

Leadership - communication



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Leadership means many things to many people. Some who hold positions of executive power lack leadership qualities; and others are natural leaders.

The distinction between management and leadership involves the difference between influencing and administering. It is possible for an individual to be an effective leader in the absence of management skills, and to be an effective manager in the absence of leadership qualities, so long as someone else in the organization has the other strength and can utilize it to inform the management/leadership process. Yet the most effective managers, those whose executive action is likely to have the highest level of value within an organization, have the qualities of leadership in addition to management skill.

Strategic decision-making depends upon those who have both of these skill sets. An executive who understands the mechanical nuances of his/her organization and is able to manipulate processes to achieve desired outcomes is an effective manager. Add to that the ability to articulate a vision and to influence others to work toward it and you have an effective manager with leadership qualities. This manager, trained to exercise independent, critical judgment, is well equipped for strategic decision-making (Hellwich, 2004).

The characteristics of leadership that foster strategic decision-making are often tied to the personal characteristics or qualities of the executive.

Leadership is more ability than a skill, although there has been significant debate about whether leadership characteristics can be learned. The dimensions of a leader fall into the categories of charisma, vision, interpersonal skill, and ethical responsibility, to name but a few. These qualities, when possessed by an organization's executives, are strongly

linked to strategic decision-making. Without them, an executive is merely a high level manager or administrator without the ability to impact the strategic direction of the organization.

Leadership is somewhat of a nebulous concept involving often intangible characteristics. For this reason, it is difficult to quantitatively measure leadership effectiveness. There are certainly some common characteristics that most experts would agree are shared by effective leaders. " Research shows that successful business leaders invariably have four key skills: they can establish strong relationships; hire, build and lead teams; produce results; and adapt to changing demands" (" Key skills," 2006, para. 2). These qualities differentiate leaders from mere managers, who often independently operate the organizational machinery that is may have been designed and implemented by the leaders of the organization.

Strategic leadership is often the result of the attributes of the executives who make strategic decisions: values; cognitive models; education and experience; and personality styles. There are many characteristics that are common to effective leaders, which can be categorized both as " hard" and " soft" skills. The perception of what constitutes leadership effectiveness, and whether or not a particular individual is an effective leader, changes depending on the person being asked. An executive might consider him/herself to be much more effective than would his/her peers or the people reporting to that executive. Interpersonal skills, communication, and facilitating an open and honest assessment from all reporting directions is crucial to forming an accurate picture of one's own leadership effectiveness. Companies must invest in processes and tools to recruit and develop the best possible leaders in order to facilitate executive action that has a true

impact on the strategic direction of the organization.

Works Cited

Hellwich, M. (2004, March/April). Strategic decision making across professional disciplines. *Cost Management*, 18(2), 39.

Key skills set successful business leaders apart. (2006, August 12). *South China Morning Post*, 4.