Notes from Life Drive Lab NLDL-1

Synthesized Framework :
Organizational & Leadership Effectiveness Framework (OLEF)

Version 1.1 – June 2025

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About me

My name is Shailesh Deshpande, and I am a student of human behavior and life. I work as an independent HR and Leadership Development Advisor. I strive to develop deep expertise in and facilitation capabilities for individual and organizational development and aspire to use these to assist individuals and organizations in their journey of growth.

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About Life Drive Lab

'Life Drive Lab' is the platform through which I offer my work. My work is focused on themes related to Personal Growth, Leadership Assessment & Development, Recruitment & Selection, Career Development, HR Strategy & Process design, Organizational Development and takes different formats depending on the context and need – from one-on-one coaching, group facilitation, workshops, to bespoke HR & Talent development consulting assignments.

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It's a series of notes/articles that I hope to write about the themes related to human behavior and work that fascinate me. I also plan to cross-reference these notes when appropriate, so that I am able to draw out the interconnections between various themes and build on them.

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About 'Synthesized Frameworks'

These frameworks are my attempt to meaningfully bring together a few foundational principles that can help us make sense of and work on complex organizational and behavioral phenomena

I also hope to keep revising and updating these frameworks hence the version number and month-year is mentioned on each framework document. <mark>**So please do share your feedback and critique – it will greatly help me improve this work**</mark>

One of the inspirations behind the 'Synthesized Frameworks' has been the 'lattice-work of models' philosophy that Charlie Munger has talked about

> *"You've got to have models in your head. And you've got to array your experience —both vicarious and direct—on this latticework of models "*
>
> *Charlie Munger*

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A. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT FOR 'OLEF'

BACKDROP ELEMENTS OF OLEF

- **ORGANIZATIONS MATTER** : It can be argued, that the greatest invention by mankind is not fire or wheel , but Organizations. Organizations shape our life and also our world – hence if we want to improve our life and our world, we need to focus on organizations.

- **LIFE DRIVE V/S DEATH DRIVE – THE EXISTENTIAL BATTLE** : The philosophical model of Life and Death drive greatly helps us in understanding all human systems – it says that all these systems are driven by two internal forces – one , the 'life drive' , which pushes us in the direction of growth and second, the 'death drive' , pushes is in direction of inertia/decay. There is a perpetual battle going on between these two drives – what happens to and becomes of us depends on which drive wins more often. The model also tells us that the Death Drive is often the default mode and hence we need to be ever watchful. (To read more : https://lifedrivelab.com/wpcontent/uploads/2023/08/Did_You_Defeat_Your_Death_Drive_Today_V9.pdf)

- **MAIN JOB OF LEADERSHIP** : And while there are millions of ways of defining leadership - Philosophically speaking , it can be said that the fundamental job of leadership is to nurture the life drive of and enable the individuals and organizations to live out their full potential. And since organizations shape the world, and leaders shape the organizations – it is clear that leaders can have disproportionately large impact on the world

- While most principles of OLEF will apply to all kinds of organizations , this version is mainly designed for **business organizations operating under free market paradigm**

"Even though most people in the world today are born, work, and die in organizations – we don't necessarily spend enough time thinking about how organizations shape our world and lives. Few things in today's world are as important and as taken for granted as organizations" : Dr. Gareth Jones

"The history of the world is but the biography of great men."
Thomas Carlyle

WHY and WHAT OF 'OLEF'

- Organizations at their best can truly be a long-term force of goodness, but the reality of organizations often falls short greatly

- How can the gap between 'IDEAL vs 'REAL' state of organizations and leadership be systematically bridged, is a vitally and perpetually important question for humanity

- Thinking about this question led me to a few foundational and essential models – OLEF is my attempt to bring these models together in a coherent framework

- It is my humble and sincere belief that these models / principles provide the deepest level and most meaningful insights into the broader subject of organizational and leadership effectiveness. And hence they also represent the 'vital few' root level levers that can be worked upon, to bring about biggest positive and systemic improvements.

B. OLEF : THE SCHEMATIC DIAGRAM

> *" All models are wrong, some are useful "*
>
> *: George Box*

> *"As to methods there may be a million and then some, but principles are few. The man who grasps principles can successfully select his own methods. The man who tries methods, ignoring principles, is sure to have trouble."*
>
> *Harrington Emerson*

OLEF : Organizational & Leadership Effectiveness Framework Version 1.1 , June 2025

OBJCTIVE

What do we want to create ?

1

EFFECTIVE and THRIVING INSTITUTION

CORE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

What core aspects do we need to work on to achieve the objective ?

3

SYSTEMS THINKING AND RISKS OF HUMAN MISJUDGEMENT

5

ETHICAL VALUES : INTEGRITY & RESPECT

4

MISSIONARY V/S MERCENARY DYNAMIC

2

REQUISITE STRUCTURE AND REQUISITE LEADERSHIP MATURITY

FOUNDATIONAL GUIDING PRINCIPLE

What principle will define our approach for this work ?

6

HUMAN WORK

C. OLEF : DEEP DIVE INTO ELEMENTS
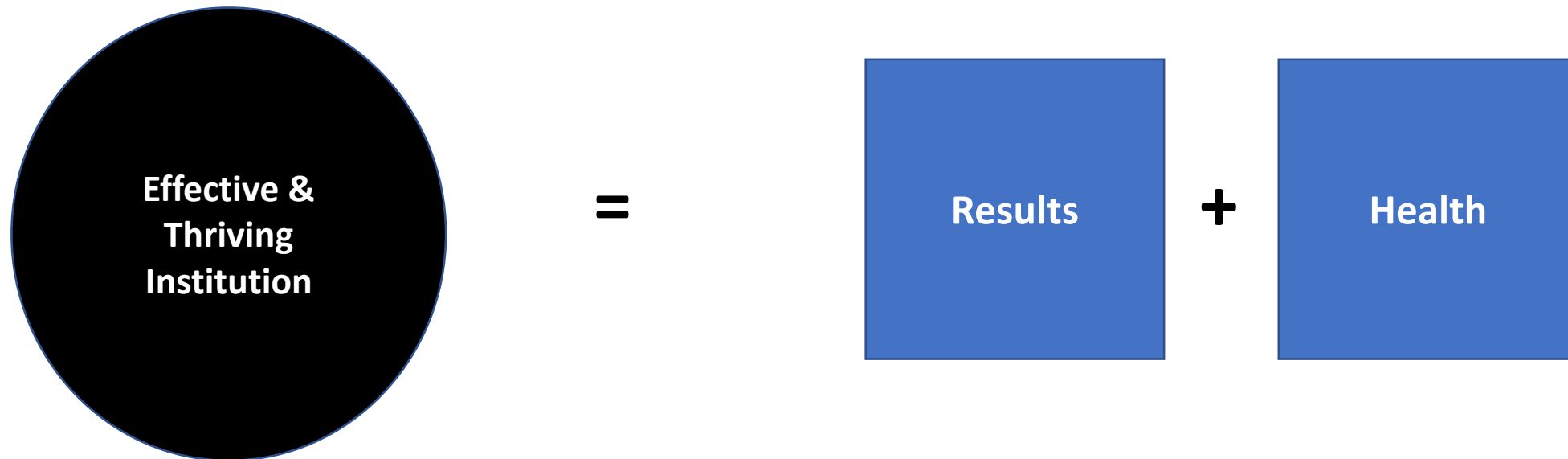
Main Element
1

THE Ultimate Objective :
Building ' effective and thriving <u>institutions</u>'

1. Ultimate Objective : Creating effective & thriving <u>institutions</u>

- **What is an effective and thriving institution :** *An organization that creates exponentially growing value over a very long period of time by continuously building self transformational capability*

- This is about holistic well being of the organization – not only in terms of the results it is producing but also in terms of the vitality and adaptive capacity it is developing

- While defining the ultimate objective – the word 'institution' has been used consciously , because it represents a more evolved state of being for an organization and not all organizations attain it – but can aspire and work towards it

1. Ultimate Objective : Creating effective & thriving institutions

Needs work NOT ONLY on 'results' But also on 'health'

Effective & Thriving Institution **=** Results **+** Health

1. Ultimate Objective : Creating effective & thriving <u>institutions</u>

- **RESULTS** : Top line , bottom line and value creation objectives that all business organizations focus on

- **HEALTH** : Organizational Health at its broadest level represents all tangible and intangible assets and capacities of an organization that influence its near-term performance, and more importantly its capacity for sustained long term adaptation and growth. It can be thought to include – all Financial , Relational , Human, Strategic, Reputational capacities. This is undoubtedly a very valuable – but equally difficult to operationalize construct

- **SCOPE OF OLEF :** OLEF ONLY includes the facets of 'Health' that pertain to people of the organization

- While this choice has been made consciously to keep the model sharply focused on one important element of health, it is extremely important to keep it in mind that the broader construct of Health does include many other critical factors.

Main Element 2

Requisite organization = Structure + Maturity

2. Requisite Organization : Right Structure + Leadership Maturity

- **Right Structure :** Distinct seven to eight work levels with each higher level responsible for significantly higher degree of complexity and time horizon. And appropriate allocation of accountabilities across business and functional verticals

- **Leaders having right leadership maturity for the level :** 'Maturity' (capacity in intellectual , emotional and consciousness terms) that corresponds to the demands placed by the work at that level.

2. Requisite Organization : Right Structure + Leadership Maturity

This element helps us understand that since organizations are human systems interacting with complex and evolving environments , organization needs structure that has clarity on the distinct role played by each level and leaders who have the capacity to operate at the level at which they are placed

- Single most important task : Selecting and developing leaders with right degree of 'leadership maturity'

- Absence of right level of leadership maturity could very well be single most important root cause of organizational challenges that business world has been facing – from issues of governance , succession , inability to adapt and all the difficulties faced in building long lasting institutions

Main Element 3

Missionary v/s Mercenary dynamic

3. Nurture the Missionary , eliminate the Mercenary

- 'Missionary' behavior is about always protecting and nurturing the organizations' long-term interest. But in many situations, an employee can choose to maximize his or her self-interest, even if it causes some harm to the organization(this is Mercenary behavior)

- The organizations needs to pay very close, continuous and serious attention to this – and nurture the 'Missionary' mindset and behaviors - through selection, leadership, culture, incentives and governance.

Main Element 4

Systems thinking and risks of human misjudgement

4. Systems thinking and risks of human misjudgement

- Organizations are complex , interconnected human systems

- They not only have characteristics that are visible and obvious , but also have extremely important characteristics that play out over a long period of time and are completely invisible , subtle, often quite unpredictable

- Effective leadership is hence about understanding the human, messy nature of organizations and managing the paradoxes and dynamics, with a lot of thought given to n'th order consequences of various decisions and actions

- Nature of human biases and limitations of human cognition make it quite difficult to be rational and act from a 'systems perspective' – and hence significant amount of individual as well as systemic efforts are needed to reduce the risks arising from these inherent patterns

Main Element 5

Ethical values : Integrity and Respect

5. Ethical values : Integrity and Respect

- **Integrity** : Ability to consistently act in alignment with ethical principles, organizational values, and professional standards and protecting the organization's interests. Not just about financial integrity – but even more importantly about intellectual integrity.

- **Respect** : Ability to consistently treat others in a way that acknowledges their worth, boundaries, and perspectives

- Uncompromising commitment to these ethical values is a foundational prerequisite to build an Effective & Thriving Institution.

Main Element 6

Guiding Principle of OLEF : Its ' Human' work

6. Guiding Principle of OLEF : It is 'Human' work

- At the core, this is profoundly human work.

- It involves navigating not just systems, structures, and strategies, but also the deeper, often invisible layers of human behavior, motivation, and meaning-making. Lenses such as **Psychodynamic theory**, and **Action Inquiry**, - help almost like 'x-ray vision'—to illuminate the hidden dynamics, unconscious patterns, and relational tensions that influence how people relate, lead, collaborate, decide, change and grow (or don't change and don't grow ☺)

- Hence anyone who wishes to work on creating 'Effective and Thriving Institutions' , will have to develop the capacity for 'human work' in addition to having the technical, analytical and functional skills.

D. How can OLEF be used ?

How can OLEF be used …

"If more information was the answer, then we'd all be (happy) billionaires with perfect abs." : Derek Sivers

- Most importantly : As it is true with the most significant principles of human life – knowing what are the right things to do, is just never enough- implementing these things on an ongoing basis is what makes all the difference
- It's the same thing with OLEF principles – on the surface they may seem obvious and simple- but operationalizing them effectively and building an organization that truly brings these principles alive, in letter and spirit – over decades, in all pockets of the organization, is a task of herculean difficulty (and worthy test of 'true leadership')

- In fact given the 'Risks of human misjudgment' *OLEF Principle*, principles of death drive and entropy – we need to assume things WILL go wrong- decay, derail - and concertedly build culture, systems, processes that will keep pushing back against this decline all the time.
- The OLEF Principles can be treated as core anchors for this work

How can OLEF be leveraged …A Real life case study

- *(This note is based on actual events that took place at a leading conglomerate in Southern India. It is based on inputs from very senior leaders in this organization)*

- *An extremely articulate and social media savvy senior leader was hired in a very critical senior leadership role. After two years of his joining, it was discovered this leader was involved in financial corruption and had created a very toxic work culture. The leader was asked to leave the organization.*

- The next page has the ==conceptual== analysis of this situation from lens of OLEF Principles

How can OLEF be leveraged ...A Real life case study

- Enclosed below is a ==conceptual== analysis of this situation from lens of OLEF Principles

- If the Selection Assessment Framework of the organization had properly operationalized the capabilities needed to create desired **Results & Health** *OLEF Principle* impact in that role , **Leadership Maturity for Level** *OLEF Principle* , **Integrity & Respect** *OLEF Principle* - and the Selection Panel had rigorously assessed the candidate on these parameters – most likely they would have rejected the candidate.

- The Selection Panel got so carried away by the candidate's resume (past roles in marquee companies, education in top B-schools) and his interpersonal charm that they almost forgot to conduct an objective assessment *(Risks of Human Misjudgment* *OLEF Principle* *)*

- Within few weeks of this leader joining the organization, his team members realized that he was a very charming 'Mercenary' leader – who was primarily driven to maximize his own visibility and personal gain and did not care much about the organization and its people. *(Mercenary & Missionary Dynamic* *OLEF Principle* *) –* As it invariably happens in such a situation, the team members who had latent Mercenary tendencies very quickly got into reciprocally beneficial equations with the leader (knowing fully well that some of their actions were harming the organization) There were a few 'Missionary' oriented team members who tried to resist this new leader – but the new leader very quickly branded them as 'folks resisting progressive change' and even got some of them fired. Rest of the team members got the message, and they became silent spectators

- As it often happens, this leader was exceptionally good at 'upward management' – and while demoralizing the good team members and indulging in financial corruption – he managed to create an impression with the senior stakeholders that he was 'transforming the function into a new era' *(Risks of Human Misjudgment* *OLEF Principle* *)*

- Things continued this way till a trusted old-time vendor complained to a senior leader about the corrupt practices of this new leader – and that's when all these details surfaced and the new leader was asked to leave the company.

NEEDLESS TO SAY, THIS IS AN OVERSIMPLIFIED ANALYSIS – DONE ONLY TO HIGHLIGHT THE POWER OF OLEF PRINCIPLES TO IDENTIFY THE ==EXACT ROOT FAILURE POINTS== – SO THAT WORK CAN BE DONE ON THEM PROACTIVELY TO ELIMINATE THE RISKS AND IN FACT LEVERAGE THE PRINCIPLES TO BUILD STRENGTHS IN THE ORGANIZATION TO BUILD VITALITY AND EFFECTIVENESS

How can OLEF be leveraged

- **The OLEF Principles can also be leveraged in design and implementation of all important people processes – selection, performance management, potential assessment, competency framework design, leadership and organizational development, employee engagement/ climate surveys, organizational effectiveness & diagnostics**

E. IN CONCLUSION

To conclude …

- **This is only an introductory document – more detailed versions and references will follow in due course**

- **I am looking forward to partnerships and collaborations for building this further and applying some of these ideas – so please do get in touch if you have any thoughts around it.**

- **Please do share your feedback and critique at shailesh@lifedrivelab.com**

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