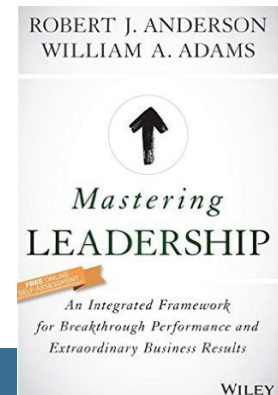


Mastering Leadership: An Integrated Framework

Book excerpt & selected writings from Mobius Friend and creator of the Leadership Circle Profile, Bob Anderson



Additional articles from Bob are located in the Reading Room on www.mobiusleadership.com under Next Practice Institute.

Empowerment

At this time in organizational history we are breaking from traditional paternal bureaucratic forms of organizations to high involvement, empowered partnership and collaborating-learning organizations. Paternal bureaucracies did not need empowered people — except near the top. The new organization, however, will only take hold when people at every level adopt an empowered stance toward their life, work and leadership. (For more on this point, read Shakti Leadership on page 57.)

Peter Block declared culture change to be the cop out of the 1980's. He noticed that most people involved in culture change were unaware of their own contribution to the problems in the culture and were busy blaming others. Test yourself and ask: "Who is responsible for the frustration I feel at work?" We approach the culture as if there were an "it" out there that needs changing; and "it" is never us. Empowerment begins when we realize the "terrible truths" Ralph Stayer (CEO, Johnsonville Sausage Co.) came to: "I am the problem; and if anything is going to change around here I have to do most of the changing."

The critical flaw in the way most organizational change efforts are constructed is that they pay too little attention to the deep personal changes that are required of people at every level. The flawed assumption is that we can create the new culture out of the level of consciousness, thinking, and behavior that gave rise to the old culture. When this fatal flaw remains unchallenged the change efforts start with a flurry of energy, vision and activity, only to grind to a halt when people start waiting for others to change first and give them permission to act on the new vision. This disempowered stance blocks substantial personal and organizational change from taking place. When we act out of this orientation we:

- Consistently put our political safety ahead of our vision
- Avoid conflict by not bringing up the real issues to address if the organization is to move forward
- Expect top management to have all the answers, provide the charismatic vision and generally fix the mess we are in (so we don't have to)
- Wait for the culture to change, for mixed messages to go away and for a guarantee of risk-free success before personally investing in change.

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When this type of thinking is prevalent in a system, meaningful change is nearly impossible because there is not enough individual leadership present to get anything moving. Leadership happens when one of us (at any level) decides that what is going on around us is our responsibility, that the success of the business, and our life, is in our own hands. And that we need wait for no one to begin creating the future we want. We become empowered when we choose to create the future we want, in the midst of the current culture, and begin the

process of learning what we need to learn to do so.

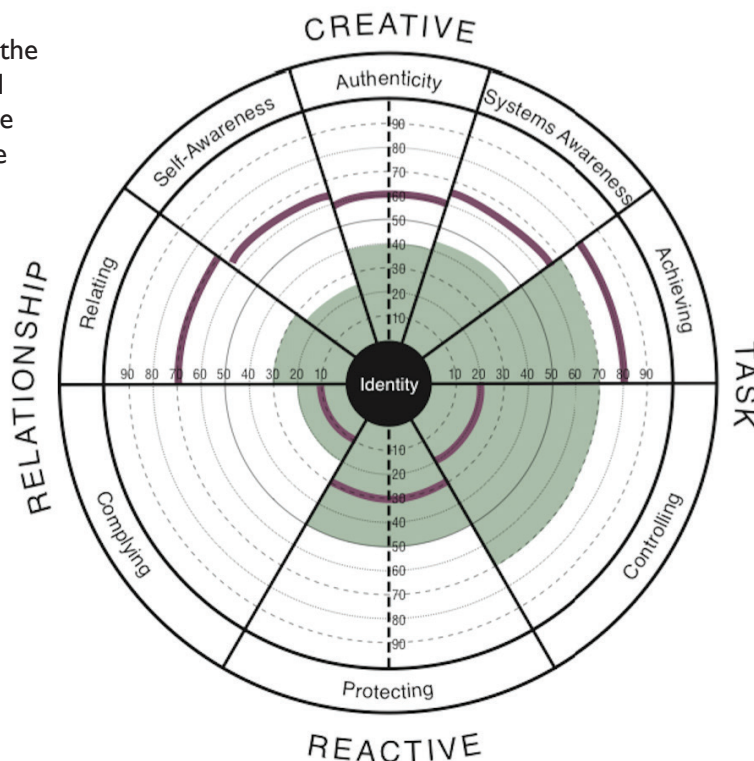
Empowerment is a change in the way we live our lives. We shift from being a reactor to becoming a creator, from being pushed and pulled by external forces and circumstances to being the author of the future we want and choosing to move toward it. Empowerment shifts us away from blaming our bosses, the culture, the obstacles and the constraints. That is, we stop blaming anything but ourselves for our current problems, and move toward taking full responsibility for what is happening.

The **Leadership Circle Profile™** is the only 360 degree competency assessment that simultaneously provides focused competency feedback while revealing the underlying assumptions that are causing a leader's pattern of strengths and limitations. Once this awareness is established, leadership development can proceed.

Illustrative results

(Inner Circle dimensions only in this example)

The top half of the circle is built around the Creative Mindset and the bottom half of the circle is how Reactive Mind shows up.



"I have found The Leadership Circle's instrument a rich and valuable complement to my work! That single picture prompts a world of reflection, and naturally leads to a well-chosen "improvement goal," the first step in many a focused coaching approach, including mine."

– ROBERT KEGAN, Co-author of *Immunity to Change*

It means treating the business as if we owned it. We become entrepreneurs in the midst of our bureaucratic cultures.

Empowerment means making our own behavior consistent with our vision. We become an example of how we want others to act. It means creating, in the part of the organization we can influence, an organization we believe can serve as a model of the culture and performance we want for the whole. Empowerment is a stance of responsibility for the whole, but it does not require that the whole rearrange itself to support our vision and provide a safe path. Rather, empowerment orients us toward influencing the whole through our own personal example. It is a stance of vision, courage, and authenticity. It is the stance of the leader.

If empowerment is the capacity to create what matters, leadership is *enhancing the collective capacity to create*. As we move toward empowered partnerships and learning organizations the task of leadership shifts from being the decision maker, planner, and author of the vision, to that of helping the organization learn to create its future. With the downward distribution of power, more and more people are being given responsibility for creating the future. Consequently, as we become more organizationally empowered we need to become more personally empowered. We need to enhance our individual capacities to create. If we are not able to develop others' skills of creating, the whole strategy of high involvement may fail. It is hard to imagine organizations as high performing, creative, innovative, flexible, and capable of creating their desired futures, if individuals and teams have not mastered their creative processes. You can't have one without the other. Enhancing this capacity is the emerging role of management.

Creative and Reactive Stances

I want to make the case for a profound shift of mind and character as a prerequisite for leadership in the future. A more popular term for this is "paradigm shift." I call the current, more common paradigm the "problem-reacting" structure. The rarer, more challenging paradigm for leadership and life I call the "outcome-creating" structure. This shift is one of the central paradigm shifts for leadership in the future.

Because this shift is so profound, there is no formula

to follow to get from where we are to where we want to be. However, we can describe where we are in some detail, and we can describe the new model of leadership as well. (For more on leading through "not knowing", see Linda Hill's article on page 53.)

I think of these two models as contrasting "life stances" because we use or apply them so widely in our professional and personal lives. Both of these life stances serve us, but in very different ways. The problem-reacting stance is what we use to protect ourselves from danger and threat; we use the outcome-creating stance when we want to bring something we care about into being.

One critical characteristic of the problem-reacting life stance is that it is focused on removing what we do not want (problems, obstacles, threats). When this structure is driving our behavior, we tend to "move away from" problems and obstacles (or — more likely — move away from the unpleasant emotions generated by the problem) in order to make them go away. Our overriding goal is to get "back to normal." Even the most efficient problem-solving strategies focus on leaving us without the problem, in a state of equilibrium — back where we started from. So what is the problem? No problem, if back to normal is where we want to go. However, the task of leadership is generally not the maintenance of normal, but creating a new future reality.

Another critical characteristic of this structure is that it is fear driven. The problem-reacting structure becomes especially insidious when our anxiety — our inner, emotional conflict — becomes our most important problem. As this happens, we take action to "solve" our anxiety — often times at the expense of solving the real problem or taking action to create the future we want. This structure becomes even more insidious because it works; and the fact that it works, makes it self-rewarding. In other words, we react to feeling bad either by leaping into action or avoiding action. The effect of these actions is that we feel better in the short run. Because we got what we want — to feel better — we reinforce the continued use of this structure.

However, two undesirable side effects more than likely result when our primary goal is to feel better. First, because the goal is to resolve the anxiety quickly, we tend to jump to a quick fix rather than address the real issue. This virtually assures that the problem will be

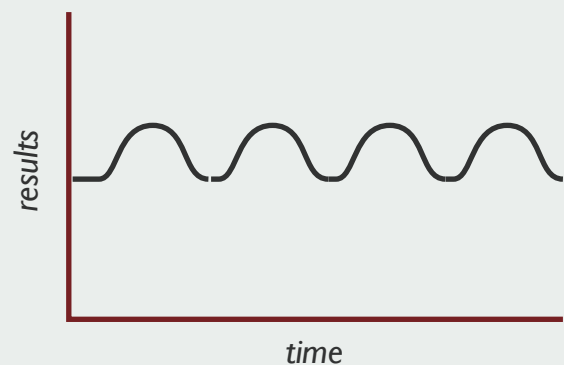
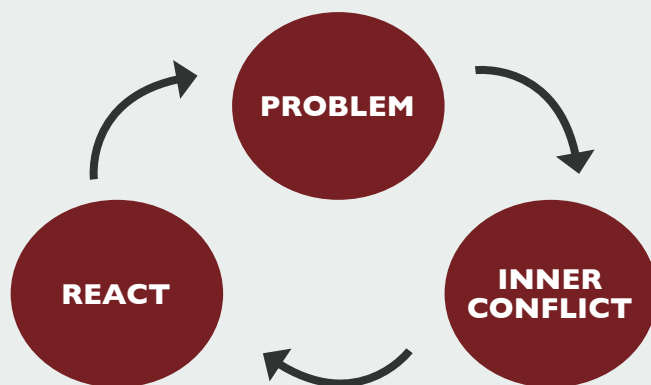
back. Second, because the action we take is principally to alleviate the anxiety, the energy that motivates our action dissipates the more successful we are. Once the anxiety is gone, so is the reason for taking action. The consequence of this is that we stop taking action and the problem returns.

In systems terminology, you are experiencing oscillation — a pattern of behavior that is a natural consequence of this structure. Just as this oscillating pattern of behavior is no doubt familiar to you, you also probably know its alternative. Have you ever produced an important result in your life or work, something that you wanted for its own sake — simply because it mattered? That is, something that turned out pretty much as you had envisioned it, something that you can look on now with pride? Each of us has a natural

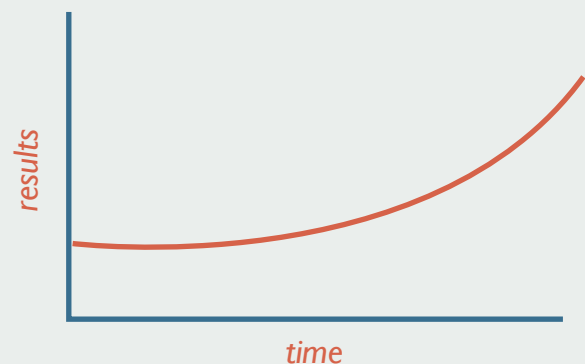
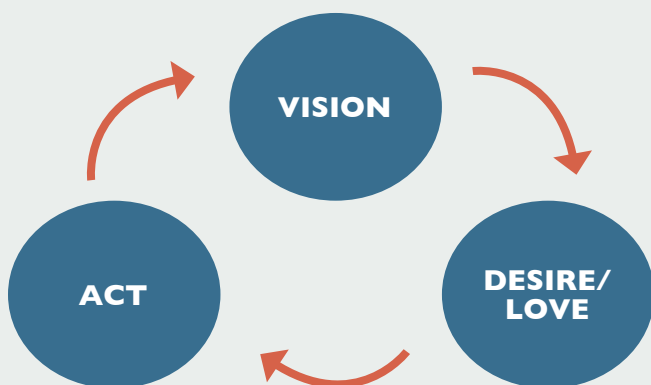
tendency to create results that matter — to bring into being something that never existed before, and to create futures consistent with our aspirations and values.

The outcome-creating life stance focuses on envisioned results. This structure derives its energy from a very different set of emotions: love is not too strong a word. The resulting pattern of behavior is growth-oriented rather than oscillation-oriented. It becomes possible to get results and to keep getting more results. Why? Because as we act out of the desire we feel for the results we want, and as we see those results come into being, our energy for seeking these results increases. This does not mean that when creating we do not experience anxiety or problems. We do. However, we note and understand them, and continue taking action based on what gets us to the vision. In this

PROBLEM-REACTING



OUTCOME-CREATING



structure, we experience what the systems thinkers call sustainable growth. In the process, we are much more likely to develop systemic, long-term solutions for the messes in which we sometimes find ourselves; in fact, we naturally expect that from a vision-oriented structure.

I defined empowerment as the capacity to bring into being what matters in our lives and work. I also suggested that leadership entailed cultivating this capacity in others and throughout the organization. I place leadership squarely in the outcome-creating orientation. Putting these two definitions together, I define empowered leadership as the *life-stance of continuously focusing one's attention and commitment on a desired future, and in the midst of the current situation, working cooperatively with others to take action that brings that shared vision into being over time.*

Leadership is a life-stance. It is a different way of going at life. It is vision-oriented and driven by passion and commitment. It is, as we shall see later, a higher level of character development. We notice in great leaders the highest of human qualities and values. What distinguishes them as a leader goes far beyond their technical skill, market knowledge, and managerial competency. They are creators. They are creating themselves into soulful renditions of their true nature, doing the work they most love, and creating futures worthy of their own commitment and the full commitment of others.

Leaders, especially leaders of the future, are partners. They are creating shared vision and working cooperatively with others to bring that vision into being. More than that, they are primary contributors to the development of others and the system. Their goal is to help others learn the creating game and to encourage the ongoing redesign of the organizational system so that it better supports creating and collaboration.

Creative Tension

I have said that the outcome-creating life stance is the basis of real leadership, that it can be thought of as a

deep new paradigm for personal and organizational behavior; and that it represents a structure that naturally tends to produce the results we want, rather than get us back to where we started. Now I would like to explore that structure.

In describing the outcome-creating stance, I referred to our awareness of the results we want to create. I call this picture of our intended result our “vision.” In order to create a result, we must have an idea of that result in our mind, clearly enough that we would recognize the result if we indeed created it. (If this seems overly simple or simplistic, remember that in the problem-reacting stance we act without a result in mind other than being without the problem or being free of the obstacle.) This vision of the results we want to create is one component of the structure that is at the heart of leadership.

A second structural component follows naturally from the first. Before we can take action on the result we want, we have to be aware of what we have to work with. Before we can take a step toward where we want to go, we have to know where we are right now. We must know all we can about our current situation, or as I call it, our “current reality.” The trick here is not to get stuck in trying to fix current reality — just learn about it. Creators have something much bigger in mind (vision) than a fixed problem or

removed obstacle.

If our vision is clear and so is our grasp of current reality, then we immediately notice the third and most powerful component of the outcome-creating structure. We notice the *gap* between what we have now and what we eventually want to have or create. Our awareness of this gap creates a positive force I call “creative tension.”

If we develop the discipline of focusing our attention on the results we most want while simultaneously telling the truth about current reality (without trying to quick fix it), then the natural tendency of this structure is to resolve by current reality changing over time to meet the vision (Fritz, 1989). Cultivating and maintaining creative

“This structure derives its energy from a very different set of emotions: love is not too strong a word.”

tension is the central discipline of the outcome-creating life stance. It is the engine that fuels sustained growth. Leaders become masterful at cultivating it because they have learned that this discrepancy is not the enemy, but a friendly and powerful force for change. (See related thinking on page 14, under the section Work with Energy and Alignment.)

However, establishing creative tension is not as easy as it seems, especially if the problem-reacting structure is an unconscious habit. As we become aware of the results we want and of our current reality, the gap between them may cause anxiety for us.

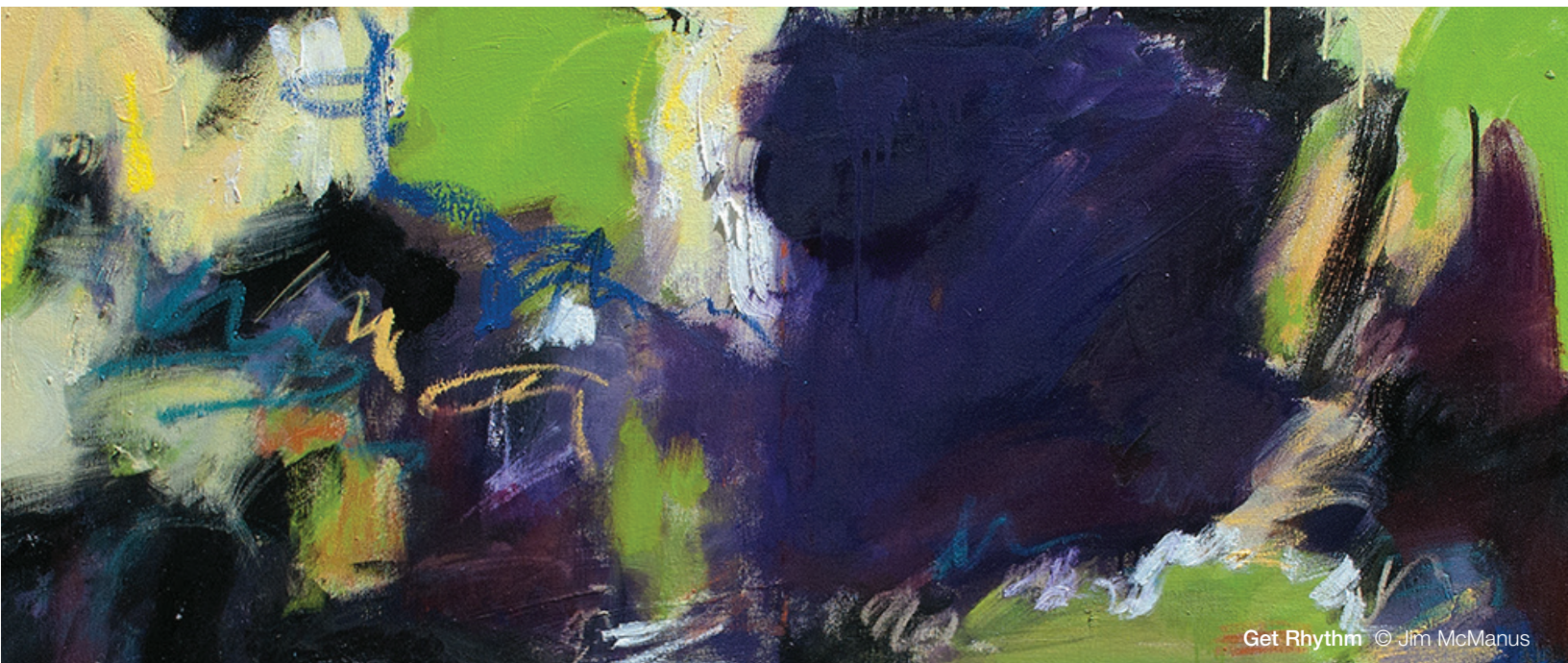
The anxiety that comes with creative tension is normal; we all experience it. However, we have a choice. We can react to the anxiety and find ourselves firmly stuck in the problem-reacting stance despite our best intentions, or we can focus our attention on results and consider our anxiety just one more component of our current reality.

This is a subtle yet powerful distinction, and it brings us closer to describing why developing our leadership requires life long discipline. Leaders sustain, even seek out, creative tension. They refuse to trap themselves into reacting to the inevitable anxiety. They do not ignore these negative feelings; to the contrary, they are

students of their own fears. But they know that creative tension — which they learn to feel just as explicitly as we feel the tension in a rubber band — is the best source of the energy it takes to create the results they want. ■



As founder and CEO of The Leadership Circle, Bob has created and conducted intensive leadership development workshops, pioneered innovative assessments, and mentored practitioners worldwide in how to manage complex leadership transformations. Spanning nearly 30 years, Bob Anderson's story is one of an innovator and visionary in leadership development. While working as a manager in manufacturing, Bob completed a Master's degree in Organizational Development. Early in his career, he was fortunate to have had Peter Block as his mentor. He has also worked closely with some of the industry's most respected names including Peter Senge, Robert Fritz, and Ken Wilber. He and David Whyte co-taught leadership workshops created by Bob.



Get Rhythm © Jim McManus

FROM MASTERING LEADERSHIP BY BOB ANDERSON

“Early in my career, I arranged to have dinner with a world-renowned Trappist monk who was involved in leading-edge work focused on developing leaders within the Catholic Church. Upon meeting him, I was surprised by his colorful character. He was a sailor before he was a monk, and he still had a sailor’s mouth, drank scotch, and smoked cigars. As we talked, I learned his story. While a monk, he developed a rare blood disease that could not be cared for in monastic life and was forced to leave the monastery. For a while, he did not know what to do with himself. Eventually, he decided to return to university and study psychology. As fortune (or providence) would have it, he studied Developmental Psychology and worked directly with Laurence Kohlberg, an early pioneer in what became a body of research on the progressive stages through which adult development proceeds. I will never forget this monk sitting across from me with a Scotch in one hand and a cigar in the other, saying: “They are finding out the same damn thing we monks have known for millennia: that human beings can grow, and if they do, they grow through predictable stages of consciousness all the way up to union with God. They are learning how to measure it!”

This conversation would define my career. I have been a student of how human beings develop, how they grow in wisdom and personal effectiveness. This passion and central focus of my life led me to leadership. Not only have I studied what makes for great leadership and how it develops, but I have had to put everything I learned into practice as an entrepreneur. Along the way, I discovered that leading is much harder than all the theory, research, and models portend. After meeting this monk, I decided to meet, learn from, and work closely with many of the leading thinkers and researchers in the field of leadership. I noticed early on that the field is a random collection of great stuff: a plethora of models, research studies, theories, and bodies of work, each aimed at explaining some aspect of human behavior, capability, or awareness that when applied to leadership promises greater effectiveness. Yet the field wasn’t integrated. None of the various models, theories, and research related to any of the others. Each used its own framework and language. There was no universal model that tied everything together into one complete framework that explained what constitutes great leadership and how it develops.

Without fully realizing what I was up to, I set out to integrate it all. I began to weave together the threads of the best theory and research from the fields of Leadership, Organization Development, Psychology, Success Literature, and Human Potential. I also wanted the integrated framework that was developing to be aligned with the wisdom of the world’s great spiritual traditions. I kept asking, “How does all of this fit together into a better model of leadership effectiveness and its development?”

I worked on this model for 20 years and field-tested each phase as it evolved. I applied it to myself and used it in my work with leaders and their teams. As the model matured, it gained traction. Its impact became more profound for my development and for that of my clients. Leaders were finding it unique, business relevant, and helpful in guiding their development.

The model underwent various transformations as I struggled to integrate what I was learning, and it went through a final metamorphosis when I remembered my conversation with the monk. After 20 years, I finally realized what he was trying to tell me, and I turned to the research on Adult Development, particularly the work of Professor Bob Kegan, one of the foremost researchers in the field and a Mobius Senior Expert. Upon reading Bob’s book, *In Over Our Heads* (1994), my model completely reorganized itself in my head, and I immediately knew it was complete.

It was then that I realized that the Creative and Reactive stances, discussed on page 30, were stages. We move through Reactive and if we evolve beyond it (a big if), we move into the Creative mindset.”