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VOOR
TRANSITIE

DÉ EXPERT IN
TRANSITION BASED LEIDERSCHAP



The power of Transition Based Leadership

Getting organisations, teams and employees to excel

The power of Transition Based Leiderschap

Executive leadership in context

- + *As the HR director of a healthcare institution, Peter was tasked with overseeing a major reorganisation, as part of which more than one hundred employees would be made redundant. These were generally employees who had been with the organisation for a long time. Many supervisors approach Peter and his team for advice on how to conduct these conversations. They struggle with the question of how they can be there for their staff, while also focusing on the continuity of the business.*
- + *Caroline began her new job as CEO of an organisation on the eve of a major change. Her predecessor had mainly focused his attention outward. Client satisfaction was the main KPI that the organisation - successfully - focused on. What Caroline found was a neglected internal organisation in which a culture of insecurity and fear had grown due to a lack of personal connection. The absenteeism and staff turnover rates were unusually high.*
- + *Achmed works as COO. His tech business has been growing non-stop for years. Even during the financial crisis, it was able to realise increased revenue by focusing largely on the Asian market. The core of the organisation's success lies in the innovative strength of its mostly young workforce. Nevertheless, there is one major concern. Despite the available growth opportunities, Achmed now views the company's direction – which seemed so successful for years – as problematic. It is not resulting in the expected loyalty and retention needed to continue the organisation's innovation and growth.*

Most executives will recognise parts of the experiences of Achmed, Caroline and Peter. They know that leadership is about changing, taking on challenges, uncertainty, getting your hands dirty and frequently tearing your hair out. What choices should you make? What direction should you choose? Is the past in the past or do you look back from time to time? How do you move towards the future? Do you avoid busywork and uncomfortable situations or do you tackle the problem head on?

These are all relevant questions if you want to exert your influence, make an impact and achieve results as a supervisor. There are no quick fixes for most of the challenges that supervisors face and the holy grail of leadership has not been found yet. However, there is a leadership approach that demonstrably helps organisations >

transform into more positive workplaces where bonding, enjoyment, and sustainable growth are key concerns.

This approach cannot be implemented or executed overnight. What it does is truly bring the head, heart and hands together and use that as a starting point from which organisations can excel. That is the power of **transition based leadership**.

Transition based leadership helps leaders who want to take the next step, move beyond mere tricks and methods and develop effective leadership from a foundation of authenticity. It is a demonstrably effective method with which to search for, uncover and activate the untapped potential within yourself and others.

Introduction

Transition based leadership is about staying connected to each other, employees and yourself during times of (major) pressure and change. It is about self-knowledge, learning to understand the roots of your leadership and enabling employees to excel by strengthening their personal resilience and emotional intelligence. Leaders who are focused on shaping transition manage to take the performances of their teams and departments to the next level.

Perhaps the most important – and challenging – job a supervisor faces is to be a secure base for their employees and give them the opportunity and freedom to explore this process of transition in a state of vulnerability.

Leaders inspire. If you cannot inspire, you cannot lead. You can do many other things, such as manage, but you cannot lead. As a result, people do not truly follow you and you lack sufficient influence to create real impact. A leader therefore knows that they must first lead themselves. They know what their sources of inspiration are and truly feel connected to them. This forms the foundation of their ability to lead others.

One of the most prevalent myths is that of the self-made leader. Every leader stands on the shoulders of those that came before them. Ninety-five percent of leadership is nurture, not nature, and therefore requires practice.

A secure base is a source that makes us feel welcome and inspires and encourages us to face the challenges that life throws at us together.

De School voor Transitie teaches leaders how to be a secure base and speak the language of transition. Leaders who speak this language know who they are and what they want to achieve in the world. They know what their calling is and use it to inspire their organisations, teams and employees. >



What is transition?

Shaping transition is about being willing to do whatever it takes to make the future more important than the past.

Leaders are constantly confronted with change. They are expected to oversee these changes and do so while focusing on the substance, the process and the people. Change is about the movement from situation A to situation B. Transition is the emotional, cognitive, physical and spiritual process that people go through when they are confronted with change. Transition has a natural tendency to take place outside our field of vision. Leaders who ignore the transition that their employees are going through run a great risk of the change ending in failure.

William Bridges was one of the first people to shed light on the fact that change within organisations starts with separation, rather than with a new beginning. The process of transition consists of three partially overlapping phases: letting go of what was, a neutral zone and a new beginning. We must go through each of these phases in order to realise successful change. The pace at which people go through these phases differs per person and depends largely on one's individual prior experiences.

Shaping transition calls for an emotionally available leader who serves as a secure base for the employee. A leader as a secure base deviates from the traditional hierarchical image of a leader who stands above their employees and invites them to find their >

way to the top. Being a secure base means being the wellspring from which employees can embark on their path of personal growth and development. The leader forms the foundation from which the employee realises their goals. The leader enquires, encourages, supports and challenges. They facilitate the steps that the employee takes on the road towards discovering and utilising their full potential. They give the employee space where possible and rein them in when necessary. In doing so, they create a feeling of security.

In an organisation where the leader offers their team members this secure base, those team members will do their jobs with more energy and enthusiasm. They dare to take risks and make (unorthodox) choices because they know their leader has their back and offers them the space they need to acquire and learn from new experiences. Successes and failures are both sources of development. One key requirement is that it must be possible to engage in a dialogue about these experiences in an environment of security and trust. Especially when dealing with failure, the importance of security and trust must not be underestimated. This educational dialogue not only boosts the employee's enjoyment of their work, but also helps them perform better.



For whom is transition based leadership intended?

Anyone can oversee transition. Being a secure base is about people's inherent ability to live up to their full potential. It builds on the positive and negative experiences we have thus far had in our lives. It challenges us to keep learning and overcome the barriers that keep us from finding true joy and experiencing success.

The term "secure base" comes from the works of John Bowlby, the founder of modern attachment theory. Attachment has to do with mankind's inherent need to feel closeness and security with someone who provides a feeling of safety. We have all had both positive and negative experiences when it comes to security. >

All these experiences affect how we have shaped ourselves as people, how we accept help with our own growth and how we form connections with employees and support and encourage them. With his work, George Kohlrieser placed the themes of attachment and secure base within the context of organisations and leadership. Leaders excel when they encourage others to take risks (daring) from a foundation of security (caring). Being a secure base might seem easy, but many find it to be quite a challenge. In order to truly connect to others, leaders must be able to show their vulnerable side themselves and invite their employees to do the same.

*#1 reason why leaders all over the world fail =
Leaders do not connect (well) enough to others*

Reflection questions

- How connected are you to your team? What about your individual employees?
- How would your employees answer this question? When was the last time you asked them this question?
- What is a reason for you to truly bond to your employees and what is a reason for you not to do so?

Forming bonds coincides with a person's growing emotional intelligence, as leadership expert Daniel Goleman calls it. Emotional intelligence allows leaders to put themselves in other people's shoes, bond with them and, in doing so, be an example during times of change. Most leaders believe they have a higher emotional intelligence than their followers. That is worrisome, because global employee satisfaction studies show that >

employees structurally feel too little involvement in their work. The lack of a true bond with their supervisor is the main negative factor in this regard. Leaders who serve as a secure base for their employees are willing to do what it takes to form a bond with their employees. They are able to understand the pain that changes cause. From there, they can inspire those around them and facilitate movement towards the future.

Bond first, lead second. First the pain, then the benefit.

Leaders shape transition

Transition is not easily managed and demands a willingness from leaders to take a moment together with employees to reflect on what >

is being lost, before shifting their focus towards the future.

You cannot welcome the new before truly saying goodbye to the old.

In an organisational context, we distinguish between three layers at which change can occur. Every change involves loss. These losses and their impact can vary in scope and may occur at one or more levels simultaneously.

- 1 Organisational level
- 2 Professional level
- 3 Personal level

When people experience loss, they are confronted with grief. There are many >

forms of grieving. It is about the way in which people learn to cope with a new reality in which something was lost. There is grief in organisations as well. Employees grieve for lost projects, dissolved teams, departing supervisors, missed promotions, broken bonds, organisational changes, name changes, as well as losses in their personal lives, such as the death of a relative, a divorce, lost friendships, etcetera.

*#2 reason why leaders all over the world fail =
Leaders do not do enough to shape transition*

Reflection questions

- What have you learned about transition in your life?
- What was an important transition in your personal history and how has it affected your leadership?
- How is transition impacting your life right now? How does that affect your leadership?

A transition based leader is willing to reflect on what is being lost and create some space to say goodbye and let go, before shifting the focus towards the future. They consciously move through the steps of the Circle of Transition (see box) and are aware of the necessity of saying goodbye and grieving that which is being lost to ensure the loss can be >

properly integrated. They believe grieving is needed to free up the energy to take on new challenges and for people so they can connect to new initiatives. If they are not given this opportunity, employees will stagnate. This stagnation often results in forms of resistance, lack of motivation, isolation, etcetera.

Shaping Transition



(Circle of Transition: Jakob van Wielink and Leo Wilhelm, partly inspired by the works of George Kohlrieser et al.)

The Circle of Transition is a framework that was developed by Jakob van Wielink and Leo Wilhelm. It shows how the themes of *contact and welcome*, *attachment and resilience*, *connection and intimacy*, *loss and separation*, *grief and integration* are connected to meaning and calling. These themes are all interconnected. Every new connection we form contains repetitions of themes from earlier relationships, which ultimately goes all the way back to our earliest experiences and the very first bonds we ever formed.

If we assume that all relationships we form will ultimately be broken, we see that *loss and separation* are in fact inextricably linked to *contact and welcome*. You cannot welcome the new before saying goodbye to the old. This cycle of forming emotional bonds, maintaining them, ending them and forming new ones is a fundamental component of transition based leadership.

Successful leaders help themselves and others examine and take on the themes of the Circle of Transition in order to find and utilise the full potential found within themselves and others and prevent stagnation. In order to shape transition, we must therefore connect to secure bases. They enable us to make new discoveries and realise change from a foundation of security and connection.

Leaders focus on psychological safety and excellence

Transition takes people to the edge of their comfort zone. Employees whose supervisor forms bonds, appears trustworthy, is genuinely curious and listens - without immediately responding - feel safe and appreciated in the workplace. From this comfort zone, secure base leaders create the space in which to challenge employees to explore and experiment. Outside the comfort zone is where new experiences are acquired. That is where one can take risks, practise new behaviour, achieve successes and experience failure. Afterwards, there is time to reflect, learn and celebrate one's successes within the comfort zone.

This ultimate balance between caring and daring fosters a feeling of psychological safety. It is a prerequisite for excellence. Safety is therefore not a goal in and of itself; rather, it is the necessary soil from which the growth and development of individuals, teams and the organisation as a whole can grow. In excellent teams, people learn from their successes and especially their failures together. This creates an environment in which people achieve and far exceed their set goals in a state of optimal connectedness. >



The focus of the transition based leader is always on growth and development, on wanting to be better tomorrow than one is today. It is not about wanting to be better than other people, but about wanting to be better than yourself in relation to others. This calls for collaboration, enjoyment and the willingness to do whatever it takes. The latter is particularly important; one must be willing and unafraid to take risks.

*#3 reason why leaders all over the world fail =
Leaders do not take enough risks*

Reflection questions

- + How have you learned to look at taking risks in your life? Who shaped your outlook in this regard?
- + What feedback do you get from your supervisor when it comes to taking risks?
- + What risk do you have to take in order to elevate your leadership to the next level?

Leaders constantly have to ask themselves the following question: does my behaviour facilitate optimal growth? Am I not only caring, but also daring? Are my mind's eye and those of my employees aimed at excellence? If the answer is "no," they >

must find out what it takes for them, their employees, the team and the organisation as a whole to regain that focus.

Dialogue is the key to success

The most important tool that leaders possess is dialogue. In this case, a dialogue is defined as a search conducted by two or more people to find a previously unknown truth.

Engaging in a dialogue requires more than listening to respond; it calls for genuine curiosity regarding what the other person has to say, acceptance of the other person's experience and empathy, i.e. a willingness to put yourself in the other person's position. >

Dialogue requires a willingness to engage in difficult conversations, embrace conflict as a foundation for growth and examine the issues at hand with genuine curiosity together.

During a dialogue, two (or more) people are connected, discuss what needs discussing and can share ideas. However, there are only few organisations where dialogue actually occurs on a structural basis.

*#4 reason why leaders all over the world fail =
Leaders avoid conflict*

Reflection questions

- + What have you learned about conflict in your life?
- + What is your primary impulse in a conflict situation?
- + How does your primary impulse affect the effectiveness of your leadership?

Successful teams are not characterised by the absence of conflict, but rather by the occurrence of conflict and the team members' ability to use it to facilitate growth.

Successful leaders do not view conflict as something negative, but rather as something fundamentally positive. >

This is because conflicts are essentially about differences. By engaging in and resolving conflicts, the full potential of employees, teams and the organisation itself can be discovered and utilised.



Leadership begins and ends with calling

Calling makes the difference between transitional leadership (getting things done) and transformational leadership (bringing out the best in people). Transition based leaders are driven by a deep-rooted sense of calling, even if they do not literally refer to it as such.

We all have a calling. It is about who you are at your core, the essence of your identity >

and what you want to realise in the world. Leaders who know and accept their calling are able to follow their path with conviction and make the necessary choices along the way. Following one's calling leads to clarity, focus and the faith to take decisive action.

*#5 Reason why leaders from around the world fail =
Leaders insufficiently accept their calling*

Reflection questions

- + What words characterise you?
- + What higher goal do you strive towards?
- + What do you want to realise in the world?

People who can express their calling in their work score better when it comes to their involvement in and the meaning of their work. Transition based leaders know their calling and show others how to understand and shape their own calling. >

Everyone has a single calling. Over time and depending on the circumstances, its exact structure and nature may change. In a professional context, leaders facilitate the organisational and professional expression of their own and their team members' calling.



Building an organisation of trust, connection and growth

Creating an organisation in which employees are challenged and stimulated to learn and develop from a foundation of connection is not a quick fix. It requires dedication, patience, a growth mindset focused on learning and development, falling and getting back up and – above all – practice. It requires commitment from the top and demands that they set the right example.

What we see in these organisations is this:

- + There is a culture of security and mutual trust.
 - + People develop and speak the same language.
 - + Leaders and their employees experience more joy and collaboration.
 - + There is a culture in which it is okay to make mistakes and the focus is on one key question: what are we learning?
 - + Teams and the organisation develop their innovative strength.
 - + The dialogue between supervisors and their employees creates room to discuss complex themes. As a result, fewer people are lost to (long-term) illness and a lack of motivation.
 - + The relationships with clients are deepened and enriched.
 - + Etcetera >
- Many organisations have already embraced this philosophy. Here are some examples:
- + A **consultancy firm** uses the principles to improve its internal conversations and, at the same time, deepen and strengthen its client relationships.
 - + After a name change, a **major corporation** discusses the impact of this change with its employees and talks to them about their individual needs that will enable them to (re)connect to the business.
 - + An **educational institution** uses the philosophy to support lecturers in the crucial role they play in demonstrating how to form connections and fostering an atmosphere of trust and security in which (young) people feel encouraged to develop themselves to the fullest.
 - + A **financial institution** offers both supervisors and employees the opportunity to improve their (personal) leadership and resilience in times of change in order to cope with the change more effectively.
 - + A **logistics service provider** allows employees at all levels to further develop their leadership in order to improve the security and openness within the organisation.
 - + A **global maritime service provider** highly values safety aboard its vessels. The organisation understands that physical safety is improved when employees experience an emotionally safe environment in which there is room for them to learn and develop based on mistakes and successes alike.

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De School voor Transitie | The expert in transition based leadership

De School voor Transitie is a secure base for people and organisations who want to realise true change. We do this by offering in-company programmes, open-registration courses and individual guidance.

Our in-company programmes are tailor-made to suit the individual organisation. Depending on the client's wishes, we offer a one- or multi-day programme during which we explore the aforementioned themes together with the organisation's employees.

These programmes are complemented by moments of inspiration and intervision and help with implementing the secure base vision into the organisation's processes and systems.

This allows us to help organisations get better at forming connections, engaging in dialogue and showing vulnerability. From there, they are able to utilise the full potential of individuals, teams and the organisation as a whole. >

The open-registration courses are centred around the development of the secure base leadership of both individuals and teams. For example, it is possible to have a select group of employees further develop their ability to help your organisation become a secure base.

Individual guidance can be used to support individual employees with their personal development. It is available as either a stand-alone solution or as an addition to one of our programmes.

Would you like to know more about how this philosophy can contribute to your own, your employees' and your organisation's ability to excel?

You can find more information on our website www.deschoolvoortransitie.nl or contact us directly via info@deschoolvoortransitie.nl or 026-3020000.

De School voor Transitie supports organizations, their leaders and employees in becoming a secure base: a pleasant place to work, and a place where you are challenged to bring out the best in yourself and others. These are high-performance environments where individual, team and organization goals are exceeded.

De School voor Transitie is the ultimate expert that merges personal growth and leadership with the practical reality of everyday life.

Our way of working? Intensification where possible, deceleration where required, acceleration where possible and always with respect for and engagement in the business and organizations for which we work and whose language we speak.

This white paper was contributed in part by Jan van Nederveen.

