

Six Fairy Tale Futures For Business Leaders

We will witness a spectacular change in the profile of top business leaders over the next ten years, according to a new report – *21st Century Leadership, A Fairy Tale Future* – published by management consultants, Hay McBer. The report uses a fairy tale analogy to explain six "work futures" that businesses can expect in ten years' time, and forecasts the characteristics of the business leaders who will steer their companies successfully through the social changes of the next decade.

Hay McBer has examined the characteristics of leaders in over 300 organizations who are successfully handling early forms of the "fairy tale futures" that the report identifies. For each such work future, ideal leadership profiles have been developed. Present-day examples of these ideal leaders of ten years hence include Peter Goss, of the Team Phillips catamaran fame, and Karen Brady, the managing director of Birmingham City Football Club.

The report anticipates a business environment more diverse and fragmented than ever before. Its six fairy tale "work futures", which Hay McBer expects to occur simultaneously, describe business environments fashioned by seismic societal change. The report concludes that each future will require a different type of leadership; so there can be no single profile of the ideal leader for 2010 and no scope for present-day perceptions of business leaders as a single type – whether "fat cats" or "corporate suits".

Hay McBer's six fairy tale futures for business are the logical extension of trends identifiable today.

Cinderella is a future of garage start-ups and transient enterprises. It is an environment dominated by ideas and the choreography of talent. The ideal leaders of the Cinderella enterprise will be corporate story tellers. They will have a golden idea and spin a compelling story to investors, the media and employees, inspiring them with their energy and willingness to take risks. Their underlying philosophy will be "go big or go home". Peter Goss is a current example of an ideal leader in this work future.

Pied Piper is a future of contractors and fluid alliances, where the goal is to make the most of professional expertise and ensure that it skips to your tune. The ideal leaders for Pied Piper enterprises will be corporate fixers. They will have a practical – sometimes cynical – insight into people's motivations, combined with a hard edge to extract maximum value from contracts and to terminate them when required. Their basic philosophy will be "I know a man who can". Two good present-day examples are Karen Brady and Alex Ferguson, manager of Manchester United FC.

Hansel and Gretel is the wild wood of global commerce, where only true multinationals can play. The ideal leaders for Hansel and Gretel enterprises will be chameleons – comfortable with complexity and masters of responsiveness to cultures, trends and markets. They will leverage their brands, operational strength and global networks to keep their organizations ahead of the game. They will believe, simply, that there are "the quick and the dead". Jack Welch, the chief executive of General Electric is a current example of an ideal leader in this work future.

Snow White is the future of social capitalism, offering the opportunity to use social and environmental consciousness to create a powerful employee and customer brand. The ideal leaders of Snow White enterprises will be values-driven communicators. They will understand that their brand must face both the consumer and employment markets and use ethical

principles as a source of competitive advantage in both. In addition, they will offer both customers and employees a sense of belonging by extending their trust and building a distinctly co-operative culture. Their underlying philosophy will be that "the company exists to boost the community and the economy". Anita Roddick, founder of the Body Shop, is a present-day exemplar.

Tom Thumb is the future of the ultra-specialist given global reach by the Internet and increasingly prosperous and discerning customers. The ideal leaders of Tom Thumb enterprises will be guardians of quality, intensely knowledgeable in their specialism and able to inspire employees in a quest for quality through their own attention to detail and a subtle blend of empowerment and challenge. They will see customers primarily as a community of users who can provide feedback on the product. This leader's philosophy will be that "quality is everything". Julian Richer, chief executive of Richer Sounds is a good present day example.

Last, *Mother Goose* is a secure environment of political stability and pragmatic government populated by large, successful companies that have learned to innovate while retaining a sense of continuity. The ideal leaders for this environment will be corporate conservationists. They will have a strong sense of their organization's history and evolution and recognize the risks of radical change. They will embrace sustainable change and innovation but never at the cost of the company's identity. This leader's philosophy will be to "grow the new in the presence of the old". The present day example of this ideal leader is Terry Leahy, chief executive, Tesco plc.

These fairy tale work futures will be driven by a range of social forces, including increasing social responsibility within business, mutual trust emerging as a form of economic efficiency and a diversification of lifestyles and ambitions, driven by globalization, increasing choice, an ageing population and the decline of old allegiances to religion, politics and class.

Russell Hobby, a consultant at Hay McBer and co-editor of the report, explained: "Society has a profound impact on business. It is not just outside the organization – in the form of customers, competitors and stakeholders – it is within it, as the perceptions, prejudices and motivations of employees and leaders."

The report argues that, for companies planning their leadership teams for the next decade, traditional selection criteria, based on experience of markets, strategies or technologies, are no longer appropriate. As society becomes more diverse and business follows suit, the ability of a leader to understand the particular social context of his or her organization and to exploit the trends and ideas at work within it, will become of pre-eminent importance.

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