

THE CO-CREATIVE NATURE OF LEADERSHIP

By Blaine Bartlett

When stripped of the behavioral characteristics, the personality distinctions, and the situational competencies typically used to describe a leader, what one is left with is movement – leaders cause movement, they cause change. Leadership is defined for the purposes of this brief paper as being the activity of co-creating the movement necessary to generate the actions required in order to produce desired results. The activity of co-creation is central to this definition and is important because nothing is ever created absent a relationship of some type. Leaders can *never* unilaterally cause movement. Change only occurs when something has moved *in relation* to what was before. It requires two (or more) to be part of the process.

It is in this sense that leadership must be seen as being foremost a relational activity. It is not an exaggeration to assert that the quality of the myriad relationships found in organizations is an accurate litmus of the likelihood of the organization's long term success. These relationships include the obvious interpersonal relationships that are readily and objectively visible. Perhaps more importantly, they also include the subjective relationships that are not so visible – the relationships that individuals have with such things as values, work processes, goals and objectives, vision, mission, self, spirit, parking places and office layouts. To the degree that all these varied relationships that are present in any system are working well, the system has a pretty good chance of being successful. Being unaware of and consequently not attending to these objective and subjective relationships will limit any leader's effectiveness dramatically.

In today's rapidly changing world it must be understood that the difficulty people and organizations have with change is seldom with the change itself. The true difficulty is with the difficulty people have in dealing with the disruption to the myriad relationships that the change causes. Learning to lead within this context requires a fundamentally different educational approach. It's not enough to simply teach to a set of situational or generic leadership competencies. Relationships are much too fluid and complex to be held hostage to such a competency framework. Rather, leaders today need to learn what

it means to co-create. They and their organizations need to disabuse themselves of the legacy paradigm of the leader as the one “in charge”.

Co-creation requires a different paradigm – a paradigm organized around connection and which includes skills steeped in Awareness, Communication Mastery, Trust, Ownership, and Context. This new skill set is informed by the domains of Spirit, Time/Space, Mind, and Personal Mastery as its core.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of tomorrow’s leader will be measured not only by the results they produce but by the *beauty* and elegance by which those results are co-created and delivered. Beauty in this model is linked to the Platonic virtue of Beauty as being the result of a spiritual co-creation. It becomes the measure of relationships that are designed to thrive rather than merely survive. Wherever we find Beauty there is an enormous reserve of power behind it.