

LEADERSHIP IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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For years, scholars have been trying to define or describe the nature of leadership. Today, driving forces exist that suggest that the purpose of leadership in the twenty-first century, rather than the definition, must be the focal point of our leadership studies.

Therefore, recognizing the context of these changing times, we propose that the **PURPOSE OF LEADERSHIP** in the twenty-first century is:

- To create a supportive environment where people can thrive, grow, and live in peace with one another;
- To promote harmony with nature and thereby provide sustainability for future generations;
- To create communities of reciprocal care and shared responsibility – one where every person matters and each person's welfare and dignity is respected and supported.

Upon reflection, it is easy to recognize that this approach to leadership will be confronted with many challenges. Among these challenges are some prominent trends that appear to be shaping thought and action for the future. A few of these challenges can be presented as dynamic trends. These are:

1. Globalization,
2. Increasing stress on the environment,
3. Increasing speed and dissemination of information technology, and
4. Scientific and social change.

Our human consciousness and capacities mutually shape these trends. They illustrate the point that leadership in the future will need to be anchored in a purposeful set of assumptions that are intended to advance human capacity and consciousness. The following narrative is intended to provide a framework for understanding the implications for leadership, it is obviously not all-inclusive.

PROMINENT TRENDS

1. **Globalization:** There is an increasing global consciousness in all sectors and societies of the world. This shift in thought and action has affected all sectors of society. Instead of focusing merely on the United States, the marketing of U.S. consumer goods, manufacturing, and even entertainment has drastically expanded to worldwide status.

This globalization of manufacturing, marketing, and competition has created multi-national organizations designed to compete in the broader economic playing field. The economy itself has become global. The economic challenges of Mexico, Great Britain or any country affect the global economy. The stock markets are interdependent.

2. **Increasing Stress on the Environment:** Issues related to the environment and its ability to support the world's populations in the future are becoming increasingly challenging. While the United States may lead the world in pollution control, environmental problems do not stay within the boundaries of any one nation. Struggles between economic interests and environmental interests continue all over the world. We see this exhibited in the debate over the use of old growth forests, wetland preservation, fishing rights, and legislation on chemicals that affect the atmosphere. Concerns about our fresh water table will probably increase as industrial runoff and other such violations challenge us. Landfills continue to be overloaded

with waste, triggering increased pressure for recycling. Toxic waste, land development, and complex environmental phenomena all contribute to issues of health education and human and animal welfare.

- 3. Increasing Speed and Dissemination of Information Technology:** Mass communication has connected the world in ways that were unheard of fifty years ago. While the Pentium chip may be the latest addition to computers this year, just around the corner is the advent of nano-technology. Nano-technology will allow the application of techniques in every discipline from microbiology to political science that will drastically decrease the size of equipment, and increase the capacity of processing and disseminating information. Today, electronic bits of information are transferred almost instantaneously. Information is rapidly disseminated throughout the world via the Internet, CNN, and major news networks. The result is that we know what has happened halfway around the world almost instantaneously. It is nearly impossible to keep information private.

Information technology is made up of “bits”, and “bits” do not behave like consumer goods. Consumer goods can be stopped at country borders and their worth can be declared. “Bits” travel electronically across borders with little possibility of control. This may explain why we now have permeable boundaries among our organizations, communities, and individuals. For example, when the Chinese students were protesting in Tienamen Square, they were also communicating by fax and other media to the rest of the world. The immediate information was very difficult, if not impossible, for the Chinese government to control. There are numerous similar examples.

- 4. Scientific and Social Change:** The recent announcement of the cloning of a sheep heralds the shape of things to come from genetic engineering. Genetic engineering is just one of the scientific changes that will reshape our lives. Bio-medical technology will not just continue to reveal the secrets of the gene code, but it will radically change the way we cure diseases, and produce and grow our food. Social changes will require new political, social, educational, and organizational structures. The perceptions of gender roles will also be reshaped and communicated widely. All of these changes will mingle with one another with little time delay.

These four trends are mutually shaped by, and interact with the ethical and spiritual dimension of human beings. The challenge and questions for leadership then become, *“Can humans develop the self-discipline to choose how they currently interact with each other and the environment? Can we develop the ability to live in peace with each other? Can we learn to live in harmony with nature? Can we increase the speed at which we learn about complex, dynamic challenges and problems? Will the human race develop and support the required diversity to match and surpass the complexity of the dynamic system of the future? How far does our current consciousness extend? What is the effect of our current human capacity on the challenges of today and of the future?”*

While any one of these four dynamic trends would be more than enough to deal with, they can not be treated as separate issues. They are highly interdependent and, because of this, it is difficult to discuss them as discrete identities. As they interact, they create an interesting set of implications that will have a powerful effect on how we practice leadership in the future.

IMPLICATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP

- 1. Increasing Diversity in our Daily Lives:** Globalization has not only effected our traveling, markets, and perspective, it has also stimulated immigration and along with it population growth. This phenomenon creates a significant increase in diversity in our communities and in the workforce. Increased diversity in our lives will continue to challenge the assumptions many organizations have used to shape standards of practice. Leadership practices that recognize diversity as a positive asset of

organizations and communities will need to be employed. New systems thinking will be required to design processes that increase inclusiveness and diversity in decision making.

2. **Increasing Change:** The magnitude and speed of change will continue (Connor, 1995 *Managing at the Speed of Change*). The discomfort of having a decreasing amount of time to respond to change will be experienced. The complexity of change events will increase. Because the total system will be more interconnected, the number of facets that need to be considered will also increase. *This will require leadership to design, support and nurture flexible, durable organizations and groups. It will also require a systemic understanding in order to respond positively to the change events.*
3. **Complexity:** As stated above, our world is composed of a wide variety of infrastructures that are becoming increasingly complex and interwoven. Each one of the dynamic trends mentioned above is a complex system in and of itself. However, they all interact with one another creating a large, dynamic non-linear system with smaller non-linear dynamic systems nested within them. In these systems, sequential cause and effect are much more difficult to track and predict. *Leadership will need to pace and intuit the changing complexity of the system. Complexity challenges every individual's capacity to fully understand or intuit the many interrelated systems. For this reason, complexity requires shared leadership, and multiple perspectives.*
4. **Interdependence:** This complex, changing system is also interdependent. Interdependence shapes complexity and complexity shapes interdependence. The dynamic trends of ecological stress, information technology, globalization and scientific and social change all demonstrate the impact of interdependence and demand a total systems approach. *The challenge and implication for leadership will be to initiate and practice a systems perspective.*
5. **Increasing Tensions Around Value Differences:** There will be more tensions between individual rights and the common good of the larger community. We will be faced with the ethical ramifications of our organizations' decisions as they influence not just the individual organization or corporation but also the community and the world. *This will require that leadership be practiced with a significant ethical dimension that focuses on sustainable principles.*
6. **Increasing Gap Between the Rich and Poor:** There will be continuing tension between the rich and the poor. This will affect both individuals and nations. This tension will include both economics and natural resources. *This widening gap will require a leadership that recognizes justice and equity issues, as well as economic and ecological concerns.*
7. **Increasing Requirement for Continuous Learning:** As stated repeatedly, these dynamic trends are continuously changing and interacting. *The implication for leadership is the responsibility to encourage the speed at which individuals learn and to provide opportunities for these individuals to grow in understanding how this learning can be brought into the changing relationship with the community or organization.*

*Recognizing the trends that have been articulated here as powerful forces that demand a new form of leadership, and focusing on the **purpose** rather than the definition of leadership leads us to assert that a **shared, collaborative** form of leadership will be the most successful approach in the next century.*

SHARED/COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP

This new leadership paradigm has been called by a number of different names – shared, participatory, collective, collaborative, cooperative, democratic, fluid, inclusive, roving, distributed, relational, and post heroic. While consensus on the name of this “new leadership” has not been reached, there is a

growing understanding that the patterns of hierarchical leadership that served us in the past, are not well suited to the global complexity, rapid change, interdependency and multifaceted challenges described above.

In the information age, the primary challenge will be to encourage the new, better-educated work force to be committed, self-managing and life-long learners. This “people-focused” leadership has its roots in democratic traditions. It is founded on the belief that in the complex future “answers are to be found in community” (Wheatley) in group-centered organizations where “everyone can learn continually” (Senge). Followers are being transformed into partners, co-leaders, life-long learners and collaborators.

As the demand for this new leadership grows, the command and control leaders at the top of the pyramid are being challenged to change. They are expected to become leaders who are facilitators, stewards, coaches, designers, and teachers (Senge). They are being challenged to become leaders who “walk their talk” and model the way, inspiring others, delegating and serving. Effective leaders are recognizing that every person has leadership qualities that can and must be recognized and used.

The new leadership paradigm, therefore, is restructuring our conceptual framework of what the practice of leadership is and our understanding of what effective leaders do. It is transforming the role of “followers” and revolutionizing the design of organizations for the 21st Century.

A recent brochure from the Robert Greenleaf Center on Servant-Leadership captures this spirit, “The old organizational pyramids of the nineteenth century are crumbling, being replaced by upside-down pyramids and circles and connections.”

The term **collaborative and reciprocal leadership** is used here to describe the **process** that is at the heart of this change. Since collaborative leadership is more adaptable and fluid, focusing on relationships and the needs of people, so too, our intention is not to fixate on a definition or a set concept that describes the “new leadership”. What is more important is to assist people to acquire the understanding and skills of the purpose of the new leadership and to describe for them how collaborative leadership principles can work for them in the context in which they choose to lead.

Evolution or progress requires the integration of past, present and future. In the midst of unceasing change in an interdependent world, this recognition provides the solid ground from which to move into the uncertainty of tomorrow with an assurance that collaborative structures have served people well in the past and can show the way to collectively shape the future.

PRINCIPLES OF COLLABORATIVE/RECIPROCAL LEADERSHIP

A basic premise of collaborative leadership is recognition that no one person has the solutions to the multifaceted problems that a group or organization must address. Leadership in this context requires a **set of principles** that empower all members to act, and employ a process that allows the collective wisdom to surface. These principles must be based on an understanding that people have the knowledge and creativity to respond to the problems they face. They encourage the development of organizations that support collective action based on shared vision, ownership, and mutual values.

The evolution of collaborative leadership has been deeply influenced by the natural sciences, as well as history. The Newtonian concept of a mechanistic world where people followed directions and where repetitive, learned responses were sufficient, has given way to an organic, systems-oriented and dynamic understanding of how people, groups, and organizations operate. This systems perspective requires nonlinear, holistic and multifaceted approaches to leadership that stress interactive participation open communication, continuous learning and attention to relationships.

The function of leadership then becomes the creation of systems, structures and environment where this interaction and learning can occur. As Wheatley has stated, “Leadership is making sure you have the right patterns in place.” Senge refers to this as fashioning an environment “where everyone takes on the responsibility for learning.”

While change and adaptability are key aspects of a systems approach, there are **core principles** that nurture the interaction and learning that are essential to collaborative leadership. **Following are seven of these principles:**

1. **Promoting A Collective Leadership Process**

“Post heroic” leadership moves away from the theory that the “great man” has the answers to a shared, distributed and fluid concept of leadership. This is based on the belief that depending on the need, situation and requirements, different people assume the leadership role and that everyone has leadership potential. Collaborative leaders create supportive and open environments that encourage initiation, facilitate the sharing of information and value each person’s contribution. At the same time, individuals are encouraged to learn and stretch their leadership potential. Leadership, therefore, is assisting people to grow and learn.

In Scott Peck’s work on building community, for example, the “leader” is a facilitator whose role is to create and hold the “safe space” where people can discover themselves and learn to relate to one another authentically. The focus is shifted from the individual leader to the group, community or organization. In fact, at times, the nominal leader may not even be visible.

2. **Structuring A Learning Environment**

An organization or group that is learner focused supports continuous self-development and reflection. Practices, such as: listening, promoting open-mindedness, seeking constructive feedback, sharing ideas and viewing conflict as an opportunity for growth, are embedded in the culture. People closest to the problem or opportunity are encouraged to interact and find solutions or innovative approaches. To do this, Senge believes the group must function “in a mode of inquiry, knowing that nobody knows and everybody can learn continually.”

As the group or organization practices learning together, open communication, mutual trust, shared meaning and a sense of collective ownership emerge. Senge refers to this as “communities of commitment where people are continually learning how to learn together.” Thus, people can venture out of their comfort zones and take the risks inherent in managing change.

3. **Supporting Relationships and Interconnectedness**

In collaborative leadership, the relationships and interconnectedness of people become a primary dynamic. Values, such as respect, honesty, expecting the best from others, and the ability to exercise personal choice lay the foundation for covenant relationships to emerge. These relationships are based on trust and mutual responsibility. Collaborative leadership focuses attention on building the individual’s and group’s capacity to live these values; to benefit from their interdependence; and to recognize that conflict and differences can foster growth and creativity.

Relationships are also strengthened through the development of a shared vision that allows people to set common directions, have mutual goals and rise about self-interest. Shared vision and values function as a governing force where people can organize and manage themselves, thereby, getting the job done without the need for control or rigid policies and procedures.

4. **Fostering Shared Power**

For leadership to be collaborative or shared, power and ownership must be distributed throughout the organization. Shared power implies that everyone has responsibility for leading, decision making and learning. Groups and teams are often used to make decisions sometimes with a consensus format. Accountability and responsibility are based on individual integrity and peer agreements.

As people collaborate around common goals, partnerships and coalitions evolve resulting in lateral networks of mutual influence (Rost and Nirenberg). Kil Janow in The Inventive Organization describes this process as multiple relationships acting in a flexible, flattened structure based on partnerships, self-regulation and interdependence.

In Re-Inventing the Corporation, Naisbitt and Aburdene refer to this as a lattice or grid where power is found in the center not at the top. Hierarchical structures are thus replaced by crisscrossing networks, overlapping, changing and fluid boundaries. This web-like structure supports optimum participation, interaction, and empowerment.

5. **Practicing Stewardship and Service**

Stewardship is the cornerstone of reciprocal or shared leadership because it turns hierarchical leadership up-side down. Stewardship focuses on ensuring that other people's needs are being served and not on exercising privilege, power, and control. According to Block, stewardship chooses partnership over patriarchy or hierarchy; empowerment over dependency; and service over self-interest. Thus, the leader is "in service, rather than in control."

In his landmark work on The Servant as Leader, Robert Greenleaf describes this commitment as "wanting to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead." The litmus test of collaborative leadership is based on whether people's needs are being served. As people feel respected and valued as partners, they can create a community of shared responsibility.

6. **Valuing Diversity and Inclusiveness**

For people to respect each other, build trust and communicate openly, they must learn to accept and value individual differences. Valuing diversity is the rich soil that nurtures relationship, partnerships, and collaborative networks. This is reflected in the Scott Peck statement, "Perhaps the most necessary key to the achievement of community is the appreciation of differences."

Respecting each person's perspective and personal style frees them to contribute their ideas and talents so that people can learn together. Furthermore, this inclusiveness is a key aspect of transforming followers into stakeholders and nurturing collective ownership. It is an understanding that creativity and excellence are enhanced through diversity. Fostering authentic diversity can be accomplished by respecting different perspectives, fostering open-mindedness, practicing dialogue, and listening with attention and empathy.

7. **Committing to Self-Development**

The movement to collaborative or shared leadership is at its heart a personal transformation that is fueled by "A commitment to work on yourself first." (Block) Greenleaf believed that the motivation to serve was based on the desire for one's "own healing."

The understanding that one's inner life reflects positively or negatively on one's leadership can serve to bring authenticity and humility to the leadership process. By working on personal learning and growth, leaders model the way for others to focus on their own personal mastery and proficiency.

This authenticity and the ability to actually “live” the principles of collaborative leadership is reflected in Wheatley’s statement, “We must be what we want to become, we must, in every step of the way, embody the future toward which we are aiming.” This resonates with the words of Mahatma Ghandi who recognized that personal transformation was the heartbeat of leadership: “We must be the change we wish to see in the world.” With the proper understanding, education, and training, every individual can begin to use the leadership gifts that they possess.

So, if these are the principles of collaborative leadership, then what are the practices or functions that collaborative leaders must practice? Based upon the premises we have stated in this document, namely:

- That as we approach the 21st century, we must focus on the **purpose** rather than the **definition** of leadership;
- That the new leadership paradigm is **collective** and **reciprocal**; and
- That there are **powerful trends** moving us in this direction.

We make the following recommendations for leadership practices for the 21st century.

COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP PRACTICES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Practices are activities, customs and ways of operating used by an individual, group, organization, or community. We view practices as an integral component of organic or natural living systems and the means by which collective leadership is exercised. Embedded and articulated in the statement of purpose and leadership practices are our values and beliefs. We think that successful leadership will model the following collective leadership in the 21st century.

Purpose of Leadership In the 21st Century	Collective Leadership Practices
<p>To create a supportive environment where people can thrive and grow and live in peace with one another.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop structures and processes to support collective leadership by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holding shared vision and core values in trust and operationalizing them. • Generating and supporting interdependent and interdisciplinary group processes. • Establishing and sustaining inclusiveness of stakeholders. • Creating and maintaining a free flow of information. • Facilitating fluidity and flexibility in group processes and structures. • Sharing and distributing power and authority among all group members. • Building a system of peer responsibility and accountability. • Demonstrating equity. • Cultivating ritual and celebration. 2. Foster human growth and development through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging in continuous self-development and reflection. • Enhancing and using intuition. • Strengthening and sustaining spirituality. • Coaching and nurturing the development of others. • Creating opportunities for people to experience success (efficacy). • Promoting group and community capacity building and progress. • Expecting the best from people. • Celebrating individual and group success. 3. Facilitate learning by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating learning communities. • Including diverse individuals and perspectives. • Fostering and demonstrating open-mindedness. • Developing meaning and insight through individual and collective reflection. • Seeking feedback and critique to enhance development. • Developing creative and intuitive abilities. • Sharing ideas through engaging in dialogue. • Practicing deep listening. • Using creative tension to foster change and new ideas. • Acknowledging and using “mistakes” as opportunities to learn, reflect, and forgive.

To promote harmony with nature and thereby provide sustainability for future generations.

To create a community of reciprocal care and shared responsibility – one where every person matters and each person’s welfare and dignity is the concern of us all.

- 4. Enhance the quality of life and preservation of nature by:**
 - Understanding the interdependent relationship between human and natural systems and working to enhance their viability.
 - Practicing “enoughness” (bigger or more is not always better).
 - Achieving balance in emotional, spiritual, and physical aspects of life.
 - Using a long-term perspective, thereby creating viability for current and future generations.
 - Generating and supporting systems thinking (wholistic thinking) as a basis for action.
 - Facilitating self-organizing, self-regulating and self-renewing systems.
 - Using natural conflict to foster growth and change.
 - Recognizing and promoting the spiritual connectedness of all life.
 - Generating and sustaining peace among ourselves and aiding peace efforts globally.

- 5. Create caring communities and of leaders and participants through:**
 - Developing trusting relationships.
 - Attending to the well-being (basic needs and human rights) of others and providing opportunities for them to sustain themselves.
 - Supporting basic freedom for others and providing opportunities for them to maintain freedom for themselves.
 - Maintaining opportunities for people to make choices for themselves that are not harmful to others, and honoring the choices they make.

- 6. Demonstrate courage by:**
 - Taking risks.
 - Tackling the difficult issues.
 - Serving others.
 - Challenging others when they depart from core values held in trust.
 - Initiating change.
 - Transforming self, groups and institutions.

- 7. Model integrity and authenticity by:**
 - Showing mutual respect.
 - Carrying out responsibilities.
 - Being accountable for one’s actions.
 - Modeling integrity and authenticity (walk the talk).
 - Being honest with self and others.
 - Demonstrating equity.
 - Practicing inclusiveness.

AND SO HOW DO WE GET FROM WHERE WE ARE TO WHERE WE WANT TO BE?

Transition From Positional To Collective Leadership

Creating an environment where collective leadership is practiced starts with a **shared vision** supported by a set of specific values or beliefs which are integrated into the person's behavior (Wheatley, 1996). Some "inner work" is required for a person who wants to practice this form of leadership. Without this inner work, the practice of authentic collective or shared leadership does not occur. This inner work starts with values and beliefs. People who practice shared leadership believe that all people have the capacity to lead themselves. Further, they believe that the gifts and resources needed to accomplish a task can be found in the members of the group, not in a single leader. Therefore, the goal of positional leaders is not to direct or tell, but to provide a structure that allows people to lead themselves.

This means that positional leaders distribute or **share the "power"** of their position. In this way, they enable the group to assume the responsibility and discover their own capacity to work together, decide, plan, and act. They are willing and able to share the power of their position to the maximum degree possible under the given circumstances. Their personal power remains evident, but they share their positional power. They may substitute or transmute the need for positional power into the joy of seeing the group evolve as a learning organization or community.

Another major element, after weaving the shared vision, is **modeling**. There is integrity in their vision of shared leadership that is reflected in the way they structure and respond to the development of the group. This integration of practice, vision, and modeling gives group members confidence that leaders "walk their talk" as reflected in their belief in each individual and their collective action.

Collective/Reciprocal leaders spend time **structuring the environment** as a learning environment. This may include the following: First, they set the expectation of success. Second, the group is encouraged to take risks and challenge the way things have always been done. They are even encouraged to challenge their own beliefs about what they can or cannot accomplish without specific direction from a positional authority.

Risk taking is supported by the creation of a safety net. The safety net creates an environment where group members believe that it is safe to challenge and exercise personal choice in achieving the mutually stated goals. Peter Block once said that people trade sovereignty or freedom of choice for safety. A step in the critical passage to the new paradigm of shared leadership requires the members of the group to practice the freedom of choice that comes with being responsible and accountable to themselves and each other (Kelley, 1992, and Chaleff, 1995).

Information is shared with all group members so that they have adequate knowledge and understanding about the task to make an enlightened decision (Wheatley, 1996). Positional leaders need not be the primary source of the information. In most cases, the members need to rely on each other and on their ability to gather accurate information rather than on a positional authority. This shift in the source of information triggers greater self-sufficiency and greater interdependence. By receiving power, choice, and information, members begin to believe that they can influence the situation and the outcome. This belief is reinforced by the subsequent accumulation of actual successes.

The interdependent structures and relationships help to insure an understanding of the distribution of different talents among group members. This facilitates the acceptance by the group of different points of readiness to practice this combination of individual responsibility and shared leadership and accountability. It also helps members discover that they can both learn with, and depend upon each other.

These interdependent structures support group members as they work together to successfully accomplish the specified task. As groups learn this new behavior, they need the assurance that the ambiguity or the anxiety they may be experiencing due to this different way of operating is normal and that their feelings are a part of group transformation. A group often experiences ambiguity, frustration, disorientation, fear, insecurity, and a frantic desire for the positional leaders to rescue them. All this shifts the role of leaders to that of facilitators, supporters, consultants, and sometimes teachers. For group members, the result of this experience is excitement, ownership of the process and product, confidence and competence, and better ideas and learning.

All these practices, and perhaps others of which we are not aware, are needed to meet the challenges of the future as we practice collaborative leadership.

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