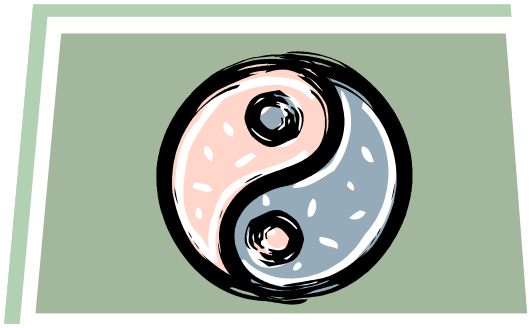
Leadership in the Era of the Knowledge Worker

STAYING IN THE LAND OF THE QUICK

By Ron Wiens

They used to say that there were just two types of people in the Old West – the Quick and the Dead. Well, in the era of the 'knowledge' economy the phrase might well now be – there are just two types of organizations, the Quick and the Dying. We are using an out of date lens to search for leaders. If we want to be one of the Quick and not one of the Dying, the time has come to change that lens.



AT A GLANCE:

- In today's economy, 'knowledge' is king. Knowledge is a resource locked in the human mind. Creating and sharing knowledge cannot be forced out of people.
- A critical driver of economic prosperity is having leaders who can engage and leverage knowledge workers.
- There are eight criteria that form the basis for detecting and selecting today's leaders. Furthermore, these eight criteria are arranged into four pairs with each pair representing two criteria that on the surface appear to be polar opposites. The polar opposite nature of these pairs goes to the very heart of today's leadership challenge.

Leadership in the Era of the Knowledge Worker

They used to say that there were just two types of people in the Old West – the Quick and the Dead. Well, in the era of the 'knowledge' economy the phrase might well now be – there are just two types of organizations, the Quick and the Dying. The knowledge economy has introduced a new set of rules when it comes to managing and leading. The Quick recognize this and are embracing new ways of detecting and selecting their leaders. The Dying are hanging on for dear life to the ways that brought them success in the past.

The World Wide Web has taken us into an electronically connected world. Today, people are connected not only to each other but also to each other's knowledge. The prediction† is that before the end of the current decade, the world's cumulative codified knowledge will be doubling every 11 hours (in 1975, it was every seven years). The insight you have at night will be outdated by daybreak. The shelf life of knowledge will be the same as that for a banana.

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In today's economy, 'knowledge' is king. Knowledge is a resource locked in the human mind. Creating and sharing knowledge cannot be forced out of people. Every individual possesses unique insights that can be put to use only with his or her active cooperation. Getting that cooperation is key to success in the modern economy. This brings us to a critical driver of economic prosperity, which is having leaders who can engage and leverage knowledge workers. Knowledge workers are quasi volunteers in that they can choose to make their knowledge known or not and can choose whether they impart all of it, part of it or none of it! The job of the leader is to build a culture that gets the knowledge workers working together, freely giving up their knowledge in order to move their organization towards its desired future. The creation of such a culture requires the leader to focus on three key building blocks.

† Dr. Nick Bontis, McMaster University, Closing Keynote Presentation, KM World 2000.

Cultural building block # 1 is helping people believe in themselves. Today, a winning organization is going to be one in which its employees are taking it to new places. This requires employees who are courageous. Employees who believe in themselves have the courage to try new things. They are making mistakes, learning from their mistakes and moving on. When they get stuck or go off into the weeds, the employees of these winning organizations are the first to recognize it and they freely put a hand up and ask for help. This ability to ask for help makes things go faster. The degree to which your people believe in themselves is a measure of your organization's Emotional Intelligence (EI).

Cultural building block # 2 involves building an organization in which people care about each other. How can caring affect the organization's performance? The answer was most eloquently articulated by James Autry, the former CEO of the Publisher Group, when he said "*I need to know that you care before I care to know what you know*". Caring is the basis of trust. If I know that you care about me and my success then I can trust you. If I can trust you, I can speak openly and frankly with you. If I can speak openly and frankly with you, we can solve problems together. If we can solve problems together, then we can leverage each other's creativity and knowledge and in so doing accelerate our organization forward. The degree to which your people trust each other is a measure of your organization's Relationship Intelligence (RI).

Cultural Building Block # 3 is about instilling common cause. In winning organizations, employees have a deep and common understanding of the organization's desired future. But not only do they understand the organization's goals and objectives, they believe in them. Achieving them is personally meaningful. The strength of your people's attachment to your desired future is a measure of your organization's Corporate Intelligence (CI).

In the knowledge economy, organizations need leaders that are capable of building a community of people who are plugged-in, turned-on and in-tune with their organization. You do this by building within your organization people who believe in themselves, believe in each other and believe in what the organization is trying to achieve. This represents a new way of leading.

Today, however, leadership is in crisis†. The boomers are retiring. This represents a mass exodus of leaders across organizations of all types. The downsizing phenomena of the 80's & 90's has thinned out development budgets with the result that organizations have not been making the investment required to replace their departing leaders. The impact of the boomer exodus is compounded by the changing attitudes and expectations of the generations that follow. Unlike the boomers, the younger generations have different priorities with respect to work. They

*† J.Ferrabee, **'Leadership Crisis:The Perfect Storm'**, (Totem Hill).*

want to be engaged in their work but they want other things out of life as well. This means that fewer are willing to assume the responsibilities and demands of leadership.

Today's reality is that having leaders who know how to lead and manage in the knowledge economy has become the organization's number one critical success factor.

So, here's the situation many organizations find themselves in. They are losing leaders en mass. They have been asleep at the switch for years in terms of growing the next crop of leaders. All the while, the importance of leadership has been rising. Today's reality is that having leaders who know how to lead and manage in the knowledge economy has become the organization's number one critical success factor.

Can it get any worse? The answer is, yes it can. And what is making things worse? It's the continued reliance on yesterday's criteria for identifying and selecting individuals to manage and lead.

The leaders' mantra can be succinctly summarized as follows:

"IT IS NOT MY JOB TO DELIVER,
MY JOB IS TO BUILD A TEAM THAT DELIVERS"

Our current recruitment process often conflicts with this mantra. A focus on what the individual has personally delivered as opposed to his or her team's performance can lead to favoring individuals with one or more of the following traits:

- Command and control
- Super-technician
- Short term orientation.

COMMAND AND CONTROL

In today's knowledge economy, a 'command and control' leader will get what he or she asks for and likely little else. Command and control leaders tend to miss out on the additional success their people's knowledge could contribute because that knowledge is never given the opportunity to be released. Command and control leaders turn knowledge workers off, destroy initiative and at worst, cause their team to divest themselves of any sense of personal responsibility for their leader's mission. Command and control leaders turn people into automatons; knowledge workers do not make good automatons.

LEADERS WHO ARE SUPER-TECHNICIANS

Look at any book that lists the attributes of a good leader and you will find a huge shopping basket of skills and behaviors. Those responsible for appointments can easily become overwhelmed with criteria on what to look for. When this happens, recruiters can fall into the trap of simplifying the process by selecting a leader based on the candidate's ability to solve particular problems causing the organization grief at that point in time. In this scenario, a leader is appointed because he or she is technically and/or professionally smart.

SMART DOES NOT ALWAYS MEAN SMART

Highly developed technical / professional smartness can actually hinder a leader. People around and below them tend to defer to their leaders' smartness. The people they lead stop thinking for themselves. They abandon their own thinking and creativity, and as a result, offload accountability to their leader.

The culture under the smart ones starts to deteriorate. Without thinking, without creativity, without accountability, people become disconnected from their work. They become disconnected from outcomes. They show up for work every day and plod along, but the work no longer has any deep meaning for them. Quite simply, the workers tune-out. The smart leader has created a ticking time bomb.

Leadership isn't only about being technically or professionally smart. It isn't only about making the right technical decisions. The biggest learning for the too-smart person is that leadership is not about being right, it's about building a creative and effective team that does the

right thing. Actually, leadership is about being smart enough to make room for your people's thoughts. Leaders need to create the space for their teams to come up with their own answers. It is this approach that gets knowledge workers engaged and leverages what they know for the good of the organization. For all their smartness, many smart leaders have not realized that their job is no longer to deliver, but to build a team that delivers.

SHORT TERM ORIENTATION

There is a natural and understandable tension that exists between a short and long term perspective. The organizational problems we face and the rewards we receive tend to reside in the 'here and now'. So there is a natural tendency for leaders to live in the present. However, without a long term perspective, the urgent will almost always push out the important. One of the 'important' things that leaders do is prepare their organization, their unit, their team for the future. When the leader lives in the 'Land of the Here and Now', this preparation does not always get done. But one day, the future arrives and the organization, the unit, the team is not ready for it. The 'short term perspective' leader has taken his or her organization, unit or team into the 'Land of the Dying'.

Our organizations are filled with talent. We have the most educated work force in the history of the human race. And it is the norm, not the exception that people want to make a contribution. People want their lives to make a difference.

The lens that is in use today to identify and recruit leaders was not built to function in today's economy. But, we continue to use it…

The good news, there is a silver lining in all this bleakness. Our organizations are filled with talent. We have the most educated work force in the history of the human race. And it is the norm, not the exception that people want to make a contribution. People want their lives to make a difference. So, amongst all this talent, where are the up and coming leaders? Why are we not suffering from an embarrassment of riches when it comes to choosing new leaders? If the potential leaders are there, why are we not seeing them?

Consider the case of the violinist who played in a Washington DC Metro Station on a cold January morning. He played six Bach pieces for about 45 minutes. During that time, over one thousand people went through the station. Only 6 people stopped and stayed for awhile. About 20 gave him money but continued to walk their normal pace. When he finished playing no one applauded, nor was there any recognition.

No one knew this violinist was Joshua Bell, one of the best musicians in the world. He played one of the most intricate pieces ever written,

with a violin worth $3.5 million dollars. Two days before, Joshua Bell sold out a theatre in Boston where the seats averaged $100.

This is a real story. Joshua Bell playing incognito in the metro station was organized by the Washington Post† as part of a social experiment about perception, taste and people's priorities.

So the question is: will talent be recognized in an unexpected context? This experiment says the answer is 'no'! Why is it 'no'? Because context affects the lens we choose to view the world around us. Basically, if we do not expect to see it, we will choose a lens that prevents us from seeing it.

So it is in finding leaders. We are using an outdated lens to search for leaders, so we are blind to the potential that is in our midst. If we want to be one of the Quick and not one of the Dying, the time has come to change that lens.

So the question becomes, what lens would help us recognize the individuals in our midst who have the potential to lead and manage in a knowledge economy?

THE NEW LENS

It is not all that difficult to come up with a very long list of criteria that leaders, in the era of the knowledge worker, need to have. The problem with the complete list approach to recruiting is that no candidate is likely to have it all. We end up making compromises and accepting leaders that meet some of the criteria but not others; this is reality. But frankly, some criteria are far more important than others. If we are not careful on the compromises we make, we will not get the leaders we need. So the challenge is to identify that very small set of criteria that are absolutely mandatory for successful leadership in the knowledge economy.

Success in the knowledge economy requires leaders with the ability and skill to flow effortlessly and smoothly between the two polar opposites as the situation dictates.

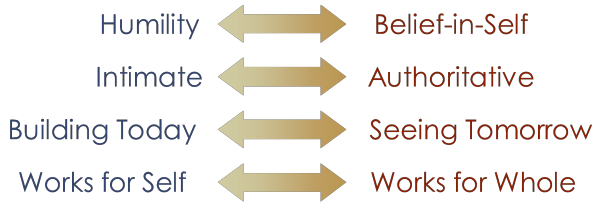
Experience, gained from working with leaders and organizations around the globe, indicates that there are eight criteria that form the basis for detecting and selecting today's leaders. Furthermore, these eight criteria are arranged into four pairs with each pair representing two criteria that on the surface appear to be polar opposites. The polar opposite nature of these pairs goes to the very heart of the challenge of modern leadership.

Each pair represents a behavioral tension. Leaders can eliminate this tension for any given pair by living at one pole and ignoring its opposite. However, this is not a strategy for success. Success in the knowledge economy requires leaders with the ability and skill to flow

*† Gene Weingarten, '**Pearls Before Breakfast**' (Washington Post, April 8, 2007)*

effortlessly and smoothly between the two polar opposites as the situation dictates.

The four pairs that define the shape of leadership in the era of the 'knowledge' economy are as follows:



Pair One - Humility and Belief-in-Self

Leaders need the humility that allows them to genuinely listen to the ideas of others. This listening does two things. First, it expands a leader's thought process. Listening gives the leader new ideas and enriched solutions. But frankly, the true impact of genuinely listening is how it transforms relationships. As Stephen Covey, says - "*What happens when you truly listen to another person? The whole relationship is transformed: Someone started listening to me, and they seemed to savor my words. They didn't agree or disagree, they just were listening, and I felt as if they were seeing how I saw the world. And in that process, I found myself listening to myself. I started to feel a worth in myself.*"

When leaders listen, they build people's belief in themselves. This belief gives people the courage to take their thinking to new places. As W. Chan Kim and Renée Mauborgne point out in their HBR Paper 'Fair Process', listening does not set out to achieve harmony or to win people's support by accommodating every individual's opinions, needs, or interests . Listening is about giving every idea a chance and it is the merit of the idea and not consensus that drives the leader's decision making. Listening gives people a sense of involvement. If I feel my leader has genuinely listened to and considered my views even if my ideas are not part of the end solution, I feel that I have contributed. When leaders listen, they build commitment; they build ownership of whatever emerges.

When leaders have the humility to value their people's thoughts and input, something magical happens – there is a sea change in their relationships. Listening takes leaders, for the moment, off their leadership pedestal and places them in a peer to peer relationship with their team members. In effect, the humble leader elevates the team and in so doing builds team. A leader that truly listens is showing respect and showing respect builds trust.

We all want to work in teams that are powerhouses of creativity and problem-solving. But the basis of creativity and problem-solving is creating sufficient intimacy and security for candor to flourish. In high-performing teams, you observe people who are willing to put their preliminary thoughts and rough ideas on the table for all to see. And what do their fellow team members do? They listen, they involve themselves intimately in their colleagues' ideas, they ask enquiring questions, share their own thinking, and as the discussion progresses, they take their colleagues' thoughts and ideas apart. This is the process that helps grow the idea and everyone involved. The end result is a fast moving team that is pumping out ideas and solutions.

The key to a high performing team is candor and the key to candor is trust. I need to trust that my fellow team members are interested in my success. It is this trust that gives me the courage to share my thoughts. It is this trust that opens my ears and allows me to hear and take in what my colleagues are telling me. In effect, a listening leader is leading by example and through that example is laying the foundation for a culture of feedback. In this culture, people say what is on their mind, at any time, to any one, for the good of the whole. As Jim Collins points out in his book 'Good to Great' - "One thing is certain; you absolutely cannot make a series of good decisions without first confronting the brutal facts. In confronting the brutal facts the good-to-great companies left themselves stronger and more resilient." Listening leads to a culture that regularly puts the 'brutal facts' on the table.

When a leader listens, people feel respected and valued. The listening gets people believing in themselves, taking ownership, innovating and going beyond the call of duty. Listening unlocks and leverages the organization's talent. Leaders that have the humility to listen build their organization's Emotional, Relationship and Corporate Intelligence (EI, RI, CI). Through listening, the humble leader enables and accelerates change.

On the other side of this polarity is the need for leaders to know when to ignore the distracting thoughts and new ideas that are being constantly whispered in their ear.

New ideas are seductive. It is easy to fall in love with the next great idea before you have finished with the previous one. This changing of horses in mid-stream can become a habit, a habit that will cause an organization to lose its strategic focus.

Many organizations whose leaders proclaim commitment to change often fail to achieve significant results because they have built a culture in which it is the idea itself that is valued and not the

implementation effort required to realize the benefits. In such cultures, creativity is considered to be an intellectual proclivity for generating new ideas, new strategies, new policies and new action plans. In these cultures, the idea people are hoisted up on shoulders and paraded around the organization while the implementers are left starving for attention. What the leaders of these cultures fail to appreciate is that the competitive differentiator lies in the 'Land of Implementation' rather than in the 'Land of Ideas'.

Ideas are important and choosing the idea in which to invest is critical to an organization's success. However, study after study demonstrates that the really successful organizations are differentiated from the rest by their ability to implement (see side box). Once an idea is chosen, the successful leader keeps his or her team focused on investing the time and resources required to transform the idea into their reality.

An organization can easily generate more ideas than it has the energy to realize. An organization that is unable to choose or attempts to ride multiple ideas under the mistaken assumption that this approach keeps their options open and thereby reduces risk is doomed to paying lip-service to the implementation process -- there is simply too much to do.

In those cultures in which it is the idea and not the implementation that is valued, the leader will be constantly bombarded with alternate ideas that, if listened to, will distract and pull the organization off its strategic track. What those around the leader are saying often sounds intelligent and reasonable. As a leader, you don't know for certain what the outcome of a given project is going to be and you feel anxiety. Leaders are human – and so they are tempted to give way to their fears and the voices recommending distraction. If they do, they abandon the implementation of the existing idea, start the implementation of a new idea, and the cycle of wasted effort repeats itself.

The research carried out by Collins and his team found that those firms that achieved a 'great' status did not spend any more time on strategic planning than the also-rans. What the 'great' firms did was to "stick to it" and not allow other seductive opportunities to side-track them.

By contrast, those leaders that can not "stick to it" create a complexity in their organizations that drives their people away from investing their energy in the implementation process. Strategy is sacrifice, try to do everything then you have no plan, no hope, no future.

WHAT DRIVES SUCCESS?

There is a significant amount of research which shows what makes an organization successful and differentiates it from the competition is its ability to 'stick to it'.

- *Jim Collins' book **Good To Great** was based on seven years of research involving 1,435 Fortune 500 companies. His research concluded what moved a company to greatness in terms of its bottom-line performance was picking "one big thing and sticking to it'.*
- *Nitin Nohria, William Joyce and Bruce Roberson, in their paper "**What Really Works**", (Harvard Business Review, July 2003) followed 160 companies over a 10 year period. They concluded that strategy was less important than the ability to implement a strategy and that success came less from the specifics of any given strategy and more from the leader's ability to highly focus their organization on the delivery of a single strategy.*
- *Jack Welch, General Electric's former CEO and one of the most successful business leaders of the twentieth century, in terms of bottom line performance, was known for picking one major change initiative and focusing his organization on it for 3 to 5 years.*

In the end, when the leader hops from idea to idea, little is accomplished, even though the organization expends a great deal of energy. This is where the leader loses credibility, resulting in people abandoning the leader's strategy and reverting back to their own 'reliable' agendas. In this situation, the organization starts to resemble the incandescent light bulb with energy going off in all directions.

Maintaining the strategic focus required for successful change is difficult. But in a culture that does not value the discipline of idea-implementation, it is all but impossible. As a leader, you must not let your fears and doubts become the lens through which you view your organization's way forward. As Ralph Waldo Emerson so eloquently said "Whatever course you decide upon, there is always someone to tell you that you are wrong. There are always difficulties arising which tempt you to believe that your critics are right. To map out a course of action and follow it to an end requires courage".

When a leader stays focused on outcomes, the leader is sending a message – "I believe in where I am going." This message builds his or her people's belief in and passion for the targeted outcomes. It builds the organization's Corporate Intelligence (CI).

Having the humility that enables one to genuinely listen to and be influenced by others coupled with the inner belief-in-self that allows one to remain steadfast on the chosen path, ignoring diverting ideas and opinions, is an essential ability for leadership.

Pair Two - Intimate and Authoritative

The question that immediately jumps to mind is 'what place does 'intimacy' have in an organization?' It would not be an exaggeration to say that the answer, for many, if not most managers, is 'it has none'. This is unfortunate for it demonstrates what is ailing organizations and the teams that make them up – lack of attachment between individuals and their leaders.

What is intimacy in the work-place all about? "Intimate interactions are those that bring us closer to each other through caring about what each person is thinking or feeling. The intent is to enhance connectedness as a desirable goal in its own right."† Leaders engage in intimate interactions when they get down off their leadership pedestal and get to know their people as people. It also means the leaders opening up and allowing their people to get to know them.

Intimate interactions are not complicated. If fact, they are possibly the simplest of all interactions. They involve leaders showing an interest in people, showing appreciation for their successes, acknowledging

*† S. Nevis et al., '**Connecting Strategic and Intimate interactions: the Need for Balance**' (Gestalt International Study Center)*

their difficulties, and being curious about what is going on in their lives. Intimate interactions are nothing more than two people showing a genuine interest in each other, building attachment and a sense of connectedness. So what is the value of attachment?

Our organizations are filled with talented people that want to 'do good'. The desire to live a life that makes a difference is not the exception, it is the norm. However, we all have our own picture of what 'doing good' looks like. We all have our own personal agendas. This is why organizations are like the incandescent light bulb. Lots of energy being expended, but it's all going in different directions. The result: tracking the organization's progress is a lot like watching molasses flow. In an organization where people all have their own understanding of what 'doing good' means, individual efforts are not aligned; everyone is going off in different directions trying to make the organization successful. A great deal of energy is expended but little gets accomplished. This year ends up looking a whole lot like last year.

In contrast, in those organizations that are moving forward in great leaps and bounds, people have aligned their personal agendas with the leader's agenda. High-performance organizations are laser like in that the people within them all have the same definition of what 'doing good' means. They have common cause. In high-performance organizations, people have chosen to follow their leader into the future. And what gets people bending their personal agendas to align with their leader's agenda? Well, understanding the leader's agenda for one. Attachment also plays a significant role here. Knowing my leader as a human being allows me to appreciate what he or she stands for. This knowing and appreciation enables me to believe in my leader. And if I believe in my leader then I am much more likely to follow him or her, which means aligning my agenda to match theirs. Believing in the 'man' or 'woman' makes it easier for me to believe in his or her dream. This is the power of attachment, the power of intimacy. It builds the Corporate Intelligence (CI) that causes people to bend their personal agendas to the leader's agenda.

Does intimacy have a place in the work-place? Well, if you are interested in building a high-performance organization, the answer is yes. Without intimacy, you may turn-around one day to find that no one is following.

There are times when decisions have to be made rapidly. In a crisis, people may have to follow not because they understand and agree but because the leader has directed them to do so. When the system needs to be pulled into rapid alignment, when expediency and speed are called for or when enough discussion has taken place and a decision is required, the leader must be comfortable with using his or

her authority to provide direction. A leader that does not know when to seize the reins or is not comfortable with using authority is unlikely to have an organization that is living in the 'Land of the Quick'.

Having the ability to get off the leadership pedestal and get close to your people while knowing when to get back on that pedestal in order to provide authoritative direction, hard feedback or make a demand is essential for effective leadership. One moment you are a peer, a fellow human being, and the next you're the 'boss'. No one said that leadership is easy!

One final point - there is a connection between intimate and authoritative interactions. "Authoritative interactions are likely to be more effective when there has been a history of intimate interactions."† Why? Because when I know you as a fellow human being, I am more likely to trust. And when I trust you, I am more likely to listen to you and follow you.

Pair Three – Building Today and Seeing Tomorrow

As previously shared, the leader's mantra goes as follows: "***It is not my job to deliver – my job is to build a team that delivers***".

There are two ways a leader can fail. If the leader's team delivers a poor product or service, clearly this is failure. However, if the team is delivering a terrific product or service but it is the leader who is out in front doing all the pulling then this is also failure. The second case embodies the 'too smart leader'. Everything is dependent on the leader. Of the two types of failure, the second has the greatest impact over the long term. In the second case, everything is apparently going along swimmingly but when the leader departs the delivery engine stalls. The leader has not built a team that delivers. The leader, in this case, has left no on-going legacy, there is little to build upon.

So what goes into building a team that delivers? Many things, some of which this paper has already talked about – e.g. common cause. In particular, the three things that are key to building a team that delivers are: ①the work processes, ②the management processes and ③the culture. You could argue that this is really two things with culture being the outcome of the organization's work and management processes since 'form follows function'. This is by way of saying that the organization's processes, procedures and polices are key drivers of the attitudes and behaviors within it, namely its culture. For example, many leaders preach the value of team work and yet their organization's reward systems focus almost exclusively on individual accomplishments. In this situation, the outcome is almost invariably a culture where the focus is 'me' rather than 'we'. Quite

*† S. Nevis et al., '**Connecting Strategic and Intimate interactions: the Need for Balance**' (Gestalt International Study Center)*

simply, asking for behavior 'A' while rewarding its counterpart is managing through 'sainthood' – i.e. expecting people to ignore the messages that the organization's processes and systems are sending them and through divine inspiration to do the 'right thing'. Although management through sainthood is still an approach favored by many, as it avoids the pain of having to change the system, i.e. the processes, procedures and policies, it does not have all that good of a track record.

So, if culture is an outcome of your processes why label it as one of the three things that drive team performance? The reason is that culture is 'soft' – generally, it is not something that you can take a picture of. Being 'soft' it is easily ignored and forgotten about. To get the behaviors and attitudes you want within your organization means treating culture as something that is very tangible. The leader needs to keep his or her culture goals top-of-mind so she or he can deliberately design the processes, policies and procedures to drive the attitudes and behaviors that lead to a team that delivers.

Leaders, even very senior ones, when building their organization, need to get into the weeds without being entangled by them. Leaders need to take a meta responsibility for their organization's / team's processes. Focusing on outcomes is not good enough. Today's knowledge workers are smart, ambitious and hard working. Give them a target outcome and more often than not they, without any intervention from the leader, will deliver. So, if this is the case why does the leader need to get involved with process? It is because while knowledge workers love the challenge and will rise to it, they tend not to think about smoothing the way for the next time a similar piece of work needs to get done. For example, successful delivery is often the result of a series of successful compromises (e.g. budget, timelines, and quality levels) and it's the management processes that tend to facilitate these compromises. Management processes, processes that force deadlines and budget constraints, are not usually top of mind for knowledge workers. These processes are a key part of an organization's / team's delivery engine and as such, the leader needs to pay attention to them along with the other processes that drive delivery.

Knowledge workers are interested in the challenge of delivery. They tend to be less interested in building the delivery engine. The job of ensuring that energy is put into the building of the organization's / team's engine falls to the leader. Without good process, every delivery becomes an adventure often requiring heroic effort. While heroic effort works in the short term it is not sustainable in the long term. It is the ongoing refinement of process and not heroic effort that builds sustainable competitive advantage.

The leader is the organization's chief architect. The leader must spend time in the bowels of the organization ensuring that the delivery engine is constantly being refined. How things get done is a key component of any business strategy. It is what differentiates organizations. It is where competitive advantage grows.

So, leaders need to be able to operate in the 'mundane' world of process. They need to be excited by building their organization's delivery engine. But here is the rub, and this is where leaders tend to get entangled in the weeds, they need to remember they are having the engine built for others to operate. It is the leaders' job to ensure that a delivery engine gets built and built in such a way as to minimize their involvement in its ongoing operation.

Leaders, by keeping the delivery engine on their personal radar screen are sending the message that they are serious about making their dreams for the future a reality. They are not just idea people; they are implementers as well. This builds their people's belief in their organization and their organization's future.

From time-to-time, leaders need to be able to pull themselves out of the mechanism that is their organization. They need to let go of the oil can and put the hammer and saw down. They need to move to the sandbox that has 'future' written on it. That's right; leaders need to play in the future. And they need to do this on a regular basis. Future work is very much about whole brain thinking. You use your left brain to gather the data – from books, conferences, speaking with people and you use your right brain to throw all this data up in the air and look for the hidden patterns. These are the patterns that give you insight as to where your world is going and how the rules of the game are likely to change. This type of thinking cannot be done on the basis of grabbing 30 minutes here and 30 minutes there. This type of thinking requires blue-sky time. This is 2 to 4 hour chunks of undisturbed time on a weekly basis. The challenge for the leader is to have the discipline to set this 'blue-sky' time aside. The future is tomorrow, so it is easy to let the pressures of the here and now rule. But sooner or later, tomorrow shows up and the leaders that have been living exclusively in the here and now end up with an organization that is not ready for tomorrow - an organization that is now one of the 'Dying'.

On the other hand, leaders that have no or little time for today and the mundaneness of delivery may think great thoughts but they end up with organizations that are unable to deliver on these thoughts. The 2008 Recession saw the demise of a number of 'great' firms whose leaders were noted for their 'blue-sky' capabilities.

Building the delivery engine and figuring out where tomorrow is going represent two wildly different sandboxes. Leaders not only have to be comfortable with and competent in playing in both boxes, they have to be deeply interested and passionate about the unique challenges inherent in these polar opposites.

Pair Four – Works for Self and Works for Whole

Leaders need a competitive streak. They need to be able to stand up and ensure that their piece of the organization gets the funding and resources it needs to be successful. Leaders need to be able to make the case, convincingly, as to why their projects should be given priority over others. They need to be able to mobilize the other parts of the organization to cooperate and supply what is needed for their team to be successful. The successful leader is single minded. They are like a dog with a bone. They are focused on their team and they are not going to let anything get in the way of their team's success.

On the other hand, leaders need to be able to see and understand the organization's big picture. They need to understand what the organization is trying to achieve. They need to understand how each part of the organization contributes to the achievement of the organization's desired future. They need to understand the hurdles and roadblocks that are on the organization's path to success - not just their own team's roadblocks but also the roadblocks that their colleagues are facing.

Why do leaders need to know about their colleagues' problems? If the leader is focused on the success of his or her own team, how does understanding his or her colleagues' issues help with this success? The answer is, the successful leader is focused not only on his or her team's short term but also on its long-term success. If the organization, as a whole, does not have a future then the leader's team does not have a future no matter how successful it is today.

Did you know that high-performance organizations sub-optimize the pieces in order to get that performance? Think about it! High-performance organizations make some of the pieces less productive than they could be in order to achieve an overall gain in performance. This makes no sense or does it?

Consider the following. Mary is the Director of Product Development and George is the Director of Operations. George needs to retool his operations in order to make them ready for some new and innovative products that are coming out of Mary's group. The future of the organization looks rosy. The new products are really going to out-strip anything that the competition has. But, there is a problem. George

has lost 3 of his best people. It looks like his re-tooling is going to be delayed by 6 months. This delay may result in the organization losing its market advantage which would be disastrous for the firm. Mary is aware of George's problem and so she approaches him with an offer. She says: *"George, how about I loan you 3 of my best people. They understand operations and with their help you will be able to keep your re-tooling to schedule. Now this is going to cost me. I will not be able to meet all the objectives that the CEO has laid out for me but if your group succeeds the future of the firm is in the bag". She also adds "Now George, you don't get to keep these people, I want them back. In 6 months you are on your own, so start looking now for their replacements".* George laughs a nervous laugh, he is grateful to Mary – she has just saved his bacon, the company's bacon as well, for that matter. But he knows Mary and he knows that she can play rough, so he just put any thought out of his mind about keeping Mary's gift.

So what happened here? Mary for the 'good of the whole' reduced the performance of her group in the near term. This is what high-performance is about. Mary sacrificed her group's performance in order to keep her organization in the 'Land of the Quick'. Enlightened self-interest you say. Yes, but painful none the less, for Mary's near term prospects especially her current year performance bonus.

Recently, we were engaged by high-tech firm whose home base was in Eastern Europe. The country is now part of the European Union. The firm recognized that if it was to survive in the EU's more competitive playing field that it would have it up its game. In a meeting with the firm's management team, it became apparent that the firm was rigidly stove-piped. Each department, each team for that matter, operated as though all that mattered was its own success. The concept of working for the good of the whole was introduced and how this may require, at times, one team making a sacrifice so that another team can be successful. When the presentation concluded, the room went silent. Then, finally one junior manager spoke up and said *"Sounds like communism to me!"*

More than one person has argued that 'working for the good of the whole' is expecting too much of people. Their point is that it is simply too difficult to build an organization in which its leaders have embraced this approach. Maybe, they are right. Maybe, this is why truly high-performance organizations are so few and far between. While this behavior may not be the norm, the prize, high performance, makes its pursuit worth the effort.

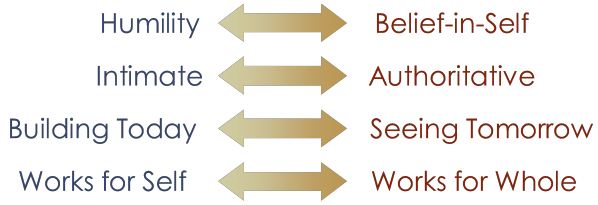
Realizing this prize requires leaders who are passionate about what their organization is trying to build and passionate about their own personal success. The tension between these two passions fuels the compromises

required for success. Once again, the leader is modeling performance for his or her people. What the leader is passionate about is what his or her people become passionate about. In this case, it results in people who believe so deeply in their organization that they work not just for their own success but for the success of the whole.

CONCLUSION

The lens that we are currently using to see and select the future leaders of our organizations has now passed its 'sell-by' date. It needs to be replaced with a lens that gives us leaders who know how to lead and manage in a 'knowledge economy'.

The new lens focuses on eight criteria arranged into four polar opposite pairs:



What tends to get rewarded by organizations at the moment is:

- Belief-in-Self over Humility
- Authoritative (ability to use rank) over Intimacy
- Seeing Tomorrow over Building Today for senior ranks. Building Today over Seeing Tomorrow for junior ranks
- Working for Self over Working for Whole

We now need to find leaders with all eight abilities not just four.

The new lens will help us see leaders who are capable of building a community of people who believe in themselves (EI), believe in each other (RI) and believe in what the organization is trying to achieve (CI). This represents a transformation in how we select leaders and how these 'new lens' leaders will lead. But in the era of the knowledge economy, this is the type of leadership that will ensure the organization remains one of the 'Quick'.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Ron Wiens has spent the past 30 years helping organizations build high performance cultures. His most recent book, titled '*Building Organizations that Leap Tall Buildings in a Single Bound*' is a leader's guide to culture as competitive advantage. To contact Ron, send him an email at ron@ronwiens.com