

Self-Leadership in a World of Uncertainty: A Brazilian Perspective

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Introduction

The world seems to be experiencing another delicate moment of transition in human history marked by an unprecedented crisis of leadership at all segments and levels of society, affecting rich and developing societies alike. Brazil, a country of marked contrasts, reflects this worldwide trend. A new kind of leadership is called for; one that taps into new sources of motivations and which demands a significant shift of emphasis in conventional leadership qualities and skills, where the focus becomes the *being* dimension of the leader and followers rather than a restricted concern for the *doing* side of the leader.

This article attempts to achieve the following:

- Highlight the relevance of leadership and leadership development in Brazil.
- Conceptualize good and effective leadership from the author's standpoint and experiences.
- Suggest a self-leadership developmental model which can lead to effective external and corporate leadership.

Realizing that the subject of leadership is of such a broad and subjective nature, this article focuses on the particular dimension of self-leadership because the author finds this to be an area of the most fundamental importance for impacting leaders in today's world and in the Brazilian context in particular.

A Threatening Leadership Crisis

Viewed from a worldwide perspective, two major forces⁽¹⁾ seem to be clashing, affecting the lives of every human being on earth. One, the force of globalization, is fueled by a fiercely competitive and impartial capitalistic system, and sustained by the high speed technological revolution. The second is a worldwide outcry for the rescue of human dignity, essentially through the observance of basic values of social justice and respect one for another. This “counter force” reflects basic and unquestionable universal values at the center of human life, transcending national boundaries, ideologies, cultural and religious differences.

Globalization has undoubtedly provided many benefits and opportunities for human societies, but along with broad development has also come a reality of disruptive social and environmental distortions demanding evaluation as to the direction that development has taken, and how environmental impact can be reduced in the short term and long term.

To substantiate some of these distortions from a macro-view, it is worrying that only 15% percent of world population accounts for almost 80% of the world’s consumption⁽²⁾; that 2.5 billion people worldwide are living on less than US\$2 per day and over 1.2 billion people on less than US\$1 per day⁽³⁾; and that “over twenty-five years, from 1970 to 1995, we depleted roughly 30% of the living reproductive capacity of the planet,” (Korten, 2001) such as forests, water tables, soil, wetlands, plant and animal species, and climate⁽⁴⁾

In the Brazilian context the statistics are no less concerning. We are currently witnessing an unemployment rate of almost 20% in major cities⁽⁵⁾, mostly affecting young people who, at the prime of their lives, are struggling to enter the mainstream of society both to contribute to and benefit from the contribution they can make there.

Just as this presentation was being prepared, it was disappointing to learn about the results of a recently concluded World Bank study⁽⁶⁾ which states that major foreign investors in Brazil have named *government political uncertainties, corruption, crime, and an ineffective judicial system* as the top four major restrictions and concerns for continuing to invest in the country. Foreign investments in Brazil have dropped from an all time high of US\$ 33 Billion in 2000 to an unimpressive US\$ 10-11 Billion in 2002 and 2003⁽⁷⁾. Another Brazilian periodical⁽⁸⁾ highlighted that at current rates of destruction, the Amazon forest could be devastated within the next 30 years bringing about serious environmental implications. These are paradoxical and unacceptable realities for a country that has abundant natural resources, where family values are held very high, where people have a joyful and peaceful approach towards life, and where cultural diversity has always been welcome.

In the corporate world, the symptoms of a leadership crisis are apparent as well. Studies show, as highlighted in the 2002 International Leadership Conference, that in a typical organization setting, 90% of change efforts fail, primarily because organizational leaders neglect to consider the dynamics that affect individuals and organizations, including human emotions and the power of culture. Further reflecting this problem two thirds of organizational members are not committed to the purposes and values of their organizations and the majority have low regard for their leaders.⁽⁹⁾

Research⁽¹⁰⁾ shows that the physical and emotional health of our Brazilian corporate executives is not doing too well either, as reflected in these statistics: 89% suffer from insomnia; 91% take tranquilizers; 89% are unhappy with their careers; 95% are seeking existential help; and only 10% are happy with their marriage.

As we look at this context of societal and corporate complexities we can infer that there seems to be a message of fear, insecurity, and even despair affecting individuals and societies as a whole. Not only is our individual present at risk, but also the future of human society if we don't make a commitment to properly address the situation, both from an individual and collective standpoint.

This is a reality that take us to a new dimension of leadership education much different than the conventional 'management education', which, as true in Brazil as elsewhere, has paid little attention to the inner side of the leader. It is a new leadership dimension that requires connecting spirituality (not to be confused with "religion") with leadership, something that demands deep self-examination, self-knowledge, and self-awareness. It is a leadership that taps into new sources of motivation and emphasizes different skills.

In spite of these recent trends, it is encouraging to witness the focus of attention the subject of leadership has attracted in recent years. Fortunately this is also the case in Brazil, where the attention of the academic and corporate arenas, and to some extent the governmental and social sectors, has been aroused to the relevance of the subject. It has become evident that at the core of current human problems, affecting lives in all segments and levels society, is a serious crisis of leadership. Leadership has been recognized as the missing link and the single most important strategic factor for effectively tackling this apparently chaotic situation.⁽¹¹⁾ Leadership is viewed nowadays as the all encompassing '*master discipline*' that subsumes a number of other disciplines ranging from history and government to psychology to social sciences, according to James M. Burns⁽¹²⁾.

Why the Brazilian Leadership Institute

It was with this reality in mind that the ILB-Brazilian Institute of Leadership was conceived and created with a mission to foster leadership development in all segments of Brazilian society. Basic premises for the existence of the ILB are the following⁽¹³⁾:

- Poor leadership performance is at the root of existing problems in the corporate, social and government sectors.
- The demand for good leadership far exceeds its availability.
- Leadership is no longer a privilege of a chosen few. It is everybody's responsibility.
- Most people have basic capacity for leadership; and they can be developed.

Since its inception in 2003, over 3,000 people from private, government, and social sector have already participated in the ILB leadership training programs, which include a Masters in Organizational Leadership in partnership with Azusa Pacific University and a special program on leadership & diversity for European companies based in Brazil. The demand for the Institute leadership programs has exceeded expectations. Recently a new request has been received from within the social sector, where a program is being designed and funds raised to support massive community leadership development. This program, a joint effort with the police force of the State of Sao Paulo, should involve leadership training for 1,000 community leaders and over 200

police officers, aiming at integrating police and community in an effort to fight rising crime and other related social problems.

An Attempt to Define Leadership

One concern the author had when starting the ILB, was conceptualizing and defining leadership for the purposes of the Institute. So many different interpretations of leadership exist, that it was very important to choose one which would serve well as the focus for the development of the Institute and its activities.

First, an attempt was made to understand the context in which leadership takes place. The following common elements seem to be present in a leadership context, regardless of the level of organizational formality:

- A Meaningful Problem: For leadership to be required, there must be a perceived problem manifested through some kind of discomfort, threat, or crisis. In this context some fundamental human value is at stake where the required change is not only of incremental order but of a deep nature. There are risks involved.
- The Emergence of a Potential Leader: Somebody cares and decides to do something about the situation. This potential leader may not necessarily have the power or ability to carry out the process to the end by himself.
- Articulation of Need and Vision: The potential leader interprets the facts and articulates the need and desired change to be brought to the context, which should include a compelling vision and strategy.
- Mobilization and Interaction of People: the potential leader starts to influence people to support and activate the desired change. Interaction starts among those involved or affected by the change and eventually a social architecture happens, formally or informally, to bring about a successful change in the context.

The next concern had to do with the kind of leadership result that was desired out of the change context. With so many possible leadership definitions, the author opted to focus on leadership as a positive moral force. The suggested definition is as follows:

“Leadership is the art and process of influencing and empowering people for a life of excellence, that leads to meaningful inner transformations (Being) and contributions to society and self (Doing), in a way that allows one to make a difference in life.”

This definition encompasses two fundamental dimensions of the leadership process: first, the task or results orientation dimension, through initiating and taking responsibility for change; and second, the human dimension, through encouraging and empowering people to actualize themselves and make a difference though a life of excellence in both character and competence. Conventional management and leadership definitions seem to place an unbalanced emphasis on the doing and self-centered side of the leader.

The Need for Self-Leadership

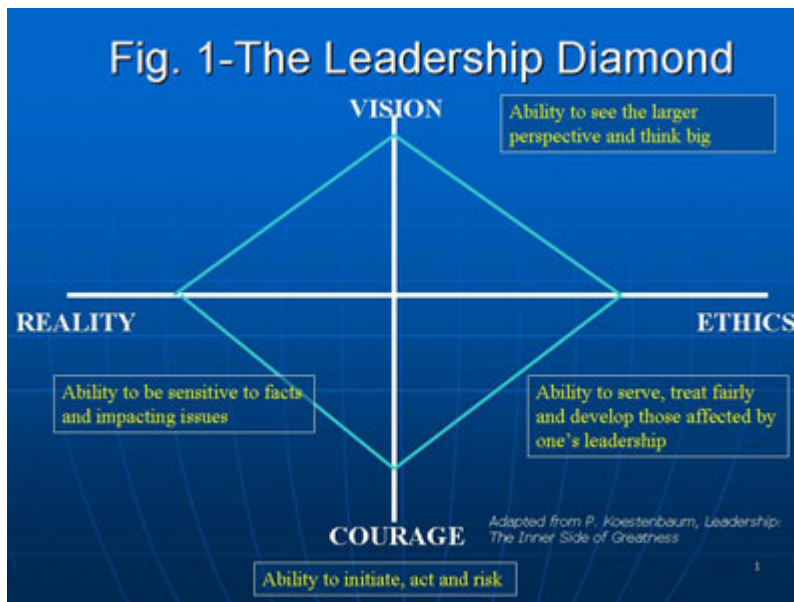
Our definition of leadership implies a need for effective self-leadership. Good leadership requires first the inner transformation of the leader himself so that he can be sensitive to the

situation requiring change, and can model the qualities and skills of interpersonal relationship to successfully deal with today's intensive levels of interdependency and diversity.

Self-Leadership is undoubtedly an area of utmost importance for impacting leadership; yet this is a dimension of leadership development which most Brazilian schools and organizations are not yet properly addressing. In fact, the author believes that herein lies the answer for those two-thirds of people unhappy and not committed to their organizations' purposes and values, as well for the organizational change program failures noted in the beginning of this article.

To further appreciate the relevance of self-leadership development, it is important to understand key leadership competencies required for effective action, as well as some shifts in thinking that have occurred in recent times.

As one endeavors to understand what is required to be an effective leader, he or she will find that there are hundreds of leadership qualities and skills identified in today's abundant leadership literature. The reader is left with the impression that it is humanly impossible to ever find or develop a leader who could embody even a small percentage of those desired requirements. Therefore, in designing a practical self-leadership development model the ILB adopted P. Koestenbaum's Leadership Diamond model⁽¹⁴⁾ as a foundational reference. Figure 1 below shows its simplicity in emphasizing only four fundamental competencies. Through the application of specially designed leadership assessments, this model is used to measure the effectiveness of leadership impact in different dimensions of the leader's life - organizational, family, professional, community, etc. The relevance of this approach comes from the recognition that from these four key competency streams come all the other competencies that a contextual leadership situation demands.

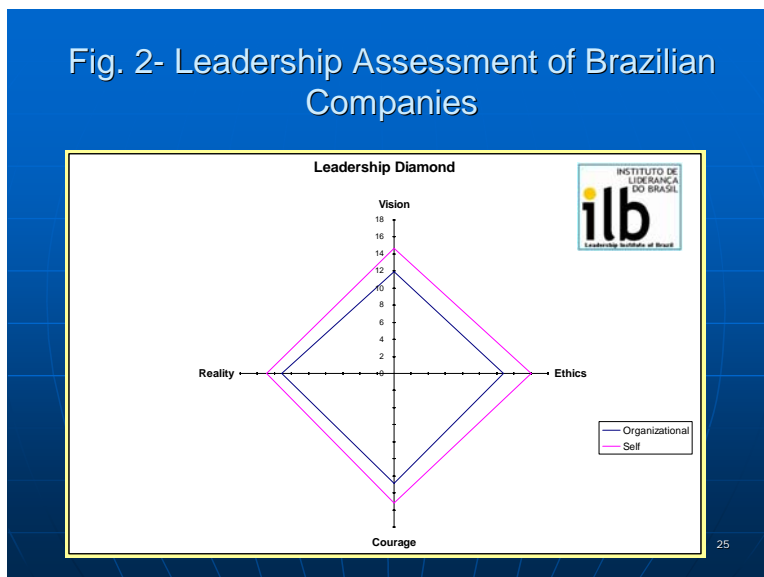


Each of the four points in the scale of the two axes represents fundamental leadership abilities. Greatness is achieved as one moves to a more balanced diamond in his or her assessment.

One of the powerful values of this model is that these four fundamental abilities have an intimate and inter-related connection with each other. For instance, the leader will not be able to effectively interpret *Reality* and articulate a compelling *Vision*, if he or she has not yet clarified his *Ethical* values. Another aspect that the simplicity of this model helps to clarify is the question: how does a leader get *Courage* to activate and support his action? This can only be appreciated when one understands that *Courage* is not the absence of fear but the predominance of commitment and action sustained by a clear personal value system (*Ethics*) and a compelling *Vision*.

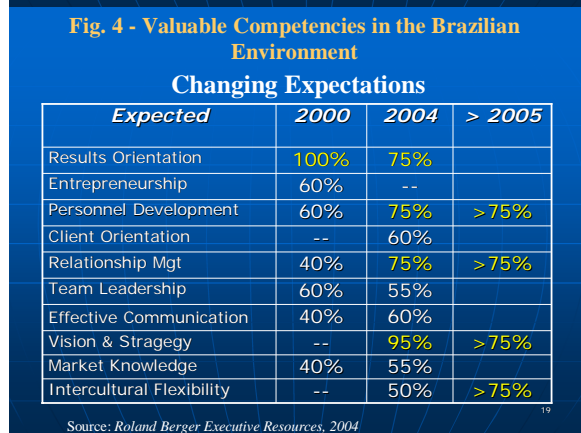
To exemplify further the usefulness of this model, two special assessments were developed by ILB in 2003 involving 452 executives from top Brazilian organizations regarding how they see themselves as leaders and how they see the leadership of their organizations. The consolidated results are shown in Fig. 2 below. It is interesting to observe that the executives assessed themselves as having higher leadership competencies (represented by the blue line diamond in Fig.2) than that of their organizations (represented by the red line diamond). This is a very typical tendency, except in this case for the size of the gaps, particularly in the Ethics dimension; something that opened the door for stimulating discussions aimed at understanding the reasons for the discrepancies. The model along with other special assessments used by the ILB provides a powerful tool for self and organizational leadership evaluations and design of leadership development programs.

Fig. 2- Leadership Assessment of Brazilian Companies



It is also important to highlight that significant shifts are occurring in the required skills for effective leadership that reinforce the greater relevance of the self-leadership model. Studies⁽⁸⁾ have shown that from the past emphasis on cognitive skills leadership has shifted over the last three decades to demanding emotional competencies. The four top areas where success differentiates the stars from the pedestrians are the following⁽¹⁵⁾: *the drive to achieve results, the ability to take initiative, skills in collaboration and teamwork, and ability to lead teams*. This trend reflects the dramatic shift from a production based workforce to one of knowledge workers where interdependency and diversity in the workplace prevails.

Figures 3⁽¹⁶⁾ and 4⁽¹⁷⁾ below serve to reinforce the changing expectations in the demand for emotional competencies from a Brazilian perspective.



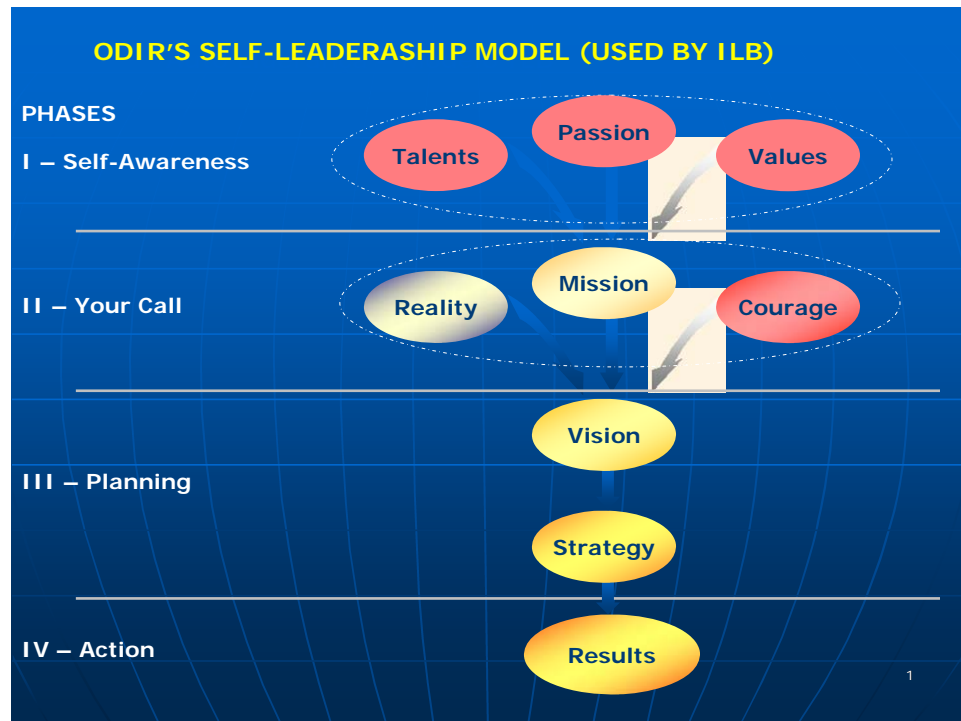
One of the great benefits of self-leadership development and the inner work and transformations that go along with it, is that it seasons and enhances the leader's maturity, integrity, and capacity to expand his thinking and social sensibility, i.e his character. Those who engage in the inner transformation effort that self-leadership development demands, end up knowing and being sensitive to a world much different from their own. They learn to appreciate differences and develop the ability to read, test, and deal with cultural diversity, without doubt one of the most needed leadership skills in the 21st century.

Suggesting a Self-Leadership Model

We see that good leadership and for that matter true self-leadership, demands a focus on something higher than just self-centered success, which is normally measured by secular standards of material possessions, prestige, and power. Self-Leadership aims at something higher than just survival and secular success. Self-leadership development, in essence, aims for higher levels of individual significance.

With this in mind, and based on his own experience, the author developed a simple *Self-Leadership Development Model* which has been adopted by the ILB. This model, outlined in Fig.

5, was developed and refined through extensive discussions with long time personal friends who had experienced deep struggles and meaningful successes in their lives.



This model is supported by the following basic premises and beliefs:

- We are all endowed with unique talents that cannot be acquired by money or other secular means. They are special gifts from the Creator.
- It is possible to go through life without knowing or ever using these unique talents and gifts. We have a responsibility for becoming aware of the uniqueness of our talents.
- Being aware, however, is not enough. We also have the responsibility to develop our talents to the level of excellence as a way of honoring the Creator and justifying the gifts we have received.
- Having achieved all of the above is still not enough if we obtain excellence in leadership for self-centered reasons. We can only achieve personal fulfillment and significance when we develop an attitude of sharing with others the results of our excellence and uniqueness.

The self-leadership model presented in Fig. 5 above has four basic levels, characterized by the following:

- LEVEL I – Self-Awareness: one must understand and clarify his innate hard-wired *Talents*, what drives him or her in life (*Passions*), and what is really most important to him or her in this life (personal *Values*). We can add to this other complementary ingredients of soul-searching like personality, experiences, and other assets.
- LEVEL II – Understanding the Call: The above elements of soul-searching will allow us to clarify our *Mission* and give us a sense of identity. When this personal identity comes across a situation or an opportunity (*Reality*) that is in line with itself, one becomes

further empowered by *Courage* and is likely to act and move to the next level of the model. Destiny, as a friend says, is where your calling meets an opportunity.

- LEVEL III – Planning: when empowered by the understanding and clarification of the very basic inner issues of levels I and II, the leader is ready to articulate the desired change he or she wants to bring about, i.e., the *Vision* and the *Strategy*.
- LEVEL IV – Action: having done the homework of levels I through III, the leader is then ready for action and the generation of meaningful results, which includes other people's empowerment and value added to society. It is appropriate to highlight that when one has clarified the components of Level I and understood his or her Mission (Level II), Levels III and IV can be worked out more expeditiously, especially in situations of crisis, because courage, without which action is impossible, will most likely develop.

A last comment on this topic: there is a price to be paid when one ignores his or her talents and passions or doesn't respect healthy values. When we ignore and don't respond to our calling in life very unpleasant personal symptoms will manifest, such as the following:

- Emotional: fear, anxiety, depression, frustration
- Behavioral: low productivity, indecision, passivity
- Physical: stress, chronic diseases, and others.

Conclusive Thoughts

The heart of leadership and self-leadership lies finally in the heart of the leader; it is something deeper and more satisfying than just self-centered success and corporate bottom-lines. This can only happen when we come to understand the ties between spirituality and leadership, something that requires a journey through non-conventional business and management education and development. This is good leadership.

We live in a world of intensive changes, surrounded by the forces of interdependency and diversity. Each one of us, in whatever segment or level of society we live, has the potential and the responsibility to serve as an agent of positive change through self-leadership in a world of uncertainties.

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