

Agile Business Leader Strategist ABL Strategist- Navigating the Course to Profitability



In our last article we spoke about Agile Business Leaders (ABL) and their ability to play a key role in the future of organisational success. The ABL model is a performance model providing a bedrock of required skills and abilities for any leader who wants to positively impact success. An ABL involves functioning and performing within four roles. These roles are::

- **Enabler-** Being able to leverage the knowledge and wisdom of everyone in the business.
- **Champion-** Having the character and integrity to achieve and succeed.
- **Specialist-** Possessing industrial intelligence and the means to continuously gather more.
- **Strategist-** Creating a sustainable organization and pushing to embrace greater possibilities.

In short, an ABL is responsive, resilient, quick, flexible and extremely agile to meet the needs of customers and achieve outstanding results. To be an effective leader, a person must be able to perform a task with an appropriate level of interpersonal skills, professional knowledge, and operational ability to achieve the goal.

The Agile Business Leader®



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This article focuses on the ABL Strategist role. The Strategist responds to the realities of 'needing to be business focused' and at the same time 'needing to achieve 'action'. They are focused on helping the business grow and mobilizing and transforming their people to make that happen.

Strategizing is a systematic way of exposing reality and acting on it. Strategizing involves rigor, intensity and depth. An ABL doesn't stand on the mountaintop, think strategically and attempt to inspire people. An ABL's heart and soul is

immersed in the company and their desire to implement positively focused strategy. The ABL is engaged personally and deeply in the business, its people and the industry.

ABL Strategists expect things may not go as planned and therefore thrive on unplanned opportunities. As a strategist they create the future by visualizing it. They are intuitive and their vision is based on ethical business values. They are always asking 'What's next?', 'Where else?', and 'Why not?'. Because of this inquisitive nature, they help create a sense of identity for those in their organization. They galvanize followers by keeping interest and motivation high. Strategists recognize that interest and motivation do run on "constant maximum" even in the best of business climates. Business operates in cycles. No matter where you are and what you are doing sooner or later there is work that is not particularly interesting or motivating and you have to slog through it to get the work done. If you are well motivated and interested in the project then you either see that what you are doing is part of the big picture or you just trust that it is and get through it.

ABL Strategists are big thinkers and their actions are dynamic and daring. They seek large gains and are not afraid to take smart calculated risks. They work on one simple rule 'Break the rules'. Quantum-leap thinking is a regular exercise for the ABL. They convince followers to discard their policy and procedures manuals and instead create common sense, flexible and ethical guidelines. They design their organisation's infrastructure to support every aspect of innovation by helping to create or modify the organization's collective values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors.

Four traits make up the role of the ABL Strategist:

- Change Leadership
- Strategic Adaptability
- Resources for Innovation

- Path to more profitability

Here is a brief understanding of each of these four important traits

1. Change Leadership

The ABL Strategists knows that 'Change is a fact and loss is an opinion'. Change needs to be reality based- people need to be able to envision and discuss specific things they need to do. Realism is the heart of change and execution of a new plan. They recognize that meaningful change comes only with execution and getting things done.

Someone once ask Chairman Mao "What is the result of the French Revolution". Moe responded "It's too early to say." Sometimes change's effectiveness is difficult to assess even after many years and sometimes if you can't state the change that has occurred then you have every right to question it's success Leadership without the discipline of execution is incomplete and ineffective.

Leaders don't execute successful change unless the right people, individually and collectively are focused on the right details at the right time. In our experience we have seen intelligent, articulate conceptualizers who don't necessarily understand how to execute. Many don't realize what is needed to be done to convert a vision into specific tasks because their high-level thinking is too broad. They don't follow through and get things done, because the details bore them. They don't crystallize their thoughts or anticipate roadblocks. They don't know how to pick people for their organizations who can execute. Their lack of engagement deprives them of the sound judgment about people that comes only through practice. In contrast, the ABL Strategist thinks strategically and delivers solutions strategically. They emphasize the production of immediate results by focusing on short-range, hands-on,

practical strategies and common-sense approaches to planning and development. They create processes and deliver solutions that continually focus on building customer and business value.

The ABL Strategist knows that they may not be able to control the weather, but they can design a ship and equip it with a crew that can navigate the ocean under all weather conditions. They know how to create and implement a strategy that works.

2. Strategic Adaptability

ABLs recognize that there is greater competition as a result of globalization and the rise of the knowledge economy has brought about important changes in organizational leadership strategies and practices. They know that no worthwhile strategy can be planned without taking into account the organization's ability to implement it. Implementation involves discussing the 'hows' and the 'whats' of the plan. It's about questioning, tenacious follow through and ensuring accountability. It often involves;

- Making assumptions about the industry
- Assessing the organization's capabilities,
- Linking the strategy to operations and the people who are going to implement the strategy
- Synchronizing those people and their various disciplines
- Linking rewards to outcomes.
- Changing assumptions as the environment changes
- Upgrading the company's capabilities to meet the challenges of an ambitious strategy

Strategizing is a systematic way of exposing reality and acting on it. Strategic adaptability involves rigor, intensity, depth and flexible thinking. It involves developing a strategy that takes in account people and operational realities. ABLs make continuous adjustments to systems and

processes along the way. They admit when something is not working and take corrective action and learn from their mistakes. During those times, they regroup and assure that the right people assembly together are provided sufficient time to think and innovate improvements for implementing the strategy.

3. Resources for Innovation

Too often leaders choose to address only those problems that are familiar, those issues for which a solution is imaginable. ABL strategists create a vision that challenges people by encouraging them to go beyond familiar ways of thinking and provoke people to stretch beyond what has seemed to be the 'reasonable' limits to redefine the boundaries of what they experience as constraining. They facilitate change, crafting the corporate culture and shaping the organization to take on a new form.

The ABL Strategist preaches "If we look for perfection we will get nowhere. We need to take more risks with good business models".

ABLs have the ability to deal with complexity, ambiguity, and uncertainty and can act decisively with incomplete information. These conditions do not create fear and anxiety within the ABL, rather they accept these situations as opportunities to challenge them to be stretched in new directions and evoke higher levels of thinking. They have the ability to achieve results when others seem stuck.

4. Path to more profitability

Organizations worldwide are scrambling to find the most effective ways to attract and keep the best talent, elevate performance, increase productivity and bring profitability to new levels. Organisations that already have footprints in emerging markets now face decisions on where and how to recruit and expand to increase profits.

The Strategist recognizes that a successfully implemented strategy is the missing link to success and profitability. It's the main reason companies fall short on their promises. It's the gap between what a company's leaders want to achieve and the ability of their organizations to deliver. When companies fail to deliver on their promises, the most frequent explanation is that the leader's strategy was wrong. But the strategy by itself is often not the cause. Strategies most often fail because they aren't lead well to final implementation. Things that are supposed to happen don't happen. Either the organizations aren't capable of making them happen, or the leaders of the business misjudged the challenges their companies face in the business environment or both.

The ABL Strategist values all ideas and opinions of others and collects their input as part of the decision-making process and the success of implementing the plan. They enlist the talents of others to help meet objectives by giving them important activities and sufficient autonomy to exercise their own judgment. They engage people to turn capabilities into action

By promoting the development of Agile Business Leaders, we are calling for a shift that requires an increased level of adaptability and flexibility in business operations. We are challenging organisations to find ways to support Agile Business Leaders and address doing business in this globally connected, hyper-active environment.

This article encourages you to recognize, that when you change the way you look at things, you change the way things look. We challenge you to develop the skills of the Agile Business Leader.

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