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A Success Story of an Innovative Leader : Steve Jobs Innovative Thinking Led Apple Inc a Great Success

Mr. Sundarapandiyar Natarajan, Associate Professor, VIMS, Coimbatore

Management Practices

Executive summary

Steve Jobs was the co-founder, chairman and chief executive officer of Apple Inc. Steve Jobs had very unique leadership style and he was an unconventional leader and this can be proven when Apple achieved 73% market share in USA for MP3 player and was awarded for the “best company” for Innovation, Marketing and Management under the leadership of Steve Jobs. However Steve Jobs leadership style still falls back to the Leadership theories something we can relate to. Steve Jobs, a high visionary, with robust self confidence and inner strength, can be portrayed as Transformation Leader, Charismatic leader, Transactional leader and Situational leader all in one.

Steve Jobs personal attributes are comparable to that of other corporate leaders Mark Zuckerberg and Eric Schemidt, as these two leaders are also very innovative and visionary leaders. Mark is the founder of Face book, Mark's personal interest in making things that help people connect and share what's important to them, revolutions, information flow, are visions that has remained the same all throughout from his young school days; always staying ahead of the others. His desire to create an open information flow for people is the mission that he has undertaken for making the world open to everyone. Eric Schmidt is an Executive Chairman of Google previously he was holding the CEO position. There are two guidelines that led to Eric Schmidt's successes: The first one considered human asset as priceless property and the second one was to be an organization builder.

Nevertheless, Steve Jobs is different and unique in terms of his leadership attributes compare to other two leaders: Passion, visionary, perfection and simplicity, communicative and symbolism. Steve Jobs had proven to be better leader compared to other in terms of innovation.

Introduction

"Leadership" is an interpersonal relationship between the leaders and followers and the former influences the latter to bring about real changes and outcomes that reflect their shared purposes. Leaders focus on direction for the people who work in their organization as their actions steer the path and help create a sense of belonging and deals with issues related to organization development, employee motivation and human communication. Steve Jobs is recognized as a true leader and described in terms such as charismatic, enthusiastic, and courageous. His creativity in decision-making and the ability to adapt to changing market conditions mark a turning point for Apple Computer.

Organizational background- APPLE

APPLE is the most popular personal computer in the world; it was founded by Steve Jobs. Steve Jobs was born on February 24 1955. Smart but directionless, job experimented with different pursuits before starting Apple computers with Stephen Wozniak in the Jobs family garage. Apple revolutionary products, which include the ipod, iphone and ipad, are now seen as dictating the evolution of modern technology.

While Jobs had always been an intelligent and innovative thinker, in 1974 Jobs took a position as a video game designer with Atari. Several months later he left Atari to find spiritual enlightenment in India, traveling the continent and experimenting with psychedelic drugs. In 1976, when Jobs was just 21, he and his best friend Wozniak started Apple computer. Wozniak was a brilliant computer engineer. Jobs and Wozniak are credited with revolutionizing the computer industry by democratizing the technology and making the machine smaller, cheaper, intuitive, and accessible to every day users. The first model, the Apple I, earned them \$774,000, and three years after the release of their second model, the Apple II this model was increased the sales by 700 percent to \$139 million dollars. In 1980, Apple computer became a publically traded company with a market value of \$1.2 billion on the very first day of trading. In 1998 the value of the company was 3 billion now the value is 350 billion.

Steve Jobs had taken a positive approach and on his influence positive effect resulted on the company success. Other two components were "group" and "goal". Apple is a large group with thousands of

people employed; Steve Jobs influenced and continue to influence with his legacy within Apple group to cascade his influences throughout the entire organisation. Goals are the direction of leadership to his group of people toward to accomplishing a positive deviation from the strategic planning

Steve an Unconventional Leader

Steve had very unique leadership style and he was unconventional leader. The core of Steve Jobs leadership style and success was consistent focus on customer and product. This made Steve unique and different from other corporate leader who normally focuses on organization and number of staff. Steve Jobs become the most outstanding CEO globally and innovative product creator. Steve Job's passion is customer and product perfection. These two things are unique pieces of Steve Jobs leadership style. These are the gaps the many corporate leaders fail. They know about their customer and have a good knowledge about the product. But something get lost in connectivity. These had made Steve as unconventional leader.

There are two steps between knowing the customer and product perfection those are "vision" where translation of customers needs and experience into product and correct and "culture" where creating and nurturing of an organization innovation culture. Steve Job's leadership way is different from text book theories. Steve Jobs is an amalgam different style of leadership such as autocratic, transformational and charismatic.

Apple is an Autocratic and CEO -Centric

The leader is supreme and takes all the powers in his hands. According to (Lewin, 1939) define Leaders provide clear expectations for what needs to be done, when it should be done, and how it should be done. There is also a clear division between the leader and the followers. (Stogdill, 1974) define; Authoritarian leaders make decisions independently with little or no input from the rest of the group. It is more difficult to move from an authoritarian style to a democratic style than vice versa. This style is usually viewed as controlling, bossy, and dictatorial. Steve Jobs, the CEO and co-founder of Apple was a highly Autocratic, or 'CEO-centric' leader. Rather than working alongside his peers and subordinates, Jobs choose to lead his team from the front, spearheading the innovation and constantly renewed products of the company (Lucas Lin, 2005). The autocratic nature of his leadership also bears some transactional traits, such as using verbal lashings at employees. Steve Jobs was also infamous for creating an

atmosphere of fear in the company when he carries out rounds of ‘executions’ to remove less competent staff.

Steve Jobs’ leadership style was autocratic; he had a meticulous eye for detail, and surrounded himself with like-minded people to follow his lead. While he was incredibly demanding of his people, he was not the best delegator – he wanted to involve himself in every detail (Richard Branson, 2011).

Steve Jobs leadership style is more of *autocratic and idealism* which led him to be a successful leader. He focused on the right stuff and setting the right people to help him in his organization in order to achieve the desired goals. He had the power and authority over his followers and workers inside the organization. These leadership qualities were helpful in managing emergency or stress situations. For instance, the autocratic leaders can make their own decision inside the group or even the organization like Apple. This style can reduce the decision making length and, improve the quality of decision making.

Steve was a brilliant and able leader to handle complex problems, like the music industry’s, by focusing on the heart of the challenge at hand. Steve Jobs changed and transformed a near bankrupt company to a globally dominant and power company (Apple). This goal, at its core, was a complex and incredibly challenging prospect to consider even for a computer expert (Troy Bynoe, 2011). However, Jobs eagerly met a similar challenge in 1997 when he returned to Apple after his dismissal in 1985. Steve systematically started over from the ground up by first hiring a new management team of executives he trusted and would form the centre of the company for more than a decade. He restructured then a new product line that would provide an elegantly cool and newly sophisticated alternative to the already familiar business focused Dell or IBM PC. The iMac, a breakthrough all-in-one computer with monitor attached marked the dawn of a new computing frontier and Apple’s return. It was high price along with drastic cost cut backs allowed Jobs to build enough cash to repair Apple’s balance sheet and prepare the company for bigger and bolder investments in the future. His approach of stabilizing Apple’s foundation and preparing it for an excitingly newer and more profitable future was one approach that he used for any venture. Whether he was remaking the music industry, movie industry or smart phone industry he always tackled the problem of the matter at its core and rebuilds the business structure from the inside out. Even when Apple’s stock prices plummeted after missing its financial targets in 2000, it hardly mattered because Steve had already laid the vital ground work for Apple’s transformation. Jobs’ *transformational leadership* is the key to Apple’s long-term strategic growth and sustainability.

Steve Jobs leadership style included stimulating creativity by challenging his team to use fresh solutions and help people overcome their fears of failing. He asked questions and made people think. He challenged his workers through inspiring speeches each time he had come out with an innovative idea whether it is iPod or Mac (Harvey, 2001). According to an article in the Fortune magazine (Steve Jobs speaks out, 2008) he spoke as “my job is to not easy on people. My job is to make them better and to take these great people we have and to push them and make them even better, coming up with more aggressive visions of how it could be”. Steve needed vindication and he openly ached to show his vision of the future of computing was correct that APPLE’S board was wrong for pushing him aside, that he could change the world again (Alan Deutschman, 2000).

Steve Jobs wanted to prove Apples Board that his vision of the future computing was correct (Alan Deutschman, 2000). He visualized that the people have to think beyond now and the future, so they will be able to see for themselves the prospect and possible potential of the particular vision. In this case they will be more willing to accept responsibility for what they have been trying to cook up (John Baldoni, 2006). He required his people to focus on what they are good at. In order to save the company, he deemed them to focus keenly on their best potential products (Leander Kahney, 2008).

Steve Jobs had a vision to turn Apple around by focusing on producing software and “customer experience” (Investor relations, 2007). Also, he was clearly prepared to take personal risks to achieve his vision. For example, his approach to former foe, Bill Gates, and partnering with Microsoft carried a great deal of risk. In addition, Jobs exhibited a high level of sensitivity to his followers by attributing the success to them when he credited the company’s ability to maintain focus on innovation and customers.

The company contributed to the digital age in a remarkable way by introducing the first commercially successful graphical user interface in 1984 (Apple, Inc, 2006). Steve Jobs creativity skills are evident in the major decisions that allowed Apple to emerge as an innovation leader. His leadership style inspired the company to return to its innovative roots. He shifted the focus to software, which led to development of iTunes, and ultimately the very successful iPod. Both situational factors and the leadership skills of Steve Jobs contributed to Apple’s recent successes. The company needed a leader capable of motivating followers provide structure, and place such leader in a power position with adequate influence. Because of such an unfavorable situation, the leader’s traits and leadership skills are detrimental. When Apple

selected Jobs to lead the company, it changed leader-member relations to good standing due to Jobs charisma. Followers are likely to accept him as a leader and exhibit willingness to accomplish tasks (Robbins and Judge, 2007).

Steve job is a great intimidator, he was quick to judge, categorizing employees as either “geniuses or bozos” and quickly firing those who fall in the latter camp (Moore, 2009). Jobs could usually justify his behavior because as Sutton adds, “he was almost always right, and even when he was wrong, it was so creative it was still amazing.” Another transactional or Theory X attribute of Jobs is his propensity to micromanage and control every aspect of the business. He has been described as a “control-freak extraordinaire” (Moore, 2009) and Steve is more personally identified with – and controlling of – the day-to-day affairs of his business” (Elkind, 2008) Steve Jobs use for the traits of micromanagement, the insensitivity, and lack of trust in his staff’s capabilities that characterize him as a transactional leader.

Steve Jobs has adapted for this ‘*Blanchard life cycle theory*’. This style contingent on his follower’s abilities and willingness the Hershey Blanchard theory stipulates that depending on the readiness of followers, the leaders may choose from the four leadership styles. There are glimpses of this theory in the way Jobs leads; if he has faith in his team’s abilities he prefers to adopt a more delegating style. This is evident from his interview where he claimed that when you hire really good people you have to give them a piece of the business and let them run with it (Fortune interview, 2008). Steve Jobs has shown indication of Hershey Blanchard theory at a time when his team was reluctant to implement his iPod idea; this was a situation of motivational problems that was best solved by a supportive and nondirective, which Steve Jobs adapted to inspiring his team (Transformational leadership @ Apple, 2002).

When Steve Jobs rejoined Apple, his style was more of “telling” or autocratic for a long time, since he was understanding radical reforms that sometimes met with opposition from his employees. For example Jobs were trying to get into deal with adobe software to acquire their new invention. As Steve Jobs said in an interview within two or three weeks that he had cancelled own internal project, a bunch of people wanted to kill him over this but he did it and dealt with adobe user software bought with 19.9% of Adobe at Apple (Harvey, 2001). Also while he preferred to Micromanage affairs when it comes to executive functions of a CEO, he preferred to be very hands-off on the creative side (Business week article, 2008).

Steve Jobs: Leadership Attributes

Capable and Passionate

Steve was overtly passionate about what he thought he wanted to achieve. Even during his drifting days in 1984, when he was humiliated and demoted in his own company, Steve was passionate about what he created and what he believed would change the life of the entire world (Erik Qualman, 2011). Jobs said “I put pretty much my entire adult life into building great products and building a great company. So I am going to give what I can to further Apple. If that means sweeping the floors, I’ll sweep the floors. If that means cleaning the toilet, I’ll clean the toilet.”

Visionary

Steve Jobs way Breakthrough innovation requires creativity, and creativity requires that we think differently about the way we think. Jobs had demonstrated and highlighted the importance of creativity and uniqueness in the way we do business. To quote Steve himself, “My philosophy is that everything starts with a great product”. (Newsweek, 1985) Steve believed that most of the time, customers do not know what the next big thing is. So, innovative business people have the responsibility to foresee the ‘next big thing’.

Perfection and simplicity

Steve Jobs was concerned with perfection, and that must have made him a real micro-manager. He always looked into all possible details of a product meticulously, even at the micro level. Jobs’ genius for design and his understanding of the needs of non-technical users has helped to make the tech sector a consumer-centric business, revolutionizing the economy as well as individual lives.

Communicative

Steve Jobs having a “walk-around approach” to his communication style; he preferred frequent review sessions and constantly checking in to see how people are doing. While some reacted negatively to this style, most people found it a positive influence for him to invest in their individual role on a project team (William L. Simon, 2011).

Symbolism

Steve Jobs had a master craftsman’s ability to create a consistent, positive product image in the minds of his customers. Products that people truly want and great branding, which is the door opener for waking people up to the products, Steve is especially credited for his contributions to marketing, which has always been one of his premier domains of expertise. He was well known for having worked on a large

number of Apple's TV commercials and promotional videos, starting with the 1984 and Think Different ads, some of Apple's most brilliant pieces of marketing.

Conclusion

The key factor in the success of any organizations is in its leader. The proper planning and implementation of the leader's strategy will result in overall development of the employees. This will enable the organization to adapt to the rapid changes occurring in the global environment of the developing countries. Steve Jobs do six manageable parts successfully run the Apple that is customer, culture, and marketing, team building, branding and leading. Running a successful business today is tougher than it has been in generations—if not ever.

Businesses today must learn how to manage effectively through planning, organizing, leading and controlling the human resource and be knowledgeable of emerging trends in training and employee development. Steve Jobs as a great leader changed Apple, as it brought the organization more adaptable, resilient, quick to change directions, and customer centered and user friendly. No one understood this better than Steve Jobs. He is gone, but his legacy of business creativity and innovation is unparalleled and lives in the corporate world.

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