



Linea Insights

Developing 21st Century Leaders

We call them Transpersonal Leaders

As we complete the first 20 years of the 21st century, we have a Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous (VUCA) world, where we are still in the early stages of the post-industrial information age. And just like the industrial revolution before it needed different kinds of leaders, so does the information age.

Hierarchical leadership does not work effectively any more in this increasingly complex world in which society is also changing rapidly. It requires collaboration, participation, delegation and distribution of leadership.

We need leaders who are more self-aware, emotionally intelligent and who can use a variety of leadership styles for different situations. They need all these attributes to be able to build a performance-enhancing culture in their organisations. But, in addition to that, in order to create a culture that is also ethical, caring and sustainable, they need to bring their values to a higher level of consciousness. They must think radically, be authentic, lead beyond their ego and work for all the stakeholders of the organisation – and that includes the planet. And no one can achieve that without continuous personal and professional development. We call them Transpersonal Leaders.

To attain these heights of leadership competence, a leader needs to reach an advanced level of adult development. But if we allow this to happen by serendipity, it will at least take until late middle-age, and then only 5 per cent or so of the population will attain it.

So, the goal is to develop as many Transpersonal Leaders as possible and as young as possible. Then we might start to change the world.

To achieve this, the approach is to enable leaders to proactively rewire their own brains based on the knowledge we provide, the insights they create, regular practice (primarily in the workplace) and regular reflection.

What has been developed over the last 20 years is a programme that uses state-of-the-art blended learning together with a process of learning that is in the most effective order to encourage embedding of the learning and the forming of new habits.



The Journey of Development

The entire “Transpersonal leadership development journey to excellence” is made up of a programme to the intermediate level, followed by one to the advanced level. To reach the intermediate level, leaders must understand what leadership is about in the 21st century, investigate how the brain actually works in the context of leadership, learn to increase self-awareness and understand how emotions impact our behaviour and leadership styles impact culture.

To progress through the advanced level of development, participants must learn to bring their values, beliefs and purpose to full consciousness and then act on them by using the new and improved behaviours they have already learned at the intermediate stage, and other behaviours they still need to learn, in order to manage their ego. During this part of the advanced journey, they will become better decision-makers, addressing ethical issues and developing other transpersonal characteristics of being caring, radical, authentic, sustainable as well as emotionally intelligent and performance-enhancing. This provides a deep level of consciousness, allowing leaders to make their own choices, work for the greater good and lead beyond their ego.

At the very start of the journey, using our “REAL” mnemonic, they function as a “Rational, Ego-based, As-usual Leader” (REAL-1). What do we mean by this?

Throughout our education (school, university, workplace and probably at home too), most of us are taught, told or persuaded to think logically and analytically; it is certainly what we are praised and measured on. And that our answers, responses and decisions should be thought out rationally and objectively. We are rarely (if ever) encouraged to think intuitively, emotionally or spiritually. By the time individuals are in a position of responsibility and take on a leadership role, most of us will have had any non-rational thinking “knocked” out of us.

When we start our role as leaders, we usually have relevant job skills, know how to use them and also understand about management processes and strategic planning (what we refer to as the “foundation” or “basic” level of leadership development). However, we often assume that other individuals think and act like us, although, in reality, we all have different preferences. Every individual will have varying levels of innate intuitive thinking and emotional awareness, but most often, we will not be fully aware of our capabilities, and therefore will not be managing these attributes to maximise levels of self-management, relationships and performance. That takes care of “Rational”.

In our early careers, both from a human maturity perspective and one of economics and sustainability, it is natural and usual to focus more on our personal needs. We want to get ahead with our careers, find the right partner, earn more money, get a nice car, buy a house, take care of our children and so forth.

We want to establish ourselves and build our persona. It is primarily about “me”. Fundamentally we seek power, reward, prestige or recognition, or any combination of these. Usually, one or more of these needs will be the prime motivator for the leadership decisions we make. We are Ego-based. There is nothing wrong or immoral in any of this, and it is the nature of things, but as an employee and especially as we develop as a leader, we should instead be making decisions in the best interests of the organisation we work for and for the stakeholders of that organisation. Many of the corporate disasters during and since the financial crisis of 2008 were the result of the top leaders, unfortunately, never moving beyond being ego-driven.

Finally, let’s explain what we mean by “As-Usual Leadership”. For the vast majority of us, our default leadership style, the “As-usual” style, is to know everything and tell people what to do. That is how most people who have not learned otherwise think leadership is and is often counter-productive other than in specific circumstances. Many of those who have learned otherwise will nevertheless maintain this style as they feel it gives them power. Even those who, most of the time, make the effort not to lead like this will revert to it when stressed or hijacked by their emotions. Just think of any situation when you were “hijacked” in the last 24 hours. Wasn’t your tendency just to want to do it your way without discussion? That is how our brain works genetically, in an attempt to reduce uncertainty (since that is experienced as an evolutionary existential threat).



The intermediate stage

The intermediate stage of the journey brings leaders to a level where they are Robust, Emotionally Aware Leaders (REAL-2). At this level, they possess a high level of emotional intelligence, and understand that sustainable performance can only be achieved by having the right kind of organisational culture. To do this, leaders must fully comprehend what leadership is about in today's world. This is achieved through appreciating how the brain actually works in the context of leadership, learning to increase self-awareness, understanding how emotions impact our behaviour and the way leadership styles determine the climate and culture of the organisation. This is the foundation of the Transpersonal Leadership development journey, the ultimate objective of which is, of course, to provide improved, sustainable organisational performance. The essence of this part of the journey is to build on the rational intelligence of the leader to enhance performance through adding emotional intelligence.

The first step clarifies what leadership is, how it differs from management and how leadership needs to change to be successful in a VUCA world. We define what “we” mean by leadership and management and explain our default instincts about what “good” or “strong” leadership. “As-usual” leadership was an acceptable and reasonably efficient style up to 25 years ago as it conformed to societal norms. However, it is no longer fit for purpose in this age of exponential social and technological changes.

We all have our instinctive views about inspirational leadership, but the reality is often surprising – such as “many are introverts”. A real understanding will give more people the confidence to be inspirational themselves. We identify some aspects of neuroscience that have a direct impact on how we lead. In particular, we focus on how much of our default behaviour is, on the one hand, based on how our brain developed to survive the stone age and, on the other, the environment needed to improve performance and productivity as well as create superior learning. We also explain how neuroscience helps us understand emotional intelligence and why and how it is possible to improve our behaviours to better manage our emotions.

The second step helps leaders increase their self-awareness, a fundamental building block to enable our development as humans, especially as leaders. This self-awareness must be on several levels: our natural preferences, how we react to and deal with emotions, understanding our strengths and weaknesses, knowing how we use and react to our five senses, how we react in different situations and what our drivers are, how others react to us and why and how this is a life-long exercise.

The third step, managing emotions and emotional intelligence, is one of the real core areas of learning and development that we all need and is a key building block to increasing performance. We must learn the importance of emotional intelligence (EI) as a part of leadership and how it can be developed. Having become aware of how our emotions impact our behaviour, we must now learn how to manage those emotions. We need to know which emotions and specific behaviours have the greatest impact, and so how to prioritise. This requires rewiring our brains and understanding exactly how we can do that. It is not just about managing our own emotions, but, as leaders, how we can impact more positively on the emotions of the people around us.

The fourth step in the journey is about how to use different leadership styles. It is a critical step because it is about how to apply emotional intelligence by using different styles in different circumstances and knowing when to adopt each style. Most of us have one preferred style, or at best two, which we tend to use all the time, but to be effective in all circumstances, we need to become competent in six styles:

- Visionary
- Coaching
- Affiliative
- Democratic
- Pace-setting
- Commanding

This means honing 4–5 new styles which, in turn, means developing specific granular behaviours, which are not necessarily natural to us.

All our research and experience, and that of others, have confirmed that of the six styles, the coaching style is the least used by leaders, even though it is the second most impactful (after the visionary style). The good news though is that it is the easiest to learn because there are many simple, proven techniques that can be used to develop and implement this style. A key role of leaders, which is often missing, is to help develop the people they are responsible for. The coaching style is the best style to use to help people learn in the workplace and develop to fulfil their potential.

In the fifth and sixth steps, we learn how to create a performance-enhancing culture and establish a mutually beneficial contract between leader and follower. These aspects are necessary to convert good leadership skills and styles into organisational effectiveness. Leaders learn how to develop the right kind of culture by first creating the right environment (climate) through their own consistent behaviour and values.

Changing culture is longer term and requires the engagement of most of the people in the organisation. We use a model that has four parameters of culture (power, structure, achievement and support), and each parameter is specifically related to one or two of the six leadership styles. So, by identifying the “actual” and “ideal” cultures for an organisation using these parameters, we can identify both the leadership styles the leaders need to use and granular behaviours the organisation needs to focus on in order to move towards the ideal. An important aspect of developing the right culture is the explicit contract between individual leaders and each person reporting to them, which has a psychological dimension as well as a practical one.

The seventh and final step in the intermediate stage of the journey is about identifying strengths and improving development areas.



The advanced stage

The advanced stage of the journey will take leaders towards becoming Radical, Ethically Authentic Leaders (REAL-3), that is Transpersonal Leaders. This advanced journey is primarily about bringing our values, beliefs and purpose to full consciousness, and then acting on them by using the new and improved behaviours we have already learned in during the intermediate stage, and other behaviours we still need to learn, in order to manage our ego.

For the purposes of this journey and to understand how we use the words, we think of Awareness as fundamentally about “observation” (knowing about self and others), whereas Consciousness is about “experiencing” (connecting with self and others) in the moment.

This advanced journey takes leaders on a voyage beyond emotional intelligence, beyond our ego to the ultimate state of Transpersonal Leadership. It is about increasing our consciousness, and then learning and taking actions from that. In addition to bringing our values to full consciousness, we must gain a better understanding of our ego and how to manage it.

Critically, we must also learn to improve our decision-making and judgement, so it takes into account the emotional, ethical and authentic aspects of any issue or challenge as well as the logic-analytical ones we are often more comfortable handling. Learning that this journey has direction but no end point or ultimate summit, and is life-long, is the final important lesson.

At the heart of the advanced part of the journey is the addition of spiritual intelligence to our rational and emotional Intelligence. This will enable us to better define what “performance” really means to a Transpersonal Leader.

The first step in this advanced journey is understanding the Eight Integrated Competencies of Leadership (8ICOL[®]) that take into account rational, emotional and spiritual intelligence and our innate personal preferences.

The second step brings the latest neuroscience research together with some relevant philosophy which focuses on consciousness and how the brain works to handle the spiritual, ethical and value-based aspects of leadership. Neurons connect in three different ways, but it’s primarily the bonding through synchronous neural oscillations that we will address in this step.

The third step, “Managing the Ego” explains that we need to know what drives us in order to manage our ego. Whereas emotions can hijack our behaviours, drivers can hijack our ego. Moving beyond the ego as an organisational leader requires us to focus on the stakeholders we are serving and the order of priority of those stakeholders in different contexts. It identifies who really are the stakeholders that will determine the sustainable success of the organisation. And where is the ethical balance between a leader taking care of their own needs versus those of the organisation?

Steps 4 and 5 introduce the importance of the 3Is (intuition, instinct and insight) and ethical philosophy in decision-making and improving our judgement. We are taught throughout our education and most of our lives to make decisions rationally and logically.

Yet, in actual fact, we tend to use logic for explaining our decisions rather than making them.

The four other sub-, non-, un-, conscious decision-making processes each come with their biases and prejudices that we need to be aware of and understand so that we can unpick and overcome them in order to make better judgements.

Steps 6 and 7 propose a new framework to understand the role of values in leadership. We divide values into the areas of personal conscience and self-determination. Personal conscience is about “who I am” whereas self-determination is “what I am going to do with who I am” and is very leadership focused. We discuss the more common values that employees want in their leaders, but also the softer values such as “forgiveness” and “humility”, and the difficult ones like “vulnerability” that need to be developed and implemented in order to become a Transpersonal Leader. Managing diversity and inclusion is another area that is critical for leaders to operate beyond their ego and in full consciousness, to establish creative, effective workplace cultures.

Developing Transpersonal Leadership characteristics or qualities (caring, radical, ethical, authentic, sustainable, emotionally intelligent, performance-enhancing), Step 8 in the advanced journey, is underpinned by an inner journey, which includes a mindfulness / meditation practice. Such practice supports the leader in being fully present and being aware of what is required in each moment from a leadership perspective. It also requires a growth mind-set and congruency of identity, values and beliefs. In addition, the leader needs to ensure that they are thriving as an individual so that they are able to create the conditions for their people to thrive. All of this promotes sustainable high performance and success.

Steps 9 and 10, “Choice” and “For the Greater Good” are interconnected. Choice is much more important than our abilities, and ultimately, to be a Transpersonal Leader, one has to make choices about what is right for all stakeholders, including the planet. To make those choices, it is important to understand one’s own purpose and spiritual belief system, and how that manifests into ethical behaviour. In the end, how will I, YOU, WE leave the world a better place?

Beyond the final step in the journey is continuous self-development. There are six levels of self-awareness, the highest level being “No longer a struggle between Ego (what I want for myself) and the greater good”. Reaching this level of self-awareness plus continually working to improve and develop those behaviours that are barriers to leadership competence, as well as raising one’s consciousness to live one’s values, is a life-long journey of development. The process in itself requires many emotional intelligence capabilities (e.g. initiative, achievement orientation and emotional self-awareness) and values (e.g. resilience, humility, motivation) to achieve.

Continuous development can be aided by following transpersonal practices, which themselves are based on the complex-adaptive system of nature, by connecting with the various stages of human development and by using the evolution of intelligences as a guide.

With commitment and determination, leaders can reach the advanced level of the REAL journey to become radical, ethically, authentic leaders. In our experience, few leaders reach this level naturally. Not because it is not possible for anyone with a slightly above-normal IQ, but because very few will chance upon the experiences, learning opportunities and support that are required to get there. Our goal is to remove the “chance” element and make it a proactive choice for anyone who has the will.



Finally, let us review what the phrase “Radical, Ethically, Authentic Leader” means.

To be Radical is critical because we need a new kind of leadership. We need to have the courage, fearlessness, conviction and ideas to move to unorthodox approaches, realise we might need alternatives to continuous growth and gauge societal success in measures other than GDP. There may also be times when we need disruptive thinking for survival. Acting Ethically means not only integrity but a social conscience and a willingness to follow the rules (or get them changed if that is what is needed). It means working for the greater good. And it is not only about “me” as an individual leader being ethical. We have a responsibility to create ethical cultures in organisations. Ethical Behaviour is about acting in a way that is consistent with one’s own principles and values which are characterized by honesty, fairness and equity in all interpersonal activities, be they personal or professional, and by respecting the dignity, diversity and rights of individuals and groups of people”.

A Transpersonal Leader must also be Authentic because a leader must act as they truly are. They must be honest with themselves and others. Excellent leadership is not a game; it is not something we can pretend to do and get right. The human being is very good at seeing through the falseness of others, although often not in a conscious way. “Authentic” also implies that the leader is the same person (though may behave appropriately differently) in all circumstances – their values are operating at full consciousness and they don’t leave them at the door to the office.

To become this kind of Leader, an individual needs to be emotionally intelligent in order to have sufficient inner self-confidence, awareness and empathy to be able to take this advanced journey.

To become a Transpersonal Leader, we must bring our values, beliefs and purpose to full consciousness and act on them.

Published in Journal of Work-Applied Management

The current issue and full text archive of this journal is available on Emerald Insight at: <https://www.emerald.com/insight/2205-2062.htm>

About the Authors



John Knights

A globally recognised expert and author in leadership, organisational culture and human behaviour & development who has developed tools and delivered programmes across a wide range of industry sectors.

Co-founder and Chairman of an organisation whose purpose is to develop leaders that can succeed in the 21st century through creating performance-enhancing cultures that are emotionally intelligent, ethical, caring and sustainable.

John is a Freeman of the City of London and a Liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Water Conservators, a Fellow of the RSA (Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce) and an Associate of the Global Leadership Responsibility Initiative.

He is a qualified Chemical Engineer with extensive corporate executive experience in international organisations (Fortune 100 & FTSE 100) and an entrepreneur founding a number of companies specialising in environmental technology.



Greg Young

A highly experienced executive and board level coach/mentor.

Greg studied at the Oxford School of Coaching and Mentoring. He is a committee member of the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) and is a member of the South East Leadership Academy. He has a particular interest in the issues surrounding Board and senior team cohesiveness, its capability to outpace technological / market changes and how that can be disseminated throughout an organisation to deliver competitive advantage.

He has significant experience of coaching in technical environments including the development and rounding off of key individuals moving into the most senior positions.

Greg has a broad functional background in business to Managing Director level including national and international marketing, sales, strategic business development, business consultancy and research. This experience has been gained in both international corporate and SME environments and this is reflected in Greg's coaching client portfolio.

This document has been prepared by Linea. The contents of this document do not constitute any form of commitment or recommendation on part of Linea and speak as at the date of its preparation.

© 2020 Linea Group Limited. All rights reserved.

No part of this document may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy or otherwise without the written permission of Linea Group.

Access to and use of this information is made under and shall be governed by the laws of England and the English courts shall have exclusive jurisdiction over any matter arising in connection with it.