



LEADERSHIP REIMAGINED

BLENDING WORLDS TO UNITE & IGNITE TRIBES

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A high-level exploration of how the intersection of neuroleadership, indigenous leadership philosophies, and Western leadership approaches can be leveraged to inspire performance and ignite potential in others.

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Executive Summary

The world has always been in a state of change, growth, and evolution. Leadership philosophies, theories, and approaches have attempted to shift in alignment with the evolution to best facilitate the change. However, as time progresses and the world gets more complicated, the pace of the change accelerates, and its complexity dramatically increases.

Western Leadership theories have pivoted to a “new leadership” approach to address the needs of the ever-changing world. Still, they do so to the exclusion of non-Western and Indigenous cultures. The one-culture-fits-all traditional approach is no longer viable in a global community.

A holistic, flexible approach that integrates relevant components of neuroleadership, indigenous leadership philosophies like Gada, and Western leadership approaches such as inclusive leadership is needed for leaders to navigate increasingly diverse and dynamic organizations effectively.

Leaders need to incorporate connecting with their people, flexing their leadership style, treating others with respect, acting with integrity, involving their team in decision-making, and creating safe and inclusive spaces into the core of their leadership practices.

A Glimpse of World Events in the Last Five Years

- Japan's emperor abdicated
- U.K. prime minister resigns
- Fire at Notre-Dame
- China Landed on the dark side of the moon
- First all-woman spacewalk
- COVID-19 declared a pandemic
- U.K. withdraws from the European Union
- George Floyd's death sparked global protests
- Brushfires burn 46 million acres of land in Australia
- U.S. leaves the Paris Climate Agreement
- Distribution of COVID-19 vaccines
- January 6 Insurrection in the U.S.
- Biden inaugurated as the 46th U.S. President
- U.S. rejoins Paris Climate Accord and WHO
- U.S. military withdrawal from Afghanistan
- President of Haiti assassinated
- Summer Olympics held in Tokyo
- Queen Elizabeth II dies & Charles becomes king
- Russian invasion of Ukraine
- Roe vs. Wade was overturned in the U.S
- Elon Musk takes over Twitter
- ChatGPT released
- Israel/Hamas War
- Iran's president dies
- New British Prime Minister
- Paris Olympics
- First female president sworn in for Mexico
- Donald Trump wins U.S. Presidential election



INTRODUCTION



In the last five years alone, society has experienced a pandemic, multiple wars, and significant political changes, among other challenges. In addition, globally, the world continues to struggle with gender, race, and ethnicity inequality, aging workforces, the rapid and ongoing introduction of disruptive emerging technology, and rising climate concerns (Christensen & Narisetti, 2024). These events and their echoes continue to impact the business and personal world. As a result, there is a need to rethink how those interconnected worlds are navigated.

While the brain tends to favor categorizing and theming information, the world today and in the future will not fit into traditional or defined boxes. Reimagining leadership to embrace a holistic, blended, flexible approach to managing, supporting, and engaging team members will be a critical next step for organizations wanting to accelerate their business growth and the evolution of society overall.

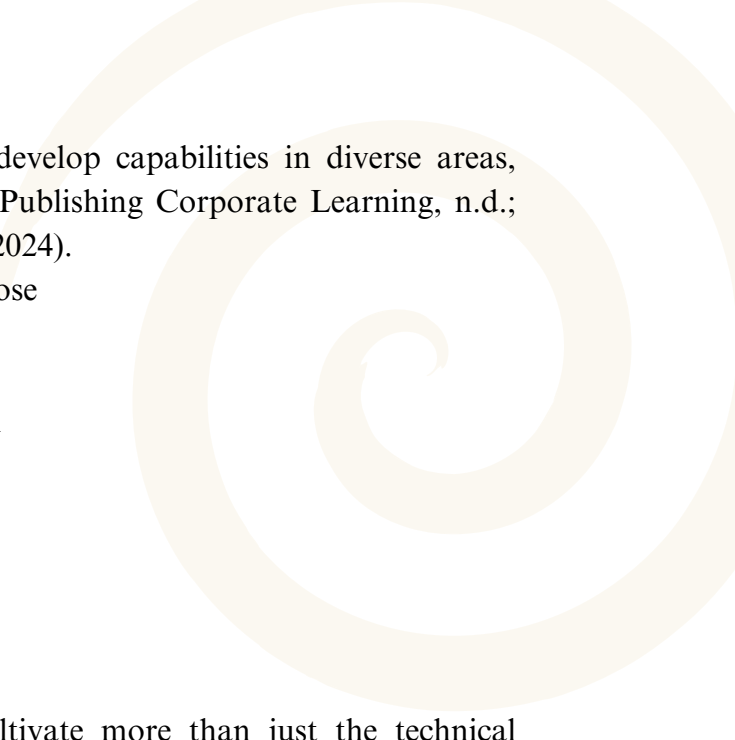
This paper will provide a high-level exploration of how the intersection of neuroleadership, indigenous leadership philosophies, and Western leadership approaches can be leveraged to inspire performance and ignite potential in others.

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

The present and future hold a world of constant transformation for organizations with a heavier need for innovation, embracing and integrating technology, managing competing and complex priorities, and leading people and cultures through change. Many past dominant leadership theories and approaches have been structured to serve more of an industrial environment (De Smet et al., 2023). While efforts have been made over the years to evolve leadership approaches with the introduction of models such as situational, transformational, and transactional leadership, there is still much work to be done to meet current and future global demands.

A single approach to leadership, whether traditional or emerging, is not going to meet the myriad of challenges that today's leaders face.

- Jennifer Jordan, Michael Wade, and Tomoko Yokoi, HBR.org



To succeed, leaders must have experience or develop capabilities in diverse areas, including those noted below (Harvard Business Publishing Corporate Learning, n.d.; Pong, 2024; Christensen & Narisetti, 2024; Neal, 2024).

- Connecting employees to organization's purpose
- Emotional and social intelligence
- Managing conflict among team members
- Building inclusive teams that drive innovation
- Align business growth with social impact
- Navigate complex stakeholder relationships
- Demonstrating integrity and accountability
- Adaptability and flexibility
- Dealing with ambiguity
- Fostering connection and trust

These areas require leaders to address and cultivate more than just the technical proficiencies of team members and themselves. Artfully leveraging these competencies and skillsets to guide others through the journey of constant transformational change will be paramount.




You have to lead by the heart and not just by the head.

- Makoto Uchida, Nissan CEO, [weforum.org](https://www.weforum.org)



PROBLEM STATEMENT



Traditional leadership approaches are no longer sufficient during a time of unprecedented challenges and complexities. Leaders must navigate increasingly diverse and dynamic organizations while cultivating innovation, fostering inclusivity, and inspiring adaptability. A holistic, flexible approach that integrates neuroleadership, indigenous leadership philosophies, and Western leadership approaches is needed to do so effectively. Organizations risk complacency, disengagement, and an inability to drive meaningful change in an ever-transforming environment without a reimagined leadership approach that blends diverse past, present, and future leadership perspectives.

NeuroLeadership Approaches

As agents of change, leaders need to be able to establish trust, build and maintain positive relationships, and influence and inspire others into action. They are, in essence, aiming to impact human behavior positively. The activation of the brain's threat and reward networks influences human behavior (Rock & Cox, 2012). Understanding and leveraging how to responsibly and ethically leverage those networks utilizing tools such as the SCARF model can help ease team member's ability to embrace and adapt to change.

SCARF Model Domains



Status

An individual's perceived level of importance as compared to others



Certainty

An individual's need for clarity and predictability.



Autonomy

An individual's sense of control over their choices, situation, and environment.



Relatedness

An individual's need to feel a sense of connection and belonging with others.



Fairness

An individual's perception of just and non-biased treatment.

The SCARF model is a tool used to gauge the potential impact of an individual's actions on others and vice versa (Rock & Cos, 2012). In this instance, it would be leveraged to explore the leader's potential impact on team members in preparation for, engaging during, or reflecting after an interaction. Taking actions that trigger an increase or decrease in these domains can activate the threat or reward network in the brain.

The first step is for a leader to get to know their team members to understand what is important to them, what motivates them, and what they value. The second step is for leaders to consider how their past, current, or future actions and behaviors may threaten or support the team members' perceptions, senses, and needs. Lastly, leaders should explore an experiment with adjusting or adapting their actions and behaviors to minimize activating threat networks and increase activation of reward networks.

Indigenous Leadership Approaches

As stewards of the future and the home they call planet Earth, leaders need to tap into the wealth of wisdom housed in humanity's past and present to garner the nuggets and insights that will merge to form the leadership approaches of the future. That also means exploring what regions and cultures outside of their own have to teach them. For example, there is much to learn and acquire from authentic African values that were birthed from the ancient tribes of what is considered to be the “cradle of humanity and civilization” (Onukwuba, 2018, p. 120).

Gada Leadership Principles

1. Humanness
2. Freedom
3. Respect for human rights
4. Equality
5. Morality
6. Peace
7. Sovereignty of people
8. Accountability
9. Rule of law
10. Separation of power and system of check and balance
11. Division of power and decentralized governance
12. Diversity or balanced representations of clans, lineages, regions, and confederacies
13. Fixed terms of office and peaceful transfer of power
14. Participation and engagement of citizen in socio-political affairs of the nation
15. Decision making through consensus
16. Conflict transformation

Authentic African leadership approaches center around doing what is best for the community and others (Onukwuba, 2018). Values, collaboration, and inclusion anchor it (Aliye, 2020). It involves sharing leadership, engaging others in decision-making, valuing their skills and knowledge, and recognizing their achievements (Onukwuba). Equally important is fostering inclusion and belonging, prioritizing well-being and family, and consistently acting with integrity and ethics. It is about a shared or mutual relationship between the leader and their followers, all striving towards the greater good.

While many African Indigenous leadership approaches exist, the most popular being Ubuntu, this section will highlight the Gada leadership philosophy. This philosophy originates from the Oromo people in the East African region. It is deep-rooted in core values and principles such as community or connection with everything around them, freedom, respect for human rights, equality, morality, peace, accountability, and diversity (Aliye, 2020). It is more than a hat you put on when you go to work; it is a way of thinking and a way of life.



Western Leadership Approaches

As previously noted, Western leadership approaches have evolved over time. In the early years, the trait theories emphasized that leaders were born, not made (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). Later, behavioral theories emerged, with the view that leadership behaviors could be learned. This was followed by situational theories when it was discovered that context was a key factor in the leadership style that should be leveraged in any given situation. The latest theories are coined “new leadership” and focus on multidimensional leadership in a complex and ever-changing world. Inclusive leadership is an example of a new leadership theory.

Key Terms in Inclusive Leadership

Belongingness

The need to develop and maintain robust and stable interpersonal relationships

Uniqueness

The need to preserve a distinctive sense of self

Psychologically Empowered

An individual feeling they had an impact and control over their activities.

Encouraging Diverse Contributions

Seeking out divergent perspectives in ways that may be challenging by involving a lengthier group process as uncommon views are solicited.

Cognitive Complexity

An individual's ability to perceive the behavior and social information of others in a multidimensional manner.

Culturally diverse teams demonstrate greater creativity than non-diverse teams, and this creativity plays a crucial role in driving team innovation and effective problem-solving (Stahl & Maznevski, 2021). This is partly due to diverse teams having and bringing forth varying experiences, views, ideas, thoughts, and styles, providing different perspectives that can strengthen creativity and decision-making. A key to unlocking those benefits is enabling others of different perspectives to have a voice during interactions and seriously considering those views.

Inclusive leadership emphasizes facilitating belonging while valuing and embracing each team member's unique qualities, experiences, and contributions (Randel et al., 2018). Leaders can practice inclusive leadership by fostering psychological safety, enabling shared decision-making, reinforcing justice and equity, inviting diverse viewpoints, and encouraging everyone to share their perspective even if they differ from the rest of the team.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Leaders seeking to reimagine and improve the effectiveness of their leadership approach by integrating the best aspects of neuroleadership, indigenous leadership philosophies, and Western leadership practices can begin by:

1. **Connecting with their people.** Getting to know them, their likes, dislikes, aspirations, concerns, values, strengths, opportunity areas, motivations, and more
2. **Flexing their leadership style and approach** to what would best resonate with their team members. Being actively aware of their behaviors and actions while engaging with others to minimize activating a threat response.
3. **Treating their team with respect and acting with integrity.**
4. **Involving their team** in decision-making and asking for their input and perspective on matters. Leaders are not all-knowing, and individual team members are not all-knowing, but collectively, the team will know and accomplish exponentially more.
5. **Creating spaces where others feel connected and included** in something greater than them. Helping them find their tribe. Being their tribe. Giving them a voice in spaces where they are present and being their voice and advocate in spaces where they are not. Appreciating, encouraging, and celebrating their uniqueness.

CONCLUSION

While we only lightly touched on the wealth of knowledge and insights available in the areas of neuroleadership, indigenous leadership philosophies, and Western leadership approaches, it is clear that there are components across all areas that leaders can leverage to better equip themselves to navigate the world in which they live.

Remember that people should be working to live, not living to work. Be mindful of the overall well-being of each team member and that they have a life outside of work that also needs tending to.

Above all else, take action. Do at least one thing differently to improve the life circumstances of another human being because it is the right thing to do. A single small spark of positive change started by each individual can ignite the greater flame of positive transformational change so desperately needed in this world. It is one planet and one human race in need of each member working in harmony for the tribe to thrive..

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