

Attentional Leadership Theory: A Framework for the 2050 Leader

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Introduction

There is no country, state, or community where leadership is not exercised, but what leadership is and clarifying how to become a leader is still debated. Numerous principles, theories, and tools abound—many grounded in theoretical and empirical research—however, most convey a limited angle of vision, provide an incomplete combination of elements, and lack the dynamic understanding of this complex and evolving discipline. At the same time, studies continue to show that developing leadership skills makes a difference in academic (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2009), professional (McCartney & Campbell, 2006), military, and other domains (Zenger & Folkman, 2009).

With so many moving and inter-connected variables, leadership might be likened to a swarm of butterflies, each one a variable in relation to the others, with structures and patterns unclear—yet beautiful. We know leadership when we see it, but often struggle to define or frame it holistically and temporally. Leadership scholars aim to re-organize the butterflies into meaningful frameworks but often do so with a limited perspective. While progress continues, more work is needed to unify, or at least better understand how to relate these leadership variables. As we move towards 2050, scholars and practitioners alike should work together to clarify the science *and* practice of leadership—making it more understandable and more useful for a broader audience.

Some consider leadership an inside-out process, leading self first, then others to expand one's circle of influence (Covey, 2004). Others look at leadership through an outside-in or top-down perspective (balcony vs. dance floor) where problem solving and adaptive processes can be

exercised within groups, organizations, and whole societies (R. Heifetz, 1998; Linsky & Heifetz, 2002; Williams, 2005). In a complex world, more relevant is to lead from the inside-out, outside-in, top-down, bottom-up, and multiple other angles—including time and place—as circumstances require. If there is one thing that futurists seem to agree upon it's that the world is becoming increasingly complex, whether through interconnected global economies, technologies that transcend communication, cultural boundaries and traditional organizational practices, or the speed at which problems need to be solved individually or collectively, the 2050 leader must be able to work effectively and draw upon a multitude of leadership skill-sets on demand.

Seeing complex systems requires a distinct solution based on the intersection of multiple variables. This suggests that the exercise of leadership takes place moment by moment where attention is required using available resources and informed practices to address the complex challenges at hand. Why then is this model relevant to the future leader? Because it provides a broad framework that drills down and parcels out the complexity into 125 discrete boxes that more clearly identifies various intersecting competencies clusters—making it easier for a leader to identify knowledge and skill gaps that may be required as they address leadership challenges moment by moment. This is a new paradigm (Kuhn, 2012) for the research, understanding, and utilization of leadership theories and practices.

This chapter seeks to frame leadership theories and practices based on the allocation of attention, resources, and the time needed to influence human systems and processes in multiple dimensions to achieve valued objectives. This new paradigm, which I've termed Attentional Leadership Theory (ALT), does not suggest a single universal theory, but a *binding* or *bounding* framework that draws connections within and between intersecting dimensions, which contain a multitude of interconnected systems and processes relevant to effective leadership. Given the

brevity of this chapter only a brief introduction is possible. Future efforts and publications will seek to draw further connections and applications.

The Foundation of Attentional Leadership Theory

While there are many definitions of leadership, in ALT, I define leadership as, “The capacity to influence oneself and others in the pursuit of individual, interpersonal, team, organization, or civic/community objectives; within any Meaningful Life Arena.” At this definition’s core, leadership *is* influence. Leadership is more than the direct exercise of command. It is a process of using oneself to influence others at multiple levels using various theories and *informed practices* to achieve valued objectives.

ALT leadership theory draws a distinction between Technical Knowledge (Tk) and Leadership Knowledge (Lk). Technical Knowledge represents the specific knowledge or skills needed within a particular profession or domain (e.g., law, aviation, athletics, engineering, medicine). By contrast Leadership Knowledge is often transferrable to other disciplines or Meaningful Life Arenas (MLA’s). In ALT, those who develop both Tk and Lk develop an “X Factor” (Plimpton, 1995), which translates into higher levels of performance or influence—inside and out—whether performing individually, in dyads, teams, organizations, or even communities.

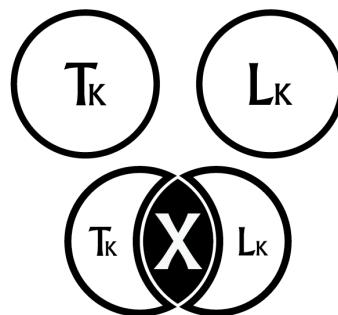


Figure 1: Technical Knowledge linked to Leadership Knowledge. The “X” Factor.

Attentional Leadership Theory emphasizes the importance of scientific inquiry—where rigorous research leads to five levels of knowledge and informed practice. Scientific inquiry begins with questions inside a conceptual domain (Level 1)—where new Principles, Laws, and/or emerging Knowledge (PLKs) are discovered and found valid and reliable (if only temporarily given the null hypothesis; Level 2). New PLKs lead to emergent paradigms that often require translation (using models, schemas, illustrations, etc.) to make them comprehensible and applicable (Level 3). New PLKs and paradigms (Kuhn, 2012), whether in the hard sciences (e.g. astronomy, biology, or chemistry) or the soft sciences (e.g. political, organizational, interpersonal, or personal), increase our understanding of underlying systems and/or processes in action. Examples of natural systems include planetary rotation, photosynthesis in plants, or chemical bonding, while examples of human systems include thought/emotion processes within the brain, uses of power, organizational communications, or legislative process. This is otherwise referred to as Level 4 (Bertalanffy, 1969; Blanchard, 2008; Meadows, 2008). Understanding human systems and processes (and the PLKs and paradigms that govern them) give rise to informed practice to influence self and lead others—using the interconnected dimensions hereafter discussed (Level 5).

Attentional Leadership Theory draws upon the theory of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1998, 2008). Central to flow theory are the following characteristics (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008):

1. An activity has clear goals and objectives;
2. An activity provides unambiguous feedback creating a coherent demand for action;
3. There is a sense of control where awareness and actions merge together;
4. There are limited distractions and high concentration power;
5. Performance seems effortless;
6. There is an altered sense of time;

7. There is a loss of ego-awareness and complete absorption in the effort;
8. The activity is intrinsically motivating; and
9. The activity provides a context where perceived challenges and perceived skills meet

(See Jackson, 2003, pg. 3)

The underlying theme of ALT is that leadership—at its core—is about influencing people within context. This is not dissimilar to flow and requires that attention and resources be placed *when, where, and at the time* needed, to influence human systems and processes at any level, be it individual, interpersonal, team, organization, or community. Other peak performance (Garfield, 1987; Jackson, 2011; Orlick, 2007), and positive psychology literatures (Fredrickson, 2009; Seligman, 2003, 2006) offer additional PLKs relevant to ALT.

The Framework of Attentional Leadership Theory

Attentional Leadership Theory suggests that leading self and others is more than fixed traits or mastery of competencies, behaviors, or situations. 2050 Leadership, will require a more dynamic, interconnected, and fluid process, where, moment by moment, attention is summoned to influence human systems inside the self and others, within various domains, time perspectives, or dimensions, using well researched practices, and to achieve valued objectives. This will require a more holistic and systemic mindset, with nimble focus, ready to address any challenges a leader may face—moment by moment.

ALT posits that 15 *big box* dimensions (and their intersections) contain many of the literatures often used to understand and exercise leadership. The first five dimensions (intrapersonal focus) include the physical, emotional, psychological, philosophical, and spiritual dimensions of self. The second five (external focus) include the individual, interpersonal, team, organization, and community (regional, national, or international). Third are the five dimensions of time (Long Future, Short Future, Focus in the Present, Short Past, and Long Past). These 15

broad dimensions, in any combination, serve the purpose of providing a meaningful structure for the many literatures and sub-literatures of leadership relevant within any technical or life arena.

The 5 Intrapersonal Dimensions

The five intrapersonal dimensions are where individuals lead themselves to achieve their best (Waitley, 1984), find personal flow (Jackson, 2011), or demonstrate excellence (Orlick, 2007). This may be called self or personal leadership (Neck & Manz, 2012)—where leaders focus attention on various internal systems and processes in order to develop their own potential (or that of others) towards full engagement (Loehr & Schwartz, 2004).

Physical Dimension - Personal leadership and the leadership of others requires the appropriate placement of attention on the body's physical systems and sub-systems that support or deny energy, general health and wellbeing (Gurt, Schwennen, & Elke, 2011). Internal considerations that support physical infrastructure and optimal functioning include nutritional requirements, physical fitness (aerobic, anaerobic, strength, flexibility), sleep, rest and recovery, stress management (e.g., breathing and meditation). All are practices that influence physical systems towards optimal functioning. External physical resources (e.g., energy inputs, tools)—even physical context (Zimbardo, 2007) play a significant role in influencing human behavior. Physical assets or deficits influence the other intrapersonal dimensions (e.g., sleep deprivation on mood, nutrition on thinking) which affects human performance in work (Ford, Cerasoli, Higgins, & Decesare, 2011) and other environments.

Emotional Dimension - The study of Emotional Intelligence (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009; Goleman, 2006; Stein & Book, 2006) and resilience (Siebert, 2005) has become increasingly relevant within the field of leadership. Developing one's capacity to identify, label, and manage emotions is at the core of personal resiliency, self-control, even grit (Cornum, Matthews, & P, 2011). This gives individuals choice using cognitive and behavioral strategies to

buffer emotional/affective triggers (Reynolds, 2004) within self and in relationships (Higgs & Aitken, 2003) at multiple levels.

Research continues to suggest that individuals with greater emotional awareness and strategies to regulate emotions have a greater capacity to manage stress and perform at higher levels by managing emotions which often get in the way of intentional focus (Wong & Law, 2002). Effective leaders influence not just with the head, but the heart, recognizing the importance in growing their emotional capacities, not only within self, but also within larger contexts of human relationships.

Psychological Dimension - There is a vast array of mental/cognitive capacities/skills that permeate the psychological dimension. Technical knowledge (represented earlier by Tk) in combination with other psychological skills, such as strategic and critical thinking, planning and problem solving, verbal self-guidance, visioning, mental rehearsal, perspective taking, sustained attention, self reflection, and others are equally relevant in self as well as leading others (Lee, 1999). This includes an extensive number of psychological disciplines—with many seeking to remove “deficit-based” (i.e., psychological liabilities) while others focus on “strength-based” (Brewerton, 2011), such as positive psychology (e.g., psychological assets;(Seligman, 2012) or strengths (Clifton, 2002). Meta-cognition, or *thinking about thinking* (Kruglanski & Higgins, 2007), is also applicable for the reflective leader.

Philosophical Dimension - The philosophical dimension is primarily focused on values and experiences acquired through self and others. While the spiritual dimension (see below) focuses primarily on conceptions of higher than self ideals or prescribed doctrine, the philosophical dimension taps into acquired shared values, ethics, and morals, gained through “lived experiences” (Allison & Gediman, 2007) and wisdom (Sternberg, 2001). This “values-based leadership” focuses on defining a shared set of core principles and values between leaders

and followers (Frost, 2014), in teams (Shoenfelt, 2011), in organizations (Ledford Jr., Wendenhof, & Strahley, 1995) and in communities. Connecting values and ethics back to flow (at the heart of ALT) was central to the Good Work Project (Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi, & Damon, 2008), where leaders not only facilitated excellence and focus, but within an ethical and moral frame.

Spiritual Dimension - The spiritual dimension is comprised of larger-than-self factors such as principles, truths, beliefs, moral values, meaning, and purpose (Gini, 1997). One's spiritual dimension transcends the self (as compared to the philosophical dimension, which is derived from personal and collective experiences). This is a compelling dimension for leaders as it taps deeply held inner and seeded historical values derived from established faith traditions. As Daft (2008) pointed out “All leadership practices can be used for good or evil, and thus have a moral dimension.” (pg. 170). As such, the spiritual dimension is central to the study and practice of leadership, often taking the form of integrity, humility, respect, appreciation, fair treatment, and personal reflection (Reave, 2005)—through calling and membership (Fry, 2003)—helping people find deeper meaning through their work.

Together these five internal dimensions (physical, emotional, psychological, philosophical, and spiritual) comprise large conceptual blocks with numerous sub-literatures. Of significant value is the cross-influential nature of these dimensions and their collective influence on the individual (See Figure 2).

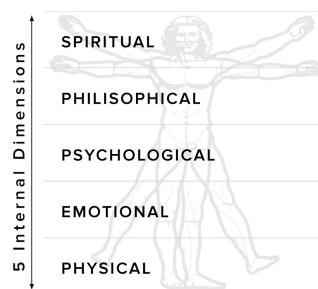


Figure 2: The 5 Internal Dimensions

5 External Dimensions

When engaging any change effort, “the leader must take into consideration individuals’, a group’s, or an organization’s, as well as his or her own, contributions to the effort.” (Bass, 1990, pg. 33). This suggests that influence and leadership take place within oneself as well as in relationships with others, including teams, organizations—even communities.

Personal Dimension - Using the five intrapersonal dimensions already discussed, an individual may exercise personal leadership by becoming physically robust, emotionally resilient, psychologically skilled, philosophically grounded, and spiritually connected. This notion of “full engagement” (Loehr & Schwartz, 2004) suggests that we need to look at ourselves with a more comprehensive, holistic mindset—to place attention in each of the five intrapersonal dimensions to function optimally (Greene, 2012; Tracy, 2002; Waitley, 1984)—recognizing that each of the five internal and five external dimensions is inter-connected (e.g., thoughts on moods, sleep on health, food on energy, beliefs on thoughts(Wisneski & Anderson, 2004). As optimally functioning individuals, leaders may use themselves more effectively as agents of influence and change.

Interpersonal Dimension - This level represents the dyadic or interpersonal dimension. Our ability to achieve goals almost always requires others to assist in various roles and capacities. Interpersonal principles, theories, and practices are vast and complex, and are necessary to coordinate and leverage one another in the pursuit of common goals. Interpersonal leadership principles include numerable practices such as effective verbal and non-verbal communication, active listening, giving and receiving feedback, praise, understanding personality and cultural differences, interpersonal conflict, use of empathy and understanding, building rapport, motivating and rewarding, appreciating and valuing, managing, coaching, networking, negotiating, and other practices designed to support higher levels of relational

influence (Canary, 2008) to achieve common goals—nested within larger relational clusters as summarized below.

Team Dimension - This level represents human relationships beyond the dyad—usually groups larger than three but less than ten (Rouse & Boff, 2005). In this external dimension leaders influence and are influenced by the group or team, each influencing the other by focusing attention and energies on the needs of each to accomplish shared goals or purpose (Larson & LaFasto, 1989). There are principles and practices that inform successful teams (Katzenbach & Smith, 2006), the process of team development (Miller, 2003), types and purpose of teams, optimal team functioning (e.g., clarifying roles and responsibilities, team accountabilities, team norms, identifying strengths and weaknesses), dysfunctions of teams (Lencioni, 2002), and why teams succeed and fail (Robbins & Finley, 2000).

Relevant here are the five internal dimensions applied at the team level such as physical assets and/or liabilities of teams (e.g., general physical health of team members, adequate physical resources), emotional assets and/or liabilities of team members (e.g., emotional understanding, empathy), psychological assets and/or liabilities (e.g., shared mental models, ideas, working knowledge), philosophical assets and/or liabilities (e.g., guiding principles, norms or ethics)—even spiritual assets and/or liabilities (e.g., a connection to a valued purpose beyond self in service of the team).

Organizational Dimension - Organizations contain distinct levels, functions, and cross-functions (i.e., operations, finance, accounting, information technology, human resources, marketing, sales, etc.) that work together to produce products, services, knowledge, or other valued outputs. With consideration to many permutations and combinations of individuals, relationships, intersecting groups or teams, divisions or business lines, etc., we take into consideration these functional units and their coordination through the broader organizational

system (Senge, 2010). Other organizational considerations include its mission, vision, core values, governance, strategies, structures, functional systems and process alignment—all contributing to a collective corporate culture (Deal, Kennedy, Kennedy, & Deal, 2000; Kotter & Heskett, 2011). Connections to the five internal dimensions may be made at the physical (plant, property, equipment), emotional (organization climate/employee engagement), psychological (institutional knowledge, shared models, mindsets or “theories in use”), philosophical (corporate values, beliefs, norms and standards), and spiritual (higher than organization purposes, faith, social responsibility).

Community Dimension (Regional, National, International) - Larger environments increase the level of human complexity and number of variables based on all previous external dimensions discussed—recognizing that communities are comprised of governments, organizations, groups, interpersonal dyads, and individuals.

Using this largest level, we might look at communities physically (e.g., physical infrastructure, public health /wellbeing, and safety), emotionally (e.g., the general climate/attitude), psychologically (e.g., shared mindset, mental models, knowledge), philosophically (e.g., core values, beliefs, culture and standards; (Crowther, 2012; Michalos & Poff, 2012)—and spiritually (e.g., collective spiritual beliefs and practices; (Marques, Dhiman, & King, 2009) (See Figure 3). Taken together these 10 dimensions may be illustrated using the following schematic representing the intersection between the five internal and five external dimensions. (See Figure 4).

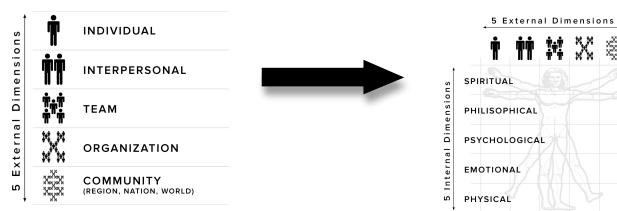


Figure 3: The 5 External Dimensions

Figure 4: The 10 Intersecting Dimensions (static)

This model suggests that influence and leadership, through the placement of attention and resources, can be exercised by influencing systems and processes at any of the 10 dimensions. Together they provide an initial static matrix from which to frame leadership theories and practice with 25 intersecting content areas.

Table 1: Summary of Inter-Relationships of the 10 Dimensions (static)

Spiritual	Higher than self, often religious principles, values, and beliefs applied to self.	Higher than relationship, often religious principles, values, and beliefs applied to relationships.	Higher than self, often religious principles, values, and beliefs applied to teams.	Higher than self, often religious principles, values, and beliefs applied to organization (i.e., Spirit in the Workplace).	Higher than self, often religious principles, values, and beliefs applied to community.
Philosophical	Self-constructed values including personal beliefs, principles ethics, norms...	Interpersonally constructed values including shared beliefs, principles ethics, norms...	Team constructed values including shared beliefs, ethics, norms, team culture...	Organization constructed values including shared beliefs, ethics, norms organization culture...	Community constructed values including shared beliefs, ethics, norms and culture...
Psychological	Mental Models Concepts Perceptions Thoughts Attitudes Perspective Knowledge ...	Shared Mental Models Concepts Perceptions Thoughts Attitudes Perspective Knowledge ...	Shared Mental Models Concepts Perceptions Thoughts Attitudes Perspective Knowledge ...	Shared Mental Models Concepts Perceptions Thoughts Attitudes Perspective Knowledge ...	Shared Mental Models Concepts Perceptions Thoughts Attitudes Perspective Knowledge ...
Emotional	Understanding and managing personal affect/emotions.	Understanding and managing others affect emotions (e.g., empathy, conflict, understanding).	Understanding and managing team emotions (e.g., empathy, conflict, understanding).	Understanding and managing emotional climate of the organization.	Understanding and managing emotional climate of the community.
Physical	Internal physical well-being. Required internal and external physical resources and context (e.g., nutrition, fitness, rest.).	Interpersonal physical well-being. Required internal and external physical resources and context.	Team physical well-being. Required internal and external physical resources and context.	Organization physical well-being. Required internal and external physical resources and context (e.g., infrastructure, corporate wellness).	Community Interpersonal physical well-being. Required internal and external physical resources and context. (e.g., (infrastructure, public health).
	Personal	Interpersonal	Team	Organization	Community

Five Dimensions of Time

Exercising influence using any process is exercised moment by moment (thoughts, decisions, transactions) in time (Thoms & Greenberger, 1995). If moments were counted in hours, 8,760 of these are given to each of us annually from which to exercise influence. While there is no perfect model for constructing time, five distinct blocks are used here: Long Future (LF), Short-Future (SF), Focus (F) Short-Past (SP), and Long-Past (LP). As the third category of five dimensions, time is central to understanding and exercising leadership.

Long Future (LF) - Leadership is never static, but constantly moving towards the future from the past, through the present—moment by moment—then into the past. In the broadest sense, at every level, we plan for the LF using the SF as a bridge. In the LF dimension resides abstract forethought such as a desired future state. This may be defined as strategic leadership (Ireland & Hitt, 1999). In this dimension we explore mission, vision, and legacy building strategies, which sets standard of excellence and integrity at every level of human engagement (See Daft, 2007, pg. 397).

Short Future (SF) - In this dimension, LF abstractions are broken down into concrete goals. Goals setting, strategic and contingency planning, risk management, time maximization, and preparation strategies reside within this SF dimension used by leaders at every level to ensure that progress is being made towards the LF objectives.

Focus - At the center is present moment focus (F) or attention in the moment. Various concepts such as “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008), “execution” (Bossidy, Charan, & Burck, 2002), “strategic implementation” (Bourgeois & Brodwin, 1984) “mindfulness” (Langer, 1990), and the many types of focus (Goleman, 2013) all discuss attention in the moment for different purposes.

Attentional Leadership Theory's premise is that leaders must continually monitor and focus their attention, time, and resources where they are needed now—the “work at the center”— (R. A. Heifetz, Linsky, & Grashow, 2009), to remove interferences and use informed leadership practices. While focus may be centered purely in the moment purely for its own sake (e.g., Mindfulness), it is also the centerpiece of ALT as focus and attention go to where they are needed within the ALT model discussed throughout this chapter.

Short Past (SP) - The SP represents the receptacle of every Moment of Performance (MOP). It is from the SP where information is gathered through experience as feedback loops for future reference (Coonradt, 2012). Studies suggest that “candid, insightful feedback” is one of the more important aspects of growth and development yet most supervisors fail to provide it (Michaels, Handfield-Jones, & Axelrod, 2001). Short Past work can be represented through such practices as “After Action Reports” in the military (Army, 1993), quality or statistic process control mechanisms (Wheeler, 2000, 2010), Balanced Scorecards (Kaplan & Norton, 1996), giving or receiving feedback generally (Folkman, 2006), or the simple practice of self-reflection (Branson, 2007). Short Past work is primarily feedback driven and takes place in any dynamic system (Gleick, 1987).

Long Past (LP) - Long Past (LP) represents a collective history or story (Loehr, 2008). Through the development of personal, interpersonal, team, organization, community histories and stories we retrieve core lessons (Allison & Gediman, 2007; Urban, 2002), develop an evolving self or collective image, store real or imaged beliefs, and build self efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Within the LP space is where beliefs, values, norms, cultural memes—even the challenging or building of an individual (Maltz, 1984), team (Hertel & Solansky, 2011), organization, or collective self-image (Gonzalez & Chakraborty, 2012) (See Figure 5).



Figure 5: The 5 Dimensions of Time

Table 2: Summary of the 5 Dimensions of Time

Long-Past	Short-Past	Focus	Short-Future	Long-Future
The collective history of an individual, a relationship, team, organization or community. It is here that the leader learns of the relevant data that informs future practice at any intersecting space referenced above.	Exiting moments of performance or execution at the individual, interpersonal, team, organization, or community level. The primary space where leaders gather feedback and identify course corrections at any intersecting space referenced above.	In the moment focus and/or execution at the individual, interpersonal, team, organization, or community level. Where attention is being placed in the here and now at any intersecting space referenced above.	Where all relevant preparatory strategies and goals are set prior to entering moments of performance at the individual, interpersonal team, organization, or community level at any intersecting space referenced above.	The abstract and broad future constructed at the individual, interpersonal, team, organization, or community level at any intersecting space referenced above.

The Interconnectivity of Leadership Theories and Practice

The 15 dimensions of ALT suggest that within any arena, leadership is exercised through influence within the greater system. As discussed within the five levels of knowledge, influence, requires informed practice, within a system, governed by principles, within a given arena/context. Attentional Leadership Theory recognizes the inherent value of all relevant leadership principles, theories, and practices recognizing that there is a time, place, and duration for which to use them. These 15 “big blocks” identify 125 intersecting “mini blocks” where theoretical intersections may be explored.

By adding new variables, these “mini blocks” can be broken down further as more specific inquiries take place. In the case above, attention may be given to the physical aspects of

a community within an historical time frame to better understand how it has evolved and may need to be influenced or led given this historical knowledge (See Figure 6).

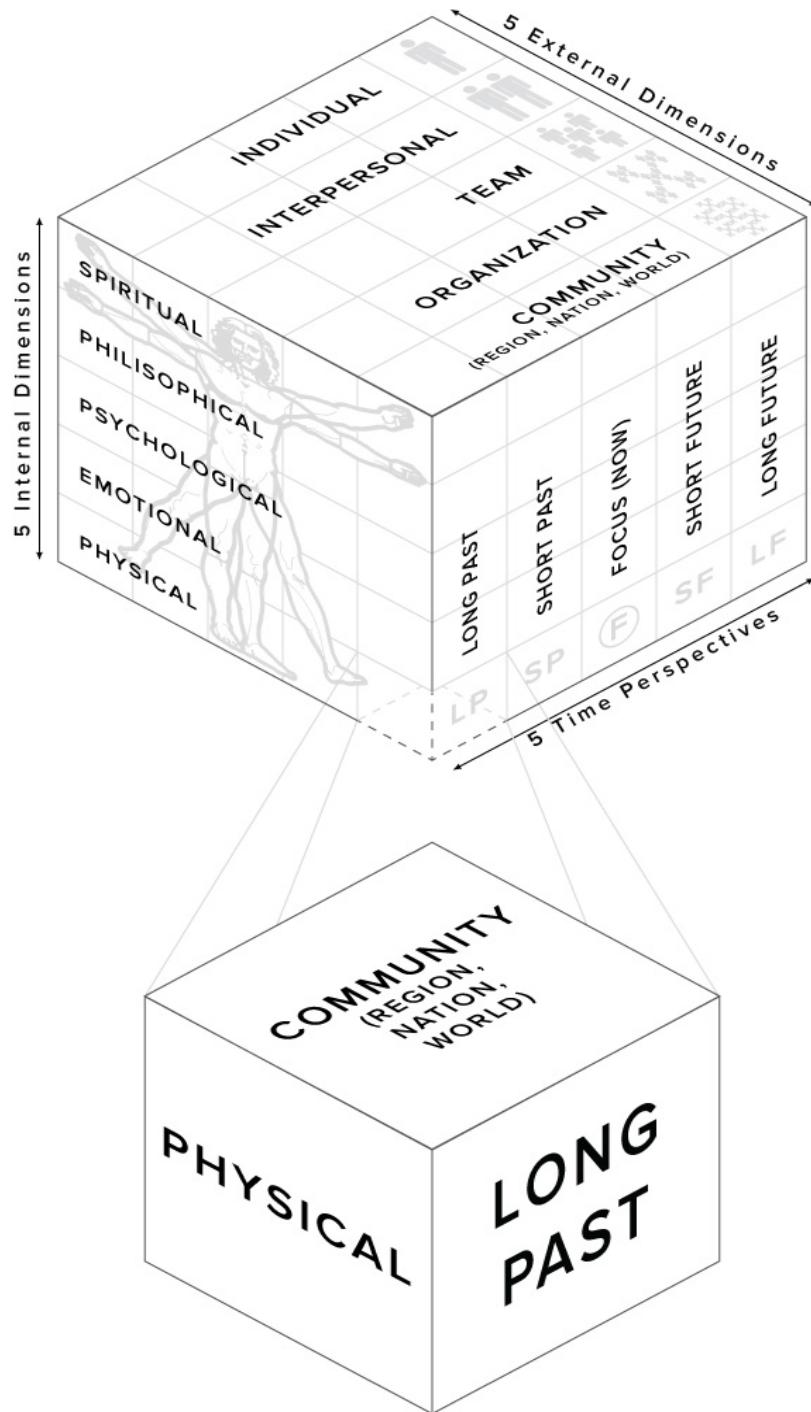


Figure 6: The 15 "big blocks" and the 125 "mini-blocks"

Practical Applications of ALT and Diagnostic Questions

At its core ALT may be a diagnostic framework from which to dive deeper into leadership theory, practice, and theoretical intersections. Addressing any current circumstance, a leader may inquire where, when, and for what duration his/her attention needs to be directed to address a problem/opportunity to influence a system or process to achieve a desired end. Five general questions may be used in exploration of this model:

1. Given current realities, situation or challenges, where should attention and resources be placed now? Does the problem concern primarily technical or primarily leadership challenges? If primarily a leadership challenge:
 2. Is the current challenge time related? Is attention needed in the Long Future (mission, vision, legacy), Short Future (goals, planning, preparation), in the moment Focus/execution, Short Past (feedback, measurement, learning), or Long Past (acquired knowledge, history, wisdom)?
 3. Within the time perspective, what external dimension needs attention: Personal, Interpersonal, Team, Organization, or Community (regional, national, international)?
 4. Within these external dimensions, what internal dimensions are most relevant: physical (i.e., wellbeing, resources, and infrastructure), emotional (understanding/managing affect), psychological (knowledge, concepts, perspectives), philosophical (ethics, values, standards) spiritual (purpose, beliefs, principles) or any combination of them?
 5. At relevant conceptual intersections (where attention is being placed), what are the best, most reliable “informed practices” for leaders to influence most effectively to achieve desired results?

5 Development Dimensions to Consider

Taking ALT further, how might these intersecting dimensions be useful at various developmental stages and arenas? Outside of traditional corporate, organizational, civic arenas, programs within colleges/universities (Komives et al., 2009) and pre and post secondary schools are not far behind (Covey, 2009). Programs such as “Life Re-imagined” (Leider, 2013) offer similar leadership theories, tools, and practices for more mature populations. These roughly drawn life stages (pre-secondary, post-secondary, college/university, professional, and mature) add other dimensions from which to consider new research and practice. Intersecting these with the multitude of cultural and demographic differences increases the complexity exponentially but with more narrow bands of focus from which to explore new questions to inform leadership theories and practice.

The Future Implications for Developing Leaders

Attentional Leadership Theory suggests that continuous and rigorous research will ask deeper and more refined questions, providing new insights, methods, and tools that leaders can use to exercise influence where, when, and how it is needed. In contrast to books and programs that offer “off the shelf” models, the ALT framework suggests that (a) there are innumerable principles, theories, and tools (known and yet to be discovered) that may be used in the right place, at the right time, and for the right duration, to exercise influence and leadership most effectively, (b) we must consider a diagnostic approach and identify the current strengths and weaknesses of leaders to better understand what they need to learn and use now for the challenges they face today (Zenger & Folkman, 2009), and (c) that leaders may benefit from a personalized competency based approach—at every developmental stage, with consideration to various cultural, demographic, and contextual variables. Such a mind-set is the clear difference

between transactional leaders and transformational leaders who use multiple “informed practices” to move a systems forward (See Daft, 2007, pg. 356).

Such is the 2050 leader: one who recognizes the importance of one’s own physical robustness, emotional resilience, psychological complexity, flexibility and focus, philosophical grounding—even spiritual connection; to build and cultivate interpersonal relationships and high performing teams; to understand the inter-connected parts of organizations—even communities (at every level). And to see each of these inter-connections in relationship to the long future, achieved through the short-future, generating thoughts, making decisions and taking actions through moment-by-moment focus and engagement, learning from every iteration in the short past, yet tapping into individual and collective histories as a significant resource for managing challenges now. Attentional Leadership Theory suggests that this is the toolkit of the future. Doing this within any distinct technical environment or domain will render leadership education and training an essential part of our education system, from Kindergarten all the way to the C-suite—recognizing that no one is genetically pre-destined for leadership, but instead capable of significant growth (Dweck, 2006) in the pursuit of leadership knowledge, skills, and abilities to serve in any life area. In 2050 Tk and Lk will be two equal parts of the human development equation and be the competitive advantage necessary to compete within an increasingly complex and changing world.

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