A practical theory to help you change society one organisation at a time

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A case study is used to compare and contrast two organisational paradigms, the traditional/hierarchical or 'pyramidal' paradigm and the participative/democratic or 'parabolic' paradigm. The term parabolic is introduced to highlight the too often overlooked role of structure in shaping behaviour. Organisational structures unconsciously shape our behaviour in nearly all of our interactions because they reinforce clusters of values. The pyramidal paradigm subtly encourages behaviours based on status and control. The parabolic paradigm encourages behaviours based on relationship, learning and purpose. The parabolic paradigm integrates two approaches – collaborative and structural. When leaders or change agents integrate a collaborative mindset (I don't, you could, together better) with the structural mindset (pyramids dominate, parabolas partner, structure matters) they develop a theory of practice that enables them to act more purposefully, intelligently and more courageously. When they repeat these behaviours within their organisations they create ripples and help to shift their colleagues' mindsets to be more collaborative within their organisation and ultimately the world.

Key words: organisation, structure, parabolic, pyramidal, leadership, paradigm, mindset

INTRODUCTION

'A practical theory to help you change society one organisation at a time.' This title may seem a little over the top when you first read it. The title could equally have been: 'A tentative theory for social change, (based on sound psychological principles and supported by some shards of evidence) that a number of intelligent people have found useful to help their colleagues develop and their organisations prosper'. Please accept my apologies if you feel you have been misled. But you can appreciate the problem. In a world oriented towards the dialectic, titles matter. If you favour the given title you are more likely to act. If you favour the second version you are more likely to take a wait and see approach. This could rapidly become a classic 'do-er versus thinker' debate unless we can agree that both versions may be equally and importantly true.

Humanity in general is facing (but not yet able to confront) the biggest challenge to its existence. World leaders including Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon have declared it:

For my generation, coming of age at the height of the Cold War, fear of nuclear winter seemed the leading existential threat on the horizon. But the danger posed by war to all humanity—and to our planet—is at least matched by climate change. (Lynch, 2007)

Energy agencies including the International Energy Agency have admitted it:

The world's energy system is at a crossroads. Current global trends in energy supply and consumption are patently unsustainable - environmentally, economically and socially. But that can - and must - be altered; there's still time to change the road we're on. It is not an exaggeration to claim that the future of human prosperity depends on how successfully we tackle the two central energy challenges facing us today: securing the supply of reliable and affordable energy; and effecting a rapid transformation to a low-carbon, efficient and environmentally benign system of energy supply. What is needed is nothing short of an energy revolution. (IEA, 2008)

And powerful business leaders, including the previously sceptical Rupert Murdoch have recognised it. In his first global webcast in 2007, Rupert Murdoch told employees that 'climate

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change poses clear, catastrophic threats' and that the world 'cannot afford the risk of inaction'. (Lean, 2009)

Clearly we need to change. I want my future grandchildren to be able to have grandchildren and for them to live in a sustainable way. For this to happen (without countries and groups of people fighting each other over limited resources) we need to change the way we relate to one another and the way we all live. In short, we need whole-system change. In the words of Riane Eisler: 'We need a massive cultural shift. Away from a culture based on dominator values to a culture based on partnership values' (Eisler, 1988). If you agree with Eisler the question becomes, how will we do it? In my view we need many ways. This paper presents a way.

In the paper I will cover some of the psychological principles and provide evidence but first I want to share some truths with you. These truths epitomise one of the essential components of this practical theory. The adoption of a collaborative mindset that says:

> I don't have the solution. (Although I could have a solution.)
> You could have the solution. (And I will listen to you as if you do.)
> Together we can work out a better solution.

When change agents adopt this mindset they can think and act to maximise the expression and use of everyone's intelligence and creativity.

The second component of this theory involves an understanding of the part organisational structure plays in shaping people's behaviour. Once we understand the link between structure and values - in particular the hierarchical (pyramidal) structure, and its associated values of status and control, we can ask whether some other structure(s) could support more collaborative values, such as, relationship and learning. If you take this perspective you discover some unusual structures that do indeed act in this way. These structures take different forms, e.g. sociocratic (Buck, 2007), self-organising teams (Emery, 1975), chaordic (Hock, 1999), ambidextrous (O'Reilly et al, 2009) and include a group of special structures (Getz, 2009) that for reasons that will become clearer in the paper, a structure that I will call 'parabolic'. The second component can also be summed up in three lines:

> Pyramids dominate.
> Parabolas partner.
> Structure matters.

It is the marriage of the two components that makes this theory powerful. When leaders or change agents integrate the collaborative mindset (I don't, you could, together better) with the structural mindset (pyramids dominate, parabolas partner, structure matters) they develop a theory of practice that enables them to act more purposefully, intelligently and more courageously. Over time the leaders can help their colleagues shift their own mindsets about how to contribute to their organisation and ultimately the world.

The paper is divided into three parts. Part One employs a case study involving two middle managers to explore the different approaches each takes to a common problem. It is based on the real-life actions and behaviours of managers who worked in different organisations. The study has been constructed as if the managers worked in the same organisation. The narrative is interspersed with a commentary to illustrate and elaborate on key aspects of the theory.

Part Two restates the main propositions and cites the evidence that link structure to behaviour. And Part Three invites the reader to take a global perspective. The paper ends with quotes from three senior managers from different industries who have experienced this work.

PART ONE – A CASE STUDY: HOW STRUCTURE FACILITATES HIGHLY COLLABORATIVE BEHAVIOUR

'We shape our tools and then our tools shape us.'
Marshall McLuhan (Wikiquote)

One of the most difficult tasks any manager has to face is to ask good people to leave their organisation. Many managers geared up to deal with this task, especially in the early months of 2009 when the economic outlook looked more bleak. This case study will compare and contrast the approaches taken by Alexandra and Caitlin, two middle managers who worked in the same commercial real estate firm, Triple A Commercial Realty Organisation (TACRO). The case study will show how Alexandra, a competent manager, handled the challenge in a traditional way and contrasts this with how Caitlin used her understanding of structure to help her team make the most of the challenge.

Commercial real estate had been one of the industries hardest hit by the recession and the board of TACRO was concerned about its survival. Early in May 2009 the executive decided to cut the sales force by 25% across the company. The

decision was communicated down through the organisation to Alexandra and Caitlin, regional sales managers for eastern and western metropolitan Melbourne respectively. The two managers were informed of the executive's decision by Michael, their Sydney-based manager, on Wednesday evening over dinner at an expensive restaurant. The retrenched staff needed to be let go before the end of the following week, i.e. in 12 days' time. They would be given industry standard packages plus 10%. Although there would be no debate over the decision to make the cuts, the details of who would stay and who would go and the process by which the choice would be made would be left up to Alexandra and Caitlin. All agreed that the decision would be kept secret until the following Monday.

Alexandra went home that evening with a heavy heart. After kissing her sleeping children she sat down with her partner to talk about the day. Their conversation was interrupted at 10.00pm by a phone call from an apologetic but anxious Julian, one of her sales staff. He had heard a rumour that Sydney was going to axe 50% and that Michael had come to Melbourne to hold secret talks with Alexandra and Caitlin earlier that evening.

'What was the figure for Melbourne? What do I have to do to keep my job?' asked Julian.

As Julian was talking, Alexandra was thinking. 'Plan A lasted just over two hours..... Julian certainly had his finger on the pulse.' She decided honesty was the best policy so she acknowledged that she had met with Michael and they had discussed redundancies but the figure was 25% not 50%. And the decision about who goes and who stays would depend on a number of criteria. She did not feel it appropriate to discuss it right now.

'Who else have you discussed this with?' asked Alexandra.

'Edwina,' said Julian.

'Would you both please keep this conversation quiet?' asked Alexandra.

> **Comment:** Alexandra's decision to be honest seems admirable. But the decision has been unconsciously 'shaped' by the organisation's pyramidal structure. The pyramidal structure encourages linear relationships (ie relationships between Alexandra and each individual member). By asking Julian (and his colleague) to keep this conversation quiet she has created a secret sub-group. Although an advocate of the theory of collaboration she does not understand collaboration deeply enough to realise that she has just undermined it.

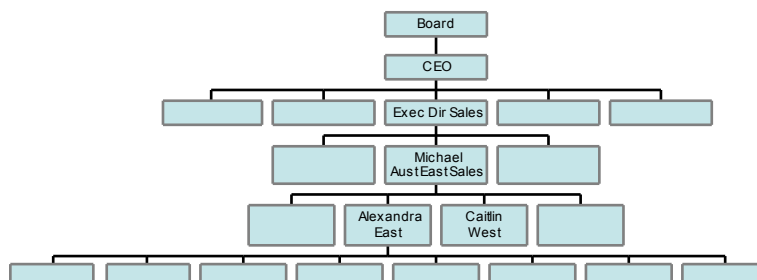**Figure 1. Alexandra has internalised the formal TACRO organisational chart.**

Figure 2. Alexandra has unwittingly created a mini subgroup that has 'secret information'.

Now let's catch up with Caitlin. Caitlin also left the dinner with Michael and Alexandra with a heavy heart but as she drove home she began to see this problem in a new light. The situation presented an opportunity to implement a new parabolic structure with her team.

> **Comment:** The parabolic structure is three-dimensional. The metaphor of the umbrella is useful here.

Imagine an umbrella lying on its side with the leader at the hub and the members of her team occupying positions on the spokes. The relationship between each tip of an umbrella's spokes is very important and if the fabric tears the umbrella falls apart. A key task of the leader is to ensure that the relationships between the team members are robust and that the people on her team become equally, mutually accountable for the team's outcomes. This gives a vital clue to one of the structural differences between parabolic and pyramidal. The parabolic leader encourages emotional and intellectual maturity in their team. The same cannot be said for pyramidal leaders and structures which act to promote dependence and immaturity. (Argyris, 1957)

Caitlin had spent several months learning about how this new structure could support her collaborative skills and those of her team and had hoped to implement the concept in the new financial year. 'I will act as if the model was in place today,' she thought.

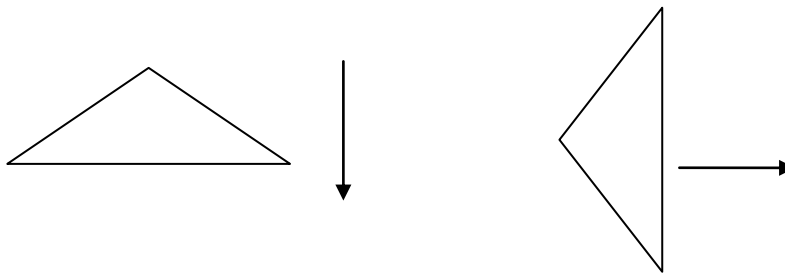**Figure 3: Rotating the traditional organisational pyramid structure**

Figure 3A shows a stylised traditional pyramidal structure

Figure 3B shows the stylised pyramid being flipped on its side.

Comment: Caitlin's first step involved rotating the traditional pyramid on its side. The traditional hierarchical orientation now has a horizontal orientation. Refer to figure 3A and 3B.

Her next step was visualise herself and her team in the shape of an umbrella with Caitlin at the hub and her team members on the tips of the spokes. Refer to Figure 4A and 4B. Note the handle of the umbrella points outwards implying movement towards the organisation's purpose. This structure helps people orient their focus away from the distractions of internal politics to that of focusing on the organisation's true purpose.

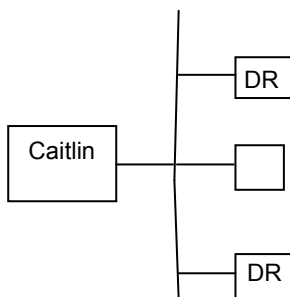**Figure 4. Pyramid and parabolic structures compared**
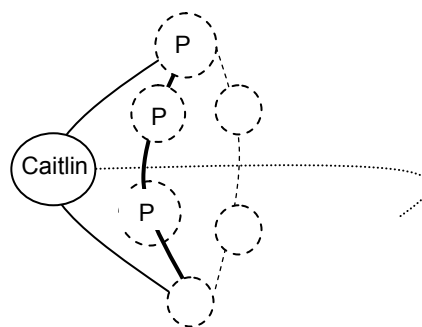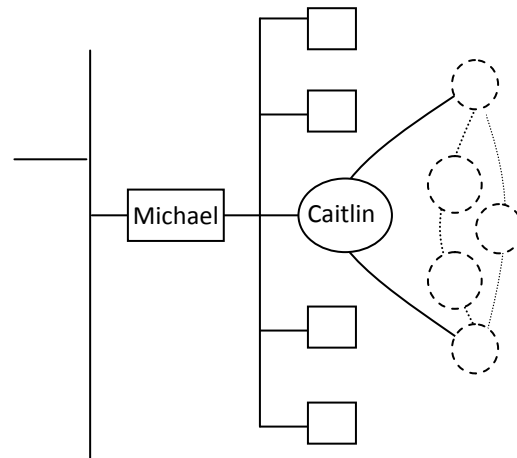
Figure 4A: Pyramidal structure

Figure 4B: Parabolic structure

Figure 5. Caitlin's new mental model of her organisation's structure

The story continues. On Thursday morning Caitlin arrived at the TACRO office just before 8.00am. She was surprised to find William already at his desk looking intently at a computer screen. Ten minutes later William walked over to Caitlin's desk.

'Can I talk with you?' William asked.

William had heard some rumours that Caitlin had met with Michael and Alexandra and that 50% of the sales staff would be axed. Could Caitlin tell him what was going on? Caitlin took a deep breath.

'Last night I met with Michael and Alexandra to discuss the business. At the moment I am not in a position to talk with you about what was discussed other than to say that that rumour is grossly distorted. What I can say is that when I am in a position to talk I will ensure that you and every other member of the team will have an opportunity to shape the next step in a fair and transparent way,' said Caitlin.

'We've just bought a new house and another baby is on the way. I'm really worried,' said William.

'I understand . . . I understand your circumstances and I appreciate you coming to me. I have to think not only of you but everyone else in the team so that overall we get the best result. Some people will have heard rumours, distorted or otherwise, and some other people will have been out of the loop. I need to call an urgent meeting to bring everyone up to speed, talk about the future and address the rumours. This is an emotional period for all of us. . . Georgina (Caitlin and Alexandra's PA) is away at the moment and I need some help. In view of the circumstances, could you give me a hand?'

Caitlin asked William to book a meeting room for the afternoon and to check that everything worked properly. She was going to make some phone calls to Alexandra and Michael about the rumours and prepare an email that she would send to the team. She wanted to word it carefully and would value William's thoughts. If he was still in the office, would he look over the email for any errors or comments?

> **Comment:** Caitlin's actions are now being guided by the new parabolic structure. Caitlin is conscious of her relationships with William as a member of a team and with Alexandra and Michael as her colleague and boss. At this stage William is likely to feel calmer as a result of being included in the process. Although it would be inappropriate to share her hopes for a new structure with her team – they will be too emotional to understand – Caitlin can act as if it was already in place. For reasons that will become clear, it will be necessary to talk about the structure with her boss and with HR.

The story continues: Alexandra was working out the criteria for how to select her new team when Caitlin phoned. They discussed their experiences and agreed that they needed to convene meetings with their teams that day. Caitlin suggested they put in a joint call to Michael apprise him of the new plan.

After the phone call Alexandra chose the criteria and then created a matrix. She gave each of her salespeople a rating of 1 to 5 according to:

- performance – monthly sales figures for the last 12 months
- ability to generate leads
- ability to form good relationships with existing clients
- willingness to share knowledge and help other members of the team
- knowledge of the company and of the industry.

When she had completed the rating it became clear that two people, an old timer and a new recruit, would have to go. Alexandra then planned the meeting. She would begin by talking about the meeting with Michael and Caitlin. It was not 50% as rumours had suggested, but 25%. She, Alexandra was going to have to make the most difficult decision she had ever made in her life. She had worked with everyone and had invited them all to be members of her team. It was not a decision she looked forward to.

She wanted to allow people some time to vent their frustrations.

She would introduce the criteria. Was there something missing?

She would inform them of her decision and let people know on Friday (the next day).

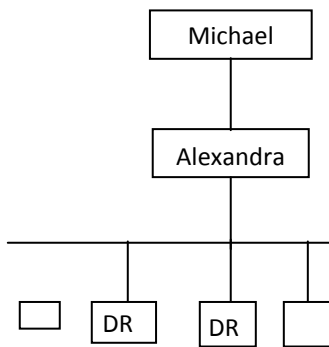**Figure 6. Alexandra's pyramidal structure and Caitlin's parabolic structure compared**

Figure 6A: Alexandra's pyramidal structure

Figure 6B: Caitlin's parabolic structure

Comment: Although Alexandra's behaviour seems thoughtful and sensitive she is being unconsciously guided by the pyramidal structure. She is again demonstrating her status and control. Her behaviour belies her espoused wish for a highly collaborative team. She chose the criteria, she did the rating and she will make the decision.

Figures 6A and 6B shows the direct contrast in the mental models. Both mental models take account of a bigger organisational system. In the pyramidal model Alexandra's behaviour is affected not only by what she wants to do but by what she thinks Michael expects her to do in a hierarchical organisation. 'Michael expects me to make the decision. That's what I am paid to do. That's why I am the Sales Manager.'
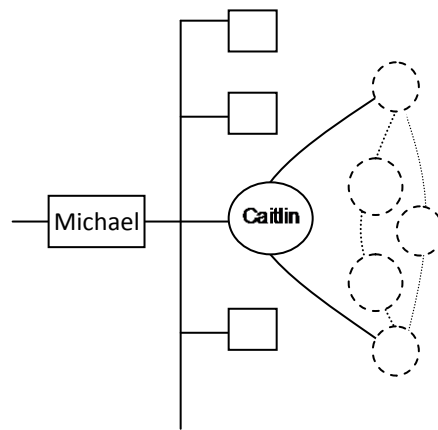
In the parabolic model Caitlin is less constrained by what she thinks others expect of her. She has a different concept of leadership, epitomised by the 'I don't, you could, better together' approach. This approach translates into, 'My role in this structure is to make the best use of people's intelligence and creativity. I will keep Michael informed and I will work with my people so that together we will make the best decision. Though difficult, it is the critical period that provides the greatest opportunity to highlight the values I want to guide my work. Let's act as if the parabolic structure was in place now.'

The story continues: Caitlin's carefully worded email was followed-up by a phone call to each team member during which she repeated the main points. It was important but not essential that all of her team participate in the meeting that day. If for any reason they couldn't make it every effort will be made to consider their interests (one of the

team members' father was gravely ill). The meeting would discuss the problem TACRO faced. It would explore a number of ways to deal with the 25% cut. No decision would be made about who would be leaving at the meeting.

Caitlin planned to first talk about and get agreement on the objective. At the end of today's meeting those present would have discussed TACRO's problem and the steps needed to get the best outcome for everyone including the organisation.

As she continued her preparation she thought of a number of possibilities including the likelihood that there were many other solutions she hadn't thought of. She wanted people to know that all of their relationships mattered – inside and outside TACRO. It was important to find a way for those who would be retrenched to leave with as much dignity as possible. She needed their help. How could her team make the difficult decision to lose 25%? What would be the basis for their decision? Who should make this decision? When should it be made? And then she added – irrespective of what we come up with I will give 50% of whatever bonus I get over the next two years to those declared redundant. She wanted to paint TACRO's problem as only a stage in its development. It would recover and be looking to grow again. She hoped that those who left would consider coming back again.

> **Comment:** Caitlin's behaviour is being shaped by the values of relationship and learning. She has imagined herself at the hub of an umbrella that currently has eight spokes. It will shortly have six spokes but in two years (if all things work out well) it may have more. She has chosen to maximise the use of her team's intelligence and creativity and is forging the team's character from the furnace of change.

From the foregoing I invite you to stand in Michael's shoes two months after he flew to Melbourne to deliver TACRO's retrenchment decision. If he were to check how his people were faring which team, Alexandra's or Caitlin's, would be likely to be performing at a higher level? What would he notice?

We will leave Alexandra and Caitlin and their respective teams and acknowledge that Caitlin will need to deal with a host of new dilemmas as she helps her team make the mental transition to a parabolic structure.

PART TWO: COLLABORATION – YES, BUT WHAT ABOUT STRUCTURE?

There are a large number of research studies that show that Caitlin's collaborative behaviour is likely to have a significant positive effect on her people's productivity and their lives: Weisbord (1991), Katzenback (1993), Rehm (1999), Hull (2003), George (2004).

But here is an important question. How much change was as a result of the collaborative leadership and how much was as a result of a change in Caitlin's mental model of her organisation's structure? And what part did Alexandra's mental model of her organisation's structure play in her behaviour. It is easy to dismiss the part played by structure. There appear to be three main reasons for this.

First, most of us live and work in a paradigm that is constantly emphasising the primacy of the individual. Take a walk through the biography and management sections of a library or book store. The number of books focusing on the individual is huge in comparison to the number of books that look at teams, culture or even more rarely, structure. It is easy to read the above without registering the significance. Let me use a metaphor to illustrate. There is a tsunami of biographies that are oriented to the heroic leader, 'I did it my way' or 'it wasn't my fault' theme in the political, business and general sections.

A torrent of good books is produced each year on how to be a better leader, e.g. T*he Leadership Engine, Level 5 Leadership, The Authentic Leader, The 360 Leader, Leadership and the New Science, etc*. A flood of books promote skill development for the individual, communication, change management, influencing, negotiation, conflict resolution, decision-making, thinking, time management, strategy development and so on. There is a river of books on teams, a stream of books on culture, a trickle on human systems and organisational design but only a mere sprinkling of mist of books on structure.

Second, most of us have a blind spot when it comes to the organisational and societal dysfunction made possible by the pyramidal structure. The pyramidal structure has played a key role in enabling devious leaders and leadership groups to commit infamy. This is a big claim (which I will elaborate on elsewhere) but in essence the pyramid makes it convenient for people to leave their socially responsible and ethical selves at the door when any organisation rewards position ahead of public

interest. Let me use an example from the holocaust.

Over sixty years ago Gustav Gilbert wrote 'Nuremberg Diary' about his experience as an army psychologist at the Nuremberg prison (Gilbert, 1955). Most senior Nazis were 'normal' intelligent people who contributed to an organisation that did extraordinarily evil things. Gilbert revealed how this alignment occurred in a conversation with Walthur Funk, who became President of the Reichsbank from 1939 -1945. Funk told Gilbert that his wife was appalled by the anti-semitism and the violence that erupted during the Kristallnacht in 1938. She pleaded with him to resign from the government. He knew she was right..... but if he resigned they would lose everything. They would be forced to move from their luxurious apartment to go and live in a three room flat..... Why not delay resigning for a bit? He was a non-violent and proud man and surely the Kristallnacht was an aberration..... The Jews would receive compensation.....

Although he denied knowing anything about it, within five years his bank would be accepting deposits of dental gold from the concentration camps. Until the end of the war in Europe, Funk and his wife enjoyed the fruits of being at the top of one of Hitler's enabling pyramids. Pyramidal structures allow senior people to avoid taking responsibility. More recently a lawyer who has represented company executives charged with malfeasance for their involvement in the 2008 Global Financial Crisis revealed his strategy: 'We'll all sing the stupidity song. We'll all sing the "These guys never told me" song'.

Third, until relatively recently, that is the last fifty years, compared to the last 6,000 years of the pyramidal structure's existence, we haven't had viable alternatives (Taylor, 2005). Attempts have been made to invert the pyramid to promote the status of the frontline staff. There has been some limited enthusiasm for social systems theory and self-managed teams (Rehm, 1999), a limited response to the sociocratic model and a blip of interest in the chaordic model. But in most cases the changes have not been embraced. These models are intrinsically valuable but not as easy to grasp as a pyramid. (Hopefully people will find an umbrella (parabola) easier to grasp.)

There are good reasons why most people have overlooked the part played by structure. The following 'mud map' will help restate this paper's major claim.

Figure 7. The impact of structure on productivity as a function of leadership
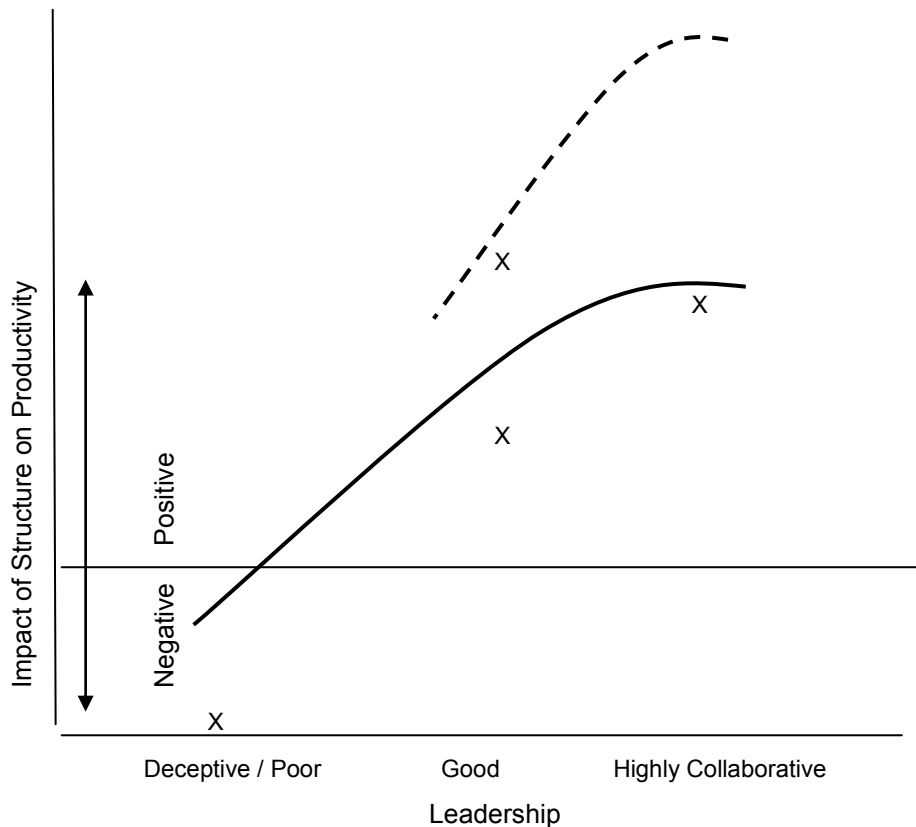
Figure 7 is a 'mud map' that represents this paper's working hypothesis and summarises the main propositions. The figure shows the impact of structure on productivity as a function of leadership. The dotted line - - - - - - - - represents the parabolic structure. The solid line _____ represents the pyramidal structure.

This paper has proposed that productivity is maximised when highly collaborative leadership is combined with a parabolic structure. Pyramidal structures have a negative effect on productivity in the presence of deceptive or poor leaders. The deceptive leader seeks to gain excessive status and/or control whilst professing the purest of motives publicly. The poor leader is either an incompetent or a laissez faire leader who believes that things will work out with a hands-off approach. Pyramidal structures can have a positive impact on productivity when combined with good (highly competent) and excellent leadership (highly collaborative leader) but cannot achieve the level achieved by parabolic structures.

Studies confirm much of data for the graph represented by _____ (Katzenbach, 1993). Studies confirm some of the data for the graph represented by --------------- (Getz, 2009). Nevertheless from our own work, that of others and the literature there is considerable and growing theoretical and anecdotal evidence to support this paper's central proposition (Hull, 2003; Bloom, 2006); Odoi, 2007; O'Reilly et al. 2009; Keller et al, 2010).

PART THREE: WE PAY A HUGE PRICE FOR NOT RECOGNISING THIS ELEPHANT

In 1962, René Dumont published his *False Start in Africa,* which became a best seller. It was based on over thirty years' experience of working as an agronomist to increase agricultural yields in colonial French Africa. 'Black Africa,' said Dumont, 'had been degraded by Western intervention. However, the departure of the colonial rulers has not brought decolonization, but a surfeit of often corrupt, exorbitantly paid, domestic officials. Administration has become the "principal industry" in many states. Aid often helps to perpetuate this system, and the educational methods inherited from the Europeans turn out only bureaucrats.' (quoted in De Groot (1989)) In a review of Dumont's work in the *New Scientist* Peter de Groot wrote 'Dumont's work suggests to me that human frailties - ego, greed, the jealous protection of professional status - stand

in the way of development for the poor. We do not appear to have come very far since he made his perceptive observations. As Dumont said, 'It is a pity that failure is not readily acknowledged, and therefore seldom serves as a lesson to others . . .'

But failure cannot be adequately acknowledged, let alone dealt with, until the reason for it is understood. The pyramidal structure, by encouraging behaviour based on the values of status and control, which is displayed as 'office politics' or 'kissing upwards and kicking downwards', underpins this failure and continues to do so to this day.

Speaking on the eve of his 75th birthday in 2006 Desmond Tutu said,

> I naively believed that come liberation these ideals and attitudes would automatically be transferred to how you operated in the new dispensation. . . we jettisoned very quickly those high ideals and this sense that you were there for the sake of the struggle and not for your own aggrandizement. . . . We are not a special breed. We have feet of clay (quoted in Meldrum, 2006).

To further illustrate this in 2008 the Kenyan government announced the appointment of 41 cabinet ministers and 52 assistant ministers. (Africapress, 2008)

Africans aren't the only people seeking gold Rolex watches and Mercedes Benz cars, and the world can no longer afford such waste of resources and talent enabled by a flawed mental model of organisations. In order to shift from our current model of organisations we need to examine the current one more critically. Interestingly Northern Africa provides another metaphor. Gareth Morgan, in his book *Images of Organizations* (1996), invites us to look behind the glossy postcard images of the great pyramid at Giza:

> It is estimated that its construction involved work by perhaps ten thousand persons over a period of twenty years. The pyramid is built from over 2,300,000 blocks of stone, each weighing two and one-half tons. These had to be quarried, cut to size, and transported over many miles, usually by water when the Nile was in flood. When we admire this and other pyramids today it is the incredible ingenuity and skill of the early Egyptians that probably strikes us both from an aesthetic and from an

organisational standpoint. From another standpoint, however the pyramid is a metaphor of exploitation, symbolizing how the lives and hard labour of thousands of people were used to serve and glorify a privileged few. In the view of some organisation theorists this combination of achievement and exploitation is a feature of organisation throughout the ages.

The need for a new theory such as the parabolic organisational model is paramount. The good news is that some people not only agree but are acting to bring it about. The following quotations attest to its value.

> We have been searching for a description for the type of organisation that we want Melbourne Water to become. We want to be highly productive and people oriented. We want to be highly collaborative both internally and with all of our stakeholders. We want to be highly adaptive to meet the complexity of our current challenges in the context of a rapidly changing climate. Of all the terms that people use to describe organisations, 'parabolic' describes best what we are working towards becoming (Skinner, 2009).

> I am an experienced manager and have read widely in the management literature and attended PD (professional development) over many years. The parabolic approach is radically different from other leadership training I have ever done. I learned more from this than the sum of all other training I have done in this area. (McMaster, 2006)

> I found it brilliant – lots won't, but for me this is part of the journey that we need to be having and we need to do more and more. (Scott, 2010)

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A BETTER PRACTICAL THEORY

The title of this paper, had its origins in Kurt Lewin's famous statement, 'There's nothing as practical as a good theory'. I believe this theory is both 'practical' and 'good'. I hope that as a result of reading this paper you may change or be tempted to change the way you look at and think about organisations. However, for a range of reasons you may not agree. If one of those reasons is that you think you know a better theory or you think that this is only a partial theory and needs considerable work, would you please let me know? I will willingly give up this theory or adapt it if after a reasoned exploration, by me and others, a better approach is found. The sooner we can apply the best practical theories the greater our chance of leaving a better world for our children and our children's children.

Finally, this paper is a work in progress. I am writing a book to give a fuller account and more examples of this theory in practice. If you would like to know more about this work please email *peter@leadershipaustralia.com.au*

Peter Rennie is a third generation Australian of Anglo-Celtic stock. He is the third son of Miriam Wood and George Rennie who were good people, thoughtful and community minded. He is married to Ann who has a maturity and wisdom he cherishes. They have one daughter and he has four other children through an earlier marriage. Peter is concerned that his daughter and other children will live in a very different world to the world that nurtured him. He believes that unless we change, his daughter and your daughter, are unlikely to give birth to children who will live to an old age. Peter is Managing Director of Leadership Australia and has run his own consultancy businesses for over twenty years in the areas of leadership and organisational development and worked with people across the spectrum of commercial, educational and government organisations. Peter was formally trained as a medical doctor and a family therapist. Peter can be contacted by email at *peter@leadershipaustralia.com.au*.

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