

**Intelligent leadership and creativity:
Supporting creativity through intelligent leadership**

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Abstract

Our working environment is changing rapidly. It is not enough to cope with continuous change but we also have to cope with contradictions, uncertainty and insecurity. This kind of work environment places many challenges before us.

Among the key issues in this new work environment are the questions of innovation, creativity and leadership. Will we see more innovative workers, teams and organizations in the future? Do we need a new kind of leadership in the future? Are we able to develop new kinds of leadership theories and models, which could help us to create more innovative organizations? Here we definitely need leadership innovations. Creativity and social innovations will be our most important competitive factors in the future. Creativity is the capability to see things from new perspectives and build out of that something new, original and functioning. Creativity is the capability to wonder and challenge and establish a new way of operating.

In this article creativity is approached as an outcome of good leadership (i.e. How can we support creativity of individuals, teams and organizations through intelligent leadership?) In addition to the wide theoretical approach the intelligent leadership model presented here is based on broad practical experience from Finnish-based multinational corporations such as Kone and Nokia. In developing the intelligent leadership framework the possibilities of good leadership to support creativity and innovation are described.

Implications an Applications

Everybody is entitled to good leadership. Being a leader is a service profession. A leader needs to provide good leadership services. A leader has to bring about success. A leader is successful when the followers succeed.

Leadership is such an important field that it cannot be left to leaders alone. Leadership is about collaboration. Leadership has traditionally been described with great-man theories. Today we are, however, far from the individualistic and hierarchical leadership model that our culture has been building for centuries. While we certainly continue to need strong leaders, strong leadership nowadays also means shared leadership. Instead of searching for great men, we have to search for greatness in each one of us. Hierarchies have to be shattered, and a transition is needed from *frightening* (repressive) to *enlightening leadership*. This way we can develop truly intelligent organizations.

Introduction

The leadership deficit is a recurring topic of discussion today. Good leadership is often lacking, regardless of whether the organization operates in the private or public sector. Where has good leadership gone? Where have the good leaders gone?

The truth is that leaders have not gone anywhere, but the leadership environment has undergone some dramatic changes during the last few decades. Leaders have apparently not kept up with the change. They have not adapted their ways of thinking and have not changed pace to move with the times. This lack of renewal afflicts not only leaders but also those being led. An intelligent organization characterized by efficiency, renewal and well-being cannot be managed with old leadership models. Individuals, teams and organizations alike have to renew themselves. Here is the true place for innovation.

There is also a huge need for leadership innovation. We can no longer lead our organizations as we did 20 to 30 years ago. We have definitely moved from industrial to knowledge based organizations and we should change the leadership approach accordingly. We are working in a totally different working environment than 30 years ago.

The operating environment of leadership is chaotic, and riddled with competing values and goals. It is not enough to cope with continuous change; we also have to cope with the contradictions of life and accommodate high levels of uncertainty, insecurity and imperfection. We have moved from the world of “either or” to the world of “both and”. Great truths have faded, and we are living in a world with many interpretations.

Leadership has traditionally been described with great-man theories. Today we are, however, far from the individualistic and hierarchical leadership model that our culture has been building for centuries. While we certainly continue to need strong leaders, strong leadership nowadays also means *shared leadership*. Instead of searching for great men, we have to search for greatness in each one of us. Hierarchies have to be shattered, and a transition is needed from *frightening* (repressive) to *enlightening* leadership. The intelligent leadership model looks at leadership from

various perspectives simultaneously, and the aim is to build a new leadership culture with new leadership practices.

Intelligent leadership is a synthesis of Western pragmatism, Nordic rationalism, Eastern holism and Southern humanism. It approaches intelligence from widely different angles, which is not a new issue but perhaps a perspective that we modern people have forgotten. Many indigenous peoples, such as North American Indians, knew that there are four kinds of intelligence: intelligence of the hand (the skill to do things), intelligence of the head (the ability to reason things out), intelligence of the heart (awareness of one's own feelings) and intelligence of the soul (clarity over the values guiding all action). The most important of these is *intelligence of the soul*. Doing, knowing and feeling are important, but real intelligence lies at the level of being. In terms of leadership this means that we need to use not only rational intelligence, but also physical, emotional and spiritual intelligence.

Intelligent leadership is based on a broad *concept of a human being* who acts, knows, feels and searches for meaning. Human beings need to fulfill themselves wholly in their work community as well. People have to be led in such a way as to enable them to develop and mature. Frightening leadership must give way to enlightening leadership, and leadership has to be seen as a service task. Only enlightening leadership will uncover the greatness hidden within all of us and enable us to create and build intelligent organizations.

Why it is important to redefine leadership?

Here I have summarized the key reasons that underlie our need for leadership innovations. The following ten reasons aim to address that question:

1. The models we are using now are dated and were developed mainly during the sixties and seventies. Perhaps the last true innovation was the transformational leadership model developed by Burns (1978).
2. There is a call for approaches deriving from sources other than Anglo-American tradition and culture. Nearly all previous theories have originated in the United States.

3. The work environment of leaders has changed dramatically during the last twenty years, but we are still using approaches developed for industrial organizations.
4. We have to move from the industrial to the post-industrial paradigm and to redefine the role of work, worker and organization.
5. Current theories are usually very fragmented; we have to grasp their core elements and learn from those.
6. The scientific paradigm has also changed; the constructivist paradigm is replacing the behaviourist paradigm. In addition, quantum physics, self-organizing systems and chaos theory add intriguing perspectives to leadership.
7. We should try to move from the “one right approach” to “both and” perspectives; we should try to integrate the best features of old approaches and only use those parts which are still valid.
8. We should add emotional and spiritual thinking to our rational and practical thinking; we should transcend mere rational management.
9. We should try to integrate leadership of people and management of things. The Finnish language is very apt in this respect because both concepts are expressed in just one word “johtaminen”.
10. We should reveal the true simplicity and practicality of leadership. We should not make leadership any more complex than it actually is.

To sum up, we might say that we are progressing from great-man theories towards shared leadership, from individualistic leadership towards shared leadership. I do not believe that a successful leader can just act like a lone rider in the desert. When problems appear, the lone rider draws a six-shooter to eliminate them. This sharp-shooting style of leadership still exists, and many still swear by it. I believe that we have the means to solve our problems more intelligently. These are some of the main reasons why we need to define a new approach and framework for leadership.

A leadership framework for the 21st century

There seems to be a lack of intelligent leaders, who are able to create and sustain an inspiring vision and implement the vision together with their teams. This seems to be true at team, organizational, societal, regional (eg. EU) and global levels (eg. UN). The missing link is often *true leadership*.

When considering the phenomenon of the changing work environment described earlier, it can be said that we need *a new leadership framework* for the 21st century. This is very much connected to our thinking about creativity and innovation. The working environment of today's leaders and followers has changed and is changing rapidly and dramatically. It is also very different in different organizations and societies. This means that we also have to understand the leadership process in a new way. To lead the 21st century *knowledge worker* is probably something different from leading the 20th century *industry worker*. That is at least one of the basic assumptions of this article. Are we able to develop some kind of *universal leadership theory and model*, which could help us to create better futures?

The intelligent leadership framework

There are several foundations and objectives for this new model. First of all, we should try to find new ways to see leadership as a phenomenon; creative and intelligent ways. "Creative" intelligence tries to integrate practical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual elements of intelligence. This is the reason the term *intelligent leadership* has been chosen (cf. an *intelligent*

organization, Sydänmaanlakka 2002). In intelligent leadership we try to lead employees at four levels: practical, rational, emotional and spiritual. *Practical leadership* is management by walking around, *rational leadership* is management by objectives, *emotional leadership* is management with emotions and *spiritual leadership* is management by meaning.

The model should also be as simple as possible. Leadership is a complex phenomenon, but let us not make it more complex than it is. We believe that leadership can be described in a very concrete way too, and there is nothing mystical about it after we have understood its true essence. We should develop both simple and comprehensive models of leadership.

The intelligent leadership model is based on the *paradigm of the knowledge-intensive society*. In this paradigm we have to redefine work, worker and organization and their relationships and also *widen our perspective to the level of society*. We have traditionally perceived an individual mechanistically as a part of a big machine (organization). We should see the employee as a whole, in a comprehensive way and put the individual really in the heart of our organizations.¹ Behind the intelligent leadership model is a comprehensive concept of man including bodily, rational (intellectual), emotional and spiritual dimensions.

An extremely important goal is to try to develop a universal leadership model, which could be applied in different kinds of contexts. To do this clear definitions are extremely important. Definitions are often problematic in the behavioral and social sciences. This is probably one reason why we have not been able to develop better theories and models in this field so far. Chester Barnard (1948, 80) wrote almost sixty years ago: “Leadership has been the subject of an extraordinary amount of dogmatically stated nonsense”. The situation seems not to be much better

even today. If the concept of leadership is whatever anyone wants to say it is, then leadership as a concept is meaningless nonsense.

The intelligent leadership model is also based on *systems theory* and *systems thinking*.² System thinking is a discipline for understanding wholes. The essence of systems thinking is based on two issues: seeing interrelationships rather than linear cause-effect chains and seeing processes of change rather than snapshots. Leadership is seen as a wider process, which takes place in an organization. In that process there are many variables, which all affect each other. By applying systems thinking we try to clarify and really see the key interactions in this process and in this way disclose the essence of leadership.

Intelligent leadership is a shared and collaborative process. It is a process that should be taught not only to leaders but also to followers. The premise of intelligent leadership is that it must be practiced by both the so-called leaders and their so-called followers. Intelligent leadership means putting people to work together efficiently. It is not manipulation. It is not management. Rather, it should energize our employees and organizations. The way we lead our employees in different organizations also affects how they behave as citizens.

Last but not least, in a cooperative of many actors we should be able to develop new common models for leadership, which should support us in finding ways out of the many problems that the industrial era has produced in the world. The new leadership model should help us to solve the huge problems – economic, political, technological, social, ecological and spiritual – which we are facing today.

Intelligent leadership can be defined as follows:

Intelligent Leadership is a dialogue between leader(s) and followers, where they come together in a certain situation in order to achieve shared vision (purpose) and objectives effectively. This process will take place in a certain team and organization, which is sharing the same values and culture. The macro environment – industry and society – has influences in this process, too.

The intelligent leadership model

In figure 1 the *intelligent leadership model* is presented. The basis of the model is input-process-output -thinking. The main *input* for this process is some kind of purpose, which is usually a *vision*, or more concretely, an *objective*. In the leadership process leaders and followers are in interactions in different kinds of situations; at its best these interactions will be a true dialogue. The *output* is the intended result or change. This leadership process happens in a team and in an organization, in an industry and in a society, in a region and at the global level. Certain values and culture are also affecting this process. All these variables have some kind of an impact on the leadership process. There are ten variables altogether in this model. In the following the main contents of these variables will be explained briefly.

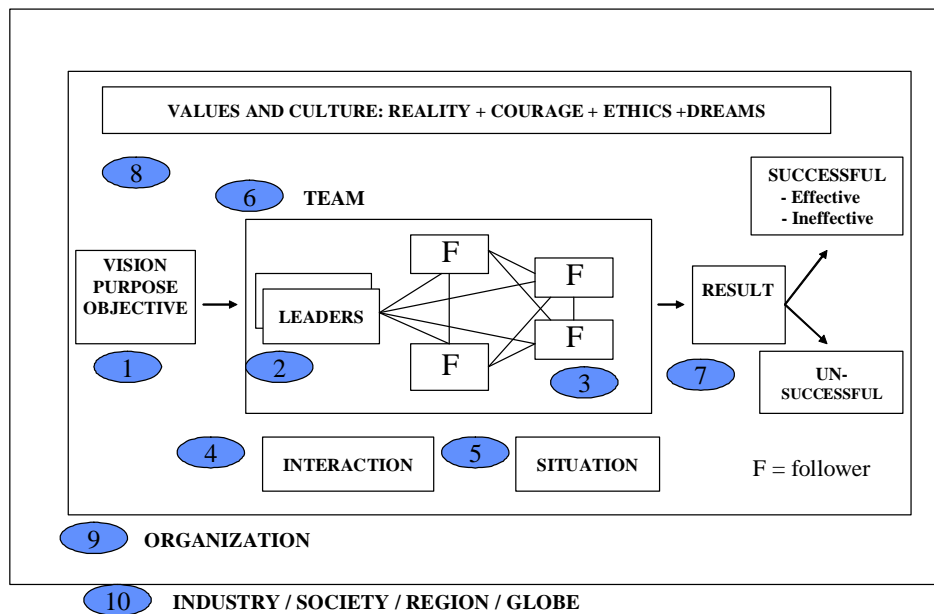


Figure 1. The intelligent leadership model

1. Shared vision and objectives

Vision and objectives are the starting point for a leadership process: they give justification for the leadership process. Leadership should give a purpose and meaning for action and guide concrete leadership behaviour. If you don't know what your goal is, it doesn't matter where you are going. Without a clear vision it is very difficult to lead efficiently.

2. Leader(s)

Leaders are certainly the key players in the leadership process. In the leadership process we can have more than one leader: the leader's leader and the leader's colleagues. They have the

responsibility to create a process that works well, because usually they have more authority and power and they exert more influence than do followers.

3. Followers

Leaders need followers and usually there is more than one follower³. Leadership takes place in a team setting. Followers should be active; they share the responsibility of the leadership process. Followers do not 'do' followership, they 'do' leadership. They are in the leadership relationship together. This is shared and collaborative leadership. Followers and leaders develop a relationship wherein they influence one another as well as the organization and society.

4. Interaction

Leaders and followers are the people in this leadership interaction, which at its best can be described as a dialogue. Usually leaders must use a more directive leadership style like commanding and coaching. The interaction is based on *influence relationship*. Influence is a process of using *persuasion* to have an impact on other people in a relationship. Influence as persuasion depends for example on purpose, status, authority, personality, charisma, interpersonal skills, perception, motivation, reputation and prestige.

5. Situation

There are many situational factors, which affect the interaction process. These are e.g. task / job demands, time, readiness of followers and readiness of leaders. The readiness of leaders means how able, willing and flexible they are in using different kinds of leadership styles. The readiness of followers means how able and willing they are in sharing the leadership responsibilities and

tasks. A mature follower has high competence, motivation, commitment, responsibility and independency.

6. Team

Leadership always happens in a team setting. Leadership is the sum of all the interactions among a leader and followers in that relationship, not only the individual interactions between one leader and one follower in that relationship. Leadership is a team (communal) relationship.

7. Results

Leaders and followers intend to achieve real results or change. This kind of result orientation is a typical feature of leadership. *Feedback* is the basic requirement of all learning, growth and development. Feedback should be given to every unit/variable of this process. The quality of leadership can be assessed at the interaction level and at the results level. At result level we can be successful or unsuccessful. The successful results can be effective or ineffective. The case where intended results are achieved at the expense of followers' motivation is an example of ineffective leadership.

8. Values and culture

Values and culture have a very crucial role in intelligent leadership. The moral dimension of leadership can also be clarified by applying Koestenbaum's (1991) *leadership diamond* model. In intelligent leadership culture the following features are true:

- a leader always responds to the facts, for *realism* means having no illusions

- a leader always initiates, acts and takes risks, for *courage* means acting with sustained initiative
- a leader is always sensitive to values, for *ethics* means to be of service
- a leader always sees the larger perspective, for *dreaming* means to think big and new.

9. Organization

It should be possible to apply this model in different kinds of organizations such as companies, public organizations, military organizations, NGO's, hospitals, universities etc. It should also be able to apply it to teams, networks and virtual organizations. Every organization has its own values, culture and structure. A leader should be flexible enough to apply his/her leadership behavior to the features of the organization or clever enough to understand that certain organizations are not suitable for her/him. There must be a certain fit between the manager and organizational environment.⁴

10. Industry, society, world

The leadership process takes place in an organization, which is part of an industry or a branch. Organizations are part of societies, countries, continents and so on (see figure 1.) All this happens in our "global village", which in a way has become smaller and smaller and is now the wider system within which we work. In intelligent leadership it is important to see the big picture. We should lead in a *comprehensively simplified way*. We should develop a global balanced scorecard, which should include financial, political, technological, societal, ecological and spiritual factors.

Conclusions: Intelligent leadership redefining the roles of worker, work, organization and society

We need quite a radical paradigm shift in our thinking of leadership. We should move from an industrial paradigm into a *paradigm of knowledge-intensive societies*. I believe that the new framework, *intelligent leadership*, can better describe the leadership phenomena at different levels: individual, team, organization, society, region and global. We also hope that the intelligent leadership would help us to create better futures in different societies.

We have to find a new approach to leadership. This is the role of intelligent leadership. We have to challenge our basic assumptions about work, worker, organization and the role of society. We need intelligent workers, whole persons, who are doing meaningful work, which could even be a calling for many of them. We need intelligent organizations where efficiency, renewal and well-being are in balance. We need societies where growth and efficiency are in balance with sustainability and well-being. In figure 2 this paradigm shift and the role of intelligent leadership have been visualized.

Intelligent leadership means, e.g., moving

- from “pair of hands”⁵ to the whole person, intelligent worker, including professional, physical, mental, social and spiritual intelligence
- from meaningless job to meaningful calling
- from machine to open system organization, an intelligent organization
- from growth and efficiency to sustainability and well-being at the societal level.

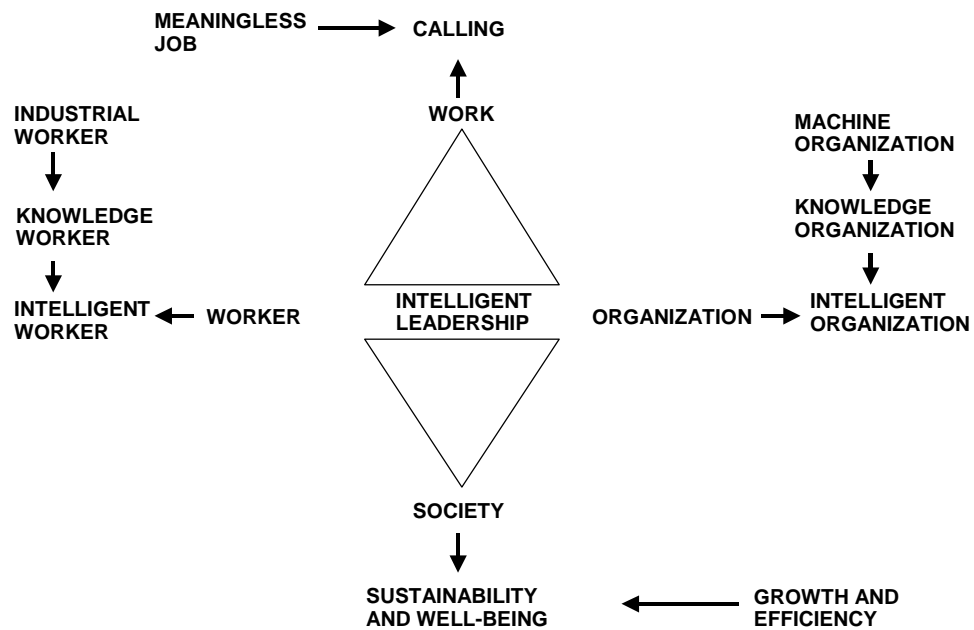


Figure 2. Intelligent leadership redefining the roles of worker, work, organization and society

Leadership is such an important field that it cannot be left to leaders alone. In this there is a big need for democracy. Leadership is about collaboration. It has to be implemented together, starting from ourselves, learning to be active “followers” and if needed bearing the responsibility of leading others. In this way we can proceed towards intelligent leadership and create intelligent organizations and intelligent societies. To quote Abraham Maslow: “The man or woman who truly is influenced by enlightened management should become a better husband or wife and better father or mother, as well as a better citizen in general”.

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¹ Gratton 2000.

² Senge 1990, 68-92.

³ Maybe we should replace the concept follower and use the concept expert, because in a knowledge based organization every employee is usually the best expert of his/her job.

⁴ Boyatzis 1982.

⁵ “I need a pair of hands but have to recruit the whole person” is the well-known saying by Henry Ford. Maybe the “Knowledge Manager” would say that “I need only the brains but have to recruit the whole person”. The “Intelligent Leader” will say in the future: “I need the whole person with all of her/his intelligences”.