

The New Age Leadership

Conventionally, leadership was the art of getting things done. Such a definition only characterizes the conservative attitude of the then leaders. But then, the circumstances in the society and the corporates were entirely different. Thus the conservative attitude of those leaders was apt in accordance with their times. The changing circumstances demand new techniques and new approaches. This article focuses on few such leadership models that have gained recognition and are used on a large scale to lead a team in an organization

The Leadership Model

There is no denying to the fact that leadership is not everybody's cup of tea. Apart from the academic enrichments and the subject expertise, it also demands few other traits. Anne Deering, Robert Dilts, Julian Russel in their book, *Alpha Leadership* segregate the role of a leader into three broad functions viz.

- Anticipate.
- Align.
- Act.

They further divide each of the functions into three sub-functions. Thus they call their 'inside-out view' of leadership as The nine principles of *Alpha Leadership*.

Anticipate

A leader needs to have the vision of the future happenings and contingencies. He/she is required to possess the ability to anticipate the future. A leader must be a good speculator (See Figure 1). To anticipate accurately, a leader is suggested to follow a three often-prescribed but seldom-implemented functions. These include:

- Detecting weak signals;
- Developing mental agility; and
- Freeing up resources.

Grasping the Signals— Skin-driven Management

The corporates have a strong belief and a blind faith in the concept of strategic planning. One should understand the logic that as long as the rate of change in the external environment is slow, the strategic planning is always viable. But when the times get volatile and the rate of change assumes new pace, the strategic

planning loses feasibility. One should not stick to the outlandish strategies to handle the new environment. It demands continuous attention of the company. The company personnel should attentively grasp the signals observed by the market facing staff. The action, then should in response to the market happenings directly and accordingly and not by a blind formula or strategy. The authors in the book *Alpha Leadership* call this mechanism as skin-driven management. The skin-driven management demands a few questions to be answered. They are:

- Who has the market knowledge?
- What is the best mechanism for sharing this knowledge?
- How can you ensure that everyone participates every time?
- How do you ensure that information is acted on?

Once the weak signals are detected, it is time to jump into action. It is the leader's responsibility mould the employees' attitude in accordance with the required change. He/she should promote the concept of 'Out of the box approach' to get new ideas and strategies from them. *Alpha Leadership* calls it 'developing mental Agility'. The authors rightly say that we live in the natural world, but also in a world. Which we have imagined and made real. This constant process of dream realization is manifested not only in rapid technological advance and endless streams of new products and services, but also in changing tastes, outlooks and behaviors as people imagined and then experiment with the new styles of living.

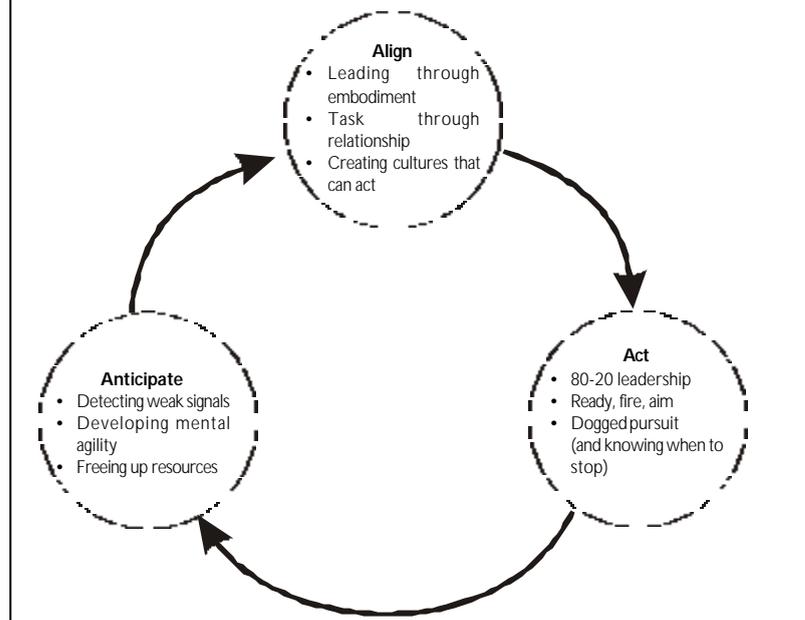
Align

Once the leader unveils the holes through his anticipatory and speculating skills, he/she should bring his/her inferences and revelations in alignment with the employees. The authors in the book *Alpha Leadership* propose that the effective alignment operates on three levels; His/her ability to embody his or her goals, alignment of relationship and coalitions among the people and wider alignment of the organization's cultures to its goals. All these undeniably depend on the pivotal factor called communication. A successful communication leads to a successful alignment in an organization.

Congruence Through Communication

After recognizing the gaps, it is the leader's foremost responsibility to bring about a congruence between his/her understanding of the affairs and his/her employees' understanding at the same level. For this congruence one has to be perfect in communication. Hardly we can find anybody in the senior managerial level of a company, who is not aware of the significance of communication in getting things done. It is a much discussed, much written and much believed gospel that communication is the most important building block of a leader. One ceases to be called a leader if he is not a good communicator. Communication is often misunderstood as excellent speaking skills and appropriate body language. One must thoroughly understand that these activities and gestures are mere a part of

Figure 1: The Nine Principles of Alpha Leadership



communication. Communication is not an act; it is a process.

Filling the Gaps—The GAPS Strategy

Every organization requires to remember three basic needs that govern the functioning of the firm. Viz., business needs, performance needs, and work environment and capability needs.

It is the responsibility of the top management to ensure that all these needs are aligned to each other. To get the best results one needs to understand the business needs, and then one has to determine the performance requirements of the people to meet those needs. To ensure the performance, one has to make certain that people are truly capable and that their work environment needs are being met. If any piece is missing in this alignment, the firm is going to have problems.

- **Zapping the Gaps**

When a firm's state of affairs is not healthy, there is every possibility that any of the three basic needs is not in its place. There can be various factors responsible for such state of entropy like gap in communication, gap in expertise, gap in training methods, gap in execution etc. Ken Blanchard in his book *Zap the Gap* has suggested an apparently effective and efficient antidote to eradicate the gaps in an organization. He suggests a four-step strategy that is abbreviated as GAPS strategy.

- **'Go' for the Shoulds**

The first step of the strategy says that an organization should know and understand as to what should be the state of affairs of the job that is currently being observed. 'Should' indicates the zero trouble zone, the flawless state of affairs. It suggests how the situation would have been, had is not been affected by any problem or gap.

- **'Analyze' the Is**

'Is' denotes the state of affairs that exist in the organization presently. To put it clearly, 'Should' denotes the standard performance level that is expected out of an employee whereas 'is' the real performance that the employees are showing as output. The difference between the 'should;' and 'is' is the gap in the organization

- **Pin down the Causes**

By this phase of the strategy, we would have known the gaps existing in the organization that are preventing the actual performance from meeting the standard performance. People often commit the mistake of jumping onto the solutions immediately after spotting the problem. They neglect the more important and unavoidable phase i.e., the cause-hunt phase. The third phase of the process is pinning down the causes responsible for the problems.

- **'Select' the Solutions**

Now arrives the last but the much awaited phase of the process i.e., selecting appropriate solutions. Taking the difference between the 'should' and 'is' i.e., the gap and the causes of the gap as the base, one should implement, apt and appropriate solution that would fit into the problem.

Communication—A Process

It is a process comprising of a set of activities, each one bearing equal importance. Any disturbance in any phase may lead to a distorted communication and thus a dissatisfactory result. The process of communication may broadly comprise of the following steps:

- Understand.
- Arrange.
- Convey.
- Convince.

The process of communication starts absolutely at the communicator's end and ends at the receiver's end. The communicator, before facing the receivers must make a thorough preparation of the subject. He/she must form a concrete understanding of the issue to be communicated. After forming a strong idea on the subject, one should align the issue according to the needs of the receivers. One must understand that the language or the level at which one understands a concept is often quite different from the language in which it is to be communicated to the people. This often creates a communication barrier. One must be cautious of this possibility and communicate his/her message the way people want to receive it, and not the way he/she wants to communicate. To make this happen, the communicator must align his/her message as per the needs and wants of the audience. Then comes the conveying phase. The communicator should convey the message effectively and as per the alignment in verbal or written form, as per the requirement. While the first three phases of the process of communication take place at the communicator's end, the last phase lies totally at the receiver's end. The understanding, aligning and conveying of the message by the communicator should be such that the receiver should readily get convinced and accept the same. This completes the process of communication.

Act

After the two earlier exercises i.e., anticipation and alignment, the organization is expected to have gained an insight on the various issues in and around the organization. Now the time to act has arrived. One requires having a knack of prioritizing various activities that he/she has to perform. It is important to do things right, but it is equally important to do right things at right time and in right order. If the audience believe that their leaders haven't got a clue about what is going on at the front line, they are not likely to be willing to follow them in a new direction.

Conclusion

The growing competition and the proportionately growing demand for the managers to manage the state of affairs, has led to the situation where organization are being over-managed and under-led. Under such circumstances, it becomes inevitable for a manager to follow certain guidelines that provide a fair understanding of the functions of a leader in an organization. The strategies suggested in the publications like *Zap the Gaps* by Kenneth Blanchard, *Alpha Leadership* by the trio of Anne Deering, Robert Dilts and Julian Russell, *Working Together* by James P Lewis etc., provides a few efficient tools to lead an organization effectively. Whatever theories may suggest to build the structure called leadership, the base has to comprise of all those characteristics that are the inevitable prerequisites of leaders. ■

References

1. *Zap the Gaps*, Ken Blanchard.
2. *Alpha Leadership*, Anne Deering, Robert Dilts, Julian Russell.

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Biblical Lessons on Justice and Fairness

- If people perceive that they are being treated unfairly, they will stop performing or they will act like those who are perceived as favored.
- The most credible companies are committed to justice not in the workplace but in the communities where they are located.
- The most credible leaders believe in fairness to all individuals and groups and act in consonance with these believes even when this is uncomfortable or difficult.
- A concern for the economically or socially disadvantaged can help not just a leader's credibility but also a company's profitability.
- A leader who operates on principles of fairness inspires better employee performance, loyalty, and retention.

Source: The Bible on Leadership.