

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY CONSCIOUS LEADERSHIP?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Understanding the changing global context

Unlike other models of leadership which address generic leadership competencies and behaviours, what we mean by conscious leadership and our approach to leadership development is embedded in our worldview which is informed by how we interpret the changing global context and key challenges of the 21st century.

There is no denying that the changing global context is increasingly more chaotic and unpredictable: violence, environmental degradation, food shortages, global consumerism, global health issues, global warming and increasing gaps between rich and poor. Whether or not these are symptoms of deeper underlying issues, it is clear that we are surrounded by challenging global crises that call for fundamental change. Never before has the interconnectedness and interdependence of humanity, the environment and our planet been so apparent. The global financial market crisis of 2008 demonstrated this reality. Our choices and decisions, small and large, individually and collectively affect each other continually and have repercussions globally as we increasingly discover how intertwined we are in our businesses, in our communities, in our countries and in our world. Yet paradoxically, despite our increasing connectedness there is an emerging sense of “homelessness” driving a quest for identity, belonging and meaning worldwide.

Never before in the course of human evolution have we had the opportunity and the responsibility to make conscious choices with so much knowledge and information at our finger tips. We are at an important global turning point that requires a new awareness and a new way of thinking feeling and acting individually and together. The time for transformation is now and this demands a different type of leadership that can bring about fundamental and profound change through informed, wise and courageous choices. New leadership wisdom is called for that transcends the reliance on individual “hero” leaders. This new wisdom demands greater levels of self and collective awareness and leadership, shared dialogue, mutual respect and accountable and informed action within with new levels of social and moral consciousness.

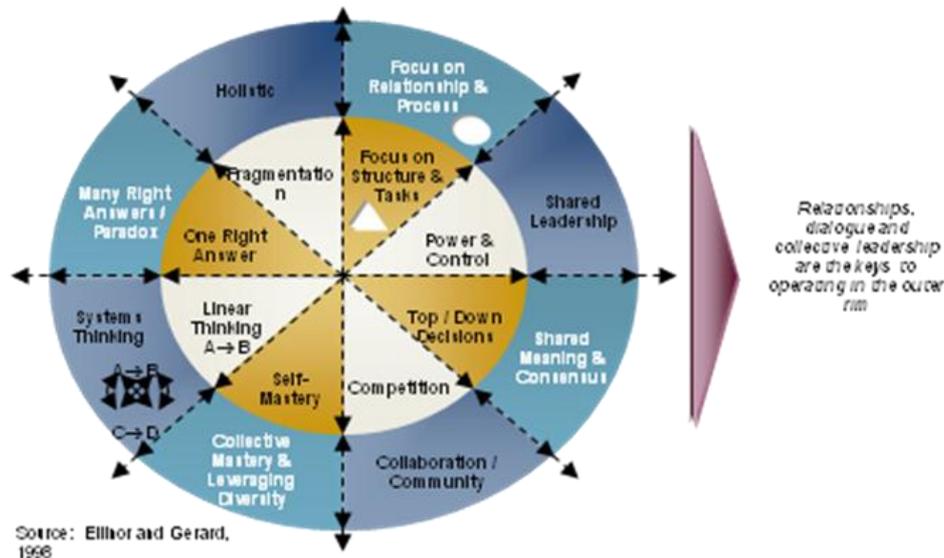
To engage and respond creatively to the challenges of our time, leaders need to use all the facets of who they are. They will need to be able to be more emotionally intelligent, and will need, increasingly to learn to cope with rapid change, uncertainty and complexity. They will increasingly be called to deal with paradox, ambiguity and conflicting polarities. They will need to combine discipline and empathy and trust the wisdom of their intuition. Ultimately this means that the capacity for emotional intelligence, embodying self-awareness, compassion and sensitivity will increasingly be a non-negotiable leadership competency. In addition, while confronting 21st century challenges, leaders will need to be able to balance the competing demands and needs across multiple stakeholder groups such as employees, colleagues, customers, owners, other organisations and communities in a way that is ethical and accountable.

The demands of the 21st century have implications for the changing nature of organisations and the changing needs of employees that work for them. These changes are important to understand as they hold important implications for what is called for from leaders in our changing global context.

The changing nature of organisations and employees

A range of concepts and paradigms have evolved over the years around how to understand organisations. Two extreme opposites on the continuum lay the ground for how we understand the current organisational context. While certain elements of the traditional idea of organisation as machine model has some usefulness, we believe that this model will have less relevance as we move into the 21st century. Our definition of conscious leadership is more embedded in the idea of the organisation as a complex, self-organising, living system. Rather than an “either-or” approach, our orientation is one of “both-and”.

Figure 1 below illustrates both approaches, i.e. the leadership approaches that align more with a mechanistic understanding of organisations (inner circle) and those approaches that are more aligned with a living systems understanding of organisations (outer rim). The living systems worldview offers alternatives for dealing in a more flexible way with the rapidly accelerating change, paradox and complexity that we see in organisational life that is characteristic of the 21st century. The capacity to build and sustain relationships and engage in collective dialogue is a strategic organisational imperative that is crucial to enabling alternative approaches to organising and leading in the organisations of the 21st century.



The shifting global context also means that as organisations are evolving, how people feel and what they expect from organisations is also changing. The degree to which employees experience meaning and reward in their work is what makes the difference between organisations that excel and flourish and those that merely survive. Meaningful work that promotes soul and spirit in the workplace through drawing on the contributions that people are inherently motivated to provide are increasingly turning conventional economics and productivity approaches on their head. People want to be fulfilled and valued, bringing their whole self to work. They want to feel a sense of personal connection and alignment with the organisation’s vision, mission and values. The capacity to create resilient corporate cultures through embracing human values more fully is increasingly seen as the new frontier for competitive advantage. What is required is a new business paradigm which embraces complexity and integrates humanism with ethical and sustainable business practice.

Understanding what we mean by leadership

The many challenges faced by leaders in the 21st century demand profound levels of individual and collective awareness. Without this, leaders are not able to develop the multiple layers of consciousness they need to be able to have the fluidity, flexibility and openness that is increasingly required of them. A key underpinning of CCL’s leadership model is that consciousness begins with self and self awareness. Awareness flows into every part of work life and is fundamental to leadership effectiveness.

The combination of what we call an “inside-out” and “outside-in” awareness and expression is central to our concept of leadership. Although inside-out and outside-in leadership are interdependent and interactive, it is helpful to distinguish between the two.

With **inside-out leadership** the emphasis is on a holistic awareness and expression of all the elements that shape who we are – in mind, body, spirit and action. This includes what I feel, how I reflect on a given situation, what I do and what I ultimately believe. In explaining what we mean by outside-in leadership, we build on situational leadership theory which was originally articulated by Hershey and Blanchardⁱ, popular management theorists from the 1960s. With **outside-in leadership** the emphasis is on awareness, interpretation and response to the needs of a given context. Both the awareness and response is contextually informed from the outside-in by the challenges and opportunities arising from the external situations in which leaders find themselves.

It is this constantly interactive process, integrating “inside out” responses and “outside in” responses that underpins our approach to conscious leadership.

Understanding what we mean by conscious

To be conscious means to be aware and mindful of oneself, of others and the world around us, to understand our circumstances and to decide how to respond to them in ways that honour our values, belief and feelings. Implicit in this is the notion that one’s awareness determines one’s predisposition to certain choices of action. The core building blocks that shape our awareness include: our values; our assumptions and beliefs; our attitudes and feelings and our responses. Collectively we define these as core building blocks as one’s orientation. It follows that one’s orientation is central to the capacity for consciousness and therefore integral to what we mean by conscious leadership. As depicted diagrammatically below in Diagram 2 we see one’s orientation as comprising the following integrated building blocks

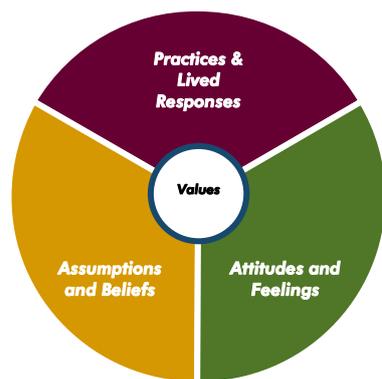


Diagram 2: The building blocks of an orientation

- a) **Assumptions and Beliefs:** An assumption is an hypothesis or claim that is assumed to be true and from which a conclusion can be drawn. Every choice and decision made, every action taken is driven from a set of personal assumptions and beliefs. These assumptions and beliefs, of which we are usually unaware, arise from our life’s experiences and form the basis of our mental models and worldviews that we live by. Conscious leadership is an awareness of the assumptions and beliefs we are holding and that influence us in a given situation.
- b) **Attitudes and feelings:** An attitude is an internal state of mind involving feelings at the time of thought and action. Conscious leadership is an awareness of the leaders’ feelings and attitudes about themselves, others, and the world and how these interact with their core assumptions to inform how the he or she acts and impacts others.
- c) **Practices and Lived Responses:** A practice is the translation of inner assumptions, beliefs, attitudes and feelings into an appropriate way of responding or acting in the given context. “Practice” implies a different consciousness associated with an intention to repeat, perfect and master. Conscious leadership is the systematic modelling and review of practices and responses to situations.
- d) **Values:** Are an individual’s accepted standards of right or wrong. They are at the core of the building blocks as they underlie assumptions, beliefs, attitudes, feelings and practices and are ultimately at the core of each human being.

In summary we believe that an orientation is an integrated awareness and manifestation of the values, assumptions and beliefs, attitudes and feelings that we hold and responses we choose in relation to ourselves, others and the outer world.

In our model of conscious leadership we advocate 2 categories of orientations, each with their own underpinning set of values; assumptions and beliefs; attitudes and feelings; practices and lived responses. We

have drawn on our definitions of inside-out and outside-in leadership to help distinguish between the two categories of orientations that underlie conscious leadership, namely:

- 🌀 Wholeperson™ leadership orientations (in-side-out):
- 🌀 Contextual leadership orientations (outside-in)

Wholeperson™ leadership orientations (inside-out)

Wholeperson™ leadership orientations define how we lead from the inside-out. There are four interrelated Wholeperson™ leadership orientations which are depicted in Diagram 3 below, namely:

- 🌀 Awareness and being;
- 🌀 Reflection and learning;
- 🌀 Conscious knowing;
- 🌀 Purposeful and informed action

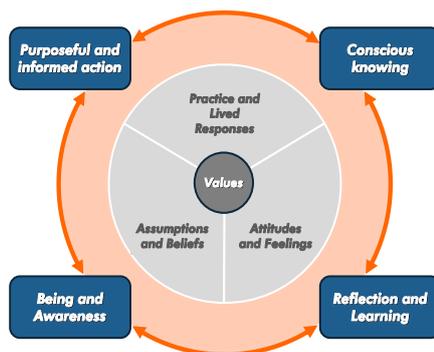


Diagram 3: The four Wholeperson™ leadership orientations

Awareness and Being:

- 🌀 The awareness of being is to be aware of, and fully present to, the human experience of being alive;
- 🌀 Relationship to and awareness of the inner experience of self, including: body, feelings, spirit and thoughts in relation to others, groups, organisational settings and the world around us;
- 🌀 Our awareness is central to how we interpret, experience and express our way of being

The more awareness is connected to, and resonates with, the deepest levels of being, the more leaders are able to display authentic leadership.

Reflection and Learning:

Becoming a conscious leader requires ongoing reflection on our experiences and sustained openness to learning. This requires:

- 🌀 A fluid and dynamic form of observation and thinking related both to our multiple levels of awareness and our subjective experience of reality;
- 🌀 Being alert, attentive and open to what is arising moment to moment in both the inner world of the self and the outer world of other and the environment;
- 🌀 Openness to learning is developed through awareness and reflection.

Conscious Knowing:

- 🌀 Conscious knowing integrates rational and intuitive thought processes which clarify the choices that underpin any decisions or actions;
- 🌀 It calls for an integration of reflections, thoughts, intentions, knowledge and wisdom of a leader;
- 🌀 Conscious knowing integrates awareness and intention;
- 🌀 Applies values, morals and ethics to how leaders think and make decisions.

Purposeful and Informed Action

- 🕒 Purposeful and informed action is underpinned by conscious knowing;
- 🕒 Informed, accountable and purposeful action embodies the application of our morals, values and ethics;
- 🕒 Engaging in purposeful and informed action reflects one's inner commitment to contribution and service.

In summary, while we have separated out awareness, reflection and learning from conscious knowing and purposeful and effective action, in reality they are closely interconnected and integrated. For example, awareness can inspire purposeful and informed action just as action can inform awareness. **Wholeperson™ leadership is the capacity to hold an integral and meta-awareness across these elements in their ongoing state of dynamic interplay.** The experience is one of having a stable witness which is alert, present, observing and able to process the dynamic interplay at all levels. Metaphorically this is as though the leader were observing and understanding him or herself in the moment-to-moment movie of their own life.

While the inside-out Wholeperson™ leadership orientations are the core of conscious leadership, leaders operate in a broader setting. There will be events in the world around us which challenge, resonate with and influence our awareness, feelings and responses from the outside-in. We describe the category of orientations that are more informed by the demands of the outer world as the outside-in or contextual leadership orientations.

Contextual Leadership Orientations (outside-in)

Contextual leadership orientations define how we lead from the outside-in. These are the second category of orientations that make up conscious leadership. They emerge from the challenges and opportunities inherent in the changing global and organisational context locally and globally. We use the category of contextual orientations to refer to what is being called for and what is beckoning leaders to new levels of awareness and responses to the demands that characterise current times. These contextual orientations have both an exterior objective reality (the external state of our planet) and an interior correlate (e.g. the feelings evoked of internal sadness or outrage)

We have chosen six contextual leadership orientations from our interpretation of the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. We describe these contextual leadership orientations as calls to attention that demand new awareness and innovative actions from leaders. The 6 contextual leadership orientations, depicted in the diagram, below are:

- 🕒 Using power with awareness and rank with responsibility
- 🕒 Facing conflict and honouring diversity
- 🕒 Engaging complexity and celebrating paradox
- 🕒 Catalysing discontinuity and being with change
- 🕒 Valuing connectivity and interconnectedness
- 🕒 Balancing the present and future order for sustainability

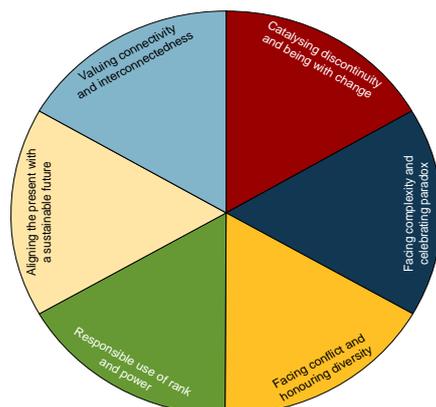


Diagram 4: The six contextual leadership orientations

While theoretically distinct in what we have defined as a more outside-in emphasis, contextual orientations are connected to and interact with the inside-in Wholeperson orientations.

While globally applicable, the challenges or calls to attention and action embodied in the contextual orientations have heightened significance in South Africa, where the need to confront these calls take on the form of a survival imperative more than that of a choice. Paradoxically, we believe that this survival imperative, in serving as a catalyst for change, creativity and new ways of leading, is potentially the source of the unique advantage that South Africa has to offer globally in dealing with the challenges of the 21st century.

We illustrate both the challenges and opportunities as we define and discuss contextual orientations below. We also highlight the principle orientations (assumptions, attitudes and practices) for each context.

Using Power with Awareness and Rank with Responsibility

One of the calls of our context both in South Africa and globally, is for awareness of how past and present challenges around mainstream and marginalised groups (race, gender, religion, economic power, political power etc) place everyone at the edge of their own power and powerlessness. This requires great sensitivity to the contextual and fluid nature and of past and present rank and privilege. This applies at both the personal and the systemic levels. The transformational call in South Africa and other countries is about how to be aware of and engage shifting rank and power dynamics. This contextual calling is around encouraging and allowing the space for all perspectives to be heard, acknowledging the rank and power differentials explicitly and using rank ethically and responsibly to enable the collaboration and team work necessary to solve complex problems. This creates the conditions for mutual understanding, inclusivity and respect and is central to our collective capacity to communicate effectively and think together.

Facing Conflict and Honouring Diversity

As the global demand for resources increases at an unprecedented rate, the potential for conflict increases as well. The more interdependent we become globally, the more our similarities and our differences come into focus. These present the potential for facing the inherent conflict brought about by diversity of perspectives, worldviews and objectives as well as opportunities for creativity, tolerance and understanding.

The contextual calling is around facing and embracing conflict constructively as well as honouring diversity so that leaders are masterful in their understanding of their assumptions about diversity, about stereotypes and how this impacts on others. The challenge and call of diversity is about catalysing the conversations which orchestrate creative interactions between self and other across diverse groups. The times call for the need to see the other in oneself. Dialogue that holds both agreement and disagreement as a reality forms part of the process of learning and creativity. Noticing and making a conscious choice to get involved in resolving conflict rather than waiting for the conflict to become polarised, becomes an essential skill.

Engaging Complexity and Celebrating Paradox

As the world becomes ever more complex leaders and organisational change agents are increasingly called upon to deal effectively with complexity, ambiguity, uncertainty and paradox. All of these pose challenges for leaders who will inevitably be faced with the reality that different parts of the external and internal system in most organisations will hold different, and at times conflicting, mental models and may well be functioning from different levels of consciousness. Such complex dynamics of organisations and organisational culture need to be widely understood and worked with in a conscious and deliberate way.

Paradox calls for an ability to deal with polarities and to see ambiguity as the source of possibility for new insights. In South Africa this contextual calling in which so many paradoxes arise from the legacy and complexity of our past and our present gives leaders an opportunity to develop flexibility, creativity and the ability to hold both. We see such paradoxes, for example, in the multiple roles that individuals play from townships to boardroom. We potentially find our greatest strengths and greatest gifts in our times of challenge.

Leaders are called to harness challenges and crises as doorways to new possibilities and reframe breakdowns as opportunities for bold new breakthroughs.

Catalysing discontinuity and being with Change

Both globally and in South Africa rapid change has become a constant feature of life. Leaders are called to be responsive to and to BE with change, whether they experience change as comfortable or uncomfortable. Leaders are being called upon to both catalyse (e.g. self-initiated changes to ensure sustainable and ethical cross-industry value-chains) and hold discontinuities (e.g. global financial crisis) at multiple levels (globally, nationally, organisationally and personally).

Valuing connectivity and interconnectedness

This contextual orientation invites us to see interconnected systems rather than isolated parts and players. The beginning of a movement from separateness to interconnectedness is necessarily accompanied by a shift in the focus from a celebration of the individual leader as hero to an understanding of the necessity of the group and collective leadership. The increasing emphasis on and recognition of global collaborative bodies, such as the G20 and NATO is a vivid example of this. The challenge is how do we build on our growing interconnectedness and think and hear each other *“to touch or be touched by the collective intelligence we need in the world”?*ⁱⁱ In the awareness and celebration of our connectivity lies an important piece for transformation within organisations and in society at large. If we don't choose to see and embrace interconnection, we lose the belonging both to society and to each other. Each of us individually, and collectively, must become responsible for seeking our own interest in harmony with, and not at the expense of, others and the environment.

Balancing the present and the future order for sustainability

Sustainability respects the interdependence of living beings in relation to each other and with their natural environment. It calls for leaders to operate businesses in a way that minimizes harm to living creatures and does not deplete but rather restores and enriches the environment.

Responding to the call for sustainability means that companies will increasingly need to identify a wide range of stakeholders to whom they may be accountable and with whom they would develop open relationships. Exploring ways to work collaboratively for mutual benefit will in the long run create more profit for the company and more social, economic, and environmental prosperity for society.

In summary, the two categories of orientations that we have outlined, one emphasising an inside-out approach (Wholeperson™ leadership orientations) and the other an outside-in approach (Contextual leadership orientations) **combine to create the capacity for fluid awareness as the leader follows and responds to events** as they unfold.

A defining feature of our model of conscious leadership is that it **calls for a more integrated way of being**. This also assumes a greater degree of **integrative awareness** of what is emerging in both the inner and outer experience. Such awareness is then embodied in action in a range of situations.

For the purposes of our model we refer to these situations as domains of functioning or domains of leadership. Domains are situations or spheres of influence or activity across which the conscious leader is required to operate.

Leadership Domains

The conscious leader operates in a dynamic and fluid state of awareness and action across five interconnected domains of function, described below:

- 🕒 SELF: the inner life and outward impact of the leader
- 🕒 INTERPERSONAL: the inner experience and the field (emotional space) that lies between the leader and another person, as well as the outward manifestation of this field in action and interaction
- 🕒 COLLECTIVE: the inner experience and field (emotional space) that lies between the leader and his or her team or community and the outward manifestation of this
- 🕒 INTERNAL SETTING: the knowledge, experience and understanding of the internal organisation, institution or entity system
- 🕒 EXTERNAL SETTING: the knowledge, awareness, experience and understanding of the broader community and macro environmental context within which the organisation, institution, entity operates

As set out above while the domains may appear discrete and linear, in reality the conscious leader's **lived** experience of the domains is both multi-directional and simultaneous. By multi-directional, we mean that the awareness of a leader often spans across several domains at a time, and that a leader will need to be aware of what is happening in each domain simultaneously. In addition, awareness of self is constant and links to awareness in all other domains.

Diagram 5 below illustrates the five interconnected and interdependent domains of functioning across which the conscious leader operates. Imagine that the circle indicating the domain marked self in the diagramme is turning around on its own axis all the time. This would give a sense of the multi-directional focus that is needed. Awareness of self spills over into awareness of self in a team, self in an organisation and awareness of one's role and impact in external communities. **A conscious leader is always moving his/her awareness between the domains.**

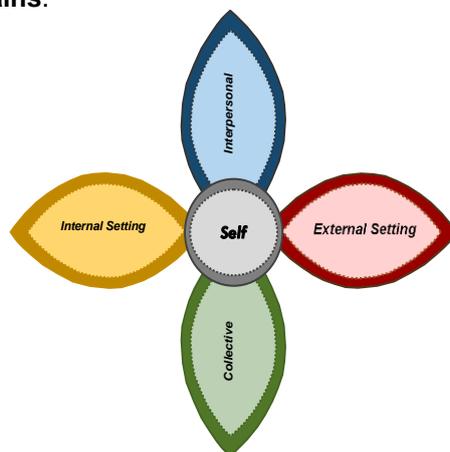


Diagram 5: The five domains of functioning across which the conscious leader operates

Consciousness is also present in all domains. A team can learn and can be conscious of its functional and dysfunctional patterns; business units can develop collective consciousness of areas in which they need to grow and similarly organisations can become more conscious of their particular strengths and weaknesses. Conscious systems, such as communities can make conscious decisions collectively.

Conclusion

The local and global context creates new leadership challenges which in turn place new demands on leaders in the 21st century. In articulating our model of conscious leadership it is our belief that conscious leadership cannot be separated out from the context in which it operates or from the challenges which are calling for profound change and a new type of leadership. Diagram 6 below illustrates the hallmark of our model of conscious leadership in that both the domains of functioning and the contextual orientations reflect an integral approach which speaks to an interior (intentional) and an exterior (behavioural) dimension of consciousness.

Putting it all together we believe that a new spirit of leadership, wisdom, accountability and awareness is being called for to ensure the sustainability of our planet and the future of our children.

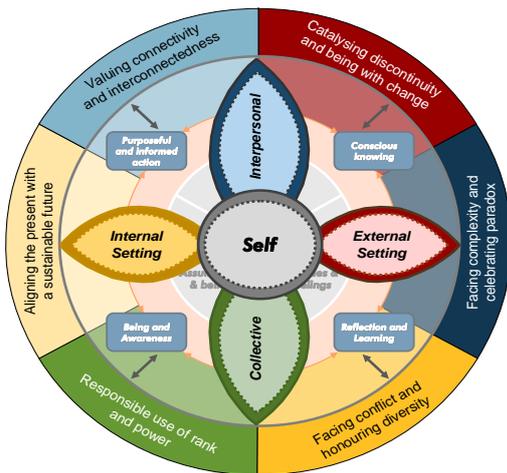


Diagram 6: Putting it all together

In Summary:

- ☉ Conscious leaders are able to maintain the awareness, flexibility and the presence of mind to operate and respond appropriately in shifting environments. This happens through the dynamic interplay of the more inside-out Wholeperson™ leadership orientations and the more outside-in contextual orientations that are called for from changing external circumstances.
- ☉ Conscious leaders develop the multiple layers of consciousness they need to be able to have the fluidity, flexibility and openness that is increasingly required of today's leaders.
- ☉ Conscious leaders are able to demonstrate awareness of personal impact and accountability through actions that are good for self, others, their organisations, the environment and world around them.
- ☉ Conscious leaders develop the courage and resilience to engage in and be with rapid and profound change.
- ☉ Conscious leaders, in responding to contextual challenges are able to demonstrate their commitment to sustainability.
- ☉ Conscious leaders are aware of the social and environmental impact of business and apply moral and ethical judgements to decisions related to sustainability.

In conclusion, conscious leadership can be likened to an ongoing journey. Over time, an evolving conscious leader becomes increasingly aware of underlying assumptions and beliefs, attitudes and feelings which translate to practices and lived responses. Allowing awareness to surface, increases consciousness then shapes the leadership actions called for in a given context.

Footnote

Hershey & Blanchard
 ii Alan Briskin