

THE PROFILE OF A FIVE LITERACIES LEADER

The days of the celebrity solo leader are numbered. The old-style, top-down, outside-in form of leadership simply won't work in today's globalized world. New mass information and communications technologies have taken all of us back to square one in an era increasingly dominated by collaborative design, scientific innovation and socioeconomic interconnectedness. We also know that complex dynamic systems, for example communities and corporations, are shaped by the innumerable decisions and actions, coordinated and spontaneous, of all those inhabiting and interacting with them. Consequently leaders have evolved from being the individual authors of inspiring speeches and unchallenged fountains of knowledge, to being the facilitators of whole-system change.

The importance of human agency, extreme sensitivity to context, clarity of intention, the passion brought to relating to and communicating with people who may hold divergent worldviews or aspire to different goals, and the willingness to take responsibility for one's decisions, including any unintended consequences, are all key aspects of today's mindful *five literacies* leaders.

WHAT FIVE LITERACIES LEADERS VALUE MOST

Five literacies leaders prize difference and diversity, in themselves and others. They regard learning, especially at an epistemological level, as a prerequisite for having fun – and having fun as a prerequisite for enlightenment. Constantly searching for alternative views and multiple perspectives, they never imagine they have a monopoly on the truth while their modesty and generosity of spirit allows them not to be especially attached to their own ideas. They understand the importance of collaboration and are inherently flexible, able to embrace uncertainty and ambiguity with ease. Constant change at a whole-of-system level is the only certainty to *five literacies* leaders.

WHAT FIVE LITERACIES LEADERS UNDERSTAND

Five literacies leaders are innately literate: their thirst for new knowledge, coupled with a natural curiosity, compels them to read widely and to discuss ideas at every opportunity. They have an uncommon breadth of reference structures upon which to draw and are deeply conscious of their own fit and personal typology within the broader ecosystem. Because of their extensive reading and willingness to dialogue they are well informed and understand the state of things far better than many of their peers. In grasping the dynamics forging global change they develop an ethos that frequently translates into a personal force for good.

THE KNOWLEDGE BASE FIVE LITERACIES LEADERS ACCESS

Five literacies leaders appreciate both hard and soft systems. They are capable of exploring ideas drawn from diverse disciplines, ranging from psychosocial and political theories, management science and social ecology, all the way to strategic foresight, literature, science fiction, business innovation and current affairs.

THE SKILLS FIVE LITERACIES LEADERS USE

Five literacies leaders are generative learners – they are inclined to learn new skills as required by the changing context. However, their overall skills base often comprises the following:

1. Cognitive skills

- The knack of thinking in whole systems and higher logical levels means that *five literacies* leaders are comfortable dealing with complex dynamics by way of deceptively simple, leveragable strategies.
- The inductive processing ability of *five literacies* leaders favours intuition and they often perceive important links that may remain weak signals (or even invisible) to others.
- *Five literacies* leaders constantly seek and adopt multiple perspectives, integrating data by ‘going meta’ and analysing and synthesizing at will.
- The capability to think of and undertake conceptual design through the use of models, principles and frames is striking. Because *five literacies* leaders constantly explore ideas they are able to hold multiple reference frames over extended periods of time.
- The ‘right-brain’ or creative capability of *five literacies* leaders is conspicuous: using heuristic thinking, abstract conceptualization and contextual consciousness to a high degree they can spot patterns and trends and discern the underlying nature of the system’s emergent state.
- The flexibility of thinking demonstrated by *five literacies* leaders enables a higher consciousness where past and possible are continuously woven into present imperatives.
- *Five literacies* leaders find joy in the purest and simplest of ideas.

2. Affective skills

- *Five literacies* leaders deliberately develop the capability to focus and concentrate for extended periods of time.
- Because *five literacies* leaders are able to focus their energy and concentration based upon contextual dynamics, they are composed

and effective when dealing with ambiguity, uncertainty, paradox and non-closure.

- *Five literacies* leaders rarely take things personally and have a knack of being able to work 'just in time' when appropriate.

3. Interpersonal skills

- *Five literacies* leaders are politically astute and possess palpable energy (often interpreted as passion, intensity or 'vision') in the presence of others.
- A sophisticated yet adaptive approach to social etiquette enables *five literacies* leaders to gain immediate rapport and credibility with the people they meet. Other cultures, languages and worldviews are not perceived as a problem by *five literacies* leaders.
- The demeanour of *five literacies* leaders is invariably positive. This is most apparent in their ability to remain appreciative in complicated situations and to mediate between opposing belief systems with confidence.
- Dialogue and conversation are often the overt passion of all *five literacies* leaders. Their ability to engage others and provide meaningful insights is obvious to those with whom they interact.

4. Instrumental skills

- *Five literacies* leaders make it their business to remain up to speed with new technologies such as computing, blogging and texting.
- *Five literacies* leaders are computer literate to the extent that they can prepare compelling cases and convincer strategies through their use of envisioning information software.
- *Five literacies* leaders understand complex dynamic systems to the extent that they can map important issues and show the systemic root causes of any consequence – intended or otherwise.
- The extensive vocabulary of *five literacies* leaders allows them to describe difficult situations, communicate complicated ideas through the spoken and written word, and work with complexity at ease.
- Because of their authentic nature, *five literacies* leaders are able to speak publicly without notes and from the heart in a manner that is inevitably persuasive and forceful.