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A progressional model for developing organizational leadership: supporting an innovative environment

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Abstract :

The capacity to cope with radical uncertainty is critical to a business's existence (Hodgson 1998). However innovation management continues to be a strategic challenge for business (Bessant 2003), and many companies lack the prerequisite managerial competencies required for innovation (Schein 1996). Strategy is seen to be an upper echelons or macro level leadership responsibility, whilst repetitive day to day operational tasks remain the domain of meso and micro level management (Christensen 1997; Davies 2000)). This 'wait to you get there' approach to leadership development increases the likelihood of a strategic thinking gap (Christensen 1997), and a reduction of learning opportunities (Gavin). Leadership has a significant role to play in enhancing individual and organisational capacities. Supporting high level involvement by all operational stakeholders through continuous learning initiatives increases leadership capabilities and supports the innovation process.

This paper presents a progressional model for developing organisational leadership. Contemporary leadership literature calling for an integrative (Horner 1997; Sinclair 2001; Gill 2002) or holistic (Zohar 1997; Scott and Harker 2002; Mussig 2003) approach to be used in developing and studying leadership is analysed and discussed. The progressional model of leadership postulates that; through the acquisition and bundling of specific technical and interpersonal competencies (Golemen 1998; Palmer 1998; Dulewicz 2000), leadership capabilities are increased along with organisational capacities for designing and implementing strategic initiatives that support an innovative environment.

1. Introduction

The world is a complex place where solutions to problems are found in mechanistic and organic type structures and processes. Such complexity requires a new way of thinking in how organisations are lead (Marion and Uhl-Bien 2001). Using a strategic mindset, business leaders can identify opportunities to improve the competitive advantages of their organisations. Developing innovative products/services and processes to benefit from continuous change is one strategy available to business leaders.

Bessant (1997; 2003) proposes that the effective implementation of continuous innovation requires a 'high involvement' strategy and such a people centred strategy needs leaders to set the goals and objectives that need to be attained. Similarly, Allen, Stelzner, and Wielkiewicz (1998) suggest a long term perspective incorporating the development of individual and organisational leadership capacities is needed to establish a sustainable future. Gill (2002) argues that the traditional mechanistic models of leadership are unable to cope with the modern business and organisational challenges, and a new integrative model of leadership is needed. This paper presents the argument that a progressional competency based approach to leadership development, based upon the competencies identified by Gill (2002) and Mussig (2003), is needed to support a high-involvement innovation strategy (Bessant 2003), creating the capacity within organisations so that individuals can exercise leadership.

2. Strategy and Innovation

Strategy, according to Davies (2001), 'is a design or plan that defines how policy is to be achieved' (p.26). That is, strategy defines how the organisational goals and objectives will be achieved (Davies 2002). According to Davies (2000), business strategy is a design or plan for achieving a company's policy goals and objectives. So strategy provides the frame in which decisions are reached concerning: how the company's goals and objectives will be achieved; what operational units will be used to achieve the company's goals and objectives; and how those operational units will be structured. Strategy is the blueprint for creating value and competitive advantage in a set market or industry. A competitive advantage is the value differentiation between the products or services of two competing organisations and the ability of either organisation to meet the buying expectations of the greater proportion of customers (Duncan, Ginter, and Swayne 1998). Sustaining a competitive advantage increases the probability of long-term survival and financial

success of the organisation (Kuatko, Ireland and Hornsby 2001). According to Bessant (2003) and Kuratko et al. (2001), innovation should be a key strategic imperative for all organisations regardless of size. Innovation is change. To survive in the long term and to be a financial success, organisations must innovate (Zhuang, Williams and Carter 1999). To innovate effectively they need to maintain their current business activities while at the same time invest in strategic innovations (Cooper 1998). Strategic innovations must be in line with the strategic plan and direction, and must fit the situation of the firm (Hewitt-Dundas and Roper 2001).

Damanpour (1991) defines innovation as the 'adoption of an internally generated or purchased device, system, policy, program, process, product, or service that is new to the adopting organisation' (p. 556). According to Damanpour (1991), the overall intention of innovation is to play a role in improving organisational performance or effectiveness. Innovation should provide new intellectual property (Bessant 2003) and alter market conditions so that the firm is more competitive in the long term (Glynn 1996). The essence of innovation is about creating change (Bessant Caffyn 1997; Zhuang et al. 1999) through creative problem solving (Bessant Caffyn 1997). With growing business uncertainty, creative problem-solving becomes an essential organisational capability for organisational survival. Capabilities build organisational capacities that enable the organisation to maintain its competitive position and hopefully grow. According to Bessant (2003) one way of increasing innovation capacity is by widening the framework of participation to a much wider community. Bessant (2003) calls this, 'High Involvement Innovation'. This community exist both within and outside the organisation seeking to be innovative.

High involvement innovation requires a commitment to continuous improvement (CI) within work units and across all aspects of the firm. This is achieved through routines. Innovation routines are what set companies apart, because it is the routines and the people that make the difference. High involvement innovation routines incorporate a number of organisational aspects but those routines relating to continuous improvement through strategy and leadership are of particular importance to this research. Innovation capabilities are dependent on people. It is the people in the organisation who learn and through learning capture the knowledge needed to build organisational capabilities (Leonard-Barton 1992). Specific routines to enable linkages between continuous improvement activities and strategy include the following behaviours: organisation's strategic goals and objectives become the focus and priority of individuals and groups; common understanding of the company's and/or work unit's strategy, goals and objectives; assess any work unit proposed changes against unit's or company objectives to ensure consistency; measure results of improvement activities and impact on strategic or unit objectives; CI activities are integral part of the individual or work unit, not a parallel activity.

Bessant's (2003) view of strategy and leadership abilities as part of high involvement innovation has a number of implications for innovation, strategy and leadership. The implications centre on the shift from individual or specialist activities to a more inclusive model of participation. Innovation has traditionally been a specialist role found in a R&D framework (Poolton and Ismail 2000). Likewise strategy, and strategic leadership, was seen to be the exclusive role the CEO, the Board, or Senior Management Team. However, contemporary literature in both innovation and strategy argue no one person has the necessary in-depth knowledge to effectively present viable solutions to the challenges of modern business and the environments in which they operate. Developing routines as part of the innovation process and strategy development do not operate in isolation. Rather, innovation management and strategy making are processes interwoven with all that it takes to manage an organization. (for innovation see Klein and Sorra 1996; Bessant and Caffyn 1997; Poolton and Ismail 2000; Kuratko, Ireland et al. 2001; Bessant 2003; and strategic leadership see Manz and Sims 1991; Campbell and Alexander 1997; Christensen 1997; Harrison and Pelletier 1997; Ireland and Hitt 1999).

3. Leadership

Given that the key role of leadership is producing change, setting the direction and the imperatives is essential to leadership. Setting direction is not the same as planning which is normally a management process and is designed to produce organized and controlled results, but not change. Andrews (1996) proposes that a leader's responsibility is to ensure continuous innovation by: creating awareness and understanding of the change process and the reasons underpinning the need for change; providing hope through a vision; aligning people through direction and encouragement; and communicating in a way that stimulates progress and enhances people's capabilities through freedom and self-direction. One element of the strategy process that is often left out is the allocation of appropriate resources to implement and sustain the strategy (Davies 2000). A leader's responsibility to ensuring high involvement innovation lies in the leader's effective allocation of appropriate resources such as time, money and permission to experiment and use of appropriate reward systems. As an example, a senior military officer planning a military campaign would not send his troops into battle without the appropriate resources to ensure a successful campaign. Not having the appropriate or adequate resources is more likely to lead to strategy failure than success.

After allocating the resources the leader has two options. Firstly, the leader may choose step back and take a coaching role, or secondly, they may choose to actively participate in the process with the group. The leader's position or level within the management structure may determine which role the leader may take in the innovation process. Whilst the imperatives of the strategy may be developed at the macro leadership level, leadership behaviours of the immediate leader, meso or micro levels, are considered more representative of management's action policies and procedures (Kozlowski and Doherty 1989). Manz and Sims (1991) argue that the old models of leadership are incapable of dealing with the complexities of the modern business environment and the leadership for today's businesses is one where 'the most appropriate leader is one who can lead others to lead themselves' (p. 18). The mythical

notion of leadership is no longer relevant (Nirenberg 1998). As Nerenberg (1998) argues such a myth ignores the reality that informal leaders also have the capability to be formal leaders if organisations develop the capacity for their leadership competencies to be exercised. This focal shift in looking at leadership suggests the planning process of strategy development and innovation implementation should also include the intellectual input of departmental or work unit members. Similar to the shift in the innovation and strategy literature mentioned previously, the Manz and Sims (1991) approach to leadership suggests a shift from the traditional focus of leadership research and leadership development (see Allen et al. 1998; Gill 2002; Horner 1997; Marion and Uhl-Bein 2001; Mussig 2003).

4. Integrative Leadership Model

Gill (2002) and Mussig (2003) suggest an integrative approach to leadership that incorporates an understanding of the various aspects of human functioning. Within an integrative approach effective leadership entails specific processes: 'defining and communicating an intelligent, meaningful and attractive (or better) vision of the future; identifying, displaying and reinforcing values that followers share or are prepared to share and that support the vision; developing, getting commitment to and implementing rational strategies to pursue the vision and that reflect shared values; empowering people to be able to do what needs to be done; and motivating and inspiring people to want to do it' (p. 2). Both Gill (2002) and Mussig (2003) argue that the study of leadership has been too one dimensional in that it is examined along separate tracks. The separate tracks and focus of studies include; the cognitive track – focuses on strategy in relation to vision and mission, environmental understanding and organisational studies; the spiritual track – focuses on the search for meaning; the emotional track – focuses on how the emotional content of the leader-follower relationship is understood and used to effectively inspire and motivate people; and the behavioural track – focuses on the behavioural interaction skills such as communication and leadership styles.

4.1 The intellectual/ cognitive dimension

Orientation towards the future has many elements. Intellectual abilities can assist in developing long-term strategies, but it also entails the ability to be adaptable and flexible in setting goals, goals that are grounded in shared values (Mussig 2003).

4.2 The spiritual dimension

Spiritual intelligence is defined as 'the intelligence with which we address and solve problems of meaning and value, the intelligence with which we can place our actions and our lives in a wider, richer, meaning-giving context, the intelligence with which we can assess that one course of action or one life-path is more meaningful than others' (Zohar and Marshall 2001: pp. 3-4). Zohar and Marshall (2002) maintain that western societies are 'spiritually dumb' because modern institutions no longer have relevance. People are unable to find meaning in their lives at many levels so they begin to rely on alternatives as a source of meaning. The shift to eastern religions is an example of this search for meaning. For many people work is what gives meaning, and it is at work that they also look to leadership to fix the uncertainties of life. Spiritual leadership is concerned with identifying and confirming shared core values, beliefs and ethical behaviours that focus on creating humanity at work (Scott and Harker, 2002). This meaningfulness is important for leaders reaching the hearts and the minds of followers in establishing high-trust relationships. High-trust relationships are built over time by the leader demonstrating behaviours based on shared values identified in the vision and goals of the organisation.

4.3 The emotional dimension

The problem with much of the research and literature on leadership is the myths they promote and the realities they ignore (Nirenberg 1998). How much research effectively embraces the human factor of the workplace as for example emotions. How do leaders deal with mistakes, anger, ambition, competitiveness or aggression (Gill 2002)? Emotional Intelligence (EI) is described as the ability to 'manage one's own feelings and emotions, to be sensitive to and influence other key people, and to balance one's motive and drives with conscious and ethical behaviour' (Dulewicz 2000). Whilst Goleman (1998) has been successful in commercialising the importance of EI in relationship to effective leadership, it has typically been portrayed as a one stop fix-it shop for achieving effective leadership. Emotional intelligence competencies are only one aspect to effective leadership (Goleman 1998). Effective leaders use personal aspects such as EI and other cognitive skills to inspire people and in identifying and promoting the shared values that support the vision and strategies.

4.4 The Behavioural dimension

Behavioural responses to a stimuli, situations or events can be either conscious, or sub-conscious. Behavioural approaches to leadership have focused on what leaders do which recognise that a leader's behavioural responses are based on some prior learned experience. The integrated model argues that effective leaders need to broaden their learning to adequately respond to all and not just some of the issues that potentially impact on the leader-follower relationship. The integrative model argues that recognition of the

emotional content in behavioural responses, ignored in the past, are essential in improving communication processes. Communication and behaviours are processes leaders use to motivate followers to commit to the vision and the goals as identified by the leader and others. The leader can use effective communication skills to communicate the vision, it is the leaders behaviours that will eventually win commitment.

The leader needs to establish credibility by establishing ongoing positive behaviours before followers are willing to commit (Kouzes and Posner 1993). Kouzes and Posner (1993) see leadership as a challenging process (innovation commitment), inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act (supporting innovation), modelling the way and encouraging the emotional experience. Many human beings have a natural tendency to creativity as a means of bolstering their individual self-esteem and learning experiences (Poolton and Ismail 2000). It is the responsibility of leaders to establish an innovative environment to develop organisational capacities for sustaining and improving competitive advantage (Bessant and Caffyn 1997; Hyland, Mellor, O'Mara and Kondepudi 2000; Bessant 2003).

Yukl (2001) argues that an integrative model of leadership is needed to develop an understanding of the many aspects that encompass the phenomenon of leadership. The separate dimensions presented above are not new. The problem is in the past they been presented as separate phenomenon and in some cases as the individual keys to leadership success. Gill (2000) argues by integrating them the essence of leadership is captured because 'effective emotional and behavioural leadership without a clear vision and strategic thinking is dangerous; the converse is impotent leadership' (p. 15).

5. Progressional Leadership Development Model

Kotter (2001) and Christensen (1997) argue that many organisations are over-managed and under lead. Kotter (2001) address the issue from a broader leadership approach, Christensen (1997) approaches the issue in relation to developing strategic competence as an imperative for all levels of leadership within an organisation. Christensen (1997) contends that the day to day issues of management make managers very effective in dealing with recurring problems and challenges. What is missing in many organisations is the opportunity for managers at various organisational levels to engage in strategy making. Developing competencies in strategic thinking requires all levels of organisational managers to take responsibility for developing key strategic insights of the overarching organisational strategy, but more importantly how that strategy can be implemented at the operational level within their own work units.

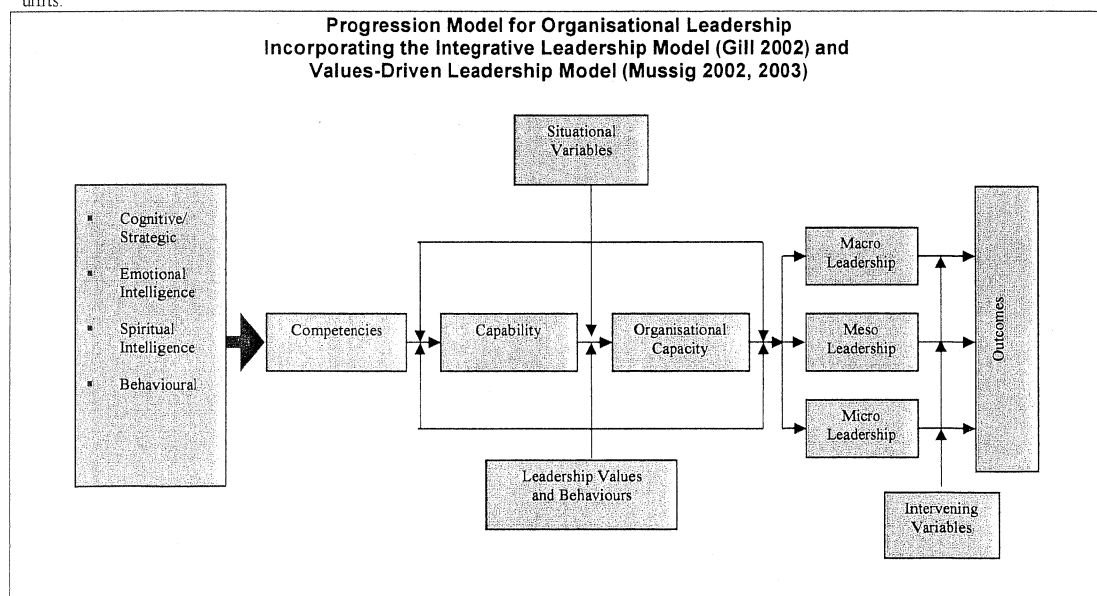


Figure 1: Progressional Model for Organisational Leadership.

The Progressional Model of Organisational Leadership (figure 1) recognises the importance of all aspects identified in Gill's (2002) the Integrative Leadership Model. Just as business has to increase its overall competencies to enhance its capabilities to sustain or

increase its competitive advantage and its organisations capacity to deal with the challenges of a changing business environment, it also needs to develop the capacity to support potential leaders at all levels to exercise leadership. The key competencies include cognitive/strategic, emotional, spiritual and behavioural which can all be further developed through training, coaching or mentoring programs.

A particular strength of the model is that it brings together two important aspects of business success. Firstly, it has the potential to increase the strategic expertise. Strategic thinking is not a core management competence in many organisations. Management skills are enhanced by repetitive responses that increase job related knowledge. Understanding strategy and developing the skills to initiate changes when warranted is not the norm for most managers (Christensen 1997). Whilst an overarching strategy may be the responsibility of the CEO, a Board or a leadership team, developing unit or department strategies to support the overarching strategy also need strategy development skills (Nahavandi 2003). The model recognises that the skills and competencies at either the micro, meso, or macro level may be different and its the organisation's responsibility to support those leaders to not only be effective in their current leadership role but prepares them for their next leadership role or in some cases their role as followers. By including strategy development skills as one of the key competencies, the model establishes a long-term perspective to strategy development. The model also identifies that at each level there are a number of variables that can impact on the leader in that particular role. The scope and strength of the impact will also vary, but by establishing the capacity for those leaders to exercise leadership at their own level and in their own way it increases the capability of the organisation overall. The model outlines the process by which leaders are effectively prepared for their next leadership role by developing strategy competencies. The model also reinforces the importance of innovation through its emphasis on learning. Learning is an important aspect of innovation (Gavin 1993), and developing leaders that understand the strategic importance of innovation and change processes can have a positive impact on innovation implementation (Hyland et al. 2000).

The essence of success in any role, but especially a leadership role, requires not only competence but also capability. A willingness to be a leader is also demonstrating that the potential leader believes she/he is able to deal with the responsibilities associated with the role. Leadership capability is demonstrated when a leader acts in a leadership role or within a specific setting that offers the potential leader the opportunity to display her/his leadership capabilities. Whilst the progressional model calls for organisations to provide the opportunity for potential leaders to exercise leadership, it must be recognised that not all members of a business or organisation want to be or can be leaders. Certain employees may have a high level of technical competence and desire to effectively and productively fulfil their role in creating competitive advantage they may not want a leadership role (Horner 1997).

The progressional model of leadership also recognises that it is very rare to find one leader who is right for all contexts and settings Leavy (2003). By developing organisational leadership capacity across all organisational management levels the organisation is able to better deal with the changing environment.

6. Conclusion

Effective leadership is not about controlling the future but rather ensuring organisations develop the capacity to be ready for the future (Marion and Uhl-Bein 2001). Providing an environment whereby innovation becomes an emergent property of an organisation will become increasingly important in the business environment of the future (Poolton and Ismail 2000). Developing leadership capabilities and an organisational capacity for leaders to exercise leadership in supporting the creativity of organisational members is the essence of innovation management. The cognitive/strategic, emotional, spiritual and behavioural dimensions of the Integrative Leadership Model are considered to be the key competencies that represent not only the technical aspects of leadership but also the human aspects. Organisations need to develop leaders that are competent strategic thinkers that are capable of dealing with not only technical change, but also the emotional and interpersonal aspects of the leader-follower relationship. The Progressional Model of Organisational Leadership sets in place a process by which developing certain leadership competencies, organisational leaders will be more capable of implementing strategic change because, leadership is about dealing with change (Kotter 2001).

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Dr Paul Hyland joined the Faculty of Law and Business at CQU as an Associate Professor in Management in 2002. He has an active interest in applied research that aims to assist firms better understand their business environment and help them to improve their management systems and processes. Dr Hyland is an associate member of the Australian Expert Group in Industry Studies (AEGIS). AEGIS' research seeks to develop an understanding of industrial development and innovation. He was deputy Director of the Innovation and Continuous Improvement Technologies Research Centre from 1996-2001. Dr Hyland's research activities are supported from the State and Federal Governments and from industry associations and individual companies.