

## Leadership is creating spaces<sup>1</sup>

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As you may remember, in [another article](#) I said that the ultimate responsibility of the modern business leader was to protect time and to create 'spaces'.

As a leader, the protection of time is intimately related to the creation of 'space' and possibly 'place'. Space and Place are not the same. Space is mainly psychological. It gives people the ability to make the most of their 'being' by stop 'doing'. People can work in a big place, like a big office, and have absolutely no space. All space and time may have been swallowed by Outlook, for example! Other people may work in not-very-big places and still enjoy (psychological) space.

As leader, a possible trap to avoid is to declare universal ways to create those spaces, the equivalent of telling somebody, "*It is Thursday afternoon, have your space, think!*" What leaders need to do is to be sensitive to our diversity and allow or create opportunities for a somehow tailored approach. However, 'generic measures' may work as a symbolic behaviour. Statistically, they may also reduce the amount of 'trapped time and space' for people. Some of them may look terribly simple such as a rule that says, "*Do not reply to any email unless you are the main recipient*". That would exclude all replies in 'cc' and 'bcc' situations. Some organisations have tried 'no meetings on Friday' for example or 'email server down' for fixed dedicated hours. People may have a bit of laugh about these but sometimes this is the only way to instil new behaviours.

If you live a corporate life – corporate of a certain size, that is - you may have experienced the nuisance of 'the server is down' at some point. It starts as a small irritation because it is implicit that it will be solved soon by the IT department. The irritation grows enormously when this is not the case. Three hours later you are told that, in reality, you have a serious problem and it may take far longer than expected. Suddenly, people around you start looking relaxed!

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<sup>1</sup> Initially posted on [www.theleaderwith7faces.com](http://www.theleaderwith7faces.com), January 2008

There is a strong case for breakdown-time-by-design! The contagious beneficial effect of these otherwise simplistic micro-management measures is that people realise that, contrary to expectations, the corporation doesn't go under, the sky doesn't fall, projects continue and one was not as indispensable as one may have thought. General De Gaulle was quoted to say that cemeteries are full of indispensable people! Significantly, email traffic does not increase or bounce back after the blackout period, and the number of meetings on Monday to Thursday does not increase either.

How each of us interprets, feels and 'uses' space is perhaps different and can't be imposed or dictated. You and I know people who seem to have 'no space', their constant 'doing' occupies their life. We also know other people who seem to manage to 'protect themselves' from the corrosion of non-stop-doing. When in my leadership seminars I ask people to reflect upon their own mechanisms and 'label them', they come up with long and in many cases amusing lists. Here is an example:

Just-give-me-Space  
Inner space  
Space-Space  
Time-space  
Think-space  
Break space  
Parenthesis-Space  
Outside Course-Space  
Gone-Fishing-Space  
Beer-Space  
Awareness-Space  
How-are-you-Space  
Don't-push-me-Space  
Embrace-silence-Space  
Doing-nothing-Space

People describe their 'concepts of space' in multiple ways. In some cases it means to physically transplant oneself to a 'place' where psychological space can be felt and experienced. One executive described his 'gone-fishing-space', meaning, don't try, you'll not find me, that's it... Actually, he had never been fishing in his life but stole the concept from a movie where somebody stuck a sign outside the shop window. He liked the idea so much that he has used the 'gone fishing' since. Beyond the light idea and language that he used, what he portrayed was a genuine sense of a need to protect his individuality and 'disappear'.

Another executive who described her 'how-are-you-space', told us (the group attending the seminar) that her daily business life did not have a moment for, what she described as, "*a normal conversation with a normal person.*" (Obviously she must have had a particular view of the normality of her business colleagues!). For her, the protection of her space, her individuality and her being meant almost the opposite of 'gone-fishing'. In fact, her space creation and protection was about engaging herself with other (normal!) people in conversations that she qualified as 'real life'. And that had to be done outside the office!

You can read more about this dimension (Time and Space) by choosing from this list:

- [It's time, stupid!](#)
- [Protecting time](#)
- [The 'always on' leader](#)
- [Leadership and the end of time](#)
- [Social space](#)
- [Sitting quietly alone](#)
- [But I never heard the builders](#)
- [100K investment lost](#)
- [Intrapreneurs at the gates](#)

You can also read more about the other two dimensions by choosing from this list:

2. [Homes](#)
3. [Legacy](#)

If you want to read more about leadership or want to continue reading from the above, you can read it all in my book [\*The Leader with Seven Faces: finding your own ways to practice leadership in today's organization.\*](#)