
Leading with a future perspective

“Foresight is part of the leader’s ethical commitment. And, therefore failing or refusing to foresee events should be considered a lack of ethics” - Greenleaf, 2002.

(Marist Voices, chap.9 - Br. Emili Turú)

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Throughout the history of World Business Owners and Founders of Religious Institutes, Leaders have not had things as unpredictable as it is today. There are lots of improvements in the world in terms of technological advancement or information dissemination, just to mention but a few. Also, we never had such growing number of problems, competing priorities and desires. We never experienced the unpredictability, obscurity and complexity in managing business and organization before now. This is why foresight is important for a servant leader.

Foresight can be considered as an act of looking to, and thinking about the future with the aim of making decision that might either impart on an organization (e.g. saving cost of operation, enhancing efficiency and effectiveness or prevent it from certain negative occurrence like running at a loss, inability to break even). Larry Schmitt (2021), citing Richard Slaughter, did define foresight also known as future thinking or “futuring” as, “the ability to create and maintain a high quality, coherent and functional forward view, and to use the insights arising in useful organizational ways”. As a new core competency, foresight can provide a competitive advantage to those organizations that use it to navigate our uncertain and changing world with purpose. This activity can involve expert or professional and those who are not expert or professional. Foresight can be a product of careful analysis of past events, present trend of things and making projection for the future.



Importance of Foresight in an Organization

Foresight is important because servant leaders make decisions that will positively affect the organization they are leading. Foresight helps leaders understand potential problems that could arise; leaders can better prepare for them and prevent them from becoming big issues to the organization. The essence of foresight in leadership cannot be overemphasized. The covid-19 pandemic came like a hurricane that disrupted businesses across the globe

including our Province and the Institute. It seems life stood still as no one could figure out at first what exactly they were to do because people were not prepared for such. However, within the shortest time possible solution started trickling in and we survived. This is an example of what foresight can do.

Key Reflections that come to mind

No one can predict the future with 100% certainty, but a servant leader with good foresight can have a better chance of seeing potential problems before they occur and try to avert the problems. Judging from the trend of things, servant leaders can foresee possible situations and plan ahead on how to manage them. It is crucial for a servant leader to identify if there is anything that can be done to help the organization or project progress in the future and work toward its realization. Competent servant leaders consider more than one way of doing things.

Personal experience on how I integrate foresight into my operations

My responsibility, as Province Bursar, goes beyond the daily office routine. I make conscious decisions that positively impact on the future of the Province such as taking actions that will minimize the general cost of operation. In Marist Province of Nigeria, we often face certain challenges peculiar to developing economy such as price instability, inflation, volatile foreign exchange rate, inadequate electricity supply, poor government policy among others. We operate Boarding schools in Nigeria and as such we feed the students who are Boarders. As price of food commodities keep rising, to keep feeding students who are Boarders requires skill. As a result of price the instability of goods and services, I try as much as possible to store up some grains during their season because the prices of such grains must do go up during off-season.

Nigeria Province is still developing and as such we have many ongoing construction works. So I try to deploy resources tactfully in order to be able to meet up with other obligations. The reason why we have many ongoing constructions is to avoid spending more money in the future as a result of price fluctuation and also to be able to reach out to more young people and children in Nigeria.

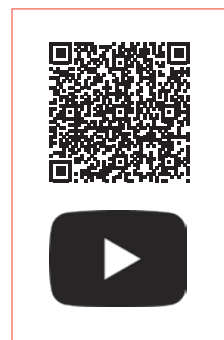
Being a leader does not make me the smartest person in the Province. The Brothers and lay collaborators working with me are also intelligent in their own right. Collectively we understand our roles and stay motivated while focusing on the Province strategic plan and adapting to changes as much as possible. As a leader I understand the importance of learning from past mistakes and successes and using lessons learned to productively evaluate present decisions. I identified what is happening and understand the consequences of the decisions and then help the collaborators to do the same.

The future maybe different from the past or even the present, it is important that the lay people working with us understand the Marist spirituality. This will be through having recollections together. I care about those that I am working with individually. I understand that when any of them feels happy and fulfilled in their personal lives, it contributes to success in their responsibility in the Province. I appreciate others' perspectives and approach situations with an open mind. I make it a priority to show those that work with me that I care about them and try to help them with personal issues when it is within what I can do. As a servant leader another thing I love doing is asking questions to understand the perspective of others instead of being too assertive.

Suggestions on how this can be integrated to our operations

Leaders who failed to have foresight about the future will end up overtaken by events. Larry Schmitt (2021), opined that the exponentially accelerating speed and magnitude of change is not relegated only to technology. The unprecedented shifts seen in population decline, climate change, decentralized learning, experiential consumption and many other areas are changing the landscape of work, education and our daily lives. Understanding the world around us and being able to foresee how changes might affect the organization can provide immense advantages and business opportunities. By implementing successful business foresight, organizations can prepare for change and build strategies to cope with it.

It is important to always look to the future to see what changes might possibly affect the activities of a particular project (schools, hospitals, social centers) or the administrative unit or the Institute at large. We are living in an era where things are changing very fast and as such leader in the Institute and different administrative units should be looking to the future to see what adaptation, innovation and changes that could continue to promote Marist life and mission in the Provinces and the Institute. If an organization is able to use foresight into its everyday processes, it can protect itself from adverse events and give it a direction to move the organization forward.



The opinions expressed in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Marist Institute.

If you would like to share your ideas, reflections, or experiences about servant and prophetic leadership with the Commission as a result of these reflections, write to fms.cimm@fms.it

