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The uncertainty and ambiguity of leadership in the 21st century

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The last decades have been characterised by fundamental changes – a paradigm shift – in organisation theory, management theory and the intellectual constructions through which organisations, managers and individuals working in organisations are understood. The value system of society has been changing, and this has had effects on leadership. Up until recently, the dominant model for leadership has been one which stresses simplicity, order, determinism and linearity. Consequently, today's leaders in the West manifest a moderate tolerance of unequal power distribution in organisations. However, this model has increasingly been coming under fire from conflicting perspectives, for example, new approaches stress complexity, bounded disorder, non-determinism and non-linearity. Under the Eastern and African influences, they also show a shift from the most individualistic approaches to group/team approaches to problem solving. Additionally, strong 'masculine' values, including traits such as aggressiveness, independence and insensitivity to feelings, have been changing moderately to relationship-building, interdependence and concern for others. In the workplace, there appears to be a move away from valuing economic incentives, organisational loyalty and work-related identity and towards valuing more meaningful work, pursuit of leisure, personal identity and self-fulfilment. The modern leader must, hence, be able to recognise value differences and trends among people at work in order to lead them accordingly. This article looks at the plurality of the dilemmas leaders are facing, as we enter the 21st century, because of the multiple realities and perspectives that they have to act out and reflect within the workplace and society.

Introduction

Much of the current human resource literature tells us that effective leadership is focused on finding the solutions for the future that resides collectively in the organisation and enabling them to be implemented. This however requires, at all levels, living with substantial ambiguity and uncertainty and being comfortable with it. When you try to build a co-responsible team, a team that can take on change and challenge with a positive nature and a shared vision, you must examine your basic beliefs and leadership styles – and therein lies the seeds for confusion. Confusion, resulting from the bombardment of literature, changing global and regional practices, and the paradox, incongruity and tensions that accompany this assessment.

Many explanations may be sought for paradox, incongruity and tensions within literature on leadership and how leadership is played out in reality. Possible explanations may include: (a) a reflection of frame-breaking transitions in paradigms on organisational behaviour and, more broadly, world consciousness in transition; or (b) reflection of the inherently paradoxical nature of leadership and human existence itself.

This article will introduce the notion of paradox in leadership theory and practice, and will explore some of the incongruities, tensions and paradoxes within the emergent leadership paradigms of the West. The article will conclude with a few reflections on the future of leadership theory, taking into consideration the incongruities, tensions and paradoxes identified therein.

Notion of paradox within leadership theory and practice

Hofstede sees a fundamental distinction between Eastern thinking (represented by, for example, Confucianism, Buddhism and Hinduism) and Western thinking (dominant in the Judaeo-Christian-Muslim intellectual tradition) as being:

'In the East, a qualification does not exclude its opposite, which is an essential element of Western logic ... Thus in the East the search for truth is irrelevant, because there is no need for a single and absolute truth and the assumption that a person can possess an objective truth is absent. Instead ... expressing a concern for virtue: for proper ways of living (like, practising perseverance and thrift, or respecting tradition and social obligations) which is less obvious in the West where virtue tends to be derived from truth' (1994: 9–10).

Thus, although a recognition of paradox may open up directions for future thought on leadership, it may also fall into the Western trap of trying to solve the irreconcilable rather than recognising or valuing paradox as a feature of human existence. Increasingly, theorists on leadership and organisational behaviour do appear to be recognising paradox and 'speaking the unspeakable', the 'undiscussables' (Bohm, 1985) about human behaviour. Stacey's (1996) views on the informal 'shadow' side of the organisation being its source of double-loop creativity and learning (that is, learning which challenges and modifies existing norms, procedures, policies and objectives), as well as a growing body of literature on irrational, 'deviant', emotional aspects of organisations and people (Pascale, 1991; Fineman, 1993) are cases in point.

It would be equally remiss, however, not to recognise transitions in Western paradigms and to consider the effect thereof on creating potentially conflicting paradigms within leadership thought. Some of the significant influences shaping changing-leadership thought appear to include the interrelated impacts of:

1. Changing world circumstances (including the emergence of a global world, the increase of cultural diversity within nations and the changing gender composition of work).
2. Changing ways of looking at the world (including the influences of postmodernism, the 'new sciences' and incrementalist views of strategy). Postmodernism, in particular,

through positing the existence of 'multiple realities' (Berger & Luckman, 1966) rather than the existence of 'one truth', increasingly challenges literal-metaphorical, real-unreal and rational-irrational dualities. Complexity and chaos theories, as discussed by Stacey (1996) and Wheatley (1992; 1999) – the 'new sciences' – likewise challenge Newtonian assumptions of an ordered world in which foresight and human agency are the order of the day. Incrementalist views on strategy (such as Mintzberg's 1994 'emergent' model of strategy) similarly challenge the concept of a leader who formulates a clear vision towards which the organisation's actions are orchestrated. Incrementalists view the strategy formulation process rather as a form of 'muddling along' in which a vision, often only recognisable as such in hindsight, emerges through the actions of the organisational collective rather than as the result of a 'grand plan' formulated by an individual strategist (Whittington, 1993).

3. Changing world needs and consciousness. In respect of the latter, a self-organising earth-consciousness akin to the Gaia principle may be influencing Western consciousness to unite masculine and feminine, *yang* and *yin*, principles to address the 'wicked' (that is, complex, systemic and paradoxical) problems confronting the earth.

Figure 1 identifies some current incongruities, tensions and paradoxes in leadership thought and practice.

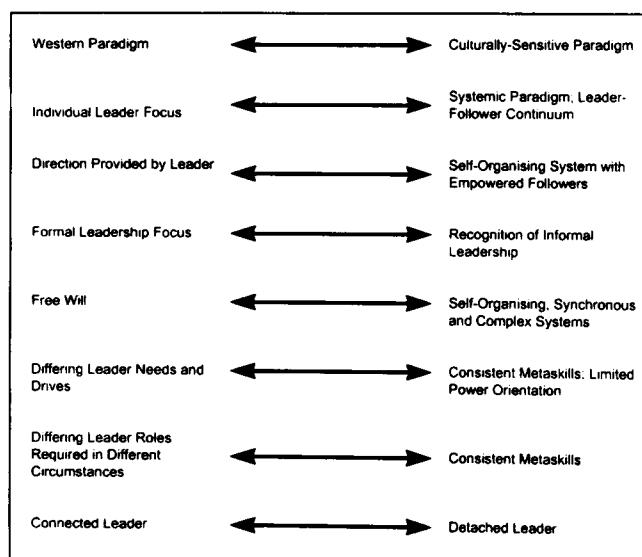


Figure 1 Incongruities, tensions and paradoxes in the emerging leadership paradigm

Western conceptions of leadership in competition with emerging leadership paradigms

A paradox or incongruity underlying many of the dualisms, identified in Figure 1, appears to relate to the strongly Western roots of current literature on leadership, and the seeming incompatibility between these roots and the mental models consistent with an emerging complexity and chaos paradigm. At a fundamental level, literature on organisations may without much challenge be characterised as – to use the terminology of Boyacigiller & Adler (1991) – a 'parochial dinosaur' derived from and implicitly representing primarily

North American cultural assumptions. The concept of 'leadership' in its entirety or in respect of the form it assumes, may be a peculiarly Western construct. There is currently a paucity of cross-cultural research on leadership and much of that which has occurred has appeared to take the cross-cultural validity of the existence of the concept for granted and rather test the applicability of Western forms of leadership to 'foreign' cultures.

Whittington (1993), however, warns against accepting Anglo-Saxon conceptualisations of leadership as universal. He posits that the French, for example, do not have a term equating to leadership (Whittington, 1993: 48). Cross-cultural research into leadership has certainly challenged the normative (prescriptive) models of leadership posed through the decades by primarily American theorists. Hui Hai (1962), by way of illustration, describes two fundamental features of 'Chinese familism' as: (1) paternalism, implying a strong acceptance of hierarchical power relations, and (2) the tendency to categorise individuals into either an in-group or an out-group. Cultural values of this nature suggest a very different form of leadership to that advocated within a Western frame of reference where values of individualism, a low acceptance of power distances between members (that is, a low acceptance of strongly hierarchical power relationships between members of the cultural group) and an internalisation of 'masculine values' of assertiveness and challenge are the norm (Hofstede, 1994).

According to Gaddis (1997), combined notions of the world being linear, evolutionary and progressive created fertile grounds in which to plant the seeds of future-oriented planning. The Enlightenment tradition of the 18th century contributed to these notions through spawning the concept of a 'progressive theory of history' in which

'we were assured that purposeful humans are capable of achieving longer-term improvement in their social, political and economic institutions' (Gaddis, 1997: 39).

Management literature, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, propagated a similar view of the efficacy of human agency, with managers being expected to plan, organise, lead and control by writers of the classical school (Gibson, Ivancevich & Donnelly, 1988). These notions of the modality of human existence are strongly compatible with a 'heroic' view of the leader as an individual who, normally from a formally recognised position of power, directs the actions of others towards a desired future.

The dominant logic of the bulk of organisational behaviour literature confers a strong role to the human agent in planning and directing her or his future. The mental models of Western 'individualist cultures' tend to be structured around the individual, whereas cognition in 'collectivist cultures' tend to centre on the group as the subject of analysis. For example, a style of leadership, which has been suppressed for many years, but which still exists in South Africa today – and is derived from ancient tribal culture – is that of the African philosophy of *ubuntu*. Literally translated, *ubuntu* means 'I am because we are – I can only be a person through others'. From an *ubuntu* leadership perspective, how we feel about ourselves and how we feel about others, is the essence of our being (Mbigi & Westbrook, 1998).

The spirit of a beehive, the behaviour of an economy, the thinking of a supercomputer, and the life in us are distributed over a multitude of smaller units (which themselves may be distributed). When the sum of the parts can add up to more than the parts, then that extra being (that something from nothing) is distributed among the parts. Whenever we find something from nothing, we find it arising from a field of many interacting smaller pieces. All the mysteries we find most interesting – life, intelligence, evolution – are found in the soil of large distributed systems (Kelly, 1994). It is our belief that many of the ancient cultures, for example native people of Africa, Australia, North America and Canada, had a better understanding of the concepts we now battle with in our organisational literature. Concepts such as an orderly universe, the importance of relationships and dialogue, interdependence, balance, teamwork and spirituality was as much a part of their ancient traditions as it is becoming part of our current literature. Thinking about the centrality of relationships, and how we exist only in as much as we are interconnected to one another, sounds remarkably similar to the current notions of new science (Wheatley, 1992), chaos and dynamic theory (Merry, 1995), complexity theory (Stacey, 1996), synchronicity and dialogue (Jaworski, 1996), servant leadership (Spears, 1998) and spiritual intelligence (Zohar & Marshall, 2000).

During our research in 1997–1999 in South Africa, Colin Hall, chief executive of Wooltru, made the point that 'new science is the West's apology to the ancient traditions and way of saying, "Sorry, you were right all along"' (April, 1999: 233). *Ubuntu*, as an example of the notions that form part of the ancient cultures, is all about hospitality, caring for one another, solidarity, love, interdependence, and being willing to go the extra mile for another. The central theme consistently is based on the fact that our humanity comes into its own in community, in belonging.

Hence, the assumptions of individual agency, free will and formal sources of authority, still implicit within much of leadership literature and practice, appear particularly at odds with the emerging new science or ancient cultures paradigms. In particular, a key incongruity appears to be the continued emphasis on the role of the leader – little attention is given to the roles required by the other players in the interaction for its effectiveness. The assumption inherent in labelling certain people as 'leaders' suggests that leadership, rather than followership, is the dominant role for certain individuals in all spheres of their lives. Certain CEOs and MDs, when interviewed during our 1997–1999 research, recognised that they were actually leading only a small portion of the time. Khanya Motshabi, chief executive of Futuregrowth (a division of the Rand Merchant Group), said:

'When I am not leading, I am following. When I am leading, I am trying to maximise quantum, and the quantum is human energy, trust and information' (April, 1997).

Although a leader-follower continuum is mentioned by a number of authors (for example Barnes & Kriger, 1986; Mindell, 1992 and Townsend & Gebhart, 1997), this area appears little developed.

A continued focus on single leaders and an assumption of static leader/follower status seems particularly surprising and

incongruous in a systems paradigm which gives its attention to the totality of the system in creating organisational effectiveness, and gives recognition to the vital role of collectives and informal structures within an organisation. Likewise, preserving the role of vision-formulation and articulation as the domain of the leader (for example Gilliland, Tynan & Smith, 1996; Bennis, 1994) appears unnecessarily prescriptive from a systems perspective – might not the vision sometimes emerge from group interaction? Surely it should, if we believe in a genuinely shared vision.

Currently, however, it is believed that we can best lead and manage people by making assumptions more fitting to machines than people. So we assume that, like good machines, people have no desire, no heart, no spirit, no compassion, no real intelligence – because machines do not have any of that. The great dream of machines is that you give them a set of instructions, and they will follow it. In the developed West, we see the history of leadership and management as an effort to perfect the instructions that you hope someone will follow. Farr (1995: 5) claims that once, through our experience, we settle on 'programs' (in the mind) that work, we tend to automate them. This saves energy and frees our consciousness to do things other than make conscious choices among routine actions. These mental sets then act as filters that create our perceptions, which in turn trigger the programs that control our actions.

Neale Donald Walsch tells us that

'every action taken by human beings is based in love and fear, not simply those dealing with relationships. Decisions affecting business, industry, politics, religion, the education of our young, the social agenda of our nations, the economic goals of our society, choices involving war, peace, attack, defence, aggression, submission; determinations to covet or give away, to save or to share, to unite or to divide – every single free choice we ever undertake arises out of one of the only two possible thoughts there are: a thought of love or a thought of fear' (1997: 18–19).

A simple model, which MBA students at the University of Cape Town find quite useful for their personal centring quests in trying to understand their own, and others' actions, is shown in Figure 2.

Colin Hall, executive chairman of Wooltru, makes extensive use of the simple 'Covey-adapted' model and the Walsh principles to illustrate the generation of 'pictures' (mindsets) in people: 'what I see' leads to two possible courses of action, an action resulting out of a fear reaction, or an action that results out of a love reaction. If it was a fear action, negative energy is generated (the individual is drained of energy); if it was a love action, the positive action is generated (the individual's energy increases). Either of the two reactions lead to 'what I do' which results in 'what I get'. As we settle into these mindsets, we automatically and unconsciously begin to rely upon them as our ego's basis for safety, survival and satisfaction. Thus, we create one of the foundations of ego – the automatic function of mind to 'be right'. To violate those mindsets comes to be unconsciously experienced as 'wrong', which threatens ego with fear, which we automatically and unconsciously seek to avoid. The result of all of this is a universal tendency to resist change, and to stick to what our

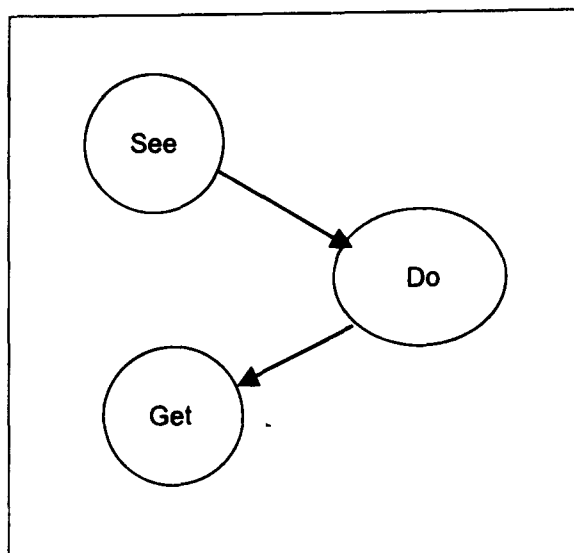


Figure 2 Centring model (simple 'Covey-adapted' model)

mindsets tell us to see and do. We have been taught to live in fear. We have been told about the survival of the fittest and the victory of the strongest and the success of the cleverest (Walsch, 1997). So we strive to be the fittest, the strongest, the cleverest – in one way or another – and if we see ourselves as anything less than this in any situation, we fear loss, for we have been told that 'to be less is to lose'. This, we believe, is the subconsciously embedded basis for single, individual leadership. A leadership paradigm that is based on a win-lose mentality, that is, that there is a bounded resource base on this earth, and the 'smartest, fittest, and cleverest' will be allowed to partake of the biggest slice of that resource. This, by its very nature, excludes the role of others, and dismisses the notion that all people can be leaders at various points within their lives, and the fact that we all lead and follow continuously.

Robert Haas, chairman and CEO of Levi Strauss & Co., observes:

'It's difficult to unlearn behaviours that made us successful in the past. Speaking rather than listening. Valuing people like yourself over people of different genders and cultures. Doing things on your own rather than collaborating. Making the decision yourself instead of asking different people for their perspectives. There's a whole range of behaviours that were highly functional in the old hierarchy that are dead wrong in flatter, more responsive, empowered organisations' (Bennis, 1996: 16).

When Wheatley speaks about 'de-engineering' she wants us to realise that the bottom-line is that we are alive, we are human beings (Katz, 1997: 19). We possess all the attributes that somehow disappeared in the currently dominant, mechanistic way of thinking.

Those authors who do recognise a role for informal leadership within an organisation, often appear to present an untethered understanding of the difficulties of realising such roles in mechanistic, hierarchical organisations. As many people who have tried to play informal leadership roles, 'influencing from below', will recognise a power structure in which status and positional power wield strong influence and can strongly

undermine informal leadership roles that potentially alter or undermine the paradigm of the dominant power group. Those individuals who pose a challenge to the *status quo* may, rather than being appreciated as a potential source of innovation and as breathing new life into stagnant organisations, be labelled as 'maverick' or 'deviant' and suffer personally in terms of belittlement, backlash or exclusion from the 'inner core' of the organisation. For informal leadership to be allowed to play an effective role, the constructs of hierarchy and consequently positional power would seem to need to be fundamentally dislodged from traditional mental models. This presents a tremendous challenge for leaders who wish to assume roles consistent with the emergent paradigm.

To fully recognise the role of groups and informal structures in a leadership process may entail, aside from a paradigmatic change, a tremendous amount of courage on the part of current leaders to relinquish the individual status and prestige an individualistic, formal, position-based notion of 'leadership' confers on them. Research by Stacey (1991) suggests that although the majority of managers possess explicit models of the strategy process which accord with classical assumptions, in practice implicit models more akin to incrementalism guide the real strategic development and control of their businesses. A tension between implicit and explicit models may threaten not only the mental model of the manager who begins to doubt the dominant logic of human agency, but also the self-esteem of the manager who, steeped in this logic, believes that he or she is incapable of effecting the influence he or she should have on the world. The potential loss of self-esteem may be particularly painful to leaders, who are likely to comprise a high proportion of individuals who are power or achievement motivated. According to Goleman (1997), psychological defence mechanisms such as repression, denial and reversal, projection, isolation, rationalisation, sublimation, selective inattention and automatism will come into play where individuals need to mask 'simple truths with vital lies'. To preserve Western views that opposites cannot co-exist without dysfunctional conflict, managers may engage in game-playing or what Argyris (1990, in Stacey, 1996) terms 'organisational defence routines' to prevent them having to face up to what is really happening. For example, a leader in an organisation experiencing rapid organisational cultural change may ascribe the cultural change to the initiatives of her or his 'transformation' team, rather than viewing cultural change as, perhaps, a confluence of changing societal values, and the wants, needs and actions of a variety of informal and formal players within the organisation. In such organisational defence routines, the model likely to triumph is that which accords with the dominant logic, and hence narratives regarding individualistic, formal, directive leadership will be likely to be legitimated.

Paradox, incongruity and tension within the emerging leadership model

Another paradox appears to be the emergence of a strongly normative model of effective leadership at a time when organisations are increasingly understood as complex phenomena, presumably requiring as complex and contextual a range of leadership processes and styles, and when cross-cultural research and postmodernist thought are encouraging a move

away from 'one best way' modes of thought. Inherent in much of the leadership literature, particularly that of post-Greenleaf authors on 'servant leadership', is a strongly normative model of the leader as reflexive, emotionally mature and strongly participative. Servant leadership views the role of the leader as a steward or servant of her or his followers. Covey describes the stewardship that servant leadership entails in the following manner:

'we may give up not only material things but also the price and arrogance of *me* and *mine* in exchange for a humble heart and a contrite spirit, for an ethic of service and sacrifice' (1997: 3).

The paradox or incongruity herein lies in the assumption that despite differing needs and drives among leaders, effective leaders either possess or can develop a fairly consistent meta-outlook on life (including a deep humanity, strong humility and a principled orientation). This appears to assume that despite leader divergence in motivation (for example along McClelland's 1962 power, achievement and social orientations) strong status or power orientations will no longer play a role among leaders of the future. Lad & Luechauer (1998) also asserts that servant leadership is paradoxical and that the journey towards it requires a certain degree of comfort with paradox and ambiguity. One of the paradoxes concerns

'the myths that servant leadership means no rules, no hierarchy, and no structure. There is nothing in the concept of servant leadership that implies that rules, hierarchy or structure should be abolished. What does change, however, is the role these functions perform. They are created to educate, facilitate and support rather than dictate, suffocate and control. Servant leaders still lead ... they just do so from a different base (Lad & Luechauer, 1998: 64).

If an individualistic power orientation is a product of socialisation, all well and good, but if it rather represents a more inherent personality trait (as posited by McClelland, 1962), it is more likely to play a role among leaders, particularly in the West where this theory was developed.

A cursory mention is given within some of the literature of the requirement for leaders to play changing roles as necessitated by differing requirements and spirits of the situation (Mindell, 1992; Melrose, 1996), but few concrete examples of how this may be achieved are provided, nor is the possibility of a strongly autocratic leadership style being effective in certain circumstances opened up for debate. It is further assumed that effective leaders can manage the paradox of needing to be simultaneously connected and detached from the followers and the presenting circumstances (Mindell, 1992; Melrose, 1996): a considerable challenge indeed! It may, hence, be questioned whether the emerging 'servant leader' model in fact liberates good leaders through allowing them to act as integrated individuals, able to inject soul and meaning into the workplace, or whether it presents yet another normative model of leadership unattuned to the complexities of differing circumstances and organisations, and thereby functions as a 'straight-jacket' into which leaders, irrespective of background, motivation and personality are required to fit. We need to, in fact, question whether the emerging leadership

paradigms do not eulogise even further individualistic models of leadership than the paradigms of the past.

Observation of a number of South African business leaders bears out this paradox, with a few leaders experiencing or evidencing a high degree of tension between a 'requirement' to follow a participative servant leader model, whilst experiencing an internal desire to play more autocratic roles at times, and evidencing individualistic views on leadership with themselves as 'leaders' sharply in the foreground and 'followers' in relief. As a starting point, a tremendous divergence in outlook and conceptualisation of the role of leader is evident among South African business leaders. For example, Rory Wilson, the former managing director of Independent Newspapers Cape and current senior executive at Jutas, in a presentation to the 1998 University of Cape Town MBA class appeared to hold a fairly individualistic view on leadership with himself as 'leader' sharply in the foreground and 'followers' in relief. His discourse suggested a strong separation between 'management/leadership' and 'employees', some instrumentalism in terms of the need for participative process, and a fairly planned rather than emergent approach to strategy. On the other end of the spectrum were a number of leaders interviewed by the authors from within social development organisations (formerly termed 'welfare organisations'). In an interview with a leader from St. Luke's Hospice, for example, she referred to the volunteers and employees of the branch she had founded as 'us' and 'we' throughout the interview, and she appeared to not separate the branch into 'leaders' and 'the led' when we asked her whether she experienced any management or leadership difficulties or challenges in the branch. In addition, she seemed to be an emergent strategist who 'feels the vision' deeply and imbues the vision within her field, rather than consciously articulating it.

Incongruities were also evident within individual leaders. The former newspaper MD, for example, demonstrated ambivalence between democratic and autocratic leadership processes, being as he described himself, 'an iron fist in a velvet glove'. Whereas this may reflect a leader's ability to change roles as needs alter, it may, alternatively, suggest that other personal motivations (such as a need for power or personal achievement) may play a role even within principle-driven leaders.

Leadership: reflections on the way ahead

Through reflection on a few of the incongruities, tensions and paradoxes of the emerging paradigm and in the field of leadership more broadly, it is suggested that the concept of 'leadership' may need revisiting. Within a Western and more particularly Anglo-Saxon context, the term leadership appears to carry many different definitions. Bass (1990) states that leadership has been conceived of as the focus of group processes, as a matter of personality, as a matter of inducing compliance, as the exercise of influence, as particular behaviours, as a form of persuasion, as a power relation, as an instrument to achieve goals, as an effect of interaction, as a differentiated role, as initiation of structure, and as many combinations of these definitions. It is debatable whether these conceptualisations are competing or compatible; whether they represent a cluster of concepts or a multi-

faceted concept; and whether or not they represent increasing accuracy in understanding leadership or the changing nature of leadership itself over the decades.

The concept of leadership may need to either be: (a) broadened to integrate the notions of a constantly shifting leader-follower continuum (or a variety of 'leadership' roles that need to be assumed within a team or social system for it to function effectively) and the role of informal leaders; or to be (b) segmented into various sub-concepts to allow more penetrative research into, and understanding of, what is currently a highly multifaceted concept. Leadership theory needs to look beyond its peculiarly Western cultural and historical context, and the normative models such a context have produced, to embracing new and divergent worldviews and making explicit the assumptions regarding human modality and leadership contained therein. Western thought tends to split the present from the future, thought from action, and the manager and leader from the system being managed and led. In our desire to take action, there is much we can learn from Taoism. The concept of '*wu-wei*' or 'nonaction', for example, is central to Taoism. *Wu-wei* refers to the idea of not forcing something, or going *with* the grain. Vaill (1993: 227) provides us with a few *wu-wei* interpretations of commonly-held Western myths, which has been adapted in Table 1.

Despite the incongruities, tensions and paradoxes in leadership theory and practice which have been explored within this article, emerging leadership thought, however, provides a potent source of inspiration for leaders wishing to play roles of personal integrity which seek to create 'a better world' through the empowerment of 'followers'. It also appears to hold greater promise for resolving the 'wicked', systemic problems confronting our world today and for producing a greater sense of humanity within Western work organisations.

In fact, we do not believe that people throughout organisations have to look very far for some of the answers. Adair (1990: 95) makes the point that, 'the seeds of the future lie in the present', and herein lies the answer to the majority of our organisational leadership hang-ups. The leadership we seek lies within each of us. In the words of Handy (1994), paradox confuses us because it asks us to live with simultaneous opposites. The future, in our view, is not about being confused and calls for leaders who are willing to live and work within the context of uncertainty and ambiguity, understanding that their roles are in itself paradoxical, and letting their spirit – inner energy and passion – ascend from within themselves. White, Hodgson & Crainer (1996) writes about 'white-water leadership' and stress the need for future leaders to be able to cope

with uncertainty and turbulence. They further claim that a 'common feature of people who handle ambiguity well seems to be an easy access to energy, both in themselves and in others' (1996: 143). We believe that the first component which a leader has to learn to do differently is to *move towards uncertainty* rather than away from it. Memorable and effective leaders, having discovered their own passion and energy, and operating with resilience and boldness, are going to be the ones that call up in each of us a visit with the raggedy edge of brilliance and the on-the-edge part of genius.

We would like to encourage readers to respond to their inner prompting – the faint voice of their own, personal inner calling.

'The idea of being called does not mean that a person is being singled out for a special mission, only that there is a special resonance in one's life that will find its fullest expression and connection with a larger whole within the context of which one is feeling called' (Spangler, 1996: 48).

Charles Handy tells us that

'a passion for the job [and life] provides the energy and focus that drive the organisation and that acts as an example to others, but this also has to be combined with its opposite, an awareness of other worlds, because focus can turn to blinkers, an inability to think beyond one's own box' (1997: 14).

In following the path, we must be fully awake, filled with a sense of wonder, waiting expectantly for that 'cubic centimetre of chance' to present itself (Jaworski, 1996: 135). Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, the chance to be fearful about the apparent paradox and accompanying tension, and hence always ineffectiveness.

Equally important, and part of the paradox of organisational leadership, is the creation of an unlearning organisation, which essentially means that the organisation, and the individual, must forget some of its past. A small amount has been written about unlearning (for example Starbuck & Hedberg, 1977; Argyris & Schon, 1978; Hedberg, 1981; Nystrom & Starbuck, 1984), but the concept has been dwindling from the academic literature. However, new efforts to revitalise and inform people have surfaced again (for example Wheatley, 1992; Bettis & Prahalad, 1995; Farr, 1995). Bettis & Prahalad (1995: 10) makes the point that, during periods of organisational uncertainty and change, the organisation wishing to be successful in the future must 'unlearn the old logic ... the focus shifts from learning to unlearning in the case of strategic change'. They argue that fundamental change will only take

Table 1 *Wu-Wei* interpretations of some commonly-held Western myths (adapted from Vaill, 1993: 227)

Myth	<i>Wu-wei</i> interpretation
A single person called the leader	Leading occurs throughout the organisation
A single free-standing organisation	Organisation is a temporary abstraction from the totality
Control via chain of command	A more democratic levelling of power differences
Organisation as pure instrument	Organisation as a field within which many purposes and processes play out
The irrelevance of culture	An understanding of synergies available from many unique common psychologies
Primary output is a product	Awareness of all the organisation is and does produce its outputs
Rational analysis for understanding	Rational analysis in the service of philosophy of life

place through the gradual unlearning of the existing dominant logic, which will be brought about by the deliberate construction of important organisational events that will decrease stability and challenge the existing dominant logic. However, the authors further assert that strategic learning and unlearning are inextricably intertwined. Our sense is that a new kind of learning needs to take place, both within individuals and organisations, whilst simultaneously unlearning obsolete practices and behaviours, mindsets, and skill-sets.

Leaders of the future need to be able to recognise paradox (fuzzy logic) – paradox in people, ideas, and feelings – and not be frightened of it. According to Lou Tice (1996: 19), during times of change there are two styles that are dominant, that is, control and release. With the control orientation, you do not want ordinary human beings running around, messing up management's perfect world. With a release orientation, you seek ways to work together. Rather than create restrictive zones, you create constructive zones at the edge of chaos.

'In the post-bureaucratic world, the laurel will go to the leader who encourages healthy dissent, who values those followers brave enough to say *no*, who has, not the loudest voice, but the readiest ear, and whose genius may well lie not in personal achievements, but in unleashing other people's talent' (Bennis, 1996: 15).

Mother Teresa once said, 'I can do what you can't do, and you can do what I can't do; together we can do great things'. In times of change, unpredictability and uncertainty, one person cannot do it alone. Leaders have got to create a critical mass around them of people who, in their own way, do whatever they need to do to build the community or organisation toward a shared ideal. It takes a complementary team of people. Complementarity represents an enhancement of resource value, and arises when a resource produces greater returns in the presence of another resource than it does alone. It takes a team knowledgeable about each other's feelings, needs, hurts, pains, beliefs, and dreams – a real community who are okay with, and understands, uncertainty and ambiguity. A team that is able to learn new things, quickly adapt in times of change and thrives on chaos. A team of shared leadership aware of the fact that whatever other changes may be required in their improvement efforts, its importance is greatly outweighed by the required changes of human minds – their minds. Leaders of, and within, these teams need to understand that leading change is mainly a matter of leading psychological processes. Change becomes a positive adventure when people feel safe moving out of their environmental comfort zones, out of their narrow definitions (and mindsets) of the way things 'are supposed to be'. Finding the way to authentic awakening presents us with an immense challenge (April, Macdonald & Vriesendorp, 2000).

'We see that no single authority holds the truth nor is there just one way to awakening ... No-one can travel our path for us, and no-one can substitute for us in our quest for awakening. The common elements of all who become wise are that they have learned to listen to their wisdom in their own hearts, to hear the underlying harmony, and to travel their own path' (Kornfield & Feldman, 1996: 177).

It is hoped that this article aids the reader to get to the highest part of themselves, discovering their passion and real purpose

in life – to tap into their personal energy so that they feel *light* again, and aid others in their own journeys to find *lightness*. It is about new ways of knowing, of ridding ourselves of the baggage and the weight of conformity, of control, of ignorance – it is about knowing yourself, your highest self, and the infinite possibilities that exist if you are willing to start the journey of self-discovery. The more choices we generate ourselves, and about the way we perceive leadership, and the sooner we move into areas we have ignored or avoided in the past, the more possibilities we generate and the more potential we allow to emerge. In essence, the only way to understand leadership, is to *be real, and live it day by day!*

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