

UPDATE ON LEADERSHIP

Roger Collins

Bernard Bass, a doyen of leadership observed that: "The study of leadership rivals in age the emergence of civilisation, which shaped its leaders as it was shaped by them. From its infancy, the study of history has been the study of leaders - what they did and why they did it." Yet despite this heritage and the extensive and persistent research of social scientists, a comprehensive understanding of leadership remains elusive. The search is characterised by phases of investigation that have used different lenses through which to explore leadership. Each lens has offered some insights; no one lens can provide an adequate understanding of this very complex phenomena.

Most writers and researchers can agree that leadership involves the shaping of the behaviour of groups of people to achieve goals. The role and contribution of organisational and societal leaders is to act as pathfinders and catalysts, especially during times of crisis and transition. For some, leadership is distinguished from management; for others, leadership is seen as one of several managerial roles.

Behavioral scientists began their quest for understanding by examining the *characteristics* of great leaders. This was predicated on the assumption that leaders are born, not made. On the upside, research has identified some relatively common characteristics that could be used to select leaders. Attention was drawn to abilities such as intelligence and fluency of speech, and to personal traits such as high energy, stress tolerance, dominance and expressiveness. The failure to identify a comprehensive, stable and predictive leadership profile led investigators to pursue new directions.

Attention was then directed at *how leaders behaved*, with the implication that people could be trained to become more effective leaders. The most influential studies identified two sets of relatively independent and critical leadership behaviours: task and relationship or process behaviours. The primary weakness of this lens is that it fails to take account of situational demands made on the leader, such as the complexity of the task, or the experience expectations and motivation of the followers.

Predictably, the third phase of the development of our understanding of leadership involved closer scrutiny of the moderating impact of *the situation*. Such a perspective implies that a key leadership competency is the ability to read and adapt to different situations. This leadership approach revealed that, for example, effective leaders enabled their people to think that they could achieve their goals, and that such goal achievement would be satisfying and rewarded.

Attention has focused more recently on *how leaders add value to organisations, communities and indeed nations*. Two insights have been particularly powerful.. The first is the distinction between transactional and transformational leaders. The former are those who have the capacity to lead in steady state situations. In contrast, transformational leaders enable fundamental change in crisis situations or when people are required to make major change in their behaviour and context. These leaders are more likely to become charismatic in the eyes of their followers. Furthermore, some leaders may be capable of playing both roles.

A second development has been the shift in our thinking from *leadership as personal achievement to leadership as organisational capability*. This latter idea implies distributed leadership, leadership at all levels of an organisation. It requires the development of a critical mass of leaders who are aligned in their goals and values, and whose collective behaviour sends consistent signals to their people. This concept has become more relevant for two increasingly common organisational contexts. The first is in complex systemic organisations such as hospitals and IT companies. The second is in, for example, professional service firms and retail financial service organisations that rely on knowledge workers and service deliverers to add value directly to customers and clients. Such leadership capability is critical because of the need to influence large numbers of geographically dispersed and autonomous organisational members. The idea of distributed leadership requires new approaches to collective learning and development, a culture that supports collaboration and unity of purpose, and collective rewards and recognition.

Three further insights serve to describe the frontiers of our understanding, *First*, the balance of evidence supports the view that "leaders can be made and that leadership make a difference." Clearly some leadership behaviours are relatively hard wired through genetic influences and early socialisation. However, key leadership behaviours can be influenced by development, performance management, rewards and an organisational context that supports the role of

leadership. Thus early identification and sustained development are critical for the creation of leadership competence and capability. Such development can be easily justified by the compelling body of evidence that effective leadership impacts, for example, the financial performance of the firm, the attraction of talent, member engagement, performance and retention.

Second, to be successful, organisations may need to consider substitutes for leadership. Either the effective leaders are physically absent or such talent is just not available. Substitutes for leadership involve, for example, the development of autonomous work groups. Similarly, communicating and establishing commitment to an organisation's aspirations, strategy and values provide cognitive controls that enable people to be more self directed in their work. These forms of influence and associated job and organisational redesign take some of the pressure off the provision of leadership.

Finally, in our intrigue with leadership there is a serious risk that we encourage people to abdicate their destiny to their leaders. For some, they demand that their leaders solve problems and resolve issues and in so doing make demands on leaders that are excessive or impossible to meet. In other situations effective leadership is not the solution. Not surprisingly a development that has gained momentum over the past decade is the concept of self leadership. For in a world of increasing change and uncertainty, the reality is that organisations and leaders can no longer focus on issues and problems that require each of us to respond and resolve.

In summary, it should be no surprise that leadership is at the top of the list of attributes expected of our CEOs. For our prevailing environment has created increasing demands for the contributions that effective leaders can add. Leadership will continue to be the subject of board discussions, speeches by CEOs, conferences, development programs and research agendas. Progress will continue to be achieved if we resist the search for simplistic approaches to the identification and development of our leaders. Progress will also be made if we reinforce leadership with other initiatives that complement the contributions of our leaders. And progress will continue to be made if we successfully convey the reality that self leadership, taking charge of our own destiny, is an increasingly important requirement for all members of our organisations and communities.

Authentic Happiness. Martin Seligman. Random House, 2002.

Over a decade ago, Martin Seligman charted a new approach to living with flexible optimism'. Now, in his most stimulating and persuasive book to date, the bestselling author of *Learned Optimism* introduces the revolutionary, scientifically based idea of Positive Psychology'. Positive Psychology focuses on strengths rather than weaknesses, asserting that happiness is not the result of good genes or luck. Seligman teaches readers that happiness can be cultivated by identifying and using many of the strengths and traits that they already possess—including kindness, originality, humour, optimism, and generosity. By frequently calling upon their 'signature strengths' in all the crucial realms of life, readers will not only develop natural buffers against misfortune and the experience of negative emotion, they will move their lives up to a new, more positive plane.

Drawing on groundbreaking psychological research, Seligman shows how Positive Psychology is shifting the profession's paradigm away from its narrow-minded focus on pathology, victimology, and mental illness to positive emotion, virtue and strength, and positive institutions. Our signature strengths can be nurtured throughout our lives, with benefits to our health, relationships, and careers.

Seligman provides the Signature Strengths Survey along with a variety of brief tests that can be used to measure how much positive emotion readers experience, in order to help determine what their highest strengths are. The life-changing lesson of *Authentic Happiness* is that by identifying the very best in ourselves, we can improve the world around us and achieve new and sustainable levels of authentic contentment, gratification, and meaning.

'Martin Seligman is the leading spokesman for the new movement of Positive Psychology, which focuses on mental health rather than mental illness. In this most helpful book he identifies characteristics and strategies of people with positive outlooks and explains how you can cultivate and experience authentic happiness and other desirable emotional states more of the time. Professor Seligman makes me optimistic and authentically happy about the future of psychology.'

Andrew Weil,

M.D.

Geeks & Geezers. How Era, Values, and Defining Moments Shape Leaders. Warren G. Bennis and Robert J. Thomas. Harvard Business School Press. Boston, Massachusetts. 2002

Our youngest leaders matured in the glow of computer screens; our oldest in the shadow of the Depression and World War 11. In a groundbreaking study of these two

disparate groups-affectionately labelled "geeks" and "geezers" - leadership experts Warren G. Bennis and Robert J. Thomas set out to find how era and values shape those who lead. -"What they discovered was something even more profound: the powerful process through which leaders of any era emerge.

Geeks and Geezers will forever change how we view leadership, but also how we reflect on our own formative experiences. Illustrated by compelling interviews with extraordinary individuals under thirty-five and over seventy years of age, the authors present a new model that predicts who is likely to become and remain a leader - and explains why others fall to rise to the challenge. At its heart are what the authors call "crucibles" - utterly transformational experiences from which one can emerge either hopelessly broken or powerfully emboldened to learn and to lead:

- Geezer Sidney Rittenberg survived sixteen harrowing years in a Chinese prison to pioneer ties between U.S. and Chinese businesses.
- Geek Tara Church, at age eight, found the inspiration for Tree Musketeers, a thriving non-profit organization, in a downbeat discussion about deforestation.
- Geezer Muriel Siebert overcame sexist 1960s Wall Street to become the first female to hold a seat on the New York Stock Exchange.
- Geek Michael Klein leveraged his mentoring relationship with his grandfather into serial success in the "new economy."

"Geeks and Geezers is both Warren Bennis's most important and his most enjoyable book."

– **Peter F. Drucker**, Professor of Social Science and Management,
Claremont Graduate University

An inspired idea, a tantalizing title, an essential book." – **Howard Gardner**, coauthor of
Good Work: When Excellence and Ethics Meet

"A great book for all ages and all seasons. I was humbled and inspired by the messages that Bennis and Thomas wrote" – **Charles Handy**, social philosopher and author.

Multiple Intelligences and Leadership. Ronald E. Riggio, Susan E. Murphy, and Francis J. Pirozzolo (Editors). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 2002.

When we ask about the actions of a leader, "How could he or she do something so stupid?" to some extent we are asking about possible relationships between intelligence

and leadership. Most laypersons expect an obvious relationship between the two constructs. People too dumb (or too smart) cannot be good leaders. However, experts in both leadership and intelligence realize that the relationships between these two areas of interest are both more sophisticated and complex than most would expect.

This is likely true for a variety of reasons, but an especially intriguing explanation is the recent and expanding discussions about multiple intelligences. Historically, analytic intelligence (IQ) is what most readers think about when considering intelligence. Of late, however, a number of additional types of intelligence have been proposed. These additional intelligences may provide useful explanations for leadership successes (or failures) beyond our understandings based on traditional IQ. These additional, multiple intelligences have been variously labelled practical, creative, social, sociopolitical, cultural, and emotional intelligence, to name a few. This expanded investigation of multiple intelligences has sparked renewed interest by some leadership researchers on the role of intelligence in predicting leader effectiveness.

The Extraordinary Leader - turning good managers into great leaders Zenger, J.H. and Folkman, J. (2002) A research based book that explores what is effective leadership, what impact does it have and how can we identify and grow great leaders. One of the very best resources currently available – don't miss it!