

## What is My Situation?

“I'm taking control of my life –  
now, right now”  
Tom Petty

We all experience forced choices and there seems to be a built-in urge to organize the world in opposites. Are you verbally or numerically oriented? Does your company focus on innovation or efficiency? What is most important for you – your career or your family life?

Juxtapositions are destructive, because they always create a false picture of reality. If you aim at a harmonious life where you balance different dimensions according to your life ambition, then juxtapositions are decidedly lethal. Each and every time you create a schism inside your head you must try to reposition and challenge yourself. This is valid not least for so-called “soft” and “hard” values. If you find yourself in a situation where you feel you have to choose between prioritizing the hard and the soft values in your life, then you will fail. You should always be in a position to identify a meta-level and think of a solution that transforms the schism into a “both/and” situation, allowing you to transcend trade-offs. A Japanese proverb says: *Vision without action is a daydream – action without vision is a nightmare.*

Just in order to name a few resolutions of dilemmas:

- ❖ You must pursue both professional and personal ambitions in order to create an optimal career – look for your life ambition.
- ❖ You must focus on both your intellectual and your spiritual competencies in order to leave a mark – look for your energizers.

- ✿ You must focus on both the present and the future, that is, both short-term and long-term in order to create wellbeing – look for what will ultimately make you happy.
- ✿ You must focus on both the vision and the operation, that is, both strategy and implementation in order to succeed – look for what differentiates you from others.

When you find yourself in situations where you have to choose between two paths always ask yourself: Is it possible to find a third way where I don't need to opt out on either A or B? My experience is that C exists. Should I accept this job or should I ask for a higher salary? You could combine the two, state that you are highly interested and want to negotiate a bonus based on clear success criteria. In reality there are very few opposites. You don't need to be either a tough or an inclusive employer. You might choose to be tough on tasks and soft on people. My experience from CEOs in all weight classes is that, the longer along their life, the more they perceive dilemmas from a holistic point of view. Their perspective becomes more inclusive and participative.

The leadership styles of senior executives are the complete opposite of lower-level managers' styles. The *decisive style*, which combines the use of minimal information and a single option, is dominant among first-level supervisors but nearly non-existent among senior executives. Similarly, the fast-moving, multi-focused *flexible style*, embraced by senior executives, scored lowest among supervisors.

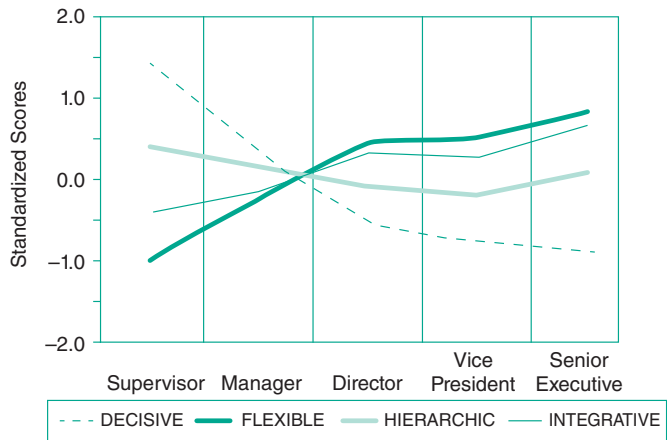
The *hierarchic style* (lots of data, one option) is the second-most frequently used for first-line supervisors; its use dips during a manager's career and bounces back somewhat at the most senior level. And the integrative style, relied on so heavily by senior executives, ranks near the bottom for junior managers (see Figure 4A).

At the second level of management, the scores are tightly clustered with no one style dominating, before they fan out again in the opposite direction. This is called the *convergence zone*, the point at which managers begin to understand that the approaches to decision making that have served them well are becoming less and less effective.

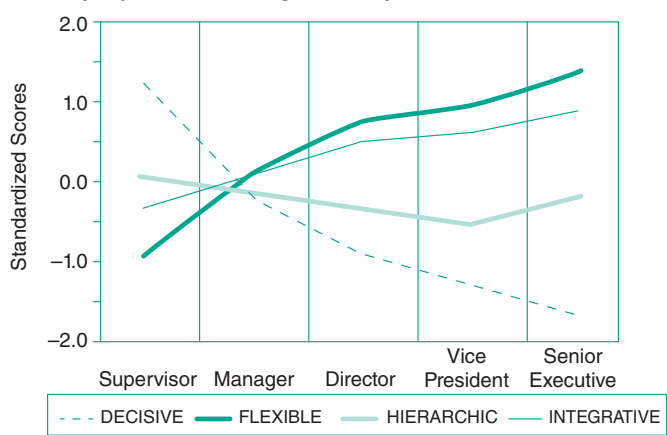
This pattern becomes even more dramatic when you look at the scores for top-performing managers. (Salary was used as a proxy for success – an imperfect

Leadership styles: Experienced leaders are flexible and integrative

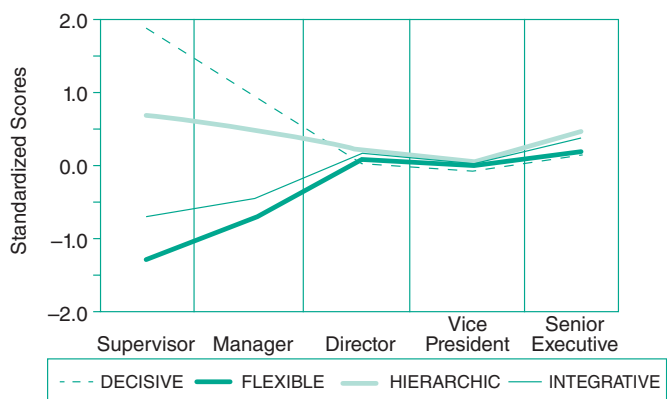
A Average leadership style scores



B Average leadership style scores for highest compensated 20% of executives and managers



C Average leadership style scores for lowest compensated 20% of executives and managers










**Figure 4** Decision Styles  
Source: Brousseau et al (*Harvard Business Review*, February 2006): The Seasoned Executive's Decision-Making Style, based on proprietary research from Korn/Ferry International

measure, but organizations do tend to pay more for better managers.) Once again, we see the crossover with the most successful people reaching this point a bit earlier than average.

This may be an indicator that they are faster to catch on to the need for new behaviors in their new jobs (Figure 4B). The least successful managers – the bottom 20% in terms of income – start out pretty much as the others, but they don't continue to evolve and their leadership styles remain clustered in an "uncertainty zone" (Figure 4C). This is an illustration of the Peter Principle at work: People are promoted up to their level of incompetence!

If you waver between pursuing two different job opportunities, don't ask yourself which one feels best. The first question you must ask yourself is: What drives me? I recently placed a CEO in a global organization and I vividly remember her comment coming out of the interview: "It is as if I have always been training for this position". This experience of lucidity – as if everything falls into place – is magic. This is the intense feeling you will experience when you have truly identified your life ambition. It will probably change over time, but being life ambitious will be a permanent attitude. Your life ambition is your strongest motivator and it will help you maintain momentum and direction in your life. We are constantly confronted with artificial choices. Very often we create them ourselves. Why make life more difficult than it is? History doesn't show the alternative. It is possible to reduce complexity. *Radical Simplification* could become your new mantra.

The potential of being able to think in both/and solutions instead of either/or is huge, not only at the individual level. High performance organizations are characterized by their ability to create a fusion between contradictions – for example:

-  Centralization and decentralization
-  Globalization and individualization
-  Rationalization and growth
-  Profit and investment
-  Consolidation and development
-  Planning and execution
-  Hi-tech and hi-touch

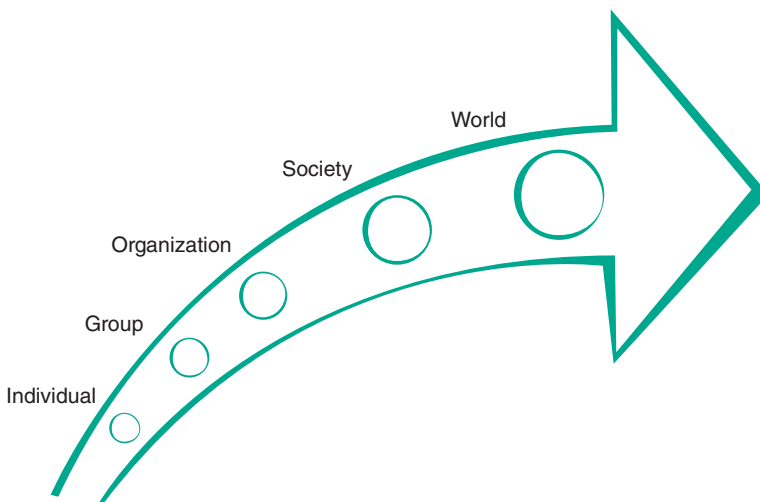
Apple, one of the world's most valuable companies, is on the one hand a superbly creative and user-oriented company – and on the other hand an

almost military-like organization as far as strategy, design, and execution is concerned. Steve Jobs called Apple the biggest start-up on the planet. It is not a question of more or better, rather a question of more and better.

## Family Versus Work

Two of the most common and harmful dichotomies are the perception that you need to choose between being either a career person or a family person, and that your actions are either in your interest or in the interest of the company. I sense an overwhelming need to look at work life and personal life as two sides of the same coin. I can say with absolute certainty that the opposite view – that the two spheres are separate and put different demands upon you – represents a short-sighted and self-destructive strategy. Executives who behave as two different people at home and at the office live on borrowed time. They are doomed to failure, both professionally and personally. You need to be credible in both spheres, because it takes too much of your energy to maintain a façade. You can only perform optimally if you consistently follow your core values both at home and at work.

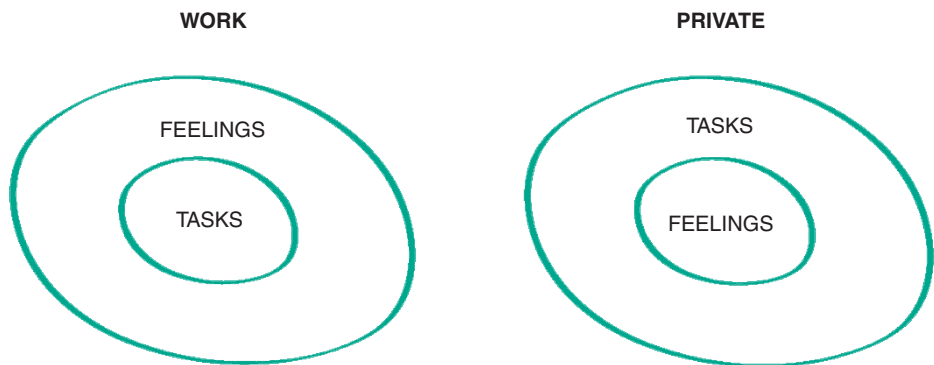
In his book *Theory U*, Claus Otto Scharmer<sup>7</sup> underlines the need for alignment between the interests of the individual, the group, the organization, and society. In Figure 5 I have added the World.



**Figure 5** The Noble Art of Scaling

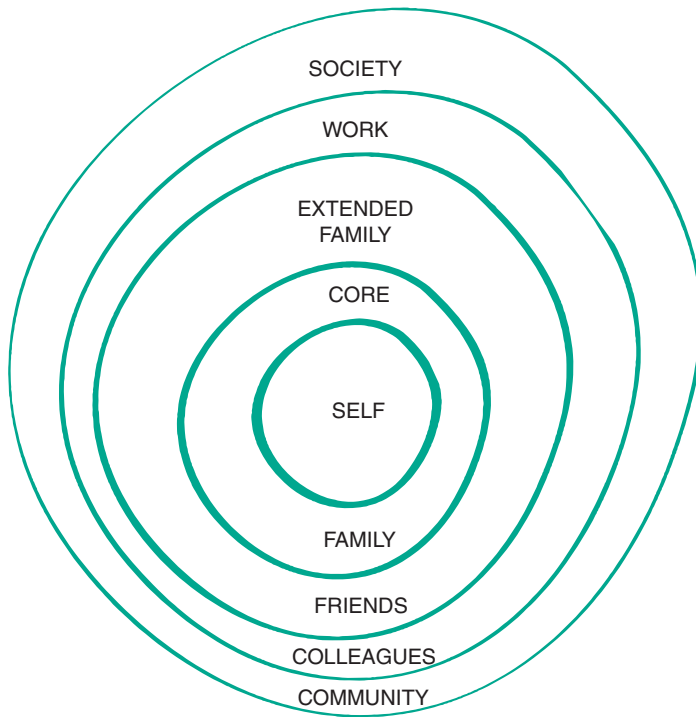
My ambition is to help you create scalability between you as an individual, your group (e.g., your department), your organization (e.g., your firm), your society (e.g., overall trends) and the World (e.g., geopolitics). When you succeed in creating alignment between these dimensions then you reduce friction, and you feel that you are part of something bigger that again is part of something bigger. By reducing the friction between these dimensions you create the basis for a perpetual motion machine. Your Personal Business Plan will allow you to see where the grand project of your life fits into the big picture. Serious PhD research on work–life balance has found that much stress stems not from work but from unrealistic expectations in your private life.<sup>8</sup>

In most work related situations we tend to focus on tasks. Then around those we may have some feelings. In private life it's the other way around. There we focus on feelings and specific tasks have secondary priority. Knowing exactly in which context you are is always beneficial to you. It is only when there is no dichotomy between tasks and feelings that clear solutions emerge. The logic of one context does not necessarily fit the logic of the other context.



**Figure 6** Work/Life Navigation

We always tend to take into account other stakeholders. At the center of the figure is you (you are always at the center, since the rest of the world is always around you 😊). Around you is your core family. Around that you'll find your extended family and friends. At work you'll find colleagues, and at the most inclusive level you'll find your community and society in general.



**Figure 7** Your Stakeholders

## What Baggage from the Past Must I Let Go Of?

In this era of globalization where everyone is competing with more people in more countries and in more ways than ever before, it may well be the question “Why?” that can give us the individual and collective energy needed to compete successfully.

Right now, most leaders have an extremely vivid experience of acute change. It is a brutal digital reality: Change or die! The concept of competition in the future does not entail a battle with traditional and known competitors, but more a battle with ourselves. The door leading to change must be opened from the inside and, for some reason, it always sticks! This constant challenge can be illustrated by using the words of Wayne Gretzky. He was asked how he had become the world’s best hockey player. He answered that he had simply listened to his dad. Imagine a kids’ team training session. The puck is always in











the middle of the biggest clump of players. Dad Gretzky's repeated instruction during hockey training had always been: "Wayne, you've got to skate to where the puck's going to be".<sup>9</sup>

In times with significant mood shifts, it is important to differentiate between fundamental economic changes and mass psychological mechanisms. There is always a time lag between the unrest in financial markets and the effect on the market economy. A financial crisis becomes an economic crisis which turns into a social crisis. It involves the development of a collective expectation, interpreted by some as a breakdown and by others as a breakthrough. In the long run it concerns emotions and the maintenance of long term competitiveness. It is when you experience a perfect storm that you have to be true to your life philosophy.

## What is Meaningful to Me Right Now?

One way of avoiding being struck down and out by change is to articulate your personal definition of meaning – so what is meaningful to you? To this end you may also ask yourself: "What preoccupies me?" and "What are my stay-awake issues?"

During our lives we all have the same type of concerns:

-  We worry about becoming unemployed
-  We worry about not exercising enough
-  We worry about the future of our kids
-  We worry about finding a life partner
-  We worry about getting an education
-  We worry about our housing
-  We worry about the weather
-  We worry about our health
-  We worry about the traffic
-  And so on.

Today, it is important that you define for yourself which of these are relevant limitations for you. You need to clearly state the specific limitations that



you are working under in order to be able to disregard all other limitations. You need to get the mental picture of the endless number of opportunities you can create if you are simply aware of the few important stumbling blocks in your way.

### **Inspiration: The Mysteries of Life**

My son, when he was eight, asked me: "Dad, how did you tell mom that you wanted to be her boyfriend?" I told him that first we dated, then we lived together and then we married. It was sort of a revelation to him – you marry your girlfriend – smart! Up till then he had seen couples dating and he had seen married people, but he hadn't made the transitional link between the two.

In Chapter 6 we will deal more in detail with the prerequisites for happiness but for now, I would just like to give you a little insight into the science of happiness.

### **Inspiration: You Decide 40% of Your Happiness<sup>10</sup>**

Your genetic and biological disposition counts for 50% of your happiness<sup>11</sup>. You have a defined happiness set-point that you will return to independently of your life circumstances. Some people are simply happier than others! Only 10% of your happiness is derived from external conditions – that is money, car, house and so on. Just for a minute think about how much time and energy we spend on this disproportionately little share. And now for the good news: The remaining 40% is free for all – you may use it in the best possible way. So you actually have the power to influence 40% of your happiness. That is a really good business proposition. When was the last time you could make a decision where you had the total control of 40% of the outcome? More often than not, our decisions are contingent on lots of external factors and therefore we don't have as much room for maneuvering as we have in this case. Happiness is a direction, not a destination. So you're the boss – you decide!

## How Can I Move Forward?

Warren Buffett once said: “It’s better to be approximately right than precisely wrong”. It’s perfectly fine if your way forward is pragmatic; the important thing is that you actually move forward. In the words of Carol Bartz, former CEO of Yahoo: “Fail fast-forward is a favorite motto of mine. It’s about not being afraid to fail; and if you do, identify it quickly and move ahead fast so no momentum is lost. I’ve never been interested in agonizing over what could have or what should have happened. Just get going again”.<sup>12</sup> LinkedIn Co-founder and Chairman Reid Hoffman adheres to this view:

“Be diligent about failing fast so that you don’t spend five years doing something that’s just going to fail. If you’re not somewhat embarrassed by your 1.0 product launch, then you’ve released too late. There’s value in launching early, getting engaged with customers, and learning from them. That can direct your progress.”<sup>13</sup>

Personal behavior that demonstrates integrity and honesty is primordial for sustained personal success. Most important of all: Only by being in harmony with your inner self is it possible to avoid becoming exhausted in the journey towards success. One of the clearest indicators of malfunction is fatigue. Fatigue is easy to identify when looking at people, and the more you focus the more sensitive you become to the visible signs. People with large black rings under their eyes are very often living a life close to the edge of their performance potential. They may still be able to perform, but the effort of doing so takes a visible toll. This gradual process of exhaustion and burn-out is frequently accompanied by a steady increase in the use of stimulants – taken in order to maintain an illusion of being in control.

### Flemming’s Tale: From CEO to SDP











Flemming was the CEO of Realdania and the overall theme for his personal reinvention was: **From CEO to SDP** (where SDP stands for Stimulating Dialogue Partner). He was acutely aware that as soon as he passed the CEO relay baton he would only be Fleming, he would no longer be representing billions of dollars in potential grants, sponsorships or investments. So Fleming desperately needed

to step up and become a stimulating dialogue partner as an individual. As a result of analyzing his situation, some of his main decisions were to kill some of his habits and break free of weaker people. He would play down relationships with people who drained his energy, which would allow him to focus his energy on his grand project. He also decided to contact his role models and thank them for their support and good example. That would allow him to invent new role models. Flemming also made a firm commitment to contribute with something that only few others would be capable of. You already now discern the contour of a life ambition. He decided to communicate his personal beliefs based on dignity. Regarding the future he made up his mind to treat it as a gigantic firework with lots of colors up in the sky. Flemming wanted to look at the world through a global lens and create value through partnerships and networks. The final picture was still diffuse but at least he sensed a direction.

### Jan's Tale: From Thought to Action

Jan had always been a loyal performer. He had done what was needed without asking for recognition or praise. In that sense he was the perfect company man. His personal success criterion had always been solving the issue – regardless of who got the credit. After 15 years working as an auditor and having had three daughters, he felt more in balance than ever. He felt that he had the necessary existential base to again go out looking for adventure in life. His work at CSC provided him with a better integration between family time and work time. Even though he still worked hard, his work was not all-consuming as was the case when he worked as an auditor. Even though he was now part of an organization under significant transformation he wasn't insecure or nervous about the future. He still felt that he had all the possibilities for creating an exciting and challenging future for himself. He had identified the key people who were mission critical for his promotion and was very satisfied with his working relationships and the trust he had built inside the organization. His Annual Appraisal "Consistently Exceeds Expectations" and he was considered to be a driving force for improvement and performing the controller role to a high standard. Through his work with *The Personal Business Plan*, he discovered that he was perhaps too loyal, putting his own interest behind the interest of the team, the interest of the department or the interest of the organization.

## Key Learning

-  Think of a solution that transcends trade-offs.
-  Vision without action is a daydream – action without vision is a nightmare.
-  Work at creating a fusion between contradictions – just like high-performance organizations do.
-  Perform optimally by consistently following your core values both at home and at work.
-  Reduce the friction between the interests of you, the group, the organization, society and the world – then you will have created a perpetual motion machine.
-  At work, tasks are surrounded by feelings. At home, feelings are surrounded by tasks.
-  Your personal business plan is an answer to all central questions around you.
-  Goals are dreams with deadlines.
-  The door leading to change must be opened from the inside and, for some reason, it always sticks!
-  Avoid being struck down and out by change by articulating your personal definition of meaning.