Pervasive Leadership℠
A Leadership Model for
Truly Agile Organizations

Organizations in all sectors—public, private, for-profit and non-profit—are struggling today with similar issues related to workforce productivity and performance against financial and market constraints. Coincident with the demise of the belief in the "great man' is the emergence of an understanding that groups of individuals rather than lone individuals can best supply answers to the problems that prevent organizations from thriving. But, old habits die hard and current management practices still perpetuate management-dependent behavior which limit small groups' ability to respond rapidly and effectively to fast-evolving complex problems. Deference to authority goes hand-in-hand with active stonewalling, which indicates a lack of belief in the individual's innate accountability to part of solutions to problems faced by organizations. It has become clear that any limitation on decision making or action on the part of an individual or work group that could have solved a problem, but didn't do so because it was waiting for the authority to proceed is a waste of human capital. Any reliance on centralized control that prevents reasonable local optimization of work processes for the advantage of the organization indicates nominal leaders[1] out of alignment with the long term thriving of the organization.

Pervasive Leadership combines aspects of servant leadership, chaordic leadership, and personal leadership in the context of facilitative leadership. It assumes that "leader" does *not* presume follower in the traditional sense and that everyone in the organization has leadership potential and leadership responsibility.[2] Pervasive Leadership acknowledges that individuals in organizations essentially cause each other to come into being as they are and that the individual is important and of unique and inherent value but not without reference to the community. Pervasive Leadership practitioners see work as a path and see everyone in the organization as having influence on the potential of the organization. They leverage conflict for its value in deepening and bringing greater meaning to relationships, which is important given that this model also finds greater value in relationships between individuals than in isolated individuals.

The purpose and importance in bringing Pervasive Leadership into an organization is to improve the leadership skills and potential of everyone in the organization so that good decisions are made, carried out, measured, and learned from *by the organization* without extensive navigation of a large human system for permission or unnecessary delays between problem definition, solution selection, execution, feedback, and adaptation. Further, Pervasive Leadership increases individual engagement in the organization, and it requires that nominal leaders be particularly good at learning, teaching, and modeling character-driven behaviors that engender natural rather than enforced followership. It assumes a mission as a leader that goes beyond profit or augmentation of personal status. A pervasively led organization can make more decisions faster with a higher rate of appropriate and effective decisions being made than more traditional top-down organizations.

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[1] Those identified by the organizations as leaders (leaders by fiat) as contrasted with those who actually lead the organization by influence and example.

[2] Typified by "do not wait to be told to close the barn door. You own the horse."

To be effective in a pervasively led organization, participants must have a familiarity with the notions of mutual causality, effective conflict engagement, facilitation, debate to dialogue shifting skills, retrospective and after action review design and participation, problem identification, encouragement, and questioning. Nominal leaders must additionally have skills in modeling, mentoring, and coaching these competencies. Pervasive leadership assumes all of these competencies will coincide with professional specialty competency and not result in a "Pervasive Leadership Center of Excellence" in organizations outside of academia or think tanks.

Pervasive Leadership is not a spectator sport, nor can it be done to or for you. It's emergence in an organization is likely to be organic and is also likely to be initiated by a champion who is trying to solve problems related to employee engagement, product or customer relationship quality, or other aspects of overall organizational effectiveness. Pervasive Leaders actively share power, preferring power-with rather than power-over, so the replication model is typically through rapid partnering facilitated by self-knowledge enhancement tools such as personality, conflict, and learning style inventories along with skill building tasks, projects, or other scenario or action-based learning.

The returned value to participants in a pervasively led organization extends well beyond the work life. Anxiety is put in its place and made use of rather than being a constant specter. Core strength, or character, increases so that circumstances requiring courage and resilience are less daunting and actually become useful character building exercises. The individual carries away from the workplace every day tools readily useful in family and community life where they, through example and rapid partnering, develop more pervasive leaders.

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