

# CHANGE LEADERSHIP

## Science and Art for Strategic, Cultural and Leadership Excellence

■ Sai Kumar Chandran



Leadership can be learned by acquiring the right mindset, skillset and frameworks to manage the various demands of any organizational operating realities. And in most cases, the fundamentals of leadership are enough to yield results. However, effective leadership is identifiable in complex and ambiguous situations, when a leader brings positive impact through an appreciation of context, and mastery of navigating various situations. In this sense, leadership will always be a two-step mastery. So, in essence, master the basics, and then master

some advanced applications of leadership.

One such advanced context of leadership that is required today, more than ever, is **Change Leadership**. In short, a leadership approach that will help the organization visualize and navigate changes that are not obvious but need to be anticipated. And like all leadership, this is also not a personality-dependent approach that only a few can have. It too can be learned, provided the right kind of guidance is provided to the leader, and the leader shows the commitment to acquire mindset, skillset and frameworks.

***Change Leadership is a Strategic Orientation and one of the more advanced inclinations that a Leader can and should develop.***

In the last 10-12 years, organizations and institutions across the globe have been struggling with wave after wave of changes. Some of these changes are ushered in by the advancement of technology, and yet others have been crises of the world's

making. In this light, most leaders who had earlier performed well in stable environments requiring planning, executing, reviewing, and course correcting, have fallen short of delivering impact in the new realities. The reason: they were possibly good managers, capable of work management, but not sharp change leaders.

Here is what change leaders do differently:

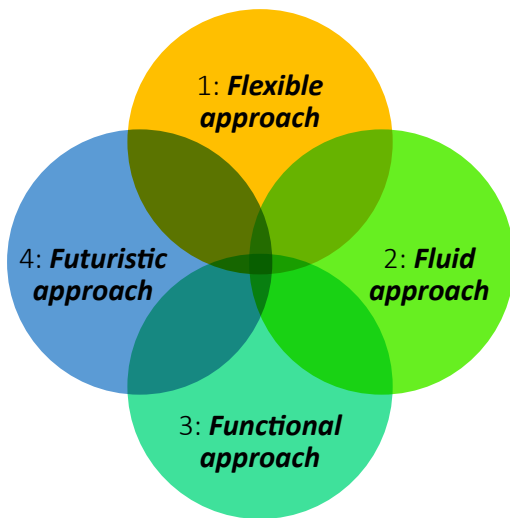
- Develop a deep understanding of PESTEL like factors that impact or will impact business.
- Float between thinking & actions of short term, preparation for the medium term and crafting of the long term.
- Think in terms of the functional utility of actions and develop the environment to create even better results.
- Focus on the systems tackling the future, throughout all operational and tactical stages and noise.
- And deliver impactful outcomes inside and outside the organization consistently.

Such a Leader and Leadership adequately bring to play:

1. **The WILL to play this role.**
  1. By taking the pains of peeking into the future and estimating change.
  2. By developing reasoning that is valid and compelling to others.
2. **The APPROACH to lead change, from within the system.**
  - a. By creating the elbow room to act.
  - b. By taking others along in this journey.

Such *Will* and *Approach* of a Change Leader / Leadership are characterized by 4 key *qualities* or focus areas. I call them qualities because, at their best display by leaders, these 4 feels like a natural part of a change leader's overall executive presence. I call them *focus areas* because they can be learned and practiced with the required finesse to make the highest possible impact.

### The 4F model of Change Leadership



#### The flexible approach of a Change Leadership:

- **Learning Flexibility:** Is evident in the leader learning constantly from a variety of sources of information. This learning is further in fields spread from the leader's core subject matter to diverse fields including philosophy, sciences and geo-politics.
- **Imaginative Flexibility:** Is evident from the Leader / Leadership being able to think and imagine a wide range of possibilities from logical extensions to a complete polar possibility.
- **Decisive Flexibility:** Is what finally brings flexibility to life, where a Leader / Leadership displays comfort and consistency making a wide array of choices that minutely match the required situation. In fact, here with this flexibility, many micro-decisions are made to constitute a macro decision. This is almost as if we are choosing from a list of features when configuring a product of precisely our choice.
- **Prevalent Flexibility:** Is evident when a Leader / Leadership stays flexible in all possible situations with all possible people. Hence, the leader/leadership shows little or no bias towards anything.

#### The fluid approach of a Change Leaders / Leadership:

- **Executorial Fluidity:** Is what helps a leader translate flexible thinking and approach, into action: as it was intended or designed to be. Hence, this prevents any tall claims but shoddy execution. This is when commitments get translated into equivalent action.
- **Spectrum Fluidity:** Is when a leader is fluid across all stages of action: initiation, build-up, navigation, and closure. The Leader / Leadership takes things in their stride and keeps moving in a smooth and continuous way. Problem-solving is a key tool that helps bring Spectrum Fluidity to life.
- **Cohesive fluidity** Is when a Leader/Leadership ensures taking others along while getting things done. The focus stays on organizational Strategy, instead of the pitfalls of siloed working. Problem-solving is again a key tool that helps bring Cohesive Fluidity to life.
- **Systemic Fluidity** Is when the Leader/Leadership ensures that the impact of the work shifts the whole system for the good towards a great common outcome and makes the system sustainable. This approach ensures that scalability and sustainability are a part of the scheme of things, right from the word go.

#### Functional approach of a Change Leaders / Leadership:

- **Relevance Functional:** Is when the Leader / Leadership ensures that whatever gets done operationally, is seen to a logical closure. Such an approach also ensures, there are no hanging skeletons and no wasteful ventures. All tasks and initiatives are handled effectively, and learnings are internalized in the organization.
- **Future Functional:** Time and resources have to be optimized in any institution/venture. With a Future Functional approach, Leaders/Leadership ensures, that while the day-to-day work gets done, they also find the time and pace to build for the future. This is where a leader displays ownership and parallel tracking of various Strategic and Operational workstreams in the organization.
- **Bold Functional:** Ensuring the requisite intensity of

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change is important, so a real impact can be experienced. This aspect of a change Leader / Leadership's functional approach ensures decisions and actions carry a well-calibrated intensity. No meek moves, no unwarranted softening, no roundabouts, no band-aids. Fix, and evolve as required. A Bold Functional approach recognizes that there is a time for diplomacy and workarounds, and then there is a time for straight-shooting.

- **Integrating Functional:** Is when the Leaders / Leadership connects everything and see the whole system through. Such an approach creates harmony and coherence between the Systems, People and Outcomes. This approach also focuses on a continuous improvement of all functions in the organization to better the whole system.

#### **Futuristic approach of a Change Leaders / Leadership:**

- **Challenging Futuristic:** Is when a Leader / Leadership challenges the status quo purposefully. The purpose being the Vision, Mission, Values (VMV) and Strategy of the organization, this approach targets reinventing or rebuilding parts of the organizational systems and culture to suit the VMV and Strategy.
- **Expansive Futuristics:** Is an approach where Leaders / Leadership recognizes the importance of expanding the playing field. This approach builds Capability, Ambition, Appetite and Attitude of the organization. This is translated into action through a Role Modelling of doing things that are new and trendsetting.
- **Divisive Futuristic:** Is an extension of the Challenging Futuristic approach, but forceful. The intention here is to address those parts of the organization or business which do not respond to the normal stimuli or put-up active resistance. Often the focus is: breaking the accepted norms or a complete redesign or reinventions. Such style, though little used, is important for turnarounds and navigating the crisis. However, positively so, the deep qualities of this style usher in integrating the best of diverse fields, seeking the art of creation,

and getting things done. All this is sometimes at the cost of continuity of what is popular and what people prefer.

- **Decisive Futuristic:** Is the culmination step that is required to ensure the effective practice of all the qualities/approaches of Change Leadership. In this approach, Leaders / Leadership is committed to taking firm steps, forwards. They display an unshakable commitment to pulling all actions together in cooperation and coordination. This core ethos is to remember that Change Leadership is about getting things done to move the system forward towards a desirable future, not just daily work.

The goal going forward is to master all 4 aspects and hence the 16 sub-aspects. And when applying them, to do so in tandem, as required. If a Leader is not able to do so or ignores some aspects, then the Change Leader/Leadership approach is unrealized.

In contrast, the much-discussed Change Management is an important tactical and transactional approach. Change Management is a hygiene expectation now, even a core competence is required for most role holders irrespective of their level in the organization. Professionals are expected to know, participate and sometimes even anchor change today, by default.

**The question is: Are you and your teams responding to change, with the Change Leadership approach or with the Change Management approach?**

If there are great Change Leaders you are reporting to and you are in a small organization, you are good with Change Management skills. But if you are the Senior Management, or if your organization requires Leadership at all levels, then the only option is to become a Change Leader. There is so much more to talk about this, but for now, this 4F model should serve you with a good thinking framework.

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