

Executive Education: Mini MBA Program

# Leading in a Social System

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## **I. LEADERSHIP MODEL**

# Social Systems

When the great French film director, Jean Renoir, was asked why the characters in his classic film, *The Grand Illusion* were not more heroic, his response was:

**“They all have their reasons.”**

This is the crux of a social system.

# Definition

Russell Ackoff defines social systems as having a purpose of their own, containing parts that have purposes of their own, and are a part of a larger system that contains other social systems.

John Mingers identifies social systems as either formal (religions, companies, private clubs) or informal (families, academics, friendship groups). In either case the social system ought to be open and amendable to experiment if they are to survive and flourish.

So, it should be the role of leadership to coordinate and guide the interactions of varied purposeful systems into a positive mode of growth and development.

# Leading in the Social System



The diagram consists of three overlapping circles. The top-left circle is labeled 'Strategic Vision', the top-right circle is labeled 'Self-Control', and the bottom-center circle is labeled 'Influencing Others'. The circles overlap in the center, creating a triangular shape. The text is in a teal color.

Strategic  
Vision

Self-  
Control

Influencing  
Others

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## **II. STRATEGIC VISION**

# Approaches to a Strategic Vision

- Henry Mintzberg, in *Strategy Safari*, his field study of strategic management identifies 10 schools of strategy. His Configuration School combines the first 9 into a systems approach to strategic management.
- Michael Porter addresses the systems notion of strategic management when he states that good strategies depend on the connection among many things and fit guides the choices of strategic processes. Fit means that the value or cost of one activity is affected by the way other activities are performed.
- Russell Ackoff notes that in our systems age complexity needs to be addressed through interactive planning, which the purposeful components of a system engaging in its functional design.

# Strategic Vision

from Russell Ackoff

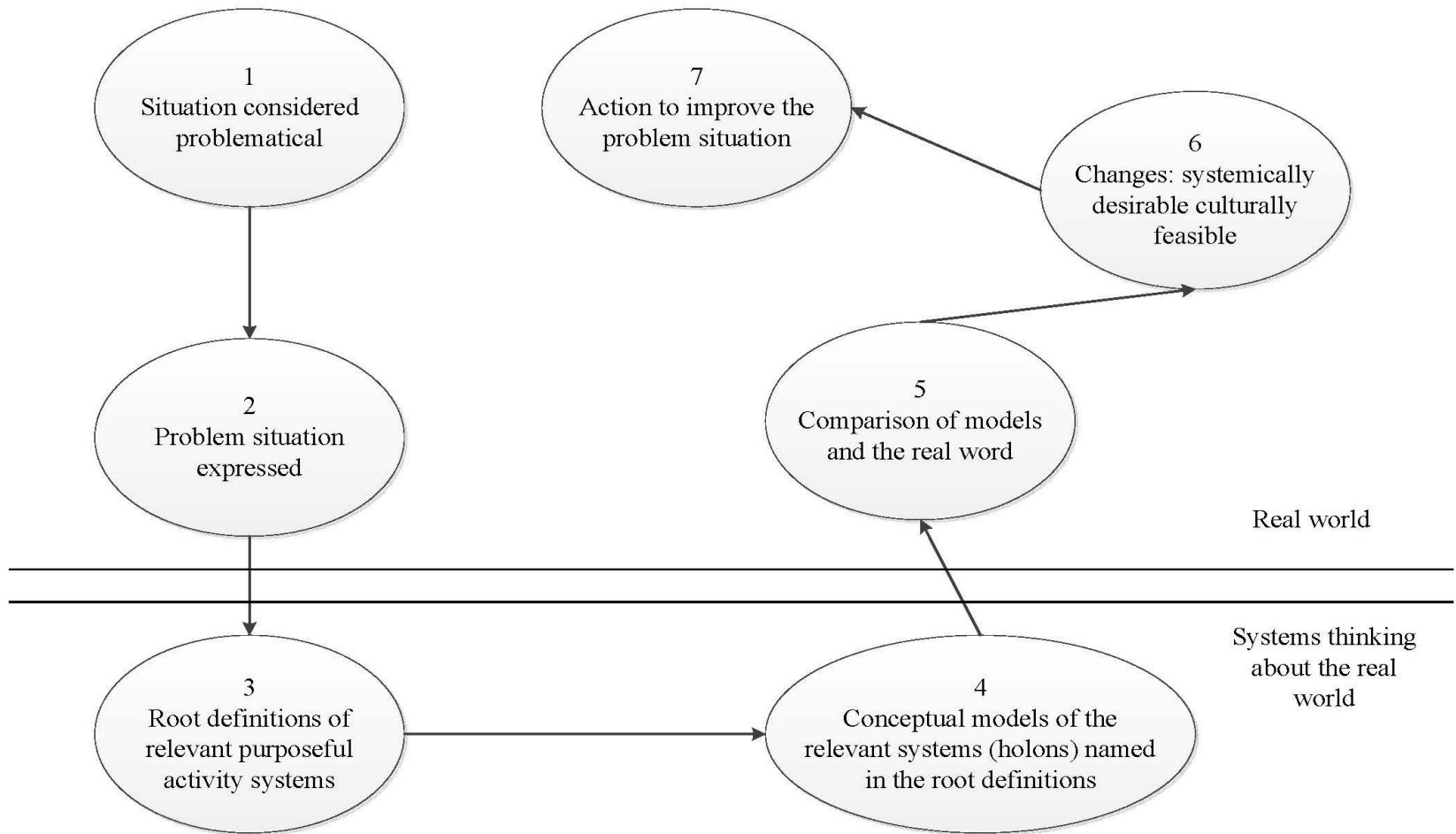
1. A strategic vision should contain a statement about the business the firms wants to be in, not what it is doing now.
2. It should formulate the firm's objectives that enables progress toward them to be measured.
3. The strategic vision should differentiate the firm from others in its markets.
4. It should be relevant to all the firm's stakeholders.
5. It should be exciting and inspiring.



# An Interactive Systems Approach

A design methodology that asks for:

- Data
- Analysis
- Empathy for other's points of view
- Thinking
- Modeling
- Facilitation of action



Source: Jackson, Michael C. Systems Thinking: Creative Holism for Managers. San Francisco: Wiley, 2003. Print.

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## **II. INFLUENCING OTHERS**

# Influencing

Aristotle in *Rhetoric* writes of influence in these terms:

- Emotion and power are influential features of leadership.
- Truth and justice are stronger than lies and injustice, “false” rhetoric would not be able to overturn them. Therefore power can coerce but not truly influence.
- Rhetoric persuades through emotion, not reason. Emotions connect the leader with the follower through the goals they both embrace.

# Influencing

- Gary Yukl defines leadership as Leadership is the process of ***influencing*** others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how it can be done effectively.
- Howard Gardener calls it changing minds. He identifies seven factors that change minds: Reason, Research, Resonance (affect), Redescriptions, Rewards, Real World Events, and Resistances.

# Influencing

Chester Barnard says that people are most likely to accept influencing authority when:

1. The communication is understood;
2. The communication is consistent with the mission of the organization;
3. It is compatible with the individual's personal interest; and
4. The person is able to mentally and physically comply with the communication.

# The Leadership Working Space

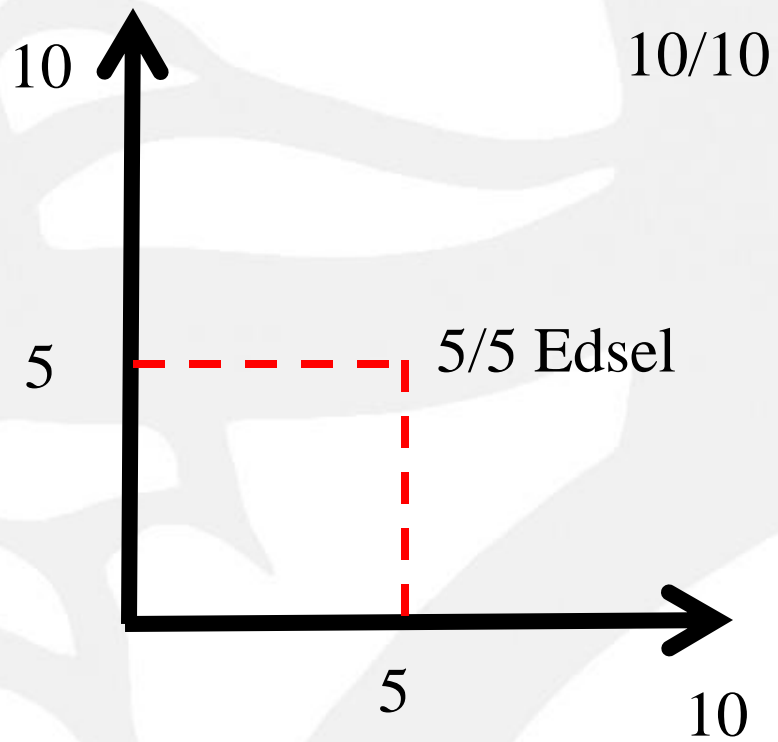
- It is a concept that says we have the leader and followers in a space that is governed by time and resources and has to achieve a goal.
- Space implies room to negotiate over time.
- Space also implies that the work will take place in the space and not on the vectors themselves. This means that solutions cannot be merely “My Way”/”Your Way” debates.

**Your  
Way**

**Our Leadership  
Working Space**

**My Way**





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## **IV. SELF-CONTROL**

# Self-Control

- Authors from Homer through Jim Collins remind leaders to subjugate their egos for the good of the social systems. Many are successful in doing so but many are not.
- The idea is that if the leader can regulate and control his/her impulses, then the leader is more patient at solving tasks, does not get bored so easily, and can resist temptation.
- Self-control is partly the function of the brain, which regulates each of us differently.

# Self-Control

Leaders need to be mentally healthy to in order to effectively guide others. Emotion and power are influential features of leadership. But often reveal the personal weaknesses of the leader.

- Truth and justice are stronger than lies and injustice, “false” rhetoric would not be able to overturn them. Therefore power can coerce but not truly influence.
- Rhetoric persuades through emotion, not reason. Emotions connect the leader with the follower through the goals they both embrace.

# Levels of Leadership Health

Healthy leaders are usually: championing people, protective, and honorable. They have empathy.

Average leaders tend to be: forceful, aggressive, and expansive. They understand the functionality of others.

Unhealthy leaders tend to be: relentless, and dictatorial. They care little about others, i.e. narcissistic. They negate the nature of the social system.

# Staying Healthy

The healthy leader remains so by:

- Attracting support from others, rather than demanding independence
- Reassuring and calming others enhances the capacity for leadership
- At the same time, a steady pursuit of goals is essential.

# Staying Healthy

1. Quality implies that one solution is better than another. The leader need not know what the better solution is but must engage with followers in the Leadership Working Space to find it out.
2. Facilitation should supply sufficient information to make a high-quality decision and a structure to assure that the right issue is being addressed.
3. The follower's acceptance of the decision is usually critical to effective implementation especially when a quality decision is necessary. Listen to them.
4. Good communication, affinity to mission, the best interest of the follower, and ability to get the job done all factor into follower acceptance.
5. The leader also must be aware of potential conflict among followers in preferred solutions. Patience is necessary to address the next round of leadership issues.