



Summary Report: Dr Patricia Pryce¹, Cranfield School of Management

Adrian Furnham – From Good to Great²

Adrian began his presentation in his usual ebullient way, promising a morning not just of well-researched information but of entertainment too. The main themes of the morning included:

1. What is leadership?
2. The concept of the heroic leader
3. Leadership – teachable or not
4. The ‘good to great’ hypothesis
5. Teamwork
6. Office politics and savvy
7. Why leaders fail

1. What is leadership?

Definitions - the ability to organise collective effort; the ability to build and maintain a team that is more capable than your competitors.

The path to leadership is usually taken from starting as a technician in a particular field (i.e. you are hired for your technical ability and skill) through supervisory (promoted as a result of effort and progress as a technician and, perhaps, organizational politics) to that of a strategic leader (promotion as a result of reputation, ambition and history). Traditionally those who have demonstrated high levels of technical ability get promoted to organise others – yet history shows that these people do not necessarily make the best people managers and, for many, it is not an easy or comfortable move.

Adrian’s primary colours model (see his slides) proposes three critical leadership domains:

- Setting strategic direction
- Delivering results

¹ This is a summary of the day’s events and does not necessarily represent Dr Pryce’s views on the subjects under discussion

² This section to be read in conjunction with the slides provided by Adrian Furnham

- Building and sustaining relationships

Critical skills of leadership:

- **Challenge** – setting clear objectives and stretching goals etc
- **Support** – technical, informational, financial and particularly emotional support
- **Feedback** – regular, specific, action-oriented

Adrian expressed a need to balance challenge and support as they impacted differently on employees:

Low	Challenge	High
Support	Absentee	Stress
High	Complacent	Ideal

In terms of the type of culture/environment employees want to work in, Adrian listed the top preferences:

- Open, honest and trusting (having an honest boss seen as the top most requirement)
- Equitably rewarded (people paid fairly for the jobs they are doing)
- Intrinsically motivating (not just external rewards but believe in the purpose of what they are doing)
- Customer focused
- Nurtures creativity

Employees become demotivated when their company espouses values that are not lived on a daily basis – called organizational hypocrisy. Essentially, employees need to understand the following if they are able to perform at their best:

- The purpose of their engagement with the business
- Their job role and responsibilities
- The vision, mission and values of the organization
- That attention is paid to their individual needs
- Feedback on their performance

2. Heroic leader approach

Adrian encouraged us to think about the ‘great man’ theory of leadership and how much weight was given to personality and personal characteristics (including whether a leader could have too much of a good thing). He posited that effective leaders had a passionate curiosity that enabled them to ask ‘big’ questions around how things worked and could be improved and who wanted to get to know their people as human beings. He also pointed to the need for leaders to be able to bring together groups of people facilitating their ability to work together and able to get the best out of them.

He warned against leaders who acquired a ‘battle-hardened confidence’ as this can lead to a heightened level of narcissism perhaps leading to a belief that they could solve all problems and were indispensable; and also to those leaders who were ‘fearless’ as this could lead to ‘guiltlessness’ and ill-thought through decisions being made. He recommended that when appointing leaders (internal and external hires) recruiters need to really think about what is required (beyond the usual measures of performance and potential) and to consider personal characteristics such as:

- Conscientiousness
- Openness/curiosity
- Approach to risk
- Stress reactivity
- Tolerance of ambiguity
- Competitiveness

3. Leadership – teachable or not?

Adrian asked us to consider, when appointing leaders, if we should select for attitude and then train skills.

Ways to train leaders:

- **Experiential** – give stretch assignments, job shadowing etc.
- **Educational** – through MBAs, short courses etc.
- **Personal** – through coaching and mentoring

He pointed to the importance of learning from experience (including failure) and the need to have a ‘plastic’ rather than ‘plaster’ approach to growth and development:

- **Plastic** – a belief that people can change (the pendulum is currently swinging more to this belief)
- **Plaster** – characteristics are fixed and enduring

(see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanford_marshmallow_experiment for the Mischel marshmallow test for instant and deferred gratification)

The important point is to really understand what people want as people will make changes if they are determined and believe the prize is worth having (passion).

4. Good to great hypothesis

Many of the principles of the 'good to great' hypothesis are enduring (see http://www.jimcollins.com/article_topics/articles/good-to-great.html). Seven characteristics of 'good to great' organizational leaders:

- Importance of humility
- First 'who?' – then 'what?' (decide who you want and then what they will do)
- Confront the brutal facts
- Use the hedgehog concept (passion, best at and driving resource)
- Create a culture of disruption
- Are technology accelerators
- Use the flywheel

5. Teamwork

In order to build high-performing teams Adrian pointed to the need for getting to know each other beyond the confines of the job role. This helps to build trust and confidence in each other and gives individual members the confidence to speak up when necessary. He also pointed out the need to have diverse teams to avoid groupthink. Greater levels of diversity do mean that each member has to work harder to understand and appreciate differences but the benefits are outweighed by the extra effort needed – diversity includes gender, culture, race, age etc.)

6. Office politics and savvy

Politics is frequently seen as dirty, devious and something to avoid when really it is part of the human system. Adrian talked about the importance of networks and identifying the key players in each function and division and then getting to know these people. He made the following recommendations to get better at the 'political game':

- Get to know your boss – don't make them an enemy

- Be a 360 degree team player – up, down and across the organization
- Understand the power map – where does power sit within the organization
- Practise subtle self-promotion – share information, mention achievement etc. talk about ‘us’ and ‘my team’
- Connect with powerful people who are committed to the business and demonstrate your commitment

(See also <https://www.amazon.co.uk/d/Books/Political-Savvy-Systematic-Approaches-Leadership-Behind-Scenes/0966763602> and <https://www.influenceatwork.com/principles-of-persuasion/>)

7. Why leaders fail

During this section Adrian helped us to understand why so many leaders fail when they are appointed into the most senior positions. He observed that most leaders fall into one of three categories:

- **Bad leaders** – due to incompetence (not doing enough) and/or derailment (doing too much)
- **OK leaders** – steady as you go
- **Good leaders** – who built teams, developed and acted on strategy and were entrepreneurial

He argued that often, particularly with catastrophic leadership failures, the clues were evident. These include:

- **Troubled relationships** – the inability to build and sustain healthy, functional relationships in the full 360 arena
- **Self-image** – a defective, unstable or non-integrated sense of self
- **Major changes that require (personal) adaptation** – become stressed, rigid and defensive and behave inappropriately (versatile leaders rise to the challenge of change)

He cautioned us, when recruiting leaders, to not only ‘select in’ individuals who met the brief but also to ‘select out’ for things we don’t want. This is an important consideration as all human characteristics are normally distributed (both good and bad) and that all characteristics can be overdone and have negative consequences (e.g. self-esteem vs narcissism; the clever, articulate, good-looking, fearless individual vs the sub-clinical psychopath). Clusters of characteristics could be warning signs of trouble ahead:

- **Odd and eccentric** – paranoid, schizoid, schizotypal

- **Dramatic presence and energy** – antisocial, borderline histrionic and narcissistic
- **Anxious and fearful** – avoidant, dependent and obsessive-compulsive

Adrian referred to the psychometric assessments developed by Hogan that are able to measure the darker side of personality traits (see <http://www.hogandarkside.com/> and <http://www.hoganassessments.com/assessment/hogan-development-survey/> for more information). He also referenced the work by Tim Judge – the Toxic Triangle (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22545622> which suggests that 3 things are needed for executive derailment: a destructive leader, a conducive environment (e.g. little or no regulation) and susceptible followers (who turn a blind eye to what is happening).

Adrian concluded by making the following points:

- Leadership is difficult – to be a good leader requires multi tasks, skills and characteristics. Certain characteristics and personality traits can predict success
- There are things you can do to train people to be effective leaders – people can change if they really want to
- When recruiting, select out for what you don't want; don't just select in what you do want – look out for the dark side of strengths
- Teamwork is important
- Develop office savvy

Margaret Heffernan – The Bigger Prize

Margaret started her presentation by listing some of the darker happenings in our organisations and institutions over the last few years – Enron, the banking crisis, child abuse in the Church, Rotherham grooming, deceit of car companies over emissions, Wells Fargo and, very recently, the Grenfell Tower fire. She stated that what characterises all these events is the concept of ‘**wilful blindness**’ – people at some point realised what was going on, or saw danger signs, but did not act on this knowledge.

The concept of ‘**wilful blindness**’ (w/b) formed the central topic of her presentation:

- **Part 1 – the drivers and behaviours that exacerbate w/b**
- **Part 2 – how to build organizations that have less w/b**

Part 1 – Margaret described the Texas BP oil refinery incident which led to the loss of 15 lives and 100 injured. Although only one man was held responsible for the accident, the subsequent investigation found three key areas that led to the catastrophe:

- The man in charge was **sleep deprived** – he had worked 29 x 12 hour days consecutively. Research shows that human productivity tops out at 40 hours and that after that we start to make mistakes. Regular working over 55 hours per week can lead to long term vocabulary loss, depression and early onset dementia
- He was **multi-tasking** - research shows that none of us can multi-task although we may be able to switch form task to another very quickly.
- As a result of **aggressive cost-cutting** he was working on his own – evidence suggests that models of scale, often as a result of mergers and acquisitions, frequently do not work.

Margaret stressed the need for organizations to have different thinkers but that often leaders all thought in the same way; that our brain is wired to make quick assessments of situations and that, when similar situations arise, it doesn’t appear as if any new thinking needs to be done. This results in physical cognitive barriers to seeing, thinking and understanding what is important – as individuals we will always miss something (a reason why we work in teams). However, if we work in a compliant culture people won’t voice their concerns (85% won’t vs 15% will). People know what is going on but will not say (because of fear, futility etc.).

Why? Because most human beings are obedient (see <https://www.simplypsychology.org/milgram.html> for more information) and when we come into work we are focused on doing a good job (perhaps instead of being a good person!) and are happy to comply with the majority. Margaret described the concept of ‘bystander behaviour’ (the more people there are around an incident the less likely you, as an individual, are to step in to help; expecting someone else will)

This all aroused Margaret’s interest in ‘**whistleblowing**’ – i.e. could more people say more about what they are seeing? Whistle-blowers tend to be loyal employees, are detail conscious, notice patterns and are cognisant of the consequences of malpractice for the least powerful if nothing

changes. There is a need for more action on organizational silence and greater protection for whistle-blowers.

As with the tragedies outlined at the opening of her piece, things happen as a consequence of a series of small errors – often a systemic problem – and there needs to be a greater onus on people to take responsibility for what they see and do. This requires ‘just cultures’ in organizations that enable people to speak out in a safe way (without fear of retribution). This needs data, hard work and to be modelled from the top.

Part 2 – Margaret talked about the problems organizations faced when they operated in highly competitive market places; that to be successful the recruitment and development of high-flyers is paramount (this is also seen in education in terms of the focus of academic achievement where rates of cheating have increased in line with competition for places at the best schools and universities and the desire for higher grades; also in sport with higher levels of doping etc.)

The impact for organizations is that highly competitive individuals find it hard to collaborate and provide help and support to others (this might weaken their status). Research shows that in high achieving organizations there are high levels of helpfulness and collaboration and openness and trust. Teamwork is critical to this as it produces collective intelligence even though the high performance teams do not have the highest aggregate IQ, nor do they have one or two super IQ levels. Successful teams tend to have members who:

- Score more highly on empathy – able to tune in with others
- Give equal air time to others to contribute – not in a formal way but in an inclusive way.
- Have more women

Margaret argued that success was to do with what was happening between the team members – their connectivity – and used the concept of social capital to build on this idea. She argued that if we want to facilitate high levels of collaboration we need to develop social capital (generosity, reciprocity and trust) and high levels of helpfulness. When you have these ingredients people learn faster, trust more and information flows more freely through the organization. With higher levels of competitiveness people are less likely to help each other. Therefore there is a need to move from an industrial model of management to a more organic one where every piece contributes to the well-being of the whole.

How? Margaret suggested that people need to spend time with each other, people need to find ways to connect and build social capital (often in an informal way as a team but in work time). Social capital compounds with time spent together. In addition give yourself and each other time to work uninterrupted (productivity can increase by 65%) and protect this time – people who know they have this time are happy to help others outside of this. People will begin to be happier to share ideas, concerns etc. and will build their care for each other too. As a result wilful blindness is likely to decrease as people feel safer talking about what they do and see.

Margaret believes that making these changes is now more important than ever as we work in increasingly complex systems and environments, where nobody can reliably forecast more than two

years ahead. As a result we need 'flexible, febrile, aware, sensitive and fast-learning organizations'. She argues that this is going to be tough as it flies in the face of what most business schools teach. Drawing on examples such as Saracens (rugby club) whose team members spend time 'making memories – building bonds' and Microsoft who have ditched competitive practices in favour of collaborative ones (and have moved from a fixed to a growth mind-set in three years), shows it can be done. Both organizations have reaped the benefits of this.

In conclusion, Margaret commented that business is not a science; that there is not one single rule in management that is robust over every situation and that we must learn to look for what we don't expect.

Summary of the day

Although the two speakers were very different in style, many of the messages overlapped:

- The need for diversity in teams
- The importance of teamwork and collaboration
- The importance of networking (building social capital)
- The importance of speaking out when things are going wrong
- The need to create environments where people feel safe to do these things – with relevant behaviours modelled from the top

Perhaps by creating these environments and providing the necessary support (and development) to our leaders and aspiring leaders fewer of them will go to the dark side and derail!