20. Cultural mythology and global leadership in Australia

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INTRODUCTION

The central thesis advanced by Hofstede (2001, 2005) and Trompenaars (1994; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1997) is that nationality-based cultural differences influence differences in work values, beliefs and orientations held by organizational members in different countries. In their GLOBE study of 62 societies, House et al. (2004) demonstrated that these differences are reflected also in the leadership styles of the middle managers they surveyed. Subsequent studies (see, for example, Braithwaite et al., 2007; Kakabadse and Kakabadse, 2007) reinforce the view that differences in leadership styles are informed, at least in part, by the culture in which the leader is embedded. As Borgelt and Falk (2007: 127) point out, leadership exists, not in a vacuum, but in a particular socio-culturally and chronologically situated context. Indeed, they maintain that, even in thinking about leadership, we bring our socio-culturally derived preconceptions to bear.

The GLOBE study described leadership as ‘the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members’ (House et al., 2004: 56). We can think of leadership styles then as how an individual influences, motivates and enables others. The purpose of this chapter is to consider managerial leadership styles in Australia and how Australian myths and legends may have shaped them.

In Doing Leadership Differently, Sinclair (2005) identifies Australian leadership values as heroism, physical and emotional toughness, and self-reliance, all the hallmarks of the traditional picture of the ‘bronzed Aussie’, a suntanned, rugged individual much like Banjo Patterson’s man from Snowy River:

He sent the flint-stones flying, but the pony kept his feet,
He cleared the fallen timber in his stride,
And the man from Snowy River never shifted in his seat –
It was grand to see that mountain horseman ride.
(A.B. ‘Banjo’ Patterson, The Man from Snowy River)
International readers might be more familiar with this rugged individual in the form of the latter-day character of Crocodile Dundee, appearing in the film of the same name, which is the most successful Australian film of all time. Indeed, Australia is well-known for this ‘macho’ culture, which extends into management and the company boardroom and is an essential element of the executive culture (Sinclair, 1994). Given the limits of a book chapter, I proceed from this point of departure and concentrate the discussion on this form of ‘heroic masculinity’ (Sinclair, 2005: 37), but there is space later devoted to the problematic nature of this characterization and the blind spots that it has produced for managerial leadership in Australia.

OVERVIEW OF AUSTRALIAN MYTHS – BUSHIES, MATES AND ANZACS

The modern mainstream culture of Australia is a Western culture, drawing primarily from the Anglo-Celtic cultures of the waves of convicts and settlers who began arriving in 1788. Blainey (1966) explores the whys and hows of this settlement in *Tyranny of Distance*.

Having ‘discovered Australia’ in 1770, through naval captain James Cook’s detour on Her Majesty’s Bark *Endeavour*, and then lost its alternative penal colony following the American Revolution of 1776, England had decided to use the great southern land to rid itself of its surplus convicts. The sheer distance made it an ideal location and large numbers of convicts were transported to Sydney Cove and Hobart, while those who continued to offend were sent to Norfolk Island and Port Macquarie, further up the east coast. Along with the forced transportation, were waves of migration and settlement based on whales, sheep and gold, with the east coast occupied by sheep farmers (‘squatters’) who simply put their sheep on the land instead of buying it, and hired convict labour to tend their herds.

This geographical isolation (see Blainey’s (1966) *Tyranny of Distance*), together with the harsh climate (see poet Dorothea Mackellar’s (1904/1997) ‘sunburnt country’) and the sparseness of the population, created a context of significant hardship for the bushies (the early settlers and the convicts who worked for them), that was later reflected in the poetry of Henry Lawson and Banjo Patterson (Page, 2002). Indeed, Lawson cemented the concept of mateship in the way he extolled the virtues of those people who were prepared to stand with and support others in the midst of that hardship and adversity (Page, 2002: 193), as *per* this sample verse from his poem, *Sez You*:

When you’re camping in the mulga, and the rain is falling slow,  
While you nurse your rheumatism ’neath a patch of calico;
Short of tucker or tobacco, short of sugar or of tea,  
And the scrubs are dark and dismal, and the plains are like a sea;  
Don’t give up and be down-hearted – to the soul of man be true!  
Grin! if you’ve a mate to grin for, grin and jest and don’t look blue;  
For it can’t go on for ever, and – ‘I’ll rise some day’, says you.  
(Lawson, 1900)

The notion of mateship and its attendant qualities were reinforced in the early twentieth century when Australian troops (the majority of whom were bushies and mates) were engaged in World War I, when the term ANZAC was first used. Devised by a signaller in Egypt as a useful acronym for ‘Australian and New Zealand Army Corps’, ‘ANZAC’ has been a part of Australian thought, language, and life since the Gallipoli Peninsula landing on 25 April 1915 (AWM, 1997). Used at first to signify a man who had served on Gallipoli, the term was popularized by war correspondent Charles Bean and grew to have broader application, with the ‘ANZAC legend’ referring to the representation of the way Australians in war, think, speak and write of their war experience (AWM, 1997). Bean’s (1946/1997) reflection on the meaning of ANZAC is often quoted:

By dawn on December 20th ANZAC had faded into a dim blue line lost amid other hills on the horizon as the ships took their human freight to Imbros, Lemnos and Egypt. But ANZAC stood, and still stands, for reckless valour in a good cause, for enterprise, resourcefulness, fidelity, comradeship, and endurance that will never own defeat.

It still echoes today in commentaries such as those by Burke (2006), who observes that the ‘comradeship, courage and sacrifice: others before self’ that constitutes the Spirit of ANZAC, ‘is a feeling that burns in the heart of every Australian and New Zealand countryman’. Indeed, it is unusual for any public commentary on the ANZAC experience not to include a concomitant reference to the value of mateship, a desirable defining quality to which individuals should aspire (Page, 2002: 194). So much so that in 2003, as Prime Minister of the day, the Right Honorable John Howard sought to have the following phrase inserted in a proposed Preamble to the Australian Constitution:

Australians are free to be proud of their country and heritage, free to realise themselves as individuals, and free to pursue their hopes and ideals. We value excellence as well as fairness, independence as dearly as mateship. (Parliamentary Library, 2000)

It is not surprising perhaps, that one of Australia’s heroes, seen to embody all that is best in mateship and the ANZAC spirit is surgeon Sir Edward ‘Weary’ Dunlop.
Sir Edward ‘Weary’ Dunlop (1907–1993)

Sir Edward ‘Weary’ Dunlop was a surgeon in the Australian Army during World War II. He is legendary for his care of soldiers taken prisoner by the Japanese. His nickname might have been ‘Weary’ but his nature certainly wasn’t. Even in the most horrific conditions Weary found energy to fight for the wellbeing and often, the lives of these men.

Weary grew up in Benalla, in Victoria, where he preferred to play sport than to study. As an older sportsman, he played with Australia’s national rugby team, The Wallabies, and was a champion boxer. He studied medicine at Melbourne University and, soon after graduation, he sailed to London as a ship’s surgeon. When World War II broke out, Weary ‘just couldn’t get into the army quick enough’.

When the Japanese attacked the island of Java, in Indonesia, Weary was sent there to help treat the casualties but, just two weeks after his arrival, Japanese troops captured the town where Weary was living. The prisoners were taken by ship from Singapore to Burma, and then crammed into train carriages for a five day horror ride into Thailand.

The Japanese wanted to build a 421 kilometre long railway from west Thailand into Burma, a job requiring physical strength and good tools – the prisoners had neither: ‘I’d see these fellas off at the crack of dawn, just carrying their rice for the day, and then they would drag in any time up until midnight, some of them on their hands and knees’.

As a commander, Weary had the awful job of deciding who was fit enough to work. As a surgeon, he was also the one who patched the men up after their hours of hard labour. Standing nearly two metres tall, Weary had to stoop as he operated on patients beneath kerosene lamps: ‘Weary was never sitting down. He was always on his feet, and his feet were terrible with ulcers. He had all these complaints too, you know. The germs didn’t leave him alone.’

Weary argued with his captors about making sick men work: ‘I’d have all sorts of conspiracies. I’d tell the fellas to start to march, but collapse and I’ll grab you’. Former prisoner of war, Bill Griffiths is among the many who owe their lives to Weary. The Japanese planned to kill him. What use is a disabled man, it was argued. Weary stepped in front of the bayonets and refused to move until Bill’s life was spared.

A habit of keeping track of the war via a hidden wireless also landed Weary in the firing line: ‘I got handcuffed around a tree, my tummy exposed to four bayonets and a countdown. Things were pretty grim.’ Weary ended up being tortured instead ... but the experience only made him more defiant.

Weary’s work as a surgeon continued after the war, in Australia and parts of Asia, and in 1969, he was recognized for his contribution to medicine with
a knighthood. Weary's compassionate nature enabled him to forgive and even meet, some of his former enemies. In 1993, ten days short of his 86th birthday, Sir Edward ‘Weary’ Dunlop died. More than 10 000 people lined the streets of Melbourne for the state funeral of the man they called ‘The Surgeon of the Railway’.

‘I have a conviction that it’s only when you are put at full stretch that you can realise your full potential.’ If ever anyone lived life at full stretch, it was Weary. (Adapted from Anon, 2007.)

Even a cursory examination of Weary Dunlop’s profile shows up the heroism, physical and emotional toughness, and self-reliance that Sinclair (2005) identified as central to Australian leadership values. But are these values reflected in Australian managerial leadership styles? The next section considers what is known about Australian leadership and management skills.

OVERVIEW OF AUSTRALIAN LEADERSHIP

Much has been written about Australian managerial leadership – the Australian Government spent three years and four million Australian dollars to produce the Karpin Report on leadership and management skills, a multivolume report which incorporated an extensive research agenda (Commonwealth of Australia, 1995a; 1995b). One area given considerable attention in the report was that related to the ‘soft skills’ of Australian managers, as they engaged in the activity of ‘getting things done through other people’ (managing). Here we review some of the Karpin Report’s findings and recommendations regarding Australian managers’ ‘soft skills’, and then examine some of the subsequent literature that has expressed concern about the slow progress being made in this area.

The Karpin Report was produced in response to the Charter of the Industry Task Force on Leadership and Management Skills (Chaired by David Karpin) to ‘advise on measures to strengthen management development and business leadership within Australian enterprises. It was asked to identify effective management practices in a range of areas, to raise awareness of the need for improved leadership and management skills and to foster enterprise commitment to management development’ (Commonwealth of Australia, 1995a: 4).

The report identified as one of the seven themes to emerge from the research programme, ‘the need for enhanced “people” skills’ (Commonwealth of Australia, 1995a: 25). By people, or ‘soft’, skills, the report meant ‘the ability to communicate, the ability to motivate, the ability to lead and delegate, and the ability to negotiate’ (Commonwealth of Australia, 1995a: 25). The view that Australian managers had poor people skills was shared by 91 Australian management experts (Commonwealth of Australia, 1995a: 67–8)
502 Asian managers (Commonwealth of Australia, 1995a: 68). The Task Force recognized the need to achieve ‘best practice management development’ (Commonwealth of Australia, 1995a: 151) and to ‘reform management education’ (Commonwealth of Australia, 1995a: 152ff), so as to promote the development of people skills and close the gap perceived to exist between the level of skills possessed by Australian managers and the skill level considered as ‘world best practice’ (see Commonwealth of Australia, 1995a: 172–4). It went on to point to managers as having primary responsibility for their own learning and development, while enterprises have primary responsibility for ‘providing management development to encourage learning and self-development by all managers’ (Commonwealth of Australia, 1995a: 266).

Subsequent commentators have pointed to the slow progress that has been made in implementing the kind of approach recommended by the Karpin Report (see, for example, Edwards et al., 1997; Fisher and Dowling, 1999). At the same time research by Kane et al. (1999) has identified management attitudes as a key factor in determining the success of people management strategies. To the extent that the Australian managers they surveyed gave low priority to people management issues and were focused on the short term, Kane, et al. (1999) were able to specify some of the barriers to this progress. Jones and Jackson (2000) examined the attitudes of Australian managers towards managing people and the managers’ perceptions of their organizations. They found that Australian business continued to demonstrate a ‘command and control’ focus and that, while they perceived themselves as more humanistic, Australian managers are also less egalitarian than one might anticipate.

These findings, in turn, point to important individual and organizational factors that might vitiate the impact of any ‘soft skills’ training as recommended by Karpin, and raise questions about the extent to which Australian managers’ leadership behaviour reflects the leadership values previously outlined. A study by Lamond (2001) suggests that there are characteristics of Australian managers, and of the organizational contexts within which they operate, that have contributed to the apparent difficulty in bridging the ‘people skills’ gap.

**Individual Characteristics**

One reason why the Australian managers surveyed by Kane et al. (1999) gave low priority to people management issues, may be found in their personalities. Personality-based explanations of behaviour are many and long-standing, going back as far as Plato and Aristotle (Statt, 1994: 168). One explanatory model, based on psychological types, is that of Carl Jung (1921/1971). A study of 228 Australian managers in 1980 found the group to be heavily populated...
by individuals who make decisions using a Thinking (T) preference and who put emphasis on order (the Judging (J) preference) (Myers and McCaulley, 1985: 39–40). Myers and McCaulley (1985: 39) commented on the high percentage (62 per cent) of what they referred to as ‘tough-minded TJs’ in this sample. A subsequent study of 523 Australian managers by Lamond (2001) showed that, not only was there a similar proportion of the tough-minded TJs (61 per cent), but also the female respondents were as tough-minded as the males. Here certainly, is the emotional toughness lauded by the poets and popular writers, exhibited by both male and female managers, not just in their behaviour but as part of their individual make-ups.

Organizational Culture

March (1994: 71) has observed that ‘[o]rganizations shape individual action both by providing the content of identities and rules and by providing appropriate cues for invoking them’. Culture, in turn, has been described as one of the most powerful and stable forces operating in organizations (Schein, 1990), and has been linked to a variety of measures of organizational success (see, for example, Bluedorn and Lundgren, 1993; Denison, 1984). While management scholars fail to agree on a definition of organizational culture (Howard, 1998), the overriding similarity in the organizational culture literature is in the reference to a shared value system (Rousseau, 1990; see also O’Reilly et al., 1991: 492; Schein, 1990).

Quinn (1988) characterizes organizations as complex, dynamic and contradictory systems in which managers must fulfil many competing expectations, and has identified four cultures or models of organizing, varying along two dimensions in terms of the extent to which they favour flexibility over control, and an internal focus over an external focus (Quinn, 1988: 47–8):

- the human relations culture (flexibility/internal focus) is broadly orientated toward human commitment, typically valuing human resources, training, cohesion and staff morale;
- the open systems culture (flexibility/external focus) is orientated towards expansion and adaptation to the external environment, valuing adaptability, readiness, growth, resource acquisition and external support;
- the internal process culture (internal focus/control orientation) is orientated toward consolidation and continuity, and values information management, communication and stability;
- the rational goal model (external focus/control orientation) aims to maximise output and values productivity, efficiency, planning and goal setting.

Noting March’s (1994) observation regarding the influence of organizations on individual behaviour, it would be reasonable to expect that those organizations which evince a human relations culture are more likely to provide an...
environment wherein the Karpin recommendations concerning management development would be played out. The CVM has been applied to a number of organizational cultures in Australia (Colyer, 2000; Lamond, 2003; Vilkinas and Cartan, 2006; Wyse and Vilkinas, 2004) and can be used to inform a taxonomy of organizational cultures.

Given that all four competing values coexist in organizations, with some values more dominant than others, it is just not the scores on each CVI subscale, but the combination of the four subscale scores that is important. Lamond (2003) identified eight clusters, derived from the combination of subscale scores and the relative influences of the four approaches suggested by the mean scores, as follows (the reference high/low is in relation to the mean for the subscale as a whole and in relation to each of the other subscale mean scores):

- **Weak:** (20 per cent) lowest mean scores on every subscale except IP (second lowest); suggests a poorly defined culture.
- **Pragmatic:** (16 per cent) low on OS and RG, just above average on HR and average on IP; suggests a reactive organization, with systems in place doing what it needs to do.
- **Strong:** (8 per cent) highest mean scores on both IP and RG, with second highest scores in HR and OS; suggests an organization strongly emphasizing all four approaches.
- **Bureaucratic:** (13 per cent) low on HR, OS and RG, but high on IP; suggests an organization emphasizing bureaucratic processes for control.
- **Millennial:** (8 per cent) highest mean scores on OS and HR and second highest score on RG, with lowest score on IP; suggests the ‘ideal organization’ according to contemporary management literature, emphasizing innovation, people and striving for success – the millennial organization.
- **Ad Hocracy:** (15 per cent) low on HR, IP and RG and only above average for OS; suggests an organization focused on the ‘next chance’, with less purpose and fewer processes.
- **Adaptive:** (10 per cent) very high scores on HR and IP, with above average on OS and RG; suggests an organization with an external focus, translating goals into people focused policies and practices.
- **Entrepreneurial:** (12 per cent) very high scores on OS and high on RG, with above average on HR and low on IP; suggests externally focused organization, striving to achieve without being held back by restrictive internal processes.

Taken together, these clusters indicate that only those organizations whose
cultures can be classified as Strong, Millennial or Adaptive (26 per cent of the total) have mean scores on the HR subscale that are consistent with the approach that is broadly orientated towards human commitment, with its valuing of people, training, cohesion and staff morale. In other words, Australian organizations have not developed the kinds of cultures that are conducive to the developmental environment envisaged in the Karpin Report. Further, even if the organizational context supported the development of ‘soft skills’, it seems that the individual managers, being ‘tough-minded TJs’ in the main, would not be interested.

GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS

Certainly, ‘Weary’ Dunlop’s life reflects the heroism, physical and emotional toughness, and self-reliance that Sinclair (2005) identified as Australian leadership values. Following the line introduced at the beginning of the chapter, it would be reasonable to expect to see the range of qualities exhibited by ‘Weary’ to be played out in the behaviour of Australian managers. Yet the evidence of recent research on Australian managers (see Lamond, 2003) suggests that, while emotional toughness is reflected in the individuals employed in managerial leadership positions in Australian firms, the caring, supportive side is absent – see Commentary box. Some reasons why this may be so, in terms of individual and organizational characteristics have been proposed. But I have not told the entire story to this point.

COMMENTARY BOX

Rupert Murdoch

I’m a catalyst for change … You can’t be an outsider and be successful over 30 years without leaving a certain amount of scar tissue around the place … You can’t build a strong corporation with a lot of committees and a board that has to be consulted every turn. You have to be able to make decisions on your own.

Kerry Packer, Australia’s Richest Man Before he Died

(Genghis Khan) wasn’t very lovable but he was bloody efficient.
Janet Holmes à Court, One of Australia’s Richest Women

The company was quite hierarchical. I often think it was like a pyramid with Robert (husband Robert Holmes à Court) at the top and lots of us paying homage to him. I try to turn the pyramid upside down so that I’m at the bottom and bubbling away and encouraging people and energising them so that they are all empowered so that they can do what they need to do, now that’s the dream … We have to shift our emphasis from economic efficiency and materialism towards a sustainable quality of life and to healing of our society, of our people and our ecological systems.

Jackie Huggins, Aboriginal Leader and Co-Chair of Reconciliation Australia

It’s a very Aboriginal thing to do, to give younger people greater responsibilities within the community as they become able to take those responsibilities on. It is a culturally appropriate transfer of roles that involves respect in both directions … from the younger to the older and the older to the younger.

(from http://www.woopido.com/business_quotes/)

Indigenous Australians and Managerial Leadership

Australia the nation is a little over 100 years old (the Commonwealth of Australia was brought into being on 1 January 1901), following European settlement beginning in 1788. Australia the continent, on the other hand, has been inhabited for more than 40 000 years by its indigenous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Australian Museum, 2004). Before 1788 there were over 600 languages spoken throughout Australia by an estimated population of 750 000 people (Australian Museum, 2004), embedded in a variety of cultural milieux that, nonetheless, shared in common many of their mythological heroes as well as the Dreaming (the process of the world being called into being and the ability to see with eternal vision), where people are very much part of the land, and associated with particular places (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australian_Aboriginal_Culture).

Today Indigenous people constitute just 2.3 per cent of the Australian population at the 2006 census (ABS, 2007), as a result of the impact of cities and towns on populations and the effects of removal of people from traditional
lands, following successive government policies of annihilation and then assimilation. It was not until 1966, following a country-wide referendum, that Aboriginal people were recognized as Australian citizens rather than Australian fauna. Aboriginal narratives over the last 200 years reflect a different experience of the same Australian space – invasion, exploitation and resistance (see Austin-Broos, 1994; Beckett, 1994). Gebhardt’s (2003) ‘Kimberley Killings’ is a chilling poetic reminder of:

    gunshot
    Running round the etched edges,
    And the necklace chains rattling.

**Women in Management in Australia**

It has often been claimed that, of all OECD country workforces, Australia’s is the most gender segregated (see Wallace, 2000). Further, despite 30 years of considerable legislative, policy and social change in the equity area, surveys of senior management and the boards of the nation’s top companies show that women have not attained leadership positions in any significant numbers in Australia (Still, 2006). It is not surprising then, that most literature and research on women in management concentrates on the reason for the low proportion of women in senior management (Rindfleish, 2000).

Women were not visible in a management context until relatively recently, with considerations of leadership being informed by, *inter alia*, the ‘great man’ theory (Jogulu and Wood, 2006). At the same time, one of the obvious exclusionary characteristics of the mateship concept is that women are not included in most understandings of mateship and what it means to be a mate (Page, 2002: 195). That being said, senior management women in Australia are divided in their support of legislative initiatives such as Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action and also in their propensity to assist the advancement of other women in their workplaces (Rindfleish, 2000). Indeed, while the majority of women in the most senior ranks of management in the Australian private sector identify the need for change, they have not used their senior management role as a means of challenging gendered structures (Rindfleish and Sheridan, 2003).

**Where To From Here?**

So it is that, to date, constructions of managerial leadership in Australia have been derived from notions of heroic masculinity that, in turn, reflect a culture that has valued the heroes of the bush and of war. Whether this celebration of the bronzed Aussie will continue in an increasingly heterogeneous, multicultural
society, is yet to be seen. Indeed, fully 30 per cent of the Australian population at the 2006 census self-identified as being from a non-English speaking background (ABS, 2007), and that adds yet another dimension to the discussion here. Several ways forward have already been suggested.

Both Smith (2000) and Sinclair (2000) have pointed to the perceptible masculine ethos in management education, which can disadvantage female and male students in different ways, and the need for greater awareness of gender issues as a basis of enabling future managers to recognize and harness gender diversity in the workplace. Meanwhile, Fitzgerald (2003) notes the growing body of literature on cultural diversity and leadership that conceptualizes and constructs theories that value and recognize indigenous ways of knowing, acting and leading. Significantly, the literature seeks to document ways in which leadership is experienced and exercised within a multicultural framework.

In the more recent spirit of reconciliation, the acts of acknowledgement of country and welcome to country at formal events recognize the unique position of Aboriginal people in Australian culture and history (see NSW Premier’s Department, 2004). Acknowledgement of country is a way that non-Aboriginal people show respect for Aboriginal heritage and the ongoing relationship of the traditional owners of an area with the land. In the same spirit, this chapter recognized, albeit all too briefly, the unique position of Aboriginal culture in Australia. The contemporary global context requires those wishing to engage with Australia to look past the ‘Crocodile Dundees’ and see the women and men from a multiplicity of backgrounds, including their own, if they are to do so effectively. Equally, as Australian leaders engage with the world, they need to recognize that not everyone is, or wants to be, a ‘mate’.

Finally, as Sinclair (2005: 175) suggests, ‘Until we unravel and expose the links between being a leader and enacting a particular form of manliness, then, in gender and racial terms, leadership will remain the domain of a homogeneous elite’. Still, there is cause for optimism as the dialogue continues, and so I conclude this chapter in the same spirit as that of the final lines proffered by Oodgeroo Noonuccal (1994) in her Song of Hope:

To our father’s fathers  
The pain, the sorrow;  
To our children’s children  
The glad tomorrow.

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