

The Leadership Fractal *Simple Rules to shape culture*



This article will provide you with a brief introduction to the Leadership Fractal and how this concept can provide an efficient and effective way to shape culture in the flow of daily work.

“Fractal” is a term from mathematics and complexity science which refers to a structure that appears very complex and intricate but actually emerges from a few simple governing patterns or rules. For example, the

lush fern plant pictured above emerges from the endless repetition of one four-part geometric pattern.(1, 2)

If culture is essentially the way people work together then in too many workplaces it is hard to see that any kind of fractal or consistent, repeated pattern of behavior is operating. Especially within the complexity and stress of work, human behavior tends to be quite diverse, nonlinear, and messy leading to difficulties such as poor communication, conflict, resistance, and disruptive politics.

In the attempt to achieve more consistency, an all too frequent tendency is to develop a complicated set of rules, procedures, programs, or trainings. But, psychological studies, in situations like workplaces which have many moving parts and unclear links between cause and effect, have indicated that complicated approaches get worse results than using a few simple rules—such as the vision, a set of priorities, and a set of norms for desired behaviors.(3)

When used repeatedly, such rules act like a fractal to guide the emergence of a common pattern of behavior. The most powerful driver for assuring these patterns repeat throughout a team or organization is the way leaders behave. This is the Leadership Fractal—common ways of engaging others based on a few simple rules applied over and over, every day in the flow of work.

Based on evidence and experience, there are simple rules which can generate a high-performing, empowered work culture. More information about these can be accessed with the links provided below.

If we as leaders want to achieve success in this way, three factors are very important: (1) strong commitment to the results and the type of workplace we wish to create, (2) rigorously sustained awareness about our own behavior; and (3) daily practice of simple rules.

The bottom line is that if we don't like the culture we are seeing, we first have to find a new, simple pattern of behavior and then personally commit it for ourselves.

References

1. Wheatley, Margaret J. **Leadership and the New Science: Learning about Organization from an Orderly Universe** Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc. 1994
2. Rodin, Scott R. **The Steward Leader** InterVarsity Press 2010
3. Sull, Donald and Eisenhardt, Kathleen M. **Simple Rules: How to Thrive in a Complex World** Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 2015

Additional Information and Resources

1. For more information on Simple Rules (also called "In-the-Moment Leadership Strategies), see neilbakerconsulting.com.
2. Subscribers can reference the **Resource Guide**. If you wish to subscribe for free monthly articles and link to this guide, click on [Subscribe](#).. You may unsubscribe at any time.

About Neil Baker M.D.

Neil Baker M.D. helps strengthen and enhance the impact of individual leaders, leadership teams, and consultants (e.g. quality consultants and improvement advisors) in the midst of work in order to create work environments which foster learning, motivation, well-being, and performance.

He is adept at assisting leaders in using any work situation, even the most complex and difficult, as an opportunity to achieve immediate impact on quality of work relationships and on progress toward results. This approach can be applied to any current work but is especially effective in the midst of quality or innovation initiatives.

He has developed these approaches through more than 30 years as an organizational leader, speaker, consultant, and coach. His clients have included the Peterson Center on Healthcare, Health Quality Partners, and the Harvard Medical School Center for Primary Care. He has served as faculty and improvement advisor over 15 years for multiple initiatives for the Institute for Healthcare Improvement in Boston, Massachusetts and was previously Medical Director of Clinical Improvement at Group Health Cooperative (now part of the Kaiser system) in Seattle, Washington.

You can learn more and see client testimonials on his website at neilbakerconsulting.com.