

Course Title

STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

“People love, hate, and love again their leaders, all in surprisingly short periods of time. Hence, what makes great leaders has been pursued with a zealous enthusiasm by philosophers, historians, anthropologists, politicians and latterly by writers and researchers of management and organisational disciplines (Kakabadse & Kakabadse, 1999:1)” Different researchers, academicians and people in leadership positions explore and reflect on leadership in various ways. One way of exploring concept of leadership and followership is using different frameworks and approaches. Like the traits approach, explained by scholars like Drucker (1955 in Horner, 1997) and Gardner (1926 in Horner, 1997) defining the traits a leader has. Gardner (1926 in Horner, 1997) explained leadership from an individual’s perspective by attributing it to the traits in a person. Functional approach puts the attention on what a leader does rather than who a leader is (Adair, 1979; Kotter, 1990). Adair (1979) defines the leadership in term of meeting individual, team and task needs. Another approach is behavioural approach that focuses attention on the behaviour of people in leadership situations (Ohio State Leadership Studies, 1945 in Mullins, 2007).

Further, another three leadership approaches are styles of leadership classifying the different styles of leadership (Belbin, 1993; Tannenbaum & Schmidt, 1973); situational or contingency theory of leadership emphasising on importance of situation in explaining leadership (Fiedler, 1967; Vroom & Yetton, 1973); transactional leadership mainly concentrates on operational, day to day transactions of organisational life where as transformational leadership focuses attention on how leaders transform organisations (Burns, 1978; Kakabadse & Kakabadse, 1999). Scholars like House & Mitchell (1974) and Fiedler (1967) gave contingency theories taking variables like situation, followers and power relation into consideration. For example, Fiedler’s concept of situational favourability laid stress on the combination of factors like leader-member relation and task structure for the effectiveness of a leader. However, authors would argue that even while attempting to describe leadership in the context of a process the scholars are not really going very far from the behaviour and traits of the leader. For example, Fiedler’s contingency theory (1967) explaining the impact of situational favourability on the effectiveness of a leader also considers the traits and behaviour of the leader in relation to the prevalent situation.

It seems necessary to understand leadership using the specified frameworks because of its complex and variable nature but authors would argue that no single approach alone is sufficient to explain leadership. One possible reason for this could be that leadership is not just limited to leader alone; it has to be seen as a leader-follower relation. As Mullins (2006) ? suggests that leadership is a two way process that influences both individual and organisational performance. It does not matter what attributes a leader possesses unless no one recognises them (Mead, 1934 in Stacey, 2007). Seeing leadership as a relation of leader and follower will lead us towards a systemic perspective i.e. seeing leadership as a whole encompassing leader, follower, and context in which leadership is woven. But, in Griffin’s view (2002 in Stacey, 2007) this systemic perspective tries to eliminate paradoxes and mystifies leadership. Griffin (2002) further mentions that seeing leadership as a complex responsive process provides an

alternative thinking about leadership. Seeing from this perspective, participation in the leadership of the leaders where leadership is the values ascribed to the organisational system is the direct interaction of people with each other, not participation in some whole. The processes of communicative interactions stay with our experience and may later amplify to transform population wide patterns (Stacey, 2007). How each of us takes part in this pattern does matter even though we cannot know what the outcome of our actions will be. Stacey (2007:351) suggests that “this perception encourages us pay attention to what we are doing and to believe that this is effective in some way, even though we cannot know how”.

Considering the given case study of Middleton Productions Ltd. in the light of different perspectives and approaches discussed above, the case provides a good background to discuss different leadership approaches. The case also indicates to some extent the role played by company culture and individuals over a period of three different managing directors i.e. Lawrence, Malcolm and Simon. This paper would discuss various leadership approaches adopted by Lawrence, Malcolm and Simon in that order and their interaction with followers. The essay will also include company culture and role played by other individuals.

Lawrence who founded the company was the driving force of the business till the last day he retired. His established ways of working, shared values and beliefs continued to a large extent even after he left the company. Lawrence provided Middleton the vision and leadership that gave the company distinctive clarity and a sense of purpose to the organisation and its employees (Kakabadse & Kakabadse, 1999). On analysing Lawrence’s leadership from the perspective of behavioural approach (Halpin & Winer 1957; Hemphill & Coons 1957), in authors’ view the strategic approach adopted by Lawrence seems to be a mixture of employee and task focus. He appears to be considerate towards employees as seen in the case of Ned whom Lawrence helped to get out of the army.

At the same time Lawrence appears to be task focussed and it could be seen at the time when he was in the army, his focus never deviated from his business. The centre of his attention was the company and thus managed to get new contracts from the navy. In authors’ view the strategic approach adopted by Lawrence seems to be a mixture of employee and task focus. However this mixed approach also reminds us of the not so famous ‘flexible approach’ given by Blake et al (1964). The flexible approach stresses on the flexibility of the person in question to deal with the situation by adapting to it as it changes. Lawrence’s flexibility probably helped him to adapt to the changing situation in the business. According to the authors, Lawrence’s ability to successfully change a partnership into an individually owned business on realizing the insincerity shown by his colleagues brings to light another aspect of Lawrence’s flexibility. He seems to be comfortable with the big change about to come in the business by removing the partners. He kept changing and adapting his leadership style with the changing situation which could also be interpreted as a contingent side of his leadership. Lawrence depicted a mixture of behavioural and contingent leadership approaches. Authors’ regard Lawrence as the soul of the business that was ever present with Middleton Productions Ltd even without being physically present later on.

Lawrence also had a great influence over the culture of the company. His espoused values and beliefs were continued throughout the life of Middleton. He created a core group of people that shared his vision, belief, and values. Most of these people like Ned, Maggie ended up working for their whole working lives with the company. Malcolm and Simon to a large extent just carried the culture forward rather than trying to change it according to the time and situation. As Susan noticed that the place seemed to be stuck in some time warp.

With Lawrence's retirement, Malcolm became the sole charge of the company but he continued following approach of his father. As Mullins (2006) mentions that leader's behaviour affects and at the same time is affected by the group of the followers. Thus, it is possible that in continuing his father's ways, he was probably dealing the employees in the way they were adapted. He appears to be an employee centred leader (Likert, 1961 in Mullins, 2006) and showed consideration for his employees. He showed concern for employees by organising social events for and showing his appreciation towards employees. He also appears to be good in identifying and nurturing talent as he could spot the talent of Alan early at the university, another attribute required for employee centred leadership. He appears to be an employee centred leader He gave his followers a feeling of significance. As Goffe and Jones (2001) suggest that with this behaviour leaders usually manage to get loyalty and obedience from their followers.

Malcolm's leadership period was highly productive for the business. Though Malcolm had many good attributes in his leadership but in authors' views the success of the business could also be attributed to the good team at Middleton during Malcolm's period, and not to Malcolm's leadership alone. Thus not ignoring the importance of good and talented followers for the success of any leader and also, that leadership is not the only core requirement to achieve the objectives (Kelley, 1988; Syque, 2002). Kevin, Simon and Alan all seemed to be quite self driven in the roles and responsibilities assigned to them. However we should not ignore Malcolm for the credit he deserves for allocating these roles and responsibilities to the most appropriate people. This again indicates towards his employee centred approach.

As Malcolm retired, Simon eagerly took over the company as Managing Director in 1993. Simon seemed to be an innovative, imaginative, and knowledgeable person as reflected by his innovative handling of the contract to build a new crane shaft without having necessary resources. His innovativeness and knowledge again came to the surface when he used the defective rollers to offer customers a unique proposition of rolled steel cones. But his management and leadership style appear quite close to an authoritarian style i.e. he was alone exercising decision making and setting procedures for achieving targets and work tasks. This argument is supported by the fact that one of the old and loyal employees of the company describes him as a 'bully' and Susan found him 'domineering'. He was not used to share information and knowledge with anyone not even Susan. Simon's autocratic style of leadership probably made Paul leave the job as he couldn't cope with his over controlling and demanding behaviour and showing no consideration for him and other employees.

Simon's style of leadership does not seem to be participative. Simon used to take all the decision himself without involving or consulting anyone else in the company. He implemented the procedures and goals that he was convinced of without considering the suggestions from other people. He apparently did not care about his employees. Authors' would argue that he was not an employee centred leader instead he was more of a production centred leader. He even hardly bothered to listen to the concerns of Paul and Susan, his main team members, as it appears from the case. Simon's attitude is quite closely reflected by the statement, "I am the leader here. If I let others make decisions that I should be making, then I'm not worth my salt." (Tannenbaum & Schmidt, 1973). His production centered leadership is reflected by the fact that he was always willing to assist employees at work floor. Whenever company encountered problems related to production he made an active effort to solve them as in the case of contract of manufacturing a precision bearing housing.

Further, the leadership of Simon, in authors' view, can neither be classified as transactional nor transformational. In transactional leadership, emphasis is on clear goals and objectives, co-ordination, efficiency, effectiveness, formal authority and control (Kakabadse & Kakabadse, 1999). Path goal theory (House, 1972 in Mullins, 2006) has also addressed the transactional leadership (Politis, 2002) and defines the function of leaders to motivate their subordinates in the direction of established goals by clarifying the role and tasks requirements and by dispensing rewards and punishment as appropriate. But, except formal authority and control, Simon's leadership lacked most of the attributes of transactional leadership. Paul and Susan did not have well defined roles to play in the organisation. Simon could not plan who would fill in Kevin's place and rather relied upon wishful thinking that Kevin would continue to work even after his declared retirement age. Also, it does not appear from the case that there were any performance related rewards for employees under the stewardship of Simon. Simon's leadership from transformational perspective was not visionary; there was probably no co-operation, unity, equality and justice (Kakabadse & Kakabadse, 1999). Further, a transformational leader helps the followers understand their aims, objectives and roles and expresses his confidence in them, and gives special consideration to their growth and developmental needs.(Mullin,2006). But, followers of Simon like Susan and Paul were not given attention and consideration. This was probably one of the reasons why Susan and Paul both decided to leave and company had to be closed down. It did not seem that there was any allegiance of followers to Simon's leadership. This made Simon's job even more difficult as Allio (2005) suggests that allegiance of followers can only give a leader the power to carry out his agendas.

In authors' views, Simon was not accepted to a great extent as a good leader by Susan and Paul. Office staff members like Pauline considered him a bully and Susan also agreed with her. But Susan noticed that Simon commanded a great deal of respect from the shop floor employees. This indicates towards interdependence between leader and follower and acceptance of leader depending upon leadership behaviour and its interpretation by the followers. As Kim et al (2004) propose and argue that acceptance of the leader depends upon the culture within which the behaviour of leader is interpreted. Certain cultures would value

certain behaviours as leadership and other cultures would not value such behaviours as leadership (Kim et al, 2004).

Considering Susan's leadership, followership, and role played by her at Middleton, Susan brings a new perspective or 'new eyes' to the organisation. But, she probably could not bring any significant change to the way things were being done at Middleton. She seemed to find herself passing through a labyrinth, a metaphor used by Eagly & Carli (2007) to describe what confronts women in their professional endeavours. Eagly & Carli (2007) further suggests that this labyrinth in front of the women leaders, like Susan in the given case, exist because of various barriers that women run up against when they are in any leadership position. One of the many difficulties that Susan seems to face here is having family responsibilities and being part of a male dominated culture. In authors' views there were some 'glass ceiling issues' (Kakabadse & Kakabadse, 1999:280) that Susan faced. Like she was treated by shop floor employees with disdain and they were not willing to accept her as their boss. She felt this issue aggravated further when she was pregnant. Further, the attitude of shop floor employees highlights the discrimination that Kakabadse & Kakabadse (1999:280) refer to as 'women-different-from-men'. It seems to authors that she was seen by employees as wanting to change the existing culture to which they were adapted and thus resulted in increasing the resistance against her. The grudging attitude of employees could also be because employees had never worked under any woman boss since the inception of the company and her lack of practical knowledge probably worsened the situation.

Another possible reason why employees found it difficult to accept Susan was probably because men and women have different styles of communication which according to Tannen (1995) make women less competent and self-assured than they actually are. Eagly and Carli (2007) stress on this mentioning that study after study has affirmed that people associate women and men with different traits and, link men more with those traits that connote leadership. Though this might be true in Susan's case but authors' would argue that some women have been able to overcome these issues. However examples like Margaret Thatcher, Indira Gandhi and Benazir Bhutto have been very good communicator and leaders by not having any of the issues mentioned by Tannen (1995) and Eagly and Carli (2007). Susan's position became even more difficult perhaps because of the gender issues, stereotypes entrenched at work, no help from Simon, no knowledge about the floor work coupled with very important domestic issues. This could be probably some of the reasons that despite spending three years; she appears to be a sort of non leader i.e. she does not fit with most of the classifications of leadership despites having rank authority and good intentions.

Further, Susan as a follower appears to be a person who tries her best to participate in a constructive manner to achieve what is expected from her. In authors' views she could think critically for example even after observing that Peter was not good for business she was perhaps aware of the unlikeliness of convincing Simon or others to fire him. But she does not seem to be providing any particular challenge to Simon's existing leadership. She might be classified as a conformist follower according to Kelly's (1992) follower typology. Kelly (1992)

classifies a conformist follower as the one who are participative but do not provide any particular challenge to the leaders.

Considering role played by other individuals and their followership styles, Paul, a non-family manager, he appears to be a pragmatic follower. As Kelly (1992) defines a pragmatic follower is the one who keeps changing his approach according to the situation and self interest. Paul joined Middleton as he saw an opportunity to become a non executive director of the company but when he realised that leadership of Simon is not serving his purpose, he decided to quit the company. Alan's son, Peter appears to be of rebellious nature and not willing to go along with what leaders say to him. Susan observes that often Peter had argument with Simon and as mentioned in the case study, he exacerbated the ever-present tension between the management and workers. He seems to be acting always in his self interest and not interested in following any leader. He might be classified as 'Individualists' using Chaleff's (1995) follower typology. Chaleff (1995) classified followers based on support and challenges they provide to their leaders and classifies an individualist follower as the one who acts in self interest and prefer to do as he/she want.

Further, at Middleton, there were some fundamental and deeply held ways of thinking and doing things. One of the basic assumptions over the years at Middleton had been that family members are in the best position to lead the company i.e. they are 'born better than the others' and they have more loyalty towards the business. But, many of the family members' own behaviour were very self serving like Simon going for big contracts to serve his personal agendas. This assumption was quite evident when Simon decided to recruit Susan as an Estimating and Contracts Manager who had no practical background. Not only family members of Swift family but family members of employees were given preferential treatment like Malcolm recruited Peter on the basis of Peter being Alan's son.

Another assumption was the 'man is boss' at Middleton. Using Hofstede's (in Kakabadse & Kakabadse, 1999) ethnicity typology of culture, Middleton's culture from the case appears to be very masculine i.e. be dominant, assertive and macho; sharp division between sexes, men are tough and women gentle. Other elements of culture at Middleton were treating company property with disdain, following almost no safety procedures, and doing everything on a shoestring budget. Sacking of employees was not considered as an option. Not learning from the mistakes and taking any remedial action was also ignored by leaders at Middleton. For example, no one considered except Susan why Paul decided to leave. Similarly, when Susan lost an important contract, Simon did not try to reflect on this and no one was any wiser for the next time. Susan faced difficulty due to this masculine culture and found it difficult to adjust with her role at Middleton. These factors probably made her quit the company finally.

If Susan had remained with the company, authors would have recommended her to take some drastic bold steps to improve the company's dysfunctional culture and trading performance. Firstly, most important thing authors identify for the turnaround of the company is the need of a strong leader or team of change agents (Schien, 2004:314). As Kotter and Cohen (2002) notes

that the major change is often directly linked with the role of a strategic leader. Susan should consider in authors' views that who can provide the leadership necessary for the "big bang" change required at Middleton (Johnson et al, 2008:520). Schein (2004:340) refers to this as "obtaining leadership commitment." As a leader is not necessarily the person at the top, Susan should take some bold steps and influence the processes to collectively achieve aims that she decides to achieve. Susan can use some or all of the six steps mentioned by Kotter (1995) for a strategic change: establish a sense of urgency on the basis of external and internal threats, forming a powerful coalition of stakeholders for change, creating and communicating a clear vision and strategy to direct the change, removing obstacles to change, changing systems that undermine the vision and encouraging non traditional ideas and activities, creating short term wins, consolidating improvements but also continuing the process of change.

Susan should engage into some straightforward open talks with Malcolm and Simon to diagnose the problems at Middleton. Communication plays an important role in shaping the new culture (Hofstede, 1997; Schein, 2004). Malcolm should be an important part of this communication process and deciding the strategy ahead as he has got experience of being with the company since Lawrence's time and led the company quite successfully. Susan, Malcolm and Simon shall engage into 'real communication' that Welch(1989) defines as a "communication process requiring countless hours of eyeball to eyeball, back and forth. It means more listening than talking. It is human beings coming to see and accept things through a constant interactive process aimed at consensus. And it must be absolutely relentless." This communication process first, should involve serious search for answers. Second, they must tolerate unpleasant truths. Third, they must invite a full range of views, spontaneously offered. And fourth, they must point the way to a course of action (Charan, 2006a). These communication channels should always be open and more and more real communication should take place between the important family members and stakeholders of the business.

Based on the case study, authors identify several problems at Middleton those require urgent attention. One of first things that require attention is that Swift family should understand that family and business issues are different. Family issues should not be mixed with business. For example, succession planning, role and responsibilities of different family members and shareholding patterns are family issues but whom to hire and fire, reinvestment decisions or how to get work done from the employees are the business issues. Family members should understand where family ends and where business begins. Family and personal interests shall not influence the business decisions. Who to play which role in business shall be based on business prudence.

Another problem at Middleton is the business does not seem to have any vision, objectives, long term or short term planning. Human resource issues were ever present like strain between management and employees, no or very few performance related rewards, no clear pay structure of the top management, permanent jobs for most of the employees. There seems to be no formal procedure for measuring the employee performance. Management development was not given any attention. There was hardly any way to manage organisational knowledge Most of the times management behaviour was domineering and unappreciative of the

employees. even the basic safety procedures like wearing hard hats and quality work wear were not followed at Middleton. Information system and database used at Middleton was antiquated. Old ways of keeping record and paying system was being used not suitable at all for the company of a size of Middleton.

Many of these problems can be linked with dysfunctional culture of the organisation. Though it cannot be said that culture itself is an issue at Middleton but it does have an impact how the organisation perform (Phegan, 1996; Schein, 2004). To improve the culture of the organisation first Susan should try to understand the elements of the culture at Middleton. Based on the given case study authors have identified some of the dysfunctional cultural dimensions that are harming company's trade performance mentioned earlier in the essay. To get the all important views across the company and to unearth all the hidden assumptions, authors would recommend Susan to identify some select groups for interviews. These groups can be identified and interviewed by an outside consultant or by Susan herself. Both homogeneous with respect to departments or ranks and heterogeneous groups should be selected (Schein, 2004). Selected groups should be interviewed preferably by an outside consultant but before the process, Simon or Susan should explain the purpose of these interviews and tell them how they can identify problems and cultural dimensions at Middleton (Phegan,1996; Schein, 2004). Further, top management and selected groups can use different models or typologies to assess the culture at Middleton. Authors would recommend using Schein's (Schein,2004:26) model "three levels of culture" and "the cultural web" (Johnson et al, 2008:197).

After the assessment of problems that are hampering the trading performance of the company and elements of culture, Susan should see elements of the culture in context of the organisation's problems. Elements of culture could be strength or constraints. Now, the top management should decide what are the elements of the culture that required to be changed to sort out the problems at Middleton. In authors' views Middleton required not only a rapid and major strategic change but also cultural change (Balogun & Hailey, 1999). After this, the change process is a kind of unmapped territory.

Before Susan could start the cultural change process; Susan, Simon and Malcolm would need to decide first who would be leading the company. Susan has been working with the company for last three years and she seems to improve the company performance. Simon did not seem to be willing in leading the company in near future and some of his actions have been harming the business. In these circumstances, Susan is the best person to provide the necessary and committed leadership required for the change at Middleton. But, in authors' views, her lack of experience is an issue. She needs a mentor to guide her through the turnaround process and in the change process. Authors would recommend Susan to be made managing director and Simon to work in as a role of non executive chairman. This would not only provide Susan the necessary guidance she needs but also give Simon more time to pursue his interests. Further, the company can consider hiring a non executive director who can give them continuous advice about the business practices and provide an objective view (Tv Choice, 1996).

Once the succession and leadership issues have been sorted out, authors would recommend Susan to take small steps further, work with existing elements of culture, “associate with powerful stakeholder groups” (Johnson et al, 2008:538), and try to create short term wins. Susan should communicate with all stakeholders affected by the change process in an informal way. The aim of this communication is to get buy-in from as many people as possible acting to make this change a reality (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). This is important that participants of this change process could “see” and “feel” it otherwise there is high possibility that these efforts would not succeed (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). . The discourse in which the leaders engage with their team members contributes to a great extent the construction of distinct workplace cultures (Holmes et al, 2007).

From this stage of cultural and process change, next stage in authors view is a bit sort of walking into an unmapped territory. Authors recommend next step to be having a system installed that would be supportive of the change that Susan and top management are intending to bring about. Susan should measure the success and failure of her efforts and adapt the actions they want to take. Kotter & Cohen (2002) suggests most of the change programs are successful when short terms wins are measure, failures are acknowledged and actions are adapted according to the situations as these emerge. In the end, authors would suggest Susan to have courage and go for this change that this company really needs.

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