

# managing worldwide

N°12-7 – December 2012

## Editorial

Collective intelligence has been around for as long as social groups, and the benefits to 'the group' are well understood and documented. Indeed, the growing formalized use of social media applications within large corporations clearly points to a desire to harness the power of group interactions.

These communication tools certainly enhance and deepen the sense of community and the sharing of ideas, but what of our **ability to adapt to the complex, shifting realities of today's global organizations?** Is there more we should be doing to leverage the full intelligence of our teams?

Stéphane Roche advocates **a major shift in leadership paradigms** to enable teams to develop their full potential and readily embrace the complexity of global markets. Specifically, we should encourage and develop leaders who are effective at **enabling and promoting environments that allow teams to grow and evolve.**

In what type of environment will teams be most motivated, adaptable and efficient? Let's read what Stéphane has to say.



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## The leader is a grower

Create the right dynamics and leverage complexity

By Stéphane Roche, Senior Consultant

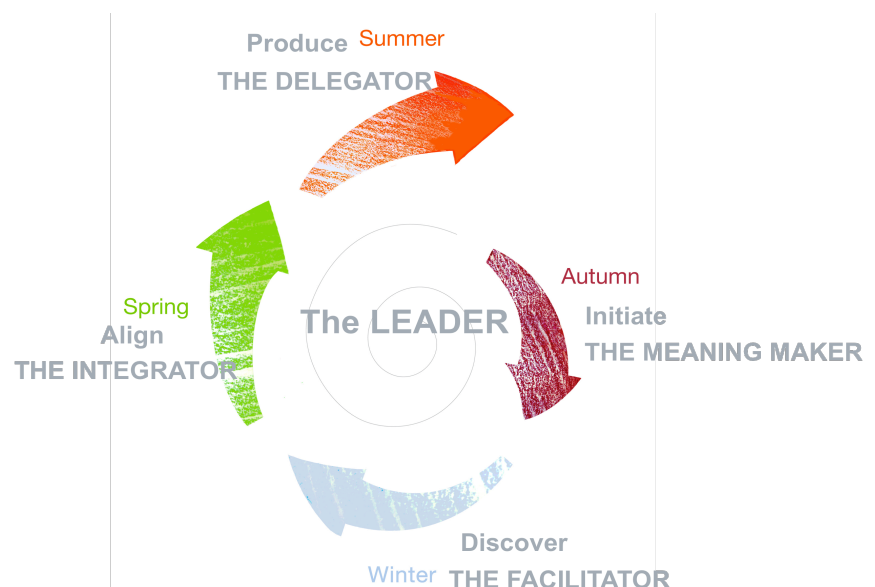
Today's global organizations are complex organizations; we all work in distributed teams, with more and more people coming from different cultures with different backgrounds, experiences, and motivations. We have different local realities, different objectives, management lines and priorities; and we are all dependent on each other to do our job. As a result, we encounter more and more problems with the interfaces and most of these problems are difficult to anticipate.

The conventional response is to do more of what we have been used to doing: more planning, more control, more process, in order to reduce uncertainty. We tend to oversimplify situations and the complex is then transformed into something very complicated. But we confuse complex and complicated. Building a car is complicated but making mayonnaise is complex!

We should rather embrace complexity and accept that more and more situations are unique and not predictable. Instead of more planning and controlling, we should grow the right environment so that people are mobilized and empowered to act intelligently, competently and quickly in the face of new and unanticipated challenges and opportunities.

To achieve that end, we need to make a huge shift in our business practices and become a new race of leaders: ones who create dynamics in the system rather than controlling it. Leaders who build strong interdependences and ties between people so that the system is able to adapt and self-organize in a constantly changing environment.

These new leaders will focus more on the context than on the content. They will familiarize themselves with a process that is different to what we have been used to so far, a circular process that is best described by using the analogy of the grower working through the seasons. It is the oldest, most simple and natural process on earth and we have forgotten it in our business practices of today. **The new leader is a grower.**



In autumn, a new cycle is initiated: the grower sows the seed that will merge with the soil during winter. Then spring returns and produces its first buds. The most vigorous buds will grow and burst forth in summer.

Similarly, when one initiates a project in a global organization, **objectives must be** clearly defined, understood and **given time to take root within the mindset of the team members**. In my experience, the time spent here is clearly underestimated. Making team members clearly visualize the goals requires a lot of two-way communication. The objectives also need to be understood in the more global context of the organization and the market, in order to create meaning and make people both intelligent and motivated. Ensuring that team members adhere to the objectives is demanding and time-consuming because each team member pursues different and multiple goals. Conflicts of objectives are normal and force members to negotiate their interests with each other. Last but not least, in a fast changing environment, new requirements emerge and objectives need to be revised and discussed again. Altogether it takes a lot of time. Doesn't autumn last a quarter of the year?

Then comes winter. Companies have a real problem with this phase; it is associated with a waste of time: people have tight deadlines and want to be as effective as possible. So after having quickly reviewed the objectives, quickly defined the roles and responsibilities of each team member, they start producing, implementing very detailed processes and tight monitoring. To my mind, there is no need to scope everything at this stage and little process should be imposed so as to leave team members free to connect, share knowledge and context, discover which role they can and want to play and their hidden interdependences. This phase is unique to each team and often chaotic. It requires a lot of iteration between the team members but it creates fun, engagement, empowerment, motivation and strong ties. Winter also lasts a quarter of the year and all growers know that long and cold winters produce the most vigorous buds.

Next comes spring and the team finds its way, self-organizes, leverages its diversity, finds consensus and builds opportunities. The new buds are the unique alchemy of the team, in line with its unique goal and setting. And when team members face unpredictable problems, which happen all the time, they are well connected and well prepared to tackle them. They even enjoy them because it is another opportunity to consolidate their ties and become stronger. Autumn, winter and spring have made the team fit to embrace complexity.

Finally summer arrives and it is time for team members to broaden their scope and start producing. Everybody now has a better picture of the layout and of their interdependences, and it is easier to implement larger processes.

**Time is not linear, time is circular.** There is a time for pulling and creating dynamics in the context and a time for pushing and producing when things become aligned.

Yet most teams try to go from autumn to summer directly as they think doing so is more effective. They have however miscalculated. **It may be effective, but it is not efficient.** Processes that have been implemented prematurely prevent teams from really cooperating and from having a clear grasp of the project environment. The mayonnaise I mentioned earlier won't have had enough time to thicken. And when unpredictable events occur, a lot of misunderstandings and confusion will ensue, making project implementation very laborious indeed. Yes, deadlines may be met, but at what price? Stress, discouragement, conflict and above all in-the-box thinking with "products as usual".

**The new leader is one who knows how to make the wheel turn, with a circular leadership process that requires 4 specific skill sets in the right order :**

1. Autumn: the meaning maker
2. Winter: the facilitator
3. Spring: the integrator
4. Summer: the delegator

Nobody has all the skills and that holds true for the leader as well. He or she must however understand how the 4 steps work and realize that more time must be invested on the context rather than on the content.

Team members all have their unique skills and centers of interest, and the new leader will empower them to take the lead in the circular process when needed.

A leader is not necessarily visible at all times, but he or she is always present.

## Mini bio: Stéphane Roche

Over the course of 15 years, Stéphane Roche has worked for 2 multinational firms, German and French-American groups. He was expatriated on 5 occasions and occupied strategic positions (Director of Divisions and Subsidiaries) and operational posts (sales, marketing and project management). For the last 8 years, he has been an international coach and consultant and has developed new strategic and management models that stimulate innovation, flexibility and change for leaders and organizations in a complex world.

