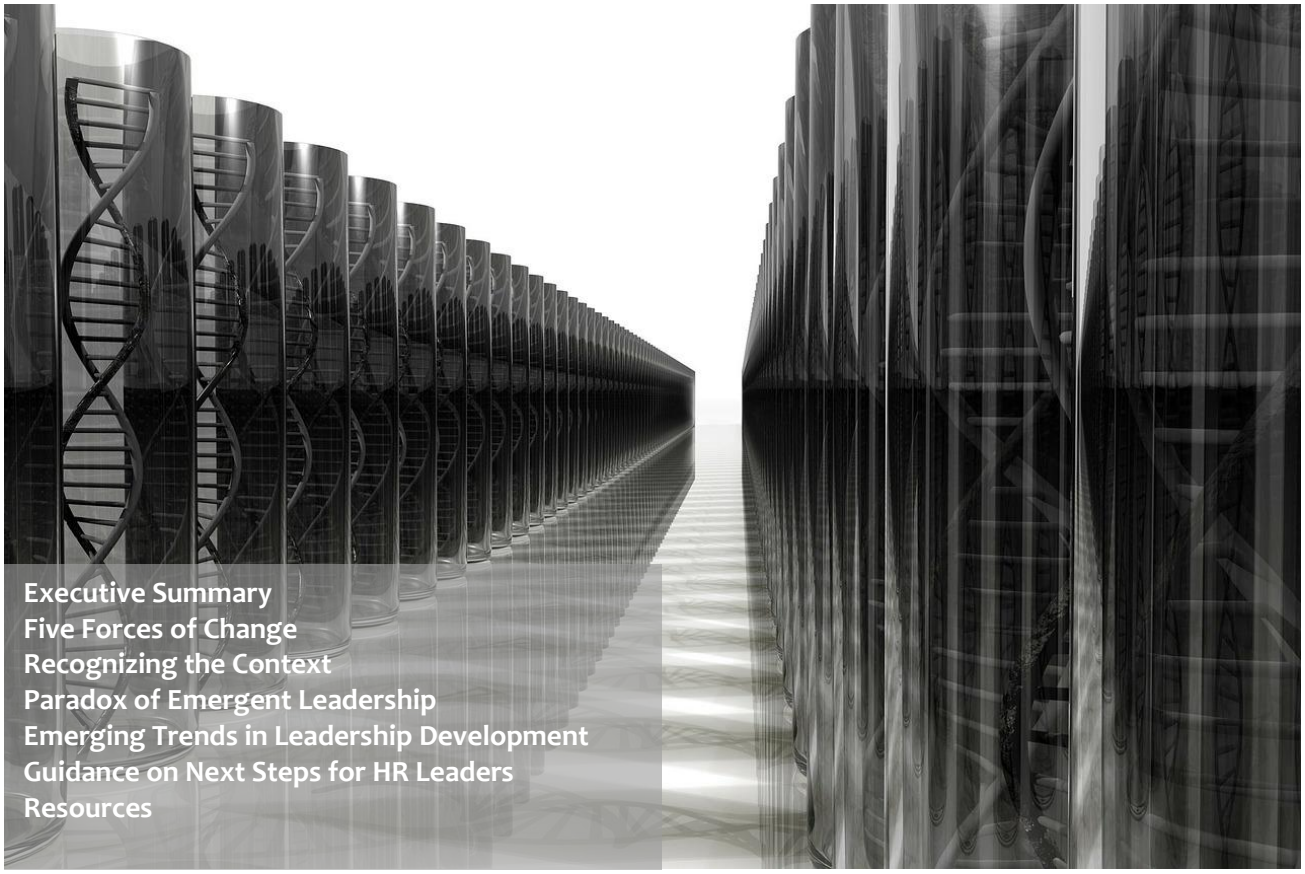
Emergent Leadership



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"We have learned that… the past will be a poor guide to the future and that we shall forever be dealing with unanticipated events. Given that scenario, organizations… will need individuals who delight in the unknown." *Charles Handy*

Barbara Elsberg
Susan Lovegren
Teresa Roche
CHREATE

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Executive Summary

Organizations are facing increased complexity, interconnectedness, transparency and many current organizational structures are not designed for these changes. Many are asking "what will be required to meet the demands of these evolving organizations—are there different models of leadership and if so, how does one decide what fits their business strategy; and once we know what is needed, how do we develop the required leadership?"

We begin this paper with setting context and a reminder of the future forces impacting the world of work as identified in the second phase of CHREATE. We then move into a description of the Cynefin framework, which serves a two-fold purpose. First, the Cynefin framework when used as a sense making tool helps all leaders determine the prevailing context they are in so appropriate choices can be made for how to proceed, which we needed as we began our work on this topic. Secondly, we found after using it to ground ourselves that we also came to believe it will be a helpful tool for our colleagues as they begin to assess their own organizations. Without taking time to understand what one is facing, we often fall back on a strategy that is familiar.

Out of the five contexts in the Cynefin framework, we determined we are a *complex* context where right answers cannot be seen and that what is called for is to implement "safe to fail" experiments. Snowden and Boone call this "the realm of unknown unknowns" where much of contemporary business operates. They suggest leaders in this context need to probe first, then sense, and then respond. We wanted to stay with complexity and not try to simplify the topic as we think a complex adaptive response is called for when thinking about leadership in the future.

In this regard, we viewed emergent leadership as a paradox of continuity and transformation. In our research on agile talent for example, certain leadership practices known today still matter and yet need to change given the movement to more on demand talent. Barry Johnson's work on polarity mapping helped us also see that emergent leadership is not a problem to be solved but an opportunity to engage in a both/and thinking. We also felt the organizing framework of paradoxes would be useful to our colleagues as they go forward to determine what makes sense in their specific situation.

There has been some great work done on the emerging trends in leadership development and we provide some key highlights from our findings. And finally, we close with guidance on how to help all of us find our "one size fits one once" approach to identifying what leadership is being called for and needs to be developed. Our hope is this brief helps each of us make our own meaning and see what right next actions should be taken.

"The future is already here--it's just not evenly distributed." *William Gibson*

Five Forces of Change and Implications for Human Resources

Earlier work identified five forces that are generally predicted to emerge and create pivotal disruptive change in society, business and work:

1) **Exponential pattern of technological change**: Disruptions through technological breakthroughs, and rapid adoption of new technology will lead businesses to respond by faster and more accurate adaptation to rapid reinvention. The workforce will drive this force through their behaviors and preferences, but it will also bring job loss and skill obsolescence. This will lead to continuous worker adaption to new models of work and organization.

2) **Social and organizational reconfiguration:** As the workforce exerts more control over how work is accomplished, their increased autonomy and decision making authority will make the workplace more power-balanced and less authoritative, and structured more through social networks and less through hierarchy. Work relationships will be more project-based and less exclusively employment-based, and the notion of workers will join or engage with organizations based on aligned purposes rather than filling a job. Organizations will tap more diverse avenues for sourcing and engaging talent that extend beyond traditional employment.

3) **A truly connected world:** Information will be more abundant, richer and more available to everyone. Work will be accomplished from anywhere, creating a truly global talent ecosystem. New media will enable increasingly seamless global and real-time communication, creating much faster ideation and product development, go-to-market strategies that are more diverse, and shorter product/strategy durations. Organizational reputation becomes a pivotal currency in customer and work markets, and can be enhanced or destroyed in real time.

4) **All inclusive, more diverse talent market:** Multiple generations will increasingly participate as workers, today's minority segments will become majorities, older individuals will work longer, and work will be seamlessly distributed around the globe through 24/7 operations. Organizations that win will develop new employment contracts and hone new leadership styles and worker engagement approaches to address the varied cultural preferences in policies, practices, work design, rewards and benefits.

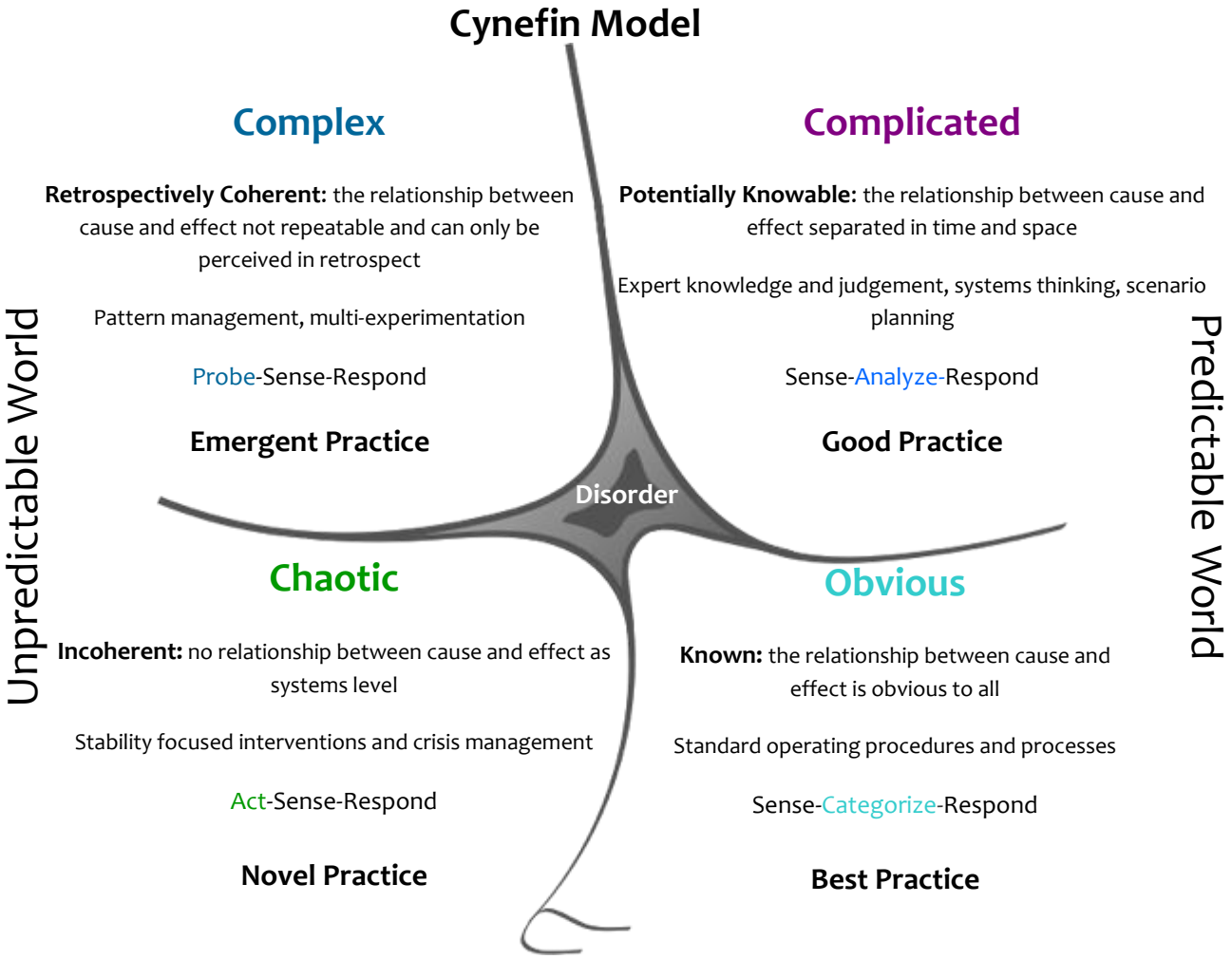
5) **Human and machine collaboration:** Analytics, algorithms, and automation will become increasingly adept at enhancing productivity and human decisions. Big data will be used to access knowledge, gain insights, and uncover deeper connections. An increasing array of tasks and work will be automated, increasing the pace of discovery and reducing the half-life of knowledge. Organizations will evolve from considering "people versus machines" to optimally designing tasks that people and computers successfully share.

"For every complex problem, there is a simple solution that is elegant, easy to understand and wrong." *H. L. Mencken*

Recognizing the Context

As we started to think about emergent leadership, reading various materials and being in dialogue with several thought leaders, we felt it would be presumptuous and wrong to assume there was any certainty on the topic of leadership. We found the Cynefin framework created by Snowden and Boone the most helpful for sense making as we tried to distinguish between what is predictable and what is unpredictable with emergent leadership. As shared in their HBR article, *A Leader's Framework for Decision Making:* "Complexity theory is poised to help current and future leaders make sense of advanced technology, globalization, intricate markets, cultural change, and much more. In short, the science of complexity can help all of us address the challenges and opportunities we face in a new epoch of human history. Knowing in which of these domains your issue is located helps you to act in new ways."

We chose the complex domain as we considered all the exponential changes impacting the future of work and the implications for leadership. We looked for patterns in our research and also considered some "experiments" in organizations that are already moving in new directions.



Adapted from David Snowden

"How wonderful that we have met with a paradox. Now we have some hope of making progress." Niels Bohr

Paradox of Emergent Leadership: **Continuity and Transformation**

Life is full of paradoxes we take to be problems, but that resist resolution. What if we stopped trying to resolve paradoxical tensions and learned to embrace the complexity they signal?

While paradoxes often show up in our language as alternatives we must choose between, focusing on one while neglecting the other will eventually be counterproductive, particularly when we know we are facing complexity.

The underlying paradox we see in emergent leadership in every aspect is continuity and transformation. The tensions of meeting today's needs and preparing for the future; being more inclusive of who gets developed and investing in the high potentials; helping leaders develop deeper self-insight and at the same time recognizing that technology disruptions call for an exponential increase in digital confidence. Competency development and more focus on sense of purpose and mindsets.

We can also point to early signals that reveal many leadership actions we need today are required in the future yet need to transform in their expression; some examples are:

- **Hiring has taken on a whole new meaning with the rise in on demand talent.** How does one lead the different talent segments simultaneously? With expectations changing with agile talent, are there still differences in the relationship that should continue? What might need to transform?
- **There is a growing phenomenon of on demand leaders who are temporary.** What orientation and development provided for full time leaders should be provided to those on demand? What is realistic for assignments that may be short term? What is the nature of the relationship to those they lead—is it the same and yet different? How so?
- **Expectations of all talent segments is shifting.** Providing context and engaging experiences for talent is as important as it has always been however doing this virtually often requires transforming leadership behaviors. Which ones and how? Discovering what matters to each individual and responding in different ways is the game changer. What applies to the many and what needs to be personalized?
- **Transparency has become increasingly critical.** What information that is not shared now needs to be going forward? And at what speed? Some organizations are proactively sharing demographic and pay information—is this the new action required and what evidence is there that it is impacting results? And how do the decisions made affect other choices? It is important to note that information is often shared in the community regardless of choices made by organizational leaders—how does this new reality shift thinking?

Thinking about emergent leadership as a paradox may be helpful to find the right solutions of what needs to stay the same and what needs to change going forward. As shared in the Phase 2 Executive Summary, the new roles of Organizational Engineer, Virtual Culture Architect and Global Talent Scout, Convener, and Coach were seen as significant in the future. We also believe regardless of role, stepping back to question what is changing in our organizations and for leadership is important across all work in Human Resources.

While it was tempting to find one right answer for emergent leadership that would apply broadly to many, we felt it was far more useful to frame the situation as a paradox where we each ask the right questions and try to find what connects to the opposing sides of the polarity of continuity and transformation. This approach can allow any of us to probe, sense and respond.

"Organizations have grown skilled at developing individual leader competencies, but have mostly ignored the challenge of transforming their leader's mind-set from one level to the next. Today's horizontal development within a mind-set must give way to the vertical development of bigger minds." John McGuire and Gary Rhodes

Emerging Trends in Leadership Development

The answers to what makes for great leaders and how to develop them have evolved over the years. The literature is full of research and commentary on what it takes for leaders to be successful today and on best practices in leadership development. Many companies' leadership philosophies reflect the current thinking. What is uncertain is to what extent the leadership practices and programs truly reflect the current thinking. As we explored what leadership needs to look like and how to develop it in light of new ways of working, we find that the current leadership trends are directionally correct. We expect the forces of change will increase the intensity and urgency to deemphasize more traditional development practices and adopt new approaches that enable self-directed development as well as formal learning, through both micro-learning and macro-learning. Three of the more significant changes we expect as a result of the contingent workforce expansion including on demand talent, is a broader perspective on who is a leader, deeper exploration of how people really learn and ubiquitous use of enabling technologies to create the conditions for ongoing development

How are these trends reflected in your company's leadership approach?

- From leadership being seen within the context of a role/position to the essence of leadership
- From hierarchical power driven leadership to leadership infused with inspiration and connectedness
- From single leadership roles to multiplicity of leadership roles
- From business school model learning to learning that is contextualized in the real work
- From program based learning to learning as a part of work, not apart from, and through coaching and mentoring
- From expert provided content to guided self-exploration on topics like purpose, change
- From competency frameworks involving strategy and people leadership to frameworks on complex thinking, ability to discern signals and patterns and adapt with new mindsets and habits
- From top management driven development to learning that is co-created and owned by those being developed
- From focus on high potentials only to democratized development - developing all kinds of leaders
- From individual focus to collective leadership
- From career path to career relevance

While we share these emerging trends in "from to" statements, we believe it is best to view them as polarities to navigate versus finite choices. While any organization may choose one pole over the other initially or continually, staying present to optimizing the upside of each and minimizing the downside we believe will help Human Resources leaders identify the right actions to take within their particular context.

"The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step." Lao Tzu

Guidance on Next Steps for Human Resource Leaders

If Human Resources is to be a developer of "All Kinds of Leadership" as described in the Organizational Engineer role, where does one begin to think about leadership within one's own organization? We think a good place to start is by asking three questions related to what, who and how:

1. What does leadership need to look like for your organization in the future?
2. Who is a leader?
3. How are leaders developed?

1. What does leadership need to look like for your organization in the future?

Recognizing how democratization and technological empowerment will affect organizations, John Boudreau describes four kinds of work in the future: current state; today, turbo-charged; work reimagined; and Uber empowered which leads to the likelihood that in any single organization, there may be multiple answers to the question of what leadership should look like.

- What are the assumptions upon which your current model of leadership is built?
  Think about the premises of who does the work, of how work is done, of organization structure, of operating models. Are the premises universally applied throughout your organization? If so, how well do they apply to the mix of work arrangements you may have in your company? For example, do the premises apply to work accomplished by contractors or freelancers?
- What forces are influencing how work gets done in your organization? What questions does this surface for your model of leadership?
  - Democratization of the work?
  - Technology solutions replacing work or activities?
  - More project based work?
  - Increasing free lancers, contractors?
  - Remote leadership, flexible working arrangements?
- What leadership actions need to stop, start and/or continue in a different way?
- If leadership expectations are grounded in a competency framework, how well do these competencies reflect the mental, emotional, self-awareness capabilities needed for leading work in an all-inclusive diverse talent market?
- Does the leadership team makeup need to mirror the increasingly diverse customer and employee bases?
- How must organization processes, systems and procedures adapt and change to accommodate the leadership of the future?

2. Who is a leader?

- What defines a leader in your organization?
- Is it related to a level within the hierarchy of your organization structure? If not related to roles, what defines it—the work being led? Behaviors, accountabilities and/or other?
- How are longer term independent contractors who are leading work in your organization factored into who is a leader? Are you open to leaders being on demand?
  - How can you redefine a leader in your organization to be less role dependent?
  - What are the implications for having a broader definition of who is a leader?

3. How are leaders developed?

- If you subscribe to the 70/20/10 approach to development, how close does actual development match the approach? How well do you recognize learning that happens outside of work?
- Who is involved in deciding what and how of leadership development? What support and avenues exist for leaders for creating their own process for development?

- How does onboarding need to shift to respond to the increasingly fast-paced environment?
- How is leadership valued—status, monetary and who decides?
- What is possible in creating emotional connections to the learning experience to assure action occurs?
- How is changing technology factored into your development? Both in terms of impact on the work of leadership and in the delivery of develop experiences.

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Thought Leaders:
John Anderson, Glowan Consulting Group
David Dotlich, Pivot Leadership
Alex Goldman IFTF
Michael Grove, CollabWorks
Harvard University Learning Innovation Laboratory Community
Marianne Jackson, eBay
Steve King, Emergent Research
Jon Younger, Agile Talent Collaborative