

Why the world needs 'Natural Leaders'

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Introduction

This paper has arisen out of preparation and discussions for our online programme 'Be a Natural Leader.' It got us thinking about our assertion that being a natural leader is so important for the future of organisations and indeed the world. We see the evidence of that statement in our work on a daily basis, but how do we communicate that to a world that may see things slightly differently?

So this paper sets out to explain why we think natural leadership is so important for the future of the world, organisations and humanity going forward. It sets out what we mean by 'being a natural leader' and gives some insight as to how any leader can tap into that innate wisdom which is the source of good leadership.

**"The only thing we
know about the future is
that it will be different"**

Peter Drucker
Management Challenges
for the 21st Century

Current context

There is no question that we are living in ever changing times. In a recent leadership research report prepared by Peter Hawkins for Henley Business School the top challenges for leaders in organisations are as follows:

1. Unceasing and accelerating transformation
2. The technological and digital revolution
3. Disintermediation and 'Uber-isation'
4. The hollowing out of organisations and the growing complexity of the stakeholder world
5. Globalisation
6. Climate change
7. The need to learn and adapt faster

"These challenges are not separate; they are all interconnected."

Hawkins, 2017

In our work we have yet to meet a leader who can tell us that these challenges don't, on occasion, keep them awake at night, or that the answers to these challenges come easily.

At the risk of using a phrase that might now have become a cliché, we live in a VUCA world. (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous) It is increasingly difficult to predict the future, yet leaders need to plan for that future. For example one of our retail customers tells us that predicting trends and buying patterns is more difficult than ever. Expectations of customers, employees and stakeholders are constantly rising. The voices and demands of communities are becoming more pressing and influential. Public opinion can change on the turn of a sixpence and, through the blessing or curse of social media, it spreads like wildfire and demands an immediate change in direction, like the upswell in opinion about plastic usage.

Demands are being made upon leaders to do more, with less, to a greater standard and with greater efficiency. It's easy to see why leading organisations and teams is such a challenge. It's easy to see how difficulties occur and it's easy to see why organisations start to falter.

At the same time people in organisations are demanding more of their leaders. People want more meaning and purpose in their work. People want to work in a place where they can make a meaningful contribution beyond profitability and productivity and they want to be valued for that contribution.

It's as important, if not more important than ever that leaders have a strong sense of purpose and clarity of mind. That they have sight of the bigger picture, are able to maintain their perspective and to have one eye on the future while being clear in the here and now.

There is a growing importance for leaders to be able to connect with people's hearts and minds. To inspire, motivate and influence others. To bring people together to build and work towards a collective endeavour.

In this context it is incumbent upon leaders to inspire hope and optimism in the workplace. To do that people need to trust their leaders but trust in organisations, institutions and individual leaders is in short supply. (ILM 2018)

**"Could we invent
a more powerful, more
soulful, more meaningful
way to work together?"**

Frederick Laloux
Reinventing Organisations

The days of the 'heroic leader' are behind us

The role of leader is great, the demands are high and the context is often too complex for leadership to rest with just one individual. It is impossible for one person to see the whole web of invisible inter connections that weave their way through an organisation, the marketplace and this increasingly connected global community.

To help them to cope with scale and to help individual leaders to handle the scale, organisations have split into divisions, operating units, functions and the like, but they have been affected by the law of unintended consequences. It has resulted in many leadership teams being required to operate primarily through their particular part of the organisation – where members of a leadership team see their individual function as their primary team and the leadership team as secondary. Their part of the business becomes their 'turf' which they strongly identify with, which in turn becomes something that needs to be promoted and defended, sometimes at the cost of the wider organisation. This creates competitiveness and individualistic working patterns. Individuals get wedded into ideas and take positional stances that are combative rather than collaborative. It's tempting when people are competing with each other to join in the competition. In other words ego comes to the fore and invites other's ego to join in the drama.

This creates problems because decisions or actions taken in one part of the business almost always impact on other parts of the business.

What is needed?

Leaders need to take a more holistic view of the organisation and its context and take "right action". What is "right action"? Right action arises out of thinking and decisions that take account of the whole. A cohesive leadership team with multiple perspectives, varied intelligences and diverse opinions have a better chance to see the greater whole with more accuracy. Therefore there is a need for more inclusion and collaboration amongst leadership teams. In other words the need for collective leadership, towards collective agendas and goals, is more important than ever.

This means that leadership teams need to be able to connect with, inspire, motivate and support each other towards achieving a collective agenda. They need to bring their individual innate wisdom to the table so that the collective wisdom is greater than the sum of all the individual parts.

All of this requires an open-mindedness and an open-heartedness towards each other that is particularly rare in organisations.

Why is it rare?

If you look at the history of organisations, you can see that the rudiments of current structures and processes have been around for hundreds of years. Historically, business owners took their lead from the military and religious institutions and built their effectiveness and fortunes through the use of hierarchy and 'command and control' leadership. These structures became embedded and have been refined and honed ever since the industrial revolution. Organisations have centralised then de-centralised in turn. They have outsourced services and brought them back in house. But the basic structure has remained unchanged over many decades.

Increasingly these structures and processes are becoming too cumbersome for organisations. They are not agile enough to respond quickly to the ever changing environment. The world has changed but the structures and processes lag behind.

Undoubtedly, organisations have evolved in response to their environment and the various stages of evolution can be codified. Each with its prevailing frame of reference to the world and resultant values, beliefs and culture. (Graves 2005) Arguably, the predominant

"The major leadership challenges lie not in the parts but in the interconnections"

Professor Peter Hawkins
Leadership Team Coaching

frame of reference guiding organisations unconsciously in today's world is that of "organisations as machines". You can see evidence of this in the language that is used on a daily basis. The need to 'gain leverage', 'move the dial on performance', inputs and outputs, how we use 'metrics' to measure everything – even human 'resource' engagement, how we try to 'map' things out, how we 're-engineer' the business, or accelerate the business or gain traction, or even the need to 'hit the brakes'.

For machines to operate effectively they need predictability, certainty, simplicity and clarity. They operate on the basis that things work in a linear way. That you can always predict effect from cause. But that is not the way of the world.

There are organisations that are leading the way on the changes needed. These organisations have a strong sense of purpose and meaning and invite people's hearts and minds into the workplace. The leaders understand that self organisation (Wheatley 2006) enables people to tap into their limitless potential. They make wholeness the primary function of individuals working in the company. These organisations are led by people who see that the future relies on all of us being fully human again. (See Laloux and Harvard Business Review)

"Self-organisation is not a startling new feature... In all of human activity, self organisation is how we begin. It is what we do until we interfere with the process and try to control one another"

Margaret Wheatley
Leadership and the New Science

The future needs leaders to be human again

It's no wonder, given the history of organisations, that open-mindedness and open-heartedness can be a rare commodity in organisations. When it has been more necessary to act like an automaton than be a human being. Where the emphasis has been on doing not being. Where it's been necessary to leave a part of yourself at the door to the building where you work.

It's hard to be human, when you are looked upon and treated as an automaton, 'a small cog in a big wheel'. It's hard to see the bigger picture when your mind is full of the fire fighting that you need to do right now. It's hard to be open minded and open hearted in the face of not meeting deadlines or goals. It's hard to feel OK when the board/stakeholders/investors/customers/staff all want an extra pound of flesh from you. It's hard to connect with a

member of your team, when your head is full of the board report you have to prepare, and the consequences of failure. It's hard to make good decisions when your mind is full of stress, pressure and angst.

On top of all that it's hard to see the wood for the trees, when there's a whole load of mental chatter in the background, that is telling you what an imposter you are, how you're not good enough and how you should be doing better.

All of this is a normal part of being human and could be seen as the downside. But they are only a few of the possible effects to how our minds work and we don't have to suffer these particular effects.

The good news is that we were born with the ability to deal with this, so called, VUCA world. We are not machines, we are human, which means that we are designed to cope with anything that the world throws at us. We're designed to make sense when things are unpredictable. We're designed to handle multiple possible effects from single causes. We're designed to respond quickly and nimbly to issues when they arise.

We are designed to have great resilience and we're designed to have limitless potential. Leadership of the future will tap into this unlimited potential. If only we understood how to do that now!

The answer lies in coming back to being human. The answer lies in finding our innate and natural wisdom. The answer lies in leaders coming back to their natural leadership.

The future needs natural leaders

For an explanation of what we mean by a 'natural leader' here are some selected definitions of the term 'natural' from the Oxford English Dictionary.

"Organic, pure, wholesome, untaught, instinctive, intuitive, unaffected, spontaneous, relaxed, genuine, open, unpretentious."

These words are all descriptions of our natural self. We don't need to learn how to be any of these things. They are naturally occurring phenomena. When we are resting in our natural self we have access to a quiet inner wisdom that guides us through life.

"The most exciting breakthroughs of the 21st century will not occur because of technology, but because of an expanded concept of what it means to be human."

John Naisbitt,
Futurist and Author

Natural leaders know how our minds work beyond the current models of psychology and that includes our spirituality. They will know how to “keep their heads, when all about are losing theirs”. Everything a leader needs, lies within a healthy state of mind. Leaders who have a clear mind are able to see with clarity and wisdom whatever is needed in the face of this VUCA world.

Natural leaders understand that and they know how to achieve a healthy state of mind. They embrace their humanness, their spirituality and the unlimited potential that comes with being human.

Natural leaders are human beings who rest in a high quality state of mind more of the time. Natural leaders know that the work begins and ends with his own consciousness.

The invisible variable

Consciousness is the key to leadership. Not the self awareness that tells us what our strengths and 'development areas' are. But the consciousness and awareness of our true self. The consciousness and awareness as the source of all the answers. And the consciousness and awareness that creates our state of mind.

State of mind is the invisible variable between average leadership and great leadership, between 'bad' decisions and 'good' decisions, between consequences and right action, between conflict and great connection with others, between stress and ease. It is the difference that makes the difference.

Leaders in a healthy, or high quality, state of mind, find it easier to connect with others, easier to influence others, easier to be resilient in a world that seems to demand their very soul and take away their mental wellbeing.

Leaders with a clear mind find new and innovative ways of leading the business and their teams. Leaders in a healthy state of mind find ways to bring out the collective wisdom of their team members. Leaders with clarity and perspective find ways to bring into fruition new products, new services, new processes. Leaders with an open heart and access to their inner wisdom find ways to connect with others, listen to others, understand their perspective and then influence others with more grace and ease.

With a clear mind it's easier to see how to win the hearts and minds of your team and colleagues. With a clear mind it's easier to see what needs to be done in the face of a changing marketplace. With a clear mind it's easier to see how to go about solving, so called, intractable problems. With a clear mind it's obvious how to bring out the best in another person.

“We have a crisis of leadership. What we don't have... are thinkers. People who can formulate a new direction... a new way of doing things”

William Deresiewicz
Author, essayist and literary critic

Three Principles to understanding how the mind works

It's easier to have a clear and healthy state of mind when you understand how it works and these Three Principles provide that guide.

This understanding is an explanation of how the mind works. It is not a diagnostic or a methodology. It is not a how to guide. With an understanding of how the mind works it becomes more obvious how to use your mind more wisely. How to use the faculty of intelligence, this ability to conceptualise and this analytical tool that is our brain in an easier and more graceful way.

The Principle of Mind

We all have an inbuilt and innate intelligence within us. There are many words that can be used to describe it. We can call it inner wisdom, our true or natural self, or even the intelligence of life. It is the source of all ideas, the source of all solutions to all problems, the source of creativity. It holds all of the answers that we may seek. When you see for yourself the truth of this, you can have full and unfettered access to this wisdom.

The Principle of Consciousness

We are conscious beings. We are conscious of life, conscious of the world around us, conscious of other people, conscious of our own inner world, conscious of our thoughts and feelings, conscious of how we impact on others and the world. In fact the essence of who we are is consciousness itself.

The Principle of Thought

We are thinking beings. We live in a world of thought. We see the world through the lens of our own thinking, whether we are aware of the content of that thinking or not. Thought is what creates our reality, our experience of life. Everything we experience in life, every incident, is experienced through the lens of thought. The nature of thought is that it is transient. Thoughts come and go. Thought creates our feelings and emotions which is why feelings also come and go. Our response to external triggers can be variable because we respond through the lens of Thought. From two different states of mind the same external trigger will result in two different responses. This is how we know that our experience of life is generated from the inside out. Our mind operates more like a projector than it does a camera.

Sydney Banks and the Three Principles

These Three Principles were introduced to the world by a man called Sydney Banks. He called them Mind, Consciousness and Thought. There are no definitions or definitive explanation. He intentionally kept the Principles simple. It is not an intellectual understanding, the understanding comes through experientially. Through reflection and discussion about these Principles, insights and realisations occur to you about how your mind works. The more deeply you understand the nature of how your mind works, the more profound the impact that understanding has on your life.

"There is no end or limitation, nor are there boundaries, to the human mind."

Sydney Banks
The Missing Link

How does understanding the Three Principles help?

This understanding of how your mind works brings about more resilience, more clarity and more ease in your life. You understand what it is that creates your experience which enables you to ride the waves of 'low quality' thinking or feeling with more grace and ease. Feelings like stress, anger, pressure, anxiety cause you less issue, because you understand the sources of those feelings and how they are helpful to you. You realise that you have more strength and resilience than you ever realised possible. Your mind gets quieter more often and you have more clarity and greater perspective. You have more access to inner wisdom, which opens up the possibility of more new and fresh ideas, better decisions and solutions to problems and a more holistic view. This understanding brings greater mental wellbeing because the heart of who you are is innate wellbeing.

Realise the natural leader that resides within you

So a natural leader is someone who understands what it is to be human. Understands the limitless potential that comes with being human and knows how to lead people so that they work in the flow of life rather than against it. They lead from the innate source of wisdom. They know how to access that wisdom and what gets in the way of it. And it feels natural.

Understanding these Three Principles will help you to realise the natural leader that resides within you. This natural leader that inspires hope and optimism in others because it is itself hopeful and optimistic. Because it is natural and authentic, it inspires trust in others. And because it is the innate wisdom that resides in everyone, the natural leader signposts others to find their own innate wisdom. Natural leaders act as a tuning fork to others to resonate and fall into their innate wisdom. This is how a leader will bring the collective wisdom of

individuals to bear upon the collective agenda and goals. This natural leadership feels more effortless and knows how to be the best leader that you can be in this VUCA world.

Conclusion

This table summarises some of the differences between some of the current notions about leadership and a Natural Leader. With a simple understanding of how the mind works, leaders will move from Column one – current ideas of what is required of them to Column two – a more natural state of mind, which enables themselves and others and therefore their organisations, to flourish.

“The role for leaders of the future will be to act as a tuning fork for others to fall into their own inner wisdom”

Ashley Wood & Maria Iliffe-Wood
Leadership Coaches

From	To
Coping mechanisms	Natural resilience
Self awareness	Consciousness
Strategies and techniques to build rapport	Whole hearted connection to others
Limiting goals	Limitless potential
Individualised efforts	Collective wisdom and action
Processes to stimulate creativity and innovation	Fresh thinking and creativity as a natural expression
Self confidence	Innate self assurance
Attachment to identity, belief and opinion	Open and curious
Pressure and stress	Ease of mind
Command and control	Trust and optimism
Strategic vision and planning processes	Listening to and aligning to evolutionary purpose
Full mind	Quiet mind

Our innate natural leadership arises from a Quiet Mind. From a quiet, calm, healthy state of mind, we can grow far beyond any expectation that we might have at the moment. “From Quiet Greater Yet”.

All of our work with leaders is designed to enable you to realise the natural leadership within you. To enable you to open yourself up to the limitless potential that you have within you, just by being human. Our programmes are designed to bring about a deep understanding of the Three Principles and how the mind works, in the context of leadership.

For a short immersion in the kind of work we do join us on our Be a Natural Leader online programme. It is a programme that runs over a period of six weeks. It includes two one to one coaching sessions and six webinars.

We would love to bring this understanding to even more leaders, to make a huge difference in the world. Please do contact us to find out more.

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Ashley Wood

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Definition of a Leadership Team

- **A small group of people with complementary skills.** Each person in the team has different but complementary skills. Each role supports the whole. The team work to achieve a sum that is greater than the sum of its individual parts.
- **Committed to a common purpose and set of performance goals.** An effective leadership team has a very clear vision which they are all agreed upon. They are all working to the same vision and performance goals
- **A shared approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable.** This is a team that works together and holds each other mutually accountable in a supportive and shared way
- **Meets and communicates in a way that raises morale and alignment.** When they meet and communicate the team feels better about the team and themselves and they are all working towards the same goals
- **Effectively engages with all key stakeholder groups.** This team engages with all key stakeholder groups, in whatever way they have agreed to do so making sure that they are meeting the needs of their stakeholders
- **It is a group that learns and develops together.** This is a team that actively coaches each other and who pro actively work through the learning cycle together (Plan, Do, Review, Reflect) in order to continuously learn. Every failure is a learning opportunity

Adapted from Leadership Team Coaching by Peter Hawkins

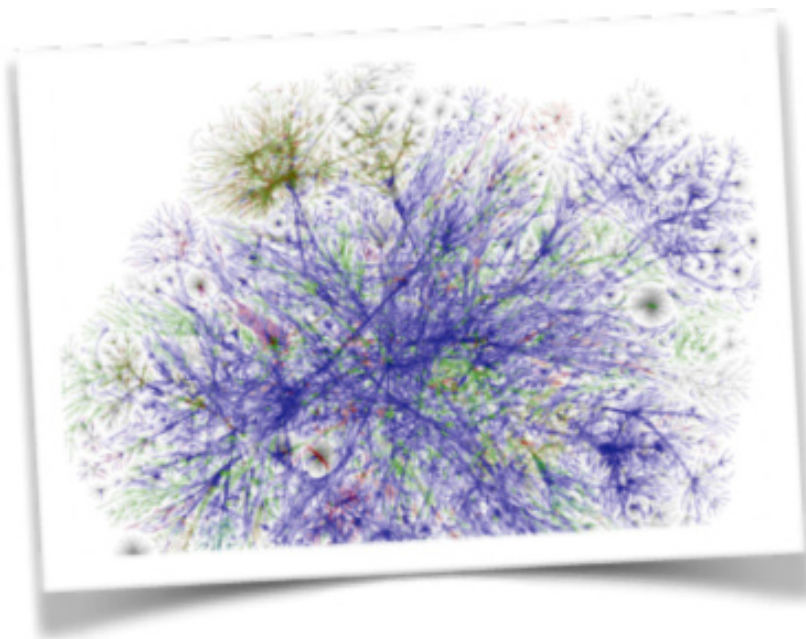
Our underpinning philosophy

Leadership and organisational development has traditionally focused on processes to inculcate ideal values, broaden and deepen knowledge, build skills and encourage particular behaviours. Whilst this has undoubtedly enabled individuals to improve their leadership capability and in turn bring about changes in organisational performance for the better, this approach always bumps into limitations at some point.

Our people development work is based on the fact that optimal leadership is 100% a function of the leader's state of mind. Knowledge, values, skills and behaviours arise out of and are contingent upon an individual's state of mind. When leaders naturally fall into their best 'state of mind' all aspects of their performance improves – relationships, clarity of thinking, creativity, problem solving and decision making, to mention a few examples.

An optimal state of mind arises when people have the time and space to allow their mental chatter to quieten down and give clear, uncontaminated, fresh thinking a chance to emerge. This is a naturally occurring phenomenon which everyone has experienced at some point in their lives. When people understand the fundamental principles which generate 'state of mind' they are able to find the answers they need.

Our development event work has two distinct phases. The first phase starts by opening up a conversation with people that draws out and develops their understanding of what is operating behind and generating any state of mind. The second phase begins after individuals and teams have a sufficient grounding in this understanding and can access higher levels of clarity. Once this level of clarity emerges then the questions that the team need to find answers to become the focus of attention.





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We help to create the conditions for stimulating, enriching and fulfilling workplaces. The kind of workplaces where people flourish.

We want to leave a legacy of great places to live and work. We want to know that the world is better because we've played a part in making that happen.

We change the lives of people and organisations for the better.

Because we spend a large proportion of our lives at 'work' we believe we should feel good about being there. To feel good because we perform well, we have great working relationships and we are making a significant contribution.

We are a UK based leadership and people development organisation. We operate through a network of associates who have each developed their expertise as coaches, trainers and consultants following successful careers in market leading organisations.

"What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead."

Nelson Mandela

Creating Conditions for Change

www.meridianiliffe.co.uk

Meridian Iliffe Ltd

Meridian was established in 1995 by Ashley Wood as a consultancy offering expertise in leadership and management development. Since then we have worked worldwide for Blue Chip organisations such as British Aerospace, Skanska, Schuh, Exxon/Mobil and Oracle. Iliffe Coaching was established in 2009 by Maria Iliffe-Wood to offer coaching and leadership development services. The two organisations merged into Meridian Iliffe Ltd in 2014.



From Quiet Greater Yet

From Quiet Greater Yet was introduced as a new service in 2017 to bring a simple but profound understanding, to the world, of how the mind works, in order to transform people's lives. Our passion is helping people to find inspiration, grace and ease in their work and leadership of others.

www.fromquiet.co.uk



Maria Iliffe-Wood

Maria is a highly experienced coach who works with leaders in a wide range of organisations. She first started coaching in 1988 and it was a key component in the way she led people for over 20 years in various corporate leadership roles before deciding to become a specialist leadership coach in 2009.

Maria is involved in the development of other coaches. She is a coach supervisor and an author on the subject. Her book 'Coaching Presence, building consciousness and awareness into coaching interventions' was published in English in 2014. It has been translated into Russian and South Korean and has been read in over 20 countries.



Ashley Wood

Ashley Wood has worked in people and organisational development for over 30 years. He has in depth experience and expertise in talent management, leadership and management development, coaching, improving performance and change management. He uses a pragmatic and down to earth style with groups and individuals to increase their resourcefulness and deliver measurable business benefits.

