excitement of take-overs. Domineering and enthusiastic, once they get going, there is no holding them back, and they can take other people on a very risky journey.

Worryingly, after they pull off a deal, they lose interest and are not good at taking the project to the next phase. Their lack of self-discipline and impatience with structures, processes and systems means that they are poor at organization building, which requires a different leadership archetype. Transactors quickly react—or over-react—to any environmental stimulus without much concern for long-term consequences. They are short-term oriented. Their mercurial temperament can create very stressful situations. Because they are good deal-makers or negotiators, they are frequently hard to read. A poker face is an asset in negotiation but it can confuse collaborators and lead to accusations of Machiavellianism and manipulation. A closer look at their inner theater shows that their confidence and bravura may cover considerable insecurity. For some, money becomes a signifier of self-worth because there was very little or no money around when they were growing up. A narrow focus on financial gain, however, can contribute to stunted development.

Successful as these people may be in dealing with one aspect of the executive’s role, left on their own, they can create havoc in the organization. They need others such as strategists, processors and coaches to compensate for their limitations.
The transactor: a case

After doing a doctorate in bioengineering and graduating from a well-known European business school, Robin Maral was hired by an investment bank. His negotiation skills—acquiring or making licensing deals (particularly in the pharmaceutical industry)—led to a meteoric rise and made him a partner before anyone else in his cohort. Although he was very good at what he did, what made him particularly effective was the very different style of his deputy, whose key strength was to take care of the “details” after the deal was made. His deputy was very talented in organizing the details of the deals, managing people issues and at selecting and keeping the right people to make the deal work.

After working successfully for the investment bank for a number of years, Robin became bored. He had lost the sense of challenge. He felt it was time for rejuvenation, and decided to venture out on his own. Given his excellent contacts in the business community, it didn’t take him very long to find a group of investors willing to support his idea to set up a venture capital firm, specialized in the pharmaceutical industry. But although everything seemed to fall into place, Robin was a disaster as his own boss. Although he closed a number of very promising deals, without his deputy to make them work everything fell apart. As day-to-day managerial responsibilities bored him, decisions were not made and meetings to sort out buy-ins for the deals were not arranged. His lack of hands-on involvement led to poor relationships with a number of scientist-entrepreneurs, who were needed to make his business model a success. Robin seemed to be unable to build long-term relationships of trust. His behavior was too inconsistent and unpredictable. After a few years of struggle, the investors had enough and severed their relationship with him. Robin found himself looking for a new job. (See Exhibit 7.)
Exhibit 7: The transactor

Executives for whom the transactor archetype is the predominant *modus operandi* are great deal makers. They are always identifying and tackling new opportunities. They thrive on negotiations. They know how to sell and create closure.

**Characteristics**

- A preference for novelty, adventure and exploration
- Thriving on new challenges
- Less interested in day-to-day management
- Great deal makers/salesmen/negotiators
- Embracing change
- Great talent for spotting new opportunities
- Enthusiasm/dynamism
- Proactive mode
- Short-term focus
- Great adaptive capacity
- Creative networking to attain goals
- Great risk tolerance
- Powerful drive to accumulate wealth
- Good reader of people

*Works best: in making acquisitions or other deals.*

**Working for transactors:**

- Be prepared for action. Do not expect long meetings and consensus building sessions.
- Transactors will mostly make the decisions themselves and expect you to carry them out.
- Be prepared to take on a complementary role. Transactors are not interested in the details of day-to-day management and this may create problems. Help to make this part of the executive equation work.
- Do not wait for a transactor to come to you. Proactive themselves, they expect you to take the initiative, whether it’s about a promotion, a salary increase or a new idea. Transactors want to know that you are where the action is. Be direct when recommending action. Transactors like people to be straight and to the point. They have no patience with long-winded explanations.
• Maintain their interest in what you’re saying: transactors are easily bored.
• Be prepared to be a sounding board in order to curb their enthusiasm (and bring them back to reality) as they can be overoptimistic at times, taking people along on wild goose chases. Be wary of their entering into a transaction just for the sake of it.
• Expect surprises. Some transactors will use Machiavellian tactics to get what they want. Engage in regular dialogue with them in order to understand what is really going on.
• Some transactors may have a volatile temperament. When they explode, take it in your stride. Their memories are rather short. They do not bear grudges.

Managing transactors

• Recognize their low threshold of boredom. To get the best out of them and keep them fulfilled, give them transaction opportunities on a regular basis.
• Be realistic about their short-term focus. Help them see the longer term consequences of their actions.
• Keep on reminding transactors that the devil is in the detail. Although you have to be realistic about their lack of interest in day-to-day management, make it clear that you expect a basic level of administrative diligence. Suggest help, when needed.
• When transactors have a temper tantrum draw their attention to it. Explain the effect poor mood management can have on their subordinates and other people in the organization.
• Tell them to be straight with you. Explain that you want transparency from your people. Make it clear, however, that you won’t tolerate manipulative people in the organization. Explain that it is one thing to enjoy complex negotiations (with all the political ramifications); it is another thing to try to manage your boss.
Leadership Archetypes

- Remember that financial incentives may be a great driver for transactors. Keep this in mind when designing reward structures.

The builder: leadership as an entrepreneurial activity

Builders like setting up “skunkworks” or other intrapreneurial ventures inside a large organization. Otherwise they want to start and build their own organizations. They have a powerful need for independence, and to be in control of their lives. They not only dream of building something, creating an enterprise, they also have the talent to make the dream come true. Builders have an enormous amount of energy, drive, dynamism and enterprise. They are decisive, focused, single minded, persevering and have a great capacity to deal with setbacks. They are achievement oriented. They thrive under pressure, can tolerate a great deal of insecurity and don’t mind ambiguous situations. They also have a high, but calculated, propensity to take risks. They are long term focused. Builders are quite creative, and quick to adapt when they see opportunities elsewhere. And they know how to get other people to give the input that gets results. However, their social skills occasionally leave something to be desired. Many builders have difficulty dealing with authority.

Limitations Builders can be too assertive, too dominant, and too controlling. Many have an aversion to authority, probably as a result of unresolved, conflicted relationships with the first authority figures they had to deal with: their parents or other caretakers. Unfortunately, this developmental outcome can make interacting with people who have to work for them (or with them) difficult. Given their great need for control, their leadership style will not always bring out the best in other people. Their impatience to get things done—again a reflection of inner anxiety—doesn’t help build relationships. When builders set up organizations they tend to create centralized, web-like structures where all of the reporting lines go via them. If the organization succeeds and grows, reporting relationships and decision-making processes become cumbersome. Builders have to be at
the center of things. There is frequently an incongruity between the size of the organization and its structure and decision-making processes.

Setting up structures and systems is also not a builder’s forte, although they will probably be better at it that a transactor. Builders tend to pay insufficient attention to the systemic side of organizational life. Thomas Edison epitomized this attitude when he said, “Hell, there are no rules here—we're trying to accomplish something.” Although the builder’s tendency to monopolize decisions may have been appropriate in the start-up phase, it can become highly dysfunctional when the company reaches a certain size. It creates bottlenecks in the information flow. Their need for control and ambivalence toward authority mean that builders find delegation difficult. They live with the illusion (which may once have been true) that nobody can do things as well as they do. They need help of more organizationally oriented types to take their organizations to the next phase.

There is a danger that this domineering approach will create a “false consensus effect” within the organization, when differences of opinion are stifled, and divergent views (departures from the “party line”) are ignored. As the false consensus effect takes hold, there is a risk that the builder will lose touch with the reality of situations. As the sees only his or her own version of reality, decision making becomes highly dysfunctional.

**The Builder: a case**

After having worked in a large mobile phone company for a number of years, the politics and slow decision making process began to get to Niels Johansen. Despite his remarkable career in the organization, where he was singled out for the fast track, it no longer held any charm for him. Niels decided to quit and embarked on a doctorate in industrial engineering at a prestigious engineering school (a decision he considered some kind of “moratorium”). He was a star student and after graduation applied for and received a prestigious scholarship for a year’s postdoctoral fellowship at Stanford. His plan was to use that year to look around for interesting opportunities in the telecommunication industry. But he knew in his heart of hearts, coming from a family of entrepreneurs, that he wanted to start his own business. At Stanford, he was approached by a Swedish
information technology firm interested in his research on the mobile phone industry. Niels initially hesitated to take up their offer, but it turned out to be hard to refuse. The Swedish company was badly in need of some form of technology transfer. Given his expertise in that industry, he was asked to start up a venture in Palo Alto. He would be in charge of a select group of the best and the brightest from the Swedish operation, to help him get the venture off the ground. It was explained that the start-up was a “skunkwork,” a venture working outside the usual rules of the organization. The idea was that this kind of set-up would facilitate the acquisition of a new technology for the next generation of mobile phones. Niels would be reporting directly to the president to shield him from the usual “noise” existing in large organizations. Although it would be a risky start-up, Niels felt it was a great opportunity. And even if it didn’t work out, the learning experience, given his desire to start on his own, would be invaluable. (See Exhibit 8.)

Exhibit 8: The builder

Executives for whom the builder archetype is the predominant *modus operandi* have a strong desire to be independent, wanting to be in control of their lives. Not only do they have a “dream” of creating something, they also have the talent to make this dream come true.

**Characteristics**

- Great need to be independent/to be in control
- Enormous amount of energy, drive, dynamism and enterprise
- Single mindedness/very focused/very decisive
- Enormous perseverance: great capacity to deal with setbacks
- Ability to live with a great deal of insecurity/ambiguous situations
- Capacity to thrive under pressure
- Long-term focus
- High achievement orientation
- High but calculated risk taking propensity
- Good at creative adaptation/creativity
- Strong motivation to create something
- Great talent for getting buy-in from others/to obtain resources
- A moderate dose of social skills
- Difficulties in dealing with authority

*Works best: setting up “skunkworks” or other ventures inside or outside the organization.*
Leadership Archetypes

Working for builders

- Point out how their independent leadership style can create bottlenecks in the decision making process. Help them adopt a more professional way of doing things. If necessary, find a more process-oriented person to help them.
- Use benchmarking to persuade them to adopt a more professional way of doing things. Show them examples of how other organizations manage the workflow.
- Help builders understand the need for involving other people in decision making processes, explaining the advantages of delegation.
- Assist them in the setting of priorities. Analyze together where they can add their greatest value.
- Be prepared to challenge “groupthink” in the organizations or units for which they are responsible. Be ready to play the role of the devil’s advocate or sparring partner (although this can be career endangering, it can be worth the risk). Point out the perils of creating a false reality, and making decisions based on wrong assumptions.
- Do not expect many compliments from builders. Accept that they are poor at creating a culture of positive feedback. Realize that they are extremely result oriented.

Managing builders

- Listen to them. They like to be heard. Make sure that they realize that their projects have your full attention. Explain that there is a place for them in the organization.
- Realize their need to be independent and in control but help them understand the benefits of involving other people in their decision making. Urge them not to do everything by themselves. Explore together the advantages of delegation.
- Do not demand too much information from builders.
- When they are overly optimistic about their projections, pay attention, compliment them about their ideas, but help them arrive at a more realistic perspective.

The innovator: leadership as creative idea generation

Innovators live in a world of imagination. They are endlessly inventive, and always on the lookout for new projects, new activities or new procedures. They never stop looking for ways of doing things better. Free-spirited and imaginative, they lose themselves in solving complex problems. Innovators are extremely curious. They want to learn more about more about anything and everything that grabs their attention. Their passion for learning new things—their insatiable search for knowledge—can be a source of inspiration to others. Innovators are the most reluctant of all the leadership archetypes to do things in a particular way simply because that is how things have always been done. They are known for their capacity to ignore the standard, the traditional, and the authoritative; they drift to the unusual, even the eccentric. Because of this innovative mind-set, they can bring fresh new approaches to their organizations. However, they are not organization builders and will only reluctantly accept a leadership position. Even then, they need others to play complementary roles; otherwise their lack of interest in established processes can cause serious problems for the organization. They are ideally partnered with more organizational people-oriented types such as processors and coaches.

Limitations Innovators tend to be introverts, stimulated by thoughts and ideas rather than people and things. They are quite happy spending hours absorbed in solitary activities. Although they are extremely talented, they typically lack the usual social graces and the ability to engage in small talk, unless it touches on topics that interest them. Adept at logic and reason, they may not always express their feelings appropriately. They are poor social sensors, unskilled at decoding body language, sensing others’ feelings, or recognizing hidden agendas. Because of this, the subtleties of organizational political life
may escape them. Their driven way of working means that they have trouble conforming to organizational norms and may be treated as outsiders. In going their own way about things, they may lose sight of the financial realities of the business situation. Acting like this can endanger the company. Innovators, however, be extremely effective if they team up with people who complement their talent, and help them translate their ideas into more appropriate organizational language.

More politically astute innovators, however, can be good at managing innovative projects, if not hampered by routine. They enjoy outwitting the system and using its own rules and regulations to win the game—whatever the game may be. Some may even rebel actively (and successfully) against social rules they view as irrational and meaningless. But occasionally they will work against the system just for the joy of being obstructive. This brinkmanship-like behavior can endanger their careers.

We could speculate that some innovator-types feature on the spectrum of Asperger’s syndrome, an autistic disorder that affects basic social and motor skills (Romanowski Bashe, Kirby et al. 2005). Individuals with Asperger’s are frequently unable to decode body language and sense the feelings of others. As children, they often have obsessive routines and may be preoccupied with a particular subject of interest where they appear to be exceptionally talented. Because of the strange combination of talent, their ability to function well in most aspects of life, and their naivety, they are often viewed as eccentric or odd. Their behavior makes them the easy prey of bullies. As teenagers, they are liable to get into trouble with teachers and other authority figures, partly because the subtle cues that define societal hierarchies are invisible to them.

**The innovator: a case**

From an early age onward Edwin Howard had been fascinated by computers, writing innovative computer programs when other children his age were playing sports. Although he was accepted at a first class college, the courses were not sufficiently stimulating to him. He felt stifled by the daily routines. No time was given to the things in which he was really interested (like software development). His restlessness prompted him to drop out
in his senior year to start a small software company. The company did not do very well, as Edwin’s organizational talents were limited, and he was poor at dealing with customers. After a number of close financial calls, Edwin asked Eric, one of his close friends from his college days, to join the organization. Eric had the organizing talent and sales flair that Edwin lacked. He helped him build a real organization and was very good at taking care of the clients. The Edwin-Eric duo proved to be a winning team. Eric was instrumental in helping grow the organization by taking care of internal processes and selling the products to corporate clients. Gradually, the company came to exemplify a successful combination of inventiveness, determination, hard work, and the ability to communicate and sell. Edwin’s relentless curiosity combined with a willful optimism drew him again and again to achieve the impossible. Eric’s enthusiasm in building a high-performance corporate culture and his sales flair made the company one of the leaders in its field. As time went by, Edwin received numerous awards and honorary degrees for his contributions to the field of computer science. (See Exhibit 9.)

Exhibit 9: The innovator

Executives for whom the innovator archetype is the predominant modus operandi have a strong desire to develop and realize creative ideas. They are always working on new projects, new activities, new ways of doing things. They possess a great capacity to solve extremely difficult problems.

Characteristics

- Great drive to pursue their ideas
- Creative and imaginative
- Always on the lookout for future possibilities: new projects, new activities, new procedures.
- Never satisfied in developing their ideas/ difficulties with closure
- Tolerance for and enjoyment of complex problem solving
- Stretch goals at whatever needs to be accomplished
- Enormous perseverance/focused
- Long term orientation in the pursuit of their ideas
- Not political/quite naïve about organizational politics
- Ineffective communicators
- Financial gains secondary
- Can be eccentric

Works best: taking on the role of the idea generator in an organization.
Leadership Archetypes

Working for innovators

- Realize that they don’t like managing people. Don’t expect too much direction or feedback. Be prepared to be a self-starter.
- As they are open to ideas, play the role of sparring partner to help them focus on the projects most likely to benefit the organization.
- Help them to be aware of the financial implications of the projects in which they are engaged. Innovators are inclined to ignore the financial dimension. Bring a touch of reality to their projects.
- Be aware of innovators’ tendency to “tinker” with the projects they are working on. Accept that they will never be satisfied and help them to achieve closure.

Managing innovators

- Channel their energy by encouraging them to pursue unorthodox ideas.
- Protect innovators from other executives in the organization who may have a negative response to their eccentricities.
- Do not put innovators in management positions. If you want them to provide inspiration to a team of people, create a partnership with a processor archetype to ensure that the organizational processes and procedures are observed.
- Be prepared to steer them towards projects that will bring greatest benefit to the organization. Help them to achieve closure.
- Use their enthusiasm in a constructive way. Channel it, so that it inspires other people in the organization by allowing them to communicate the exciting projects they are working on.
The processor: leadership as an exercise in efficiency

Processors like to create order out of disorder. They excel at turning organizations into smoothly running, well-oiled machines, and are particularly adept at helping organizations to make an effective transition from an entrepreneurial to a more professionally managed stage. They are talented at setting boundaries and at creating the structures and systems necessary to support the organization’s objectives. Processors have a systemic, practical outlook and dislike unstructured situations; they are by definition heavily process oriented. Due to the disciplinary role their caretakers played earlier in life (through the process of identification), they have become very conscientious, reliable and efficient, and keep a cool head in stressful situations. They are good at time management and have a very positive attitude towards authority. They can be good team players. Processors will be committed corporate citizens and loyal to their organizations. However, they are not always particularly effective when dealing with people. They make decisions based on irrefutable data, sometimes at the cost of the personal element.

Because they tend to be collaborative, processors complement most other leadership styles; they will play an important role in any executive role constellation. Generally, they are not the kind of people who will get themselves or their organizations into trouble.

Limitations What may cause problems for processors, however, is their potential lack of flexibility and spontaneity. Because of their developmental background, deviating from the rules makes them anxious. They are market followers, not innovators. Although they have no problem handling continuous change, processors may find it difficult to cope with discontinuous change. They are not truly visionary. Because they are naturally conformist, and relatively unimaginative and unadventurous, they tend to be slow to respond to new opportunities. Without a great deal of structure, they may find themselves lost, unable to act. In these instances, they may regress to routines that have helped them in the past, but are highly inappropriate in a new situation, for example, ritualistic activities that have no real substance. They may also resort to exerting hierarchy and
authority, rather than influence, to get their way. Because of their inflexibility and need to stick to the rules (when the occasion may warrant a very different approach), their attitude can create people management problems.

The processor: a case

Marianne Gore was a senior executive at a media conglomerate. The company she worked for had been built up from a small music publishing house to its present mammoth size by a flamboyant entrepreneur. The transition had been far from smooth, however. Marianne’s interventions had been a major factor in the company’s ability to deal relatively effectively with its growing pains. She had been brought in at the suggestion of a non-executive board member who realized that, if the company was going to continue to grow, it needed people with complementary skills to its entrepreneurial CEO. Marianne had succeeded in bringing order to a chaotic environment at a critical point in the company’s development. It had earned her a great deal of respect from the CEO.

Before joining the company, Marianne had spent most of her career at a Fortune 500 company, starting as a management information consultant, which gave her the expertise to tackle any complex system problem, knowledge that she used to assure the company had a state-of-the-art information processing system in place. However, during the last years as controller of the organization, she felt increasingly that she was functioning on automatic pilot. She decided that it was time for a change. Coincidentally, she was approached by a headhunter and offered her present position, as Vice-President Administration. Although she was knew that much needed to be done to knock the company into shape, what she found was far worse than she had expected. Compared with the organization she had just left, life in the media company seemed total anarchy. Some of the most basic information reporting systems were missing. Most of the decision making seemed to be seat-of-the-pants, and centered on the CEO. Very quickly, however (and here her unassuming approach to running her part of the business turned out to be very helpful), Marianne was able to build a working alliance with the CEO. This
relationship of trust enabled her to introduce the structural and systems changes that were needed to get the company out of its slump. (See Exhibit 10.)

Exhibit 10: The processor

Executives for whom the processor archetype is the predominant modus operandi views the ideal organization as a smoothly running, well-oiled machine, and are very effective at setting up the needed structures and systems to support the organization’s objectives.

Characteristics

- Systemic outlook
- Extremely effective at turning abstract concepts into practical action
- Good at implementing process-based actions
- Effective at providing structure/processes/boundaries
- Dislike for unstructured situations
- Adherence to rules and procedures
- Possessing a great commitment to the organization/good corporate citizens/loyal and cooperative
- Great self-discipline, very reliable, efficient and conscientious
- Remaining cool-headed in situations of stress
- Positive attitude toward authority
- Excellent at time management

Works best: in creating order out of disorder. Highly effective at creating a professionally managed organization, setting up structures, systems and procedures.

Working for processors

- Explain to them the importance of complementing strategists, transactors, and builders. Make the importance of their balancing role clear to them.
- Understand that processors may stifle others’ creative abilities. Be ready to point this out to them.
- Serve as a buffer between the people who work for you and the processor. Try to elicit creative responses from them without interference from your superior.
- Help processors recognize new opportunities. Encourage them to be more adventurous and decisive. Present the case for taking action.
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- Accept that, if you are work successfully for a processor, you will have to function according to the established rules and procedures. Deviating too far from these rules will cause irritation and could damage your career.
- Appreciate that when you work for processors, you are more likely to be rewarded for conformity than for innovation.

Managing processors

- Reward them for what they good at: taking care of detail, but also help them see the larger picture. Explain that cost-cutting and creating greater efficiencies can only go so far to benefit the organization. Impress upon them that the major gains are in strategic innovation.
- Demonstrate how they can help other people in the organization for whom detail orientation is not a priority.
- Prevent them from instituting a stifling set of structures, rules and procedures. Explore with them the adverse consequences of doing so, on personal issues for example.
- Support them in making decisions quickly. Help them overcome their need for excessive information before they are ready to make a decision.
- Calm them down when they are distressed by others who fail to observe rules and regulations to the letter. Remind them that we live in an imperfect world.

The coach: leadership as people development

Coaches are very good at instituting culture change projects that address issues of organizational alienation and loss of trust. They are exceptional people developers, who possess a lot of empathy. Coaches are extremely good listeners, and have high emotional intelligence. With their positive, constructive outlook on life, they inspire confidence and trust. Coaches are great communicators and motivators, excellent at handling difficult
Leadership Archetypes

interpersonal and group situations, and at giving constructive feedback. They know how to get the best out of their people. Coaches create high performance teams and high performance cultures. They are great believers in participatory management and know how to delegate. Because of their great people skills, coaches are particularly effective in networking, knowledge-based organizations.

Limitations People sometimes complain that coaches are not tough enough when needed; that they are sometimes too soft with their people. Some of their colleagues and superiors believe that their sensitivity to others’ feelings makes them overly careful in telling people how they are doing. Because coaches may over-identify with the people who work for them, they do not always make the tough decisions needed to help the organization progress. They may even “manage by guilt,” and avoid telling people about their true performance, protecting underperformers. And it is true that, at times, they may beat about the bush when dealing with very difficult people issues. Coaches may be slow to act or procrastinate about important issues, a danger when speed is a competitive advantage in the organizational world.

Generally, however, coaches are highly effective in getting the best out of their people. Having had positive developmental experiences when growing up, they stay on that path in adulthood. And even those who might have had a more difficult background want to compensate and to create a better world for the next generation. Of course, there are situations when a coaching archetype is less effective. In crises a more direct (more authoritarian) approach might be required. With some exceptions, however, coaches can work quite well, even in extreme situations.

The coach: a case

Lena Butler was Vice President HR of a large insurance company. When she was parachuted from the outside into her present position the first item on her agenda was to change the company into a true learning organization. Soon after she arrived, she realized that the company was a jungle, where inter-group rivalry was rife. There was too much infighting, too many silos and insufficient awareness of the enemy outside. The problem
started with the executive committee, which was deeply divided. There was no unity of vision and complete lack of focus. There were so many contradictory messages from the top team that, unsurprisingly, the “troops” were confused about what their senior executives expected of them. Lena noticed that members of the top executive team avoided dealing with substantive issues at their meetings. There were lots of “undiscussables” floating around and ritual seemed to have replaced substance. Their boundary-like behavior prevented any form of synergy, or the exchange of best practice. The various “barons” zealously protected their fiefdoms, showing little or no interest of the overall good of the company, which was not doing well. For a number of years, market share and profits had been slipping. New contenders had entered the market place with more innovative practices, drawing their customers away.

Looking at this dismal situation, Lena (a very astute observer of the realities of power) concluded that her first task was to get the support of the CEO. She needed him to realize that things could not go on as they were. She had to make him see what a number of non-executive board members were saying, that if things stayed the same, his position would be in danger. Several large institutional investors had been rumbling about the company’s performance.

Lena decided that one possible quick win would be to set up a team building session. After considerable prompting, she managed to get agreement for this from her CEO. After some thought, she decided that she would be the facilitator. In retrospect, she considered that it was this that broke the ice. During the session she presented some “brutal” facts about the company’s situation and managed to get the executive team members to talk about substantive issues. It became very clear that board members were aware that things were not going well but had preferred to close their eyes to the facts.

That team building session was the start of a culture change program, one of the main points of which was to make clear to all employees that values were not empty slogans but statements with meaning. It was pointed out that there would be consequences if people failed to live accordingly to these values, not excluding those at the top of the organization. As part of the culture change program, action learning projects were
introduced into the organization. One element of these was asking high potential junior executives to present recommendations about how to do things better in the organization to senior executives. These innovations helped change the culture of the organization from one of command, control, and compartmentalization to a culture of interaction, information and innovation. The company began to move from a very hierarchical to a more networking structure. Once again, Lena played a pivotal role in seeing these changes through: her door was always open to those with suggestions for doing things better. As time went on, she became a confidant and mentor for people at many different levels of the organization. (See Exhibit 11.)

Exhibit 11: The coach

Executives for whom the coaching archetype is the predominant modus operandi are exceptional people developers. They have the ability to get the best out of their employees, in the process creating high performance teams and a positive organizational climate.

Characteristics

- Empathic/high EQ
- Good listeners
- Inspire trust
- Affinity with people/cooperative
- Excellent at handling difficult interpersonal and group situations
- Talent at creating high performance cultures and teams
- Great developers of people/giving constructive feedback
- Excellent at giving career guidance
- Great motivators
- Good communicators
- Have a positive outlook
- Good delegators
- Preference for participatory management

*Works best: instituting a culture change project to address feelings of organizational alienation and to regain trust. Very effective in networking, knowledge based organizations!*

Working for coaches

- Realize that coaches may over-identify with people, and so may not always be prepared to make the kinds of tough decisions that are needed in
a particular organizational situation. At times, you may have to take on the role of “executioner.”

- Prevent them from protecting underperformers. Explain the negative implications of doing so.
- Prevent them from managing by guilt rather than giving honest, constructive feedback to underperformers.
- Create a greater sense of urgency about dealing with difficult interpersonal decisions.
- When they are overly optimistic about an executive’s capacity to change, try to inject a greater dose of reality. Remind them of how many times the person in question has been given another chance. Help to establish realistic performance plans.

Managing coaches

- Appreciate their ability to get the best out of their people.
- Occasionally remind them to be more demanding of their people.
- Suggest other situations in the organization where their people development skills would be useful. Encourage them to use their talents and take on a mentoring role for high potential junior executives.
- Help them to be less idealistic, more political, and to feel comfortable with the dynamics of power.

The communicator: the leadership as stage management

Communicators can express a vision strongly and powerfully. They are able to “touch” and inspire people individually at all levels. They also know how to appeal to other organizational stake-holders. They are good at projecting optimism in times of adversity or crisis and are strongly influential with the various constituencies in the organization. Communicators have impressive theatrical skills and great presence, accomplished at
getting the attention of others. They are fantastic networkers, very effective in building alliances and enlisting the support of other people. They tend to take a sweeping, broad outlook at the future of the organization and are not detail oriented. However, they are adept at surrounding themselves with “experts,” whom they use very effectively to help them take care of details and get things done. They are quick to refer to consultants or others for professional advice.

Limitations Communicators can appear to lack real focus and vision. When it’s time to deliver, very little happens, and at that point all they have been saying can seem like empty rhetoric. Despite communicators’ gift for stage management, and their talent for performing, it’s sometimes possible to detect lack of real sincerity and authenticity. We sometimes feel we’ve been watching the performance of an actor who is just speaking their lines without truly believing in what they’re saying.

Some communicators seem to have no “true North”. They lack an inner compass. The chameleon-like quality of their behavior suggests the triumph of form over substance. They are like windsocks, blowing with that day’s prevalent wind. Promises are made, but not kept. They will do whatever serves their self-interest. Expert in looking out for number one, they are not averse to obtaining excessive perks and other benefits for themselves.

Communicators know how to flatter people when it serves their own interests. They quickly latch on to others for support and frequently go further, taking credit for other people’s achievements. This parasitic, self-serving style can contribute organizational disintegration. In their drive to acquire the symbols of power, they will tolerate warfare between internal fiefdoms in the organization.

Communicators are ideal clients for consulting firms. Because they have very few ideas of their own, they look for providers who can make them look good. Many of them can be compared to empty (but beautifully tailored) suits, moving up on the career trajectory, having dazzled people in power and authority en route. Shallow themselves, they are advocates of the quick-fix over long-term solutions. They seem to forget that effective
leadership is not about making speeches or being liked; leadership is defined by results, not attributes.

There is frequently a history of grossly inadequate early parenting in the childhood of communicator archetypes, characterized by devaluation, rejection, humiliation and loss. As a result, the child feels that it is in the way, pleases no one, or is even hurting the person to whom it feels attached. As a result of this treatment, children feel helpless, isolated, abandoned, incomplete and unwanted. They are deprived of normal, adaptive socialization processes. Unable to express themselves as they would have liked, it may have become extremely difficult for these people to establish a wholesome, secure sense of self. For the purpose of emotional survival, they have no choice but to conform and to create a false self, a persona more acceptable to the external world. Because they feel devalued, they do anything to get attention. Satisfying and pleasing others becomes a survival tactic. The legacy of this sort of psychological solution to external pressures, however, is a feeling of artificiality. To pretend, and blend in, is more important than being authentic. They turn into emotional sensors, having learned how appropriately respond to the needs of others. But engaging in drama and make-believe is really a technique for seeming to give without really giving. It all part of an effort to feel alive, rather than estranged from the environment.

The communicator: a case

Ken Gerard was CEO of a large clothing manufacturing firm. Very good looking, impeccably dressed, Ken knew how to impress. He dazzled everyone with his knowledge of the market, and the latest trends in fashion. He liberally dropped the names of great designers he had just been talking to. His persuasive behavior had helped him land his present job.

When he first joined the company, Ken made quite an impression. Everyone he interviewed was bowled over by him. His credibility was increased by the wealth of information he had accumulated through his conscientious attendance of trade fairs. He would lecture all and sundry about the future of the industry. Through his connections, he
had been invited to be part of a government delegation on a study trip to China. People in the garment industry still recounted how, following the trip, he had persuaded the Minister of Industry of his country to delay the lifting the tariffs for the market segment his company (and others) operated in. This won him the gratitude of many employees who had been concerned about the future of their jobs. Before that trip, he had managed to stop a strike in one of the company’s major manufacturing plants. He had even succeeded in persuading the workers to forego a salary increase, using the China import menace as a persuasive argument. His talents in stage craft had to be credited for that. Ken’s achievements had impressed the non-executive directors of the company so much, that when the CEO announced his plans to retire Ken was chosen as his successor.

Successful as Ken may have seemed from the outside, a closer look at his achievements told a very different story. People who knew him better maintained that the brilliant ideas and strategies reiterated on every possible occasion were really the brainchild of a high-powered fashion consultant Ken had been using for many years. Having very few ideas of his own, Ken seemed to spend an enormous amount of time and energy being coached by this consultant for whatever presentation he needed to make. And given his skills in mimicry, it didn’t take him very long to learn and repeat the text, without really understanding its substance.

During a private moment with his consultant, Ken once mentioned that he only became a businessman by chance. When he was young, he had really wanted to become an actor. This was greatly discouraged by his parents, who had forced him to study engineering. Although his heart was not in it, by cheating and using his charm to get the maximum help from fellow students (and teachers), he just managed to scrape through the engineering exams. After graduation, his father’s contacts had brought him a good position in a cosmetics company. When a place on the board of the clothing manufacturer became available, Ken lobbied his contacts and managed to assure himself of the position—and the next step was his selection as CEO. (See Exhibit 12).
Exhibit 12: The communicator

Executives for whom the communicator archetype is the predominant modus operandi are great influencers, capable of having a considerable impact on their various constituencies.

Characteristics

- Excellent at communicating broad themes/big picture
- Talented in using simple language/metaphors
- Not detail oriented
- Great presence/knowing how to attract the attention of others
- Impressive theatrical skills/creation of make-believe
- Capacity to reframe difficult situations positively
- Talent for influencing others
- Good networking skills/building alliances
- Excellent at managing various stakeholders
- Very effective in getting people to see their point of view.
- Very effective in using “experts”
- Not proud to ask for outside help/use advisors and consulting firms

Works best: to influence the mindset of the various organizational constituencies to overcome crisis situations.

Working for communicators

- Recognize that they are not good at dealing with detail. Be ready to support them with greater detail to clarify why what they are doing is necessary.
- Help them in the implementation of their broad ideas.
- Trust their instincts about how, when and where to communicate with the various organization’s stakeholders.
- Make sure that their exposure to people is short. Communicators are not good at dealing with detailed follow-up questions.
- Ensure they receive multiple inputs to balance their ideas, and that experts do not try to run their own agendas.
- Prevent them from resorting to quick-fix solutions to organizational problems. Point out the longer-term ramifications of what they plan to do.
• Be realistic when dealing with them. Realize that communicators make many promises but do not necessarily deliver. Help them keep their promises. Engineer closure.

• Be aware that communicators may take credit for the work you have done. Actively build networks so that other people recognize your achievements. Make an effort to become independent from communicators.

• Prevent consulting firms from taking the company to the cleaners by asking communicators explain exactly how they are using them.

Managing communicators

• Use communicators in situations where their talents are needed, such as taking on the communication role in crisis situations or dealing with various stakeholder groups.

• Be explicit about the kind of behavior and results you expect from them. Make them explain how they plan to meet your expectations and explain to them the consequences of not meeting your demands.

• Create a support system to help them with follow-up/ implementation.

• Prevent them from excessive hiring of consulting firms or other advisors.

• Watch out for their taking advantage of the system, acquiring perks and other benefits.

A Summing-Up

The acquisition of a specific leadership behavior pattern is a duet between nature and nurture. Leadership behavior does not emerge in isolation. It is a highly complex transformation in which many factors play a part. Genetic predisposition combines with socializing factors to create character traits that will be expressed as behavior, including leadership archetype(s). A leadership archetype is an outcome of an interactive process between the individual and his or her environment.
For diagnostic purposes, using the notion of leadership archetypes is helpful in designing and shaping effective organizational teams. Understanding character, competencies, and roles is a powerful tool in the hand of an organizational designer. And as some of the case examples have illustrated, effective or ineffective leadership behavior is very much dependent on context. The situation in which the organization finds itself will be the determine which leadership archetype is going to be most effective. What transition do leaders have to make to function well in a new role? What kind of developmental preparation is needed to make such a transition possible? What can executives do to enact changes in their leadership behavior?

This taxonomy will help assess which executive role configuration will be most effective in meeting future challenges. As suggested, the strength of an archetype in one situation may turn into a weakness in another. Knowing one’s preferred style will also be helpful when creating management teams. Highly effective organizations have high performance teams, and from my experience studying such teams, there needs to be complementarity between members of the team (Kets de Vries 2005). In well-functioning teams, the members help each other. They view life in organizations as a sum-sum, not a zero-sum game. In such high performance teams, executives leverage their strengths, allowing their colleagues to compensate for their weaknesses.

As the descriptions of the seven archetypes here show, identifying particular leadership behavior patterns is not easy. It can be a complicated process. What’s more, it can trigger a kind of hypochondria. Just as junior doctors discover that they have the symptoms of every new disease they study, we all start to recognize aspects of ourselves in the description of each archetype. The truth of the matter is that most of us can be slotted into more than one archetype, and archetype identifications can change as our life changes. Assessing where we are is not a static process.

People are like books: it takes time to read them and work out the plot. And the plot thickens as we peel our metaphorical onion. We have to view the identification and exploration of our own archetypes as a first step to self-knowledge. By learning more about their behavioral preferences and their leadership behavior, executives will optimize
their interactions more efficiently. The knowledge will help them with communication and decision-making. They will gain valuable insights into other people and how they are like or different from them. When executives take time to develop understanding of each other’s leadership archetype, and are able to discuss each other’s strengths and weaknesses, they will have laid the foundation of the organization’s success.
References


