

# Rethinking Leadership in an Information Era

**By Anthony V. Zampella,**

Founding Director/CEO,  
Center for Transformational Leadership, Inc.  
azampella@ctlnetwork.org

Assistant Professor, Mercy College,  
Master of Science Organizational Leadership (MSOL) Program

© 2004 by Anthony V. Zampella. All rights reserved. Permission required by author for any (whole or partial document) duplication or transmission.

**Special acknowledgement and recognition:** Kathy Szaj, adjunct faculty of the Manhattan MSOL Program, for editing and clarifying the thoughts herein.

# Rethinking Leadership in an Information Era

## *Introduction: A Leadership Inquiry*

For more than two decades, I have had the privilege to observe and work with inspirational leaders, and I've also had great opportunities to lead, fail and to learn a great deal about leadership. First, as publisher of a weekly gay and lesbian news-magazine, I observed the media's inner workings. During that time, I also engaged many community activists, which expanded my view of leadership, within grassroots movements and community organizing. I was struck by how communities formed to serve, especially during the nascent AIDS crisis, and how leadership emerged as vital in responding to life and death issues.

Then, as an appointed city commissioner, I worked within the political process, which included interacting with congressional members, council members, state legislators, lobbyists, mayors and political operatives. These experiences, coupled with consulting both in politics and business, exposed me to many business and industry leaders. Finally, a foray into academia landed me on two advisory boards to trustees and administrators, where I observed both elected and appointed administrators and faculty at universities and colleges. This academic realm is where I subsequently became fully immersed.

Within each realm, I observed two distinct forms of what I considered leadership: those who were brilliant at controlling events and who could outmaneuver others, and those who were ingenious at creating and reframing circumstances in which events occurred. Later I realized that the majority of those who I identified as leaders within the former group were actually great managers, strategists and tacticians. In time, I began to understand that only the *few* in the latter group *were actually leading*.

Intrigued, I became engrossed in examining distinctions between leadership and management—and discovered that only a few academic scholars had pursued this path of inquiry. I also discovered that most academics—indeed even professional practitioners—maintained that the discussion surrounding this distinction inhabited settled territory: that the ground between managers and leaders was already clearly defined and thoroughly explored. This ignorance of the vast universe between these two functions of human potential became more unsettling to me than the difference itself.

My research suggests that the first real effort to articulate this leadership distinction was initiated in 1977 by Abraham Zaleznik (1992), whose inquiry began within the psychological realm. Then John Kotter's (1994) work in 1990 brought the topic into the business realm, causing an uproar at the Harvard Business School where both men served as professors. Kotter's work (1994,1999) offered brilliant insights, illustrating major distinction in function and purpose between leaders and managers. "They don't make plans; they don't solve problems; they don't even organize people," Kotter declared. "Instead leaders prepare organizations for change and help them cope as they struggle with it."

## Purpose

How do leaders prepare organizations for change in this high-speed Information Age? Although this might appear to be the reasonable question to pursue, a more fundamental and urgent question surfaces: *How is the Information Age—with its perpetual saturation of information—reshaping what we mean by leadership itself?* This paper explores the conditions present in the Information Age, and how they impact our understanding of leadership. These conditions and factors compel us to re-think and redefine leadership apart from management in order to disclose new ways to organize work environments in these dynamic and unpredictable times. These pages draw from many of the most important leadership insights and discoveries realized during the past fifteen years. The nature of leadership reaches beyond business or science to include inquiries in philosophy, spirituality, and artistic practices. Therefore, I invite you to join me as I travel numerous disparate avenues to examine these insights and inquiries.

“Rethinking Leadership” includes three sections. Section 1, *Leaders and Managers*, clarifies the distinction between leaders and managers, which considers new discoveries and insights revealed during the past decade. Informed by a comprehensive study, James Collins (2001) has challenged our fundamental notions of leadership. His research into 1400 companies led him to discover which qualities of leadership transformed 11 of 1400 companies to “greatness,” and then to define such a leader, not as a personality profile, but as leadership *character*.

Section 2, *Leadership Challenges*, examines some of the extraordinary challenges confronting organizations and leaders prompted by our emerging Information Age. Certainly, these have been seized and diagnosed at great length within other frameworks and disciplines; however, I am attempting here to view these Information Age challenges specifically to understand their impact on leadership, and by extension, on organizational life.

Section 3, *Significance of Learning*, explores three far-reaching macro-conditions—globalization, compression of time, and access to information—as both the cause and context for renewed leadership. In the face of these macro-conditions, more than two decades of research by James Kouzes and Barry Posner (2002), within cross-cultural studies on six continents, reveal consistent similarities and trends about our most sought-after attributes and expectations of leaders.

## Emerging Field

In addition to the recent research by Collins, and Kouzes and Posner, a wealth of empirical studies and theoretical research conducted during the last two decades also suggests revisiting older notions of leadership. Peter Senge (1990, 1994, 1999, 2000), Chris Argyris (1991), Noel Tichy (2001), Steven Covey (1989), and Peter Drucker (1999) expand our view of knowledge, learning, and the leadership “character” required to develop others in a learning environment. Fernando Flores (1987, 2001), John Searle (1984, 1998), Robert Kegan and Lisa Lakow Lahey (2001, 2001), and Jeffrey Ford (1998, [a], [b]), deepen our perspective of interpretation, language, and conversations as generative and creative instruments to foster such learning environments. And, critical work by Daniel Goleman (1995, 1998, 2002) and

Richard Boyatzis (2001, 2002) increases our awareness of how to talk about emotions in organizational life, as a valuable source of information that leaders can consult more readily than most others. Finally, Ken Wilber's work (1996, 2000) brings forth an integral vision for viewing and thinking about our world, and for exploring human development. He includes matter, life, mind, soul and spirit to provide a rich framework and language to access the complexity of human development. Amazingly, most of the research and work cited above has occurred just since the Internet entered the public domain little more than a decade ago.

This overwhelming body of empirical evidence ought to give pause to those in academia: *it might be time to reconsider the purpose and fundamentals of leadership*. To that end, for the last seven years I have been probing these specific issues within the academic realm. Much of this work is the product of application and development of leadership potential in the Manhattan MSOL (Masters of Science in Organizational Leadership) Program at Mercy College, a small liberal arts college with campuses in metropolitan New York City. The resulting insights emerged "accidentally" as my colleagues and I worked on campus and within a corporate setting to design an environment of optimum graduate-level learning that can be replicated.

In 2002, we formed a research team of MSOL graduate students to explore the distinction between leadership and management graduate level programs. Armed with criteria for leadership gleaned from the research mentioned above, our student researchers identified some seventy graduate academic leadership programs throughout the U.S. Ironically, the team repeatedly encountered a lack of agreement about definitions and descriptions of leadership and management, and most existing descriptions were superficial, akin to slogans and clichés. This provoked us to revisit our fundamental notions of leadership, and update our understanding of leadership in our information era.

### ***Section 1: Leaders and Managers***

A critical distinction has evolved between leadership and management (Kotter, 1994; Zaleznik, 1990, 1992) during the last two decades. A growing body of knowledge within this emerging field of study recognizes specific distinctions between:

- **Management theory**, which develops learners to optimize the current paradigm to "cope with complexity" (Kotter, 1994) by reducing demand—tactical implementation—and becoming more effective and efficient (Conner, 1998). To sum, *managers must be adept at allocating resources*.
- **Leadership theory**, which develops learners to operate between paradigms to "cope with change" (Kotter, 1994) and uncertainty at a level of discontinuity, and to increase capacity—enterprise preparation—in an unpredictable future (Conner, 1998). In short, *leaders must be adept at aligning meaning*.

Organizations require both to succeed and to sustain any great mission (Kotter, 1996; Collins, 1997, 2001). The evidence, however, paints a dismal picture of organizations that are over-managed and under-led (Kotter, 1994). Regulations, mandates, and even compliance programs to ensure ethical behavior have attempted to replace leadership decisions and judgment with management guidelines. As such,

leaders are strangled by systems that are *not* designed to be challenged, to handle change, or to grow in a dynamic world.

DIAGRAM A: LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT<sup>1</sup>

| CONTEXT                 | MANAGEMENT (current thinking)   | LEADERSHIP (emerging thinking)  |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Approach</b>         | Operates from scarce resources: finances, time, raw materials, and tasks through application of evidence.           | Operates from abundant resources: ideas, values, meaning, trust and potential through development and learning            |
| <b>World View</b>       | Orderly and stable (Newtonian-Cartesian Paradigm)   | Dynamic, uncertain and unpredictable (Quantum Paradigm).  |
| <b>Viewpoint</b>        | To optimize the current paradigm: organize efforts for more effectiveness and efficiency.                           | To challenge the current paradigm and operate from an unrealized (unknown) future paradigm.                               |
| <b>Purpose</b>          | To cope with complexity; maintain order: reduce demand<br>To allocate and organize resources.                       | To cope with change; foster learning: increase capacity.<br>To align meaning and coordinate action.                       |
| <b>Outcome</b>          | Operational effectiveness   | Organizational agility  |
| <b>Axiom</b>            | "To do things right"  | "To do the right thing"   |
| <b>Role of Problems</b> | To establish new mechanisms, structures, and initiatives to resolve or reduce problems                              | To understand source of problem, and learn how best to grow into a new context where problems are not identified as such. |
| <b>Role</b>             | Navigator   | Designer  |
| <b>Mental Models</b>    | Operates within a single paradigm; copes with complexity. Requires layers and levels to maintain order and control. | Operates between paradigms; copes with change. Requires teams and partnerships to initiate change and leverage learning.  |
| <b>Functions</b>        | Creates and implements appropriate policies and procedures to improve systems and optimize current paradigm         | Requires resolute belief in future to develop language and inspire teams for learning and change.                         |
| <b>View of Info</b>     | Controls information to predict what is true.   | Shares information to inquire about and reveal truth.   |
| <b>View of Inquiry</b>  | Maintains status quo; searches for growth as evidenced through scientific inquiry.                                  | Inquires about purpose, values and meaning through philosophical inquiry.   |
| <b>View of Change</b>   | Implements creative solutions to alter processes and improve systems.   | Inspires individuals to identify, alter and create context.   |

Managers and leaders have different functions. Each is required to ensure the success of an organization. But the systems and thinking (mental models) in place must honor *both* as participants in the design of an organization to manage complexity *and* to lead change (Hock, 199; Bohm, 1994; Collins, 2002). Most organizations today were originally designed to honor managers and management theory. This is

<sup>1</sup> Developed by the author to distinguish between the role and functions of leadership and management, based on research identified by James Collins in *Good to Great*, specifically his discoveries about leadership (Level 5 Leadership).

problematic in dynamic times; as presented here, managers and leaders approach issues from a different context and different perspectives, with different views of time and change.

### **A Missing Inquiry**

This inclination toward management theory stems, in part, from the disparity between management programs found in several forms on most campuses (MBA, MS in Finance, Accounting, HR, IT, Economics, etc) that serve “marketable” business needs, and leadership programs sprinkled sparsely throughout academia that straddle serving business needs and addressing larger ideals within the human condition. Our preliminary research discovered tens of thousands of management-based graduate programs rooted in a problem-solving paradigm at nearly every college, university and on-line campus. However, as previously mentioned, we were only able to locate approximately seventy graduate programs (outside educational administration programs) nationwide dedicated to the inquiry of leadership.

Moreover, many leadership programs operate as a hybrid: within a management construct and in a business context. As a result, many programs designated as leadership studies are regarded as a field of scientific inquiry leading to an M.S. degree, much like the program at Mercy College. I am concerned that this view of leadership studies is limited to short-term benefits within a short-sighted business context that seems obsessed with producing the most pressing “marketable” skill-sets. Instead, I propose that we need more programs built upon a deep inquiry that creates a *leadership mindset*: one that is grounded in timeless philosophical wisdom, inquiry and deep values, to better withstand challenges and learn to adapt to specific markets and unpredictable climates.

Exploring leadership within the market-driven, scientific paradigm is myopic, with learners unprepared for the harshest challenges they will face as leaders—how to inspire, accept and assimilate new learning and ideas with greater frequency, and how to create environments from ideals that reach far beyond compensation packages and the allocation of temporary resources. Simply put, the market-driven, scientific paradigm is at odds with the essential nature and expanding view of leadership, which explores the interaction and integration of five dimensions of human consciousness<sup>2</sup>—matter (physical), life (senses), mind (consciousness), soul (meaningfulness) and spirit (nothingness)—to identify leadership potential and to create leadership environments. At best, science is equipped to handle two of these dimensions. A full discussion of all five human dimensions is larger than the space available here. My core tenet is that leadership is ultimately best explored through philosophical inquiry—which, like any artistic endeavor, emerges from within a designer’s mind—that is subsequently applied to constituencies such as business, politics, education, the public sector, etc. The best avenue for developing a framework in which meaningful inquiries are generated and sustained is an innovative liberal

---

<sup>2</sup>Typically, we collapse these domains or dimensions into three or four realms, such as physical, intellectual, emotional, and/or spiritual (Loehr and Schwartz, 2001, 2003); however, by integrating Eastern and Western thought and reviewing historical development worldwide, Ken Wilber’s work creates important distinctions, which are worth exploring in leadership development.

arts education, grounded in philosophy, humanities, the arts, and learning methodologies.

It is amazing to observe the extent that management has crept into our decision-making processes. A PBS special on how principals lead New York City schools featured a principal recalled from retirement, who was asked about her success as a principal/leader. She spoke eloquently about how leading her school meant working daily to “transcend” the management structure. She described this structure as consisting of federal mandates, state regulations and testing requirements; local efforts and mandates, such as compliance programs, union mandates, and pressures from local groups; and the educational bureaucracies—all designed to reduce problems, rather than confront them. She insisted that the educational system is designed to *manage, not lead*. Her solution: to creatively enroll volunteers into the system to manage many of the day-to-day mandates while she began charting a future for her school. This single vignette exposes the problems faced daily by principals and others who venture to express leadership in any organization with a hierarchical structure designed to control information and behavior, rather than fostering conditions to generate results from a bold future.

What has changed about our notion of leadership? How is our world so altered as to inspire us to reconceptualize the whole phenomenon of leadership? The next two sections are devoted to exploring these questions. Section 2, *Leadership Challenges*, examines three significant macro conditions of this Information Age, and their impact on our reality, society, human condition, organizations—and leadership. Section 3 *Significance of Learning*, explores the result of these far-reaching macro-conditions as both the cause and context for renewed leadership, which embraces learning at its core.

## **Section 2: Leadership Challenges: Shifting Views**

The mindset of a leader is finally being recognized as complex and distinct from that of a manager. We are beginning to fully grasp that the human interpersonal “soft skills” available through human interaction (e.g., self-expression through values, purpose and commitment; collaboration through new levels of relatedness; and complex change and learning) are essential for leadership. In contrast management programs tend to develop inquiries rooted in handling an organization’s quantitative “hard skills” to resolve problems.

Until recently, leadership was viewed as yet another training function or rite of passage destined for a select few in upper management—the most efficient managers—of large organizations. Such training typically included retreats, workshops and seminars, and mentoring programs to provide the on-the-job training necessary to “lead.” That model is no longer functioning effectively; even those in leadership positions are finding that they themselves must “learn to learn” to lead in these dynamic times. “Learning to learn” first requires a great deal of “unlearning” (Argyris, 1991) in order to properly distinguish between the *purpose* of leading and the *position* of leader (Bartlett, 1994). This evolution in our understanding of leadership mirrors our evolving understanding of the complex nature of information and its impact on circumstances, organizations, learning, and human interaction.

During the last four decades several major events have accelerated the shift from the Industrial Age to a new age of human and economic growth known as the Information Age. Each of these instances is shifting human sensibility and expectations incrementally by increasing the rate of change:

1. Invention of the micro computer chip (1968), and the break-up of AT&T (1981); the application of the microchip to create the portable and mobile personal computer (1984); and development of local and wide area networks (late 1980's).
2. The fall of the Soviet Union (1989) causing the break-up of the old communist regime (1991), spurring the release of the Internet into the public domain (1993), and the rise of new economic trade agreements (1990's).
3. The advance of cable television (1980's) and expansion of twenty-four-hour news, digital, and satellite programming spurred by the new Federal Communications Act (1996).

In the late 1950's Bell Labs redefined "information" as the "resolution of uncertainty," which posits a unique relationship between information and uncertainty. In uncertain times, information—as ideas, ideology, values and meaning—is the critical constituent in shaping events, resolving uncertainty, making sense of the world, and creating context. Information carried through, and interpreted by, multiple media has the power to both inform (content) and to form reality (context).

This shift to an idea- and information-based society is facilitated and accelerated by three macro-conditions: *globalization*, *access to information*, and *compression of time*. Together these factors add complexity to how change unfolds and what it means to lead in the face of new conventions of uncertainty.

### Globalization

Implications of globalization range from economic, to social (human interaction), to intellectual (exposure to new experiences and ideas). The dissolution of traditional political boundaries favors mutual agreements that foster economic trade and market regulation. Far broader than economics or politics, this entails a new "system of thinking" about our existence on this planet. A "smaller," connected planet demands that organizations become more aware of and open to viewing the world through a plethora of perspectives and experiences.

The challenge for leaders is to integrate this complex array of perspectives and experiences into their interpretations, vocabulary, and subsequent decision-making.

### Access to Information:

Technical knowledge has expanded with greater frequency, reaching beyond our capacity to gather, capture, analyze, and generate data. Information is available in greater quantities to individuals at home, in offices and in organizations. Multiple levels of information are now available on any topic, at any time, any place, by anyone. The result is an overwhelming sense of too many choices without enough reflection to rank or prioritize which choices demand what kind of time.

The challenge for leaders is to process more content, more often. This abundance and frequency of information means viewing information as both content and context. That is, information often shifts or forms the reality that it reveals. Paradoxically, this level of consciousness requires less attention to individual and separate pieces

of information, and compels greater attention to connecting patterns, with the greatest attention focused on integrating patterns to form judgment. For instance, with a greater abundance and frequency of information, its *source*—and not its content—becomes a proxy for assessing credibility.

### *Time Compression:*

Access to more information means more to sift through in less time to determine what is “useful” to resolve uncertainty and act with greater awareness. Increasing expectation of speed and urgency continues to reduce product life-cycles, creating an increasing demand for new information. A shift to digital processing, through smaller devices, creates conditions for greater mobility, which again, facilitates more time compression. It is now possible to use almost all of our free time—once reserved for important reflection or much-needed respite—to make decisions and forward action while traveling by train, car, subway, or plane; while waiting for someone; and even while eating.

The challenge for leaders is to prioritize among competing contexts: short-term desires competing with long-term aspirations. Choosing becomes a battle of *expectations* between the convenient, expedient and the sustainable. New technologies that compress time create an *expectation* of free time as a competitive advantage, which creates an *expectation* of time as a spend-it-or-lose-it commodity. Additionally, and perhaps most deceptively, these expectations fuel the larger *expectation* that we can control our time, thereby giving us the impression that being overwhelmed and needing more time can be resolved by: 1) compressing activities through multi-tasking and speed reading; 2) compressing technologies through “convergence,” a market-driven response that creates all-in-one devices (PDA’s that are also cameras and phones; copiers that scan, fax and print); 3) compressing information as digits in PDA’s, CD’s, TiVo, DVD’s, and MP3 technologies, which edit, transport and control information with greater speeds at our fingertips; and, 4) compressing space through Internet chats, teleconferences, and video-conferencing. The core challenge here is to manage this phenomenon of “expectations,” by *discerning what’s important from what’s most urgent with clarity of purpose and a clear future context.*

### ***Section 3: Significance of learning***

The result of shifts in these macro conditions provokes an urgency to rethink our notion of leadership. First, these three macro conditions interact to produce non-linear change or multiple, unpredictable futures, creating what Alvin Toffler called “Future Shock” (1965): the future rushing to us at ever-increasing speeds. This phenomenon is less about predicting a future and more about seeing many possibilities to *interpret the present that will make sense in a future.*

Second, globalization, access to information, and time compression are shifting our fundamental perceptions of reality, society and humanity, affecting our sensibilities with more choices and greater consequences that can be overwhelming. This “assault” demands an increased level of awareness from all who aspire to lead in small or large organizations.

Third and most significant, non-linear change alters our life's navigational compass. The guiding "North Star" is no longer viewed apart from or outside us. We have grown to understand that true meaning and purpose demand an inward exploration to find direction. To understand the world "out there," we must first ask *which* world; that is, from which level of consciousness are we viewing the world (Bohm, 1994; Wilber, 1996, 2000; Beck, 1996). Simply put, on which rung of the ladder are we standing when we peer out? The view from the top rung presents quite a different world than from the middle or bottom rung. In general business and organizational terms, this occurs as a shift from valuing *output* to valuing *input*. This is apparent when we examine the focus of our attention, as indicated by each paradigm or mindset:

- **Industrial-age mindset.** Our focus was on *output*. We produced products, which could be measured, planned, and organized in a predictable and orderly process – that is, product-driven. Value was attributed to scarce resources, such as capital, raw materials and time, which required proper allocation. To increase value we developed methods, systems and structures to preserve and protect "output."
- **Information-age mindset.** Our focus is on *input*. We develop knowledge from ideas and information through new levels of learning. Value accrues by developing abundant resources—such as talent, trust, and ideas—through aligning meaning as systems of ideology. This unpredictable, messy and dynamic process demands human-inspired cultures that grow, adapt, and integrate to reach new levels of "input."

And finally, non-linear change challenges previous notions of knowledge, shifting what it means "to know." Many experts believe that knowledge today has a half-life of seven years, and technical knowledge a half-life of eighteen months. So, for leaders simply "knowing" is of little value. *How we know* is a greater predictor of success than *what we know*. For leaders this means rethinking who we are as learners.

### **Shifting from "Winning" to "Progress"**

Today, to lead means to learn. Leadership, as a developmental process, is not simply an add-on set of skills in a linear growth model. We are increasing input capacity, not merely adding more output. Development requires an awareness of how capacity evolves over time—often marginally, until suddenly the right piece of information resonates; a growth spurt occurs, and everything seems to "click." This dynamic is akin to philosophical inquiry or artistic endeavor (Depree, 1989).

However, philosophical inquiry's seemingly leisurely rhythm may appear to contradict the need to process an abundance of information in less time, with greater need and capacity for connectivity. Indeed, our current non-linear progression seems to recommend that we keep adding more skills to become better and faster. And here precisely is the conundrum: the leadership paradox. *To lead today demands critical reflection and keen judgment to view leadership in the largest context—a deliberate philosophical inquiry in which paradoxes reveal truths and not problems for quick solution.* This is a radical shift from the current business context, which at present is preoccupied with instant answers and short-term gains.

*Shall we view leadership as a momentary instrument used when it serves a purpose, or as a timeless art/philosophy through which we fulfill purpose?*

A larger, philosophical context reveals the need to prioritize learning beyond short-term skill sets to shifting mindsets: from a competitive mindset that is designed to *win*, to a learning mindset that transforms information and values to generate incremental progress. In a world in which drastic change mines the abundance of ideas, trust, information and human potential, *progress is that which is sustainable and that which serves the human condition*. Social philosopher Eric Hoffer proclaimed as much five decades ago: “In a time of drastic change it is the learners who inherit the future. The learned usually find themselves equipped to live in a world that no longer exists.”

Leaders who embrace “learning” operate from a longer view of the future that requires a shift in perspective from “winning” to “progress.”

DIAGRAM B: SHIFTING MINDSET<sup>3</sup>

| TOPIC                            | WINNING   | PROGRESS  |
|----------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Global Paradigm</b>           | Scarcity  | Abundance   |
| <b>Leadership Context</b>        | Position  | Purpose   |
| <b>Leader’s Context</b>          | From mission: what we accomplish  | From purpose: reason for being (why we exist)                                       |
| <b>View of Leadership</b>        | As content: skills and techniques applied to issues, as style and/or topic to enhance effectiveness | As context: lens (mindset) through which to view/live life                          |
| <b>Leader’s Purpose</b>          | To provide opportunities to get ahead.  | To enhance human condition  |
| <b>View of Humanity</b>          | Competitive creatures: to be effective, to be the best.   | Social creatures: to be connected   |
| <b>Views of Learning</b>         | Acquisition of knowledge to gain competitive advantage.   | Growth and development: adaptability and change, achieving new levels of awareness. |
| <b>View of Employment</b>        | As a job: to gain skills and a path to acquire security and safety in a competitive world.          | As work: realization of self through service or practice                            |
| <b>View of Change</b>            | Opportunity to gain new ideas for competitive advantage.  | Opportunity for learning and new growth and development                             |
| <b>View of Values</b>            | Opportunity to gain competitive advantage   | Fundamental   |
| <b>View of Future (planning)</b> | Strategy: organize resources to win, be more effective.   | Core philosophy: align meaning to enhance growth and development.                   |

<sup>3</sup> Diagram developed by author to illustrate the mindset of leaders who set out to win, in contrast to leaders who develop environments to learn.

For the pragmatic reader, time and urgency are practical considerations in confronting the harshest realities of organizational life. Yet, what could be more practical than achieving sustainability? Leaders develop people and design environments for the long haul, to steward environments for emerging leaders, and not simply for instant gratification, empire building, or to acquire positions. Critical research on this topic by Collins (2001) establishes that those companies that have made the leap to greatness all operated within a longer view to achieve and sustain greatness.

Studies also indicate that Information Age leaders develop a mindset that cultivates a particular relationship to time. Beyond being proactive, these visionaries maintain a long-term view of the future—often long after their tenure—with a forward-looking view of reality. These individuals are more apt to inspire learning that can out-grow, rather than control, problems.

Two notions seem to preoccupy successful leaders: learning and the future. A comprehensive twenty-year study<sup>1</sup> conducted on six continents examined twenty criteria people admire in leaders; the results were striking in their consistency. In 1987, 1995 and then recently in 2002, Kouzes and Posner (2002) found at the top of the most esteemed leadership traits list the same four criteria: *leaders are honest, forward-looking, competent and inspiring*. Two of these four descriptions, “inspiring” and “forward-looking,” speak to a longer and bolder view of the future. The other two—“honest” and “competent”—embody elements of trust essential for the kind of learning that takes us to this future.

Ironically, the study’s consistently rated *least* admired leadership traits—mature, loyal, self-controlled, and independent—are often cited as top criteria of “potential leaders.” Kouzes and Posner’s results appeared repeatedly in cross-cultural comparisons among Australia, Canada, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Scandinavia, Singapore and the United States.

Based on their extensive research, Kouzes and Posner developed a model that clarifies five leadership practices, accompanied by ten commitments (following each practice below) required in these dynamic, unpredictable and uncertain times:<sup>4</sup>

- 1) Model the Way: a) Find your voice by clarifying your personal values; b) Set the example by aligning actions with shared values;
- 2) Inspires a Shared Vision: a) Envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities; b) Enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations.
- 3) Challenges the Process: a) Search for opportunities by seeking innovative ways to change, grow, and improve; b) Experiment and take risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from mistakes.
- 4) Enables Others to Act: a) Foster collaboration by promoting cooperative goals and building trust; b) Strengthen others by sharing power and discretion.
- 5) Encourages the Heart: a) Recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence; b) Celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community.

---

<sup>4</sup> From *The Leadership Challenge*, third edition by Kouzes & Posner.

## Shift to Non-linear Change

Specifically, greater frequency of non-linear change—that is, greater predictability of the unpredictable—affects human thinking deeply, at the level of choice. Past organizational strategy consisted of predictable linear (first-order) change based in an already existing framework. This provided a universe of known scenarios from which to operate—and to feel secure and certain. Current strategy increasingly operates from a future *without* a road map, existing framework, or predictability, which results in a nearly endless array of choices and non-linear (second-order) change.

In the past Industrial era, complexity alone dominated our thinking and planning cycles in organization. Our universe of choices appeared constant for periods of time to allow for near-permanent structures, procedures and methods to remain in place. Product life cycles were regular and predictable, and employee turnover interfered only mildly in terms of planning. Non-linear change occurred as a major event; however, the focus of attention was on resources and how best to allocate them to manage output. People were instruments to produce the best products (output). People were fungible; products were the stable assets that built great organizations.

Today, unpredictable change occurs frequently inside complex organizations. Employees do not expect lifetime employment. Product-life cycles are compressed, causing a greater need for new ideas (inputs) and new products (outputs). Ideas (input) are critical as products (output) become fungible, and new ideas must be integrated at the speed of thought. For example, in the previous paradigm value accrues to that which is rare. In this paradigm networks accrue greater value than individual parts; and the capacity of a network to act, think and learn collectively accrues the greatest value.

Focusing on increasing organizational capacity to develop new ideas that foster new thinking and non-linear change is no longer a luxury but a requirement. This environment calls upon two distinct roles to serve organizational life and well-being for human interaction: to cope with complexity (managers) by allocating resources and optimizing the current systems, and to cope with change (leaders) by increasing capacity.

An increased level of uncertainty in the Information Age demands that ideas, carried through information, be readily accessible and available to everyone and not just to a few “at the top.” Leadership must be exercised at all levels of an organization. The only constant ingredient of unpredictable change and uncertainty comes from the sources of ideas and information—the talent and learning leveraged by leaders within organizations. This is the ground, consisting of three elements, upon which leaders and organizations stand: *purpose* (our reason for being), *values* (what we stand for) and *context* (the frame of interpretation that creates meaning [Collins and Porras, 1997; Lencioni, 2002]).

*Perhaps the leader's sole job is to connect and sustain purpose and values within dynamic contexts; to continually translate, articulate, reframe and interpret what is occurring so that we are able to move forward—seamlessly and/or without interruption—in the face of uncertainty.* This demands a particular mindset that begins with greater self-awareness: to identify and continually reframe individual purpose and

values within different circumstances; to assume the responsibility to inspire learning; and to seek greater awareness of the connection between an organization's purpose and mission within an employee's work context.

Organizations designed to accommodate this new level of consciousness will create environments that can sustain inquiry and self-knowledge, clarify values that hold meaning (Lencioni, 2002) in uncertain times with unpredictable futures, and offer stakeholders the possibility to develop more meaningful existence. Developing an environment of inquiry, values, meaning, and possibility demands an organizational design with leadership as its organizing principle—leadership that does not reside in a select few, but lives throughout the organization.

### **Conclusion:**

The wealth of empirical studies over the last fifteen years provokes rethinking our notion of leadership. The Information Age—with the Internet as a potent symbol—continues to challenge our perceptions of reality, society, humanity and organizational life. Information emerges as the raw material that both informs reality and forms reality through the construction of meaning. Meaning, as carried in ideas, ideology, values and purpose, is *the* asset that must be cultivated and leveraged in any organizational environment. Leaders are called to cultivate (through trust), create, and align meaning (as they embody and articulate values) through the use of generative language that inspires action.

This paper identifies the influence of three macro conditions—the unprecedented access to information, compression of time and globalization—that together produce non-linear change. We are seeing that in these dynamic, uncertain and unpredictable times, the demand for leadership shifts from mere operational effectiveness to an elevated role of primary “meaning maker,” someone who inspires learning, change, and a bold future by aligning purpose, values and mission for all in his/her environment.

These reflections offer considerable content about leadership and develop a powerful context for leadership. However, the leadership domain is in an embryonic stage of exploration. The possibilities for leadership development are still in process of discovery, even as I complete this draft. A vigorous exploration demands an equally clear and powerful lens from within our academic institution—or perhaps other learning environments are better suited for this exploration.

We are at the genesis of many essential shifts. Whether we choose to observe or to participate, we are co-creating new forms of leadership that will emerge to inform and shape the next brand of CEO's, educators, organizational pioneers, political and global leaders. It is within our reach—today—to ask what might be (and who we might become) if we discover and design organizations that leverage the full range of human potential within us.

## ***Bibliography***

### **Books**

- Beck, Don Edward and Christopher C. Cowen (1996) Spiral Dynamics: Mastering values, leadership, and change. ISBN 1-55786-940-5
- Bohm, David. (1994). Thought as a System. Routledge. ISBN 0-415-11030-0 (pbk).
- Collins, James, and Jerry I Porras. (1997). Built to Last. ISBN: 0887307396.
- Collins, James. (2001). Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap . . . and Others Don't. ISBN 0-06-662099-6.
- Conner, Daryl R. (1998). Leading at the Age of Chaos: How to Create the Nimble Organization. ISBN: 0-471-29557-4.
- Covey, Stephen R. (1989). The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change. ISBN: 0-671-70863-5.
- Depree, Max. (1989). Leadership is an Art. ISBN 0-440-50324-8.
- Drucker, Peter F: (1999). Management Challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. ISBN: 0-88730-998-4.
- Goffman, Erving. (1959). The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. ISBN: 0-385-09402-7.
- Goffman, Erving. (1963). Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity. ISBN: 0-671-62244-7.
- Goleman, Daniel. (1995) Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ. ISBN: 0-553-09503-X.
- Goleman, Daniel (1998). Working with Emotional Intelligence. ISBN: 0-553-37858-9.
- Goleman, Daniel and Annie McKee, Richard E. Boyatzis. (2002). Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence. Harvard Business School Press; 1st edition. ISBN: 157851486X.
- Harvey, David. (1990). The Condition of Postmodernity. ISBN: 0-631-6294-1.
- Heidegger, Martin. (1962). Being and Time. ISBN: 0-06-063850-8.
- Heidegger, Martin. (1971). Poetry, Language, Thought, translated by Albert Hofstadler. Harper & Row, Publishers Inc. ISBN 06-090430-5.
- Hock, Dee. (1999). Birth of the Chaordic Age. ISBN: 1-576-75074-4.
- Hoffer, Eric. (1952). The Ordeal of Change. Harper & Row Publishers.
- Jaworski, Joseph. (1998). Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership. ISBN: 1-57675-031-0.
- Kegan, Robert and Lisa Lahey. (2001). How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work. ISBN: 0-7879-5535-3.
- Kotter, John P. (1996). Leading Change, Harvard School Press. ISBN: 0-87584-747-1
- Kotter, John P (1999). John Kotter on What Leaders Really Do. Harvard Business School Press. ISBN 0-87584-897

- Kouzes, James M and Posner, Barry Z. (1999). Encouraging the Heart: A Leader's Guide to Rewarding and Recognizing Others. ISBN: 0-7879-4184-0.
- Kouzes, James M and Posner, Barry Z. (2002) The Leadership Challenge, Third Edition. Jossey-Bass. ISBN- 0-7879-5678-3
- Kuhn, Thomas. (1996). The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. ISBN: 0-226-45808-3.
- Palmer, Parker. (1990). The Active Life: A Spirituality of Work, Creativity, and Caring. Jossey-Bass.
- Rosenau, Pauline Marie. (1992). Post-Modernism and the Social Sciences: Insights, Inroads and Intrusions. ISBN: 0-691-02347-6.
- Searle, John R. (1984) Minds, Brains and Science. Harvard University Press. Cambridge Massachusetts. ISBN 0-674-57633-0.
- Searle, John (1998). Mind, Language and Society: Philosophy in the Real World. Basic Books, NY. ISBN 0-465-04521-9.
- Senge, Peter, *et al.* (1990). The Fifth Discipline: Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organization. ISBN: 0-385-26095-4.
- Senge, Peter, *et al.* (1994). The Fifth Discipline Field Book: Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organization. ISBN: 0-385-26095-4.
- Senge, Peter, *et al.* (1999). The Dance of Change: The Challenges to Sustaining Momentum in Learning Organizations. ISBN: 0-385-493223.
- Senge, Peter, *et al.* (2000). Schools that Learn: A Fifth Discipline Fieldbook for Educators, Parents, and Everyone Who Cares about Education. ISBN: 0-385-49323-1.
- Solomon, Robert and Flores, Fernando. (2001). Building Trust: In Business, Politics, Relationship and Life. ISBN: 0-19-512685-8.
- Wheatley, Margaret J. (1992). Leadership and the New Science: Learning about Organization from an Orderly Universe. ISBN: 1-881052-44-3.
- Wilber, Ken. (1996). A Brief History of Everything, revised edition. Shambhala, Boston. ISBN: 1-57062-740-1.
- Wilber, Ken. (2000). A Theory of Everything: An Integral Vision for Business, Politics, Science, and Spirituality. Shambhala, Boston. ISBN: 1-57062-855-6
- Winograd, Terry and Flores, Fernando. (1987). Understanding Computers and Cognition: A New Foundation for Design. ISBN: 0-201-11297-3.
- Zaleznik, Abraham. (1990). Executive Guide to Motivating People. Bonus Books, Inc. ISBN: 0-929387-11-2.

## **Articles:**

Aldog, Ramon and Deborah Dougherty. (1997). "Organizational Transformation." *Journal of Management Inquiry*.

Argyris, Chris. (1991). "Teaching Smart People How to Learn." *Harvard Business Review*.

Bartlett, Christopher A. and Ghoshal, Sumantra. (1994). "Changing the Role of Top Management: Beyond Strategy to Purpose." *Harvard Business Review*.

Boyatzis, Richard E. (2001). "Unleashing the Power of Self-Directed Learning," Original.[??]

Collins, Jim. "Level 5 Leadership: The Triumph of Humility and Fierce Resolve." *Harvard Business Review*, January, 2001.

Collins, James C. and Porras, Jerry I. (1996). "Building Your Company's Vision." *Harvard Business Review*

Drucker, Peter; Dyson, Esther ;Handy, Charles; Saffo, Paul and Senge, Peter. (1997). "Looking Ahead: Implications of the Future." *Harvard Business Review*.

Ford, Jeffrey D. and Ford, Laurie W. (1998). "Organizational Change as Shifting Conversations." *Journal of Organizational Change Management*.

Ford, Jeffrey D.; Ford, Laurie W.; and MacNamara, Randall. **[a]** "Resistance and The Background Conversations of Change." Original. [??]

Ford, Jeffrey D. and Ford, Laurie W. **[b]** "Conversations and the Authoring of Change." Original. [??]

Kegan, Robert and Lahey, Lisa Lakow. (2001). "The Real Reason People Won't Change." *Harvard Business Review*.

Keepin, William. (1993). "Life Work of David Bohm: River of Truth." [Periodical name?]

Kotter, John P. (1994). "What Leaders Really Do." *Harvard Business Review*.

Kotter, John P. (1995). "Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail." *Harvard Business Review*.

Johnson, Lamont. "Meaning and Speech-Act Theory, Speech-Act Tutorial: Interaction & Relationships."

Lencioni, Patrick M. "Make Your Values Mean Something." *Harvard Business Review*, July, 2002.

Loehr, Jim and Schwartz, Tony. (2001). "The Making of a Corporate Athlete." *Harvard Business Review*.

Tetenbaum, Toby T. "Shifting paradigms: From Newton to Chaos." *Organizational Dynamics*, Spring, 1998, 26(4), 21-32.

Tichy, Noel M. (2001). "No Ordinary Boot Camp." *Harvard Business Review*.

Zaleznik, Abraham. (1992). "Managers and Leaders: Are they Different?" *Harvard Business Review*.

---

<sup>i</sup> From *The Leadership Challenge*, 2002: The Characteristics of Admired leaders (p.25):

---

| <b>Characteristic</b> | <b>Year and Percentage</b> |             |             |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|-------------|-------------|
|                       | <b>2002</b>                | <b>1995</b> | <b>1987</b> |
| 1. Honest             | 88                         | 88          | 83          |
| 2. Forward-looking    | 71                         | 75          | 62          |
| 3. Competent          | 66                         | 63          | 67          |
| 4. Inspiring          | 65                         | 68          | 58          |
| 5. Intelligent        | 47                         | 40          | 43          |
| 6. Fair-minded        | 42                         | 49          | 40          |
| 7. Broad-minded       | 40                         | 40          | 37          |
| 8. Supportive         | 35                         | 41          | 32          |
| 9. Straightforward    | 34                         | 33          | 34          |
| 10. Dependable        | 33                         | 32          | 33          |
| 11. Cooperative       | 28                         | 28          | 25          |
| 12. Determined        | 24                         | 17          | 17          |
| 13. Imaginative       | 23                         | 28          | 34          |
| 14. Ambitious         | 21                         | 13          | 21          |
| 15. Courageous        | 20                         | 29          | 27          |
| 16. Caring            | 20                         | 23          | 26          |
| 17. Mature            | 17                         | 13          | 23          |
| 18. Loyal             | 14                         | 11          | 11          |
| 19. Self-controlled   | 8                          | 5           | 13          |
| 20. Independent       | 6                          | 5           | 10          |