

# Using the 'lever of leadership' to drive environmental change:

## Ten tips for practitioners

23 July 2010

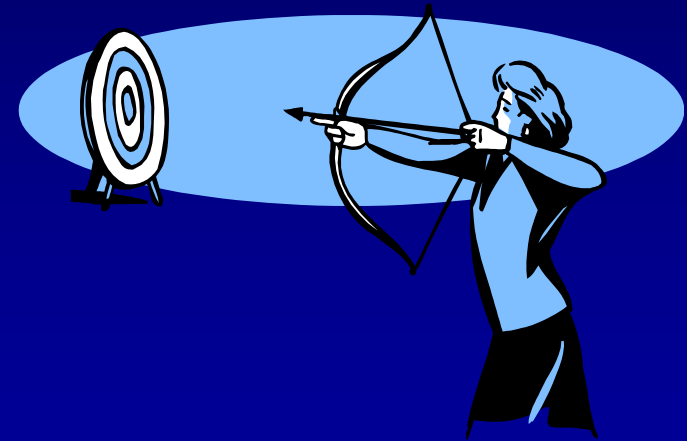
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Enviro 2010, Melbourne



# Objective

- To provide guidance on how to use the ‘lever of leadership’ to drive more sustainable practices.
  - To highlight the importance of leadership in this context.
  - Offer ‘ten tips’ for sustainability practitioners.



# This presentation

- Draws on:
  - International literature.
  - PhD research at Monash University.



- Uses a white-water rafting metaphor as a communication tool to help explain ...

Why some  
environmental  
practitioners thrive  
in times of change...





While others  
struggle...



# Introduction to the metaphor

## ■ The river:

- The environment a sustainability practitioner must navigate.
- Has periods of stability and periods of rapid change.





# Introduction to the metaphor

- The rapids:
  - Greatest challenge and risks.
  - Often, the best opportunities to exert influence and drive change.



# Introduction to the metaphor

- The rafters:
  - It takes a range of abilities to:
    - ‘Read’ and understand their environment.
    - Look for ‘windows of opportunity’ to exert influence.
    - Work with others to achieve a shared goal.





# What is 'leadership'

- A process of influence 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'

- Like successfully navigating a rapid, including:
  - Developing a shared vision of how to negotiate the rapid.
  - Coordinating the team's resources / abilities.
  - Motivating and inspiring the team to generate extra effort.



# Why is leadership important

## ■ 1. Context:

- Sustainability practitioners often work in environments that are:
  - Rapidly changing.
  - Complex, unstable and uncertain.
  - Scattered with 'wicked problems'.
  - Require cooperation from people across organisational boundaries.
- Greater need for leadership capacity.
- Need particular leadership forms and skills.





# Environmental leadership:

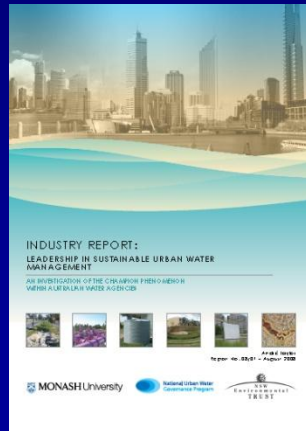
“... complex problems and rapidly changing conditions require more leadership from everyone in an organization. Leadership skills that were appropriate to the few [i.e. executives] are now necessities for the many”



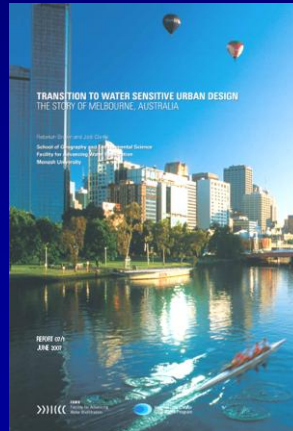
Gordon and Berry (2006, p. 90).

# Why is leadership important

- 2. Strong empirical evidence that leadership matters:
  - Evidence from research on environmental ‘change agents’, ‘champions’ and ‘policy entrepreneurs’.
  - e.g. Australian research on urban water ‘champions’:



Taylor (2008)



Brown & Clarke (2007)



White (2006)

# Why is leadership important

- 3. Leadership skills are central to driving change:

“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).





# 10 tips - environmental leadership

- 1. Become an excellent networker:
  - Essential skill to exercise influence across boundaries.
  - Numerous benefits.
  - Need to *strategically* design and maintain networks.
  - Keys to development:
    - Learning strategies and techniques (e.g. from mentors).
    - Using 'networking plans' to design critical networks.
    - Invest the time to "dig your well before you are thirsty".

# 10 tips - environmental leadership

- Networking:
  - Some people are 'naturals'.
  - Others aren't...



# 10 tips - environmental leadership

- 2. Become familiar with theories and models of leadership and change management:
  - Useful tools to understand these complex phenomena.
  - e.g. Complexity Leadership Theory.
  - Keys to development:
    - Be a 'student of leadership' - learn.
    - Get involved with a high quality LDP.





# 10 tips - environmental leadership

- 3. Develop an appropriate mix of technical, management and leadership skills:
  - Typical hierarchy of skill development:
    - Technical → Management → Leadership.
  - May be a 'career window' for efficient leadership development.
  - Keys to development:
    - Manage your own skill development process.
    - Think ahead in terms of the skills you will need.

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- Skill development (rafting metaphor):
  - Technical:
    - e.g. paddle strokes, rescue.
  - Management:
    - e.g. trip planning.
  - Leadership:
    - e.g. getting the paddlers working as one team, motivating others.



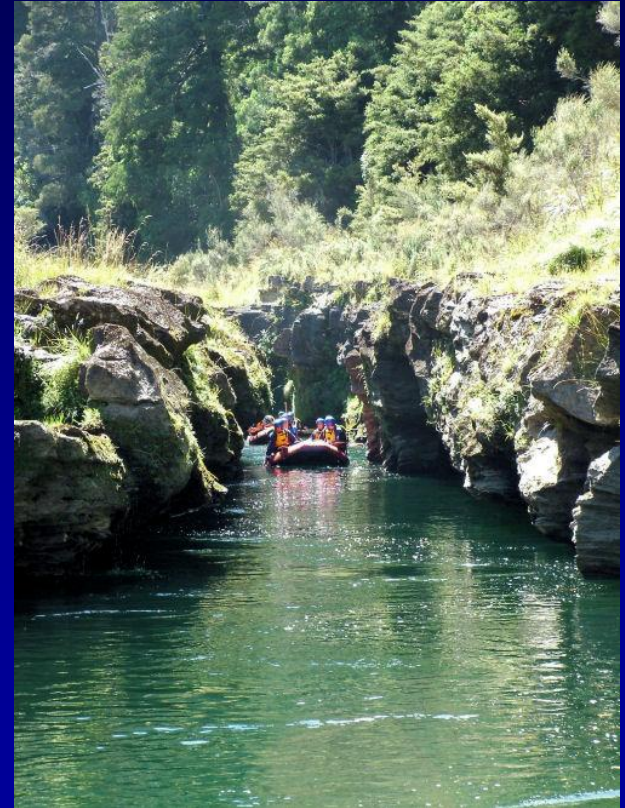
# 10 tips - environmental leadership

- 4. Gather a diverse range of experiences:
  - Often involves:
    - a range of work roles;
    - extensive travel; and/or
    - working in different industries, organisations and locations.
  - Numerous benefits.
  - Keys to development:
    - Look for, make and take opportunities.
    - Set up new experiences as leadership development interventions.



# 10 tips - environmental leadership

- Diverse experiences (rafting metaphor):
  - Develop expertise by rafting a range of rivers.



# 10 tips - environmental leadership

- 5. Learn how to use 'windows of opportunity':
  - Experienced leaders have the ability to anticipate, plan for, and use these windows to drive change.
  - May need to go 'venue shopping' or open new windows.
  - Keys to development:
    - Learning from experienced leaders / mentors.
    - Being prepared / planning ahead.
    - Engaging in 'scanning behaviours'.

# 10 tips - environmental leadership

- Windows of opportunity (rafting metaphor):
  - Learning when it is safe to run a rapid.
  - Being prepared when the time comes.



# 10 tips - environmental leadership

- 6. Invest time in cross-boundary teams and networks:
  - Cadres of environmental leaders are needed to drive change.
  - Keys to development:
    - Planning ahead: Strategically building strong relationships.
    - Building the set of skills needed to manage high performance, cross-boundary teams.
    - Building trust within such teams.



# 10 tips - environmental leadership

- Teams / networks (rafting metaphor):
  - Using all the team's abilities to safely run a big rapid.



# 10 tips - environmental leadership

- 7. Learn how to use the 'enabling leadership' style:
  - Suited to complex challenges / 'wicked problems'.
  - Most relevant to senior leaders.
  - Requires specific behaviours / skills.
  - Keys to development:
    - Continue to learn about leadership styles / approaches that are suited to particular contexts and problems.

# 10 tips - environmental leadership

- Enabling leadership (rafting metaphor):
  - One behaviour is 'destabilising the status quo' to accelerate group-based innovation, experimentation and learning.



# 10 tips - environmental leadership

- 8. Build and use an ‘individual leadership development plan’:
  - “No individual leader should ever depend upon an organisation to school him or her in leadership” (Adair, 2005, p. 164).
  - Provides direction and focus.
  - Keys to development:
    - Develop a plan via a quality LDP or mentoring / coaching relationship.
    - Keep it up-to-date and make time to implement it.



# 10 tips - environmental leadership

- Individual leadership development plan (rafting metaphor):
  - Experienced guides plan each day of their trip, and revise their plan as circumstances change.



# 10 tips - environmental leadership

## ■ 9. Learn from mentors:

- Numerous benefits.
- Keys to development:
  - Need to match the strengths of the mentors to the needs of the mentee.
  - Need to learn how to set up and manage the relationship.
  - Using ILDPs to focus mentor-mentee discussions.

# 10 tips - environmental leadership

- Mentoring  
(rafting metaphor):
  - Experience is something you get *after* you need it.
  - Why not learn from the experience of others?



# 10 tips - environmental leadership

- 10. Help to develop the next generation of environmental leaders:
  - Leaders grow leaders (Hurt & Homan, 2005).
  - Coaching and mentoring are part of the 'transformational leadership' style.





# Key points

- Leadership = process of influence.
- Leadership skills = critical for 'boundary spanning' environmental practitioners.
- Presented 10 tips for development that reflect research findings.



“... there is no more urgent task than to encourage and nurture the next generation of environmental leaders.

The most important message we have to offer is that environmental leadership consists largely of learned skills and styles and that learning needs to begin early and last a lifetime.”

Gordon and Berry (2006, p. 148).

“Environmental Leadership Equals Essential Leadership”

