

Leadership for a Changing World



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There are only a few certainties in life: death, taxes... and change. And the rate of change is speeding up—rapidly. Several factors are causing this acceleration: the expansion of technology and knowledge, globalization and the changing demographic majority. Let's take a look at how these factors are impacting the landscape of leadership.

Technology: Ray Kurzweil, in his 2001 essay "The Law of Accelerating Returns," asserts that technology won't experience 100 years of progress in the 21st century—it will be more like 20,000 years of progress (at today's rate).

Knowledge: By 1900, it had taken 150 years to double all human knowledge. Today it takes only one or two years, and by 2020, knowledge will double every 72 days, according to estimates.

Globalization: The competition for talent, resources and attention doesn't just come from the other members of your local chamber of commerce; it now comes from every high-rise, second bedroom and basement in the world.

Changing Demographic: The millennial generation (those born in the 1980s and 1990s) are the largest to enter the workforce since the baby boomer generation. Nurtured through a different era, this generation has a different value system, and they will play a key role in the changing nature of workplace dynamics.

Leadership over the past 50 years has been based on the premise that the organization is purely an economic entity. The priority was to develop structures, set controls and leverage capital as effectively as possible. This was accomplished through pyramids of hierarchies performing rigidly narrow tasks within clear guidelines.

Today, the speed of change demands a completely different leader: one who can rapidly adapt to change, requiring constant involvement in skill development. They will need to be expert in human capital, not just financial capital; master emotional intelligence, not just economic competence; know how to collaborate, not just control; lead through networks, not hierarchies; and align people through meaning and purpose, not structures and spreadsheets. Leadership will rely more on emotional and relational aptitude rather than technical or financial expertise.

Ultimately, in my view, the leaders who will succeed going forward will be those who can build leadership in others. Leadership is no longer about getting others to follow you, but building leadership in everyone around you. You do this by developing the mindset and emotional intelligence (self-awareness, self-confidence and self-management) and skills sets (communication, time-management, networking and team-building) so everyone can lead themselves in this constantly changing environment, thus leading you and the organization in the direction of your greater goals.

It comes down to this: The winning leaders of the future will be those who can develop leaders out of everyone in their organizations the fastest.

Ready, set, go!

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