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“Transcultural Impacts and Perspectives on the Future”

Perspectives from Armenia, Canada, France, Georgia, Germany, South Africa, Sweden, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America.

Getting to 2025: Inspiring Cross-Cultural Leadership¹

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"You must learn what you want to ignite in others."

William Butler Yeats (1865-1939)

In light of the major global trends we face, we need to immediately examine the changes in leadership practices that will produce a future we prefer. Later in this article we will see those trends and understand that all of them can produce quite a bumpy ride for all around the world. But, as the article concludes, we can land softly from each bump only if, as leaders of trade or any non-warring cause, we carefully help other world entities survive, prosper and grow – in ways *they* prefer. Inevitably this means adopting good cross-cultural leadership practices as quickly as possible, or facing an undesirable and more chaotic future.

CULTURAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

Let's first take a look at current cultural leadership practices.

Well-known author and speaker, Dr. Lance Secretan points out in his book, *One*, that the prominent leadership model emerging around the world today is 'leadership as one.' In other words, great leaders today are using clear mission, vision and socio-economic values to paint the picture of their organization's social destiny and purpose. These leaders are connecting constituents, at all levels, to act as responsible lookouts for signals of 'consumer/client' needs, as designers of adaptive strategies, and as

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willing creators of cultural practises that execute those strategies with targeted excellence...acting as *one*. Some examples in North America include Timberlane, Southwest Airlines, Walgreen's, Girl Scouts of the USA, FedEx and Vancity.

For structural evidence of this collaborative, dynamic model, we need only look at how any typical organization's constituent bodies have expanded rapidly since the late 1990's from board members representing shareholders to include first, its clients/customers, then its employees/volunteers and its suppliers. And, most recently, it has added the social community in which the organization functions, e.g., the environment is now recognized as a key, interfacing element of most organizations.

But make no mistake about the characteristics of these great leaders, as Jim Collins reminds us in his book, *Good to Great*. They are anything but the heroes portrayed in fictional best sellers, plays or movies. They are humble, quiet and courageously relish the ambiguities and challenges only real life circumstances can provide. They also possess extraordinary will – a passion and determination for the cause and great compassion and respect for other human beings, of all cultural origins. They exemplify what they expect from individuals, groups and teams – collaborating on critical issues to deal with dynamic realities. And, finally, they contribute their energies to connecting constituents on all levels of human need – from safety and security, social-emotional, and (role) motivational to personal fulfillment.

On the last point, in human relationship terms, great leaders ignite the burning desires of our whole brain, helping us connect with our passions and encouraging us to express ourselves naturally, within the domains of our personal expertise. They do this intentionally, in order that we have an ongoing excellent impact on each of our collective responsibilities.

As creators of cultural practices, leaders appear in all roles – initiating patterned icons/images, actions, learning, celebrations and stories that tell a tale of organizational survival, effectiveness and sustainable growth. They challenge us to use inductive reasoning (inferring a solution from an observed pattern, or data set), deductive reasoning (applying a known solution from policy or practice to a new situation) and abductive reasoning (creating a solution from two or more seemingly unrelated ideas or thoughts).

And, as participants in this interactive process, we experience accomplishment and the full range of emotions that goes with it, both good and bad. But they are in it with us – and most importantly – we feel alive. We have a purpose, a cause, and a destiny. We are committed.

In short, we feel both inspired and fulfilled. We have a meaningful life outside of ourselves.

FAST FORWARD TO 2015

Fast forward to 2015. What will we have experienced?

Among the worldwide turbulence, some patterns and related challenges will likely have emerged, as Mary O'Hara-Devereaux describes in her book, *Navigating the Badlands*. Her premise is that the great economic, (accelerating) technological and social innovations shifts, witnessed by the world in the last 50 some years, combine to form an 'historical cycle of disruptive innovation,' which she and her colleagues estimate as 75 years in length and ending around 2025. This post-industrial cycle has been called the information age, the knowledge era, and is what Daniel Pink has labelled the conceptual age in his book, *A Whole New Mind*. But, whatever we call it, O'Hara-Devereaux tells us the *major global impacts that its three interactive shifts will have on companies and organizations worldwide by 2015* will be:

- An increased number of older, healthy people.
- An increased number of non-traditional households.

- An increasing demand for higher education, and, more educated, more experienced women than men in the world's workforces.
- New digital technology, communications infrastructure such as the Internet, and 4 billion more people competing (e.g., India and China) have exploded emerging markets growth, changing economic and political balances.
- New investment driving innovative technologies and productivity; creating new wealth but not many jobs.
- Customers/consumers defining what's of value and how they receive it.
- Sustainability (e.g. Green) continuing to grow in importance.
- The current trend of income inequality increasing, in both emerging and developed economies.
- The 'globalization of the local' dominates the worldwide landscape, as we grapple with the unrelenting tsunami of cross-cultural flows created by the three major shifts of our new age.

Evidence for each of these expected trends is already streaming, if not pouring toward us, daily. So, we urgently need to ask what leadership practices must we adapt in order to prepare for this future?

NEEDED LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

Among her prescriptions, O'Hara-Devereaux calls for new cross-cultural (diversity) leadership skills, particularly an ability to weave multiple networks as we create and execute emergent strategies. She predicts existing corporate cultures will [evolve] as the economy and the need for creativity and productivity grow. She explains that what is good for business also needs to be good for people, so corporate culture will be overcome by local cultures as new bargains establish flexible 'work' norms based mostly on female values, as female leaders redefine family and other socio-economic relationships. This likely means people will generally value good relationships with leaders, cooperation, security and living in an area desirable to themselves and their families.

One can conclude that over the next several years, as these values increase and as skills and talent remain in short supply, there is likely to be added pressure for work relationship bargains for such things as flexible schedules, work-life balance and family leaves.

Largely, in spite of the growing trend to 'leadership as one,' these new values amount to a dream in our present day corporate world. 'Command-and-control' leadership remains rampant, according to the multitude of surveys from North American business schools and consulting firms of all kinds. Just pick up any Dilbert cartoon to get a chuckle out of today's corporate cultural reality. It's no wonder many people in North America have left or are attempting to flee their current boss.

TWO CULTURAL PILLARS

Now, looking broadly at O'Hara-Devereaux's trends, let's assume for a minute that they fully mature by 2015 and that leaders are using the required skills. This scenario should help us to see the potential future impact of these combined factors on two cultural realities in many, many countries of today's world:

1. Secular, cultural diversity by business organization, including NGO's – with religious (cultural) freedom, by individual.
2. Secular, cultural melting pot/mosaic by politically networked boundaries, e.g. European Union – with religious (cultural) freedom, by individual.

Most of us believe that these are desirable conditions. So, we need to ask ourselves, why are these two cultural pillars likely to continue to grow by 2015 and keep growing until at least until 2025? The

answer – the moral foundation of leadership – is fundamental to the human condition, for which we are all accountable and which we can all influence.

The moral foundation of leadership remains constant over time across all social units. As described by Steven Robbins and Nancy Langton in their book, *Organizational Behaviour*, these moral guidelines are:

1. Truth telling: Telling the truth as you see it, because it allows a mutual, fair exchange or dialogue to occur.
2. Promise keeping: Leaders need to be careful of the commitments they make and they need to be careful about keeping those promises.
3. Fairness: This ensures that individual constituents get their fair share for their contributions to the organization.
4. Respect: Telling the truth, keeping promises, and being fair all show respect for others. Respect means treating people with dignity.*

Successful leaders of institutions/organizations understand, adopt and insist on these basic moral principles – and strive to maintain culturally driven dignity. Conflict is assured in any domain when leaders fail to keep these tenants. In cases where these simple acts of good faith are violated, trust, peace and prosperity inevitably become strained and difficult, if not impossible.

CULTURAL IMPACTS ON LEADERSHIP STYLES

Respect/Dignity are Culturally Driven*

- The extent people respect – or challenge – authority, aka ‘power distance’ varies from one ethnic ‘cultural family’ to another. Across areas such as Asia, Latin America, France, Spain and Africa power distances in groups can be experienced as generally high, whereas power distance in groups in the US, Britain, Israel and most of rest of Europe can be seen as generally low.
- Where ‘individualistic’ social tendencies are found, as in the United States currently, people tend to expect and encourage individual responsibility and loose affiliations to networks or groups. Whereas those in areas with ‘collectivist’ social tendencies, as in Japan, Mexico, Greece or Korea prefer to establish group responsibilities and more solid, networked loyalties.
- ‘High uncertainty avoidance,’ or a low tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity can lead to a rule-oriented society/organization, i.e. one with many laws, rules, regulations and controls – whereas a society/organization with ‘low uncertainty avoidance’ has more tolerance for a number of opinions and more readily accepts ambiguity and uncertainty.
- ‘High masculinity’ in a society/organization is a preference for male domination, achievement, control and power. A ‘low masculinity’ rating indicates the society/organization has a low differentiation between the genders.
- Finally, a social entity with a ‘high long-term orientation’ prescribes to values of long-term

cultural commitments and tradition. In an entity with a ‘low long-term orientation’ commitments are more short-term and people can adapt to new norms more readily.

*Adapted from Geert Hofstede’s Model, and influenced by challenges to that Model by Prof. Brendan McSweeney’s (University of Essex, England) *Human Relations*, Vol. 55, No.1 [Jan], 2002.

In free regions of the world, notwithstanding ethnic and regional influences, none of this bodes well for leaders heavily invested in ‘command-and-control’ practices.

By 2025, will leadership practices be fully adapted to ensure the freedom scenarios we want? That depends on our worldwide ability to grow leadership throughout our business, economic, political and religious institutions. In any case, organizational leaders who haven’t started to reflect on their own impact behaviours are already being left behind.

Finally, let’s imagine which systemic issues will need attention in the near future if we wish to shape our world as just stated. What social innovations can our leaders embark on in order to maintain peace, prosperity and happiness? As a start, these might include:

- Addressing public shareholders’ cavalier attitudes about short term vs. long term profits. Much investment behaviour is more like gambling than investing. For example, investors shoot themselves in the foot when they pick a company whose leaders do not insist that sustainable financial excellence is driven by client/customer interface excellence, which is driven by employee performance excellence, which can only be created by leadership performance excellence. To stop this waste of investor capital, individual stock market investment in *public firms* could be buffeted by a public system where shares could be indexed by company-based scorecard measures and audited by qualified professionals. In fact, there may not be a better place to apply the moral leadership tenants in any society.
- A decidedly determined new moral leadership stance at the United Nations. All signatories could be required to enlist in world peace and mean it. Everything from pooled regional support councils to resources funding would have to be reconsidered in order to create measurably incremental effectiveness. Outcomes might include disaster prevention bodies dealing with medical health treatment, famine, drought, flood and renewable resource issues with responsibilities for planning and coordinating preventative measures and advising ruling governments regionally. All world powers must be instrumental in establishing and supporting these new structures, if peaceful growth and trade means anything to them. Vetoes could be unnecessary. Those governments involved in war or genocide could be given standardized cessation options with real consequences decided by world courts. All ethical decisions could be debated by representatives in good standing, but would be decided by court tribunals, in keeping with moral leadership principals.
- Similar new structures accountable for major scientific strategies. These bodies could collaborate to recommend and advise governments of alternatives and coordinate actions on issues like global warming, disease prevention, genome sharing, and food and clean water development.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we have a choice to make for posterity. We can take strategic action to make things better in our own organizations, and in our own countries to make our world a better place to live by reaching out for our cross-cultural calling. Or, we can continue piecemeal with less effective

leadership behaviours that focus strictly on, and may have even caused, the negative realities the recent past has brought to us.



David Day is the founding Partner of Incite Leadership®. He, his Partner and their Associates enable leaders to achieve sustainable and profitable growth. They offer custom process tools and personalized implementation services to help senior teams strengthen leadership performance practices in all roles, create customer-focused strategies, and effectively execute strategies across the organization.

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POINTS FOR THE CLASSROOM (send comments to forum@futuretakes.org):

- *The author states that leaders “... contribute their energies to connecting constituents on all levels of human need – from safety and security, social-emotional, and (role) motivational to personal fulfillment.” In 2020, will more people, on a percentage basis, live at the self-actualization level (from Maslow’s hierarchy of needs) than today? Why or why not, and what are the impacts on the practice of leadership?*
- *What cross-cultural leadership skills will be observed in the workplace, volunteer-driven organizations (interest groups and professional societies), and the community, in 2010 and beyond?*
- *In group-oriented cultures, people are less likely to be assertive. As cultures intermingle (as a result of increased information flow, tourism, and international commerce), how will leaders emerge in the future in various parts of the world, and what will be the cultural impacts on leader emergence? Also, do Mr. Day’s observations apply equally to emergent leaders and appointed leaders?*
- *The US is often characterized as a melting pot, more recently as a salad bowl. Arguably, these descriptors represent the experiences of immigrants from diverse nationalities and ethnic groups. However, the US has developed its own work and business culture that is at variance with those of several other nations, especially from the standpoint of work-life balance. Even uncompensated overtime (for example, nine or more hours of work per day with eight hours of pay) still exists in a few places. Turning the calendar ahead to 2020, do you agree with Mr. Day that corporate cultures will be overcome by local cultures, with flexible work norms (family leaves, work-life balance, etc.) based mostly on female values?*
- *“Bonus question”! Will these “female values” be accompanied by a trend toward long-term sustainable financial excellence and away from quick-turn profits (the quarterly earnings statement)?*
- *More generally, which work and business cultures will prevail in 2020 – those of the US (especially in occupations for which talents and skills are not in short supply), those of Western Europe, or other ones?*

- *In 2015, will we see a preponderance of conviction leaders or consensus leaders? Task-oriented, people-oriented, or process-oriented leaders?*