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

of

*Leading Minds — An Anatomy of Leadership*

(Gardner, H. 1997, Harper Collins, London)

This paper will critique, in terms of leadership development, the book *Leading Minds – An Anatomy of Leadership*, by Howard Gardner. To achieve this aim, this paper will firstly discuss the nature of leadership. The body of the paper will then review some competencies a leader should have and how these could be developed in an individual. Discussion throughout the paper will focus on comparing the theory furnished in literature to the practical application of leadership development as depicted in *Leading Minds*.

**THE NATURE OF LEADERSHIP**

The Industry Task Force on Leadership and Management Skills (1995, p. 39) states that leadership is the process of achieving business objectives through others while not relying on the authority of the management role. Prahalad (in Ettore, 1995) argues that a leader provides the organisation with “a sense of opportunity ... a sense of continuity ... clear and unambiguous standards ... [and] a sense of excitement and intellectual challenge”. These two sources suggests that leadership involves motivating or influencing people towards the accomplishment of a goal, rather than directing or ordering a task to be completed. Gardner’s view is somewhat broader than those reviewed in the literature, as it does not reference the attainment of goals, or the contemplation of challenges, but simply the influence of one person upon another. He proposes that leadership is the influence of behaviours, thoughts, and/or feelings of a significant number of their fellow human beings (Gardner, 1997, p. 8).<sup>i</sup>

Drawing from ancient literature, a Chinese proverb says “A good leader is one whom the people respect, the poor leader is the one whom people hate; but the great leader is one who, when the people have finished, they say ‘we have done it ourselves’”. Therefore, a great leader may be seen as one who leads in such a way that people are empowered. In contrast, Gardner’s view of effective leadership, to a degree, relies on attributes and characteristics of the leader — not on empowerment — as a successful leader is the one who “most keenly senses the wishes of a potential audience” (Gardner, 1997, p. 17).<sup>ii</sup>

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES****Competencies**

The Industry Task Force on Leadership and Management Skills (1995) found that, inter alia, coaching, mentoring and training skills<sup>iii</sup>, as well as skills for international operations<sup>iv</sup>, were desirable in future leaders. Gardner (1997) supports the notion that the leader must have an ongoing, active and dynamic relationship with the follower, such as a coaching role

that is founded in employee empowerment. Indeed, ongoing intercourse between the leader and the follower was viewed to characterize diverse leaders such as Robert Hutchins and Jean Monnet (Gardner, p. 36). However, his review of leaders does not follow on to specify the importance of international experience, although he does note that a leader must be in regular and constant contact with his or her 'community'. As with most of Gardner's illustrations, this concept is broad and possibly designed to encompass the widest possible meaning such that it is relevant to most, if not all, leaders in the community, rather than just the those in the business environment.

The development of 'leadership wisdom' (Cacioppe, 1997, p. 335) is also put forward as a desirable competency. Such wisdom has been termed 'emotional intelligence' and is "a person's ability to be aware of, manage and use emotions appropriately in dealing with people" (Cacioppe, 1997, p. 337). Gardner (1997) argues that leaders will influence, in part, through the traits they embody and that traits cannot be 'learned'. In fact, traits have often been the downfall of a leader. For example, Richard Nixon campaigned on the theme of 'law and order' (Gardner, p. 37), but came under attack for his own lawless acts. His intellectual intelligence may have been high, but he lost office because of his lack of emotional intelligence.

Berry (1997) suggests that the core competency of leadership development should be stewardship of the planet's limited resources.<sup>v</sup> Gardner does not argue that stewardship be the core platform of leadership. To the contrary, Gardner points out that often leaders can be motivated by their own passions which have been developed since childhood. Indeed, risk taking and a willingness to go to great lengths to achieve their ends have often been present in the early years of a leader (Gardner, p. 33). For example, Martin Luther was impassioned when he became "overwhelmed by especially flagrant abuses of the church" (Gardner, p. 33).

### **Leadership Development**

A new perspective has emerged in recent years which may influence the way we manage organisations and, therefore, how we develop leaders. Chaos theory, put simply, purports that 'small changes can have large consequences' (Millett, 1998, p.6). To apply this theory to the business environment, organisations 'achieve success because of their ability to constantly realign with the environment'. (Millett, 1998, p. 7). It follows that if leaders are inflexible<sup>vi</sup>, they will stifle the organisations ability to continually adapt to the changing environment. Therefore, Millett proposes (1998, p. 8) leadership development needs to inspire 'self-organisation'<sup>vii</sup>, rather than control oriented behaviours where rigid systems are stressed by the dynamic conditions in the global marketplace. Consequently, leadership development should ensure the leader makes decisions based on the dynamic environment, rather than on a rigid pre-determined set of criteria. Gardner supports Millett's proposal by arguing that the key to leadership is the effective communication of a story (Gardner, p. 62). Leaders say many things, at many times. Not everything said is a story, nor is every story consistent with others. The embodiment of the story may be similar, but the context will change depending upon the audience. When Martin Luther King, Jr. gave a speech it was 'crafted for the ears of the audience' (Gardner, p. 62) such that the same message has the

desired effect of on a diverse section of people. In this way, we can see that Martin Luther was flexible and was able to change his delivery based on a dynamic environment.

The literature also supports the notion that the frequency of leadership skills training needs to be balanced at key times throughout a person's career. Training is seen as 'a process of life long learning' (Fulmer, 1997, p. 62). The report by the Industry Task Force on Leadership and Management Skills (1995) also supports the need for life-long learning to develop and maintain leading-edge knowledge bases. As with Gardner's view on what leadership entails, his view on the development of leadership is also broad and inclusive in that 'no leader is ever fully realised; at most, one can observe individuals who are in the course of attaining greater skills and heightened effectiveness' (p. 36). Therefore, Gardner concurs with Fulmer (1997) and Fulmer and Vicere (1995) that leadership development is a whole of life process.

In addition to leadership development taking place throughout a leader's career, and inspiring adaptability and flexibility, Fulmer (1997) proposes that leadership development<sup>viii</sup> needs to be a dynamic exchange where participants listen occasionally, interact frequently and spend a significant portion of time applying concepts to real challenges. This is called 'action-oriented learning' and has a real-world orientation, rather than being purely theoretical in nature. Most of the leaders reviewed by Gardner have benefited from action-oriented learning. For example, Jean Monnet was deeply influenced by both the economic and diplomatic affairs of the First World War. After the Second World War, Monnet was able to influence politics as he "knew well the diplomatic and economic mistakes that had been made at the end of the First World War and was determined that they not be repeated" (Gardner, p. 270).

## CONCLUSION

Gardner's review of prominent leaders primarily reveals that the theory of leadership development is often different from practical application. The literature implies that good leadership attributes may be developed, yet Gardner's overriding view is that good leadership lies in those qualities beyond our influence. Whilst evidence could be found in *Leading Minds* (1997) to support the existence of some leadership competencies documented in literature, again, the prevailing view was that such competencies are inherent, nurtured by events rather than by training. However, Gardner's review of competency development did have a closer correlation to the literature as both Gardner and the literature support the idea that "the kind of learning that results in competitive advantage will not be limited by time, space, or matter. The new paradigm will be focused on learning as an action-oriented, lifelong process where global partners work together to produce a positive, profitable future for all" (Fulmer, 1997, p. 70).

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**Endnotes:**

<sup>i</sup> Under Gardner's definition, both Churchill and Einstein can be viewed as leaders as they significantly influenced the thought, behaviours, and/or feelings of others. Churchill exerted his influence in a direct way through stories, and Einstein exerted his influence in an indirect way through the ideas he developed and the ways those ideas were captured in theories.

<sup>ii</sup> Gardner goes further to note that intuition is ineffective without the ability to articulate the message clearly and convincingly. An effective leader must be able to influence. The way this influence is delivered will depend upon the leader's traits and the audience he or she is addressing.

<sup>iii</sup> Rather than the traditional role of controlling and directing, employee training and empowerment are important for the new global business which enjoys a flatter and less autocratic organisational structure.

<sup>iv</sup> The importance of managers having an understanding of the countries or markets into which their goods and services are being, or will be, exported. For example, for the Australian business operating in Asia, the understanding of Asian business practices, languages and cultures is essential.

<sup>v</sup> The type of leader an organisation desires is entirely dependent upon the type of organisation. Historically, development programs have been based on liberal market capitalism (Berry, 1997, p. 86) where the "overriding

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objective is that managers shall so behave as to maximize the net present value of the shareholders' wealth" (Berry, 1997, p. 87). This leads to what Berry terms as "moral hazard" — the production of self interested individuals. Such individuals may not hold the values necessary to adequately represent stakeholders. Indeed, based in ecology, Berry argues that liberal market capitalism has been disastrous on the environment as "there is the assumption that business activity is benign in respect of the physical environment" — most decisions are financial. Berry's conclusion is that leadership development programs need to assess the framework on which they are based. Social democracy and collectivism are viable alternatives in a world where resources are finite. Indeed, sustainability leads us to the notion of stewardship and implies "a departure from competition towards collaboration" (Berry, 1997, p. 90).

<sup>vi</sup> "Our basic assumptions about organisations, their strategies, structures and processes can influence our behaviour towards work. If those assumptions are overly rigid, then we may have arrived at a static position in our learning" (Millett, 1998, p. 1).

<sup>vii</sup> This can be brought about by double loop, rather than single loop, learning. Single loop learning is where we detect and correct error within set parameters (Millett, 1998, p. 1) and double loop learning is where the very subject of those parameters is under challenge and the subject of learning.

<sup>viii</sup> Fulmer (1997, p. 59) describes leadership development as the attempt to "create leaders who are capable of helping the corporation shape a more positive future".