

LEADERSHIP

A Theoretical Perspective to Practical Application

Leadership is the very heart and soul of business management. No one really manages a business by shuffling the numbers or rearranging organizational charts or applying the latest business school formulas. What you manage in business is people.

Management and leadership are of course inextricably intertwined, but for the sake of clearer understanding, the writer thinks of business management as something objective: You want to accomplish an objective, to get from here to there, so your performance can be measured. You can be taught the tools of your trade in a school of business administration. In fact if you pass all your examinations, you are rewarded with the title “Master of Business Administration.” However, the legion of young men and women who come out of the business schools each year, armed with calculators and computer science, are at best enlightened business administrators, not leaders. Leadership is purely subjective, difficult to define, virtually impossible to measure objectively, and cannot be taught in school, any more than a baseball player can learn to throw a curve ball by reading a manual. Yet it is always palpably there in every enterprise, setting the personality of each individual company, a reflection of the character and personality of the chief executive and his top management team of players. The quality of leadership is the single most important ingredient in the recipe for business success (Geneen, 1984).

Leadership according to Geneen (1984) is the ability to inspire other people to work together as a team, following your lead, in order to attain a common objective, whether in business, in politics, in war, or on the football field. The writer does not particularly subscribe to the theory that there are natural born leaders. Leadership is learned, although it cannot explain entirely how it is learned. The ability to lead and inspire others is far more instinctual than premeditated and it is acquired somehow through the experiences of one’s everyday life. The ultimate nature and quality of that leadership comes out of the innate character and personality of the leader himself.

Understanding the Basics

Leaders come in every size, shape, and disposition - short, tall, neat, sloppy, young, old, male, and female. Nevertheless, they all seem to share some, if not all, of the following ingredients:

- The first basic ingredient of leadership is a *guiding vision*. The leader has a clear idea of what he wants to do (professionally and personally) and the strength to persist in the face of setbacks, even failures. That guiding purpose which is the vision is what is essential.
- The second basic ingredient of leadership is *passion* - the underlying passion for the promises of life, combined with a very particular passion for a vocation, a profession, a course of action. The leader who communicates passion gives hope and inspiration to other people. This ingredient tends to come up with different spins and sometimes it appears as enthusiasm.
- The next basic ingredient of leadership is integrity. There are three essential parts of integrity: self-knowledge, candor, and maturity.

“Know thyself,” was the inscription over the Oracle at Delphi and it is still the most difficult task any of us faces. Until you truly know yourself, your strengths and weaknesses, and what you want to do and why you want to do it, you cannot succeed in any but the most superficial sense of the word. A leader knows his flaws as well as his assets and is capable of dealing with them directly.

Candor is the key to self-knowledge. Candor is based in honesty of thought and action, a steadfast devotion to principle, and a fundamental soundness and wholeness.

Maturity is important to a leader because leading is not simply showing the way or issuing orders. Every leader needs to have experienced and has grown through following - learning to be dedicated, observing, working with and learning from others, not being servile, always truthful. When the leader finds these qualities in himself, he can encourage them in others.

- Integrity is the basis of trust, which is not as much an ingredient of leadership as it is a product. It is the one quality that cannot be acquired, but must be learned.

- Two more basic ingredients of leadership are curiosity and daring. A leader ponders on situations and wants to learn as much as he can and is also willing to take risks, experiment with new thoughts and ideas.

Characteristics of a Leader

There are many characteristics that a leader should exhibit such as: Vision, Eloquence, and Consistency, Commitment, Being Well Informed, Willingness to Delegate and Empower, Astute Use of Power, and Emotional Intelligence.

Vision, Eloquence, and Consistency

According to Tichy and Ulrich (1989) one of the key tasks of leadership is to give the organization a sense of direction and strong leaders seem to have a vision of where the organization should go. They are eloquent enough to communicate this vision to others within the organization in terms that can energize people, and they consistently articulate their vision until it becomes part of the culture of the organization.

Commitment

Strong leader is someone who demonstrates commitment to his or her particular vision, often leading by example.

Being Well Informed

Good leaders do not operate in a vacuum instead they develop a network of formal and informal sources that keep them well informed about what is going on within their company. Leaders develop back-channel ways of finding out what is going on within the organization so that they do not have to rely on formal information channels.

Willingness to Delegate and Empower

Good leaders are skilled delegators. They recognize that unless they delegate they can quickly become overloaded with responsibilities. They also recognize that empowering subordinates to make decisions is a good motivational tool. Delegating also makes sense when it results in decisions being made by those who must implement them.

Astute Use of Power

Edward Wrapp notes that good leaders tend to be very astute in their use of power. Good leaders play the power game with skill, preferring to build consensus for their ideas rather than use their authority to force ideas through. They act as members or

democratic leaders of a coalition, rather than as dictators. Second, good leaders do not commit themselves publicly to detailed strategic plans or precise objectives. Third, good leaders possess the ability to push through programs in a piecemeal fashion. They recognize that, on occasion, it may be futile to try and push total packages or strategic programs through an organization, since significant objections to at least part of such programs are likely to arise.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional Intelligence is a term coined by Daniel Goleman to describe a bundle of psychological attributes that many strong leaders exhibit. They include self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Self-awareness refers to the ability to understand one's moods, emotions, and drives, as well as their effect on others. Self-regulation is the ability to control or redirect disruptive impulses or moods- to think before acting. Motivation refers to a passion for work that goes beyond money or status and a propensity to pursue goals with energy and persistence. Empathy means understanding the feelings and viewpoints of subordinates and taking those into account when making decisions.

Leaders, not managers

The difference between leaders and managers is as the differences between those who master the context and those who surrender to it. There are other differences, as well, and they are enormous and crucial according to Bennis (1989):

- The manager administers; the leader innovates.
- The manager is a copy; the leader is an original.
- The manager maintains; the leader develops.
- The manager focuses on systems and structure; the leader focuses on people.
- The manager relies on control; the leader inspires trust.
- The manager has a short-range view; the leader has a long-range perspective.
- The manager asks how and when; the leader asks what and why.
- The manager has his eye always on the bottom line; the leader has his eye on the horizon.

- The manager imitate; the leader originates.
- The manager accepts the status quo; the leader challenges it.
- The manager is the classic good soldier; the leader is his own person.
- The manager does things right; the leader does the right thing.

The Leadership skills

Most business schools teach six fundamental managerial skills that supposedly insure success in today's business world:

- Set goals and establish policies and procedures
- Organize, inspire, and control people
- Analyze situations and formulate strategic and operating plans
- Respond to change through new strategies and reorganizations
- Implement change by issuing new policies and procedures
- Get results and produce respectable growth, profitability, and return on investment

While these may have worked in the past, declining American productivity and competitiveness prove they no longer suffice. In order to achieve corporate excellence in the dynamic future, leaders must learn to transcend the past with New Age skills: creative insight, sensitivity, vision, versatility, focus and patience.

The first two skills help forge a strong foundation for excellence because insight informs successful strategies and sensitivity helps build strong cultures. Vision and patience help leaders *integrate* their skills. While vision helps them invent an excellent future, patience allows them to take the necessary time to implement it successfully. Furthermore, since any organization must be able to evolve, versatility and focus provide for *adaptation*, the former stimulating anticipation of future needs, the latter directing implementation of change efforts. Vision logically comes after insight and sensitivity because it yokes the two, while patience naturally follows versatility and focus because it links all the other skills by providing exquisite timing.

Creative Insight: Asking the Right Questions. Insight, which involves adapting a variety of critical perspectives, forces executives to strike at the heart of a problem, not just at its visible symptoms. Executives lacking insight see either the forest or the trees, but not both. Without insight, executives waste valuable resources because they do not

get at the roots of problems and are therefore unable to design successful solutions. When they ask the right questions, leaders obtain the key to the increased insight that informs superior strategies.

Insight, which help leaders to spot and take advantage of strategic opportunities, is the first of two foundation skills. Leaders unite insight with the second foundation skill, sensitivity-understanding and acting upon people's expectations and needs-to forge the strategy-culture alloy from which excellence is created. These two skills help leaders successfully manage the two basic components of corporate excellence.

Insight requires a mind capable of concentration, one that thinks creatively and is capable of adopting a variety of perspectives. For example, a photographer will take quite a few "shots" of a subject before deciding which pose will create the most effective portrait, an executive with insight will take several "shots" of a problem from varying points of view to determine which solution will produce the most desirable results. The insightful executive often discovers opportunities others do not see and solves problems in ways that others would not conceive possible.

Insight depends on physical and mental experience. However, since no one lives long enough to experience everything, leaders can easily be trapped within a rigid set of habits, underutilizing their experience and greatly reducing their ability to spot opportunities, create advantages, and devise solutions to problems. Multiple perspectives free them to maximize their experience by letting them apply it in a different way for each point of view.

In an effort to gain insight executives learn to ask a series of questions from far-ranging points of view. When insightful executives solve problems, they try to heighten their perceptions, going beyond the old, habitual, comfortable ways of experiencing the world.

Recognizing Insight

Recognizing insight in leaders or others begins with increased comprehension of the characteristics most insightful executives share. They do not look for once-in-a-lifetime brilliant flashes. It is a belief that deep insight is a basic and abiding skill that continually guides the thinking of a strong leader.

Creative problem-solving derives from the ability to adopt multiple viewpoints and ask the right questions. If creativity makes people more independent, self-directed, and assertive helps them allocate the right resources to cope with life's difficult situations, then insight may be thought of as a highly directed application of creativity.

Eugene Raudsepp, president of Princeton Creative Research and author of *How Creative Are You? (1981)*, has won acclaim for original research into creative problem-solving. A portion of Raudsepp's "problem-solving behavior" test have been applied to help identify the characteristics of insightful executives:

- They prefer tackling problems that do not have precise answers, asking questions like, "In what ways can we create new needs in our customers, needs only we can meet?"
- They spend more time synthesizing information than gathering it, relishing the process of breaking information down into its component parts, then reconfiguring those parts to expose the essence of a problem.
- They can easily drop an approach to a problem that is not working, forcing their way out of habitual methods of thinking or analyzing.
- They doggedly pursue difficult problems over long periods of time, never feeling frustrated when the solution isn't readily apparent.
- They do not worry about asking questions that might display their ignorance. Such "dumb" questions cut to the heart of the matter and open a new path of thinking.
- They pay more attention to information's content than to its source, not caring where insight comes from as long as it's based on accurate data or real perceptions.
- They do not apply strictly logical step-by-step methods to problem-solving, because they realize that each problem is unique and uniqueness resists easy formulas.
- They entertain offbeat ideas without automatically labeling them "crackpot": some of the best ideas seem idiotic in the beginning.
- They saturate themselves with all they can learn about a problem, preparing themselves thoroughly and with great enthusiasm.
- They love complex problems and enjoy struggling with thorny issues. They mentally experiment with solutions that would not even occur to others, considering every possible approach

- They usually think up more ideas more rapidly than anyone else in brainstorming sessions because their disciplined but flexible minds thrive on such exercises.
- They picture situations and possibilities with vivid imagery that often colors their language, describing possible solutions in rich detail.
- They have made meditation a habit, not an occasional exercise, and set aside time each day for such activity.

In their own experience, insightful executives also routinely manifest their creativity by:

- Holding open discussions in which they encourage disagreement. Insightful executives spend a good deal of their time fostering honest exchange of ideas among their associates and subordinates.
- Reading voraciously to satisfy a thirst for knowledge and the experience of others. Executives with insight constantly add new information and perspectives to their understanding.
- Enthusiastically entertaining new ideas. They help their associates and subordinates come up with innovative approaches.
- Asking penetrating questions. They ask more questions than they answer.
- Swiftly devising a number of scenarios for solving a problem. They visualize all possible viewpoints.

Sensitivity: Doing Unto Others. If, in the final analysis, people are an organization's greatest asset, then leaders must understand how to bind them together in a culture wherein they feel truly motivated to achieve high goals. Face-to-face communication, ongoing training and development, creative incentive programs, and job security all display the sort of sensitivity that nurtures strong cultures. Every strong culture derives from management's sensitivity. Without it, employees feel unmotivated, underutilized, and even exploited.

Everyone has heard the old saying, "Don't judge a man until you've walked a mile in his shoes." That could serve as a working definition for sensitivity, the second core skill. The Japanese call it *haragei*, from *hara*, stomach, and *gei*, art. The art of getting inside another person. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" is a simple concept, yet difficult to practice because true sensitivity doesn't merely involve

crawling inside another person's head, it includes *acting to fulfill the needs and expectations* you find there.

All people want their needs and expectations fulfilled by the organizations they choose to work for. Otherwise, they bide their time or resign. In either case, morale plunges and productivity declines. Turnover in personnel and deteriorating productivity are sure signs of organizational and executive insensitivity.

Recognizing Sensitivity:

In his masterful work *Human Intimacy: Illusion and Reality*, Victor L. Brown asserts that the realities of human intimacy include love, trust, openness, sincerity, service, and sacrifice. While the illusions of human intimacy trap us into self-obsession, manipulation, personal gratification, superficiality, and a false belief that violating the realities of human intimacy will not bring damaging consequences. According to Brown, successful human relationships grow from kindness, empathy, and commitment, and he warns that illusions about human relationships rise when people relate to “fragments of human beings,” “deny the consequences of human behavior,” and “deal in indulgence, not discipline.” Despite the fact that contemporary society enjoys the virtually unlimited technology to create material comfort, people in our society tend to move from one superficial, unfulfilling relationship to another. Only through deep commitment and hard work can people win lasting pleasure and enduring security. It does take work to talk to, touch, and in other ways cultivate intimacy with others.

Over the years there has been an observation of five blocks that make the journey to true sensitivity a difficult one. If leaders recognize these blocks, they will be in a better position to avoid them.

- Assuming you know others' expectations and needs without discussing them.
- Treating all employees the same regardless of differences.
- Viewing employees as tools or production units.
- Seeing employees as they once were, not recognizing changes or improvements.
- Believing employees should respond the way you would respond in the same situation.

When executives assume, without asking, that they understand the expectations and needs of their people, they risk making poor decisions about such important factors as working environment, employee recognition, incentives, and communication methods. To overcome this, they must listen carefully when employees discuss their expectations and needs. Most executives spend 80 percent or more of their time listening to people, but unfortunately half the time they do not really hear what is being said.

When an executive treats every employee the same, serious problems arise. Treating everyone the same communicates the message, “I do not care enough about you to find out what makes you unique.” In order to remove this block, leaders must identify and understand the differences among individuals. This does not mean they develop a different set of policies for each employee, but it means that they recognize and respond to the differences among their people.

Locking employees into a past perception ignores the fact that people change, at times quickly and in major ways. Regardless of deep-seated idiosyncrasies and personality traits, tomorrow’s employee may differ as much from today’s as today’s differs from yesterday’s. People acquire new technical knowledge, learn new skills, increase their experience and judgment, improve competence, and evolve interpersonal relationships. If an employee achieves a major improvement in any area, give public recognition to that achievement. If an employee seems to have lost something, figure out why.

Do not expect your people to respond to a given situation the same way you would. Even if you say, “Of course not,” don’t be sure. Most of us can’t help projecting our own attitudes and approaches on others. Even if they have successfully crawled into another person’s head, they have to be constantly on guard against projecting their own ideas onto that person’s decision or solution to a problem. Fortunately, if an employee’s decision concerns the organization’s commitment, competence, or consistency, a strong corporate culture will narrow the range of acceptable courses of action, but many decisions do not concern cultural factors. Some executives push so hard for conformance to a cultural model that they thwart innovative, independent thinking, creating “yes” people instead. Such people do not support strong cultures. To remove this block, they must avoid projecting their skills or style when they evaluate employees actions.

Executives need to detach themselves and rely on the tenets of the organization's culture rather than letting their biases determine their judgment.

Five Levels of Sensitivity:

True sensitivity springs from a deep understanding of the basic needs and expectations of people. Two of the most well-known, widely used theories are Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Frederick J. Herzberg's motivational theory. Maslow identifies five levels of needs: physical well-being; safety and security; social affiliation; self-esteem; and self-actualization. When your physical needs such as those for food, clothing, and shelter are satisfied, the needs of the next level become paramount. Then, when the needs for safety and security are met through an assurance that your job situation frees you from having to worry about your physical needs, you concentrate on social affiliation needs, which are fulfilled by belonging to a group with shared beliefs, values, and concerns. Once these needs are satisfied, the need for self-esteem rises to the fore. This need is fulfilled by feeling good about oneself as a result of recognition and praise from others. Finally, once you develop self-esteem, you focus on the need for self-actualization, which you attain through growing and developing into the sort of individual you believe you can or must be.

Herzberg's motivational theory isolates two groups of needs, motivators and dissatisfiers. The motivators include interesting work, challenging work, personal achievement, recognition, and the opportunity for increased responsibility. The satisfaction threshold for motivators has no limit and can reach ever increasing heights. By contrast, the dissatisfiers are organizational policies, working relationships and conditions, supervision, and compensation. Although one can achieve satisfaction in these areas, satisfaction does not increase one's motivation. For example, an organization's poor policies will cause dissatisfaction, but good policies will only create satisfaction, not motivation. Dissatisfiers cause varying levels of dissatisfaction but not varying levels of motivation. One's satisfaction threshold -for instance, one's idea of a good salary-rises over time, making dissatisfaction a strong possibility in the future.

The five levels of sensitivity are:

- **Sensitivity to security expectations and needs** requires that one you dedicate himself to his people's physical well-being, environment, working conditions, compensation, supervision, and benefits. Demanding that his managers do the same.
- **Sensitivity to belonging expectations and needs** involves scrutinizing the social interaction, group dynamics, community feeling, participation in decision-making, and sense of family his people experience. Do you feel like a family member yourself
- **Sensitivity to recognition expectations and needs** entails thoroughly evaluating how and when your employees win formal and informal recognition via oral and written praise, promotions, bonuses, awards, honors, and other means. No two people are exactly alike and the kind of recognition craved by one may not satisfy another.
- **Sensitivity to quality-of-work expectations and needs** requires you to define the sort of work people find interesting and challenging. What makes people feel inspired and excited? What calls forth their most creative effort? Individual differences become even more crucial at this point.
- **Sensitivity to self-actualization expectations and needs** helps you to look inside the hearts and minds of your people. Do you comprehend their dreams? What do they really wish to become? Do they feel that their dreams lie within their eventual grasp? Spend thoughtful time with each worker.

Vision: Creating the Future. Leaders who develop clear vision can mentally journey from the known to the unknown, creating the future from a montage of facts, figures, hopes, dreams, dangers, and opportunities. By applying the art of meditation to organizational introspection, leaders gain a deep understanding of a business and its environment.

Clear Vision Creates the Future

We all have dreams and fantasies about the future. Most of us picture ourselves more successful, wealthier, and happier than we are now; but we will not reach those goals by idle dreaming. Major events loom on the horizon, among them technological breakthroughs in artificial intelligence, that we can view either as threats to our humanity or as opportunities for advancement. Our individual and corporate success will depend on our ability to anticipate and participate in such changes.

Vision help executives position themselves and their organizations to create and take advantage of future opportunities. Vision is both an offensive and a defensive skill. It helps you chart a course that creates change, and it helps you respond to external changes. It links the foundation skills to the adaptive skills (versatility and focus) and it joins the second integrative skill, patience to allow leaders the necessary time to create lasting excellence, Visionary executives integrate creative insight and sensitivity to forge the strategy-culture alloy, and they patiently use versatility and focus to maintain excellence over the long term. Executives with clear vision invent excellent futures for their firms; those who lack it set their companies adrift in dangerous waters.

What do we mean by vision?

Essentially, *vision is a mental journey from the known to the unknown, creating the future from a montage of current facts, hopes, dreams, dangers, and opportunities.* Just as the mental journeys of Thomas Jefferson and Karl Marx guided nations, such journeys can dictate the success of businesses; and just as nations must adapt their original visions to changing conditions, so must corporate leaders mold their visions to keep pace with a rapidly evolving world.

How can we recapture vision?

The old vision of hard-nosed, bottom-line management served well until recently. Some of it may still serve well. Leaders do not have to start from scratch, but if they are to successfully lead their companies into an ever changing future, they must shape the old vision in imaginative ways. As visionary leaders guide their companies through change, they will be able to transcend the facts and figures at hand.

Clear vision results from a profound understanding of an organization and its environment. The executive needs a practical knowledge of the dynamics of industries, markets, and competition and must recognize the potential of the corporation to influence and exploit those dynamics. It takes a craftsman's, not a technician's, skill. The craftsman can see exactly what the end product will look like and exactly what work must be done to achieve it. He then puts his tools and materials to work shaping the product, adjusting and adapting as he goes, keeping constant mental view the look and feel of the goal. By contrast, if one simply follows a set of instructions without vision, he will never create superior results.

Recognizing Vision:

First, one must learn to distinguish between executives with vision and those without it. Since it's easy to feign vision, this is not as simple as it seems. Some self-styled visionaries are really dreamers who let their imaginations paint interesting but impractical pictures of the future. Such fantasies may inspire people for a period of time, but when they fail to materialize, they bring disillusionment in their wake.

John Kotter, Harvard Business School professor and author of *The General Managers*, has shed interesting light on the nature of effective executives by filming a "day in the life" of two very different senior executives, one closely resembles the epitome of a "visionary executive," while the other one falls considerably short. The visionary executive, a skillful strategic player, works quite differently from the nonvisionary one, who is merely trapped in a role. Consider the differences:

- The visionary executive smilingly admits he has only a few crucial appointments scheduled on his calendar. In contrast, the nonvisionary executive couldn't squeeze in another appointment. His overloaded schedule has strapped him in a straitjacket.
- The visionary executive spends considerable time walking around the organization, warmly greeting and chatting with employees. The trapped executive spends the bulk of his time in large, formal meetings, during which he directs the actions of his subordinates.
- The visionary executive frequently talks about his philosophy, the corporate direction and values he thinks will keep the company successful. The nonvisionary executive never talks about philosophy and, in fact, does not appear to have one. "I'm too busy to fool around with abstractions and fantasies," he says.
- The visionary executive urges his employees to bring both their brains and hearts to work because, in the critical path of life, one cannot separate the two. The other executive, who frowns a lot and rarely smiles, takes executives aside between meetings to criticize their work.
- During his work day, the visionary executive spends a lot of time in the plant discussing new products. He hosts spontaneous and informal lunches with key personnel, after which he delivers inspirational speeches to small groups of key employees. The nonvisionary executive, who wastes most of his time in meetings,

devotes a lot of time to such unproductive undertakings as reviewing a sales training script, reading it aloud, word by word, to the district managers.

The two types of executives can be defined by the following traits:

Nonvisionary Executive

- Solves daily problems and makes decisions.
- Meets formally with immediate subordinates.
- Is aloof, rational, critical, and “cold” (people and ideas prompt a reserved response).
- Pays attention to weaknesses.
- Talks about current business activities.

Visionary Executive

- Articulates philosophy.
- Makes contact with employees at all levels.
- Is receptive, expressive, supportive, and “hot” (people and ideas ignite him).
- Pays attention to strengths
- Talks about future goals.

Obviously, vision distinguishes the strategic player from the trapped executive. Though strategic players do more than merely create visions for their organization, their visions reside at their very core and rule every action. By contrast, trapped executives do what they do because they’re too busy to see where they are going, they have no concept of what’s really important, and they experience rather than invent the future.

Versatility: Anticipating Change. A difficult skill to master, versatility presumes that some goals other than immediately pressing business problems should concern leaders. Unless leaders aggressively pursue interests outside their field, they will not be able to comfortably adapt to change.

Change

No other single word so completely captures the essence of contemporary society and its enterprises, and no other characteristic of the era poses more demanding problems for executives. Tried-and-true approaches no longer work against the force of accelerated change. Technical innovations, global communications, and fierce competition can bring changes overnight that once took decades or even centuries to manifest themselves.

Product and service life cycles have grown dramatically shorter because, according to a

Fortune article, rapid technological change plus easy credit, mass communications, and advertising have put business on a rollercoaster. As never before, corporate and executive success, even survival, depends on an ability to control the ride.

Executives take advantage of accelerated change with versatility and focus. They use versatility to anticipate change, and focus to successfully implement it. If the foundation skills (creative insight and sensitivity) help you lay the groundwork for excellence, the adaptive skills (versatility and focus) help you make the changes required for maintaining it.

What is meant by versatility?

By versatility we mean the capacity to embrace and participate in an ever changing world. That may sound obvious and easy to accomplish, but most people resist change because any major change, from a marriage to a new job, brings with it new conditions, adapting to which takes time and energy. Since we almost instinctively react to change as a threat rather than an opportunity, we cannot learn to master it unless we learn to welcome rather than fear it. You must help evoke and control change rather than simply suffer through it. To better anticipate changes, versatile executives seize opportunities to incorporate change into their personal and professional lifestyles. Unfortunately, it's easy to fall into accustomed habits, reacting to new situations with previously successful responses. But only when you change a habit can you begin experiencing the world with a fresh perspective, the sort of outlook that spots a trend, foretells an innovation, or anticipates shifts in consumer behavior, competitor strategies, products, and opportunities. If you become intimately aware of change in one aspect of life, you automatically become more acutely aware of impending changes in other areas. By creating change at one level, you can better control it at all levels.

Recognizing Versatility;

A flurry of recent articles has touted high-output management, high-speed management, high-tech management, and other supposedly newfangled techniques for adapting to this era. These articles claimed that executives facing market turbulence are learning vital lessons:

- To think constantly about new products.
- To back new product thinking with prompt investment.

- To stay close to the customer.
- To keep up with competitors' investments and costs.
- To more closely coordinate product design, manufacturing, and marketing.
- To move quickly.

These six lessons may offer clues to recognizing versatility, but it must be added that versatile executives regularly and consistently:

- Develop and try new ideas, products, approaches and methods, never allowing complacency or inflexibility to settle in
- Monitor the environment with acute attention to detail, quickly and thoroughly studying anything that might signal a trend or a change in customer or competitor behavior.
- Get into the habit of moving boldly but in a coordinated, orderly fashion, seizing opportunities with discipline.

In his book, *The Leader*, Michael Maccoby articulates the development of a new “self-development or self-oriented” character in our society. Maccoby suggests that leadership by this new character can become the basis of a new society, one that fosters productive adaptation to a rapidly evolving world. The “new” self-oriented person says: “I can contribute more, if they listen to my ideas, if I am treated as an individual, neither as child nor a machine, and the rewards are fair. Otherwise, I’ll look out for myself.” Clearly, this new character has two sides, one positive and one negative, the positive side includes:

- A flexible, experimental, and tolerant attitude.
- An interest in self-development, playfulness.
- A sense of fairness and a participative orientation.

The negative side includes:

- Self-centeredness, detachment from others.
- A self-indulgent, demanding attitude.
- Rebelliousness and manipulativeness.

If executives can ingrain the positive traits in themselves and their people, at the same time minimizing the negative ones, they will be able to cultivate the new character. An assessment of the positive or negative new character traits in individuals and groups

can help executives recognize versatility. If the negative traits outweigh the positive, versatility does not exist, but if the positive ones outweigh the negative, it does. The ratio between the two indicates how much need there is for improvement. An example of how this works: consider the following situation: An executive orders an employee, who has been working within a six-member task force, to deliver a summary presentation to senior management, bringing it up to date on current progress and results. A person with the positive traits enthusiastically accept the assignment, then immediately call the other five task force members together to discuss the best way to make the presentation. Everyone would freely discuss different approaches and decide as a group on the best one. All six members would prepare the content of the presentation. As new ideas came forth during the preparation, everyone would have a chance to react to them. It could be a deeply satisfying, shared experience, with the person designated as the spokesperson giving credit to colleagues during the presentation and sharing the experience with everyone afterwards.

By contrast, a person with the negative traits might enthusiastically accept the assignment, then retreat to a private office to determine how best to exploit this opportunity for personal advantage. To retain all the possible glory, he or she would not involve the other members of the task force. What an opportunity to shine in the eyes of management! No credit would be given to others during the presentation, and afterwards the spokesperson would keep details of the meeting as secret as possible.

Focus: Implementing Change. Everything that happens in your organization either contributes to or erodes its efforts to implement change and keep strategy and culture in harmony. Focus enables leaders to invest available resources toward implementing successful and lasting change.

Focus Exploits Change

Think of accelerated change as an object hurtling toward you at tremendous speed. If you first spot it a mile away, its speed and the distance between you and it blur its nature; all you can see is an indistinct shape. As the object continues rushing toward you, you begin to discern a rough oblong shape, but you cannot determine much else about it. Is it a threatening enemy missile or a friendly vehicle you might ride toward the future? Quickly, it bears down on you. As you peer at it closely, you suddenly see

handles on its side. An opportunity, not a danger! If you have focused well and soon enough, you can seize it, letting it whisk you forward well ahead of those who failed to focus on it in time.

Focus, the second of the two adaptive skills, allows executives to exploit change. Versatile executives anticipate change. Focused executives successfully implement it. While versatility comes from full participation in an ever changing world, focus requires undivided attention to details. The Chinese character for crisis combines two seemingly conflicting symbols: one for danger, the other for opportunity. Picture versatility and focus as that sort of combination. While they may seem on the surface to contradict one another, they actually represent two inseparable skills. Such versatile men as Leonardo da Vinci and Benjamin Franklin maintained an intense focus that not only propelled them toward great achievements but also sustained their interest in and enthusiasm for a variety of endeavors. Their focus spurred their versatility and their versatility discovered new targets for their focus.

Focus is defined as the ability to direct individual organizational energy and resources toward one or a few details at a time. Suppose you have correctly anticipated an impending change. How do you adapt to that change without damaging the delicate balance between strategy and culture? By focusing on one step of implementation at a time, you can bring about the sort of permanent change that a brilliant strategy and strong culture can naturally accommodate. Successful organizations must be able to evolve, but if they try to change “too much, too soon” they risk losing their excellence.

Recognizing Focus

Some people have developed the ability to focus intensely on whatever activity or problem they tackle, and as a result, achieve desired results in a short time, thus buying time to pursue other tasks or problems with equal focus. Highly focused people have a hard time not applying focus to all phases of their lives.

There are three attributes of focus which aptly define the focused executive:

- Pursuing every activity of life with full attention. Focused executives can put such uninterrupted concentration into meetings that they can conclude in twenty minutes what might take several full-hour meetings for their unfocused counterparts. They buy time for meditation and action on other important matters.

- Limiting activities to those in which you can achieve excellence. Focused executives do not waste time signing the corporate letterhead or selecting office furniture when someone else can do so more efficiently and with more flair.
- Totally shifting from one activity to another when required. Focused executives move from activity to activity at convenient breaking points, or they tie up loose ends before launching their focus in another direction.

Scientists, doctors, and researchers might not be able to explain the phenomenon that enables people to focus their attention on one activity while temporarily excluding others, but it is believed that one word sums up the primary force behind focus, *interest*. When something truly interests you, it automatically attracts a certain degree of focus. Versatile executives find their attention drawn to a wide variety of interests, each of which they award with their full attention. To master focus, you must develop the ability to manage your interests, determining when and for how long you should award each your undivided attention. Although your interests develop over the years and are strongly influenced by tastes and preferences acquired as early as childhood, you can take four steps to manage them as focused executives do:

- First, identify and categorize your personal and professional interests, not just those activities to which you do devote time, but also those to which you think you should devote time. Try to rank your interests in terms of their importance. Which lead to excellence? When change requires you to focus on an area that does not interest you, you may be tempted to ignore the change. However, if the change will have a strong impact on your organization or industry, you can take one of two paths: delegate the responsibility for implementing a certain change to someone who does display interest in that area and therefore can achieve the necessary focus, or implement the change yourself in a way that coincides with your interests.
- Identify and categorize the personal and professional interests of the people who report directly to you, paying attention to those they feel are most important. Sensitivity will help you do so quickly and accurately. When you're sensitive to the interests of your people, you can better manage those interests, maximizing their great potential by applying them in areas where focus will help your organization exploit change.

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- Always review your own and your people's interests with aspect to a given change. Knowing that interests change, focused executives also know how to instill interest in both themselves and their people. Meditation and freewheeling discussions can reveal interesting facets of a previously mundane or boring problem. The more interest you can build, the more likely you are to achieve focus.
- Sustain interest in an area long enough to allow your focus to successfully, implement change. When you lose interest you also lose focus and set yourself up to become a victim rather than a master of impending change. How many times have you seen a new program or approach introduced, only to be scrapped a few months later because of a lack of sustained focus. If a change takes tremendous time and effort, consider a rotating assignment of personnel to make sure the interest level remains high.

Patience: Living in the Long Term. Executives must rise above the thoughts and actions of others and commit themselves to the long-term perspectives of their enterprises. If leaders believe in their firm's long-term purpose, they must be patient enough to see it through.

Patience

Patience is defined as a persistent commitment to approach all management tasks with the future firmly in mind (and therefore under control), employing the skills at the right time, in the right proportion, and for the right duration. Because it allows you to take the time to create excellence, patience integrates the other skills, fostering the ideal environment in which they all can flourish.

Recognizing Patience

In their recent book, *Decision making at the Top*, Gordon Donaldson and Jay Lorsch, both Harvard Business School professors, summarized their research into the complexities of corporate decision-making. Their goal was to discover why so many organizations make decisions that cause them to disappear during times of economic turbulence.

Obviously, it takes a strong leader to guide an organization through major changes involving strategy and culture, and Donaldson and Lorsch identified two leadership qualities that are essential to success: patience and persistence. It takes time to develop new ways of doing things, and you cannot take the necessary time unless you have patience. Donaldson and Lorsch identified these characteristics of patient executives:

- A capacity for personal reappraisal that allows the executive to rise above the pressures of day-to-day activities and evaluate his or her role in the broader scheme of things. When one executive, who had been intimately involved in the development and implementation of a new marketing strategy, backed off to reappraise her role, she was amazed to discover that her tight hold on the reins actually prevented others from embracing her new strategy. She immediately began working through rather than over others.
- A commitment to corporate assessment that leads the executive to analyze the sources of the organization's difficulties and to address them in terms of the organization's existing and future strengths. This characteristic, while similar to the first, goes beyond individual analysis to the organization as a whole.
- Confidence in a vision of the organization's future. Confident people are patient people, and patient people marshal strong confidence behind their vision. Those who lack faith in themselves, their visions, and their organization are always impatient.

Patience helps you make good decisions in the proper place, at the right time. As patience plays its integrative role in creating excellence, it functions as a timer to make sure events unfold in logical sequence. Chester Barnard recognized this long ago in his classic 1938 work, *The Functions of the Executive*, in which he described four characteristics of good decision-makers: "The fine art of executive decision consists in not deciding questions that are not now pertinent, in not deciding prematurely, in not making decisions that cannot be made effectively and in not making decisions that others should make." In other words, patient executives know when not to decide. The pace of accelerated change has blinded many executives to this time-honored advice. Barnard goes on to assert that four rules can help executives make good decisions:

- Make decisions that are pertinent now. That means having the patience to put off a decision that your financial officer pleading with you to make right now but that in your judgment need not be made until certain events and circumstances have occurred. When someone insists that you must answer yes or no right now, you should usually answer no.
- Never make decisions prematurely. That does not mean patient executives do not act quickly or experiment with solutions to problems, but it does mean that they do not act hastily or experiment prematurely.
- Make decisions that can be carried out. Executives who make decisions their organizations cannot support are not only impatient, they are foolish. Patient executives carefully pursue strategies their cultures can implement, focusing on changes they know their people can successfully make.
- Never make decisions others should make. In emergencies and crises, impatient executives can not resist making decisions for their subordinates, but when you make a decision someone else should make-even a strategically sound one-it adversely affects the culture.

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