

Managing the Dark Side of Competition: Creating Reflective Leaders

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Organizations are like automobiles. They don't run themselves, except downhill. They need people to make them work. And not just *any* people, but the *right* people. The effectiveness of an organization's employees—particularly individuals in leadership positions—determines how the organizational “machine” will perform.

Some people are so effective at their job that a leader can do very little to make them better; others are so hopeless that almost nothing can be done to improve their effectiveness. The majority of the population, however, falls somewhere in between those two extremes. These people do their job adequately and go with the flow, looking to their leader to set the course, speed, and duration of that flow. They want some guidance, some suggestions about where to go and how to get there. A company, however, can have all the advantages in the world—strong financial resources, enviable market position, and state-of-the-art technology—but if leadership fails, all these advantages melt away and the organization—like the driverless car—runs downhill.

But if we're to understand the dark side of competition, we also have to be willing to go beyond the directly observable. We have to pay attention to the presenting internal and social dynamics; to the intricate playing field between leaders and followers; and to unconscious and invisible psychodynamic processes and structures that influence the behavior of individuals, dyads, and groups in organizations. People who dismiss the complex clinical dimension in organizational analysis can't hope to move beyond an impoverished understanding of what life in organizations is all about.

In this presentation I plan to focus on two issues:

1. Leadership's Shadow

Most of the literature on leadership depicts the leader as a paragon of virtue and speaks in glowing terms of the attributes that constitute leadership. I will remind the audience that there's another side to the coin. We can all name at least a handful of political leaders tainted by the darker side of leadership. Adolf Hitler, Idi Amin, Joseph Stalin, Pol Pot, Saddam Hussein, and Slobodan Milosevic all come readily to mind. We're far less likely to recognize leadership's shadow when it falls on the workplace, even though that shadow can darken the lives of many.

The first part of my agenda is *to provide insights into the darker side of leadership*. Although it could be argued that ineffective leadership is a contradiction in terms—that the only *true* leadership is *effective* leadership—many organizational leaders derail. The questions I address is, What makes them do so? What can be said about the failure factor in leadership? Can we identify specific warning signs? What effect is

failed leadership likely to have on corporate culture, organizational structure, and patterns of decision-making? I'll offer some explanations for leadership derailment; address the psychological pressures that often lead to dysfunctional behavior; and discuss the interrelationship between personality, leadership style, corporate culture, and organizational decision-making.

2. Seeking the Essence of Effective Leadership and High Performance organizations

The second theme of my presentation concerns what's needed to become an effective leader, and how to create well-functioning teams and high performance organizations. In this context, I'll address a number of related questions: What competencies, practices, and roles distinguish effective from ineffective leaders? What is leadership development and coaching all about? And what can be done to develop effective leadership qualities? I'll also comment on the psychodynamics of personal and organizational change, dealing with such issues as: What are some of the levers that make for successful change? What are the characteristics of high-performance organizations? In this context I will introduce a number of the intervention methods and "tools" we use at INSEAD to counterbalance the dark side of competition, thus enabling the presence of high performance teams and high performance organizations.