

<p style="" class="MsoNormal">Kamran Rizvi, Navitus
January, 2014</p><p style="" class="MsoNormal"> </p><p style=""></p><p style=""></p><p style=""></p><p> </p><p></p><p> </p><p></p><p></p><p class="MsoNormal"></p><p class="MsoNormal"></p><div style="mso-element:footnote-list" mce_style="mso-element:footnote-list"><div style="text-align: left;" mce_style="text-align: left;" id="ftn1"><p style="text-align: center;" mce_style="text-align: center;"></p><p style="text-align: center;" mce_style="text-align: center;"></p><p class="MsoNormal" style="text-align: left;" mce_style="text-align: left;"><i style="mso-bidi-font-style: normal" mce_style="mso-bidi-font-style: normal">I have seen many examples of business leaders who failed to adapt themselves to the demands of their context ♦ internal and external. They were rigid in their thinking and victims of their habits. They could only give orders and never encouraged dissent. </i></p> <p class="MsoNormal" style="line-height: 14.4pt; text-align: left;" mce_style="line-height: 14.4pt; text-align: left;">We want our bosses to perform wonders as managers and leaders. Our overwhelming wish list includes a variety of skills and competencies that we feel our leaders should possess and demonstrate. Not only should they be technically sound in areas like marketing, supply chain, manufacturing, resource allocation, finance etc., but they must also be competent in strategy, execution, persuasion, negotiation, listening, speaking and writing. At times, expectations run even higher i.e., they should express vision, passion, sensitivity and live by ethical standards and show commitment. As though all this wasn't enough, subordinates demand a caring attitude, a healthy dose of humility and a hand of friendship as well!!</p> </p></div></div>

There are a number of methods you can consider in developing your own outlook. Here are a few:

The big thinking method: Big thinking comes in handy when your organization needs a change in direction in light of the changing market dynamics. The core components of your job include, 1) strategic steering; 2) managing human relations; and 3) operations. Mediocrity arises when you lose your focus and spend most of your time in operational matters, mostly engaged in fire-fighting and in being reactive, when strategy formulation is of the essence. The higher up you are in the organizational ladder, the more time you need to devote to strategic thinking. This means looking ahead with a keen eye on the opportunities and threats prevalent in your business, social and political environment, while being acutely aware of your organizations strengths and weaknesses. To give more time to strategic thinking you need to delegate more. This will free your time and will enable you to look ahead with greater confidence and clarity. You therefore must ensure that competent people are on board to take care of the day-to-day operations of the business at every level.

The people-centric method: Here your emphasis will be more on the people who are closer to the market realities in their autonomous business units. Your belief will be that such individuals and teams are better able to contribute to strategy formulation. Your philosophy here could be guided by the ideal of leadership at all levels. This will entail you spending bulk of your time aligning human energies through frequent interactions across functions and vertically top-down and bottom-up.

line-height: 14.4pt; text-align: left;"></p><p class="MsoNormal" style="margin-left: 0.5in; line-height: 14.4pt; text-align: left;" mce_style="margin-left: 0.5in; line-height: 14.4pt; text-align: left;"><b style="mso-bidi-font-weight:normal" mce_style="mso-bidi-font-weight:normal">The capability method: In considering this approach, you will be driven by the need to strengthen a particular set of capabilities throughout your organization to attain a competitive advantage. Your focus of activities will be on driving home the message of continuous bottom-up improvement (Kaizen) and frequent meetings with technical experts and customers. You will spend time ensuring that appropriate systems and procedures are designed and implemented. Training of people in the selected skills and competencies will be another priority item on your agenda. </p><p class="MsoNormal" style="margin-left: 0.5in; line-height: 14.4pt; text-align: left;" mce_style="margin-left: 0.5in; line-height: 14.4pt; text-align: left;"><b style="mso-bidi-font-weight:normal" mce_style="mso-bidi-font-weight:normal">The ♦standardization♦ method: If your organization needs to offer its customers a uniform and predictable experience, then standardization will be advisable. You will need to create, communicate and oversee control mechanisms covering financial, quality and cultural parameters of your organization. In this scenario, you will find yourself spending more time in dealing with periodic monitoring and evaluation of activities, attending to missed deadlines and areas of non-compliance. In such a climate, you will be more inclined to promote people from within the system, rather than risk lateral entries.</p><p class="MsoNormal" style="margin-left: 0.5in; line-height: 14.4pt; text-align: left;" mce_style="margin-left: 0.5in; line-height: 14.4pt; text-align: left;"><b style="mso-bidi-font-weight:normal" mce_style="mso-bidi-font-weight:normal">The ♦change♦ method: Here your focus will not be as much on how to reach a desired vision, but on the process that will get you there. Innovation will be your rallying cry. You will expect people to be comfortable with ambiguity and


chaos that are a necessary part of any change effort. You will find yourself making speeches, motivating people and attending meetings with colleagues and key stakeholders. Seniority will not matter much to you. Instead you will be looking for passion, energy and openness in people around you.

None of these methods can work in isolation. There are overlaps. However, you need to have a dominant philosophy and strategic intent reflective of your particular context and challenge. Your choice of method should not be based on your personal level of comfort, but on what will strengthen your organization in your specific industry and in its market environment.

To survive and thrive as a leader, make flexibility in your thinking a key element in your repertoire, before it's too late. I have seen many examples of bosses who failed to adapt themselves to the demands of their context. They were rigid in their thinking and victims of their habits. They could only give orders and never encouraged dissent. They did not entertain alternative perspectives with ease.

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No matter how big your organization gets, continue to empower your people at every level to deliver. Only this way will size lead to advantage.

It is always useful to explore the history of any company to understand how they got to being what they are today. Corporate success usually follows some combination of visionary entrepreneurship and luck. When companies acquire early successes and achieve a dominant position in some market or markets they become profitable and usually follow a steep growth trajectory in their early years.

With the passage of time, however, pressures on managers come mostly from inside the firm. Building and staffing a bureaucracy that can cope with growth is the biggest challenge. External constituencies are neglected. The firm needs, hires, and promotes managers, not leaders, to cope with the growing bureaucracy. Top managers allow these people, not leaders, to become executives. Sometimes top management actively prevents leaders from becoming senior executives. Managers begin to believe that they are the best and that idiosyncratic traditions are superior. They tend to become increasingly arrogant and aloof. The problem is compounded when top management does nothing to stop this trend and often ends up exacerbating it.

A strong, insular and conceited culture develops. Managers fail to acknowledge the value of customers and other key stakeholders. They behave in an inward-looking, sometimes political fashion and fail to acknowledge the value of leadership and the talent available at all levels that can provide it. They tend to stifle initiative and innovation. They behave in centralized and authoritative ways.

Consequently, as organizations grow, whether in terms of sales, number of employees, range of products and services, market share, or whatever, they start to lose the advantage they once had. According to John Naisbitt in the book *Rethinking the Future* it is the small companies who are creating the global economy, not the Fortune 500. And these days a small company can be as small as one person. In his book, *Megatrends 2000* he gave the example of his neighbors Linde and Lito who have a publishing company called Western Eye Press. He continues, "It's just two people and they publish wonderful photographic and guide books. They create them on Macintosh computers in their basement in Telluride. They print out the camera-ready pages on their own high resolution laser printer. Then they FedExed these pages to Seoul, South Korea, and the printer there manufactures their books and ships them to distributors all over the world. Western Eye Press is a key player in the global economy and its just two people on this little mountain perch in Colorado."

Large corporations and global conglomerates, if not careful, end up becoming highly bureaucratic, over-managed, rule-driven and inflexible by virtue of their size. In this day and age

of cyberspace and nanotechnology, fetish with size of a business can become an impediment. This is particularly true for organizations that have grown significantly in scale in terms of revenues and market share. Organizations like Citibank have lost touch with their core constituents. It may be a major player with a strong brand image, but customers interacting with its frontline employees are often disappointed by their state of helplessness in resolving routine problems. This could be on account of slavish adherence to archaic procedures. Often, individual contributors in big companies don't take the initiative needed to listen and understand customer requirements with the intent to ultimately delighting them. There is a lot to be said for systems and processes, but if they are not customer oriented and responsive, the game is as good as lost. Quality can now be replicated anywhere in the world. China is leading the way in this respect. With the falling of trade barriers and dropping of quotas, the Chinese have taken their global market share in textiles from 16% to over 50% in less than a decade. In recent years, the Pakistan market has been flooded with Chinese products (mostly electronic, light engineering) that are low priced and in much demand. We no longer live in a world of big mainframes. We live in a world where the real power is large networks a lot of individuals connected together Facebook & Twitter are pointing the way. A network does not have any headquarters. Chinese excel in this field and have spread their global business through this means. Naisbitt cites Asea Brown Boveri (ABB) as a great example of a huge company that thrives and grows through networking. He quotes Percy Barnevik (Former CEO at ABB) as having said, We grow all the time, but we also shrink all the time. As the network gets larger, the nodes get smaller. So, no matter how big your company gets, continue to excel by empowering your people at every level to deliver. Building agility and responsiveness is the key.