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Management
is the Art of
Doing and
Getting Done

Effective execution lies at the heart of achieving superior business performance. And purposeful action-taking by managers – both individually and collectively – lies at the heart of effective execution. But, five years of research by **Heike Bruch** and **Sumantra Ghoshal,** shows that only a relatively small proportion of managers actually engage in such purposeful action-taking. What are the causes of this pervasive lack of purposeful action-taking by managers? What is different about those who do take purposeful action? What can managers do to enhance their personal action-taking ability? And what can corporate leaders do to create an organisational context in which others can take purposeful action?

"Management was, is, and always will be the same thing: the art of getting things done", wrote Harvard Business School professors Bob Eccles and Nitin Nohria in their book *Beyond the Hype.* "And to get things done, managers must act themselves and mobilise collective action on the part of others."[1]

Almost ten years later, lamenting what they described as the pervasive "knowing-doing gap" in companies, Jeffrey Pfeffer and Bob Sutton of Stanford posed the question: "Did you ever wonder why so much education and training, management consultation, organisational research, and so many books and articles produce so few changes in actual management practice?... Why knowledge of what needs to be done frequently fails to result in action or behaviour consistent with that knowledge."[2]

Our own research in companies mirrors Pfeffer and Sutton's observations. Most companies, including those that are very successful, can be visualised as a few isolated islands of action amid an ocean →

→ of inaction. There are a few managers in them who take decisive, purposeful action, while the vast majority does not. What we found in our research surprised us. Only about 10 per cent of the managers took purposeful action.

One of the companies in which we conducted a detailed study on action-taking is Lufthansa, a highly successful organisation. From a crisis situation in 1991, when it was close to bankruptcy, it had pulled itself up to record profits of close to a billion marks in 1997. Beyond the dramatic change in financial performance, the company was also seen as extremely energetic and vigorous, being the primary engine of restructuring the airlines industry, for example, by creating the Star Alliance. Jürgen Weber, Lufthansa's charismatic and highly regarded CEO, had dismantled the company's historically strong central hierarchy and had also declared war on its traditional bureaucratic culture, creating freedom for managers at the operating levels to take bold action. These were the managers we wanted to study, to see the why and how of their action-taking.

So, it was not that only a limited number of managers took purposeful action in a poorly managed, poor performing company. This was the situation in a highly successful, high performance

pursued over the last five years. We started in 1998, following the 130 managers in Lufthansa over a two-year period and observing what they did to pursue specific projects they had committed to execute. We also carried out a questionnaire survey, covering the same 130 managers, to test with some quantitative rigour some ideas we had developed from the interview-based qualitative data. Then we replicated the survey to Conoco, to check if the patterns revealed in the Lufthansa survey also held in another company with a very different industrial and organisational background.

Beyond these two studies, we have also written detailed case studies on 12 companies – Goldman Sachs, Oracle and Sun Microsystems in the United States; BP, Hilti, Micro Mobility Systems and Siemens in Europe; and Sony, the LG Group and Infosys in Asia. Each focused on managerial action-taking in the context of a specific project or initiative. Finally, in the last phase of our study, we identified 20 managers from different companies and at different levels of seniority – people whom we knew very well including several ex-students – and interviewed them at length (some up to 20 hours and none less than four hours) to document their own experiences of both action-taking and non-action.

The real gap was between knowledge and action.

company. We repeated the same study in Conoco, the US oil company, surveying 250 managers. The percentage of purposeful action-takers was about the same.

It is not that the other 90 per cent of managers did not know what to do. Most of them had clearly defined projects and goals, and had all the knowledge necessary to take action. The real problem for those managers was not the lack of knowledge or even resources. The real problem was that even though they knew what to do, they simply did not do those things. The real gap was between knowledge and action.

Also, it is not true that those who did not take action were lazy people who were shirking from their work. They worked very hard. They were extremely busy, attending meetings, making phone calls, conducting reviews – they were running all the time. But not purposefully. They were spinning wheels and no real progress came out of all their busyness.

What are the causes of this pervasive lack of purposeful action-taking among managers? What is different about those who do take purposeful action? What can managers do to enhance their personal action-taking ability? And what can corporate leaders do to create an organisational context in which others can take purposeful action? What can they do to develop managers who can and do act?

These are the research questions we have

Based on these different pieces of work, we have developed a set of answers to the research questions we posed. Our data and analysis is presented in our book, *A Bias for Action*. Here, we provide a broad overview of some of our key findings, summarising what we believe we have learnt from our investigation of the phenomenon of managerial action-taking.

Action must not be confused with being active

One of the most common misunderstandings about action is that it is confused with being active or doing something. This misunderstanding is the central reason why effective and persistent action is so rare in companies.

In *In Search of Excellence* (1982), Tom Peters and Robert Waterman identified "A bias for action" as the one attribute of excellent companies that underpins all their other attributes. "Ready, Fire, Aim" was their prescription for building a bias for action. Experimentation, "make a little, sell a little", remaining flexible to disengage quickly – these were the things they saw as the essence of action-taking in companies.

What we mean by purposeful action is very different from what Peters and Waterman described as action. Purposeful action is determined, persistent and relentless action-taking to achieve

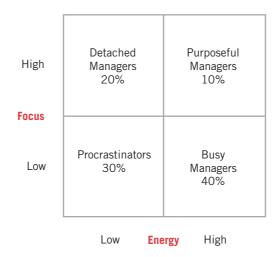|	Low	High
High	Detached Managers 20%	Purposeful Managers 10%
Low	Procrastinators 30%	Busy Managers 40%

Focus

Low   **Energy**   High

Figure 1

a goal or a purpose, against all odds. It is driven by a deep personal commitment to the goal that cuts out all distractions and overcomes all difficulties. It is not a quick shuffle, not flirtation with ideas, not the dilettante behaviour of management butterflies. It is not the superficial attempt to do something. It is action-taking to succeed, no matter what.

Experimentation is important for companies. The flexibility of dipping toes in the water to test the temperature is sometimes useful. But, in our observation, the most critical challenge for companies is relentless execution, and purposeful action-taking lies at the heart of relentless execution. Behind every significant improvement in productivity, every new product, and every successful strategic or organisational change lies a set of disciplined, persistent and purposeful actions taken by specific individuals, both separately and together.

Purposeful action, as we use the term, is based on two traits – energy and focus. Action is particularly energetic in the sense that it implies a level of personal involvement that is more than "just doing something". Action is subjectively meaningful; it genuinely matters to the action-taker.

distraction, overcome problems and persist in the face of unanticipated setbacks. In other words, purposeful action is different from impulsive behaviour – it does not emerge out of the moment but involves thought, analysis and planning.

Very few managers take purposeful action

Typical managers are not passive or lazy. On the contrary, looking at what managers do shows that their day is usually busy and there is seldom any relief from the workload – managers are permanently facing requests. There is practically no interruption in doing. During a typical day, managers face a constant stream of demands for their time and attention. They are very active.

However, only a small minority use their time to make a real difference; to get things done that matter. As we have indicated earlier, only about 10 per cent of the managers we studied took purposeful action. It is possible that in a particular company the fraction can be a little higher but, in all likelihood, not a lot higher.

Purposeful action is determined, persistent and relentless action-taking to achieve a goal or a purpose, against all odds.

Also, such action demands effort. It involves a certain amount of exertion. The need for effort is not only a result of external pressures but also of forces within the action-taker: action is self-generated, engaged and self-driven behaviour.

Purposeful action is focused, i.e. conscious, intentional and goal-directed behaviour. It is guided by a person's intention to achieve a particular goal. This purposefulness of action is demonstrated when attainment of the goal requires discipline to resist

The awareness that unproductive activity – what we call active non-action – is a hazard to effective management is not new.[3] In fact, managers themselves bemoan the problem; but the underlying dynamics of the behaviour are less well understood. Undoubtedly, managers are under incredible pressure to perform, and they have far too much to do, even if they work twelve-hour days. However, the reason why many managers spin their wheels without much progress very rarely lies in contextual conditions. →

→ Rather, in most cases the reason lies in the way managers deal with their jobs.

Diagnosing the causes of non-action as well as the basis for purposeful action-taking, our research shows four types of managerial behaviour:

While 10 per cent of managers take purposeful action – a behaviour that relies on a combination of high energy and high focus; 30 per cent of managers

the most costly form of managerial non-action – from both a personal and a company perspective. Busyness is costly for the individual because busy managers spend a lot of time, energy and emotions on their jobs and yet are not really effective. Due to their strong identification, busy managers tend to get frustrated or hurt more easily when confronted with setbacks, criticism or mediocre performance. Often

The most dangerous hazard to managerial action is busyness.

procrastinate – they hesitate and fail to take initiative because they suffer from low-level energy and focus. While 20 per cent of managers show detached behaviour – they are highly focused but have little energy; 40 per cent exhibit distracted behaviour – busyness – a highly energetic but unfocused activity.

Busyness is the central hazard to purposeful action

The most dangerous hazard to managerial action is busyness – high energy with low focus. There are three reasons why. First, busy managers are usually highly motivated and well-intended. They are enthusiastic about their work, identify strongly with their jobs and could achieve a lot if they would consciously concentrate their force on purposeful action.

Second, the largest group of managers suffer from busyness. The reason is that the nature of managerial work makes focusing extremely difficult. The typical managerial job requires multiple activities, implies numerous interruptions and makes it extremely difficult to concentrate attention and energy on selected goals.[4] Managers need discipline in order to prevent themselves from falling victim to the omnipresent trap of busyness.

Third, and most critical, is a culture of frenzy and unreflected activity that dominates most organisations. Presence-cultures, cultures of speed and the rhetoric of instant decisions force managers into mindless busyness. Taking time for reflection, seriously reviewing and questioning projects are simply neither the usual practice nor well perceived in many organisations. Rather, the implicit expectation is that managers must do everything quickly, must be permanently active and must not "hesitate" to take immediate actions. Being motivated and engaged, busy managers are particularly prone to meeting these expectations. A culture of busyness makes it hard for them to escape from the trap of busyness. By creating such cultures, senior executives virtually drive their managers into busyness.

The problem is not only that busyness is the most pervasive trap of managerial jobs but also that it is

they have difficulties dealing with the higher effectiveness and, eventually, the greater success of their more reflective and purposeful colleagues. Many managers who have become chronic procrastinators were once busy managers.[5]

Busyness is also costly for companies not only because the immense potential of these managers is not effectively used, but also because is can cause serious damage. Distracted managers – especially when under pressure or in times of crisis – act in extremely short-sighted ways. Because they do not take sufficient time for reflection, they typically deal with immediate problems while neglecting long-term issues, underestimate the necessary time-spans for implementing strategies and start activities without adequate analysis and consideration of the risks and long-term implications. Busy managers demonstrate a well-intentioned but desperate need to do something, anything – and they become as potentially destructive as the proverbial bull in the china shop.

Purposeful action requires deliberate management of demands, constraints and choices

Most managers who fail to take purposive action do so because they fall victim to one or more of three traps of non-action.

The first is the trap of *overwhelming demands*. Many managers get caught in webs of expectations that completely overwhelm them. The second is the trap of *unbearable constraints*. In this trap, managers feel squeezed by narrow constraints of rules, regulations, budget restrictions and so on and come to believe that they have no space for autonomous action. The third trap of non-action is *unexplored choices*. Focused on the demands and constraints of their jobs, managers develop a tunnel vision and concentrate on immediate needs and requirements. They do not perceive or exploit their freedom to make choices about what they would do and how they would do it.[6]

Managers who overcome these traps of non-action actively manage their jobs and their work

environments. To overcome the trap of overwhelming demands, they develop an explicit personal agenda that helps them link short-term, medium-term and long-term goals and also shape the expectations of others inside and outside the organisation. They learn to manage their time to create the slack necessary for pursuing their long-term goals. They build in time for reflection and develop personal discipline to reduce, prioritise and organise the demands they face. Above all, they do not attempt to become indispensable and thus avoid getting caught up at the centre of frantic activity.

Most organisational constraints are real, but they are rarely as absolute as some managers make them out to be. To unshackle themselves from the trap of unbearable constraints, purposeful action-takers consciously map the relevant constraints. What they often discover is that not all the constraints are relevant in terms of their personal action-taking agenda, and so they can focus on overcoming only those that are. They also learn to accept trade offs, sacrificing some "nice to have" aspects of their projects while intensely fighting for the "must have" aspects. They selectively break rules and develop the capacity to tolerate conflicts and ambiguity in the course of making progress on their chosen tasks.

Finally, to overcome the trap of unexplored choices, purposeful managers learn to become aware of their choices. They consistently expand their opportunities and their freedom to take autonomous action on the choices they have, and they develop personal competencies that both create choice and enhance their ability to make things happen. Above all else, they learn to enjoy choices – to thrive in the context of freedom and derive energy and excitement from that pleasure.

with long-term objectives. In everyday jobs, managers commonly strive for multiple – often conflicting – goals, many of which are not simple one-shot affairs but long-term projects that require sustained effort. Ambitious goals, long-term projects, high uncertainty, extreme opposition – these are the circumstances when the limitations of motivation become critical. Managers who make things happen under these circumstances rely on a different force: the power of their will.[7]

Motivation is usually driven by external variables or triggered by the expectation of some reward. Yes, theoretical concepts as well as management practice acknowledge the role of intrinsic motivation – the internally driven desire to do something. But motivation remains in the volatile state of wishing to engage, feeling attracted by certain opportunities, or being tempted to act out certain behaviours. Ultimately, both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are volatile because they are susceptible to changes in either the external context or inner preferences or both. Since the expectation of some reward drives extrinsically motivated behaviour, a more attractive opportunity can always come along or obstacles can appear that reduce the perceived value of the reward. Similarly, the desires and enjoyment that drive intrinsic motivation can always change and fade.

Typical managerial deficiencies in taking purposeful action, such as difficulties in getting started, being too easily distracted from goal pursuit, not resuming action after disruptions, losing interest and excitement as the project evolves, and giving up in the face of obstacles are the consequences of this fragility and volatility of motivation.

Willpower goes a decisive step further than motivation. It implies the commitment that comes

Purposeful managers learn to become aware of their choices.

Willpower, not motivation, drives purposeful action

Why are some managers highly energetic and focused, whereas others procrastinate, disengage, or dissipate their energy in unfocused busyness? What distinguishes managers who take purposeful action from those who do not? Most top-level leaders will tend to ascribe the difference to "motivation" or the lack thereof.

Our research does indeed indicate that motivation enables managers to perform routine tasks well.

But it is not sufficient for making things happen that would otherwise not happen. Unfortunately, managers are not the maintainers of routine; they are not paid to make the inevitable happen. Their tasks are usually complex and innovative, dealing

only from a deep personal attachment to a certain intention. Willpower springs from a conscious choice to make a concrete thing happen. This commitment to a certain end – not to doing something but to achieving something – represents the engagement of the human will.[6]

While motivation ultimately remains in the superficial and volatile state of wishing, willpower enables managers to execute disciplined action even when they lack the desire to do something, do not feel excited by the work at hand, or feel tempted by alternative opportunities. The force of their will enables them to fight the headwind that comes with change. Their will gives them the power to overcome barriers, to deal with setbacks, to persevere through the energy-demanding long journey from a vision to its realisation. With →

→ willpower, abandoning an intention is not an option – subjectively, there is no way back. Willful managers are determined to achieve their intention, no matter what.

The foremost task of leaders is to engage their own willpower

Top level leaders of companies are often not in the position to give direction to others, to enthuse them or to encourage them simply because they themselves have not engaged their personal willpower. Managers who are distracted or disengaged as well as those who procrastinate or take purposeful action only occasionally, aren't good leaders, and they know that they are not. The subjective feeling of unease in their leadership role is neither an exception nor a surprise. How could they energise others when they themselves feel exhausted or even burnt out? How could they provide orientation and meaning when they are carried along by inertia and much of their capacity is absorbed in fire fighting? How could they encourage others when they themselves are insecure about the right way to go?

We have come to the conclusion that effective leadership is impossible without the force of personal energy and focus. Being the central source of managers' energy and focus, willpower is the

deliberately activate and use it. Our research shows that to build willpower, managers have to undertake a personal journey through three overlapping phases.

The perception of an exciting opportunity – something that will make a difference, nothing routine – triggers the first phase of *intention formation*. An emotional dimension gives the intention meaning; a purely rational calculation of costs and benefits of pursuing a goal never leads to volition.

During this first stage, attention is unfocused, perceptions are undirected and judgments are unbiased.[8] Gradually, managers acquire the focus that precedes the leap to commitment that defines the second phase of *engaging willpower*. In this phase, managers make a choice, which is a pre-requisite for the engagement of willpower. When there is no choice – in reality or in perception – there can be no free will, no volition. Also essential is acceptance of personal responsibility. The decision to commit comes with the resolve to bear full responsibility.

In this phase managers go through a process of inner consensus building to resolve anxiety, conflicting feelings and doubts. Few managers confront conflicting feelings about work, a costly mistake that blocks real commitment. By facing their concerns, volitional managers avoid later hesitations and develop the apparently

Effective leadership is impossible without the force of personal energy and focus.

basis for effective leadership. The first and foremost task of a leader is to engage his or her willpower, and than to unleash the power of the will in others.

Willpower is not a personality trait

While only a minority of managers actually form and use the power of the will, the good news is that every manager can actively engage his or her willpower. We have seen many managers who take purposeful action in one situation while taking a reactive and will-less stance in another situation. We have also observed that in similar situations, while many managers have problems in taking purposeful action, others pursue their goals vigorously, persist in the face of obstacles, and are able to resume their action even after disruptions. As a result, it is clear to us that willpower is neither linked to a stable set of personality traits nor is it the product of certain contextual conditions. Each individual manager can activate the force of his and her volition.

How can managers harness the power of their will? Many managers have never had the experience of volitional action at work. Some others may have accidentally got into situations that set free their volitional force, but they do not know how to

unreasonable belief in success which helps them accomplish feats that others would find impossible.

Finally, the third phase is one of *intention protection*. Homer tells the story of Odysseus' escape from the Sirens – sea nymphs whose singing made sailors leap overboard and drown. Odysseus bound himself to the mast of the ship, ordered his men to plug their ears with wax, and forbade them from freeing him from the mast until the ship had safely passed beyond the Sirens' island. As the singing began, he struggled to release himself, begging to be untied. But deaf to his entreaties, his men stayed on course, saving themselves, Odysseus and the ship.

Companies are full of Sirens – distractions that take attention and energy away from purposive action. Willful managers adopt a variety of ways to protect their intention through the action-taking process.[9] They create social pressures by making public commitments, for example, or by setting challenging deadlines and having relevant stakeholders monitor their progress. They deliberately enhance the cost of abandoning their goals. Some reward themselves for passing certain mileposts. Initially exciting projects can become

boring or difficult in advanced stages; so they set up increased interactions such as review meetings at later stages in order to keep energy flowing and to shield their intentions.

combination of three contextual principles: creating space for autonomous action; building processes for providing professional, social and emotional support; and developing a culture that

Leadership that focuses on motivating managers is often superficial and even counter-productive.

Most motivational techniques generate superficiality, not willful commitment

Most executives see themselves as motivators of their managers. They coax and cajole, they seduce and incentivise, and they try to enthuse their managers to persuade them to engage in particular activities. Many leaders do these things quite well; they actually build up the motivation of their people and feel good as a result. But the perspective utterly changes when the focus shifts from intention to action. Many managers who are motivated to do something and achieve their goals, do not actually make things happen. Leaders may create motivation but they rarely unleash the power of volition.

Helping people engage their willpower is a completely different process from motivating. Leadership that focuses on motivating managers is often superficial and even counter-productive. The same leadership practices that lead to high motivation often destroy the willpower of middle managers. To engage willpower behind particular projects or goals, leaders need to do precisely the opposite of what they typically do. They need to create a desire for action without encouraging superficial acquiescence. They need to make commitment more difficult and build in barriers rather than trying to get quick buy-ins. They need to make their people consider conflicts, doubts, anxieties and emotional ambivalence. They need to tell them about difficulties, costs and privations rather then painting rosy pictures of the tasks.

Overall, leadership that counts on unleashing willpower is a much more difficult way of winning people over. But, it is much more effective and, in the end, less risky than motivating managers and counting on their half-hearted acceptance.

Organisations can be designed to support volitional action

Volition-supportive leadership involves more than a certain way of directly influencing managers. Unleashing managers' willpower also includes the task of creating an organisational context that does not suppress volitional action but leaves enough room and gives sufficient reason for it. Again, creating a volitional company is far from easy. Our observations show that executives who seriously foster managerial volition concentrate on a

fosters the exercise of responsible willpower.

To exercise their willpower, managers must have sufficient freedom to take action. To develop a sense of personal ownership, they must not only have the space to take action but also perceive and feel it. It is only within such space that their ability to take self-initiated and purposeful action comes into full force.[10]

The second principle is that the main benefits of organisational scale and diversity lies in the ability to support individual action. Our research indicates that managers need three forms of support to be able to exercise volitional action. First, they need supervisory support which is the central source of inspiration, intellectual stimulation, backing and encouragement. Second, they need personal relationships that provide both professional and emotional support. Professional support involves cooperative work as well as information or advice and is primarily problem-focused. Emotional support, on the other hand, plays an important role in coping with stress or negative feelings as well as for building up action-inducing emotions such as courage, pride and enthusiasm for the job.

Organisational structures and management processes by themselves, however, cannot create volitional action and sustain it over long periods of time. In most companies, the rhetoric of leaders emphasises empowerment of people and celebrates autonomous action of managers. The reality, however, is often exactly the opposite. The third principle for designing the organisation to facilitate volitional action, therefore, is to build a supporting culture. To unleash the willpower of their managers, leaders have to – and this is ultimately both the more difficult and the more important task – embed volitional behaviour as a central element of the company's core values and habits. Ultimately, it is the culture, not structure, that stimulates and sustains a manager's courage to exercise choice and his or her ability to enjoy freedom.

While the requirements of autonomy, support and a volitional culture are pretty straight-forward, the challenge of effectively developing them lies in the tensions that exist across them. At the extreme, personal freedom and shared support are difficult to combine: highly autonomous managers focus only on their own goals and tasks and tend to be unwilling to share knowledge or resources with →

→ others, or to invest their own time and energy in helping others succeed. There are no quick-fixes for creating a volitional culture – it is the product of a long journey of continuously living and uncompromisingly demanding the values of action, willpower, and personal responsibility. Yet, these tensions can be reconciled but such reconciliation requires both an enormous amount of courage on the part of organisational leaders and persistent and patient work over long periods of time.

Organisational energy drives persistent, collective action

In thinking about organisation design and management, most senior leaders focus on the intellectual and cognitive dimensions: how decisions must be taken, how resources should be allocated, how strategies should be made, and so on. Few pay explicit attention to the emotional features of their organisations. Yet, the most important driver of organisation-wide action is organisational energy – which, in turn, is also a manifestation of the organisation's emotional state. To build the capacity for determined, persistent and collective action, a key leadership task is to create the force of strong, constructive energy in the company.

Many executives neglect this leadership task although most of them have experienced the decisive difference in the productivity and

to take self-initiated actions to pursue the dream. The third strategy combines these two approaches – essentially creating a vision the pursuit of which will also automatically involve dealing with short-term problems or challenges.

At the same time, we have also observed the fallacies of trying to continuously drive a company to higher and higher levels of energy. No organisation can exist in a state of permanent acceleration. The second leadership task in managing organisational energy, therefore, is to sustain corporate vitality and momentum over long periods of time.

Leaders must create a desire for the sea

The French World War II pilot and philosopher Antoine de Saint-Exupéry wrote: "If you want to build a ship, don't drum up your men to go to the forest to gather wood, saw it, and nail the planks together. Instead, teach them the desire for the sea."

This metaphor reflects an enduring truth about willpower: Leaders must create in their people the capacity to dream. Most managers are prisoners of routines. They do not have the time to dream. Some lack the openness of mind necessary for visualising an exciting future and the opportunities that may lie there. Others may dream but kill those dreams immediately because they cannot imagine stepping outside the cage of their daily habits. Indeed, through their own efforts to systematise things,

Leaders must create in their people the capacity to dream.

momentum of highly energetic companies compared to their inactive or inert counterparts. Many have seen the symptoms of a lack of organisational energy: apathy and inertia, tiredness, inflexibility and cynicism. And they know that highly energetic organisations can be ineffective if their energy turns corrosive: their force is invested in selfish or destructive actions. By contrast, some have experienced the momentum of positively energised organisations which have fully activated their potential in the pursuit of their business goals.

In our research we have found that leaders have two critical tasks in managing the energy of their companies. First, they must mobilise organisational energy and focus it on key strategic initiatives. We have discovered three different ways in which leaders can unleash and leverage the energy of their companies. The first, which we have labeled *killing the dragon* strategy, focuses the organisation on a clear and unambiguous threat and channels the energy created in response to the threat to a highly disciplined process of executing concrete projects that would overcome the threat. The second way, which we describe as *winning the princess* strategy, creates energy by drawing the organisation's attention to an exciting vision and enabling people

senior leaders often reinforce habitual work and prevent their people from taking the first necessary step toward building collective commitment and organisational energy: the ability to develop ideas and the capacity to imagine.

There is no recipe for creating dreams: how can one find a formula for crafting a seductive picture in managers' hearts, a space for adventurous exploration? And yet, leaders can follow some general guidelines for allowing dreams to emerge. The first requirement is to provide some open space – not only to provide managers with the freedom to act but also to help them see and use that freedom. A second requirement is to provide people with a challenge – a difficult and stretching goal. Easy problems do not seduce or excite. Difficult challenges do.[11] Finally, leaders must make the goal personally meaningful to people. To inspire managers, a 'desire for the sea' cannot be abstract or mundane; it must be subjectively meaningful and emotionally captivating.

Ultimately, what distinguishes human beings from almost all other species are two things – imagination and willpower. These two wonderful capacities have allowed the enormous progess that human society has forged over time. Corporate

leaders have many resources at their disposal – money, technology, equipment – but none as valuable as their ability to use their own imagination and will, and enable others to do the same. As we move forward into the future, this is the task of the purposeful leader. ■

Notes

1. Eccles, Robert G. & Nohria, Nitin (1992), *Beyond the Hype*. Harvard Business School Press.

2. Pfeffer, Jeffrey, & Sutton, Robert I. (2000), *The Knowing-Doing Gap*. Harvard Business School Press.

3. See for example Kotter, John P. (1995), "Leading change: Why transformation efforts fail". *Harvard Business Review*, 73(2).

4. Mintzberg, Henry (1973), *The Nature of Managerial Work*. Harper Collins. Also see Colin P. Hales (1986), "What do managers do? A critical review of the evidence", *Journal of Management Studies*, 23(1).

5. See for example, Hallsten, L. (1993), "Burning out: A framework". In W. B. Schaufeli, C. Maslach, & T. Mazek, (Eds.), *Professional burnout: Recent developments in theory and research*. Taylor and Francis.

6. Rosemary Stewart (1967) suggested the framework of demands, constraints and choices in her book *Managers and Their Jobs*. Macmillan. See also her 1982 book *Choices for Managers*. Prentice Hall.

7. Narziss Ach's research showed that, before a person's intention could become a deep, personal commitment, he or she had to cross an emotional threshold. He distinguished motivation, the state of desire before crossing the threshold, from volition, the state beyond it, when the individual has converted the wish of motivation to the will of unwavering resolute engagement. See Narziss Ach (1935), *Analyse des Willens (Analysis of the Will)*. Urban and Schwarzenberg.

8. This three stage model of developing and sustaining volitional action-taking was proposed by Heinz Heckhausen and his colleagues. For one of the foundational pieces in this stream of work, see Heckhausen, Heinz, & Kuhl, J. (1985), "From wishes to action: The dead ends and short cuts on the long way to action". In M. Frese & J. Sabini, (Eds.), *The concept of action in psychology*. Erlbaum.

9. Julias Kuhl and his colleagues have developed a theory of action control which identifies different strategies for shielding an intention during the process of enactment: See Kuhl, Julias, & Fuhrmann, A. (1998), "Decomposing self-regulation and self-control: The volitional components inventory". In J. Heckhausen and C. S. Dweck, (Eds.), *Motivation and Self-Regulation Across the Lifespan*. Cambridge University Press. And Kuhl, Julias (1987), "Action control: The maintenance of motivational states". In F. Halish & J. Kuhl, (Eds.), *Motivational intention and volition*. Springer.

10. See Deci, E.L., & Ryan, R. H. (1988), "The support of autonomy and the control of behaviour". *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 53(6).

11. Only ambitious goals energise individuals and are likely to influence their will to enact intentions; goals that are considered "easy" are unlikely to do so: See E. A. Locke et al. (1984), "Effect of self-efficacy, goal and task strategies on task performance". *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 69(2). For a more detailed analysis, see. Locke, E. A., & Latham, G. P. (1990), *A theory of goal setting and task performance*. Prentice Hall.

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