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WHITE PAPER

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Part 1. Leadership as a System *The Four Dimensional Alignments of Leadership*

Version 1.31

Purpose

Leadership is far too fuzzy in the minds of prospective leaders and has been taught and trained in a manner that has created too much muddled thinking. This paper addresses the following issues:

- Why Leadership is not a set of traits, but a “System”
- The Four Dimensional Alignments that leaders must understand
 1. Strategic Alignment – Mission & Direction
 2. Operational Alignment – Execution & Results
 3. Cultural Alignment – Building an Environment of Trust
 4. Dynamic ReAlignment – Changing & Adapting in Time

Leadership as a System

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Author’s Note:

My father started my leadership journey for me at a very young age – he expected me to lead and set standards. Frankly, at this age I really didn’t have a clue what this quest meant, but I stumbled forward. Probably the first step was being a Boy Scout and teammate. My first formal leadership training was as a Reserve Officer Training Corps candidate beginning as a freshman in college in 1965. I also received leadership training every summer as a midshipman in the Navy, including Marine boot camp. During my career I served as a leader in combat operations in Vietnam, studied leadership at Harvard, served on the Board of Directors of nearly 30 profit and not-for-profit organizations, started 7 companies, and led training programs in leadership for nearly 50,000 executives. I have read hundreds of books on the subject, including authorities writing about leadership and the biographies of the leaders themselves.

It has taken nearly sixty years of experience to begin to recognize we’ve missed the mark – something that is so obvious has been overlooked. Now it’s time for a fresh look.

The Four Dimensional Alignments



Leadership has always been a priority for educational institutions. From business schools to military academies, leadership has had an uphill climb to be defined, trained, and evaluated. It's been approached by so many angles: from character, from traits, from idols, from models, from prescriptive practices, from the great man or woman biographies, from people-first, from mission-first, from outcomes, from do's & don'ts, from aphorisms, and on and on. Nothing has captured the underlying essence of how a leader thinks, perceives, reacts, communicates, builds trust, and produces extraordinary results.

This White Paper goes into a region seldom explored from a new point of view that enables leadership to be conceived, analyzed, trained, measured, and even multiplied.

Leadership as a System

Today's world is changing at a bewildering pace. In no other period in the history of human events have we encountered so much change so fast, with the exception of wartime. This makes leadership even more vital today – times of change can become chaotic and regressive when poor leadership prevails, and, alternatively, enlightening and progressive in the presence of inspiring leaders .

In the times ahead:

What kind of leadership will be most likely to succeed under these volatile conditions?

What is the nature of the challenge leaders face today and into the future?

How should we prepare leaders to understand and carry out their roles and responsibilities?

Why has leadership been so difficult to train and what can be done to improve our fate?

These are just the beginning of the questions we need to address. This paper, in its short form, will propose some observations and solutions (although a full treatment is worthy of a book).

The Troubling Shortfalls of “Teaching” Leadership

For centuries, leadership has been trapped in paradigms that don't necessarily produce better leaders. And those who “teach” leadership are seldom held accountable for the failures, nor do the teachers challenge their own assumptions about what great leaders do and how to best “train” people to find their own “inner guidance system” that enables them to respond in inspirational ways to demanding circumstances.

There are many points of view on how leadership excellence should be inculcated into leaders. Some argue that leadership is an innate quality and thus cannot be trained. Others advocate that there are specific skills and mindsets that can be taught. Others claim that leadership is more of a personal style. Still others teach leadership by case examples of great or poor leaders. Another approach dictates that priorities, such as mission and strategy, must prevail above all else; which is contradicted by those that say people and their feelings are just as important and cannot be subjugated to the demands of mission. Another school of thought believes that trust, respect, and integrity are the qualities of success, and these supersede all else.

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Others frame leadership in terms of aphorisms, admonitions, or principles, such as Covey's "Characteristics of Abundance Managers."¹ Others have approached the issue from "Lessons in Leadership" such as Colin Powell's or George Washington's, or Genghis Khan's or Attila the Hun's. Still other leaders define leadership as a "style" while others define it as an "art," or a series of "principles, practices, and best processes." Another group of authors will aim at a specific skill set, such as great leader's abilities to communicate their message. And yet another angle will be to "reveal the leadership secrets" an acclaimed leader such as Winston Churchill, Jack Welch, or Ronald Reagan.

Having been in innumerable leadership positions in my various careers, and having read scores of books about leaders and leadership, they all seem to be lacking something that goes deep into the core of teaching leadership. What's missing? Why have so many people failed? Consider this analogy:

What if we taught human biology the same way we teach leadership?

Medicine would be thrown back into the dark ages. We know that the human body is a complex "systems architecture" -- interconnected functional cardiovascular, digestive, skeletal, and neurological subsystems, elements and organs.

Here's another analogy that will further illustrate the point. Suppose we want to design the world's most advanced jet fighter plane. We might start with selecting a few of the "traits" of a great plane and pilot:

Plane: Fast, carries heavy payload, highly maneuverable, long range, accurate deployment of weaponry, etc.

Pilot: Courageous, fast response times, quick thinker in stressful conditions, follows standards of excellence, intuitive, innovative, etc.

We would never stop at this level in our aviation design. We would look at an airplane as a "system" composed of highly integrated sub-systems. This means we would breakdown the jet fighter "system" into several sub-systems, including the guidance system, the propulsion system, the airfoil system, the landing system, and so forth. Then we would look at design limitations, the battle environment, the critical trade-offs (weight, space, etc), and the cost. That's what's called "systems design."

But, when it comes to something critical issues of leadership design, we revert back to thinking that was sufficient hundreds of years ago, but falters in today's fast moving, complex world.

Understanding the "whole" means more than understanding the "parts;" it requires more than platitudes, principles, and stories – leadership should be viewed holistically as a system or framework of interconnected functions. This shift in approach enables a leader simultaneously to take both an analytic and holistic view of the tasks, responsibilities, objectives, and results to be achieved.

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Great Leaders do Four Things Well

Regardless of the culture or the times, no matter what the historical epoch or the situation, great leaders across the ages seem to do four things really well: (Figure 1)

1. **STRATEGIC VISION:** They set a powerful/noble **Vision** that inspires, creates **Value** and charts a **Strategy** that generates a significant Competitive Advantage. (think of this as “Strategic Alignment”)
2. **SPIRIT OF TRUST:** They create **Culture of Trust & Teamwork** that channels people’s **Energy** and unleashes **Co-Creativity**, which is focused towards the *strategic vision* and *drives out fear*. (think of this a “Cultural Alignment”)
3. **OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE:** They establish coherent system of **Processes, Measures,** and **Rewards** that produce **Results** that achieve #1 & align with #2. (think of this a “Operational Alignment”)
4. **INNOVATIVE ADAPTATION:** They **shift** and **evolve** as conditions change over the course of time, generating innovative solutions that adapt to forces around them. (think of this as “Dynamic Realignment in time”)



Figure 1: Four Dimensions of Great Leadership as a System

This is the Essence of the Four Dimensional System of Leadership

Virtually all of leadership can be viewed in the kaleidoscope of these four “dimensions” or “alignments.” Because these “dimensions” are all parts of the system, they must be “aligned” and realigned as outside and inside forces change and fluctuate in time (very little is stable for long in today’s fast-moving world²).

Think of these four dimensions as “Alignments” which are interactive and in constant flux as people, technologies, markets, and a multitude of strategic forces dynamically interact. Just like the front-end on your car: when the wheels are “out of balance or alignment” it’s difficult to steer. The great leader understands how to make constant adjustments in the four dimensions, as they ultimately equally important (although at any one moment, one may prevail over the other).

The 4-Dimensional Alignment approach is a “systems architecture” that embraces the core functions of organizational leadership, including interactions, governance, and metrics of sustainable functional effectiveness.

In the following pages, the Four Dimensional Alignments are briefly outlined. (This is a White Paper, and thus brief. In a future book there will be deeper elaboration.)

Leadership as a System

Leaders direct people and organizations. Organizations are systems (see definition below), thus leadership is the act of directing a people in an organizational system.

Definition: *Organization*: the process of giving an organic structure to something; any vitally or systematically organic whole in which separate functions are mutually dependent; any living being; arranging or constituting constituent interdependent parts in relation to the whole.

The 4-Dimensional Alignment System is more than just a Leadership Framework. It is a “universal” architecture that can be used in many modes for understanding the interaction between leadership, organization, people, cross-functional interdependence, teamwork, and a multitude of issues, such as:

Applications of Alignment Architecture



The Four Dimensional Alignments



1. Strategic Alignment

Strategic Alignment addresses how an organization sets its direction into the future to create sustainable competitive advantage.

Aim of Strategy

*To transform Vision and Strategic Assets into Value
that creates Sustainable Competitive Advantage
fast with the most efficient use of Resources.*

An inspiring element to strategy should set forth some powerful sense of mission and purpose for the organization and its people. It should generate a significant advantage over the ordinary. This gives people a sense of mission, purpose, and meaning – they make a difference. Having a “vision” or a “dream” is not enough because people need something more than the ethereal words to live by -- a “strategy” is essential – it is the means to bring the dream into reality.

The effective leader is always keeping the organization “aimed” in the right direction, aligning vision, adapting to competitive threats, responding to customer needs, and ensuring sustainable profitability both immediate and into the future. The leader that loses their “aim” sees an organization wander, flounder, and use precious assets poorly.

Strategic Assets are not just physical (like money or equipment). People constitute “vital” assets. Customers, suppliers, and alliance partners compose “virtual” assets. These assets enable the leader to marshal resources to succeed.

Strategic issues impact the organization’s long-term destiny. Strategy must ultimately:

- Create *Value* that can be recognized by key stakeholders: customers, investors, employees, and suppliers.
- Produce sustainable *Competitive Advantage* that keeps the organization thriving into the future.

In today’s world, where networks of organizations compete against other networks, no leader can realistically expect to excel at strategy without carefully including high-value suppliers, customers that experience critical advantage from the company, and strategic alliance partners that deliver or add value -- this is a “value network” view of the competitive field.

Competitive advantage is the mainstay of sustainability. Competitiveness is more than just a competency; it’s a state of mind, a way of being, a mindset about how to continue to recreate oneself. This is almost always overlooked in competencies.

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2. Cultural Alignment

Cultural Alignment addresses how people interact with each other and how the organization structures its unique beliefs, holds its inherent values, punishes and rewards behavior, establishes what it values for behavior, and sets expectations for performance. Leaders play a major role in the cultural dimension communicating what the culture expects. Culture has a larger impact on people's behavior than any other factor, that's why leaders must pay attention to it.

Three Fundamental Approaches to Leadership & Culture

There are three fundamentally different ways leaders can interact with others – *adversarially*, *transactionally*, and *collaboratively* -- the basic options of leadership in the cultural dimension:

- 
- **Collaborative** – open, trusting, engaging, creative, empowering, participatory, caring.
 - **Transactional** – hierarchical, controlling, wary, protective, distant, judgmental, contractual.
 - **Adversarial** – antagonistic, confrontational, combative, distrustful, threatening, disrespectful.

Each of these three has its optimum time and place. In situations where organizations are pitted against each other, the trust is low, and cooperation between the parties would be useless, an *adversarial* approach may be appropriate; war and political campaigns are good examples – until the campaign is over, then a *transactional*, deal-making approach is required. (Note: At the heart of these three are the 4-Drives of Human Behavior.³)

Historically, much of business commerce has taken the *transactional* route, stemming from the bargaining methods used in trading. Further, when organizations were staffed by combinations of highly intelligent managers and relatively ignorant workers in somewhat stable competitive environments, the *transactional* approach to leadership found strong reasons for its justification.

However, in situations where complexity, change, ambiguity, uncertainty, and rapid adaptation is critical, and the workforce has reasonable competence and intelligence, the *collaborative* approach has shown massive advantages (see our other white papers for examples). And, as the world moves more and more to value networks in ecosystems for delivery of products and services, collaborative leadership is called upon more and more.³

Muddled Leadership

What is most disconcerting to most organizations is that a fourth option also manifests – *muddled leadership* – which, willy-nilly, grabs a piece from all three of the above noted approaches into a befuddling *mélange*, mixing and matching a little of this and a piece of that glued mercilessly together into a pastiche of contradictions and confusion. Most graduates of business schools have been exposed to all three forms of leadership, with different professorial advocates of each salaciously extolling the virtues of their favorite model.⁴

^a See Lawrence, Paul; *Driven to Lead*, Jossey, Bass; 2011, and Lynch, R.P.; *White Paper, Culture as a Force Field*

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Values, Metrics, Rewards & Symbols

Values epitomize what is important in culture – it’s “character.” Leaders must carefully align performance metrics, rewards, punishments, values and symbols to ensure a consistent, integrated message is delivered both inside and outside the company. Symbols -- such as stories, statues, mottos, and awards – are central to communicating what is truly valued.

The Power of Culture

Overwhelming evidence, in study after study, demonstrates that *people’s behavior is influenced more by culture than any other factor*, including personality.⁵ Great leaders understand how perceptions, work ethic, teamwork, and performance responses are deeply imbedded in culture, and spend the time ensuring the key elements of culture (see Figure 2: Impact of Culture on Results).

“The defining ethos of Thomas Watson, Sr. (the founder) was everywhere at IBM...part of the company’s DNA. His personal philosophies and values – hard work, decent working conditions, fairness, honesty, ethical behavior, respect, impeccable customer service – defined the IBM culture. A sense of integrity, of responsibility, flows through the veins of IBM in a way I’ve never seen in any other company.

“I came to see, in my time at IBM, that culture isn’t just one of the aspects of the game – it is the game. In the end, an organization is nothing more than the collective capacity of its people to create value. business, government, education, healthcare, or any area of endeavor – will succeed over the long haul if those elements aren’t part of its DNA.

“Successful institutions almost always develop a strong culture that reinforces those elements that make the institution great.”

-- Lou Gerstner, CEO who transformed IBM from *Who Says Elephants Can’t Dance Inside IBM’s Historic Turnaround*

Figure 2: Impact of Culture on Results

Thus, culture becomes a central point of leverage for leadership, perhaps not in the instant moment, but over the long haul. Add to this the fact that *the number one determinant of culture is leadership*. In this way, leadership influences outcomes more than any other factor in organizations and our society as a whole.

The main determinate of culture is *leadership*. Leaders are the most powerful means of influencing people’s thinking that leads to actions that make a difference. Leaders strongly influence how people perceive their realities, how they prioritize options, how they interact, what they expect of each other, and how they perform. (See Part 4, White Paper, *Culture as a Force Field*.)

Behavior is influenced more by culture than any other factor.... the number one determinant of culture is leadership.

This is why effective leadership is so important

Sports provides simple examples of a great coach taking over a losing team, trading no players, and winning the world championship the following year. We understand how this

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transformation is done in sports, business, government, education, and community – it can be taught, replicated, and sustained. A consistent, integrated delivery architecture (frameworks, mind-sets, strategies, methods, and skill-sets) is necessary to be successful.

Effective leaders work within a culture – the attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, and rewards of a particular set of expectations; what works in one culture may backfire in another. And, while people are more similar than different the world over, individual personality and personal experience does play a role in the way people respond to the world around them.

How a leader interacts within a culture and how the leader molds culture is one of the most vital lessons in leadership, as displayed in the “Union from Hell” case in White Paper #4.

For these reasons, many leadership “models” have limited effectiveness because the model that was effective for Genghis Khan might not be effective for a modern leader such as an urban school principal.

Central Organizing Principles of Collaborative Cultures

Trust and teamwork are the *central organizing principles* of collaborative leadership, which enables people to engage in teams, to solve problems together, to enjoy each other’s company, to share resources and ideas, and to be willing to sacrifice the present for a better future.

The spirit of trust channels people’s *energy* into teamwork and unleashes *co-creativity*, which is focused towards the *strategic vision* and *drives out fear* – the paralyzing force of destruction.

In developing a culture of high performance, the central organizing principle must be trust. Why is this so important? Because without trust, all the other critical factors for successful performance are either undermined or wither. This happens at the small team level, at the organizational level, and also at the national level. For example, we have found a direct correlation with the level of trust (lack of corruption) and the economic prosperity of a nation. In virtually every case, the countries with the highest level of trust (lack of corruption) had the highest levels of economic prosperity. And the opposite was also true: the highest levels of corruption produced the poorest nations.

At the foundation of all great cultures lies the ability of people to trust their leader and to trust each other, without which no teamwork can manifest. This is why collaborative cultures are so important in the rapidly changing world.

***Courage enlarges, cowardice diminishes resources.
In dangerous straits, the fears of the timid
aggravate the dangers that imperil the brave.***

--Christian Bouvee (1820-1904)



3. Operational Alignment

Operational Alignment addresses how different functions interact and execute to produce visible, tangible **results**.⁶ Without worthwhile results, no organization, no leadership, no strategy, and no culture can be considered valuable. The danger here is Machiavelli's precept: the means justifies the ends – which may produce unethical behavior and unsustainable gains.

Sustainable results do not come simply by installing a hard-driving, in-your-face project leader who screams and instills fear into people; it comes from highly aligned organizations that have their strategic, cultural, and operational acts integrated and aligned to execute in a highly coordinated team.

Operational Excellence

Successful leaders establish coherent system of **Processes**, **Measures**, and **Rewards** that transform the vision and dream into concrete reality, meaning that a leader must produce tangible and measurable **Results**.

There is a powerful statement:

*"Vision without execution is hallucination."*⁷

This does not imply, however, that a leader has carte blanche to follow the Machiavellian premise that the means justifies the end, while destroying all sustainable passion and teamwork. Getting results while sacrificing trust will only turn people against each other or drive wedges between them as they hunker down behind defensive castle walls (known as silos).

Cross Functional Integration

Because a large proportion of all delivery requires cross-functional integration from different specializations, producing results requires bridge-building, cross cultural communications, and functional integration. These can only be delivered successfully in a highly collaborative system.

Because organizations today deliver value through complex value chains/networks composed of multiple layers of suppliers and customers, a leader must be able to manage complex interfaces, eliminate non-value added work, and respond with lightning speed.

Operational Breakdowns

The faster the system tries to function, the more it will hit barriers where operational breakdowns are encountered. High performance, high trust teams are very adept at turning breakdowns into breakthroughs, solving problems by sharing information, and improving coordination for precision delivery. This is where *collaborative* cultures excel and their counterparts fail.

Productivity

High levels of productivity come from many factors that enable efficient use of resources. The worst obstacle to productivity actually is the introduction of non-value added functions, which typically arise in low trust cultures (*adversarial* and *transactional*) where increased control, risk, and auditing functions bog down fast-paced delivery.

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4. Dynamic Realignment in Time

Dynamic Realignment is the process of how the organization adapts and innovates to keep out in front of changing conditions; it is the “fourth dimension.”

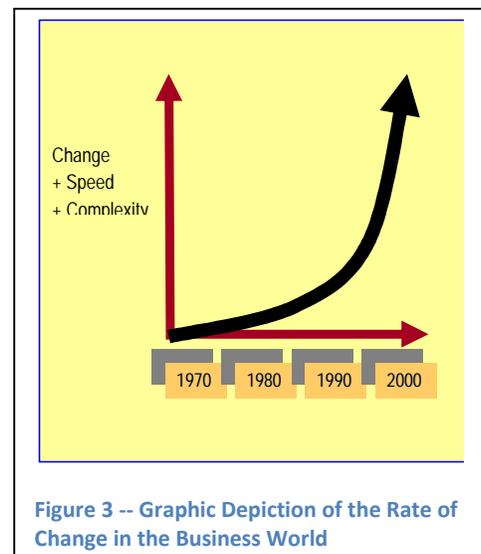
We live in a dynamic, fast moving, rapidly changing world. Competitive advantage can be very fleeting. What’s been valued in the past may not be valued in the future. Just look at the evolution of today’s “cell phone” to understand this.

There is no time to rest on one’s past accomplishments, for the future is not the same as it used to be. Competition, technology, information, politics, and environment are always throwing new forces and demands into the organization.

Adaptation is the focus of dynamic realignment.

Two major forces are at work: the first is the nature of change, complexity, and speed, as illustrated in Figure 3. The other force is *creative destruction*, which is the result of any capitalistic economy that causes new innovation and dynamic realignment to happen very quickly. A good example is how fast Nokia, Blackberry, and Motorola fell from preeminence in the cell phone market when Apple introduced the iPhone.

This condition is not conducive to hierarchical, top-down leadership systems that thrive on stability. Instead it calls for a special type of Collaborative Leadership that embraces a strong commitment to Collaborative Innovation and Collaborative Entrepreneurship to be poised to adapt in dynamic (real-time) change.



Value Evolution

Value is never stable – it is constantly evolving. The very foundations of capitalism cause the old to be replaced by the new – it’s referred to as “creative destruction.” Creativity is essential just to keep up; dynamic innovation is necessary to get ahead.

Collaborative Innovation

The very foundations of capitalism cause the old to be replaced by the new – it’s referred to as “creative destruction.” Creativity is essential just to keep up; dynamic innovation is necessary to get ahead. There are fundamentally two ways for innovation to flourish

1. Highly Creative Individuals – such as Einstein or Tesla, or
2. Dynamic Innovation Teams – based on “Collaborative Creativity”

In the final analysis, in today’s world, the Dynamic Innovation Team approach outperforms the highly creative individual nearly every time (another advantage derived from an investment in collaborative systems.) Why? Because an individual will either run out of ideas or get caught in “paradigm paralysis,” while the innovation team, if properly

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constructed, will keep on inventing. (this is actually the approach used by Edison, which produced the one of the most prolific streams of innovation the world has ever seen. It has and can be reproduced with reasonable certainty as evidenced by organizations like NASA, Lockheed Martin's Skunk Works, or Palo Alto's IDEO.)

All the great problems today will be solved on a foundation of Collaborative Innovation.

Dynamic Differential Energy

Generating innovation at a rapid rate is possible only when people who think differently from each other are brought to bear on a problem. (if everyone thinks alike, innovation seldom materializes because common thinking gets common, stale, incremental solutions.)

Diversity, when optimized in a *collaborative* culture, is the source of innovation. All innovation comes from either of two sources: highly creative individuals or people who don't think alike (differential energy) but can collaborate (requiring a "trust" environment). Differences in perceptions, cultures, backgrounds, skillsets and experiences have proven to be the best way to use the different energies of people to design new ideas.

This can only happen in a culture of trust. If creative people don't trust each other, their ability to generate innovation drops to very low levels very fast. Leaders who are unable to create trust and unable to align people on common goals, quickly encounter difficulty getting teams to adapt to changing conditions.

In the final analysis, differential energy is most sustainable and productive as a sustainable source of innovation.

Changes in Strategic, Cultural, & Operational Forces

Change can be monitored in each of the three core dimensions relatively quickly, as outlined in Figure 4

Innovation is the essential ingredient in times of change as forces change in the organization's environment (context). No single leader can possibly anticipate and respond to risks, thus a more holistic approach is essential that brings the create talents of entire teams and organizations to bear on the problems and turn them into an opportunity.

Typical Shifts Leaders Must Anticipate

These should immediately trigger Dynamic Realignment: (Abbreviated List)

- ◆ *Shifts in Strategic Environment*
 - ✓ International Price/Political Changes
 - ✓ Change in Technology
 - ✓ Competitors Entering Market
 - ✓ Market Changes
 - ✓ Production Costs
 - ✓ Strategic Realignments
- ◆ *Changing Culture*
 - ✓ Changes in Trust
 - ✓ Change of Key Personnel
 - ✓ Lack of Commitment & Support
 - ✓ Conflicting Organizational Values
- ◆ *Changing Operational Conditions*
 - ✓ Internal Financial Problems
 - ✓ Production and Marketing Costs
 - ✓ Lack of Productivity

Figure 4: Shifts to Monitor

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Conclusions

We have gone astray for centuries focusing on leadership traits and qualities, primarily by telling stories. This tradition goes back to the Greco-Roman era, epitomized by *Plutarch's Lives* – a brilliant analysis comparing leaders of ancient times. The world was less complex then, and we have come a long way in terms of understanding human behavior and the cause-effect relationships between thinking and action. While many of the precepts of ancient wisdom are still valid, we can benefit immensely by rethinking the leadership paradigm.

The Four Dimensional Alignment framework provides a new future for understanding, learning, and teaching leadership.

Civilizations are only as strong as their underlying institutions.

Vibrant institutions advance great societies; mediocre ones fail to bear the stress of changing social and economic needs.

Leaders are the single most important force that makes the difference between progress and regression, as the Dark Ages give clear testimony.

¹ Covey's Characteristics of Abundant Leaders include:

- They Return to the Deep Sources of Internal Security
- They Seek Solitude and Enjoy Nature
- They Exercise Mind and Body Every Day
- They Serve Others Anonymously
- They Maintain Long-Term Intimate Relations
- They Forgive Themselves and Others
- They Are Problem Solvers

² See White Paper: The Case for Collaborative Leadership

³ It should be noted that four critical issues must also be addressed in addition to Collaborative Leadership when shifting to a Value Network model of delivery: 1) Trust, 2) Alignment, 3) Value, & 4) Risk. The current models and levels of thinking for these issues is not sufficient to enable successful execution of most Value Networks. We have addressed these issues in a reasonable level of detail in other White Papers.

⁴ Interviews with recent MBA students revealed a wide variety of idealized leadership styles, ranging from Machiavelli and Attila the Hun to Jack Welch (GE) and Larry Kelleher (Southwest Airlines).

⁵ see White Paper – Culture as a Force Field

⁶ An excellent book on getting results and integrating functions is *Execution, The Discipline of Getting Things Done*, by Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan, Crown Business, 2002

⁷ Attributed to both Einstein and Edison