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John Knights discusses new leadership and education for the information age

We call it Transpersonal!





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One of the reasons for the success of the Industrial Age in the Western world was the introduction of education for all. Though there are many parts of the world where the standard remains inadequate, in macro terms education has continually increased across the globe. Its focus has been fundamentally on literacy and numeracy with other cognitive subjects added for the more advantaged. Again, in macro terms, economies have blossomed, and living standards have increased along with health and life expectancy. But our planet has suffered.

Post COVID-19 and immersed in the new Information Age, we have to determine what kind of education we need for our young people for this revolution, and what form of society will be most successful. Agility is required more than ever before, our societies are polarised, equality and fairness are high on the agenda, and we need to take care of our planet. To meet these challenges, education must focus on the development of the human being as a whole so that we can continue to prosper as a species.

Our default brain, which has not changed materially in 200,000 years, is not ideal for this new world. It does not like change – which we face at an increasing intensity. Our brain wants to be in control and exhibits powerful (usually negative) emotions. Our most impactful emotion is fear, so we are naturally suspicious of those unlike ourselves, and this breeds division, competition and inequality.

Our brain needs to embrace change, and in a world of increasing complexity we need to learn to be more collaborative.

As we go through life, we encounter a range of experiences and learning opportunities which rewire our brain. By the very nature of things, this rewiring may create a positive or negative change. As most of this process happens unconsciously, the impact these experiences and learning have on our brain – and so also on behaviours, beliefs and attitudes – is very much down to chance. Where the changes are positive, we overcome our defaults and, as a result, function more effectively.

COVID-19 has been an interesting experiment in how we humans have reacted to an emergency and been forced into change. It would be fair to say that those countries with the foresight and resources to be prepared for a pandemic and those with a more collaborative style of government fared better than those without. These are good pointers to the kind of leadership we need in the future.

Our survival instinct has made us change. Organisations have been 'forced' to trust their employees to work remotely. According to some experts, what was a slow trend towards remote working has accelerated by as many as five or six years. Governments and organisations are also being forced to adapt in other ways too like transport, education and the location and type of services required for the future. But despite our cognitive pre-frontal cortex trying to bring rational thinking into our plans for the future, the resistance to change, controlled unconsciously to a large extent by our amygdala evoking strong emotions and impulsive actions, remains.

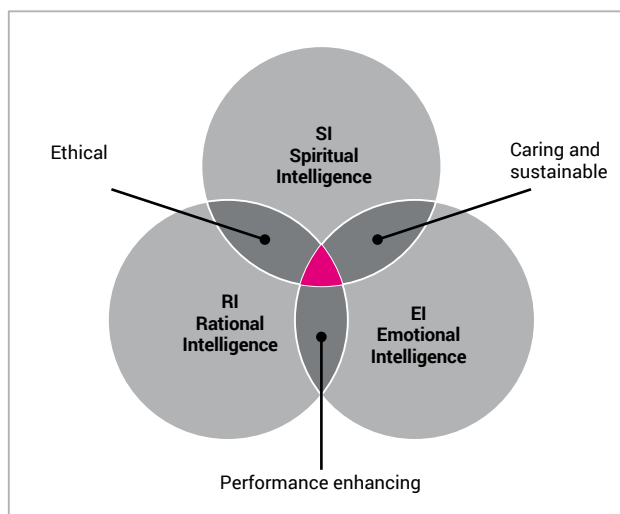
So, what if we could replace this serendipitous journey of learning through experience with one of planned education and learning such that everyone had the knowledge and power to re-programme their own brain? To enable them to overcome the negative defaults so that it was more suited to twenty-first century needs? How can we make it both intentional and accelerated? How can we enable more people to not only reach this higher level of human development but also at a younger age?

Transpersonal Leaders

Transpersonal Leaders operate beyond their ego and continue personal development and learning. They are radical, ethical and authentic while emotionally intelligent and caring.

They are able to:

- embed authentic, ethical and emotionally-intelligent behaviours into the DNA of the organisation
- build strong, empathetic and collaborative relationships within the organisation, and
- with all stakeholders create a Performance Enhancing Culture that is Ethical, Caring and Sustainable



Our solution has been to create the Transpersonal Leadership Development Journey (TLDJ), a programme of development for leaders. It is explained in detail in *Leading Beyond the Ego: How to Become a Transpersonal Leader*, published by Routledge and summarised in the peer-reviewed paper *Developing 21st Century Leaders, a Complete New Process* <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/JWAM-12-2019-0038/full/html>

One foundation of our programme is Kegan's model of human development "The Five Stages of the Evolving Self" which specifies three levels of adult development: the socialised mind, the self-authoring mind and the self-transforming mind. Kegan's research demonstrated that very few people (less than 1%) reach the self-transforming stage and those that do are most usually in the later stages of their life.

The Self-Transforming Stage:

They have learned the limits of their own inner systems and indeed of having an inner system or specific world view at all. They have a reformed ego. They reach out for similarities with others rather than differences. These individuals no longer see the world as black and white, rather seeing the world in shades of grey. They lead in order to learn. These individuals can hold contradictions, work with ambiguity, find solutions from adversity, and move from the linear to the holistic.

Other underpinnings of the TLDJ model include work by Senge (5th Discipline), Greenleaf (Servant Leadership), Goleman's treatise on leadership and emotional intelligence (Primal Leadership), Zohar's book on Spiritual Intelligence and Sadler-Smith (Intuition).

We call them Transpersonal Leaders, as defined in the box top left.

The model is well developed and continues to be updated and refined by client experience, developing neuroscience and societal changes. It can most simply be defined by this diagram.

The programme has been accredited to Master's degree level and is available through a licensing model to universities and business schools as well as being delivered directly (and remotely) to organisations through partners around the world.

Our focus has been on developing leaders suitable for the twenty-first century, firstly because that is where our experience lay, and secondly because if we don't have the right kind of leaders to implement and monitor such fundamental change, no systemic approach will be successful.

Moving beyond the development of senior leaders, we believe this model has a much greater potential in three areas:

1. As a standard module in all university programmes
2. As a model behind systemic organisational development
3. In all schools – from foundation upwards





As a standard module in all university programmes

Currently, the Transpersonal Leadership (TL) model is offered through licensing to higher education primarily as a module (“course” in the USA) in an MBA programme and infused into other modules, or as a stand-alone Master’s degree. However, most functional courses (engineering, fashion, media, etc.) could benefit from a module on leadership, preparing young adults for the organisation of the future which will be less hierarchical and have more distributed and evolved leadership.

As a model behind systemic organisational development

There is much discussion and innovation in the field of Organisational Development about how to build people development into the core of the culture and operations of an organisation. Kegan & Lahey in “An Everyone Culture” propose developing Deliberately Developmental Organisations (DDOs). Our view is to start with developing the individuals (everyone is a leader) and the systems will emerge. If we have the people with the right attitudes, values and behaviours (as well as the cognitive abilities that are not in such short supply) then the people in each organisation (macro or micro) will be capable of developing suitable systems to fit their context.

One of our own areas of development is further integrating the concept of Complex Adaptive Systems (CASs) with Transpersonal Leadership. We have started by connecting the basic characteristics of CASs to a series of 11 Transpersonal Practices that provide a checklist of how organisations need to function in the future.

Complex Adaptive Systems

- are made up of many individual parts or agents
- follow simple rules
- provide no leader to coordinate the action of others
- generate emergent patterns through the interaction of agents
- react and adapt if the elements of the system change

In all schools – from foundation, upwards

This is more of a dream as I am the first to acknowledge my lack of expertise in child education. But surely, if we added social development (behaviours, values and preserving our planet) to the curriculum and gave it equal importance to reading, writing and maths, we would already be laying the groundwork of developing the leaders of the future. I know schools who provide emotional intelligence studies but the subject seems to be always offered for those with learning or behavioural challenges rather than for everyone.

The result would be an education system suitable for the fast-changing Information Age. This would prepare everyone to be more collaborative, caring and purpose-oriented. And that would produce the willing discretionary effort and hence productivity that is often lacking today. It may even make our TLDJ redundant – and that would be a success!



About the Author

John Knights is Chair of LeaderShape Global and lead author of “Leading Beyond The Ego: How to Become a Transpersonal Leader”, published by Routledge in March 2018. After a career as a senior international corporate executive and serial entrepreneur, John’s life changed when he learned to coach and then facilitate groups of chief executives to support them continue their development. This, plus the experience and research of working with many other leaders over the last 20 years, as well as a reflection on his own career, provides the basis for John and his colleagues to develop the Transpersonal Leadership Journey. John is an Associate of GRLI