

How to manage change, how to manage life: Ichak Adizes, the organisational therapist

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Abstract

Purpose – Ichak Adizes has developed original and practical conceptions of executive interaction, change management and corporate development, collectively referred to as “synergetic organisational therapy”. Although his name is celebrated in some executive circles, it is not widely known within mainstream management academia. Further, Adizes’ insights into what organisations are and how they achieve optimal performance are not routinely dealt with in Western business schools. After exposing his ideas, this paper aims to investigate reasons for such neglect.

Design/methodology/approach – The approach adopted is textual analysis of Ichak Adizes’ publications.

Findings – The argument made is that reflection on the case of Adizes illustrates consequential problems in academia and, in particular, the disconnect between what happens in the academy and that which occurs when managers have to do their job.

Originality/value – The article features the work of Ichak Adizes, whose work is not well known within Western business school. It also highlights the disconnect between what happens in the academy and that which occurs when managers have to do their job.

Keywords Corporate governance, Management theory, Organisational learning, Diversity management, Business cycles

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Ichak Kalderon Adizes is a Holocaust survivor born in 1937 in a country known today as North Macedonia. He has made presentations and advised government leaders within at least nine countries (see [Adizes, 2004b: xviii](#)) and written twenty-eight management books,

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translated in total in thirty-six languages. He has consulted to Fortune 100 corporations and established the Adizes Institute in 1971 (www.adizes.com).

Adizes has a PhD from Columbia University Business School. He served as a tenured faculty member at the UCLA Graduate School of Management (now UCLA Anderson School of Management) from 1967 to 1982 and has taught at Stanford, Tel Aviv University, the Hebrew University and within Columbia University's executive programs. He is recipient of a lifetime achievement award from the International Academy of Management, of the Ellis Island Medal of Honor (which distinguishes exceptional civic, cultural or professional contributions to American society made by immigrants and their descendants) and of the Russian Quality Award and Makarenko Medal. In 2017, Adizes was named one of the "Top 10 communicators in the World" by PProvoke Media, alongside the Dalai Lama and Pope Benedict.

If testimonials and endorsements of well-known management writers, CEOs and heads of government are to be the evidence base, Adizes (with his team) has achieved remarkable results. His achievements have been in disparate industries and contexts (from banking to food services, from aircraft manufacturing to the performing arts and creative endeavour), in corporations large and small and to the benefit of stakeholders in commercial and not-for-profit sectors (ichakadizes.com/testimonials). Commentary on his work and intervention protocols has been featured in such leading broadsheets and practitioner periodicals as *Inc. Magazine*, *Fortune*, *The New York Times*, *The London Financial Times*, *Investor Relations Daily* and *Nation's Business*.

Whilst Adizes' contribution to management thought and practice is conspicuous in certain circles, his name does not appear in mainstream management textbooks and within scholarly literature. Despite the accolades and the fact that his thinking about leadership (in particular) is being now taught in Eastern Europe and parts of the Middle East (e.g. Bar Ilan University), the full corpus of his work is not well-known within Western business schools. More generally, Adizes himself is somewhat under-recognised as a public intellectual or leading management thinker.

The purpose of the present article is twofold. First, it exposes Adizes' main conceptions concerning organisational health, change management and corporate lifecycles. Second, it presents and defends an argument about why Adizes' insights have not fully broken into mainstream academia. The conclusion offers general reflections on Adizes' life and work and what these mean for executive education. The structure of the article reflects transparently its objectives.

To provide context for what is to come, exposition of three consequential problems with mainstream twenty-first century management and workplace superintendence theory is required (Adizes' own view of what is wrong with the academy is discussed in the latter part of this article). First, so-called theory coming from business schools is mostly irrelevant to that which managers need to concern themselves (Joullié & Gouldx, 2022, 2023). Second, theory itself, the holy grail of mainstream academic research, even when relevant to a real-world workplace problem, is often not presented (packaged) in a way that is especially helpful to managers (Joullié & Gould, 2022; Tourish, 2020). Third, aside from concerns about the way it is communicated, theory about management phenomena is typically of low quality, being often bereft of implication for understanding, let alone prediction. Specifically, the Adizes case draws attention to the triumph of internal over external validity within the academy, what Hambrick (1994: 13) called the "closed incestuous loop" of management research. Indeed, following publication of the Ford and Carnegie Foundation reports of 1959, management theory has mostly been derived from application of a conception of the scientific method suited to physical phenomena (physics, chemistry and the like). Its relevance to workplace phenomena entails a strawman portrayal of human and workplace

life (Joullié and Gould, 2023). In literature, these three kinds of criticisms are growing in both their frequency and sophistication.

Organisational health

In his monographs, Adizes (2023a: 124; 2023b) argues that his method enables organisational development in a way which not only avoids “destructive conflict” but also cultivates internal “collaborative leadership”. The substance of his contribution is captured in the qualifier *synergetic*, a term he coined by combining the words symbiotic and synergetic. Seen from the Adizes perspective, employers are at their best when they prioritise measures which cultivate mutual trust and respect amongst all members of an organisation and its stakeholders. Adizes (2023a, 2023b) emphasises that there is value in diversity, which he sees as the raw material for developing and capitalising on corporate wisdom. The synergetic construct is nested in the larger notion that sentient creatures and conglomerate entities such as human organisations regularly need therapy because multidimensional change is ever present and, when not dealt with, is inclined to cause disintegration. The overall idea is that entities affected by change should be conceived of as systems entailing subsystems, each of which move at different speeds (for example, marketing moves faster than production, production faster than accounting and accounting faster than human resources). Hence, when it comes to corporate development, a synergetic entity is one that is growing, moving towards wholeness and integration in spite of its altering context(s). Disintegration is manifested in what often end-up being called “problems”. In practice, problems, be they personal or professional, arise from change, specifically from disintegration caused by alteration.

In his work, Adizes (2023a) delineates the allied constructs of organisational health and organisational therapy. Organisational therapy, he insists, is neither traditional consulting nor conventional corporate development activity. The therapy metaphor chimes in with the idea that entities are at their best and will be successful sustainably when they are healthy. A healthy organisation is synergetic, i.e. both symbiotic and synergetic. This state exists when constituent members manifest “united (or integrated) diversity”. In such circumstances, employees (including, crucially, managers and executives), for example, display mutual trust. As such, a healthy organisation is one that integrates diversity of styles (different interests) into common interests within a culture of mutual trust and respect. Its executives will be diverse in their orientations but come together in pursuing corporate objectives. At first blush, the synergetic construct and the related propositions that workplaces require cooperation and collaboration seem hackneyed, even trite. However, upon further examination, these ideas, at least as conceived of by Adizes, have compelling underpinnings and implications.

According to Adizes (2023a), mutual respect means recognising the right of the other person to be different. In organisational life, there thus needs to be a structure that accommodates plurality. Moreover, organisations need commonality of member interests, a long-run concern that is often difficult to discern when one takes a snapshot view of corporate life. Whatever the case, practitioners of the Adizes method focus on what Adizes describes as implantation – not implementation. They steer clients towards identifying and addressing what clients can solve and control. In a nutshell (unlike with traditional consulting), the Adizes method is not about outsourcing the role of managers but is to provide internal capabilities and solutions.

When it comes to decision making, the process (and outcome) is enhanced because of diversity (Adizes, 2023a). Members of a healthy organisation focus their effort on development-related activity, whereas those of an entity that is disintegrating are inclined to expend energy (resources) on matters other than development (Adizes, 2004a). Underlying this view are three related constructs. First, sameness or uniformity of outlook is incompatible with meaningful

integration, which requires difference. Second, where there is uniformity of outlook (sameness of opinion, perspective, etc.), no growth is possible. The oft quoted saying here is “if two people agree on everything, one of them is unnecessary.” Third (and to be further explored), a particular kind of diversity is central to Adizes’ thinking, namely the PAEI model. If any of these three elements is sub-par (especially within the executive group or organisational structure reflecting functions to be performed), the organisation is designated as ‘sick’ and will manifest a predictable set of problems with its leadership.

Under Adizes’ pen, the term “role” is broadly interpreted, referring to a generic managerial function performed within a corporate context (conventional meaning). Adizes differentiates style (habitual behaviour) and immediate behaviour (which he views as entirely environmental). Ideally, style, behaviour and roles align and are adapted for addressing corporate imperatives and management functions. The roles themselves can also be conceived of as distinctive sets of priorities held by a consequential workplace actor. Adizes’ four generic roles are: (P)roducing, (A)dministrating, (E)ntrepreneuring and (I)ntegrating (see [Table 1](#)). The associated typology is known as PAEI. Being central to Adizes’ body of work and his methodology for addressing organisational challenges, this typology requires further exposition.

The PAEI typology of executive roles

Underpinning the PAEI typology of executive roles is [Adizes’ \(2004a, 2004c\)](#) cornerstone conviction that no single individual is up to the task of managing “healthily” an entire corporation. To address this generic limitation, four distinct executive roles are required, the idea being that no-one discharges these simultaneously because each is incompatible with the others. Further, if each role contributes to organisational success in particular ways, it also harms corporate performance if left unaddressed or poorly executed. As such, the ideal executive, capable of steering alone an organisation to short- and long-term success “does not exist and cannot exist”, except in management textbooks and business schools ([Adizes, 2004c: 117](#)). The quest for the identification or priming of such an individual is not only futile, but destructive because it conveys a somewhat narcissistically dysfunctional view of management, one wherein (executive) teamwork is established as a second-best option to an all-powerful, all knowing, super-executive who takes responsibility for everything.

Before discussing further the PAEI classification, it is noteworthy that [Adizes \(2004c: 19\)](#) portrays his typology as being of managerial and pragmatic, as opposed to psychological, origin. That is, he does not interpret leadership and the prescription for obtaining corporate health as the outworking of a particular psychological theory derived from positivist-orientated research [\[1\]](#). Instead, he contends that his leadership model and recommendations for organisational performance emerge from over fifty years of consulting with (and observation of) his international corporate clients. In practice, he does not ask those he assists to sit a categorising test before talking to them ([Adizes, 2004c: 180](#)) [\[2\]](#). Rather, he assesses individuals’ styles by observing how they behave and speak. In so doing, he follows what he

Table 1. The PAEI leadership model

Executive role	Makes the organisation	Horizon	Main concern
Producing	Effective	Short term	What should be done
Administrating	Efficient	Short term	How it should be done
Entrepreneuring	Effective	Long term	When it should be done
Integrating	Effective	Short term	Who should do it

Source(s): Adapted from [Adizes, 2023b: 6](#) and 2015: 137

calls an “existentialist” approach, embracing the view that people are how they behave, what they do to others (Adizes, 2004c: 235). In this respect (and to underscore the point), Adizes (2015: 136) makes plain that he is not interested in ethereal notions of personality, but rather in behaviour. He considers that labelling people amounts to changing them (by freezing them in their styles) and is a less potent intervention than measures aimed at changing the environment that causes (mis)behaviour.

An executive in the Producing role ensures that an organisation delivers on its *raison d’être*, that it pumps-out results consistent with its understood mission, i.e. satisfying its clients’ and other stakeholders’ expectations. Success in this role is typically measured, for commercial entities, using orthodox indices of repeat business, growth in market share and other standard (mostly financial) indicators of corporate attainment. For a political party, productivity is invariably assessed using the number (or proportion) of people who vote for (or vote again for) the party’s candidates.

In the Administering role, an executive ensures that workplace processes and protocols operate systematically, predictably and in an orderly way. When this state is approached, organisational participants do the right things, in the right order, and with minimal resource depletion. In this regard, to administer is principally to ensure efficiency in the short run by paying attention to details and systematising how the (A) role is performed. In practice, administrators ensure that organisational actors understand and follow systems and routines.

Short-term efficiency, *à la* administration, is not enough, insists Adizes (2023c). As such, organisations need to adapt to environmental change, a long-run effectiveness concern. This latter focus is the “Entrepreneurship” role, which combines creativity and willingness to take risks. When executives perform as entrepreneurs, their employing organisation will have anticipated offerings that future customers are likely to want. Whereas administrators implement and regulate plans, entrepreneurs create and replace them, being principally concerned about what the organisation should do differently.

In the Integrating role, values, not rules or manuals, cause interdependencies and cooperation. Motivated in such a way, executives who wear the integrator’s hat ensure that employees and other workplace actors mesh together smoothly their activities. In this latter respect, integrators remove, insofar as possible, functional silos and, more broadly, are concerned that key people concern themselves with managing the interests of those whose functions impact. Adizes further distinguishes between mechanistic and organic forms of integration. His conception here is that the former of these is externally imposed, often in the form of rules and operating protocols. The latter, however, is concerned with value systems and mostly comes from collective psychological elements. Adizes recommends that, inasmuch as it is possible, mechanistic forms of integration should be converted into organic forms and that Integrators facilitate this transition. Further, Integrators bring meaning to the workplace. Insofar as practicable, they seek to eliminate functional silos, thus connecting employees through inculcating a shared sense of belonging and affiliation. Adizes (2023b: 20; 2015: 67) considers the Integrating role as the most crucial (among the four he delineates) for an organisation’s ongoing existence. He argues that integration comes closer than the other roles to an approximation of corporate purpose.

Adizes (2004c) holds that managers typically exhibit one dominant role in their everyday behaviour, with usually at least one less apparent role (subdominant) still visible in their demeanour (for example, someone can be classified ‘P-ei’, meaning that this person behaves mostly as a P, with elements of the E and I roles also conspicuous, but without any detectable sign of the A role). Although managers can perform two (exceptionally three) roles at the same time in specific circumstances and for a limited time (for instance, act as a PAei), no-one adequately fulfils the four roles concurrently, even for a short time. Adizes (2004s: 238)

identifies managers with no gap (or glaring deficiency) in their management style as “well-rounded”. By contrast, those who fail to display behaviour characteristic of any of the roles (i.e. someone classified as “—”) are labelled as “deadwood” (Adizes, 2004c: 112).

Serious mismanagement occurs when an individual acting in accordance with one role but showing no detectable behaviour consistent with any of the other three is granted consequential executive responsibility. For example, “P—” managers are “Lone Rangers” or “unguided missiles”, because they are obsessed with fulfilling the purpose for which the organisation exists, at the expense of practical considerations and constraints. Unable to delegate, Lone Rangers are workaholics. They tend to ignore organisational boundaries, protocols and policies, thus disrupting a workplace and its supporting and contextual structures. Conversely, “A—” managers are “Bureaucrats”, sticklers for discipline and respect of procedures. They stifle innovation and creativity because they want to do things right, without concerns for doing the right things. As for (exclusively and, thus, pathologically) “-E-” managers, they are “Arsonists”. They are preoccupied only with ideas and opportunities for future development but are stubbornly uninterested in details, personal relationships, processes and a panoply of vital (mostly technical) short-term considerations. Their *modus operandi* is management by expectations (i.e. they make decisions which they expect will be implemented) but they do not bother inspecting (monitoring and controlling) nor concern themselves with corrective measures (Adizes, 2015: 140). Even exclusively “—I” managers are viewed by Adizes as organisationally dysfunctional. (2015: 111). Indeed, bereft of any managerial preoccupation bar a desire that everyone else works harmoniously, “—I” managers are “Super Followers”. They listen to all and sundry and tend to say “yes” to everyone because they have no ideas of their own.

It is noteworthy that the emphasis Adizes places on the idea of management roles cannot be divorced from his contention that, much as occurs in biological systems, organisations have life cycles (a matter to be returned to). By way of preamble, the relative importance of each role differs depending on where an entity is in its development trajectory (stage in a corporate lifecycle). In short, when an organisation is healthy, each role will assume prominence in a predictable way at a specified lifecycle stage. Each role becomes activated and attains its moment of salience through the solving of a series of standard and thus foreseeable problems. In this regard, Adizes distinguishes between normal and abnormal problems. For an organisation to be healthy it (ultimately) needs exposure to each of the four roles. Ideally these develop in a prescribed sequence (the first to come is E, then P, A, then I).

To illustrate the import of the idea of a sequence (for both the emergence of normal problems and of roles), Adizes invokes a metaphor from developmental biology. Specifically, it is to be expected that babies struggling to walk for the first time will fall. This phenomenon is not a problem in and of itself unless it persists unduly. Similarly, if a role does not develop as anticipated (a cul-de-sac situation) and the next stage of the lifecycle is entered into, a so-called normal problem becomes “abnormal” (Adizes, 2004b: 12). In practice, these latter kinds of concerns, if they can be addressed at all, are the remit of turnaround specialists, but not of organisational therapists. Organisational therapy takes time to produce results, and time is typically high on the list of resources in short supply for firms plagued by abnormal problems. Although the Adizes methodology provides protocols for differentiating between normal and abnormal problems and for addressing each kind, none of these protocols amount to finger snapping.

The inevitability of conflict

On Adizes’ (2004c: 132) view, the PAEI roles (more precisely, the executives fulfilling them) have each different priorities. For example, while the role I is process orientated, the E one is results obsessed. Further, different roles focus on different geographies (E looks for

global opportunities, P is concerned with obtaining results locally), operate at different paces (A follows a progressive approach, P wants to deliver immediately) and tackle problems differently (I tends to be rather unstructured, A is rather structured).

According to Adizes (2004c: 135), it is not only the case that each of the four roles focus on different time horizons, geographies and priorities. Indeed, and more consequentially for daily interaction, each communicates and interprets missives from their peers, superiors and subordinates on different terms. For example, when Es say “yes”, they in fact generally mean “perhaps” (but a “no” is definitive). Conversely, when an A says “no”, it is typically a provisional “no” (i.e. “perhaps, but not now”), whereas, for them, a “yes” is conclusive. Similarly, for each role type, silences (or pauses) in speech convey different meanings: a silence implies for As disagreement, while for Es it signifies tacit agreement. To complicate matters further, each role attributes different emphases to the infinitive verb-form “to be” (Adizes, 2004c: 140–141). Specifically, while Ps are usually attuned to the differences in meaning between “is”, “should be” and “want to be”, for Es “is” often implies “want it to be” whereas As tend to equate “is” with “what should be” (for Is, these distinctions are irrelevant, since they tend to agree with everything said). Such differences are fertile soil for enduring misunderstanding and miscommunication. They typically result in a managerial Babel Tower, wherein mis-fitted executives find themselves unable to maintain (let alone expand) corporate success.

For the same reason that the “textbook manager” (the ideal executive embodying and fulfilling all four PAEI roles simultaneously) does not exist, there is no such thing as the exemplary, or perfect, management style. As such, and contrary to much management education orthodoxy, a method or theory applicable ubiquitously and intended to produce unfailingly the best outcome is an industrial-age myth (Adizes, 2004c: 261 and 2015: 121). Rather, there is a variety of (mis) management styles, because for every unbalanced manager (those exhibiting only one of the four PAEI roles), there is a corresponding way of miscommunicating, misjudging priorities and misapplying procedures. Such revelation entails that a mis-manager is so judged, not necessarily because he is unable to show strength in at least one of the PAEI roles, but, more often, because he is below a threshold on a sub-dominant role and thus is unable to be paired with others, impeding the overall development of a complimentary team. Insofar as practice is concerned, it follows from the Adizes conception that a generic objective of corporate boards is to compose teams that, from within, are able to fulfil, in complimentary ways, the four PAEI roles.

While collective performance requires behavioural input from individuals exhibiting dissimilar orientations on the four PAEI roles, the ultimate responsibility for a group’s success is not shared. Indeed, Adizes (2004c: 229–230) is adamant: each unit (team, department, etc.) should be led by an individual who remains responsible for the performance of that role. Further, to the different “What”, “How”, “When” and “Who” answers provided by the PAEI members, this individual provides the missing “Why” element (Adizes, 2015: 137). Acting like a thumb on a human hand (Adizes’ analogy), the leader opposes each finger (the four roles) while simultaneously being able to work with each, individually and collectively. In Adizes’ (2004c: 231) view, the leader of a team is ideally an Integrator-type individual, with well-developed complementary qualities of the remaining three other roles.

If something approximating an ideal team is made of individuals discharging incompatible roles and communicating differently, conflict is inevitable amongst members. However, for Adizes (2004c: 128–130), such discord is not inherently a problem. On the contrary, conflict between disparately positioned PAEI individuals is a natural phenomenon since it signals that people with differing strengths (and weaknesses) are seeking to attain the same corporate objective(s). Further, conflict, manifested as a clash of priorities and rationales, should be welcomed because it allows decisions to be scrutinised and

implemented comprehensively, in a process where the cap-wearer for each role is the custodian of disparate aspects of a decision and implementation effort. As such, within a group in which the four PAEI roles are represented, discussions follow a Socratic method of sorts, whereby, through argument and counterargument, critique and counter-critique, the best choice options emerge incrementally. These options, [Adizes \(2015: 139\)](#) insists (and, in fact, provides examples of), concern as much what to do as what not to do.

The inevitability of conflict, even within a well-balanced team (i.e. a team that assembles the four incompatible PAEI roles), entails that inter-member discord is legitimate but must also be managed, channelled and leveraged as a learning tool. Indeed, if unmanaged, conflict invariably (and sooner rather than later) becomes destructive, whereas, when carefully managed, it (conflict) is productive. According to [Adizes \(2004c: 159–211\)](#), such a feat is accomplished through attending, in specific ways, to people, process, structure, values and a common mission. Among the principles that inform [Adizes' \(2004b: 315–317\)](#) recommendations on these matters is his contention (which goes against Chandlerian canon) that strategy follows structure (i.e. that structure causes strategy). As such, rather than developing grand blueprints that, without other changes to how things happen within the organisation will remain pies in the sky, [Adizes](#) counsels that executives ensure that roles, reporting lines and management processes are clearly defined.

The aforementioned recommendations concerning conflict management are not entirely original to [Adizes](#) (see for example [Litterer, 1966](#) or [Rahim, 2023](#), originally published in 2001 and now in its fifth edition). However, [Adizes' \(2015\)](#) take on managing organisational conflict (turning it into a constructive phenomenon) is decidedly iconoclastic. Specifically, his perspective moves the debate beyond being about mere legitimacy and establishes such activity (workplace conflict) as an integral, orthodox and non-controversial element of organisational superintendence, broadly conceived. In short, [Adizes](#) conceives of inter-team conflict as consequential input for better overall performance.

External change: an untapped source of comparative advantage

Change management experts typically start exposition of their favoured method by reminding the audience of the unremitting (indeed accelerating pace) of transformation and the imperative to deal with it through either cleverly reacting to it or begrudgingly anticipating it (see, for example, [Kotter, 2012](#)). While [Adizes' \(2015\)](#) view is compatible with such orthodoxy, he adds a twist. According to him, alteration is not something to be dealt with at the last minute, feared, let alone prevented, but rather embraced as inherently positive and replete with opportunities ([Adizes, 2004: 9](#)). Indeed, change is the principal hallmark of life, evolution and growth. As such, trying to prevent it (or pretending it is not happening) is tantamount to committing organisational suicide. To be alive, whether referring to human beings or organisations, is to face difficulties, setbacks, challenges and risks (as well as opportunities), about expenditure of energy and time and decision-making conundrums. Decisions, however, inevitably create new problems as well as new openings. To provide philosophical context for these second-order elements, it is worth remembering that only dead people and stewards of defunct organisations who do not have to deal with ebb and flow.

[Adizes' \(2015\)](#) perspective is again compatible with much of the mainstream organisational change management literature when he warns that dealing with altered (and altering) circumstances inevitably generates conflict within the firm. Indeed, as most authors note (e.g. [Rahim, 2023](#)), in a general sense, confronting a problem entails challenging the status quo and thus creating new sets of winners and losers. However, [Adizes \(2015: 25\)](#) identifies a specific source of conflict inherent to the change management effort: that which

arises from within the executive team tasked with making decisions to facilitate transition. The existence and inevitability of this more focused tension is central to his analysis and recommendations for handling a world in perpetual transition. To appreciate why Adizes believes change-related tensions within an executive team arise, it is necessary to describe and explain salient aspects of his theory of corporate lifecycles, itself a broad matter returned to later in this article.

Change and growth cycles

For [Adizes \(2015: 20–21\)](#), changes in an organisation's environment are disintegrating factors. To address such dysfunction, the entity expends energy (in a more technical sense, depletes its capital, labour and executive resources) outwardly, typically in the form of new product development and marketing, mergers and acquisitions, or entry into new markets. Such long-term investment generally induces a neglect of daily operations, which is followed by a slow but steady internal disintegration. When noticed, this kind of interior corrosion triggers from the executive team an inward expenditure of energy, which in turn occasions a relative neglect of the external situation and ensuing exacerbation of external disintegration, further leading to outward effort, etc. Principally because of this generic cycle, the typical organisational growth trajectory has a staircase (or see-saw) graphic form: periods of growth when the corporate board focuses its energy on the entity's environment and embarks on long-term investments, followed by internal consolidation epochs (and possible contraction), when the executive group deals with short-term problems arising from outward expansion.

In [Adizes' \(2015: 22\)](#) experience, most firms deal with the expansion-consolidation cycle by successively hiring and firing executives. Specifically, corporate boards take on entrepreneur-types to grow the entity and subsequently let them go when the pains of growth become too acute to go unnoticed. Thereafter they hire administrators to stabilise a firm and regularise its internal woes, only to fire these same operators when growth stalls (or sales decline), as it must when the external environment becomes a more pressing priority. [Adizes \(2015: 24\)](#) maintains that such a response is not only second-best but in fact dysfunctional. Indeed, the succession of executives tasked repeatedly to turn around a firm by addressing its woes, be them of endogenous or exogenous origin, does not attenuate the swing of the organisational pendulum. Rather, such remedial intervention makes oscillation more pronounced, since each executive doubles-down on what he believes is the 'real' problem at hand. Such a doubling-down effort triggers the next wave of disintegration. Hence, the constant hiring and firing executives tasked with trouble-shooting carries the seeds of long-term organisational destruction.

If successively responding to the consequences of internal and external disintegration is dysfunctional, then the prescription for good corporate governance consists, not in trying to accommodate the coming and going of growth and stability phases, but in preventing them in the first place ([Adizes, 2015: 25](#)). To that purpose, the conditions for the sort of continuous corporate expansion that does not trigger either sort of disintegration must be instituted. The crux of the dilemma is hence to arrive at optimal corporate decisions, namely decisions that maximise benefit in the short and long term. In other words, the organisation able to resist internal as well as external disintegration threats and manage the adjustments such threats require is a 'healthy organisation,' as per Adizes' definition of the expression. At this stage of the discussion, [Adizes' \(2015: 30\)](#) prescription is detailed and moves from the conceptual to the technical: the best decisions, those capable of addressing short and long-term challenges, are arrived at by groups of people comprising the four PAEI roles reviewed earlier.

Adizes' recommendation about the composition of groups responsible for making change management decisions highlights a central aspect of his thinking. Specifically, Adizes' vision of 'healthy' (change) management is not one focusing on results *per se*, but one concerned with the process by which results are obtained. Such a process makes room for (indeed, requires) the expression of different opinions, each focused on dissimilar premises, aspects and consequences of the decision being considered, as well as on its short- and long-term dimensions. Once again, a degree of conflict is thus inherent to Adizes' method.

Hard rules and soft tactics

Mutual trust and respect, even between people of good will, are typically early victims of exchanges at cross purposes, wherein interlocutors have discordant priorities and interests and speak with differing emphases but without being aware of their incongruent circumstances (Haen, 2015). As anyone who has tried will attest, reaching agreement in a meeting in which protagonists defend (at least *prima facie*) conflicting views is a challenge. Yet, if Adizes (2015) is correct in his description of the four incompatible PAEI executive roles and in his argument that their comingling is required to address organisational change (and, more generally, to obtain a "healthy" organisation), such encounters will inevitably and recurrently take place. To harness such inherent conflict, turn it into constructive energy and produce optimal management decisions while preserving (in fact shoring up) trust and respect, Adizes proposes to follow a series "hard rules," each accompanied by what he labels as "soft negotiation tactics". The overarching goal of such endeavour is to obtain the most from meetings of people exhibiting different executive profiles. Before presenting and discussing these rules and tactics, conceptual clarifications are in order.

Calling on Max Weber, Adizes (2015: 141–142) construes authority as the right to indicate *both* yes *and* no, as "determined by the position in the organisation." Adizes interprets Weber as conceiving of authority as the right to say either yes or no, and argues that, through his broadening on the idea (the "yes and no" conception), authority and responsibility come together. Adizes further notes that a common source of organisational dysfunction is executives delegating the function of saying "no" but retaining that of saying "yes". Implicit in Adizes' view is that authority (as he conceives of it) is delegated from the top down, namely from upper hierarchical strata (senior executives, initially the organisation's founders) towards lower levels. Only those with the required authority are permitted to make decision about the problems that concern their job.

While most within business schools (and seemingly all authors of management textbooks) take for granted that authority over a particular sphere of concern automatically comes (or at least should come) with responsibility for decision making on these same concerns, Adizes, with his "yes and no" conception (posited as an ideal) proposes a different interpretation. Specifically, he (2015: 144) observes that a perfect overlap between authority and responsibility cannot occur in practice. Indeed, on his view, because organisational change is constant, neither authority nor responsibility can be precisely delineated; rather, each is approximated and continuously (but not synchronously) revisited. Like what happens during a double's tennis game in which players on one side must decide who is best placed to hit the ball each time it enters their half of the court, workplace situations evolve to require different and perpetually altering arrangements. As such, consequential workplace actors constantly deploy and assert (while also conceding to others) their respective domains of authority and responsibility.

Adizes' analyses of power and influence are no less at odds with orthodoxy than his views on authority and responsibility. Specifically, power, for Adizes (2015: 152–153), is not to be confused with authority as is often done; rather (for him), power "is the capability to grant or

withhold needed cooperation.” In a typical organisation, it is front-line employees who have maximal power and minimal authority, yet they are also those whom managers prevent from taking responsibility. Further, Adizes (2015: 154) interprets the construct of influence to be “the capacity, but not the right, to make another person do something without using authority or power”. As such, someone (like Adizes himself) who, for whatever reason, has a knack for convincing another party to do things in a certain way, even though no formal relationship exists or will exist between each protagonist, has demonstrated his influence.

Where authority and power reconcile, Adizes (2015: 159–168) writes of “authorised power”. He views authority, power and influence as generic necessary precursors for implementing a decision, coining the term ‘authorance’ to describe a state where these elements come together appropriately. When authority, power and influence overlap and work synergistically, Adizes uses the acronym “capi”, short for “coalesced authority, power and influence”. Adizes is unambiguous that executives perform at their best when they deploy authority, power and influence adroitly, depending on circumstances and (in particular) the kinds of problems they face. The holy grail for executives, according to Adizes, is to have their capi reconcile (or integrate) with their zone of responsibility, even though, as mentioned, constant environmental change makes such reconciliation neither perfect nor fixed.

For Adizes (2015: 175), if people share a problem, they should also share its solution. Further, he avers that the saying “either you are part of the problem, or you are part of the solution” (that managers often press on their colleagues and subordinates to obtain their agreement over a particular course of action) is unhelpful, because it conveys an artificial (and misleading) distinction. Indeed, for Adizes (2015: 176) it is incoherent to propose that people should not be part of the solution if they are not part of the problem. These insights accounts for why someone calling a meeting and announcing upfront “we have a problem and here’s the (or my) solution” typically does not generate commitment but withdrawal. The rational here is elegant: people instinctively think “if you have the solution, then it must be your problem, not mine”. More generally, Adizes (2015: 175) holds that forcing workplace actors to choose a side each time a conundrum is to be addressed (and a strategy is to be implemented) tends to frame debates into “win-lose” confrontations in circumstances where “win-win” outcomes typically are possible (but require effort and imagination to be identified).

Arguing from Chinese etymology, Adizes (2015: 7 and 179) avers that the words “problem” and “opportunity” refer to two sides of the same coin. Specifically, he portrays each problem as an opportunity to improve the status quo but simultaneously warns that opportunities are not pursued without tackling (and overcoming) difficulties. As such, a first step when addressing a situation that requires collective decision-making is to have stakeholders recognise that they are involved in the identification and pursuit of the underlying opportunity and in the implementation of the solution required to address it. Adizes (2015: 172) calls this preliminary task the “pre-problem”; in his view, it is to be tackled by explaining to (and convincing) concerned parties that the dilemma is everyone’s responsibility. No meaningful decision-making is possible if such preliminary agreement is not obtained. As for cases where stakeholders do not even realise that a problem exists and, at some point, will need to be addressed collectively, these circumstances constitute what Adizes (2015: 178) calls “pre-pre-problems”.

Progress with each of the aforementioned situations requires a circumscribed tactic. Specifically, on Adizes’ (2015: 182) view, executives facing pre-pre-problems mostly use their influence, those facing pre-problems mainly deploy their authority, while those confronted with decision-making challenges use both authority and influence (their “authorance” in Adizes’ parlance). As for those assigned implementation tasks, they use

“authority to decide, [...] knowledge to influence, and [...] power to enforce. [They] do not have to convince anyone, just order and inspect” (Adizes, 2015: 183). Whatever the case, irrespective of whether the issue at hand is a pre-pre-problem, a pre-problem or a problem (a situation which requires decision-making), there remains the challenge of steering group discussions towards the identification of, and then agreement about, a solution. To that purpose, Adizes (2004c: 218) advances a set of terms of references. Here again, his choice of words requires a brief exposition.

Adizes (2004c: 216) distinguishes policies, rules and guidelines. He argues that while policies *must* be adhered to, rules *should* be respected, but guidelines are merely *recommended* courses of action. Expressed differently, guidelines are general instructions, conveying an accumulation of experience and wisdom about a certain topic. As such, they can be ignored freely without prior or a posteriori justification. By contrast, rules are instructions which can be disregarded if conditions warrant, but in such cases after-the-fact justifications must be forthcoming, documented and, if need be, logically defended (a rule that is deservedly and repeatedly ignored is best demoted to the status of a guideline). Policies, however, cannot be ignored without upfront approval. Since exceptions to them should be rare, policies themselves are best kept at a minimum. Adizes (2004c: 217) holds that much organisational grief and confusion stems from those who, on the one hand, write out and, on the other, apply protocols because each of these parties misconstrues rules for policies, policies for guidelines, and guidelines for rules, etc. In the same vein, when all missives are considered as guidelines, the organisation becomes chaotic; conversely, when employees misread every formalised process as a policy, executives no longer manage the book, but the book manages them. Further, each of the four PAEI role cap-wearers tends to misunderstand rules, policies and guidelines in idiosyncratic ways. For example, A (mis) managers typically confuse rules and guidelines for policies, whereas pure E executives treat everything as guidelines.

As explained, Adizes’ recommended decision-making encounters bring together people with differing expectations and priorities (the PAEI typology). As such, regulations are required to frame proceedings and transform inevitable tensions into productive outcomes. Adizes (2004c: 219) calls such regulations “hard rules”, by which he means meeting standards that sit somewhere between rules and policies (as he understands these terms). The first hard-rule is that meeting participants are allowed to speak freely, for as long as they want, without interruption. Anyone interrupting a speaker incurs a penalty, which is a donation for a charity (a donation box is set up in the meeting room). Once someone has finished speaking, the next person who wants to follow suit raises their hand and waits until he is authorised to contribute by the previous speaker (second hard-rule). During the meeting, people use only their first names, to favour relaxedness and appease tensions (third hard-rule). The fourth hard-rule is that meetings start on time (late comers do one push-up for each minute late or make use of the donation box in proportion to their lateness). Meetings last no more than 80 min, but the fifth hard-rule is that participants cannot leave early or do anything else but contribute to the session while it is on-going (no mobile phone or computer use, no reading or dealing with correspondence, etc.) [3].

Adizes (2004c: 221) recognises that enforcing his rules is often difficult but insists it is worth the effort. Indeed, in his experience (Adizes, 2015: 182), meetings so regulated allow for more sophisticated forms of problem sharing and, as a result, the identification of better solutions. More specifically, meeting rule enforcement facilitates agreement about the five Ws (why, what, how, by when and who) required when it comes to implementation and inculcates mutual trust and respect between participants. As a tactic to encourage obedience, he (Adizes, 2004c: 221–222) often makes sure he is the first one to disrespect a prominent

rule (and pay the fine). Intriguingly, he also makes donations on the behalf of those who neither respect the rule nor want to accept the penalty (he reports that doing so shames recalcitrants into submission).

To summarise, Adizes does not shun internal conflict (which he believes is inherent to good management, especially good change management), but rather seeks to contain and direct its intensity to productive ends through appreciation of a combination of behavioural insight principles and debating rules. Further, [Adizes' \(2015: 182 and 191\)](#) holds that the best team of executives (the one best able to tackle change management challenges) are not only those comprising the four PAEI roles, but also those whose collective authority, power, influence and responsibility overlap, if not perfectly, at least substantially. Whatever practical benefit there is to Adizes' perspectives and recommendations, it is noteworthy that these same axioms integrate to underpin his problem-solving method, his change management strategy and, more generally, his entire organisational therapy philosophy. They (the perspectives and recommendations) also figure centrally in his approach to corporate lifecycles.

Corporate lifecycles

Initially published in 1990, *Managing Corporate Lifecycles* is one of Adizes' first books. This work draws widely on anecdotes and is thoroughly referenced (175 scholarly footnotes in total, whereas Adizes' other books typically contain fewer than 15 references). *Managing Corporate Lifecycles* is also the only tome that Adizes extensively revised for a second edition, which appeared some fifteen years after the first.

In *Managing Corporate Lifecycles*, [Adizes \(2004b\)](#) makes a generic argument about firm evolution. He defends the contention that there are ten stages (from "Courtship" to "Death", through "Infancy", "Go-go", "Adolescence", "Prime", "Signs of Aging", "Aristocracy", "Recrimination" and "Bureaucracy"), each associated with a set of typical problems. In this account, stages map either the typical growth journey of a firm, from its beginning to maturity ('Prime' in Adizes' parlance), or its decline and downfall. An inevitable demise takes place when executives have not been able to steer away from (and overcome) the problems that each stage triggers. Although the presentation of these stages suggests that a firm's typical successful journey is sequential, [Adizes \(2004b: 96\)](#) notes that it is not necessarily the case. Indeed, in his view, corporations can find themselves simultaneously at more than one particular stage in the overall lifecycle, presumably (although Adizes is not explicit about this point) because, for example, different business units or other consequential organisational elements of large firms do not necessarily progress through the lifecycle at the same rate.

[Adizes \(2004b: 10\)](#) recognises that he is not the first management writer to chart the general evolution of an organisation from inception to maturity. Specifically, among a handful of pathbreakers, he acknowledges the contributions of such noted authors as [Greiner \(1972, 1998\)](#) and [Whetten \(1980, 1987\)](#). However, while noting the "revolutionary" insights of these predecessors, [Adizes \(2004b: 18\)](#) opines that, overall, tests of their models' predictability have yielded "ambiguous" results. In his view, such letdown is mostly because his predecessors have neglected nuance in consequential human interaction when developing their theories, preferring instead to focus on what he calls a "mechanical" view of organisational development ([Adizes, 2004b: 19](#)). By contrast, he insists that his model of corporate lifecycles is derived from ethnographic observations of over 500 corporations and associated interpretations of the relationships that emerge inside and outside firms as these are born, develop, mature and possibly disappear.

For current purposes, it is not necessary to present within the present article a summary of each of the corporate lifecycle stages that Adizes identifies. Suffice to say that a casual survey of relevant literature confirms Adizes' assessment that scholars generally do not investigate in any meaningful way the human interaction aspect of corporate development, preferring instead to focus on matters such as diversification, corporate governance or ownership structure (e.g. O'Connor and Byrne, 2015; Shyu and Chen, 2009). To repeat, Adizes' mapping of a typical corporate journey takes account of the dynamics of human interactions; the relationship side of an enterprise is the dominant and central factor in his depiction of the challenges that corporate executives face, from the inception of a new venture to its possible eventual decline, including growing pains. In that regard, the claim to originality announced in the introduction of the book is vindicated by its content.

Adizes provides no blueprint or even general advice about the sort of business plan that each stage of the cycle requires. However, he offers detailed accounts, as far as personal and workplace relationships are concerned, of the challenges that the concerned individuals face during their corporate journey and provides commentary about how these can be met. For example, in the Courtship stage (before the venture is actually launched and the new organisation formed), aspiring entrepreneurs need to build commitment (notably from financial backers, both investors and creditors) and convince other key partners (such as prospective colleagues, suppliers and customers) that the venture's business model is viable, at least in the medium term (Adizes, 2004b: 22–30). Support from friends and personal companions (especially wives and husbands) is also desirable, since the private lives of the founders will be affected. In addition to business acumen (which Adizes mentions but does not discuss), garnering such support and commitment requires specific skill, namely the ability to create and sustain relationships within constrained settings. Indeed, since new ventures have typically (at inception at least) little in the way of attractive financial results to show, the relationships that founders need to develop are similar to those nurtured by people trying to entice others through promises of a personal happy ending (hence the term 'Courtship' to name that phase of the lifecycle).

Adizes' (2004b) successive descriptions and analyses of the human interactions that dominate each stage of organisational development (should development continue successfully) is not the only distinguishing feature of his theory of corporate lifecycles. Indeed, whereas most authors speak at best in general terms of the executive team in charge of the firm during its evolution, Adizes (2004b: 82) insists: "Good management is not a marathon race. It is a relay race". With this insight, he implies that it is highly improbable (and in practice, undesirable) that the same individual leads (or merely attempts to lead) the firm throughout successive portions of its lifecycle. Indeed, successful management of each stage entails distinctive generic challenges, requiring specific skill and priorities to be successfully tackled. This is perhaps best illustrated when discussing the maturity stage ("Prime") of corporate development, to which Adizes (2004b: 95–114) dedicates substantial space. In its Prime stage, a firm's executive team has a well-developed vision of what the entity is about, the core values that guide its development are crystalised and widely shared and its objectives are clear. Internal creativity is simultaneously nurtured (to ensure renewal of the firm's offering) and controlled (to ensure that, in the case of commercial operations, the firm does not lose sight of its current customers' expectations). Further, during Prime, the firm's structure and processes are stable and enduring but make room for flexibility, ensuring that sales and profits are not only secure but grow steadily. As its environment changes (as it will), the firm in the Prime state embraces such alteration confidently and effectively. In short, the Prime corporation approaches optimal effectiveness and efficiency, both in the short and long terms. In Adizes' terminology, the Prime organisation is at its healthiest and

its main (in fact, unique) problem is to remain that way. How is such an ideal state to be achieved? Adizes' (2004b: 250–254) answer is a logical outworking of his theorising: the Prime organisation is led by an executive team comprising the four PAEI roles reviewed earlier.

On Adizes' view, the requirement to have differing executive profiles applies retrospectively to the stages that came before Prime. For example, during the Courtship stage, the soon-to-be venture is best led by an individual exhibiting the sort of behaviour associated with the E (Entrepreneurship) role, namely an individual with a passion for creativity and a willingness to take risks (while not overlooking the priorities associated with the three other roles; in Adizes' terms, this should be a paEi individual; see Adizes, 2004b: 237). However, the Infancy stage (during which concerns for clarifying and solidifying the firm's offerings dominate the corporate unfolding) is best overcome by executives playing the PaEi (i.e. mostly a Producer role), because their drive for delivering short term results is what is required. Later, the Go-Go stage requires an individual (or a team) able to play the PaEi roles; as for the Adolescence stage, it calls for either PAEi or paEi executives (Adizes, 2004b: 240–242).

Adizes is adamant: when the roles that each stage of the lifecycle require are not fulfilled as per his prescription, corporations inevitably decline, then die. Similarly, if the firm in its Prime stage is not led by an executive team assembling the four PAEI roles, premature organisational ageing necessarily follows, eventually leading to terminal decay. Conflict with such an ideal team is not only inevitable, but in fact necessary; however (and for the reasons exposed earlier), it is well managed conflict within the corporation that keeps it on its toes in the Prime stage. In a nutshell, ongoing commitment to executive diversity ensures that each consequential aspect of management and governance is addressed during a firm's lifecycle.

In the twilight zone

The originality and overall coherence of Adizes' body of work are hard to miss. To the present authors, his writing style is clear, straightforward to follow and often persuasive. Candour and humour enhance his narrative ("do I read the books I write?"; Adizes, 2004b: 90), helping the reader digest what would otherwise be dry content. Further, aspects of his thought are refreshingly free of humbug, especially those pertaining to the typical clashes of priorities within executive teams and the corresponding mismanagement styles they tend to breed (marketing types tend to think big and long-term but neglect the fine print, finance people are generally sticklers for procedures and overly cautious, operations managers are often obsessed with details and lose the big picture from sight, etc.). Beyond these subjective comments, Adizes' main ideas can be summarised as follows.

There are four archetypal (coded PAEI) 'executive roles,' an expression that refers to (mis)management styles, behavioural patterns and communications preferences. Coming with distinctive sets of priorities, each of these is suited to tackling differing challenges and overcoming dissimilar difficulties while also creating new problems if given free rein. As such, no single individual is able to run a firm (a department, a team) or manage organisational change and the issues it generates, but groups can rise to the challenge, provided that they collectively embrace the four roles in ratios dictated by lifecycle contingencies. However, assembling these incompatible roles within a team creates problems, as each type of person envisions the same situation differently, communicates about it dissimilarly and arrives at a distinctive solution to address it. Conflict within such groups is therefore inevitable but is made constructive when their members' power, authority and influence coalesce and reconcile with their managerial responsibility, even if such reconciliation is doomed to being imperfect because of an ongoing need for constant

organisational adjustment. This kind of perpetual corporate change has two origins. First, firms evolve as they hatch, develop and mature. Each successive phase comes with an idiosyncratic array of challenges that is best addressed through the sets of priorities and management approaches promoted by the four PAEI executive roles. Second, at maturity, firms need to adapt continuously to their altering environment if they are to survive. Faced with this challenge, most corporations enter a growth-plateau (or growth-contraction) pattern, which reflects the hiring and firing of executives by their board. Much preferable to such repetition is to engineer sustained adaptation and long-term growth through inputs from the four executive styles that Adizes identified.

Adizes has provided a coherent and iconoclastic account of what governance and superintendence are and are not. His construct of management is defended through an ethnographic evidence base accumulated over decades. However, as Adizes' example shows, clarity of style and originality of ideas, underpinned by testimonials and objective forms of evidence attesting to results have not been enough to secure a place (in this case, not even a footnote) in mainstream management history textbooks. While Adizes' is not an entirely obscure name (as was mentioned in the Introduction, he has received numerous accolades and is inclined to be lionised by those who have worked with him), his legacy is absent in Western academic circles. To explain such a situation, two hypotheses can be advanced.

First, missing in Adizes' work is sustained (and formalised) research showcased in conservative scholarly management and business journals. Although it is undeniably the case that [Adizes \(2017, 1979, 1976, 1973\)](#) has published in recognised (indeed elite) outlets, including one article in the *Academy of Management Journal*, his contributions have mostly appeared in practitioner periodicals such as the *California Management Review* (3 appearances, all from the 1970s). Further, as the aforementioned dates indicate, most of these articles appeared while Adizes was seeking tenure at the UCLA Graduate School of Management. As such, they predate his decision to abandon a faculty position at university and create the practitioner-orientated domain of organisational therapy. This timing implies that Adizes' scholarly contributions do not provide his latter-day work with the sort of scientific credentials that are expected within academia. Relatedly, at no point during his career has Adizes tried to validate his methodology using (at least in a formal sense) a natural or field experiment protocol with a control group, be it longitudinal (to study the long-term effects of his recommendations on his clients and wherein subjects act as their own controls) or cross-sectional (to compare firms he assisted with others he did not wherein non-assisted firms are the controls). Further, [Adizes \(2004b: xvii and 8\)](#) recognises that, in the books where he expounds his vision of organisation therapy, he deemphasises literature reviews and statistical analyses. He is also somewhat disdainful of ethereal causal theories about the phenomena he discusses, but rather emphasises "collages" and "progress report[s]" ([Adizes, 2004b: xvii](#)) of his experience. However, production and validation of causal theory is precisely what much of today's management research is about. For better or worse (mostly worse – see [Joullié & Gould, 2023](#)), not having a causal theory (at least as conceived of – and enforced – by the editors of mainstream management journals) to structure recommendations is, at the time of writing, a major block on the road to academic recognition.

The lack of formal research (again, as currently conceived) grounding Adizes' ideas and methodology is particularly apparent concerning the PAEI typology of executive roles. To reiterate, the so-called roles refer to more than mere managerial functions; indeed, they denote (in a broad sense) behavioural patterns, communications styles and priority clusters. They are the cornerstone of Adizes' approach to organisational change and corporate lifecycle management and, as such, appear in each of his interpretations of what constitutes

organisational problems and recommendations for overcoming these. Although there is nothing about the typology that seems implausible (it is admittedly straightforward in addition to containing, despite Adizes' indication to the contrary, psychological elements), the absence of empirical grounding for such a central construct denotes a lack of concern for academic conventions – and perhaps nothing more, although such paucity is likely to be construed within the academy as a chink in the armour of Adizes' contribution.

More generally, evidence for the soundness of Adizes' ideas and methodology comes mostly in the form of self-reported anecdotes and testimonials from selected clients. Although a convincing case exists that these kinds of data are legitimate, they do not easily lend themselves to being portrayed graphically (as is done for charting the effectiveness of authority, power and influence according to the number of times it is utilised; Adizes, 2015: 162). As for common sense – a resource that Adizes (2023a: 168) often extols – when dealing with workplace situations and business concerns, the academy remains uneasy, with authors deriding judgement calls as misguided instinct and misplaced confidence (Kida, 2009). As an aside, it is noteworthy that the harshest criticisms of common sense come mostly from scholars, people who have never managed anything beyond classrooms and research projects (short term endeavours involving limited number of consequential actors).

The second (and related) hypothesis concerning Adizes' patchy profile in mainstream business education is that he is regularly and stridently dismissive of the sort of knowledge disseminated by textbooks and taught in business schools (*The Ideal Executive* contains an entire chapter vociferously criticising current management education). A maverick by nature, Adizes has likely offended people in high places – however, as Oscar Wilde used to say, alienating those with vested interests is not the same as being wrong, and is often a far cry from it. To repeat, Adizes (2004c) is particularly critical of the idea, implicit in much management education, of the super-executive, the all-knowing, all powerful individual able to overcome successfully (and alone) any organisational problem occurring in any firm, irrespective of sector.

Adizes' denunciations of contemporary management and business education essentially amount to a down-to-earth repackaging of criticisms that are becoming increasingly salient in scholarly critiques (and which were exposed in the Introduction). Adizes' arguments can be broadly summarised thus. First, he considers that mainstream management educators overemphasise how to make a good decision but pay little heed to implementation (in this regard, in a personal communication, he points out that most business school faculty have little management experience, describing them as “virgin sex therapists”). Second, Adizes considers that course curricula are too focused on individuals, not recognising that what is needed is a diverse and complimentary team. Third, Adizes holds that business schools have become excessively scientifically orientated. It is indeed noteworthy that some in academia have made careers by arguing (through deployment of obscure statistical manipulation techniques) that workplace superintendence is a hyper-nuanced affair. Fourth, Adizes charges that management education emphasises knowledge acquisition at the expense of fundamental change in one's orientation; in his words (personal communication), business schools “teach you to know but not to be”. Fifth (and relatedly), Adizes opines that management education tilts too much towards dispassionate analysis and away from concern to improve the lives and wellbeing of others (Adizes expresses this later idea as “developing the brain and not the heart”). Sixth, according to Adizes, management education does not sufficiently emphasise the importance of inculcating the elementary value of mutual trust and respect within teams and workplaces. Further, it does little to provide aspiring executives with practical tools to practice these values. Seventh, Adizes is critical of the nuts and bolts of the academy's teaching and assessment protocols. He views exams, for example, as

mostly of low predictive validity and case studies as typically one-dimensional, strawman portrayals of organisational life. Consistent with the role he grants to the construct of mutual respect, to the extent that there is a place for case studies, he recommends those that emphasise situations where a manager must address circumstances where team members do not get along. Adizes also posits that management education should be a humbling experience, providing its acolytes with frequent exposure to aiding others. One of his frequent sayings on this topic is that ‘A wise man knows he is ignorant.’

A further example of Adizes’ (2004c: 35–36; 2015) deliberate shunning of mainstream scholarly output is his dismissal of debates pertaining to distinctions between the constructs of “executive”, “manager” and “leader”, terms which he uses interchangeably. Differences between these notions, on Adizes’ (2015: xi–xiii) view, are artificial and only reflect fads typical of the management education and consulting industry. In this regard, he invokes a line of logic that is simultaneously novel and compelling. Specifically, in his account, “administrator” used to be fashionable – hence the Master of Business Administration degree – until the word became synonymous with “bureaucrat”. “Management” then became the hype (hence the multiplication of “schools of management”), until the term started to refer to anonymous middle hierarchical positions; “executive” subsequently took over as the fashionable label but has now been replaced with the supposedly more prestigious “leader”. While Adizes’ account is not without merit, it generates an additional impediment for the academy’s embrace of his insights. In the same vein, Adizes reacquaints his readers with reality when he invites them – however uncomfortable as it may be – to ask whether the pointy heads have violated Occam’s razor, that is, whether they have overly complicated matters. The problem, of course, is that perhaps the old man is right. As Nietzsche wrote in *The Gay Science* (Book III, aphorism 173), “Those who know that they are profound strive for clarity. Those who would like to seem profound to the crowd strive for obscurity. For the crowd believes that if it cannot see to the bottom of something it must be profound.”

As noted, Adizes’ ironic summary of the rise and fall of “management” as a desirable job title and its replacement with the term “leader” has some bite to it. Further, his judgement (s) about the content of much management research and education (which he finds faddish and largely irrelevant to practice) has recently received (albeit in other contexts) compelling academic endorsement (Joullié & Gould, 2022; Tourish, 2020). Nonetheless, Adizes’ wholesale conflation of the relationships denoted by the terms “management” and “leadership” is controversial. The conventional wisdom has been that the two encounters merit distinction because each entail different kinds of obedience: while management implies voluntary and involuntary submission, leadership implies only voluntary submission (Joullié *et al.*, 2021). As Adizes (2004b: 290) himself often notes, subordinates are not necessarily followers (and vice-versa). However, there is a “big picture” issue which frames (or should frame) this debate. Indeed, the stubborn overarching question is about how to improve corporate performance. How can it not be? As such, it reminds saying that the Adizes formulation, whatever its internal apparent logical flaws, has a proven track record.

The aforementioned hypotheses concerning lack of embrace by the academy of Adizes’ work (paucity of formalised supporting research and across-the-board dismissal of mainstream management academia) have limited explanatory power and remain somehow inadequate. Indeed, the criticisms that could be made of Adizes could also be made of the contributions of management writers who have unambiguously achieved achieve guru status. For example, Peter Drucker, of global fame, did not support his ideas with rigorous research and relied instead on anecdotes to make his points (Joullié and Spillane, 2015). Henry Mintzberg (2004), also of worldwide recognition, has been as dismissive as Adizes (if not more) of traditional management education, and for similar reasons (like Adizes, Mintzberg

rejects the idea that one management approach fits all situations). Further, if no known philosopher has been able to advance a coherent system of thought ([Joullié and Spillane, 2021](#)), it is not reasonable to expect a management writer to achieve such a feat (although, to defend Adizes here, his system, in a general sense, passes the minimum threshold test for coherence).

In summary, if, taken separately, none of the aforementioned weakness in Adizes' ideas is fatal to academic and general endorsement, their combination, appears to have formed too high a bar for his name to clear. This conclusion is somewhat churlish. It leads back to a prior observation: all is not well within business schools. In a more objective sense, management academia has the unenviable record to have so far neglected an author who proposes an original, broadly consistent and (for many) effective approach to widespread governance challenges and to have instead celebrated individuals whose ideas have had no detectable benefit for practice (the archetypical case being that of worldwide management icon Michael E. Porter, whose consultancy – Monitor Group – filed for bankruptcy in 2012).

Conclusion: the legacy of a survivor

In his autobiography, Ichak [Adizes \(2023a\)](#) recounts the harrowing ordeals that, as a young Jewish boy, his family and himself had to go through during WWII. In these same pages, he is candidly (and bravely) explicit about his feelings of fear (especially fear of conflict and confrontation), guilt (for having survived) and general inadequacy these traumatic experiences have left him to deal with and which have always haunted him. In reading Adizes' account of what he has been through, it becomes clear that professional and intellectual success, no matter how great, is not a cure for deep personal traumas. In [Adizes' \(2023a: 182\)](#) own terms, "there is no light at the end of the tunnel [and he had] to learn to enjoy being in the tunnel itself."

The fear of conflict that has dominated Adizes' life is apparent in his writing (and arguably, his reflections). Although acknowledging the existence, in fact the inevitability, of organisational tensions, Adizes' enduring message is one about the necessity for harmony, even love, within workplaces. In this vein, his most frequent analogy for the sort of relationship that executives should develop with each other and with their subordinates is that of spouses (e.g. [Adizes, 2004c: 21](#)). Moreover, Adizes often mentions God, or the Lord, in his anecdotes and discussion of corporate life. Relevant or not, irritating or enlightening, such invocation reveals another structuring feature of his thought: in Adizes' conception of organisational life, it is undesirable that non-managers, managers and even senior executives turn-up to work only because they have to and not because they seek a workmate. Expressed differently, a strongly held, if implicit, belief of Adizes is that executives generally, even the most incompetent (those exhibiting the most pronounced mismanagement style), are not only of good faith and good will, but pursue happiness and wholesomeness at work. Further, if they do not find it, it is merely because they have not been fortunate enough to receive assistance from an organisational therapist. Such a perspective is certainly open to criticism. However, as has happened all too often in the academy, criticism has mostly come with a tendency to throw the baby out with the bathwater. When thinking about the contribution of Adizes, it would be to the benefit of all (researchers, students and practitioners alike) to not repeat such an error.

Notes

1. [Adizes \(2004c: 180\)](#) recognises that his typology is close to Carl Jung's classification of personality in four types, but says he became aware of this proximity after the publication of his first book about it. Further, he indicates (ex. [Adizes, 2015: 100](#)) that he is not a trained

psychologist. He claims about himself that he has a theory, practiced it and then attempted to understand why it works.

2. Although a test to assess one's style of management is available from www.adizes.com
3. Adizes (2015: 263) explains that there are "many, many more" rules to his methodology but does not make them explicit.

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