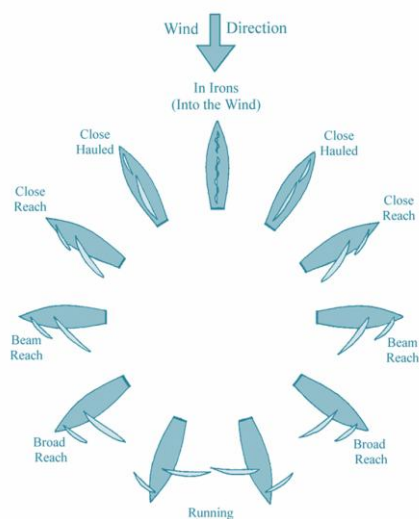




Sailing

SETTING DIRECTION VERSUS STEERING

A car is simple to control. One can directly and instantly affect speed and direction by pressing the accelerator or moving the steering wheel. Whilst a yacht may have a wheel at its stern, yachtsmen know that this is not for steering. Rather one controls direction and speed with the set of the sails.



This is because a yacht has no independent propulsion. It is utterly dependent upon the strength and direction of the prevailing wind.

In choosing how to set the sails, the helmsman balances three considerations (i) the directness of the route (and therefore the distance from A to B); (ii) the speed of travel (some angles to the wind are fast, others less so; and (iii) the comfort of the crew (some angles to the wind result in

smooth sailing), others in quite

hard sailing). Now, once underway in a car, one must continuously adjust both speed and direction. By contrast, in a yacht one can set the sails and, for the most part, sit back. So what then is the point of the tiller?

Its purpose is twofold:

First, left to its own devices a yacht will tend to 'bear off the wind'. That is to say it will allow the wind to push it a little off the optimum direction and in doing so will slow down. In this case, a steady hand on the tiller will keep the sails at the optimum angle to the wind making sure that the boat generates best speed through the water.

Second, a sudden gust of wind can over-power the sails putting the yacht at risk of capsizing. A nimble helmsman will immediately bear off wind just enough to avoid the risk of calamity whilst maintaining boat speed.

The tiller then is the way that speed of travel is optimised taking into account prevailing conditions.

It seems to me that organisations are more like yachts than cars. Winds change and yachts tend to bear off the wind. Market conditions shift and our teams tend to old habits.

A good helmsman ensures that the sails are well set



changing direction infrequently, using the tiller only to optimise speed. Clarification of priorities, roles and what constitutes performance seems to be at least part of the organisational sail setting.

Of course, the very best helmsmen do not rest. They make continuous adjustments to sail trim squeezing

executive reflection

BI-MONTHLY THOUGHTS FOR LEADERS OF HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE



every possible knot of speed from the wind.