RESEARCH ON THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CORE COMPETENCIES OF LEADERS: BASED ON BEHAVIORAL EVENT INTERVIEW

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Abstract

Leaders, cultivated by the organization, become the core force, the source of the reform and development of the organization, and the engine to grow its economy. The promotion of the organization's core competence, according to facts, lies more likely on its leaders` core force due to their roles of dominance, directivity, and fundamentality and as well their basic and key position to foster and build the core competence. The core force is not only an important theoretical proposition but also a practical one, concerning the foundation of their leadership and more heavily the success or failure of the organization. This study firstly identified the core competencies of leaders through Behavioral Event Interview(BEI) and then summarized the core competencies of leaders into three dimensions: overall command ability, managerial communication ability, and strategic leadership ability, and then elaborated on the contents of each dimension.

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1. Introduction

Leaders are the decision-makers of organizational activities and play the leading role in the whole leadership activities of the organization. The level of leaders' ability is related to the smooth realization of the goals of organizational leadership activities and the effective improvement of leaders' work, thus affecting the realization of the ultimate goals of the organization (Tang,1992). However, leaders need to comprehensively use many different abilities in their leadership activities, each of which plays a different role. Not all leadership abilities play a central role in leadership activities. The formation of a leader's core competence requires a long-term process. It is a comprehensive quality gradually accumulated through learning, training, internship, and increasing social experience (Nahavandi,2003). Therefore, before studying the core competencies of leaders, it is necessary to find out which competencies of leaders are core competencies.

This paper applies the Behavioral Event Interview (BEI) and follows these steps: firstly determining the key position of the leader, and collecting critical incidents of the leader position, then based on these critical incidents obtained, conducting thematic analysis on the leader's critical behaviors, to extract the characteristics of the leader's core competence.

2. Methods and Steps for Obtaining Critical Events

The significance of the Critical Incident Interview by Prof. McClelland, the psychologist of Harvard University US, lies in a detailed description on some critical incidents in the interviewee`s career, in which the client capability, especially the potential beneath the iceberg, is revealed and excavated and a full view about the specific and work-related incidents is provided. The leaders` core force of the research, on the one hand, is comparatively abstract and hard to observe, and on the other hand, it can`t be looked at alone but with inextricably links and all-round consideration. Therefore, this method just meets the need, and choosing the right interviewee is an effective basis and an important guarantee to practice. There are three levels to select interviewees: firstly, having had experience in organizational decision making; secondly, having fulfilled critical tasks of home and abroad; lastly, with higher education and abilities. Then, in the

research, the STAR, the most common tool in the Critical Incident Interview, is used to design the outline of the interview, hoping to get enough and effective information.

BEI studies the behavior of leaders in dealing with critical events and summarizes the various abilities used by leaders in the event processing by analyzing the behaviors of leaders. Therefore, it is necessary to obtain the research object, namely the critical events handled by leaders and the specific performance of leaders in the event.

2.1 Preparation of the Interview Group

To a large extent, the collection quality of critical events determines whether the interview group can grasp the narrative focus of the interviewee in the conversation, quickly analyze the psychological and behavioral changes of the interviewee in or behind the event, and guide the interviewee to conduct in-depth and detailed description while recording the conversation content.

In the preparation of the interview group, first, two professional training items were conducted. In the first training, experts on leadership were invited to introduce the basic work of leaders and some basic knowledge of their abilities when dealing with events. The second item is the skill training of BEI, which introduces the basic methods of describing and refining behavioral indicators and some tips for the interview group. Before the formal interview, the interview group is scheduled to simulate several times interview training which consciously exercises familiarity of BEI for group members and makes them more accurately record the key conversation and identify the behavioral characteristics of various abilities. Also, the performance of the interview members is observed in the simulated interview to find out the remaining deficiencies and guide them to improve.

The members of the interview group have been to Yingkou Port and MBA/EMBA education center of the Dalian University of Technology for field investigation and interview three times. The purpose is to observe the actual work situation of the leader and understand the real work behavior of the leader, to lay a practical foundation for extracting the component dimension of the core competence of the leader.

2.2 Sampling Strategies for BEI

The research object of this paper is the leaders of the organization who are the core think-tank. To explore the core leadership abilities of these leaders, the interviewees selected must participate in the decision-making activities of the organization. They need to complete many key tasks both internally and externally, and their quality and ability are relatively high. In this paper, 36 middle and senior leaders of the organization were selected as interview objects, among which 14 were leaders of Dalian Yingkou Port, including 6 leaders of the bureau level and 8 leaders of the division level. Six of them are leaders of Dalian University of Technology and Dongbei University of Finance and Economics, including two at the department level and four at the department level. There are 16 students from the EMBA class interviewed with the approval of the MBA/EMBA program of the Dalian University of Technology. All of them are senior leaders of enterprises with rich working experience in leadership positions. The specific statistics are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Position Statistics of BEI objects

Position	Top leaders	Middle leaders	Grassroots leaders
Frequency	14	20	2
Percentage	38.89%	55.56%	5.55%

In an interview, objects were asked to recall their personal experience in a successful event and a failure event in the past year or longer, and to specifically introduce the cause and effect of things including the situation, task, action, and result. Finally, they were asked to summarize the successes or failures of the event and to list the leadership abilities they considered important and demonstrated in the process of handling the event. The STAR tool of BEI is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: The STAR tool of BEI

S : Situation	T : Task	A : Action	R : Result
1.What was the situation? 2.What were the factors caused the situation? 3.Who was involved?	1.What was the task at the time? 2.What kind of goal did you want to achieve? 3.What were the actual thoughts and feelings at the time? 4. How to do?	1.What were the reactions to the situation? 2.What did you do actually? 3.What specific actions were taken? 4.Describe the role you played	1.What was the final result? And what happened in the middle? 2.What effect did the result have? 3.What feedback did you get?

The interview time of each object is about one hour. With the consent of the objects, the interview group recorded the whole interview process. Besides, the basic information of interviewees and their performance during the interview were recorded during the interview, and they were required to describe the successful and failed events within one year or longer period in written form as the supplementary content of the interview, and to sort out the interview records and critical events of different leaders.

3. Thematic analysis and extraction of characteristics of the leader's core competence

The subject analysis is an objective and quantitative analysis method to the literal content, aiming to make and test clear the essential facts and tendency in the subject analysis and to uncover something hidden in the interview. Specifically, in this research, Thematic analysis is to analyze the specific performance of leaders in the process of dealing with critical events by recording interviews and to formulate a relatively professional and representative name for similar or identical behaviors.

Based on the research results of leadership model at home and abroad, the author and group members proposed 26 abilities that leaders may or often use in leadership positions as references for thematic analysis and ability coding as follows: ideology and morality, insight, the ability to exercise power correctly, personal influence, professional and technical knowledge, new knowledge acquisition ability, prediction ability, decision- making ability, organization and command, coordination, interpersonal understanding, teamwork, strain capacity,

self-control ability, oral expression ability, use of personnel ability, inclusiveness, thinking ability, monitoring ability, information acquisition ability, interest integration ability, the ability to capture opportunities, driving ability, confidence, flexibility, and developing ability.

The interview group was divided into two groups and thematic analysis was conducted on the data obtained by each group. First, the recorded results of each group were analyzed concerning the common leadership abilities listed above. Identify the leadership characteristics in each event, record their names and where they appear in the results, and mark them accordingly. Some leadership abilities cannot be found within the abilities listed above, which requires analysts to make preliminary judgments and names in their language based on their own experience. An interview record often contains multiple leadership abilities, but some abilities may belong to a large group of abilities, for example, the group of thinking ability includes inductive thinking ability, deductive thinking ability, and innovative thinking ability; perhaps it represents independent leadership.

Since there is no complete system of leader competence so far, most of the leadership competence is named after the description of the leader's behavior in critical events, and the correctness of strength, level and behavior description has not been tested and corrected by multiple rounds of interviews. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to find out the core competence that plays a greater role and has a higher status in the leadership competencies, and the relevant statistical analysis of the leader competence system cannot be carried out in this study.

By comparing the leadership characteristics obtained by the analysis of the two groups, these two groups may adopt different descriptions and different names for the leadership characteristics of the same meaning, or they may have different ways of understanding when analyzing the behaviors reflected by critical events, to extract completely different leadership characteristics. The meaning of each leadership characteristic is determined based on the corresponding behavior of the leader in critical events. Therefore, the two thematic analysis groups should check the differences in the analysis results, analyze and discuss the corresponding critical events and behaviors repeatedly, name the same feature in the same language, and reach a consensus. This kind of back-and-forth discussion is necessary to get the two groups to adopt the same definition of the same behavioral characteristics and to be consistent with the common presentation of

leadership abilities, while at the same time to name the uncommon leadership abilities with accurate words and make them conform to the common naming style.

After the discussion of two thematic analysis groups, 42 items describing the leadership characteristics in critical events were finally extracted, and the frequency of the occurrence of these 42 items in the interview records was counted. The first 20 items were listed in Table 3. Moreover, the first 20 items were given commonsense names, some of which were common in previous studies, while others were self-defined as needed. From Table 3, the frequency reaches 100%, referring to the leaders about their correct execution of power, and it explains that the execution is their most attention. Also, the frequency about the abilities of the vision, interpersonal understanding, and so on is next to 100% in the interview and it illustrates that those abilities ought to be in the system of the leaders` core force.

Table 3: The frequency of the leadership characteristics in the interview records

S.#.	Leadership	Frequency	Frequency	S.#.	leadership	Frequency	Frequency
1	The ability to exercise power correctly	108	100%	11	long-term awareness	95	87.96%
2	the insight	106	98.14%	12	the awareness of the overall situation	93	86.11%
3	Professional technical knowledge	106	98.14%	13	ability to predict	93	86.11%
4	interpersonal understanding	105	97.22%	14	ability to the pioneer	90	83.33%
5	teamwork	104	96.30%	15	dredging and coordination ability	89	82.41%
6	decision-making	104	96.30%	16	with technical strengths	87	80.56%
7	coordination of conflicts	100	92.60%	17	confidence	87	80.56%

8	get new knowledge	98	90.74%	1 8	resilience	86	79.63%
9	communicatio n	98	90.74%	1 9	the ability to accept advice	84	77.78%
1 0	opportunity capture	97	89.81%	2 0	organizational planning	84	77.78%

Based on the above thematic analysis results, combined with the responsibility characteristics and main responsibilities of leaders, and according to the meaning of leadership characteristics, these elements are summarized into three core competency categories, which include overall command ability, managerial communication ability, and strategic leadership ability. Combining the characteristics of each category, the main sub-dimensions under the three categories of leader's core competencies are summarized as follows:

1. Overall command ability: the ability to exercise power correctly, the awareness of the overall situation, the insight, the ability to accept advice.
2. Managerial communication ability: interpersonal understanding, teamwork, coordination of conflicts, communication, dredging, and coordination ability.
3. Strategic leadership ability: decision-making, opportunity capture, long-term awareness, organizational planning.
4. Component dimensions of the leader's core competencies.

4.   Overall Command Ability

The overall command ability refers to the leader's ability to use strategic thinking, master the situation comprehensively, and guide the work. To control the overall situation refers to the behavior of externalizing strategic problems under the guidance of strategic thinking. The importance of strengthening the overall concept and sorting out the overall awareness is determined by the nature of a leader's work. Any leader should have the ability to take charge of a certain range of work independently. Therefore, strengthen the leadership of the global concept, improve the overall ability is of great significance for leaders: on the one hand, it can make the leader's own work consciously obey the organization globally, and contribute to the smooth development of the global work; on the other hand, in the process of control and organization work of the department, to mobilize and coordinate various aspects strength, prompted the department to make greater progress. Therefore, the overall command ability is an important part of the leader's core competence. The leader's control of the organizational work directly

determines his position in the organization, as well as the development power and direction of the organization.

Based on the above analysis of the connotation of a leader's overall command ability and the research results of existing scholars, this paper believes that a leader's overall command ability includes four aspects: thought control, policy control, contradiction control and organization control (Robert W. & Rueker,1985).

Thought control requires leaders to be aware of the problems existing in employees' work, timely urge and put forward suggestions for improvement, revise the work ideas, and guide employees to implement the work concept, according to the actual situation of the organization and the requirements of main tasks.

The policy control ability requires the leader to reasonably grasp the changes of the external policies of the organization and formulate policies within the organization that are conducive to the orderly development of the organization. While strictly implementing policies, leaders should also require members to strictly comply with and implement the requirements of organizational policies. Policy control is necessary for the overall command ability of leaders because the policy is the basic premise for the development and progress of enterprises or organizations. The enterprise's plans and innovative activities can only be implemented within the normative scope of policies, and only through policies can members' behaviors be effectively restrained within the organization so that they can make maximum efforts to achieve organizational goals. In this way, leaders can grasp the overall situation of the organization from the outside and inside of the organization.

Effective contradiction control can help leaders to establish their own leadership role in the organization, promote cooperation and communication among employees, and improve the work efficiency within the organization. However, if leaders ignore conflicts, the cohesion of the team will be destroyed, which is not conducive to the normal work. Therefore, contradiction control is also a part of leaders' overall command ability. Properly handling organizational conflicts and creating a good organizational environment are conducive to the development of the organization and the improvement of leaders' overall command ability.

Leaders can effectively control the whole organization and grasp the overall development trend of the organization, which will help the organization and its members to clarify the organizational goals, enhance team cohesion, and effectively promote the progress and development of the organization. On the one hand, the leader's organizational control can reasonably optimize the allocation of the organization's resources, to make full use of both human and material resources. On the other hand, leaders' organizational control is conducive to the formation of a good cultural atmosphere for the organization, especially the integration of team forces and continuous work toward the completion of organizational tasks.

4.1 Managerial Communication Ability

The managerial communication process runs through the whole process of a leader's work. It serves as a bridge between the organizational goals and the individuals who have the desire to cooperate in the organization. The tasks of a leader include accurately transmitting the information of the organization's vision, mission, expectation, and performance to employees, then guiding and leading them to achieve the goals.

The so-called managerial communication refers to all communicative behaviors and processes in the field of management to achieve management goals or objectives. If the communicative behaviors and processes occur within the scope of management processes and functions, such communication should be managerial communication. But if the purpose of communication is not to achieve management goals or objectives, such communication cannot be called managerial communication. Managerial communication can be considered from three aspects: the subject, the media, and the object. The whole process of managerial communication is shown in Figure 1.
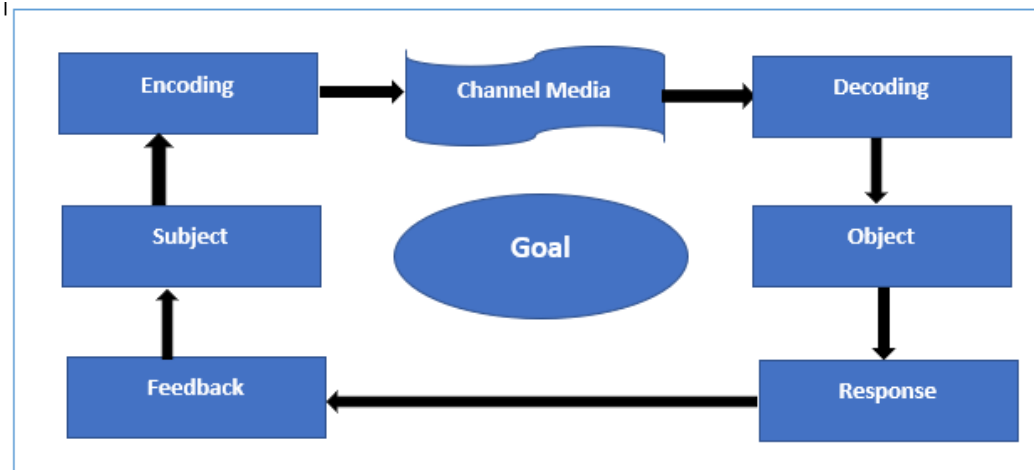
Figure 1: The whole process of managerial communication
(Source from the Author)

Effective communication is the premise of ensuring subordinates to do a good job. Only by making subordinates understand their work objectives, requirements, and responsibilities, can employees know what to do, what level to achieve, and their attitude to work. Moreover, effective communication is an important way to inspire the work enthusiasm and initiative of employees. Through communication with leaders to know the relationship between their work and the development of the whole enterprise, employees can feel the respect they receive and the value of their work, which will motivate them to work actively. Finally, effective managerial communication is a guarantee for employees to do a good job. Only through communication can the leader accurately and timely grasp the work progress and work problems of subordinates, then provide support and help to solve the problems in time.

4.2 Strategic Leadership Ability

This paper holds that strategic leadership can be divided into four dimensions: strategic thinking ability, strategic decision-making ability, strategic planning ability, and strategic control ability. After sorting out relevant literature on the elements contained in the four dimensions of strategic leadership, the ability deconstruction diagram is obtained and shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Strategic leadership deconstruction

Strategic Thinking Ability	environmental observation ability, direction selection ability, vision ability, and concept innovation ability
Strategic Decision-making Ability	opportunity evaluation and identification ability, strategic judgment ability and risk-bearing ability
Strategic Planning Ability	ability to quickly integrate resources, communicate and coordinate, and innovate planning models
Strategic Control Ability	strategic effect evaluation ability, strategic revision ability, and strategic changeability

4.3.1 Strategic Thinking Ability

The growth and expansion of an enterprise are often closely related to the leader's strategic thinking space. Whether the leader is capable of strategic thinking will determine the development of the enterprise, which is also the biggest difference in the management ability of individuals (Adair,2006). According to Bhaduri and Worch, the strategic thinking ability that a leader should possess includes four aspects, namely, the ability to find problems, the ability to foresee, the ability to think independently, and the ability to innovate in response.

Through analysis, this paper argues that the leader's strategic thinking ability is that, in the process of managing the daily affairs, leaders could have the observation and thinking for the organization's vision and the changing environment from the height of the strategic level, and also have the innovative thinking, strategic thinking and integrated abilities with comprehensive organization characteristics.

4.2.1 Strategic Decision-making Ability

Strategic decision-making is not a common part of leaders' work, but a key part of making the enterprise adapt to the changes in the current environment and continue to grow up. Based on analyzing the changes in the situation, combining the market rules and the actual situation of the enterprise itself, leaders must effectively formulate and adjust the development direction, goals and resource integration of the enterprise, to ensure that the enterprise can develop towards the

right goal -that is strategic decision-making ability (Matsuno, Ken & Mentzer, 2000). Many domestic scholars have also studied the role of leaders' strategic decision-making ability. He Xiaogang believes that the strategic thinking ability of leaders is conducive to the rational organization and selection of resources in the work, and to bear the risks brought by decision-making (Etzioni & Amitai,1964).

4.2.2 Strategic Planning Ability

The strategic planning ability refers to the ability and level of leaders to grasp the overall situation and development situation of the organization, determine the direction for the organization, point out the way and formulate development strategy. Strategic planning is the first crucial target for the leader as the general commander of the enterprise. The leader needs to have a clear blueprint and development direction for the future development of the organization (Gold&Lan,2001). In a broad sense, leaders' strategic planning ability includes vision realization ability, environmental analysis ability, strategic goal-setting ability, and strategic matching ability; in a narrow sense, leaders' strategic planning ability refers to the planned means, measures and methods to achieve the enterprise goal after it has been determined.

4.2.3 Strategic Control Ability

The strategic control refers to that in the process of strategy implementation, the leader adopts a series of methods and measures to make the implementation of strategy consistent with the established strategic planning, compares the feedback results in the process of strategy implementation with the planned goals, to evaluate the implementation of goals and find out the problems, then take necessary measures to deal with and adjust accordingly (He,2006). It includes three aspects: the evaluation of strategy effect, the revision of strategy, and the control of strategy execution environment. Through effective control of strategy implementation, leaders can ensure that the strategic plan is implemented completely according to the plan, which is conducive to the realization of the enterprise's strategic objectives.

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