Implementing SharePoint with Change Models and Leadership Styles

by Jaap Zwart

It is important that a SharePoint implementation is properly managed. SharePoint means change and therefore it has everything to do with change models and leadership styles. Doing a SharePoint implementation without at least some basic knowledge on these subjects will often lead to undesired results. This article gives a brief overview of the relationship between SharePoint, change models and leadership styles. What it not offers is an overview of the influence a SharePoint implementation can have on the strategic levels within an organization.

Change

Organizational change is everywhere. Change happens on all levels and is influenced by many internal and external forces. Change is all about dissolving different patterns of behavior and defining new ones and make them part of 'the way we do things around here'

There are many different kinds of change. Whether changes are smooth, incremental, revolutionary or bumpy; reactive, anticipatory or just small adjustment, change often means that processes must be altered and that 'the way we do things around here' will be done differently.

More things can be said about other types of change, but this article is focused on leading change. SharePoint has many characteristics and one important element is change. When SharePoint is implemented many things change within the organization. If it concerns a huge SharePoint implementation, then several layers within the organization will be affected by these changes.

These induced changes by SharePoint implementations are often underestimated and this can lead to unforeseen negative side effects. It is important that these changes are guided properly and that the right leadership style is chosen. At least some analysis on these subjects must be done. Otherwise blind spots will be everywhere and in such a case it is almost unavoidable not to get stuck in the middle of them.

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Role of the leader

Leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree what needs to be done and how it can be done effectively. It is the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish the shared objectives. How effective the leader is depends in part on how the game is played to resolve role conflicts, cope with demands, recognize opportunities and overcome constraints.

Shared objectives are often not defined properly around a SharePoint implementation or at least they are not well enough documented. Facilitating individual and collective efforts without properly defined shared objectives is a daunting task. These shared objectives should be formulated for different levels in the organization and not just for the IT related departments. When levels are not addressed early in the process, then resolving conflicts and coping with unforeseen demands will prevent the leader from recognizing the possible opportunities a SharePoint implementation can have for the organization.

New ways of leadership styles and skills are needed for future organizations. There are two broad conceptions of what leaders do – they motivate their followers and they design organizational context to enable their followers to function effectively.

Motivation and creating the right organizational context for the SharePoint implementation is very important. Often SharePoint is implemented as an afterthought without proper communication. The context is not defined and without having a concrete vision around the implementation of SharePoint it is very difficult for employees to get motivated. This vision and organizational context should be analyzed first before implementing SharePoint on a wide scale. Communicate the vision constantly and make it part of the organizational culture. This will keep the focus of all related stakeholders up to date and the motivation high.

In the future hierarchical management structures will be less evident. Management of intellectual capital will require skills that nurture creativity and innovation in workforces rather than compliance in the past. Regimes of control and command will no longer suffice. In a world of outsourcing and contract working, managers will need skills to plan and coordinate 'associates', who are working in different parts of the world.

When implemented properly, SharePoint can increase the creativity and innovation of subordinates. SharePoint makes it possible to replace the regimes of control and command with a different way of working together where boundaries cease to exist and everyone's input can become an integral part of the organization. It is important to see these changes and what needs to be done on the leadership levels to support all the different possibilities that comes along when implementing SharePoint. These changes can be approached by change models.

Some change models

Change is about working together. It is unwise to act alone as a leader. Putting more executives at the top does not work either. It is better to build a coalition of people who have position power, expertise, credibility and leadership. The members of this "guiding coalition" need management and leadership qualities to make it work.

When implementing SharePoint, this guiding coalition can be very important. When ground needs to be conquered, you need thrustworthy people who are respected by others. Getting only the technical guys in the front line is almost asking for trouble down the road. Because SharePoint is about huge changes on different levels, these levels should be present in the sponsor team. They need to walk the talk and talk the walk of the strategic, tactical and operational levels. Otherwise some levels will miss the boat and they will not like that fact. Loosing support at the start will make the finish difficult .

Among others there are two important models of change. The five staged model of Hayes (2010) and the eight step model of Kotter (1996). They see change as a process that goes through a series of stages. Their steps give us a guideline for handling change when implementing SharePoint. Hayes talks about people management as an overall process guiding his steps. Kotter talks about the guiding coalition, the supporting team.

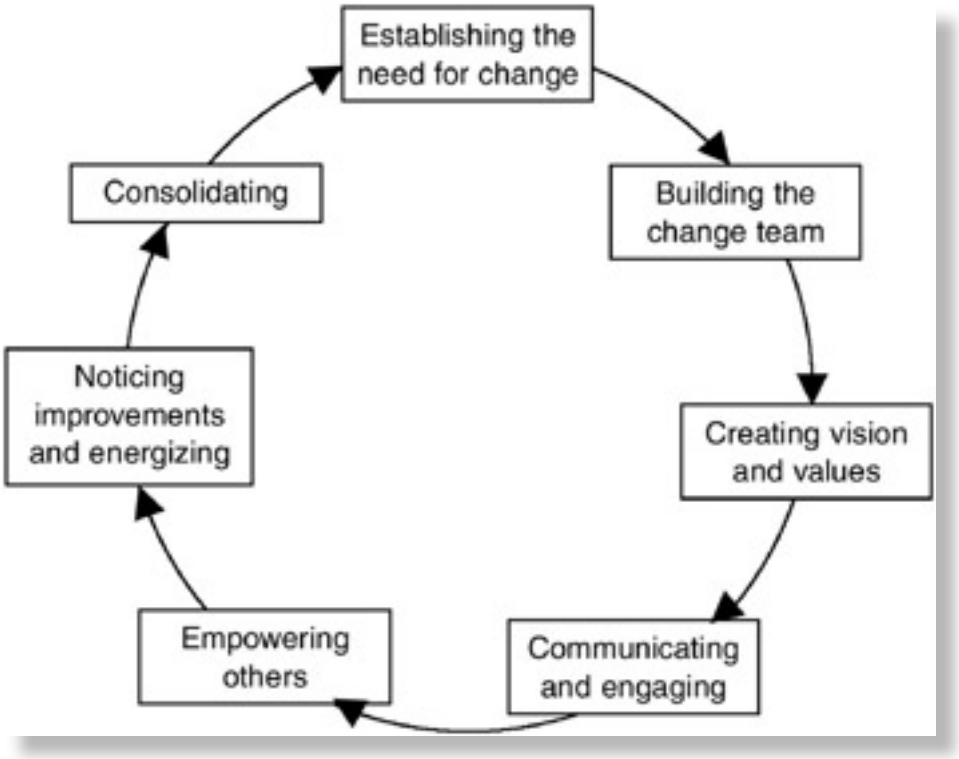

Figure 1: Kotter, 1996; change model.

One of the elements of the people management of Hayes is communicating the change and this is strongly related to the communication of the vision in the steps of Kotter. Hayes talks about motivating others to change and this is what the guiding coalition of Kotter is all about. Hayes emphazises people management and places it as an umbrella over the steps, but the steps themselves are quite analytical. It would be better when the people part was integrated in the steps in the first place. That is where the steps of Kotter (1996) are stronger.

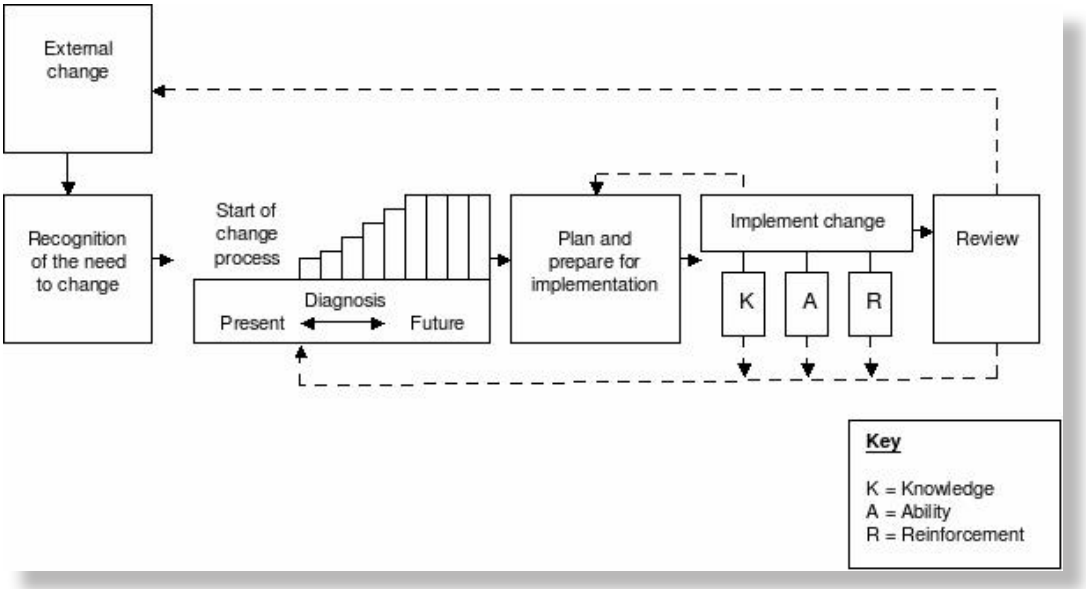

Figure 2: Hayes, 2010; change model.

What we can learn from these analysis of both writers, is that people are an important element during the implementation of SharePoint and the changes that it creates. They need to be properly guided through all the stages of change. Otherwise the risk of loosing them while implementing SharePoint is very likely. Make the vision part of the organizational culture and let SharePoint be 'the way we do things around here'. The guiding coalition can be of service to make this happen.

Lack in the models of change

The model of Kotter (1996) does miss some important apects though. The steps suggest that the need for change and the expected change are already known. This is not always the case. The model of Hayes (2010) does take this into account and addresses the issue of choosing the change to follow after recognizing the need for it. Sometimes the stage models are an over-simplification of the situation. Change processes in reality are messy and untidy, unfolding in an iterative fashion.

It is important to investigate if the need for change is recognized on all levels when implementing SharePoint. When there is a misbalance in this recognition for change, then the first thing that must be done is communicating the needed change to all related stakeholders of the SharePoint implementation. Otherwise the implementation starts with many risks that could be avoided. Stakeholders that do not recognize the need for change will have difficulties accepting it being implemented.

What appears to be cause and effect may actually be 'coincidental' symptoms. Any organization is a balance of forces built up and refined over a period of time. Consequently, proposed change of any significance will inevitably change this balance. Stage models often do not take these interwoven processes and relations of changes into account and are not useful for every change situation.

It is not hard to imagine that the changes created when implementing SharePoint will have influences on other changes and processes as well. It is impossible to see all implications concerning a SharePoint implementation, but the most obvious can be analyzed and properly addressed. Change models can guide a SharePoint implementation and with them successful results can be more secured. Although change models are indeed an over simplification of reality, not having some of them in place when implementing SharePoint will make it more of a gamble instead of a realistic endeavor.

By now it must be clear that just letting all the changes happen around a SharePoint implementation is asking for trouble. The vision for the Sharepoint implementation must be well defined before the start. Some thoughts are needed around the change process used when implementing SharePoint and the need for change must be clear for all the relevant stakeholders. The change process must be well guided and doing it in increments is also well understood by the technical layers where software creation and implementation is often done in increments.

What can be analyzed in many organizations implementing SharePoint is that analyzing change in combination with leadership styles and including change models increases the chance of success. Putting this in a different perspective; it can be seen that many organizations who implement SharePoint without thinking about change models and leadership styles fail to make this SharePoint implementation a success. Don't blame SharePoint, blame the lack of proper preperation instead.

Analyze change needed

When analyzing the change needed it is important to know how the organization handled change in the past or what the current changes are the organization faces. What kind of resources are needed for the change or how the power is devided when taking action are valuable questions. Analyzing the needed change before implementing or choosing a model for the implementation is important.

Knowledge about how changes were encountered and integrated in the past by the organization is a key element of the success for new changes when implementing SharePoint. As said before, it is not only important to know which levels to address during a SharePoint implementation, but also the contextual powerbase must be analyzed. "Who is responsible for what" and "how can we make use of all those responsibilities" are valid questions. Neclecting or ignoring responsibilities and not being aware where these responsibilities should reside, is walking in the dark and not knowing when the walls will hit you. That you will be hit is a certainty.

After reading the text so far it is obvious that we need a well defined vision around the SharePoint implementation. We also know that the change procedure we choose is an important element of the success of a SharePoint implementation. All the relevant layers and stakeholders must be addressed properly and a guiding coalition will make the implementation process much more smooth than doing it without a well selected team of project sponsors. Not only must the needed change be thouroughly analyzed but it must be properly guided as well. That is where leadership styles enter the stage.

Leadership Style

When implementing SharePoint one thing is for sure: it must be properly managed and not all leadership styles fit the situation and the organization. It is remarkable to see how many SharePoint implementations, which are solid and sound on a technical level, still end up in failure because the leadership style chosen does not fit the bill. Often leadership styles are not analyzed let alone that they are being used during a SharePoint implementation. It is of the utmost importance to be aware of this and to embed the SharePoint implementation within a leadership style that is accepted by all the relevant stakeholders.

Leadership is done on a higher level than management. It is more about the relationship with people. Leadership is focused on motivating and inspiring people. Many people studied the essence of leadership and most of them concluded that leadership is about guiding people in a direction, being an inspiration and having a shared vision. If management is reactive, then leadership is active and pro-active. It is very much about achieving change through the way people think by inspiration and being an example. Leadership is more transformational and people oriented.

Leadership styles have a great influence on how the change is handled and indirectly how successful the change process will be. Three main leadership styles are important; autocratic, consultative and group oriented. These three styles can yield different levels of effectiveness based on the three criteria:

- quality of solution
- time required to arrive at it
- acceptance of it by subordinates and stakeholders

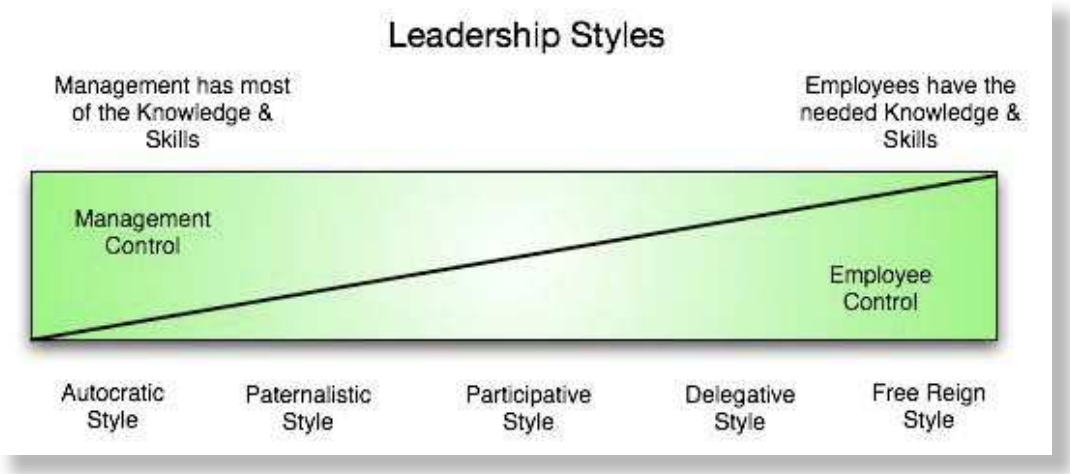

Figure 3: Rectangle of leadership styles.

Another popular leadership model is an outwardly practical approach to Situational Leadership. The 'readiness' of followers is a key factor in deciding on an appropriate leadership style. The leader's task behavior (providing guidance and direction) and relationship behavior (team building, providing socio-emotional support) should accord with the readiness of followers. This is definitely a more human oriented approach to leading change then the stage models described earlier.

Situational leadership is about having no single leadership style that fits all situations. Successful leaders can adapt their behavior to the specific needs of the situation. Leadership style can be seen as a combination of directive (task oriented and transactional) and supportive (relationship oriented and transformational) behavior.

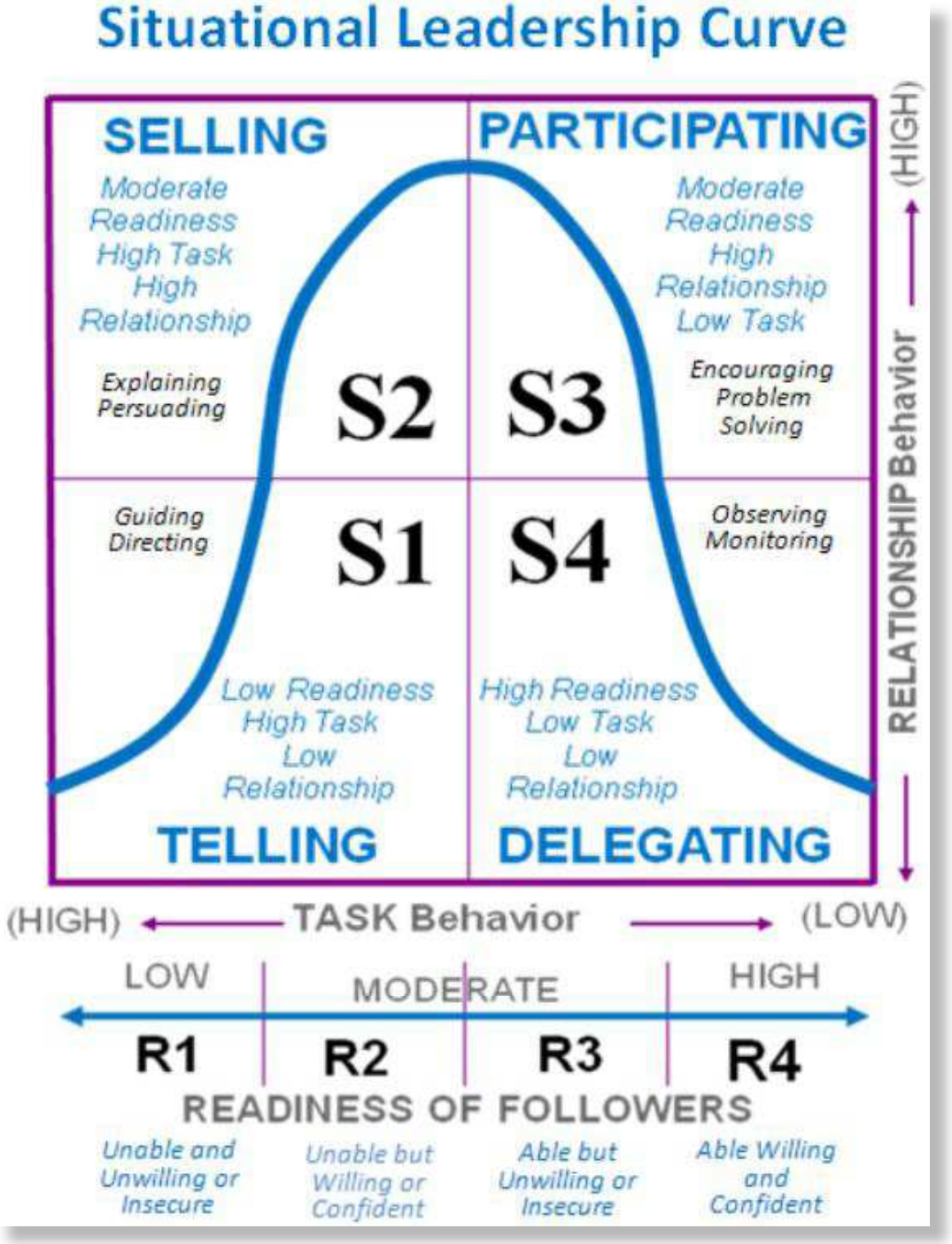

Figure 4: Square of situational leadership.

The important thing to take from this part is that analyzing the organizational context and the relevant stakeholders related to the SharePoint implementation is very important when choosing the right leadership style. Is a combination of transactional and transformational the best choice? Or are the stakeholders ready for a pure transformational style of leadership? The square of situational leadership can be of use when thinking about other dimensions of leadership. The basic point here is that a leadership style can make or break the success of a SharePoint implementation. Not having thought about it and just doing the implementation and see where it ends, as is still done in many cases, can be called an example of bad leadership and a lack of supporting strategy.

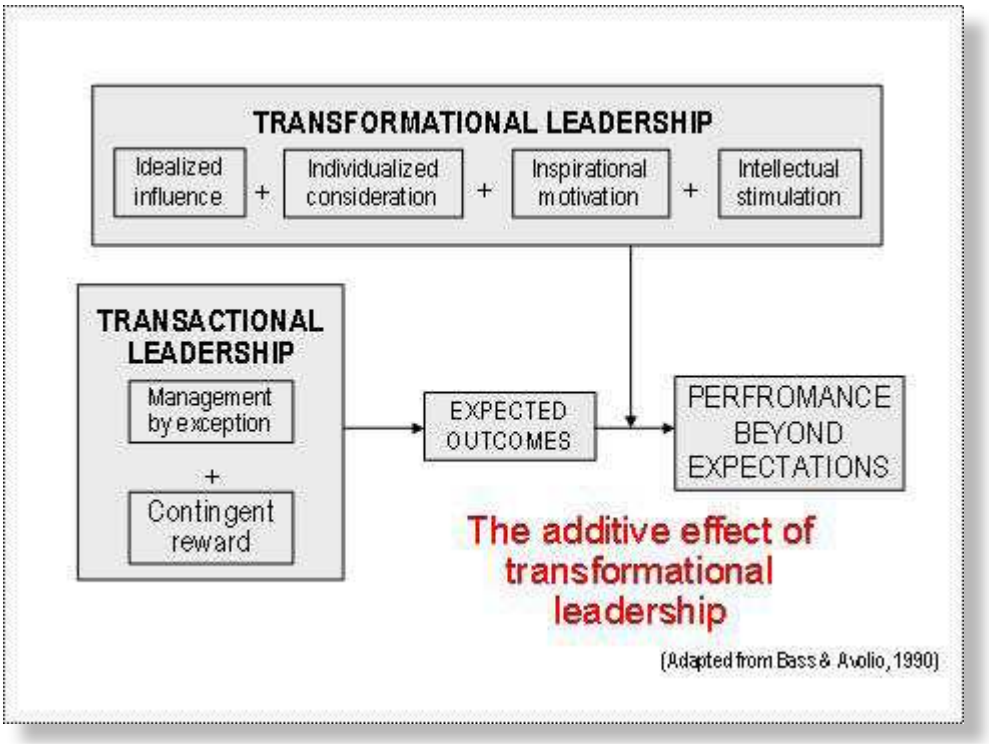

Figure 5: Transformational vs transactional leadership.

It is obvious by just mentioning some different leadership styles that the success of a SharePoint implementation depends heavily on how it is approached by the leadership levels in an organization. When the internal situation of the organization is not properly analyzed in relation to which kind of leadership style is best suited for the organization, then it must be clear by now that the SharePoint implementation will be at risk from the start. It is not only about being aware that SharePoint change must be well guided to make it a success, but it is even more important that the proper leadership styles are used or else it is only a bad combination that leads to insecure results .

Conclusion

It can be said that SharePoint is all about change. These changes happen at different levels within the organization. Changes are often complex and need to be guided properly. That is where leadership plays an important role. To be able to lead all the changes surrounding a SharePoint implementation it is important that the right leadership style is chosen. Not being aware of change models combined with leadership styles is asking for trouble. Failed SharePoint implementations can be avoided by being aware of this problem. Get the organization ready to make the right choices concerning change models and leadership styles before doing a complex SharePoint implementation. If done well, it can save money. Otherwise be prepared for unforeseen failures.

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