

Cross Cultural Cosmos

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Leaders and Managers – Mission Ownership

What good is a company vision if you don't have the right people to realize it?

Many argue that leadership is a rare commodity because true leaders possess unusual characteristics that are innate and present in only a small fraction of the population. The opposing view is that leadership may require innate components but that leadership attributes are also developed through experience. Could it also be that recognized leaders of today should be classified as managers since they practice systematic control in forming structure and rules, whereas true leaders are not involved in implementation and operation?

The distinction between management and leadership has long been recognized. Most agree that managing for continuous improvement to the status quo is different from being a force for change that compels a group to innovate and depart from routine. The leader sustains the core concept and core values of the organization and possibly adapts them to evolving times and a good manager focuses on efficiency, standardization, and processes to either sustain a position of dominance within an industry or to maximize the growth potential of a company.

Those with ideas have found that managers at all levels consistently reject ideas offered to them. Most will ignore the idea and others will spend their intellectual power devising reasons why new ideas won't work, won't fit with the organization, and so on. Good ideas will eventually triumph, but sadly, most managers won't assist in the transition. To present an idea to a leader is close to impossible. They have become insulated and usually associate only with their peers. This is unfortunate because since the managers do not welcome new ideas, the leader of the organization may be losing some profitable ideas, maximizing the quality of their staff, becoming more competitive with their products, services, and caliber of staff. It is for the leader to pass the directive that the company is open to new ideas and he or she should be involved in this process.

A visionary entrepreneur understands problems, is open to new ideas and trends, grasps their full context, connects the dots, and has the vision, courage, resourcefulness, and persistence to see the solution through to execution. A successful manager would do the same on another level and scale. To create a meaningful vision, or even goal, leaders and managers must strike a careful balance between ambition and actionability, grandeur and simplicity. A defining characteristic of great leaders is their ability to tell the difference between the seemingly impossible and the genuinely impossible.

After 32 years in the business market on two continents, it seems to me that the majority of leaders and managers have changed their priorities. Personal ambition and/or professional fears have overtaken the general good of the company and the vision, mission, and goals of the company remain a little blurb on their website or in the promotional material. It is only family-run businesses that hold true to their founding vision and will dilute it only if absolutely necessary to the survival of the business. Directors and managers have less authority today. The human resource department – the most important department of any company, responsible for providing the fabric with which the company will be made, hiring management and staff who fit the company's vision and core values - has no authority. Why? Is it that the leadership has not made the effort to pass their vision to their department heads and assure that management and staff are aligned with the company vision? Is it that they don't trust their managers/directors? Is it that they have settled for a less-than-qualified manager/director?

A leader delegates to managers who delegate to heads of departments who delegate to their teams who implement a vision: "When we achieve our vision, our customers will love us because our products and services will be first class, our competitors will want to be like us, people will want to work for us, investors will want to buy into our company. You will be proud of what you do and for whom you do it". Effective visions push organizations and the individuals within those organizations to look outside themselves to see not what they are now but, rather, what they can become.

And what happens when the leader of the organization is replaced? And was he/she replaced to increase profits, change the course of the company, or introduce new a new strategy? Will he/she in turn bring in management who are more aligned with their new vision? Is it, in fact, time for the organization to recreate itself? After all, the leadership would not have been changed unless it was necessary – as they say, if it's not broken don't fix it. Or should the vision remain the same but the goals,

The power of integrity, dignity, efficiency, and elegance in communication and behavior

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objectives, and implementation change? These are obviously rhetorical questions, but extremely pertinent in a world of ever-changing management. The staff – the common denominator - goes through several leaders and different management, they become indifferent. Each leader has a new idea, vision, or new goals and wants to leave his mark. This is good, new blood is healthy, however, the staff – who are the ones responsible for implementing this fine new vision – have heard it all before and are losing their enthusiasm and even confidence in the management by this stage, or, in fact, may not even be aware of the company's changing business strategy.

We know that a vision comprises a core ideology (product and market lifecycles, technological breakthroughs, management fads, individual leaders) and core values (guiding principles of intrinsic value to those inside the organization- the glue that holds the organization together). The core purpose, a part of the core ideology, is the organization's reason for being (Walt Disney: "to make people happy", Sony: "to experience the joy of advancing and applying technology for the benefit of the public") and reflects the management's and staff's motivations for doing the company's work, it captures the soul of the organization.

Let's say that you have been asked to recreate the very best attributes of your organization in another country but you can only send six people to this country. Whom would you send? Most likely you would choose the people who understand your core values, have the highest level of credibility with their peers, and the highest levels of competence. Even global organizations composed of people from widely diverse cultures can identify a set of shared core values. The secret is to work from the individual to the organization. People involved in articulating the core values need to answer several questions: What core values do you personally bring to your work? Can you imagine them being as valid for you in 50 years as they are today? Would you want to hold on to them even if at some point one or more of them became a competitive disadvantage? If you were to start a new organization tomorrow in a different line of work, what core values would you build into the organization regardless of its industry? These questions make the crucial distinction between enduring core values that should not change and practices and strategies that should be changing all the time.

Your company is changing its strategy and has proudly announced their new goals but you get stuck at the first hurdle of meeting those goals – mobilizing the organization away from the status quo. Catalytic mechanisms (changes that cause actions throughout the system) are simple yet powerful tools which enable companies to boost commitment levels past the point of no return. They are stimulating, non-bureaucratic means of turning visions into reality, usually involving a distribution of power. Catalytic mechanisms motivate people to take initiative and exercise creativity - helping employees to achieve greatness by doing the unexpected. They motivate people to act on behalf of the customer and the company as a whole, giving people the freedom to do what is right, often in direct contradiction to senseless rules. It establishes a tangible process by which the vision will be fulfilled. They attract the right people. Traditional companies attempt to train newcomers in their core values. Great organizations find people who already share those values and will exhibit desired behaviors regardless of training or controls. Their catalytic mechanisms reinforce rather than instill their values. People who don't share those values either never get hired or soon leave. Since catalytic mechanisms provide no escape route and require 100% commitment, their results can last for decades. So, once again, it is the leaders who are accountable for the corporate vision's implementation.

The old saying "People are your most important asset" is not quite correct. The *right* people are your most important asset.

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