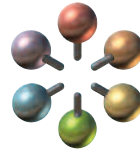


A QUESTION OF SURVIVAL, A MATTER OF LEADERSHIP

Recession-Proofing Your Organization

OCTOBER 13, 2009 REPORT



Our world is no longer what it used to be. We need to look at leadership in dramatically new ways... it is no longer the business of a handful of people... in today's world, the practice of leadership is everyone's business.

Conducted & Facilitated by Leader:

Rod Matheson

MES, CERT. AD. ED.



Core Culture Inc.

Leveraging **Your** Culture
To Elevate Results

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A Question of Survival...

In today's world, many organizations are increasingly faced with challenges that could be described as threats to their survival.

Whether they survive or not, thrive or not, depends greatly upon their capacities to respond to these challenges, five of which are listed here. The first four get a lot of attention these days. The last one, the one that gets little or no attention, is by far the most important aspect of our problem; it is and always will be our greatest challenge.

Change, Complexity and Uncertainty

Change and interconnectivity in the world and in the affairs of organizations is occurring more and more rapidly. As it increases so too does the complexity of our world. Subsequently, there is more and more uncertainty, ambiguity, instability, volatility, chaos and turbulence.

Demands for Value and Quality

We live in a competitive world. Customers, clients and shareholders want value and performance. That means not only quality service and products, but low costs and healthy dividends, too.

Demands to "Do More with Less"

Not only do organizations have to get better to survive or thrive, they often have to do so with fewer resources... there are increasing expectations or demands for more speed, more efficiency, more value, more profit, more flexibility and more service with less employees, less cost and less time.

Employee Needs

All these demands upon an organization add to the concerns of its lifeblood – its people. Today's workers are not only concerned about job security; they are, to varying degrees, also resistant to change. Yet, paradoxically, most workers want change and their wish list would certainly include having, for example:

- work environments where relationships are less adversarial and more cooperative
- more meaning and fulfillment from their work
- the opportunities to participate within, and influence the affairs of, the organization

And if their needs go unmet, the best will move to "greener pastures"; adding to the dilemma of finding and maintaining a talented, stable workforce capable of responding to the demands placed upon it.

Learned Incapacities

Of all the threats we are facing, this one gets the least attention, yet **it is by far our greatest challenge.**

Whether an organization succeeds or not is determined not primarily by the events that happen to it, but by how the organization responds to these events. The organization's greatest threat is **not** the change thrust upon it; nor is it the demands of quality and value, global competition, and doing more with less. Our greatest threat is and always will be ourselves, our *Learned Incapacities* - our conditioned ideas, habits and responses (ways of seeing, knowing, understanding and acting) that limit or incapacitate us, that make us less capable (or incapable) of reaching our full potential. For example, many have learned to one degree or another:

- how not to be open, flexible and responsive to change
- how not to take initiative, be self-reliant, independent
AND interdependent
- how not to act responsibly
- how not to possess "enlightened self-interest" – an awareness of and care for one's self and the common good
- how not to communicate and interact in ways that promote understanding, tolerance and constructive conflict resolution
- how not to pay attention, be mindful or self-aware

Let me put this another way. What will always get in our way most, when it comes to surviving or thriving in this world, are not "the things out there"; our greatest obstacle will always be the way we see and understand our world... which leads us to the way we act, interact, behave or respond... which influences the results we get or create... good, great, bad or ugly. It's our learned ways of seeing, understanding, acting and interacting that will always be our greatest obstacle.

An organization's chances of survival will depend most upon its ability to see, recognize and overcome these learned responses that incapacitate it, these *Learned Incapacities*.

...A Matter of Leadership

Your organization can survive in today's world; it can even thrive. It is possible for your organization to look beyond the concerns of keeping pace and, instead, focus on and succeed in setting it.

Whether this occurs or not, in the end, is primarily a matter of leadership; your organization's success, or lack of it, will be greatly influenced by the leadership you practice.

The first step to practicing the requisite leadership is to broaden our understanding of it - i.e., we must first overcome our *Learned Incapacities* regarding the idea and practice of leadership.

Leadership can be seen in four general ways. The next few pages briefly describe each of them. All are essential to organizational success in today's world.

Formal Leadership - *Leadership By One*

This is the leadership that is formally bestowed upon one person - i.e., they are in a formal position or role of leading others. There are two general kinds of Formal Leadership.

Leadership of Others

This is the one we are typically most familiar with. Of the four presented here, this is the one most like "the managing of others".

It is the kind of leadership we are referring to when we say "Take me to your leader!" or "Who's in charge here?". It is the leadership that is about such aspects as: shaping organizational culture and vision; inspiring passion, courage, commitment and action; establishing strategic direction; leading the improvement of business processes and practices; coordination; delegation; aligning individual and team efforts with higher level business objectives; managing and measuring performance; discipline; and developing and monitoring interpersonal relationships.

Leadership for Others¹

This is the greatest kind of leadership... because the focus is on serving others and enabling an organization or society². It is the kind of leadership that is most like "the developing of others... helping them to build their personal capacity and realize their full potential".

Here, the leader's goal is to make his or herself redundant or unnecessary, i.e., *to help others to help themselves*.

This is achieved by helping others, for example: to **learn** (and *learn how to learn*); to **think** (and *think about their thinking*); to **see** (to notice, pay attention, be conscious, aware, mindful) and see more (be **creative** and **innovative**); to be **wise** and create wisdom; to build and possess great **character**; to acquire and sustain enlightened self-interest; to **act responsibly**, to **care** and be caring; to be independent and interdependent.

¹ Sometimes I refer to this as *Facilitative Leadership*.

² Robert Greenleaf - *The Servant as Leader*. 1970.

Ultimately, those helped would become *Facilitative Leaders* themselves - helping and serving others, contributing positively and exponentially to the quality of life.

This is a realm of empowerment, and the extent of the leader's influence in this process is indicated by the expression: "you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink." The leader can only help facilitate the empowerment of others; they cannot, in the end, empower others... only each individual has the power to do that; it cannot be done for them, or to them.

As mentioned earlier, *Leadership for Others* is the greatest kind of leadership, but it is not the most important. That distinction is placed upon another kind of leadership.

Informal Leadership - Leadership By All

This perspective of leadership recognizes that **we all practice leadership, and we do so all of the time.**

This interpretation of leadership, of course, goes far beyond all conventional definitions. Typically, we call these behaviours something else, for example: followership, initiative, teamwork or common courtesy. It can be argued, however, that using the label "leadership" is much more appropriate... perhaps even necessary for our survival.

The rationale for this perspective begins with an examination of the etymology. "To lead," means, "to influence, or cause to move".

As *Systems Thinking* demonstrates, all of us, to varying degrees, continually influence or cause someone or something to "move" or to occur; we do **not** live in isolation; we cannot not make a difference. As this science reveals, there is no such thing as "sitting on the fence"... that even *doing nothing is doing something.*

As a result of this influence, each of us makes a difference³... good, great, bad or ugly... our actions, or inactions, always lead to something... we are all leaders. We all practice leadership, and we do so all of the time.

These sciences demonstrate how this broader perspective of leadership is more than just "playing with words"; they prove that the idea of *Leadership By All* is much more than just a matter of semantics.

But if more proof is required, it can be found in classic leadership theory, which reminds us that leaders are, essentially, one or both of the following:

- They are *Task Oriented*. They are focused on outcomes; they strive to ensure that group, team or organizational tasks are successfully understood, undertaken and accomplished.
- They are *Relationship Oriented*. They attend to process; they seek to ensure that individuals are involved and encouraged, and that interactions and relationships in the group, team, organization or society are healthy, cooperative and harmonious.

These two leadership behaviours are not beyond the capacities of those we typically call "followers". In fact, these behaviours are continually carried out, to varying degrees, by all of us as a matter of everyday activity. Yet, we seldom acknowledge these contributions as being "acts of leadership". In other words, leadership constantly happens informally, without being officially bestowed upon one or many individuals... it occurs in natural ways,

³ No matter how small, as the sciences of Cybernetics, Chaos, and Quantum Mechanics demonstrate.

often without conscious intention. This form of leadership is like “air”... it’s everywhere, happening around us all day, every day.

The metaphor of air (oxygen) expresses not just the ever-presence of informal leadership but also the vital necessity of its positive form – i.e., it is essential... we cannot do (live/work) without it... it is, in fact, **more important** (more essential) than the two kinds of leadership already identified here.

This bold claim of “greater importance” and “greater presence” was also expressed wisely by Mahatma Gandhi when he suggested the best way to practice leadership is to: “Be the change you wish to create.”

Leadership By All does not mean we don’t need formal leaders, nor does it suggest we all have (or should have) the same influence or leadership capacities. What it does say, however, is that we all make a difference and the difference each of us makes is vital to the quality of life.

Once again, this controversial view on leadership is much more than a matter of semantics. It can be argued that seeing “leadership” in this way is important... perhaps even necessary for our survival.

By not acknowledging their contributions as “acts of leadership”, we fail to fully recognize, engage and motivate non-formal leaders; we diminish them and foolishly undervalue their influence (which, in turn, “helps” them to do the same to themselves... and others); we deny not only the full extent of their roles, contributions and potentials, but also, more importantly, we fail (and help them to fail) to recognize one essential, vital truth: **freedom is not free**... each and every individual has a responsibility for the quality of life, our life, this world’s life.

The scapegoats for today’s troubles are often our formal leaders. This way of thinking is contradictory to Systems Thinking, which shows us that we’re all responsible and accountable for our problems, not just our formal leaders. The perspective of *Leadership By All* recognizes, respects, encourages and enables the contributions of each and every individual; it clearly illustrates that all of us not only have rights but responsibilities too; it challenges all of us to stand up and be accountable.

This view of leadership defies our conventional paradigm; it leads us to a more wholistic understanding of the nature and practice of leadership. It is a vital view, made all the more important by the challenging times we live in, and the subsequent necessity that we recognize (admit, acknowledge, realize) that: whether we like it or not, each of us makes a difference... and this leadership that we practice can be helpful or positive, a good or great thing... or it can be unhelpful - a negative, bad or ugly thing.

We are faced with a question of survival... whether we survive or not, thrive or not, is a matter of leadership. Whatever result we get or create (positive or negative, helpful or unhelpful), will be a matter of (result of) leadership.

There are two general kinds of *Informal Leadership or Leadership By All*.

Leadership with Others

This is the leadership we each practice every time we interact with others. It creates or sustains (or blocks and destroys) the positive synergy and social capacities that help enable an organization (and/or society or individuals) to perform at optimal levels. For example, this kind of leadership is about or related to: culture, teamwork, interpersonal relations, communication,

cooperation, competition, conflict, diversity, tolerance, pluralism, inclusion, respect, consideration, compassion, care and caring, citizenship, courtesy, civility and trust.

Leadership of Self

This is the most fundamental, most important kind of leadership. It's the leadership each of us practices every day, all day long.

If there's anyone we lead most, it's ourselves. We lead ourselves because we cause and influence the way we see and understand our world... which determines how we act, interact and behave... which leads us to the results we get or create: good, great, bad or ugly. Each of us is the person most responsible or accountable for the quality of our own life, and the consequences of our choices and actions.

Leadership of Self includes, for example: character, ethics, integrity, attitude, choice, awareness, consciousness, mindfulness, learning-how-to-learn, virtue, wisdom and systemic wisdom, paradigms and perception, critical-thinking and paradigm-busting (thinking-about-our-thinking), creativity, risk-taking, courage, self-discipline, self-motivation, self-confidence, self-esteem, humility, honour and being honourable.

Leadership of Self is the foundation of all other kinds of leadership; it determines how well we practice the first three kinds of leadership described here. The more effectively one leads one's self, the more effectively one can be a leader of/for/with others. Concentrating on the other kinds of leadership without adequately focusing on *Leadership of Self is like building a house by starting on the second floor...* it doesn't make sense; it won't work. Yet this is often what we try to do and, therefore, it is often THE reason why leadership fails or becomes less than it could be.

This document is based on a book of the same name, to be published in 2010.

The author, Rod Matheson, specializes in helping others build the most vital capacities of our times... their abilities to:

- Learn (and learn-how-to-learn);
- Think (and think-about-their-thinking);
- See (to pay attention and to notice - be conscious, aware, mindful), and
- See More (be creative and innovative);
- Be wise and create wisdom;
- Possess and build character;
- Act responsibly;
- Practice great leadership.