



A LIVING RESEARCH PROJECT

REDEFINING LEADERSHIP for the FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

DISCUSSION PAPER



Oxford Leadership is conducting a ‘living research’ project aimed at redefining leadership in the context of what has been referred to the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The project focuses on how corporations are adapting their leadership style, culture and way of working in order to innovate and steer the implementation of new business models and face the relentless headwinds of new market realities caused by disruptive technologies and turbulent business conditions.

CONTEXT

The world is undergoing a technological revolution that is changing how we work, how we live, and how we relate to one another. Recent studies ¹⁾ indicate that this revolution is unlike any we have experienced before. The technologies driving this revolution include smart and connected machines and systems, nanotechnology, gene sequencing, renewable energy, quantum computing, 3D printing, driverless cars, new forms of money (e.g. bitcoin), robotics, drones, and biological breakthroughs. Studies also cite the sharing economy (e.g., AirBnB and Uber) and the emergence of cyber warfare. It is the fusion of all these breakthroughs that makes the Fourth Industrial Revolution different. It’s argued that this is not an extension of the so-called Third Industrial Revolution because of: a) its velocity, b) its breadth and depth, and c) its systemic impact.

These views are shared by prominent business leaders, such as former Cisco CEO, John Chambers. In an interview published by McKinsey in March 2016, Chambers states that up to 40% of the world’s biggest companies will not exist in a meaningful way after the next decade, if they do not adequately prepare themselves for this era.

1): Klaus Schwab “The Fourth Industrial Revolution”, World Economic Forum 2016.

OUR APPROACH TO THIS RESEARCH

We believe that traditional leadership mindsets, styles and ways of working within most global corporations are simply not suited to coping with the speed, volatility, complexity and ambiguity of this new operating environment. We believe that a new approach to leadership learning and leader development is necessary.

The purpose of this 'living research' project is to engage our clients, other leading multinational corporations and our global community in an immersive, collective learning experience aimed at redefining leadership in this new environment. The output is intended to help companies more effectively develop and prepare their leaders for this new reality.

The living research project will not only seek to identify and describe the new 'principles' of leadership in this new era, but open up the possibility of redefining the notion of 'leadership' itself in this environment, i.e., perhaps, more towards facilitating the emergence of shared meaning by the collective, rather than 'leadership' being primarily attributed to the individual.

“PROBABLY 40% OF THE WORLD’S LEADING COMPANIES WILL NOT EXIST IN A MEANINGFUL WAY TEN YEARS FROM NOW”

- JOHN CHAMBERS, EX-CEO CISCO

“If you’re a business leader in today’s world, you have to focus on the fact that this is the biggest technology transition ever. This digital era will dwarf what’s occurred in the information era and the value of the Internet today. As leaders, if you don’t transform and use this technology differently—if you don’t reinvent yourself, change your organization structure; if you don’t talk about speed of innovation—you’re going to get disrupted. And it’ll be a brutal disruption, where the majority of companies will not exist in a meaningful way 10 to 15 years from now. This digital age is the connectivity of going from a thousand devices connected to the Internet to 500 billion. It will transform business. It will transform our lives, our healthcare system. Business models will rise and fall at a tremendous speed. It will create huge opportunities—probably \$19 trillion in economic value over the next decade, incremental above what we’re seeing today. That’s the size of the US economy, plus some.

But it will also result in tremendous disruption. And this is where it’s so important—whether they’re countries or companies, regardless of their size—that you either disrupt or you get disrupted. Probably 40 percent of enterprise customers around the world will not exist in a meaningful way ten years from now. “

Extraction from: <http://www.mckinsey.com/industries/high-tech/our-insights/ciscos-john-chambers-on-the-digital-era>



Focus Areas for the Research

The companies most advanced in adapting to this new environment have successfully introduced several of the following characteristics into their organisation and have adapted their approach to leadership accordingly:

- » Flexible, adaptable, decentralised, empowered networks within a structure of strategic intent.
- » Leadership learning through immersive experiences, scenarios and rapid prototyping .
- » Acceptance of uncertainty and ambiguity.
- » Systemic collaboration across functions and business lines (breaking the silos).
- » Collective intuition as a valid contributor to clarity.
- » Strategic sense-making beyond operational problem solving.
- » Uncoupling ‘winning’ from the need for a solution.
- » Leadership engagement through a ‘team of teams’ approach harnessing collective intelligence, as a superior approach to dealing with complexity.

Aim of the Living Research

The intention of this ‘living research’ is to study and share the leadership mindset, thinking, styles and ways of working that have enabled and accelerated implementation of these various approaches. We aim to create a context for the research participants to extract relevant learning about leadership, enabling them to advance the development of leaders in their own organisations.

Outcomes and Outputs

- » A series of 4-IR Leadership Research Roundtables comprising CHROs, Heads of Leadership and Talent and Learning, in which these insights are shared, discussed and disseminated.
- » Each such round table will feature a relevant corporate case study from prominent business leader who has successfully adapted to the new market realities in their own business.
- » Open sharing of experiences and cases by way of blogs, podcasts and video interviews and papers on the Oxford Leadership Journal, and other industry and professional journals.
- » White papers on specific themes related to ‘Redefining Leadership for the Fourth Industrial Revolution’ – compiled into a book and published in 2017/18.



Hypotheses

1. In order to adapt and succeed in this VUCA (**V**olatile, **U**ncertain, **C**omplex, **A**mbiguous) environment, it may be useful for leaders to shift their way of thinking about the organisation from ‘mechanical science’ to biology and viewing ‘the organisation as a living organism’ .
2. Under the influence of the machine metaphor, organisational leaders were locked into a form of engineering preoccupied with relations between goals, structures, and efficiency. The idea that organisations are more like organisms could change this, by guiding the leader’s attention toward the more general issues of sustainable growth, organisation-environment relations, adaptability and organisational effectiveness. In this case, goals, structures, and efficiency would become subsidiary to efforts aimed at facilitating sustainable growth and other more ‘biological’ concerns.
3. The Oxford Leadership ‘living research’ project will explore how this organismic metaphor is helping organisations identify and study different organisational needs and thereby more quickly and effectively adapt their leadership to the new environment through such approaches as:
 - » Starting with a vision of the ‘whole organisational ecosystem’ and understanding its needs, rather than with each part and its goals.
 - » Organisations as ‘open systems’.
 - » The process of adapting organisations to environments.
 - » Organisational life cycles.
 - » Factors influencing sustainable growth and rapid adaptability.
 - » Focus on factors influencing organisational health and development.
 - » Focus on different ‘species’ of organisation, i.e., cultural bio-diversity.
 - » The relations between species and their ‘ecology’.

Scope and Methodology

1. Individual interviews: in-depth interviews with business leaders, heads of HR, leadership, talent and learning, specialist consultants and luminaries.
2. Case studies: investigation and analysis into adaptive leadership styles and ways of working (aligning people and culture with strategy) inside companies that are successfully adopting innovative practices to deal with the introduction of disruptive technologies and other forms of turbulence.
3. Expert panels – Round tables: Business leaders, Heads of HR, Leadership, Talent and Learning will be invited to form an on-going expert panel that meets in different cities throughout Europe and North America to extract learning and inspiration from the interviews and case studies, as well as sharing their own experiences and learning. The output from these round tables will be the co-authoring of white papers and an evolving set of ‘principles’ for leadership in the Fourth Industrial Revolution, possibly structured as New Leadership Principles for:
 - a. Transforming the Self
 - b. Transforming Teams
 - c. Transforming the Organisation
 - d. Transforming Society

Target Audience : For whose use is the research mainly intended?

CEO & Management Boards, Senior Leadership (execs and teams).

Heads of HR, Leadership, talent and learning in multinational corporations based in Europe and USA.

Transformation Segment > Older, well established global companies needing to adjust leadership style to face new market realities.

Performance Acceleration Segment > High performance growth companies seeking to rapidly scale up their organisational capability and people, culture and leadership capacity in order to harness exponential growth.



How the Research Findings Will Be Used

- » **To Develop** leadership programmes and curriculum to develop leaders more capable and confident of steering and growing the organisation successfully through the Fourth Industrial Revolution.
- » **To Create** High Impact, High Performance Teams > How can the senior leadership work more effectively together to succeed in the new market environment (VUCA / Fourth Industrial Revolution) and create a ‘team of teams’ throughout the organisation.
- » **To Execute** strategy effectively and quickly in a highly volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous market environment.
- » **To Transform** the Culture > More Engaged, Agile, Performance Driven > Creating a high performance workplace > maintaining positive spirit and motivation whilst introducing disruptive new technologies and ways of working, which often need fewer people in critical areas of the business.
- » **To Inform** New Executive & Team Coaching Methods > Developing a new team purpose, vision, mindset and way of working which results in making consistently good choices, faster together > Develop new understanding about ‘leadership’ > More about creating context > Seeing the organisation as a whole, living ecosystem > Using ‘biology’ rather than ‘mechanics’ as an organising metaphor / principle > A team of teams.
- » **To Inform** Culture Shaping Methodologies > Design and facilitation of the human capital element of strategy execution programmes > Identify critical areas for potential breakthrough performance > Strategic Focusing workshops throughout the organisation > Leading self > Leading a ‘team of teams’, creating breakthrough performance.

Oxford Leadership

Oxford Leadership is a consulting firm with a truly global footprint - 100+ Partners and Fellows in 19 countries - to match a truly global need.

Our core methods and approaches have been proven repeatedly to work in some of the largest, most complex corporations in the world.

Our approach to organisational leadership is based on 'living-systems', and therefore more suitable to complex organisational challenges requiring high levels of speed, adaptability, ambiguity and collaboration.

We have over 50 highly skilled academics providing comprehensive qualitative and quantitative research services through our sister company Oxford Research.

How is your organisation preparing its leaders and adjusting its leadership development to face:

Dysfunctional Top Team > Dysfunctional relationships, slow decision making, poor execution skills, misalignment of key team members, fear of failure and risk taking, lack of innovation and vision.

Poor Organisational Performance > Toxic culture, poor business results, failure to execute commitments and agreements, consistently low people engagement and NPS scores, wrong-footed by competitors.

(Provisional) Research questions

- » Mastering the Fourth Industrial Revolution' > What does this mean for organisational leadership and how are you addressing this?
- » In what ways are you adapting your business and organisation models in order to face these changing conditions?
- » What behaviours define the new 'way of working' for leaders and teams in this environment?
- » What does an individual leader need to do differently in this environment?
- » What type of culture is needed to succeed in this environment? How is it different than before?

Research Team



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