The Changing Nature of Leadership

by T.C. Balser

Change is the only constant, and today this is true more than ever as we face unprecedented challenges globally, economically, and environmentally (Inayatullah and Gidley, 2000; Covey, 2004; McCaulley and Velsor, 2004; Pink, 2006). One possible strategy is to ignore the change and continue business as usual until forced to respond. This may or may not prove the best strategy in the end. Another option is to run around like Chicken Little crying that the sky is falling. This too may prove less than effective. Perhaps a better response to unprecedented change is with unprecedented measures; meet change with change. However, to do this will require a broader understanding of what it means to lead in times of change. It requires a new approach to leadership when there are more and increasingly complex issues to address and fewer resources with which to address them. This is the challenge facing the agricultural sciences, and meeting this challenge will require leaders of a new sort.

A New Sort of Leader?

Leadership has been a topic of interest in the social sciences since people first began to observe and categorize human behavior. Despite decades of research focused on questions such as “What are the characteristics of the best leaders?” or “What are the variables that affect the emergence and maintenance of leadership in groups?” we remain essentially ignorant about what “good leadership” is (Wood, 2003). This may be because good leadership is nonexistent, and “effective leadership” should be our focus instead. Effective leadership depends on context. In other words, what is effective leading in one situation might be completely ineffective in another.

In the relatively recent past, effective leading was hierarchical, and leadership was a position more than a process. The paradigm from which we operated was that of leadership as power and influence: the hero-leader single-handedly solving problems and giving orders. The flow of power was unidirectional, from the leader outward (Fig. 1). However, in the past several years, there has been a marked shift in our leadership paradigm from leadership as unidirectional to that of leadership as a process relying on interdependence. This shift is marked by the recognition that the complexity of issues facing us today is more than a single person can address (Blanchard, 2007; Martin, 2007). The solution to technical, organizational, or environmental problems requires multidisciplinary teams, and today’s leader could be any one of the team members. Effective leadership now is a multidirectional flow of influence.

Figure 1

A shifting paradigm for leadership

Older paradigm: Leadership as power and influence

“The only definition of a leader is someone who has followers.” — Peter Drucker

“Leadership is influence—nothing more, nothing less.” — John C. Maxwell

“My definition of a leader...is a man who can persuade people to do what they don’t want to do, or do what they’re too lazy to do, and like it.” — Harry S. Truman

“Leadership occurs when one person induces others to work toward some predetermined objectives.” — Massie

“Leadership is the ability of a superior to influence the behavior of a subordinate or group and persuade them to follow a particular course of action.” — Chester Bernard

“Leadership is the art of influencing and directing people in such a way that will win their obedience, confidence, respect, and loyal cooperation in achieving common objectives.” — U.S. Air Force

New paradigm: Leadership as process and interdependence

“Leadership is a function of knowing yourself, having a vision that is well communicated, building trust among colleagues, and taking effective action to realize your own leadership potential.” — Warren Bennis

“Leadership is the process of persuasion and example by which an individual (or leadership team) induces a group to take action that is in accord with the leader’s purpose, or the shared purposes of all.” — John W. Gardner

“The function of leadership is to produce more leaders, not more followers.” — Ralph Nadar

“As we look ahead into the next century, leaders will be those who empower others.” — Bill Gates

“The growth and development of people is the highest calling of leadership.” — Harvey S. Firestone

“The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between the two, the leader must become a servant and a debtor. That sums up the progress of an artful leader.” — Max DePree

Unidirectional flow of power/information

Multidirectional flow of power/information

The only constant is change, continuing change, inevitable change, that is the dominant factor in society today. No sensible decision can be made any longer without taking into account not only the world as it is, but the world as it will be.” — Isaac Asimov
ence. Effective modern leaders both influence and are influenced by those they lead.

The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) calls this “Connected Leadership.” In a recent study, the CCL reported that leadership is changing, and approaches focusing on flexibility, collaboration, crossing boundaries, and collective leadership are the highest priorities for the future (Martin, 2007). With this comes increased need for what we might call the “soft skills,” such as building relationships and collaboration. The new leader will need to achieve results through teamwork and innovation. S/he will need right-brain skills such as empathy and inventiveness. What this means for many of us is that leadership-style alternatives to the traditional hierarchical/dominant style are emerging as increasingly viable (see Fig. 2). As a result, there is increasing research emphasis on the leadership qualities and styles of minorities and women (Coughlin et al., 2005; McCauley and Velsor, 2004). The innate leadership styles of these groups often traditionally model a more collaborative leadership style (Coughlin et al., 2005).

Developing as a New Paradigm Leader

For many of us, the new emphasis on soft skills is counter to our long-held ideas about leadership. Most of us have some idea of what it means to be a leader, whether from experience or from watching someone model leadership (Mom? Dad? high school soccer coach?). However, many of us also know the struggle of trying to change entrenched ideas. Nevertheless, it can be done. No matter your background or experience, new ideas, skills, and attitudes can be learned. A first step is to make transparent your ideas: What is leadership to you personally? Where did your ideas about it come from? A second step is to challenge those ideas consciously. Do they still serve you? Are they reflective of a style of leadership you wish to continue to use? Or is there room for developing a set of new leadership tools to complement your old ones? Learning anything new at a deep level can be a challenge, but below are some suggestions:

1. **Read.** There are some very good books on the subject of leadership. Books by Marcus Buckingham (*The One Thing You Need to Know*), Jim Collins (*Good to Great* and *Built to Last*), Steven Covey (*7 Habits of Highly Effective People* and *First Things First*), John Kotter (*Leading Change*) are all excellent.

2. **Start a group.** Not only misery but change and learning also love company. Never underestimate the power of a regular group for keeping you on track. Use the group to reinforce your reading and practice new skills.

3. **Attend workshops.** In the corporate world, attending professional development activities to improve leadership or managerial skills is the norm. In the academic world, we often fail to take advantage of the opportunities around us. There are excellent op-

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**Figure 2**  
Some leadership styles

1. A **dominant/controlling** leader will be one who is decisive, formal, dominant, leads from the front, gets results easily, focuses on results often to the exclusion of “feelings” or consensus. Will move easily to action and get results. May be more challenged by vision, enrollment, and reflection.

2. An **analytical** leader will innately be drawn to the strategic and planning parts of leading and will be focused on moving from awareness to action, but may get stuck in analysis.

3. A **supportive/facilitative** leader is one who is concerned about harmony in the group and will focus on facilitation and consensus. While awareness (of others) and reflection will come more naturally, it may be more difficult to get results.

4. A **promotive** leader will capitalize on his/her strengths in enrolling people in big ideas. A promoter will naturally excel in providing vision and mobilizing resources, but may be more challenged by awareness and also the follow-through necessary to move from action to results.
opportunities, and often funding can be found to support professional development.

4. **Get a coach.** Professional career coaches are becoming more common in business as well as academics. Good coaching can go a long way toward supporting growth and change and new learning. There are coaches who specialize in nearly every area, from business, to academia, to creativity.

5. **Stay alert to programs and activities from the Societies.** Recognizing the value of leader development, ASA is initiating a pilot program this year. During the Annual Meetings on 3 November in New Orleans, ASA will launch the first ASA Leadership Cohort. Its purpose is to provide a service to the membership and support the development of leadership capacity in the agricultural sciences to address current environmental, educational, and economic challenges.

### Conclusion

Now is no longer the time solely for the “John Wayne Leader” who boldly and single handedly takes charge of all situations. Rather, the job of today’s leaders is to make space for others and to foster effective action through collaboration (Martin, 2007). This can be done in a multitude of ways, as there are likely as many styles of leadership as there are individuals. The only thing that is certain is change is happening, and we will need them all.

### References


Buckingham, M. 2005. The one thing you need to know...about great managing, great leading and sustained individual success. Free Press, New York.


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**International Collaborations**

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frequently return to responsible positions in their home countries.

2. Make short fact-finding visits to regions or countries of interest to build personal networks. Collaborative research is most easily facilitated between scientists who trust each other. Personal contact is the best way to build trust.

3. Contact scientists you know from reading the literature pertinent to your discipline. You already know these individuals are working in your area of science, and good scientists are always searching for good collaborators.

4. Interact with professional colleagues who are already working internationally. They can help you network and can also include you in their work. University International Programs offices can also help with these contacts since one of their functions is to promote such networking.

5. Seek contract work through universities, federal agencies (especially the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Millennium Challenge Corporation), and consulting firms to provide opportunities overseas. Consulting firms and federal agencies often search for scientists with specific expertise to do short-term work overseas. Make yourself known to them.

6. Consider volunteering to do professional work overseas. Such organizations as ACDI-VOCA, CARE, Peace Corps, and USDA-FAS frequently seek professionals for short-term volunteer activities to which your professional expertise can make a contribution.

### What Resources are Available to Work Overseas?

There are multiple opportunities for international work through the U.S. government. Prominent among these is the Fulbright Program, which places scholars overseas at universities and research facilities. Numerous federal (USDA, USAID, U.S. Department of Education, National Science Foundation, etc.) and state agencies (State Trade Development Commissions, etc.) have international linkages that should be sought out for possible assignments. Multinational agribusiness firms, especially units involved in research and development, may also offer pathways to international engagement. Many foreign countries also support visiting scientists through their own university, state, or national programs. Local contacts can be very helpful in providing access to these programs.

In summary, international engagement offers one of the most important avenues for both professional success and personal fulfillment. In a “flat world,” international opportunities abound, and when one examines his or her disciplinary expertise, it will be difficult not to find a clear and compelling reason to be engaged internationally.