



The Role of Strategic and Operational Leadership Skills: How and When to Use in a Government Setting

There is great debate in leadership literature as to whether private business practices can or should be applied to public sector government agencies.

While differences exist, Blanchard believes that private sector and public sector organizations have three common organizational goals.

- 1. Organizational Vitality**
- 2. Employee Work Passion**
- 3. Customer Devotion/Constituent Respect**

Whether one is concerned with effectively leading a private organization or a government agency, these goals must be met for the leadership to be labeled effective. Strategic leadership in the form of purpose informs operational leadership practices, which, in turn, impact employee engagement, productivity, performance, and retention. This heightened level of employee work passion directly impacts measures of organizational vitality and customer devotion/constituent respect.



Blanchard's Research

Blanchard's original research into the relationship between leadership and long-term organizational productivity, longevity, and vitality began with an in-depth analysis of hundreds of studies over a 25-year period to understand what connects these concepts. The analysis looked at the three outcomes and how they were impacted by two aspects of leadership: strategic leadership and operational leadership.

Blanchard research found that these two types of leadership impact organizational performance either directly or indirectly. The research showed that strategic leadership indirectly influences organizational vitality but directly influences operational leadership, which in turn directly influences employee work passion and customer devotion. In addition, Blanchard found that employee work passion and customer devotion influence one another—when employees are passionate about their job and their organization they tend to interact with the customer in a more positive manner, and vice versa.

Subsequent research found that this same chain of correlations held true in the public sector if new descriptors were applied. For use in the public sector, customer devotion was replaced with constituent respect, and profit was replaced with purpose, to better represent desired meaning and outcomes in a government setting.

The Leadership-Purpose Chain model was created to visually represent these connections. The indirect influence of strategic leadership is represented by a dashed arrow. The direct influence of operational leadership on employee work passion and constituent respect is represented by the solid arrows

The Leadership-Purpose Chain



Defining Terms

Strategic leadership is defined by the concern for the performance and evolution of the organization, including its changing aims and capabilities. Strategic leadership defines the imperatives for everyone in the organization by creating and communicating a vision for the future; developing organizational structures, processes, and controls; managing multiple employees; sustaining an effective organizational culture; and infusing ethical values systems within the organization's culture.

Operational leadership provides the day-to-day interpretation of the organization's strategic mandates or policies. Operational leadership enables departments and employees to understand how they specifically contribute to the organization's success.

Organizational vitality is defined as the degree to which an organization has continually been successful in meeting performance expectations in the eyes of its customers, employees, stakeholders, and relevant communities, which results in the organization remaining economically viable and stable over time.

Employee work passion is defined as an individual's persistent, emotionally positive, meaning-based state of well-being stemming from reoccurring cognitive or affective appraisals of various job and organizational situations, which results in consistent, constructive work intentions and behaviors.

Customer devotion/Constituent respect is defined as a customer or constituent's persistent, emotionally positive, meaning-based sense of well-being stemming from reoccurring cognitive or affective appraisals of the quality of products or services offered by the organization, which results in consistent, constructive intentions and behaviors and supports the organization's purpose.



Three Fundamental Considerations

At the heart of the model is the idea that achieving organizational outcomes requires the cooperation and commitment of the people leading and providing the organization's product or service. The Blanchard model suggests that this requires three fundamental considerations:

- 1. Recognizing the link between strategic and operational leadership**
- 2. Maintaining a dual focus on employees and customers/constituents**
- 3. Building a strong commitment to a service-based organizational culture**



Implications for Strategic Leadership

Strategic leadership involves allocating resources, including budget, personnel, and technology, to various departments and projects. Needs are prioritized based on the organization's objectives and effective use of resources. Strategic leadership practices must ensure that processes are well defined, streamlined, and optimized for efficiency. This includes identifying bottlenecks, removing unnecessary steps, and implementing best practices to enhance the delivery of services.

People employed in a strategic leadership role must recognize that strategy is implemented through the actions of other people. If strategic leaders want transformational change or if they want to achieve specific results related to an initiative, they must appreciate how initiatives will be implemented by people in operational leadership roles and their team members. Strategic leaders must realize that for a transformation to occur, the standards and values inherent in the initiative must become the standards and values of those who carry out the initiative.



Implications for Operational Leadership

Day-to-day operational management practices are where strategic initiatives either succeed or fail. Good operational leadership in a government setting involves effectively managing the day-to-day activities, processes, and resources to ensure the efficient and effective delivery of public services and the achievement of organizational goals.

People employed in operational leadership roles in a government setting ensure that services are delivered on time, meeting quality standards and addressing citizen needs promptly. They convey expectations, goals, and feedback effectively to employees. They demonstrate empathy and emotional intelligence to build strong relationships. Operational leaders maintain open and transparent communication channels.



Maintaining a Split Focus on Organizational Goals, Employees, and Constituents

Can government leaders focus their activities and intentions on departmental goals and employees as well as the constituents the organization serves? The Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) is an annual survey administered by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM). It is a tool that measures federal employees' perceptions of whether, and to what extent, conditions characterizing successful organizations are present in their agencies.

The FEVS serves as a valuable tool for assessing the perceptions and experiences of federal employees within government organizations. Over the years, several consistent themes and key takeaways have emerged from analyzing the survey results.

Trust in leadership, transparent decision-making, and effective communication are commonly highlighted areas that contribute to a positive work environment. Leadership that fosters collaboration and empowers employees can lead to higher job satisfaction. Effective communication, recognition of contributions, and opportunities for skill development all contribute to enhanced engagement.

The [2022 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey](#) showed sobering statistics regarding this question:

- Only 42% of federal employees believe differences in performance are recognized in a meaningful way.
- Only 43% feel management involves employees in decisions that affect their work.
- Only 48% would agree senior leaders generate high levels of motivation and commitment in the workforce.

To a large degree, these findings are reflected in Blanchard survey results featuring respondents from both the public and private sectors. Surveys looking at [Are Employees' Needs Being Met by One-on-Ones?](#) and [Ten Performance Management Process Gaps](#) both found large gaps between what people wanted from their leaders and what they were experiencing.

Blanchard's research into employee work passion factors suggests that government leaders in both strategic and operational roles must have a deep knowledge of elements that generate employee work passion, constituent respect, and organizational vitality.

Blanchard research also shows that employee enthusiasm on the job is based on their perception of meaningful work, procedural justice, autonomous job conditions, connectedness with colleagues and leaders, task variety, specific feedback, opportunities for professional growth, and work-life balance.

Effective strategic and operational leaders are able to define the strategies and leader behaviors necessary for achieving high quality results while fostering work passion in their employees.

- Strategic leaders must appreciate and use their abilities to influence their organization's culture toward a clear, values-based vision. In follow-up research looking at [What's Important in Creating a Motivating Work Environment, and Whose Job is It?](#) survey participants identified senior leaders as being more responsible for the organizational factors of Distributive Fairness and Growth.
- According to the same survey results, operational leaders must focus on effectively implementing vision by turning strategic initiatives into engaging work environments and assignments. Respondents saw operational leaders as responsible for Performance Expectations, Procedural Fairness, and Feedback.



Refocusing Leadership Efforts

Good leadership in the public sector ensures that services are delivered effectively, transparently, and in line with the organization's mission. It requires a combination of organizational skills, effective communication, adaptability, and a strong commitment to serving the public interest.

Developing strong strategic and operational leadership skills is essential for effectively managing employee performance in a government setting. Leaders who possess these skills can better navigate the complexities of the public sector and drive employee growth, thereby contributing to greater outcomes and success.

A deeper understanding of the links between leadership practices and the desired outcomes of organizational vitality, constituent respect, and employee work passion can provide a blueprint and planning resource for the betterment of employee and constituent outcomes in the public sector.

To learn more about Blanchard's research into these connections, please visit these additional resources on the Blanchard website.

- [The Leadership-Profit Chain](#)
- [From Engagement to Employee Work Passion](#)
- [Employee Work Passion: Connecting the Dots](#)
- [What's Important in Creating a Motivating Work Environment, and Whose Job is It?](#)
- [Leader Values and Employee Work Intentions](#)
- [Are Employees' Needs Being Met by One-on-Ones?](#)
- [Ten Performance Management Process Gaps](#)
- [Leader Power and its Impact in the Workplace](#)



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