

Transnational Leadership: Harmonizing “Long Wave” Career Influence and “Ceannaire
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by

Allen D. Engle, Sr., B.B.A., M.B.A., D.B.A.
Professor of Management
Eastern Kentucky University
USA,

Fred Allen Engle, Jr., B.Sci., M.B.A., Ed.D.
Professor Emeritus of Economics
Eastern Kentucky University
USA,

and

F. Bruce Engle, B.A., M.A., Ph.D.
Lecturer of English
Morehead State University
USA

Overview: This paper has five sections: First, a definition of leadership as a context-specific process of clarifying and infusing a corporate culture that transcends national cultures is posited. Key leadership processes and outcomes are presented. Second, there follows a model of global leaders in a more traditional role of corporate “architect”. The third section provides a contrasting model of global leader in the role of corporate “bard”. The fourth section will present a discussion of the relationship between global careers as they “cause” leader capabilities associated with the bard leader. Finally, a discussion of the relationship between bard leaders as they “effect” the careers of other employees of global firms will conclude the paper.

On Leadership: Leadership, particularly global leadership, is a complex area of study in organizations. Building on the literal Anglo-Saxon translation of leadership as “people

on a journey,” it is just those journey-specific aspects of leadership we will emphasize. Organizational leadership must ultimately be context-specific if it is to be strategically directed behavior – influence in an already “shared domain [corporation], influencing a specific audience [followers/employees] which is already sophisticated in the stories, the images and the other embodiments [our emphasis] of the domain.” (Adler, 2001:78).

The overarching goal of global leadership is nothing less than the creation, reinterpretation and continually refreshed enhancement of a globally shared corporate culture. This globally shared culture balances a consistency with and acceptance within a wide variety of local national and regional cultures while simultaneously identifying itself with higher, unique corporate values and purposes (Deal, Dalton & Ernst, 2003). Global corporate cultures must be firmly rooted in these local cultures and yet floating and flowing beyond them. Leadership is the manipulation of organizational culture – the conscious creation of meaning (Schein, 1985). Associated values, literally that which is more valuable in any given decision situation, are communicated largely through symbolic actions and not explicit communiqués.

Leadership is both the process of influence via rich communication as well as the outcome of an improvement; improvement in the form of the vision of a better existence for the firm’s members and all the societies that host the firm. The outcome cannot be separated from the process. Present the future visionary state (the outcome) you want and then we can talk about appropriate processes of leadership and what leaders need to look like.

If outcome without process is philosophical musing, then process without articulated outcome is demagoguery. Both of these incomplete situations are dangerous for firms, their employees, their shareholders, as well as host societies.

The Traditional Role for Global Leader: Leader as Architect

Traditionally, leadership in larger firms has taken on the role of corporate architect – the “master builder” that as entrepreneur starts out with the vision for a new or better way of doing business – new products, or new models of an existing business, new markets, or new uses in existing markets, or new functions added for customer satisfaction or regulatory requirement. In the early stages of firm development personal, one-on-one or one on small group leadership dynamic (hereafter referred to as “*level one leadership*”) is responsible for the creation or re-energizing of firm culture. This stage is characterized by the successful articulation and widespread acceptance of the vision (goal) and the discipline (those physical and psychological paths to walk) required to achieve the vision.

As the firm becomes larger “level one leadership” transitions to leadership by organizational design; Max Weber’s (1947) “routinization of charisma.” During this transition the selection of key disciples, the creation of tasks, jobs, hierarchies and a structure of formal relationships, all must be structured to create “spaces of influence.” Personal influence is largely supplanted by specialization (to hold on to a piece of the vision) and requisite integration mechanisms hereafter referred to as “*level two leadership*.” Setting up and maintaining a structure of command and control is deemed

the most effective way to focus attention in increasingly specialized, truncated and myopic pieces of the vision (goal) and the path (values).

“*Level two leaders*” spend much of their time tinkering with structures and gaming the chess-like placement of “key” players embedded within these structures. Influence here is the influence of creating the architectural setting.

“*Level one leadership*” interacts with “*level two leadership*” through two primary mechanisms. First, as the firm becomes larger and more diverse – diverse as to products, technologies, functions, activities, and particularly geographically and culturally diverse – leaders engage in occasional “walkabouts,” showing the flag, cutting the literal or symbolic ribbon, instilling confidence and/or shock and awe as the case requires.

Second, architectural leaders may occasionally personally intervene to tear down an aging edifice; subtly, with the replacement of a single key executive, more aggressively with the sledgehammer of a “night of the long knives” style wholesale sacking and reassignments, or even with the wrecking ball of product line reductions, restructuring and downsizing. Within this second mechanism, mergers and acquisitions may be seen as the masterstroke of the architectural leader. This interaction between “*level one*” and “*level two*” leadership will be referred to as “*short wave*” leadership interactions. See Figure 1.

The role of leader as architect is increasingly inadequate for today’s global firms. Environmental complexity, dynamism, diversity and uncertainty are so much a part of our work worlds that architect leaders spend all their time moving people around positions and rearranging structures, always two or three moves behind changing environmental conditions. Leaders simply cannot be everywhere in person all the time

(Davis & Bryant, 2003). The owners (shareholders and other constituents) do not like the way the house is “looking,” so they sack the architect and hire a new one, etc.

An Alternative Role for Global Leaders: Leader as Bard

Recent developments in telecommunications and information systems provide a unique opportunity for these globally “stretched” leaders. Global leaders can do much more than merely apply these new technologies to reinforce the structural basis of command and control inherent in the leader-as-architect role. These technologies allow the leader to depart from this old role and take on an even older role: The leader as bard. The bard leader initially follows “level one leadership” with one on one, person-to-person communication (stage i). At this stage assumptions, values, imagery, stories, symbols and ceremonies are introduced and reinforced via personal exchanges. Things depart from the earlier role in stage ii with the explicit “mapping” and translation of organizational culture – its values, symbols and iconography – onto the virtual space of a global information system. It is this web-based decision support environment that creates a new incarnation of what Allan Bird would call a “sharing field” – a place and time for dialog where critical tacit and implicit knowledge can be transferred (2001). Sharing this tacit knowledge - across cultural, functional and product divides - is critical if global firms are to blend global standardization, local customization and the diffusion of innovation in an effort to realize the firm’s now-global vision. To quote Bird “The difficulty in organizations is in fixing a location for the sharing field and in assembling participants with the right set of shared experiences” (2001: 32).

The global virtual “sharing field” creates what we will refer to as “*level three leadership*.” Conventional wisdom states that the influence of leaders breaks down with physical distance (Kerr & Jerimer, 1978; Yukl, 1994). However, if we orchestrate and coordinate the personal messages and iconography of “*level one leadership*” with the iconography and interactive virtual symbolism of a global decision support network, then cannot this “*level three leadership*” act as a sounding board or amplifier of the original message? See Figure 2 for a presentation of this model.

The purpose of these networks is not to independently create the tune of the cultural message, but rather reverberate - resounding and evoking the values of culture. In this manner the pattern of personal messages and values of leadership are expanded upon.

This interaction between “*level one leadership*” and “*level three leadership*” is what we will refer to as “*long wave*” leadership. Structure and architecture still exist, but they are of secondary importance and not strategically relevant to top-level leaders. The critical role for bard leaders is to orchestrate and harmonize the song of influence across the personal and virtual levels.

Whereas in modern parlance the term “bard” has become generalized to the point of being synonymous with “poet” and is most often used in connection to Shakespeare, it has a unique and much more specific history. In Celtic cultures, particularly Welsh and Irish, the bard was a master-poet, professionally trained in music (specifically, the harp), oral recitation, poetry (mastering up to one hundred highly formalized poetic metres), the reading of manuscripts, and the history, law, and customs of his people. In some cases the position was hereditary, whereby a particular family became well-known. Bards were an

established entity by the 6th century AD, and flourished up through the 1600s. The bard received patronage from a chieftain and produced poetry that was in turns, if not simultaneously, eulogistic, satirical, genealogical, and commemorative. As a free man, he could travel anywhere and was highly valued as the bearer and repository of news, messages, and history, as he moved from village to village.

Favored themes in bardic verse were love, war, religion, and death; the bard celebrated the conflicts and victories of his chieftain and his people, and thus played important roles in exhortation and unification. The Welsh “*bardd teulu*,” a chief minstrel to the court, had “special duties toward the . . . household troops, one of which was to sing the ancient strain entitled ‘The Monarchy of Pictland’ in front of the ranks as they were arrayed for battle” (Lloyd, 1911: 121). Throughout the twelfth century, in the Welsh uprisings against the Anglo-Normans, the bards “took fire and chanted deathless lays which their countrymen would not willingly let die.” These singers rose “on the crest of the movement for independence,” transferring “the passion of the people into song” (Lloyd, 1911: 122). In Ireland as in Wales, the bards were loathed by English colonists as potent and influential representatives of indigenous Celtic culture. Ironically but inspirationally, in recognition of these men’s power, the recently-imported Christian culture converted and joined hands with many of the heretofore pagan bards. Irish “Franciscans formed an early and enduring alliance with the bardic poets, and were accused by the late thirteenth century of preaching insurrection to the Irish chiefs” (Foster, 1989: 74).

Whether pagan or Christian, bards sought to convey the truth, and were seen as wise messengers: visionary prophets well-versed in history but also gifted with second

sight. Thus, beyond their duties to a temporal lord, bards were often considered intermediaries between two worlds, those of the physical and the spiritual—between the present and the future, between men and gods. Tales of various actual and legendary bards abound with stories of divination and amazing power. One bard was said to be able to calm storms with his music; another could induce sleep. While some operated as peacemakers, others spurred their people on to victory in combat or even shattered the morale of an enemy army before a battle.

The new global bards are not the court lapdogs of late medieval or renaissance courts. Rather they should be seen as newly incarnated personifications of the earlier warrior-poets, evoking national/tribal heritage and values in the face of the tumult and confusion of battle.

Shared, trans-cultural decision support networks allow both the leaders and followers to listen to each other (Boudreau, Loch, Robey & Straud, 1998; Engle and Mendenhall, 2001). Leaders can send messages customized to followers and groups to reinforce and clarify cultural visions, values and norms as well as receive information on the state of individual employees and groups (stages iii and iv). This system will allow the leader to keep in touch with the actions and career progress of a wide number of geographically dispersed individual followers (Davis & Bryant, 2003).

Level three interactions, when reinforced by personal “*level one*” “sharing fields” in the form of retreats, action learning assignments, seminars, etc., can create a “steady state” or “flux” between the two levels of leadership (stage v). In a sense this “flux” is merely a centralized extension of the reportedly increased use of virtual intercultural task forces and project teams, a use expanded to more fundamental cultural issues (Oddou, et

al., 2001: 115). Coordinating and “spinning the top” of this global “flux” relationship is the role of the bard.

Global Careers and Leadership: Careers as the “Cause” of Leadership

What kinds of career experiences will cause (influence) individuals to have those capabilities and perspectives required to be successful global bards? Larsen and Ellehave (2000) provide empirical information on the transformation from vertical career ladders to what one of the authors of this paper has termed as “widening career weirs” – open, horizontal activities and assignments intended to build knowledge and competencies across cultures, functions, products and institutions/customers (Engle and Mendenhall, June, 2003). Careers are conceptualized in terms of developing and maintaining these competencies – open, ongoing linkages to developing product technologies, sources of the latest functional knowledge, cultural contacts as well as links to key clients and institutional players (Engle, et al., 2001).

Careers may be seen to be composed of two elements:

$$\text{Career} = \text{Personal Capabilities} * \text{Situational Experiences}$$

Personal capabilities (cognitive capabilities, the ability to perceive stimuli and apply what is experienced in a purposeful manner) and situational experiences (those assignments, places and events; those environments we place ourselves in) combine and

interact. Experience alone is no guarantee of future capabilities. In the 18th century many young gentlemen from England took the “grand tour” of the continent and returned effectively unchanged. One must have the quality of mind to respond to what one has experienced.

Personal capabilities, often called competencies, emphasize those qualities of mind that act upon or react to circumstances – literally that which surrounds us. Traditional global leadership competencies, as presented by Mark Mendenhall, Marion Festing and Torsten Kuhlmann, (Mendenhall, Kuhlmann and Stahl, 2001) include inquisitiveness, personal character, flexibility of thought, business savvy, empathy, open mindedness, behavioral flexibility, tolerance for ambiguity, curiosity, cognitive complexity, reflectiveness and learning capabilities. To this list, and specific to bards, we submit:

- 1) “Ortsinn” defined as “a sense of locality” and “the power of quickly forming a correct geometrical idea of any portion of country, and consequently of being able to find one’s place in it exactly at anytime.” (von Clausewitz, 1968: 153). In the U.S. Civil War (1861-1865) Confederate General “Stonewall” Jackson had the ability to ride over a range of countryside and be able to use the terrain to tactical and strategic military advantage months or years later and in the heat of battle. What is the global competitive equivalent – “the global mind set” put to competitive use (Aycan, 2001; Pucik and Saba, 1998)? Ortsinn may be the combined, balanced cultural, functional and product competency set that allows the global executive to see the global competitive implications or potential in a

- location, process or set of activities located anywhere in the globe (Bartlett, Ghoshal and Birkinshaw, 2004: Chapter 7; Evans, Pucik & Barsoux, 2002: 382-397).
- 2) Communication capabilities drive these role incumbents - communication on a personal and human level, as well as across diverse cultures. The ability to listen; personally and from a cultural, physical and functional distance, is critical for the bard. To tell a leader's story you must have an ear attuned to the listener's frames of reference (Hitt, Keats & Yucel, 2003).
 - 3) Finally, and often overlooked – “the constitution of a goat.” Global leadership requires the ability to travel well (an adjustable biological clock) and the ability to think global and yet eat local (recall George Bush's unfortunate dining experience in China in the early 1990's).

In terms of experiences and careers, five observations follow. First, an early exposure to the core values and capabilities associated with a firm's major success or even a significant failure can be useful. It is the “whistling of bullets” that clarifies the mind and sets the stage for a serious adventurousness.

Second, early, in-depth experiences in a variety of core functional areas, critical product lines and with key customer-client relationships are invaluable in gaining a balanced overview (Black, et al., 1999). Third, assignments that stretch communication capabilities are useful, particularly communicating in difficult, complex, cross-cultural situations. Fourth, a real understanding of the capabilities of global decision support

systems, leading to the ability to send and receive complex cultural messages across cultures, functions and products is of course absolutely fundamental for the bard leader.

Experience with the capabilities of global decision support systems may be very difficult for many traditional executives as they may be tempted to relegate these activities to low level technical specialists. Finally, mentoring experiences, first as a protégé and then as a cross cultural, functional and product mentor is a requirement.

An Aside on Careers: Do global careers have to be such a stretch for organizations? Should not we so design domestic or regional careers that a variety of product lines, functional areas and regional subcultures are covered? In this way, the leap to a global career would not be so daunting. Domestic careers should, to the degree possible, capture those significant aspects - albeit on a narrower frame - of global careers. Does it make sense to play rugby in lower leagues and then be called up to the Premiere League to play football? And yet, too many global firms create domestic career patterns with very limited activities across functions, products or cultures (Black, et al., 1999; Mendenhall, Kuhlmann & Stahl, 2001).

If we want an executive to be successful in experiencing the “Grand Tour” of global assignments, perhaps his or her domestic career should emulate the “Repertoire Tour” of repertory theatre that forces young British actors to learn their craft in a variety of plays and settings.

Leadership and the Global Careers: Leadership’s “Effect” on the Careers of Others

As presented in the discussion of global leader as bard, the global leader, by personally and virtually monitoring and tracking the careers and assignments of any number of far-flung employees, can intervene to provide an orchestrated pattern of tasks, assignments, projects, retreats and seminars to allow those “shared experiences” that provide and reinforce the cultural glue of the global firm. The employee competency database (comprised of capability assessments and experience logs) within the global decision support system has the capability to track employee activities and experiences (Engle and Mendenhall, 2001). The leader can, almost at a glance, determine the most appropriate, efficient and timely forms of cultural influence – be it live and personal or indirect and remote; individual or group; or interactive or unidirectional influence.

A constant stream of sustained shared meaning can be the location for “the sharing field. . . assembling participants with the right set of shared experience” (Bird, 2001: 32). According to Bird, “if managers don’t share a sense of community, they cannot effectively share the tactic knowledge they have acquired” (2001: 34).

Bard leaders are responsible for directing and orchestrating the global careers of a wide range of followers. By weaving personal and virtual influence sources across time zones, space, functionality and culture, the bard may overcome these differences and provide a persuasive, journey-specific balance of global, corporate purpose and local, personal sensitivity.

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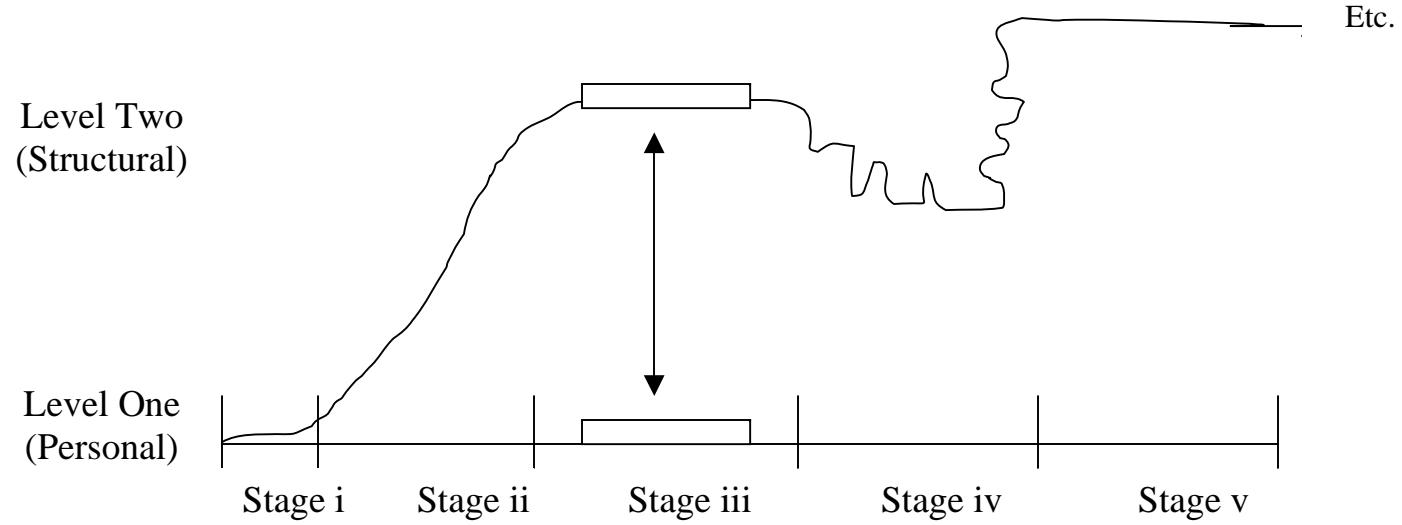


Figure 1

Leader as Architect

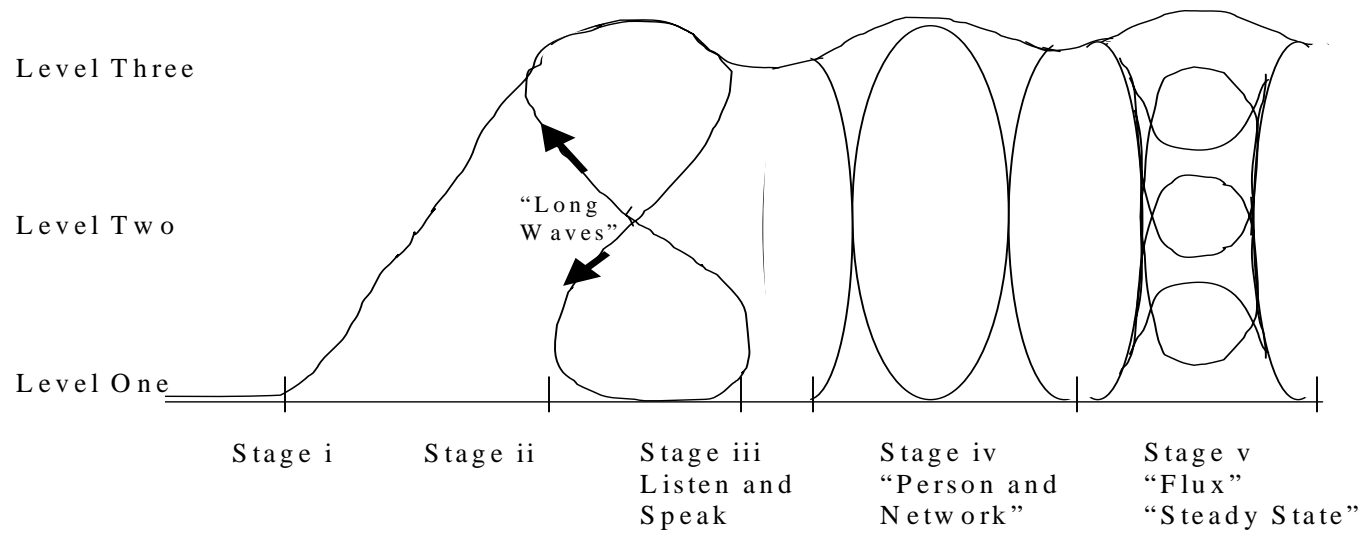


Figure 2

Leader as Bard