

Leadership in High-Performance Organizational Cultures

About the Author/s

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■ The Big Idea

Leadership in High-Performance Organizational Culture is intended to help anyone in a position of authority become a more effective leader by leading from the center. You may be just considering a career in leadership, new to your leadership position, or a veteran supervisor, manager or executive. Or, you may just be working for a top-down manager or organization. Whatever the case, this book should broaden your thinking and guide your actions to help you do the three things that enlightened leaders do in creating a high performance organization.

1. Lead more from the center of your group, team, unit or organization to engage your team members to unleash their desire and abilities, and achieve extraordinary results;
2. Create an effective organization by developing a performance enhancing organizational culture; and
3. Establish a direction for your organization that is clear, concise and compelling.

FEATURES OF THE BOOK

Reading Time: 4-6 hours, 171 pages

Management fads come and go, however leadership principles which have proven to be effective in improving performance and producing lasting results are indelibly preserved. Such is the case of the Truskie's L-4 Leadership Strategy. Introduced in 1999 in his book, *Leadership in High Performance Organizational Cultures*, this updated and revised second edition expands on his proven leadership model and is enhanced with new and important information.

From his studies and continued professional practice as a Fortune 500 executive coach and leadership professor, Truskie demonstrates how enlightened leaders (and organizations) have abandoned the dated and ineffective top-down management approach in favor of a much more adaptive and engaging one that creates an energized, innovative and results-driven company culture.

INTRODUCTION

Successfully implemented by thousands of leaders since it was first introduced ten years ago, it continues to be the “go to” strategy for leaders who are attempting to build a high performing organization in the midst of difficult and challenging economic times. Testimonials by those leaders who have successfully used the model are proof of its effectiveness as a strategy for change and improved performance.

This book has been of particular interest to leaders of all levels who provide direction, engage and motivate others to perform as a collaborative team at consistently high levels to produce exceptional results. It has also proven to be a valuable resource to professionals who teach, train, coach and develop those who are either learning about leadership in the classroom, or currently serving in a management position.

BEYOND LEADING FROM THE CENTER

Organizations over-perform and succeed, or underperform and eventually fail for one of two reasons, or both. One has to do with direction of the organization. No direction or a flawed direction for an organization leads to meandering, confusion, de-motivation and underperformance.

The other variable has to do with the effectiveness of the organization. If the organization is unfit or incapable of achieving the goals and executing the strategy set by the direction, the likelihood of achieving success is significantly diminished. An effective organization has a performance enhancing culture. Getting the right organizational culture established, according to my research, contributes to about 45% variance in performance.

Enlightened leaders who lead from the center minimize the effects of the serendipitous factor. In other words, they do not depend on good luck in building a high performance, successful organization, and on the other hand, they do not allow the bad luck events to significantly hurt the performance of their organization. They do this by leading from the center to establish a sound strategic direction, and build a performance enhancing organizational culture.

DISCOVERING THE IDEAL ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

The L4 strategy is an organizational leadership strategy that is intended to form an optimally balanced culture. It draws upon positive elements from four cultural groupings identified through the writing and research of others who have identified them as performance-enhancing qualities. In other words, these positive elements have the qualities that contribute to high performance, sustained growth, and organizational success. The L4strategy is an organizational leadership strategy; it should not be confused with the direction of the organization.

In order to understand the balanced organizational culture concept and how it contributes to successful and consistent performance more fully, it is instructive to review what we know about leadership, organizational culture, and performance. The L4 strategy recognizes and applies the principles and important findings on organizational culture and performance within the framework of leading from the center. It focused on the core findings which are helpful, useful, and practical to leaders – at all levels of the organization; and it is presented in a language that is void of obtuse technical language found in highly theoretical treatments of the subject.

THE OPTIMALLY BALANCED CULTURE

Organizational cultures take time to evolve. Patterns of consistent behavior do not emerge overnight. A newer organization, in its early stage of development, may not have as strong and embedded a culture as an organization that has been around for some time. But, even an organization that has been around for years may not have a strong culture.

The goal for leaders should be to form a strong, optimally balanced culture by incorporating appropriate 'characteristics' which are described in the following sections.

THE COOPERATION CULTURE

This cultural pattern stems from the term 'collectivism', which is rooted in family values especially those of Asia, South America, and Southern Europe. Being of service to one another, and to the group is a very important value. Relatedly, each member develops a greater commitment to cooperative efforts and creates a positive concern for collective interests.

This culture values and develops teamwork. Individuals and member groups strive to help each other. Relationships are very important, as is open communication. Members approach and solve problems together. Interpersonal conflicts are dealt with openly and constructively.

THE INSPIRATION CULTURE

The inspiration cultural pattern values self-determination, encourages individual initiative, and shows concern for the total person including one's freedom, growth and development. Members of this culture are inspired to achieve because they truly believe in, and trust an organization that is concerned about people as individuals, and who treats them with dignity and respect. This culture also demonstrates social responsibility by demonstrating concern and support for all individuals, not just its members.

The inspiration culture is driven by 'doing good', or improving the human condition by making things better than they were before. This culture takes its social responsibility seriously. It attempts to build moral content into its purpose or mission. It strives to be a model citizen. It is a culture of mercy and compassion. This translates into developing people, recognizing what people contribute, responding to family and community problems, and sourcing from disadvantaged groups.

THE ACHIEVEMENT CULTURE

The achievement cultural pattern values competition, being the best, striving for excellence, advancing and improving performance. This culture constantly strives to be at the leading edge. This culture is held together by a commitment to winning. The long term aim is the achievement of measurable goals and targets. This is highly productive culture is marked by hard work, drive, and discovery.

The achievement culture's emphasis is to work against a standard of excellence. The standard may be related to past performance; an objective measure; the performance of others or even what anyone has ever done. The achievement culture is guided by these qualities in attempting to become "best in class" and have a superior advantage over its competitors.

THE CONSISTENT CULTURE

The consistent cultural pattern values stability, predictability and order. It strives to consistently produce key results expected by its customers and stakeholders. It monitors results versus plan in some detail, identifying deviations, and then planning and organizing to resolve these deviations.

The consistent culture strives for control. This is done through the examination of pertinent statistics and facts. Critical data and information are carefully collected, thoroughly analyzed and systematically examined. No stone is left unturned, so to speak. Leaders in the culture take a long time to gather and systematically analyze the facts.

ON BECOMING AN L4 LEADER

How does one become an L4 leader? How does one begin shaping a culture for optimal balance in order to achieve successful performance and growth? To address that question, one must explore one's leadership presence. The theory and practices believed to be essential about the proper way to run an organization are manifested, symbolized, or implied in the presence of the leader. The leadership presence is the culminating statement of that person's view of how to lead an organization. Understanding leadership presence more fully requires a definition of what it is and how it is formed.

Leadership presence is often misunderstood to mean things like power, influence, style and charisma. But leadership presence is not just an abstract concept; it is tangible, palpable, and can be seen and felt. Leaders always possess some semblance of presence, whether they are aware of how it varies or is perceived. The author defines leadership presence as:

“The living out of knowledge and values in ways such as taking a stand on an issue or by modeling specific behaviors to set an example. By performing these acts, the leader teaches important self-held concepts – that which he/she believes important to the organization’s effective performance. These concepts are exuded through the leader’s way of being.”

THE L4 IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

It is important to note some major points which need to be emphasized if the plan is to be successful.

1. Leaders are key in changing and reshaping the culture. Their attitudes and actions must reflect the L4 leadership model presented.
2. Culture change is not likely to occur unless it is done within the context of organizational direction. Members need to know where the organization is headed before they can seriously consider accepting changes in their culture.
3. The learning intervention must be designed to help members move to the action stage of the change process. This must include a strong and compelling case for changing and reshaping the culture. The argument must be strong enough to move members from the pre-contemplative through the preparation stage of change.
4. Changes in the organization’s infrastructure must closely follow the learning intervention. These changes help move members through the action stage to the maintenance stage of the change process. These infrastructure changes are accomplished by using mechanisms outlined earlier.

The L4 strategy is a process similar to continuous quality improvement. It requires the leaders of the organization to continuously monitor the culture and search for evidence indicating evidence of optimal balance.

THREE SETS OF LEADERSHIP DIMENSIONS

Requisite Leadership Dimensions are basic, fundamental personal attributes which are required for superior leadership performance. To use an analogy, a secretary cannot become an outstanding performer if he or she does not possess some basic dimensions such as technical skills (ability to type and file) and interpersonal skills (ability to effectively interact with others). Similarly, a leader will find it difficult to align followers if he or she is not honest and trustworthy. Followers will seldom align themselves with a leader they do not believe or trust.

1. **Requisite Leadership Dimensions.** There are attributes which are threshold requirements for superior leadership performance for managers and executives which support the effectiveness of other dimensions in the two major leadership tasks.
2. **Directional Leadership Dimensions.** The dimensions of this cluster differ between executives and managers in two major areas: complexity and time orientation. In other words, the task of establishing direction at the executive level of the organization is much more complex than at the management level. Plus, the time frame for planning is long term (three to five years) at the executive level and short term (six to eighteen months) at the management level.
3. **Organizational Leadership Dimensions.** The dimensions for this cluster are those required to establish an effective organization following the L4 strategy. These dimensions are classified according to each of the four cultural patterns that help form an optimally balanced organizational culture. They apply to both executives and managers.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE L4 MODEL

The L4 strategy offers broad implications in leadership and organizational development. For example, it can be used to explain why conflict exists when and between organizations. Conflict occurs within organizations when various combinations of unbalanced subcultures interact with one another. The same can be said when two independent organizations with unbalanced cultures are joined through merger or acquisition. This resulting conflict offers partial explanation as to why only half of all mergers and acquisitions meet their financial expectations.

The L4 model is also useful in selecting and developing leaders. It offers a framework for understanding the need for a liberal-based education for leaders of the future. It also offers a model that can be used in developing current leaders who want to improve their effectiveness and performance. The L4 model has been useful in identifying important traits, characteristics, and behaviors that contribute to effective leadership.

Like any leadership theory or approach, the L4 strategy is not the complete answer to effective leadership and/or superior organizational performance. It is offered as a tool for all leaders to use in evaluating their current leadership effectiveness and exploring ways of improving upon it as well as their organization's performance.

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