Purpose of leadership - Vision

Articulate Vision

A leader must establish purpose, the direction or the strategy he stands for, the reason why others should follow him. The leadership's inherent strength is in defining a "vision" for the organization, it is the leader's ability to imagine a different and better future for the organization along with plans to achieve it. Envisioning the path to a better future is a very creative process and often cannot be taught or learned, except for how leaders generally formulate it. Leaders often collect dissimilar problems from various units of organizations; synthesize them into a vision that articulate a compelling picture of the future. Visionary leaders often express discontentment with the current situations, propose their vision and plans for the future, which is something to be sought after, they motivate their followers by clear description of what can be achieved.

Vision - for employees or for stock-holders?

The management has certain well defined objectives (MBOs) but the dilemma remains as to what benefit it has for the employees. If the purpose of leadership cannot be related to development of employees, very few will buy it. A leader must establish that his purpose is to serve the organization and its employees; this is known as servant leadership. What he receives in returns as perks is mere validation of the job done right. When the leaders indulge themselves with the lavish perks and intoxicating powers, they are indeed paving way to be ousted.

"The leader’s first job is to define reality. The last to say thank you. In between the leader must become a servant and a debtor” – Robert Greenleaf

In an organization, it is important that employees follow the leadership not because “they have to”, but because “they want to”. One must understand that “to lead” doesn’t imply giving orders on how to do things, but to earn the confidence of others such that they are willing to follow your directives. The important question that comes to the mind of a aspiring leader is, “How do I make other follow me readily?” Most organizational leaders fail to acknowledge or even appreciate this, they feel the authority and position gives them the right to drive others. Or in simply they rely on creating the culture of “follow the boss”.

“A good leader needs creative ideas to depict the purpose of organization in a way that employees see it as a means of their own prosperity”.

The essential part of defining purpose of leadership is to establish forward-looking plans and forecast growth. Employees look up to their leadership to essentially lead them to growth & prosperity. Developing strategic plans, forecasting business is the key to defining purpose. For the lower or middle management, it’s important to have these skills in their professional development plans, if they want to grow into more leadership roles. Indeed, strategic planning has been found to be the most desirable quality of senior leadership, more than 95%.

Vision and the organization’s state

The challenge of formulating vision is dependent upon the maturity level or state of the organization. There are three common categories of organization’s state

1. Start-Up: The organization is directed towards building an emerging technology or significantly differentiated product or service. The size of organization is small with lot of key experts, there is high expectation from employees and success of organization is tied
to individual aspirations. The vision is implicit in the idea of formulation of the organization itself.

**Successful**: The organization has attained its business and management objectives, it is well established both in terms of organizational structure and business demands. Both the leadership and employees have a satisfactory sense of achievement and believe that the only task left is to make the success sustainable, which is inherently perceived as relatively easy task. Formulating vision for a successful organization that continues to motivate employees is pretty challenging job, it is easier to find followers when things are bad but not when it’s good. Nevertheless, significance of vision cannot be ignored, external environment is always highly competitive and turnarounds happen frequently.

**Struggling**: An organization is in crisis when its business is falling or failing, and its very existence is in jeopardy. Formulation of vision under crisis is easy but not the plans to achieve them, it’s important for the leadership to be very convincing that their strategies would be successful. The evolution has programmed humans to deal with crisis, hence there is always a sudden surge of solutions or ideas and leadership has to convince why only certain ideas are chosen or rather why the unorthodox idea of the leader would work.

**Considerations in articulating vision**

- Vision must be differentiating, compelling and believable.
- Vision must project a brighter future.
- Vision must be inspirational and motivational.
- Vision should bring a meaning to the work of employees.