Transforming the Leadership Crisis:
From Command and Control to Conscious Evolution

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Abstract

This thesis aims to examine overall leadership results and the crisis in leadership we face today and demonstrate the transformative potential and benefits of a conscious collaborative leadership model as the antidote to this crisis, an evolution of humanity and leadership as compared to the most common leadership styles. By providing clear definitions of leadership styles, the benefits and objections of adopting a conscious collaborative leadership style in today's information age and offering a practical framework for developing such transformational leadership, it seeks to contribute to academic knowledge and provide practical real-world leadership development practices for evolving leadership. The findings of this study offer valuable insights for current and future leaders aiming to address the leadership crisis and evolve leadership capabilities to better navigate the complexities of leadership in the information age.

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Introduction

Leadership has the power to shape the trajectory of organizations, communities and entire societies due to its relational, collective, and purposeful nature (Burns, 1978). Yet, despite decades of research, leadership remains an elusive and contested concept—rich in theory but often inconsistent in practice. In an era of unprecedented challenges—ranging from global crises to organizational dysfunction—the persistent gaps in leadership effectiveness are not just theoretical concerns but pressing realities. Are the leaders of today equipped to meet the complexities of tomorrow? This paper contends that we are at a crossroads, facing a crisis born from outdated models and approaches to leadership. By critically examining data on outcomes, common leadership frameworks, and leadership development, this work makes the case for a transformational shift toward a shared, intentional, and cooperative model—one capable of addressing the demands of a rapidly evolving world.

The aim of this study is to evaluate common leadership styles in the context of coursework completed in the Inner MBA program, an inside-out approach to leadership development. This evaluation also integrates an extensive literature review, research, and insights from my 40-year leadership career in information technology, a business degree, and the Inner MBA program. The goal of this study is to determine a leadership style that is well suited for addressing the challenges of the current and future environment and build a case for leadership evolution and transformation. These challenges include the leadership crisis, the rapid pace of technological change, disruptions caused by technology advances, climate change, geopolitical crises, pandemics, mass migration and an

environment that is increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous. This study examines strengths and weaknesses of common leadership styles, focusing on whether they incorporate the inner work, self-awareness, and developmental practices to address today's complex issues. Ultimately, the review will determine if one or more leadership styles meet these needs and propose a practical framework for identifying and cultivating a successful leadership mindset. The framework will include experiential learning activities, essential skills, and key traits to prepare leaders for evolving demands of the future.

Literature Review

The purpose of the literature review is three-fold: to provide context for a discussion of leadership by evaluating the current state and real-world results of leadership today; to identify and assess common leadership styles; and to build a case for leadership transformation and a new kind of leadership. The scope of the literature review includes data on global environmental impacts, conflicts, resource inequity, workplace conditions, worker engagement, pay and opportunity disparities, economics, diversity in leadership and governance, and public perceptions of leadership. The analysis of leadership styles encompasses traditional publications and studies, as well as critiques of common leadership approaches, spanning from 1939 to 2024. To support the argument for leadership transformation, the review draws on materials from the Inner MBA course and integrates insights from leading experts in community, the environment, quantum physics, cosmology and global culture. This body of literature includes research studies, books, online data, articles and a podcast interview. Ultimately, the review further highlights evidence of a leadership crisis, develops a

hypothesis, establishes the imperative for leadership transformation, and serves as a foundation for research.

Current Leadership Results

Why is leadership important? There is compelling evidence that leadership is in crisis. No matter which leadership style or a combination of styles is employed, the impacts and results overall must be considered when evaluating current leadership's effectiveness. We stand at a precipice, with climate change due to greenhouse gas emissions from over consumption, burning fossil fuels, farming livestock, industrial processes, and deforestation, we are destroying our environment at an alarming rate (United Nations, 2024). We are causing a sixth mass extinction of species, estimates range up to 30,000 species per year (Center for Biological Diversity, 2024). Species are becoming extinct faster than at any point in modern history, 10,000 times the average, with humans almost wholly responsible (The World Counts, 2024b). More than a third of Earth's resources have been destroyed in the past 30 years; we consume 1.75 planets worth of resources today with the rate increasing to two planets by 2030, yet humanity's existence depends on the one planet Earth (The World Counts, 2024a). With 56 conflicts involving 92 nations at war, the most since World War II, using technologically advanced weaponry, which is all too often used on civilian populations from afar, one must conclude more conscious leadership is an immediate imperative (Vision of Humanity, 2024). There are also extreme inequities in resource utilization and availability between countries. Globally, there is an extreme concentration of capital in the top 10%, who own 60-80% of all capital, even in advanced economies (World Inequity Report, 2022). There is

also excessive wealth inequity, where the poorest half of the population own 2% of the wealth while the wealthiest half own 98% of wealth on earth (World Inequity Report, 2022). To adequately address the challenges of wars, climate change, natural disasters, geopolitical crises and economic collapse, we need a fresh approach to leadership that is immediate and sustained, based on long-term, inclusive, international cooperation and collaboration instead of nationalist or competitive mindsets (Allen, 2024). We must rise to become the leaders we seek, the leaders needed for these times of crisis, chaos, and uncertainty, by evolving our leadership practices now. Evolving leadership practices, mindset and skills are critically important in every organization and community, whether in a business, government, community or non-profit organization. Leaders set the guiding vision, mission, direction, strategy, priorities, policies and are the most influential factor in shaping and sustaining the organizational culture from small to large multi-country organizations. Leaders are role models for the organization's cultural norms, values, how the organization navigates change, solves problems and fosters innovation. Therefore, leaders directly impact engagement, morale, productivity, overall performance and success. A fundamental assumption for this study is the definition of successful leadership, that it is not simply about power, prestige or maximizing profit, a popular viewpoint nowadays, but instead, successful leadership achieves a mission to produce value through people, equitably, with integrity, and sustainable stewardship of resources, benefiting all stakeholders and serving the common good. This is a new model of leadership, one that acknowledges interdependency, being within a larger ecosystem, and relies on our own inner work as leaders first.

In evaluating current leadership, or making a business case for transformation, there are many factors to consider including results.

In addition to global indicators on climate, species extinction and war, let us also consider the organizational level, workplace culture. In their 2024 State of the Global Workplace report, Gallop indicates that 77% of the world's workers are disengaged, and the estimated impact of low engagement costs the global economy $8.9 trillion or 9% of global GDP (Gallup, 2024b). The Society for HR Management reports that two-thirds of American workers have experienced incivility at work; those who say their workplace is uncivil are three times more likely to leave within a year (SHRM, 2024). In the U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey, 48.6 million, or 30% of American workers, and 43% of remote workers, reported they experience abusive workplace conduct, with 65% of bullies being bosses and those surveyed said 60% of organizations respond negatively to complaints by encouraging, defending, rationalizing, discounting or denying it (Workplace Bullying Institute, 2021). In The Evolution of Work survey by workhuman* in 2023, employee respondents said that, by far, the Senior Leader has the most influence on whether they feel psychological safety at work (workhuman*, 2023). Psychological safety is a perception of the risk of how others will respond when one asks a question, expresses an idea, viewpoint or makes a mistake; psychological safety is linked to group learning, performance and innovation, critically important for succeeding in today's environment (The Learner Lab, 2024). Creating and managing workplace culture is the essence of leadership (Schein, 2010). Therefore, one must conclude we also have a leadership crisis at the organizational level.

Another critical factor in evaluating leadership is the intersection of economics and inequity. According to the Economic Policy Institute, CEO compensation increased by 1,085% from 1978 to 2023, while the typical worker's compensation rose by only 24% (Bivens, et al., 2024). In 2023, CEOs earned 290 times the salary of the typical employee, compared to a ratio of 192-to-1 in 1978 (Bivens, et al., 2024). This stark disparity fuels widespread inequity and is not a result of a competitive market (Bivens, et al., 2024). Income inequality has also risen between 1979 and 2019, the most recent data available (CBO, 2022). Pay inequity remains an issue for women and minorities. Women working full-time earn 84% of what men earn, with Hispanic women making 13% less than Hispanic men and the gap widens further in comparison with white men (George & Livingston, 2024). A woman must complete one additional educational degree to earn as much as a man with less education (George & Livingston, 2024). The pay gap is especially pronounced for Black women, who earn 64%, and Native American women who earn 59%, of what non-Hispanic white men make (Haan & Reilly, 2024). Pay inequity has far-reaching negative consequences for organizations and employees. It reduces retirement benefits, exacerbates societal inequities, lowers morale and motivation, increases turnover, and diminishes engagement and productivity. It can harm an organization's reputation and pose legal and compliance risks. Pay inequity also reflects a lack of opportunity and gender bias in promotion; women hold only 28% of CEO or Board Member positions in senior leadership (Kurt, 2024). Yet, firms with women in top management positions are more innovative, better at solving conflicts, building trust, dealing with unexpected or ambiguous situations, foster transparency,

teamwork, governance and adherence to regulatory standards (Kong, et al., 2024). On a global scale, as discussed, the climate crisis exemplifies a leadership failure, which disproportionately impacts women, who make up 49.6% of the world's population but account for 80% of those displaced by climate change (Quinn, 2022). Despite this, women represented only 34% of negotiating delegations and just 19% of heads of delegations at the 2024 United Nations COP28 climate change summit (WEDO, 2024). As far as government leaders are concerned, research shows that countries with at least 30% female leadership have lower corruption rates, better law enforcement, reduced mortality rates, higher GDP, and improved decision-making and negotiations (Quinn, 2022). Yet, globally, only 19 of 193 countries have a woman Head of State, and only 17 as Head of Government while 31% have never had a woman head of government (UN Women, 2024). Only 26.9% of parliamentarians are women; local government representation is better, but still only 35.5% of local representatives are women in 145 countries (UN Women, 2024). In the U.S., women made up only 27.9% of Congress with only three women of color in 2023 (Statista, 2024). Women make up four of the nine, or 44%, of U.S. Supreme Court Justices, 31.9% of state governors, 32.8% of state legislators, 26.8% of city mayors and 32% of municipal office holders (Center for Women and Politics, 2024). And none of these statistics reflect gender fluidity or LGBTQ. These are the ultimate leaders with the highest level of influence in policy at the societal and global level. Certainly, we have a long way to go to reach gender parity in key leadership roles and thereby realizing the benefits of diversity and parity and how they contribute

to identifying innovative real-world solutions. In the next section, we will explore the widespread perception of leaders and the implications of those perceptions.

In considering the perception of leaders, a Harris Poll-U.S. News survey indicates 86% of respondents are largely disappointed with leaders in society, 47% are strongly disappointed and 84% say there is a leadership crisis in government, 78% in corporate America, with 70% saying current leaders are not prepared to address the crises of today (Davis, 2023). In the same survey, more than three quarters indicate there is a leadership crisis and 59% don't see any leaders in their organization that they aspire to be while 57% say retaining employees is difficult due to leadership decisions (Davis, 2023). A Pew Research Center poll indicates only 4% say the U.S. political system is working well, 25% do not feel represented by either party, only 26% rate the quality of political candidates as good, and 63% say politicians are too influenced by lobbyists and money, they serve their own selfish needs or only want to make a lot of money (Pew, 2023). A crisis in leadership is certainly reflected in these perceptions.

From the lack of leadership and action pertaining to environmental destruction, climate change, species extinction, and war to workplace culture, economics, gender pay inequity and lack of equity in compensation, leadership opportunities or inclusion, and widespread perceptions of leaders and leadership, these factors unanimously indicate a crisis and a defining moment in leadership as well as the immediacy of this imperative to take action and transform leadership into conscious, collaborative, community building, interdependent leadership where stewardship, humanity, and the greater good is what is most important above personal, organizational or national agendas.

When evaluating leadership styles against this backdrop, one must look at the common models, their strengths, weaknesses, impacts, and whether they prepare new leaders, facilitate further development of leaders, promote innovation, diversity, build teams or communities, or provide the expertise to handle disruption, volatility, uncertainty and chaos prevalent during these times and expected to continue. We begin the analysis of common leadership styles, with autocratic or authoritative leadership, then transactional, servant leadership, transformational, laissez-faire, or delegative leadership, followed by a brief discussion of other styles in general.

Leadership Styles

Autocratic or Authoritative Leadership

This leadership style is hierarchical, male-dominated, command and control, centralized decision-making, with an expectation of obedience and order with little or no input from subordinates (Lewin, et al., 1939) This leadership style was developed during the Industrial Revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries and focused on productivity and efficiency, largely due to mechanization and mass production manufacturing, urbanization and the rise of capitalism. Although organizations do not publish or report on leadership styles, many leaders still follow an autocratic or authoritative model of leadership or elements of it. While this leadership style provides for clear direction, structure and quick decision-making. It was assumed this style was more effective in a crisis or during geopolitical disruption, but research indicates it is less effective and inhibits innovation (Imran, et al., 2024). This leadership style reinforces inequity and a hierarchy with decision-making and rewards concentrated at the top. There

is no focus on the common good, sustainability, equity, participation, engagement, leadership or staff development. This style is outdated and no longer effective (Jing, 2019) for many reasons, including:

- Can create a fearful, dysfunctional, toxic environment and abuses of power

- Employees are viewed as "cogs in the wheel," replaceable machines

- Lack of respect for employees, which can lead to abuse and the exploitation of workers

- Lack of engagement, creativity, innovation, low morale, and resentment

- Lack of diversity and rigor in decision-making

- Resistance to change

- Lowered organizational productivity, performance and profitability

- Reinforcement of existing social structures, the "good ol' boy" network and hierarchy, polarization of leadership and workers and a lack of teamwork

- Lack of appreciation for diversity of perspectives or thought, diversity in hiring, equity and diversity in leadership, diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, which reflects a backlash against recent progress for minorities, women and LGBTQ rights, and support for the status quo

Since this leadership style was developed, there has been a movement toward more democratic decision-making, but in many organizations, the decision-maker is still at the top of the hierarchy with a limited delegation of decision-making, participation, or authority at lower levels of management or staff. This is the predominant leadership style for most organizations where I have worked over my 40-year career, at seven different companies of differing industries, size, and located in different states in the U.S. Even if there are elements of other

leadership styles being used, the dominant style is still authoritative or autocratic. It is my observation that this leadership style can often lead to a dysfunctional, sometimes toxic, culture and work environment. After establishing a successful career, I experienced bullying while working in a departmental leadership position at a national laboratory; this was after six successful years and two promotions. The laboratory leadership was hierarchical and authoritative, and my direct boss was the bully. After I reported a bullying incident, corroborated by a witness, the situation only became worse. My boss reorganized the structure ensuring I could no longer succeed. Then, on a business trip to another lab with my boss and six of my colleagues, I was the only one solely reliant on my boss for transportation to and from work every day. The organization's values, culture, and priorities became incredibly clear. While my experience is only one example, it is consistent with criticism of the authoritative leadership style. Leadership style, organizational culture, and a lack of leadership development or self-management have significant consequences. I resigned, and this served as my motivation for enrolling in the Inner MBA program. It was important to take action to prevent the dysfunctional, destructive leadership I experienced and address the effects of dysfunctional leadership in the world. How can we manage and address a leadership crisis if we cannot manage ourselves? I focused my energy on understanding what successful leadership is, how to develop it, the effects of stress, uncertainty and chaos, change and crisis management, the importance of leaders exercising self-management and doing the inner work required to make conscious rational decisions so that we serve the team, our organization, and community while healing ourselves, ensuring our

own trauma isn't brought into our organizations subconsciously. This includes having the awareness to identify and eliminate dysfunction, chaos and trauma in our organizations by establishing healthy cultures and diverse teams with psychological safety. Ultimately, the responsibility lies with leaders to identify and implement changes for the good of our teams, organizations, and society at large. From our evaluation of the authoritative leadership style, we turn to analyzing the transactional leadership style.

Transactional Leadership

The Transactional Leadership Style is based on the leader retaining power, working through reciprocity and a system of rewards and punishments, maintaining order and achieving goals through structured processes (Burns, 1978). In this leadership model, there is no focus on further leadership development and improvement from the organization, there is no shared decision making or even input into decisions. The rest of the organization and staff are still not seen as valuable contributors. The focus in transactional leadership is on conducting exchanges, or transactions, rather than on leadership development or improvement, or the team's development. There is no mention of leadership development as this style's focus is transactional. This leadership style does nothing, in and of itself, to develop the leader or the team to address uncertainty, chaos, rapid changes and disruption in our environment, let alone to build teams to foster innovation, ensure psychological safety or develop change leadership, which are needs of today and expected to be in the near future. As we continue our analysis of leadership styles, the next leadership style we will analyze is that of the servant leader.

Servant Leadership

Robert K. Greenleaf first coined the term Servant Leadership in his essay, The Servant as Leader, in 1970 (Center for Servant Leadership, 2024). This style focuses on serving their subordinates' needs and helping them develop and succeed rather than meeting their own needs or the organization's. There are many admirable elements to this style in that it develops people, focuses on empathy, promotes teamwork, trust, and employee well-being. Employees feel valued, supported, are developed and their opinions and knowledge matter. The servant leader puts others first, shares power, and helps others perform. The servant leader begins with a natural feeling of wanting to serve (Center for Servant Leadership, 2024). This is a different mindset than the other styles under evaluation and is worth noting, a desire to serve a greater mission or purpose. This style requires confidence and courage since the leader is not relying on positional authority or command and control. It also requires emotional intelligence, humility, flexibility, time and patience. Some criticism of this style is that the leader's needs can get lost, there can be a lack of focus on the leader's development, it may not support quick decision-making in a crisis, it may require cultural change as they may be seen as too soft or fail to establish authority especially if the organization is partially or fully hierarchical with traditional command and control leaders and it may place more responsibility on staff who cannot fulfill the requirements. There may be a lack of healthy boundaries to ensure servant doesn't mean subservient, it may not promote ethical behavior because it relies on the personal traits of individual leaders and followers rather than on agreed-upon vision or standards and it can lack big picture systems

thinking (Shonk, 2024). There is also no focus on change leadership or dealing with stressors such as volatility, uncertainty, disruption, and chaos. The next leadership style to evaluate is the transformational leadership style.

Transformational Leadership

The Transformational Leadership Style seeks to achieve high performance by focusing on inspiring and motivating workers and teams around a shared purpose, with the leader as a role model, encouraging innovation and transformation (Arenas, et al., 2024). This style relies on a passionate, charismatic, virtuous and visionary leader and is focused on innovation and frequent change (Arenas, et al., 2024). This requires a leader with self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing and a moral perspective for authenticity (Arenas, et al., 2024). For criticism, this leadership style relies on a charismatic leader so there is potential for abuse of power, decisions that aren't in the best interest of the organization, and manipulation or exploitation of workers. There is a lack of structure and clarity or clear guidelines, therefore followers may be overly dependent on the leader and struggle without their presence or guidance, so it is less effective at improving performance with geographically dispersed teams (Chaplin-Cheyne, 2021). This style requires, and is overly reliant on, a charismatic, motivational and virtuous leader who may or may not have an inspiring mission, process or structure for consistency. It may yield results but is not sustainable or scalable, nor does this style include leadership development, the ability to pivot or manage change, or deal with uncertainty, disruption and chaos. As we continue analyzing common leadership styles, the next leadership style for evaluation is democratic or participative.

Democratic or Participative Leadership

This leadership style encourages participation and maximum involvement, with input from team members in decision-making (Gastil, 1994). It fosters distributed responsibility and solving problems through deliberation, fostering collaboration, engagement, innovation and commitment (Gastil, 1994). This style can be slow in decision-making and subject to group thinking. Criticisms also include that this style can threaten authority, status or power and that people want a charismatic leader hero or the opposite of that with no faith in leaders or the need for them (Gastil, 1994). There appears to be little information about this style except participative and consensus-driven decision-making. Therefore, one must conclude this style encourages participation in decision-making and promotes teamwork, but it does not focus on leadership development, managing stress, change, innovation, or addressing disruption and chaos. Results of this style are completely dependent on the quality of the team and may be subject to group thinking. As we continue our analysis and discussion of leadership styles, the next style to analyze is the laissez-faire or delegative style.

Laissez Faire or Delegative Leadership

Laissez Faire is a passive style of leadership in which the leader provides minimal supervision and allows team members to make decisions and complete tasks independently, yet leaders maintain overall responsibility and accountability. This style was found to be disorganized, detrimental to the performance of subordinates, productivity, cohesiveness and satisfaction (Bass, 2009). This style may be beneficial for people who are experts in their field, or who function best with little direction or where tasks are routine or well-defined

(Bass, 2009). It encourages creativity and innovation but requires people to be self-motivated to manage their own time and attention. This style does not mention the importance of leadership, leadership development, team development, psychological safety, collaboration, managing stress or chaos, or continual improvement. It is a hands-off approach. Consequently, this leadership style is not effective in producing performance results or solving the problems of today or the future. As we continue, we look at other leadership styles that have not been included in this analysis.

Other Leadership Styles

In the literature reviewed, leadership which combines leadership styles to fit the situation or environment is termed adaptive or situational leadership. Being able to adapt leadership style to a situation or environment is important and provides flexibility, but requires strong emotional intelligence, an understanding of an adaptive framework, leadership styles and applicable situations, and there is a lack of structure, so success depends on the leader's ability to read the situation, have a thorough knowledge of the best leadership style(s) to employ to any given situation, and the awareness to consciously choose. An adaptive or situational style is flexible and has merits but basing leadership style on other existing leadership styles that are not fully effective to address our current organizational and environmental landscape, still falls short of a successful leadership style where there is no leadership development, stress management, self-awareness, change management, diversity, psychological safety or team building.

Literature Review Conclusion and Gaps

In conclusion, while the literature offers substantial insights into various leadership styles, there are several notable gaps when evaluating their effectiveness in today's highly dynamic environment, characterized by rapid technological advancement, organizational disruption, geopolitical crisis, economic uncertainty, climate change, industry disruption and evolving workforce expectations. Traditional leadership models often rely on the individual leader in a hierarchical organization, as the main decision maker, with a focus on stability, long-term vision, and reliance on structured environments, which may not fully capture the complexities of today's fast-paced, volatile, and uncertain settings, nor provide for innovation, equity, or sustainability in the larger ecosystem. Adaptive leadership provides the ability of leaders to pivot to other leadership strategies in response to unforeseen changes, but success is dependent on the leader's insight and still, a reliance on outdated leadership models and styles. Servant leadership provides a mindset of service and acknowledgement of the importance of people and the promotion of teamwork but does not address leadership development, self-management, or leading in times of uncertainty, chaos, disruption and radical changes.

There is also a gap in understanding how leadership styles can be successfully applied or adapted in environments where diversity, continuous learning, innovation, flexibility, and real-time decision-making are critical for organizational survival and success. Adaptation is honorable and necessary but there is a lack of clarity for leadership development, guidelines on which style applies in which situation, a reliance on outdated styles and a lack of consistency

or focus on collaboration or the development of diversity, teams and community. There is no attention paid to leadership development, emotional intelligence, or connection to a larger ecosystem of community, a focus on the inner work required to manage one's own nervous system, to develop effective leaders that are aware, conscious, self-managing, psychologically healthy and capable of focus and making strategic decisions, fostering innovation, developing and maintaining healthy relationships and a healthy workplace culture. There is no focus on leadership development to facilitate growth and continual innovation and learning, developing awareness, focus, compassion and empathy. Leaders must understand the importance and value of diversity, organizational development and change, psychological safety and how to build authentic, collaborative, inclusive communities for people, teams and organizations to pivot, innovate, and thrive. In the O.C. Tanner 2024 Global Report, only 27% of leaders felt they were prepared to help people navigate change while employees who perceive their leaders have the tools to help them navigate change are five times more likely to feel a sense of community, six times more likely to thrive at work, 10 times more likely to feel a strong sense of trust and 76% less likely to experience burnout (Tanner, 2024). Organizational change is a constant, yet only the adaptive leadership style includes the flexibility to change to another style but provides no guidance for leadership that operates in an overall ecosystem, building diversity, equity, innovation, and leading successful organizational change. None of the leadership styles evaluated include developing the leader's expertise to manage themselves, build awareness, and implement successful change leadership.

Ultimately, the common traditional leadership styles assessed are potentially harmful, certainly inadequate for solving the problems of today and the foreseeable future. The indicators of a leadership crisis at multiple levels, the expected continued volatility, disruptions and changes in the global environment, governments and business necessitate an urgent evolution in leadership. In the information age, characterized by an ever-increasing pace of rapid change, geopolitical crises, technological advancement and disruption, shifts toward geographically distributed service and information-oriented teams and work streams, environmental pollution and climate change, pandemics, the mass migration of people, disruption, and a constant need for innovation, the old existing leadership models no longer suffice. Let us consider a model of leadership that better addresses these challenges.

The Case for Leadership Transformation

Leadership is crucial, as it possesses a unique power to influence, characterized by its relational, collective, and purposeful nature (Burns, 1978). It is a complex, multi-dimensional concept encompassing processes, influence, group dynamics, and the pursuit of common goals (Northouse, 2022). Leadership must evolve based on the world we live in, a VUCA world: volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous, and these factors are only increasing, which calls for future-ready compassionate leaders who understand our impact on others, the environment and the overall ecosystem (Chiu, 2023). Compassionate leadership increases our resilience, our ability to adapt to changes, to innovate, and make wiser, more strategic decisions (Chiu, 2023). We also live in a distraction economy, where we are inundated with information and distractions, where self-

management, the ability to focus, and the quality of our minds is what generates value (Hunter, 2023b). With so many distractions and constant change, without the ability to manage ourselves and our nervous systems, we can experience leadership lockdown syndrome, when the nervous system is on high alert to the point where one can no longer process information and make decisions effectively (Hunter, 2023b). In O.C. Tanner's 2024 Global Culture Report, 42% of employees don't feel cared for by their organizations yet 87% of organizations say they show enough care (O.C. Tanner Institute, 2024). Only 59% of employees feel their leaders' empathy translates into action or support but they stay at the organization 2.5 years longer if they see the leader as empathetic (O.C. Tanner Institute, 2024). Given a VUCA environment, developing compassion and empathy, while understanding our nervous systems under stress, would contribute to both employee retention and satisfaction but also benefit the leader's ability to focus and make better decisions. In addition to developing empathy, compassion, self-awareness and self-management, let us further consider the context of environmental factors and the additional facets of leadership required, not only to succeed, but to innovate and thrive, with a new perspective as part of a wider interdependent ecosystem.

Scholars who study the characteristics of complex human civilizations indicate our civilization is in chaos, decline and eventual collapse, generating uncertainty, confusion and fear, yet the chaos we see today can be a powerful generative force for change (Wheatley, 2023). I assert that in today's fast-paced disruptive and chaotic environment, we need new tools, frameworks and

solutions, we need a transformational, creative, compassionate, conscious, diverse, community-building type of leadership to succeed in these transitional, chaotic uncertain times. While many leadership styles contain admirable approaches and can produce some positive results, none of these leadership models acknowledge the inner work to improve the efficacy of the leader for modern times. In many organizations, leaders who perceive these environmental and global shifts, and do the inner work to improve, and respond to these shifts by developing themselves as leaders, also serve as change agents in their organizations which often puts them into an awkward position due to change resistance and the status quo. Not only do our leadership styles and models need to evolve, the organizational environment, culture, and our communities must also evolve to support this new model of leadership.

The Evolution of Leadership: An Inside Job

It is an illusion that we are separate individuals from others, plant and animal life, earth and the cosmos. It is evident that our actions can devastate the earth and cause the extinction of species. Cosmologist Jude Currivan explains it this way: We are diverse but unified microcosmic co-creators; whether we are conscious of it or not, we are part of an interdependent community, a living ecosystem (Currivan, 2024). Our hyper-individualistic ethos, unbalanced capitalism, and consumerism drive self-interest and partisan tribalism and have undermined respect for human nature, connection, service, and care (The Aspen Institute, 2019). We cannot separate ourselves from community, the source of all life, plants, animals, creation, the earth, our solar system, the galaxy, the universe, and each other (Currivan, 2024). In this light, a holistic, ever evolving,

continually growing and living view of leadership, an evolutionary form of leadership, is required to face the challenges of today and tomorrow. Wisdom often comes from lived experience but also through internal work, the focus of the Inner MBA program. Our spirit, connection, and resonance to divine source and to each other is imbued in our environment, everyone and everything we interact with, and life force is prevalent in every type of matter even the seemingly inanimate (Karim, 2024). Like our universe, our solar system, our planet within it, and ourselves, an organization is also a living entity, a community (Currivan, 2024). Acknowledging this spiritual truth is a matter of scientific discovery and authenticity. In these disruptive times, one must do the inner work to heal and manage oneself, understand one's stress response and how to calm one's nervous system so that one can build empathy, compassion, conscious awareness, a higher consciousness, change resilience[1], the ability to embrace and implement change quickly and adapt to new circumstances, while acknowledging our interdependence and connection to community as an overall ecosystem.

As we consider our connection to our environment and interdependency, we must also consider the current state and what that state tells us about our ability to manage ourselves, make sound decisions, innovate, build resilient teams, as well as lead our organizations and communities through our ability to face and overcome challenges now and into the future. More than 90% of the time, people are on autopilot, 95% of the thoughts people have today they had

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[1] Change resilience is the capacity to adapt to change, overcome adversity and stress, learn from change experiences, and thrive amid evolving challenges or conditions.

yesterday, while our attention is wandering 46.9% of the time, with only a third of people being able to name what emotion they are experiencing and, if you lack self-awareness, you only have a 4% chance of managing yourself and your nervous system (Hunter, 2023a). These are shocking statistics; it is no wonder decisions are often made irrationally. How can we succeed, let alone thrive and meet these challenges, without self-awareness and the inner work that allows us to develop this self-awareness? Let us examine what is meant by inner work.

Inner Work

Inner work includes practicing mindfulness, being fully present, aware and attentive. The benefits of mindfulness are numerous: emotional regulation, increased empathy, compassion, focus, and clarity, physical healing and well-being, memory capacity, ability to stay present in complex stressful situations, the ability to listen deeply to others, and it also decreases our biases (Kornfield, 2022). Mindfulness also positively impacts company value. In a multi-year study comparing company value, companies with leadership that was based on ethical and mindful principles and values, company value was double that of the companies without that kind of leadership (Kornfield, 2022). Byproducts of mindfulness are empathy and compassion. As "future-ready leaders," we must pay attention to what is happening, market trends, global events, the environment, and understand our impact on others, the environment and overall ecosystem so we can consciously choose how to respond, which requires self-management and compassion (Chiu, 2023). Compassion is also critical to strategic decision making, it strengthens our resilience, builds our agency and power, enables us to face reality, find meaning, and respond with ingenuity

(Chiu, 2023). Emotional and social intelligence are also correlated to increased productivity, employee satisfaction, engagement, client service and revenue (Chiu, 2023). In turn, employee engagement is correlated to 18% more sales, 15% more production and 25% more profit than lower engagement levels and the manager is responsible for 70% of the variance in team engagement (Gallup, 2024a).

In doing the inner work required to develop conscious leadership, self-awareness, self-management and compassion, we become more aware, effective and attentive, managing our nervous systems, and our emotional, mental and spiritual energy. Managing yourself begins with understanding stress, your nervous system, and the importance of your breath (Hunter, 2023). This understanding also allows you to recognize stress responses in others on your team or in your community and organizations. We can consciously choose to bring a calm mindful consciousness and awareness to our own lives but also our families, teams, organizations, communities, the earth, and the cosmos for the greater good, to ensure more compassionate, change resilient, innovative, strategic and conscious solutions are identified, decisions made, and resolutions to conflict are achieved.

Given the chaos, volatility and uncertainty in our world, one can see that intellectual and physical flexibility, systems and design thinking[2], shared leadership in community, strategic thinking and planning to anticipate change and build change resilience, are now essential. Add managing ourselves and our

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[2] Design thinking is a problem-solving process used to design innovative practical solutions focused on understanding the end user of a system, or the customer, and their needs.

energy to that list. Everything is energy at its most fundamental level and comes into resonance with the energy around it; the energy we bring influences our environment and other people, impacting our emotional, mental and spiritual levels, so it is important to be aware of energy and surround yourself with life-giving positive energy and limit exposure to, or transmute, toxic or detrimental energy (Karim, 2024). It is up to us to change the script and become the leaders our teams, organizations, communities and the world so desperately need.

Teamwork and Communities

The ability to build, leverage and motivate geographically distributed, innovative teams with diverse perspectives, backgrounds, and skill sets is crucial for building trust and team cohesiveness to solve today and tomorrow's complex problems. To achieve high performance, we must develop not only teams with psychological safety but communities of empowered equals, all contributing, with open and honest communication, without games or politics, able to proactively resolve conflict and where everyone is a leader (Macadam, 2022). This kind of leadership is a practice and can only be learned by doing it; it is a journey (Macadam, 2022). In times of crisis, psychological safety is even more important, making the difference between organizations that innovate and adapt to those that don't (Hadley, et al., 2023). A new leadership paradigm must also include agility to anticipate and manage change, lifelong learning, and a team-based approach which emphasizes empathy, compassion, respect, inclusivity, collaboration, interconnectedness and shared responsibility. Technology giant, Google, studied effective teams, those who generated more revenue, had better retention rates, harnessed diverse ideas, were more creative, rated twice as

effective by executives, and they identified the five keys of an effective team are: psychological safety (the most important), dependability, structure and clarity, meaning of work, and impact of the work (Hunter, 2023). Also, in Gallup's survey of over 183,000 teams over thirty years, the things that separate the best teams are manager talent, playing to team members' strengths, meaningful coaching conversations, frequency of recognition, leadership training, setting motivational goals, and ongoing development (Gallup, 2024a). These both underscore the importance of psychological safety, leadership development, team development, recognition, training and continuous improvement as well as serving a greater mission. In addition, the best teams have three types of goals, individual, team and customer, where value creation comes in (Gallup, 2024a).

We have examined the state and results of leadership in crisis, the perceptions of leadership, living in a VUCA world, common leadership styles, inner work, the environment, the importance of building diverse teams and community, change resilience, stress response, inner work, the environment and our interconnectedness to the entire ecosystem. Now, we will discuss the research study methods and results.

Research

Hypothesis

A new evolutionary leadership model is needed, one which acknowledges a larger purpose and mission requiring leadership development, continuous improvement, the development of knowledge and skills from inner work to establish healthy communities and organizations that are diverse, equitable, inclusive, and innovative, centered around value creation.

To test this hypothesis and identify or validate leadership solutions from the literature review and my lived experience, I structured a research program that included in depth interviews with leaders to gather qualitative and quantitative data in response to questions about their approach to leadership. Qualitative data provides the respondent's experience and perspective. Quantitative data provides how prevalent their experience is and establishes patterns among responses. Data was collected during interviews by recording responses by hand or via a video recording transcript. The data for each question was collated into a tabular format for analysis, pivot tables were used for word counts in responses. The research questions were formulated to have broad application to leadership and provide the space for addressing the hypothesis topics without leading respondents in any specific direction. I interviewed 10 people for one to two hours each who self-identified as visionary, pioneering or innovative leaders. Interviewees included leaders of diverse genders, ethnicities, from different industries, varied leadership positions, levels of leadership, different age groups, and were not enrolled in the Inner MBA program and had not completed it. The research questions asked of all participants were as follows:

Introductory Questions

1. Can you share a bit about your journey into conscious transformational leadership? What motivated you to pursue a leadership role?

2. What personal values or principles guide your leadership style?

3. What inner work do you feel has best prepared you for leadership?

4. What leadership style, practices, traits or skills do you see as foundational for leaders to develop?

5. What do you feel are the biggest benefits from practicing conscious transformational leadership in business, nonprofit organizations, political and government organizations?

Collaboration and Diversity/Team Building

6. How do you foster an environment that encourages diversity, psychological safety, communication, collaboration, trust and shared leadership among team members?

7. How do you measure your performance?

8. How does conscious transformational leadership influence the overall culture of your organization? How do you cultivate future leaders?

Challenges and Development

9. What are the biggest challenges you have faced in practicing conscious transformational leadership?

10. How do you stay informed and continually develop your skills in conscious leadership?

11. What advice or resources would you recommend to aspiring leaders? (books, courses, mentors)?

Vision and Future

12. How do you envision the future of leadership?

Methods

A combination of heuristic and organic methodologies was employed in this study. Heuristic methods were used to examine and evaluate literature, leadership styles and whether they solve practical, real-world problems, whether they address leadership development, building community, organizational development and change and spiritual aspects of leadership. I integrated research insights with over 40 years of lived experience in information technology in both business and government from multiple industries: manufacturing, healthcare, pharmaceutical, research, commercial and government contracting. I have also held leadership positions in civic nonprofit organizations. Utilizing an organic

approach allowed me to adapt to information and circumstances as the study progressed. Data collection methods include literature review, as discussed, my own observations, and results of the interviews.

Results and Discussion

Findings from the research interviews indicate the challenges faced by interviewees in leadership today include the organizational hierarchy, too many layers of management, cultural inertia, functional siloes, resistance to change, lack of respect, lack of continuous improvement, and lack of alignment to stated values, which leads to cognitive dissonance. The organizational hierarchy and too many levels of management are indicators of centralized decision-making at the top of the organizational structure, an autocratic style, and interviewees view this as an obstacle to employing a more modern conscious collaborative leadership model. These challenges are also cultural, indicate organizational change resistance, and therefore the need to address them by leaders in the interest of growth, continuous improvement, leadership development, healthy organizations and considering an organizational change management framework, supporting those aspects of the hypothesis. During the interviews, several interviewees indicated, with these challenges, they successfully made a difference applying this more modern style of leadership in their area of influence, with their teams or part of the organization, even if the rest of the organization or the upper levels of leadership were reluctant or resistant to change, but several mentioned they felt they had to keep it quiet until it was a proven success that could not be questioned or attacked.

In addition, another challenge cited was monetary incentives and rewards only going to the top leadership of the organization, rather than those who are creating the most value, typically closest to the customer or stakeholder at the bottom of the hierarchy. This practice correlates with an autocratic or authoritative style of leadership, where compensation and bonuses are paid to the top levels of the organization, perpetuating income inequity. Though controversial, the assertion is, this is not where the most value is created or delivered to the customer or stakeholder. As discussed earlier in this paper, CEOs are paid 290 times what the typical employee in their organization is paid. Are CEOs generating 290 times the value? As one respondent described it, organizational leaders do not talk about the organization's value story: how value is created, and by whom, and key competencies and skillsets required to produce that value, concluding that they likely do not even understand it nor focus on the value proposition. For boards of directors, the focus is on shareholders and short-term value rather than customer or business value. As reflected in pay disparities and this research, rewards do not follow the value created. This is a critical disconnect. Boards of Directors are focused on stock price, but it does not equate to value (Hinmon, 2023). This has also been my experience working in both small and large companies and contracting firms where there wasn't an understanding of value creation, nor the compensation or rewards aligned with those creating and delivering the value and accomplishment of strategic objectives. The one exception to this, in my lived experience, was at a large employee-owned contracting company, employees could purchase stock at a discount and people who delivered value aligned to the goals and objectives of the

corporation were given stock option bonuses, including those in non-leadership positions. Employees had ownership, which was reflected in the culture, which was respectful, professional, and focused on continuous improvement, excellence in project execution and value creation for customers and the company. In every other business, corporation, nonprofit or contracting company I've worked with, and with concurrence from my research, there isn't an understanding of, or focus on, the overall value creation and delivery story. As a strategist at heart, and in light of industry-standard strategic planning and portfolio management best practice, during the strategic planning process and budgeting, the portfolio of potential initiatives is evaluated first for alignment to organizational strategic goals, then the business case and return on investment are evaluated *in terms of business value*, to determine which initiatives would be prioritized, planned and funded. This is how strategy is executed and achieved. This approach ensures investment in the highest value initiatives to the organization. Employee benefits, compensation, and development is simply another form of an organization's investment except this type of investment continues to pay increasing dividends in the value provided by the employee over the time of their association with the organization vs. one initiative. The research, in addition to the disparity of pay between CEOs and typical employees and inequities by gender and ethnicity cited earlier, and the negative outcomes associated with pay inequity for organizations and individuals, indicate a need for a new leadership model that includes equitable compensation and development, centered around value creation, supporting these aspects of the hypothesis, but also leads to improved employee

engagement, retention, satisfaction, and productivity and better downstream economic impacts.

Benefits of a more conscious collaborative leadership style cited by interviewees include: less drama, more respect, psychological safety, equality, valuing differences, producing better products, services, ideas and decisions, and a more positive mindset and enjoyable environment. The highest occurring responses among interviewees were higher collaboration and customer satisfaction. This research also supports the literature, a McKinsey & Company survey shows psychological safety is more important than ever, and leaders can build psychological safety by creating a positive team environment, which is correlated to collaboration and innovation in organizations, gains the benefits of diversity, and the ability to adapt well to change (McKinsey, 2021)., while an authoritative leadership style is detrimental to innovation and psychological safety (Imran, et al., 2024).

When discussing benefits of a leadership style or leadership practices, a related topic is how to measure performance. The respondents varied considerably in their responses to ways they measure their performance from outcomes, customer satisfaction, level of engagement, speed or velocity, value creation and delivery cycles, the amount of curiosity, number of failures to measuring how experimental they are. Satisfaction, staff retention and recruitment were additional performance measures cited. Measuring the number of improvements made, leading and lagging performance indicators, using a net promoter score to measure engagement and collaboration were also measures

mentioned. 40% of respondents indicated organizations should measure what matters, the value produced or outcomes rather than time or activity. All respondents indicated measuring performance and acting based on performance was their standard practice.

When it comes to leadership values and principles, interviewees cited 56 unique values or principles that guide their leadership style. Of those 56 values and principles, the top 16 values, those that were most prevalent, cited more than once, and the number of interviewees who cited that value or principle appear in Table 1.

Table 1

Guiding Values and Principles Cited by Interviewees

Values	Count
teams	4
honesty	4
communication	3
people	3
mission	3
integrity	3
vision	2
authenticity	2
relationships	2
diversity	2
trust	2
equality	2
presence	2

Values	Count
help others	2
inspired	2
integration	2

These are not the types of values or principles associated with the traditional or common leadership styles evaluated earlier in this paper. These values are associated with a more collaborative, intentional, conscious leadership style built on deeply personal intrinsic values such as building teams, having a vision, equanimity[3], communication, serving a greater mission with authenticity, integrity, honesty, equality, relationships, helping others and building trust. These values reflect a level of introspection or inner work to cultivate self-awareness, and a broader sense of mission more than profits, an important purpose, people working together in diverse, innovative teams toward a higher purpose of delivering value that cannot be done by individuals alone. These guiding principles and values support the hypothesis of a different kind of leadership style being employed, one that is intentional and conscious, collaborative, team building, integrated, community building, innovative and guided from within, with self-awareness and serving a greater mission. Next, we consider the responses to questions about organizational culture.

An organization's culture includes beliefs, norms, language, symbols, traditions, customs, rituals, and, yes, especially values. So, the discussion of

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[3] Equanimity indicates a calm, steady composure in a difficult situation.

values naturally leads to a discussion of culture. When asked how to foster an environment that encourages values of diversity, psychological safety, communication, collaboration, trust and shared leadership, the answers were very much in alignment with these values. Suggestions to endeavor to include no judgement, no agenda, foster authenticity, self-awareness, a moral compass or integrity, respect, compassion, empathy, healing, perspectives, continuous learning, promote diversity and psychological safety, having an open heart, letting go of ego and eliminating toxicity. All of these suggestions support the hypothesis as each of these indicate self-awareness, leadership development, continuous improvement and would create healthy communities and organizations that are diverse, equitable, inclusive and innovative.

What about the inner work that prepares one for leadership? This is the most important subject of this research and the Inner MBA program. Respondents spoke candidly about the inner work they had undergone, which they felt prepared them best for leadership. Only one respondent mentioned formal education, describing an organizational development postgraduate program that was unusual, saying it resembled five years of therapy. The other respondents discussed old leadership styles and paradigms, rooted in scarcity, that they had once found comfortable. However, they emphasized that evolving into a transformational conscious and collaborative leader requires "humbling up, looking in the mirror," or "working on your own stuff," to continuously learn about oneself. This process involves willingly undergoing "reckonings" with one's thinking, subconscious behavior, and approaches, to identify one's personal

demons, identify one's triggers and behavior patterns, and address past traumas. 80% of those interviewed reported they felt guided on this journey, often led by a spiritual, greater overall mission, or awakening. These responses are in alignment with the inner work as part of the Inner MBA curriculum.

One of the questions which generated a significant response from interviewees was to provide their recommendations of leadership style, practices, traits or skills that they see as foundational to develop. Interviewees see communications skills as a clear priority, followed by continuous improvement and collaboration, then courage, being a change agent, developing intuition and team building skills. Table 2 lists responses since providing recommendations for leadership development is an important part of the purpose of this research. These responses align with the attributes of a new model of leadership discussed earlier, yet differ from the common leadership styles analyzed, and therefore support the hypothesis.

Table 2

Foundational Leadership Style, Practice, Traits or Skills to Develop

Response	Count	Response	Count	Response	Count
communication skills	6	promote diversity	1	touchpoints	1
continuous improvement	4	honesty	1	body language	1
community	4	shared leadership	1	autonomy	1

Response	Count	Response	Count	Response	Count
collaborate	4	ideation	1	normalize spirituality	1
courage	3	practice	1	soul	1
change agent	3	customer experience	1	openness	1
intuition	3	psychological safety	1	spiritual	1
team building	3	intention	1	organization	1
value alignment	2	rewards distribution	1	culture	1
integrity	2	camaraderie	1	patience	1
self-reflection	2	spiritual intelligence	1	no games	1
authenticity	2	data-driven decisions	1	no programming	1
let go of ego	2	peacemaker	1	transparency	1
develop people	2	suggestions	1	metrics	1
purpose	2	programming	1	visionary	1
empower people	2	teams over individuals	1	mindfulness	1
flatten organizations	2	promote justice	1	adaptability	1

Response	Count	Response	Count	Response	Count
vulnerability	2	break down siloes	1	new paradigm	1
Spiritual/business bridge	1	diversity	1		
recognition	1	stewardship	1		

A related question explores how to continue developing oneself as a leader. A majority of interviewees emphasized the critical importance of continuous learning. Reading was the most popular suggestion, followed by staying open to new experiences, taking training, participating in workshops, listening to podcasts, meeting with peers, observing other organizations, and engaging in industry groups. Additional recommendations included quickly synthesizing information, listening to and developing your team, staying curious, fostering ideation and innovation, and cultivating creativity. Interviewees also highlighted the value of seeking feedback and maintaining direct communication with customers as essential practices for ongoing leadership development. The suggestions related to leadership development and continuous improvement support the hypothesis.

Interview participants also had suggestions on ways to foster an environment which encourages diversity, psychological safety, communication, collaboration, trust and shared leadership among team members. Their suggestions include: exhibit integrity and respect, be authentic, vulnerable, curious, admit mistakes, decentralize decision-making and authority, incentivize

collaboration and empower teams, reward and compensate the people creating the value, ensure a "no judgement zone," provide space, communicate directly, develop people, be present, look for the good, promote justice, develop relationships, enable change, develop community, measure the right things, apply systems and design thinking, incentivize the right behaviors, be open to new ideas, be proactive, give permission to experiment and to fail, acknowledge and recognize people, provide protection for pilot projects and support teams. All of the suggestions support a new leadership model and the hypothesis.

Interviewees had insightful suggestions for cultivating future leaders, from more traditional methods like a management training program to more modern suggestions to reward performers and develop everyone as future leaders. The most frequent response, by most respondents, was to be, and have, role models or, "way showers" who could model this kind of conscious collaborative leadership for others. The interviewees also repeated suggestions from other questions, such as continuous development, promoting diversity and valuing differences, enabling change, being vulnerable, taking criticism, ideation, innovation and creativity, mindfulness, collaboration, ensure psychological safety and trust. But, also, they provided more specifics to recognize talent and executive functioning, conducting regular check-in discussions, having an open-door policy to encourage open communication, providing opportunities for growth, establishing healthy teams, enabling collaboration through technology, creating value and also being able to articulate the value story and where everyone's activities contribute to that value story, measuring the outcomes and incentivizing shared responsibility, accountability and ownership. The responses

to cultivating future leaders support the hypothesis in establishing healthy organizations by including these factors in developing future leaders.

The most interesting conversations during the interviews were the respondent's responses to how they envision the future of leadership. Everyone interviewed was positive about the evolution of leadership and of the future, though several said we, as a society, would go through some discomfort, stress and uncertainty as the old hierarchical, command and control type of organizational structure and leadership paradigm and systems built on that paradigm, are forced to change and modernize. Respondents felt there is a gravitational shift to better leadership and better leaders with each generation, people want to be valued for who they are, what they contribute, and working collaboratively. The old paradigm is seen as "stagnating," "lacking heart," "not evolving," and "too competitive vs collaborative." So, what does this future leadership look like? Answers to this question were a continuation of the practices, traits, skills and policies that have been discussed. Those interviewed unanimously see self-leadership being the most important and prevalent in the responses, the ability to manage oneself, as well as leaders with compassion and empathy, being able to be vulnerable by being one's authentic self, realizing it is okay to be flawed, understanding we are equals and all have our unique contribution to make. Integrity and character will continue to be the highest values and critical to leadership. Having a deep understanding of oneself provides an understanding of serving a higher mission or purpose and our interconnectedness with life, a heaven on earth, becoming increasingly certain about one's spiritual mission, energy, power, clarity and purpose. Interviewees

also mentioned people would continue to develop their character, flexibility, agility, adaptability and change resilience as well as continue to work together with innovation and creativity to diagnose and resolve problems of increasing complexity. Leaders have a growth mindset, focused on adding value. All interviewees agreed future leaders would be more female and ethnic minorities, as there is more respect for our differences and a greater understanding of the value and benefits of diverse opinions and diversity of experience and background in teams and in teams of teams, organizations. People will continue to be able to work from anywhere with more work/life balance and sustainable earth-preserving practices. There will be more of a sense of community and connection, more teamwork and collaboration as well as more disruption of industries from artificial intelligence, machine learning, as well as innovation from people working together to innovatively solve complex problems and invent solutions. To assist in achieving this future, a suggested framework of practical activities for leadership development, support and organizational change are included at the end of this study.

There were a few unexpected findings in the research. The interviewees were diverse in age, gender, ethnicity, industry, levels of management and position, but were open and forward-thinking. All interviewees were already pursuing self-awareness and inner work. Respondents had pursued mindfulness and meditation, and a concerted effort to build teams, encourage collaboration and build psychological safety, without any structure or process such as a leadership style or formal leadership development. Another surprising finding was that respondents mentioned role models but did not mention mentors or

mentoring programs. This is surprising given that 84% of U.S. Fortune 500 and 100% of Fortune 50 companies have mentor programs, and companies with mentoring programs had 18% better than average profits while those that don't had 45% worse than average profits (Forbes, 2022). Another surprise in the research was that no performance measures were mentioned by any of the interviewees for measuring organizational health, psychological safety, diversity or equity, although the respondents did cite performance measures for innovation, engagement and collaboration. Although much has been learned in this study, it has its limitations.

Additional Research

Leadership style and practice is a complex subject that has been extensively studied over decades. However, further research is needed to deepen the understanding of the interplay between leadership, teams, and organizations, particularly within the context of change and transformation. Such research could provide valuable insights by quantifying the impacts of an evolutionary conscious leadership style and its associated practices on personal, team, organizational and community outcomes. Additionally, more investigation is required to assess how an evolving leadership model might influence political and governmental institutions. A leadership model focused on equity, sustainability, diversity, collaboration and innovation—where individuals contribute as equals to serve the greater good—could present a constructive alternative to the polarized, divisive, competitive, and siloed systems often driven by an "us vs. them" mindset. At the same time, it is crucial to consider and analyze counterarguments to this proposed evolution in leadership.

Counterarguments

Numerous counterarguments challenge the hypothesis supporting a new leadership model that emphasizes purpose, continuous improvement, personal development, inner work, and cultivating healthy, diverse, equitable, inclusive, and innovative organizations centered on value. One assumption underlying this study is that leaders, aspiring leaders, and others have good intentions, genuinely strive to become the best leaders they can be, care about their impact on the organization and the world, and aim to generate optimal results and value. However, it is essential to acknowledge that not all individuals share this mindset. Some leaders may resist change, lack interest in self-improvement, or be indifferent to their broader impact. For instance, a leader in a hierarchical organization who relies on an authoritative leadership style may be reluctant to share or delegate his power and authority for the betterment of the organization unless incentivized or compelled by external pressures. This resistance highlights a significant obstacle to adopting a new leadership paradigm. Nonetheless, this counterargument does not diminish the urgency of addressing the leadership crisis or the negative impacts and limitations of traditional leadership models. Change is imperative to overcome current and future challenges, foster organizational success, and meet evolving demands, even if resistance is inevitable.

Another counterargument suggests that the current state of leadership is adequate, and while improvements are possible, they may not be essential. This perspective mirrors arguments seen in other areas, such as climate change, where some claim that because issues appear disconnected or non-urgent, they do not

warrant immediate action, so no action is taken. However, this viewpoint is flawed. Leadership—much like climate change—has a far reaching impact that influences every member of a team, organization, community, and the world. Addressing shortcomings in leadership is crucial not only to resolve existing challenges but also to build a future that prioritizes the collective well-being and sustainable success.

Cost and resource constraints represent another significant counterargument. Implementing a new leadership model often requires substantial investments in training, time, and resources, as changes to organizational structures can be both costly and time-consuming. Organizations may argue that such investments are not feasible or sustainable, particularly if the returns on investment are not immediately apparent or easily measurable. However, the long-term benefits of adopting a new model far outweigh the initial costs. As discussed, organizations that embrace such changes are better positioned to manage disruption, navigate chaos, foster innovation, and adapt to change. These advantages yield significant returns over time, demonstrating that the short term costs of training and support are a worthwhile investment for future success.

Some may argue that focusing on continuous improvement and inner work detracts from immediate productivity, dismissing these concepts as unrealistic, overly abstract, or irrelevant psychological jargon. Critics might contend that such approaches distract from direct organizational goals and could potentially reduce efficiency. However, this perspective often stems from a lack of understanding of the proven benefits of continuous improvement, psychological

safety, leadership development, mindfulness, self-management, and self-awareness. As outlined in this paper, these practices contribute significantly to individual and organizational success, fostering sustainable growth and long-term efficiency.

Changing organizational leadership and culture is challenging and requires buy-in from all levels. Long-standing leaders may resist a new leadership model, viewing it as a challenge to established power dynamics or a threat to their roles, which can create resistance across the organization. In addition, some may argue that this new type of leadership is just a fad and will disappear. It is true that organizational change management is required to support this change across an organization. It is not true that a leader couldn't implement this change for themselves, their team(s) or in some organizations that are open to change and value improvement. At the end of this paper, organizational change management is discussed and a practical high-level framework for change management is provided. Simply because resistance or organizational inertia may exist, will need to be proactively planned for and addressed, and a process for change management followed, does not indicate that change does not need to occur.

Another counterargument is that this leadership style or model is perceived to be complex or difficult to implement because it relies on inner work and is adaptable to the leader involved, so it cannot be consistently applied across varied organizational structures and industries. This is exactly the strength and adaptability of this leadership model to meet the leader and organization where they are as this is a journey that is configurable. This leadership model is similar

to maturity models[4] where this model is adaptable and descriptive, but not prescriptive.

Organizations are inherently political, individuals and groups bargain and negotiate for power and position, people must be controlled, so leaders that employ this style will not succeed. This is another argument from the old hierarchical command and control structure and authoritative leadership style, which was discussed earlier in this study, and which is no longer effective. Yes, organizations and people within them can be political, but that is a result of the organizational culture and current leadership. There is nothing inherent in being an organization that makes it political or apolitical. Organizational culture and leadership can and must change to face the challenges of today and the future and thrive. In my experience, collaboration, rather than competition, acknowledging our place in a larger ecosystem, produces much greater benefits for the good of all than the interests of any individual or group.

These counterarguments underscore the challenges of the state of leadership and evolving leadership practices but also emphasize the importance of proactive, intentional change to overcome these obstacles and create sustainable, positive impacts for the leader, for the people and teams in organizations, the organization itself and society.

A Framework for Transforming Leadership and Organizations

Based on the results of this study, this framework serves as a set of practices forming a practical roadmap for transforming one's leadership, developing

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[4] Maturity models are frameworks used by organizations to assess the current state of maturity against a standard.

conscious collaborative leaders, and thereby creating a culture sea change on teams, in organizations and political systems. All suggestions may not resonate with everyone, the objective is to approach the suggestions with openness and curiosity, as a continuous journey, we begin with further developing the leader or aspiring leader, followed by organizational leadership then organizational change management.

Development of Future Ready Leaders

All of us carry past trauma or unconscious triggers that influence our behavior, often operating within our comfort zones or on autopilot. Yet, real growth and transformation occur in the discomfort of inner work. This is where we truly examine and understand ourselves and our motivations—with compassion and kindness. Through this process, we develop empathy, compassion, and evolve, not only as individuals but also as leaders who prioritize the well-being of people, the organization, and the community over personal agendas. This concept transcends traditional servant leadership, though the two are not mutually exclusive. Throughout my career, I've found this type of leader to be rare and immensely valuable, though most organizations fail to recognize them. Yes, I assert through the evidence provided in this study, this is exactly the kind of leader we need, now and into the future.

Inner work and developing soft skills are far more challenging than any external work because this work requires facing yourself and your behavior as an observer. It is unique to everyone—their past, triggers, and behaviors—but many people experience similar practices and insights along the journey toward self-awareness. One could describe the process as a repetitive, cyclical practice that

becomes easier with time. Some of the most frequently mentioned practices that aid in this work include meditation or prayer, mindfulness, setting aside the ego, practicing self-compassion, openness, maintaining a growth mindset, journaling, relaxation techniques, breathing exercises, and a willingness to listen to others, such as mentors or therapists. All of these practices serve the goal of increasing self-awareness, focus, calm, consciousness, allowing individuals to recognize and change unconscious behavior patterns into consciously chosen ones.

This process also requires self-regulation and an understanding of how stress affects the nervous system. Monitoring the state of the nervous system is essential (Hunter, 2023). The introspective part, depending on your level of comfort or trauma, may require the help of a trained and licensed therapist. This is the most crucial piece and must be done with self-compassion and kindness, observing oneself without judgment. We ask ourselves a series of reflective questions about our behavior: When thinking of a specific situation, why do I behave this way? What underlying reasons contribute to this behavior? When have I behaved this way in the past? What emotions am I feeling in these moments, and when have I felt this way before? What am I feeling now? What is my earliest memory of experiencing this pattern or emotion, and what was happening at that time? Is this feeling relevant to the present moment, or is it a trigger from the past? What story am I telling myself about this? Is the story I am telling myself true, or is it merely my interpretation? What alternative response could I choose in the future that would better align with my conscious values and self-respect?

This practice is not about blaming others; it focuses entirely on understanding our own behavior, thoughts, and approaches. It is a way to become more aware so that we can consciously choose how we think, feel, and act in different situations. Importantly, this process is not about feeling guilty or self-critical; it must be carried out with self-compassion, kindness, and understanding. This foundational work is a journey which allows us to become conscious leaders as well as to recognize stress responses in others. This work also has benefits for all of our relationships and communities. It is always a choice to do the inner work. Often, patterns from wounds will repeat themselves in one's life until there is healing and release. When one builds self-awareness of wounding and how it manifests, one can recognize when it occurs and choose a more conscious path.

The next suggestion in the framework is to increase emotional intelligence, specifically, awareness of the Karpmann Drama Triangle. The Karpmann Triangle is a social model of dysfunctional relationships, developed by Stephen Karpman, M.D., in 1968, with actors or faces of drama being a perpetrator, a victim and a rescuer (Graham, 2017). Recognizing when this dysfunction occurs and discussing it directly with the individuals involved is invaluable in preventing a toxic environment and dysfunctional relationships. Suggestions to consider are discussing the model openly and how roles change, ensuring equality among the team, realizing everyone has choices, and setting and maintaining healthy boundaries and behaviors.

Psychological safety is an attribute of an environment where team members feel safe to share their ideas, information, experiences, make mistakes,

take risks, or ask for assistance, without fear of it being held against you, retribution or negative consequences. There are ways to increase psychological safety by many of the suggestions in this paper, fostering open honest and direct communication, emphasizing the importance of everyone's input and participation, encouraging experimentation as learning experiences, treating everyone with respect, compassion and kindness, acting with integrity, authenticity and humility.

Another suggestion is to identify unconscious or implicit bias in yourself, your teams and organizations. These can be good or bad, but they are subconscious assumptions, beliefs and attitudes that the brain uses to process information quickly, as a short cut. However, these biases also reinforce stereotypes and keep us from making clear unbiased decisions, including in recruiting, hiring, promotions and relationships in organizations. There are many of these implicit biases that operate without our awareness unless we take concerted effort to identify them and put structures or processes in place to avoid them. An example is to use gender-neutral language in job postings and remove names from resumes so to avoid gender bias in recruitment. There are many courses available on identifying and avoiding implicit bias that would help address unconscious bias in ourselves, our teams and our organizations.

Having a vision, a plan and intentions are important in leadership. To gain clarity in yourself, your teams and organizations, set clear personal and organizational mission, vision, goals, and objectives with the team and organizational stakeholders, then communicate them widely and map them to the tactical steps to reach them and measure effectiveness. Provide a visual

dashboard, in a prominent place, displaying progress against the objectives and goals, and therefore fulfilling the mission. Revisit this often to determine if any changes need to be made. Related to setting these important targets, be aware that organizational policies, structures and culture influences behavior. Review the policies, actions, and the culture of your teams and organizations. Do they create and reinforce the culture and behaviors desired, or do they need to be revised? Ask team members for their thoughts and perspectives on changes.

As discussed in this study, there are many skills, principles and practices to further develop as leaders. This work is not limited to those in leadership positions but applies to all who endeavor to increase one's self-awareness, self-management and effectiveness during these disruptive chaotic times. Development of these attributes also benefits one's sense of wellness, one's relationships, teams, organizations, community and the larger society. A list of principles, skillsets, traits and practices as part of an evolution of leadership include:

- Integrity. Integrity builds trust and is part of one's character. If one cannot keep their word, acknowledge it and apologize, make amends, ensure this is a very rare occurrence based on unexpected circumstances.
- Mindfulness, self-awareness and self-regulation ensures we monitor our stress and the impacts on our nervous system, understanding the importance of taking care of ourselves so that we can be at our best with our full capacity to remain calm and make the best decisions by monitoring our state of being, breathing through the nose, getting adequate sleep and exercise (Hunter, 2023). Look for signs of stress in

family, friends, teammates, and people in the organizations, share
information about the effect of stress on the nervous system, offer help,
suggest taking a break, treat them with compassion and help them
regulate their nervous system.

- Cultivate positivity, always look for the good in others and assume positive
  intent. If someone has proven to lack integrity, set healthy boundaries with
  them. When things occur that seem negative or disastrous, take a moment
  to brainstorm and write down all of the positive things that could result. If
  you notice someone who tries to control or diminish others, this
  dysfunction stems from insecurity and becomes a habit, it creates a toxic
  environment and is a morale killer in teams, communities and
  organizations, deal with this directly with the person(s) involved with
  compassion and offer suggestions of counseling, mindfulness and doing
  the hard work to build self-esteem to change this behavior. Our culture
  often focuses on lack and scarcity. Recognize and celebrate abundance,
  there is more than enough for everyone when we work together and share
  what we have. Winning does not mean someone is losing. Energy goes
  where your focus is and multiplies so focus on wins, successes, creativity,
  abundance, our strengths and capabilities.

- Monitor and manage one's energy and the energy of one's environment,
  teams, communities and organizations. Everything is energy and is
  constantly exchanged with our environment and with others (Karim,
  2022). You are not separate; you are connected to everyone and everything
  in our world as a large interdependent ecosystem (Currivan, 2024). Limit

exposure to the energy of television violence, fearful news, social media comparisons, etc. There are many ways to shift one's energy in a positive direction and further develop awareness. Some suggestions for experimentation are: smile, laugh, practice gratitude, connect with nature or animals, listen to peaceful healing or uplifting upbeat music, engage in a physical activity such as dancing, help someone else, write a thank you note, think of happy memories, conduct an experiment, go on local adventures to an art museum, take a walk, ride a bike, go roller skating, go to a park, watch birds or animals or the snow in Winter, the Fall leaves outside a window, feel the Sun on your face on a beautiful day, identify all of the things that you make you laugh, are fun or joyful and start doing those. Keep a "life lived list" with accomplishments, experiences, places traveled, this serves as a great reminder for reflection when feeling down or something doesn't go our way. Pay attention to how your body feels around others, spend more time with the people who make you feel safe, happy or loved.

- Cultivate one's awareness of a spiritual dimension, awareness of experiences of awe, whatever that is for you as everyone is unique. This could be in a church of some sort, spending time in nature, spending time with loved ones, cultivating creativity, mindfulness and relaxation, developing compassion, empathy and intuitive abilities or many more situations. Normalize spiritual seeking.

- Value and celebrate diversity and differences. We are each unique and how wonderful that makes us a human ecosystem with each having a unique

piece of the puzzle. Value experiences, being interested in people, when we listen to their stories with an open heart, we naturally find our commonalities and celebrate them, so intentionally and consciously look for differences with curiosity and openness.

- A natural byproduct of mindfulness and self-awareness is the development of kindness and compassion (Harvard Business Publishing, 2023). Exhibiting kindness, compassion, and valuing diversity isn't encouraged in our current polarized and divisive society. Kindness and compassion build goodwill and relationships based on integrity and trust while dispelling fear and darkness. Dispel misconceptions, one can exhibit compassion, kindness and understanding while still advocating equity of contribution and accountability.

- Adopt an attitude of curiosity, wonder, and openness to new ideas. Ask questions, seek to understand rather than to be understood, try new things, learn something new every day, travel, and break patterns. Understand that if one already knows everything, one can learn nothing.

- Setting clear, healthy boundaries is a crucial skill for a leader to build psychological safety, healthy, open communication, and healthy relationships. Articulate values and expectations, then live them. Actively address and heal dysfunction. Be a good role model of one's values. Hold yourself accountable to these values and foster accountability within your teams, organizations, communities, country and globally.

- Improve communication skills as a continuous journey. The ability to convey information effectively and listen actively with full presence is a

crucial skillset that is never perfected, there will always be room for improvement. Communicate first with the audience in mind. Identify the audience's preferences and perspectives and craft the message for that audience. Find common ground, develop the ability to facilitate conversations even in the face of chaos or difficulty, develop the ability to analyze and communicate ideas verbally, in writing and graphically. In a crisis, communicating early and often, with humility and transparency, while demonstrating a commitment to one's values and sharing power, builds psychological safety and trust (Edmundson, 2020). Realize communication is a two-way street, it must be received by the receiver and understood to count as effective communication. Leaders who demonstrate open, honest, humble communication, create psychological safety, which is more important than ever (Hadley, et al., 2023). Psychological safety can be created by encouraging speaking up in all conversations, illustrating the benefits to employees as valuable contributions, asking direct questions to get perspectives, monitoring for any negative consequences to eliminate them, and expressing appreciation and rewarding acts of candor as generosity (Hadley, et al., 2023).

- Do the work to develop diverse, creative, teams and communities that have psychological safety. To enable and facilitate high performance, you must become a community of equals (Macadam, 2024). In

- Exercise and build creativity and a willingness to experiment and fail. Creativity begets creativity. If we are not failing, we are not experimenting. Encourage creativity and 'out-of-the-box thinking' within teams and in

organizations. Build the capacity to experiment and find creative solutions to challenges.

- Manage and prioritize your time effectively by aligning tasks with your values to maximize productivity. In today's distraction-driven world, focus and attention are essential. Recognize that routine activities build lasting habits, so ensure you're concentrating on what truly matters in the present moment.

- Maintain flexibility and adaptability, openness to change, development and continuous improvement, continuously evaluate and make adjustments.

- Measure performance by measuring what matters and use measurements to improve, not as a fault-finding mission. Use measures to identify problem areas to solve. Measuring takes time, energy and resources, be aware and be sure to prioritize as visibility and measures also influence behavior.

Leadership Development by Organizations

Supporting leaders with leadership development is essential to develop and reinforce leaders. Throughout this study, the importance of leadership development has repeatedly been raised and substantiate yet only 60% of leaders report they receive any training from their organizations (O.C. Tanner Institute, 2024). Harvard Business Publishing's 2024 report on leadership development indicates current training programs are focused on automation, artificial intelligence and machine learning, strengthening corporate culture, and building a capacity to innovate, all consistent with a world in transformation (Harvard

Business Publishing, 2024). In the Harvard survey, 70% responded that it is important for leaders to develop a wider range of effective leadership behaviors such as connecting employees to the organization's purpose, emotional intelligence, managing conflict, handling employee stress and burnout, polarization, clarity in dynamic situations and embracing ambiguity (Harvard Business Publishing, 2024). Also, 58% of the respondents said it is important for leaders to improve their ability to function in constant change, uncertainty and stress (Harvard Business Publishing, 2024). Leaders also need training in building psychological safety by building a positive team climate and demonstrating supportive behaviors (McKinsey & Company, 2021). With the benefits discussed, it is in an organization's best interest to provide leadership development and training for not only leaders, but team members as well.

Organizational Change

Excellence in organizational change management with a structured defined approach is correlated to eight times the success on U.S. projects with excellent change management (Prosci, 2023). Continuous improvement is an evolution. This study seeks to evolve leadership practices and provide support for leaders and teams embracing change. Often, the organizations that need to change the most are the most resistant because change challenges the existing norms, routines, culture and comfort zones. Change requires a clear strategy and consistent effort, starting with understanding the current culture, defining the desired culture through a vision, setting specific measurable goals, values and behaviors that need to change and obtaining a commitment by leaders to embody the new values to set an example for the rest of the organization and form a

change coalition. Successful change implementation requires acknowledgement and respect for the people side of change, that people have awareness of the change, the desire to change, knowledge of the change and its impacts, the ability to change, and reinforcement for making the change (Prosci, 2023). This means there must be clear communication of the changes, the reasons behind the change, the benefits, how it impacts everyone and proactively address fears and resistance. Then, the critical step where organizations often fail, is that change requires reinforcement through incentives, policies, practices, and systems to ensure sustainment, then regularly measuring outcomes against the goals, communicating those measures and progress, celebrating wins when goals are achieved. Prosci's research shows mid-level leaders are the most resistant to change (Prosci, 2023), so these are the group of leaders that are the best to include in leading change initiatives, forming a change coalition and in forming strategies to address change resistance. Building change resilience requires agility, adaptability, proactivity and perseverance. Organizations that create policies to support these will see more innovation, retention and prosperity yet only 30% of employees see their organizations as resilient, and those that do are nine times more likely to see themselves as resilient, which leads to an increase of 584% higher engagement and 233% more of a sense of fulfillment (O.C. Tanner Institute, 2024). The organization can reinforce this model of collaborative leaders by providing the opportunity, environment and culture to address change resistance proactively, promote adaptability and resilience, communication, aligned systems and structures, ensure a coalition of support and offering ongoing leadership development.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this review of the current state of leadership, with an evaluation of common leadership styles and a literature review, along with the research, confirms a leadership crisis shaped by present and future environmental factors and disruptions—all of which indicate urgent action and demand an evolution in leadership approaches. Mindfulness, self-awareness, and self-regulation are essential for enabling leaders to respond effectively and make sound strategic decisions in chaotic or high-stress situations, both now and in the future. Insights from the Inner MBA program, this research, and related literature, emphasize the critical importance of psychological safety, integrity, empathy, compassion, change resilience, innovation, collaboration, and systems thinking to build strong teams and communities, acknowledging our interdependence as part of a larger creative ecosystem. The findings from this study support a shift toward a more conscious and collaborative leadership model, one that is well-suited for a world marked by rapid change, technological advances, climate challenges, and geopolitical crises. Since leaders set the organization's direction and shape its culture—directly influencing productivity, engagement, morale, and overall performance—their leadership style is more important than ever. Rather than focusing solely on profit, power, and prestige, this is a compelling case for an evolved leadership style that serves a larger mission, is part of an interdependent ecosystem which fosters equitable value through people, upholds integrity, and emphasizes sustainable resource stewardship, benefitting all stakeholders and the common good, as reflected in the hypothesis.

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