

Key Insights for the Strategic Leader

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In a turbulent world where speed and adaptability can make or break an organization, senior leaders are expected to make the necessary and correct judgment calls while staying current with the dizzying daily changes in their environment. Today's major leadership challenge is to remain strategic while seemingly everyone else focuses on a vast array of reactive tactical thoughts and actions. Given the discontinuities between the tactical and strategic levels of leadership, we advocate the following actions—not as a series of silver bullets, but rather as a range of overlapping capabilities that will develop high-performance leadership.

Strengthen Collective Identity

Fluid teams; virtual organizations; and joint, combined, interagency, and nongovernmental operations often result in unclear boundaries and divided loyalties. Leaders must develop an organizational culture that builds a unique and shared group identity that is congruent with individually held values around a shared vision. For example, the pursuit of the Olympic games rallied Atlanta and the state of Georgia around a common vision that enabled community leaders to build new roads and other infrastructure when the voters, to avoid increased taxes, had previously turned such efforts down. Likewise, the global war on terror unites otherwise-divergent international organizations in a common cause. In many ways, when collective identity is clear, shared identity assumes the burden of leadership because it helps organizations and their members to self-adapt and reduces anxiety about future direction.

Promote Distributed Intelligence to Leverage Uncertainty

Today's chaotic, highly interconnected, and turbulent global environment is one in which stability, control, and standardization are culturally overvalued, and flexibility, innovation, collaboration, and improvisation are undervalued. The hierarchical leader-subordinate relationship must yield to "network leadership," where collaborative participation builds thought diversity and mitigates risk among all involved. For example, to address the need for real-time information exchanges, dialogue, and stories that help company commanders deal with highly interconnected and turbulent environments, U.S. Army captains developed the informal <www.companycommand.com> Web site because the organization did not share knowledge fast enough through formal, centralized channels.

Appreciate and Leverage History Without Becoming its Prisoner

Knowledge of history helps to eliminate ethnocentric blind spots that cause one to reinvent the wheel or be trapped on both a personal and professional level by a similar set of historical nuances and conditions. Leveraging history's

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lessons means not letting success go to one's head or mistakes to one's heart. Appreciating history serves to provide insight into the why of change. It means recognizing that the tactical insights garnered may not only help one visualize the future, but may also trap one into holding onto the status quo. Today, influential players outside their professional boundaries want the leaders inside to change because many leaders appear trapped by the narrowness of their own historical orientation and cannot think and act from a broader context. U.S. Army Air Defense Artillery leaders continued to hold on to their profession and its structure despite the fact that they have not shot down enemy aircraft since the Korean War. The Marines continue to invest in amphibious vehicles that have not been used in an opposed assault for decades with the result that not only has their leadership been undermined, but they wasted millions of dollars that could have been used to support other areas that needed to grow—areas that are strategic in nature.

Promote Social Justice and Morality Around a Common Set of Strong Ethical Values

An institutional climate that is perceived as fair, compassionate, and socially responsible will increase individual and group satisfaction and commitment. Strong ethical values promote social justice and complex moral reasoning in highly interconnected and turbulent environments where moral uncertainty is prevalent. Leaders must infuse values that guide others when they face ethical dilemmas. It took President Harry S. Truman, a socially aware leader, to both initiate the effort and ensure the success of racial integration of the military in the early 1950s.

Build Mutual Trust and Cooperation Across a Range of Stakeholders

Effective performance of a collective task requires cooperation and mutual trust, which are more likely when people understand each other, appreciate diversity of thought, and are able to confront and resolve differences in constructive ways—through principled negotiation and cross-cultural awareness. It is essential that leaders align their personality, communication, and professionalism with decisions that are consistent, reliable, trustworthy, and collegial. The glue of professionalism is a

shared ethos that is a function of specialized knowledge and skill, responsibility, performance in a social context, and esprit de corps.

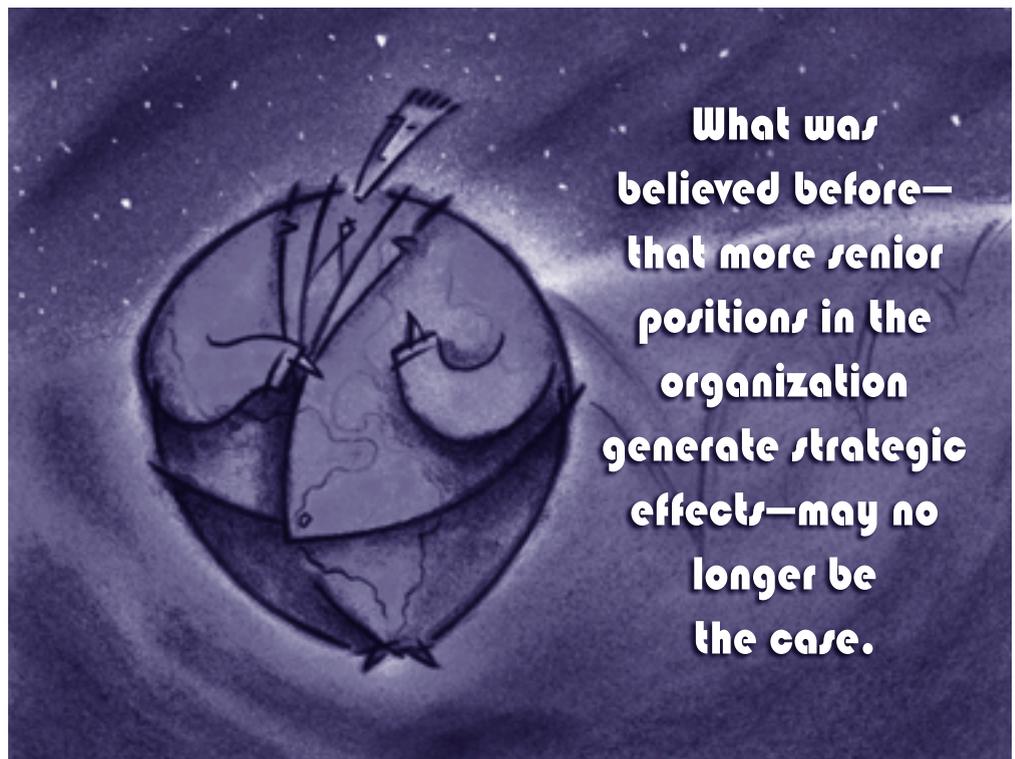
Develop and Deploy Talented People Who Challenge the Status Quo

Without empowered innovation, strategic effects are impossible. When people work in an environment that empowers them to challenge the status quo, they think like owners, and the result is innovation. Job #1 is not to empower people (as the sole distributor of power) but to create an environment where people act instinctively in the organization's interest—a subtle but significant difference. The result is that autonomous teams self-monitor performance and respond to the intrinsic rewards of the job. The concept is that of inclusive leadership for the common good on three levels: individual, group, and society. Senior leaders often serve as co-team leaders and know that by strengthening the talents of those around them, they actually strengthen their own.

Shape Expectations with a Common Organizational Image

How the senior leader conveys his or her perception of the institution can influence others to see it the same way. Following are some examples of how various images might affect the military mindset:

- **Football Team**—A rigid structural view with an emphasis on control through hierarchy in which the quarterback is the decision maker
- **Living Organism**—The institution viewed as an open system that, based on environmental feedback, must evolve and adapt, or die



- **National or State Government**—A collection of political entities within a larger political environment where individuals and groups have competing interests
- **A Basketball Team**—Where a blend of spontaneous creativity and fluid teamwork is the hallmark of a winning team.

Facilitate Strategic Alignment

Effective performance on a national or industry-wide collective task requires considerable agreement (or at least consensus) about what to do and how to do it. The joint, interagency, multinational, intergovernmental (federal, state, and local), and nongovernmental/private volunteer organizations (commercial, nonprofit, loosely coupled networks, etc.) are key examples of where senior acquisition leaders must exercise influence with those over whom they have little or no formal authority. Gen. Eisenhower displayed this quality when he influenced Allied operations against the Germans and Italians during World War II.

Build Task Commitment and Optimism Backed By Emotional Intelligence

The performance of a difficult, stressful task requires commitment and perseverance in the face of obstacles and setbacks. People are drawn to high-level leaders whose internal strength and resolve is unshakable in spite of circumstances—such leaders as Martin Luther King Jr. and

Gandhi. Emotional intelligence becomes an important concept for self- and organizational-awareness.

Harness the Art and Science of High Authority in the Age of Networks

Successful performance of a complex task requires the capacity to direct many different, but interrelated, activities in a way that leverages and makes efficient use of people, resources, and information. Leaders can turn this capability into an art form—as have Japanese manufacturing companies. A true leader is like the conductor of an orchestra who achieves harmony by maximizing the unique instrumental capabilities of members, or like a performance artist who brings the crowd into the performance so that all come to own it.

Build Your Bench

Senior leaders build their “bench” to accomplish simultaneous intra- and extra-organizational goals and to foster effective present and future support to joint operations, interagency working groups, multinational coalitions, and intergovernmental or industrial networks. They recognize that the skills needed in the field (i.e. warfighting) are not necessarily those skills that are needed in the institutional military (i.e. business, political, and regulatory practices that include force management, finance, human resources, information management, and external relations).

Obtain Necessary Resources and Support with Successors in Mind

Senior leaders, recognizing the difference between immediately important resources and support and those that will be needed in the future, plan accordingly. With the longer term (beyond their tenure) in mind, effective leaders obtain many of the resources and approvals and much of the assistance and political support from superiors and people outside the organization. Leaders do not substitute urgent tactical implications clouded by ambiguity for the important institution-level, complex system issues, and they are able to get others to recognize the difference. Their decisions are not episodic events,



but are rather like precision-guided munitions that take their cues from the future, making continuous en-route adjustments in order to reach the objective.

Become a Policy Expert

Translating political goals into military means and vice versa is both an art and a science and requires creativity, cunning, political and bureaucratic savvy, and a deep appreciation for the nature of policymaking and strategic decision making across different environmental and organizational cultures. Senior leaders develop and use their national security policy-level expertise as a magnet to draw others to seek out their advice and perspectives. They foster innovative and often counterintuitive thinking across and between joint, interagency, industry, and multinational lines—because they recognize the solution complexity and inherent paradoxes that come with global economic, technical, and cultural challenges.

Consider an Effects-Based View of Leadership

What was believed before—that more senior positions in the organization generate strategic effects—may no longer be the case. Some have referred to this phenomenon as the compression of the tactical, operational, and strategic levels of activity (the pyramid becomes flatter). Task complexity means that often what those in “lower” positions think and do may be strategic to the whole network. The action of Army Lt. Col. Christopher Hughes—who ordered his troops go down on one knee and point their weapons at the ground to convince the people of Najaf, Iraq, that he and his troops had no intention of destroying their mosque—had both tactical and worldwide strategic implications. An acquisition decision that considers only the lethal power of a vehicle without considering its fuel efficiency can lead to tactical and strategic missteps concerning fuel re-supply and can also affect the strategic reliance the nation has on imported oil, given the volatile locations of that resource—particularly when one considers that DoD is its highest single government user.

Extract and Make Accessible Crucial Points from Complex Situations

Effective leaders not only help identify emerging threats and opportunities, but also help people make sense of issues and events and understand why they are relevant. As the post-industrial image of organization moves away from bureaucratic, hierarchical structures toward an organic, complex, adaptive system, so the senior leader must help others develop the parallel conceptualization of—and transformation to—network leadership.

Facilitate Communities of Knowledge with Followers, Peers, and Superiors

The day of the omniscient leader is over. Followers, peers, superiors, and external experts are fellow sense-makers.

Leadership is more accurately a relationship; it is not the property of an individual, nor is it necessarily connected to a person’s position in the organization. Leading is a process of facilitating change across a range of personal and organizational fronts. Senior leaders recognize that culture is what determines most thinking and action (including their own). To quote Andy Grove, former chairman of Intel, “Culture eats strategy for lunch every day.” Senior leaders recognize that while culture may start with the founder, the workforce does the changing. As Lou Gerstner, CEO of IBM, put it, “At the same time I wanted them to follow me, I needed them to stop being followers.”

Engage in Continuous Self-Reflection

Institutional reflexivity occurs when members collectively question the prevailing paradigm or theory of effectiveness and then collectively recognize when transformational change is required. How leaders view themselves and the world around them shapes their conclusions about the possible and the desirable. Leaders strive for personal self-awareness and build institutional conditions for the same. They engage in continuous and long-term self-reflection and challenge the status quo, even while experiencing success. They recognize the difference between doubt and cynicism. The process of continuous reflection turns leaders into serious life-long learners and learner role models.

Embrace Paradox

Acquisition leaders who achieve strategic effects, continuously find balance among the interrelated paradoxes of complex human systems:

- Flexibility with respect to control
- Internal focus with respect to external orientation
- Differentiation with respect to integration
- Interdependence with respect to independence
- Analysis with respect to intuition
- Simplification with respect to complexity
- Tradition with respect to innovation
- Liberty with respect to security
- Present with respect to the long term.

Our insights are not to be considered definitive but should challenge leaders to unlearn old ways and learn new, patterned ways to think about leading in a strategic context—a more complex view that is significantly different from that of “tactical” leadership. We leave you with more questions than answers because those who engage in this transformational process will likely have to embrace the open-endedness and questioning associated with the life-long journey that becoming a senior leader involves. And that’s okay.

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