

1

The Connection

While the brain is but one organ among many in the human body, it is the source and the determiner of everything. Our understanding of the world changes in concert with the evolution of this delicate structure, which is unlike anything in the universe. Indeed, we understand the world the way we do at each of life's stages because of our brain. And yet, until lately, the brain jealously guarded its secrets. Only recently—with the development of powerful technologies—have we been successful in delving into the secrets of the Brain.

—Grubin (Restak, 2001, p. xvi)

The View From the Edge

The leadership connection to others has always traveled neural pathways because leadership is a phenomenon of the brain. At the edge of the twenty-first century, moreover, it is a connection that can and must be tightened. To involve your brain more directly regarding this point, reflect for a moment about whether the twenty-first century will: (1) become increasingly more challenging and complex, (2) expect and require more of human intelligence, and (3) place ever greater demands on leadership knowledge and skill.

Similar to completing a customs questionnaire when traveling abroad, your responses to the above projections were likely quick and consistent. It is fairly safe to assume that you anticipate a challenging future that will further raise the premium on the exercise of intelligence and leadership. This is not to suggest a pessimistic outlook, only what any informed adult living at this time in history might reasonably conclude—that the challenges that lie ahead will continually ask more of intelligence and leadership, rather than less.

Suffice it to say that early indicators suggest a bumpy ride. There is an ongoing threat of terrorism and war involving weapons of mass destruction. Scientific breakthroughs press issues of ethics and effects. The global economy suffers from political unrest, failed diplomacy, mismanagement, and greed. The environment continues to warm from abuses of production and consumption. Social and economic injustices strain political systems. Educational structures and programs are increasingly viewed as antiquated and inadequate. And, as if there was not enough on the agenda, our disposition to probe all facets of the universe continues to lure us into new explorations.

Is the future intimidating? Will humankind progress and prevail? At the edge of a future that only promises more complexity, is leadership as presently understood and practiced up to the task? It is with such questions in mind that a leader might pursue a tighter connection to the capacities that enable all human learning and achievement.

The Connection

More than anyone else, the boss creates the conditions that directly determine people's ability to work well.

—Goleman, Boyatzis,
and McKee (2002, p. 18)

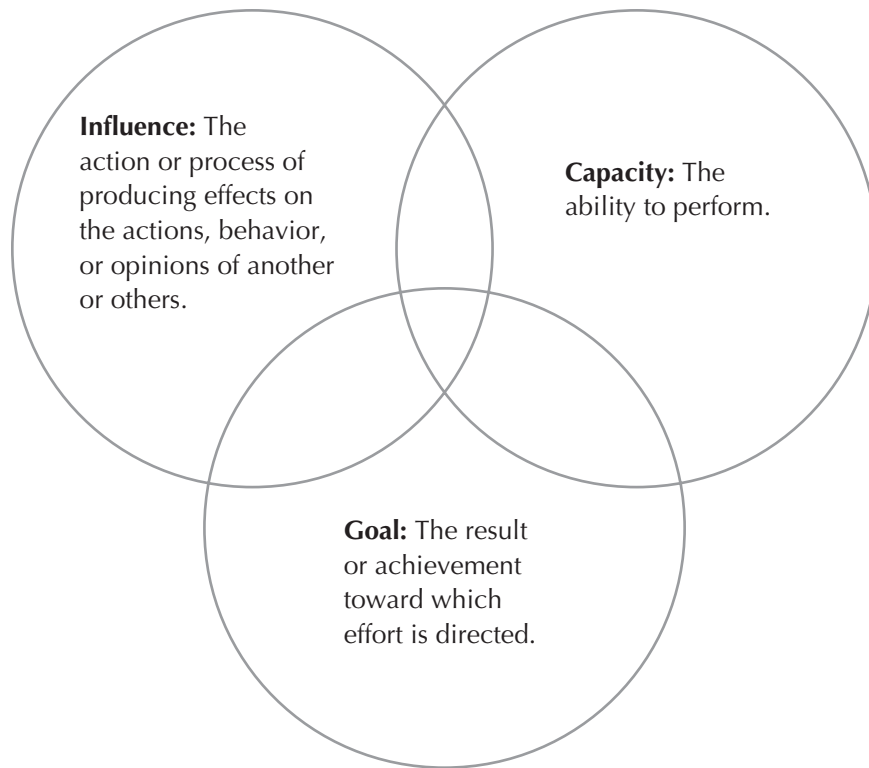
Leadership assumes a connection between leaders and others. It matters not who is the leader or what is the cause. One might look to the conquests of Alexander the Great or the humanitarian impact of Mother Teresa. Examples are as easily found in the everyday leadership of parents, teachers, coaches, clerics, politicians, and corporate officers. In every case, leadership is defined by a connection with others that produces results.

At its core, moreover, the leadership connection to others is a matter of influence and context—and the present context is providing extraordinary insight into the neural nature of the influence. This is the heart of the matter, the point that must not be lost if a deeper understanding of leadership is to be realized. *The brain has everything to do with who we are and what we do, and leadership is all about influencing who we are and what we do.* Thus, the leadership connection to others necessarily travels neural pathways.

A Matter of Influence

Leadership is a process of influencing others toward the achievement of a goal (Dickmann & Stanford-Blair, 2002). Numerous attempts to interpret

Figure 1.1 Elements of Leadership: A Process of Influencing Others Toward the Achievement of a Goal.



the nature of the phenomenon have produced many versions of this basic understanding. Most, nevertheless, acknowledge a fundamental process of influence occurring between two or more individuals toward the achievement of a goal (e.g., Burns, 1978; Rost, 1991; Northouse, 1997). Furthermore, while goals range and change, the basic elements of the process remain the same. Leadership—whether exercised by presidents or parents, individuals or groups—is always about developing, encouraging, facilitating, or otherwise influencing the capacity of others toward the achievement of a goal (see Figure 1.1).

This definitional matter is important to the content that follows for three reasons. First, it values clarity about goals. Second, it prompts leaders to pursue productive relationships with others (i.e., acknowledging that the leader cannot go it alone). Third, it implies that a leader should know a thing or two about the nature (i.e., the capacity) of the other(s) they aspire to influence. Indeed, it is this third point that encourages twenty-first-century leaders to access emerging knowledge about the nature of intelligence.

A Matter of Context

The leadership process stays the same while the goals range and change, but context directs the game. Change is a constant in nature and human systems. Abruptly or methodically, contexts inevitably shift, and so does leadership in response. Leaders adapt *how* they influence others to the context in which their influence is attempted. Accordingly, brute strength worked to influence others in the historical context of the cave. Similarly, the rule of the enlightened few over the ignorant masses fit the context of medieval times. There is little tolerance and even less rationale, however, for brutes and monarchs in modern history. Educated populations and sophisticated technologies create a context that favors brain over brawn and democracy over dictatorship. It is a context in which leaders influence others by communicating the merits of an idea or action—often employing sophisticated technologies in doing so. The phenomenon of leadership, then, is always a process of influencing others to achieve a goal, but the exercise of such influence must adapt to the context in which it is being exercised.

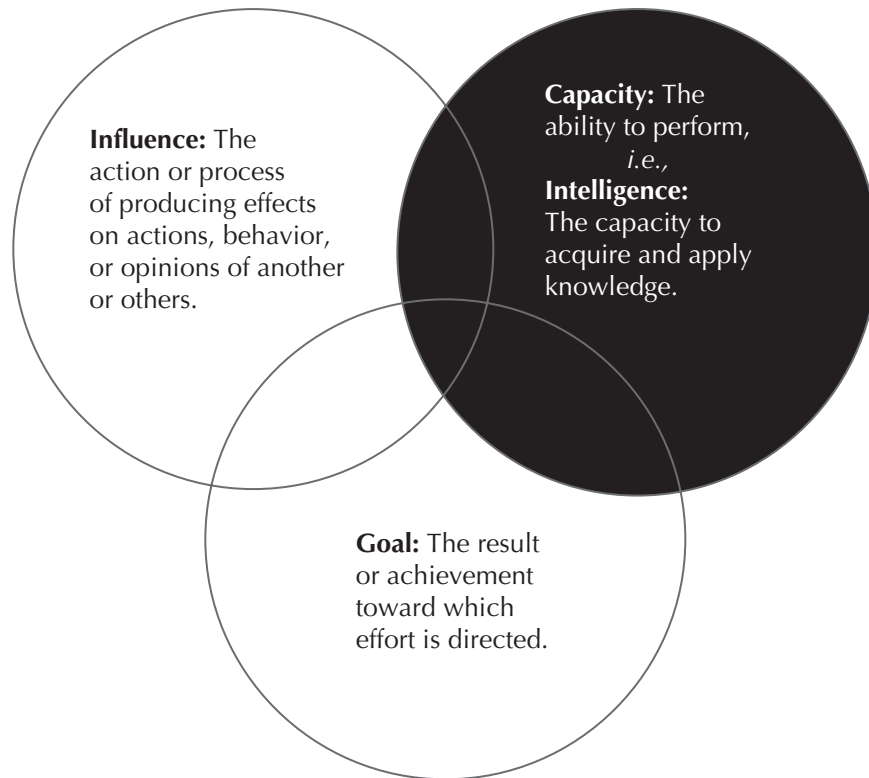
Case in point, emerging knowledge about the nature of intelligence holds promise for new understanding about how leaders might more effectively influence others toward goal achievement. It is a contextual opportunity born of scientific breakthroughs that are revealing the secrets of the brain and, thereby, opening the heretofore “black box” of intelligence. It is an extraordinary opportunity to know how the brain enables the capacities that leaders aspire to employ and influence—to understand the intelligence base that underlies all human ability to perform and achieve (see Figure 1.2.).

The importance of this context-enabled opportunity for a better understanding of the leadership connection to the brain might be all too obvious to some. It might also be a relationship, however, that is less understood and appreciated by most. After all, leaders might effectively influence others with only an intuitive sense of how their behavior is being processed through the brains of the group. Furthermore, meaningful scientific revelations about the nature of the brain and its intelligence qualities are of relatively recent vintage. Accordingly, a leader might be forgiven for not being steeped in knowledge about the nature and importance of the leadership-brain connection.

Tolerance of such ignorance, nonetheless, is inevitably limited by the leadership demands of the twenty-first century context—a context that calls for more effective alignment of leadership influence to the nature of human capacity for achieving compelling goals.

The brain is the immediate force behind who we are and what we do, and leadership is about influencing who we are and what we do. Accordingly, leaders necessarily influence others through neural pathways because the

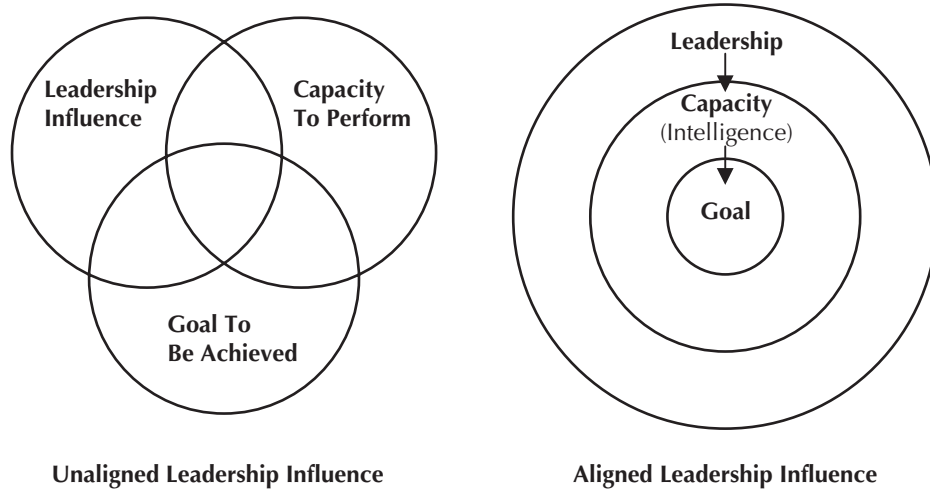
Figure 1.2 Perception of Intelligence as the Foundation of Capacity in the Leadership Process.



brain enables the multidimensional capacities that leaders connect to in self and others. There is no choice in this matter. Such connection inevitably occurs, whether intuitively or consciously, because qualities of intelligence are the means by which the brain creates mind and connects to other brains.

In summary, leadership influence on human capacity has historically relied on intuition and insight gained from trial and error. Breakthroughs in knowledge about the nature of human intelligence present an opportunity to alter that circumstance. More mindful (*i.e.*, attentive) alignment of the leadership process that marshals human resources toward the achievement of desired results is now possible. The knowledge of the twenty-first century enables a tightening of the leadership connection to the intelligence capacity that underlies all human achievement. It is a breakthrough opportunity that projects capacity-connected leaders—leaders who are more aligned in perception and practice to how individuals and groups best learn and achieve goals (see Figure 1.3).

Figure 1.3 Mindful Alignment of Leadership Influence to Capacity and Purpose



Reader Reflection

1. What is leadership?
2. What is intelligence?
3. What is the relationship between leadership and intelligence?