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**LEADERS CHANGING
INSIDE-OUT**

What Causes Leaders to
Change Behaviour?

Cases from Malawian Civil Society

Rick James

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Disclaimer

The opinions in this document arise out of research conducted by Rick James and are not necessarily shared by INTRAC.

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Executive Summary

Our experience of capacity building has shown that for organisations to fundamentally change, their leaders themselves have to change. Leadership development is universally recognised as a priority capacity building need for strengthening civil society in Africa. Yet our knowledge of how and why this critical process occurs is quite limited. To address this gap INTRAC undertook a 50-day research project in Malawi to understand more about this process of change amongst civil society leaders. It sought to find out:

- What were the most significant improvements that leaders felt they had made since becoming leaders?
- What were some of the constraints that initially held leaders back from changing?
- What pressures were promoting them to change?
- What was the actual process of change that leaders went through?
- What was at the core of this change?
- What were some of the key factors in the success of this change?
- What was the impact of these changes on the organisation and the followers within the organisation?

From this greater understanding of how change actually occurs in practice amongst civil society leaders, we are in a much better position to promote such processes effectively. The paper therefore finishes the implications of these findings for:

1. civil society leaders themselves.
2. Capacity building in general.
3. leadership development in particular.
4. donors who wish to promote leadership development amongst partners.

To explore the answers to such questions, INTRAC undertook in-depth interviews with 10 respected leaders that were recorded and transcribed. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants in Malawi and South Africa as well as an extensive literature review. The prime audience for this research is international NGOs who are actively interested in supporting leadership development with their partners. It is also aimed at leaders of civil society organisations in Africa as well as providers of leadership development services.

Findings:

The most striking and obvious finding was that 70% of respondents perceived that the most significant positive shift they had made as a leader was to a more **empowering style** of leadership. This lends weight to the belief that an empowering leadership style is not simply a Western blueprint, but is very relevant in African cultures too.

Leadership change **required changes in followership** too. This reveals that leadership is actually a relationship between leaders and followers, rather than an individual person.

The changes that leaders made did have a significant **impact on the organisation's performance** in different ways. As a result of the changes by leaders the staff and the board are now taking more responsibility for the organisation and are therefore performing better. The shifts have also **prevented a loss of key staff**. In addition, the

leadership changes have enabled the organisations to better **achieve its mission** and expand its impact through considerable growth in funding.

The main factors that caused dysfunctional leadership behaviour and held leaders back from changing were **societal expectations of leadership (including gender) as well as personal fears and pride**. In Malawi, leaders are expected to behave in an authoritarian manner with power highly centralised. This encouraged leaders to behave in an autocratic fashion. Young, female leaders also found that cultural expectations about the role of women had inhibited the development of the self-confidence they needed to lead effectively. There were also important personal blocks to change. In order to change leaders had to overcome their own fears and insecurities and not be threatened by other people, or unduly influenced by what other people thought of them. They had to be prepared to conquer their pride and humble themselves in order to change.

The **process of change** that leaders went through was highly complex. There was a multiplicity of factors, converging together at a particular time that resulted in their shifts. There were different forces pushing and pulling in different directions within a complicated web of relationships. While the change processes that people went through were far from identical, they did share these common elements:

1. In each situation there was a problem of leadership, which respondents attributed to cultural and personal constraints.
2. In most cases, these constraints exerted on-going negative pressure on the organisation's performance (which particularly affected pioneers) and caused increasing personal pain for the leader (particularly recently appointed leaders). This rising heat melted the situation creating more openness to change.
3. A number of different, one-off external catalysts were introduced into this now fluid situation, such as negative feedback, positive encouragement, new knowledge, exposure to impressive role models and importantly the time and space to reflect. Interestingly the critical feedback that catalysed change came largely from juniors or peers. In no instance did the donor play a direct role in catalysing the leader's change.
4. Leaders interpreted these external events and gave them meaning within themselves based on their core values and beliefs (including spiritual beliefs). When sufficiently convinced of their need for personal change, leaders found themselves in an uncomfortable 'valley of decision', but chose to respond positively by humbling themselves, letting go of past behaviours and changing themselves on the inside.
5. These internal victories resulted in changed external leadership behaviour, which in turn had an impact on the organisation's change.

The change process was essentially inside-out. It was internal changes in the hearts of the leaders that preceded behavioural change on the outside. The realisation that there was a considerable difference between the people they wanted to be (their core values) and the people they were (their leadership behaviour) was what drove the change process.

The respondents in the research clearly felt that there was a spiritual dimension to their change. They felt that their faith had had a profound effect on their values by educating their consciences. This education took place through both biblical examples and teachings, as well as, they believed, through direct revelations from God. Their change process was also encouraged by a faith that their leadership was a part of God's overall purpose for their lives. Finally respondents also felt that God provided them with a courage and a power to change themselves that was beyond their own human power.

The key success factors in the change processes were:

- The leaders themselves.
- The timing of the change.
- The followers' response to the change.
- Organisational systems and structures.
- The visibility of the impact of the change.

The research reveals that personal change of leaders does lead to organisational change. But the research also shows that organisational changes and a change in the leadership role can influence an individual to change. Thus there is a dynamic and two-way relationship between individual and organisational change. We also see that the principles and process of individual change that have emerged from this research have profound relevance, not simply at an individual level, but also can be directly applied to development and change of organisations, communities, societies and even nations.

The Implications for Leaders

Know Yourself

The research showed that effective leaders have considerable **self-knowledge**. If leaders are to withstand the misinterpretation and criticism of others, they have to have a self-image that is not dependent on the opinion of others. To have this requires leaders to be honest with themselves and dare to look inwards. You cannot really know yourself unless you create the time and space to reflect on your life.

Become Yourself

But more than just knowing yourself, the research highlighted the value of **becoming yourself**. This 'becoming yourself' requires leaders to find the meaning or purpose of their life. An organisation needs to be inspired by a vision to be effective. In order for leaders to inspire others to a higher purpose, they have to be inspired themselves. Leaders needed to be **open to their own change and passionate about learning** new things about themselves and their organisations.

The research also showed that **humility** was a critical element of the change process in leaders. Our human tendency towards pride is one of our most serious failings, because it closes us down to change. The desire to **maintain integrity** was also a key factor in leaders changing.

Believe in Others

The research has shown that effective leaders believe in their staff. An essential element of a great leader is to draw out the best in their staff and unlock that potential. Part of believing in staff involves caring for them and wanting the best for them. This means listening to them, trusting them with your honesty and giving them credit.

For staff to reach their potential, it is not simply a question of giving them power. Taking responsibility is a gradual process that places time-consuming demands on the leader who needs to mentor and coach the staff member. The importance of forgiveness in a change process emerged from the cases. As leaders want staff to take greater responsibility they need to be ready to accept mistakes and forgive those mistakes. If they try and control the situation too tightly in order to avoid error, delegation will not be authentic.

Implications for Capacity building

There is a need to **personalise change within organisational capacity building**. Many capacity building programmes fall short of individuals taking responsibility for changing themselves, which results in a lack of organisational change.

We should apply **principles from individual change to organisational change**. For example, this research on individual shows the importance of values at the turning point of change. For organisations to change more, we may need to work more at using organisational values to leverage change.

We need to **appreciate the complexity of capacity building**. If changes at an individual level are very complex and impossible to plan for and predict with precision, how much more organisational change? We need to approach capacity building with less arrogance and more respect.

Implications for Leadership Development

The cases revealed that not only was the cultural context very influential in creating resistance to change amongst leaders, but was also a factor in promoting change. A leadership development programme therefore needs to be aware of these influences and be **embedded within the culture**.

The research shows that an **'empowering' style of leadership is relevant** to Africa and not confined to Europe and North America. There are certainly some cultural constraints to its implementation in Africa, but at a deeper level, an 'empowerment' style touches on universal human principles about people.

Leaders had to undergo a significant internal change process before their leadership behaviour fundamentally shifted. Leadership development programmes should therefore include elements of **self-development**, though self-knowledge.

There was a definite impact of knowledge-based leadership development programmes. These knowledge-based programmes had most impact where the learning also touched a deeper **emotional level** in participants. The cases also point to the importance of the spiritual dimension to change.

The cases demonstrate the importance of feedback in assisting leaders to change. Opportunities for **peer feedback** (or facilitator feedback) are therefore important elements of an effective leadership training programmes. Formal feedback methods, such as leadership **performance appraisal** are also very useful in catalysing change.

Leadership development programmes should provide participants with space for reflection. **Sabbaticals** were also seen to create the time and space to reflect and change. **Coaches and mentors** are another important means for ensuring that structured reflection on action takes place.

Individual change and organisational change are inextricably linked. Leadership development programmes should strive to ensure that leaders are not treated merely as individuals on their own, but that their change is in the context of their organisation.

Implications for Donors

An important finding of the research was that there was **no evidence of donors playing a significant direct role in the leaders' change processes**. Because donors do control resources, they cannot avoid having reward and coercive power. But having such power legitimately raises people's fears that the resources will one day be taken away and also often leads to a (sub-) conscious resentment of the donor by the leader. This makes it very difficult for leaders to 'hear' constructive feedback from donors, however well meant it is.

The cases did reveal that by **withholding funds**, the donors increased the organisational heat, which in some cases melted the blocks to change, particularly for founder leaders. Sometimes, too donors play a highly interventionist role by insisting to the board that the NGO recruits a new leader.

In dialogue with partners, donors have the greatest opportunity to influence through **asking questions**, rather than issuing ultimatums to leaders.

Donors also had a role in providing **positive feedback** to the leader after the change showing the visible impact of the change.

Donors also have an important role in **making funds available to directly support the sorts of leadership development interventions** outlined previously. The interventions mentioned are resource intensive and need generous support from donors if they are to occur.

Finally, donors have an important role in leadership development by being a **role model**. While many donors preach empowerment for grassroots development, their practical relationship with their NGO partner is anything but empowering of that partner.

Leaders Interviewed

Joyce Banda

Joyce Banda is an entrepreneur and gender activist. In 1990 she founded the National Association of Business Women (NABW). Joyce has been nominated as the 'Woman of the Year' in Malawi on two occasions and was recently awarded the 'Africa Prize for Leadership for the Sustainable End of Hunger'.

Makoko Chirwa

Makoko Chirwa became Director of Women's Voice in 1997. Originally from Zambia, she came to Malawi in 1995 with her Malawian husband after the advent of multi-party democracy the previous year.

Anderson Kamwendo

Anderson Kamwendo is the Executive Director of Blantyre Synod Projects Office having worked there since 1992, initially as an agriculturalist. He was brought up in Zambia.

John Kapito

John Kapito, is the founder and Director of CAMA (Consumers' Association of Malawi). John worked for 15 years in the private sector as a sales manager. He has been awarded Man of the Year award in Malawi.

Jones Laviwa

Jones Laviwa has been Executive Director of CARD (Churches Action Relief and Development) for the last 10 years, after completing his Masters in Development Studies in Ireland.

Joyce Mataya

Joyce Mataya has been working as an OD practitioner since the formation of CABUNGO (Capacity Building for NGOs) in 1997. She has recently been appointed as Director.

Arnold Mhango

Arnold Mhango joined CSC (Christian Service Committee) in 1992 as Head of Finance after experience as an accountant in the private sector. He has been Executive Director for the last five years.

Nelson Mkandawire

Nelson Mkandawire joined as Director of Chisomo Children's Club in March 2000, after working as an auditor in the private sector.

Nellie Nyangw'a

Nellie Nyangw'a became the first female and the first Malawian Programme Representative for Oxfam when she was promoted in January 2002. Prior to Oxfam, Nellie worked in micro-credit having studied accountancy.

Francina Nyirenda

Francina Nyirenda began work as a secretary in 1995, but by 1999 was made Coordinator of MANASO, the umbrella organisation for HIV/AIDS initiatives in Malawi.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Make a habit of regularly observing the universal process of change: be assiduous in your attention to it and school yourself thoroughly in this branch of study: there is nothing more elevating to the mind.

Marcus Aurelius¹

1.1 The Human Face of Capacity Building

The cascading shelves of management literature in bookshops and libraries can camouflage the obvious and essential truth that organisations are made up of people. In their essence, organisations are simply groups of human beings working together for a common purpose. Not surprisingly, therefore, organisations behave as people do, as living organisms, in all the contradiction, confusion, and complexity that this involves.

In our ardent desire to be able to control and direct organisations towards greater effectiveness, we often conveniently and sub-consciously simplify them to inert matter. In doing so we ignore the very elements that give them life. We use the language of lifeless matter, such as machines, systems, and structures. In the NGO world we talk of capacity building as if the process were as simple as placing bricks on top of one another. Some aid project documents appear to believe we can construct organisations, folly tantamount to believing we can construct an ear of corn or a living flower by placing cells on top of each other. No, all we can really do is cultivate, not build, capacity.

Not surprisingly, therefore, by treating organisations as lifeless machines, rather than complex living systems, our attempts at changing them have met limited success. Studies in the corporate sector reveal that between 55% and 75% of organisational change efforts fail (Marcic 1997:27 quoting Hammer and Champy 1993 and Wheatley 1998). Many writers argue that the major reason for this failure is that the human dimension to organisational change has been ignored. This reflects Lebow's explanation as to why 89% of the top 500 companies in 1950 no longer exist – 'people problems have been the icebergs of these Titanics' (1997:xxiv).

The experience in the aid sector reinforces these findings. Edwards and Sen assert that 'it is rarely possible to generate substantial change in human behaviour simply by altering the rules and institutions that govern our lives. The missing ingredient is personal change, which acts as the well-spring of change in other areas' (Edwards and Fowler 2002:42). Similarly, Carr's study of the psychology of the aid system concluded that 'the failure of many aid projects may be connected to a comparative neglect or naivety about the so-called human factor' (1998:2). As Edwards and Sen go on to exhort 'personal transformation is essential if we are to see society change in the directions we espouse. Confronting this challenge squarely and with honesty is the challenge of this hour' (2002:44).

¹ Quoted by Kaplan 2002: 113

1.2 Leadership Change in Capacity building

INTRAC's learning from experience of NGO capacity building in Malawi reached similar conclusions (James 2002). As well as highlighting the importance of personal change, it also found that leaders were central to change. Leaders needed to both drive the change process in the organisation and also be prepared to change personally for significant organisational change to happen. Leaders in today's organisations need to be first and foremost leaders of change. But as Robert Quinn also points out 'when I discuss the leadership of organisational change with executives I usually go to the place they least expect. The bottom line is that they cannot change the organisation unless they first change themselves' (2000:106). This emphasis on the role of the leader is particularly true of many civil society organisations (CSOs) in Africa, which, being young, still tend to be led by a charismatic founder-leader. As other organisational change consultants in Africa have found, for CSOs in Africa to change, 'Leaders often have to go through the most major changes... If leadership can't shift then no organisational process can succeed' (Interview with Allan Kaplan, Crockett, 1996). The initial emphasis of the INTRAC capacity building programme was exclusively on organisation-wide interventions, such as strategic planning or team building, but if the leaders did not change as a result, the organisational commitments to change did not always materialise in practice. Leadership commitment to organisational change was in practice synonymous with their commitment to their own personal change. This finding is corroborated by organisational change experience within the American corporate sector, where according to Daft, 'Leaders cannot simply decree new thinking, leaders first have to change themselves' (1998:52). He and others (Hurst 2002) attest that the leading cause of failure of so many change efforts is that change efforts are directed at fixing the system below the manager and do not involve the manager's own change.

Given the centrality of leadership change in organisational change, the need for leadership development² is not in doubt. Leadership development has been consistently defined as the priority capacity building need for NGOs in Africa according to African NGOs themselves (IFCB 1998 and 2001). Certainly the problems of poverty and conflict are so great in this continent that extra-ordinary leadership is needed to address them. And yet what we do not seem to know much about is the process for how leaders transform to display such desired behaviours. We know where we want to go, but are very unsure of how to get there. A plethora of leadership development programmes have been tried, but we have little idea of what made a difference and why. It does not seem very sensible to continue exhorting and supporting such leadership development programmes when we remain largely ignorant of how leaders change.

1.3 The Research Project

This 50-day research project sought to address this vacuum of knowledge to a degree. The purpose of the research was to understand more about the process of change amongst civil society leaders. It sought to address such questions as:

- What were the most significant improvements that leaders felt they had made since becoming leaders?
- What was the impact of these changes on the organisation and the followers within the organisation?
- What were some of the constraints that initially held leaders back from changing?

² I am taking leadership development to refer to development of both existing and future leaders

- What pressures were promoting them to change?
- What was the actual process of change that leaders went through?
- What was at the core of this change?
- What were some of the key factors in the success of this change?

From this greater understanding of how change actually occurs in practice amongst civil society leaders, we are in a much better position to promote such processes effectively. The paper therefore finishes the implications of these findings for:

1. capacity building programmes in general and leadership development in particular.
2. donors who wish to promote leadership development amongst partners.
3. civil society leaders themselves.

The methodology used to explore these questions involved:

- Literature review, building on other work carried out (see bibliography)
- Semi-structured interviews with key informants in Malawi and South Africa
- In-depth interviews with 10 'respected' CSO leaders transcribed from audio tape
- Analysis and drafting
- Input from leadership specialists in Africa and Europe
- Presentation of research report to CORDAID Africa Department
- Feedback workshop with CSO leaders in Malawi
- Publication as an Occasional Paper (also as a Journal article)

This qualitative research was not trying to verify the extent or quantity of behaviour change (e.g. by gathering data from different sources for triangulation) but was simply trying to explore the causes for leaders' perceived shifts.

The prime audience for this research is international NGOs who are actively interested in supporting leadership development with their partners. It is also aimed at leaders of civil society organisations in Africa as well as providers of leadership development services. By reading this research, people will gain a much deeper appreciation of the human dimension to capacity building. They will also better understand the complex processes that people go through in order to ultimately change their behaviour – a subject at the heart of all development practice. Although the sample has been taken from one particular context, Malawi, I believe this research has a far broader relevance. The principles and processes that emerge are actually universal human processes and the implications therefore have relevance for all capacity building work.

1.4 The Structure of the Publication

Chapter Two relates selected stories of the changes leaders went through. Chapter Three analyses the cultural and character blocks to effective leadership and the organisational and personal crises that resulted. It also highlights the different external catalysts that were introduced into this more fluid situation. Chapter Four analyses in some detail the internal process of change that leaders went through and the spiritual dimension to this shift is discussed in Chapter Five. The 'Conclusions' in Chapter Six draw out the major learnings from the research. Chapter Seven highlights the implications of the research for civil society leaders. Chapter Eight identifies the implications for capacity building in general and leadership development in particular as well as for international NGOs wishing to support such processes.

CHAPTER 2

STORIES OF CHANGE

You can never change society, if you have not changed yourself.

Nelson Mandela³

The salvation of this human world lies nowhere else than in the human heart, in the human power to reflect, in human meekness and in human responsibility.

Vaclav Havel speech to US Congress⁴

2.1 Letting Go of Control to Share the Vision

Joyce Banda, recently awarded the 'Africa Prize for Leadership for the Sustainable End of Hunger'⁵, as well as 'Woman of the Year' award on two occasions, attributes her empowering leadership style to the difficult and humbling experiences in the early years of National Association of Business Women (NABW).

Joyce established NABW in 1990 to assist Malawian women to become economically empowered. Only then, she believed, would they be able to realise their social and political rights. Joyce herself had suffered an abusive marriage before walking out with her three children to start what was to become one of the largest garment manufacturers in the country. She was very concerned about what was happening to less fortunate women and so invited some colleagues to form an organisation that would act as a pressure group for women's empowerment. After protracted negotiations to register with the government, NABW was registered and grew very quickly. By the end of 1991 there were already 2500 members.

But already there were problems with the supposed beneficiaries at the grassroots level. Joyce explains that *'sometimes people would get excited but when they did not understand what I was doing, they gave up. They left. The impact I was making was completely weak. Mobilisation was weak. Because I was seen to own the initiative, they wanted me to be the provider'*. The women simply waited to be told how to do everything. The goal of empowerment was a long way from the reality of ongoing dependence.

This led Joyce to agree with the donor to do a national needs assessment, which was announced on the radio just before a NABW board meeting. Joyce relates what happened next, *'By the time I got to the board meeting, they had heard the radio*

³ Interview with Oprah Winfrey Show 2001

⁴ Quoted in Daft 1998:188

⁵ An award given once a year by the Hunger Project in New York to African men and women who have 'provided leadership and worked tirelessly in the fight against hunger, and the promotion of education, environment and women's empowerment'. Joyce shared this award with President Chissano of Mozambique and used the proceeds to establish the Joyce Banda Foundation for education and orphan care.

announcement. They were not talking to me. I asked 'What is going on?' They replied, 'What is going on is that we do not know what you are doing. We are not interested in continuing to work with you. Who says we need a needs assessment, and what is a needs assessment'. The board meeting did not end well. I was upset. I did not apologise. Did they not understand that I was just doing my best, trying to make this organisation a success?'

Joyce went home in a state. 'I was very angry indeed. The board was not grateful, but I am doing all I can. I felt bitter and frustrated. As I sat, I thought, I either have to give up or change something. I was determined not to give up - my own situation of my previous marriage made me think there must be other women out there who are not as fortunate as me, being beaten and not having the economic security to resist. So that night, the question I asked myself was 'what am I going to do? Do I look for another board or can I change me? Can I come down, can I lower myself and work with the same committee?'

As Joyce thought about it, she realised that she had a serious problem. She had not been able to let go of control to be able to share her vision with others. She realised that she was being held back by a fear of losing power and a human desire to dominate, especially in a culture where leadership is expected to be distant and autocratic, where chiefs are chiefs for life. But what it had left was an alienated board and dependent women members. She describes it *'as if I had been in deep sleep and had just woken up and realised for the first time that it is not going to work if I take on things on my own'*.

She decided not to have any NABW activities again until the board had a brain-storming session to plan the future. Things soon changed.

The results of this personal shift were amazing. The most difficult board member became her greatest support – *'once she internalised the vision she was more passionate than I was'* according to Joyce. NABW continued to grow, now having more than 30,000 members. Most importantly lives were being changed at the grassroots with women scarred from repeated beatings describing how their husbands now *'come down on their knees and treat me like a partner. He listens and we make decisions together.'* Joyce describes seeing *'the greatest joy on the faces of rural business women when they feel what they have done is their initiative'*. In 1997, Joyce was able to take the rare step of a founder leader, to retire graciously and hand over NABW leadership to a new director and watch as the organisation continues to thrive today.

2.2 Why the Man of the People is Sleeping with the Enemy

John Kapito, the populist supporter of consumer rights in Malawi has been strangely quiet in recent days. The 'champion of the people', a constant thorn in the flesh of government and exploitative business alike, has traded his fame for an influential place at the negotiating table to draft a Consumer Law, in the hope that this will transform unfair business practices in Malawi.

'I was born an activist' according to John and *'grew up in a volatile culture where we like to be heroes and do something and be noticed all the time. Even the shopkeepers in my home area insist on putting their own names on their shop fronts'*. After 15 years working as a sales manager, in 1994 John was sent to a workshop discussing and describing the consumer movement in other countries. Establishing the Consumer's Association of Malawi (CAMA) after this seemed a natural next step.

John describes what happened in the first five years, *'It was the first time for consumer issues to be championed in Malawi. I felt like a king because a lot of people praised me. Even when I walked into a shop you looked at the way the shop manager would come and talk with you. The attention I was given made me feel I was really remarkable and everyone in Malawi knew me from Nsanje to Chitipa. Everybody wanted to shake my hand and say you are doing really well. That made me very proud as a person'*.

But CAMA as an institution struggled financially. There was very limited support from donors, who were concerned that the absence of a Consumer Law made it difficult to see sustainable benefits. John too realised that much of the change he was achieving was cosmetic – *'I would go in a shop and find expired goods and I would go with Blantyre Assembly and sweep up that shop but the next day, the things would be put back on the shelves. I asked myself how long I would do that? How often can I do this?'*

John increasingly realised the cost of his confrontational approach. While it was heartening to be feared by government, *'we discovered that we could not change anything because the target was the people that CAMA was fighting with. Whatever you sent to the government, no-one was prepared to look at it if it came from CAMA. If a meeting was organised by CAMA, government officials would shun away, but we had very important issues'*. Even the support from opposition parties and civil society was undermined by their disorganisation and *'fear of being victimised'*. There were even family pressures too. John relates, *'my wife was not sure of our safety because there were two bombs at my house and I was also supposed to be killed at the office but all this did not happen. I had to think about my family and how it would survive.'*

John had realised that CAMA was very personalised around himself. *'We were trying to portray the image of me personally of John Kapito as being the centre force, the more I talked about these political issues, the more the focus on me. People were failing to distinguish between CAMA and John Kapito. It even seemed as if I was trying to promote myself to become a politician, which created a lot of enemies and was not my immediate goal'*.

While the handshakes and the popularity were very alluring, John began debating with himself, *'Am I really trying to champion the people or myself? If I keep on championing myself to become a popular leader but am unable to give people what they want then I would die a hero but without fulfilling what people need. The handshakes were coming to me and not to the people, but the people would need more from me. I could be the stumbling block'*. While the advocacy campaigns had changed a lot, there was still something missing – a law on which to base the advocacy.

John decided on a radical dual approach – taking a more institutional and less personal approach isolating himself from the media and pointing them to his staff; and proactively seeking to engage, not merely confront, government. He decided to co-operate with the government on developing a Consumer Protection Law, which would provide the structure on which to fight for consumer rights for the foreseeable future (which was after all the main reason for CAMA being founded). CAMA began to play a more intermediary role between the people and the government in debates on consumer issues.

In taking this co-operative approach John has faced considerable opposition from many people accusing him of being co-opted by government and remaining silent on major

economic scandals. But he says to people that *'this "quiet diplomacy" gives you this – the law will be with you for life'*. The consumer law progresses and has recently received cabinet approval, but has not yet been passed by Parliament. There is still a risk that this costly strategy will ultimately fail, a fear that continues to haunt John with sleepless nights

But his motivation comes from realising that praises and handshakes may mislead you. Although not a frequent church-goer, John says, *'I read the Bible and my belief is that people who have done well have not done it by being thanked by the people. My faith is in God. I feel my judge should be God and not the people. I feel the consumer law will take time but it would still come out. I give myself a handshake from within'*.

2.3 A Perfectionist is Forced to Delegate

When Nellie Nyangw'a became the first female and the first Malawian Programme Representative for Oxfam she did not expect that it would require such a radical internal change in her attitudes to other people.

Nellie was brought up by her mother in a poor home. When her only brother died, she quickly took up the position of helping her mother with all the 'boys jobs', especially because she did not want her mother to feel the loss even more. As a result she grew up determined to do everything that men could do and to an even higher standard. She has been resolute in ensuring that common complaints about female managers, that they are *'noisy and moody'*, should never be levelled at her.

When Nellie was promoted to Malawi Programme Representative last year she found herself in the unenviable position of having two jobs to do, her old one in charge of partner support and the new overall country director role. She quickly found her old ways of working were under pressure. *'I discovered that I had very limited time and it was clear that I was not going to meet the deadlines. My insistence on perfection was quickly challenged, but I used to feel so bad when something was not done well. I would take personal condemnation'*.

The pressure of time forced her to delegate. She began to trust people with work and responsibility, delegating jobs that she used to do all by herself. She even compromised on her standards of perfection, an issue that had been pointed out by the former programme manager in one of her performance appraisals. Nellie points out that *'the desire for perfection has not been easy to let go because I had to lower my standards. I have had to fight inside myself and accept standards that I would never have accepted before. I have begun to focus more on universal standards of what people expect rather than my personal standards'*. This internal fight involved a battle against her pride or 'public image'. *'I was worried about my public image. I was feeling like people will be saying 'she is not as she was'. This held me back. I learned that being a leader I need to allow criticism as a part of life. It is more important to hold onto principles and values that you believe in. I will not care too much what people say, so long as I can move and make progress in relation to the objectives I have set'*. Self-appraisal is more important than public approval.

Nellie believes that her Christian faith has played a major role in enabling her to let go and change. *'A lot of my behaviour is influenced by my Christian values – there is a lot of spiritual influence on the way I do things. The spiritual dimension teaches me to accept*

things that I cannot change. I now say to God, 'I have done what I needed to do, beyond this you will perfect it'. Her faith also affects the way she values other people. 'To me it is very important that a person feels very good about themselves. That has helped me make the shift. That stops me from screaming at them'.

The internal organisational appraisal systems in Oxfam have also had a major influence on Nellie's ability to change. Every six months the staff feedback to the Programme manager how she has behaved as a manager to them. Nellie points out, *'I have had to listen a lot to what the staff say about me as a manager. That alone is a motivating factor for me to do well. I do not want them to bring up the same things as they did last year. It is certainly a tense moment. Some have opted to explain it verbally while others have opted to write it down. I quickly sit down and strategize on how I can change and help staff, rather than holding on too long. If I hold onto criticisms too long, they can become a grudge. Having to quickly let go of the pain of criticism and then strategize to improve is what makes a leader'.*

2.4 Earning Leadership through Empowerment

When Nelson Mkandawire took over as Director of Chisomo Children's Club, he found that his autocratic style of leadership did not fit comfortably in a participatory organisation. After a difficult period of soul searching, Nelson decided that he should change.

Nelson was brought up with a keen sense of duty, responsibility and doing things right. His father inculcated into him that as a man he must do things himself and find a way for others. After all, 'mwamuna sauzidwa' – you are a man and therefore you are right. As a young man Nelson was a keen admirer of Dr. Hastings Banda, who was able to command and see things happen. When he joined Chisomo from a commercial accounting firm, Nelson describes how he took his beliefs with him *'My previous experience was 'me'. I never believed in involving people much or thinking that others could do things better. I was a kind of person who would say 'me and me alone''.*

But when Nelson joined Chisomo, he found a different style of leadership was expected by the board and staff (who were taking a very participatory approach in their work with the children). Nelson initially resisted, relating that *'When I joined Chisomo I did not see much importance in the weekly meeting with staff. I felt this is a waste of time, trash - discussing, talking instead of things happening. I wanted us to meet once a month'.*

But Nelson's passion to do right things meant he was open to different inputs that challenged his way of thinking. In his first month in the post he saw that the participatory approach that Chisomo was taking with children was yielding clear results. He describes *'One thing that spoke to me so much was when I saw the results of the children in class. Ah so I can measure the output of what we are doing. Now a number of boys from Chisomo came in the top ten at school. When I saw that outcome I said that's it, we move as a team, we value each other's thoughts, we listen to each other and to the children. I learned to value the child and listen to them and also to find out more about them and hoped for the better. This was a leap of joy – leap of faith. If more is going to happen I must explore more and invest more into this team approach'.*

But this shift was a real struggle. For two months Nelson languished in a 'valley of decision', asking himself, *'If I do change how do I know that it works? How am I going to measure that those things are working? Shall I not be blamed if it goes the other way round? What if I lose my job?'* But Nelson believed that to be a good leader you have to be a risk-taker and initiate the change in you. He became secure enough in himself to allow other people's ideas to influence his ways of working, without in any way feeling inferior. Some of the major influences included the chair of the board, different trainings and mentors, exposure to other cultures and biblical teaching.

The chair of the board was a British woman and Nelson's preconceptions were immediately challenged, *'I thought a 'mzungu' (white person) does no wrong, and whatever she says I will do. A mzungu is a know-all and I am on the losing side. Whatever she says I will take as she is senior. Instead she told me that it is your show. We have taken you because we believe that you are the one to lead. I saw she is driven by confidence and that she had confidence in me'*. He realised that they had similar temperaments and that although there were sometimes disagreements these were quickly resolved and forgiven. Disagreements were viewed as vehicles for change. According to Nelson, *'This helped me in seeing people in a different perspective – that people are bound to make mistakes, but it does not mean they will always be making mistakes'*.

Nelson also received input from various training courses, such as a distance learning course in NGO Management, Institute of Chartered Administrators, and courses inside and outside of the country. *'I realised from books, training and advice that team work is important in getting results. I began to understand power and authority in a new way. I realised that most leaders always want to show they are the boss by exerting pressure. When I began experimenting and reflecting, I realised that people know you have power and authority so you do not need to force it on them. All you need to do is work with the people and fill in and go down and understand that it is not an issue of You You, but of esteeming and encouraging people'*. One of the trainers on these courses also played an important role in frequently asking Nelson 'what if' questions, not condemning faults, but opening eyes to a possible adjacent path. Another exercise also proved influential according to Nelson, *'In an "animals" exercise I did with CABUNGO I humorously described myself as a lion. People laughed and laughed not knowing that it was because people thought I really was like that'*.

Another amusing incident occurred during an early fund-raising trip to the UK. *'When I went to the Comic Relief when I met this guy who wore short trousers, small shirt and sandals, at first I said where am I? Have I come for a meeting? I thought I was meeting a donor in authority. It took me five minutes to adjust and go into that meeting. If that man had come as I expected I would have been in panic and I would not have spoken things in the right way. I already esteemed this person high, if he had come in that aspect, it would not have worked. He made me relax and I became me and I spoke what was in me and I spoke without fear. I learnt that as a leader if you are humble and set people at ease, they become real and expose who they are. You can understand and lead people who are real and they can understand you'*.

A final element in Nelson's shift was his Christian faith. The biblical teaching from Ephesians spoke to him very powerfully, where it describes one body being made up of many different parts, each with their own important role. *'This helped me in moving from wanting to be ME always into understanding that there are also other people who can*

also play important roles. I am just a part of the body. I am just a piece that needs to fit in. Being a leader does not mean that I am more valued than others are'.

2.5 Overcoming Shyness to Lead the Fight against HIV/AIDS

In the last few years, Francina Nyirenda has been propelled from being a mere secretary to the forefront of the fight against AIDS in Malawi, as Coordinator of the umbrella body for all HIV/AIDS organisations in Malawi. This has happened largely because she has had the courage to overcome her natural shyness and assume the responsibility of leadership.

Francina has always felt shy. Raised by people other than her parents, she would not voice her concerns or wishes. This inclination was exacerbated by the cultural expectation that girls ought to be responsible for household chores. It was not thought that she would continue in education, but simply be prepared for marriage. Francina remembers that *'when I was still in primary school some members of my family were telling me that most of my friends were married and I was delaying and wasting time going to school. Later they even went to the extent of finding me someone to marry while I was still in Form 2'.* But Francina was determined to proceed with her education, graduated from secondary school and was selected to go to university.

In 1995 Francina began work as a secretary at MANASO. The first coordinator retired and the next one died, leaving Francina as the Acting Coordinator in 1999. After acting for eight months the post was advertised, but Francina did not even have the confidence to apply for it. It was only through the encouragement of a friend that she put in her application and was appointed.

In the early days Francina describes herself as *'afraid to face challenges, I was somebody shy to speak in public. But people wanted to hear about MANASO, so what do you do? I was the one who had to do it. Someone had to talk about MANASO and I was the one who was supposed to do it.'* Francina realised that if she did not speak out then MANASO would not be known and its mission to address issues of HIV in Malawi would not be fulfilled.

A number of factors assisted Francina in addressing this lack of confidence in herself and overcome her temptation to hide behind a boss rather than take full responsibility for leading MANASO.

The chairperson of MANASO encouraged her enormously saying *'Francina you can do it. What I ask you to do is to keep it up. You can make it, I know'.* Even when MANASO had grown to the point of Francina feeling that another person should be employed as Coordinator, Francina was encouraged to go on. Francina also gained confidence from the example of other women standing up and talking in meetings – *'I feel if they can do it why can't I do it. I know I have to do more. I have learnt that women can stand up just like men do and I would want to be that'.* She also saw friends doing well, such as a classmate who is the new Executive Director of NABW. Francina's husband has also encouraged her very much, especially when she was given the position of National Coordinator. He has continued to support her in her role by taking care of the family when she is required to travel. In Malawi many husbands would not do this.

Francina has also sought to improve her management knowledge and skills by studying part-time courses in Business Administration at the Polytechnic. As MANASO has received support from outside donors, Francina has had to back up proposals and negotiate with donors, a process she believes has '*enabled me to build my self-confidence*'. Being forced to make presentations and open functions has turned her trembling into an assurance of '*Wow, I can make it*'.

One turning point in Francina's life was a leadership workshop organised by CABUNGO, where nearing the end of the third module on 'Me as an Individual Leader' participants were asked to give feedback to each other. Francina describes what happened '*they saw in me I have potential to grow, but they felt I was held back by a force. Each one wrote a single piece of paper and the same thing came from four people. They felt I should remove my shyness. At first I felt sad for myself. When I went to my room to think about the comments I had received, I said to myself, 'no, no no, this is good... Here you are Francina, what are you going to do about these things? You have a task'. I do not like hiding things to myself. I analysed myself to find ways of removing the shyness that people always point out in me and started working on the weaknesses identified. I am still addressing the weaknesses that were pointed out to me. Even in my current studies I consciously try to mix with other people in order to become more sociable. Although I like to sit quietly on my own, but now I try my best to mix with other people*'.

This courage to be honest with herself and change has reaped dividends for Francina and MANASO. Internally Francina is more able to confront, advise and encourage staff than she was before. Externally MANASO is increasingly known and is clearly raising the profile of HIV/AIDS in Malawi, as demonstrated by MANASO's recent successful organising of World Aids Day.

2.6 Re-Discovering her Core Values in Leadership

Makoko Chirwa found increasing dissonance between the management style she was expected to practice and the core values she had been brought up to believe in. A combination of academic assurance that her own values were legitimate and self-belief from staff challenged Makoko to become more of herself and use her own values to lead the organisation.

Women's Voice had been founded in 1993 by Dr. Vera Chirwa, together with a group of professional women she invited to be involved. But the organisation struggled to really get off the ground in the early years. In 1997 the board approached Makoko Chirwa, a Zambian married to a Malawian doctor, and persuaded her to become the director of Women's Voice, even though there was still no money for salaries. Makoko set about raising money and by 1998, with the assistance of CORDAID, Women's Voice was able to recruit key staff and get Women's Voice up and running. Makoko found that she had become accustomed to making all the decisions on her own and was clearly successful.

The only problem was that Makoko found that she was the only one really taking responsibility for Women's Voice. Although everyone was supposedly fighting for the same cause, Makoko realised that while staff always knocked-off early, she was left working until midnight to keep things afloat. This dependence on her was particularly an issue for Makoko because her husband was now working in Namibia and she wanted to be able to leave Women's Voice and join him.

She also noticed that there was an uncomfortable distance between her and staff. She had been brought up by her parents to treat everyone on a level, even treating house-servants almost like family. So Makoko was shocked when she noticed that *'my junior staff were not close to me. They were keeping a distance. The staff were not free to propose or suggest anything and I felt that was not normal. I did not even know much about them because of my distance. I did not know their true characters as they were keeping away from me. I also had them thinking wrong about me and I was also thinking wrong of each other'*. Yet she also realised that part of the problem was her own insecurities. Makoko feared that by delegating more to staff *'I would look under-rated and my juniors would think they know more than myself'*.

In 2000, Makoko was given a scholarship from Oxfam to do an NGO Management course by distance learning, which proved to have a major impact. According to Makoko *'it really helped me and opened me up. I would think through after every session. I would really say, 'yes I am doing the wrong thing there - I am doing the wrong thing there'. That was what changed me much I must confess. I realised that I was doing it wrong. The course made me think it was best to get closer to staff and allow them to contribute ideas in the programmes. Only then would I be able to lead them properly'*.

A pivotal input moment came when Makoko was writing a very demanding proposal for the EU against a tight deadline. When she considered following her usual pattern of writing it herself and then sending it to an outside consultant to tidy up, some of her staff came to her and asked, *'Do we really need to consult this other person? When Makoko asked whether they felt they could do it all in house, she was startled and shamed by their response, "YES we can do it! Let's do it on our own and not waste time"*.

Those words struck a deep chord in Makoko and she realised that her fears and selfishness had been inhibiting the organisation. Makoko remembers that the change was triggered by *'the guilt that I was not really as close as I was supposed to be. I was being selfish, not really opening up to my juniors. I had to humble myself for the organisation to go on well'*. Makoko says *'I opened up first and they responded to me'*. They did the proposal together, often working on one computer until midnight. The proposal was approved by the EU to the amazement of all concerned, especially the expert consultant! After this gradual shift, Makoko then opened up completely and has seen performance of Women's Voice improve dramatically. They have never gone backwards since. Staff contribution and morale is high and consequently Women's Voice has not suffered from high staff turnover.

Yet although the organisational performance improved, Makoko faced considerable resistance to her new style of management from an unexpected quarter – her female board. Up until today, Makoko says *'I get negative comments from the board members that I am working too closely with my juniors. I am supposed to distance myself from them. They say I cannot control or discipline anyone without distance. I am still blamed up until now so much by the board.'*

To Makoko it is more important to be able to inspire as a leader, rather than instil fear and discipline. She rejects the accusation that if you are closer to someone you cannot discipline. She believes that it is the insecurities of her female board members that encourages them to behave in a stereotypically masculine way. Makoko fears how far their own organisations will go with such autocratic leadership and wants to show an alternative leadership style can be far more effective.

CHAPTER 3

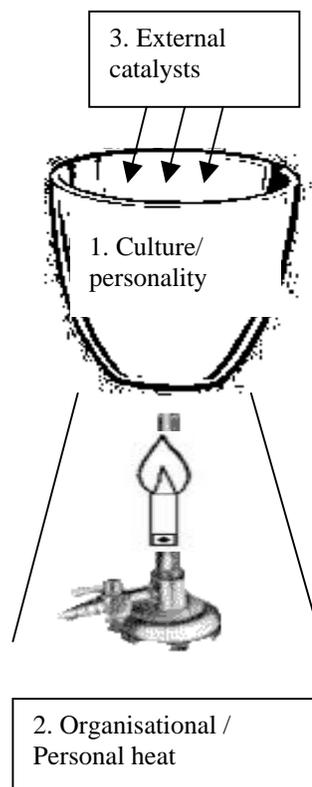
THE PROCESS OF CHANGE

CULTURE, CHARACTER, CRISES AND CATALYSTS

3.1 The Overall Process of Change

The process of change that leaders went through was highly complex. There was a multiplicity of factors, converging together at a particular time, that resulted in their shifts. There were different forces pushing and pulling in different directions within a complicated web of relationships. The final straw that 'broke the camel's back' may indeed have only been a single seemingly insignificant incident, but which proved enormously significant for the individual concerned.

While the change processes that people went through were far from identical, they did share common elements, illustrated below⁶:



⁶ Diagram inspired by Bennis and Taylor 2002

The Change Process

6. In each situation there was a problem of leadership, which the respondents attributed to cultural and personal constraints.
7. In most cases, these constraints exerted ongoing negative pressure on the organisation's performance (which particularly affected pioneers) and caused increasing personal pain for the leader (particularly recently appointed leaders). This rising heat melted the situation creating more openness to change. The degree of heat (or crisis) needed depended on the extent of the change needed and the openness of the individual to change – some leaders even had the foresight to respond to potential rather than actual pain.
8. A number of different, one-off external catalysts were introduced into this now fluid situation, such as negative feedback, positive encouragement, new knowledge, exposure to impressive role models and importantly the time and space to reflect.
9. Leaders interpreted these external events and gave them meaning within themselves based on their core values and beliefs (including spiritual beliefs). When sufficiently convinced of their need for personal change, leaders found themselves in an uncomfortable 'valley of decision', but chose to respond positively by humbling themselves, letting go of past behaviours and changing themselves on the inside.
10. These internal victories resulted in changed external leadership behaviour, which in turn had an impact on the organisation's change.

Certainly this framework is a simplification of the more messy and complicated reality. No easily understandable model can hope to capture the complexity of human change as change takes place within a tangled web of relationships in which a number of different actors are the subjects of change at the same time. Change does not usually occur in convenient, sequential, logical steps, but is sometimes more characterised by meanderings back and forward between steps. Sometimes change is radical and other times more incremental. Change is even sometimes temporary and behaviour can easily revert to the previous mode. The cases reveal the diversity of the different change processes. Different levels of change required different levels of discomfort with the status quo. For some a major personal crisis was necessary to promote change, while for others, much less pain was involved. Clearly none of the change processes described are identical and yet they do all broadly follow the model described above.

3.2 The Blocks to Change

3.2.1 Cultural Expectations of Leadership and Followership

The 'era' and culture in which people were raised has a profound impact in shaping leaders behaviour. According to Bennis and Thomas, 'the era in which we grew into maturity remains an important force throughout our lives' (2002:10). To a very significant degree the era defines peoples' expectations of how leaders should behave. All the leaders interviewed in the research 'came of age' during President Banda's thirty-year dictatorship and their behaviour as leaders has been very heavily influenced by it. Added to this, most of the respondents were raised in rural villages, where traditional culture

has more weight and influence on behaviour than in urban settings. As a result, every single one of the respondents felt that societal expectations of how leaders are supposed to behave was a major factor in both causing their dysfunctional leadership behaviour as well as holding back attempts to change. These cultural expectations of leadership are obviously intimately related to expectations of how 'followers' should behave. The case studies also revealed that cultural attitudes to gender also had a significant influence on leadership behaviour for women in particular. These cultural blocks to effective leadership are explored below. But at the outset we must avoid slipping into the mistaken assumption that culture is only a constraint to leadership development in Malawi. As we shall see cultural expectations also at times provided a vital positive force for change. The interviews also highlighted that culture was dynamic and shifting.

Social identity theory indicates that leadership behaviour is bound up with leaders' definitions of themselves in relation to the group – their social identity (Haslam 2001). As such leadership is not a person so much as a relationship. It is a dynamic process of mutual influence between leaders and followers. As Mayo pointed out 50 years ago, 'The desire to stand well with one's fellows, the so-called human instinct of association, easily outweighs the merely individual interest and logical reasoning upon which so many spurious principles of management are based' (quoted by Haslam 2001:17). It can be argued that social identity theory has even more weight in countries like Malawi where the African spirit of Ubuntu – a person is a person because of other people – 'I am because we are' – prevails. Yet despite this it seems that still, 'most studies of leadership are divorced from the broader social context within which these roles and qualities emerge' (Haslam 2001:58).

Certainly the interviews highlighted the very pervasive influence of the social context on leadership. Some of the leaders' board members put strong pressure on them to maintain an autocratic style. One respondent said that when he started delegating more *'the board looked at me as a weak manager because they were used to a centralised and dictatorship kind of management'*. This mirrors Makoko's experience of her board who felt strongly that she is supposed to distance herself from her staff in order to be able to control or discipline them. These attitudes are symptomatic of what Hofstede (1991) has termed a 'high-power distance culture', where people feel more comfortable with a significant 'distance' between leaders and staff. Hofstede argues that subordinates also prefer this, as in high power distance settings followers have strong dependence needs. They are often comfortable abdicating all responsibility upwards, resulting in situations like this one described by one respondent: *'You will find that at times you go away and there is a decision to be passed. People are not sure as it may have repercussions, so people simply say, 'let's wait for him for him to come back and decide for us what we should do''*. If people are not certain what the outcome is going to be, they would often prefer to do nothing than run the risk of being blamed. The very high levels of economic insecurity in Malawi make people very risk averse, not daring to do or say anything that might affect their future employment. As a consequence, many followers expect superiors to behave autocratically and not consult them and may even feel uncomfortable if they do. Certainly a number of Chichewa proverbs illustrate these perceptions, such as:

Atambala awiri salira mkhola limodzi – two cocks do not crow in one kraal (there can only be one leader, so if others are talking they are competing with the leader).

Mutu ukakula sulewa mkhonya – a big head will not dodge the fists (the leader is responsible for sorting out all our problems).

Chalaka bakha nkhuku singatole – if a duck with a long beak cannot pick it up then a chicken certainly cannot (if a leader cannot solve something, then the followers certainly cannot).

Wamkulu sawuzidwa –he is old...therefore he is right (a leader's decision is not open for discussion).

In such societies leadership is generally implemented through fear and punishment, an approach perfected and institutionalised by 'Life-President' Kamuzu Banda during his thirty year rule in Malawi. Throughout his leadership Banda emphasised four pillars of Malawian society: Loyalty, Unity, Obedience, Discipline. Despite the advent of multi-party politics ten years ago, the prevailing influence of Banda's example of leadership is enormous. Banda himself described 'the Malawi system, the Malawi style is that Kamuzu says that it's that and then it is finished. Whether anyone likes it or not that is how it is going to be. There is no nonsense. You cannot have everyone deciding what to do' (Donnelly 1998:46 quoting Carver 1990:14). According to one respondent, '*Many Malawians are so used to having someone with a whip to push them around that if you do not do that then work suffers*'. Banda's ongoing legacy is that in Malawi it is much wiser to start from the assumption that fear and insecurity will be dominant features of an NGO's culture. Such fear creates significant blocks for leaders to employ a different style of leadership as frank and open communication between members of different hierarchical levels is unexpected and difficult. As one leader described, '*Communication has been a problem. We are not open to each other. If I really wanted to communicate with someone, it was to read them the riot act. If I did mention some positive things, people just thought I was being cunning*'. Another pointed out that '*we have grown up knowing that it is disrespectful to question what your leader is saying*'. This reflects Donnelly's observation that in Malawi, 'Open criticism of the chief's authority is not common and people who do so are likely to risk exclusion from the village for life' (1998:50).

The lack of good leadership role models in Malawi has certainly perpetuated this culture. According to one respondent, '*all the managers I have worked for have influenced me. I was following what they were doing. They were autocratic. It was the same in this organisation, when I joined. Everything was done in the Executive Director's office*'. Role models in Malawi promote a very personalised leadership. The tradition in Malawi is that a leader is a leader for life. Chiefs in Malawi cannot be challenged and will remain in power until they die. Cammack describes Malawi as a 'post-colonial neopatrilineal system, where the right to rule is ascribed to a person, rather than an office... The relationship is one of loyalty and dependence.' (2001:9)

Interestingly the leaders of church-based organisations involved in this research felt that these issues were actually exacerbated within the church. Far from pushing a biblical notion of 'servant leadership', one respondent described his board being made up of '*church leaders who are very autocratic and used to traditions*'. Another felt that because it is perceived that '*whatever the clergy say is gospel truth*' his board felt that whatever decisions they made were innately 'right'.

3.2.2 Cultural Expectations of Gender and Leadership

With respect to gender and leadership roles, Malawian societal expectations had a strong influence, particularly for the women leaders. According to one woman leader *'there is still the belief that men are superior and women inferior. When the Director post was advertised people felt that it should be a man'*. Francina's story describes similar cultural expectations where girls were not expected to go to school, but to do household chores in preparation for marriage. Such cultural assumptions about women undermines female leaders' self-confidence. This is why for two of the five women interviewed their major shift was to become more self-confident, able to confront when necessary and take ultimate responsibility for the whole organisation. For Nellie too, it was cultural expectations that women were 'noisy and moody' that influenced her to always behave in the opposite way.

But this gender dimension was not restricted to influencing women. Nelson spoke about how his father had inculcated into him a belief that *'you are a man and therefore you are right'*. In order to become more of an empowering manager, he had to confront and overcome this cultural expectation of gender.

3.2.3 Character - Personal Constraints to Change

But people's behaviour is not entirely dominated by cultural expectations. To believe this would be an 'ecological fallacy' (Trompenaars quoted by Carr 1998: 82). Respondents were clear that their own character and failings had also contributed to the problems (it was also their personalities that gave them the determination to change in opposition to many cultural norms). The main personal factors or *'addictions'* that respondents identified as blocks to their change were pride, selfish ambition and inner insecurities and fears. It was crucial to their change process that leaders became conscious and acknowledged the existence of their shadow side. According to Robert Johnson, unless we accept we have a shadow side, we cannot control it. If we are not able to (self) control it, it is likely that we are going to be controlled by our shadow (1991).

Pride and selfish ambition was a factor in preventing John Kapito change his leadership approach. He describes how all the attention, handshakes, congratulations and media coverage he would receive made him feel *'really remarkable'* and *'very proud'*. The alluring dangers of such pride were well-known by Roman Generals, for when they were being carried on chariots in triumphal processions they had a slave whispering in their ear, 'Remember you are only human' (Carr 1998: 28). Similarly Nellie described the chief protagonist in her internal fight to delegate more as *'my public image. I was feeling like people will be saying "she is not as she was". This held me back'*. For Nelson too, a lot of his shift came from 'unlearning' his individualistic background. He describes his *'previous experience as "me". I never believed in involving people much or thinking that others could do thing better. I was a kind of person who would say "me and me alone"'*.

As well as pride, peoples' own insecurities and fears were the root of their problems according to many of the respondents. One leader explained, *'those who feel insecure, have to prove themselves better than others by suppressing those who would be emerging. We want to be the only one to talk in a meeting, because we always fear that someone will take over our position. This is an inferiority complex.'*⁷ Another leader described her *'fear within that if these people know what I am doing and maybe do it*

⁷ This phenomenon is known in the literature as the 'push-down syndrome' which is seen to be very common in Malawi (Carr 1998)

better, what is my position? Similarly Makoko realised that part of her reluctance to delegate was due to her own insecurities, fearing that by involving staff more, *'I would look under-rated and my juniors would think they know more than myself'*. The roots of these insecurities may be very deep. Nelson highlighted the historical and cultural roots of his insecurities, when he became director of an NGO with a British, female board chair. His instinctive reaction was *'I thought a "mzungu" (white person) does no wrong, and whatever she says I will do. A mzungu is a know-all. I am on the losing side. Whatever she says I will take'*.

The causes of such insecurities are complex. As we have seen they have historical roots for some, while for others it may be a product of up-bringing and early childhood experiences. For others it may also be simply a lack of knowledge and skills in leadership. In Malawi the limited opportunities for post-graduate education as well as experience of being given real leadership responsibility may have compounded this. As leaders develop their knowledge and skills their professional wisdom and judgement develops. Such competence in leadership, combined with the experience of having 'done it themselves' in the past, is invaluable in giving leaders sufficient self-confidence to overcome any insecurities.

3.3 Crises? The Heat Rises and Blocks Melt

The previous section described the societal expectations (era and culture) that had been very influential in determining dysfunctional leadership behaviour. Yet culture is obviously not static, particularly in an increasingly globalised world, where cultures are invaded by outside influences. Within Malawi too, there have been very significant changes in the last decade, particularly the advent of multi-party democracy, which have begun to melt the blocks to change. As one respondent commented about his 'followers', *'the type of people we have now are different. Multiparty has changed the whole thing. People are more enlightened, more mobile, more trained, and more demanding'*. In addition, the increasing aid dependence of Malawi (now ranked as the poorest country not affected by conflict) means that it is invaded from without and highly influenced by international pressures and interests. Aid donors increasingly emphasise results, performance and impact, not respect and relationship. Many leaders in Malawi, particularly those employed within the aid system, are now 'caught between the demands of two moral systems: one stressing individual competence and the other group co-operation' (Carr 1998:159). The contextual changes have also affected the perceived role of women. According to another respondent, *'the change of government to multiparty has helped women start looking at themselves as people who can contribute and trust in themselves'*. This has even shaken up how women are viewed within traditional structures like the church. The previous certainties about what constitutes effective leadership behaviour are no longer there. The new context demands a different style of leadership to be effective. There are new rules of the global game and the autocratic style is no longer so acceptable. David Dotlich quotes a CEO saying 'Show me a leader who is decisive, fiercely independent, dominant and in control and I'll show you someone who doesn't have a clue about how to lead in today's organisations' (1998:xi).

We also see from the cases that the 'dysfunctional' leadership behaviours promoted by cultural and personal factors contained the seeds for their own destruction. The leadership behaviour began to cause increasing and ongoing problems on two levels: for the organisation and for the individual leaders. These pressures increased the heat and

began to melt the blocks to change (as in a chemical process a reaction can usually only take place if the elements are fluid by being dissolved or melted). The amount of heat (degree of pain) needed is directly related to the extent of the change needed and the openness of the individual to change. For example, one leader in particular had the foresight to respond to avoid potential rather than actual pain.

Organisational performance of the NGOs suffered as a result of the problems in leadership. In some of the cases, the organisational symptoms were a lack of ownership of the organisation by the board and/or the staff. The NABW board felt so little ownership of their organisation that they would leave everything to the Director to do and were constantly demanding travel allowances. In a number of other cases it was the staff who were taking a very instrumental approach to their work (just a way to earn money) and abdicating responsibility and pushing their work up to the director to do. Their potential was being severely under-used. This caused problems of reduced impact and in some cases even challenged the very survival of the organisation. In the case of CAMA, the leadership approach taken had resulted in CAMA alienating the government (its main target audience for change) and also potential donors. It is interesting to note that organisational performance and survival is a particularly powerful melting factor for founder leaders. The possible 'failure' of their personal dream raised the temperature for them very considerably.

As well as having organisational costs, leaders were finding they were having to pay increased personal costs. Many of the leaders describe the increased time-pressure that they were under, particularly in the cases where the staff were not taking much ownership of the organisation. Leaders were putting in very long hours, but still the overload remained. As Jones Laviwa described, *'For me I discovered was that I was being misused. I ended up doing most of the work that could be done by members of staff. For example with correspondence, staff were not checking their work and I was left to edit all the typing and grammatical errors. The staff were taking advantage of me'*. Unable and unwilling to increase the amount of time they could give to the organisation, the leaders felt increasingly uncomfortable and realised that something would have to change. As another explained, *'I was failing to do what I was paid for. I was paid to do PR, networking, vision, mission, but now I was bogged down with everyday routine things that could be done at another level'*. Yet another described his organisation as *'One small head with a very fat body. All my subordinates were reporting to me personally even on small petty issues, such as what coffin to buy'*.

These personal pressures on time were felt most strongly by leaders who had recently assumed the leadership role, which might imply that people may be more open to learning and change early in their leadership tenure. It was a change in their role (their personal context) and sometimes also a change in the organisational context (independence from another NGO in two of the cases) that heightened the personal pressure for change.

3.4 External Catalysts are Introduced

As ongoing pressures from changes in the organisational and personal context increased the heat and melted the frozen situation, one-off external events occurred that

disturbed leaders. It was often these one-off events that catalysed change⁸. The cases show that it was often only the combination of a number of external events that made the difference. The source of these catalysts and the way they were introduced proved to be very important, due to the fact that change involved leaders confronting the personal forces of pride, fear and insecurity that had held back change. To address personal constraints, people had to confront their shadow side. To confront shadows and fears, requires that people sense sufficient security, acceptance and love.

3.4.1 Challenging/Negative Feedback

The cases reveal that challenging feedback from people was one of the major catalysts for change, though the context, level of formality and source of this feedback varied.

Formal feedback from staff was given to Nellie as part of a regular performance appraisal system. This structured feedback from junior staff on her performance as manager proved a major incentive for Nellie's shift to greater delegation to staff. Her desire that any particular feedback should only ever be given to her once, made her very anxious to change.

For Arnold Mhango feedback from staff was also very important, but this feedback was more informal. He relates, *'I took tea with them and they started opening up. They said, you are doing this, but you are getting frustrated. Others would be very open. Since you have asked, you have this problem, that problem, you make these statements'*. Yet despite asking for this feedback from staff, Arnold remembers, *'I resented it. The first day I was annoyed. I said all sorts of things, I said I was disappointed with her. She did not back down, just said these are the feelings that are on the ground. Since you have asked, I thought you should know'*. For Makoko, too, it was a challenging comment from her staff, that *'yes we can do it ourselves'* that proved pivotal in catalysing her change. For Jones Laviwa, the feedback also came from staff, but in the form of a letter of no-confidence, which was written even before even he was appointed leader. Although *'it was very unpleasant, it was a learning point, not only for me, but even for them... We had to make sure that those problems were not going to be real'*.

Peers provided the feedback for other respondents. For Francina challenging feedback came from fellow participants on a leadership development programme. When a number of them mentioned her shyness in holding her back as a leader, she decided she really had to change. For Jones, such a role was played by a trusted friend outside the organisation: *'We would sit here and discuss for hours and learn from one another and advise one another. That has also been instrumental in my own development, particularly when he said to me 'Instead of cracking your head, float it to the members let them decide'*.

For Joyce Banda, it was feedback from her board that proved catalytic. They threatened to resign because they said, *'we do not know what you are doing. We are not interested in continuing to work with you'* and although she left the meeting angry and upset, she later realised that there was some truth in what they had said.

⁸ In reality of course such a neat separation between melting the blocks to change and introducing catalysts is too simple as some events acted both to melt and catalyse simultaneously.

For others this feedback came from mentors. Joyce Mataya commented that it was consistent, open feedback from her mentor that resulted in her becoming so frustrated with herself that she began to change. Another respondent also mentioned the important role played by the '*mind of a mentor, who does not condemn your faults, but asks "what if?", and "have you seen an adjacent path?"*'.

Spouses have also proved an important informal source of ideas, support, inspiration as well as constructive challenge for many of the leaders interviewed. John Kapito relates, '*My wife could criticise me on some of the things I said in public saying that "you were too heavy" and I would tell her it was just use of language*'.

It is worth noting at this stage a few things:

- In almost every example above, the initial reaction of the leader was denial of the feedback, even to the extent of becoming angry. Many respondents wanted to shoot the messenger. The meeting in which the feedback was given often did not end well.
- A critical part of this challenging feedback was that respondents had the time and space to digest this internally. It was only later, after the leaders had gone home or into their room, that they were able to process and weigh the feedback, asking themselves whether or not there was truth in it.
- Much of the feedback came from peers or juniors, rather than people in authority. It may be that we are able to hear better from people who do not have power over us. This reveals the importance of followers in influencing the behaviour of leaders. Leadership is a relationship between followers and leaders, not any one individual.
- One respondent commented that all his constructive critics were women. He thought this might be because, '*women are caring, they are not schemers. They are not looking for favours, whereas menfolk want to be recognised and get promoted*'.
- None of this challenging feedback came from donors, an important finding that is discussed in Section 8.3.

3.4.2 Positive Encouragement

Positive encouragement, as well as negative criticism, was also a powerful factor in catalysing change. Given the need for people to overcome their fears and insecurities to change, this positive encouragement was particularly important. Nelson relates, that the board chair's insistence that Chisomo was his show and that he had been hired to lead, not follow her, proved influential in encouraging him to lead in an empowering way. Similarly the chairperson of MANASO encouraged Francina consistently giving her positive reinforcement that she could do it, that she had the ability to lead. This message was also repeated by her husband, not just in words, but in actions by providing the childcare support while her leadership duties took her away from home.

3.4.3 Exposure to Inspiring Role Models

According to Albert Schweitzer 'example is not the main thing in influencing others, it's the only thing' (Bridges 1995: 61). The cases certainly reveal the importance of role models in showing leaders alternative ways of behaving.

Francina gained confidence from seeing the example of other Malawian women standing up and talking in meetings and leading NGOs. She states, '*I feel if they can do it why can't I do it. I know I have to do more. I have learnt that women can stand up just like men do and I would want to be that*'. Others were also influenced by expatriate role

models. Anderson Kamwendo spoke of his predecessor as *'one of the few true missionaries I have ever met. He was a kind of person who was humble and who built most of the staff who are here. He would sit on the ground with villagers and attend staff funerals'*. Similarly for Nellie Nyangw'a her previous programme manager modelled for her a different way of leading. She said, *'If leaders are exposed to other leaders in action, it plays a role in them shifting because they have seen another human doing it. If I am impressed with people, I will easily copy what they do'*.

For Nelson, the forgiving example of his board chair, *'helped me in seeing people in a different perspective – that people are bound to make mistakes, but it does not mean they will always be making mistakes'*. Another amusing, but formative incident was his trip to meet a potential donor in the UK. Nelson relates, *'I met this guy who wore a short trousers, small shirt and sandals, at first I said where am I? Have I come for a meeting? I thought this was a donor in authority. It took me five minutes to adjust and go into that meeting. If that man had come as I expected I would have been in panic and I would not have spoken things in the right way. I already esteemed this person high, if he had come in that aspect, it would not have worked. He made me relax and I became me and I spoke what was in me and I spoke without fear. I learnt that as a leader if you are humble and set people at ease, they become real and expose who they are. You can only really understand and lead people who are real'*.

3.4.4 New Information / Knowledge through Training

The fourth type of catalyst found was the introducing of new knowledge or information, often through some form of leadership or management training. We found in the previous section that a lack of knowledge about leadership and management sometimes contributed to the insecurities that held people back from changing.

For Makoko, the NGO Management course she completed by distance learning had a major impact on her leadership. She said it really opened her up and clearly revealed to her the areas of leadership in which she was failing. The information about leadership styles pricked her conscience and made her feel guilty about the individualistic and autocratic way in which she had been leading. John Kapito was also affected by this same course, but in a different way. When he understood more about different organisational phases, John realised that a different strategy for the future did not necessarily mean that the way he had been working in the past was wholly wrong, but just not appropriate for a maturing NGO.

Others were affected by leadership courses by organisations like CABUNGO and the CDRA, both inside and outside of the country. Arnold Mhango describes, *'the major shift in my life was when I attend a OD CABUNGO workshop. I learnt that leadership was about sharing responsibilities, delegating some work and having different opinions from others. I realised that actually if I am Director it does not mean that I am the most intelligent person around here'*. Nelson also *'realised from books, training and advice that team work is important in getting results. I began to understand power and authority in a new way'*. Furthermore a course with the CDRA taught him, not only about the content issues of leadership, but more importantly for him, the process of reflecting, learning and acting. He now says he has not only is more reflective as he is speaking, but he makes time to ask himself *'What other ways could I have done that? What could I have done differently?'*

For others too, management training boosted their confidence, helping people like Francina overcome their shyness, and also enabling them to lead out of a sense of self-confidence, rather than their fears and insecurities. It was when the training made people think *'that is me in a nutshell'* that people responded to it. Interestingly though, it sometimes took some time to respond. One respondent mentioned that a course he had attended in Kenya six years earlier suddenly became relevant: *'The hidden knowledge of how to involve people that I gained from CORAT assisted me when the time came'*.

3.4.5 Time and Space

One further dimension that was often necessary in conjunction with each of the other catalysts, was simply the time and space to digest and process the new input. For many of those who received negative feedback their initial response was one of denial, anger and frustration. This follows the normal human transition curve (Kakabadse 2000:441). It was only when this feedback was processed alone later that the trust of what had been said was internalised.

For training too, there is often the need for time to digest its usefulness and relevance, though usually not as long as six years! In fact one of the main benefits of a training course is creating the space for very busy people to think and reflect on their work. According to Dotlich and Noel 'We have found that one reason people in business do not change is that they do not take time to reflect' (Dotlich and Noel 1998:47). Usually leaders' very busyness precludes serious questioning. As Arnold Mhango said of the CABUNGO course, *'I had time to reflect upon my leadership background, development, and the way CSC was running its affairs and challenges facing as an organisation and how to respond to the challenges and environment'*.

For Anderson Kamwendo it was a 'sabbatical' one-month trip to the States that gave him the opportunity to reflect and fundamentally change his way of leading. He describes the tendency to lead organisations on 'autopilot' with not much creativity so long as the donors are happy. He describes his trip away as *'like I was seeing the organisation from a distance. I was able to see some loopholes when I was away because I was looking at the organisation from an outsider's perspective.'*

CHAPTER 4

INNER CRUCIBLES: THE TURNING POINT OF CHANGE

Private victories precede public victories.

Steven Covey⁹

If I had not been in prison I would not have been able to achieve the most difficult task in life, and that is changing yourself.

Nelson Mandela¹⁰

4.1 The Preconditions for Change

The Melting Process – Something must change

So far we have seen that the blocks to behaviour change of leaders (societal and personal) have been melted to a degree by organisational and personal pressures. There is a recognition that there is a problem that the leader or the organisation is not going to succeed if this continues. People do not like being seen as a failure, so there is an acceptance that *something must change*. Into this more fluid situation a number of external catalysts were introduced.

External Catalysts – I should change

But these catalysts, in and of themselves, did not lead to the change. We know how a comment or a training event may change one person's life, but leave another's totally unaffected or that the same information may be ignored at one time and seized on by another at different times. In the cases, it was not the events themselves that brought about change, but how people interpreted those events within themselves that made a difference. According to Tony Robbins, 'It is not the events of our lives that shape us, but our beliefs as to what each of these events mean' (1991:73). The respondents in the interviews chose to be disturbed by these external occurrences, because they perceived them to be meaningful or truthful. They came to the conclusion that 'I am in some way responsible' for this imperfect situation and *I should change*. It was only because this external feedback or events gave people a new view of self that they were prepared to change. The turning point came on the inside.

4.2 Crucible Experiences – I must change

Bennis and Thomas's study of the most successful young (geeks) and old (geezer) leaders pointed out the absolute centrality of such 'crucible experiences' in the development of leaders. 'Every leader in our study had undergone at least one intense, transformational (crucible) experience' (2002:14). Crucibles are difficult and painful

⁹ Covey, S., 1992:42

¹⁰ Bennis and Thomas, 2002:17

experiences. Successful leaders react positively to adversity and are able to extract wisdom from it (unlike others who are feel the victim of such experiences). Nelson Mandela is an excellent example of such a leader. He said, 'If I had not been in prison I would not have been able to achieve the most difficult task in life, and that is changing yourself'. Although crucibles vary enormously (as they are highly personal and to some outsiders they may appear even mundane), they are opportunities for people to ask themselves essential questions, e.g. 'Who am I? Who could I be? Who should I be? How should I relate to the world outside of myself? They are experiences from which one extracts meaning, meaning that leads to new definitions of self and new competencies' (2002:99). Crucibles are defining moments.

When the research respondents were confronted with information that considerably challenged their preferred ways of leading, they entered a crucible experience. Like all of us their instinctive reaction was denial and to externalise the blame. The respondents were able to move beyond blaming others and accepted responsibility for it (the foundation of all development processes). But even when they accepted responsibility for a problem they had not arrived. They found themselves in a crucible or in the words of the respondents in a '*valley of decision*' or in an '*internal battle*'. This was not a pleasant place to be. It was a dark and confused place where old bearings and anchors had gone. It was a journey into the interior of themselves. Many of us prefer not to venture into our depths as we are frightened or ashamed of what we will find. In the words of Sogyal Rinpoche 'We are so addicted to looking outside ourselves that we have lost access to our inner being almost completely. We are terrified to look inwards' (Davine Thaw in Edwards and Fowler 2002:151). If we dare enter our 'hearts of darkness', we have to be very courageous to resist the real temptation to quickly flee.

This inner conflict takes place at the level of values for ultimately the leadership style people adopt springs from their core beliefs about themselves and about other people. The protagonists in the inner battles of the research cases were powerful beliefs about self and about other people. These included:

- an inner sense of self-worth conflicting with the desire to simply please the crowd;
- a belief in the value of excellence conflicting with the need to delegate;
- a belief that 'I cannot do everything' conflicting with a fear that others will be better than me;
- a belief that people have unique potential and value conflicting with a control-oriented management practice (that implied staff were not up-to-the-job).

For most of the respondents change occurred when they realised that who they thought they were and who they actually were, were two different people. As Charles Handy explains, 'If we try and live our lives in separate compartments, one for doing, one for being, why then for part of the time we are living a lie' (1991:13). There was a sudden realisation that what they believed about themselves and how they were behaving were not the same things. To a degree this challenged their very identity. For example, Makoko and John experienced an increasing tension between their expected behaviour as leaders by others and their core values. For Nellie, Nelson, Francina, and Joyce it was more a dissonance between their personal preferred behaviour and their core values. They realised that their leadership style was not really them, or if it was, it was the part of them they did not like very much. One important factor in influencing leaders' core values and therefore encouraging them to positively change was the African cultural concept of 'Ubuntu' – a worldview that understands that my humanity is caught

up and inextricably bound with other peoples' – 'I am because I belong'. The very essence of being human therefore involves generosity, care, hospitality, and compassion. When leaders' felt they were not behaving in this way, they felt their values were being compromised. Culture therefore was also a driving force for change.

When people realise that a gap exists between who they are and who they want to be, they will do a lot to maintain the integrity of their personality. As Tony Robbins puts it 'the greatest leverage you can create for yourself is the pain that comes from inside knowing that you have failed to live up to your own standards' (1999:127). Ultimately it is our conscience that tells us whether we have lived up to our standards or not. As Joyce Mataya said, '*My conscience forces me to resolve things in a different way*'. Steven Covey describes conscience as 'that unique human endowment that senses congruence or disparity with current principles and lifts us towards them' (1992:64). He goes on to say that our effectiveness as leaders 'is predicated upon certain inviolate principles – natural laws in the human dissension that are just as real, just as unchanging, as the laws of gravity. These principles are not invented by us or by society; they are the laws of the universe that pertain to human relationships and human organisations. To the degree to which people recognise and live in harmony with such basic principles of fairness, equity, justice, integrity, honesty and trust, they move toward either survival and stability on the one hand or disintegration and destruction on the other' (ibid:18). Such laws are about trust, honesty, forgiveness, and a belief in other people. Unfortunately our conscience interprets these laws in a relativistic and imperfect way. The conscience may have become unreliable (too sensitive or deadened) and need resetting. Covey goes on to say that the key to change is 'to educate and obey the conscience', to align our conscience with universal principles. John White also asserts that change is 'positive only to the extent that it involves aligning oneself, to a greater or lesser extent, with the reality of the way the universe is made' (1991:40), following the Greek idea that freedom is rooted in design (all things are designed to function in a certain way and are most free when they function as they were designed).

For many, the change process was not a matter of learning new leadership skills, but that new knowledge about themselves enabled them to return to who they really were, a refinding of their identity. Socrates said that 'the greatest way to live with honour in the world, is be what you pretend to be' (quoted by Covey 1992:51). Or as Makoko Chirwa said when asked why the change process had succeeded, one respondent replied, '*Because I was myself*'.

4.3 Choice at the Turning Point – *I will change*

Yet facing this inner turmoil does not mean that a positive choice will always be made. Each of the respondents in the case study had a choice as to how they would respond. All were tempted by their pride or fears to flee and return to the old and familiar ways. But each of them consciously chose '*I will change*'. One of the most influential psychiatrists of this generation, Victor Frankl, pointed out that 'man is ultimately self-determining' (1946:154), they have a choice in determining how they respond to a situation, even one as apparently limited as a concentration camp (where Frankl was writing from). More recently and from a very different perspective, the developments on the New Sciences have lent weight to this argument. Margaret Wheatley reveals that, 'In the past we have thought of freedom as a political idea or contemplated free will as a spiritual concept, but it now appears in biology as an inalienable condition of life. Every living being, every microbe, every person develops and changes because it has the

freedom to create and preserve life' (1998:1). In very practical terms we have a remarkable example of this with Nelson Mandela, who chose to respond to 27 years of imprisonment with forgiveness for his captors, enabling him to take on leadership of the newly born rainbow nation.

Yet choice is hard because it involves **risk**. In the case studies, Nelson asked himself, '*If I do change how do I know that it works? I do not know which way it will go. Shall I not be blamed if it goes the other way round?*' John, too, traded popularity for the potential of a Consumer Law, and there is still the risk that it will be rejected by Parliament.

It is also a hard choice, because change involves **humbling** yourself. Most of the cases described a process whereby they had to humble themselves and apologise for their past ways of behaving. As Makoko said, '*I had to humble myself for the organisation to go on well*'. Yet such a humility is very hard for a leader, because it is a form of surrender, a letting go, a loss of control of the situation – anathemas to traditional understandings of how leaders should behave. But as CDRA discussions on organisational change conclude, 'there is a loss of control in the turning points. Indeed until you lose control for a while it is not a turning point' (CDRA 1999:15).

Whether we choose this risky and humbling path depends on two other factors; our vision or hope, and our sense of security and acceptance.

The Power of Vision and Hope

Research has shown that any major change must be linked to the individual's dream for life. Frankl says that 'striving to find a meaning in one's life is the primary motivational force in man' (1946:121). For the founders, in particular Joyce and John, their energy for change came from a reconnection with their core purpose for starting the organisation in the first place. In a slightly different way, but also linked to their personal vision, Makoko, Jones Laviwa and Arnold Mhango chose to become more empowering of staff because they ultimately wanted to move on from the organisation and not be there for life. As one said, '*One day I will move from here and someone must take over, my current leadership is not sustainable*'.

The vision involves hope for change. One of the lessons from the experiences of capacity building in Malawi was that a key principle for consultancy interventions must be to leave the client with the hope that they can change. This is much more important than simply leaving expert recommendations. Ultimately people change because of a positive hope for the future, not a negative criticism of the past (James 2002). As CDRA also concluded, 'the defining moments in a change process were ones of finding hope' (1999:7).

The Power of Security and Acceptance

One of the major factors holding the leaders back from changing were their fears of what others would say. They feared being exposed, losing control and not being accepted. 'Fear is one of the greatest diseases of mankind and it is rampant in organisations and group decision-making processes' (Marcic 1997:110). For respondents to take the risk of choosing to be different, these fears had to be confronted. The only antidote to fear is love and an inner sense of security. Somewhat paradoxically if people feel accepted as they are, they have the security to be open to change. What is needed for people to

change is often reassurance – ‘repentance does not come about as a response to severity. Recrimination may increase guilt and shame’ (White 1991:112). It is love and acceptance rather than rejection that prompts change.

Our sense of inner security is based on our understanding of universal truths. Our view of self, so vital in this decision, touches a spiritual core (one we will explore in the next section).

4.4 Implementing the Change – *I am different*

Once this choice to change has been made there were further steps to take to actually implement the shift. Some of the key elements of this response were:

Letting Go of Past Behaviour or Repentance

Once the choice to change had been made, respondents had to consciously let go of past ways of behaving. As French philosopher Paul Valery says, ‘Every beginning ends something’ (quoted in Bridges 1995:17). Transformation is essentially a process of death and rebirth, with all the pain and uncertainty and joy that comes with it. In practical terms this ‘death’ needed visible or audible confession. Arnold Mhango found that ‘*I had to say it with my own mouth. I have called people to my office and said ‘I am sorry’. I told them ‘You know I used to have this attitude towards you, but it is gone’.*’ A confession of error not only helps bring healing to the wounds caused by leaders’ past behaviour, but it makes public the leader’s inner commitment to change, making it more difficult for them to go back to old ways.

Forgiveness

Another vital element in a change process is forgiveness. Dysfunctional leadership behaviour creates grudges on both sides, which can only be dealt with through forgiveness. As Arnold points out, ‘*If I do not forgive it still rankles. I feel bitter. It takes up a lot of my energy every time I meet the person*’. Desmond Tutu, the Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa points out that a lack of forgiveness leaves the unforgiver in prison, but such forgiveness is neither cheap, nor easy. Forgiveness is not a natural or a particularly just process. It is not sentimental, but an act of faith that the other person can change (1999). Doug Reeler says that to learn and change, ‘boils down to accepting the antidote of forgiveness’ (2001). In a similar vein, Charles Handy relates asking a personnel manager why his development programme was so successful, ‘In one word he said, ‘Forgiveness. We give them big jobs. They make mistakes. We correct them, but we forgive them. They learn and grow.’ (1991:124)

New Behaviour

Obviously the final element of this change is the new actions themselves. The cases describe in some detail the different behaviours of leaders. For example, Joyce Banda’s new way of involving board members in strategic visioning and decision-making processes was different. Nellie also relates that ‘*I used to do all the arrangements for visitors myself, but now when a visit comes I ask John or Robert to do those things*’. Makoko describes her shift as leading to different ways of writing proposals, doing it as a joint staff exercise rather than contracting it out to a consultant. For Francina and Joyce Mataya, their behaviour changed by gaining the confidence to confront staff when

necessary and publicly present their organisation in national and international meetings. John Kapito clearly exhibited new behaviour when he joined government discussions on policy rather than choosing to stand outside and criticise through the media.

4.5 Maintaining the Change – *I remain different*

Once the change has been made, the battle is not over. There are many internal temptations to return to the comfort of the old ways. One respondent likened herself to a tortoise, which often quickly withdraws its head when threatened in the new situation. The fears and pride may have been overcome for a time, but they never leave entirely. For those who had become more empowering of staff, there were also external pressures to revert to the previous behaviour. Some staff did not want the extra responsibility (and the potential for blame), while others took the power, but abused it in an irresponsible manner. Some boards, particularly church boards, clearly preferred the more autocratic, controlling style of before. Similarly too, John Kapito faced very vocal opposition to his more co-operative approach, being accused of being bought off by government.

To resist these temptations and pressures and sustain the changes made, respondents described a number of support systems that helped them:

- Organisational **feedback systems** (from regional managers/board and donors) helped Nellie and Nelson see whether the changes they had made were making a difference;
- **structural changes** in the organisation helped Jones Laviwa and Anderson Kamwendo to reinforce their personal changes;
- ongoing support from **coaches, mentors, and peers** helped a number of respondents maintain their change;
- a regular internal 'stock-take', often through prayer and meditation, was mentioned by many as being essential in ensuring they did not drift back to old ways.

4.6 Conclusions

The cases revealed that external changes of leadership behaviour came about as a result of deep internal choices by leaders. These choices were made as a result of internal conflict at the level of peoples' identities and values. When people realised that their leadership behaviour was not living up to their own very personal standards, their conscience made them feel uncomfortable enough to change. For some people this process was very quick, while for others it was more drawn out. For some it was very painful, while for others they responded more to the potential of pain.

Change came about as a reconnection with people's core values. It was not a fundamental change in those values, it was a return to them. Yet in returning to them, these values were strengthened and developed aligning themselves more strongly with universal principles of trust, love, integrity, and generosity (Adair 2002). It was these core values in people that drove their change.

Yet questions remain. Where did people's courage to change come from? Where did the power to shift emerge from? Was it from mere survival instinct? Was it from the cathartic energy of pain? Was it the dissonance of values from behaviour? Was it from a reconnection with an empowering vision – the energy from dreams and meaning? Was

there a spiritual force in all this? There is probably an element of truth in all of the above, but as Allan Kaplan points out we will never fully know – 'How did the switch occur? The question burns constantly in the heart of every social practitioner – and perhaps is never fully answered; perhaps the key lies in the possession of the burning question. It is a silent mystery of metamorphosis, like a butterfly emerging from a cocoon' (Kaplan 2002:135). One element of this mystery that deserves some further exploration is the spiritual dimension to change, a dimension that almost every respondent felt had been very important to their change.

CHAPTER 5

A SPIRITUAL DIMENSION TO CHANGE?

Concerning all acts of initiative and creation, there is one elementary truth – that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too

Goethe¹¹

No man was ever great without some portion of divine inspiration

Cicero¹²

Of the respondents in this research, 90% explained their change in leadership behaviour with reference to a spiritual force. As one put it, '*from my point of view the way I changed was purely spiritual.*' The spiritual dimension to change must be discussed in order to remain true to the findings of the research, even if many readers may not subscribe to this explanation. Furthermore many of the key informant interviews with change agents in Africa highlighted the importance of the spiritual issue. As Lovemore Mgibi says, 'the most pervasive and fundamental collective experience of African people is their religious experience. It is therefore important that conceptual frameworks of powerful strategic ideas must try and make reference to the African religious and cultural experience' (1995:2).

What is perhaps more surprising is that the literature review revealed an apparent increasing acknowledgement of a spiritual dimension to leadership and organisational change. John Adair, perhaps the most famous author on business leadership, concludes that 'the vital difference, the X factor, which enables you to transcend limits, is called inspiration ... there is guidance and help available in strategic leadership from God, or as if from a god if you would prefer it' (2002:266). His study of leaders reveals that 'a spiritual faith has always been realised by those leaders we call great or the greatest' (ibid:307). Steven Covey too states that 'I believe that there are parts to human nature that cannot be reached either by legislation or education, but require the power of God to deal with. I believe that as human beings we cannot perfect ourselves. To the degree to which we align ourselves with correct principles, divine endowments will be released within our nature in enabling us to fulfil the measure of our creation'. (1989:319). It seems that many management gurus increasingly agree with Marcic when she states that 'the spiritual dimension is absolutely essential, yet largely overlooked in management thinking' (1997:29). Even in the aid world, there is a 'resurgence of interest in the developmental role of faiths, even in such non-spiritual organisations as the World Bank' (Edwards 2002:46).

This research was undertaken in a predominantly Christian context (80% of Malawians call themselves Christian) and so their responses naturally focus on the Christian faith. If, for example, the research had been undertaken in an Islamic country then no doubt responses would have focused on the Moslem faith. Yet the contextual specificity of the

¹¹ Robbins 1992: 38

¹² Adair 2002: 318

findings does not undermine their validity. As Marcic notes 'Many of the ideas about how to live wisely, such as love your neighbour, be honest, live in justice, control your impulses, avoid corruption, let your intentions be pure, serve your fellow humans, are articulated by all of the world's religions and schools of philosophy with remarkable consistency' (1997:3).

Certainly the spiritual dimension to change is a very contentious and complex issue. People have very different understandings of the term spiritual. Some equate spiritual as meaning simply your inner-self, while others see spiritual as something outside of yourself (God) but also at the same time as something within. This paper will not enter such definitional discussions, but will simply seek represent the views of the respondents in how they felt the spiritual dimension had affected their change process. They outlined four major ways:

1. Knowledge through Biblical Example and Teaching.
2. Knowledge through Revelation.
3. Faith – A Sense of God's Purpose.
4. Power – God's courage and creative force.

5.1 Knowledge through Biblical Example and Teaching

Respondents in the interviews felt that the example and teaching of Jesus in the Bible had proved a major influence in assisting them to change. Many, like Andersen Kamwendo, took Jesus as their role model: *'My drive and encouragement come from the lessons and from the stories of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was humble, obedient and he had even to die because of our sins. He was God, but he did not equate himself with God. That is the biggest thing'*. Similarly John Kapito said, *'Jesus was not thanked by the people, but look at how he has changed people's lives. I am not trying to be Jesus, but let us follow what he did'*. One of the key lessons from Jesus life is that of forgiveness. Arnold Mhango related, *'I used to be a very harsh person. When I started growing spiritually instead of just looking at the rules, I saw people as human beings. When the robber on the cross was spitting at him Jesus did not answer back, but forgave. To be a leader you must be very forgiving and tolerant'*.

As well as Jesus' direct example, other biblical teaching proved influential too. In the area of resolving issues with people, Joyce Mataya said, *'I strongly believe the spiritual aspect has helped me. I strongly feel the bible talks of the need to talk to a friend and not go to bed angry'*. For Nellie her core value of believing in other people and the need for patience, *'comes from my Christianity. That has helped me make the shift. That stops me from going and screaming at them.'* For Nelson the biblical teaching about all being different members of the body of Christ *'helped me in moving from wanting to be ME always into understanding that there are also other people who can also play important roles. I am just a part of the body. Being a leader does not mean that I am more valued than other. That chapter simply tells you that you are just equal to any other, even though you have the job of boss'*. Arnold too, looked at the example of Moses' delegation of responsibility in the bible and said *'I had heard that story before but it had never really occurred to me that I would apply teachings from the bible to a professional situation'*.

5.2 Knowledge through Revelation

As well as knowledge through biblical teaching, respondents felt that God had communicated with them in revealing to them the areas they needed to change. This is akin to the catalytic 'challenging feedback', but on a spiritual level, working with and aligning peoples' conscience. As Joyce Mataya describes, *'My conscience forces me to resolve things in a different way. The Holy Spirit is there to guide me and even tells me to go and tell that person that. I would not naturally go, but my conscience keeps coming back'*. For Arnold, *'The Holy Spirit gives us light in our hearts. He brings in the open these things that are not supposed to be there. He says this is not right, that is not right.'* Similarly for Nelson, he believes, *'I have learnt a lot from the Holy Spirit by allowing him to speak to me, silently. I am dealt with in the presence of God. I ask the Holy Spirit to 'search me and find out what is within me that needs to be otherwise'.*

As well as revelations about self, Andersen mentioned that the Holy Spirit also brings revelation about situations. He described the times of reflection about his organisation as, *'like the Holy Spirit opening the curtain. God removes blanket from our eyes and makes us see things clearly. The prompting questions come from God'*.

5.3 Faith – A Sense of God's Purpose

It is also clear that a key spiritual influence on leaders and their change process was a belief that they were part of God's purpose. Anderson believes that *'God prepared me in one way or another to take over the post. God exposed me to leadership, because God's plan is not for today but for the future. Things planned by God do not happen by coincidence. We see things when we have crossed the bridge, but God has already prepared it for us'*. Similarly Jones Laviwa sees God's purpose, *'One has to ask oneself – why am I here? Is it through luck coincidence or is it the will of God? Definitely it is not an accident. It is the will of God because there are much better people out there'*.

This faith in God's purpose, is closely related to Nellie's ability to let go and trust God, rather than hold on to her perfectionism. She believes that *'God will look after the results I believe there is a limit to what a person can do, beyond that the divine supernatural nature works. We should use ourselves to the best we can and ask for divine intervention beyond that'*.

This mirrors some current thinking on leadership by John Adair, who states that 'the greatest leaders have been sustained by a belief that they were in some ways instruments of destiny, that they tapped hidden resources of power, that they truly lived as they tried to live in harmony with some greater, more universal purpose or intention in the world' (2002:306). He also quotes Ordway Toad, who wrote back in 1935, 'A good leader has faith. There is unfortunately no other word that might be less objectionable to some readers to convey what is meant. Fundamentally a deeper kind of faith seems almost invaluable, if not essential'(ibid:305). Adair also quotes John Ruskin, who said of truly great people, 'They have a curious sense of powerlessness, feeling that the greatness is not in them, but through them; so that they could not do or be anything else than God made them. And they see something Divine and God-made in every other man they meet and are endlessly, foolishly, incredibly merciful' (Adair 2002:105).

5.4 God's Inspiration and Power

Returning to the question of where does the courage come from to overcome people's fears, Alcoholics Anonymous' experience with millions of people in major change processes conclude that, 'Our basic antidote to fear is a spiritual awakening. As faith grows so does inner security' (AA:2002). According to Jones, *'For you to have the courage to relinquish that power, and change really you need divine intervention. It doesn't just happen. You have to have the courage and that courage doesn't just come from within yourself. That courage comes from God.'*

As well as giving people the power to overcome their inner fears, many believe that a spiritual force is the energy for change. In Greek, Latin and Hebrew, spirit originally meant breath or wind and inspire literally means to breathe in. According to Allan Kaplan, spirit is the creative energy, the breath of life (2002), reflecting Adair's observation that, 'In all traditions, there is a deeper tradition, that all inspiration flows from God, named or nameless, just as the sun is the ultimate source of energy in nature' (2002:318).

This belief is reinforced by a recent research project designed to explore what actually happens in the moment of major corporate transformation. They found 'a rational logic for pushing the organisation to the brink of transformation... Yet in all cases the transformations they helped to generate were sparked, not through rational efforts at all: the actual 'cause' of transformation, according to the data, was expressed by these practitioner/theorists in terms of 'grace', 'magic' and a 'miracle'. By definition these are phenomena that cannot be scientifically or logically explained, supernatural events going beyond theory and rational action, suggesting that the actual transformation is out of the rational control of the practitioner. The cause of transformation may indeed be spirit, yet the result may indeed be an increase in effectiveness and productivity within the system (Neal, Lichtenstein, Banner 1999:180). There may be a power that we do not fully comprehend when, for example, Andersen's wife, *'locks herself in the bathroom and prays all night'* for problems at Andersen's workplace. This spiritual power may be there, whether we are aware of it or not, whether we call on it or not. As Joyce Banda revealed, it was only much later she became *'aware that that God must have been there all the time, that I have reached this stage, because of God.'*

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Did Leaders Change and How?

The conclusion of this research is that individual **leaders changed considerably**, certainly in their own eyes. There were very real changes in their leadership behaviour. The research was not intended to measure the extent of the change or its organisational impact, but rather it focussed on questions of why and how the change took place. Having said that, anecdotal feedback confirms that significant changes did indeed take place. Leadership behaviour is not fixed for life, it can change in quite radical ways.

The most striking and obvious finding from the research (of all ten cases) was that 70% of respondents decided that the most significant shift they had made as a leader was to a more **empowering** style of leadership. Carr points out, 'Leadership often boils down to one basic question, namely, what degree of worker participation is appropriate?' (1998:67). The research shows that the majority of respondents felt that they had improved most by increasing the level of worker involvement. This important finding lends weight to the belief that an empowering leadership style is not simply a Western blueprint, but is very relevant in African cultures too. This finding is mirrored by Smillie and Hailey's study of successful South Asian NGO leaders who found that although 'certain aspects of leadership style are culturally determined, there is a growing cadre of development leaders with similar competencies and outlooks that transcend cultural boundaries' (2000:137). The appropriateness of an empowering style of leadership undoubtedly challenges some cultural norms in Malawi, but its relevance comes from deeper and universal principles of human nature.

Two of the other cases were of young, women leaders in Malawi. They both found that the major shift that they had to make when they were promoted to leadership, was to gain greater confidence in themselves, be more able to confront when appropriate, and accept that they were ultimately responsible for the success or otherwise of the organisation. Again it is clear that these shifts involved challenging and overcoming cultural expectations about both youth and gender.

6.2 How did this Affect Followers?

Yet at the same time as challenging cultural norms, these changes also fitted to a degree within the cultural norms of the organisations. Some of the organisations, like Oxfam and Chisomo, were already used to a more democratic style of leadership, and so there was a certain coherence between the leader's change and the culture of their organisation. Other organisations were less accustomed to the change in leadership style, but in such cases the change was not made too dramatically enabling followers to gradually adjust. Thus leadership change required followership change too. Followers' responses undoubtedly influenced the extent to which leaders were able to change. This reinforces the notion that leadership is more of a relationship between leaders and followers, rather than an individual person. Leadership is something that is earned from followers, not a right of position. Peter Senge's considerable experience in promoting

organisational learning and change concludes, 'There's nothing, nothing, nothing as important as the quality of relationships. Relationship building happens before we go anywhere' (Lichtenstein 1997:395).

6.3 What was the Impact on the Organisation?

The leaders interviewed believed that their shifts have had a significant impact on the organisation's performance. For many of the organisations, the main impact of the change in leadership behaviour has been to enable **follower behaviour** to change – they now take more responsibility for the organisation and perform better. In fact, analysing followers' behaviour may indeed be the best indicator of leadership change as the degree to which leaders can facilitate the growth of others is a very good measure of their own growth as leaders. Makako described how her staff changed from knocking off early, to staying until midnight to work together on a proposal. Nelson also derives satisfaction from seeing *'how the people are moving. Even the people that were there originally are not the same. I have seen their performance and dedication change'*. Jones sees that his staff now have the skills and are gaining the confidence to negotiate for funds in a way that never happened before. Joyce Banda also notes how her shift led to increased ownership of the organisation by board members, with one of the most difficult members becoming one of the most passionate and committed.

These leadership changes also **prevented a loss of key staff**. Some pointed out that their previous behaviour would have created a lot of tension with staff. According to Nelson, *'I would have been a deterrent to progress and growth in the organisation if I did not change. I would have made people leave the organisation'*. If some of the leaders had not changed, they themselves may have been sacked or resigned. As Nelson said, *'if I had not shifted I would have left. It would not have worked.'* For others like Joyce Banda, this shift enabled them to later graciously retire and move on, a very rare occurrence for founder leaders in Malawi.

Furthermore, the changes in leadership have also had an impact on the organisation's ability to **achieve its mission** and expand its impact. As a result of her sharing the vision for the organisation, Joyce Banda has seen NABW continue to grow, now having 30,000 members. Most importantly lives are being transformed at the grassroots. For John and Makoko their shifts have had a very real impact on funding. CAMA is now able to find donor support to an extent unobtainable with his previous style of leadership - enabling CAMA to expand. Similarly for Women's Voice, the more participatory proposal development process has been very successful, with funds secured from donors as demanding as the European Commission, again allowing for massive expansion of impact. For MANASO too, Francina's increased ability to confront, advise and encourage staff, as well as speak out in public, has meant that externally MANASO is increasingly known and the profile of HIV/AIDS in Malawi significantly raised.

6.4 What held Leaders Back from Changing?

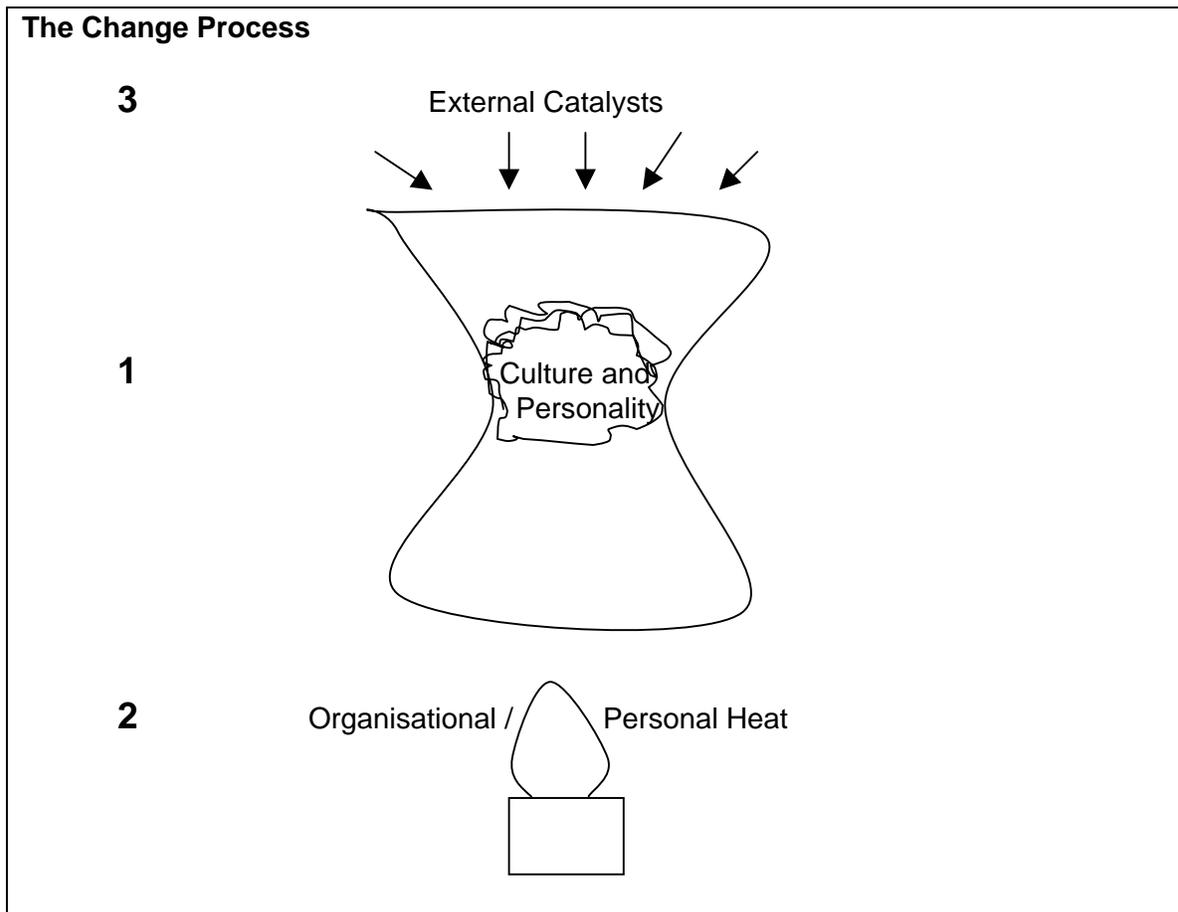
The two sets of issues that held leaders back from changing were societal expectations of leadership from the era and culture and personal fears and pride. In Malawi, leaders are expected to behave in an authoritarian manner with power highly centralised. This encouraged leaders to behave in an autocratic fashion. The young female leaders found that cultural expectations about the role of women in society had inhibited the

development of the self-confidence they needed to lead effectively. The assumed male superiority also undermined some men's ability to delegate. Gender expectations also played an important role in shaping some leaders' behaviour. Nellie grew up determined to do everything that men could do and to an even higher standard. Some respondents felt that being female '*made it easier to make the shift*' of opening up. Another said that she felt that '*we can provide more effective leadership as women. Even in a board-room you see a nephew, or a son, whereas men see themselves as chiefs*'. And yet the reality is also that many women in Malawi do not take advantage of this. Many women behave in an autocratic and stereotypical 'male' way, as demonstrated by Makoko's board.

There were also important personal blocks to change. In order to change leaders had to overcome their own fears and insecurities and not be threatened by other people, or unduly influenced by what other people thought of them. They had to be prepared to overcome their pride and humble themselves in order to change.

6.5 What Process of Change took place?

The process of change that leaders went through was highly complex. There were a multiplicity of factors, converging together at a particular time, that resulted in their shifts. There were different forces pushing and pulling in different directions within a complicated web of relationships. While the change processes that people went through were certainly not identical, they did share common elements:



- In each situation there was a problem of leadership, which the respondents attributed to cultural and personal constraints.
- In most cases, these constraints exerted ongoing negative pressure on the organisation's performance (which particularly affected pioneers) and caused increasing personal pain for the leader (particularly recently appointed leaders). This rising heat melted the situation creating more openness to change.
- A number of different, one-off external catalysts were introduced into this now fluid situation, such as negative feedback, positive encouragement, new knowledge, exposure to impressive role models and importantly the time and space to reflect.
- Leaders interpreted these external events and gave them meaning within themselves based on their core values and beliefs (including spiritual beliefs). When sufficiently convinced of their need for personal change, leaders found themselves in an uncomfortable 'valley of decision', but chose to respond positively by humbling themselves, letting go of past behaviours and changing themselves on the inside.
- These internal victories resulted in changed external leadership behaviour, which in turn had an impact on the organisation's change.

Pain was certainly a common element of almost all of the change processes, though some leaders changed before they had to, responding to potential rather than actual pain. Crisis is not absolutely essential for transformation. It is possible to step into new behaviour in more graceful ways, but for most of us the pain usually prepares the way. 'If there was an easier path we would endorse it', as Dotlich and Noel say (1998:95).

The outside catalysts that heralded the turning points included negative or challenging feedback, opening the eyes of the leaders to truths about themselves they had previously ignored. The initial reaction of most of the leaders was denial of the feedback, even becoming angry. It was only later when the leaders were reflecting on what had been said that they realised the truth of it. Interestingly none of this challenging feedback came from people in a position of power over them. Donors, especially, were not involved here. Instead, leaders were better able to hear constructive criticisms from peers or juniors, rather than people in authority. Other catalysts included positive encouragement, new knowledge, exposure to impressive role models and importantly the time and space to reflect. It made a big difference that these changes took place in a context of vision for the future and hope that change was possible. Leaders were also more easily able to address the fears within if they felt secure and accepted. The change process was essentially inside-out. It was inner changes in the hearts of the leaders that preceded behavioural change on the outside. It was essentially a self-driven change.

6.6 What was at the Heart of the Change?

An internal battle at the level of values was at the heart of these change processes. The realisation that there was a considerable difference between the people they wanted to be (their core values) and the people they were (their leadership behaviour) was what drove the change process. Some might argue that this is an example of leaders merely learning new 'values', imported from outside, but it appears that the values were at a

deeper level than this. It is not a question of traditional versus imported values, but a more profound tension between our better and our baser natures. Change was motivated by a desire to maintain their integrity to be the people they wanted to be. According to Lebow, 'The primary human motivator comes from values. Values do not have to be sold to people, because all of us already have a set of fundamental values deeply embedded' (1997:48). This research would concur that values were the most important lever for change. This was not based on an intellectual calculation, but an emotional reaction to waking up and finding out that they were not living up to their own standards. As Tony Robbins points out, 'Although we would like to believe it is our intellect that drives us, in most cases our emotions (the sensations we link to our thoughts) are what truly drives us' (ibid:61).

6.7 Was there a Spiritual Dimension?

The respondents in the research clearly felt that there was a spiritual dimension to their change. In fact some even couched their whole change in spiritual terms. They felt that their faith had had a profound effect on their values by educating their consciences. This education took place through both biblical examples and teachings, as well as through direct revelations from God. Their change process was also encouraged by a faith that their leadership role and change was a part of God's overall purpose for their lives. Finally respondents also felt that God provided them with a courage and a power to change themselves that was beyond their own human power.

6.8 What were the Key Success Factors in these Change Processes?

The Leaders themselves

The personality of the leader obviously had a major influence on whether they changed. A number of the respondents changed because they were the type of people who did not flee problems and were prepared to challenge themselves. They had the courage and determination to look within and make themselves change. They were the sorts of people who took responsibility for their own problems and worked out quickly how to respond, rather than simply blaming others. They were also honest with themselves, not denying or hiding their faults¹³. They also had sufficient inner security to look outside themselves and learn from the advice or example of others. Finally they were sincere about their attempts to change. It was not a cosmetic shift done to impress someone else, but a deeply felt need to change, almost whatever happened as a consequence. This need to change fitted with their own personal vision for the future.

The Timing and the Time

The research revealed that many of these critical turning points came early in the leader's tenure, indicating that leaders may be more open to change in their early years of leadership, before they have slipped into bad habits. The very best leaders retain this openness to change and humility throughout their lives, though the danger is for many that as we gain more experience we think we have arrived and no longer have much to learn.

¹³ Alcoholics Anonymous have found that the only people who fail to change are those 'constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves'.

The second aspect was that time and space played critical roles. We have seen how time was needed for people to move through denial of constructive criticism to acceptance. It was also clear that the leaders needed time to reflect on their organisations and also on their inner selves if they were to change. As one key informant, Dirk Marais put it, '*a busy leader will never change, because they do not have time to reflect*'. The key is creative reflective space within the busyness of leadership.

Followers' response

The followers' response to the change also proved important. Most staff in civil society organisations in Malawi are not accustomed to taking on significant responsibility. That is not the way it has been done before. Their economic vulnerability makes them highly risk averse. They take time to develop skills and even attitudes to accept changes such as an empowering leadership approach. It is a learning process for followers and the cases show that in some cases followers were not easily able to make an immediate shift. Other cases reveal that where followers have been pushing to rise to the challenge of taking greater ownership of (and hence responsibility for) their organisation, the leaders' change was reinforced.

Organisational Systems and Structures

Organisational systems, such two-way performance appraisal, gave Nellie in particular a major incentive to change: '*They tell what is right and wrong in their supervisor. That alone is a motivating factor for me to do well. I do not want them to bring up the same things as they did last year*'. For others, the changes in structures formalised the delegation of power and responsibilities and ensured that the personal changes of the leader became embedded in the organisation as a whole.

Visible Impact

Another key factor in the success of the change process was whether there was a visible impact of the change. Where leaders saw that their change had had a beneficial impact in terms of followers taking more responsibility for the organisation; or leaders themselves being less overworked and caught up with petty issues; or seeing the Consumer Law passed by Cabinet Committee; or donors responding positively, the change was reinforced.

CHAPTER 7

IMPLICATIONS FOR LEADERS

Being a CSO leader today is an unenviable task. The deteriorating poverty levels in many countries is making demands on CSOs even greater. At the same time, the aid world is becoming a harsher environment in which to operate. Not only are aid funds for CSOs declining, but also donors are constantly emphasising short-term results measures. The next few years is likely to see a very Darwinian 'survival of the fittest' scenario, where many CSOs may become extinct. Mediocrity in CSOs is not sustainable and many are faced with the option of radical transformation or slow death.

But we have seen that for organisations to change, leaders have to change. As leadership is first and foremost a relationship if a leader maintains their same behaviours they also maintain the existing problem relationship. No matter what they say their behaviours cause the change target to react in exactly the ways they have in the past. Yet if a leader does change then everyone's relationship with them will also necessarily change. To transform others effectively we must transform ourselves first (Quinn 2000). This approach to change is so simple to say and so difficult to apply – almost too painful to be true. If we do not change, we cannot expect anyone else to change. CSO leaders today are faced with a stark choice in today's turbulent and increasingly performance-oriented aid world, 'change or be changed'.

But how should leaders change and in what ways?

7.1 Know Yourself

It is clear from the research that effective leaders have considerable self-knowledge. This was pointed out many years ago when Socrates said 'the unexamined life is not worth living' (Kakabadse 1999:9) and is reflected by many other philosophers (Plato, Aristotle) and religions (especially Taoism, Buddhism). They all strongly proclaim the need for becoming in touch with the inner self, that inner self being the source of humility, which opens the individual to the benefits of reflection. Dotlich and Noel assert that 'Leaders cannot act decisively when they are not in touch with their feelings and beliefs. They lack the internal security necessary to state their opinion or make a decision that runs counter to conventional wisdom... Leaders with self-awareness are more likely to move quickly and confidently and in different directions, without needing to be consistently right and in control' (1999:138 & 187).

In a similar vein, Allan Kaplan quotes Parker Palmer's observation of the paradox that people rise to leadership though success in the outer world, but the more we focus on success in the outer world, the more we ignore the inner world. 'Thus we become dangerous, for our power grows even as our consciousness dims. We become increasingly blind and small and we visit our projections onto the world around us. The very factors that propel us into leadership precipitate our downfall and promote pain and discomfort in those we lead' (Kaplan 2002:195).

If we do not have a clear knowledge about ourselves, our habits can become our identity. If we are to withstand the misinterpretation and criticism of others, we have to have a self-image that is not dependent on the opinion of others. To have this requires us to be honest with ourselves and dare to look inwards. Chris Argyris identified the need for us to 'embrace our hypocrisy' (1988 quoted by Quinn 2000:73). He recognised that in any group hypocrisy is ubiquitous as there is a recurrent discrepancy in all of us between our espoused theory (how we claim to behave) and our theory in action (how we actually behave). We need to ask ourselves questions like: what do we fear? what aspects of our behaviour are we ashamed of? how much of our identity is caught up in our role? where do we really get our sense of security from? The first stage of change, therefore is to recognise where we are. As Carl Rogers said, 'We cannot change, we cannot move away from what we are, until we thoroughly accept what we are. Then change seems to come about almost unnoticed'. (1988 quoted by Quinn 2000:83).

Give yourself Time and Space to Reflect

'Thus the source of change and growth for an organisation or an individual is to develop increased awareness of who it is, now. If we take time to reflect together on who we are and who we could chose to become, we will be led into the territory where change originates' (Wheatley 1996 quoted by Quinn 2000:100). You cannot really know yourself unless you create the time to reflect and meditate on your life. This is notoriously difficult for busy leaders. 'The rush and pressure of modern life are a form, perhaps the most common form of its innate violence... it destroys one's inner capacity for peace. It destroys the fruitfulness of one's work because it kills the roots of inner wisdom which make work fruitful' (Kaplan 2002:187 quoting Douglas Steere). As a leader you have to invest in yourself, as fundamentally you are the only instrument you have to make a difference with.

This practice of reflective inaction is what Peter Simpson calls the essential 'negative capability' of leadership – the ability to resist the tendency to flee into action (2000). As an early issue of *Psychology Today* proclaimed on its front cover 'Don't just do something, stand there'. The Japanese even have a word 'ma' to describe a necessary pause that one must make in waiting for the right moment for action (Bridges 1995).

7.2 Become Yourself

But more than just knowing yourself, the research highlighted the value of becoming yourself. Not becoming what others want you to be, but becoming who you were created to be. The research identified four major factors that were essential to being a leader able to change. Interestingly, these factors which were key to personal change are also key factors for successful organisational leadership and also same factors that make a person a healthy, fully integrated human being.

7.2.1 Find the Meaning/Purpose for your Life

The leaders in the research changed because they had a personal vision for their lives. They realised that in order to achieve that vision, they had to change. To be an effective leader you need to find the meaning or purpose of your life – what life expects from you rather than what you expect from life. Becoming connected with the vision for your life is a very powerful process on an individual level as it touches a person's higher self and

inner motivation. It elicits commitment, passion, and what Gandhi called 'soul-force' – essential elements of effective leadership.

An organisation needs to be inspired by a vision to be effective. 'In humans the yearning to pursue a dream is imprinted on our unconscious' (Daft 1998:99). A core task of leadership is to inspire the staff with a vision, but as Kakabadse and Kakabadse point out, 'In order to define meanings for other people, leaders first need to define meanings for themselves and their own philosophy on which their values are based' (1999:206). For leaders to inspire others to a higher purpose, they have to be inspired themselves.

7.2.2 Learn and Change Continuously

The case studies in the research confirmed Bennis and Thomas's finding from their study of highly successful American business leaders, that 'to the extent that any single quality determines success, that quality is adaptive capacity' (2002:91) - the openness to learning and change from any experience, however painful. 'The change our leaders experienced – the thing that pushed them to the next plateau – is learning and they all seem to appreciate its unique power' (ibid:117).

Effective leaders are captivated by learning. They are constantly on the lookout for new ways to enhance their ability to learn. A study of top NGO leaders in the South Asian revealed that they 'had a fascination with knowledge and learning. ... What has been striking has been the ability of their founder leaders to change and adapt' (Hailey and James 2002:405). Rather than wait until they are forced to change by circumstance, effective leaders change ahead of time.

The most effective leaders in the research followed Jack Welch's golden rule for chief executives, 'Change before you have to' (quoted by Adair 2002:223). As with organisations, so with individuals, 'the sooner an organisation is willing to change – ahead of the time it has to change – the more options it has open to it... Always better to take change by the hand and lead it where you want it to go before it takes you by the throat and drags you off in any direction' (Adair 2002:219 & 221).

7.2.3 Take the Road of Humility

But to change and adapt requires humbling. The research showed that humility was a critical element of the change process in leaders. Promotion to leadership can create or feed dangerous arrogance, as we become increasingly blind to our faults. This closes us down to change by always externalising blame for a situation.

Humility stems from knowing we are necessary, but not sufficient. It also comes from recognising that we are part of the problem. As Peter Block said 'Our ability to facilitate the learning of others is absolutely dependent on our willingness to make our own actions a legitimate source of enquiry. Allowing the personal to become public is the act of responsibility that initiates cultural change and reforms organisations. Our need for privacy and our fear of the personal are the primary reasons why organisational change is more rhetoric than reality. Real change comes from our willingness to own our own vulnerability, confess our failures and acknowledge that many of our stories do not have happy endings' (1995). This reinforces Smillie and Hailey's conclusion to their study of successful South Asian NGO that 'humility is an essential component of collective leadership' (2000:147).

As leaders we need to be humble enough to recognise that we sometimes, perhaps often, 'do not know'. This is a difficult thing for many people, who feel that they are paid to know the answers. But the state of not knowing can be extremely practical and is in fact essential, because it creates space for new learning to take place. As French and Simpson entitled one article 'Our best work happens when we don't know what we are doing' (1999). Effective leaders are able to deal with the risk and vulnerability of not having the answers, so that they can learn new things. This is a critical aspect of leaders being open to their own change and not stuck with outdated or ineffective behaviours.

7.2.4 Retain your Integrity at all Costs

The desire to retain their integrity and reduce gap in values between who they were and who they wanted to be was the driving force of the individual changes in the research. Again, not only was this an essential element of the change process, but it is also an essential part of leadership. According to Bennis's recent research, 'Effective leaders were the same people on the job and off. Leading was not only what they did, it was who they were' (2002:xv). Alan Fowler suggests that adherence to moral principles and enduring consistent drive is much more important for leaders than a charismatic personality (2000).

At a time when leaders' integrity is under considerable challenge this cannot be over-emphasised. Once a leader compromises their integrity, often through financial or sexual impropriety, it is very difficult to regain. The loss of integrity would render positive changes in other areas worthless.

7.3 Believe in Others

The research highlighted that leadership is not an individual's character, but is a relationship between leaders and followers. Again this is reinforced by Bennis and Taylor's research which found out that 'In virtually every case our leaders are successes because of their ability to identify, sustain and inspire other talented people'.

7.3.1 Believe in Your Staff

The research has shown that effective leaders believe in their staff, and that this was a core aspect to respondent's positive change process. One of the difficult responsibilities of leadership is that 'the leader must go first in the game of trust'. As we have seen leadership is about the relationship between a leader and followers and an essential element of a great leader is to draw out the best in their staff. As John Buchan put it 'the task of leadership is not to put greatness into humanity, but to elicit it, for the greatness is already there' (Adair 2002:256). Leaders must be prepared to believe in people's potential in order to unlock that potential. Goethe said 'Treat a man as he is and he will remain as he is. Treat a man as he can and should be and he will become as he can and should be' (Quoted by Covey 1992:57). If the leader believes that their main role is to discipline staff as described in one of the cases, then the organisation will stagnate and die, whereas if the leader believes their main role is to inspire and release staff then the organisation may fly.

This does not mean that leaders should be blind to people's limitations and faults. Potential and behaviour are two different things. We have to understand people's

character and current competence in order to identify the right people and support them effectively so that they reach their potential.

7.3.2 Mentor and Train them

In order for your staff to reach their potential, it is not simply a question of giving them power. What some leaders do is that when they realise the potential benefits of empowering staff, they suddenly delegate. They are surprised when the staff do not immediately react well to their new authority. Taking responsibility is a gradual process that places time-consuming demands on the leader who is there to mentor and coach the staff member. Staff will only feel comfortable taking on extra responsibilities if they feel they have the competence to do it.

In Malawi there is a common, but debilitating belief that you cannot be a good leader unless you know more about everything than your staff. When people think of mentoring they think of a top-down process of telling your staff how to behave. Mentoring is not this, it is sitting down with them, listening to them, discussing the decisions they want to make, asking questions, but leaving them with the responsibility for taking their own decisions. If leaders understand the capacity of their staff and are anxious to help them reach their potential, they spend considerable time and effort training and developing their followers. As Richard Daft puts it, 'the person that influences me most is not he who does great deeds, but he who makes me feel I can do great deeds' (1998:185).

7.3.3 Love them and forgive them

The importance of forgiveness in a change process emerged from the cases. As leaders want staff to take greater responsibility they need to be ready to accept mistakes and forgive those mistakes. If they try and control the situation tightly in order to avoid error, delegation will not be authentic. At the heart of leadership of others is loving them and being able to forgive them when they go wrong. Charles Handy relates asking a personnel manager why his development programme was so successful, 'In one word he said, forgiveness. We give them big jobs. They make mistakes. We correct them, but we forgive them. They learn and grow' (1991:124).

John Adair says that 'No one can be a really good leader who does not love members of their team or organisation'. He quotes Leo Tolstoy who wrote, 'Men think there are circumstances when they may treat their fellow human beings without love, but no such circumstances exist. If you feel no love for men leave them alone. Occupy yourself with things, with your own self, but not with men' (Adair 2002:291).

We have seen that the capacities, traits and attitudes of a great leader are similar to the capacities of someone open to their own personal change. The capacity for continuous improvement on a personal level is in fact a precondition for great leadership, particularly in the turbulent times of rapid change in an increasingly globalised world.

CHAPTER 8

IMPLICATIONS FOR CAPACITY BUILDING, LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND DONOR SUPPORT

8.1 Implications for Organisational Capacity building Practice

8.1.1 *Personalise Change within Organisational Capacity building*

The research clearly reveals that transformative change does take place on an individual level. Leaders did change behaviour and this individual change had ramifications within the organisation. If individuals change then the organisation will change.

The emphasis on individual change in capacity building is the missing element of many, if not most, of our capacity building programmes. Many of the OD interventions I have led, such as strategic planning, team-building or board/staff conflict resolution have focused on the need for organisational change, but fallen short of systematically applying that to individual lives. As a result action plans have remained generalised and not been implemented as individuals have not taken personal responsibility. But if individuals do not change, then our capacity building efforts will be meaningless. The importance of personal change in organisational or societal change are emphasised by two remarkable leaders who have transformed their nations: 'The salvation of the world lies in the human heart' (Vaclav Havel), or as Nelson Mandela says, 'You can never change society, if you have not changed yourself' (1994).

This finding supports Edwards and Sen's view that substantial change in human behaviour cannot be generated simply by altering the rules and institutions that govern our lives (Edwards and Fowler 2002). It challenges Beer's assertion that 'The most effective way to change behaviour is therefore to put people into a new organisational context, which imposes new roles, responsibilities and relationships on them' (Lebow and Simon 1997:47). While the evidence from the cases shows that a change in leadership roles and organisational context did undoubtedly act as a catalyst in the change process and also as a reinforcer of change, in and of itself the shift in organisational context did not bring about change. The decision about how to respond was still a personal choice.

8.1.2 *Apply Principles of Individual Change to Organisational Capacity building*

As well as ensuring that we personalise organisational change, the principles and process of individual change that have emerged from this research are very relevant for organisational change too. The research showed, for example, that the core of personal change is a decision based on values. People realised that they were not the people that they thought they were and so decided to change. The importance of values in provoking individual change is mirrored by the recognition of the power of values in promoting organisational change. For example, Collins and Porras's longitudinal research on 18 visionary companies which have been leaders in their industries for over 50 years, show that each company's success was due to a focus on core values, not solely on the bottom-line (1997). Or as a recent copy of the British Medical Journal

emphasised with its cover page headline 'Great Leadership is Based on Values: Medicine needs it badly' (2002). One of the key informants highlighted, '*values are the most powerful issue around organisational change... from my experience the main factor in a change process is when a group realises that they are not as honourable as they thought*'. If values are so powerful in promoting change, then our capacity building efforts must go beyond even developing values statements. If an organisation can realise that they are not living up to their own values then their likelihood of change is immense. As Lebow and Simon point out the primary human motivator comes from values (1997). Both people and organisations change when their behaviour is not consistent with what they believe in.

If we apply the individual process of change to organisations, then capacity building processes should look more at the blocks to change, such as culture and character, and on seeing crises more positively as crucibles in which dysfunctional organisational behaviour is melted and new behaviour emerges. We should also look more broadly at catalysts for change. Most of our capacity building efforts focus on providing organisations with new information and knowledge. But what about the other four catalysts: critical feedback from peers or juniors; positive encouragement; exposure to inspiring role models; and simply the time and space to reflect? Perhaps we need to develop more creative approaches to capacity building catalysts.

Interestingly too, these same principles of human change apply not only to organisational change, but also to the development of communities, societies and even nations. The principles and processes of individual change that have been outlined by this research have very important and strong application to development as a whole.

8.1.4. Appreciate and Respect the Complexity of Capacity building

When we see how complicated the change process was for even just one individual, we realise how much more complex that process is for an organisation. We see that the crises and the catalysts interacted at a particular moment in a serendipitous way. The event that proved to be the final straw was often quite minor and unexpected. It was the interaction of a number of events that catalysed change. We should therefore take a broad view and support a number of different capacity building interventions, rather than simply assume that one event or project will make the difference.

In addition we see that none of these individual change processes could have been predicted with the benefit of a log frame. We see that so much of change is to do with time and timing and is out of our control. We must therefore approach our capacity building programmes with much less arrogance. We cannot control or really predict change processes that occur inside other people and other organisations. The aid system forces us to do this to a degree, but in future we should do it with greater humility and respect for human change processes.

8.2 Implications for Leadership Development

As well as these general implications for capacity building practice, the research highlights implications for leadership development in particular. Leadership development programmes should:

8.2.1 *Be Contextually and Culturally Aware and Relevant*

The late President Nyerere concluded some years ago that 'the training of African managers appears to have been designed to divorce them from the societies it is supposed to equip them to serve' (quoted by Donnelly 1998:37), and unfortunately there is still some truth in that statement. The cases show how leadership change takes place within a powerful cultural context. That cultural context was very influential in creating resistance to change amongst leaders, but was also a factor in promoting change. A leadership development programme therefore needs to be aware of these influences and be **embedded within the culture**. This will mean that change processes are more likely to happen incrementally, in order for leaders to retain a sense of socio-cultural identity. The cases clearly reveal too the importance of looking at the special issues relating to gender and leadership.

8.2.2 *Include the Concept of Empowering Leadership*

The cases show that the relevance of an 'empowering' style of leadership is not confined to Europe or America. There are certainly some cultural constraints to its implementation in Africa, where many societies are more comfortable with high power-distance relationships. But at a deeper level, an 'empowerment' touches on core values about the value of people. These values are in fact **universal human principles** that transcend geography and culture and are already expressed in the African notion of 'Ubuntu'.

8.2.3 *Focus on the Person's Self Development*

The research revealed that leaders had to undergo a significant internal change process before their leadership behaviour fundamentally shifted. They changed from the inside-out. Leadership development programmes should therefore include elements of self-development, though self-knowledge. This may involve exploring people's inner values, their vision and meaning for their life, their restraining fears and pride.

8.2.4 *Be Holistic and Touch Both Intellect and Emotion*

There was a definite impact of knowledge-based leadership development programmes, such as the Wye Certificate in NGO Management, as well as the CABUNGO Leadership Development training. Increased leadership knowledge and skills did serve to reduce some of the insecurities that were causing the dysfunctional behaviour. But where these knowledge-based programmes had impact was where the learning also touched a deeper **emotional level** in participants. For change to occur, people 'have to feel badly about the current course that resulted in negative or non-productive behaviour and feel exhilarated when new actions provide a fresh approach' (Dotlich 1998:79).

Leadership development needs to be holistic and touch both the intellect and the emotions of participants. The cases would also point to the value of including the spiritual aspect too. Leadership development programmes cannot hope to change the way a leader thinks and acts by simply focussing on a single aspect of that person.

8.2.5 *Use a Variety of Methods*

The stories from the research showed that where leadership development inputs catalysed change, they were only one part of an ongoing internal change process. This

cautions us against expecting too much from single inputs. Changes occurred when a multiplicity of factors inter-reacted in a somewhat serendipitous way. Leadership change cannot be manufactured from outside following a set recipe.

8.2.6 Provide Opportunities for Feedback

The cases demonstrate the importance of feedback in assisting leaders to change. Opportunities for **peer feedback** (or facilitator feedback) are therefore important elements of an effective leadership training programmes.

Formal feedback methods, such as leadership **performance appraisal** are also very useful in catalysing change, particularly if they are 360 degree processes that involve feedback from juniors. While it may be a challenge in many cultures to get quality feedback up the hierarchy, the Oxfam example in Malawi shows that it can be done.

8.2.7 Provide Opportunities for Reflection

The research also reveals the necessity of having time to reflect and consider in order to change. Leadership development programmes should also provide participants with space for reflection, by not packing the programme too tightly and ensuring that such training takes place away from work or entertainment distractions.

One case also highlighted the value of **sabbaticals** for leaders in creating the structured time and space for them to reflect away from their work. As Bennis and Taylor emphasise 'Today's demands make sabbatical more important. We have to furlough talent, instead of losing it' (2002:174).

Coaches and mentors are an important means for ensuring that structured reflection on action takes place. Good coaching can help leaders explore areas of themselves they have kept hidden and can help them through the stages of anger and denial when confronted by negative feedback.

8.2.8 Link Individual to Organisational Change and Follower Change

'As critical as new behaviours are for recreating leadership, if they are not linked to key business issues, they often do not impact business' according to Dotlich (1998:79). Individual change and organisational change are inextricably linked. Leadership development programmes should strive to ensure that leaders are not treated merely as individuals on their own, but that their change is in the context of their organisation.

As a result of this, leadership development should realise that follower development is a key part of leadership change. Leaders do not change in a vacuum, but in relationship to others. Action plans should include thinking through followers' reactions and how to build the capacity of these followers to adjust positively to the intended change.

8.2.9 Focus on Leaders Open to Change

The selection of participants for leadership development programmes must prioritise those who are clearly open to their own learning and change. Leadership development programmes may even benefit from focusing their efforts on people recently appointed to leadership posts.

8.3 Implications for Donors

8.3.1 *The Limitations of Power*

An important finding of the research was that there was **no evidence of donors playing a significant direct role in the change process**. In fact if donors did try and direct a leader to change it often proved counter-productive. As one respondent noted about her change, *'No, it is not possible for any foreign entity to influence that. It can't happen. In fact if that foreign element says to you, you are doing it wrong, this is how you should do it, the instinct is to go the opposite direction'*.

This reflects research that has taken place in other fields. Carr's study of the donor world revealed that 'As a parent attempts to control the behaviour of his/her own child so too the aid agencies have attempted to control the behaviour of the people they sought to help. Although the use of expert power has the ability to produce change in people's personal beliefs and feelings, the use of reward and coercive power tends to produce compliance rather than real change and people will only comply when there is surveillance. Change that is brought about in this manner is therefore unlikely to be sustainable' (1998:59).

Because donors do control resources, they cannot avoid having reward and coercive power. But having such power legitimately raises people's fears that the resources will one day be taken away. It also leads to a (sub-)conscious resentment of the donor by the leader. Civil society leaders are social entrepreneurs with a vision, who do not like being dependent on the whims of a donor. They do not like being in the position of 'having to beg for money'. The financial insecurity of partners means that it is impossible for donors to give the unconditional acceptance and assurances of support that is necessary to silence people's fears and insecurities long enough to listen and hear. The research showed that leaders were much better able to hear challenging feedback from juniors or peers, who had no power over them.

Donors therefore are in too powerful a position to be able to give feedback on leadership behaviour that will be internalised by the leader, however well meant it is. Leaders have experienced donors that try and solve their organisation's problems before they have even fully accepted responsibility themselves. Carr notes that 'Interventions by relief agencies may tend to shift the burden of responsibility to themselves (the intervenor) rather than the intended target of institutional development' (1998:12). Or as Charles Handy puts it 'stealing other people's problems, means stealing their choices, and unless they are totally incapable, that's denying them some of the responsibility that is their due. It is only by managing their own choices that people learn to grow and be free' (Handy 1991:82). The power that donors have over their partners through control of resources necessarily undermines CSO leaders' freedom to choose and at best will only lead to cosmetic compliance rather than actual change.

8.3.2 *Positive Roles for Donors in Promoting Leadership Development and Change*

So what role can donors play in promoting leadership development and change? The cases reveal that this same power that constricts their ability to catalyse personal change, did assist donors increase the organisational heat, which can melt the blocks to

change. The research showed that by **withholding funds**, donors even put the future of the NGO in doubt. This indirectly caused the leaders to change, particularly for founders who are very sensitive to the success of their organisation, which had been their personal dream. Founder leaders will change themselves significantly in order to realise their dream, as the John Kapito and Joyce Banda cases show.

Donors also often play a more interventionist role in promoting leadership change. Instead of bringing about changes within an individual, they sometimes **insist to the board that the NGO recruits a new leader**. Such insistence may galvanise the board into action so that it starts to play their essential governance role and as such may usefully empower the board. At other times it leaves the board feeling inadequate and disempowered (Fowler:2002).

In dialogue with partners, donors have the greatest opportunity to influence through **asking questions**, rather than issuing ultimatums to leaders. According to Robbins, 'If you want to help someone, you will not do it by pointing out their inconsistencies, but by asking them questions that cause them to realise for themselves their inconsistencies. This is a much more powerful lever than attacking someone. If you try and create only external pressure, they will push against it, but internal pressure is next to impossible to resist.' (1991:127)

Donors also had a role in providing **positive feedback** to the leader after the change in showing to the leader that their change was making a positive difference. Many donors would not have been aware that this was how their positive feedback was being interpreted, but it was powerful all the same.

Donors also have an important role in **making funds available to directly support the sorts of leadership development interventions** outlined in the previous section. The interventions mentioned are resource intensive and need generous support from donors if they are to occur. Furthermore, many NGO leaders in Malawi claim their reluctance to delegate arises from having very under-trained staff. More generous support for the hiring and development of second and third-line leadership will assist the development of followers and enable leaders to take on more empowering styles of management.

Finally, donors have an important role in leadership development by being a **role model**. While many donors preach empowerment for grassroots development, their practical relationship with their NGO partner is anything but empowering of that partner. To paraphrase Socrates, donors can have an influence on partners' leadership by 'being the organisation they pretend to be'. In this research, leaders changed when they became the people they pretended to be – this is the ultimate lesson for us all.

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LEADERS CHANGING INSIDE-OUT

What Causes Leaders to Change Behaviour?

Cases from Malawian Civil Society

Rick James

At the heart of this Malawian study lies the question of what makes leaders change? The research reveals that change processes were essentially 'inside-out', exposing a pattern where internal changes in the hearts of the leaders often preceded behavioural change on the outside. The principles and process of individual change that emerged have profound relevance, not simply at an individual level, but can also be directly applied to development and change of organisations, communities, societies and even nations. Useful implications are drawn that are relevant to Capacity Building, Leadership Development, Donors and Leaders, raising interesting questions for leaders about whether the belief that an empowering leadership style is not simply a Western blueprint, but is relevant to African cultures.

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