

The right leader for the right time

When appointing a new CEO, an organisation needs to find a match between the evolving organisational state and the personal comfort zone of the candidate.

Based on research by **MARC VAN DER ERVE**

The appointment of a new chief executive in an organisation often creates uncertainty about which leadership comfort zone the new incumbent is in, and how this will affect the organisation.

All leaders have a certain habit zone, which corresponds with an organisational state within which they are most comfortable and effective. This causes them to attract and appoint people with the same habit zones. These leaders have trouble succeeding when market forces require the organisation to advance to a new organisational state and their leadership habit zones are no longer adequate.

Changes brought about by market dynamics, such as new legislation, globalisation or competition, force an organisation to adapt – often causing the organisation to enter a new organisational state. Unless a leader with the

right leadership habit zone for taking the organisation into this new state steps in, the organisation may stagnate and fail to bring about the required changes.

Research conducted on the types of leaders *for the right time* identified four distinct states an organisation goes through, as well as four habit zones of leaders matching each of these organisational states.

The four organisational states are declining growth, uncertain growth, early growth and solid growth (illustrated left in the diagram). For each organisational state the ideal leadership habit zone is shown (on the right). To give meaning to each habit zone, the corresponding leader is referred to as either a confronter, a transformer, a builder or a grower.

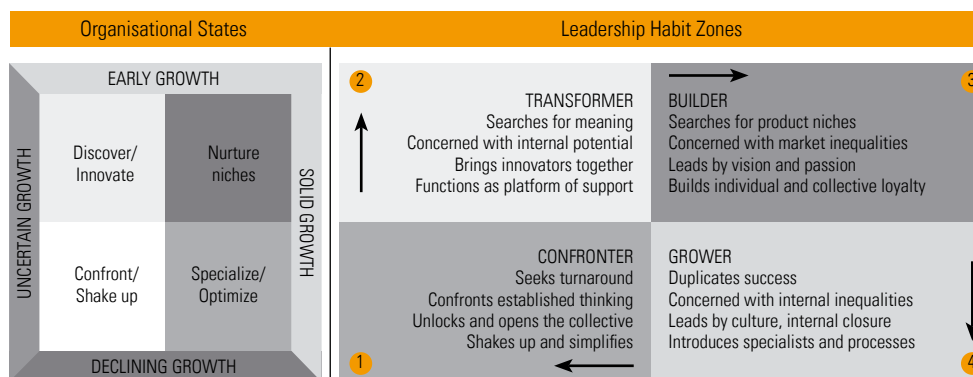
In a time of declining growth, for example, the organisation needs a confronter at the top: one that shakes things

up, challenges established thinking and turns the company around (see diagram). Similarly, during a time of uncertain growth the organisation needs a transformer that will tap into the existing potential and bring the innovators into mainstream action. So, for early growth a builder is needed, and for solid growth a grower.

This means leadership is not timeless, but temporal.

Leaders, therefore, should face up to the limitations imposed by their habit zones and should end their reign when their behaviour no longer responds to the changed needs of the organisation. Organisations should, likewise, be sensitive to their own temporal state and the related pattern of simultaneous action and inaction (their temporal codes) when appointing and promoting their leaders. ■

Explaining the four organisational states and leadership habit zones



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HABIT ZONE:
A leadership habit zone should not be confused with leadership style. Two leaders may have the same style but differ in habit zone (organisational state in which they are most comfortable). On the other hand, two leaders with the same habit zone may differ in respect of style.



DR MARC VAN DER ERVE, Dutch author of the book, *A New Dimension of Time – Why we didn't discover it so far and how it will change our world*, presented this research at the monthly Leader's Angle series of talks at the University of Stellenbosch Business School. For more information about this talk series, visit www.usb.ac.za/leadersangle.