

Developing and Enhancing Organizational Leaders as Competitive Advantage

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Abstract

Competitive advantages represent the lynchpin of a successful firm's corporate strategy. A firm's effort to dominate competitors requires a well-crafted strategy executed effectively. Leadership is critical both in formulating strategy and during the execution stage. Firms seek to concentrate on strengthening their competitive advantages as a way of retaining and improving their competitive position. Leadership has the potential for being one of a firm's competitive advantages. As such, firm's need to focus on selecting individuals with leadership potential and develop these individuals to be successful leaders occupying influential positions throughout the organization. A recommended educational model offers a framework for organizations to pursue a proactive approach in developing effective leaders and more importantly, create a systematic process that ensures that leadership remains one of the organization's competitive advantages.

Introduction

Competitive advantages offer firms the potential to become successfully dominant performers within their respective industry. Often these firms became leaders within their respective niches (Porter, 1980). With increased competition from global firms because of declining trade restrictions, the competitive advantages of many American firms diminished in value to these firms. What these firms must do is find new advantages or accelerate the development of pre-existing competitive advantages. With more businesses, that is American emphasizing the value creation activities associated with a firm's human resources (Mulcahy, 2005). This becomes a critical area for creating competitive advantage. The author seeks to focus on a special subset of human resources, the development of leaders in an organization because leadership is even more critical to the success of a firm.

American businesses sought to increase their responsiveness to competitive challenges in part by decentralizing decision-making through the reduction in the number of managers through

constant re-organizations (Fryer, 2001). These forced reductions make competitive sense, but the organizations have become more reliant on fewer managers to provide the required visionary leadership throughout the organization. Thus, managers who are leader types are critical to the success of the organization. However, in only a limited number of circumstances have organizations focused on developing and enhancing the leadership capabilities of managers (Kotter, 1990).

The purpose of this study is to examine how organizations can view leaders as a source of competitive advantage. With this viewpoint, it becomes essential to identify leader types and to cultivate these individuals to enhance their contribution to the organization. To aid in this endeavor, we create a systematic leadership development process to develop leaders in a way that strengthens the organization's ability to compete successfully in the 21st century.

Historical View of Leadership

The major leadership theories emphasize that people either are born leaders, created or arise from situational factors that inspire someone to become a leader (Kreitner, 2004). In the latter case, circumstances dictate who will demonstrate the appropriate leadership capabilities of the type warranted by the conditions. The key dimension that differentiates leaders from non-leaders is leader attributes. Leadership attributes are important because these help to identify when someone is a leader or demonstrates leadership potential.

General Electric developed a complex system for identifying potential leaders through recruitment or identifying current employees who show leadership potential (Bartlett and Mclean, 2003). Once labeled as a potential leader, these individuals move to different career paths that involve active participation in a leadership development process. The ultimate outcome of this process is the preparation of the next CEO.

The ancient Greeks provided the earliest traceable attempts at defining leadership (Takala, 2006). Through the centuries people (Hamlyn, 1987) remained fascinated with the idea that a cookie cutter model for identifying and preparing leaders is achievable. Machiavelli's *The Prince* and Plato's *The Republic* represent serious attempts at identifying effective leader attributes and offering a framework for developing effective leaders. Since the middle ages numerous theories on the subject of leadership were developed (Chemers, 1977) to define and explain what is leadership.

The "born a leader" theorists believe that a leader is pre-determined through an individual's genetic code and that this type of leader only needs refinement or education to enhance already pre-existing abilities. This model of leadership lost favor because proponents showed a bias towards societal elites who failed to meet expectations.

The socio-cultural definition of leadership next emerged. Put a person in the "right" family/peer environment and benefiting from the accepted education model and ruling elite emerges. This school of thought lost credibility because too often these types purchased their way into the correct groups programs and emerged something short of leader types but who nevertheless were placed in leadership positions. Their failure to lead successfully led to the eclipse of the social-cultural leadership school as a dominant theoretical model.

As democratic societies started to emerge and the concept of meritocracy (Simon, 1965) become dominant, organizations sought leaders who demonstrated behaviors that were associated with the types of behavior people viewed as being exhibited by leaders. The problem

confronting this school was the inability to develop a universal code of behaviors that were applicable in all types of situations. Thus, the influence of this school waned.

The Situationalist school followed. Situation proponents view leadership as something that emerges according to the circumstances. Accordingly, someone can be a successful leader in one situation but fail as a leader in a different set of circumstances. The major limitation of the Situationalists is that society's efforts to prepare situational leaders is problematic when only the circumstances uncover who is a leader and in that it lasts only as long as the situation lasts. Thus, a new situation warrants a new and potentially different leader. The fundamental issue is whether society offers universal leadership training or selective training for a limited few. The problem inherent with a universal approach to leadership development is that a focused approach is necessary because society cannot develop everyone as a leader. This is impractical on economic terms and for the simple reason that many people prefer not to be a leader.

Other schools, such as the transformational leadership theorists emerged (Burns, 1978) without offering the holistic perspective that fully captures what constitutes leadership.

We have yet to uncover the universal theory to explain leadership with all schools of thought offering some useful insights and hints of important indicators of leader attributes. We can criticize all views for obvious reasons. The search for the universal is like looking for the "holy grail" while other attempts at narrow definitions are criticized as simplistic attempts that satisfies no one.

Unfortunately, while the theorists debate the issue, organizations require effective leaders. With more and more organizations emerging and the demands on organizations to improve performance increases, the need for effective leadership grows. Increased competition increases the demand for effective leaders. An increasingly complex society and a more dynamic world require a greater number of effective leaders to advance.

We can surmise intuitively that leadership is not genetically determined because there are many more leaders in today's world than in prior times. The probability exists that even if only some are effective, proportionate to the past this number is likely to be greater. We also recognize that for leaders to successfully lead requires preparation that the ancient Greek philosopher Plato (*The Republic*, 2003) recognized long ago. An individual must possess the capacity to lead but lacks the knowledge, skills and personality to lead effectively.

In designing a leadership development educational model that organizations can follow, we must first understand the importance of two primary dimensions, leader orientation and leader effectiveness. These dimensions are important to consider when designing a program because each symbolizes what an effective leader must be to be effective.

Leader Orientation

Leaders demonstrate a two-dimensional view, which help to define them as a leader versus a non-leader manager (Zaleznik, 1977). One dimension, "leader orientation," encompasses what Plato refers to as "the all knowing philosopher king" which means that the ideal philosopher ideal combines physical, military, intellectual and philosophical abilities. The second dimension is proportionalism. More art than science, proportionalism refers to the extent to which someone possesses personal attributes associated with leaders.

Leader orientation incorporates three primary characteristics. There is the strategist who is a visionary, capable of defining a roadmap with a specific outcome or end state. A strategist

focuses on the “big picture” and is able to look beyond on the day-to-day (routines) that easily can distract.

The second characteristic concerns the leader’s ability to execute a strategy where the emphasis is on managing day-to-day routines that involve others who are responsible for facilitating change. The leader is responsible for ensuring that the vision is achievable and routines established and followed to ensure that the probability of realizing the vision is high.

Finally, leadership incorporates a technical component. This refers to a specialization that makes the leader an expert. Expertise can be engineering based, financial, operational or any other area of technical knowledge which has a direct association (versus indirect such as Human Resources) with the success of the organization. Technical expertise is often associated with one of the organization’s competitive advantages. Competitive advantages refer to those unique strengths of the organization, which represent the key factors, which contribute to the success of the organization.

Proportionality refers to the extent to which a leader incorporates strategic, manager and technical attributes (See Figure 1). Leaders incorporate all three attributes but what differentiates someone who is an actual leader from a non-leader manager is the dominance of the strategic attribute. First, the strategist must dominate because leaders must provide a vision to all the critical stakeholders and keep the organization’s constituents focused on this vision of what the organization is to become. Next in importance is the manager attribute. Execution is all about creating or re-designing systems and processes, adhering to these to move the organization towards realizing the vision. Because execution is critical to the success of the leader, managing requires an understanding of the role and purpose of management systems and processes. This understanding is fundamental to direct others and oversee the successful execution of strategy, which is all about the optimal functioning of systems and processes. Last, the leader incorporates a technical attribute because the leader must demonstrate a proficiency in and commitment to at least one of the organization’s competitive advantages. This ensures that the organization continues to build on this advantage. A leader that possesses no useful expertise appreciates and values other competitive advantages because the leader has firsthand knowledge of how advantages benefit the organization. This ensures that competitive advantages remain critical foci in the evolution of an organization’s corporate strategy.

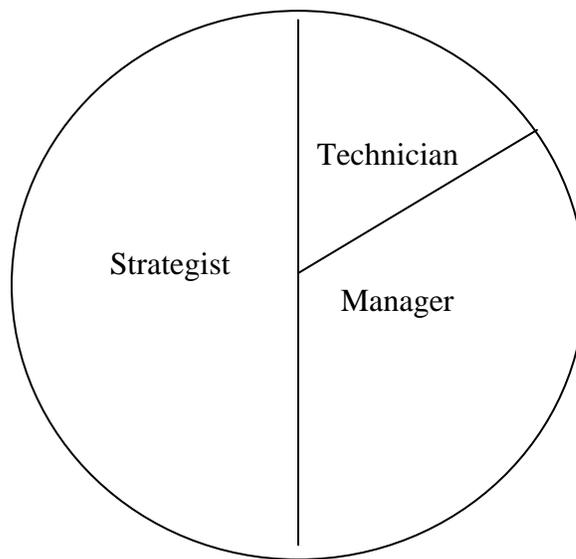


Figure 1. Proportionality of the key attributes of a strategic leader type.

Organizational Effectiveness

We judge leaders by the effectiveness of the organization (Edmunds, 2006). Effectiveness refers to the achievement of pre-determined outcomes, referred to as goals. Goal achievement is subordinate to the realization of the vision. The goals move the organization forward in the effort to realize the vision.

Once a strategy is set an effective leader, shifts focus towards the execution phase of implementing the strategy. Execution (Bossidy and Charan, 2002) has an operational focus and involves leveraging the organization's systems and processes to accomplish the key tasks associated with achieving the goals. People management and organization skills are essential in execution because of the need to rely on others to perform according to expectations. Organizational effectiveness is also critical because of the myriad day-to-day issues can easily distract and sidetrack the leaders from focusing on actions correlated with performing the key tasks associated with achieving the goals. The leader's primary responsibility during execution is to keep everyone motivated and focused which requires that the leader remain committed and focused (Mintzberg, 1990).

To achieve a vision requires a leader who is a change agent, moving the organization along a growth trajectory. Orchestrating change requires modification to the existing systems, processes and routines. Resistance to change occurs for many reasons, one of which is a natural desire to retain that, which is familiar (the Comfort Zone). The more ambitious the vision, the greater are the changes expected and the greater the likelihood of resistance. A focused leader is sensitive to the program of resistance. Actions dealing with resistance cover preventive measures to forestall resistance and remedial measures to overcome resistance. The 80/20 principle (Reh, 2006) helps to keep the leader focused on allocating the bulk of the leaders' time on the critical issues that lead to success.

Execution issues are the dominant focus (See Figure 2) during the process for achieving the vision. However, the leaders need to retain a strong view of and commitment to strategy because strategy is the roadmap that identifies and directs the important actions during execution. Strategy can change because of external factors (Farkas and Wetlaufer, 1996) or because of internal problems (Teal, 1996) which warrant a shift in strategy. External factors refer to new competitive challenges, changes in economic conditions and other factors outside of the control of the organization, which can affect the organization's performance. Internal factors, controllable by the organization, nevertheless represent strong impediments, which represent serious barriers that can distract a leader's focus and result in a failed vision. For example, often it is better to go around an enemy's defensive position (Luvaas, 1999) by outflanking movements. The position becomes irrelevant in the scheme of things and handled later once the main battle is won. Only when a position is critical to the outcome of the battle is the position attacked, but ideally on the attacker's terms and not the defenders. This example serves to illustrate for the leader the approach to take when confronting resistance to change. Constant battles, though victorious, slow the change process and can ultimately contribute to the failure in realizing the vision.

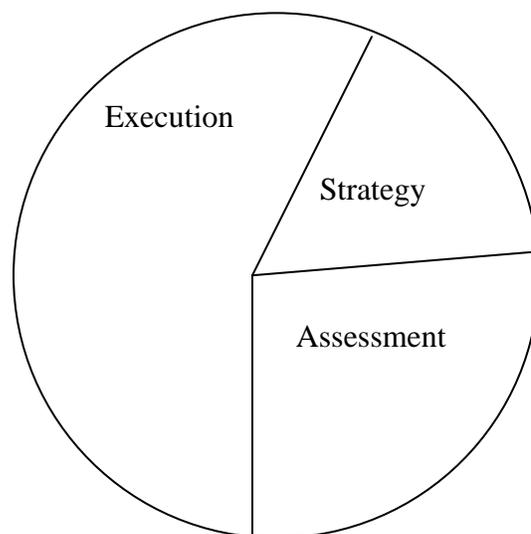


Figure 2. Proportionality of the key attributes of a leader type during execution.

Finally, the leader needs to assess progress (use benchmarking article) towards accomplishing the organizational goals. The litmus test for a leader is success and success requires measurement. Therefore, a metric system helps to identify critical information to collect and the form in which to organize the information. Goals help to define the type of information to collect and the best way to organize this information. For example, if a goal is to increase market share by some percent, information on the organization's sales and sales of all other

competitors within the market is collected and then (using ratio analysis) we compare company sales with total sales to determine market share.

Up to this point we emphasize measuring the performance of the organization or large units within a conglomerate type organization. However, too often clear trends take time to evolve and provide the requisite feedback. Addressing resistance and operational problems quickly is essential. Leaders do not have the luxury of time to demonstrate success unless there is a reservoir of goodwill associated with prior successes. A leader needs to develop a different form of metric system including qualitative and quantitative information that provides the necessary feedback to quickly identify key problem areas and target these problems with an immediate solution.

The leader who develops the processes for collecting and organizing the information determines the types of qualitative and quantitative information. What is central to organizational and leader success is the need to get a feel for the “pulse” of the organization because this provides the leader with information about the commitment and success of others in doing the work the leader requires. Those who want the leader to succeed in achieving the vision show a commitment solving operational problems. Those less committed allow problems to become insurmountable. Leaders need to know which scenario dominates in order to take action that either reinforces or overcomes these scenarios.

Competitive Advantage

Organizational success relies in part on the ability to leverage the organization’s competitive advantages to achieve the strategic goals. Strategic goals refer to the long term aims that an organization seeks to accomplish which, if achieved, places the successful organization in a superior position versus its’ competitors or erstwhile competitors. Thus, we begin to understand the concept of competitive advantage (Dranove and Marciano, 2005). The concept is a relative term. That is, the organization has an advantage over competitors. However, the advantage(s) are not universal but narrow in scope. An organization may realize a superior position (ranked #1) than competitors and this in itself is an advantage. However, the factors, which got the organization to a top ranking, are more critical. Often considered strengths, strengths are ephemeral. Critical advantages represent unique strengths developed over time, which the organization’s corporate strategy emphasizes. Wal-Mart has a unique inventory control system to help keep costs down and avoid deleting stock at individual stores. DELL Computer emphasizes its manufacturing expertise, GE takes advantage of the leadership training and development programs designed to find and prepare leaders. Marvel Enterprises leverages the creative writers who develop unique and long lasting storylines. Other organizations have excellent product development processes, unique relationships with distributors or operational expertise in utilizing the experience curve.

What separates competitive advantages from strengths to create a special class of strengths are the uniqueness of the “advantage “and the ability of the organization to outperform competitors consistently by leveraging these advantages (s) strategically. Strengths are easily lost or replicated by competitors. Advantages are difficult to lose (but can be) and difficult for competitors to emulate successfully (though not impossible).

Competitors can gain competitive advantage(s) generically by developing internal strengths into competitive advantages or through the acquisition of existing advantages either by taking over another organization or recruiting people with the knowledge and expertise.

Acquisitions either assist the organization by enhancing a pre-existing strength(s) into an advantage(s) or create a very new advantage(s). However, acquisitions are often difficult to make work because assimilation is a difficult process to navigate through because of cultural barriers (Cameron and Quinn, 1999).

How an organization first acquires competitive advantages is a critical question because the answer poses obvious benefits to the organization. Most probably, the organization begins with an idea about important strengths. Only through successful performance and reflection on the key factors that contributed to success do the advantages begin to emerge clearly. Understanding how the process evolves is important, but identifying the start point is essential. Identifying the start point is critical to the process.

People represent the beginning first step. To understand the source of competitive advantage is to know the key people in the organization. Too often, we look at the systems and processes that are the manifestations of the competitive advantages. These represent the tactics of the organization to both improve the competitive advantages and to guard against overdependence on individuals.

There are three categories of people from which organizations can gain competitive advantages. The strategists, the managers and the technical experts represent the three major groupings of relevant employees. As described earlier, what is important to know is that the combination of the knowledge, skills and abilities of key people emerges over time to turn strengths into advantages over time. The astute organization recognizes the competitive advantage and begins to incorporate these into the corporate strategy. The thoughtful organization, during the execution stage in implementing the strategy, creates or enhances the systems, processes and routines associated with the competitive advantages. The consequence is to build an insurmountable lead over competitors.

Insightful leadership is a source of advantage itself. This type of leader has the awareness to identify factors that contribute to the success of the organization and demonstrates the good sense to leverage these factors to continue the organization's success. This reflects the strategic leader.

The manager who knows how the systems and processes operate can identify problem-areas or bottlenecks and offer solutions. The manager's expertise is in offering a superior way to execute a firm's strategy through the utilization of the systems, processes and routines associated with the respective advantage(s).

Technical experts refer to organizational members who provide a specialized knowledge that extends out through the associate skills and abilities that are manifestations of the specialized knowledge. These individuals provide the knowledge to create an advantage and remain on the knowledge frontier to keep the advantage unique and beneficial to the organization.

We link the three types of personas. The leader identifies the competitive advantages and prioritizes both the organization's strategy and actions around the advantage(s). The manager executes the strategy through an understanding and use of the mechanisms (i.e., systems, processes, routines) associated with implementing strategy. The technical expert provides the specialized knowledge that keeps the organization on the cutting edge through continuous effort to push the frontier of knowledge further and further (The strategist provides the vision, the manager executes and the technical expert is the knowledge specialist.)

After identifying the competitive advantages, the organization must make haste to continue to build on these competitive advantage(s). The point of this is obvious. Identifying

and creating new advantages is not precluded; creating new advantages is difficult and takes time to determine if an advantage sought is an advantage gained. Maintaining and building on an existing advantage(s) requires a pro-active approach by the organization's leaders and the ability to identify and develop leaders can be a competitive advantage. What follows is a proposed educational model for developing effective leaders as a competitive advantage (Gandz, 2006).

Proposed Educational Model

We begin by recommending the design of a selection process to target individuals who fit an organization's profile as a leader type. Selection is difficult for two reasons. First, assessment is an imperfect process, which can remove potential leader types and identify those who represent a false positive type of leader. No system is fool proof but a fail-safe mechanism approach is to continuously evaluate the assessment process to ensure that assessment meets the needs of the organization. Second, there are those who because of maturation and experience reasons fail to be identified as leader types but at some point begin to fit the profile of someone with potential to become a leader. The organization must build into the assessment process a mechanism to identify these individuals. By creating the ability to recognize these people, the organization benefits from utilizing the leadership abilities of the individuals.

Finally, there is no universal test to identify potential leaders. Each organization must first create a leader profile that identifies the leader qualities most in demand and then create a methodology for finding people who fit this profile. Use of multiple measures is ideal because this ensures internal consistency so that we know the process is reliable and the findings valid. Psychological profiles, supervisory evaluations, prior work experiences and leadership type roles, personal interviews, peer evaluations represent some of the major methods an organization can use to identify someone who matches up with the organization's leader criterion

Designing a leadership educational program is an idiosyncratic experience for each organization to create. To maximize the effectiveness of the program addressing specific action issues is critical. These include the following.

- Explaining both training (job specific) and developmental (non-job specific) themes
- Creating a systematic process
- Provide focused *active* learning methods
- Problem-solving using conventional methods (convergence)
- Problem-solving through non-conventional means (divergence)
- Process orientation
- Assessment of the education program

Creating a Systematic Process

Designing a leadership educational program requires forethought and consideration of the process to follow. Thinking about the outcomes forces decision-makers to consider the process to follow including learning methods to use, sequence of linked stages to follow, assessment techniques to use in evaluating the program and trainees, the key people directly involved and training of the trainers. Whether simple or complex, a well-designed educational training program sets the tone in professionalizing a process expected to develop leaders for the organization on an ongoing basis.

Training and Development

The educational program needs to have a training (job-specific) focus and developmental emphasis (non-job specific). Job specific training is important because trainees need to relate the subject matter with their work, utilizing training and the job in an osmotic relationship. The job provides concrete situations to use during training, which helps trainees, reflect on the issues confronted routinely and non-routinely.

Developmental activities are essential in preparing trainees because these activities aim to broaden the trainees' abilities such that the trainee can apply these abilities in a wide variety of situations. Oral and written communication, organizational skills (e.g., time management, prioritization, and multi-tasking), social relationship skills (e.g., empathy, listening, etc.) and motivating others are examples of the types of abilities successful leaders require.

Leader Groups

Groups represent a powerful force for influencing individual behavior. Research shows both positive and negative effects of groups (Janis, 1982). Janis describes how groups influence individuals to act in ways the individual would not choose left alone. Harnessing the power of the group effect enables trainers to maximize the impact of the educational program on trainees in applying self-directed learning exercises (Hunt and Weintraub, 2007).

Focused Active Learning

Learning while doing activities represents an optimal approach to teaching leadership because of the in vivo nature of the activities. The approach, referred to as *focused active learning*, differs from action learning because the latter emphasizes the reflective approach to learning from prior experienced. The learning methods emphasize a focused approach because trainers need to ensure that the trainees maximize the total learning benefits from the experiential exercises. Current experiences where individuals make major and routine decisions, develop motivational programs, participate in strategic planning, re-organizations, etc. represent perfect opportunities to implement new ideas and experience first-hand the consequences. Here reflection is important by examining how mediate actions demonstrate the benefits of training. An incremental approach in applying new ideas by trainees likely and expected because the individual lacks the familiarity and experience (positive) in applying new ideas. The individual selects the method(s) for introducing a new idea, step-by-step, and benefits from the knowledge and experience through this incremental approach.

There are varieties of techniques used to facilitate focused active learning. Examples include:

- Answering questions with a specific focus
- Keeping a log using defined guidelines for note-taking
- Self-interview using prepared questions
- Prepare one page memorandum's after a set point in time updating the status of the situation (responding to pre-determined memorandum content guidelines)
- Making group presentations following a pre-determined format.

Conventional Problem-Solving

Conventional problem solving refers to the cultural-bound methods/approaches (Cameron and Quinn, 1999) that represent commonly accepted practices used to solve problems by

organizations. The leader trainee must be adept at both knowing and using these problem-solving practices. Deviance from normal practices is difficult because of resistance to doing anything that differs from standard practices. This is particularly true at lower levels in the organization where expectations to conform dominate. Therefore, the leader trainee must be adept at using the conventional means for solving problems. This means that the trainee must know the following.

- Process for solving major problems
- Process for solving minor problems
- Communication methods associated with problem-solving
- Consideration of those who needed to be involved depending on whether the problem is major or minor

Common examples of methods used in solving problems include benchmarking, forecasting techniques, statistical analysis, brainstorming, etc. A problem-solving process involves knowing each stage, the sequence of stages, information requirements, reporting requirements, and selecting and involving people.

Non-Conventional Problem-Solving

The ability to think outside the box or develop innovative solutions to difficult problems is often what separates leaders from non-leaders. Leaders need to know how to move beyond traditional practices when necessary to be able to assist others. Conventional approaches work well in familiar and predictable situations. However, organizations often confront situations in which the circumstances require non-traditional responses. Too often, the usual approach is to attempt to shape the circumstances to apply the commonly used problem-solving procedures. This is a recipe for long-term disaster because the organization rigidifies as it attempts to defy change thus becoming insulated and susceptible to obsolescence. This situation means that the organization becomes divorced from the reality. The leader trainee needs to learn how to work in different, unique ways to their benefit and to assist others to do the same. Training must involve identifying novel solutions to atypical problems. Here again an incremental approach to problem solving is most likely to apply until the leader builds credibility through developing a record of accomplishment of successful problem-solving situations. Also, become more confident and work with the leader who demonstrates that new approaches can and do work effectively.

Knowledge of the Role, Functions and Consequence of Processes

If everything about business is part of some form of process, understanding the role, functions and consequences of a process is logical and necessary. Process here refers to an orderly sequence of multiple combinations of decisions-actions with a common focus. Whether the process involves strategic planning, solving operational problems or operational re-alignments, implementing strategy or adhering to policy, there is a process involved (a process can range from extremely formal to very informal). Process provides order, a systematic way of accomplishing a purpose.

Leadership training must involve process education because understanding processes represents a proactive approach to assist leaders during execution of the organization's strategy. Proactive because leaders must focus on the most logical sequence of decisions and actions, which if

successfully executed, leads to the expected outcome. Guaranteed results are improbable because of the probabilistic nature of decision-making. Leaders require expertise in time management. First, because there is not an unlimited amount of time to achieve concrete results. Second, there are too many stakeholders watching the leader, assessing whether the leader is succeeding according to the stakeholders expectations and the expectations. Finally, leaders never have enough time. Understanding the importance and value of a process, leaders begin to understand the importance of prioritizing important goals to accomplish and then begin to consider the best way to accomplish these goals. Awareness and understanding of process is important because this contributes to designing the process. An effective leader is aware that circumstances change and the process must change to meet the circumstances. The training program that includes a module covering process helps leader trainees begin to understand the value of process, process limitations and requirements to fulfill to create a successful process. By putting the subject of process in the training program, leader trainees begin to examine and understand process issues and learn to make better use of this knowledge to achieve more and better outcomes. This knowledge can substantially enhance leaders' leadership capabilities during strategy formulation and strategy execution.

Assessment of the Education Program

Ensuring that the education program is effective is essential in justifying the expense associated with operating a formal leadership-training program. Assessment starts with a review of the process, criteria and success rate in selecting the "right" types of people; training involves teaching the "correct" subjects; and ensuring that the best training methods are employed. "Garbage in garbage out" is a phrase that best illustrates the importance of selecting the right people. The organization determines the profile that defines "right". Once defined it is important to stay committed to this definition until such time that the organization requires a modification of the definition. Selecting the right people ensures that we learn the subject matter because of the motivation to succeed is high; trainees benefit from learning from each other; and that the organization is finding and developing individuals who are actual leaders. Although some with leadership potential may initially get excluded from the selection process for a variety of reasons (some may be included in error as well), individuals with leadership promise stand out eventually and are recognized as such and then become eligible for leadership training. The organization must not dwell on who loses out or who fails subsequent to joining the training program. Instead, the focus is on improving the selection process to find the "right" people. (Sorcher and Brant, 2002)

Assessment includes examining the subject matter covered in the training program. Some subjects are likely to remain an essential component of training (considered the fundamentals). Other subjects are likely to diminish in importance because time determines the long-term viability of subject to remain relevant and useful to decision makers. Over time new subjects emerge that, become critical areas for inclusion. The education program must avoid operating with a rigid curriculum far removed from contemporary management issues (Loehr and Schnartz, 2001).

Finally, trainees must assess the effectiveness of training methods. Methodology is the vehicle for educating. An effective method is a powerful medium for promoting learning just as an ineffective method can impair learning. Trainers need to recognize the importance and relevance of training methods and determine the best and most appropriate methods to include.

Determining effectiveness is an art and a science. Objective measures exist to assess the knowledge and skills learned. Subjective measures are also important in generating feedback from all those parties committed to the success of the educational programs (decision-makers, trainers and trainees). Because training is continuous, designing a process and assessment tools are essential in keeping the educational program dynamic and relevant, which contribute to the success of the organization.

Conclusions

It is a sine qua non that a leadership development program remains both dynamic and relevant. Dynamic because the experience must charge trainees with an excitement to lead and pose a challenge for trainees to step up and focus on reaching greater levels of achievement and to become as role models for others to follow. A dynamic program changes in all ways to ensure that trainees benefit from the myriad of opportunities presented throughout the training program. The design of the program, management of the program, teaching methods employed, program content, and the trainers all contribute to a dynamic process. Relevance is essential because irrelevant subjects do not help leaders improve their effectiveness. This negatively affects the organization. Trainers and program managers need to stay abreast of the issues confronting the organization to ensure that this knowledge is incorporated into training in a way that motivates the trainees.

Leadership is teachable! We can expose individuals identified as leaders to a vast array of knowledge and skills utilized by experienced successful leaders as well as failed leadership experiences. Both types of situations are enriching because each helps clarify what practices can work. What is essential is exposing trainees to a wide variety of situations to help the trainee understand the contextual issues (Bennis and Thomas, 2002) which shape leader actions and contribute to either success or failure.

Selection is critical to the success of any leadership development program. With the wrong candidates, even the best designed and managed program will fail to accomplish its mission. A dynamic and relevant program, abetted by a well-run program offering contemporary subjects using varied and sophisticated teaching methods will not benefit the organization if training the wrong candidates. Wrong in the sense that too many do not represent leadership candidates. Thus, the organization needs to establish a “relevant profile” of the type of leader needed and utilize effective tools to screen candidates. Developing a profile using external sources helps to overcome internal bias that might be “user friendly” but identifies less than the best candidates. Screening tools are essential in targeting good candidates, minimize the problems associated with selecting the wrong candidates, identifying good candidates, and minimize failing to identify the correct candidates (based on the firm’s leader profile characteristics).

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