



# Acceleration of Change Through the Middle

BCSSA Leadership Series: Part III

The Spirit of Leadership in Action

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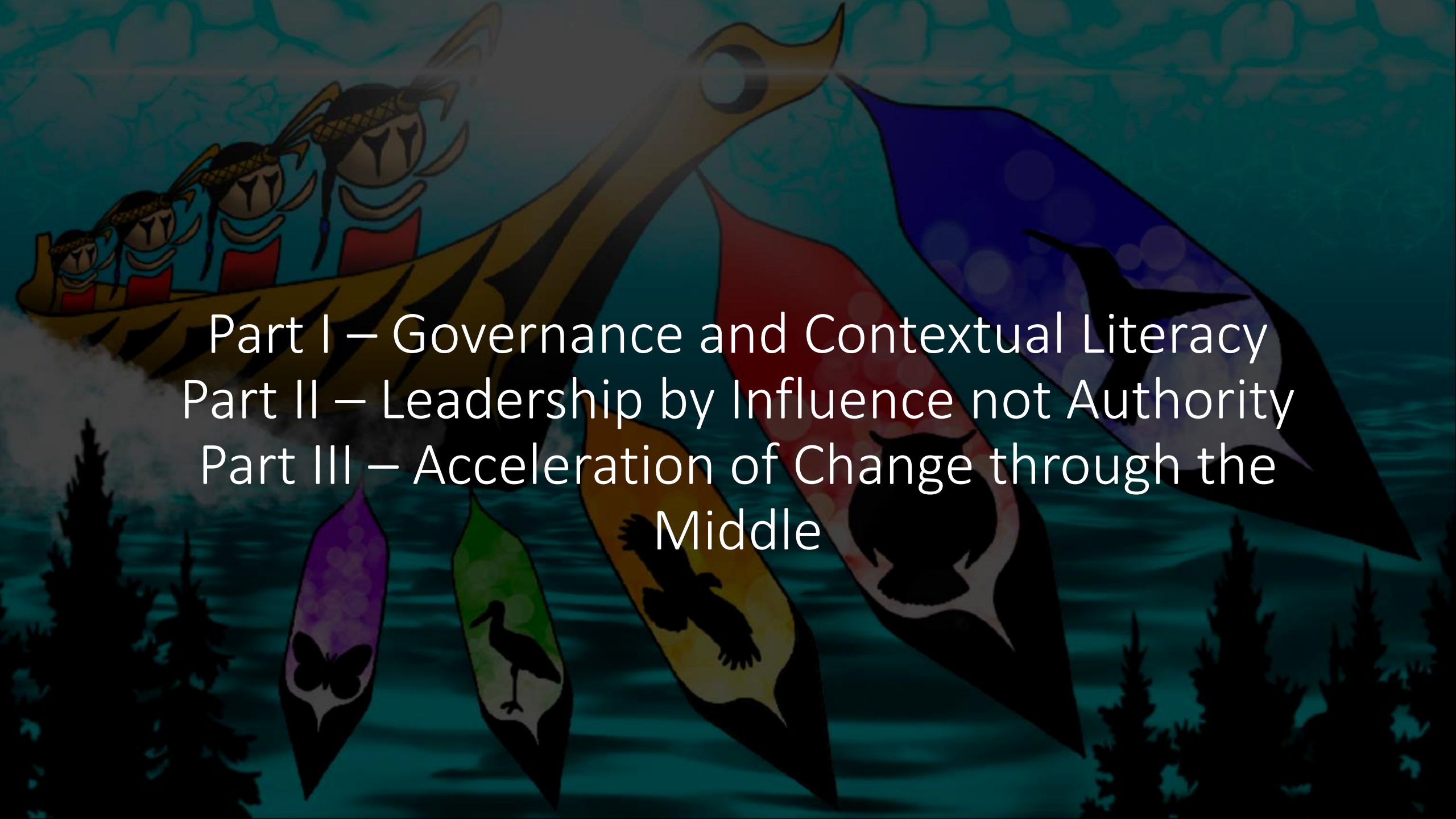
We want to acknowledge that today we gather on the historical territories and on the unceded traditional lands of the Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh and Squamish Coast Salish Peoples.





# The Spirit of Leadership in Action: A BCSSA Leadership Series

What exactly have you signed up for?



Part I – Governance and Contextual Literacy  
Part II – Leadership by Influence not Authority  
Part III – Acceleration of Change through the  
Middle





## Part I – Governance and Contextual Literacy – Summer Academy

How do leaders come to understand and work with the numerous governance structures that surround you and influence your work? How do you take calculated risks designed to transform our systems that demand both compliance and innovation?



## Part II – Leadership by Influence not Authority

How do leaders build, nurture and sustain relationships as foundational to advancing and rethinking our work and systems? From the importance of a co-constructed vision to building momentum and aligning values and beliefs that challenge and change our structures and practices.





## Part III – Acceleration of Change through the Middle

Acceleration of change happens through relationships built on trust and transparency. How do leaders get “into the mess” of the work as part of the change, how do you explore together to support innovation and transformation? How do you both “have the backs” of those doing the heroic day to day work, yet retain high expectations on behalf of all children?

# The series - in a nutshell

- Come one, come all – this isn't for “new to role” this is for all leaders at all levels
- Come with a team, come alone
- This is a series, but is not intended to be in sequence – it's a la carte, choose what you need
- Our format will be the same each time, share, present concepts, and have you engage with each other through structured interviews
- The overall intention – to continue to move The Spirit of Leadership forward – from theory to action while expanding your network





# Let's Look Back at the Year

- Reflect back – the intentions, the format
- Part I – key lessons and the matrix
- Part II – key lessons and the matrix
- Part III – welcome to today!

# Part I – Contextual Literacy and Populism 101

- We talked, at the time (Summer 2023) at the emergence of groups/individuals who are creating disruption
- How do we place things “in context” and how do you understand and influence things that impact your work?



Guidelines for  
Public  
Engagement  
at Board Meetings



## 2. Narratives of polarization

- what challenges are they presenting?

- creating lack of trust for professionals in system
- leaders feeling vulnerable
- difficulty finding common ground (compromise?)
- difficult to build PVP capacity to facilitate conversations
- difficulty adjusting own biases
- spirit of fight ignited - regardless of topic
- takes up space + time + resources - distracting

- impacts innovation
- when in defensive mode
- + takes away from learning agenda
- forced to create teams
- challenge to create space for dialogue (appropriate spaces like on social media)
- how do you create safe space for the dialogue
- leaders have self-doubt
- polarization w/in staff (schools, leadership teams etc.)
- ~~fe~~ lack of research (local) to address issue
- differences in regions





## Part II – Leadership by Influence not Authority

- We introduced the term “Connected Autonomy”
- The response







A photograph of two tree frogs, one with green and orange skin and the other with pinkish-orange and white skin, sitting on a dark, textured log. The log is positioned horizontally across the middle of the frame. Below the log, the frogs and the log itself are reflected in a body of water. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green. The text "The Importance of Narrative" is written in a white, serif font, centered over the frogs and the log.

# The Importance of Narrative



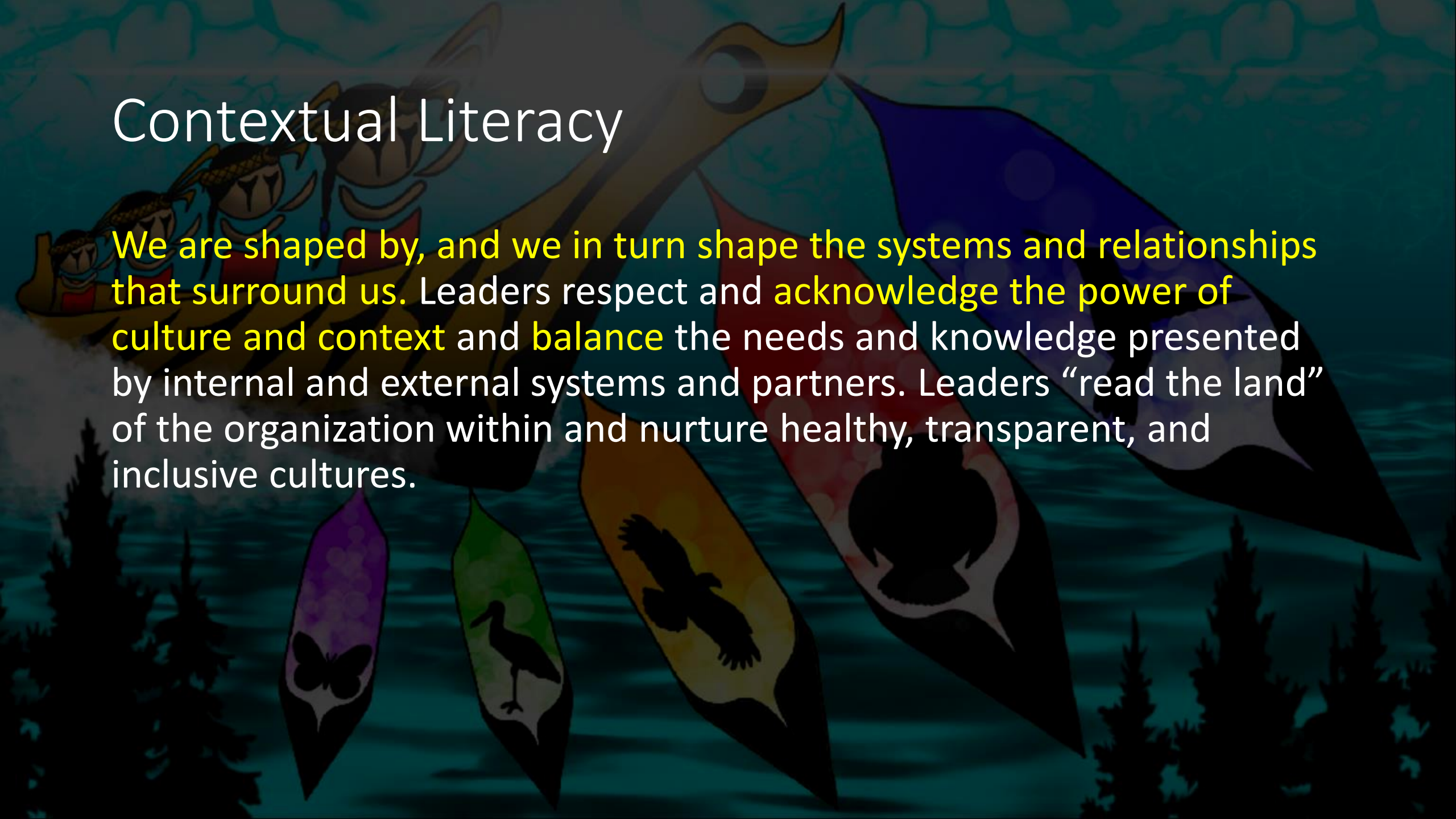
A photograph of two tree frogs sitting on a dark, textured log. The frog on the left is green with a red-orange throat and belly, while the frog on the right is a lighter, pinkish-white color with a red-orange throat and belly. Both frogs have large, dark eyes and are looking towards the camera. The log is positioned horizontally across the middle of the frame. Below the log, the scene is reflected in a body of water, creating a clear mirror image of the frogs and the log. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting a forest or natural habitat. Overlaid on the image is the text "Changing a culture is changing the narrative" in a white, sans-serif font, centered horizontally and partially covering the frogs and the log.

Changing a culture is changing the  
narrative



# Contextual Literacy

We are shaped by, and we in turn shape the systems and relationships that surround us. Leaders respect and acknowledge the power of culture and context and balance the needs and knowledge presented by internal and external systems and partners. Leaders “read the land” of the organization within and nurture healthy, transparent, and inclusive cultures.





# Growing the Capacity of Self and Others

A system is only as strong as the people within. Across the organization, people need to be supported and nurtured not only as individuals but as leaders who influence, affirm and nurture those around them.

Processes must exist to strengthen and sustain schools and their supporting networks and structures as learning organizations. In these organizations, the collaborative and action-oriented processes of inquiry are part of an intentional professional learning plan that builds on the existing strengths of all and, in addition, provides ongoing job embedded professional learning to nurture and sustain their own growth and leadership journey whether in the classroom, or at the system level.



# Icebreaker And Context: The Voices of BC





What resonates for you in this  
narrative?

Your colleagues, our work. The  
question:

“What gets in the way of us  
accomplishing all we hope for  
education in BC?”





What resonates for you in this  
narrative?

10 minutes at your table – Do you  
agree/disagree/what would you  
add?

Back to our last gathering – a focus on  
relationships



## #4 How do you work to strengthen and support relationships with individuals and groups?

• energize and inspire others

• building relationships starts with honoring each individual \*

• active listening, listening to understand, <sup>(being present)</sup> building trust

• being intentional - creating space for voice

• compassionate systems leadership  
- spirit, body and mind

• non judgmental & no hierarchy of roles (flatter)

• modeling listening, humility, integrity

• "valuing" people - who they are, what they bring

• collectively creating norms, reviewing often

• when things get tough, "roll up sleeves" do work with them

• finding common ground

• being visible, acknowledge, celebrate success

• clarity with expectations

# Part III – Acceleration of Change Through the Middle

- Acceleration of change happens through **relationships built on trust and transparency**. How do leaders get “into the mess” of the work as part of the change, how do you explore together to support innovation and transformation? How do you both “have the backs” of those doing the heroic day to day work, yet retain high expectations on behalf of all children?
- How do you “get into the mess,” “explore together,” “have the backs,” and “have high expectations.”



And...



How do you do that in a way,  
that you aren't "the one" –  
you are "one of them"  
but...with a different level of  
influence and responsibility.





What responsibility has been passed to you?



# Part III – Accelerating through the Middle

- Let's start with what is the “middle”


# The District isn't the top – It's the middle

- A Principal is about as close to the “Top” as you will find
- You have “your” staff, your students, and you have daily interactions which deepen and extend your influence
- You have enormous ability to shift and move an organization



# Welcome to the District

- You are negotiating influence with adults on a day-to-day basis
- If you're district staff, you have principals, other district leaders, unions, colleagues all of whom require navigation and attention. You may have "positional responsibility," but your authority is based on trust and relationships.
- If you're a superintendent, you have a Board, you have trustees (and a Board is not trustees), you have the ministry, you have your own district staff, you have principals etc. You have substantial authority, but how you exercise that authority will either empower, or disempower you



The Higher You Go – the More You're in  
the Middle – Not in the middle of a  
hierarchy – but in the middle of systems  
of people and practices

What is required to be an intentional and successful (= influential) district leader?








Compassionate Leadership

A black and white close-up photograph of a person's face, showing their eyes and nose, with a hand resting near their face.

# Compassion vs Empathy



# Compassion is essential – but insufficient

- You find ways to broach the difficult conversations
- You “care enough to confront”
- Compassion is care and empathy for the common good
- Compassion builds connections, improves collaboration and raises trust
- Compassionate leaders are seen as more competent
- The Wise Compassionate Matrix\*

\* Hougaard, Carter, Hobson



A person is shown from the waist up, sitting in a meditative lotus position. They are wearing a white tank top and light-colored pants. Their hands are held in front of them, with the fingers of both hands interlaced in a specific mudra. The background is softly blurred, showing warm, golden light and some out-of-focus lights in the upper left corner. A semi-transparent dark brown rectangle is overlaid on the bottom half of the image, containing the text "Compassion in Balance = Legitimacy in Leadership" in a white, sans-serif font.

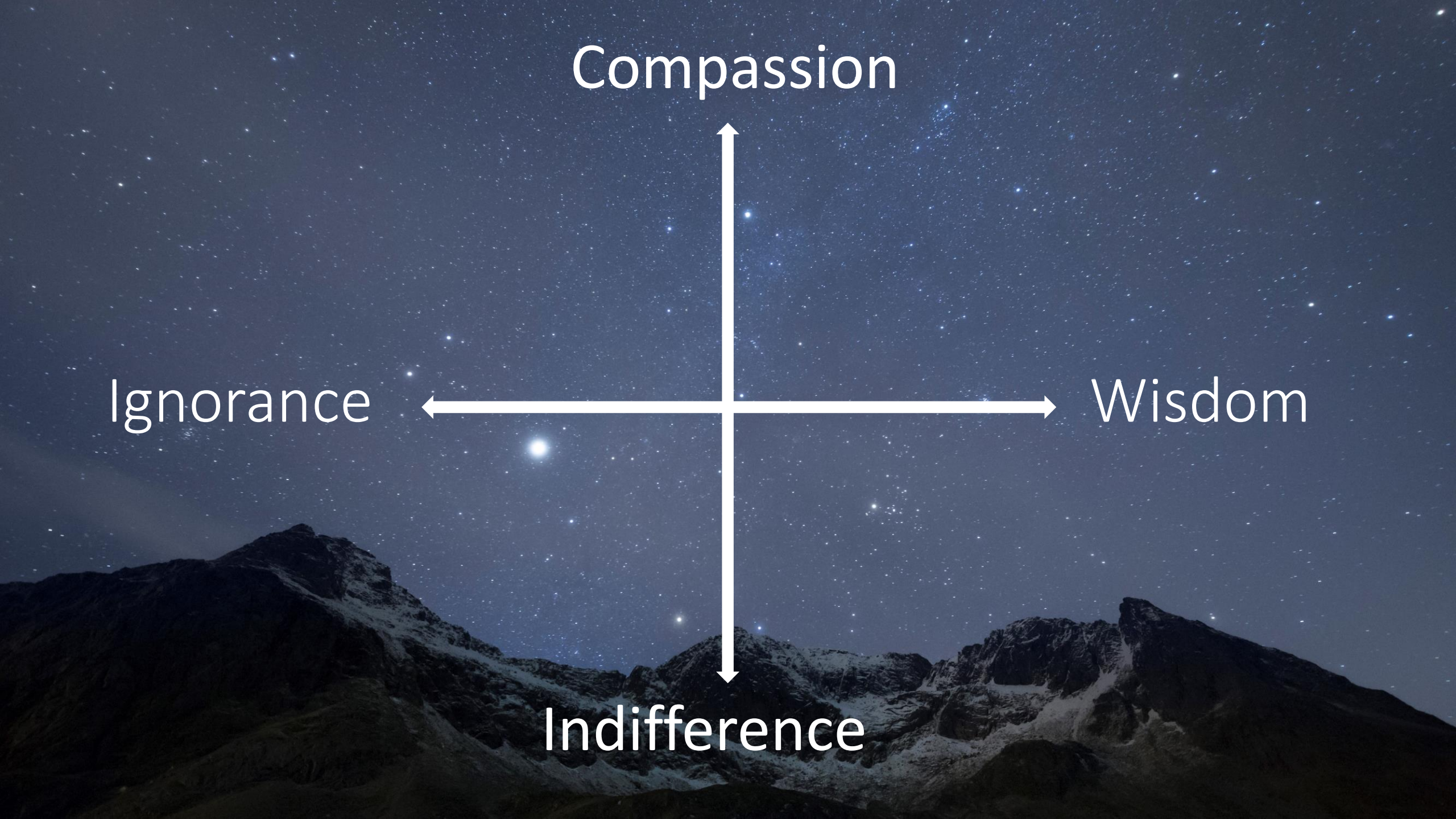
Compassion in Balance = Legitimacy in Leadership

Compassion

Ignorance

Wisdom

Indifference





# Compassion



The cost of harming a relationship is more important than dealing with difficult issues. Empathy is a barrier to action.

Action centred on the best for all, but with trust, effective communications and care at the heart. Difficult decisions are made, but rationales and processes are understood and respected.

## Ignorance

Leaders who are disconnected from the work and from others. Perhaps cynical and/or exhausted.

## Wisdom

Power and status are a main tool. Unaware of the collateral damage on culture of an organization. Actions have deep impact on morale and relationships of trust.

# Indifference



# Compassion



Caring Avoidance  
Empathy is a barrier to action

Wise Compassion  
Doing tough things in a caring way

## Ignorance

## Wisdom

Ineffective Indifference  
Lacking interest in and concern for others.

Uncaring execution  
Results come before people's well being

# Indifference





Compassionate leadership includes holding  
sometimes contradictory tensions

Paradox – Contradictory but mutually interdependent

Simpson, Berti, Rugo, Clegg, Cunha (2022)



# Paradoxes

Idealism: expressed through consistently espoused humanistic values of empathy, kindness and compassion, informing a clear guiding vision of the division and authentic leadership practices.

Pragmatism: stemming from decisiveness and strength, negotiation skills, as well as learning and improvisation.





# Paradoxes

Idealism: can you  
dream, envision and  
generate hope?

Pragmatism: can  
you get results?



# Paradoxes

Inclusivism: involving people in collectively working to address challenges through displays of empathy and practices of collaborating, communicating, role modelling and partnering.

Rationality: science, systems, policy and accountability mechanisms that support appropriate and thorough responses based on evidence.



# Paradoxes

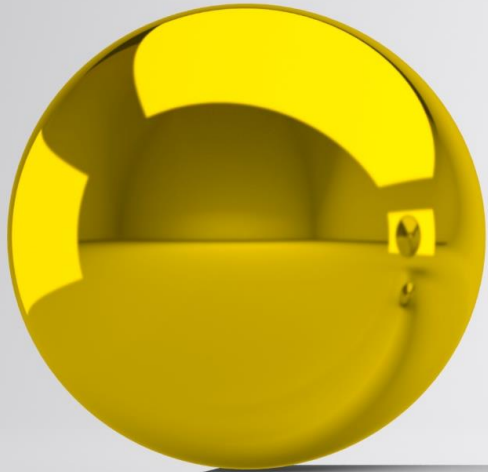
Inclusivism: do you include, listen, and connect with people?

Rationality: are you guided by evidence, designing systems and structures, and ensuring accountability.

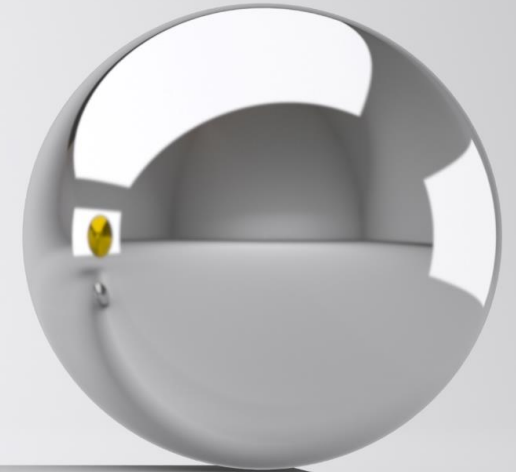


# Balancing Paradoxes I Can...

Dream  
Listen



Deliver  
Decide



Courageous Action

# The more I know, the more it's all about culture and relationships...

- But strong relationships are not about being “liked” it's about being consistent, predictable, fair, and carrying out the responsibilities with which you've been entrusted.
- “Relationships” does not mean it's about going out to dinner, it's about knowing that you can “relate” you understand the values, beliefs and consistency behind decisions.
- Strong relationships create the courage to act, they do not protect indecision or an avoidance of risk

# When we say “relationships” what do we mean?

- How do you build and enhance relationships?
- What decisions/styles focus on building relationships
- What decisions/styles focus on consolidating power (and status)



## Focus on People

1. Listen Actively: Show genuine interest in others' ideas, feedback, and concerns.
2. Acknowledge Mistakes: Openly admit mistakes and take responsibility for them.
3. Seek Feedback: Regularly ask for feedback on your leadership and areas for improvement.

## Focus on Power

1. Top-Down Decision Making: Decisions are made by the highest authority levels and passed down through the hierarchy.
2. Authority and Control: The leader maintains strict control over all aspects of the organization or group, including strategic direction, policies, and procedures.
3. Limited Participation: There is little room for participation or input from lower-ranking members in decision-making processes.

# Focus on People

- 4. Highlight Others' Contributions: Publicly recognize and appreciate the efforts and achievements of others.
- 5. Empower Your Team: Delegate meaningful tasks and decisions, showing trust in your team's abilities.
- 6. Stay Teachable: Show willingness to learn from anyone, regardless of their position.

# Focus on Power

- 4. Centralization of Power: Power and control are centralized in the hands of the leader or a small leadership group.
- 5. Paternalism: The leadership often justifies the concentration of power by assuming a paternal role, suggesting that the leader knows what is best for the organization and its members.
- 6. Resistance to Change: This leadership style can be resistant to change, especially if the change threatens the existing power structure. Innovations and new ideas might be discouraged unless they align with the leader's vision.

# Focus on People

7. Be Approachable: Maintain an open-door policy and encourage open communication. Being approachable and available helps build trust and shows you're part of the team.

8. Serve Others: Look for opportunities to serve and support your team. Leadership is as much about serving as it is about guiding.

9. Reflect on Your Behavior: Regularly take time to reflect on your actions and decisions. Self-reflection helps in recognizing areas for improvement and in making more informed decisions in the future.

# Focus on Power

7. Emphasis on Stability and Tradition: There is often a strong emphasis on maintaining stability, tradition, and the status quo. Changes to processes, structures, or strategies are approached with caution and are driven from the top down.

8. Clear Hierarchical Structure: The organization or group has a clearly defined hierarchy, with roles and responsibilities strictly delineated according to rank. This structure supports the centralization of power and decision-making.

9. Communication Flow: Communication tends to flow vertically from the top down. Information from lower levels is filtered as it moves up the hierarchy, and there is often less transparency about decisions and the decision-making process.



## Focus on People

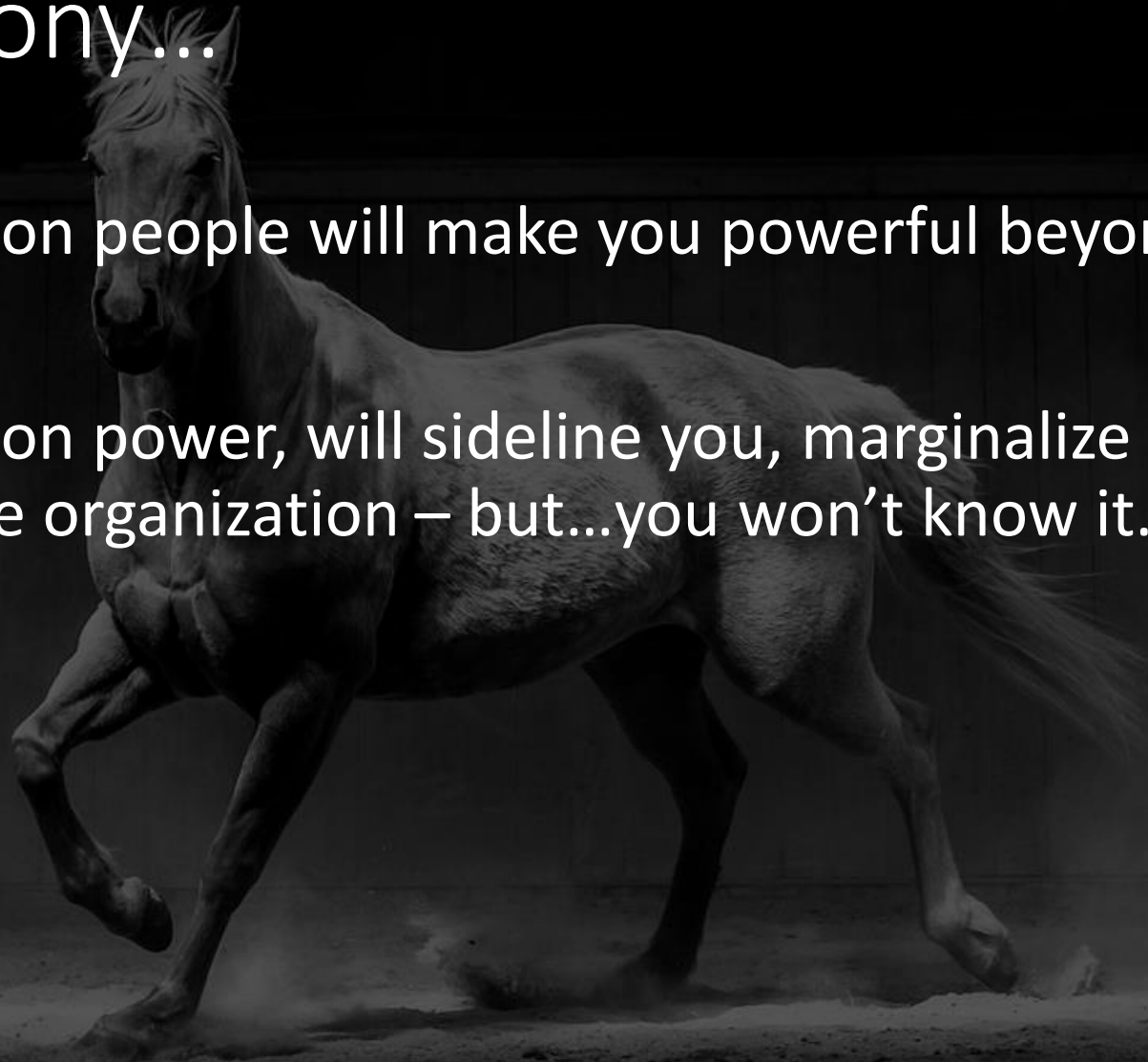
- 10. Practice Gratitude: Regularly express gratitude for your team's hard work and dedication. A simple "thank you" can go a long way in showing appreciation and humility.

## Focus on Power

- 10. Dependence on the Leader: The success of the organization or group can become heavily dependent on the leader's abilities, vision, and decision-making. This can create vulnerabilities if the leader's capacity is compromised or if there is a transition in leadership.

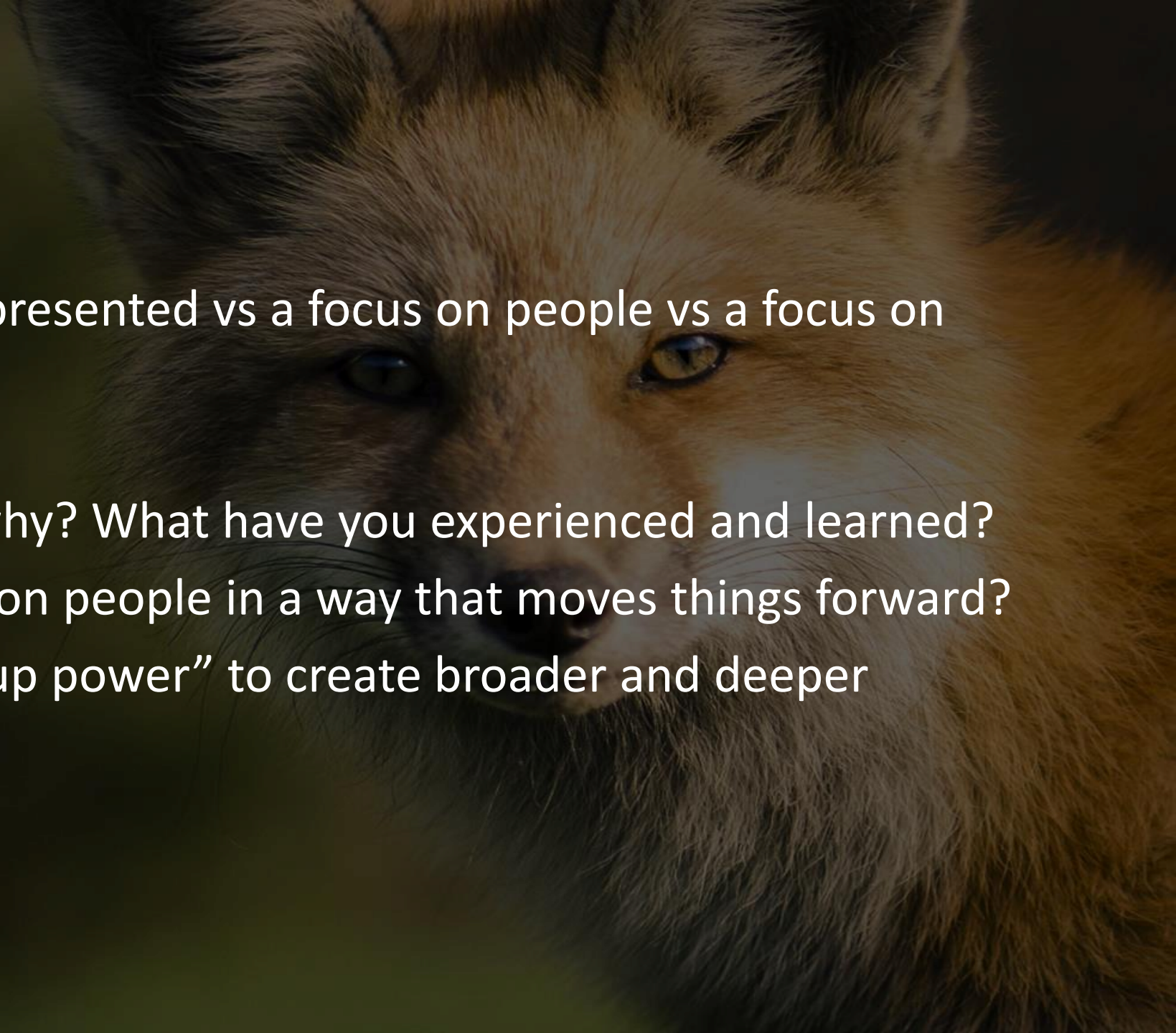
# The irony...

- A focus on people will make you powerful beyond your intentions.
- A focus on power, will sideline you, marginalize you, and detach you from the organization – but...you won't know it.



# At your tables...

- What I have said and presented vs a focus on people vs a focus on control
- What resonates and why? What have you experienced and learned?
- How are you focusing on people in a way that moves things forward?
- How have you “given up power” to create broader and deeper influence?





A photograph of three people in a modern office setting. A woman with curly hair, wearing a light-colored button-down shirt and jeans, sits in the center, gesturing with her hands while speaking. To her left, a man in a grey hoodie is seen from the side, listening. To her right, another woman with long dark hair, wearing a denim vest over a white top, is also listening. The background features a large window and a white wall with a light switch. The text "Ok, let's get into conversation (rooted in our presentation)" is overlaid in white on the image.

Ok, let's get into conversation  
(rooted in our presentation)

# The root of questions: A Focus on People

- **Encourage Autonomy and Initiative:** Create an environment where team members feel empowered to take initiative and make decisions within their scope of work. Autonomy fosters a sense of ownership and can lead to increased innovation and engagement. The autonomy is aligned to a common goal and purpose.
- **Acknowledge and Reward Contributions:** Regularly recognize and appreciate the efforts and achievements of all team members. Public recognition, rewards, and simple expressions of gratitude can go a long way in making people feel valued.

# The root of questions: A Focus on People

- **Serve Others:** Look for opportunities to serve and support your team. Leadership is as much about serving as it is about guiding.
- **Stay Teachable:** Show willingness to learn from anyone, regardless of their position. By being open to new ideas and approaches, you underscore that everyone has value to add.



# Matrix Questions

1. How do you create an environment where team members are empowered and take initiative?
2. What steps do you take to recognize and appreciate the efforts and achievements of team members in a way that doesn't create favourites and cliques?
3. How do you actively demonstrate your support for the work of others in a way that is both welcomed and visible to them?
4. In what ways do you model that you are teachable as a leader? That you still have much to learn and that you are reflective and malleable?



Thank you!

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