

CHAPTER 4

Beyond Paradoxes: Bifocal Thinking and Systems Intelligent Leadership

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This article discusses the inherent paradoxical nature of systems intelligent leadership. Systems intelligent leaders show a fluent ability to act as the situation calls for and exhibit bifocal thinking to transcend seemingly oppositional positions to exploit the emergent potential. Selected paradoxical aspects of systems intelligent leadership are highlighted: acting intelligently without knowing the system completely, balancing control and emergence, and demonstrating utmost selflessness along with stern resolve. The article concludes that seeing beyond different kinds of paradoxes is at the heart of both systems intelligent thinking and leadership.

Introduction

[G]reat leaders ... are like chameleons, capable of adapting to the demands of the situation they face and the people they lead, yet they do not lose their identities in the process. ... [They] remain focused on where they are going but never lose sight of where they came from. (Goffee and Jones 2005, p. 88)

Leadership is a paradoxical discipline. Some of the most outstanding leaders are signified with the ability to think in pluralist ways, to reach beyond what seems the most obvious, and to exhibit seemingly contradictory behaviour. In what has emerged as a novel opening towards conceiving human systems, the systems intelligence initiative has set out to study “intelligent behaviour in the context of complex systems involving interaction and feedback” (Hämäläinen and Saarinen 2006) with the aim to enhance the human interaction systems we are involved in daily. As leaders have as their main task to make people capable of joint performance and to guide and change human systems, systems intelligence is as such relevant for leadership. We hold that systems intelligent leadership is synonymous with good leadership by making things work better and explore in this article the paradoxical nature of this discipline.

Lewis (2000, p. 760) defines paradox as denoting “contradictory yet interrelated elements – elements that seem logical in isolation but absurd and irrational when appearing simultaneously”. She notes that a paradox holds an “enlightening potential” and this can be captured by managing the paradox. According to Lewis there are three key ways of doing this:

acceptance, confrontation, and transcendence. While acceptance simply means learning to live with the paradox and confrontation making the paradox more understandable, transcendence connotes a capacity to think paradoxically. Lewis points out that to think paradoxically transcends traditional first-order thinking or “slight alterations to the logic and behaviors ... used in the past” to second-order thinking that involves “critically examining entrenched assumptions to construct a more accommodating perception of opposites”. The transcendental capability, ability to think paradoxically, resembles closely the ability to see beyond simplistic symptomatic solutions (Senge 1990) that only postpone the real problem. This bifocal¹ quality, we propose in this article, is at the heart of systems intelligent leadership.

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The structure of the article is as follows. We start by briefly reviewing the most relevant notions of the systems intelligence framework for our discussion. Next, leadership is discussed as an inherently bifocal discipline. After this, selected paradoxes of systems intelligent leadership are treated, using three renowned US military leaders during World War II (George S. Patton Jr, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and George C. Marshall) as case examples of systems intelligent leadership in action. The article ends with concluding remarks.

The Systems Intelligence Framework

Systems intelligence is defined as intelligent behaviour in the context of complex systems involving interaction and feedback (Hämäläinen and Saarinen 2006), more specifically, in the context of human interaction systems. It is a concept coined by Professor Raimo P. Hämäläinen of Helsinki University of Technology, and driven further by research initiative facilitated by Hämäläinen and Professor Esa Saarinen. The initiative could be summarized as “an effort to combine human sensitivities with engineering thinking that approaches matters with the idea of making things work” (Hämäläinen and Saarinen 2004, p. 3). The initiative has its roots most notably in the work of Peter Senge (1990) but at the same times holds that systems intelligence goes a step further in recognizing the importance of perceiving what could be better instead of what is wrong currently. Along with the definition given above, it should be noted that systems intelligence evades a definite description; Hämäläinen and Saarinen (2006) propose it to be a general capability all humans have. Therefore, to supplement the general definition, a number of elaborations of the concept have been provided. Here we refer to two works which capture some of the essentials of the systems intelligence framework, needed as an important background for this article.

Saarinen and Hämäläinen (2004) provide the so far single best complete account on the systems intelligence perspective. Some takeaways of this article for our discussion are:

- Systems intelligence is about betterment in human life by enhancing the human interaction systems.
- Systems intelligence is based on the notion that minimal input can amount to unexpectedly large outcomes when the inputs are directed at the crucial points.

In a more recent work, Hämäläinen and Saarinen (2006) emphasize, among other things, that:

¹ The succinct term “bifocal” is adopted from Deal and Peterson (1994).

- Key aspect of systems intelligence is thinking intelligently while acting.
- One has to act without complete prior knowledge of the system.

The overarching feature in these two selected accounts is the focus on improvement of human systems by conscious actions of an individual. This makes systems intelligence a relevant perspective for the art of leadership.

Leadership as an Inherently Bifocal Discipline

The basic function of leaders of an organization is to make people capable of joint performance (Drucker 2005, p. 4). Kotter (1988) holds that leadership refers to the “process of moving a group ... of people in some direction through (mostly) noncoercive means” (ibid., p. 16) and that good leadership accomplishes this movement to a direction that is genuinely in the real long-term best interest of people (ibid., pp. 16–17). In doing so, the leader has according to Kotter, two main tasks: (1) to create the agenda for change and (2) to build a strong implementation network for the change. Kotter’s position of leadership is synonymous to accomplishing change. But this is not a surprise; more often than not great leaders are associated with changes they have pulled through – for example societal reformers such as Gandhi and Martin Luther King, or business transformers and captains of industry such as Alfred P. Sloane (Gardner 1995). Gardner (ibid., pp. 8–9) for his part defines leaders as “persons who by word and/or personal example, markedly influence the behaviors, thoughts, and/or feelings of a significant number of their fellow human beings”. Leaders, then have as their main task to influence people and set a shared goal and a vision, and in essence, to provide meaning. At the same time leaders have the responsibility of keep things up and running. Jack Welch, the legendary CEO of General Electric acknowledged this in a MIT seminar by noting that one of the paradoxes of leadership is “managing short and thinking long” (MIT 2005).

Collinson (2005) observes that typical distinction made in the leadership literature is between leaders and followers. While citing briefly a range of other “apparently opposing binaries” – such as rationality/emotion, theory/practice, quantitative/qualitative, and local/global – Collinson recognizes how on the one hand we as humans need simplifications to understand the world, but on the other hand, in complex situations black-and-white thinking leads to problems. Among these lines emerges Collinson’s main thesis: a dialectical perspective can facilitate new ways of thinking about complex, shifting dynamics of leaderships. The dialectical approach “focuses on the simultaneous interdependencies and asymmetries between leaders and followers as well as their ambiguous and potentially contradictory conditions, processes and consequences” (Collinson ibid., p. 1422).

Collinson thus proposes, instead of a new dichotomy, thinking leadership as a dynamic phenomenon incorporating the various dualisms. This call is voiced also by Fairhurst (2001) who observes through study of several fields in leadership communication research how each field uses some kind of dualism and is in favour for one polar end. Fairhurst (ibid.) concludes that to understand leader–follower communication better, a systemic view – with dualistic (in our terminology bifocal) thinking that perceives “both opposing poles ... important regardless of how visible or dominant either pole might be” – is needed.

Leadership, the two cultures, and the challenge of bifocal thinking

Snow (1959) put forth the famous proposition of a great divide between two cultures, the “sciences” and the “literary intellectuals”. Sciences, especially physical sciences in Snow’s address, are typified by rational, objectivist thinking but also admirable optimism as scientists are

“impatient to see if something can be done: and inclined to think that it can be done, until it’s proven otherwise” (ibid., p. 7). Literary intellectuals, on the other hand, represent the “traditional culture”, which can be interpreted more generally as the humanities. Be the division into two cultures, “technical” and “humane”, if you will, an oversimplification or not, it still remains a powerful metaphor of the classic division between the objectivist and subjectivist perspectives, discussed for example in the seminal Burrell–Morgan grid (Burrell and Morgan 1979).

Now, of particular interest for the argument developed here, is Drucker’s (2005) insightful remark: he regards that management² as a discipline stands in both of Snow’s cultures. On the one hand, then, leadership, immersed heavily in action and application, and as having results as the ultimate test, is clearly a technology and thus part of the objectivist approach. However, dealing with people and his values, growth, and development, the leadership-discipline is at home also among the subjectivist perspective. Thus it seems apparent that leadership has a strong embedded dualism: the combination of technical and humane aspects of human life. Successful leadership, it then can be argued, is a result of bifocal thinking – a successful balancing act between two seemingly opposing positions, utilizing the best of the both worlds without reverting to downplaying the role of either.

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Bifocal thinking, however, is not easy, as Gardner (1995) shows. He offers a plausible description of the development of human mind in relation how we as humans learn to deal with the paradoxes of life. Gardner proposes that we pass through four phases in our development (ibid., pp. 43–45):

- (1) Rigid dualism
- (2) Fair to a fault
- (3) Revels in relativism
- (4) Personal integration

The first phase, *rigid dualism*, Gardner associates broadly with the mind of a “five year old” (note that the ages given in the model are illustrative, rather than definite). The mind of the five year old is connoted with a strict Manichean view: things are perceived as either extremely good or extremely bad. There is no understanding for the “bad view” because it is fundamentally flawed. The second phase, *fair to a fault*, is associated with the mind of a “ten year old”. In this perception, the beholder has an unwavering belief in the righteousness of own view, but can to a certain extent acknowledge some aspects of the opposing viewpoint. Further in the model an “adolescent fifteen-year” old *revels in relativism*. In this phase the mind is at an extreme polar end towards “rigid dualism”. The fifteen-year old perceives that every issue can be conceptualized from multiple viewpoints – no view is any better or worse than any other. Finally, at the fourth phase *personal integration* takes place. Within this view, resembling the mind of an average mature adult, there is an awareness of relativity of values; at the same time, however, the individual arrives at a single position that dominates other positions.

There are two important takeaways from Gardner’s model. Firstly, Gardner notes that although he describes the four stages with illustrative age-anchors, even adults may, and indeed do, resort to other phases, most notably rigid dualism. This is according to Gardner especially true for

² Drucker’s use of the word “management” is interpreted here in the meaning of “the collective body of those who manage or direct an enterprise” (Webster 1986).

grown ups in a field where one is not an expert. Ignorance leads easily to bipolar views and taking extreme sides. And the choice of side might well be ideology based, rather than purely rational. Secondly, we as humans tend to hold a position over others. Otherwise we become inoperative. If we just “revel in relativism” we end up in endless “on the one hand – on the other hand” pondering and get nothing ever done. This last point is extremely important for this discussion on paradoxes. It alludes on the challenges to transcend paradoxes; it takes effort to cope at the same time with seemingly contradictory positions. Bifocal thinking masters this.

The manager—leader distinction and leadership with behavioural complexity

A classic dualism in the leadership literature is the manager—leader distinction. Deal and Peterson (1994), studying paradoxes in school leadership, concretize this by stating that the paradox of good school principal is to be both a “technical engineer” and a “spiritual artist”. At the same time the leader has both to manage administrative details and to depict a vision for the organization.

The distinction between leaders and managers is besides prominent, also ambiguous. Buchanan and Huczynski (1997) observe that while the terms “manager” and “leader” are closely related and overlapping, using them interchangeably would be an oversimplification. The classic distinction made between these two concepts is that while a manager is seen as an “operator”, “technician”, “fixer”, and “problem-solver”, a leader is perceived as a “visionary”, “prophet”, “catalyst” and “mover-shaker” (Buchanan and Huczynski *ibid.*, p. 594). Kotter (1988) also holds in accord that management and leadership are not mutually exclusive, while on the other hand he submits that there is a clear distinction: management is, compared to leadership, more administration oriented, more tool-oriented, and a more copyable set of practices.

The classic behavioural division is made between people oriented (democratic) and task oriented (autocratic) leadership (Buchanan and Huczynski 1997, p. 598). However, the contemporary leadership theories suggest, as do Deal and Peterson (1994), that there is no one universally best leadership style, but the appropriate style depends on the context and thus effective leaders are both people and task oriented – leader needs to get the job done while at the same time maintain group relationships (Buchanan and Huczynski *ibid.*, p. 598, p. 625).

Denison et al. (1995) call this multiplicity of behavioural schemes “behavioural complexity”, defined as “the ability to exhibit contrary or opposing behaviors ... while still retaining some measure of integrity, credibility, and direction” (*ibid.*, p. 526). Denison et al. propose that good leaders fit their behaviour with the context. Collecting data from 176 executives (both from their subordinates and superiors), the authors compare how well and poor performing executives compare in terms of behavioural complexity. The outcome of their study verifies their main proposition: successful leaders show a greater variety of leadership roles than less successful ones. Thus when needed, good leaders can be both coordinators and innovators, and both mentors and directors, for example. The particular strength of the Denison et al. paper is that they subject the leadership paradox under empirical test. Behavioural complexity is, however, only one aspect of leadership paradox. As the authors themselves note, further studies would do well by examining other paradoxes, such as symbolic vs. literal dimensions of leadership.

Systems Intelligent Leadership in Action

We have so far posited that leadership as an art and practice incorporates both objectivist and subjectivist approaches, being both a technique and a humane art, and making it thus an inherently bifocal discipline. Successful leaders employ bifocal thinking and express behavioural complexity, being proficient to surpass seeming dualisms and incorporate versatile action schemes. Next we turn to case examples of successful leaders and use selected features of their leadership to discuss the more profound features of leadership paradoxes, perceived through the framework of systems intelligence. The key source used to supply case material is Edgar F. Puryear's (1981) insightful analysis of the leadership styles of several US generals during World War II. Puryear uses as his sources military memoirs and biographies of prominent people during World War II; in addition, Puryear has interviewed well over 100 people, who in Puryear's own words "comprise the 'who's who' of [US officers during] World War II". As Puryear stands as an account of its own, we refer directly to Puryear and not to his sources.

More specifically, in what ensues we examine three US generals in their most prominent World War II roles: George S. Patton Jr (1885–1945), the commander of the US Third Army from August 1944 to November 1945, his superior Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890–1969), Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in the European war scene, and George C. Marshall (1880–1959), the US Army Chief of Staff. Eisenhower later became the 34th President of the United States, Marshall the US Secretary of State, father of the post World War II Marshall Plan for the reconstruction of Europe, and a Nobel laureate for peace³.

General George S. Patton Jr: "Forward, [intelligent] action at any cost"

One of the more profound paradoxes of systems intelligent leadership is the fact that one should act, without knowing completely the system within which the action should occur and without the benefit of a complete solution. This being a (seeming) paradox stems from dualistic thinking that separates solution and action, presupposing the first to enable the latter. But if we were to demand complete solution before we could move an inch forward, we would be sitting put long after the window of opportunity is gone. Systems intelligent leadership sees no controversy in acting without a complete solution. The reason is the bias towards the existence of a solution, the Snowian optimism of a scientist "to think that it ... can be done, until it's proven otherwise" (Snow 1959, p. 7). And while the existence of solution is certain, the complete solution as such, *ex ante*, may not be at hand.

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George S. Patton Jr, the legendary and controversial general in the US Army during World War II, is *the* embodiment of call to action. "A good solution applied with vigor now is better than perfect solution applied ten minutes later" is only one of the many proverbs accounted to Patton (Province 1995, p. 21). To acknowledge Patton's ferocious predisposition towards action, Puryear (1981) even entitled a chapter on Patton in his book as: "Forward, action at any cost".

³ The information in this passage on Patton, Eisenhower, and Marshall is from Wikipedia. See the list of references.

One particular instance where Patton was true to his principle was the swift change of direction of attack during the Battle of the Bulge or the Ardennes Offensive⁴. In the late 1944 the Germans made their last desperate effort to change the course of war and succeeded gaining some results, most notably surrounding US troops in the Ardennes region. Patton, operating his Third Army south from this area saw quickly the possibilities he could do with his Third Army to mitigate the situation – to move contingencies unexpectedly fast to the Ardennes. After a joint meeting with generals and acceptance by General Eisenhower, Patton executed the bold move, and to the astonishment of all, succeed to move the bulk of his army – 250 000 operationally capable troops – to the scene of action, with the first divisions attacking in only less than 48 hours after the decision to start the operation. With this move Patton showed that despite the uncertainties of war, one has to act. He saw vital to produce a response and that at this occasion helped to solve the crisis and beat off the Germans.

However, Patton's action, although produced in an exceptionally short time, was not rash. Or as Patton puts it "haste and speed are not synonymous" (Province 1995, p. 42). The point is that Patton had a strong intuition on what he was doing. He had devoted all his life to the study of military arts and owned, except for General MacArthur, the largest private collection of related literature, over 7000 volumes (Puryear 1981, p. 382). In one instance Patton compared himself as a military leader to a surgeon who in the course of operation needs to make decisions – ones based on "knowledge, experience, and training" (Puryear *ibid.*, p. 382). The task of systems intelligent leader then becomes to act, without knowing the complete solution, but to act intelligently.

General Dwight D. Eisenhower: Balancing control and emergence

The paradox of "balancing control and emergence" has it that a leader has to both keep things in control and on the other hand delegate to subordinates. For a systems intelligent leader the paradox takes a slightly alternative meaning: as systems intelligence relies heavily on emergence, letting things develop on their own, inducing action only perhaps with slight push, the systems intelligent leader balances giving inputs and pushes while letting the system operate on its own. Military leadership at its best can be thought of demonstrating this wise balance of control and emergence. The key is that leaders on the one hand keep the ultimate responsibility themselves and at the same time employ trusted subordinates that are given all the necessary leeway to operate.

Puryear's (1981) analysis provides us with material on this balancing act, as employed by General Eisenhower. First note how Eisenhower was very careful in selecting his staff as he told them:

You are handpicked experts in your fields. I expect you to get your jobs done without supervision. Otherwise, I made a mistake in selection. (Puryear 1981, p. 212, citing Eisenhower)

Eisenhower's principle of giving leeway to trusted subordinates is further elaborated with the expressive anecdote reported by General Alvan C. Gillem Jr. Gillem was out of his headquarters, taking a few days off after the heavy fights during the Ardennes Offensive. However, while on his short vacation, Gillem received a notification that Eisenhower had turned up on a surprise inspection visit and rushed back to the headquarters:

... and as I arrived General Eisenhower and several staff officers emerged. I reported and stated my regrets at not being present to meet him when he arrived. He informed me, with a

⁴ This account is based on Blumeson (1985).

broad smile, that his visit was unexpected, and that, as a matter of fact, it was better to inspect a Headquarters when the Commander was away, for if it could not function under such circumstances it was not efficient. He further stated he was eminently satisfied and that he would not return, that he had obtained the viewpoint he wanted and that he regretted he must leave. He congratulated on my command and expressed his pleasure at what he had seen of the conduct of the Corps during the recent battle. We shook hands and he departed. That was the last time I heard from him or his Headquarters until the final days on the Elbe River. (Puryear 1981, pp. 226–227, citing General Gillem)

Two points should be noted. First, the principle that a well functioning system operates smoothly without its leader and the success of a leader is measured to the extent the system can cope without his direct supervision. Gillem had conceived his staff as such a system, and Eisenhower, a man supporting this principle was apt to acknowledge Gillem's competence as a systems intelligent leader. Second, Eisenhower never again returned to inspect Gillem. With the visit he obtained further corroboration that Gillem was a capable commander and the best thing to do would be not to disturb him.

But while providing leeway to his commanders, Eisenhower was strict to control critical issues himself. The decision on the specific time of the Normandy invasion in the summer of 1944 is a good case in point. Puryear (1981) cites the story of how Eisenhower finally made this decision, touching directly the lives of 2 million soldiers in the attack force and indirectly millions of people more. The particular question was whether or not to launch the main attack in the early hours of June 6th. However, the weather, perceived as playing a crucial role in the success of the operation, was not looking very promising.

The meteorologists were brought in at once. There was the ghost of smile on the tired face of Group Captain Stagg, the tall Scot. "I think we have found a gleam of hope for you, sir," he said to General Eisenhower, and we all listened expectantly. "The mass of weather fronts coming in from the Atlantic is moving faster than we anticipated," the chief meteorologist said and he went on to promise reasonable weather for twenty-four hours. Ike's advisers then started firing rapid questions at the weather man. When they had finished asking questions there was a silence which lasted for a full five minutes while General Eisenhower sat on a sofa before the bookcase which filled the end of the room. **I never realized before the loneliness and isolation of a Commander at a time when such a momentous decision has to be taken, with full knowledge that failure or success rests on his judgment alone.** He sat there quietly, not getting up to pace with quick strides as he often does. He was tense, weighing every consideration of weather as he had been briefed to do during the dry runs since April, and weighing them with those other imponderables. Finally he looked up, and the tension was gone from his face. He said briskly, "Well, we'll go!" (Puryear 1981, pp. 357–358, citing General Walter B. Smith, emphasis added)

We thus see how Eisenhower balanced control and emergence, making the critical decisions himself, having trusted people as subordinates, and leaving them to handle the systems themselves. He supported emergence from these sub-systems to the overall system and showed accordingly an application of a systems intelligent thinking model.

General George C. Marshall: Dynamic humility

Selflessness is a key ingredient of good leadership, but is not as such enough: truly outstanding leaders combine selflessness with exceptionally bold personal perspective. This is the paradox of

“dynamic humility”⁵, which, for a systems intelligent leader is no more paradoxical than seeing the both sides of the coin, or acting as the situation demands. The utmost selflessness while retaining own identity and driving own agenda is the ennobling feature of great leaders.

The paradox of dynamic humility is vividly elaborated by Collins (2001). He studied 11 good-to-great companies – companies that had sustained a shift to a higher level of cumulative stock returns over a prolonged period – and by means such as comparing them to a comparison group – 11 similar companies that had not sustained such a shift – aimed to explain the reasons for their success. Based on the extensive 5-year study, Collins concludes that the key factor is “level 5 leadership”, leadership that “blends extreme personal humility with intense professional will”. The level 5 leader is both “modest” and “willful”, both “shy” and “fearless”; “compelling modesty” is blended with “stoic resolve to make decisions”. The CEO of one the “good-to-great” companies in the study, Darwin Smith of Kimberley-Clark, Collins describes as having “lack of pretense”, and “fierce, even stoic resolve towards life”. In essence, the level 5 leaders have ambitions for their companies, not for themselves, and with their extreme humility they leave behind a company that will be great also without them.

George C. Marshall, who in numerous instances put the advantage of the nation before his personal one, is a fine example of dynamic humility in action⁶. Marshall was an exceptional staff officer – starting from World War I he displayed astonishing proficiency in administering war operations, resulting in his fast ascendance in ranks. However, Marshall’s true aspiration was field command; he wanted to be where the action is. But Marshall never objected his superiors’ opinions when time after time they assigned him to – ever more demanding – staff positions, leading eventually him becoming during World War II the highest ranking staff officer in US Army, the army Chief of Staff. One of the most startling acts of his selflessness is illustrated through the selection process of Supreme Command, the selection of the leader who would command the allied forces in Europe, with the first major task of pulling through the invasion to the continental Europe in 1944. Marshall was the prime candidate. US President of the time, F.D. Roosevelt, expressed thoughts that it would surely be the position for Marshall, besides him being the most capable one of bringing the task down, it would be for Marshall the time he could rise from relatively unknown man in the back to the limelight and claim a position as one of the great generals in history. But it was decided otherwise. After deliberation, key people in Washington, including Roosevelt, arrived at the inevitable conclusion that no one could par Marshall as a chief of staff and that the staff operations would be severely crippled with Marshall’s absence. All in all: Marshall “was too important to the harmony of the Joint and Combined Chiefs organizations to be spared”. It followed:

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Then the President [Roosevelt] announced his decision. He told General Marshall, “I’ve been thinking this matter over and have decided that I will keep you as Chief of Staff and put Eisenhower in as head of Overlord [the code-name for the Normandy invasion].” Marshall accepted the President’s decision **without displaying any emotion**. He discussed the meeting with McCloy [Assistant Secretary of War], right after it had taken place, and McCloy observed that Marshall **did not “seem as he were a very greatly disappointed man”**. But Stimson [Secretary of War] averred that “I think I know better. I know his deepest ambition

⁵ The term was inspired by Hämäläinen and Saarinen’s (2006) term “dynamic humbleness”.

⁶ The following account on Marshall is based on Puryear (1981).

in his heart is [sic] and it was to command the invasion to France. It was **simply his matchless power of self-sacrifice and self-control that gave the other expression**. (Puryear 1981, p. 342, quotations drawn from Stimson's diary, emphasis added)

We should note two crucial aspects in this passage. First, the obvious. Marshall was the embodiment of selflessness. More than anything in the world, he would have liked to have the position of Supreme Command. However, he at the same time realized painfully clearly that he truly was indispensable in the position of Chief of Staff, and that the system would be much better off him remaining at the position. Secondly, he did this selfless act without a noise; he did not put up a scene. Nor he did he go from people to people to tell his story and let everybody know how selfless he was. No, right after the decision he had a conversation and "did not 'seem as he were a very greatly disappointed man'". With this Marshall touched the core of proficient systems intelligent leadership: holding the interest of the system as paramount. Marshall, operating with utmost humility, would only have broken the harmony by behaving in another manner.

Now, the other side of the coin, the paradox if you will. Marshall was amazingly bold in his perceptions, and he would be the least to be accused of being a yes-man towards his superiors. An example of this is given by Puryear (1981):

One afternoon, shortly after he had become Chief of Staff, Marshall returned from a meeting in the White House and told a member of the his staff, "I probably will not be Chief of Staff tomorrow." It seems that he had just crossed the President by insisting that the heads of the aircraft industry must be made aware of the fact that the international situation was extremely serious and that they had to give first priority to the defense of the country. The uncooperative attitude of many aircraft industry executives had reached the point where something had to be done. "The President", said General Marshall, "was quite perturbed at my forthright stand." (Puryear 1981, p. 89)

Marshall was, of course, kept in his position. Puryear's opinion is that "[n]o more than Marshall himself did Roosevelt want be served by yes men". In another example, Puryear (1981) describes vividly Marshall's fierce resolve, how he had high expectations for his sub-ordinates and was apt to throw aboard those who would not live up with them.

General Marshall was always an active thinker and it was a sore point with him that many of his fellow officers were not. He often said, "Give me an officer who can and will think for himself. Deliver me from the lazy thinker." He was patient with officers and enlisted men with limited capabilities for thinking and reasoning, but very tough on those who had ability but failed to use it. ... With his talent for analyzing the capacities of his men, he could quickly recognize the "dead beat" and was equally quick in dealing with them. (Puryear 1981, p. 99)

We arrive at the conclusion that Marshall would clearly have had the capacity to object his superiors, and with his admirable persuasion skills and impenetrable argumentation that earned him his good reputation, he could have run for the position of Supreme Command. But he did not. He chose to support the system. This is systems intelligent leadership in action.

To reflect, some explanations on the rationale of dynamic humility can be found from the works of Ury (1991) and Gintis et al. (2005). Ury (ibid.) suggests an ingenious way to success in negotiations. The essence could be summarized as holding one's own interests while seeing the whole system and thus the other's point of view – an act of combined selfishness and selflessness, or as Ury puts it "letting them have *your way*" (ibid., p. 10, emphasis in original). In Ury's model the wise negotiator has clear objectives for the negotiation but at the same time is prepared to

bend. The overarching economics stems from increasing the size of the pie by having a win-win resolution by “joint problem solving” instead of ferocious pie-sharing and win-lose battles.

Gintis et al. (ibid.), on the other hand, report how people do not just maximize their own profit but behave altruistically, having sympathy for others. The authors cite numerous experiments that have shown this to be the main case in human interactions. Perhaps the most striking observation comes from the so called ultimatum game: in an experimental setting involving two people (a giver and a receiver) with the game of dividing a fixed amount of money by way of one player (the giver) proposing a distribution scheme, and the other (the receiver) either accepting the scheme, in case both have their money as per the proposed and accepted scheme, or rejecting the scheme, when both get nothing, the givers do not offer minimum possible share to the receivers, neither do the receivers accept any minimum amount proposed. People thus seem to work from certain inherent aspect of collectivism, summarized by Gintis et al. (ibid.) as the notion of strong reciprocity, or the “predisposition to cooperate with others, and to punish (at personal cost, if necessary) those who violate the norms of cooperation, even when it is implausible to expect that these costs will be recovered at a later date” (p. 8). In essence, Gintis et al. argue quite compellingly that acting in an unselfish way in fact makes sense.

To summarize, Marshall demonstrated both extreme selflessness towards the system and unwavering resolve to defend his own position – the combination termed here as dynamic humility. This systems intelligent perspective operates with a stern resolve to use personal actions to improve the surrounding systems. Marshall was fluent in combining a key dilemma within systems: seeing the system and operating from the system perspective while retaining own identity and being an active actor to enhance the system.

Concluding Remarks

This article has discussed the important role of paradoxes within the systems intelligence perspective. Rather than providing an all-encompassing taxonomy of paradoxes, we hope to have demonstrated that when examining leadership in general, and leadership with systems intelligent stance in particular, one is prone to face paradoxes but at the same time, these seeming dualisms should not overwhelm the student of systems intelligent leadership. On the contrary, the primary goal should be the transcendence of the paradoxes – that is, to incorporate fluent bifocal thinking. Systems intelligent leadership does this, along with the expression of behavioural complexity – acting as the current situation calls for, in order to make things work better.

Bifocal thinking is just a representation of one fundamental principle in the systems intelligence framework: thinking system-wise one step beyond. When an initial position is critically evaluated by thinking a bit further about the systemic consequences, one is expressing bifocal thought. The challenge becomes to sustain this skill fluently. Great leaders strive continually towards this pluralist point of view, for every seeming paradox hides a potential. While single-minded dualism is prone to prefer dogmatically one way over other, bifocal thinking opens up new possibilities and avenues for higher-order productivity within human interaction systems. Having said this, we conclude by stressing that bifocal thinking is only part of the systems intelligent framework. Leadership with systems intelligence incorporates the continuous and active aspiration towards better systems. Within this aspiration bifocal thinking is only a means to an end.

Leadership with systems intelligence incorporates the continuous and active aspiration towards better systems.

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