



Collaborative Leadership The Role of Leadership in an ICAS Organization

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Main Topics: THE ICAS ORGANIZATION (Leadership and Leaders; Collaborative Leader Actions and Values; Beyond Collaboration); FOUNDATIONAL CONCEPTS (Values; Trust; Empowerment; Alignment; Vision Purpose and Direction; Risk); SUMMARY THOUGHTS; REFERENCE.

Introduction

Over the past half-century the industrial age has gradually morphed into the information age, resulting in a plethora of information that has become so intense and ubiquitous that it often overwhelms decision-makers. It is well known that information feeds on information, ergo its exponential rise. However, information also feeds complexity as systems compete and knowledge advances through the learning stimulated by the availability of information and competition. A corollary phenomenon of these processes is the increasing need and value of knowledge. Examples are smart cars, market versus book value of corporations such as Microsoft, and the internet explosion with its new ways of doing business.

As we continue to create multi-networked, flexible, national and global organizations it is becoming clear that information alone cannot provide the understanding and meaning needed to solve problems, make decisions, and take effective actions. Such a milieu requires a different organizational paradigm and with it, a new perspective on leaders and leadership. The paradigm selected for this paper is The Intelligent Complex Adaptive System, (ICAS), a nominal organization designed within a framework and set of concepts that combine to create and maintain sustainable high performance in a rapidly Changing, Uncertain, Complex and Anxiety prone environment, **CUCA**. This organization was first introduced by Bennet and Bennet in *Organizational Survival in the New World: The Intelligent Complex Adaptive System*. (Bennet and Bennet, 2004)

After briefly describing the major tenants and characteristics of the ICAS we will explore the roles of collaborative leaders and collaborative leadership needed to guide the organization through its uncertain and surprise prone future.

THE ICAS ORGANIZATION

The Intelligent Complex Adaptive System is an organization designed to behave similar to an autopoietic system, meaning the structure of ICAS may change but its identity remains. Von Krogh and Roos describe this well when they say that, "...autopoietic systems are systems of a certain organization, independent of its components but dependent on their interrelations. Thus over time an autopoietic system changes its components but maintains its organization."

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They also note, “ The theory of autopoiesis refers not only to self-production as such, but also to the characteristic of living systems continuously renewing themselves in a way that allows them to maintain the integrity of their structure...then the system must allow for the interrelations between that define it as a unity.” (von Krogh and Roos, 1995, p. 36) In the ICAS organization, the most significant relationships are those between, and among knowledge workers. With the increase in global complexity, competitiveness and information, human capital is becoming *the source of choice* for creating value. As Lawler suggests, “The era of human capital has finally arrived.” (Lawler, 2001) As we will discuss below, collaborative leaders play a big role in creating value from human capital. ICAS was created on the presumption that an organization can best survive by possessing a number of specific capabilities and competencies not usually found in industrial or bureaucratic enterprises. The organization, with its identity, competencies, and internal relationships, is the primary source of long term performance and survival—its products, services and markets will almost surely change. Even if its structure, culture and processes change over time the unity, identity, or alignment of the institution should remain the same. This is so because it is the unity of ICAS that represents the nature and character of the organization such that it has the characteristics necessary for survival in an unpredictable world, see below. The basic tenants of ICAS include:

- (a) It co-evolves with its environment through autopoietic structural adaptation. (Maturana and Varela, 1987)
- (b) It continuously learns, creates, manages and applies knowledge that can deal with change, complexity, and uncertainty.
- (c) The sum of the daily actions of employees determines the ICAS performance, thus people with their knowledge, competency, and relationships are its most important asset.
- (d) The major functions of *senior leadership* are to set the direction, vision, and purpose of the organization and to direct and allocate resources at the highest level.
- (e) The major function of *collaborative leaders* is to support, energize, and empower the workforce (primarily knowledge workers) so they can respond quickly and effectively to environmental opportunities and threats.
- (f) The major function of *collaborative leadership* (the emergent collective effect of collaborative leaders) is to ensure organizational alignment while modulating the structure, culture, and local directions to achieve sustainable high performance.

Bennet and Bennet propose that the foundation of the ICAS organization is built upon eight characteristics. These emergent characteristics are **permeable boundaries, selectivity, flow, optimum complexity, knowledge centricity, multidimensionality, shared purpose, and organizational intelligence.** (Bennet and Bennet, 2004) Each characteristic contributes to the capacity of the organization to survive and adapt in a highly uncertain environment. For example *permeable boundaries* addresses the mechanisms of exerting influences across boundaries and ensuring that the organization remains open to changes in its environment while continuously interacting with, and responding to external forces, customers and markets. (Gold and Douvan, 1997) *Selectivity* denotes the capacity to scan and select only those environmental events and trends that are of interest to the organization—thereby filtering and simplifying external complexity, minimizing cost and focusing effort. This also serves as a basis for forecasting future trends and creating possible scenarios and strategies. (Makridakis, 1990) To do these well

requires continuous learning through effortful, reflective experience and a well developed, context oriented intuition and judgment.

Flow as used here is an expansion of Csikszentmihali's concept of optimal (autotelic) experience to encompass the continuing movement of people, ideas, and resources to provide the local capacity to handle opportunities and threats. (Csikszentmihali, 1990) *Optimum complexity* is a concept that helps organizations deal with complexity and is based on Ross Ashby's law of requisite variety. (Ashby, 1964) It gives visibility to, and addresses the management of, different levels of internal complexity to help deal with external complexity. For example, there are many actions that a facilitator or a team can take to vary the diversity and number of ideas, solutions or actions to consider when solving a complex problem or making a decision within a complex situation. Nonaka says,

The more variety the market generates, the more information and decision burdens increase; the more variety each firm faces, the more variety of information it needs to record, monitor, and interpret for decision-making...A way to cope with this variety is to respond in kind by creating variety in one's own organization structure. This is a fundamental principle called the law of requisite variety, first proposed by Ashby. (Nonaka, 1996 p. 2)

Knowledge centrality puts knowledge in the middle of the organization and promotes its capacity to create, manage, leverage and apply knowledge. *Multidimensionality* (also called integrative competencies) addresses the need for knowledge workers to expand their competency beyond their own discipline so they develop a broader perspective and understand the impact of their actions on other parts of the organization. It includes competencies such as system and complexity thinking, relationship network management, the risk of poor leadership and information literacy. *Shared purpose* represents the grounding for ICAS existence and is a resource for aligning and energizing the workforce and their daily actions. *Organizational intelligence* represents the ability of ICAS to plan, set and achieve goals and objectives. The underlying theme of these eight characteristics is to use learning, knowledge, collaboration, empowerment and a systems perspective to support and unleash the energy and potential of knowledge workers. The objective is to take effective local actions that are in concert with the organizations direction, values and purpose, while being able to respond quickly to surprising local threats and opportunities.

From a different perspective, the major factors in ICAS would be: workforce competency, collaboration and empowerment; the recognition, management and application of knowledge to support workforce needs; and strategic direction and intent to guide organizational actions while encouraging local flexibility and adaptability. Other factors would be a culture, structure and management that support knowledge workers in their day-to-day actions in responding to environmental issues and opportunities, and in their need for continuous learning and growth.

Leadership and Leaders

Leadership is probably the most widely studied aspect of organizations. Many thousands of books have been written on the subject over the past century, and undoubtedly many others before that. Continuing interest in leadership is exemplified by the number of edited books with multiple authors offering different views and suggestions, examples being: Spears, 1998; Bennis

et al., 2001; Hesselbein and Cohen, 1999; Hesselbein et al., 1996; and Shelton, 1997). As noted in the overview paper, the recent trends in leadership have been toward a greater acceptance of the role of knowledge, an increasing awareness and respect for the workforce and a concern for the well-being and empowerment of workers. This has been driven by the rising affluence, education, mobility and expectations of knowledge workers coupled with their newly recognized value to employers. Knowledge worker expectations and demands are changing the age old psychological contract/compact between workers and their employers. For example a recent workforce research report prepared for the Water Utility Industry entitled *The Changing Workforce... Crises & Opportunity*, noted that

...The Baby Boomers' work ethic, "If you work hard, you'll succeed," does not exist to the same degree in other generations. The generation Xers and Nexters want to be in integral part of the company decisions, be self-reliant through the use of technology, learn and experience new things at work, and have others trust them. Their biggest issue is a lack of recognition for ideas, performance, and contribution toward organizational goals." (An AMSA/AMWA Checklist, 2004, p. 8)

Given the functional requirements needed for survival and the changing knowledge worker values and attitudes, is there an historic leadership style or approach that would meet the needs of the ICAS? The classical autocratic leader would not be successful because no individual knows enough to second-guess the environment, whether it is global or local. The charismatic leader is unlikely to be effective because knowledge workers, while inspired by passion, also demand respect and freedom of choice. They want to participate, not just follow. It is also becoming clear to many workers that while energy is needed, it is not sufficient for effective actions—working smarter is clearly better than working harder. Since they lead by personality and image, strong, individualistic leaders want and expect control and visibility. The nature of ICAS is best fulfilled by leadership distributed throughout its structure to aid in cohesion, alignment, rapid responsiveness and adaptability. Such an organization cannot be designed and constructed using bureaucratic style authority as a driver, it must be created through seeding, nurturing and co-evolving with the workforce and its environment via self-organization at the local level and iterative interactions with the outside world. This is not something strong, ego-driven leaders are good at, or usually willing to do.

The key question for this paper is: what kind of leadership can best provide the guidance and support to the workforce as they sense, interpret, respond and adjust to their uncertain and changing environment? Leadership has been described as the process of giving meaningful direction to collective effort and causing willing effort to be expended to achieve collective goals (Jacobs and Jacque, 1990). For our purposes, collaborative leaders are those individuals throughout the organization who have the initiative, competency, and connections to mold, support, and guide their own part of the organization's structure, culture, and execution competency to achieve success.

One part of this ICAS leadership consists of senior people with top level authority, responsibility, and accountability to determine and guide the organization's purpose, vision, and direction. These leaders have similar roles and responsibilities in all organizations, the exception being that ICAS senior leaders recognize their control limitations and are more collaborative, servant and people oriented than most others. This is necessary to create the flexibility adaptability needed to deal productively with its marketplace, customers, suppliers and other

stakeholders. A bureaucratic organization that is tightly controlled will have great difficulty adapting to a rapidly changing environment. Its chain of command and bureaucratic process restrictions are simply incapable of responding quickly and flexibly. In a CUCA world no one individual or group has enough knowledge or power to control their organization. Because of their past successes with a control oriented approach to management, the recognition of this limitation is extremely difficult for senior leaders to accept. Yet knowledge worker competency, empowerment and, pro-activity are major factors in ICAS's capacity to perform. Wiig notes that "Improving the quality of the myriad of small problem-solving situations in every employee's daily work culminates into a significant improvement in performance for the whole enterprise." (Wiig, 2004, p. 31) By working with their colleagues, collaborative leaders will create, support and maintain an environment where employees can learn and develop the competency to create, leverage and apply knowledge. This type of relationship with the workers is also very difficult for an autocratic manager to buy into because of the issues of trust and power.

In concert with the above, ICAS performance is achieved by empowering the work force, providing a learning structure, nurturing an action oriented culture, and embedding and growing multiple networks that facilitate quick response. Collaboration is such an important part of creating the right environment and leveraging knowledge that we call the type of leaders described in this paper, *collaborative leaders*. It is within this context that we investigate the leadership attributes and behavior that will move the ICAS into the future. These leaders will be found at all levels of the organization and recognized by their broader perspective, networking efficacy, and collaborative relationships with other workers. Through knowledge, systems perspective, and actions to build trust, respect and self-directed learning with their coworkers, these leaders will be both admired and supported. By using a team/networking approach to problem solving, decision-making and implementation, they will create and motivate a workforce of competent professionals. Goleman, in a Harvard Business Review article proposes that emotional intelligence is twice as important as technical skills or IQ in its contribution to excellent leadership performance. (Goleman, 1998) In a later article he defines emotional intelligence as "...the ability to manage ourselves and our relationships effectively..." (Goleman, 2000) He then identifies four components of emotional intelligence at work: Self-Awareness; Self-Management; Social Awareness; and Social Skill. The consulting firm Hay/McBer, drawing on a random sample of 3871 executives selected from a database of over 20,000 leaders found that those with the best results do not rely on only one style of leadership—they use many or all of six styles. *Coercive leaders* demand immediate compliance. *Authoritative leaders* mobilize people toward a vision. *Affiliative leaders* create emotional bonds and harmony. *Democratic leaders* build consensus through participation. *Pacesetter leaders* expect excellence and self direction. And *coaching leaders* develop people for the future. "These styles, taken individually appear to have a direct and unique impact on the working atmosphere of the company, division or team...the leaders with the best results do not rely on only one leadership style; they use most of them in a given week—seamlessly and in different measure—depending on the business situation." (Goleman, 2000) From our collaborative leaders viewpoint it is easy to identify with each style for a given situation within ICAS. In emergencies even coercive leadership may be necessary. Authoritative leadership would likely be least applicable, rather a collaborative leader would work with workers to understand and believe in the organization's vision and purpose. The other four styles fit nicely with our concept of collaboration and leadership.

In ICAS leadership *emerges*, with leadership attributes, character, and styles springing forth at all levels of the organization. This will occur when there is cohesion among managers and leaders, when communication is open and energy is focused on learning and performance, not personal gain. Zand, addressing leadership in knowledge organizations, believes that "...Leadership in knowledge organizations is the ability to harness, and integrate three interdependent forces—knowledge, trust, and power." (Zand, 1997, p. 23) We take issue with his use of the word power and would use influence instead. Power, in the sense of ultimate authority or control, does not encourage collaborative relationships or processes. Even a medium use of power may quell open communication and knowledge sharing. Yet, it is our contention that for any reasonable level of complexity, one mind is insufficient. Collaborative leaders can be most influential when they are distributed throughout the organization, interacting, supporting and sharing their experience and insight with their colleagues. These leaders will also exhibit a coherence of perspective, approach and direction that combines purpose, values and respect for people while encouraging creativity, diversity, risk and proactive endeavors. This is not an easy tightrope to walk. It takes a lot of communication, the sharing of understanding not the transfer of information, and a steady build-up of trust and personal caring. Formal staff meeting, coupled with coffee mess conversations are good places to discuss topics like success, mistakes, context importance on decisions, how and why decisions were what they were and why action learning is so critical to the future. Leadership behavior such as this may well merge management and leadership. Managers are tasked to get things done; collaborative leaders look around and beyond the task and guide, support and integrate. The two are not incompatible. However, collaborative leadership is not for all parts/department of an organization.

Many organizations, including ICAS will have subsystems that work in a predictable external environment and therefore deal mostly with repetitive situations, for example production lines, legal, human resource, and contracting departments, etc. These subsystems need process discipline and efficiency to reduce costs and maintain process integrity. For the other subsystems where change and uncertainty run high, efficiency must take a back seat to learning, adapting and a certain level of trial and error. Under these conditions collaborative leaders are in the best position to understand and support knowledge workers at the scene of action, while simultaneously seeing the larger picture from the organization's needs and objectives perspective. All qualified individuals, from the CEO to team leaders to knowledge experts may be, or become, collaborative leaders. These individuals will set standards, leverage knowledge, reinforce the action culture, interpret and explain the environment, support knowledge worker career growth, orchestrate disputes and resolve internal problems. They will be role models and build empowerment, collaboration and a systems perspective among knowledge workers. They will also develop other leaders through mentoring, staff meetings, and informal conversations while continuously challenging everyone to be critical thinkers, take reasonable risks and leverage all cognitive, technical and financial resources.

Collaborative leaders may not represent formal positions in the organization; they are individuals who have demonstrated their ability and accepted the responsibility of leadership within the context of ICAS needs. They are not bosses so much as collaborators and colleagues. In a sense they will likely be the "high potential knowledge workers" as seen by upper management. Their value lies in their capacity to learn, develop the key competencies, and create relationships and perspectives that, working in concert, will prepare and guide the ICAS into the future. Through this complex set of interactions among the internal environment, responses from knowledge workers, the structure and culture within which they work, and their own personal

needs and goals, a world view and an understanding of their purpose and who they are in the context of work will emerge. During this process some individuals change and grow in a manner that they become respected, admired, and trusted by others. Through this process collaborative leaders emerge who have earned their right of influence. These leaders are co-equals who help others get their work done, who are good role models to mimic, and who care about their co-workers. While they may or may not be team leaders, they will know facilitation, team problem solving and decision-making as described by Bennet. (Bennet, 1997) They develop an understanding of how and why the ICAS is what it is and does what it does and take the time to share that meaning with their coworkers. They will develop an understanding of their organization that enables them to convey meaning, worthiness and pride to the workforce.

Collaborative leaders represent a mobilizing force within the organization. By working at multiple levels and networking with each other they can build organizational cohesion and local flexibility. In other words they are hierarchical level spanners, having the perspective and competency to work at multiple levels with the goal of keeping local actions coherent with top strategies. As they learn and grow, many of them will be promoted to higher levels of management/leadership responsibility. They will also move around within their organization every three or four years—as most ICAS knowledge workers will. This mobility is part of their career growth and develops higher level understanding and appreciation of the needs, structure and culture of their organization. It also ensures continuous learning and selects out non-learners. Collaborative leaders become adept at creating and using living networks in several ways. They will be members of communities of practice, quick response teams and their own personal verification network, (getting advice from a trusted, knowledgeable ally). To meet their alignment responsibilities they will network with each other and also with the Operations and Learning Centers. (Bennet & Bennet, 2004, p. 80) They may have senior level mentors and their own mentees. While many companies provide special opportunities for their high-potential employees, ICAS may have a large number of collaborative leaders depending upon the nature and needs of each organization. Collaborative leaders cost money. Learning, working together and creating value through knowledge and teamwork are not free. However, in a society where knowledge creates value, they should be viewed as an asset and the cost of maximizing its value is the cost of doing business.

Collaborative leaders will have developed competencies considerably beyond their individual discipline expertise. For example they would expand their own learning and help others acquire and apply the integrative competencies needed to succeed in their specific markets. They would also continuously monitor and exercise the organizations capacity to implement actions required to meet sustainability criteria, such as continuous learning, quick response, resilience, robustness, flexibility, adaptability and customer satisfaction. Each of these capabilities places certain requirements on different parts of the organization, requirements that may not come naturally. Just as the military plans for surprises during wartime and develops and practices scenarios to help prepare them for possible surprises, any organization living in a CUCA environment should consider a similar approach. Collaborative leaders represent one resource of for this preventive planning.

Collaborative Leader Actions and Values

To indicate their perspective and leadership approach we provide a short sample of the kinds of actions, values and behaviors that collaborative leaders would exhibit. (Bennet & Bennet, 2004)

- As usual, actions are situation and context dependent.
- Insist that everyone be treated with respect, fairness, and equality.
Reward sustainable high performance, not quick fixes.
Maintain strong moral and ethical values and apply them in all areas of life.
Treat people as professional colleagues, giving them the benefit of the doubt until proven otherwise.
Inspire others through positive thinking with an optimistic but not a naive outlook.
Understand and actively foster relationships and their role in ICAS operations.
Ask how and why things happen, and how and why an action is taken.
Challenge the status quo to prevent stasis and the creation of false realities.
Use networks to align the organization and to leverage knowledge.
Focus on quality, effectiveness, and organizational health.
Lead by example and collaboration, not by power or ego.
Build other leaders, and build leaders who build other leaders.
Facilitate loyalty, respect, competence, synergy, and learning among the workforce.
Do not pretend to know when they don't.
Challenge all knowledge workers with high standards.
Change the structure and nurture the culture to support the workforce.
Always share context with team members.
Leverage knowledge wherever possible.

Beyond Collaboration

Another role of collaborative leaders is to guide and nurture their local workforce to make optimum use of all of its resources. These resources include knowledge workers, their knowledge, their ability to leverage knowledge through relationship networks, and their flexibility through empowerment and self-organization. Because knowledge workers—with their creativity, initiative, loyalty, and competency—represent a very valuable resource for ICAS, leaders must support, challenge, and work with them as coequals and highly respected partners. Knowledge workers need the freedom and responsibility to decide how to organize and complete their assignments, either individually or in teams.

Collaborative leaders both build and leverage competency, they do not control it. They are participants, contributors, and change agents, not directors. They combine the art of collaboration, the art of leading others, and the art of alignment. While these actions are normal and necessary, they also work to inspire the workforce through the leader's behavior, sensitivity, and support. As noted above, they are not only leaders within ICAS, they are also part of the leadership of ICAS.

Foundational Concepts

We now consider in more detail some foundational concepts underlying successful collaborative leadership: **values; trust; empowerment; alignment; vision, purpose, and direction; and risk.**

Values

Values and moral principles have historically played a strong role in the ability of leaders to lead and keep followers. In the ICAS they become even more significant because knowledge workers are independent thinkers and differences in basic values can quickly lead to distrust. Collaborative leaders need to make organizational values visible, openly discussed and analyzed so they can be used as a foundation for behavior, decisions, and performance expectations. Common values facilitate dialogue and build trust and understanding. Strong organizational values contribute to knowledge worker empowerment. If a worker understands and agrees with the organization's values, they have a space for empowered decision-making by knowing what decisions are acceptable and which ones are not. This also helps reduce external complexity through filtering by selecting only those opportunities consistent with the organization's values. Collaborative leaders will improve internal communication and cooperation by talking about personal and organizational values at staff meetings, providing seminars and workshops on their importance and role in organizational performance, and through stories and anecdotes from the organizations past experiences.

Trust

Trust is foundational to the ability of the ICAS to create, share, leverage, and apply knowledge anywhere and anytime it is needed. Trust is notoriously difficult to create and becomes fragile in times of stress. From the collaborative leader's perspective, words and behaviors have to be consistent, objective, and sensitive to coworkers. Individuals perceived to operate from power positions are easily distrusted by subordinates, who often look for sub-rosa intentions or goals. A collaborative leader with authority who uses that authority only when absolutely necessary—most of the time working with others in a collaborative, coequal way—is in a position to gain the trust and the cooperation of others.

This trust has to be mutual to be effective. A leader who does not trust his or her people will not be able to treat them as equals, openly share information and be fair in evaluations. Trust, like values, needs to be brought into the light, openly discussed and maintained with quick actions taken when it buckles. Lack of candor, unethical behavior, a non-caring attitude relative to others, egotism, and acrimonious debate all lead down the road of distrust. Empowerment, fast communication, teamwork, risk-taking and mutual respect all exist on a foundation of trust—trust among workers and between the organization and its workforce.

Empowerment

For the ICAS to have the capability to self-organize, adapt, and respond rapidly to changing events, knowledge workers must be empowered to use their knowledge and act, sometimes on their own, more often with others. Empowerment has become a touchy subject with some organizations who have attempted to use it within a classical bureaucratic structure. When push comes to shove, most managers will choose control. In fact, it is emotionally difficult in many organizations to relax the level of control. Managers who are accustomed to

having authority, responsibility and accountability often find it difficult to trust others to perform well without close oversight. (de Geus, 1997)

One all too common approach to empowerment is to give subordinates decision freedom without providing them the knowledge, boundaries, or context they need to make the best decisions. The result is often a series of mistakes with subordinates feeling frustrated, and even betrayed. The manager then withdraws the empowerment, convinced that it cannot work—their people are just not competent enough to be empowered. The author witnessed this process over 50 times in a six month period while consulting with the Department of Defense on Integrated Product Teams. The problem is that without knowing the limits of their decision space or the context and history of their situation, and without the experience of making similar decisions, it is luck, not competency that determines success. But, there is a second interpretation of employee empowerment that fits ICAS much better. Quinn and Spreitzer worked with a Fortune 50 manufacturing company that needed a turnaround and decided to do it through employee empowerment. In interviewing the top executives, Quinn and Spreitzer found that half of them believed the above approach to empowerment was what was needed, including adequate counseling and preparation of the workers. However, the other half interpreted empowerment to mean

...trusting people and tolerating their imperfections. When it came to rules, they believed that the existing structures often presented a barrier to “doing the right thing” for the company. They assumed that newly empowered employees would naturally make some mistakes, but that mistakes should not be punished. Empowered employees ... would be entrepreneurs and risk takers, acting with a sense of ownership in the business. They would engage in creative conflict, constantly challenging each other. This group of executive saw empowerment as a process of risk taking and personal growth. (Quinn and Spreitzer, p. 37)

The implicit strategy of the second group of executives for empowerment was to: a) Start at the bottom by understanding the needs of the employees; b) Model empowered behavior for the employees; c) Build teams to encourage cooperative behavior; d) Encourage intelligent risk taking; and f) Trust people to perform. From an ICAS view, this latter interpretation of empowerment is clearly most appropriate.

Alignment

Alignment is the process that continually assures that the activities of workers are directly or indirectly supporting the organization’s common vision and purpose. In a fluctuating environment, where the mosaic of events and tasks continually changes, there should be a network that maintains awareness and some degree of cohesion among activities. In ICAS the Operations Center has the responsibility for tracking and coordinating these activities. Collaborative leaders provide inputs into this nerve center and assist in working out duplication problems or resource shifts to accommodate work goals. Many collaborative leaders serve as team leaders and team members, and are actively involved in the day-to-day work. In a highly dynamic world, duplication may be needed to generate more ideas (optimum complexity) or keep options open (risk aversion). Alignment of work efforts is frequently a judgment call between strategic direction and variations that expand possibilities that broaden or shift that direction. This judgment requires seeing the work from the higher perspective of systems thinking and broad experience, resulting from a balance of connectedness of choices

and exploration. Although the degree of responsibility for alignment may vary with the level and experience of the collaborative leader, the overall interaction of collaborative leadership helps ensure that the organization remains aligned.

Another role of collaborative leadership is to ensure that the ICAS strategy, structure, culture, processes, and leadership are coherent and supportive of the intended organizational direction. Collaborative leaders do this in two ways: first by their networks and close relationships with each other and second, by working with managers and knowledge workers to keep the culture, structure, and processes consistent with, and supportive of, the desired self-initiating, empowered and collaborative behavior needed for organizational success. Saint-Onge suggests that to meet these needs, the organization must have a “membership contract with employees, one in which their commitment creates value in exchange for an opportunity to develop their capabilities.” (Saint-Onge, 2000, p. 291) This goal, from an ICAS perspective, requires collaborative leaders to work with human resource departments and with individual knowledge workers to ensure that they have, and feel, ownership of their performance and its contribution to the overall direction of the firm. Does an individual knowledge worker serve best by following the party line or by breaking away and exploring new opportunities?

We are back to the alignment, or as Birkinshaw & Gibson put it, the ambidexterity problem. They further define contextual ambidexterity as when, “...individual employees make choices between alignment-oriented and adaptation-oriented activities in the context of their day to day work.” (Birkinshaw & Gibson, 2004, p. 49) Based on their research, they identified four ambidextrous behaviors in individuals: They take the initiative and are alert to opportunities [and threats] beyond the confines of their own jobs; They cooperate and seek out opportunities to combine their work with others; They are brokers, always looking to build internal connections, and finally; They are multi-taskers who are comfortable wearing more than one hat. (Birkinshaw and Gibson, 2004, p. 49) Another example of one of the roles that ICAS collaborative leaders play in their support of organizational performance.

Vision, Purpose, and Direction

Senior leaders continuously communicate the ICAS vision, purpose, and direction. Vision provides workers with knowledge of what the organization is (culture, beliefs, and values), and what it should look like to a knowledgeable outsider (persona). This differs from the classical meaning of vision as a clear picture of what the organization is seeking at some point in the future. Its vision is a broad description of the organization’s values, beliefs, direction and what it stands for. A phenomenon of complex enterprises is that the sum of the local visions may not add up to the overall organizational vision, yet they must be coherent with it. To be energized by vision, purpose and direction workers must be aware of them, understand their meaning and believe that they are worthy of acting upon. To take positive actions the actor must feel good about said activity and have accepted ownership for the action. This is where collaborative leaders must work with their coworkers and share significant beliefs, thoughts and feelings—a difficult challenge at best.

According to Kayser, collaboration is close communication and the sharing of understanding with no hidden agendas (Kayser, 1994). We broaden his interpretation to include active and effortful working together, openly and purposively, to accomplish some task or reach a common understanding. Collaboration requires an open, and trusting relationship where each party contributes their capability and works with others to align and integrate the efforts of all.

ICAS leaders use collaborative relationships and interactions to share understanding, get the work done, and guide development of their coworkers. It is through a collaborative approach to relationships that ICAS leaders earn their leadership rights while at the same time serving the knowledge workers.

Collaboration often includes play. As team members work a given problem they need to play with it in their minds, then share concepts and ideas and perspectives. These actions are “play” in the sense that different, and sometimes wild things are tried before conclusions are drawn. Such interactions foster mutual respect, active listening, and camaraderie—all valuable for building synergy, excitement, and feelings of accomplishment. When asked to solve a difficult problem, ICAS leaders respond by admitting: “I don’t know how to solve this, but if we all work together, I know that we can figure out a good solution.” This simple honesty brings others into the challenge, sets the stage for collaborative efforts, and communicates the respect and confidence the leader has in others.

Risk

A common interpretation of risk is the exposure to some chance event or possibility of loss. Looking from another perspective, we take risk to also mean the chance or possibility of not achieving an intended goal and the consequences associated with the outcome. In this sense, an organization always runs the risk of non-optimum performance every day. Collaborative leaders in ICAS have a great deal of freedom, and with that freedom goes the responsibility for understanding the broader ramifications, and risks, of their work.

For example, collaborative leaders should be sensitive to risks that may arise within their organization, such as; a) the risk of poor decision-making and b) the risk of poor leadership. The first category relates to the difficulty of anticipating the future impact of decisions and actions and the level of quality of decision-making. In an uncertain environment, there is no decision that guarantees the desired result. However, if the *quality* of the decision and the decision process is high, the probability of success may be high. Decision quality, a concern of collaborative leaders, includes factors such as: leveraging knowledge through dialogue and the diversity of team participants, the scope and timing of the decision, implementation and political ramifications, pivot points for flexibility, risk analysis and consistency with ICAS long term objectives. The second category relates to the risk that leadership is not performing well in meeting its responsibilities *to the organization*. History has shown that it is easier to blame the workforce for poor results than to look into the mirror. By deliberately discussing the effectiveness of leadership and monitoring local and overall performance, collaborative leaders can manage themselves and help others to work toward the ideal of an energized, empowered, knowledgeable workforce.

SUMMARY THOUGHTS

In summary, collaborative leadership, rather than use power or control, use the seven “Cs” to lay the groundwork for getting knowledge workers to learn, grow and make the difference that is the difference.

Compass---they set a direction to go, not a specific objective. In a turbulent world the best one can do is continue pushing in the right direction.

Connecting---they make connections, know who to contact when needed and how to help when asked.

Communicating---they do not transfer information, they share understanding with others to create and leverage knowledge and to lay the groundwork for widespread cooperation.

Collaborating---they work with others in an open and coequal basis to seed the culture where everyone contributes and helps everyone else through a continual flux of relationships.

Caring---they really care about people, listening to them, trusting in them, respecting their opinions and helping them grow.

Co-creating---they work with others to create new ideas, build new relationships, and solve problems in new ways.

Character---they demonstrate strong values, moral and ethical strength, and a high respect for their organization and their co-workers.

As a final note, collaborative leaders do not have a special style, flair, insight, personality or brilliance. What they do have is a respect for others, and an appreciation for the value of knowledge, teamwork and critical thinking. They are measured by their actions, perspective, values and attitudes, not their positions, age or power. No individual is capable of knowing enough to make good decisions when situations turn into complex messes. However, learning to create and amplify understanding and insight by dialogue, teamwork and networking, and being able to solve problems, make decisions, and take action via collaborative efforts of knowledgeable workers may well be the keys to survival and sustainability. In the end it may be all about character, intent, energy and values.

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