

# LEADERSHIP IN THE DIGITAL AGE

## Notes from Day One...

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### Seven Topics in Seven Hours

1. Introduction and Framing Commentary
2. Washington case study
3. Indian case study
4. People smarter than leaders
5. South African case study
6. Defining Digital Leadership (and Prospects for the Quad Model)
7. Why Digital Leadership

### 1. George Vradenburg – Introduction and Framing Commentary

- **Power of computing has distributed power in a corporation** - This was happening in corporations for decades before the 1990s
  - **Now – with the internet, the exchange of information between organizations** took off enabling a conceptualization of issues within business that cross boundaries
  - This new types of inter-organizational creativity has enabled economic growth without job growth!
  - Cross – border thinking has been enabled through globalizations
  - Key skill is identifying the information you need across the supply chain
  - Military used joined up systems to lead the war in Iraq
- **New technology enables new types of leadership**
  - Bill Gates etc are great cross boundary users
    - Most tech companies are using normal types of leadership present in corporate life....no real differences...
    - No real difference in Silicon Valley types between regional development initiatives in other sectors
  - **'Stewardship' rather than leadership**, demonstrated by people looking to use government, business, and NGO communities –
    - Skills needed to do this are similar to leading a normal ICT company, but little more difficult
    - Eg. Steve Case moving from AOL to using after-school hunger
    - Bill Gates taking on global health agenda became a digital steward
      - Characteristics include private wealth
      - Younger leaders – in their 30s and 40s

### 2. Washington Case Study

- a. ICT development in Washington didn't conform to the classical Quad principle – it developed initially by the private sector alone, first with UUNET and Sprint and

- then cluster effects, emergence of a professional support class and finally, attracting traditional regional development initiatives
- b. If a leader can be described - it might have been Mario Marino – an early ICT regional champion

Discussion turned to philanthropy

- i. Decline of the tech boom and the reduction of foundation budgets
- ii. Will digital super rich create foundations?
  1. Current generation of digital super wealthy tend to be
    - a. young (30,40s)
    - b. Results driven
- iii. Contrasted with the 19<sup>th</sup> century philanthropists (some suggested its too early to tell if they will be very different from previous generations)
- iv. Digital era enables social sector cross-over activism from stratum of the less than super rich, without 'foundations' but with means, energy and networks.
- v. New generation of leaders, being younger and in the spirit of the 'valley' might also be committed to 'transformative' and democratic possibilities of technology for the developing world and first world poor in a way previous generations of rich might not be. (importance of style of leadership)

### 3. Indian Case Study

**Sam & Akhtar led the commentary:**

**Sam Pitroda** led us through a very first hand account of how the current Bangalore phenomenon, or more precisely, how India became a leader in ICT, is really a product of a sustained program of ICT leadership that started 20 years ago under Indira Gandhi and importantly Rajiv Gandhi, that involved

- Elite political sponsorship to cut past bureaucratic sclerosis
- Generational change – under 25s were recruited to avoid institutional thinking traps
- Role of the government, Bangalore was chosen
  - Existence of engineering talent, cluster of existing tech industry
  - Far from Delhi
  - Southern Indian Management Culture

**Akhtar noted:**

- Significant role of elite institutions and their international networks in promoting ICT growth in India
- Emerging role of the sizable and influential sub-continental Diaspora
- Important role of symbolic leadership – ie. Having space program – in providing a assembling and inspiring ICT talent

**General commentary on the transformative possibilities of ICT for India**

- Empowering inter and intra village communication for 600 million Indians
- Connectivity is beginning to emerge through deregulations and the ingenuity of local entrepreneurs
- ICT growth is suited to India because of 'non-linear' flexible styles, multiple speeds and 'syncretic dynamism' inherit within India – a cultural asset in the post modern world.

- India will affect the west as much as vice-versa through the growth of ICT – Starting to see this through the growth in ‘Bollywood’ as a rival to classically ‘Western’ forms of cultural production in much of developing East /Central Asia and the Middle-East and influx of Indian cultural producers within the ‘West’ – a trend that will magnify within a generation
- Finally, spread and democratic impact of ICT is yet to be determined – assumptions are that it will lead to greater personal liberty, higher standards of living and the ability of ‘rents’ to be shared amongst those traditionally marginalized. However, a more dystopic and under-explored possibility is that ICT can also be used for anti-democratic, demagogic and violent purposes.

**4. Reed Hundt** – Our lunch time speaker, in the guise of an unlikely revolutionary, asked us to ponder how people know more than their leaders – borrowing a phrase that gained currency of late, people are the ‘second super-power’

- He described the difference, in deliberate contrast, what people know through unmediated means and what their leaders know
- In this new world people use percipient evidence to gain views on the world and the media writ large is failing in its civic role in enabling conversation by privileging, in its very grammar and syntax infotainment over explanation and fact telling
- Leaders are trying to break through by going directly to the people
  1. To establish a shared set of ‘facts’
  2. To talk about the ‘goals’
  3. Talk about the means to get to those goals
- Truth is essential in our age – it cannot be concealed
- New type of leader required – who can set ‘big goals’ and illuminate the path based on values and general directions as people don’t want to know the details of policy (nor, given complexity, are they capable of absorbing much of the details)
- Politicians, amidst the 24-7 global media spotlight, can no longer do deals behind closed doors for long periods of time (as was possible with the negotiations leading up to the Treaty of Versailles) and there natural limits, in this environment, to ‘executive prerogative’
- Leaders must be candid when changing course – its visible in today’s environment, while leaders in information poor eras could disguise these changes
- Increasingly, politicians cannot elide goals (ie. With tax cuts, is the goal to create growth or end progressive taxation?) without seeming mendacious
- Finally, culture determines technology

## 5. South African Case Study

**Nape, Willie, Derrick led the commentary:**

- Important role of global civil society institutions anti-apartheid struggle
- ICT development happened in the context of the emergence of the ANC and the power and skill imbalances that were apartheid legacies
- What started out with promise has been somewhat disappointing
- Government / ANC control from the center has stalled efficient roll-out

- Mandate for universal access and the imperative to pay for it is creating a market stifling charging model with few prospects for a regulatory solution in terms solving the crisis through granting additional licenses etc.
- Constraining factors include:
  - Centralizing and control impulse of ANC leadership
    - Likely a systemic response to the anti-apartheid context where power once gained by the state and previously excluded actors, is loathe to be returned to often those who previously wielded power oppressively, under the guise of 'deregulation' and 'privatization' of 'reform'

## 6. Defining Digital Leadership (General Discussion)

- Digital Leadership
  - What was unique about digital leadership?
    - Digital leaders were not very different
    - ICT as the
      - As a sector
      - Enabler
      - As medium
- Explanatory potential of the Quad framework considered:
  - Good overview – heuristic
  - Concerns over two-dimensional framework not capturing the complexity of the people
  - It is flexible – can change
  - The circles themselves need further explication
    - Civil society – is it really just NGOs?
    - Government – In the valley they're not a factor
    - Private sector – differences between large and small enterprises
    - People need to be included into the equation
    - Leaders act in the center of the quad
    - Strength of the lines was seen as the key variable
    - Measurement of the strength of the lines is important

## 7. Why Digital Leadership (General Discussion)

Question of relationship between ICT leadership democracy and the purpose of ICT spread remains under-defined and worthy of stronger investigation in subsequent session(s). It was suggested that leadership had as its normative project, the promotion of the following principles:

- Democracy
- Efficiency
- Equality

It was, provisionally, suggested that leaders, in the digital age, are in some combination:

1. Resourced
2. Connected
3. Skilled
4. Boarder crossers
5. Charismatic