

# Going Mainstream: A Review of *Mastering Leadership*

Anderson, R. & Adams, W. (2016). *Mastering leadership. An integrated framework for breakthrough performance and extraordinary business results*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

Reviewed by Jonathan Reams<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

In reviewing a book like this, I realize there are many challenges. It is a business book, yet there is extensive theory incorporated into it. Written for a mainstream business audience, it also brings anticipation to those looking for adult development work to get a stronger foothold into society. The authors aim high, intending to set a new benchmark for leadership development work. So there can be intense scrutiny of how the argument is put together. In this review, I attempt to give voice to all of these tensions as I weave my way through conveying my impressions of it.

To begin this review, I take an overview of some academic work as a way of contextualizing how such an integrative move can be approached. There have been many attempts to create an integrated framework for first understanding leadership, and then from this, to be able to do something about developing it. For example, Rost (1991) stated that “no one has presented an articulated school of leadership that integrates our understanding of leadership into a holistic framework” (p. 9). Subsequent scholars have taken up the challenge with varying perceptions of the results. Goethals and Sorenson (2006) undertook *The Quest for a General Theory of Leadership*, without coming to a consensus. Harvey and Riggio (2011) explored *Leadership Studies: The Dialogue of Disciplines*, examining how diverse disciplines such as political science, psychology and history among others can give insights into leadership. Kellerman (2012) talks about *The End of Leadership* as a way of trying to get us past the chaos of our multiple conceptions. She estimates 1400 definitions of leadership, along with 44 theories about it.<sup>2</sup> It appears that scholars are not coming to an integrated framework anytime soon.

If all these scholars have struggled to do this, what can this tell us? It might be that approaching it from the academic orientation comes with inherent limits. One of these limits could be from being more immersed in observing and analyzing than doing and reflecting. It could come from the type of training one receives to be an academic, with the disciplinary, rational and analytical enculturation of the profession. The postmodern demand to give equal

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<sup>2</sup> Russ Volckmann presents a good overview of this in his article on *Integral Leadership and Diversity* in Integral Leadership Review (June 2012).



voice to diverse perspectives could play into it. It could even be that the deeper one looks and the more granularity in the focus, the forest can get lost for the trees.

From this it can be worth looking to see if something new, at least a step in the direction we are looking, can come from beyond the academic world. Being outside of the constraints of the academy has its advantages. While many of us have encountered casual, popular attempts to bring good ideas into practice, we have often been disappointed. However, at its best, being free of academic constraints allows for a freedom of expression that can generate breakthroughs of expression, enabling complex, post-conventional ideas get a foothold in the conventional consciousness of mainstream society.

The challenge here is that it can be rare to find a sufficiently reflective practitioner (Schön, 1983) who can give clear enough voice to his or her experience in order to share that with others. Few business leaders are sufficiently well versed in theory to describe their experience in terms that would meet the scholar's desire for conceptual rigor and clarity. Among consultants, Bill Joiner (Joiner & Josephs, 2007) comes to mind as someone who has aimed to present an integral view of leadership and its development. Bill Torbert (2004), as an academic and consultant practitioner, has also done a great deal to bridge the gap in this area. Doing a simple search on Amazon for 'integral leadership' generates plenty of results (including the book under review here), with most appearing to my view as either being the usual suspects, specialized or related topics. However, my perception is that none of these works has penetrated deeply into the mainstream business discourse.

It is in this context that Anderson and Adams (2016) have come forward with their version of an integrated framework for mastering leadership. As consultants with a reflective turn and a strong capacity for theoretical integration, they have put together a book that explicitly takes on the challenge to come up with an integrated framework for leadership. The questions that I wish to address in this review are primarily about how this book makes its case for this framework.

## Context

My own study of leadership has been much more in the academic context, although in recent years this has translated into practice at facilitating its development in others. With an aim at transparency and disclosure, much of this practice has come in conjunction with the use of the framework and tools described in this book. I first encountered Bob Anderson in 2003 on a conference call and then in 2005 through an interview with Russ Volckmann in *Integral Leadership Review*. This led to taking the certification in The Leadership Circle that year and beginning the long journey of learning how to make good use of it. Part of that journey has also included becoming associated as well with Bill Adams and the Full Circle Group (a consulting business built on the TLC framework) in 2010.

I should also say that I have been using the main assessment instrument from the framework, The Leadership Circle Profile (TLCP), in the classroom for a continuing education leadership course and with various client programs over the past seven years. I have also in the past year begun to lead certification programs for consultants and coaches wanting to be licensed to use TLCP in their work. This leads to two things relevant to this review. One is that I am deeply

familiar with the framework and tools in a variety of contexts (I have seen something like 300 profiles and coached dozens of leaders with it) so I can speak from experience in relation to many of the descriptions and claims in the book.

The second is that while on the one hand I might be biased in favor of the book for a variety of practical reasons, I also come with high expectations. Nothing that is in this book is new to me and I was not expecting it to be. This book is a combination of many of the arguments, stories, research and implications that have been the core fabric of the TLC business and community of practice as long as I have been associated with it.

Before getting to a brief summary of the contents of the book, it is important to make some remarks about who is the intended audience for the book. This book is not meant to be an academic treatise on the subject, even though it is backed by extensive theoretical sophistication. This book is written for practitioners of leadership, “for leaders swimming in complexity, wanting and needing to thrive, knowing it could be different ... also for leaders who are thriving in complexity and are hoping to teach others how to do the same” (pp. xxi-xxii). From this it appears to me that the aims of this book are primarily *pragmatic*. Thus the tone, tempo and structure of the book have this aim and audience in mind. For my review, I aim to examine a variety of issues around how this pragmatic approach shapes the book.

Another positioning that Anderson and Adams take in their introduction is to call their work “the first *Universal Model of Leadership* to emerge in the field” (p. xxii, italics and capitalization in the original). This is a bold claim and the authors acknowledge as much. Some of the opening references in this review hint at the breadth of other considerations possible when the term “universal” is invoked. Within these two contexts, the academic search for a comprehensive, integrated, framework for leadership and the pragmatic needs of organizational leaders, I will also examine how this book makes its case for this claim.

I want to reflect further for a moment on this claim and the positioning of the book as an integrated framework. This is related to the issue of integrative moves per se. One of the authors (Bob) describes how he “decided to meet, learn from, and work closely with many of the leading thinkers and researchers in the field of leadership” (p. xxiii) and from this saw that “the field wasn’t integrated” and so “set out to integrate it” (p. xxiii). Any such integrating move is subject to a number of constraints. Anderson (2006) discusses the tension between the synthetic nature of such integrative theoretical ventures and the need for humor, humility and openness to surprise. There is also the challenge of an unspoken set of hermeneutic horizons of preunderstanding (Palmer, 1969) that, when not acknowledged or reflected upon as constraints, can contribute to a totalizing orientation where contrary data can be filtered out or re-interpreted to fit the model.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, any (vertical) developmental move aimed at taking a diverse set of constructs and conceptions and weaving them together in a manner that helps to illuminate a field of experience and phenomenon from a higher level of development so that it makes it accessible for a conventional audience can be considered as integrative.

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<sup>3</sup> This critique has been aimed at Wilber’s AQAL integral model in particular. It is a natural enough tendency that many of us have been conditioned to take as a given aspect of such work.

## Overview

Anderson and Adams begin with an introduction aimed to contextualize their work. It is a nice mix of stories, personal reflections and journeys with some orientation to the purposes and theoretical background supporting the book. They even have made a free version of the TLCP available for readers (self only, no evaluators included) to help anchor some of the concepts and examples to personal experience.

The book is laid out in two parts. The first few chapters set out to make a business case for the framework. Once this has been established, the second half then outlines the nature of the journey to greater leadership effectiveness. This is done over 13 chapters briefly described here.

Chapter one, *The Promise of Leadership: Meeting the High Bar of Expectations*, sets out the agenda for leadership and the related expectations. It notes the explicit expectations such as specific outcomes that roles bring, as well as the implicit expectations like competence, commitment and providing meaning and direction. Together these create a very high bar for leadership. They describe four ‘universal’ promises around leadership; setting direction and giving meaning, engaging stakeholders and holding them accountable, ensuring focus and execution, and leading effectively. Together these make up the leadership agenda.

Chapter two, *Leadership Effectiveness and Business Performance: The Primary Competitive Advantage* lays out a research project undertaken by TLC to determine the relationship between these two key constructs. An additional set of survey questions was constructed and added on to the TLCP survey that measured business performance. They show that the top 10% of leaders, in terms of this business performance index, scored on average in the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile on leadership effectiveness, while the bottom 10% of leaders scored at only the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile. (They also note comparable results from the research of Zenger and Folkman (Zenger, Folkman, & Edinger, 2009)). Having established the impact of leadership effectiveness, they then show how they can measure a leadership quotient by dividing leadership effectiveness by ineffectiveness.<sup>4</sup> This simple formula can provide insight into the competitive advantage effective leadership can provide. The chapter also goes into the collective leadership effectiveness as being critical for business performance.

Chapter three, *Mastery and Maturity, Consciousness and Complexity: The Leadership Development Agenda* begins to describe the field of adult cognitive development and how it relates to the agenda of leadership. They introduce this by talking about the outer game of leadership being made up of processes and competencies, while the inner game is about consciousness. They also give a long list of examples of literature that emphasize the view that the inner game runs the outer game. They then give a list of premises, that; structure determines performance, you are a structure, consciousness is the operating system of performance and that to achieve higher performance, you must be restructured. These are linked to the relationship between consciousness and complexity, the basic theme being to lead in the face of growing

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<sup>4</sup> In this section of the book they focus on using only the leadership effectiveness scores for this. There is also a further relationship between the upper and lower halves of the TLCP related to this formula. I also make some comments on the leadership effectiveness survey in my discussion.

complexity you need to have an adequate complexity of mind to do this. This then forms the core argument of their view on the essence of leadership effectiveness and its development.

Chapter four, *Stages of Development: The Backbone of the Universal Model of Leadership* takes this a step further. It goes into Robert Kegan's (1982, 1994) model of adult development and shows how it relates to the TLCP. The labels are adapted to the profile, with the socialized mind becoming the reactive half of the profile, and the self-authoring mind becoming the creative upper half of the profile.<sup>5</sup> Figure 4.4 shows the relationship between stages of development and leadership effectiveness, making a curve that is utilized later as well to show parallels with other facets of the framework.<sup>6</sup> The chapter also places identity at the core of the consciousness development framework.

Chapter five, *Five Levels of Leadership: Structures of Mind and Performance* goes through more detailed descriptions of the conception of vertical development stages and how they look in relation to leadership. They spend a lot of time showing how the socialized/reactive mind is linked to a set of beliefs that are measured in the TLCP and then how these reactive tendencies are negatively correlated with leadership effectiveness. In a similar manner, the self-authoring/creative competencies are linked to the upper half of the profile and shown to correlate very positively with leadership effectiveness. Brief descriptions of integral and unitive stages of consciousness are also included.

Chapter six, *The Universal Model and Metrics: Global Leadership, Cross-Cultural, and Gender Application* goes into the full range of application of the framework, research and relevance to questions of cultural diversity and gender. The chapter describes the dynamics that are woven through in the profile between the different dimensions.<sup>7</sup> There is also some interesting data on gender differences, with women being seen as significantly more caring than men, as well as generally scoring higher on the upper creative dimensions. They also present the research done on the relationship between stage development and TLCP that indicates a clear correlation between higher stage development scores and higher creative competency scores. As well, this chapter provides the data that the authors base their use of the term universal on. Their examination of how leadership effectiveness is described in diverse cultural settings supports the view that this framework translates around the globe.

Chapter seven, *The Leadership System: The Central Organizing System* describes the larger set of six systems that are relevant for organizational effectiveness, with leadership sitting in the center of this system. This chapter also contains some extended case studies that help flesh out how the application of the framework looks in practice. One in particular is an extended description of a leader and his team over a number of years and through significant changes in conditions. This is a very illustrative case, showing the ups and down over time and the impact a

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<sup>5</sup> It should be emphasized that TLC is very clear that theirs is not a developmental measure. The upper and lower halves of the profile are designed to be grounded in these distinctions of Kegan's, without making any claims to be measuring them.

<sup>6</sup> It occurs again in relation to the stage development research. As a note, I have had access to the data set used for this and was able to replicate this figure.

<sup>7</sup> I can say as a practitioner that these dynamics are very useful and insightful for clients to see the impact of certain limiting beliefs and behaviors.

leader can have on business performance. They also use this to introduce the larger leadership system built on the framework.

Chapter eight, *Reactive Leadership: An Insufficient Triumph of Development* begins a section of chapters that go into more depth and detail about the leadership journey. This chapter describes the nature of this stage of development, through a number of examples of how leaders came to realize that their behaviors were based on limiting assumptions based on safety rather than purpose. This is characterized as an anxiety management system where a problem or threat generates a fear, which leads to a reaction, which aims to alleviate the problem. The limitation of this structure is that once the problem goes down, so does the fear and thus the reaction. In the end, equilibrium is maintained and performance is limited.

Chapter nine, *Reactive Leadership at Work: From Patriarchy to Partnership* continues the theme set out in the previous chapter and links it to more in depth descriptions of the three main personality structures used in the reactive styles part of the TLCP. Based on Karen Horney's (1945) work, the TLCP framework describes complying, protecting and controlling orientations. The gifts or strengths of these are labeled heart, head and will. How these gifts get hung up on reactive operating structures is the key distinction they make. They also show how the natural outcomes of these reactive tendencies are to create patriarchal organizational systems and cultures.

Chapter ten, *Creative Leadership: Fulfilling the Promise of Leadership* moves on to the next stage of the journey. The journey to this stage is framed in terms of Joseph Campbell's (1991) description of the hero's journey. Once there, the process driving behavior is contrasted with the anxiety management system of the reactive mind as starting with purpose and vision, leading to passion and action. This virtuous cycle can enable sustainable growth. The restructuring of identity beliefs is shown to fuel this shift. This is also described in relation to how distinguishing the reactive elements and undertaking the practices described in the next chapter, a leader can move to the related area of the upper half (e.g. controlling can move to achieving).

Chapter eleven, *Six Leadership Practices: Spiritual Bootcamp for Leaders* does just as this title suggests; laying out six practices that all aim at supporting the developmental journey laid out in the previous chapters: Discerning purpose, distilling vision, knowing your doubts and fears, engage in authentic, courageous dialogue, develop intuition, open to inspiration and think systemically.

Chapter twelve, *Integral Leadership: Built for Complexity, Designed for Transformation* takes into account that a small but hopefully growing cadre of leaders are actually entering into this next stage, where they shift their relationship to not only leadership, but also to their sense of identity and understanding of the journey of development itself. Reference is made again to the stage score research, showing an aggregate profile of leaders who scored in this range as being highly in the upper creative half of the circle. Harvesting shadow elements of our identity is described as a key part of how the hero's journey shows up in this transition.

Chapter thirteen, *Unity: Journey's End, development Turned Upside Down* closes the book by questioning some of the very foundations upon which the framework is built. At the same time, it

points to the authors' sense of purpose and meaning behind all of the work they have done. Grounding in various spiritual traditions is referred to as a way to describe this stage where ego is not developed, but surrendered. Two arguments are made for development despite the description of unity consciousness as making all of this irrelevant. One is that you still need to live in the world and need to use a structure of mind compete with competencies etc. to do this. The second reason given is that only a mature ego can be surrendered.

Two appendixes close out the book, one listing all of the definitions of dimensions in TLCP. The second shows a long list of theorists whose work contributed to this integrated framework.

## **Discussion**

### **Kudos**

Given this brief and basic description of the book, what can be said about it? The claim of being an integrative framework is justified. My belief for this comes from thinking about what theories and practices are worth including in such an integration, if as noted in the introduction, there are 44 theories of leadership. After spending 20 years studying the field, I find that the theories covered in this book tend to address perspectives on the topic that I view as worthy of inclusion (although I can imagine some differences in emphasis of course). Given the pragmatic, practitioner orientation the book is aimed at, the framework does indeed integrate a great number of theories, models and research from both academics and practitioners in the field of leadership in a very elegant and useful manner. (The appendix mentioned above describes the work of over 50 theorists whose work has been integrated into this framework). A good description of this is found when they write that TLCP

and Universal Model integrate the best of Cognitive and Rational Emotive Psychology, within the Type framework at various Stages of Development, and relate all of this to what we have learned from the field of Leadership and Organizational Development about what works and what does not. (p. 198. Capitalization in the original).

One thing in particular that I want to give credit for is that Anderson and Adams do not fall prey to the typical tendency present in so many books in the field of creating a simple contrast between an old, bad version of leadership and a good new one we should all aspire to. Instead they lay out a clear developmental trajectory, how it applies to leadership and how each stage has its place and role in our growth and functioning as leaders. While this is not new, (in addition to the work of Torbert (2004) and Joiner and Josephs (2007) there is a growing body of leadership books based on developmental frameworks), they do a very good job of deeply developing and illustrating each stage, the transition processes and how they are relevant in a business context.

They also do a good job of presenting practices aimed to provide a good balance of challenge and support for leaders inspired by the vision and journey laid out in the book. While at first reading these practices can appear to fall prey to the critique Kegan (1994) makes of leadership literature by assuming a self-authoring mindset in order to achieve them, a closer reading shows that they are contextualized to actually help leaders use them as practices rather than as

prescriptions. As practices, they can be used as a tool for growth rather than a measure of a standard with implicit requirements.

As a package for business leaders and consultants, the book gets the core message across clearly. The development of leadership effectiveness, and with it improved business performance, is linked to personal growth and development. Not just development as a generic term, but as a specific path of maturing the structure running our meaning making capacity. Getting this message across so powerfully is, in my view, the core achievement of this book.

## Critiques

The critiques that arise for me need to be placed in context. As noted above, this book is written with a pragmatic lens. Not only that, I believe it is written primarily for an audience who the authors believe will read it with a conventional mind. The issues I have with the text are things that are more likely to appear relevant for a post conventional mind and or those with domain specific knowledge of adult development theory.

Along with this is a tension that I see goes along with the choice of writing style for the intended audience. I believe there is a desire to have greater market penetration for the core message of developmental growth being at the heart of leadership effectiveness than has been achieved by others. While I am happy to see this happen, I recognize that it comes with these certain tensions.

The primary framing for this tension for me is related to what Sara Ross (2008) wrote as the casual use of formal theories. Reading this text, there are sections of it where, to the knowledgeable eye, it could appear that the authors use theory casually. What I believe is more the case is that they use it implicitly and by not making sufficient acknowledgements of the tension that comes with simplifying for the intended audience, they leave themselves open to appear to the post conventional and domain knowledgeable mind that they use theory casually.

My first critique comes from tripping over some math when the authors begin describing their stage development research (p. 107). They use the work of Zenger and Folkman (2009) as a comparative set of research that also aims to understand the link between leadership effectiveness and business performance. The basic claim from both sources is that increases in leadership effectiveness as measured by a good 360 feedback instrument correlate powerfully with bottom line results, or increased profitability.

The question that arose for me was to what *degree* do “extraordinary leaders” (defined as performing at the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile or better on leadership effectiveness scores) actually bring these better results? Anderson and Adams claim a six-fold multiple for this. Digging around, I came to see that Zenger and Folkman (2014; 2009) talk about doubling profits. This difference of degree caught my attention and led to some extensive detective work to find its source. What I found was that Zenger and Folkman’s data on financial performance was reporting on the *average* per leader. This was only made explicit in their 2014 article, while in the earlier presentation of their research it was implied. Anderson and Adams interpreted the financial performance data as being an *aggregate* of the leaders’ performance in the lowest, middle and highest performing

categories. Thus this difference between average and aggregate led to the differences in degree I noted above. I am sure that the reality is even more complex, with many possible factors influencing business performance. However, it is clear, and makes sense, that increased leadership effectiveness translates into increased business performance.

Moving on to a second critique, I was also confused by some of Anderson and Adams' use of developmental labels and statistics on the distribution of leaders across developmental levels. One issue I had here is how the authors have presented claims around findings from "the field of Adult Stages of Development" (p. 107. Capitalization in the original), as if there is clear consensus among theorists in the field.<sup>8</sup> This makes it simple and clear for the conventional business reader for sure, but it also misrepresents the actual diversity and ongoing dialogue about how stage models are actually related to each other, where stages can be sliced and for what purposes, etc. The authors have done their homework and thought deeply about these issues; I know this from personal experience. A simple acknowledgement in the text that *they* have made decisions and judgment calls on how to put this diverse body of theories together instead of an appeal to the authority of "the field of adult stages of development" would have been nice and explicitly acknowledged their implicit role in the presentation of this material.

I have some smaller critiques as well. The degree of repetition in the book became a bit too visible for me at times. Not only were phrases and sections of text repeated, but many figures appeared more times than I felt were necessary to get the point across. In the end, I believe that the book could have been cut by one third and made all the points necessary to present the framework and journey in a comprehensive manner.

A critique can also be made around how they support their claims in relation to leadership effectiveness. In the broader field of leadership studies this construct has been researched extensively (see for example the work of Fiedler, Bolman, Hogan, Yukl and others). In the TLC framework, leadership effectiveness is constructed as a measure based on five questions that are part of every TLCP. A description of the sources drawn on for this set of questions is not included in the book, and something around how this key measure was constructed would have been helpful to support the core argument.

My final point of critique relates to the label "integrative framework" presented in this model. It is really an integration of two key elements; leadership effectiveness and consciousness development. Beyond this it also integrates a host of other theoretical influences. So it is integrative. Using the term *universal* goes beyond this. While Anderson and Adams do point to how cross cultural results lead them to claim this universality, the scope of work referred to in

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<sup>8</sup> They list their *creative* label as comparable with Cook-Greuter's *individualist* level and Kegan's *self-authoring* stage. My understanding is that Kegan's self-authoring is his 4<sup>th</sup> order, and that Cook-Greuter's (as well as Loevinger, Torbert, Joiner and Josephs, although with different labels) individualist level is equivalent with Kegan's 4/5 order. Kegan's 4<sup>th</sup> level is equated with the achiever stage in Cook-Greuter, Torbert and Joiner and Joseph's research.

In regard to the statistics of 20% being at the creative level or higher, again, I have seen diverse statistics around this, which are very much dependent on exactly where a person is deciding to slice things. I believe that the key is related to the above, the implicit choice that Anderson and Adams have made about how to position their creative dimension is key, yet how it is expressed could lead to confusion.

the opening remarks, along with a sense of *American* style of self-promotional language, (rubbing the wrong way on my Canadian and European sensibilities), give me the impression that the claim is a bit of a stretch.

## Conclusions

This book is clearly designed as a pragmatic approach for a mainstream practitioner market of leaders, those who want to be leaders in business and the coaches and consultants who work with them. For this audience, the claim to have found the “universal” model for leadership development will be on target. I believe it is a clear step up from the vast majority of approaches to leadership and its development on the market today. However, for those who are aware of the larger field of leadership studies, the claim to universality could irritate.

If I had been an editor for this book, there are some key things I would have strongly recommended to the authors. One would be to tone down or better frame their use of assertive language claims. A second involves the desire to see more polishing on the text in terms of clarity and better support for key aspects of the argument. Along with this, some explicit acknowledgment of their own judgment calls would help make the book that touch more solid it could use in places. The degree of repetition, while possibly helpful for some readers, could get tiring for others. I believe the same case could be made with only two thirds of the text and figures in the book.

None of these critiques take away from my perception that the book does manage to do what it sets out to; integrate key themes of leadership effectiveness and business performance with how they relate to the journey through maturing structures of cognitive development.

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