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## Notes from the Field: A “Weak Signal” About Leadership in 2010

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*A key component of our service offering for 2010 is a series of “weak signal” executive briefings (see the Special Announcement on the website this month for details).*

*We will be acting as “peripheral vision” for members of our new Private Client Network. Our job is look out into the near future and identify events or trends that we believe will significantly affect business operations. We will be an early warning system for external influences, paying particular attention to “weak signals” that may not appear to be critical today but will be impossible to ignore within 24 months. This Note is an excerpt from the first of those executive briefings..*

The weak signal we are currently receiving is that the existing set of knowledge, skills and experience of knowledge worker professionals is not adequate to meet business needs in the 2010-2020 timeframe.

Our research suggests that knowledge workers of the future must master core skills that promote innovation and collaboration as well as the ability to facilitate change in patterns of both thinking and doing. Understanding those skills and their implications for workplace design and support is an essential requirement for success in the workplace profession.

### **1. Systemic thinking: “What are we talking about?”**

You need new models of thinking that go beyond the traditional linear cause/effect logic. You will need the ability to perceive and interpret larger patterns of interactions among economic forces, political agendas, and process elements. Everything seems to be connected to everything else—because in many ways, it is.

Feedback loops, information flows, and attenuating and amplifying forces must be recognized. In addition you need to bring into focus an understanding of the relationships among levels of social organization (i.e., from the team level all the way up to industry groups). Today a team leader on the shop floor needs to understand the importance of national-level policy decisions made thousand of miles away.

### **2. Self-awareness: “What are we sure of?”**

Self-awareness is the new psychological competency. What do we know, how do we know it, and how do we test our perception of reality? Understanding (and accepting) the fact that we all have different ways of seeing the world is crucial to this competency. How does your world interact with mine?

Realizing your individual strengths and recognizing how they fit together with the different strengths of others gains in importance. So does an ability to assemble teams of people with complementary strengths—and to manage that delicate balance. Understanding your own way of interacting with information, people, and power relations will allow smoother and quicker reactions to changes in the environment.

### **3. Group processes: “What is possible for us?”**

This competency is a corollary to the previous one. Here we focus on the social psychological level of work. How do you influence the blending of power and status differences within a work group? What are the cultural differences that drive group behavior?

A group can only enter a state of high performance when these factors are in equilibrium.

And achieving that equilibrium requires an understanding of people’s basic motivations (are they here only for the paycheck?), any hidden agendas, and what really motivates people to levels of accomplishment that often they themselves don’t know they are capable of. This is a core leadership principle; everyone has to be a leader in some context.

### **4. Continuous learning: “How will the environment help and/or oppose our goals?”**

This competency is about “learning how to learn.” It will not be enough to depend on passive learning, which is rigidly scheduled. Professionals today need the ability to learn on their own—or to put themselves in learning situations *before* they require new knowledge.

Continuous learning also requires a genuine sense of anticipating the future. What do I need to be working on now so I am ready for tomorrow? Where can I get help? What things or people might get in my way? Attacking these questions will require you to be a members of several interlocking learning communities outside any formal educational system.

### **5. Bi-lateral Integration: “What is becoming necessary?”**

Perhaps the most difficult competency for Westerners to master is the ability to think logically and sense intuitively at the same time. Some have said that “genius” can be defined as the ability to hold two contradictory thoughts in your mind at the same time.

This kind of thinking goes well beyond the typical “right brain, left brain” idea. In a sense it is the Zen of thinking. At a practical level you may think of it as a “balanced scorecard” approach to performance management—paying simultaneous attention to several different dimensions of performance.

More recently we see this kind of integrative thinking skill emerging in “value-based management,” “Triple Bottom Line” models, and “Virtuous Organizations.” All of these management science approaches hold at their core an ability to integrate analytical and holistic thinking.

*Members of WDC’s Private Client Network receive reports like this one on at least a monthly basis, along with a detailed set of practical recommendations for action to leverage the trend for competitive advantage while minimizing any potential negative impacts.*

*Please [contact us directly](#) for information about our Private Client Network program and our 2010 research agenda, and to arrange a conversation about becoming a network member.*

### **About the Work Design Collaborative and *Future of Work Agenda***

*Future of Work* is a global network of resources – practitioners, thought leaders, researchers, and senior consultants – who are committed to building and implementing physical, social, and technology-based work environments that are cost-effective, socially and environmentally responsible, and personally satisfying.

We are focused on defining the future of work and helping our members and clients achieve new levels of workforce and workplace productivity. *Future of Work* produces and distributes management tools, surveys, benchmark databases, white papers and technical reports, conferences and workshops, newsletters, books and articles, and public presentations on the changing nature of work. The Work Design Collaborative, LLC, provides leadership and infrastructure services for the *Future of Work* community.

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