

Twenty-first century needs transpersonal leaders with emotional intelligence

02

JOHN KNIGHTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The world is changing at an ever increasing rate, fuelled mainly by the widespread availability and distribution of information as a result of the invention of the internet and the mobile phone. This in turn is rapidly changing society and technology which, when added to the financial and economic crises, globalization, the awareness that resources are finite, and the shift in world economic power, positions us on the edge of chaos.

At the same time the present day human brain at birth is virtually the same as that of stone-age man, more than 250,000 years ago. Fortunately, at the dawn of the 21st century, neuroscience research took a leap forward with the invention of hi-tech scanners that could investigate the minute actions of the brain in real time so we now understand much more about how the brain works, and perhaps most important, how the brain prefers to learn.

A transpersonal leader is one who thinks beyond his or her ego and focuses on the needs of all the stakeholders of the organization, from client, shareholder and employees, the community and... the planet. Our research and experience show that to develop as a transpersonal

leader one has to change oneself first before one can change the world (ie be transformational). This means learning to proactively reconfigure the neural connections in our brains to change our behaviours and even attitudes rather than letting it happen as a result of traditional teaching and random experiences.

To develop and improve these behaviours we need to raise our emotional intelligence. This means being aware of our emotions in real time and managing them effectively so that they do not hijack us into reacting instinctively and displaying our stone-age default. As a leader it also means being aware of the emotions of others and using that knowledge to effectively manage relationships.

Twenty-first century leaders

To understand the kind of leadership we need in the 21st century and to develop appropriate capabilities in our leaders, we need first to look at how the world has changed and is continuing to change. Then we need to understand why traditional leadership just won't work effectively any more, and to learn how the human brain can best cope with this fundamental change to enable the development of the leaders the world needs.

It is not that the characteristics of excellent leadership have changed, it is just that the default stereotype 'alpha-male' leadership style of 'I know everything and I'll tell people what to do' that goes back to stone-age man and is still predominant in organizational leadership, does not work in our new world. It is also a fact that there has never been a recognized best practice of what excellent leadership was or how to become one. So we finish up getting whichever leaders rise to the top for whatever reasons.

The world is changing... faster than ever

I am not going to provide here a chronicle of the increasing speed of change in the world but it is important to highlight that until the mid-1990s everyone accepted that the Industrial Revolution that began in the mid-1700s changed the world faster and more fundamentally than any previous period in history. And then in the mid-1980s we had the development of the mobile phone, which became generally available in the industrialized world in the mid-1990s – at the same time as the beginnings of the general

availability of the internet and the ever increasing speed of computers. To think that as I write this it is only 16 years since e-mails became generally available and accessible in the UK!

In my view, this fundamental revolution in global communication and access to information is having a greater impact on the world we know and will continue to live in than any invention in history. And these changes have spawned many other inventions and developments that are changing the way we live our lives, such as smart phones, social networks, information gathering technologies (eg barcodes and radio frequency tags), medical technology, global travel, globalization of business, new emerging economic powers, reducing influence of the United States, rights vs responsibilities, flexible working structures, global terrorism, global drugs, diversity and human rights, the changing face of religion, an increasingly 'rule bound' society and the age of celebrity.

Then we have the issues of climate change and limitation of natural resources, and the attempts to respond through corporate governance, social responsibility and sustainability all while there is a deep financial and economic crisis caused by both bad leadership and pure greed... and we have no idea of the outcome. We are in many ways on the edge of chaos and are likely to continue surfing on the wave of uncertainty and increasing change. I am completely agnostic about astrology but the 'dawning age of Aquarius' does have a ring to it!

Leadership needs to catch up

We have always been taught that 'knowledge is power' (in Sir Francis Bacon's *Religious Meditations, of Heresies*, 1597) and in a way that is still true. But knowledge is not now the domain of leaders of organizations as it was in the past; knowledge is increasingly available to everyone. Whereas in 1985 executives could retain 85 per cent of the information they needed to do their job in their head, by 2005 it had reduced to less than 10 per cent (Kelley, 2008) and given the rate of increase in availability of information this is likely to soon be below 1 per cent. So the 'know everything and tell people what to do' approach, which we all tend to default to when we are stressed even if we have learnt more progressive behaviours, is just not effective in this new world. But it is not only that our brain cannot hold sufficient information to know everything, it is also that our brains don't like being told what to do and are ineffective in that mode! Our brain is much more effective at learning from insights (Rock and Schwartz, 2006).

So we have this conundrum. Society and the world are changing at an ever faster pace and our brains are changing at a Darwinian speed – glacial

by comparison to society. In other words our brain is changing minutely in each human generation whereas over the same period society is changing at an enormous rate. This means the human brain at birth today is very similar to that of stone-age man. It is only how the brain changes through the life of the human that enables it to cope with a changing world. We have a whole range of educational interventions to help the brain to reconfigure, some of which are more effective than others, but when it comes to leadership much of this reconfiguring has been left to experience, serendipity and pure chance.

Traditional leadership development has been about how leaders change other things (organizations, their people, strategies, the world!) rather than how they proactively change themselves. As Tolstoy, the Russian novelist and social reformer wrote: ‘Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself.’ Now it is time for leaders to focus on how to change themselves – how they can proactively reconfigure their brains to become more effective. As leaders we can only keep up with change by using our ‘personal choice’ and ‘intense will’ to make the effort to reconfigure our neural circuits to a non-default state, and embed that change so they become new habits.

Finally, we need to understand that ‘leadership’ is not the same as ‘management’. Management is about planning, organizing, staffing, controlling and problem solving whereas leadership is about establishing direction, aligning people, motivating and inspiring. Management produces key results – leadership produces change and transformation (see Covey, 1992; Landsberg, 2001). Try the quiz ‘Management vs Leadership’ at www.leadershape.biz to check your own understanding of the difference and receive a detailed report.

Considering the management-type tasks listed above it becomes apparent that most people in leadership positions spend most of their time ‘managing’. Leadership is about vision, direction and people; management is about process. But even with vision and direction you have to engage people to achieve it. So in the end leadership is about people.

The neuroscience of leadership

By understanding how the brain works we can improve our personal performance and leadership. Fortunately, one of the other great developments since the change of the century was neuroscience research enabled by the development of hi-powered brain scanners, especially the invention of the

magnetoencephalograph (MEG), which allows 3-D, real-time brain mapping in great detail (Zohar and Marshall, 2000). Some people are content to accept the latest psychological theories and research on behaviour whereas others will be given comfort that neuroscience actually supports most of those theories and gives them even greater credence. In turn this may provide leaders with greater insights into why they need to change their behaviour.

The human brain has developed genetically at a much slower pace than society, which provides a behavioural conflict. Genetically, how the brain works is all about the inter-relationships between energy, memory and neural wiring, which defaults the brain to resist change while at the same time wanting to be creative. There are three kinds of neural connections (Zohar and Marshall, 2000):

- 1** Serial connections (like a row of Christmas tree lights) provide our IQ, instinct and learnt habits and are more or less fixed.
- 2** Associative connections, which enable our emotional intelligence and conceptual thinking where bundles of brain cells can connect with each other apparently at random but which can be reconfigured through practising and focusing on specific behaviours. This is where new wiring can become stabilized and embedded and thus is more like serial connections.
- 3** Synchronous neural oscillations are where wave motions form in all the parts of a brain that relate to a particular event, providing unitive, holistic and transpersonal thinking, which ranges from the relative simplicity of understanding the totality of a coffee mug to the high order of things such as spirituality.

However, the brain also resists being told what to do (it takes so much of the brain's energy, which in our stone-age brain is needed to be preserved for 'fight or flight') and therefore any change is most effectively implemented by the individual having an insight and thus developing his or her own solution. Insights also use up a lot of energy but the process simultaneously releases adrenaline-like chemicals that sustain the energy for a longer period of time.

Continued focus and attention opens up associative neural circuits and then stabilizes the new neural connections (created by insights) until they become a new habit. This is how behavioural change occurs. Finally, we know from research in positive psychology and neuroscience that happy people are more effective and learn better (Seligman, 2002).

Enabling leaders to become more competent

So what can we learn from all this to enable leaders to be more competent and effective in this new world? Here are a few things we have learnt from our work in developing leaders over more than a decade, which is confirmed by Rock and Schwartz (2006):

- Leaders need to understand the changes in behaviour that will have the most impact on their own performance and how they affect the performance of others.
- They then need to focus on and practise these new behaviours and get feedback as to how they are succeeding with the new behaviours and what else they could do to implement the identified behaviours.
- For this to be effective leaders need to think beyond their ego; that is, not just what is best for 'me' but what is best for the people around me and the organization as a whole.
- One of the most important and often forgotten roles of leaders is developing their followers, especially those reporting directly to them. A few key activities are:
 - Provide them with the right environment to allow them to reach their own solutions through insights.
 - Don't tell people what to do, except as a last resort, as it does not provide sustainable effective change.
 - To learn new behaviours, leaders must provide the opportunity and environment for their people to focus on and spend time learning new behaviours in order to sustain change.
 - Involve their people in the development of 'vision' at an early stage so that everyone can contribute through their own insights and feel ownership to the vision of the organization.
 - Provide an open, no-blame culture that helps people perform from a basis of opportunity rather than threat.
- Coaching, group facilitation, reflection, action learning and experiential learning, as well as contemplation and meditation are all excellent techniques to support people in finding their own solutions, embedding change into habits and sustaining new behaviour (Raelin, 2008).

The importance and role of emotional intelligence

Most leaders try to improve organizational performance by implementing new processes and structures and by developing their people through the learning of ‘hard skills’. This manifests itself by changing the organizational structure, implementing a change programme or introducing a new process such as ‘lean’ (a recent buzz word). They send their staff to learn about project management and strategic planning but rarely about how to understand themselves or deal effectively with each other. In general, the methods normally used do not work (Beer *et al*, 1990). Although processes and structures are necessary, a fundamental premise of this book is that they only work when the people involved (and especially the leaders) develop and use behaviours that provide for high levels of awareness of self and others, self-management and relationship management (Carnell, 2007). This is called ‘emotional intelligence’ (EI), first defined as the ‘ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s own thinking and actions’ (Salovey and Mayer, 1990).

However, it is not possible to embed these new EI behaviours using traditional teaching methods as it requires learning through insight, practice, reflection and time, and to be directly related to the context of the workplace (see Chapter 8 for more details). Even for people who have the right behaviours (either inherent or developed), it is not natural for them to manage themselves in a way that is most conducive to maximizing personal and organizational performance.

While some of us may be born with greater natural leadership abilities than others, there is now no doubt that leadership skills can be built through practice and that each individual’s leadership potential can be realized through effective development. Anyone in a senior position requires both management and leadership skills – and the more senior the role, the more time needs to be spent operating as a leader than as a manager. Leadership development should be an ongoing journey towards excellence, with the indispensable ingredients of continually increasing self-awareness and inner self-confidence.

The approach we use is centred on the Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee model of emotional intelligence (Goleman *et al*, 2002). This model proposes that successful leaders require something beyond intellectual ability – they need also to be able to understand and manage their own and others’ emotions. Goleman (1996) tells us that the basis of EI is self-awareness, an understanding of our personality and our emotions and the ability to notice how

we react emotionally to events and individuals. This self-awareness provides the underpinning for both the ability to manage our own emotions and to understand those of others. The fourth element of EI is the ability to effectively manage relationships with others, in particular to be able to develop and lead them.

The main reason for using this model is that, uniquely, it relates specific EI capabilities to particular leadership styles and then compares the impact of various styles on the performance of an organization and explains when the various styles should be used. In connecting EI capabilities to leadership styles to be used in a specific context, they have provided leaders with a valuable route to leadership excellence. We need to build on this though by providing specific methodologies on ‘how’ the leader can actually develop and improve their emotional intelligence.

Developing emotional intelligence

The first step in developing EI is to understand a little about emotions and how they work. It is generally agreed there are six primary emotions (Ekman, 1992): anger, fear, disgust, joy (or happiness), sadness and surprise. More recently ‘contempt’ has been suggested as the seventh (Ekman, 2003) but some believe it is just a mixture of anger and disgust. Whatever is the case, it is worth noting that of these six or seven primary emotions, only one is positive (joy), one is neutral (surprise) and all the others are negative. It is said that primary emotions are emotions that have been scientifically proven to have a certain facial expression associated with them, but there are over 600 words in the English language to describe emotions and we use 42 muscles in our faces to express them (see the Science Museum website).

What is most important about emotions is they are initiated outside our conscious control. In other words, we cannot stop an emotion happening! We can only decide how to respond to the emotion once we are aware of it. But how often are we hi-jacked by our emotions and taken over by our instinctive stone-age default – and then live to regret it?

Emotions have information, energy and influence and they can trigger behaviours, feelings and actions. Emotions are felt in response to a situation (real or imagined) and prepare us to take action. We should not submit to them or pretend they are not there. To manage emotions effectively we first have to acknowledge them and then respond, as follows:

- 1 What am I beginning to feel (our own subjective representation of the emotion)?
- 2 What do I feel compelled to do (what would be my default behaviour in response)?

- 3 What do I need to be aware of (what would be the consequence of that default)?
- 4 What important goal of mine is involved (what do I really want to achieve)?
- 5 What is the key issue and which response shall I choose (choosing a behaviour that will have the most positive outcome)?
- 6 Am I going to achieve my goal or just be frustrated (success or failure)?

Even more difficult is that a good leader must be sensitive to the emotions of others and be able to use that knowledge to manage relationships and help people be more effective.

To learn this process of increasing emotional intelligence takes dedication, time, practice and focus. Various interventions such as coaching, reflective practice, mindfulness (we prefer the term ‘full consciousness’) and action learning/science can all be of great help. However, the single most effective intervention to help leaders increase their competence is, in our experience, the use of an effective 360° assessment tool that can identify the two or three key behaviours that will have the greatest impact in the context of their role. It is also important that the implementation of the process follows best practice (CIPD, 2003).

Chapters 3, 4 and 6 describe this process and the outcomes in more detail based on LeaderShape’s unique LEIPA® (Leadership and Emotional Intelligence Profile Assessment) 360° tool, which not only assesses granular behavioural traits of emotional intelligence but also compares the candidate’s competence in six leadership styles to the importance of those styles in their current role. By doing this, it is possible to identify the two or three key granular behaviours that will have the greatest impact on an individual’s leadership performance as well as providing a personal development manual for continued reference and improvement.

A word of warning

Organizations must realize that once they have gone down the route of developing the EI of their people and thus providing them with more effective, sophisticated styles of leadership and behaviour than our default, which creates a higher performing culture, there is no turning back! We have witnessed occasions where either in the middle of or at the end of a leadership programme, a new chief executive has been introduced (say because of retirement or an acquisition) who is lacking either EI or the right values, or both. Because of the new awareness of everyone in the organization, poor behaviour and lack of true engagement and authenticity were

not acceptable, resulting in the loss of the best people who went elsewhere to utilize their new found skills.

An issue can emerge when those who made the new appointment focus on experience (often in a different context) and formal qualifications rather than more carefully assessing the soft competencies that are required in the new culture that has been created. It is imperative that the selection and interview process of any new recruits (especially the top leadership) is consistent with the transpersonal leadership programmes that have been implemented and that any development needs are discussed and committed to before employment.

Emotional intelligence is only the first step towards transpersonal leadership

EI is, however, not sufficient on its own. Unfortunately it is possible to combine some great EI capabilities with poor values, so EI is just an important stepping stone in moving towards transpersonal leadership, which we believe is the natural progression (Knights, 2012) as described in Chapter 5. EI provides a foundation of awareness and managing one's feeling and behaviour to improve performance, but it is only the first stage to enable leaders to become ethically authentic and act beyond their ego – to become 'transpersonal'.

To be organizationally useful, EI and leadership need to be connected to the development of the ideal culture of an organization. We have found that having identified the ideal culture of the organization according to its leaders and staff (LeaderShape, 2012), we know the leadership styles the leaders need to use. Once the key leadership styles are known we can work backwards to which EI capabilities are core and which granular behaviours they need to develop.

We define a 'transpersonal leader' (Knights, 2012) as one who 'thinks beyond his or her ego' and is a 'radical, ethical and authentic leader'. A more complete definition is:

possesses the values, attitudes and behaviours necessary to intrinsically motivate oneself and others so all have a genuine desire to *serve others* – and in so doing deriving purpose and meaning in life, and *establish an organizational culture* whereby leaders have genuine care and concern together with appreciation and understanding for self and others (that is, all stakeholders), while having the will, energy, aspiration and sense of doing one's best (excellence) to achieve the highest level of performance to fulfil the organization's vision.

SPECIFIC ACTION POINTS

This chapter suggests that there needs to be a fundamentally different approach to developing and assessing leaders if we are to get the leaders we need in the 21st century to run our organizations successfully and sustainably. The key action points are:

- Differentiate between leadership and management development and ensure talent gets ‘leadership’ development. Learning business skills is not leadership development.
- Use or develop leadership programmes that are going to enable leaders and future leaders (talent) to change how they themselves behave in order to improve their own performance and those around them.
- Develop programmes that are a journey, which allow regular small doses of connected learning.
- Provide the time, space, environment and work-based interventions that allow talent to practise, focus and embed learning.
- Provide talent with a mixture of facilitated group and coached one-to-one learning opportunities.
- Within this framework use EI-based assessment tools similar to LEIPA® that help candidates identify those behaviours they need to develop and embed in order to get the biggest positive impact on their leadership competence.
- Make sure that once the 360° report is complete there is accredited feedback and follow-up to ensure an action plan is developed and implemented (see Chapter 6).
- Conventional consultants don’t have the skills to provide leadership development – they usually tell or advise what to do. Coaches who can work with individuals *and* groups are more likely to be successful by helping talent find their own solutions. Coaches with business experience can more quickly connect to the contextual issues.

FURTHER RESOURCES

LeaderShape Resources: **www.leadershape.biz** provides a broad and open resource to leadership development. In particular for this chapter see **<http://www.leadershape.biz/emotional-intelligence>** and **<http://www.leadershape.biz/transpersonal-leadership>**. To find more information about the unique LEIPA® 360° assessment, go to **<http://www.leadershape.biz/leipa>** which provides all the details.

EI Consortium: **www.eiconsortium.org**: Its mission is ‘to advance research and practice of emotional and social intelligence in organizations through the generation and exchange of knowledge’. The Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations is currently made up of eight core members and 75 additional members who are individuals with a strong record of accomplishment as applied researchers in the field. There are also six organizational and corporate members. The Consortium was founded in the spring of 1996 with the support of the Fetzer Institute. Its initial mandate was to study all that is known about EI in the workplace. The website provides a range of case studies, development programmes, methodologies and tools for measuring emotional intelligence.

David Rock Net: **<http://www.davidrock.net>**: this website provides many links for more information about the applications of neuroscience to leadership development.

Wikipedia webpage on the Stone Age: there are numerous references to the development of the brain before during and after the Stone Age. A good place to start is **http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stone_Age**. The Stone Age Institute website: **<http://www.stoneageinstitute.org/>** is another good general reference for further information about the Stone Age.