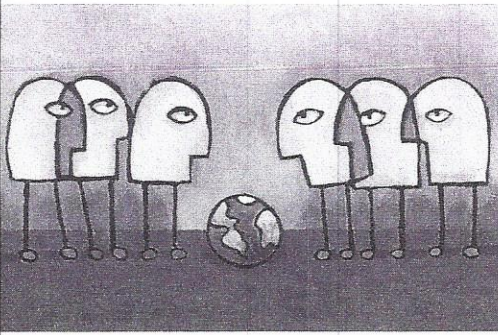


Soccer metaphor works best

Individual and team responsibilities learned on the playing field are key in today's business world.

Written by
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e have all used metaphors to help explain things, including understanding the nature of change. It's as

American as apple pie.

For many of today's leaders, this includes the use of the sports metaphor. Football, for example, has been frequently used in sports metaphors to explain how business works, what leadership looks like, and how employees are expected to perform. Football as a sport—and the metaphor as a business application—have been a big part of American culture which has recognized and rewarded individuals for doing their specific job.

As we move toward the year 2000 and beyond, however, the present nature of business is “being transformed from a structure built out of jobs to a field of work needing to be done,” writes William Bridges, the country's leading author on managing life's transitions, in his book, *Job Shift*. Because of this shift to a field of work needing to be done in organizations, “our organizational world is no longer a pattern of jobs,” reports Bridges, and “football is too position-driven a game and inadequate as a metaphor.”

So what is a more appropriate metaphor for describing what business and leadership look like under a global context? We submit soccer as a far more fitting alternative.

Until the 1980s, soccer's development and growth in America had been a struggle since its introduction in the nineteenth century. Why? I would suggest that soccer did not grow in this country because people (in the mainstream) did

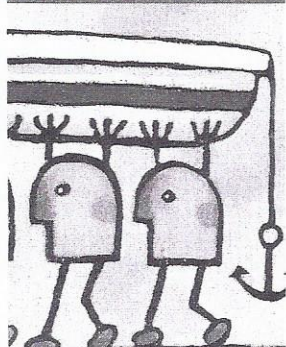
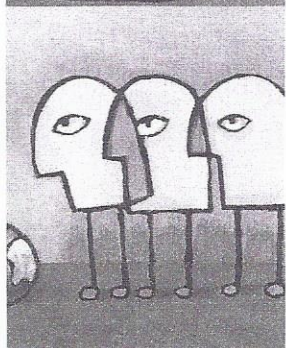
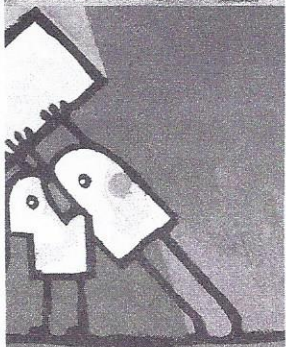
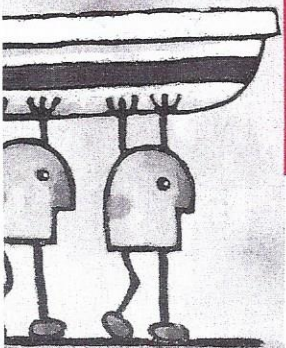
not accept the values associated with the collective experience! Soccer's struggle ran smack into the American image of the rugged individual which represented a conflict between team or collective values and individual values.

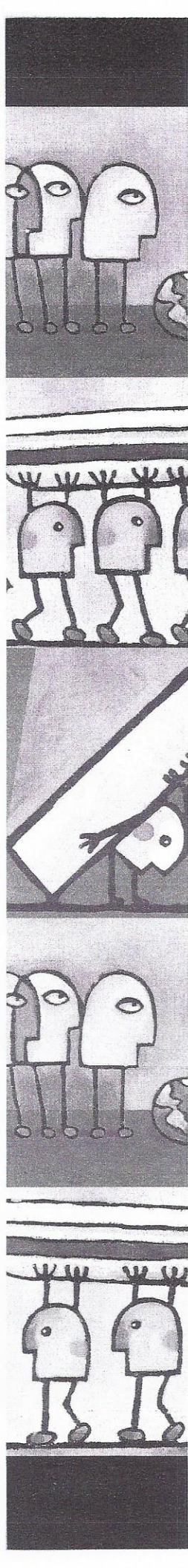
In their best-selling book, *The Wisdom Of Teams*, Jon Katzenbach and Douglas Smith talk about the conflict between team-based values and individual values when they write that, “at their core, most people have values that favor individual responsibility and performance over any form of groups, whether it be a team or otherwise. Our parents, teachers, ministers, and other elders emphasize individual responsibility as paramount from our earliest days onward. We grow up under a regimen that measures (academic grades), rewards (allowances), and punishes (trips to the principal's office) individual—not collective—performance.”

However, soccer provides American industry with a working metaphor for reconciling the values conflict between individual performance and collective—or team performance. Historically, the conflict has always been an either-or argument, with the values presented as opposites on a continuum.

The reconciliation that soccer offers is not a question of dealing with the values in an either-or application, but understanding that (both) individual values and collective values are needed in order to compete, with real teams, in the global business environment of the future.

“As (real) teams become more important,” state the authors in *The Wisdom Of Teams*, “modifying the strong natural emphasis on individual accountability will, of course, be necessary.”





In soccer and in business in the global environment, this really means placing the focus on results produced when all positions interact on the soccer field or the business field!

Soccer represents the world's most popular game! It is well recognized as a game and as a metaphor throughout the world. Soccer's

position as needs dictate on the field to assist other team members. Each player on the team represents an interdependent part of the team. Multiple skills are extremely important in providing each player with the ability to control the ball in the air and on the ground, to change roles, and to play both offense and defense as

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popularity as a game in America continues to grow at the recreation, high school, college, and professional levels. The fact that soccer crosses a number of personal boundaries including age, ethnic background, and gender is adding to its growth and popularity. For example, soccer is a very attractive sport for females to play! In addition to providing physical conditioning, soccer can provide female athletes with a better understanding of the interdependent nature of the team experience, along with associated character and leadership skills such as self-sacrifice and cooperation needed to be successful in the global business world. This is a world in which the “work of the manager or leader is as a servant, a counselor, and a confidant,” writes Richard Farson, in his book, *Management Of The Absurd*. This all relates directly and vitally to the continued growth of females entering the business world and management ranks.

Soccer is not position driven. Often described as a thinking person's sport, the team's work consists of advancing the ball to score goals and defending its own goal to keep the opponent from scoring. Eleven team players are called upon to play for two 45-minute halves as they move up and down the pitch or field. The goalkeeper is the only player on the team who may be described as partially position-driven; however, he or she does have the ability and flexibility to move out of that

the flow of the game dictates. The soccer player's ability to do many things is a form of multi-tasking, and its application is tied to both the individual player and to the team who are expected to manage their entire work effort. In effect, the soccer team is a self-directed unit charged with performing the work needing to be done.

All of these characteristics are representative of a real team and its present and future application in the global business world. Here, the distinction between real teams and groups that management calls teams is an important one made in *The Wisdom of Teams*: “In any situation requiring the real-time combination of multiple skills, experiences, and judgements, a (real) team inevitably gets better results than a collection of individuals operating within confined job roles and responsibilities.”

Soccer is played on a larger field than most other sports, including football, and it requires all players on the field to understand the bigger picture including: team strategy, goals, opponent's strengths and weaknesses, game plan, and the like—all so important to the team's success.

Understanding the bigger picture empowers all players on the field to make decisions, take risks, and manage and anticipate change, as the flow of the game dictates. As a self-directed team operating on a real-time, continuous schedule, individual players and the team must be able to

respond to changing conditions on their own! For example, except for serious injury on the field, there are no opportunities to stop the clock to plan a strategy, to give players a rest, or to slow down the opposition's momentum.

American industry in today's highly competitive global business world, where technology is empowering organizations to be more responsive to markets (speed) and empowering employees on the front line (and in the field) to make decisions, to take risks, to manage change, and to deal directly with the customer, has become more and more like the game of soccer.

In soccer, what is the primary leadership style for a coach? Delegating on the sideline and leaving the execution of the game to the team and its players! As a delegating coach, this means the coach "empowers the team to act independently (from the leader)," with the coach providing the "appropriate resources to get the job done," according to Ken Blanchard, one of the country's leading experts in the field of leadership development and author of the numerous books including the *One Minute Manager*, *Gung Ho*, and *Raving Fans*.

Leadership has vital significance to future global business applications. In the past, with American industry "at the center of the world's economy during the industrial age, the emphasis

Computer at that time, who was speaking about the need for organizations to change, indicating "that organizations were very hierarchical; that model is no longer appropriate."

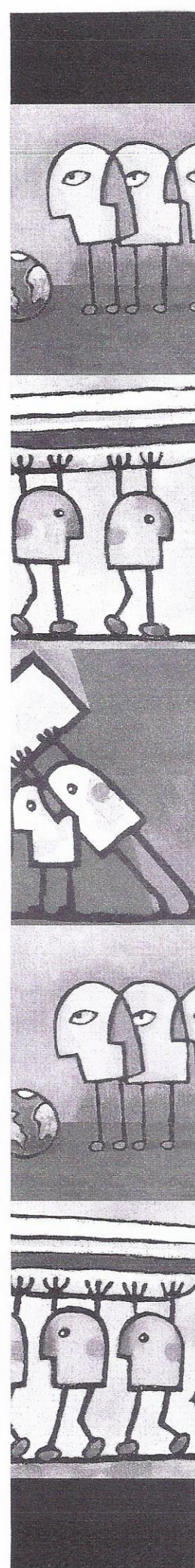
The mindset of business and government leaders at the time called for a command and control or highly directive leadership style with one-way, top-down communication. Promoted as the one-best leadership style in all of American society, it represented a style appropriate to the mass production world of work calling for job specialization, and it helped America survive a depression and win two major wars by teaching people discipline, courage, dominance, and self-preservation. However, states Scully, "the new model is global in scale, an interdependent network. So the new leader faces new tests, such as how does he lead people who don't report to him—people in other companies, in Japan or Europe, even competitors? How do you lead in this idea-intensive, interdependent-network environment? It requires a wholly different set of skills, based on ideas, people skills, and values."

The soccer coach provides the best description of what leadership looks like in the context of a team application in the global business world. He or she is one who has the fundamental belief in people (teams) to accept responsibility for getting the work done, along with the ability

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was on self-sufficiency in every sort of enterprise—education, business, or government," reports Warren Bennis in his book, *On Becoming A Leader*. Bennis was sharing the words of John Scully, Chairman and CEO of Apple

(skills) to be totally responsive to people (teams), through demonstrating the flexibility to change leadership styles in order to meet an individual's (team's) changing needs. The most effective coach or leader is "one who can provide for the



individual (team) what they cannot provide for themselves," to paraphrase Ken Blanchard.

In soccer, that all-important diversity is present in the make-up of the players and coaches. It is typical, for example, to find teams at the professional and international levels made up of many different ethnic groups. Diversity brings strength to soccer teams and reinforces the universal partnership the world has for the game. As American industry continues on the global path, diversity will be a necessary prerequisite in order to successfully compete and partner with others around the world.

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The soccer metaphor represents a natural opportunity for American industry to link up with their global partners for understanding leadership and business on a global basis. Further, soccer's ability to provide American industry, its leaders, and its employees with a working metaphor will help provide people with a better understanding of what change looks like as they search for meaning in their organizations and in their careers.

In looking to the past for answers to help us understand present changes in the world and future challenges, it is interesting to note Great Britain's experience in the 1800's with

promoting organized team sports, like soccer, to help educate and prepare people to participate in the British Empire's global affairs. In his book, *Physical Education In England Since 1800*, Peter McIntosh wrote that, "organized games came to be recognized by authority and were regarded as a powerful force in the education of the sons of the middle and upper classes." This was in the early 1800's in England. By the 1860's reports the author, "these organized games were promoted by authority in England to meet social needs, for character training, to teach loyalty, self-sacrifice, cooperation, and to provide

socially harmless outlets for the exuberance of youth." Therefore, concluded McIntosh, "public school education was being consciously related to success on the battlefields and in the garrisons of the Empire."

Did the British Empire's attempt to perpetuate its influence throughout the world through the promotion of soccer represent the first attempt at managing on a global basis? Can soccer provide us with a more realistic working metaphor for American industry as we attempt to tackle the challenges presented in the global business environment? Without question, the parallels are striking!

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Teamwork

