

The Courageous Leader in a Postmodern Organizational Context

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The premodern leader builds her credibility in part on the foundation of courage—and typically looks to an external enemy as the focus for engaging this courage (and more generally as a generator of energy and motivation among those she is leading). The modern leader builds her credibility in part on the foundation of empowerment—and typically looks to her own team as the source of both difficulties and opportunities. The enemy and fundamental challenges in modern organizations reside inside the organization. What about the postmodern leader? What are the fundamental challenges facing this person. The enemy is now even more intimate. It resides within the heart of the postmodern leader. The enemy force is now constituted of the “demons” that reside inside each of us. How do we take the risk? Can we learn by doing and by making mistakes? Is courage ultimately about risking our own reputation on behalf of a worthy cause?

The postmodern enemy is manifest in many forms. It can take the form of fear about specific actions. It can show up as anger that may begin as frustration or disgust with another person or group, but ends up as frustration or disgust with oneself (often leading to depression). The postmodern enemy can also be manifest in a state of “freeze” (rather than either fight or flight). A leader is faced with the challenge of paradox and polarity. She sees both sides of an issue and doesn’t know which decision to make – which path to take. Any decision will inevitably have a negative impact on some aspect of the organization. And no decision (leading to inaction) is even worse. So what does a postmodern leader do?

Planning and the Internal Enemy

I propose that it is in the engagement of strategic planning processes that a postmodern leader moves from a state of freeze to a state of action and from fear and anxiety regarding the unknown to a reasoned analysis and management of risk. It is through strategic planning that one can effectively encounter one’s own internal enemies and can truly be brave in the midst of postmodern complexity, uncertainty and turbulence.

In this essay I will specifically identify five approaches to strategic planning that I believe helps a style two leader confront the postmodern challenges. The first three approaches relate directly to the three fundamental domains found in all organizations: (1) the domain of information, (2) the domain of intentions and (3) the domain of ideas. Each of these approaches begins with a different set of assumptions about the appropriate sequence for an organization to use in moving through these three domains. While each of these approaches holds some strengths none of them fully address the unique challenges associated with the postmodern condition. I will identify two other approaches that I believe more effectively meet the challenges of our postmodern condition. Each of these approaches involves repeated movement through these three domains.

Approach One: Command-Based Planning

This first approach is probably the one most common for (in many ways) it involves no formal planning at all. The focus is on the domain of ideas—getting the flash of brilliance that launches a major new product or service line. Typically, the “boss” has an idea and then the rest of his staff scramble to find the information that supports this idea and they re-craft the intentions (mission, vision, values, purposes) of the organization so that these intentions are aligned with this idea. The organization then moves immediately to action (often before the justifying information and intentions are even fully assembled).

While, at first blush, this appears to be an inappropriate approach to strategic planning, it can be very effective if used by a small, family-owned organization or a highly entrepreneurial organization that must be responsive to a volatile market place. Certainly, there have been many instances of spectacular success in the use of this command approach in the high-tech industry, though there have also been many spectacular failures in this industry—one need only look to the failure of many dot.com startup ventures of the 1990s and early years of the 21st Century.

Obviously, one of the strengths of this approach to strategic planning is that it allows for rapid planning processes. In many ways the command approach to strategic planning does away with the distinction between strategic and tactical planning. Command based planning, whether strategic or tactical, tends to be highly contextual: an opportunity opens up and a great idea is formulated to meet an immediate customer need. The organization is “off to the races” with this idea. This approach often leads to many risks, but it also offers the possibility of a few big successes. Rather than being failure-avoidant, this

approach is highly success-oriented: “we can make some mistakes, and hopefully learn from these mistakes; however, what is most important is that we have some major successes.” This approach more than any of the other approaches moves a postmodern leader out of freeze and inaction to action.

At a very practical level, this command approach is likely to be most appropriate in an organization that has substantial financial reserves or that has many programs operating that are already highly successful and are likely to product major revenues during the foreseeable future (the so-called “cash cow” of Boston Consulting Group fame). One needs this financial buffer (financial reserves from past successes or venture capital) to overcome the failures; without this buffer the success-oriented approach will be too risky. A couple of big failures will drive out the possibility of even launching a major success.

The primary weakness of the command approach is not just the potential for failure; at an even deeper level, the primary weakness concerns the treatment of information. Employees get in the habit of fashioning the data to meet the perspectives (and biases) of those who are in command—those who are producing the ideas. Once this habit is formed, the organization ceases to be a learning organization; it becomes increasingly vulnerable to repeated failures, especially in a volatile market. It is indeed ironic that the command approach is most likely to be used in an unpredictable world, yet it is also most likely to create organizational habits that block the capacity of those working in this organization to learn how to effectively respond to this unpredictable world.

We can relate this approach to strategic planning (as well as the other approaches) to several prominent models regarding ways in which people and entire organizations are likely to engage their world. First we can turn to the model of personality type that was first offered by the Swiss psychoanalyst, Carl Jung, and was later modifies and made quite popular by architects of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). We find that the command approach is most likely to be embraced by leaders and by organizations that prefer the intuitive rather than sensing mode of perception, and that prefer the processes of judgment over the processes of perception (the NJ configuration on MBTI). Put in other words, these leaders and organizations are inclined to rely on hunches, images of potential opportunities and memories of past successes, rather than on data, “cold hard facts” or present day realities. They are also likely to move rapidly to action, rather than spending much time reflecting on the current

situation—in terms of either gathering more information or further clarifying the relationship between actions about to be taken and the fundamental intentions of the organization.

There is also a tendency for those leaders and organizations embracing the command approach to assume an internal locus of control, meaning that they believe that they can readily influence the setting in which they operate—both the internal operations of the organization and the marketplace in which they are situated. Assuming this internal locus of control, these leaders and organizations will tend to focus on strengths as they relate to the leader’s or group’s ideas. We see this operating successfully in the “skunk-works,” and other forms of “intra-preneurship” that are to be found in many high-tech organizations. Furthermore, we find many of these leaders and organizations leveraging their distinctive strengths (though command approaches to strategic planning) in seeking to identify their “unfair advantage” in the marketplace. The internal locus of control can also lead to an ignoring or denial of weaknesses as well as the role played by powerful external forces.

On the other hand, an effective use of the command approach can be compatible with an external locus of control. To make sense of this use of an external locus, we turn to the well-known SWOT model of planning that is usually associated with Harvard University. The “S” in SWOT refers to the strengths that exist inside an organization, while the “W” refers to internal weaknesses. We have already mentioned that command-based planners are often inclined to focus on their distinctive strengths and ignore the weaknesses that exist in their organization. The “O” and “T” in SWOT refer to external factors—opportunities and threats—that must be taken into consideration when engaged in strategic planning. Command-based planners can be very effective in adopting an external locus of control if they focus on opportunities that emerge in the external marketplace—especially as these opportunities relate to the innovative ideas introduced by the leader or group. Command-based planners can provide an entrepreneurial response to emerging opportunities. They can “seizing the moment [of opportunity]”, though in doing so they may be ignoring or denying threats that exist in the world.

Finally, before moving to the second approach, I will identify the major leadership challenge associated with the command approach to planning. This challenge concerns the frequent chaos being created in an organization that relies on command-based planning. Everyone in the organization may find themselves working in an uncoordinated manner to enact unrealistic plan. There is insufficient information and no

clear priorities. Under such conditions, not only are members of the organization unlikely to learn much from either their failures or successes, they are also likely to find themselves repeatedly in the business of “fire fighting” rather than producing a high quality product or providing high quality service. The postmodern leader who embraces this command approach in an uncritical manner is likely to fail.

Approach Two: Symbol-Based Planning

This second approach is probably the second most commonly found. In some ways, like the first approach, this second approach actually involves no formal planning at all. The focus is on the domain of intentions—identifying or promoting a specific vision (or mission, purpose or values) for her organization. Once again, it is typically the “boss” who starts the planning process—in this case by promoting a specific “dream” or compelling image of what the organization could be if it successfully launches a new product or service. As in the case of the command-based approach, the rest of this leader’s staff scramble, in this instance, to generate an idea that hopefully will enable the organization to achieve her vision, and find information (often from the marketplace) that does two things: (1) demonstrates that this vision is “realistic” and “achievable” and (2) provides the idea-people with guidelines and boundaries for creating their successful strategy. The organization then moves to action inspired by and motivated by the compelling image offered by the symbolic leader.

The symbolic approach to planning can be very effective if used in very large organizations where the upper-tier of leaders primarily are in the business of inspiring rather than getting involved in the day-to-day operations of the organization. The symbolic approach also makes sense in a setting where the market place is relatively stable, but in which there must be a sustained effort for products or services to be viable. In other words, the symbolic approach makes sense when it comes to organizations that are in the business of product or service quality and must be constantly concerned with reputation and prestige. Collegiate institutions often belong in this category, as do organizations that produce high end products (such as Swiss watches or yachts) or provide high-end services (such as expensive resorts or restaurants offer).

One of the strengths associated with the symbolic approach to strategic planning is that it tends to encourage patience and persistence—an ongoing pursuit of some lofty and highly desirable outcome. Symbols inspire for the “long haul” and “keep us going when the going gets tough.” This second

approach to strategic planning offers a clear distinction between strategic and tactical planning. The symbolic-based planner offers the big vision and the long-term strategy. She leaves the tactical implementation of the vision and strategy to the mid-managers and other lower-level employees in the organization. While the symbolic leader may find ways to “touch the masses” and may make a symbolic show of support for the operational managers of the organization (photographed climbing a telephone pole or serving a meal in a fast-food restaurant), this person (like the command-based leader) is often out of touch with the realities of the workplace. She fails to attend sufficiently to the domain of information—particularly information about the internal operations of the organization.

As in the case of the command approach, symbolic planning can often be risky—the dreams are often not very realistic. However, the symbolic planner and leader can be very appreciative and can provide support for a “success-oriented” approach to program development: “we have taken on a very ambitious goal and will undoubtedly make some mistakes on the way to this goal; hopefully we can learn from these mistakes; however, what is most important is that we get up, dust ourselves off, and try again to achieve a major, worthy success.”

This approach, like the command approach, is most appropriate in an organization that has substantial financial reserves or that has many programs operating that are already highly successful and are likely to produce major revenues during the foreseeable future (the “cash cow”). Once again, it is a matter of building a financial buffer to overcome the failures; that is why the symbolic approach is often most appropriate in a large organization. This organization is likely to have a financial buffer if it has mounted successful programs for many years and has established a strong reputation and is prestigious. Reputation and prestige can themselves serve as financial buffers in that the symbolic leaders of this organization are more likely to get loans and additional financial backing than are leaders of organizations with less prestige and a more spotty reputation. The primary weakness of the symbolic approach concerns the treatment of information. As in the case of the command approach, employees may get in the habit of fashioning data to make the vision of their symbolic leaders seem viable. This is yet another way in which an organization ceases to be a learning organization;

If we turn once again to ways in which people and entire organizations are likely to engage their world, we find that the symbolic approach is most likely to be embraced by leaders and organizations preferring

intuitive rather than sensing modes of perception, and that prefer feeling-based criteria rather than thinking-based criteria when arriving at a judgment (the NF configuration on MBTI). Symbolic leaders and organizations oriented to this approach are inclined to not only rely on hunches (as do the command-based planners), but also mistake dreams for reality. Their dreams are motivating in part because other people can see, hear and even taste these dream—thereby often mistaking the dreams for reality. Data and cold hard facts (the sensing function in MBTI) are often considered to be offensive and even a sign of disloyalty. They certainly are not welcomed. There is also a tendency for symbolic leaders and organizations to assume an internal locus of control. They believe that they can achieve anything, if there is sufficient commitment and effort. Assuming this internal locus of control, symbolic leaders and organizations (like their command counterparts) will tend to focus on strengths--especially as these strengths are aligned with the symbolic leader's vision. The symbolic leader, like the command leader, is likely, with an internal locus of control, to ignore or deny weaknesses in their organization (especially the failure to understand or support their vision) and the role played by powerful external forces that are not aligned with their vision.

Once again, the key to effective symbolic planning by a postmodern leader is often the shift to an external locus of control. We turn again to SWOT. Symbol-based planners can be effective in adopting an external locus of control if they focus on ways in which their intentions (mission, values and purposes as well as vision) align with opportunities (O) that are emerging in the external marketplace to which their organization is responsive. A symbolic approach to strategic planning can be quite powerful if the symbolic planner's or leader's dreams can be connected to the dreams of stakeholders from outside their organization: "Go west young man [and woman] and seek your fortune, while fulfilling the manifest destiny of this great land." Furthermore, by identifying the threats (T) that exist out in the world, a symbolic planner can avoid the creation of dreams that simply can never be realized or that divert attention and resources away for those threats that can reduce or eliminate the organization's capacity to realize its dreams.

Before moving to the third approach, I will again identify the major leadership challenge associated with this second approach to planning. This challenge concerns the ability of the symbolic planner and postmodern leader to clearly define the vision and link this vision to the personal aspirations not only of those who are leading the organization, but also other members of the organization and other

stakeholders: “We will help each other out in realizing our personal dreams as well as our collective dream.” Without this alignment between personal aspirations and organizational vision there is a lack of coordinated efforts. Like an automobile with nonaligned tires, the nonaligned organization will have to exert more energy, will find more wear-and-tear, and experience a much bumpier ride than the aligned organization.

Approach Three: Reason-Based Planning

The third approach to strategic planning is most often associated with 20th Century organizational management. It begins with a focus on the domain of information—and, in particular, identifying the internal strengths and weaknesses of the organization, as well as the external opportunities and threats. Typically, this approach to planning is placed not in the hands of the upper level executives in the organization (as is the case with the command and symbolic approaches) but in the hands of a planning office, planning committee, the Management Information Systems office, or the Finance and Budgeting department of the organization.

The rational approach to planning can be very effective if used in an organization that is very large and in an organization that resides in a stable marketplace (or often a marketplace that this organization strongly influences or even controls). We are particularly likely to see this third approach embraced in an organization that is highly bureaucratized—in which change occurs slowly and with considerable deliberation. One of the strengths associated with the rational approach to strategic planning is that it tends to reduce failure—at least failure of major proportions. Failures are reduced not only because this approach emphasizes the formulation of realistic plans, but also because rational planning usually closely links the strategic and tactical planning of the organization. All of the tactics (often directed toward the achievement of specific objectives linked to specific initiatives) emerge from and are compatible with the strategic plan (often directed toward the achievement of programmatic goals).

While the command or symbolic leader may be out of touch with the reality of the workplace in their organization, the rational planner and leader is “in touch”—though this connection may be mostly in the form of numbers and statistics rather than actual, direct experience in the workplace. There is a tendency for rational planners to devote too much attention to calculations and not enough to commitment. This, in turn, points to one of the weaknesses of the rational planning approach. It too often leads to a plan that

never gets implemented because it is not inspiring (the symbolic approach) or leads to results that are not very impressive given that the plan is not terribly innovative (the command approach).

The strength of the rational planning approach has already been noted—it is not very risky. More often “failure-avoidant” than either the command or symbolic approaches (which are more likely to be “success-oriented”), the rational approach makes sense if mistakes or failure would be very costly for the organization and its customers or clients. Rational planning makes sense in the design and construction of a new airplane or in the treatment of a seriously ill patient. You can’t afford any mistakes when flying 200 passengers across the Pacific Ocean or when treating a patient who might die if a mistake in diagnosis or treatment is made.

It is typically not hard for the rational planner to be practical. While large, bureaucratic organizations are likely to have substantial financial reserves, these reserves are often unnecessary if the rational planners have done a good job of preparing a SWOT analysis. On the other hand, when we turn again to the ways in which people and entire organizations are likely to engage their world, we find that the rational approach is just as “irrational” as the first two approaches. Just as many untested assumptions are likely to underlie a rational planning approach as is the case with command and symbolic planning. Rational planners are usually inclined to assume an external locus of control. Though they may conduct a SWOT analysis that focuses on internal as well as external factors, attention usually is directed toward the external factors. In part, this focus on external factors is likely to occur because it is often assumed that these large, bureaucratic organizations are very hard to change internally—so why spend much time identifying internal strengths and weaknesses (especially the latter). It is often assumed, given the organization’s influence in its marketplace, that the organization is likely to be able to change external conditions more quickly than internal conditions.

With regard to MBTI profiles, the rational planner, leader and organization are most likely to be oriented toward the sensing function (S) when gathering information (perceiving) and to the thinking (T) processes when making a judgment (the ST configuration on MBTI). Rational planners, leaders and organizations are inclined to rely on data from the outside world, rather than building a plan on the basis of hunches (command-based planners) or dreams (symbolic planners). While their plans may not be

very inspiring or innovative, they are realistic and have been derived in a systematic and thoughtful manner.

The key to effective planning for those postmodern leaders using the rational approach is often the opposite of those from the command and symbolic planners. Rational planners need to pay more attention to the internal operations of their organization—they must embrace an internal as well as external locus of control. A rational approach to strategic planning can be quite powerful if the planner or leader can fully appreciate the distinctive strengths that exist in her organization, and if she finds ways in which to use these strengths to address the weaknesses that exist in her organization. The “enemy” is not just an external threat. It is also internal inertia and a sense of powerlessness among those working in large, bureaucratized organizations. An appreciative perspective regarding distinctive strengths—especially when these strengths are being assessed in a systematic and thoughtful manner (the strong suit of rational planners)—can make a real difference in sustaining the viability of a large (and often old) organization.

Before moving to the final two approaches to planning, I will identify the major leadership challenge associated with the rational approach to planning. This challenge concerns the focus of a rational planner and leader: “To what should I [the planner or leader] attend?” When one starts with the domain of information, there is an immediate question: “what do I look at first (given that we have not yet clarified intentions nor have any ideas to evaluate)?” This is where rational planning isn’t very rational. That to which we attend first, tends to be more influential than that to which we attend later. Furthermore, the way in which we interpret or place a frame around specific information has a great impact on how this information is used. Many scientists have come to realize in recent years that the tool of measurement may have a greater impact on the outcome of the measurement than the phenomenon being measured. Thus, rational planners need to be very careful in formulating their initial questions regarding strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and must be very careful in their selection of measurement tools and criteria when seeking to answer these questions.

The Strategic Challenge

In reviewing these three approaches to strategic planning I would suggest that you ask yourself, as a leader, the following three questions in determining which of these approaches is most appropriate:

1. Which of these approaches has been most commonly used by you during the past five years? Why have you used this particular approach?
2. If you look at a project, change initiative or organizational improvement in which you are about to engage, which approach seems most appropriate? Why?
3. Look back on your planning efforts in the past, your preferred way of doing planning (question one) and the planning challenges you now face (question two) what are the lessons learned from these past efforts that are applicable to today's challenges? When have your planning efforts been most effective? Why do you think they have been effective? When have they been least effective? Why do you think this is the case?

You might find that none of the three approaches offered in this blog will do the trick. Perhaps one of the two more complex and often subtle approaches will be a better fit as you engage the personal enemy inherent in postmodern leadership.

I propose that the three strategic planning processes just described are each rather “safe.” We hide behind precipitous action (command model), behind vision (symbolic model) or behind data (rational model). Unfortunately, our postmodern world of complexity, unpredictability and turbulence requires that we move beyond these three models and that we effectively interweave information, intentions and ideas. There are two models of strategic planning that facilitate this interweaving and that enable a postmodern leader to take appropriate risks—and most importantly to learn from these risks and the mistakes that inevitably occur when facing the challenges of postmodern complexity, unpredictability and turbulence.

Approach Four: Transaction-Based Planning

The transactional approach to strategic planning begins with a focus on all three domains—information, intentions and ideas. When using a transactional approach, the postmodern leader can begin anywhere; however, any dialogue or exploration of any one of the three domains automatically moves a postmodern leader and his planning group over to the other two domains. It is the transactions between the three domains that lead to powerful ideas that can be translated into successful action.

This approach is also transactional in that the planning does not end with the movement to action. There is ongoing organizational learning, for any action not only provides valuable information about the quality of the idea being engaged, but also provides greater clarity regarding organizational intentions (“Oh, that’s what we really want to achieve”), as well as clarity regarding additional information that needs to be collected (“Oh, I guess we made a wrong assumption about this; we need to find out more about it”). At this moment, the postmodern leader becomes a *leader/learner*.

Transactional planning is rarely placed in the hands of the upper level executives in the organization. However, unlike the third approach, transactional planning is not housed in a planning office, planning committee, or the Management Information (or Budget) Office; rather, this fourth approach is usually housed deep in the organization and involves many players. There may be a series of *ad hoc* planning committees, or a series of intensive large-scale meetings involving many representatives from different areas and layers of the organization. The major outcome should be a broad based understanding of what is now happening and what is about to happen in the organization. Organizational learning takes place at all levels of the organization. Thus, there is a third way in which this approach to planning is transactional—it involves transactions between and among all levels and departments of the organization.

The transaction-based approach to planning can be very effective if used in an organization that is large and in an organization that resides in a relatively stable marketplace. The organization must be large enough and secure enough, and the environment must be stable enough to allow for personal and organizational reflection and sustained, collaborative planning processes. More than any of the other approaches, the transactional approach tends to increase commitment to the plans finally formulated. Given that ongoing monitoring takes place, the fourth approach (like the third approach) also tends to produce few failures. At the very least, those failures that do occur tend to have a reduced impact, given the ongoing analysis and re-planning processes.

Transaction-oriented postmodern leaders are usually inclined to assume an internal locus of control. They believe that broad based participation by parties who are internal to the organization can make a difference in addressing tough external challenges. Furthermore, by emphasizing ongoing organizational learning even after the plan is put in place, members of an organization are likely to feel that they can

eventually manage and even overcome major external challenges. At times this assumption of internal control is not realistic. Transactional leaders are sometimes over-confident about their ability to control or even influence external conditions.

Turning to the MBTI profiles, we find that transactional leaders are most likely to be oriented toward the sensing function (S) when gathering information (perceiving) and to the thinking (T) processes when making a judgment (the ST configuration on MBTI). Transaction-based leaders are also much more inclined to be deliberate and diligent in the judgments they reach. From an MBTI perspective, they are more likely to be oriented toward perceiving rather than judging in their work (STP). Rational leaders (third approach) are deliberate in their work and ensure that they have the appropriate data and clarity of purpose before moving forward. They are also inclined, however, to stick with their idea and their assessments once a plan of action has been mapped out. Conversely, the transaction-oriented leader keeps her options open even after a plan of action has been initiated. Transactional leaders are always open to new ideas, clearer intentions and new information—they remain in a “P” mode even when engaged in action. These transactional leaders can be a source of real frustration for other leaders with a more “J” (judging) orientation. Not only are transactional leaders slow to come to a decision, they even tinker with the decision after it has been made!

The key to effective planning for those who embrace the transactional approach is paying attention to the external environment that has an impact on their organization—these leaders must embrace an external as well as internal locus of control. Transactional leaders must fully appreciate not just the ongoing collaborative processes that occur inside their organization, but also the powerful forces that are operating in the 21st Century on their organization. They must be wary of the “group think” that can occur when building consensus—the tendency for a group to perceive what it wants to perceive and to stifle contradictory (and particularly pessimistic) perspectives. In this case, as in the case of the third approach, the “enemy” is not just an external threat, it is also internal pressures to conform on behalf of consensus. Participants in transactional planning may abide by the results of a carefully conceived collaborative process without taking a second look to be sure that the results of this transactional analysis are not just properly reached, but are also based in reality.

Before moving to the final approach to planning, I will identify the major leadership challenge associated with the transaction-based approach to planning. This challenge concerns the value inherent in the involvement of all members of the organization (or at least all members of the planning group) in reflective practice. This type of analysis and organizational learning requires a level of cognitive sophistication that may not be found in all members of an organization. Is the transactional leader simply naïve in assuming that people really want to learn from their mistakes and are willing to redo their carefully prepared action plans if the actions that are eventually taken reveal a flawed plan? In some ways the fourth (transaction-based) approach to planning is a postmodern, 21st Century version of the third approach—it pushes the envelope with regard to creation of a learning organization.

Approach Five: Generative-Based Planning

The fifth and final approach to strategic planning can be considered a 21st Century, postmodern version of a command-based approach to planning (Approach One). While the fourth approach requires a relatively stable environment and works best in a fairly large organization, the fifth approach is quite entrepreneurial (like the first) and works most effectively when the environment is unstable (a common phenomenon in the 21st Century) and when the organization is relatively small or at least very nimble. There is a strong emphasis in this approach, as the name implies, on generativity—producing something, learning by doing, trying it out, “letting it all hang out.” Risk-taking and pilot-testing reside at the heart of this approach. It truly challenges the internal courage of the postmodern leader. Rather than spending much time talking about or conceiving an idea, or spending much time clearly articulating desired outcomes (intentions), or conducting a needs assessment or conducting a market survey (information), generative leaders try something out in a small, controlled setting. This pilot test can produce substantial and highly tangible information for them about the real needs and interests of the market they are surveying and a much clearer sense of what they can realistically expect with regard to desired outcomes.

As in the case of the fourth approach, attention is given in the fifth approach to learning-after-implementation. An idea is tried out and careful attention is given to what occurs. Rather than devoting a substantial amount of time up front to planning, a generative leader spends time after the initial offering or pilot test in determining what worked, why it worked and what modifications need to be made in the near future to make it work more effectively, more efficiently or in a more attractive manner (given the

market to which this product or service seems to appeal). It is critical when the fifth approach is engaged to create or find a safe place in which the new idea can be pilot-tested. Newly-designing airplanes are tested out in wind tunnels. Something equivalent to a wind-tunnel must be created when testing out a new product or service under generative planning guidelines.

This highly entrepreneurial approach is simultaneously action-oriented and quite reflective (after the initial action). It makes sense in a highly turbulent environment, for one must act quickly and learn quickly to keep up with the shifting conditions. It is not enough to create a learning organization (as is the case with the fourth approach), one must create a *fast-learning* organization—which is even more challenging in terms of cognitive flexibility and willingness to learn from mistakes (as well as successes). This ultimately is the major leadership challenge of the fifth approach: how to create this fast learning climate in the organization.

Broad-based participation is required if generative planning is to succeed—not just to build commitment, but also to enable the fast learning to occur. Those involved in the actual production of a pilot test are usually best informed with regard to analyzing the results from this pilot test (unless they have a vested interest in the outcomes of the pilot test—which means this is not really a safe place in which to test out a new idea). They learn fast and must then convey what they have learned to others in the organization so that broader patterns can be detected. The pilot tests can be a source of additional learning. Further modifications can be made in existing pilot products or services, or new products or services can be created. The learning demanded of generative planning is simply too much for those operating at the top of the organization to absorb; leaders need the knowledge, insights and wisdom of other members of the organization.

Generative leaders, like transactional leaders, are usually inclined to assume an internal locus of control. They believe that enough good ideas—tested and modified through continuous improvement processes—can meet the demands of any external challenges. As in the case of the fourth approach, generative learners believe that ongoing organizational learning and modification after the plan is put in place enables them to eventually manage and overcome major external challenges. At times this assumption of internal control is not realistic; generative-oriented leaders are sometimes over-confident about their ability to control or even influence external conditions. They simply are not nimble enough

to keep up with the turbulence that exists in the external environment, or do not have sufficient organizational smarts to learn everything that has to be learned about the complex, unpredictable and turbulent setting in which their organization operates.

What about MBTI profiles? Generative leaders are most likely to be oriented toward the intuitive function (N) when gathering information (perceiving) and to the feeling (F) processes when making a judgment (the NF configuration on MBTI). These men and women are much more likely to be oriented toward perceiving (NFP) in their work than are those who use any of the other approaches to planning. They may move rapidly to action (as do people with strong J functions); however, they are always leaving options open and will readily try out another idea, based on their own intuitive powers. They are also very concerned with outcomes (Feeling function) and don't really care much about how a decision is reached, as long as it leads to something that is greatly valued (even something that can't be imagined prior to the start of the generative planning process).

If transactional leaders can be a source of real frustration for planners, leaders and organizations with a more "J" (judging) orientation, generative Style Two leaders will be even more frustrating. They move rapidly (which the "J" folks like), but keep changing their minds. They are like jugglers who keep many balls up in the air and don't seem to worry about one or two of the balls falling. They simply pick up the balls, reflect briefly on what has been learned, and begin juggling these same balls or some new ones.

For those who engage in generative planning the key is not just fast learning but also *fast execution*. Cut back on the number of barriers and review procedures (which are so dear to the rational planners) that exist in the organization. Instead, "let all flowers bloom." This means that there will be many mistakes, but a fast-learning organization is one in which one can learn from these mistakes. It is even more appropriate that generative leaders learn from the successes that occur. This does not only mean that they keep the successes moving forward, but also that they try to extract the important lessons to be learned from these successes, so that this learning can be applied to other potential projects. While a generative leader will inevitably make mistakes and foster many failures, there will be fewer of these negative outcomes if lessons can be learned from past successes.

The generative planner does not have to be concerned in particular about a balance between an internal and external locus of control, for the pilot test will usually yield rich information about both internal and external factors that influence the outcome of the pilot test. The real challenge is not about being biased toward internal or external data. The real challenge concerns ways in which all of this abundant information is processed and interpreted. It is a matter of too much information from all sources rather than too little information from any one source. All-too-often, organizational leaders escape from a generative approach to planning, and return to one of the “safer” approaches (One, Two and Three) of the 20th Century, or to a more systematic, but less entrepreneurial, mode of transactional planning (Four). It takes real, personal courage (and heart) for a postmodern leader to remain engaged in a generative approach to strategic planning.

Conclusions

While no formula exists for the brewing of personal courage, the two approaches to strategic planning that I have just briefly described do tend to move leaders toward action, while also encouraging reflection and clarity of direction. They both discourage blind movement forward—yet also discourage non-action and the state of freeze. Perhaps most importantly, both the transactional and generative approaches to strategic planning encourage postmodern leaders to confront a profound and challenging question: on behalf of whom are we displaying courage and taking risks? Who ultimately will benefit from our brave leadership? Are we doing this work on behalf of our own career advancement or to inflate our own ego? Or are we engaged in a “bigger game” and furthering a much more noble cause? When we confront this profound challenge—which we often do in our postmodern world—we are becoming not just more effective postmodern leaders, we are also becoming leaders who embrace another emerging style of postmodern leadership. We are becoming *servant leaders* who work on behalf of a broader and more widely-embraced mission, vision, and social purpose for our organization.