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**Final Manuscript**

**Leadership's Management Style that Influences the Followers' Perception, Firm's  
Market Orientation Success, and Organizational Change: the Case of a French  
Entrepreneur**

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### **Leadership's Style that Influences the Followers' Perception, Firm's Market**

#### **Orientation Success, and Organizational Change: the Case of a French Entrepreneur**

##### **Abstract**

From a sample of a French family business entrepreneur we explore the role of leadership style that influences the followers' perception, firm's market orientation success, and organizational change when the firm faces uncertain and competitive environment. Our case observation indicates that successfully implementing and sustaining the momentum for organisation-wide change demands a long-term, strategic approach, incorporating both "hard" (strategy, structure, systems and technology) and "soft" (vision, values, behaviours and attitudes) issues (Kouzes and Posner, 1995; Whipp and Pettigrew, 1993). The need for a two-pronged approach also highlights the importance of blending the charismatic and instrumental dimensions of owner's change leadership role.

**Key words:** Entrepreneurship, Leadership role, Organizational change, Family business

##### **Introduction**

The past decade of leadership theory and research has provided considerable support for the effectiveness of transformational and charismatic leadership in organizations. The focus of such leadership models centers on the leaders creation, communication, and implementation of vision, defined here as a highly desirable and vivid future organizational state that motivates followers (Larwood and Fable, 1995; Strange and Mumford, 2002; Berson *et al.*, 2001). Indeed, most current leadership scholars argue that exemplary leaders are described by their followers as visionary and inspirational (Rafferty and Griffin, 2004; Bass and Avolio, 1994; Conger, 1999), while recent empirical studies and meta-analytic reviews demonstrate the powerful effects of visionary leadership at the individual, group, and organization-levels of analysis.

For example, research has shown that visionary leadership positively affects net profit margin (Waldan *et al.*, 2001 stock value (Agle, 1993) and follower perceptions of leadership effectiveness (Dumdum *et al.*, 2002). Given convincing empirical support for the impact of visionary leadership on positive organizational outcomes, many scholars have turned their

attention to the interpersonal skills and competencies that are necessary for demonstrating visionary leadership behaviors.

Beginning as early as the late 1980s, leadership scholars have examined emotional communication skills as key predictors of effective visionary leadership. Empirical studies by Howell and Frost (1989), Holladay and Coombs (1994), Awamleh and Gardner (1999) and Den Hartog and Verburg (1997) assessed the relationships among vision content (visionary versus no visionary) and communication style (nonverbal expressiveness versus no nonverbal expressiveness) using trained actors as leader figures and students as followers reporting their perceptions of visionary leadership charisma, and leadership effectiveness. The results of these studies and others generally support the relationship between an emotionally expressive communication styles, characterized by eye contact, facial expressiveness, effective gestures, and vocal variety, and follower perceptions of visionary leadership, charisma, and leadership effectiveness. However, no study to date has examined the relationships among emotional communication skills, visionary leadership, and leadership performance utilizing actual managers and their direct reports in real organizations thus the purpose of this paper is to extend the visionary leadership literature by assessing:

How, in a Family Business, Leadership's Management Style Can Contribute to the Followers' Perceptions of Visionary Leadership, Firm's Market Orientation Success, and Organizational Change?

### **Conceptual Background**

Change oriented models of leadership have sustained the interest of managers and scholars alike because of their promise of extraordinary individual and organizational outcomes. As we move to the new millennium, models of outstanding leadership such as transformational, charismatic, and visionary leadership, which focus on organizational transformation, are likely to become even more important to organizations because of the breathtaking changes

foreseen in the business and political environment. These include workforces with a greater degree of demographic diversity, technological change, and increased international competition which will place new demands on the leaders of tomorrow (House, 1995). The importance of leadership to the change management process is underscored by the fact that change, by definition, requires creating a new system and then institutionalizing the new approaches (Kotter, 1995).

While change management depends on leadership to be enacted, to date there has been little integration of these two bodies of literature. The key role leaders' play in the change process has been noted by change theorists, yet there is no conclusive research that focuses on this relationship between leadership and change (Almaraz, 1994). Recent theoretical research has attempted to integrate change as a contextual variable influencing transformational leadership (Pawar and Eastman, 1997). Such research focuses on determining when organizations will be more receptive to transformational leadership and the match between receptivity level and the actual transformational leadership process. However, Pawar and Eastman (1997) do not address the issue of the capabilities of transformational leaders required to carry out the pertinent change process.

### ***The Affect Side of Management in the Twenty-first Century***

Leadership authors have recently devoted considerable attention to the role of emotional intelligence as a critical interpersonal competency for today's leaders. Both theoretical and empirical studies provide evidence for the relationship between leader emotional competencies, including self-awareness, emotional expressivity, self-monitoring, and empathy, and a range of important leadership outcomes. In short, research suggests that leaders with greater emotional competencies are more likely to display visionary leadership behaviors, which demonstrate impressive effects at the organization-, group-, and individual-level of analysis. In a theoretical article, Ashkanasy and Tse (2000) describe transformational

leadership as the management of emotion, and assert that transformational leaders engage followers by conveying an inspiring vision through emotional language and communication.

They also suggest that transformational leaders have an understanding and intuition about followers' needs and values, which leads to greater interpersonal sensitivity and higher quality relationships with followers. Similarly, George (2000) describes how aspects of emotional intelligence, including the appraisal and expression of emotion, knowledge of emotions, and management of emotions, facilitate a leader's ability to develop collective goals with followers, communicate the importance of work activities to followers, and motivate followers by generating enthusiasm, confidence, and trust. Recently, Bass (2002) noted that several aspects of emotional intelligence are critical for transformational leaders who score highly on visionary leadership and individualized consideration. Overall, many leadership scholars agree that the potency of visionary leadership behaviors depends heavily on one's ability to exercise emotional competencies.

In addition to theoretical contributions, several empirical studies provide support for the relationships among emotional competencies and leadership effectiveness. For example, Sosik (2001) found that self-awareness, a key aspect of many contemporary models of emotional intelligence (Bar-On, 1997; Mayer and Salovey, 1997; Goleman, 1998), predicted charismatic leadership and managerial performance. Sosik and Megerian (1999) found that self-awareness, defined as agreement between self and other leadership ratings on 360-degree assessments, predicted follower perceptions of transformational leadership. The authors suggested "self awareness may support a leader's translation of purpose and meaning in life into invigorating challenges for followers." Research has also demonstrated that self-monitoring, defined as the ability to monitor and control one's expressive behaviors (Snyder, 1974), is a key interpersonal competency that predicts charismatic leadership (Sosik and Dworakivsky, 1998).

More recently, leadership scholars are assessing the relationships among comprehensive emotional intelligence models and transformational, charismatic, and visionary leadership behaviors (Dvir *et al.*, 2004; Srivastava and Bharamanaikar, 2004; Dasborough and Ashkanasy, 2002). Across all of the empirical research linking emotional intelligence competencies and visionary leadership to date, the most robust finding is that effective visionary leaders have the ability to powerfully communicate a compelling vision that inspires followers. Research suggests that such leaders rely upon various nonverbal, emotional communication skills to powerfully articulate their vision for the organization and followers' respective roles in the future state. Although no study to date has examined the relationship between specific nonverbal, emotionally expressive skills and visionary leadership among senior organizational leaders, several laboratory studies have examined the role of vision delivery in eliciting perceptions of leader charisma and leadership effectiveness.

Laboratory studies by Howell and Frost (1989), Holladay and Coombs (1994), Awamleh and Gardner (1999) and Den Hartog and Verburg (1997) found that a strong delivery style characterized by nonverbal, emotional communication skills is a key determinant of perceived charisma and leadership effectiveness. In each of these studies, delivery style was manipulated by utilizing trained actors to display nonverbal communication skills, including eye contact, animated facial expressions, body gestures, and posture.

Overall, the results from these studies demonstrated that leaders who communicate highly visionary messages utilizing a delivery style characterized by nonverbal expressiveness elicit the greatest follower perceptions of leader charisma and leadership effectiveness. In short, the effectiveness of visionary leadership behavior is largely dependent upon the nonverbal, emotional communication skills that deliver the message. Interestingly, Holladay and Coombs (1994) found that the combination of non-visionary content and an emotionally expressive delivery elicited greater perceptions of charisma than visionary content and a weak delivery.

Indeed, such findings illustrate both the sheer power of highly expressive communication skills and the potential “dark side of charisma” (Conger, 1990) in that vision delivery may have a strong impact on follower perceptions regardless of vision content. While these studies provide support for the importance of vision delivery through nonverbal communication, the findings discussed above are limited in that each study utilized student samples and professional actors to portray strong (charismatic) and weak (non-charismatic) communication styles. In a recent review of the research on emotional expressivity, Riggio and Riggio (2002) concluded that emotionally expressive individuals have the ability to establish subtle connections with others on an emotional level and transmit emotional messages that can affect the moods and emotional states of others. Similarly, Gardner and Avolio (1998) argued that charismatic leaders use body posture and gestures, speaking rate, smiles, eye contact, and touch to project a powerful and confident presence, and that such nonverbal displays may be utilized to elicit desired responses from followers.

### **Research Methodology**

In order to evaluate the research issues, a qualitative, case study approach will be used to examine the role of leadership style to improve the firm’s market orientation, organizational change, and performance. A series of semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions will be conducted on-site and ran from one to two hours. Interview transcripts will be forwarded to all participants for comment. Follow-up calls and second interviews would be conducted with some participants. Further data will be obtained from documents made available to the researchers; published literature; and in-house publications.

A number of authors have argued that the overall success of data generation and the achievement of satisfactory responses are greatly dependent on efficient and effective administration and implementation of a survey (see for example Dillman, 1978; Churchill, 1991; Faria and Dickinson, 1992). Indeed, there is a wealth of prescriptive articles which offer

advice on effective survey design (see for example Diamantopoulos *et al.*, 1991). An important feature of such literature is the generally accepted value of survey pre-notification (Murphy *et al.*, 1990), response incentives (Duncan, 1979) and follow-up mailings (Paxson, 1992). Possibly the most influential work in this area is provided by the total design method of survey administration advocated by Dillman (1978). A full discussion of all the issues considered in Dillman (1978) is impractical due to the objectives of our research. However, it should be noted that in an effort to improve content validity and response reliability complementary interviews would be conducted if necessary.

### ***Data Collection***

This study began by conducting a series of semi-structured interviews with the owner and managers of a family SME business in Pau, Aquitaine region. France. In order to understand the relationship between owner-leadership, strategy, culture, capability and performance of the firm, we conducted an additional number of employees' interviews. All interviews were taped and transcribed. The analysis indicated that employees and managers perceived leadership, strategy, culture and organisational capability to be the main drivers of the CEO-owner that improved the firm's market-orientation and performance.

A number of questions were amended to ensure that they captured the essence of the drivers of performance. The suggested amendments were tested in the pilot stage and confirmed. In addition, more data from the firm's sector, appliances retailing, were provided by the Association of French SMEs (CGPME) so that we could compare their performance with the one of our family business ECL (Energie, Confort et Loisirs), its real name.

We also used managerial perceptions as they shape to a significant degree the organisational behavior of the firm. This is consistent with Chattopadhyay *et al.* (1999) and Spanos and Lioukas (2001). Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991, p. 434) state:

*“The CEO-owner is portrayed as someone who has primary responsibility for setting strategic directions and plans for the organisation, as well as responsibility for guiding actions that will realize those plans.”*

Data were gathered by means of a self-reporting survey questionnaire, consisting of questions to infer the existence of a strategic process and to establish the degree of perception of satisfaction with the results of the strategic process. Selecting a self-reporting respondent is a well-established approach in management research (Avolio et al., 1991). In addition, Garg *et al.* (2003) suggest that as most small firms are privately held, it is unlikely that CEOs will be willing to provide detailed accounting data on the firm’s performance. Therefore, they suggest the use of “subjective, self reporting measures of performance”. Moreover, the literature suggests that subjective measures should be used when interest centres on capturing the perspective of organization members when studying management behavior and decision making (Boyd *et al.*, 1993).

### **Results and Analysis**

Data from our series of semi-structured interviews with the family business owner, managers, and employees reveals the pivotal role change leadership plays in promoting and sustaining the change agenda, market orientation, and firm’s performance. The role of business-owner is to “set clear firm challenges” that matter for everyone on personal and professional level. The personal involvement of owner signals the level of commitment to change and heightens the sense or urgency for change.

The need for strong, personal leadership from the top that provides a clear overarching vision and focus seems particularly critical as organisations discard their traditional, hierarchical organisational structures in favor of leaner, flatter boundaryless forms comprising smaller, autonomous, networking units. Because of the autonomy and elasticity implicit in the design and working relationships of these organisations without walls, the line between

“loosely coupled” and “decoupled” is easily overstepped. Organisations most successful in managing the dynamics of loose-tight working relationships meld strong “personalized” leadership at the top with “distributed” leadership, a group of experienced and trusted individuals operating at different levels of the organisation (Butler et al., 1998; Handy, 1997; Whipp and Pettigrew, 1993). To lead change effectively means acknowledging that senior managers do not have all the answers and encouraging “integrated thinking and acting at all levels” (Senge, 1990, p. 7).

### ***Energie, Confort Loisirs (ECL) SA***

ECL’s core business was distributor of a kind of gas barbecue, locally called “PLANCHA.” The bulk of its products were sold to the local market of the city of Pau and its suburbs (around 150. 000 inhabitants). From the beginning of the 1990s, ECL found itself operating in an increasingly uncertain, hostile environment. The new priorities were increased flexibility and responsiveness to customer demands. With the collapse of its B2B clients (restaurants) as a result of the recession in the early 1990s, ECL moved to consolidate its position and focus on designing, manufacturing, and wholesale distribution. The company's immediate response to the dramatic changes in its external environment, therefore, was to embark on large-scale restructuring and downsizing in a bid to increase operational efficiencies and reduce costs, i.e. PLANCHA’s production was outsourced to a Moroccan manufacturer. Between 1992 and 1994, the company's program of change evolved from improving operations to redefining business strategy and culture. The external appointment of a new general manager, human resources (HR), and the development of a new vision for “world class glass”, symbolized the true beginning of corporate transformation at ECL. Management sought to fulfil the new commitment to “excellence in customer service to be achieved through product quality, speed of delivery and flexibility in meeting customer demands” through operational improvements.

It began by dismantling the old hierarchical structure, along with its top down management style, redefining skills and responsibilities, and redesigning work processes. With the support and commitment of the management executive, the company moved to establish team-based work groups and aimed to develop a participative management style within an open, learning environment.

### ***Creating a capacity for change***

ECL's senior management had no need to manufacture any sense of urgency when its business nose dived with the collapse of its three major client industries as a result of the recession in 1990. Initially, however, while the traditional command-and-control bureaucracy was still firmly in place, the potency of this crisis as a major vehicle for communicating the need for change was unrealized. As a result, while the workforce was well aware that the company was experiencing difficulties, it was unprepared for the initial merging of businesses and rationalizing of the workforce which followed.

All this changed with the appointment in 1992 of a new general manager, HR. His appointment confirmed that organisational change was a top priority on the management agenda and was a public admission by employees of the difficulties confronting ECL. The symbolic “new blood” also helped rekindle a sense of urgency by immediately moving to dismantle the old order with its hierarchically focused service structure and autocratic mentality.

### ***Creating a vision and setting the direction***

The new general manager, HR, aware of the importance of communicating a clearly articulated, meaningful message, met with the employees to develop a new vision for “world class PLANCHA”, as well as a mission and statement of values and commitment. ECL attempted to give substance to this message by conducting face-to-face workshops; producing written material for display as well as distribution and providing each employee with a

statement of the revised corporate philosophy and statement of values (see Appendix I and Appendix II). However, if an organization wants to influence people's behavior directly, it must encourage "hot" media, where key personnel model the new behaviors (Bertsch and Williams, 1994). In this regard, ECL encouraged leaders at different levels of the organization to show their commitment to the new organizational paradigm by repeating its message and pursuing strategies which would help institutionalize the new behaviors and values in their areas.

Initially, it was clear that not all employees were pursuing this task with the appropriate amount of "enthusiasm and vigor". If successful implementation only occurs in companies where executives "walk the talk" (Bertsch and Williams, 1994), apathy among some employees becomes a critical issue. Recognizing that this was a serious problem, ECL's training and development department provided on-the-job advice, and a three-part management development programme was implemented.

### ***Leadership commitment***

ECL adopted a team approach to the task of leading change. The owner was not directly involved in selling the need for change through the organization. This was the principal task of the general manager, HR, with the backing of the other directors. However, although there was no single figurehead, the key team players were committed members of the senior management staff, not small bit actors. This aligns with the view that only top management has the power to bring about major cultural change (Kotter, 1995; Bertsch and Williams, 1994; Useem and Kochan, 1992).

However, it remained to be seen whether the less direct involvement of the owner, would be detrimental to the long term success of corporate transformation at ECL. In addition, ECL encountered some resistance among its department leaders who were less than enthusiastic about altering old habits and supporting new behaviors that would undermine their status and

power base. Unless the management development programme succeeded in unlocking old behaviors, attitudes and values among its middle and senior management, the message from its "guiding coalition" would be seen as inconsistent and thus discredited.

### ***Communicating the message***

Under the guidance of the new general manager, HR, the company recognized the importance of communicating the need for change, not only at a senior level, but also, more critically, from the grassroots up. However, the concentration of efforts in this regard, seemed to be towards "cold" media, with face-to-face workshops used at the beginning to introduce staff to the new mission statement and statement of values.

The company also needed to work hard at winning over key personnel at the middle management level and using them as messengers for change. However, the lack of personal involvement of owner in walking the talk and modeling the new behaviors appeared to create a vacuum at the middle management level that was likely to remain until this key group saw the commitment of senior managers.

### ***Reinforcing and Institutionalizing the new Behaviors***

The rewards at ECL clearly came to those who were committed to moving to a team-based, participative work model. Employees, through working party representatives, were involved for the first time in deciding the roles and responsibilities of team members and the rewards and incentives available to each team member. These were then built into the enterprise agreements and became the main drivers of workplace reform. Examples of rewards and incentives were bonuses tied to productivity improvements, and employee training and accreditation to ensure a long term career path. In addition, those departments that had developed the team model very effectively were held up as "models of success" to those "dragging their feet. Using models of success to symbolize the opportunities of the new order

is a potent means of producing dissatisfaction with the status quo (Beer and Walton, 1990; Spector, 1989).

### **Conclusion and Implications**

The literature is unequivocal that successful transformation occurs in companies where executives “walk the talk.” ECL’s owner was convinced that the only way he could win the support and commitment of the workforce was “showing by doing.” The establishment of the “*charter of values and commitment*” ensured that the new behaviors were enacted in deeds as well as in words. The resistance to change encountered at the middle level management was managed by the role played by the general manager, HR as change messenger and the support and direct action of the owner.

In addition, the establishment of work area teams, multi-skilling, and the provision of skills and knowledge education symbolized a radical departure from the structures and control systems of the past. The delegation of power and authority to each work area team symbolised a new organisational paradigm at ECL.

Case observations indicate that successfully implementing and sustaining the momentum for organisation-wide change demands a long-term, strategic approach, incorporating both “hard” (strategy, structure, systems and technology) and “soft” (vision, values, behaviours and attitudes) issues (Kouzes and Posner, 1995; Whipp and Pettigrew, 1993). While each company initiated the corporate transformation process at the operational level, it became abundantly clear that, if change was to “stick”, they must learn to blend operational improvements with strategic transformation and corporate self-renewal (Blumenthal and Haspeslagh, 1994). The need for a two-pronged approach also highlights the importance of blending the charismatic and instrumental dimensions of owner’s change leadership role.

The hope of the authors is to contribute throughout an empirical verification that leadership style is a critical antecedent of market orientation success, follower's perception, and organizational change.

Past studies have produced a considerable and daunting array of obstacles to market orientation success, commonly focusing on system, strategy; structural or procedural barriers. This concentration on the tangible impediments to market orientation has been to the detriment of the study of less intangible (and arguably elusive) obstacles. This issue has long been acknowledged in the organizational behavior literature where researchers have examined the relationship between leadership style, culture and performance (see for example Bass and Avolio, 1993). The current examination of the association between leadership style, followers' perception, market orientation, and organizational change success, constitutes an attempt to redress this imbalance. We believe that the findings of this study though a single case will lead to a number of interesting implications for both theorists and practitioners.

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## Appendix I: ECL's, Charter Values and Commitment

We value and are committed to:

- The vision of becoming world class;
- Integrity in our daily business;
- Dedication to meeting customer needs;
- Active pursuit of continuous innovation and improvement;
- World standard excellence in business;
- Efficient use of resources to achieve our goals;
- Team approach as well as individual effort;
- Acquisition and retention of skills which result in superior performance.

**Source:** in-house publication, 1995

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## Appendix II: World class PLANCHA

- **The customer.** We put the customer first always! We aim to focus on what they want: product type, delivery and follow-up service. No customers; no business!
- **Continuous improvement.** Always looking for the better way to do it.
- **Commitment.** Be passionate, be committed. A real desire to be the best, to be professional, to be dynamic.
- **Quality.** There's no substitute for total business quality in everything we do.
- **The team effort.** We're a team-based company, flexible, working together using our collective skills and talents for the best results.
- **Be safe, not sorry!** Everyone is responsible for workplace safety. Be aware, be careful, and make workplace safety a habit.

- **Participation.** The new ECL involves all its employees more and more in making decisions. Consultation, listening and acting on input is an essential part of how we do business from now on.
- **Going international.** Meeting international benchmarks, constantly on the alert for export opportunities.
- **Problem solving.** Issues and problems are merely challenges to be met and solved. Turn problems into opportunities.
- **Goals and vision.** Knowing our plans, future directions and ambitions, and being able to measure performance honestly and accurately

**Source:** Adapted from ECL company poster, 1995