

# STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP: A NEED OF TODAY'S A COMPETITIVE ERA

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**Abstract** *Strategic leadership is the leaders' ability to anticipate, envision and maintain flexibility and to empower others to create strategic changes as necessary. This paper is focused on the aspects of strategic leadership like: planning and organizing, problem solving, clarifying, informing, monitoring, motivating, consulting, recognizing, supporting, managing conflict and team building, networking, delegating, developing and mentoring, and rewarding. Leadership is a function of knowing yourself, having a vision that is well communicated, building trust among your colleagues, and taking effective action to realize your own leadership potential. Leadership is considered far more superior and necessary for an organization's success than management. The main function of a strategic leader is forming a vision and a mission, balancing the organizational control, establishing effective organizational culture, and emphasizing on ethical practices. Any strategic leader will not follow one style of leadership. It is always a mix of different styles of leadership. Depending on the goal, the styles of leadership are: autocratic style, participative, transactional, transformational and charismatic leadership.*

**Keywords:** Leadership Power, Leadership as Supervisor

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## BACKGROUND

The concepts of strategic leadership were acknowledged 30 years back. Preceding World War II every business could withstand any drawback without the support of a leader since the economic conditions were favorable and non-demanding and demeaning. Post the world war the economic conditions, the socio-political factors, the technological factors all became far more complex and with progress, the market became more competitive. This is what gave rise to strategic leadership and also to the need for a strategic leader to drive the organization to new heights and created a new forte in the field of leadership which went hand in hand with strategy. Leadership is considered far more superior and necessary for an organization's success than management. Many studies have indicated that leaders can make a difference to both the satisfaction of their subordinates and their performance (Bass, 1990a).

Good organizations convey a strong vision of where they will be in the future. As a leader, you have to get your people to trust you and be sold on your vision. Using the leadership tools and being honest and fair in all you do will provide you with the ammo you need to gain their trust. To sell them on your vision, you need to possess energy and display a positive attitude that is contagious. People want a strong vision of where they are going. No one wants to be stuck in a dead-end company going nowhere...or a company headed in the wrong direction. They want to be involved with a winner! And your people are the ones who will get you to that goal. You cannot do it alone!

A directional skill that is our thinking skills sets the direction for your organization. We get a clear picture of vision, purpose, and goal. These act as your eyes and ears to the future of your organization and help us to recognize the need for change, when to make it, how to implement it, and how to manage it. You will get the vision by reaching for any available reason to change, grow, and improve. Just as you perform preventive maintenance on your machinery, you must perform preventive maintenance on your organization. Do Not believe in the old adage, "If it isn't broke, don't fix it," for the people who do, go broke! Treat every project as a change effort. Treat every job as a new learning experience.

Every organization has a distinct work environment, which decides to a considerable degree how their leader reacts to the forth coming problems and opportunities. Here the role played by its past leaders and its present leaders provides a great base for every step in the direction of betterment of the organization.

The culture and climate of an organization act as two distinct forces that dictate actions within an organization. Culture and climate differ from organization to organization. It is a combination of the founders, past leadership, current leadership, crises, events, history, and size (Newstrom, Davis, 1993). This results in *rites*: the routines, rituals, and the "way we do things." These rites impact individual behavior on what it takes to be in good standing (the norm) and direct the appropriate behavior for each circumstance.

The climate is the feel of the organization, the individual and shared perceptions and attitudes of the organization's

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members (Ivancevich, Konopaske & Matteson, 2007). While the culture is the deeply rooted nature of the organization that is a result of long-held formal and informal systems, rules, traditions, and customs; climate is a short-term phenomenon created by the current leadership. Climate represents the beliefs about the “feel of the organization” by its members. This individual perception of the “feel of the organization” comes from what the people believe about the activities that occur in the organization. These activities influence both the individual and team motivation and satisfaction.

Leadership as a quality is something of a modern-day enigma due its importance in leading an organization, which is essentially a group of people having a common goal and at the same time, because of the fact that it remains so difficult to define and, even more so, to emulate. The desire to follow is a basic human (indeed animal) instinct, suggests Ardrey (1970). But, unlike a flock of sheep, humans do not tend to indiscriminately follow a leader; on the contrary, they do so critically. Here falls the onus of responsibility upon the leader to motivate and inspire his followers towards a common vision. Leadership is not just issuing a set of orders; it is winning over the hearts of the followers, sharing a mutual vision with them and providing a clear strategy to achieve it. Simply having better skills or knowledge than the others does not make one an effective leader. A survey conducted by the Chartered Management Institute in UK suggests that the followers expect vision and inspiration from their leaders but instead find ambition and technical knowledge (Gill, 2006).

Leadership is a function of knowing yourself, having a vision that is well communicated, building trust among colleagues, and taking effective action to realize your own leadership potential (Bennis, 1997). Leadership is the process of directing, influencing the task related activities of the group members (Stoner, Collins & Yeton, 1985). Simply explained, leadership can be defined as the power of energizing people’s ambition so that they could achieve their personal goals as well as organizational goals.

## STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

Strategic leadership is a discipline and the art of guiding, directing, motivating and inspiring a group or organization towards the achievement of common goals (Marshall 2011). It is therefore, very necessary to have a clear strategic vision in order to lead the organization. Capable management of the staff calls for utilizing a well-formed strategy. This is where strategic leadership comes into the picture. Strategic leadership is the ability of the manager to motivate his staff by providing a strategic vision to them (Management Study Guide 2012).

Strategic leadership is the need of the hour in today’s competitive era. Strategic leadership can be defined as

“the leader’s ability to anticipate, envision and maintain flexibility and to empower others to create strategic change as necessary” (Hitt, Ireland & Hokisson, 2007)

Leadership is considered far more superior and necessary for an organization’s success than management. Many studies have indicated that leaders can make a difference to both the satisfaction of their subordinates and their performance (Bass, 1990b). Leadership makes sure the organization runs profitably in the present and prepare it for the future and make sure that the organization never makes a mistake made in the past so as to avoid any crisis. Leadership also plays a critical role in deciding the faith of the organization since when an organization has to adapt to technological and environmental change, it is the leadership that will see the success of the process through (Burke, Richley & Angelis, 1985). Strategic leadership also helps in setting standards, once standards have been set in place leaders demonstrate how they have to be applied and complied with, by subordinates (Hampton, 2003)

The main functions of a strategic leader are as follows.

- Determining strategic direction and forming a vision for the organization: this is the ideology of the organization which would motivate the employees to achieve the goals set by the organization.
- Making a mission for the organization: this is the goal set for the employees. This gives the employees an idea as to what an organization is hoping to develop into in the course of time.
- Establishing balanced organizational controls these are necessary to ensure that the firm achieves its desired outcomes (Hitt, Ireland & Hoskisson, 2007b). Organizational controls are nothing but guidelines set for employees, it helps the employees understand what is in their power to decide and what is not. Strategic leaders have to keep in mind that the organizational control established by them still allows their employees to be flexible and innovate (Guerrero, 2010). Good organizational control helps in gaining the trust of investors/stakeholders and increases the organizations credibility. Managing the organizations resource portfolio – Strategic leaders have to keep in mind not only the short term needs of their organization but also make sure they have a competitive position in the future (Rowe, 2001) This can only happen when the strategic leader knows how to put the right resource in the right place at the right time . Good resource portfolio management bridges the gap between strategy and effective strategy implementation.
- Sustaining an effective organizational culture: this is one of the crucial tasks of a good strategic leader. The organizational culture is the identity of an organization. Organizational culture is what shapes the ethics,

beliefs of the employees. Good organizational culture gives the organization internal stability (Catalin, 2011) and also a lot of goodwill which is very important to survive in the competitive market of today.

- Emphasizing on ethical practices: it is very important to emphasize on ethical practices as it builds social credibility as well as goodwill in the market, both of which are intangible assets that are indispensable. Ethical practices pave way for future strategic changes.

However, we need to understand that even strategic leadership has its limitations. Strategic leadership doesn't bring about a fast change. Strategic leadership paves way for slow, gradual, transition with a very small amount of calculated risk. Another limitation would be that strategic situations are not knowable they are only interpretable (Canella, Finkelstein & Hambrick, 2008) this means that even after conducting a detailed analysis leaders may come up with different ways to handle situation so there is always a probability of things going wrong.

### Aspects of Strategic Leadership

The role of a leader is very different from that of a manager with respect to the influence that they wield and the purview of their responsibility. The essential difference lies in the fact that managers have their work cut out for them by simply having to ensure that their department functions according to the standards of the organization; but even the managers have to exhibit effective leadership qualities to succeed in their positions. On the contrary, the primary task of a leader is to provide a vision to the organization and at the same time understand his followers' needs and motivate them by developing strategies to fulfill the individual and organizational goals at the same time (Maslow, 1987). When a manager is thrust with the task of leading the organization the preference of the followers are simply held in abeyance, but a leader will influence their preferences and align these to the needs of the organization. That is the reason why simply having a position of power is grossly insufficient to be a leader; communicating the ideas effectively is equally important.

A leader is an integral part of any successful organization. Effective leadership results in high level of satisfaction among the employees because it aims to empower and motivate them. Such leadership is extremely important in our modern society where high levels of affluence and wide-spread education result in the working class demanding the fulfillment of needs higher than the basic ones of mere survival. In such a scenario, the employees are more responsive to ability and leadership than to power and control. Douglas McGregor classified these as Theory Y structures where leadership accepts and utilizes the abilities

and skills of the people of the organization and also aims at their participation and consensus (Gitlow, 1992). Leadership is, therefore; to take the skills of the employees, as in a jigsaw puzzle, and put it all together creatively to achieve the most out of it for the greater good of all. This results in heightened employee satisfaction and greater levels of productivity. Power is necessary to manage an organization, but creative leadership involves using it judiciously to strike a common ground between personal codes and the organization codes (Wolf and Iino, 1986). This is vital for the success, and indeed the survival, of any organization.

Leadership has for long been a hot topic of scholarly debate; however, it is rather difficult to understand the practical aspects of leadership without reflecting on the various functions and styles of leadership. The list by Yukl, Wall & Lepsinger (1990) on the functions of leadership is the most comprehensive one available. These functions include: planning and organizing, problem solving, clarifying, informing, monitoring, motivating, consulting, recognizing, supporting, managing conflict and team building, networking, delegating, developing and mentoring, and rewarding (Tolbert & Hall, 2009).

Leadership and management go hand in hand and it is only the right combination of the two which guarantees the success of an organization. But there are very fundamental differences between them; leaders are the people who develop a plan of action but managers are the ones who implement that plan of action and maintain it. Leadership has to be followed by good management in order to achieve the goal set by the organization. Another difference that comes to mind is that leaders will challenge the status-quo, leaders always think as to what would be their next step whereas managers accept the status quo. Managers are responsible for the smooth functioning of an organization in the present; they work on what is ordered. However, leaders are responsible for the stability of the organization in the future.

Other crucial aspects of leadership would be followers, because leaders neither act nor exist in a vacuum without followers (Kelly, 2008). One cannot be called a leader unless one can influence a group of people to achieve a common goal. Leadership and followership co-exist. So, to drive an organization along the path of success, one not only needs a good leader but also authentic, competent, co-operative and independent followers. Followership is considered to be an internal factor of leadership; it depends highly on the type of people the leader chooses to employ.

The last and the most significant aspect of leadership is the situation; the situation not only creates leaders but also decides on the style of leadership they would adopt. Situation is the external factor of leadership; it can always be controlled but can never be selected and it is in this controlled environment that they allow their followers to innovate and

contribute in shaping something new and achieving personal growth and goals.

## Different Styles of Leadership

Any strategic leader will not follow one style of leadership. It is always a mix of different styles of leadership depending on the goal, the followers, and the situation to achieve the desired result.

- The leader can use the autocratic style of leadership in a situation where decisions have to be taken immediately and there is no time or rather the conditions are not appropriate for second opinions. This type of leadership style is generally adopted during a crisis. The downside to this type of leadership is that it does not leave any room for flexibility or innovation by the employees. You have to work according to stringent orders and generally, people dislike being treated in this manner which results in a high staff turnover. The leaders take full authority and assume full responsibility (Mehrotra, 2005). When a leader follows this type of leadership, he is more concerned about getting the job done to achieve the goal.
- Another style of leadership that is used by a leader is the participative leadership. This is generally used with the top level of management where all the employees have knowledge and experience at their disposal and when future planning is required. In this type of leadership, although the final decision is made by the leader, everyone is included in the decision making process and all opinions are taken into consideration. This gives the employees or the stakeholders a chance to be innovative, creative and flexible in a way that facilitates their personal growth and development. In addition to this, it empowers the people and makes them feel important. A leader uses this style of leadership when his followers are his main concern.
- Another style of leadership is transactional leadership, a very simple style which directly links efforts to rewards or punishments in the form of personal achievements. If you achieve your goal or surpass the expectations, you are rewarded; if not, you are punished. There is no bigger picture; it is a simple use of both negative and positive motivation to achieve immediate goals.
- With everything evolving fast in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the new approach to understanding leadership has given us two new styles: the transformational and charismatic leadership; these styles are widely used today. Transformational leadership is a process that changes and transforms people by treating them like human beings; understanding their emotions, values, satisfying their needs to accomplish more than what is usually expected (Northouse, 2007).

- A transformational leader is a catalyst or facilitator of positive change. They are linked greatly with the growth of the organization; they turn a zero profit organization to a profitable one, a low profile organization to a high profile organization he and exploit all resources available to them. People who exhibit transformational leadership often have a strong set of internal values and ideals, and they are effective at motivating followers to act in ways that support the greater good rather than their own self-interest. (Kuhnert, 1994) They provide inspiration; they become role models and instill belief among their follower to achieve their dreams and thereby satisfying their need for self-gratification, which, in turn, enhances team spirit.
- Charismatic leadership is not very different from transformational leadership. Charismatic leaders are great orators who can build trust; they have an adventurous personality; they romanticize risk, and they have public appeal which helps the gain more followers.

What will influence a person to follow a leader?

People want to be guided by those they respect and by those who have a clear sense of direction. To gain respect, they must be ethical. A sense of direction is achieved by conveying a strong vision of the future.

When a person is deciding if he/she respects you as a leader, he or she does not think about your attributes, rather, he or she observes what you *do* so that he/she can know who you really *are*. He or she uses this observation to tell if you are an honorable and trusted leader or a self-serving person who misuses authority to look good and get promoted. Self-serving leaders are not as effective because their employees only obey them, not follow them. They succeed in many areas because they present a good image to their seniors at the expense of their workers.

The basis of good leadership is honorable character and selfless service to your organization. In your employees' eyes, your leadership is everything you do that affects the organization's objectives and their well-being. Respected leaders concentrate on (U.S. Army, 1983a).

According to a study by the Hay Group, a global management consultancy, there are 75 key components of employee satisfaction (Lamb, 2004). They found that:

- Trust and confidence in top leadership was the single most reliable predictor of employee satisfaction in an organization.
- Effective communication by leadership in three critical areas was the key to winning organizational trust and confidence:
  1. Helping employees understand the company's overall business strategy.

2. Helping employees understand how they contribute to achieving key business objectives.
3. Sharing information with employees on both how the company is doing and how an employee's own division is doing — relative to strategic business objectives.

So in a nutshell — you must be trustworthy and you have to be able to communicate a vision of where the organization needs to go.

Eleven principles of leadership (U.S. Army, 1983b).

1. **Know yourself and seek self-improvement** – In order to know yourself, you have to understand your *be, know, and do*, attributes. Seeking self-improvement means continually strengthening your attributes. This can be accomplished through self-study, formal classes, reflection, and interacting with others.
2. **Be technically proficient** – As a leader, you must know your job and have a solid familiarity with your employees' tasks.
3. **Seek responsibility and take responsibility for your actions** – Search for ways to guide your organization to new heights. And when things go wrong, they always do sooner or later — do not blame others. Analyze the situation, take corrective action, and move on to the next challenge.
4. **Make sound and timely decisions** – Use good problem solving, decision making, and planning tools.
5. **Set the example** – Be a good role model for your employees. They must not only hear what they are expected to do, but also see. *We must become the change we want to see* - Mahatma Gandhi
6. **Know your people and look out for their well-being** – Know human nature and the importance of sincerely caring for your workers.
7. **Keep your workers informed** – Know how to communicate not only with them, but also with seniors and other key people.
8. **Develop a sense of responsibility in your workers** – Help to develop good character traits that will help them carry out their professional responsibilities.
9. **Ensure that tasks are understood, supervised, and accomplished** – Communication is the key to this responsibility.
10. **Train as a team** – Although many so called leaders call their organization, department, section, etc. a team; they are not really teams...they are just a group of people doing their jobs.
11. **Use the full capabilities of your organization** – By developing a team spirit, you will be able to employ your organization, department, section, etc. to its fullest capabilities.

*I used to think that running an organization was equivalent to conducting a symphony orchestra. But I don't think that's quite it; it's more like jazz. There is more improvisation.* — Warren Buffet

Good leaders are made not born. If you have the desire and willpower, you can become an effective leader. Good leaders develop through a never ending process of self-study, education, training, and experience (Jago, 1982).

Different people require different styles of leadership. For example, a new hire requires more supervision than an experienced employee. A person who lacks motivation requires a different approach than one with a high degree of motivation. You must know your people! The fundamental starting point is having a good understanding of human nature, such as needs, emotions, and motivation. You must come to know your employees' *be, know, and do* attributes.

You lead through two-way communication. Much of it is nonverbal. For instance, when you “set the example,” that communicates to your people that you would not ask them to perform anything that you would not be willing to do. What and how you communicate either builds or harms the relationship between you and your employees.

All situations are different. What you do in one situation will not always work in another. You must use your judgment to decide the best course of action and the leadership style needed for each situation. For example, you may need to confront an employee for inappropriate behavior, but if the confrontation is too late or too early, too harsh or too weak, then the results may prove ineffective.

Also note that the *situation* normally has a greater effect on a leader's action than his or her traits. This is because while traits may have an impressive stability over a period of time, they have little consistency across situations (Mischel, 1968). This is why a number of leadership scholars think the *Process Theory of Leadership* is a more accurate than the *Trait Theory of Leadership*.

### Leader as a Supervisor

Leaders also have to act as supervisors, and only then will he be able to influence his employees. There is a narrow band of adequate supervision. On one side of the band is over-supervision (micro-management); and on the other side is under-supervision. Over-supervision stifles initiative, breeds resentment, and lowers morale and motivation. Under-supervision leads to miscommunication, lack of coordination, and the perception by subordinates that the leader does not care. However, all employees can benefit from appropriate supervision by seniors with more knowledge and experience who tend to see the situation more objectively.

Evaluating is part of supervising. It is defined as judging the worth, quality, or significance of people, ideas, or things (U.S. Army Handbook, 1973). It includes looking at the ways people accomplish a task. It means getting feedback on how well something is being done and interpreting that feedback. People need feedback so that they can judge their performance. Without it, they will keep performing tasks wrong, or stop performing the steps that makes their work great.

Getting people to accomplish something is much easier if they have the inspiration to do so. Inspire means “to breathe life into.” And in order to perform that, we have to have some life ourselves. Following main actions will aid you in accomplishing this:

- A leader has to be greatly passionate and enthusiastic about a project, and only then will a trickle-down effect occur. You must be committed to the work you are doing. If you do not communicate excitement, how can you expect your people to get worked up about it?
- Leaders should involve employees in the decision making process as it makes them participate much more enthusiastically than those who just carry out their boss’s order. Help them contribute and tell them you value their opinions. Listen to them and incorporate their ideas when it makes sense to so.
- The fundamental truth, as General Creighton W. Abrams used to say in the mid-1970s, is that “the Army is not made up of people. The army is people. Every decision we make is a people issue.” Your organization is the same. It may make a product or sell a service, but it is still people! A leader’s primary responsibility is to develop people and enable them to reach their full potential. Your people may come from diverse backgrounds, but they all have goals they want to accomplish. Create a “people environment” where they truly can be all they can be.
- Provide feedback throughout the practice period until they can do it on their own. If it is a large complicated task, then break it down into short learning steps.

## Leadership Power

Al Capone once said that “You can get much farther with a kind word and a gun than you can with a kind word alone.” However, while almost anyone can use power, it takes skill to use leadership. Leadership power is much more than the use of force. Leadership is influencing others to truly want to achieve a goal, while power forces others to achieve a goal.

Power refers to a capacity that a person (boss) has to influence the behavior of another so that he or she acts in accordance with the boss’ wishes. This power is a capacity or potential

as it implies a potential that need not be actualized to be effective. That is, a power may exist, but does not have to be used to be effective. For example, an officer in the Army has certain powers over enlisted personal, but that power does not have to be used to be effective. The mere knowledge of an officer’s power by an enlisted person has some influence over him or her.

A person has the potential for influencing five points of power over another (French & Raven, 1959):

- **Coercive Power** is a power that is based on fear. A person with coercive power can make things difficult for people. These are the persons that you want to avoid getting angry. Employees working under coercive managers are unlikely to be committed, and more likely to resist the manager.
- **Reward Power** — Compliance achieved based on the ability to distribute rewards that others view as valuable. Able to give special benefits or rewards to people. You might find it advantageous to trade favors with him or her.
- **Legitimate Power** — The power a person receives as a result of his or her position in the formal hierarchy of an organization. This person has the right, considering his or her position and your job responsibilities, to expect you to comply with legitimate requests.
- **Expert Power** — Influence based on special skills or knowledge. This person earns respect through experience and knowledge. Expert power is the most strongly and consistently related to effective employee performance.
- **Referent Power** — Influence based on possession by an individual of desirable resources or personal traits. You like the person and enjoy doing things for him or her.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we can say that strategic leadership is requisite for any successful organization which wants to achieve long term success and continued, sustainable competitive edge. Strategic leadership is required to make the right decisions that build on each other, making the organization more credible. Leadership is indispensable for continuous development not only on a national level but also on an international level.

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