

# THE WICS MODEL OF LEADERSHIP: THEORY AND APPLICATION IN HOTEL MANAGEMENT

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***Abstract:** The broadened and diversifying global market at great pace led to the increasing demand for hospitality business and in particular for hotel industry and hotel managements; globalization changes their business environment into fierce battlefield. In order to “win the war” hotel firms need to acquire effective leadership, probably more the ever in their long history. Since nineteenth century, a dozen of leadership theories and models had been proposed, and none of them was able to totally capture all of the many facts—both internal and external to the individual—that make for a successful leader.*

*Relatively recently, Steinberg’s WICS model drew much attention; it offered a fresh view on old problems, being designed to provide the integrative approach based upon the notion that a successful leader needs the critical ability to synthesize wisdom, intelligence, and creativity. If any of the traits mentioned would be lacking, according to this model, the leader will fall into the category of those who failed in his mission.*

*The paper discusses the theoretical and empirical ameliorations provided by Steinberg’s model, its ambiguities, as well as practical applications for hotel management.*

***Keywords:** Hotel management, leadership, Steinberg, WICS, critics*

## **Introduction**

It is an inevitable fact that the times of crisis as a rule produces the revival of urgent needs for competent leadership; thus starts the search for individuals who would, employing their personal advantages for the benefit of followers, make the decisive effort to undo the harm of economical or political dangers. For centuries, the most question remains: what are those advantages that so sharply differentiate successful leaders from the followers, or from those who tried to lead, but utterly failed to accomplish the task they undertook? If we could understand the nature of successful leadership, then we would eventually be able to nurture them from their early ages, or, we could with more confidence make the appropriate choice between prospective leaders.

The problem appeared in the face of very ambiguity of the notion of successive leader the experience had proved that the same people may be successful leaders in certain period of time, just to fail when the

circumstances, or environment in general, had changed. From the other side, a dozen of leadership theories did not meet the standard of rigorous empiric evaluation, and none of them have become a comprehensive theory.

Robert Sternberg, psychologist and psychometrician, known for his work in the fields of human intelligence, creativity, thinking styles and leadership, have proposed the relatively novel model of successful leadership, known as „WICS model“. WICS is an acronym for "wisdom, intelligence, creativity synthesized." The basic and entirely new idea incorporated in this model is that leadership is not something individual is born with and is not inherited. According to Sternberg, leadership is a matter of personal decision; whether the decision was correct, and leadership would be successful, depends on a combination, or synthesis, of wisdom, intelligence and creativity.

### **Creativity**

The issue of human creativity was always one of the most attractive puzzles since the beginning of human civilization; it is only in last century that creativity was treated as a privilege of minority. Sternberg's concept of creativity was indeed challenging: he proposed that it is a sum of skills and attitudes which could be used to generate extraordinary ideas and products. Those ideas are relatively novel, high in quality, and appropriate to the task at hand. Sternberg maintains that it is obvious fact that leaders may influence their followers, but with the ideas that may completely lack creativity or other two above mentioned attributes of successful leader. The question that may arise here is the well known question of nature of human creativity: nurture versus nature-in other words, is creativity of constitutional origin, or may be trained as all other human potentials? For Sternberg, creative people have many particular personality traits, that are not innate, but they rest on the conscious decisions. (Sternberg, 2000). In this way, Sternberg revives the old sentence Thomas Edison expressed, maintaining that creativity "consists of 99% of perspiration and only 1% of inspiration". In this way, he argues that creative personality rest on decision to be creative, and on positive attitudes towards creativity. Those positive attitudes, according to Sternberg, are composed of six distinctive traits: problem redefining, problem analysis, selling a solutions, recognition of value of knowledge, willingness to take sensible risks, and willingness to surmount obstacles.

There are some issues in which proposed model is not supported with detailed analysis: Sternberg states that creative leader should possess the ability to redefine problem, instead of rigidly pushing towards the shared problem definition. In this way, rigidity is character trait that stands against

the free and fluent attitudes towards redefining the problem. At the same time, he argues that gifted leaders are more willing to analyze their own strengths and weaknesses, while analyzing the problem. This means he should possess the one important trait that he failed to notice: his personality maturation would enable him to have balanced, healthy and mature narcissism. The same stands when we consider the attitude towards taking sensible risks. In the narcissistic culture, many individuals do not accept the risk to fail-for it may impact their narcissistic equilibrium.

### **Intelligence**

Concerning his concept of intelligence and leadership, Williams and Sternberg post question how important is the high intelligence? They state that, if leader possesses much higher intelligence than followers, he may be not able to connect to them, and become ineffective. Williams & Sternberg, 1988). According to this model, intelligence does not have close connection to old, well known models of Binet (Binet, 1905), Spearman, etc. Sternberg points on “successful intelligence”, which is...” in part, the skill and disposition needed to successful life...given one’s own conception of success, within one’s sociocultural environment. ( Sternberg, 1997). They also make distinction between academic and practical intelligence. The first one refers to memory and analytical thinking and depositions that together constitute the conventional notion of intelligence. Academic intelligence is of importance for leadership for it enables retrieval of information, as well as their analyzing, evaluation and judgment.

The second one, practical intelligence, is defined as a composite of skills and dispositions aimed for solving everyday problems. Concerning the leadership, a leader who possesses high academic intelligence, but lacks practical one, may have excellent memory skills and may possess enormous amount of information, yet will not be able to use it for practical purposes.

### **Wisdom**

According to Sternberg, the concept of composite model needed for successful leadership should possess the third element: wisdom. This additional quality is, according to the author, most important quality, but the rarest. Wisdom is...” At work, when individual use successful intelligence, creativity and knowledge as moderated by values to (a) seek to reach a common good, (b) by balancing intrapersonal (his own), intrapersonal(others) and extrapersonal (organizational) interests (c) over the short and long term to (d) adapt to, shape and select environments” Sternberg, 1998, 2003).

Measures	Intelligence	Creativity	Wisdom
<b>ART</b>			
intelligence	1.00	0.55	0.78
creativity		1.00	0.48
<b>BUSSINESS</b>			
intelligence	1.00	0.29	0.51
creativity		1.00	-0.24
<b>PHILOSOPHY</b>			
intelligence	1.00	0.56	0.42
creativity			
<b>PHYSICS</b>			
intelligence	1.00	0.64	0.68
creativity			
<b>LAYPERSONS</b>			
intelligence	1.00	0.33	0.75
creativity		1.00	0.27

Adapted from Sternberg, 2003. p 181

Sternberg’s conception of wisdom, it seems, is not generated from any contemporary personality theory; if we consider the relatively novel psychodynamic conceptions of personality, wisdom, intelligence and creativity are highly inter-correlated. Wisdom is viewed as the outcome of development of healthy narcissism; archaic forms of narcissism, however, are predominant, and only the minority of population may reach the level of wisdom. According to Kohut, and his followers, development of narcissism may be blocked at certain developmental stage, when the urge to satisfy archaic (infantile) narcissistic needs, individual cannot develop its creative potentials, may not apply intellectual abilities, and consequently, cannot attain wisdom. (Kohut, 1978-1991) Leaders with archaic narcissistic needs are not able to take risks, for the possibility to fail produces enormous internal tension in them. To loose, means that- often exaggerated (grandiose, omnipotent)- image on oneself would crumble. Therefore, they avoid taking any risks. In another words, applying creative potentials is possible only if the prospect of success is unquestionable. Another outcome of high levels of narcissistic vulnerability causes the severe lack of practical intelligence; when avoiding facing difficult problem in effort to solve it, they abstain to learn on their own mistakes.

Finally, the imperative to present themselves authentically as ones who will seek to reach a common good means to put the interest of others before his own. This is not an easy task for personality with strong archaic

narcissistic needs: he is to search for fulfillment of self, and not having firmly established attitudes for concern for others. From the other side, the sense of his existence is amorphous, without contemplation for any effort that will benefit the future. More or less, for him, life is “here and now”. “To live for the moment is the prevailing passion -- to live for yourself, not for your predecessors or posterity”<sup>9</sup>. (Lash, 1979)

### **WICS and other theories of leadership**

Although situational theories of leadership did get support from research, but Sternberg’s model gives a fresh view on old problem. He states that situation variable is included in the model: what may be considered in one culture may not be treated in a similar way by another. From the other side, people may be creative to the extent which is allowed by environment. According to the contingency models of leadership, the interaction between leader’s traits and the situation will determine leader’s success. There are empirical data that points on the fact that, when leader’s cognitive skills are significantly higher comparing to those of followers, his higher cognitive skills would hamper his effectiveness-just as WICS theory predicts.

Comparing to contingency-based leadership theories, WISC model is congruent in a way that it states that the optimality of actions depends on the situation in which leader has to operate. Again, the decision that is intelligent in one situation is not necessarily intelligent in another

Sternberg argues that... ”Moreover, creativity is largely situational determined. A course of action that was creative some years ago (e.g., an advance forward incrementation) might be at a later time only mildly creative (e.g., a small for-ward incrementation). Similarly, a wise course of action depends on who the stakeholders are, what their needs are, the environmental constraints under which they are operating, the state of the organization at the time, and so on.” (Sternberg, 2003, p. 109)

The influential model of transformational leadership, developed by Burns and followers (Burns (1978, Bass, 1985, 1998, 2002; Bass & Avolio, 1994, 1995; Bass, Avolio & Atwater, 1996; Sashkin, 2004), postulates two essential ways of leadership, transactional and transformational: according to WICS model, transactional leaders are primarily concerned with the adaptive

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<sup>9</sup> For extensive elaboration of this topic, see Lash, C.(1979) *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* W.W. Norton, New York

function of practical intelligence, aiming to modify their behavior to adapt to the environment. From the other side, transformational leaders emphasize the shaping function of practical intelligence, by modifying the environment to suit their leadership goals.

### **Conclusion**

Sternberg's WICS model tries to synthesize previous models of leadership, offering the composite of traits that, according to the author, in a way incorporate old models. However, it seems that at the same time it incorporate their failures as well. The empirical studies gave the correlations, presented in Table 1. (For example, negative correlation between creativity and wisdom.) That may raise the question of terminological imprecision and overlapping. It also seems to present a step back to the old theory of traits, which does not necessarily need to be misleading. Particularly problem is the conception of wisdom, for it seems to be burdened with many valued-oriented connotations.

It is probably extremely difficult to design the model of leadership that will cover all the facts —both internal and external to the individual—that are decisive for leader to be successful. The WICS model is based upon the notion that a successful leader decides to synthesize wisdom, intelligence, and creativity. Creative skills and dispositions are needed to form ideas, academic skills and dispositions to evaluate them as good or bad, practical skills and dispositions to make the ideas work and convince others of the value of them: wisdom-based skills and dispositions to are needed to promote that the ideas are in the service of the common good rather than just the good of the leader or small group of followers. A leader with less creative ideas cannot cope successfully with novel and difficult situations; a leader who does not possess intelligence will lack correct decisions whether his or her ideas are viable. Finally, leader with under-developed practical intelligence is unable to implement his or her ideas effectively. Wisdom would, according to this model, provide that implementing ideas are contrary to the best interests of the followers.

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