

TARGETED LEADERSHIP

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INTRODUCTION

Every organization is unique in some ways, yet also has much in common with other organizations. For example, each organization has a unique history, environment, and set of operating values and principles, and each faces a unique set of business issues and needs. But each organization must also accomplish a set of functions in common with others: e.g., it must market, sell, and deliver its products and services and it must monitor and manage its processes.

Organizations often recognize, and address, this mix of commonality and uniqueness in their marketing efforts, their information systems, their compensation and benefit plans and a multitude of other ways. In each of these areas, decisions are made by taking into account both broadly-applicable general principles and the specific needs of the business. Yet we often treat leadership differently, looking for the ‘best’ approach independent of the needs of a specific organization.

The most effective leadership model for an organization should reflect both its uniqueness and its commonality with other organizations. While all leaders must accomplish the same fundamental purposes, the way they do so must reflect the people they work with and the organizational environment in which they work. *A targeted approach to leadership is one that reflects both the purposes and practices of successful leaders and the unique needs and business environment of a particular organization.*

The key benefits of establishing such a leadership model are that (1) it creates alignment of leaders in the organization around a shared set of principles and (2) those principles are clearly linked to the specific business needs and strategy of their organization. The process of establishing the model is valuable in itself, since it actively involves the organization's management in an effort that strengthens their understanding of, and commitment to, a set of leadership principles — as well as their ability to work effectively as a management team.

The resulting set of leadership principles and practices should be designed to help the organization meet the needs of today and the challenges of tomorrow. The leadership model can serve as a guide for other managers in the organization, as well as a base for developmental efforts to increase the overall level of the organization's leadership and management competence.

PROCESS: Developing a Targeted Leadership Model

Development of a targeted leadership model involves working very closely with personnel in the organization. Below is a brief summary of key steps in the process.

1: Leadership Scan — What drives the business? What are leadership implications? The first step is to gather and/or confirm information about the organization through discussions and interviews with key personnel, including selected knowledgeable managers, and through review of relevant documents such as employee surveys, mission statements, customer feedback, corporate histories, and others. This information is used to prepare a report for review with decision makers.

Key outcomes:

- Identification of the business drivers that can be most directly affected by leadership
- Initial draft of leadership principles that appear relevant to the organization, its issues, and its business drivers
- Recommended actions for leadership development

2: Selection of Leadership Practices Pool — What are potentially appropriate behavioral practices? The next step is to begin defining leadership principles in terms of leadership behavior. Given the information from Step 1, we select a *potential* set of relevant leadership practices. We deliberately choose a large pool of practices that represents the draft of leadership principles and goes beyond it. We also ensure that this initial pool of practices fully samples the common leadership purposes of providing direction, motivation and guidance. For many organizations, it is also important to include practices that are primarily relevant to working with peers across the organization.

Key outcome:

- Leadership practices that are keyed to the business needs of the organization and the performance needs of its people

3: Practices Review — Which practices are most critical to achieving results?

We then gather additional information and review the practices with representative members of the organization:

- Managers are asked for their views of the organization's key business needs and the principles and practices that will be critical to meet those needs.
- As part of the interviews, managers complete a "practice sort." They select, from the practices chosen in step two, those that are most critical to success given the direction business needs of the organization. They then rate the extent to which those most critical practices are currently being performed effectively in the organization. They are also given an opportunity to suggest additional practices.

These individual interviews are typically supplemented by focus group interviews with both management and non-management personnel. The “practice sort” can also be extended through a survey.

Key outcomes:

- Practices that are identified as both critical to the organization’s success, and not currently ‘in place’ among the organization’s leaders and managers
- Examples of both effective and ineffective leadership in the organization
- Expansion of the information gathered in Step 1

4: Draft of Leadership Model — What model best reflects the organization’s needs? From these efforts, a set of "best practices" is selected from the original pool to reflect the organization and its needs. These practices are then clustered into a potential set of leadership principles, which may be somewhat different from the initial draft. Sometimes, additional practices are added as needed to fully represent the principles, and adequately sample the purposes of leadership.

Key outcomes:

- Leadership model, with principles and working definitions, accompanied by behavioral practices representing implementation of each of the principles

5: Review of Leadership Model — What will management live by?

This step involves a meeting with the top management team to review and refine the leadership model as needed to establish an agreed-upon set of leadership principles and practices. This meeting also usually includes review of a preliminary plan for how the principles can be introduced, championed, and implemented throughout the organization.

Key outcomes:

- Business-relevant leadership model that management has committed to support
- Preliminary plan for implementation

RESULT

The result of this process is a leadership model, usually containing five to seven leadership principles — each defined in terms that are meaningful to managers in the organization, and each accompanied by five to seven representative behavioral practices. This model can then serve as a base for communication, training, orientation, and development throughout the organization. It can also provide a base for providing individual feedback to managers and/or organizational surveys.

EXAMPLES

British Airways provides an excellent example of the potential impact of targeted leadership. In 1983, British Airways’ CEO, Colin Marshall, initiated a company-wide event for all employees to initiate a “customer revolution.” The program, called “Putting People First,” was designed to focus people on providing effective customer service. The effort had some initial success; it presented a new way of conceiving of the business, and convinced most people that serving customers was indeed key to the airline’s success. But this conviction did not result in the hoped-for revolution. Old habits and the pressures of getting aircraft away on time frequently overwhelmed even the best of intentions.

British Airways soon realized that it could not leave managers to figure out how to make the change by themselves. Even those managers who were most sympathetic to a customer focus, either through personal preference or through commitment to the business rationale for it, did not know how to make it happen. They realized that it was necessary to fundamentally change the way they managed the business and to establish a new way of leading the company — but few had the experience to make those changes, and they did not have the luxury of taking their time

to figure it out. The British government was clearly moving toward privatization within a few years, and at the time was heavily subsidized.

The first task was to clearly demonstrate to the organization's managers that people *could* significantly change the way they managed to improve customer service. A pilot program was developed for management personnel from the Heathrow terminals. It worked; managers were able to make dramatic shifts in the way they perceived their jobs and worked with their people, to achieve better customer service.

This success encouraged British Airways to implement a broad-scale leadership development program for all managers in all departments. This program was called "Managing People First." It included training, multi-source feedback, active senior management participation, support teams, and a linked performance appraisal system. More than 5,000 managers participated in the effort.

The effect of this effort on the organization was fairly immediate. BA became profitable *before* it was actually privatized. While a number of factors contributed to this, BA's CEO cited new leadership focused on service as a key factor in better customer retention and significantly higher revenues.

Below is an example of a leadership principle, with illustrative behavioral practices.

VISION: *Creating the Future:* *Making sure that people have a clear picture of what the organization is trying to accomplish and what impact it will have on the organization, its customers, and its people.*

- Anticipates what the future could hold and how we can make it happen for ourselves.
- Is willing to make significant change in the way we do things now in order to meet the challenges of tomorrow.
- Communicates a view of what we can accomplish together that captures the commitment of the team.
- Keeps the team informed of the "big picture."
- Challenges and inspires the team around shared values and broad purposes.
- Communicates a positive view of the company and its long term success.

SUMMARY

The past 15 years have seen a number of ‘revolutions’ designed to create more competitive organizations: they include service excellence, total quality management, re-engineering, and a host of others. Perhaps we’re ready for what may be the most significant of all: promoting effective leadership at all levels in an organization.

One of the major benefits of targeted leadership is that it builds on the experience of the past to provide a base for management development which is consistent with the demands of the business environment. A targeted approach to leadership says to managers: “These are the practices that will help us meet the needs of our business. Therefore . . .

- improvement in these practices is a management responsibility, not just a matter of personal growth;
- your investment in development as a manager and leader should be viewed against its return, both to you and to the organization.”

Targeted leadership creates a clear focus on leadership effectiveness — on what leaders *accomplish*, rather than what they do or what they are like.