

Conviction, consensus, and policy

Three distinct leadership styles for effective leadership

Will Larson. June, 2024.



carta

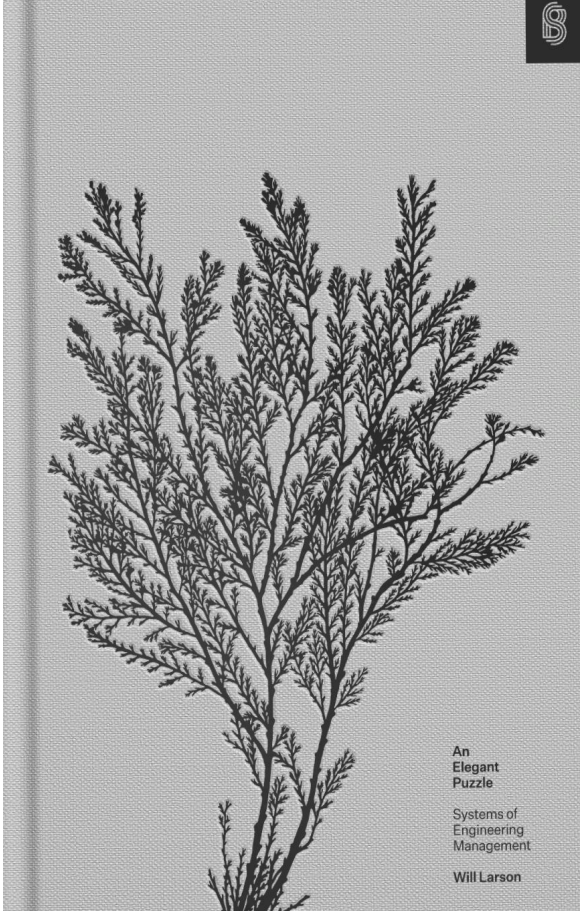
Uber

Calm

digg

stripe

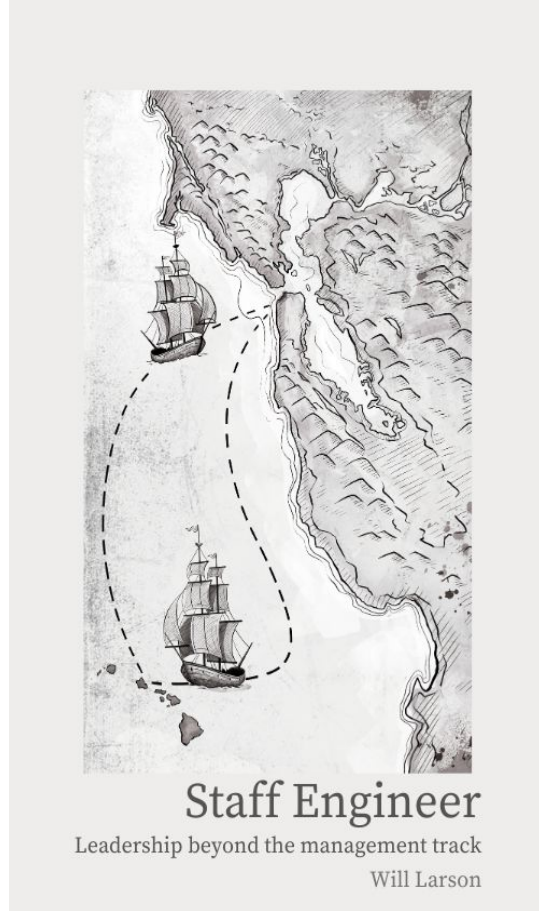
yahoo!



An
Elegant
Puzzle

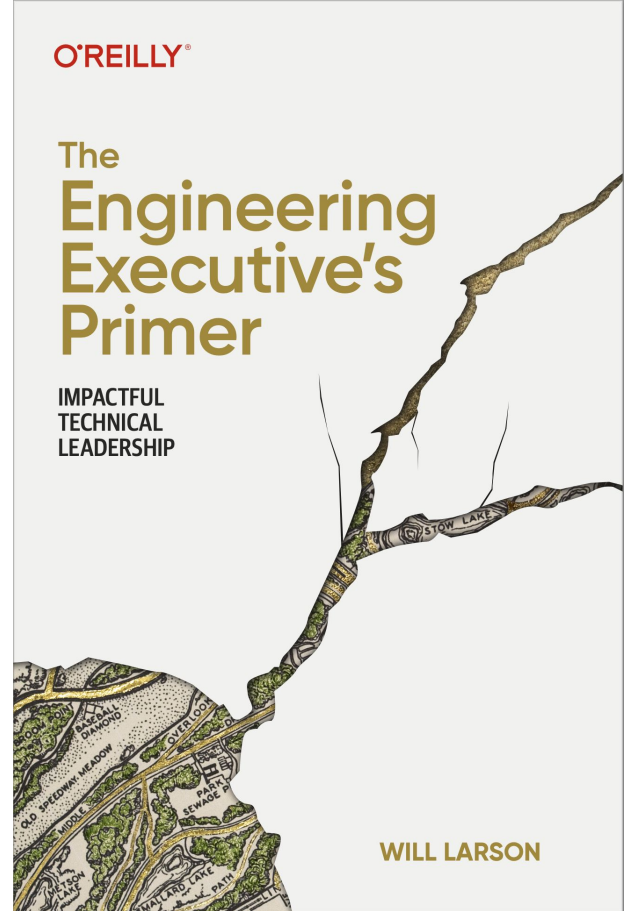
Systems of
Engineering
Management

Will Larson



Staff Engineer
Leadership beyond the management track

Will Larson



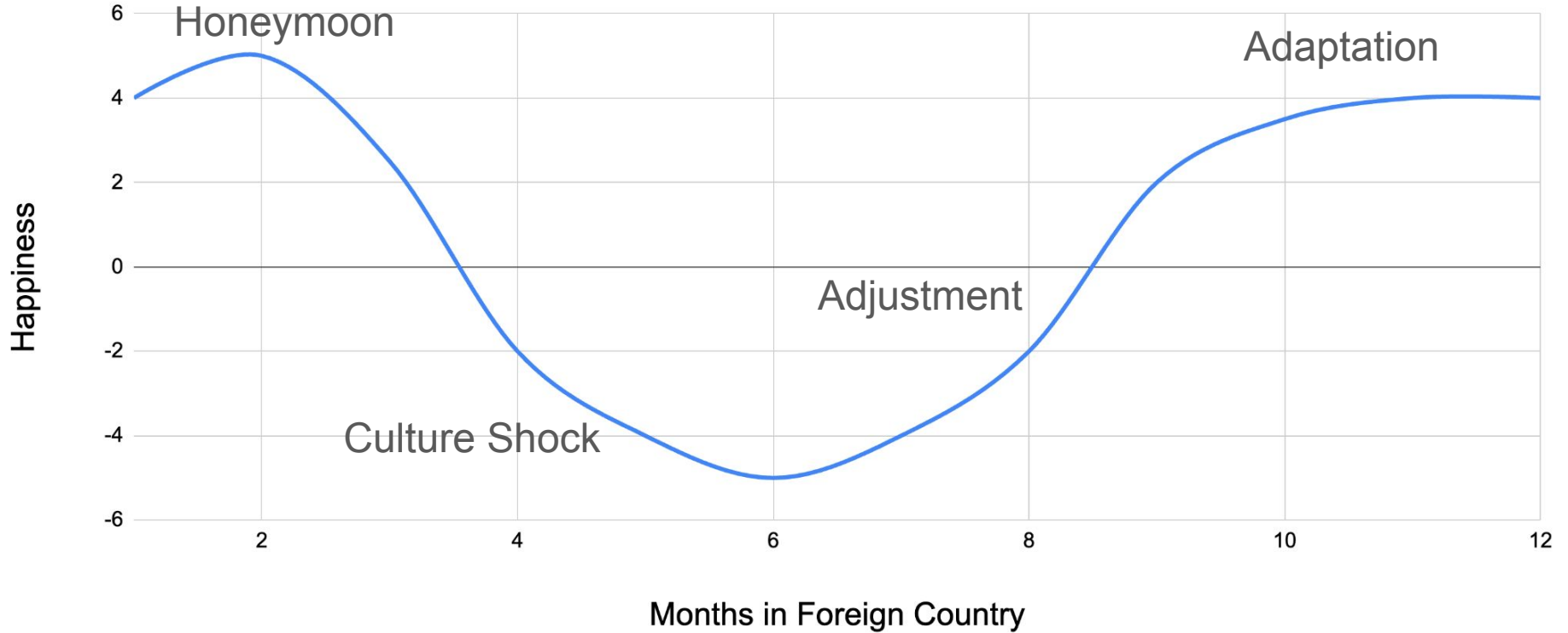
O'REILLY®

The
Engineering
Executive's
Primer

IMPACTFUL
TECHNICAL
LEADERSHIP

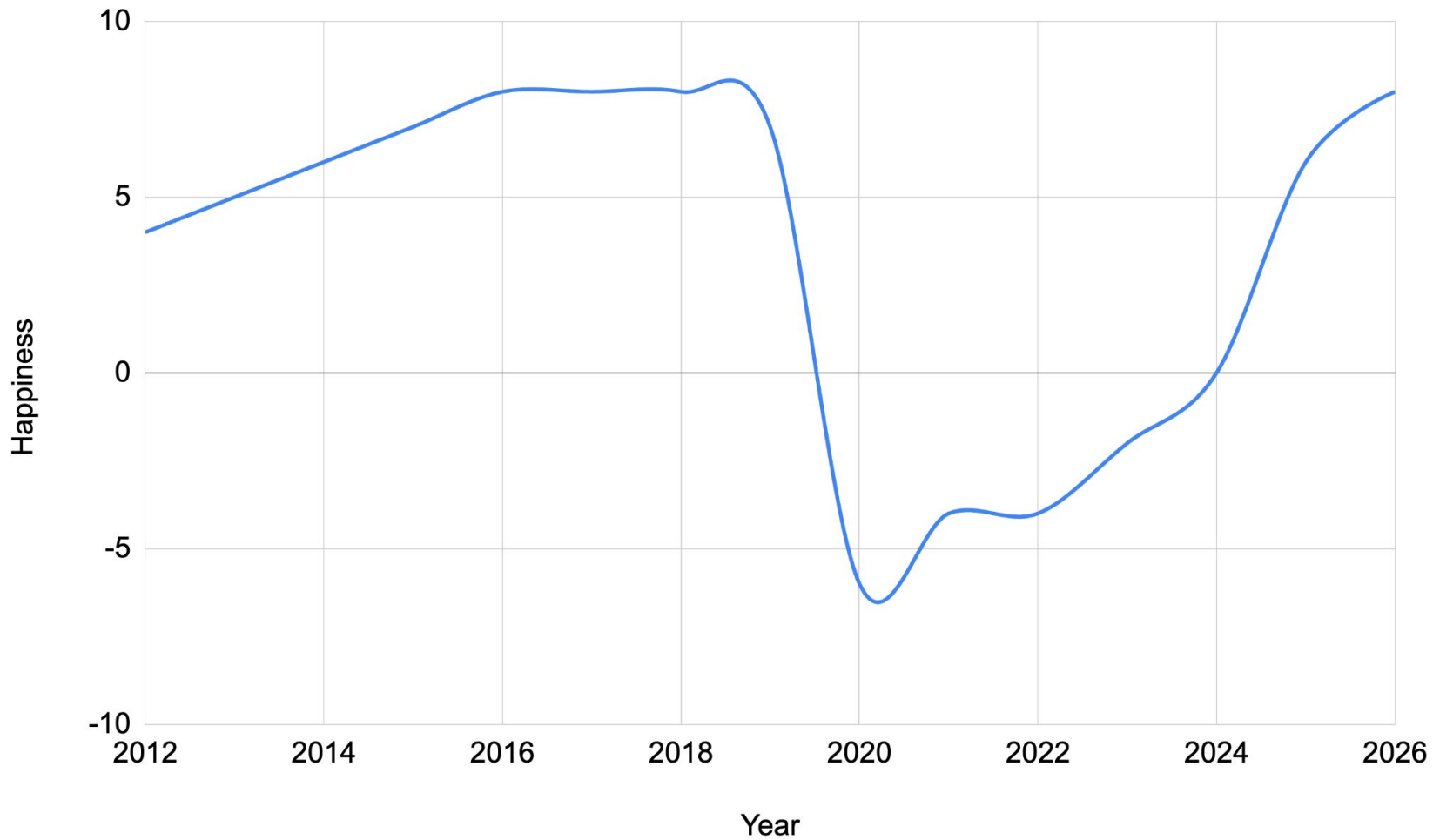
WILL LARSON

Culture Shock Curve



Sverre Lysgaard, 1955

Eng Mgmt Happiness



Hypothesis

Many leaders are missing one (or more) leadership styles.

Leadership styles

Leading with (1) conviction,
(2) policy, and (3) consensus.

Corollary

**Leadership styles are
learnable, not innate.**

Agenda

Overview

Examples: success and failure

How to develop

	<i>What</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Conviction	Personally decide and manage execution on critical, contentious, or ambiguous problems.	Add supported programming languages. Decide on service decomposition. Run reorganizations.
Policy	Implement a consistent policy and mechanisms to enforce that policy.	Run quarterly planning. Making hires and promotions. Perform headcount planning.
Consensus	Pull a group forward when there's no engaged over-arching decision maker with context.	Prioritizing projects. Run reorganizations. Evaluate acquisition.

Conviction

<i>When</i>	<i>How</i>	<i>Examples</i>
<p>Decisions with extreme ambiguity, uncertainty, or inertia.</p> <p>Also decisions where stakeholders are simply unalignable.</p>	<p>Go deep on context. Test decision widely. Communicate. Push through friction.</p>	<p>Add supported programming languages. Decide on service decomposition. Run reorganizations.</p>

Story #1 / Conviction

Quality Strategy at Carta.

Story #2 / Conviction

Quality Strategy at Calm.

Policy

<i>When</i>	<i>How</i>	<i>Examples</i>
<p>Decisions made by many distinct individuals across your organization where consistency is important.</p>	<p>Study a recurring decision. Document how it should be made. Rollout the policy. Enforce it!</p>	<p>Run quarterly planning. Making hires and promotions. Perform headcount planning.</p>

Story #3 / Policy

Candidate Review at Stripe.

Story #4 / Policy

Agile at Stripe.

Consensus

<i>When</i>	<i>How</i>	<i>Examples</i>
<p>Infrequent decisions with context spread across a number of different stakeholders, and no engaged decision maker.</p>	<p>Identify missing decision. Decide if it really matters. Try to find decision maker. Form decision-making group.</p>	<p>Prioritizing projects. Run reorganizations. Evaluate acquisition.</p>

Story #5 / Consensus

**Monolith decomposition
at Uber.**

Story #6 / Consensus

RIF at Calm.

Auditing your gaps

**Watch style you use for your
next five hard-ish problems.**

Developing your styles

Once a month, audit problems to solve, and pick an uncomfortable style for >1 .

Thank you!



<https://lethain.com/developing-leadership-styles/>

	<i>When</i>	<i>How</i>
Conviction	Decisions with extreme ambiguity, uncertainty, or inertia. (Also decisions where stakeholders are simply unalignable.)	Go deep on context. Test decision widely. Communicate. Push through friction.
Policy	Decisions made by many distinct individuals across your organization where consistency is important.	Study a recurring decision. Document how it should be made. Rollout the policy.
Consensus	Infrequent decisions with context spread across a number of different stakeholders, and no engaged decision maker.	Identify missing decision. Decide if it really matters. Try to find decision maker. Form decision-making group.