

Navigating Stars Concept: An OC6 Model of Leadership

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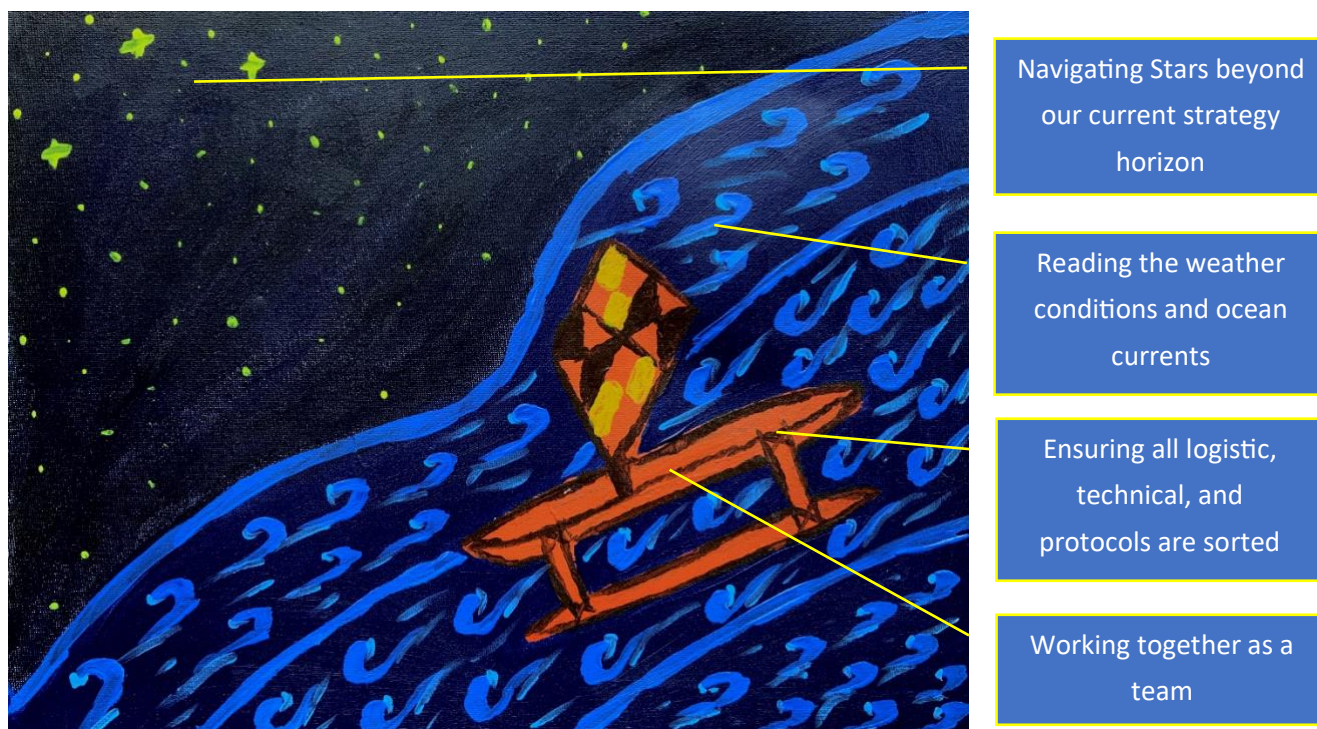


Figure 1. Original Artwork by Mark Yettica-Paulson. *Navigating Stars: Know your purpose, find your way.* © 2015

Introduction

This is a brief paper that seeks to apply the ancient wisdom of navigating stars to guide ocean journeys as an analogy for organisational direction and leadership. Additionally, this document aims to explore the idea of using the OC6 as a model for leadership.

Reframing *The North Star* concept to suit communities in the Southern Hemisphere

The 'North Star' is widely referred to in personal mission statements or for guiding values in business, community, and personal development. Also known as the Polaris or Pole Star (Ursa Minor constellation), the North Star can only be seen from the Northern Hemisphere and has relevance to star gazing cultures in that locality. It represents a central bright star in the night sky; a singular focus and a reminder to have an orientating purpose.

For many Maori, Pacific Island and Indigenous cultures located in the Southern Hemisphere, there are many stories of stars and moon phases acting as signs for new harvests, birth, death, healing and even cyclones. Though we might not see the North Star, our *Navigating Stars* for orientating purpose can be drawn from our southern constellations.

This paper was created because we are inspired by the *Southern Cross and Pointers* and our own Aboriginal, South Sea Island and Pasifika stories of stars and navigation. *

Navigating Stars for organisations

The *Navigating Stars Concept* is like the orientating purpose for an organisation. It is the reason for existing. It is the overall pathway or course that remains true regardless of the changing strategic approaches, personnel, and activities for the organisation.

It is the focal point for milestones that allows the organisation to chart progress and success.

An organisation's *Navigating Stars* is separate from a Strategic Plan or Club Rules. It can be values or actions, e.g., connecting through a deep love for the water, celebrating dynamic cultures, investing in intergenerational relationships, passing on our skills & knowledge to our youth/families etc.

It is also important to note that constellations and *Navigating Stars* are always moving, therefore there should always be an element of checking and confirming to ensure that the overall course is remaining true.

For organisations, this means that checking and confirming should be done collectively.

There should be a group (preferably with influence), who share a common understanding, language, and interpretation of the organisation's orientating purpose.

Just as the stars move across the night sky, the act of checking and confirmation of your organisation's course should also be dynamic and reflect the current conditions.

An OC6 Model of Leadership and Governance

In general terms, the leadership team, executive team, and/or governance committee provides the "hands-on" action that enables the organisation to progress in the direction of the *Navigating Stars*.

An organisation's Strategic Plan, Club Handbook and Rules all serve to point people towards those stars.

To do this, the leadership team devises a strategic approach (that is usually time-bound, e.g., 6 months or 3-5 years). This strategic approach is combined with organisational values and culture to come to life in a series of coordinated actions that can be used to demonstrate progress.

In the case of an outrigger canoe club, the analogy of the OC6 Va'a/Waka on the ocean and its crew would be very familiar.

The overall bearing/course for an organisation is taken from the *Navigating Stars*.

The preparation for the journey on the water takes time. It requires planning, testing, appreciating the conditions, reading the tides and weather, and getting to know your crew. It includes understanding the strengths and weaknesses of your crew and mitigating risk. It calls for the crew to have enough cohesion and balance for the trip, plus effort to maintain physical resilience and mental stamina.

Preparation also involves the logistical, technical, and physical preparation of the va'a and safety protocols. Someone needs to know how to bind the kiatos and amas using the appropriate rope so that the va'a doesn't fall apart. The life jackets need to be checked and seaworthy and so on. Each action is critical and can be likened to the activity of an organising committee or leadership team. Every question and each check (even double checking) that occurs before the va'a leaves the shoreline, are like the actions of a leadership group ensuring that their organisation has what it needs to make progress in the direction of the stars.

The work of an OC6 team is like the actions of a leadership group. In the same way that a crew knows what it's like to have rhythm, to glide and be in-sync with each other in the va'a, executive teams must strive for that same feeling of enough alignment in their leadership to work confidently and effectively as a committee.

For the OC6 crew where paddlers have assigned roles for their designated seat, the leadership team will also bring unique skills and have responsibilities that need to be fulfilled. Collectively, the crew relies on each other to develop and succeed (this is a great example of shared responsibility and burden in leadership – it's not an OC1, it is an OC6).

Just as we can change seating in the va'a and adjust roles to adapt to changing conditions and circumstances, the leadership team can and should be fluid and flexible to meet the external changes, but also address team morale and cohesion by taking up different roles when needed.

The President or General Manager of an organisation can be likened to the steerer (Seat 6). They are responsible for the wellbeing and safety of their crew or committee, and they do their best to understand, communicate, set, and lead the course. They work closely with certain seats in the va'a to ensure their crew takes advantage of conditions to move towards their goals.

Additionally, the President or General Manager can sit anywhere in the va'a and help guide their crew irrespective of their seat.

Finally, the analogy of the va'a on the ocean is a great example of how a leadership team can also respond when things go wrong or bad. One instance of this is the practice of a collective response to a huli. In organisational terms, it is important for a leadership team to practice and prepare for when things are upturned. In the same way that the team in an OC6 practice and prepare to meet the overturned va'a, the leadership group can prepare themselves to act with clear-headed purpose for the organisation and not panic or revert to self-interest.

Conclusion

Drawing on our own cultural knowledge of sea faring, navigation, and material culture to create models of governance and leadership, is a powerful way to nurture ownership, participation and resilience in any industry or organisation.

Envisioning Club Values, rules, and a Strategic Plan as guides towards our *Navigating Stars* can help executive committees be brave and ask the hard questions with the purpose of paddling together – confidently, passionately and committed for each other.

Notes:

*In Bruce Pascoe’s book, “Dark Emu: Black Seeds: Agriculture or Accident?” (2014) he writes of the Gunditjima People (Victoria) and their story of Totyerguil. For them, the Southern Cross represents the footprints of Totyerguil, a spiritual ancestor who played a role in the creation of the landscape.

For the Pitjantjatjara People (Central Australia), the Southern Cross is associated with a story of 2 brothers who are hunters. Their transformation into stars, along with their digging stick and woomera (spear) is discussed in “Tjukurpa Pulkatjara: The Power of the Law” (1995) by the Pitjantjatjara/Yakunutjatjara Women’s Council.

A noted star the Samoans indignantly call Le Tāelo, the stinking-striker, or hitter; “When this star is visible, Samoa is sure to be visited by an *afa*, or *cylone*.” It is red in colour, twinkles constantly, and has a jagged appearance at the edges. “The names and movements of the heavenly bodies, as looked at from a Samoan point of view.” (1898) The Journal of The Polynesian Society.