

Wakefulness:

The decisive leadership skill

Keywords: wakefulness, leadership, internal wakefulness, external wakefulness, integrated wakefulness. awakened leader, change.

Wakefulness is reviewed as a critical characteristic for leaders. It is described as the way of an awakened leader. An awakened leader maintains a high level of alertness in every regard; toward him or herself and his or her driving motives in various matters; toward the people he or she guides; toward the organisation he or she leads; toward the environment in which his or her organisation operates, and toward the entire universe. Wakefulness is subdivided into three dimensions: internal, external, and integrated. Each of these dimensions is briefly reviewed. Two models are presented demonstrating the scope of a leader's wakefulness, and the role of wakefulness in a leader's life.

Wakefulness may not immediately sound like a leadership skill of any prominence, but the more you think about it, the more it will. Based on my observations of four remarkable leaders, each in a different type of environment, I came to the conclusions to be presented in this paper. The environments from which these

leaders derived were widely diverged: one leader operates in the academic environment; one in a large non-profit organisation; one in a small international operating business; and one in a leading global citrus cooperative. I concluded that all these leaders, despite their divergence in work environment, background, and lifestyles, had one thing in common: wakefulness.

Wakefulness, as a significant leadership trait, has been mentioned before. In his review of the characteristics and behaviours of a 'conscious leader' (p 19), Secretan (2001) asserted, 'Consciousness is being awake to the mystical and ineffable aspects of being alive' (page 19). Prior to Secretan, Harung, Heaton, and Alexander (1995) had also mentioned the importance of wakefulness in leaders when they stated, 'A more abstract and universal feature of leaders, [...] is their heightened degree of consciousness or wakefulness' (page 47).

So what does wakefulness entail? Wakefulness is the way of an

awakened leader. And the simplest explanation of an awakened leader is 'a leader who is awake.' Not just in the factual sense of the word, but in every way. An awakened leader maintains a high level of alertness in every regard: toward him or herself and his or her driving motives in various matters; toward the people he or she guides; toward the organisation he or she leads; toward the environment in which his or her organisation operates, and toward the entire universe.

Dimensions of wakefulness

Wakefulness, in the case of a leader, can be segmented into many dimensions. For the purpose of conciseness, only the three basic areas shall be reviewed here:

- Internal wakefulness
- External wakefulness
- Integrated wakefulness

Each of these layers could, in turn, be subdivided further.

Internal wakefulness

- Internal wakefulness pertains, in foundation, to the leader's connection with his or her inner source of wisdom. It could be subdivided into two main segments, which are:
- Rational wakefulness, which pertains to areas such as intellectual skills, ethical sense, and beliefs;
- Emotional wakefulness, which touches on areas such as emotional intelligence, intuition, morals and values, self-perception, and passion.

External wakefulness

External wakefulness pertains to the leader's awareness of the world around him or her. Not just the environment within the organisation, but also within the industry in which the organisation operates; outside of this industry toward other, potentially new industries to enter once an operational change comes about, and in the world at large.

External wakefulness can be subdivided into three basic segments:

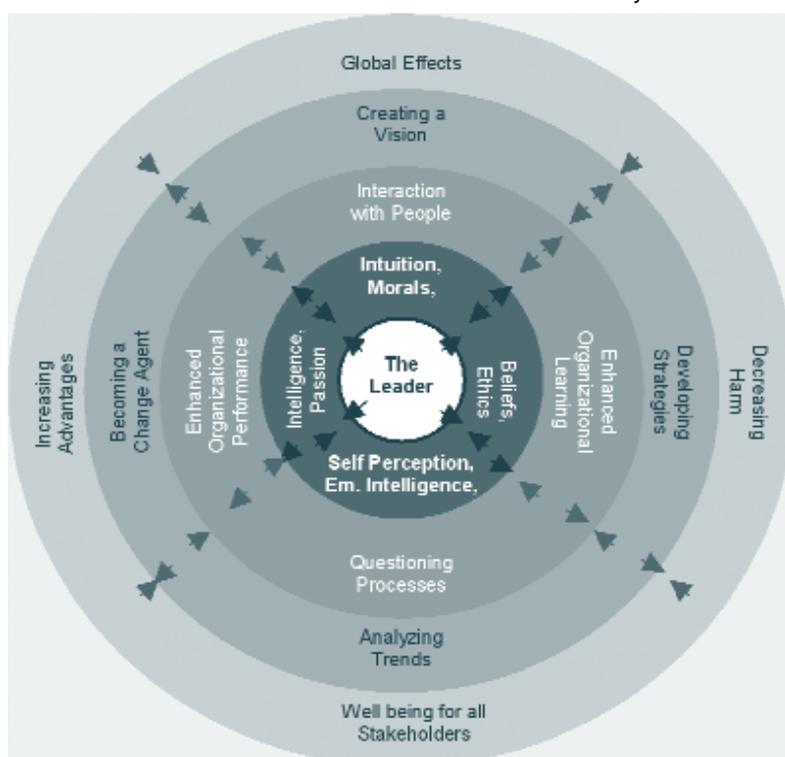


Figure 1: The scope of a leader's wakefulness

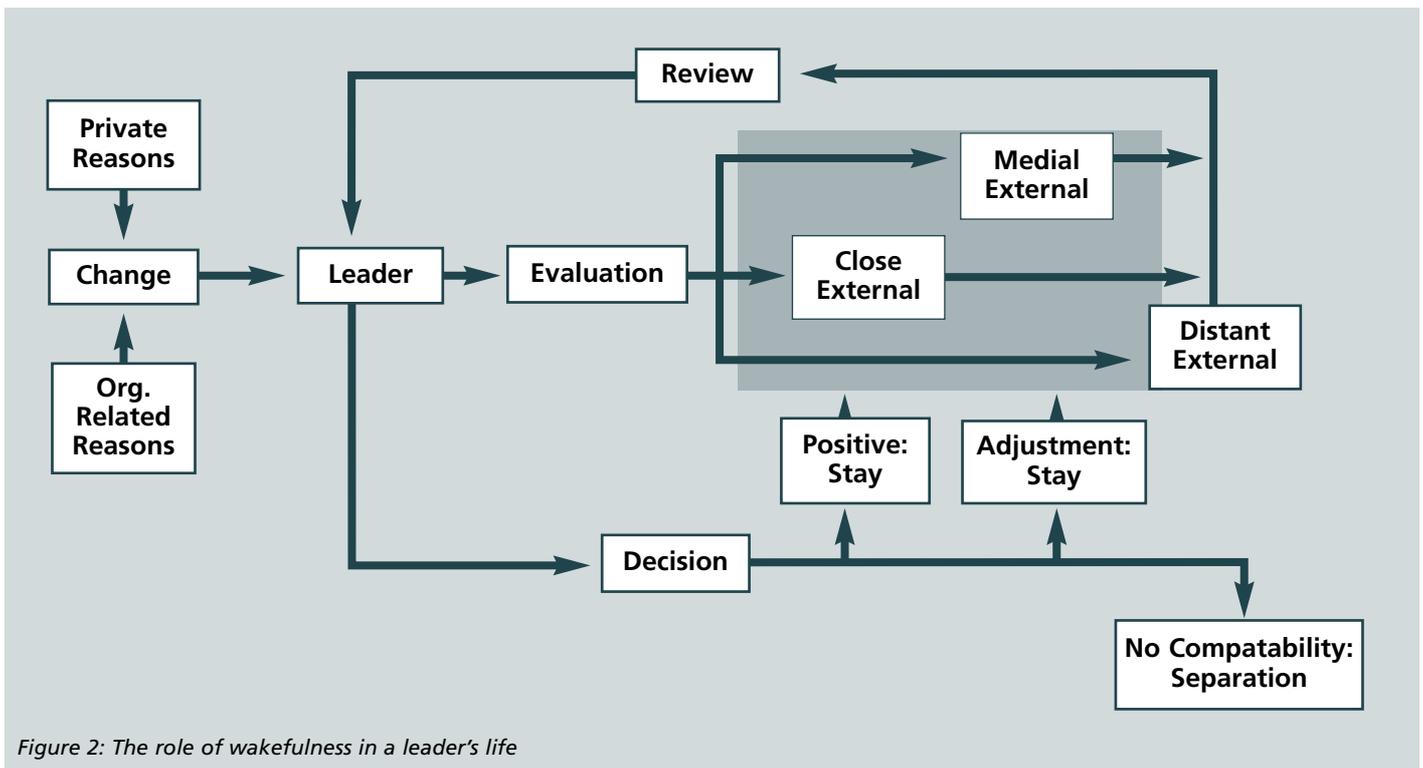


Figure 2: The role of wakefulness in a leader's life

- **Close external wakefulness:** which pertains to the leader's behaviour within the organisation and the way he or she treats the people and processes around him or her. Elements such as continuous questioning of processes in order to establish upward spiralling organisational learning will be involved in this area.
- **Medial external wakefulness:** which involves skills such as a vision for the organisation; one or more strategies toward realising the vision; the continuous alertness necessary to analyse trends and use them to the advantage of the organisation's future. The awakened leader will most apparently use his or her wakefulness in this regard to alter the perceived trends in order to become the change agent in the organisation's industry.
- **Distant external wakefulness:** which pertains to global effects of the activities of the organisation and the industry in which it operates. The awakened leader will, at this level, consistently attempt to decrease harm done to environments due to this industry, and increase advantages for as many and as wide a range of stakeholders as possible.

Figure 1 on page 5 demonstrates the leader's scope of wakefulness. **Integrated wakefulness** Integrated wakefulness pertains to the way the leader intertwines his or her

internal and external wakefulness attributes. It gets into areas of combining the leader's values, intuition, emotional intelligence, intelligence quotient, beliefs, ethics, self-perception and passion, with the given circumstances of the organisation; its workers; its current direction; its potential; its industry, including all stakeholders; and the world at large.

The integrated wakefulness is the most complicated part of being a leader, because it pertains so much to action through perceived compatibility. If there is no compatibility between the leader's internal qualities and his external environment, there will not be any integration. Either the leader will exit this organisation, or the organisation will undergo some sort of change in order to establish equilibrium between its operations and the leader's perspectives.

Endnote

Important to keep in mind is also that – being human and, thus, receptive to things that happen to us – awakened

leaders are constantly changing. And so may some of their internal pillars of wakefulness. Fortunately the changes are usually not too tremendous unless something life-changing occurs in the leader's personal or professional life, for instance, death, birth, intense exposure to another culture, or a great loss affecting the business.

If such is the case, the leader will probably reevaluate his or her areas of wakefulness, and calibrate them again toward the external circumstances, which also change continuously, in order to determine the possibility of continued integrated wakefulness; altered integrated wakefulness, or separation. Figure 2 illustrates this process.

References:

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 Secretan, L. (2001). The Conscious Leader. *Industry Week*, 250(2), 19-20.

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