

# WOULD YOU RECOGNIZE A LEADER IF YOU HEARD ONE?

THE  
CHANGING  
PARADIGM  
FOR  
LEADERSHIP  
ISSUE

Globalization, technological advancements, and an increasingly interconnected world are shifting the paradigms for leadership. So, what does effective leadership look in our new normal?

BY **SHIDEH SEDGH BINA**  
AND **NATHAN OWEN ROSENBERG**





**C**lose your eyes and imagine what a leader looks like. Did you picture a historical figure? A man or a woman? What other traits, characteristics and qualities does she or he have? If we were to collect and organize the responses, chances are the mosaic that results would be a rich tapestry of human beings with wildly dissimilar backgrounds, experiences, and appearances.

If we compare that mosaic to what would have been the likely responses in the later years of the twentieth century, it becomes apparent that the world has witnessed a profound transformation in whom we consider leaders and leadership approaches over the past decade. From hierarchical structures to decentralized networks, from authoritative decision-making to collaborative and inclusive processes, the paradigm—or our mental model for leadership—has undergone a remarkable evolution. From Henry Ford to Mary Barra, if you will.

The evolving nature of enterprises across the global business landscape means that leadership requirements are constantly shifting, as well. Conversely, the transformation in who can lead and how they lead has transformed enterprises.

Successful leaders must possess the agility to lead in dynamic environments. Identifying individuals who can meet these evolving demands adds to the difficulty of identifying good leaders. Even more difficult, perhaps, is the ability to identify these qualities in ourselves.



#### Highly Visible Leaders

20-meter-tall murals of Nelson Mandela and Malala Yousafzai—painted by famed street artist José Gallino—looms above Montevideo, Uruguay. Gallino was inspired to paint both leaders because, “Mandela inspired me as a symbol of struggle, emancipation and revolution. In turn, Malala Yousafzai for being a fighter for freedom and education of women that this has made her an international symbol of peaceful protest.”

Within the corporate realm, the traditional top-down leadership model—characterized by a single individual wielding power and authority—has given way to a more fluid and adaptive style. Intangible qualities such as emotional intelligence, adaptability, ability to relate, communicate, and inspire and ethical decision-making are now a requisite.

If the future is to be realized, then evolving our paradigms for leadership could be the catalyst to achieving our agendas and intended outcomes. According to Stephen Covey, author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, “If you want small changes, work on your behavior; if you want quantum-leap changes, work on your paradigms.”

In tomorrow’s world, the effective leaders behind “quantum-leap changes” will be those who focus on the key pain points; build real teams to achieve and accomplish the highest priorities; position themselves to inspire, empower and hold accountable those teams; drive organizational success, and make a meaningful impact on their enterprise and society as a whole. So, how do we get there?

#### Surveying the Shift

If the paradigm for leadership is changing, then what is *driving* the shift?

The advent of globalization, technological advancements, and an increasingly interconnected world have contributed to a shift in societal values, expectations, and demands. So has the recognition that organizations have to be designed to encourage and allow each and every person to make her or his maximum contribution to gain competitive advantage.

# Leaders must now act as facilitators, enabling teams to thrive, adapt to challenges, and achieve collective success.

As an Insigniam client in Saudi Arabia said years ago, “How can we compete if half of our population cannot contribute?” As a result, leaders are now expected to possess a broader skill set that encompasses empathy, adaptability, and the ability to navigate complexity.

In our digital age, knowledge is no longer confined to a privileged few but accessible to anyone with a computer and an internet connection. This free flow of information has empowered individuals, enabling them to challenge traditional power structures and demand transparency and accountability from their leaders. Furthermore, the rise of social media platforms has amplified the voices of individuals and communities, giving them a platform to express their opinions and influence public discourse.

This has led to a more participatory and inclusive form of leadership, where leaders actively seek input and engage with diverse perspectives. Inclusion and diversity are no longer mere buzzwords but integral components of effective leadership, fostering innovation, creativity, and resilience.

High leadership engagement can pay dividends, says former PepsiCo CEO Indra Nooyi, “If you want to improve the organization, you have to improve *yourself* and the organization gets pulled up with you.”

Another significant aspect of the evolving leadership paradigm is a growing recognition of the importance of emotional intelligence, particularly empathy and strong listening skills. Leaders must be adept at managing their own emotions while creating a supportive and empathetic environment for their teams.

According to a recent study, organizations that value and widely use emotional intelligence (EI) as a performance indicator are 3.2x more effective at leadership development. Perhaps shockingly, 59% of employers surveyed said they would not hire someone who has a high IQ but low EI. And yet, 68% of organizations surveyed said they do not have any formal tools in place to identify, develop or leverage EI.

The shift towards a more collaborative leadership style has been fueled by the recognition that diverse teams with varied perspectives can tackle complex challenges more effectively. Leaders must now act as facilitators, empowering their teams and fostering an environment that promotes engagement and trust.

“Effective leaders understand the importance of creating a safe and trusting environment for their teams,” writes Amy Edmondson, Novartis Professor of Leadership and Management at Harvard Business School in her book, *The Fearless Organization*. “They act as facilitators, empowering individuals to contribute their ideas, take risks, and learn from failures. This enables teams to thrive, adapt to challenges, and achieve collective success.”

## Five Principles for Leading in the New Paradigm

To thrive in our ever-changing landscape, Insigniam counsels our executive clients to embrace a set of principles in order to reframe our leadership paradigm. By understanding and allowing yourself to be influenced by these principles, we have witnessed leaders not only evolve their skillsets, but also foster a culture of trust, innovation, and resilience within their organizations.

### 1 Leaders Are Reliable for Results

First and foremost, accountability is a cornerstone of effective leadership.

At Insigniam, we view accountability as making commitments for actions and results and then being reliable for delivering on commitments or accounting for what was missing in promises not kept. This means leaders live true to the commitments they make, operating with no alternative to achieving the result to which they have



committed. This gives them the right to hold others accountable.

One leader who exemplifies the principles of accountability and being reliable for results is Satya Nadella, the CEO of Microsoft. Since assuming the role in 2014, Mr. Nadella has transformed Microsoft's culture and positioned the company as a leader in the technology industry.

Mr. Nadella's leadership style is characterized by his strong emphasis on accountability and taking ownership of outcomes. He has instilled a culture of trust and transparency within Microsoft, where employees are encouraged to take risks, learn from failures, and be accountable for their actions.

Under Mr. Nadella's leadership, Microsoft has experienced significant growth and innovation with a remarkable increase in shareholder value. By fostering a culture of accountability and being reliable for results, Mr. Nadella has inspired teams to drive transformative initiatives, such as the development of Azure, Microsoft's cloud computing platform, which has become a major revenue driver for the company.

Mr. Nadella's commitment to accountability extends beyond business outcomes to include a broader sense of responsibility towards society and the impact of technology.

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### 2 Leaders Work as Their Word

Accountability without trust is hollow, and therefore, working as your word is the second principle to guide your leadership paradigm. Leading starts with taking a stand—giving your word to a new future.

At Insigniam, a leader's integrity involves consistency, meaning all your actions, conversations, and behaviors are consistent with the stand you have taken. When one has integrity and is consistent in one's word and actions, that inspires credibility, trust, and a foundation of certainty even during uncertain times.

A study conducted by The Center for Creative Leadership supports the notion that leaders who exhibit integrity and consistency in their actions are perceived as more credible and trustworthy by their teams. This perception fosters stronger relationships and enhances the level of commitment and engagement from employees.

When Alan Mulally, the former CEO of Ford Motor Company, joined Ford in 2006, the company was facing significant financial challenges and struggling to compete in the global automotive market. Mr. Mulally consistently acted with integrity by being transparent about the company's issues and by implementing a comprehensive turnaround plan. He honored his commitments and maintained consistency between his words and actions, which generated trust and

### Standing The Test of Time

Not every leader will have statues erected in their honor, such as Martin Luther King Jr.'s memorial in Washington, D.C. Yet, according to the Center for Creative Leadership, leaders who exhibit integrity and consistency in their actions are perceived as more credible and trustworthy by their teams. This perception fosters stronger relationships and enhances the level of commitment and engagement from employees.

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credibility among employees, shareholders and other stakeholders. Mulally's leadership and integrity played a vital role in Ford's successful transformation and recovery.

### 3 Leaders Generate New Futures

It is important to understand that leader is not a title or position; in this new paradigm, anyone can lead. A leader takes a stand for a new future and engages others to take on that new future as their own commitment.

Consider Malala Yousafzai, a Pakistani activist for female education, defied the oppressive Taliban occupiers in her region and became a global advocate for girls' right to education.

By taking a stand and making room for others to embrace her vision, Ms. Yousafzai empowered individuals to rise to the occasion and contribute to positive change. Ms. Yousafzai's courage and determination inspired others to join her cause and take inspired actions needed to address gender inequality. Her advocacy led to the establishment of the Malala Fund, a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting girls' education worldwide.

### 4 Leaders Embrace Humanity

Authenticity begins with a willingness to accept oneself and others exactly the way they are—and the way they are not. Ultimately, this is about compassion, graciousness, and an appreciation for people, a commitment to people's greatness even before it is evidenced.

On the international stage, Jacinda Ardern, the 40th prime minister of New Zealand and leader of the Labour Party from 2017 to 2023, has frequently been showered with praise for embracing the principles of acceptance, compassion, and appreciation for people's greatness. Ms. Ardern's response to the Christchurch Mosque shootings in 2019 showcased her deep compassion and acceptance of others. Following the tragic event, she swiftly condemned the violence and stood in solidarity with the Muslim community, wearing a headscarf as a sign of respect and empathy, emphasizing her acceptance of different cultures and religious beliefs. Ms. Ardern's compassionate approach not only provided comfort to those affected but also united the nation in a shared commitment to tolerance and inclusivity.

By embracing diversity, fostering inclusion,

and acknowledging the worth and potential of every individual, her leadership exemplifies the transformative power of accepting oneself and others, and the positive impact it can have on individuals, communities, and nations.

### 5 Leaders Engage Commitments from Others

Most people's tendency is to deal with people's complaints, justifications, wants, likes and dislikes, and personal comforts. A leader makes room for all of those things while still generating a sense of true inspiration within those they lead.

Although frequently shortlisted as one of the greatest leaders in modern history, Nelson Mandela, the iconic anti-apartheid activist, and former President of South Africa, embodied these qualities under the most difficult of circumstances.

During his 27-year imprisonment, Mandela faced numerous challenges and grievances, both personal and political. However, he made room for those complaints and injustices, acknowledging the frustrations and grievances of his fellow prisoners and the oppressed South African majority. He listened to their concerns and understood the depth of their suffering.

Mandela's ability to make room for people's complaints and wants while remaining rooted in his bigger commitments inspired others to transcend their own limitations. Even after his release from prison and becoming President, Mandela continued to embody these qualities. He sought to address the concerns and needs of all South Africans, recognizing that true leadership requires understanding and empathizing with people's wants, likes, and dislikes, while also driving toward a greater vision.

#### Shift Happens

Tomorrow's most effective leaders will be those who recognize and embrace this changing paradigm of leadership, adapting their approaches and mindsets accordingly. They will understand the importance of agility, empathy, inclusivity, and innovation in navigating the complexities of the modern world.

By actively embracing the changing landscape—leading change in the landscape, these leaders can position themselves to inspire and empower their teams, drive organizational success, and create a positive impact in an ever-evolving society. **IQ**

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