

Leading Big Businesses: An assessment of differing leadership styles

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Abstracts

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SUMMARY

Very large organizations are usually shaped by the style of leadership imposed by the CEO. Structures and cultures vary according to the person at the very top of a company. Some CEOs thrive when working in one area of the economy but then fail in others, unable to adapt. Others, typically those leading a group of companies, have found success by concentrating on company culture, granting power to those lower in the hierarchy to take meaningful decisions.

Meanwhile, other CEOs run their businesses according to harsh financial reality - Mike Ashley being a well-known example - due to highly competitive market environments.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Characterized by his uncompromising business style, Ashley seeks to reduce costs where ever possible.

A flamboyant, risk-taking businessman, Branson has predicated the Virgin brand on his own image, frequently undertaking high-profile record attempts (such as the ill-fated effort to co-pilot the first hot air balloon to traverse the globe) to promote the brand.

When Amazon was created in 1994 the concept of internet shopping becoming commonplace remained distant. Founder Jeff Bezos gained enormously from

being an early adopter of new technology, propelling a lowly online book retailer to one of the most successful and commercially influential retailers in the world.

SCOPE

Examines differing styles of leadership in large businesses

Looks at how brand image is created

Analyzes the role of structure on the fortunes of companies

Assesses the difficulties of managing businesses in new markets

Examines how company culture reflects that of the leadership

REASONS TO BUY

How do leadership styles differ?

How does company culture change according to leadership style?

How does a hands-off style influence a company?

Can a hand-on approach work in a group of businesses?

Contents

Overview

Catalyst

Summary

Mike Ashley built a retail empire through aggressive purchasing and sales

Sports Direct thrived on low prices and buying out struggling brands

Aggressive low-cost strategy pursued at expense of brand perception

Recent high-street purchases continue trend of buying struggling brands

House of Fraser takeover reveals how aggressively Ashley is happy to play his hand

Ashley is wasting little time in getting to work on troubled cycling retailer Evans Cycles

Richard Branson hands-off style built Virgin into international brand

Treating each brand as a stand-alone business helped to build Virgin group

Branson not only sells goods and services, but the Virgin name too

Branson has constructed a desirable brand image by employing enterprising leadership style

Jeff Bezos built Amazon in his own image, propelling it to global powerhouse

Bezos has created a business model able to expand into new revenue streams

Long-term perspective limits Bezos to doing what he does best

Management structure enables Amazon juggernaut to progress

Eddie Lampert has been blamed for decline of Sears through poor leadership

Hedge fund management style failed at Sears, continuing a trend of retail failures

Centralized style of Lampert caused problems at ESL Investments but also allowed it to thrive

AutoNation and AutoZone were transformed in value when ESL Investments became major shareholders²⁰

Conclusions

Mike Ashley has become a major retail player thanks to ability to find value where rivals struggle

Culture instigated by Richard Branson at Virgin allows the group to maintain its core identity

Jeff Bezos style of leadership allowed Amazon to become a global business superstar

An intense style of leadership helped Eddie Lampert succeed in hedge funds, but the same approach failed in retail

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