

Strategic Leadership: An Organic Intellect

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INTRODUCTION

I chose to explore this topic because the research of strategic leaders and managers, while far from exhausted, is drifting toward a continued understanding of how organic intellect influences strategic leading; which is refreshing to me. In the complexity of all the challenges faced by strategic leaders and managers, the capacity to embrace an organic mindset demonstrates the *knowing* that it has great potential for leading an organization not in a flat world, but one that is jarring. Leaders with organic intellect see the world in imaginative and different ways; they exhibit an intellectual curiosity. They expand the horizons of possibility. They make thought visible which has the opportunity to become the clay with which people build creative solutions to complex challenges (Palus & Horth, 2002). Organic leaders embrace the habit of adapting great ideas from other areas which includes the ability to restructure old thought patterns and provoke curiosity and creativity (Karlgaard, 2014).

Many managers and leaders began their leadership journey utilizing an approach with striking similarities to the game of checkers, a highly reactionary game often played at a frantic pace. Any strategies we employed in this style of leadership was limited, if not rudimentary (Miller, 2015). Mr. Miller further posits:

The opportunities in our world for leaders to play checkers and be successful are dwindling. The game today for strategic leaders can better be compared to chess – a game in which strategy matters; a game in which individual pieces have unique abilities that drive unique contributions; a game in which heightened focus and a deeper level of thinking are required to win. (2015, p. 2)

As our opportunities and challenges grow ever more complex, strategic leadership has never been more valuable. This chapter demystifies the essence of modern leadership in the hope that it provides insights into what it means to lead from an organic mindset that engages intellectual virtues; thus, of great value to many managers and leaders, not only in itself but also as a strategic instrument. Kotter tells us, “the driving force behind leading is: leadership, leadership, and still more leadership” (1996, p. 31).

Organic Mindset

Knowing strategic leadership has become extremely complex, we cannot simply take the traditional strategic leadership skills and morph them into the future without willingly collaborating with intellectual integrity, humility, empathy, and intellectual fairmindedness. If we take those dispositions and add to the strategic thinking mix, this then reconfigures leadership mindfulness. Leadership mindfulness involves conscious direction of being purposefully aware, not vaguely or habitually aware. In other words, hav-

ing an organic mindset means we are deliberately noting our responses to those perceptions throughout the organization. With an organic mindset we are concerned with noticing what is going on right now. That does not mean we do not think about the past, but are more concerned with what is arising in the present moment, and then are able to create that strategic space where we identify how and where the organization can grow.

If we assume that leading organizations using a holistic lens is imperative, then managers need to have the capacity to function with an organic mindset. As organizations become more distant and more complex, leaders cannot ignore the influence of incorporating organic awareness into their strategic decisions and thus must lead with a growth attitude. If strategic leaders do not have the capacity of organic thinking, their predetermined responses and interpretation of business situations may not be healthy for pursuing a competitive approach in a competitive world; whether in a fiercely competitive domestic market or semi-globalized milieu.

Implicitly every leader follows their strategies using similar step-by-step models but an organic leader seeks to better understand the engine of the strategy, from an eco-system view. Here I would like to emphasize the eco-system model goes beyond immediate mobility, meaning pushing the enterprise forward, but naturally advancing execution of an organic strategy knowing it affects local markets, culture, regulations, and other idiosyncratic factors where specific insights address highly converging strategies; thus, not following a step-by-step process. Is not the step by step approach highly constrained and standardized? I argue it is, and therefore encourage strategic leaders to invest in leadership mental powers which allow for leading in the business environment made up of a web of relationships and borderless reality. Therefore, here is an excellent place to define organic intellect, intellectual virtues and the connections to strategic leadership.

Is the organic mindset a different way to think? Hopefully by now the reader is asking that question. If we asked that to Maxwell he would state, “To change lives and organizations, leaders must change their thinking” (2003, p. 3). Your next question may be why should you embrace the organic mindset? What Claude Briston wrote in *The Magic of Believing* is true: The successful people in any industry have succeeded through their thinking (Maxell. p. 10). If your thinking shapes who you are as a strategic leader, then doesn’t it naturally follow that your potential is determined by your thinking?

Organic Intellect

In Ernest Sosa’s early essays, the first which is now over 25 years old, he and some of his disciples tended to think of the intellectual virtues as faculties (eyesight, hearing, introspection, memory, inferential reasoning, and so forth) but more recently scholars have focused on virtues being intellectual courage, openness and humility – dispositions that are not faculties, but character traits (Roberts & Wood, 2007). Using this new focus, we can argue that leaders who display organic intellect understand differing perspectives, develop real dialogue with key actors in different organizations and their style is outward oriented. Organic intellect achieves strategic aspirations based on combined intellect, natural curiosity, and experience. According to Smith (2003):

Everyone gets switched onto seeing an organization through organic understanding and practice. This puts breath into the capacity to critically question and have breathtaking debates. In a civilized space there needs to be disagreement. What is important is that there is a lot of curiosity that develops and that organic learning is allowed to take place during this process. (p. 61)

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