

# THE LEADER OF THE FUTURE



VISIONS, STRATEGIES, AND  
PRACTICES FOR THE NEW ERA

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## The Leader Integrator An Emerging Role

Usman A. Ghani

**I**n past decades, leadership has often been viewed as a formula—one that most often appeased organizational “wants” rather than attending to their “needs.” Some leaders were capable of leading with their hearts while others led with their minds, pushing the “warm, fuzzy” stuff to the side to make room for theories and concepts aimed at strengthening the organization’s structure or its impact on the marketplace. Still other leaders were crowned the ultimate “multitaskers,” leading first with their hearts, then with their minds and occasionally, at some point, with their souls.

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When confronted with problems, traditional leaders often were unwilling to admit mistakes until these had taken their toll, allowing products and services to degrade, customers to complain, employee morale to erode and, in some extreme cases, the companies to fragment or implode. Eroding ethics and sagging integrity have had their own consequences, creating a lack of trust and fleeting accountability that resulted in diminished authenticity—inside and outside the business.

Rather than directing the organization in a holistic manner, these leaders found it easier to focus on finding the answers rather than taking a step back and asking, What's the real question? Instead of developing all parts of the organization, they focused on the quick wins and easy accomplishments, distracting their energy and resources from the ultimate goal of steady development and growth. Sixty years ago, Peter Drucker was among the first to dissect and examine the role of the leader.<sup>1</sup> In *Managing the Nonprofit Organization*, Drucker described his vision of an effective leader:

The leaders who work most effectively, it seems to me, never say "I." And that's not because they have trained themselves not to say "I." They don't think "I." . . . They understand their job to be to make the team function. They accept the responsibility and don't sidestep it, but "we" gets the credit. . . . This is what creates trust, what enables you to get the task done.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout his writings, Drucker has repeatedly emphasized executive effectiveness over efficiency or other leadership characteristics.<sup>3</sup> Ultimately, the leader of the future will continue to embrace the traditional responsibilities and the effectiveness characteristics Drucker depicted, and he or she also will know when and how far to step outside the box to fine-tune the organization's mission and vision as well as its operation and execution, or to reset the context. The leader of the future will have the agility to move from pre-

vious traditions to innovation, the courage to adapt to new or dynamic business models, and the ability to examine issues across the breadth and depth of the organization.

### The Leader Integrator

The leader of the future is the Leader Integrator—an individual who breeds multiple perspectives, consciously connecting these perspectives and applying a variety of skills to establish new directions, options, and solutions for the organization. Leader Integrators adapt multiple roles for themselves and seek new talents and new teams to create new directions for their organizations.

As a rule, Leader Integrators move away from the traditional accolades such as, "He is a great visionary" or "She is a strong recruiter" or "He is an astute strategist" or "She is an excellent mentor" or "He is a smart implementer" to "He brings myriad talents to the table and can effectively bring into play a particular role at an appropriate time."

The most important characteristics of Leader Integrators include

- Having faith in the power of an idea in action, rather than the idea of power in a person
- Having the ability to be deep listeners, actively seeking multiple perspectives
- Having a relentless predisposition and openness to critique

- Being creative decision makers, weighing a variety of options and possibilities
- Being bridge-builders across multiple disciplines, fields, departments, stakeholders, and so on
- Being visionaries with limitless perspective and an ability to zoom in or zoom out at all times

- Having a strong commitment for continuing learning experiences—to themselves, their employees, their organization, and their organizational partners
- Being steadfast developers of leaders, facilitating others unleashing their potential, and helping everyone discover the leader in themselves and in every situation

Embracing diversity, Leader Integrators eagerly invite a wide variety of experiences, visions, and skill sets into the task of forming and then expanding the corporate vision. As a result, the Leader Integrator not only increases the passion of every worker for his or her contribution to the corporation's direction but also amplifies the workers' personal commitments to the organization.

Harlan Cleveland, a business, educational, social, and political leader, sees leadership from an integration perspective, calling it the “get-it-all-together” profession:

“How can we be different together?” . . . sums up a prime dilemma of our time. . . . Helping the many think of themselves as one, selling a wholeness that can incorporate diversity will be a central challenge for many different kinds of leaders in the 21st century. . . . The threat to robust cultures (those that can meld the best of the new with the best of the old) comes from both extremes: an unthinking attachment to what has already been thought or done, and an overenthusiastic espousal of what is new because it is new.<sup>4</sup>

Compare the role of the Leader Integrator to that of the traditional leader. Whereas a traditional leader generally focuses on “one slender slice” of the organization at a time, the Leader Integrator “sees the whole pizza,” so to speak, arranging each slice to establish new directions and aligning, motivating, and inspiring people to

- generate a new collective meaning. As Lou Gerstner described his early days as CEO of IBM:

We needed to rebuild the fundamental strategy of the company. . . . [T]he unique opportunity for IBM—our distinctive competence—was an ability to integrate all the parts for our customers. . . . However, before I could integrate for our customers [in 160-plus countries], I first had to integrate IBM! . . . I turned my attention to three areas . . . organization, brand image, and compensation. . . .<sup>5</sup>

As an archetypal Leader Integrator, Gerstner applied his vision across the corporate landscape, discerning the areas needing his attention first and then, as he became familiar with the corporation and his people, identifying the next levels of consequence—organization, branding, compensation, and so on.

Much like a consummate multitasker, the Leader Integrator is constantly evolving and expanding his or her arena of activity and spheres of influence. Susan Hockfield, president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in a recent address defined the expanded scope of MIT’s future direction:

I have been impressed by the volume of collaborative activity between MIT and other area universities, such as the exceptional joint program in Health Sciences and Technology established by MIT and Harvard 35 years ago. Structuring collaboration across departments within one school is a non-trivial task; building collaborations across institutions poses even greater challenges. But MIT will actively foster these collaborations because many of the most important opportunities before us require skills and resources that no single institution can deliver.

I have drawn the circle of collaboration around departments and schools within MIT and then enlarged

it to include our academic and medical colleagues. Of course, I must enlarge the circle further to include the critically important collaborations between the academy and industry.<sup>6</sup>

Think of the Leader Integrator in the role of a Broadway musical director, maintaining the synergy of the various actors, singers, dancers, and other performers while combining and mixing these elements and then reframing them in new formats conceived to move performance to a higher level.

### Three Model Leader Integrators in Corporate America

Within the modern business environment, the nature of leadership challenges continues to evolve, requiring leaders to reach beyond traditional scopes of influence to guide the growth of their organizations. Let us consider three examples of Leader Integrators and the indelible imprint they have made on their organizations as well as on society.

#### Lou V. Gerstner, Former Chairman and CEO of IBM Corporation

It was once believed the greatest leaders were those individuals with “guts,” and the gutsiest must therefore be the most successful. Next, it was believed the greatest leaders were the great “minds” of their times. Then, as the “heart” began to emerge as the driver of passion, leaders with “hearts” were at the forefront. Over time, the “backbone,” the “sixth sense,” and “soul” were also emphasized as central to the leadership role.<sup>7</sup>

Lou Gerstner’s success at IBM was not attributable to these or any other leadership traits. His success was due, in part, to his “wholeness”—his ability to lead the organization by bringing all fac-

ulties, thoughts, and feelings into focus and applying each to bring about richer, more effective outcomes.

As he describes in his book *Who Says Elephants Can’t Dance?*,<sup>8</sup> Gerstner focused on four critical decisions as he began devising a survival strategy for the struggling IBM: (1) to keep the company together, (2) to change the fundamental economic model, (3) to reengineer how IBM did business, and (4) to sell unproductive assets in order to raise capital.<sup>9</sup>

When Gerstner took IBM’s helm, his Leader Integrator instincts immediately took over, helping him resist the knee-jerk responses that would have destroyed the company. He was able instead to focus on day-to-day execution, stabilizing the company as he sought growth strategies that would leverage IBM’s unique position in the industry. Using the “pizza analogy” mentioned earlier, Gerstner focused on the whole pizza, rather than obsessing on a single slice, and—in the interim—he built a team of people who were ready to try to do things in very new and different ways.

As the Leader Integrator continues to refine and refurbish the organization’s vision and mission, he or she is also focusing on sustainability and succession—the defining difference that has, for whatever reason, escaped much of modern leadership.

At his retirement, Gerstner said this: “I want IBMers to think and act like long-term shareholders—to feel the pressure from the marketplace to deploy assets and forge strategies that create competitive advantage.”<sup>10</sup> Then he added, “If you ask me today what single accomplishment I am most proud of in all my years at IBM, I would tell you it is this—that as I retire, my successor is a longtime IBMer, and so are the heads of all of our major business units.”<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, Gerstner’s role as a Leader Integrator allowed him to see the value—to the corporation and to its employees—of being succeeded by someone from inside the corporation rather than someone totally unknown to the organization from another city, another state, or another industry.

### Oprah Winfrey, Chairman of Harpo Inc.<sup>11</sup>

Taking on multiple professional and social roles—news anchor, talk show host, entrepreneur, magazine editor, business executive, and social advocate—Oprah Winfrey has uniquely positioned herself as a Leader Integrator with the ability to see through multiple lenses and to have an impact on many of the environments under her observation.

Obviously, as the media offers immediate mega-audiences for Winfrey's initiatives—such as her overwhelmingly successful book club and her efforts to improve educational opportunities for the underclass—she has leveraged the reach of her organization and has been able to focus on the real rather than the mundane. This vision, replacing the typical short-term, sensational issues addressed by others in her genre, has lifted Winfrey and company far above her competitors, many of which eventually foundered and failed.

Winfrey, who has continued to respect diversity in all its venues, generates initiatives to address issues that resonate with her audiences as well as much of the country and, as a result, this Leader Integrator has redefined standards for her genre and ultimately is working to redefine overarching media standards as well.

As chairman of Harpo Inc., Winfrey serves as

- Institution-builder, crafting a new definition of the media industry that others are adopting
- Motivator to her staff, as well as role model
- Hope and inspiration to audiences around the world
- Innovator for her organization as well as for the entire television industry
- Connector of desperate entities with a common purpose and meaning

As a team builder, Winfrey has created an entire organization, as described by Professor Nancy Koehn of Harvard Business School, as a place where employees are incredibly committed and where turnover—an issue hurting many corporations, including those with strong brand names—is minimal. “They all breathe and think they have a very important mission they are fulfilling as an organization,” Koehn wrote. “They have very important precepts for how they engage with that mission and execute it, day to day.”<sup>12</sup>

Said Winfrey in case “Oprah Winfrey”:

I have already done the work of creating a team of people who understand not to propose a show idea to me unless there is an intention behind the idea. Tell me what the intention is first so we know that the intention is in line with [Harpo's] mission. It's a broad mission, to transform the way people see themselves, to uplift, to enlighten, to encourage, to entertain. So you get a really broad canvas in which to do that, but whatever show idea you're bringing me has to fit into that category.<sup>13</sup>

In the mode of the classic Leader Integrator, Winfrey continues to perceive and plan for future shifts in the entertainment industry as she seeks to address deep social issues, not just those affecting women and minorities but those truly of a global reach. Winfrey views these forecasted trends as unique opportunities to develop in new directions and to leverage and appropriate resources to continue her social impact across diverse and disparate elements.

By redefining directions and goals across people, problems, and processes, Winfrey has maintained and increased every skill in her leadership arsenal as she has simultaneously strengthened her organization. And she continues to grow.

### **Herbert W. Kelleher, Founder and Chairman, Southwest Airlines<sup>14</sup>**

Long noted for his strategic successes within a capricious and fragile industry, Herb Kelleher provides an unquestioned model of the Leader Integrator, taking on roles, either simultaneously or individually, as

- Coach to his employees
- Careful listener to his board
- Challenger and creator of new business concepts
- Operational manager for execution and evaluating the business
- Visionary in thinking long term when most think there is no long term, or when current hyperactivity blinds most from admitting there is a clear blue sky

Unlike the traditional leader, who rushes to gather only the “low-hanging fruit,” Kelleher continues to mine the marketplace for those unique opportunities that push and pull the boundaries of the Southwest business model to meet the demands of each new decade. As he built the business, he also built a culture of loyalty, in which employees immediately became part of a family whose pride far exceeded temptations to jump ship when tough sledding occurred.

Soon after the airline industry suffered the first blow of the 9/11 tragedy, for example, numerous passengers were seeking to change or cancel their preurchased tickets. Many airlines were charging \$100 to make these alterations. Kelleher, however, thought beyond the current stages of panic, deciding that frightened passengers should not be penalized, and instead offered a full refund without penalty. The loyalty Southwest had built with its passengers paid

off. While several did ask for refunds, most did not. A few even sent their tickets to Southwest with a note saying, “Take this money and put it back into the company.” The result: Southwest did more than just survive during a time that brought near-death experiences to some long-established brands within the industry.

Instead of cutting costs to the bone in order to enhance profitability, Kelleher on numerous occasions opted to refine processes and optimize the full potential of the company’s workforce. Once this was accomplished, opportunities to explore pent-up demand and unmet needs presented themselves, and these in turn would encourage expansion of services and eventually new business.

- Ultimately, the three Leader Integrators mentioned here have served in multiple capacities and worn many hats in their diverse organizations. However, all of them embraced the roles of change agent, visionary, transformer, culture builder, synergistic catalyst, and many others for their organizations. In the face of tradition, they ventured far outside the proverbial box to explore unique options and, in their wake, have developed loyal teams and successors to continue their work.

### **The Leader of the Future**

By disposition, the Leader Integrator works with an inclusive attitude, incorporating individual viewpoints as well as commonalities across different personality types and thoughts. It is the *idea and the thought process* that is most important to the Leader Integrator, who actually seeks out diversity to enrich every process.

Leader Integrators—the leaders of the future—consistently escape the bonds of tradition to incorporate many levels and many domains within their vision. They have the ability to translate challenges into opportunities and the future into present reality as they continue to move the corporation forward. Over time, Leader Integrators positively influence the culture of all their communities.

Any discussion of the leader of the future also must include a cursory examination of the development opportunities for Leader Integrators. Initially, these uniquely talented individuals were born as self-styled integrators from chief executives whose burning desire was to do something bigger—and different. Today, however, the advantages of integration have been distinctly clarified to the point that organizations should not be asking themselves if Leader Integrators are vital to their survival but, rather, 'When will development of the next generation of Leader Integrators begin?'

#### Endnotes

1. See Peter F. Drucker, *Concept of the Corporation* (New York: John Day, 1946).
2. Peter F. Drucker, *Managing the Nonprofit Organization: Principle and Practices* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), 18–19.
3. Peter F. Drucker, *The Effective Executive* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967). This book (and the supporting films with the same title from BNA Communications) tremendously inspired the author as a young adult in the 1970s.
4. Cleveland, Harlan, *Nobody in Charge: Essays on the Future of Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002).
5. Louis V. Gerstner Jr., *Who Says Elephants Can't Dance?* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 83.
6. Susan Hockfield, speech to Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce, MIT Speeches and Essays, September 14, 2005, <http://web.mit.edu/hockfield/speech-commerce2005.html>. Authorial comment: Harvard and MIT have traditionally seen themselves as "rivals," but the new MIT president views these two institutions collectively as a community in the larger social sector.
7. Each role has had its unveiling at times when its need was felt. Each defined its distinctive role, vis-à-vis what prevailed then, and each had its devout followers. For more examples, see Lee Bolman, *Leading with Soul* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001); Sigmund Ginsburg, *Managing with Passion* (New York: Wiley, 1996); Daniel Goleman,

*Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam, 1995); Sharon Good, *Managing with a Heart* (New York: Excalibur, 1994); Regina McNamara, *A Spine Is a Terrible Thing to Waste* (Cheshire, CT: Kelso Press, 1999); and Kenichi Ohmae, *The Mind of the Strategist* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982).

8. Gerstner, *Who Says Elephants Can't Dance?*

9. Gerstner, *Who Says Elephants Can't Dance?*, 96.

10. Gerstner, *Who Says Elephants Can't Dance?*, 73.

11. Material is from the author's research and from excerpts from *Harvard Business School Case: Oprah Winfrey*, by Nancy Koehn and Erica Helms; revised edition, June 1, 2005.

12. Martha Lagace, "Oprah: A Case Study Comes Alive," *HBS Working Knowledge*, February 20, 2006. Available at <http://hbswk.hbs.edu/item.jhtml?id=5214&t=leadership>.

13. Lagace, "Oprah: A Case Study Comes Alive."

14. Based on notes from the author's personal interviews with Herb Kelleher in 1991 and subsequent follow-up through numerous articles related to Kelleher and to Southwest Airlines.