

2014

Leaders Make the Future: Ten New Leadership Skills for an Uncertain World [review] / Johansen, Bob

Kenneth Manders

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/jacl>

 Part of the [Leadership Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Manders, Kenneth (2014) "Leaders Make the Future: Ten New Leadership Skills for an Uncertain World [review] / Johansen, Bob," *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*: Vol. 8: No. 1, 113-116.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/jacl/vol8/iss1/13>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Applied Christian Leadership by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact repository@andrews.edu.

each organization's purpose was that leaders and members clearly and effectively conveyed to others the characteristics that made their organization and its purpose special, unique, or significant" (p. 43).

The Power of Invisible Leadership articulates how an unseen force exists within successful organizations—between leaders and followers, and between purposes and people. Hickman and Sorenson emphasize charisma of purpose as the motivating force of invisible leadership: "A democratic organization is clear about why it exists and where it is headed and what it hopes to achieve" (p. 43). Invisible leadership creates an environment in which all members of the organization can understand and be committed to its purpose and mission.

The Power of Invisible Leadership exemplifies leadership situations in which there is a dedication to a common purpose and a motivating force for guidance. While the authors' research is an excellent starting point for a discussion of the concept of invisible leadership, more research must be done before the ideas and concepts presented can be universally understood and accepted. Those without an existing knowledge of the foundations of leadership theory will need to engage in much additional study to understand concepts briefly referenced in beginning chapters. However, the authors bring a fresh perspective on the motivations that lead people to accept leadership roles and on the factors affecting their success. The passion elicited by a common purpose—invisible leadership—can cause organizations to succeed despite overwhelming setbacks and problems. Leaders who want to understand how commitment to a common purpose can benefit their organizations would do well to consider purchasing and reading *The*

Power of Invisible Leadership. Leaders of nonprofits such as churches and schools will recognize that invisible leadership is already present in their organizations and will benefit from a thoughtful consideration of how to help their organizations benefit more by focusing on the common purpose.

ROBERT L. OVERSTREET, M.A., is the principal of Andrews Academy in Berrien Springs, Michigan. Robert is also a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Leadership at Andrews University.

LEADERS MAKE THE FUTURE: TEN NEW LEADERSHIP SKILLS FOR AN UNCERTAIN WORLD

By Bob Johansen
San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler
(2012, 2nd edition)
Hardcover, 248 pages

Reviewed by KENNETH MANDERS

Leaders Make the Future speaks to this present time when the Western world is experiencing great uncertainty and perplexity accompanying the global economic downturn, high unemployment, industrial production sullied by ongoing pollution of the environment, and the consequent problems of global climate change. These challenges are accompanied by a wave of political and social unrest typified by the Arab Spring that leaves humanity with the sense that something more than a traditional approach by today's leaders will be needed to make the world a better place. The idea that leaders can take action now, and develop a skill set that will guide their organizations and communities to create a better future and make the world a better place, is indeed an idea whose time has come.

In his second edition of *Leaders*

Make the Future, author and futurist Bob Johansen, from the Institute for the Future, shares his forty years' experience of forecasting the future. For him, forecasting is about provocation, not prediction (p. 8). He consults with top executives across a number of industries and leverages socio-economic technology and demographic trends to analyze and identify the future-shaping forces of this world to forecast the future. From these insights he seeks to provoke thought leaders of business, governments, nonprofit organizations, and communities to develop the skills needed to address the challenges of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity in our world (VUCA).

The author sees four overarching messages from his forecast of the future:

1. Our VUCA World will get worse in the future.
2. The VUCA World will have both danger and opportunity.
3. In the VUCA World, leaders must learn new skills in order to make a better future.
4. The VUCA World will need more than traditional approaches to leadership development and executive training.

Johansen posits that leaders will need ten specific skills to not only survive but to thrive in our world's future. Johansen emphasizes the fourth skill, immersive learning, and weaves it thematically throughout the book. He states that "in order to increase their readiness and ability to make the future, leaders must immerse themselves in the future and return to the present ready to make a better future" (p. 3). The book is intended for the development of leaders who can constructively make timely actionable decisions on behalf of their organizations and communi-

ties and apply those decisions in the context of the rapidly approaching future.

Johansen, a social scientist and author, seeks to forge a link between forecasting the future and provoking the need for the development of the skill to meet that need. He shares how leaders can nurture those skills in themselves and in those they are privileged to lead through immersive learning and leadership development.

Johansen argues that while engineering and mechanical thinking drove the last economic era, the next era will be driven by biology—what we are starting to refer to as the global well-being economy, which includes sick-care, wellness, and all the various aspects of well-being, such as financial, social, physical, vocational, and spiritual. The author describes the skills, abilities, competencies, and traits that will fit together to create a leadership profile for the future, and concludes the book with personal guidelines for future leaders that focus on what the reader can do to be more prepared for the future which they have the potential to impact (p. 9).

The 10 leadership skillsets needed in the future are as follows:

1. *The Maker Instinct*: The ability to exploit your inner drive to build and grow things, as well as connect with others in the making.
2. *Clarity*: The ability to see through messes and contradictions to a future that others cannot yet see. Leaders must be clear about what they are making, but flexible about how it gets made.
3. *Dilemma Flipping*: The ability to turn dilemmas—which, unlike problems, cannot be solved—into advantages and opportunities.
4. *Immersive Learning*: The ability to immerse yourself in unfamiliar environments, to learn from them

- in a first person way.
5. *Bio-empathy*: The ability to see things from nature's point of view; to understand, respect, and learn from its patterns.
 6. *Constructive Depolarizing*: The ability to calm tense situations where differences dominate and communication is broken down—and bring people from divergent cultures toward positive engagement.
 7. *Quiet Transparency*: The ability to be open and authentic about what matters, without being overly self-promoting.
 8. *Rapid Prototyping*: The ability to create quick, early versions of innovations, with the expectation that later success will require early failures.
 9. *Smart-mob Organizing*: The ability to create, engage with, and nurture purposeful business or social change networks through intelligent use of electronic and other media.
 10. *Commons Creating*: The ability to seed, nurture and grow shared assets that can benefit all players—and allow competition at a higher level.

Because Johansen seeks to empower, and not to overwhelm people, he gives a positive definition of VUCA, which can be discovered by listening to and taking heed to the foresight. He believes that leaders must listen 10 years into the future and gain insight that can help to make the right decisions. In order to accomplish this, he says that leaders will need to have vision, understanding, clarity, and agility. Because the VUCA World is not unyielding, volatility can yield to vision, uncertainty can lead to understanding, complexity can yield to clarity, and ambiguity can yield to agility. Leaders, who are natural makers,

must have intuitive abilities to create a future for those they serve. This is the value of possessing the first skill, upon which all other skills are built. Good leaders cannot sit back and wait for things to happen; good leaders must position themselves to make things happen.

Those who lead in a VUCA world must develop a value-driven leadership that considers the long-term future of our resources, our environment, and the collective interests of others. Those who lead cannot do so successfully without connecting with the people, or without identifying with the common good of others. “The best leaders will not be isolated, but they will be ravenous networkers with active links all around the world” (p. 19).

The author's goal in writing the book is to help leaders make the world a better place. He acknowledges that many people are already living in a VUCA world—especially people on the wrong side of the rich-poor gap. He acknowledges a progressive widening of the gap of extreme imbalance in wealth that creates growing poverty and hunger, yet there is nothing in the book that suggests that leaders of the future are seeking to create a better world for victims of this disparity—the poor. If there are values in the ten suggested skills that leaders need to develop, there ought to be hope for those who are already living in the future VUCA world.

Leaders might obtain great value from reading this book. Those who wish to be well informed on the trends that affect this rapidly changing world will be challenged to stretch their leadership skills so that they can navigate their organizations through the VUCA of the future, and avoid the dangers of being unprepared. Johansen's think tank and his collaboration with the Center for

Creative Leadership provide a rich resource of professional wisdom on anticipating and creating a successful future for those they lead.

Any leader who wants to be successful, and who is not mired in tradition, will welcome the insights from Johansen's forecasting model. Responsible leaders will not want to be caught off guard in our rapidly changing world. The development of new leadership skills offered in *Leaders Make the Future* encourages leaders to keep their organizations on the cutting edge of innovation and success in our ever changing world.

KENNETH MANDERS is a pastor and conference administrator in the Bermuda Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and is a student in the Doctor of Ministry program at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary.