The Article of the Month

by Robert Dilts.

The New Leadership Paradigm

One of the most important sets of skills

One of the most important sets of skills required in a changing world are the skills of leadership. This has become increasingly evident as we have attempted to adapt to the escalating changes in our society and workplaces over the past century. As we try to take command of our own destiny and guide the destinies of our families, communities, organisations and our planet, the necessity of effective leadership ability has become increasingly obvious. Effective leadership is one of the keys to our future success and survival.

But what is leadership, and who has it? Can you develop leadership ability, or is it something you must be born with? Some say leadership has to be learned and earned. Others say leadership is a gift that cannot be taught.

Much of the literature on leadership focuses on "characteristics" of good leaders. These characteristics, however, are often too general to be of much practical value to someone trying to become a better leader. For instance, to say that good leaders are "gifted optimists" or are "honest" and "inspiring" provides little practical basis for specific skill development or improvement. These are typically judgments about our behaviour made by others.

Frequently, descriptions of effective leadership emphasise what has been effective in a particular business, culture or environment. However, the actions, style or characteristics that make a leader "good" in one context may be ineffective or devastating in another.

Some studies of leadership focus on the outcomes of effective leadership; pointing out that good leaders "create vision," "mobilise commitment," "recognise needs," etc. However, simply knowing about these goals is not enough. The key to actually achieving them involves having the mental and behavioural skills required to put them into practice.

With the tools of NLP it is possible to define and explore some specific models, principles and skills that will allow you to be a more successful leader; i.e., the "how to's" of effective leadership.

In defining what effective "leadership" is, it is important to distinguish between (a) a "leader," (b) "leadership" and (c) "leading." The position of "leader" is a role in a particular system. A person in the formal role of a leader may or may not possess leadership skills and be capable of leading. "Leadership" is essentially related to a person's skills, abilities and degree of influence. A good deal of leadership can come from people who are not formal "leaders." "Leading" is the result of using one's role and leadership ability to influence others in some way.

In its broadest sense, leadership can be defined as the ability to influence others toward the accomplishment of some goal. That is, a leader leads a collaborator or group of collaborators towards some end. In businesses and organisations, 'leadership' is often contrasted with 'management'. Management is typically defined as "getting things done through others." In comparison, leadership is defined as, "getting others to do things." Thus, leadership is intimately tied up with motivating and influencing others.

In the emerging views of leadership, however, leaders do not have influence simply because they are 'bosses' or 'commanders'. Rather, leaders are people who are committed to "creating a world to which people want to belong." This commitment demands a special set of models and abilities in order to effectively and ecologically manifest the visions which guide those committed to change. It involves communicating, interacting and managing relationships within an organisation, network or social system to move toward one's highest aspirations.

Micro, Macro and Meta Leadership

Nicholls (1988) has pointed out that a fair amount of confusion has arisen in leadership research because there are three fundamentally different perspectives of leadership: Meta, Macro and Micro.

1. Meta leadership creates a 'movement' in a broad general direction (such as civil rights, home computers, or glasnost). Meta leadership, "links individuals, through the leader's vision, to the environment. In doing so, it releases energy and creates enthusiastic followers."

2. In macro leadership, "the leader's role in creating a successful organisation is fulfilled in two ways, path-finding and culture-building... Path-finding can be summed up as finding the way to a successful future. Culture-building can be viewed as drawing people into purposeful organisation - one which is capable of traveling along the path that is found or of fully exploiting current opportunities...Macro leadership activity can influence individuals by linking them to the entity - be it the whole organisation or just a division, department or group. The leader influences the individual by supplying the subordinates with answers to such questions as: what is this organisation all about? where do I fit in? How am I valued and judged? what is expected of me? why should I commit myself? In the process, the leader creates committed members of the organisation."

3. In contrast to both of these, Micro leadership, "focuses on the choice of leadership style to create an efficient working atmosphere and obtain willing cooperation in getting the job done by adjusting one's style on the twin dimensions of task and relationship behaviour. Choice of leadership style depends on the particular subordinates and the job/task being done, it is, thus, situational and contingent...the leader directs people in organisations in the accomplishment of a specific job or task. If the leadership style is correctly attuned, people perform willingly in an efficient working atmosphere."

Effective leadership involves a mixture of all three different types of leadership ability to some degree. A typical leadership situation involves a leader leading others toward a goal within the 'problem space' of a system. This seminar will cover a variety of skills; including self skills, relational skills and systemic thinking skills.

Self skills have to do with how the leader deploys himself or herself in a particular situation. Self skills allow the leader to choose or engineer the most appropriate state, attitude, criteria, strategy, etc. with which to enter a situation. In a way, self skills are the processes by which the leader leads himself.

Relational skills have to do with the ability to understand, motivate and communicate with other people. They result in the ability to enter another person's model of the world or perceptual space and get them to recognise problems and objectives and understand the problem space within which they and the company are operating.

Strategic thinking skills are necessary in order to define and achieve specific goals and objectives. Strategic thinking involves the ability to identify a relevant desired state, assess the starting state and then establish and navigate the appropriate path of transitions states required to reach the desired state. A key element of effective strategic thinking is

determining which operators and operations will most efficiently and effectively influence and move the present state in the direction of the desired state.

Systemic thinking skills are used by the leader to identify and comprehend the problem space in which the leader, his or her collaborators and the company is operating. Systemic thinking is at the root of effective problem solving and the ability to create functional teams. The ability to think systemically in a practical and concrete way is probably the most definitive sign of maturity in a leader

In summary, effective leadership skill involves the mastery of all of the different elements which make up a particular leadership situation, including:

Mastery of Self (States)
Balance
Congruence
Awareness

Mastery of Relationship (Rapport)
Multiple Perspectives
Thinking Styles
Positive Intention

Mastery of Communication (Messages)
Verbal & Non-Verbal
Representational Channels
Meta Messages

Mastery of Problem Space (System)
Thoroughness
Relevance
Chunking

Levels of Change and Leadership

"Creating a world to which people want to belong" involves different levels of change and influence. In fact, the different types of leadership – 'meta', 'macro' and 'micro' – and the 'problem spaces' they involve, can be related to the 'level' of change that an individual or organisation is attempting to influence.

For instance, there's the where and the when of the 'problem space' of change. This relates to particular environments and environmental influences, such as physical space and time constraints, that might influence a problem or goal.

Then there's the what related to a particular context. This refers to the behavioural activities or results to occur within the environment – i.e., what is supposed to happen in a particular where and by when.

Of course, people's actions are not only determined by their external environment. Different individuals may exhibit a wide variety of behavioural reactions to similar environmental cues and constraints. What accounts for these behavioural differences? Variations in people's mental maps and perceptions. Outcomes and responses on a behavioural level are directed by cognitive processes; that is, by how people are thinking about something or mentally representing it. The 'how' level of change relates to people's inner maps and cognitive capabilities.

The process of change is also greatly influenced by people's beliefs and values. These relate to the why of a particular problem or outcome. Why, for instance, should a person consider changing his or her thoughts or actions? A person's degree of motivation will determine how much of his or her own inner resources he or she is willing to mobilise. Motivation is what stimulates and activates how people think and what they will do in a particular situation.

There is also the who involved in the process of change. Which roles and functions are involved in the problem or outcome? Who is supposed to be involved? What beliefs, values, capabilities and behaviours are associated with the various roles?

Finally, there's the who and what else, involving the larger system or vision surrounding specific roles, beliefs, capabilities, actions, etc. This level relates to what could be considered the vision and 'spirit' of an organisation or system.

As these distinctions indicate, our brain structure, language, and social systems form natural hierarchies or levels of processes. The function of each level is to synthesise, organise and direct the interactions on the level below it. Changing something on an upper level would necessarily 'radiate' downward, precipitating change on the lower levels. Changing something on a lower level could, but would not necessarily, affect the upper levels.

The levels I have identified here were inspired by the work of anthropologist Gregory Bateson (1972), who identified several fundamental levels of learning and change. Each level is more abstract than the level below it, but each has a greater degree of impact on the individual or system. These levels roughly correspond to:

'Spiritual'   **Vision & Purpose**

A. Who I Am – Identity: . . . . .Role & Mission
B. My Belief System – Values, Meta Programs: . . .Motivation & Permission
C. My Capabilities – States, Strategies: . . . . Perception & Direction
D. What I Do – Specific Behaviours: . . . . Actions & Reactions
E. My Environment – External Context: . . . . Constraints & Opportunities

The environmental level involves the specific external conditions in which our behaviour takes place. Behaviours without any inner map, plan or strategy to guide them, however, are like knee jerk reactions, habits or rituals. At the level of capability, we are able to select, alter and adapt a class of behaviours to a wider set of external situations. At the level of beliefs and values we may encourage, inhibit or generalise a particular strategy, plan or way of thinking. Identity, of course, consolidates whole systems of beliefs and values into a sense of self. The 'spiritual' level relates to our perceptions and maps of those parts of our larger system which are beyond ourselves. While each level becomes more abstracted from the specifics of behaviour and experience, it actually has more and more widespread effect on our behaviour and experience.

- Environment determines the external opportunities or constraints to which a person has to react. It involves the where and when of leadership — influencing the external context. The 'environmental' level of leadership primarily relates to people's reactions. It consists of things such as the type of room, food, noise level, etc. that surrounds a situation. Certainly these external stimuli will effect the responses and the state of a leader and his or her collaborators. One key aspect of leadership skill has to do with attention to the physical environment.
- Behaviours are the specific actions or reactions made by a person within the environment. It involves the what of leadership — influencing people's actions. The 'behavioural' level of leadership has to do with the specific behavioural activities that the leader and his or her collaborators must engage in. The specific behaviours that people actively participate in, such as tasks and interpersonal interactions, often serve as the primary evidence for organisational goals. Much of the focus of leadership has traditionally been on the level of behaviour.
- Capabilities guide and give direction to behavioural actions through a mental map, plan or strategy. The level of 'capabilities' relates to the how of leadership — influencing people's minds. 'Capabilities' have to do with the mental strategies and maps collaborators develop to guide their specific behaviours. Simply prescribing behaviours does not insure that tasks will be accomplished and goals reached. The function of the level of capabilities is to provide the perception and direction necessary to achieve particular objectives.

- Beliefs and Values provide the reinforcement that supports or inhibits capabilities and behaviours. The level of 'beliefs and values' involves the why of leadership — influencing people's hearts. In addition to developing behavioural skills and capabilities, an effective leader must also address the presuppositions, beliefs and values of his or her collaborators. The degree to which some task fits (or does not fit) into the personal or cultural value systems of one's collaborators will determine the degree to which they accept or resist that task. Beliefs and values influence the amount of motivation and permission collaborators experience with respect to their roles and tasks.
- Identity involves a person's role, mission and/or sense of self. It relates to the who of leadership. The 'identity' level has to do with the sense of self experienced by a group or group members. Identity is somewhat difficult to define precisely. It is more abstract than beliefs and has to do with the deepest levels of incorporation of information, responsibility for what one has learned, and the commitment to put it into action. Identity has primarily to do with mission.
- 'Spiritual' change relates to the larger system of which one is a part and the influence of that system on the group or organisation. It involves the who else and what else of leadership — influencing the larger system. 'Spiritual' factors come from our perception of being a part of larger and larger systems surrounding us. It determines the overall vision or purpose behind the actions of an individual or organisation.

Clearly, each level of change involves progressively more of the system, or a larger 'problem space'. Each level involves different types of processes and interactions that incorporate and operate on information from the level below it. In this way they form a network of "nested" processes.

Effective leadership clearly involves addressing issues at all of these levels – whether it be in regards to self, others, system or goals.

Micro leadership primarily addresses issues at the levels of environment, behaviour and capability: i.e., *where, when, what* and *how*.

Macro leadership focuses on issues at the levels of beliefs, values and role identity: i.e., the *why* and *who* behind the *where, when, what* and *how*.

Meta leadership emphasises the levels of 'spirit' and identity: i.e., the *who* and *what else* which form the vision and purpose behind all of the other levels of leadership.

Also see the NLP Pattern of the Month or the Archives if you are interested in checking out NLP in more depth.

You also may want to visit the Anchor Point Page. **Anchor Point** is the practical journal of NLP.

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