The Role of Leadership for Environment and Sustainability

Guest lecture

Perspectives on Environment and Sustainability, Monash University

Dr André Taylor, 18 April 2011

Outline

- Brief explanation of my perspective.

- Basic introduction to 'leadership'.

- Why leadership is important in driving sustainable practices.

- Some of what we know about environmental change agents / champions (focus: 'project champions' in the water industry).

- Case study – sustainable water management champion.

- Practical implications.

- Key messages.

- Resources for more information.

- Discussion.

My Perspective / Background

- My research focus.

- My current work.

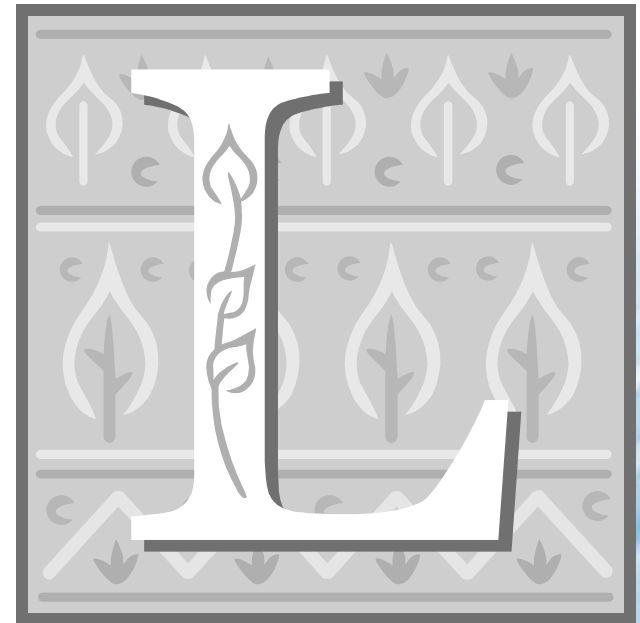- This background will affect what I focus on this evening.

Introductory Concepts and Terms

One Definition of 'Leadership'

- A <u>process of influence</u> that occurs within the context of relationships between leaders and their collaborators that involves:

  - establishing direction (shared vision);

  - aligning resources; and

  - generating motivation and providing inspiration.

  Draws from Rost (1993) and Kotter (1998).

What is Leadership?

- **Can be useful to distinguish between 'management' and 'leadership' behaviours:**

Management	Leadership
Planning & budgeting	Setting a direction
Organising & staffing	Aligning people
Controlling & problem solving	Motivating & inspiring
Makes an organisation run efficiently	Helps an organisation grow, evolve, and adapt to changing circumstances

Prof. John Kotter

Formal and Emergent Forms of Leadership

- It is common for processes of environmental leadership to involve:
  - **Formal leaders** (e.g. political / executive leaders operating within their 'role descriptions'); and
  - **Emergent leaders** (e.g. people who voluntarily take on 'extra-role' leadership behaviours).

- Some types of **emergent leaders** are particularly important in triggering and driving environmental leadership processes (e.g. champions).

Typical Forms of Environmental Leadership in High Performing Organisations

- **Corporate sustainability researchers stress the need for 'top-down' (usually formal) <u>and</u> 'bottom-up' (usually emergent) leadership to drive change.**

- **Quote from a regional President of BP Australasia (Benn *et al.,* 2006, p. 163):**

  - "Leadership comes from the passion of the <u>change agents</u> and identifying who those people are becomes very important. Building a <u>network</u> of committed leaders at all levels is a first step to change. Only when there is a <u>critical mass</u> does change take place.

  - Leadership from below can work, but the layers above need to become 'surrounded' in order for the most intransigent to move. It is far better to have <u>leaders near the top</u> of the organisation, <u>linked to enthusiasts throughout</u>, driving change."
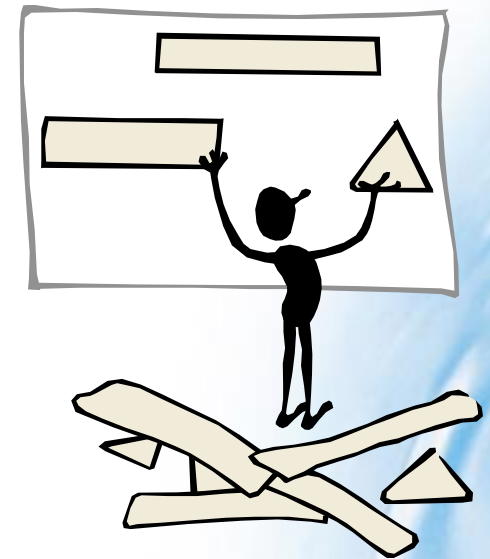
Sustainability Change Agents

- 'Change agents':

  - "A change agent is any individual or group that initiates and/or facilitates change" (Duncan, 1978, p. 362).

  - Ottaway's (1983) taxonomy of ten types of 'change agents':

    - The 'champion' construct is similar to Ottaway's "key change agent" . . .

Champions

- 'Champions':

  - No consistent definition in the literature.

  - Re-occurring themes:

    - Emergent leaders and a type of <u>change agent</u>.

    - Centrally involved with <u>effecting transformations</u> within organisations or broader institutions, particularly <u>early</u> in the process of change.

    - They are adept at <u>exercising influence</u>, usually through personal power.

    - Associated with specific personal <u>attributes</u> (e.g. behaviours, traits and demographics).

  - Term often used in contexts where there is <u>resistance to change</u>.

Brief Overview of Leadership Theories

Types of theories	Description	Notes
Great Man Leadership Theories	"Great leaders are rare, exceptional people, born to lead."	e.g. Plato. A type of trait theory.
Trait Leadership Theories	"Leaders are born, not made. Effective leaders have specific sets of innate traits."	Popular until the 1950s (e.g. Stogdill, 1948). Resurgence after the 'Big 5' were identified (e.g. Hogan & Kaiser, 2005).
Behavioural Leadership Theories	"Leaders are made, not born. Effective leaders use specific sets of behaviours or styles."	Focus on leadership styles, e.g. directive, participative, laissez-faire, and supportive styles (Schermerhorn, 1996).

Sources: Bolden *et al.* (2003), Falk (2003), Horner (1997) and Yukl (1989)

Brief Overview of Leadership Theories (cont.)

Types of theories	Description	Notes
Situational / Contingent Leadership Theories	"The most effective leadership style is dependant on situational variables."	e.g. Hersey & Blanchard's (1988) Situational Leadership Theory. e.g. Normative Decision Theory (Vroom & Yetton, 1973). e.g. Leader-Member Exchange Theory (Graen, 1976). e.g. Path-Goal Theory (Evan, 1970; House, 1971). e.g. LPC Contingency Theory (Fiedler, 1967). e.g. Leader-Member Exchange Theory (Dansereau *et al.*, 1975).
Substitutes for Leadership Theory	"In some circumstances, leadership is not needed or its importance is minimised."	Kerr & Jermier (1978): substitutes and neutralizers.
Distributed Leadership Theory	"Leadership is a process that occurs in groups and involves many leaders."	Gibb (1954) and Gronn (2000).

Brief Overview of Leadership Theories (cont.)

Types of theories	Description	Notes
Implicit Leadership Theory	"Leadership is in the eye / mind of the follower."	Lord & Maher (1991).
Charismatic Leadership Theories	"Leaders have a divinely inspired gift (charisma) who inspire followers via special relationships."	House (1977) and Conger & Kanungo (1987).
Transformational Leadership Theories	"Leaders use charisma, intellectual stimulation, individualised consideration and inspirational motivation to inspire colleagues to reach organisational goals."	Burns (1978) and Bass (1985).
Complexity Leadership Theory	"Leadership in complex systems is an emergent phenomenon that is an outcome of interactions between many people."	Relatively new. Three forms of leadership are needed in organisations to address complex challenges: Administrative, enabling and adaptive (Uhl-Bien *et al.,* 2007).

Brief Overview of Leadership Theories (cont.)

- **Where are we now?**

  - Transformational leadership theory is still the dominant leadership theory.

  - Useful to use several theories to help understand an aspect of leadership (e.g. the 'champion phenomenon').

  - Some theories are more useful in some contexts (e.g. Complexity Leadership Theory for environmental leadership).

Why Leadership is Important for Environmental Management and Promoting Sustainable Practices

MONASH University

Why is Leadership Important?

- Leadership skills are critical in <u>driving processes of change</u>:

"Producing change is about 80% leadership … and 20% management… In most change efforts, those percentages are reversed. We continue to produce great managers; we need to develop great leaders."

(Kotter, 2006, p. 14)

John Kotter

- Plus: Environmental leaders commonly need to exert influence across organisational boundaries using personal power.

Why is Leadership Important?

- Not just at executive levels:

    - "… complex problems and rapidly changing solutions require more leadership from everyone in an organization. Leadership skills that were appropriate to the few [i.e. executives] are now necessities for the many."
    (Gordon and Berry, 2006, p. 90).

MONASH University

Why is Leadership Important?

- Strong evidence that leadership matters.

  - Research in Australia on 'champions' and 'key change agents'.

    - See: Brown & Clarke (2007), Taylor (2010).

  - International research on 'policy entrepreneurs':

    - See: Meijerink & Huitema (2010).

  - Many obvious examples in our sector (e.g. champions behind iconic projects, members of the Wentworth Group)

Why is Leadership Important?

- Our context requires certain forms of leadership.

  - Context:

    - Complex challenges / wicked problems.

    - High levels of uncertainty and rapid change.

  - In such contexts:

    - There is a greater need for leadership per se (Conger, 1993).

    - Certain forms of leadership are needed.

    - Particular leadership attributes are needed.

| Context: Complex challenges | → | Complexity leadership theory (2007) | → | Enabling leadership style | → | Managing organisational culture. Systems thinking. |

Why is Leadership Important?

- **Characteristics of 'wicked problems':**
  - Difficult to clearly define "the problem".
  - Many interdependencies and are often multi-causal.
  - Attempt to address them often leads to unforeseen circumstances.
  - Unstable / dynamic.
  - No obvious / agreed solution.
  - Socially complex.
  - Cross jurisdictional boundaries.
  - Require behavioural change.
  - History of chronic policy failure.

Contemporary Government
Challenges

Australian Government
Australian Public Service Commission

Tackling Wicked Problems
A Public Policy Perspective

Commonwealth of Australia (2007)

Champions Driving Sustainable Urban Water Management (SUWM) – What Do We Know?

INDUSTRY REPORT:
LEADERSHIP IN SUSTAINABLE URBAN WATER MANAGEMENT

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE CHAMPION PHENOMENON WITHIN AUSTRALIAN WATER AGENCIES

André Taylor
Report No. 08/01 – August 2008

For more information, see Taylor (2008) at: www.urbanwatergovernance.com.

SUWM Champion Types

- **Research in Australian water agencies:**
  - **Political champions.**
  - **Executive champions:**
    - Transformational.
    - Supporting.
  - **Project champions (PCs):***
    - Diplomat.
    - Maverick.
  - **External champions:**
    - Consultants.
    - Academics.
    - Staff in 'bridging organisations'.

Some Project Champion Attributes

Personal characteristics
• Personality traits (e.g. specific personality characteristics and personal values).
• Knowledge (e.g. general and relational).
• Demographics (e.g. influential life experiences).

Behaviours
• Core behaviours (e.g. influence tactics).
• Leadership style (e.g. engaging in distributed leadership by collaborating with other leaders).
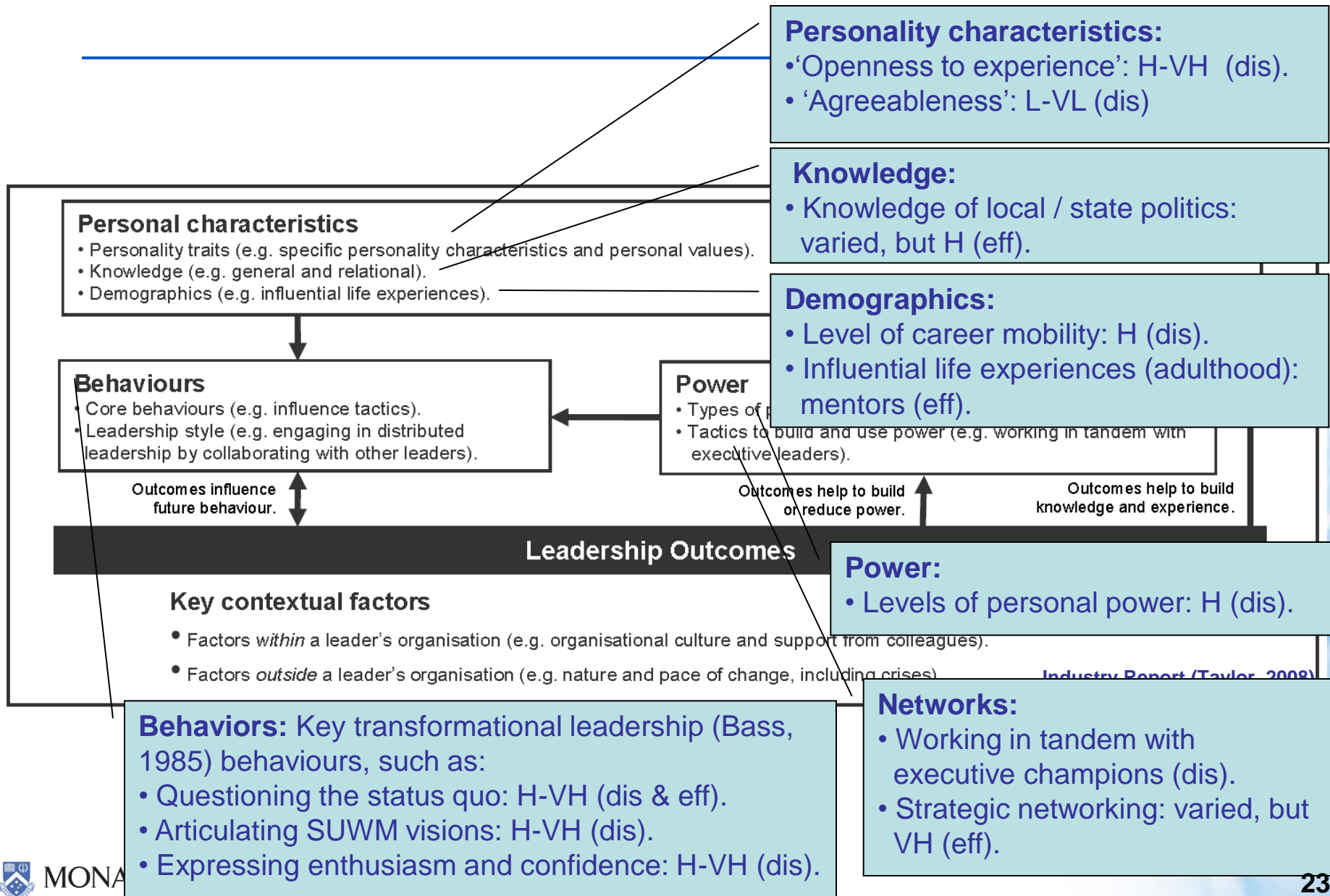
Outcomes influence future behaviour.

Power
• Types of p...
• Tactics to build and use power (e.g. working in tandem with executive leaders).

Outcomes help to build or reduce power.

Outcomes help to build knowledge and experience.

Leadership Outcomes

Key contextual factors
• Factors *within* a leader's organisation (e.g. organisational culture and support from colleagues).
• Factors *outside* a leader's organisation (e.g. nature and pace of change, including crises).

Industry Report (Taylor, 2008)

Personality characteristics:
• 'Openness to experience': H-VH (dis).
• 'Agreeableness': L-VL (dis)

Knowledge:
• Knowledge of local / state politics: varied, but H (eff).

Demographics:
• Level of career mobility: H (dis).
• Influential life experiences (adulthood): mentors (eff).

Power:
• Levels of personal power: H (dis).

Networks:
• Working in tandem with executive champions (dis).
• Strategic networking: varied, but VH (eff).

Behaviors: Key transformational leadership (Bass, 1985) behaviours, such as:
• Questioning the status quo: H-VH (dis & eff).
• Articulating SUWM visions: H-VH (dis).
• Expressing enthusiasm and confidence: H-VH (dis).

MONA

23

Some Key Attributes

- Personality characteristics:
  - Some important to their emergence (e.g. confidence, openness to experience, agreeableness, persistence, promotion regulatory focus, etc.).
  - Some important to their leadership behaviours (e.g. enthusiasm, energy, confidence, propensity to focus on communication, etc.).

Some Key Attributes

- Personal values:
  - Important to their emergence, behaviours and effectiveness in this context.
  - Congruence = key issue (personal values / issue / culture / peers).
  - Only 1 champion had "deep green" personal values (see Harding, 1998), but 5/6 had a moderate to strong commitment to the philosophy of environmental sustainability. Why so few "deep greens"? Quote:
    - **"Well, I think in the end it probably makes for … avoiding a few pitfalls. I think if you are completely driven by the environment, then your ability to engage other people is probably going to be affected …"**

Some Key Attributes

- Behaviours:
  - Social networking:*
    - Advanced skills: operational, personal and strategic.
    - Preference for using the 'strong' tie strategy.
    - Often working in tandem with more senior champions.
  - Scanning behaviors.*
  - Articulating an inspiring vision of the future.
  - Gathering political and managerial support.
  - Establishing pilot projects.
  - Expressing enthusiasm and confidence.
  - Communicating clearly and frequently.
  - Questioning the status quo.
  - Coordinating group-based leadership processes.
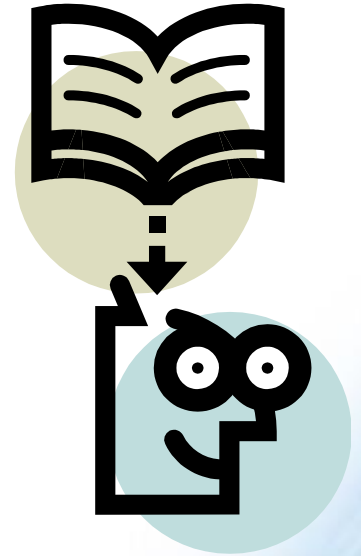 - Persisting under adversity.

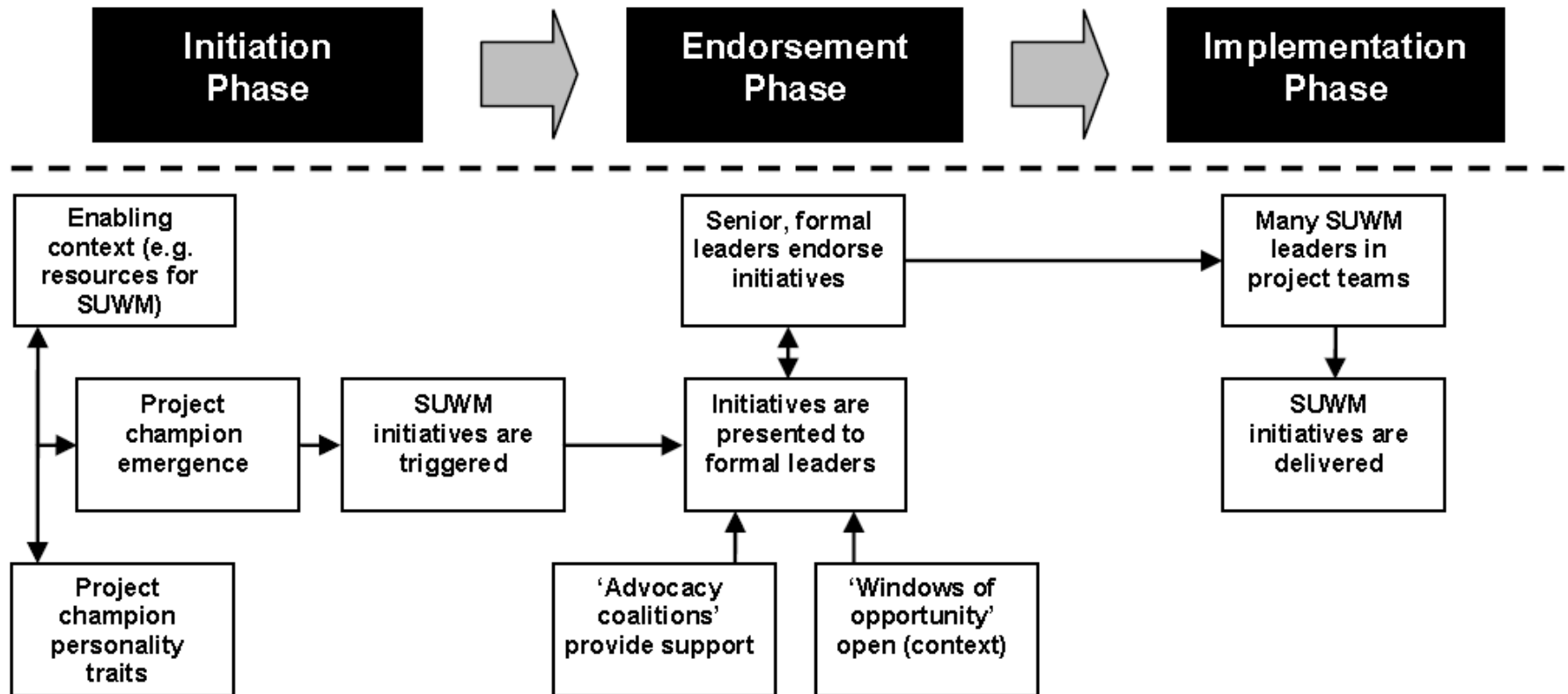# Some Key Attributes

- Knowledge:
  - The most effective PCs had a very good *general* knowledge of SUWM and very good *political* knowledge.

- Power:
  - Level of personal power: High - very high.
  - Relative use of personal and position power: Personal > position.
  - The most effective PCs = combination of personal and position power.

PC-driven SUWM leadership processes

| Initiation Phase | → | Endorsement Phase | → | Implementation Phase |

- Enabling context (e.g. resources for SUWM)
- Project champion emergence
- SUWM initiatives are triggered
- Senior, formal leaders endorse initiatives
- Many SUWM leaders in project teams
- Initiatives are presented to formal leaders
- SUWM initiatives are delivered
- Project champion personality traits
- 'Advocacy coalitions' provide support
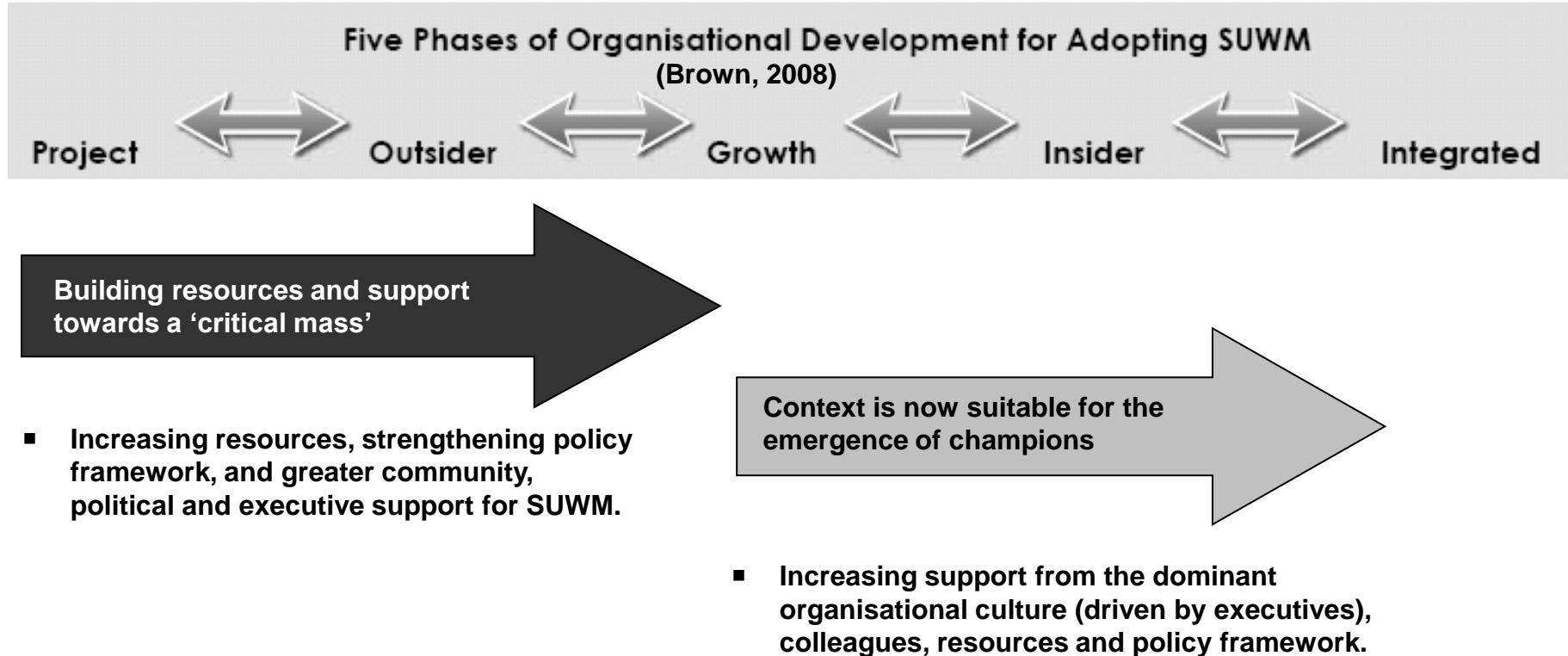- 'Windows of opportunity' open (context)

Executive champions create a safe environment for innovation, learning, risk-taking and collaboration ('enabling' leadership)
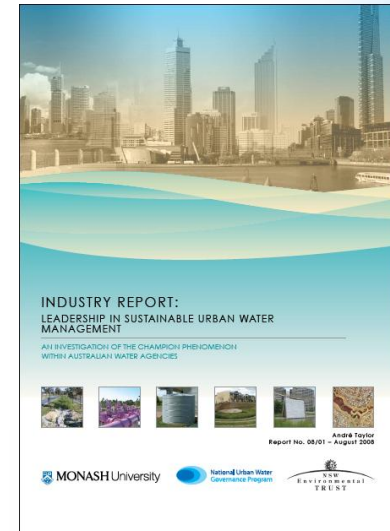
Relevance of Leadership Theories

- Transformational leadership (Bass, 1985):
  - Specific TL behaviors were used by project champions, especially during the *Initiation* phase.

- Complexity leadership (Uhl-Bien *et al.*, 2007):
  - The enabling leadership element of CL was important to the overall leadership process. Often undertaken by executive champions who created environments for project champions to emerge, collaborate with other leaders, innovate, take risks and learn.

How this form of the 'champion phenomenon' is affected by context

Five Phases of Organisational Development for Adopting SUWM
(Brown, 2008)

Project ⟷ Outsider ⟷ Growth ⟷ Insider ⟷ Integrated

Building resources and support towards a 'critical mass'

- **Increasing resources, strengthening policy framework, and greater community, political and executive support for SUWM.**

Context is now suitable for the emergence of champions

- **Increasing support from the dominant organisational culture (driven by executives), colleagues, resources and policy framework.**

Practical Implications of Such Knowledge

- Knowledge of this form of the champion phenomenon was used to develop 28 locally validated, evidence-based <u>management strategies</u> (see Taylor, 2008).

- These provide guidance on:
  - Creating a supportive leadership context for SUWM and SUWM project champions.
  - Attracting, recruiting, supervising and developing SUWM project champions.
  - Fostering effective SUWM executive champions.
  - Fostering collaboration and group-based ('distributed') leadership to assist champion-driven SUWM leadership processes.

INDUSTRY REPORT:
LEADERSHIP IN SUSTAINABLE URBAN WATER MANAGEMENT

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE CHAMPION PHENOMENON WITHIN AUSTRALIAN WATER AGENCIES

André Taylor
Report No. 08/01 – August 2008

MONASH University   National Urban Water Governance Program   NSW Environmental TRUST

Practical Implications of Such Knowledge

- **Knowledge used to design a customised leadership development program:**

  - The LDP's evaluation results were positive for all 7 tiers of evaluation.

  - Behavioural change (peer assessed): Average = 60% level of improvement .

  - ROI: The conservative estimate of the average ROI was 190% after just 1 year.

  - **Provides strong evidence such programs can produce desirable behavioural change and quickly provide a positive ROI.**

Case Study

The Champion Phenomenon in the City of Mandurah (WA)

Introduction

- Aim:

  - To use a case study to highlight some of the **factors** that helped an effective 'project champion' to drive sustainable water practices.

- Source:

  - Taylor, A. (in press; accepted 31 October 2010). Champions of change: The role of change agents in promoting sustainable forms of water management in a local government agency. In S. Benn, D. Dunphy & B. Perrot (Eds.), *Cases in Corporate Sustainability and Change: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, Tilde University Press, Melbourne, Victoria.

Case Background

- City of Mandurah (WA):
  - Research conducted in 2007.
  - ~72 km south of Perth.
  - Population = ~62,000 (2007).
  - Growth rate ~4.4% p.a.
  - Close connection to waterways.
  - Waterways at risk from nutrients.
  - Drought.
  - History of waterway-related crises (e.g. severe algal blooms).
  - Strong political champion for sustainability and liveability (Mayor).

Case Background (cont.)

- City of Mandurah (WA):

  - Local council / LGA = 540 staff.

  - Drainage issues managed by Council (e.g. through its DA system).

  - WSUD strongly promoted by Council – widely viewed as the LGA that was having most success in WA.

  - Council worked cooperatively with the Peel Harvey Catchment Council as a regional 'bridging organisation' (e.g. development of model planning policies).

  - Council's mission statement: "to create a vibrant and sustainable community, maximising opportunities through innovation and partnerships".

Key Findings

- WSUD strongly driven by a PC:

  - Middle management (third tier).

  - Relatively high levels of position power (DA role).

- Enabling context:

  - Mayor = sustainability advocate.

  - Branch manager = an enabling leader, mentor, "good supporter" of PC.

  - Managed organisational culture: encouraged innovation, learning, adaptive management, responsible risk-taking, collaboration, sustainability, and empowering staff to make decisions.

  - Strong connection between the community and local waterways.

  - History of water-related crises.

  - Booming economy / development.

  - Relatively small organisation: helped to build strong ties / relationships.

Key Findings (cont.)

- During the **Initiation** phase:

  - PC very active and visible as an advocate for new WSUD projects / initiatives.

  - Traits:

    - Strong environmental values, openness to experience, propensity for risk taking, persistence, enthusiasm, energy, self-sufficiency and optimism.

    - Relatively low levels of agreeableness.

  - Work history of occupying many different roles.

  - Value alignment between: PC, the WSUD philosophy, the Mayor's values, the organisational culture and the values of a small, cross-boundary team of peers PC worked with.

1. Initiation Phase   2. Endorsement Phase   3. Implementation Phase

Key Findings (cont.)

- During the **Initiation** phase (cont.):

  - Frequently used 'inspirational motivation' transformational leadership behaviours (e.g. expressing enthusiasm and confidence).

  - Other key behaviours:

    - Articulating visions for projects.

    - Communicating clearly and frequently.

    - Questioning the status quo.

    - Tailoring communication activities for specific audiences.

    - Planting the 'seeds of ideas' with stakeholder groups.

    - Preparing for anticipated criticisms of new ideas.

    - Persisting under adversity.

    - Providing inspiration and motivation to others.

Key Findings (cont.)

- During the **Endorsement** phase:

  - Strong networker:

    - Preference for strong tie strategy and lateral networking with peers / colleagues.

    - Didn't have as strong networks with politicians and executives, as PC focussed on influencing via the DA system.

    - Invested the time to develop constructive 1:1 working relationships with local developers.

    - The strength of PC's relationships with others (e.g. a small group of colleagues) was one key to his ability to successfully deliver WSUD-related projects.

  - Used windows of opportunity: DA process, pace of development, supportive Mayor, supportive organisational culture, etc.

  - Other key behaviours:

    - Venue shopping in the region.

    - Using pilot projects to demonstrate feasibility of WSUD (e.g. to skeptical developers).

    - Building coalitions of support within Council and the region.

Key Findings (cont.)

- During the **Implementation** phase:

  - Often worked with a small team of colleagues across organisational boundaries who shared a common "care factor" for sustainable development.

  - High level of trust amongst this team – built over time.

  - Behaviors:

    - Often coordinating activities in project teams.

    - Collaborating with stakeholders and being flexible.

    - Getting the right people involved at the right time with projects.

    - Some conflict between PC and others who resisted change (especially within Council). EC often played a mediation role.

  - Note:

    - PC was effective in <u>all three phases</u> of typical WSUD-related leadership processes, which requires a broad range of skills.

Key Messages

Key Points / Take Home Messages

- 'Leadership' can be conceptualised as a *process of influence* that potentially involves many leaders.

- Environmental leadership:

  - Top-down (usually formal) and bottom-up (usually emergent) forms of leadership involving a network of leaders is common in high performing organisations.

  - Change agents (incl. champions) often play a major role in initiating and driving change (e.g. SUWM project champions).

  - This context (i.e. complexity, uncertainty, 'wicked problems', etc.):
    - Places a premium on leadership *per se*.
    - Requires certain forms of leadership.
    - Requires leaders with particular attributes (e.g. skills).

Key Points / Take Home Messages

- Sustainability leadership (cont.):

  - Advanced leadership skills are critical for driving processes of change.

  - We can study certain types of leaders and leadership processes in particular contexts. This generates knowledge on:
    - Attributes of individual leaders.
    - The nature of group-based leadership processes.
    - The contextual factors that help leaders to emerge and be effective.

  - This knowledge can then be used to develop evidence-based *management strategies* to foster certain forms of environmental leadership in particular contexts (e.g. programs to build key skills).

Resources

MONASH University

Some Relevant Resources

- Organisational leadership:
  - Web site: www.ccl.org.
  - Book: 'The Leadership Challenge' (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

- Environmental change agents:
  - Book: 'Organizational change for corporate sustainability' (Dunphy *et al.*, 2007).

- Champions that drive sustainable urban water management:
  - Industry Report: 'Transition to water sensitive urban design: The story of Melbourne' (Brown & Clarke, 2007).
  - Industry Report: 'Leadership in sustainable urban water management: An investigation of the champion phenomenon' (Taylor, 2008).
  - Papers on: www.andretaylor.com.au.

andre@andretaylor.com.au

Organisations who kindly helped to fund Monash research in this area: