

## GENERATIVE LEADERSHIP

### MOVING TOWARDS LIVING LEARNING ORGANISATIONS: THE TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP CONCEPT OF THE THEME-CENTERED INTERACTION (TCI)

The key question leaders face nowadays is how to lead themselves and organisations in a turbulent environment. The answer is: by being aware of wholeness. This is the essence of Generative Leadership: the transformational leadership concept of the theme-centered interaction, based on *living learning*, developed by the German-American psychoanalyst Ruth Cohn.

**‘You are rewarding a teacher poorly if you remain always a pupil.’  
NIETZSCHE**



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About decades ago, TIME Magazine's front-page headline read: **'Where have all the leaders gone?'** These days, leadership is still scarce and under pressure. What kind of leadership is called for is not as clear as we may think. We often revert to characteristics that are believed to be masculine, such as 'charisma'. However, the underlying feelings that are reflected by questions as 'where have all the leaders gone' paint a clearer picture. Apparently, leadership is missed or not experienced as such. This creates a chaotic field of opportunity that is exploited by so-called populists in politics. Obviously, present political leaders fail to highlight the 'living' themes in our communities. Similar developments are visible in business, not-for-profit organisations and the government sector: leaders are losing credibility. Ethical and financial scandals rock the community, from Lernout & Hauspie or Enron, to Ahold and the mortgage market, victimizing and affecting thousands of innocent people.

Not knowing who can still be trusted sparks dormant feelings of insecurity and fear. No wonder everyone is calling for leadership. Present-day managers are making longer hours than ever. They are being swamped with work, feel an enormous amount of pressure and often don't take personal time or spend time with their friends and families. As markets systems are becoming disordered, endless mergers and takeovers force organisations to take drastic cultural and structural measures. Frequently, these measures extend beyond individual learning and adapting capabilities, overwhelming both employees and the organisation itself. Present-day managers experience a deep-rooted feeling of loss of control, no matter how hard they work. The one thing that has become clear is that the future is unpredictable, both of the profit sector (production companies and business services) as the non-profit sector (health care, government and education).

## Living learning systems

The end of the 1980s and the fall of the Berlin Wall marked the beginning of a period of permanent turbulence, with changes following one another in rapid succession, resulting in heightened unpredictability and a sense of increasing insecurity and fear. More and more, we are having to deal with complex interactions on a global scale, not only affecting a few companies or the financial banking system in the West, but all of us. All organisations, companies and educational or health institutions, face intermittent and irreversible changes.

That is why the key question present-day leaders have to tackle is: how does one lead organisations from a solid base in a turbulent environment? The key for an answer is 'seeing from the whole' and developing the capacity not only to suspend our assumptions but to 'redirect' our awareness toward the generative process that lies behind what we see. (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, Flowers, 2005). New ways of thinking about profound change and transformations increasingly focus on organisations as living organisms and learning systems (DeGeus, 1997). It all goes about living and learning in organisa-

tions as living learning networks (Callens, 2005).

In order to respond to a changing environment, all teams in an organisation should be centred and be aware of their intimate relationship with the other and the environment.

## The need for renewal and renewing leadership

In the past few decades, many partial answers have been given to the question of new leadership. New leadership requires another understanding of profound change, known as 'transformational leadership'. Callens (2003) mentions several themes, among which:

- > result-orientation based on environment awareness and mutual dependency
- > driven by values and passion
- > servant leadership
- > willingness to undergo profound personal changes
- > emotional intelligence
- > connecting people in teams, learning networks and communities in practice
- > generating dialogue
- > environment awareness: the awareness of being connected to a larger whole, and not losing sight of the essence of the destination: ecological consciousness.

**What is Generative Leadership?**

This leadership concept generates diversity, innovative capacity and learning ability in a continuously changing environment. It systemically links areas of change with one another by focussing on themes that really matter: the living themes. Generative Leadership requires a balance of both feminine and masculine competencies. (Callens, 2003).

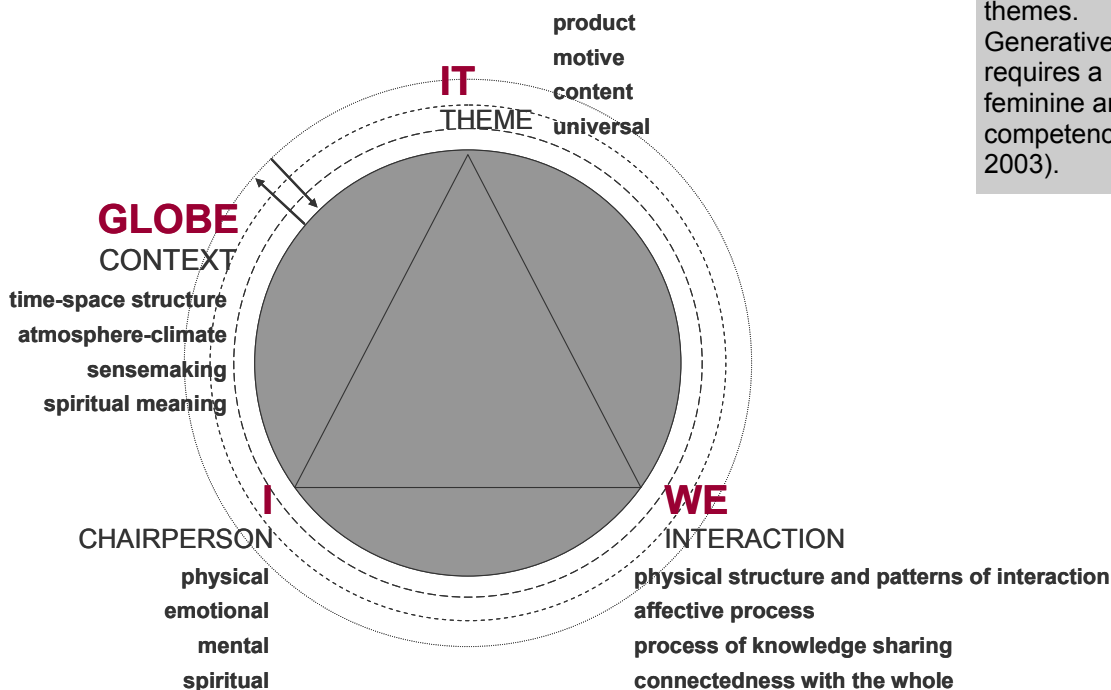


Fig. 1: The dynamic system relationship of the four components at four levels.

This list does not mention at all a dominant, masculine image of the perfect leader: an enterprising, charismatic and ambitious initiator (research on differing images of leadership by man and women: see Fischer, 2000). Quite the contrary. In fact, many women will associate themselves with most of the themes listed above. Even though it is important that women should reach more high managerial positions, I feel there is no need to create a 'breaking through the glass ceiling' approach. What is essential is that we generate new ways of organizing that create new adequate leadership to this in our age. And this goes about men and women. Generative leadership by TCI integrates all of the above mentioned themes, from servant and value-driven leadership to energy (flow) and result-orientation.

**Generative leadership**

Generative leadership is an advancement of the leadership concept of the Theme-Centred Interaction (TCI). This concept and methodology has been developed by psychoanalyst Ruth Cohn (1979<sup>1</sup>, 2002<sup>5</sup>, 1984, 1989). According to Ruth Cohn, every living and learning situation in which interactions take place, form an I-WE-IT-GLOBE configuration. Every single one of us (I) is part of the environment (GLOBE) in which we relate to tasks (IT) and in which we need the other (WE) to perceive ourselves.

Cohn has converted this existential fact to a central working hypothesis. The hypothesis states that living learning processes are generated by (dynamic) balancing the attention equally between- and linking this way- the four components I, WE, IT and GLOBE. It not only focuses on tasks (IT) and relationships and interaction (WE), as is the case with the popular leadership models, but also draws attention to individual dynamics (I) and environment dynamics (GLOBE). Each of the four components is systemic linked and therefore equally important to the whole. The way these components move in a system dynamic process to each other is also taken into account. TCI transforms tasks and ideas (IT) into themes that truly motivate and does matter. As interaction centres itself around a theme, it is important for the quality of the interaction that the theme is selected carefully, and that people can connect themselves at more levels: *physical, emotional, mental and spiritual*. 'A theme is like a room with a thousand doors. Everyone should be able to find an entrance. Interaction takes place through the theme.' (Cohn, 1984; Callens, 2005, 2006). How to manage this inspiring process can be learned.

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**PRESENT-DAY MANAGERS EXPERIENCE A DEEP-ROOTED FEELING OF LOSS OF CONTROL, NO MATTER HOW HARD THEY WORK**  
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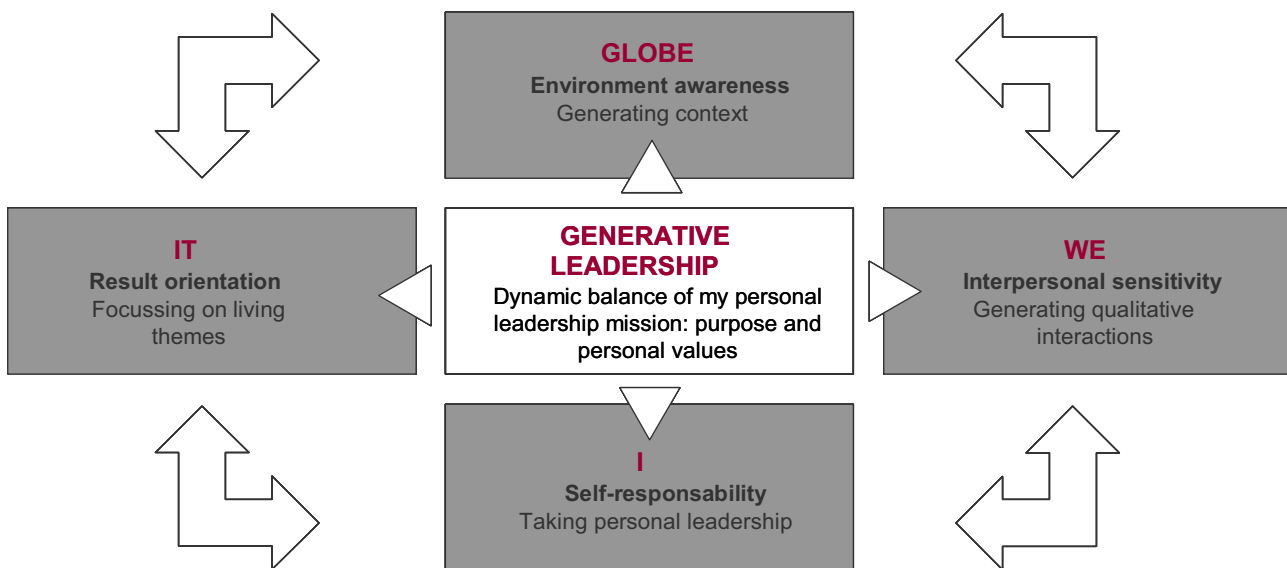


Fig. 2: **Generative Leadership: The Dynamic Balanced Leadership ScoreCard® 4.1**

Generative leadership is a concept that enables all those involved to focus on the central theme. Even though its methodology is simple, it can still be confusing to many because it requires leaving prevalent logics and mental models.

The four 'simple' rules of generative leadership are:

1. Lead yourself. (Look inwards and outwards in order to decide on what it is you intend to do.)
2. Search for and focus on the living theme. (Put it forward in such a way that it may generate *diversity*.)
3. Give each of the four components I, WE, IT and GLOBE equal attention.
4. Search for and use an adequate structure to initiate interaction. Be creative in this (generate *variety*).

With the aid of these rules, it is possible to create an organic learning system. You may experience even renewing and innovative insights, up to and including a real transformational change of yourself and the interactional system as a whole.

To sum up, the basis of this leadership concept is to invite group members (I) to focus on living themes (It) and interact with each other (We) in the same space and time (Globe/ Context). A 'we' is not created because all members think in the same way, but because in the existing globe they are focused on the same theme. By means of this theme, each I enters into their variety of interactions. Personal differences are thus stimulated from each self-leadership, and *diversity* and *variety* are generated and connected to one another through the central theme. From the recent insights of chaos- and complexity theory we know that this is crucial to enable transformations. Hence, a living learning system organises itself. Generative Leadership, the transformational leadership concept of TCI elicits self-organisation and own-leadership of the individual, the team and the organisation.

### Self-responsibility and 'Being your own Chariperson'

The key principle of the concept of Generative Leadership is 'lead yourself'. This inalienable form of leadership is in essence not hierarchical, but is closely linked to principles as authenticity and 'being'. The ground rule of TCI reflects this. Be your own chairperson: assume your own personal leadership. Generative leadership includes generic skills every employee in an organisation may be able to develop, regardless the level of performance, especially if self-responsibility and leading yourself are key issues. The concept does not exclude any relevant professional competencies, but they are not at the heart of leadership development.

Beside the four components (I, We, It and Globe), Generative Leadership distinguishes four levels: a physical, emotional, mental and spiritual level. The Dynamic Balanced Leadership Scorecard<sup>®</sup> systemically links the four components at four levels, comprising a total of 16 competencies. Further dividing them into inward oriented and outward oriented competencies, amounts to a total of 32 competencies. This leadership links self-responsibility to environment awareness, result-orientation and interpersonal sensitivity, thereby generating innovation and ways for profound change. More information on the Dynamic Balanced Leadership Scorecard<sup>®</sup>, accompanying competencies and Generative Leadership and TCI is available at the Centre for Generative Leadership.

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