

Shifting Leadership Styles: How C-Suite Executives Manage to Stay on Top

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Abstract

This paper focuses on how a CEO can remain in the C-Suite by employing the different leadership strategies on the leadership spectrum. The leadership spectrum chronicles a leader's thinking pattern and helps him to respond to the challenges facing his multi-national organization. It is posited here that in order for the CEO to remain in power for the longest possible tenure, he must shift his leadership strategy depending on the unique circumstances that the organization faces.

Introduction

Derailment is a major corporate disturbance. It happens when a qualified C-suite executive is either forced out or terminated. The CEO is often surprised and derailment is usually punitive (Daft, 2008). And derailment costs companies a lot of money which is why it should be prevented (Taylor, 2010). Companies face downward spirals in production capacity, an interruption in normal customer relations, and a loss of intellectual capital due to the derailment (Templar, 2010). Often, a first sign of trouble for the Chief Executive Officer (hereinafter, CEO) would be exclusion accompanied by a perception of escalating negative situations (Robbins, 2007). It is possible for CEOs to utilize the leadership spectrum as a way to prevent career derailment. Lippitt (2002) identified management priorities in her work entitled, *The leadership spectrum*. Here, it is argued that a CEO must adopt all of the leadership strategies on Lippitt's (2002) spectrum in order for a CEO to remain in power and to avoid the career derailment that is so common at that level.

Leadership Spectrum, Applications

The leadership spectrum chronicles the leader's strategy and thinking pattern (Lippitt, 2002). A CEO will prepare the staff to: (1) create new products, (2) manage and increase clientele, (3) maintain a solid corporate infrastructure, (4) develop more efficient processes, (5) produce a culture that stresses performance and rewards, (6) monitor future opportunities and prepare for possible contingencies (Lippitt, 2002). CEOs utilize a specific leadership style to accomplish one of the aforementioned management priorities. They employed all of the leadership styles, on the spectrum, at different times to increase their organization's success and their longevity in the position.

Leadership Styles, Manage Hierarchy

It is important for the CEO to use a specific leadership style to safely navigate his way through turbulent times and to protect the integrity of the corporation's hierarchy. The leadership spectrum was used to show how a CEO can deal with organizational and economic changes. It was up to top management to employ the correct leadership style at the right time. This paper features an in-depth look at how a CEO can advance in the chosen career path by changing the leadership style, in response to changing management priorities, as influenced by uncertain economic times. We can see how leadership style calls for flexibility because of the complex nature of the problems that every CEO continues to tackle.

Economic Turbulence, Shifting Management Priorities

Over time, CEOs measure corporate needs and management priorities must change as a response to market conditions. A strong CEO anticipates this requirement for change and this provides a safeguard preventing career derailment. The CEO decides which leadership style on the leadership spectrum to implement depending on the business climate. The CEO can be a *Performer* on the leadership spectrum, as described by Lippitt (2002) and the *Performer* responds to market changes by teaching us to continuously strive for perfection. Next, the *Catalyst* on the spectrum teaches us to handle market conditions by increasing customer base. As an *Inventor*, this CEO, teaches us to interact with markets while cultivating a corporate culture that is devoted to research and development (R&D). As a *Challenger*, within the leadership spectrum, this CEO concentrates on limitless possibilities during his tenure with the organization. Another leadership style also included characteristics of the *Protector*, on the spectrum and this CEO establishes a culture of high achievers.

Finally, a CEO may employ the *Developer* leadership strategy which allows the CEO to organize and to delegate work responsibilities in order to create processes that tend to be more uniform.

The CEO's Primary Role, Massive Profits

These leadership profiles protect the CEO's careers while helping the corporations compete when market conditions fluctuate. CEOs are charged with increasing profits for their shareholders while they anticipate and respond to world markets (Slater, 2001). This was a process that propelled many multi-national organizations forward as they competed globally. A successful CEO had a style that coordinated with the leadership spectrum and it featured flexible approaches to accomplish all corporate goals.

Corporate Leadership, Increasing Prominence

The *Performer* leadership style allows the CEO to place a premium on quality. O'Neil (2004) suggested that CEOs tend to follow a quest to be the most influential leaders of their time. Lippitt (2002) advised, *Performers* continue to use efficiency and quality control checks to advance the corporate goal of winning customers. And the CEO constructs an empire with his strong leadership style that tends to increase his organization's market share making him a favorite among Wall Street analysts (O'Neil, 2004). The level of dedication the CEO exhibits will lead to perfection and high quality products. And this will translate into greater value for the organization's stock price. And CEOs will always be judged based on how well the company's stock is rated and by share price. His influence stems from an uncompromising need to follow his gut instincts. Certainly, as long as the stock price remained high, he was able to retain and expand his powerful position. Therefore, he monitored the stock and continued to develop fresh ideas to promote the company. These actions have insured his legacy because he will last longer as CEO. The CEO's success and longevity will correlate with a marked strategy to follow one of the leadership styles. The leadership styles all tend to emphasize striving for perfection and high-quality at all times (Slater, 2001).

CEO's Employ Catalyst Leadership, Profits Increase

CEOs create personalized and customer-oriented service since he listened to people to find out what they wanted (O'Neil, 2004) O'Neil (2004) advised that the CEO was always visible to workers and accessible to suppliers and to customers. Business to Business (hereinafter B2B) customers also chose to develop stronger relationships with the CEO (O'Neil, 2004). The problem that most CEOs faced was figuring out the best way to provide their organization's services to local customers and to B2B clients. And CEOs who used the *Catalyst* style tried expanding their product lines, through B2B referrals, and by meeting and exceeding all client expectations. His choice to pursue B2B networking paid dividends and resulted in greater profits for the organization and its shareholders. In the spirit of a true *Catalyst*, the CEO had increased the type of products offered in order to appeal to B2B clients. In this manner, the CEO clearly protected his job as CEO, since shareholders were pleased since the amount of customers and diversity of customers kept increasing.

Catalyst's Approach, Increasing Customer Base

Further, Lippitt (2002) showed the readers that *Catalysts* are focused on satisfying clients quickly. *Catalyst* CEOs tend to excel when working with other people and they create workforces that are committed to pleasing customers (Lippitt, 2002). They are constantly surveying their surroundings and have a keen sense of environmental awareness. And this helps them to anticipate change making it easier to respond to the disturbances from change as well as the hidden opportunities that arise. By following the *Catalyst* leadership approach the CEO can increase the organization's business in global markets as he furthers his own stature as CEO. Also, share prices should continue to rise further insulating him from career derailment. We know that shareholders will grumble and could force out the CEO if shares drop or continue to fall in a steady pattern. Shareholders would be more likely to look unfavorably on this CEO's brand of leadership should that scenario occur.

The CEO's Vision, Promotes His Longevity

A CEO who follows the *Inventor* leadership style can reach a level of unprecedented success when his research and development team responds to a problem. Corporations need to develop new financial products to sell to their customers in order to continue their dominance in world markets (Lane, 2007). Under the *Inventor* CEO's leadership, the research and development team will forge more innovative solutions leading to increased demand for the organization's products and service (O'Neil, 2004). These inventions can often be particularly lucrative for the corporation and they will seal the CEO's legacy as a greatest corporate leader. Clearly, the employment of the *Inventor* leadership style provides him with a greater level of job security. Truly, shareholders will be happy that unique designs and new products will be created and offered on the open market in order to increase sales and profits. *Inventor* CEOs are often able to create another line of business as they work to increase their market share in a particular industry (Lane, 2007).

These type of CEO's are considered to be pioneers who refused to believe that this level of technological innovation could not be reached (O'Neil, 2004). As *Inventor* CEO's, their mantra is to encourage workers to continue to seek innovative solutions using many methods of intellectual discovery (Slater, 2001). These CEO's also favor the development of new scientific methods and this proclivity will help their organizations through tougher times (Lane, 2007). These *Inventor* CEO's offer a leadership strategy that leads them to remain at the top longer since they have a relentless quest to exploit all uses of creativity.

Leadership, Seeking Emerging Markets

Lippitt (2002) advised that *Challenger's* place their organizations in positions that are poised to step into the emerging markets of the future. *Challenger* CEO's prevent their own career derailment because they tend to be overly sensitive to such future market changes. *Challenger* CEO's are proponents of educating all workers to watch for possible opportunities in new globalized markets (Lane, 2007). They keenly solve problems that involve low productivity levels before it is too late (Lane, 2007). These CEO's use a hands-on approach and personally developed every worker through on-site corporate continuing education programs (O'Neil, 2004). Workers display honesty with these CEO's and they are willing to explain many of the production problems that need to be worked out (Lane, 2007). In short, *Challenger CEO's* and their production teams create innovative solutions through collaborative networking (Lane, 2007). Employees brainstormed new ideas that led to an improvement in conditions and this led to an increase in productivity levels because of the CEO's behavior (Slater, 2001).

Future Concerns, Inspire Workers

A CEO understands that motivation will always be required to propel workers to reach all corporate goals. Further, CEO's avoid career derailment when they instill a more futuristic approach to manufacturing and to conducting business in globalized markets. Therefore, the CEO has more job security because when he forges long-term plans and articulates a clear vision. And the company needs him, rather than another CEO, to implement each stage of those plans (Lane, 2007). *Challenger* leadership helps CEO's to stay on top since they constantly think and plan for the future that only they can help the organization get to. Surely, the successful is a visionary leader, since he knows that it will take tenacity and boldness to reach vital goals.

Developer Leadership, Handling Risk

Developer CEO's handle risks through a series of structuring systems and they can be valuable to companies, as a result (Lippitt, 2002). This CEO places great emphasis on how the organization's systems must be configured in ways that lead to excellence. For the *Developer* CEO, his problem will be to communicate his main message so that every worker has something to contribute. This CEO has to create a system to enable and to encourage workers to reach their highest potential. In the end, this *Developer* CEO ensures his job security by keeping his finger on the pulse of the corporate culture. As he puts structures in place that compliment the development of all workers rather than hinder their potential. This CEO knows whether shareholders are displeased and then he adjusts his leadership strategy. His real talents lie in his ability to compensate for his organization's vulnerabilities. Then, he works to effectively demonstrate how the company needs him, and no other CEO, to manage that particular risk. As a *Developer*, this CEO builds the corporate infrastructure that leads the organization to unparalleled success warding off any possibility of his own career derailment.

Protector Leadership, Team Builder

The *Protector* leadership style serves the CEO well since many multi-national corporations became a household name when their CEO's followed it. Many American based brands symbolized value and efficiency for all who used them (O'Neil, 2004). *Protector* CEO's can be described as an instinctive (Lane, 2007). In order to solve that problem, the *Protector* CEO utilized a leadership style that focused on nurturing his staff. His nurturing abilities spawned later research and development to create new products as employees worked to please him (O'Neil, 2004). The *Protector* CEO deliberately designs products that make his company stand apart from the competitors (O'Neil, 2004). They educate all staff members to have a trained eye to zero in on problems using the Six Sigma approach (Lane, 2007). Steady sales figures will ensure his position at the top for many years (Lane, 2007). Shareholders will continue to support the *Protector* CEO because he fosters a supportive environment that encourages risk taking (Slater, 2001). His managerial style celebrates achievement and the organization's products often became top sellers worldwide (O'Neil, 2004). This CEO effectively utilizes his connections and influence among suppliers backed by the continued support of a well-trained and supportive staff. And his prideful nature makes him easier to work with (Lane, 2007). Truly, this *Protector* leader helps his organization earn billions of dollars as this CEO shifts and incorporates the different leadership styles within the *leadership spectrum*.

Leadership Characteristics, Keen Insight

In conclusion, we have seen how the CEO can employ different leadership styles within the *leadership spectrum* in order to solve corporate problems and to remain in power. CEOs must utilize their strengths to benefit their respective organizations even when they struggle to remain in the C-suite. CEOs of multi-national organizations use management strategies to solve their organizations' problems based on the management priorities that Lippitt (2002) defined. Surely, different perspectives and priorities work as the CEO furthers his career, as he implements winning solutions for his organization. Clearly, these organizations will face scenarios that require innovative leadership. And Lippitt (2002) had successfully categorized the leadership styles that worked in many situations. Certainly, one of the worst problems that a corporation could face would be to lose its CEO because of a career derailment.

It is readily apparent that CEO's have strong and unique leadership qualities. The question can be raised whether leaders are born or whether they are made. In sum, there truly are characteristics that all leaders must have in order to succeed. The successful CEO will tend to have all these qualities and will ardently work on developing them in others. First, a CEO must have a keen mind that is curious about things and people. Second, the CEO must make sure that teams are functioning with unity to meet the same organizational goals. Third, the CEO needs to understand market trends and how the corporation can benefit from all strategic opportunities. Finally, a top CEO brings out the best in people propelling his organization to record success and record profit levels.

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