

## Getting to 2025: Inspiring Cross-Cultural Leadership

*"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. ...

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 willing creators of cultural practices that execute those strategies with targeted excellence...acting as *one*. Some examples in North America include Timberlane, Southwest Airlines, Walgreen, 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).

## Getting to 2025: Inspiring Cross-Cultural Leadership

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.

...[With this backdrop, we can ask ourselves, 'What values will become more important?']

In her book, 'Navigating the Badlands' ...Mary 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.

Now, before you stir up this new cultural recipe, try adding to it a very zesty fact: The moral foundation of leadership remains constant over time, across *all* social (including business) units. As described by Steven Robbins and Nancy Langton in their book, *Organizational Behaviour*, these moral guidelines are:

- Truth telling: Telling the truth as you see it, because it allows a mutual, fair exchange or dialogue to occur.
- Promise keeping: Leaders need to be careful of the commitments they make and they need to be careful about keeping those promises.
- Fairness: This ensures that individual constituents get their fair share for their contributions to the organization.

## Getting to 2025: Inspiring Cross-Cultural Leadership

- 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. Why? 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.

### 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 the 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.

Notwithstanding ethnic and regional influences, none of this bodes well for leaders invested in 'command-and-control' practices in free regions of the world.

In any case, organizational leaders who haven't started to reflect on their own impact behaviours are already being left behind...End.