

**Book Review by Fiona Steel
(as a requirement of unit 55209 Leadership Development)**

of

***The Leadership Challenge*
Kouzes, J.N. & Posner, B.Z. 1995, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.**

INTRODUCTION

Effective leaders are usually identified by competencies. Woodruffe (1991) asserts that competency refers to the sets of behaviours that enable the performance of tasks, or rather, the dimensions of behaviour that enable competent performance. Hence, if competencies enable competent performance, which competencies will be relevant for leaders to be effective in the future?

To answer this question this paper will critique, in terms of leadership skills and competencies, *The Leadership Challenge*. The practices and behaviours of leadership put forward by Kouzes and Posner in *The Leadership Challenge* will first be identified. The body of the paper will then discuss the relevant leadership skills and competencies that may be required by organizations in the next ten years, through the comparison of theories furnished in literature, to that proposed by Kouzes and Posner.

KOUZES AND POSNER'S PRACTICES AND BEHAVIOURS OF LEADERSHIP

The Leadership Challenge explores five fundamental practices based on Kouzes and Posner's research into effective leadership. Within these five practices are ten behaviors, or commitments, as follows:

- Challenging the Process
 - Search out challenging opportunities to change, grow, innovate and improve.
 - Experiment, take risks, and learn from the accompanying mistakes.
- Inspiring a Shared Vision
 - Envision an uplifting and ennobling future.
 - Enlist others in a common vision by appealing to their values, interest, hopes and dreams.
- Enabling Others to Act
 - Foster collaboration by promoting co-operative goals and building trust.
 - Strengthen people by giving power away, providing choice, developing competence, assigning critical tasks and offering visible support.
- Modeling the Way
 - Set the example by behaving in ways that are consistent with shared values.
 - Achieve small wins that promote consistent progress and build commitment.
- Encouraging the Heart
 - Recognise individual contribution to the success of every project.
 - Celebrate team accomplishments regularly.

The five practices and ten principals are underpinned by a significant amount of historical data¹. However, despite the quality and quantity of the data, the derivations of competencies are based on historical illustrations of leadership and, as such, it is necessary to consider whether such competencies will be relevant to future leadership requirements.

LEADERSHIP SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES IN THE FUTURE

To analyse what competencies leaders will need in the future, it is first necessary to review the possible direction of the business environment over the next ten years.

Projected Environment

Kouzes and Posner preface their book with a summary of today's environment.² Whilst the authors briefly state that the "domain of leaders is in the future" (Kouzes & Posner, p. xxv), the text does not explore future issues, or suggest competencies that leaders will need to navigate such issues.

In searching for an illustration of the projected environment, the Hagberg Consulting Group suggest some challenges which must be faced by tomorrow's leaders to stay ahead of the competition, including:

- globalization of business leading to cross cultural competency requirements;
- geographic shifts in economic power;
- growth of strategic alliances;
- an accelerating avalanche of information and democratization of access to information;
- changing demographics and a changing workforce;
- changing expectations of a more educated workforce; and
- Flattening of organizations, increased workloads and expanding skill requirements.

The behaviours and competencies in *The Leadership Challenge* are all relevant to leadership in this projected environment — individual's will still need to be encouraged, a vision will still need to be communicated, and collaboration will still need to be fostered. In fact, given the globalisation of business, these competencies become more important. However, the competencies have been derived historically without reference to the changing environment — whilst they are relevant, will they ensure tomorrow's success? To ascertain leadership competencies required in the projected environment of tomorrow, it is necessary to consider some alternative leadership models.

¹ The practices and behaviours of effective leadership proposed in *The Leadership Challenge* are derived from data spanning eleven years (commencing 1983), from ten thousand leaders and fifty thousand constituents (Kouzes and Posner, p. xv). The data was collected through leadership experience surveys, as well as personal interviews, which then led to the development of the Leadership Practices Inventory enabling the measurement of leadership practices.

² Today's environment is characterized by high employee alienation, computer technology shifting the power base, humans connected in a global village but existing in a fragmented community, knowledge deriving power, job stability being low, and in amongst these changing variables, people searching for meaning.

Alternative Leadership Models

Quinn et al. (1996) suggests that there are eight leadership models³ encompassing different competencies. Rather than support one particular model, Quinn et al. suggest that competencies in all models can have both positive and negative effects and, therefore, to concentrate on specific competencies only is to lose sight of when other competencies may be more appropriate or effective. Therefore, rather than concentrate on the same competencies as proposed by Kouzes and Posner in *The Leadership Challenge*, Quinn suggests that perhaps the key to effective leadership in the future is to utilise more than one model. Quinn uses the term ‘behaviour complexity’ to describe this ability to use competencies from different models as the situation dictates.⁴

Yukl’s framework (Hunt 1991) proposes that effective leadership is supported by high level behaviours⁵ unpinned with eleven competencies⁶. Such behaviour and competencies are not dissimilar to those proffered by Kouzes and Posner. However, in contrast to Kouzes and Posner, Yukl (1998) acknowledges that not only must there be flexibility in the competencies drawn upon, but that future leaders will require higher skills level and new competencies due to a rapidly changing environment — leaders must be able adapt and develop new competencies to address technological, social, and economic forces to stay ahead of competition. This leads us to consider what these new competencies might be.

Future Competencies

Van Houten (1989) has questioned how, in a changing global environment, one can prepare competencies for an unknown, or projected, environment? Some authors, however, have ventured to offer some suggestions as to competencies required of leaders in the future. For instance, Adler and Bartholomew (1992) have suggested that leaders will need competencies for a global environment, such as understanding the business from a global perspective, adaptation to foreign cultures, and the ability to collaborate with foreign colleagues. This was also found in Lobel (1990), where the ability to interact effectively and openly with other cultures was identified.

Further, Thompson and Cole (1997) have suggested that organisations must be able to manage change in a dynamic environment and, therefore, must understand its internal and external environment. Environmental understanding will encompass, among other things, knowledge of a diversifying workforce, such as the increasing demand for part-time work, job share arrangements, and family care requirements.

Relevancy of the Competency Based Approach

It can, therefore, be seen that future leadership competencies may include global abilities, as well as an awareness of changes and developments in the internal and external environments. However, is defining required competencies for effective leadership as illustrated in *The Leadership Challenge*, as well as by Quinn and Yukl, too narrowly focused given the

³ Director, producer, monitor, coordinator, facilitator, mentor, innovator, and broker.

⁴ The ‘behaviour complexity’ theory is also supported by Thompson et al. (1996, p. 58) in that “rigid adherence to a generic list may undermine or detract from the very things that have led to current success”. Woodruffe (1991) also supports a notion of a generic list, where for differing tasks, the core and peripheral competencies will change.

⁵ Making decisions, influencing others, giving and seeking information, and building relations.

⁶ Competencies include problem solving, networking, motivating, and planning.

volatility of the business environment which demands that organizations continually adapt to compete? In a changing environment, where the measure of competence is being continually reassessed, it may be argued that different lists of competencies will be relevant based on different organization performance criteria and business scenarios (Stuart & Lindsay 1997).

In fact, if effective leadership is encouraging and inspiring individuals and teams to give their best to achieve a desired result in a given environment (Armstrong 1990), then it is possible that the characteristics of that environment will be influential on the leadership competencies required. As such, given the changing nature of the environment, it is possible that effective leadership in the future will not be defined in a particular set of competencies, but rather, the desired outcome, combined with environmental factors, will define the required leadership competencies to be effective.

CONCLUSION

Tom Peters recommends *The Leadership Challenge* by stating that the book was relevant in 1987, and will still be relevant in 2002 (Kouzes & Posner p xvi). It is easy to see why this recommendation is so strong — the book is timeless in that it expounds competencies that will be relevant for as long as there are leaders and followers. However, the additional challenges of the next ten years and beyond will require additional competencies, not all of which can be foreseen. *The Leadership Challenge* provides a great foundation for good leadership — but great leadership in the future will be dependent not upon what can be learnt in a book, but upon the leader's ability to adapt to the unknown and ever-changing future.

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