

# Leadership Update

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## Special points of interest:

- Australian (and most other) political leadership has lost its legitimacy
- You can be effective and efficient without legitimacy—but at what social cost?
- We need to re-examine the leadership we deserve (and get) and demand the leadership we need.

## What is important?

As I write this leadership update, Australia is 8 days away from a Federal Election. Yesterday I spoke with a taxi driver in Sydney. He was originally from Poland but is now an Australian citizen. He said that he found it hard to understand why elections in Australia (and many other countries) concentrate on handing back huge quantities of tax money to people who are probably over-taxed in the first place. His concern was that, if as is claimed, Australia has had an enormous budget surplus over recent years (and this is to continue to be the case according to both major political parties) why isn't this being spent on infrastructure such as

roads, hospitals, education, etc.

He was, of course, quite right.

He put his finger on a crucial aspect of leadership—distinguishing between what is urgent and what is important—and concentrating on the right thing.

Infrastructure right across Australia needs big money spent on it. That is a matter of key importance for the future of our nation and should be a very high priority for governments at local, state, and federal levels. Attention to this is urgently needed.

However for politicians what is seen as being important is re-election. In

times when an election is imminent re-election is also seen as urgent.

Of course this emphasis on what are really matters of secondary importance in terms of the long-term future of the nation brings into question the adequacy of current leadership understandings—especially by the media and, consequently, by the majority of the population.

The fourth estate ought to be screaming out about this superficial approach to both leadership and the future of the nation but, because they are part of the problem rather than part of its solution, in the main they fail miserably.

So how do we change?

## Legitimate, Effective, Efficient?

In his book *Action Inquiry: the secret of timely and transforming leadership* (2004, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc) Bill Torbett talks of the need for leadership to be legitimate, effective, and efficient. Legiti-

macy refers to doing the right thing—how does what the leader is doing reflect the over-riding moral responsibility of the organisation. Effectiveness and efficiency then follow as measures of how well the

leader is carrying out his or her role in furthering the organisation along the path of making the over-ruling moral concern (ie the true vision or purpose of the organisation) a reality.

## The Liberal-National Coalition

This was, I suspect, the sort of thinking that lay behind my taxi driver's comment.

There is no doubt that the Howard Government is an efficient one in terms of driving through the agenda set by the Prime Minister. With a majority in both Houses of the Federal Parliament he has been able to determine the agenda on all issues and avoid accountability in such matters as the war in Iraq, broken promises, the Australian Wheat Board Scandal, the

Rau affair (and other immigration matters), the fiasco of terrorism related charges being dismissed because of inappropriate behaviour of ASIO officers and the Federal Police, and a myriad other issues.

In terms of being effective and efficient in relation to those things on its agenda, the Howard Government would have to score close to 100%.

Yet I suspect that at least part of the reason for the polls so consistently showing a public move away from the

Coalition is that people are questioning the legitimacy of the leadership we have seen for the past 11 years.

Yes, we have a strong economy—and that's great—but the downside of that is that, for example, with WorkChoices there is less job security, people may need to work longer to obtain the same money as before, and the negative impact on individuals and society is starting to have an effect particularly in the mortgage belt.

## The Australian Labor Party

But much the same argument can be made for the Opposition.

If at least part of the role of the major opposition party in any democracy is to hold the government accountable, then the ALP have also failed to show legitimacy in their leadership.

When the record of the ALP in opposition is examined, then it is clear that they have very often chosen to go with political expediency and either support or at least not seriously question

government behaviour because of the fear of being ridiculed or "wedged" so that any moral perspective can be used against them. Clear examples of this are the "me too" emphases that have characterised this election campaign—one startling example of this being the approach to capital punishment which, when official Labor Party policy was espoused, resulted in the spokesman being publicly contradicted by Prime Ministerial aspirant

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Kevin Rudd.

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## No Clear Way Forward

In light of a lack of legitimate leadership, there is a very real possibility that whatever government is elected on November 24, it will be elected because of the personal vested interests of "we, the people". In other words we will vote for the Coalition because we like the current state of

the economy and believe the scare campaigns of trade union influence if there is a change. Alternatively we will vote for the ALP because there's not much difference between the parties and, after all, Kevin Rudd is simply a younger version of John Howard and he will modify WorkChoices.

Both of which, of course, are pretty disheartening reasons to vote for a party—and both of which explain why the result will probably be very close, especially in the marginal seats.

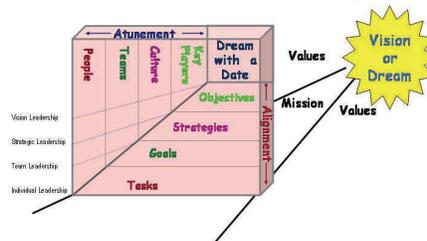
And some people wonder why I find the whole concept of political parties so problematical and an aberration of democracy!

## Restoring Legitimacy

It is almost 20 years since Tero Kauppinen, Bo Gyllenpalm, and myself developed an approach that places a focus on legitimacy, effectiveness, and efficiency in leadership. We called it Vision into Action—VIA—and I wrote about it in *Competitive Advantage; from vision into action* (1993, Centre for Leadership, Australia).

The core of this approach lies in the development of a vision or “dream” for an organisation—to use more modern parlance, an over-ruling moral

**The Vision into Action Concept**



purpose that will drive the organisation. This then becomes translated into a series of “Dreams with a Date”

which set out the steps by which movement will be measured—effectiveness. From these are developed the processes which will be followed in order to attain the vision—the efficiency.

When I look at governments today—both in Australia in this election period and governments overseas—I find very little real vision. Rather I find a pandering to self interests instead of a willingness to make the hard decisions necessary for our world’s future.

## A Different Emphasis

If, as I argued in *Leaders: diamonds or cubic zirconia* (1998, Centre for Leadership Studies, Australia) the role of the leader is to create an environment in which people can succeed, then the role of political leadership is to concentrate on the infrastructure of society—the environment, transport, education, health, military, and the like. In a country like Australia there is no excuse for third-world standards of medical care—yet we know that in

places this is precisely what we have. In a country like Australia there is no excuse for roads which are demonstrably unsafe—yet we know that in places this is precisely what we have. In a country like Australia there is no excuse for mortgaging the future of our children through irresponsible environmental practices—yet we know that in places this is precisely what we have. And so

**I find very little real vision. Rather I find a pandering to self interests instead of a willingness to make the hard decisions necessary for our world’s future**

on.

These are moral issues—and debate on moral issues—especially the overall moral purpose of government—is virtually totally lacking from all parties in this campaign.

My fear is that whoever is elected on November 24 will be the government we deserve rather than the government we need.

## The International Perspective

Of course, all the above can be said equally for the United Nations organisation.

There is no doubt that the concept of the United Nations (as with its predecessor the League of Nations) is a good one. A body in which nations can share their concerns and work

together towards a greater common good for humanity is totally desirable.

Unfortunately, however, it has become a “toothless tiger” because the vested interests of, primarily, the powerful nations such as the USA, Russia, Great Britain, Japan, Israel, China, etc dominate and where these vested interests

are not served—such as in the cases of Iraq and Iran—international bullies decide that what they want is all that matters. The result is today’s crazy situation where millions of poor and innocent people suffer while the wealthy and powerful play their games under the guise of pro utilitate hominum.

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## Call to Action

This is my last update for 2007. By the time I write a new one we will be in a new year with, at least in Australia, a new government. Unfortunately many things will remain the same. I suspect that we will still be reaping the folly of invading Iraq. I fear that we will have (or be close to) invaded Iran under further pretexts and lies. I suspect that we will still be turning a blind eye and a deaf ear to the cries of those with legitimate grievances because of oppression, inadequate health, water, food and other basic resources. And I suspect that the self-satisfied among us will continue to mouth platitudes while simultaneously feathering their own nests at the expense of others.

But there is hope.

A year or two back I invited people to submit their visions for Australia and a number of people responded.

Today I repeat this invitation.

I invite all who are really interested in the issue of leadership and who want a better possible future for our children grandchildren and great grandchildren (etc!):

- To submit to me your visions for Australia and for the greater environment.
- To enter into dialogue with each other through these updates so that we can work together in actualizing these visions

- To discuss and implement those positive things that we can do so that we are not just another talk-fest.

I will publish submissions sent to me—the only editing I will do is that required for legal or other legitimate purposes.

If we want leadership that is

- Legitimate
- Effective
- Efficient

then lets do something about it.

I wish you all the best for the festive season and hope you have a great 2008.