



Talk on “ Strategic Leadership” by Ir. Chew Weng Yuen

Ir. Chew Weng Yuen is currently a committee member in the Engineering Education Technical Division (E2TD).

The Engineering Education Technical Division had co-organized a talk entitled “Strategic Leadership” with Engineers Australia Malaysia Chapter, and the Institution of Mechanical Engineers Malaysia Branch, on 26th April 2017, at Wisma IEM. The talk was delivered by Ir. Dr Ling Chen Hoe who is currently the Senior General Manager and Director of Meiden Malaysia.

There were 21 participants in the talk, and Ir. Dr Ling commenced by reviewing the differences between the old and the new leadership paradigm. He informed that whilst the old paradigm emphasized on the personal power to control and be served, the new leadership emphasizes on empowering, influence and serve others. He also revealed that some recent studies on corporate leadership have found that about 40 percent of CEOs fail to keep their jobs for more than 2 years, and 37 percent of leaders fail after moving into a new leadership position. He pointed out the traits of a bad leader and then went on to discuss the facets of leadership. He mentioned that the current view of key leadership traits is that a leader must possess drive and energy, a desire and motivation to lead, honesty and integrity, self-confidence, intelligence, and knowledge of the business he or she is in.

Ir. Dr Ling then proceeded to briefly discuss the evolution of management theories commencing from the scientific management approach, to the systems, humanistic, and contingency approaches. He also did a brief review of leadership theory by mentioning the Great Man Theories, the Trait Theories, Behaviourist Theories, Situational Leadership, Contingency Theory, the Transactional Theory, and the Transformational Theory. He informed that in a survey done across seven countries, it was found that the six common challenges that leaders face in each of the respective country are developing managerial effectiveness, inspiring others, developing employees, leading a team, guiding change, and managing internal stakeholders and politics.

Ir. Dr Ling next mentioned leadership styles. Amongst the leadership styles that were being discussed are the Autocratic, Laissez-Faire, Democratic, Transformational, Cross-Cultural, Participative, Charismatic, Transactional, Strategic, Situational, and the Visionary Leadership. He delved into the topic of leadership styles by culture and illustrated the differences in leadership styles between the Anglo, South Asian, and the East Asian leaders. He also showed a comparison between three styles of leadership namely the command and control style, the consensus style, and the collaborative style *vis-à-vis* the company’s organizational structure; as to who has the relevant information; who has the authority to make the final decisions; what is the basis for accountability and control; and where does it work best.

Ir. Dr Ling gave examples of strategic leadership that have had managed to helm near bankrupt companies back to profitability. He also gave examples of companies that were once giant in their industry but are currently struggling to stay afloat because of the lack of strategic leadership. It was also shown that strategic leadership is demonstrated in situations where leaders take direct control (leadership as command); where leaders set the vision and core beliefs (leadership as vision); where the leader weighs up the options and decides (leadership as decision-making); where the leader is the embodiment of the strategy, but not involved day-to-day (leadership as symbolic).

Ir. Dr Ling then proceeded to discuss on the importance of understanding diversity and culture. He mentioned that the strength of an organization lies in the differences of its people and not in the similarities. It was noted that diversity is a driver of innovation as creativity involves looking and performing things in different ways from the established norms. Creativity may be stifled if all people think alike. Of equal importance is that a leader should create and manage the culture of an organization. If a leader does not manage the culture adequately, then it will in turn manage him or her, says Ir. Dr. Ling.

Ir. Dr Ling next discussed on the importance of effective communication. He mentioned that good leadership always starts with good communication. A leadership communications model was then presented. It shows the communication actions that correspond to various leadership processes, for example, the type of communication action that is relevant when a leader is tabling a vision, or presenting a plan, delegates, coaching, and motivating his or her subordinates, and so on.

The next topic that was being discussed was the skills that are required when one becomes a leader. These include advanced leadership skills, team leadership, basic leadership, conceptual leadership, supporting skills, and leadership as a person. It was also mentioned that an intrinsic quality of a leader is self-awareness. Ir. Dr. Ling explained that leaders who are aware of their weaknesses are likely to hire subordinates who perform well in areas in which the leaders lack acumen. In leadership development, a leader will first need to develop personal mastery and authentic leadership (leading self), then continue to develop relationship mastery and interpersonal excellence (leading people), before proceeding to develop a high-performance culture when leading an organization.

The strategic leadership roadmap on both strategy development and strategy implementation was next discussed. The 10 principles of strategic leadership were also mentioned together with the three strengths of a true strategic leader. These encompassed the understanding of the complex relationship between the organization and its environment, then the strategic leaders take decisive action consistent with the strategic direction of the organization, and finally building commitment to the organization's strategic direction by engaging others, forging relationships both within and outside the organization, and navigating the political landscape on the way.

Ir. Dr Ling concluded the talk by stating that strategic leaders need to anticipate the changes in their organizations' environment, interpret its effects, accept challenges, be decisive in taking actions, align their organizations' vision towards the new environment, and lastly always learn about the new landscapes that have emerged before them.



Ir. Dr Ling Chen Hoe discussing a topic during his talk on Strategic Leadership.