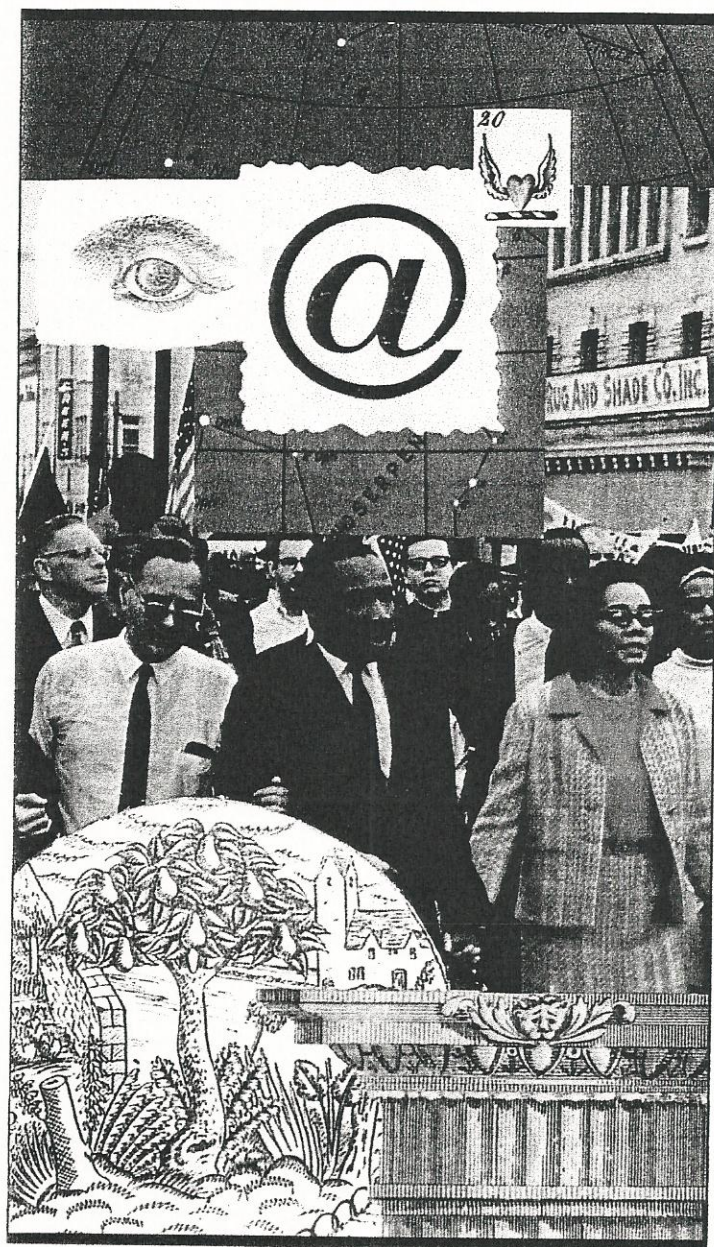


Leader to Leader

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The Age of Connective Leadership

BY JEAN LIPMAN-BLUMEN

On the cusp of a new era, Václav Havel reminds us that "Something is on the way out, and something else is painfully being born." The detritus of failed leadership is everywhere: nations divided, governments distrusted, corporations discredited, leaders discarded, and constituents disillusioned. Criticism of political, corporate, educational, even religious leaders grows. Our discomfort stems from a sea change in the conditions of leadership imposed by the new global environment. This change requires new ways of thinking and working. Most important, it makes traditional forms of leadership increasingly untenable.

Economist John Kenneth Galbraith suggests that the distinguishing feature of all great leaders is their ability to deal with the anxieties and tensions of their times. Today, two opposing tensions—interdependence and diversity—increasingly shape our world. They are transforming the circumstances under which leaders must lead. Only leaders who can confront and constructively integrate these tensions will succeed.

Understanding Interdependence and Diversity

Interdependence, driven largely by technology, connects everyone and everything, everywhere. It drives us toward collaboration in many guises—in joint ventures, partnerships, strategic alliances, networks, and temporary coalitions. Interdependence focuses on overlapping visions, mutual problems, and common goals. It seeks out similarities, fostering convergence of interests.

In contrast to interdependence, diversity concerns the distinctive character of individuals, groups, and organizations. Reflecting the human need for identity, diversity highlights everyone's uniqueness, underscoring differences and emphasizing independence and individualism. It is a force for social, economic, and cultural differentiation.

In its fullest expression, diversity is evident throughout the world—from emerging and splintering nations to fragmenting religious groups and political parties. It's a major force in the growth of single-issue political groups. In every case, diversity promotes new and often opposing priorities.

Leading in the Connective Era

Interdependence and diversity distinguish the current Connective Era, in which everyone and everything are intertwined. The importance of diversity and the inevitability of interdependence require a more fully developed leadership repertoire. Such a model—a connective leadership model—can help leaders make use of the most positive aspects of diversity and interdependence.

Connective leaders easily “get” the connections among diverse people, ideas, and institutions, even when the parties themselves do not. They perceive connections and possibilities where traditional leaders and long-term opponents see only separation and hostility. Because connective leaders can discern common ground, they can begin to address common problems. Unlike individualistic leaders before them, connective leaders can see the overlap between their own visions and those of other leaders. Eventually, through joint action on even small problems, stereotypes of opponents soften, empathy sprouts, and the common ground expands.

Connective leaders negotiate, persuade, and integrate antagonistic groups. They reach out to long-standing adversaries in order to accomplish mutual goals. Mikhail Gorbachev's rapprochement with his country's Cold

War adversary exemplifies another aspect of this new leadership approach. In the unfolding Connective Era, leaders will need to engage in many forms of collaboration—even with traditional competitors. Connective leaders contribute to others' successes and act as mentors, without losing their ability to compete, take charge, and make tough independent decisions when necessary.

Connective leaders do much more: They construct and call upon social networks and multiple, shifting coalitions. They open these networks to colleagues. They seek active constituents, unshackled by orthodoxy, who can share the burdens of leadership but feel free not to support the leader's every issue.

To achieve results in an era caught in the grip of interdependence and diversity, connective leaders must develop at least six important leadership strengths:

1. Ethical Political Savvy

Connective leaders have abundant political savvy; they exhibit system know-how seasoned with a strong sense of ethics. They adroitly use themselves, others, and all the resources they can garner as instruments for accomplishing their goals. They employ these resources overtly, ethically, and altruistically through a strategy of “denatured Machiavellianism.” This political savvy is the secret weapon that connective leaders use to couple the counter forces of diversity and interdependence.

Connective leaders use other people's personal strengths, as well as their networks, to solve group problems—not to enhance their own power. They connect emotionally



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with constituents through dramatic, unexpected symbols and counterintuitive gestures. Moreover, connective leaders amplify their supporters' abilities and ensure their loyalty by entrusting them with challenging tasks. In the process, they spur the personal growth of those entrusted. Negotiation and persuasion are part of their political repertoire. So is the ability to build shifting coalitions, using their own and colleagues' supporters.

Traditionally, we have rejected the instrumental use of others as "unethical manipulation." Nonetheless, divested of self-promotion, instrumental political know-how is especially relevant to a complex, diverse, and interdependent world. In a single week in 1993, Mary Robinson, then president of Ireland, reached out to Britain's Queen Elizabeth and Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams. Despite immediate criticism, her historic connective visit to West Belfast set the tone for a subsequent thaw between Britain and the Irish Republican Army.

2. Authenticity and Accountability

When leaders consistently dedicate themselves to the purposes of the group rather than to the enhancement of their own power, they demonstrate authenticity. Authenticity establishes credibility and sustains supporters' faith in leaders. This is crucial when the leader's behavior seems confusing or contradictory—as it may in an increasingly complex world. Authenticity helps constituents determine whether the change in a leader's behavior reflects a new, more complete understanding of the problem or simply a waffling from weakness. Thus authenticity helps stem the corrosion of cynicism.

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Accountability, authenticity's twin imperative, involves two major obligations: first, to explain one's decisions and actions, and second, to be held responsible before a widening jury of stakeholders. Accountability means that a leader is willing to have every choice scrutinized. Coupled with authenticity, accountability blocks unethical, irresponsible, or simply thoughtless action. In the Connective Era, a diverse set of constituents expects full disclosure, making accountability a requirement for leaders.

To be sure, connective leaders are not saints. They can be as difficult as anyone in authority. Like the rest of us, they can suffer depression when things go awry. They sometimes explode in anger. At times, they may exasperate their supporters. Generally, however, the special capacities they bring to the leadership table overshadow their human failings.

3. A Politics of Commonalities

In a world connected by technology but fragmented by the forces of diversity, connective leaders foster community. They do so by practicing a politics of commonalities, which offers membership to the broadest set of constituents. They create an environment in which many constituents achieve at least part of their agenda.

To build community in organizations, connective leaders take the broadest perspective on what is needed and by whom. They search for similarities and common ground, even among groups who see their agendas as mutually exclusive. For example, a connective leader could probably convince feminists and conservatives to collaborate

against pornography and domestic violence, which both groups oppose for their own separate reasons.

Similarly, the joint efforts of avowed enemies Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to initiate a peace process took their respective supporters by surprise. Such action is not without risk—it cost Rabin his life and nearly toppled Arafat. In each case, the leaders were in jeopardy from their *own* confused supporters, who mistook their connective gestures for betrayal or weakness.

Because the Connective Era is just beginning, many constituents are still locked in to traditional leadership expectations. Thus leaders who engage in connective behavior will need to communicate their intentions to constituents carefully and clearly.

Connective leaders understand the importance of reaching out to multilayered coalitions, not simply to embedded elites. When community consists of individuals from such diverse backgrounds, their divergent agendas create a social jigsaw puzzle. It takes leaders who have the skill to bevel the agendas of multiple coalitions to make the pieces fit.

4. Thinking Long-Term, Acting Short-Term

Day-to-day performance pressures notwithstanding, building community requires an appreciation of obscured long-term possibilities. It takes vision and courage to choose between current demands of key constituents and a better future for a larger community. When former San Francisco mayor (now U.S. Senator) Dianne Feinstein committed scarce funds to retrofit Candlestick

Park against earthquakes, she offended various groups who pressed “more urgent” demands. Later, when the Loma Prieta earthquake struck at the opening of a 1989 World Series game, 60,000 people escaped injury in the strengthened stadium.

Cherishing the future requires that leaders set aside their egos to ensure that talented people succeed them. Grooming a large cadre of potential successors is the only sure path to achieve this goal. With the possible exception of promoting clones of themselves, traditional leaders have rarely had much interest in this. In fact, they often consume their potential heirs, as both Henry Ford

and his grandson demonstrated at Ford Motor Company. Succession mechanisms are commonly lacking in organizations with leaders who have little yen for bringing others into the leadership circle. Connective leaders, who coach and encourage their younger associates, are more likely to take this leadership responsibility seriously.

5. Leadership Through Expectation

Connective leaders set high expectations and then entrust their own most valued tasks to others. Moving beyond empowerment, they scrupulously avoid micromanaging. Instead, they stand back and rely upon the principle of reciprocity, whereby the gift of the leader's confidence is usually repaid by the constituent's outstanding performance. Connective leaders encourage the creative expansion of their vision, requiring only that the associate act ethically and legally. Beyond that, the associate's creativity can expand to its own natural limit.

Leadership through expectations is no panacea. Colleagues may misinterpret or mishandle a leader's inten-

Set high expectations and entrust the most valued tasks to others.

tion. Connective leaders, however, are attuned to the dynamics of learning and recognize that not all new ventures result in immediate success. They support associates despite occasional failures and encourage them to try again. For example, one senior executive in a high-tech company routinely hosts a dinner to recognize the best "near miss" of the quarter.

6. *A Quest for Meaning*

Most people seek to leave a legacy, to be remembered for making a difference. With growing maturity, we sense the shortening of time, the need to make our lives count for something worthwhile. Altruistic, life-expanding enterprises—be they the building of an organization or a social movement—offer us such possibilities. Even as they search for their own ennobling experiences, leaders can guide others through these complicated, life-enhancing challenges. Investment banker Robert Fisher, managing director of Schroder and Co. in Los Angeles, routinely draws others into his journey. He often gives colleagues and friends books he has found compelling, thereby provoking a dialogue.

Effective leaders know that, ultimately, they are measured by their ability to influence others. In reconciling the forces of interdependence and diversity, they invite those around them to join their quest for greater meaning. By calling supporters to change the world for the better, connective leaders present constituents with elevating opportunities. They also stand as shining examples. Nelson Mandela is one such connective leader. Emerging from years of potentially embittering imprisonment, Mandela called upon South Africans of all

racies to forgo their animosities to strengthen a common homeland. He challenged the entire nation to build a nonracial democracy where all groups could share power and responsibility. Mandela's own great sacrifices for justice and democracy served as a model even for the skeptical.

Corporate leaders can spur their employees to make comparable sacrifices for the good of the organization, the customers, and the community. In 1996, the Pratt & Whitney aerospace plant in North Berwick, Maine, faced closure. Robert Ponchak, the plant manager, pushed, prodded, implored, and inspired employees to

think lean, cut costs, and improve quality. Not only did the plant escape downsizing; it also won the company's Product Center Excellence Award for three consecutive years.

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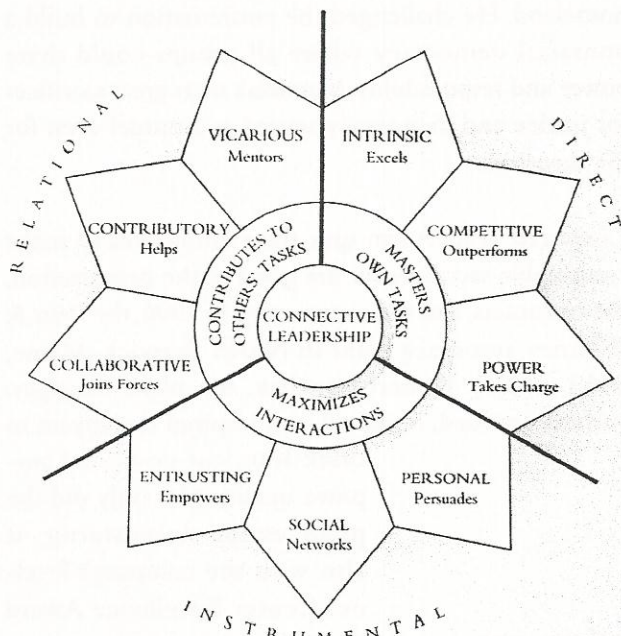
In brief, connective leaders manage interdependence and diversity by calling upon a set of special strategies. They use a spectrum of ethical, politically savvy behaviors to integrate the opposing forces of interdependence

and diversity. Their vision links diverse groups. They seek to connect their vision to those of others, even when that means amending their dream. They model authenticity and accountability. Beyond that, they search for ennobling experiences to share with supporters. They bring others into the leadership circle and nurture successors. Their ability to think long-term and act short-term connects the present with the future.

Principles of Connective Leadership

Connective leadership is based on the ordinary behaviors most of us learned early on for achieving

LEADERSHIP STYLE SETS



Source: Jean Lipman-Blumen, *The Connective Edge*, Jossey-Bass, 1996.

our goals, be they serving as team captain, studying algebra, or designing computer software. These behaviors may be thought of as our “achieving styles.”

Over time, we tend to limit ourselves to a narrow set of achieving styles, those with which we’ve experienced success. The outcome: The broader repertoire of behaviors essential for connective leadership—and available to everyone—atrophies.

The behavioral foundations of connective leadership can be divided into three major sets of achieving styles: the direct, relational, and instrumental sets (see figure). Within each set, there are three broad strategies with which individuals can accomplish their goals. People can and often do choose from any or, ideally, from all of these nine styles, depending on the circumstances.

People who prefer the *direct* set of achieving styles tend to concentrate on their *own* tasks. Closely linked to the forces of diversity, these styles are well suited to individual striving. Three strategies constitute the direct style of leadership:

- *Intrinsic*—deriving satisfaction, even exhilaration, from mastering one’s own task, measured against an internal standard of excellence
- *Competitive*—outdoing others, measuring one’s accomplishment against an external standard of performance
- *Power*—taking charge, delegating tasks, and coordinating the action of others

People who prefer to work on group tasks or to help others attain *their* goals draw on the *relational* set of leadership styles. These relational styles are analogous to the societal force of interdependence. These are the three relational styles:

- *Collaborative*—working with others on a group task, sharing both credit and responsibility for the accomplishment
- *Contributory*—playing a behind-the-scenes role or helping others complete their tasks
- *Vicarious*—taking satisfaction from facilitating, coaching, and observing the accomplishments of others

The *instrumental* set of leadership styles is characterized by political know-how. Most traditional models of leadership include direct and relational leadership skills, but they often ignore instrumental leadership. Connective leaders, however, use instrumental action to integrate the self-oriented and the group-oriented leadership styles. Individuals who see themselves and others as instruments for achieving their goals prefer these styles:

- *Personal*—using all of one's personal assets, including intelligence, wit, humor, charm, physical attractiveness, family background, and educational attainment to attract supporters
- *Social*—creating and employing social networks and alliances, as well as using others—and their networks and resources—to accomplish mutual goals
- *Entrusting*—relying on others to enhance a shared vision without supervision, but with strong expectations for success

Research spanning more than half a century has demonstrated that leadership is not reducible to a set of inborn traits. Most people can cultivate their particular leadership gifts. At the Drucker Graduate School of Management, studies of more than 40,000 managers have shown a great diversity of leadership styles. This research has demonstrated the effectiveness of each of these leadership styles in given situations. Still other research has traced the rewards that accrue to individuals who value and organizations that reward connective leadership. These studies make clear that learning to be a connective leader is not only possible but absolutely necessary to achieving lasting and meaningful results.

Becoming a connective leader requires serious effort. For traditional leaders, this involves understanding fresh ideas and practicing unfamiliar leadership responses. For traditional followers, it means becoming active constituents.

*The greatest danger
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Although connective leadership adds the new dimension of ethical instrumentalism, it does not discard all previously learned leadership strategies. Rather, connective leadership builds on what effective leaders already know how to do. But it deepens and revitalizes the best traditional strategies, while offering new ways to be effective.

For today's leaders, the greatest danger stems from clinging to outmoded strategies. For today's constituents, the greatest danger lurks in insisting upon traditional behavior from their leaders and waiting passively for marching orders. Both strategies are sure-fire methods for missing the enormous opportunities of the future.

Connective leadership is not for the fainthearted. Not infrequently, it requires us to choose between the logic of consequences, that is, expected results, and the logic of aspirations that

express our noblest identity. There are no easy problems and no easy solutions in the Connective Era.

The challenges of the Connective Era will inevitably multiply. Only those leaders with the most extensive, flexible leadership repertoires will be able to meet the dynamic demands of the Connective Era. Only those leaders with the capacity to harness the tensions spawned by interdependence and diversity will gain the connective edge. ■