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Book Review by G D Price (as a requirement of 55209 Leadership Development)

of

*Intelligent Leadership*  
(Mant, A. 1997, Allen & Unwin, Sydney)

## INTRODUCTION

The book selected to review and critique is *Intelligent Leadership* by Alistair Mant, who began his working life on the Snowy Mountains Scheme, then progressed to the IBM Corporation before becoming an academic and consultant to public and private organisations.

Mant has, therefore, experienced the practicalities of business leadership and the experience of educating business leaders, as well as advising corporations and governments on leadership and leadership development.

His book draws on the experiences of eight business leaders, who he believes epitomise intelligent leaders and gives us insights on how to be better leaders and recognise excellent leadership when we see it. It is interesting to note Mant's statement that none of the outstanding people described in the book owe their success to formal business education (Mant 1997, p. 273).

Mant believes that to lead you need authority, which is earned by showing judgement in making sound decisions. Leadership has everything to do with abilities and little to do with charisma according to Mant. In defining approaches to leadership Mant coined the terms 'binary' (a relationship characterised and dominated by interpersonal influence — if I win, you lose — often exploitive and divisive) and 'ternary' (building a relationship that works for both in the long term — let's get it right — generally useful and healthy (Mant 1997, p. 213).

Mant is clearly a supporter of the ternary approach to business leadership and believes intelligent leaders are focussed on the organisational goal that they share with their followers, rather than on personal gain. However, we should be aware from personal experience that 'binary' leadership is still very evident in business and governments today.

Mant believes that leadership development naturally flows from the 'ternary' leader and involves mentoring, on-the-job training and development, empowerment and leading by example.

## LEADERSHIP AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Leadership, for Mant, is not about who wins the narrow contest, but about the magnificence of the whole game (Mant 1997, p.29).

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In his focus on business leaders Mant, in terms of leadership and the new type of leader, looks to those who are able to generate shared enthusiasms, rather than merely wield influence. He believes that acting with purpose, authority, good judgement, systems thinking, sanity, broadband intelligence and virtue are necessary elements of intelligent leadership.

The leaders referred to in Mant's book are all 'natural' leaders in the sense that people are generally prepared to follow them. They lead from behind (Mant 1997, p.25) but can generate shared enthusiasm and have an ability to emotionally energise people around them. They know how to connect with employees at all levels of the workforce and this is supported by Laabs (1999) (Study Book, p 1.14) "effective leaders have clear convictions about their roles and are able to make strong connections with people in terms of what is important".

Mant's ideal leadership role model is Sir William Hudson, the first Commissioner of Australia's Snowy Mountains Scheme who was appointed in 1949 and retired in 1967. According to Mant, Hudson was a 'direct' and unassuming leader who never lost touch with the grass roots and took a personal interest in all the employees. He ensured that employees understood where they fitted into the big picture. Hudson's leadership style had everything to do with ability and little to do with charisma. Kouzes and Posner (1995, p.15) and Noer (1997, p.167) both support the view that there is little evidence that charisma has much to do with real leadership and Mant is certainly not a supporter of the charismatic leadership style. However he notes effective leaders can have charisma, such as another of his business leaders, Bob Clifford of Incat (International Catamarans) fame, but whose real motivation flows from a commitment or attachment to the organisational goal which translates to his employees.

Mant, in his book, wanted to expose under-appreciated leaders like Hudson because of their substantial leadership capacity and ability to develop leaders, and to educate, empower, mentor and support employees, rather than the prominent and flashy but shallow, charismatic leaders often evident today (Mant 1997, p.245). Mant, through his selected leaders, also acknowledges the importance of formal and informal mentoring and coaching at all levels of the organisation in developing leadership.

Tichy (Study Book p 1.14) supports this view stating that "the role of leader as coach and mentor is now being emphasised very strongly and this needs to be reflected in any developmental programs".

However, while the informal mentoring system took a body blow in the 1980s and 1990s when so many large companies downsized and off-loaded many older, experienced employees the value of mentoring is again re-emerging as an important tool in developing leaders throughout organisations today. Tichy (in Alter, 1997, p. 58) has said "real leaders teach other to be leaders".

Mant makes considerable references to leadership development in regard to mentoring, education empowerment and, particularly, learning on the job in his book. He refers to the one-to-one mentoring focussed on in the Karpin Task Force, but warns however that the mentor-leader matching must not be insensitive, or it will be ineffective.

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Leading by example is an important component of the leadership and leadership development views of Mant and he believes that “individual leaders who are clever and sane in the pursuit of valuable goals create circumstances which encourage a critical mass of other people to develop in the same way (Mant 1997, p. 15).

## CONCLUSION

Leadership for Mant is not about command and control, but rather about leaders who can generate shared enthusiasm and develop their people in a ‘ternary’ or inclusive way.

Mant’s questioning of formal, academic subject-based business school programs (Mant 1997, p. 273), however, underscores the significant benefits available, as such education exposes participants to an extensive range of leadership development opportunities, ideas, methods and networks.

Apart from this contradiction the book generally supports the current leadership and leadership development literature.

Mant views intelligent leaders as those focussed on the organisational goal, a goal that they then share with their followers, rather than on personal gain, and can develop their people through on-the-job training, mentoring and coaching, empowerment and leading by example.

## REFERENCES

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