



THE LEADERSHIP REPORT

Enabling fast 5G rollout

The Complex Adaptive Leadership (CAL) story behind a large 5G deployment

"Self-organisation isn't a nice to have. It's an absolute necessity. CAL was a lifeline."

John and Alec took over the lead of an under-performing complex 5G deployment by a large mobile phone infrastructure firm's programme and turned it around within less than two months, whilst reducing their programme headcount by over 50% and increasing its productivity by 40%. It had taken a traditional approach to programme leadership by the firm 5 months to complete 20% of the programme, and a more modern approach to leadership, based on a new science applied by John and Alec, an astonishing 6 weeks for the remaining 80% .



During Q3 of 2019 the firm's client, a major US mobile phone service provider, enhanced their launch plans for 5G, putting increased pressure on the Product Line and the Services team of the company of John and Alec. The client had prepared their marketing campaign for a launch in mid-November of 5G covering over 200 million customers, 10 days ahead of Thanksgiving. This aggressive acceleration in a compressed timeline was scheduled to deploy 5G to some 7,500 Cell sites. Each site was a project in its own right.

The programme was started by the firm in April 2019, but by mid-August only 1,000 sites had been changed and progress was slow with productivity low and relationships between firm and their client difficult. The programme required some radical changes to its leadership, so John and Alec were put in charge in early October to apply their experience in mass volume deployment. With just 6 weeks to go to complete the remaining 6,000 sites remaining, the task was daunting as never before had such a large rollout occurred within such a short time. Deploying 5G is complicated, very complicated but it's not all complex. A programme dealing with 41 markets, support

Teams in India, daily customer meetings, ever changing software and weather, with 24/7 deployment of some 20,000 site visits is sometimes complex but mostly complicated. Learning to differentiate the complicated vs the complex, the deterministic vs the non-deterministic, and separate what can be controlled versus what cannot, kept them on track.

John and Alec had been heavily involved in a flagship award-winning leadership programme, which had won the EFMD Gold Award for Executive Development some years earlier after 4 years of delivery. They had helped deliver the programme as internal Champions working with external faculty



from Complex Adaptive Leadership (CAL). The CAL approach mixes a new science, Complexity Science, with some ancient Chinese wisdoms to enable leaders get better results faster, for less effort and resource. CAL has been applied across the world by thousands of managers.

Since the CAL programme, both had applied the approach to their day jobs and this new 5G deployment role gave the

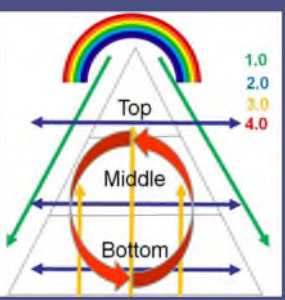


opportunity to combine their efforts. Whilst Alec (who had been involved from the start in the contract on the peripheral) managed the internal issues, John focused on managing external stakeholders, especially the client.

The main contract drivers were labour (mainly provided by the firm) and materials (largely provide by the client). Underscoring the roll out was a much larger and separate contract to use the software provided by the firm. Although the programme they took over was progressing the projected site count was nowhere near what was needed. The weekly volumes had to increase tenfold within six weeks. This had never been achieved before. However, by November, deep customer dissatisfaction during September turned to complete delight and almost disbelief.

John and Alec put down a large measure of their success by employing all the various methodologies taught by the CAL approach. Some specific methodologies/CAL insights included:

1. Enabling Leadership 4.0 – Most leadership approaches and methodologies are based on Leadership 1.0 – something done by leaders. It has frequently been defined and redefined, but is still mostly 1.0 – downwards, done by leaders. However, organisations are becoming more complex which needs leadership to go sideways and outwards – Leadership 2.0. The team identified groups outside of the direct programme that needed



proactive management to pursue and improve relationships. In addition, John and Alec were clear with the team when they did not know answers, showing that not knowing answers is completely acceptable.

This gained them respect as well as a desire by their team to find solutions. It led the team to practice Leadership 3.0 – upwards leadership, with John and Alec following the team that they led. And they combined 1.0, 2.0 and 3.0 into Leadership 4.0 – leadership as a vibrant effective multi-directional dynamic, rather than just a role, competence or static position.

2. Knowing when and how to let go. Employing the CAL push/pull 2+2 methodology enabled a much more effective team. With so much pressure it was critical to



focus on the key things that had an impact. The hardest choice, and one which most leaders traditionally score very poorly at, is knowing when and how to let

go of the areas they are leading, by giving their teams more authority and responsibility with transparent accountability. Knowing when to push, when to pull, when to get a grip and when to let go was critical. The time saved by letting go of certain things enabled that time to be spent on more valuable, important things. John and Alec employed CAL’s “Devolve” techniques as well as “SW3 – Some Will, Some Won’t, So What?”. They concentrated on the 80% and let go of the 20%, focusing on “Good Enough” rather than “Perfect”. They provided topics to their team to teach HOW to let go, foregoing immediate emotions that don’t help.

3. Improving Level of Followers. When they took over the programme, some followers were at Levels 1 and 2 (Wait to be told or Ask to be told), whilst others were at 4 (Act and inform routinely). John and Alec moved the subordinates, step-by-step, to Level 6 (Self-organise and exception report). For some this was not a linear progression but in the end the team became much more self-organising and their agility and productivity increased dramatically.

4. Using ancient martial arts technique. Learning to let go is a powerful strategy when using CAL’s approach based on Aikido and active listening. It allows effective delegation to

enable creativity, empowerment and emboldens the team whilst building trust with the client. Given the high pressure the customer executives were under to meet the aggressive timelines the relationship was, at times, heated and very demanding. John employed CAL’s IRA Aikido technique to build a better relationship by Inquiring, listening carefully and Reflecting back to show full understanding, before Advocating any point of view.



There had been much failure of delivery of materials, leading to labour cost over-runs. A lot of time had been spent seeking blame and “blamestorming”, looking back at problems. John over time managed to move the debate to looking forward. If any crunch time in this movement came, it was due to John saying in one particularly fraught meeting “*When will you be able to forgive us for what you say is our fault, so we can look forward to fix the problems facing us?*”. After that meeting the relationship much improved.

5. **Avoiding the content trap.** Aligned to the Aikido approach is to focus on the HOW (method) not only the WHAT (content). Too much time in the various meetings had been focused on the content (e.g. WHAT had gone wrong) rather than looking forward deciding quickly (e.g. HOW to progress). The “Content Trap” is a lonely place. It can crush those involved and remove any work life balance. Embracing mistakes, not “blamestorming “as in the past, and knowing when to just move on, put the wind back in the sails.

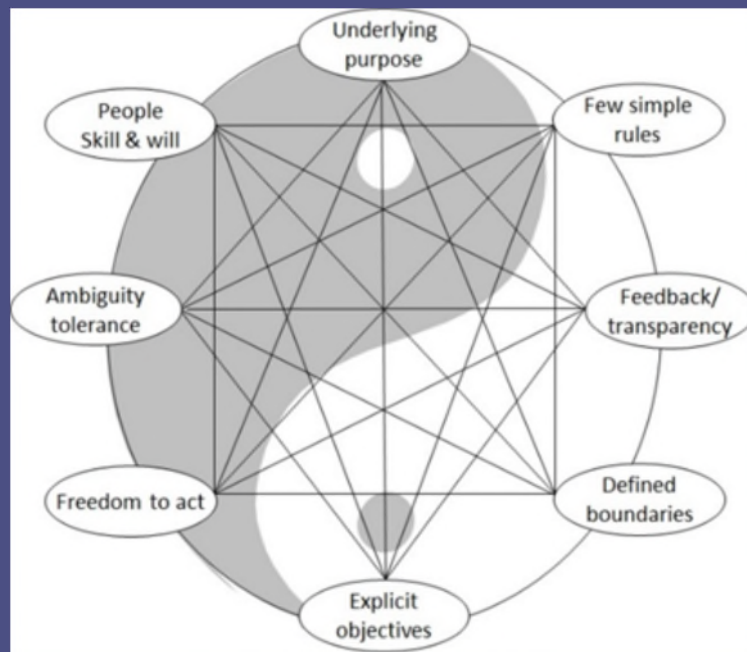
6. **Differentiation between “Complicated” and “Complex”.** Using CAL’s approach to the famous and useful Cynefin map, the team could quickly decide



what in fact was complex and what was complicated. When the latter was identified, the focus was on quickly gaining the information needed to do the analysis followed by sound decision making. When things were identified as complex, a variety of CAL techniques were used ranging from using the butterfly effect to letting go and enabling emergence.

7. **Being mindful of the CAL 4+4 principles to navigate complexity better.** John and Alec employed the CAL sometimes contradictory 8 Yin-Yang principles to navigate the complexity of the programme.

i. Underlying Team Purpose – the underlying purpose of the programme was clear – to enable a fast and



effective deployment of 5G across the country. As John and Alec involved several new elements to the team, they had to overcome bias and resentment. This was quashed immediately, and “One Team” was created with mistakes embraced and shared rather than hidden.

ii. Explicit individual objectives - Ensuring each individual in the programme was clear on what they had to achieve, and how this fitted within the whole, enabled more devolvement and empowerment.

iii. People’s skill/will – by understanding both the Skill (technical and personal) as well as Will (motivation and confidence) of all those involved John and Alec were quickly able to mobilise the right person at the right time by employing CAL’s 2+2 approach .

iv. A few simple rules – The team they took over was disjointed, overwhelmed and lacking in clear direction. John and Alec quickly established a few simple rules for their “One Team”. “One Plan”, “One daily all hands meeting” and “One Daily Report” all helped with transparency as well. Another simple rule, to break with the past, was “If it cannot be measured, stop doing it”.

v. Clear transparent measurement. Clear measures were widely communicated so that anyone could see how they were doing against their own objectives and any problems could be dealt with in a pro-active rather than in reactive

way. They used frequent reflection practices to acknowledge the current accomplishments and to challenge others to share in the same perspective. The message was, *"I no longer want to hear anything negative about the work you have performed. I request you to be mindful of your behaviour and to promote your own self-fulfilling success"*. Another simple rule to aid transparency and feedback was to only forecast that which could be done (rather than hoped for).

vi. *Tolerance for VUCA* – the context was volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous. Both John and Alec had a high tolerance for this, understanding how to use CAL techniques, and passed this confidence onto their team.

vii. *Clear boundaries* – the boundaries between the various stakeholders needed to be identified and understood by all concerned.

viii. *Freedom to act* – Freedom within boundaries but also freedom to cross boundaries was enabled.

8. Employing catalytic mechanisms/butterfly effect.

Although the programme consisted of thousands of projects, planned using standard project management techniques,

given the VUCA context catalytic mechanisms were employed to effect change with minimum planning and resource.



For example, subtle changes were made with supply chain, where cost structures were simplified and combined. This created a behaviour change that reduced additional cost.

In looking back at their achievement, John and Alec commented:

"When we took over the 5G deployment we were faced with the need for deploying some 6,000 complex site upgrades in under 2 months. It was one of the toughest projects we have been involved in 22 years of service. CAL wasn't a tool in a toolbox, or a mechanism to lean on when things got tough, or a set of slides from a seminar that had some cool buzzwords. It was a lifeline. Without it we would have been fired for not delivering. We both very strongly believe that without CAL, and its application to every meeting, every decision, and every day, this 5G deployment programme would have failed."



Nick Obolensky

Nick Obolensky
 Founder, Complex Adaptive Leadership

WHO ARE COMPLEX ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP?



CAL is an ISO certified global firm which combines modern western Complexity Science with some ancient Chinese wisdom to enable leaders to get better results, faster for less resource/effort, resulting in enhanced organisational agility.

Our interventions extend mindsets from Leadership 1.0 (traditional, albeit redefined many times, with leadership done by leaders/managers, downwards), to cross-boundary organisational Leadership 2.0 (where leadership also has to go sideways and outwards without "formal power"), to Leadership 3.0 (where leadership needs to go upwards with leaders needing to enable and learn to follow the people they lead, and followers needing to learn to take the initiative and lead themselves) which all combine into Leadership 4.0 (where leadership becomes a dynamic, not just a role or attribute).



For more information: www.ComplexAdaptiveLeadership.com Email: Info@ComplexAdaptiveLeadership.com