

LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING IN THE NEW ECONOMY

Guest Editor's Introduction: Ronel Erwee

In this special edition about 'Leadership and Learning in the New Economy', the authors present their unique perspectives about trends affecting knowledge workers and their leaders in the digital age.

There are a few themes that are common to the papers. One is that managing highly educated and creative individuals requires significant changes to traditional models of management. A second theme is that although there are similarities, as well as differences, between Eastern and Western management traditions, these differences need to be acknowledged and bridged. A third theme is that new generations of knowledge workers have different expectations and place new demands on leaders. Finally, training and development of people in organizations need to be adapted to fit new models of management and leadership, changed expectations of knowledge workers, and the capabilities of new technologies.

The keynote article by Purushothaman and Sohal, 'Bridging East and West: transforming management for the digital economy', opens the discussion by noting that managers are aware that human capital is central to the strategic success of organisations in the digital age. They argue that compliance-based management systems have to give way to more commitment-based models and emphasise that spiritual and emotional value systems appears to have a renewed role and significance in organisations. Western-based value systems may benefit by infusing Eastern ideologies into management theory and practice. They argue that the digital age is an appropriate evolutionary phase in which to holistically synthesise modern management principles with the inspired perennial wisdom of the ages. Therefore, the challenge in the digital age is cultural transformation at organisational and individual levels. They are concerned about the declining human spirit and suggest that ancient traditional eastern education could be the foundation of spiritual and moral education that teaches one to deal with deep psychological and social issues. We need to integrate, mind body and spirit of the modern man, redesign our organisations and leadership styles to appeal to the spirit and souls of workers.

In the second article by Fisher and Bilbo, 'No Leadership Without Representation', the authors acknowledge that although there has been a growth in emphasis on culture as a factor influencing the performance of managers, a two-factor model to leader behaviour has prevailed that ignores cultural issues. They propose a new conceptualisation of leadership which incorporates a representation/participation dimension of leadership, in addition to a task-orientation dimension and a relationship-orientation dimension to incorporate both Western and Asian leadership research. They propose that their model, would contribute to the explanation of leadership behaviour in collectivist cultures.

Ferres and Travaglione in 'Attitudinal Differences Between Generation-X and Older Employees' investigate a specific category of workers that need to be led, namely the generation born between 1965 and 1972—Gen-X employees. The question is posed whether there are generational differences in levels of trust, commitment, procedural justice and turnover intention levels among employees. No substantial differences in levels of trust and affective commitment were found when comparing Gen-X employees and older employees. However, Gen-X employees, as

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predicted, reported significantly lower continuance commitment, had a higher turnover intention and had less favourable perceptions of procedural justice within the organisation compared to older employees.

The challenge is to hold on to talented Gen-X employees who may have higher turnover intentions and therefore leaders should foster mutual trust and respect, and adapt their management style. Rewards, recognition and opportunities for development should be designed for Gen-Xer employees to provide challenge, autonomy and encouragement. The question remains to what extent the issues raised in the previous articles, namely leading this generation with more commitment-based or participatory models and emphasis on spiritual and emotional value systems, will be appropriate.

Although the final two articles originate in two different cultures namely Taiwan and the USA, they do not specifically focus on culture, leadership, spirituality or commitment-based or participatory models. They link to the third article by their focus on the individual in the digital age, specifically on training innovations in small and medium enterprises. Chang analyses how the organizational innovation environment, self-directed learning, course design strategies, and technology factors affect the performance of web-based training. He finds that web-based training is appropriate in small and medium enterprises (SMEs). However both organisational factors such as the organisational innovation environment, technology factors, and course design strategies, as well as individual factors such as the learners' concept of self-directed learning, will determine how successful such training will be. He concludes that asynchronous training, non-complex training courses and learned-centered instruction are appropriate for SMEs.

Fernald, Solomon and Doshna in their article on small business training in the USA, investigate training and development issues confronting small business owner/managers. The entrepreneurs in the study believe that training is particularly critical in the areas of accounting, finance, marketing, time management, conflict management and basic business and financial skills in order to help their organisations better compete in the marketplace. The most useful training methods are on-the-job training, training conferences and training manuals on a one-to-one basis, or through mentoring and attending conferences. An unexpected finding was that the perceived value and usefulness of training, as well as of training methods by entrepreneurs and their employees, declines as the business moves from its initial start-up phase through its mature growth stage—but then dramatically increases in the mature stage. Both these papers do not debate the role of the lead entrepreneur and to what extent they could use commitment-based or participatory models or address spirituality or value systems.

The papers enrich our insight into the challenges of leading knowledge workers in a digital age. We strive to synthesise our Western based management education with spirituality and Eastern ideologies, while coping with the demands of new generations of employees in different types of enterprises.

I thank the authors for their willingness to transform reviewed conference papers into articles for this special edition and further reviewers for their input. I also thank my colleague Cec Pedersen for sourcing the keynote article by Purushothaman and Sohal.