

The Five Lenses of Responsible Leadership

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Despite the elevated moral consciousness in the post-Enron era, news of misconduct continues to impose on the headlines. Every week we read of business leaders who become ensnarled in situations casting dubious light on their integrity. Executives who inflate their credentials, or who receive suspiciously timed stock options continue to undermine the public trust -- both in themselves, and the institutions they represent.

Beyond the glow of the headlines, leaders continue to struggle with agonizing choices that inhabit not the clarity of a black or white world, but rather the nuanced and perplexing domain of gray. Trade-offs often pit short-term financial results with longer-term implications that are too murky to reliably assess. Leaders must balance consequences for the institutions to which they have fiduciary responsibilities with effects that may impact the global community. They must interpret laws that are often ambiguous and self-contradictory.

In the wake of Sarbanes-Oxley and the revised Federal Sentencing Guidelines, the stakes have been raised both for organizations as well as their leaders. Organizations must take proactive measures to ensure ethical conduct. They must diligently create cultures to sustain and nurture ethical behavior. Directors are mandated to involve themselves in program oversight. And leaders are held personally accountable for complying with legal and ethical codes of conduct.

This increased scrutiny has only added to the pressures facing business leaders. Yet, all too often, even the most well-intentioned leader will miss the vital warning signs that the ethical temperature is rising, and ignore the danger lurking ahead.

Over the past several decades, the discipline of business ethics has evolved to help leaders wrestle with these challenges. The intellectual origins of this community stem from moral philosophers who applied ethical theories to the domain of business. This created a backlash of sorts, as business leaders dismissed the ethical doctrines as too “ivory tower” for the complex and tangled world of business. The field has progressed considerably since these early years, as new disciplines have become appended to an ever widening spectrum incorporating perspectives from anthropology, sociology, psychology, economics -- and the law.

My teaching at the University of Minnesota’s Carlson School of Management has led to the development of an analytical framework which I call the Five Lenses of Responsible Leadership. The framework has evolved over the past three years, and has been tested both at the MBA level, as well as Executive MBA -- in the United States and in Europe. Students have found this framework helpful, not only for analyzing the cases we discuss in class, but also to help resolve moral dilemmas in their own careers.

The Five Lenses framework asserts that complex business problems must be analyzed through multiple perspectives – each one contributing a piece of the puzzle. Only when the entire picture is assembled can responsible action come to pass. Students of moral philosophy will recognize that several of the lenses draw from the ethical teachings of Kant, Mill, and Aristotle. These theories provide a foundation for the present framework, but just as the field of business ethics has evolved, so have the Lenses been extended beyond their original conceptualizations.

Before describing the lenses themselves, it is worthwhile to discuss what is meant by "responsible leadership". This term is distinguished from "ethical leadership" or

"moral leadership" because the emphasis is not exclusively on ethics or morality, but rather on integrating ethical principles into a comprehensive code of conduct that acknowledges a leader's complete responsibilities to the organization. The term is also distinguished from "environmentally responsible leadership", because the concept of responsible leadership incorporates environmental considerations but also balances other dimensions of responsibility -- to shareholders, customers, business partners, and the general community. Perhaps if there is one word that most captures the essence of responsible leadership it is *sustainability*. Responsible leaders must be long-term stewards of their organizations, advancing organizational interests in harmony with the long-term interests of society. Responsible leaders also desire to flourish in their careers over the long term.

The recent dilemma facing Patricia Dunn and the Hewlett-Packard board of directors is an excellent example to illustrate the framework.¹ While the situation is most often labeled a "board leak" problem, we will see through our analysis that this way of framing the issue may have contributed to the unfortunate outcome.

Hewlett-Packard has always had a venerable record for excellence and corporate integrity. Frequently cited as one of America's most trusted companies, its leaders have world-class reputations for the highest level of capability and experience. Moreover, what separates Hewlett-Packard from other recent corporate debacles is that none of the players involved were motivated by personal greed. In their hearts, they were all working to serve the good of the company – although different individuals may have had different visions of what is "good" and how to achieve it. Thus, the lessons learned as

these leaders wrestled with a confounding, multifaceted problem may be instructive to other leaders as they strive in their practice of responsible leadership.

Let us consider the situation facing Dunn in February 2005. She had just been appointed non-executive board chairperson of Hewlett-Packard in the wake of the firing of CEO Carly Fiorina. In late January there had been a front page Wall Street Journal article revealing confidential and sensitive information surrounding a board level discussion of a contemplated reorganization. At the request of Fiorina (who was still CEO at the time), outside counsel Larry Sonsini conducted interviews with each board member, and only one board member confessed to being a source for the article. Other board members were suspected of contributing to the story. Upon her appointment as chairperson, Dunn perceived that the board had given her a mandate to further investigate the matter and find the leaker.

The Five Lenses Framework is presented schematically in Figure 1. As seen in this diagram, each lens offers a unique area of focus. Two lenses – Lens of Organizational Dynamics and Lens of Business Context – shed light onto internal and external risk factors which may threaten or complicate the practice of responsible leadership. The remaining three lenses – Lens of Duty, Lens of Consequences, and Lens of Personal Vision – are prescriptive. They yield different insights on what “should” be done to embody responsible leadership.

The core mission and values – both of the organization, as well as the individual – serve as a common bond linking all of the lenses. Just as an organization’s mission and values give purpose to a business, an individual’s mission and values give purpose to a

person's life. These parallel core mission and values act as a foundation for responsible leadership.

Let us now examine the Five Lenses framework in more detail.

Lens of Organizational Dynamics

In any organization, a culture develops as a cumulative effect of both formal and informal systems and processes. Certain aspects of the culture can reinforce responsible decision making and inoculate the organization against risks. However, unusual circumstances may challenge the culture, threatening to break down these safeguards, moving the organization in the direction of peril.

Through the Lens of Organizational Dynamics we look at organizational behavior at a systemic level. We examine how factors such as communication patterns, incentive systems, shared organizational values, and implicit power structures, shape decision making in ambiguous and novel situations or in situations of high organizational stress.

Within Hewlett-Packard, values ingrained by founders Bill Hewlett and Dave Packard permeate the organization. Known as the "HP Way", the HP culture holds deep respect for individuals, and emphasizes trust and integrity. This strong culture affords significant resilience against possible trespasses. Yet, the Lens of Organizational Dynamics reveals a number of interrelated problems which cascaded over time to chisel away at core company values, leaving HP susceptible to risk.

The most prominent problem – dysfunction of the board of directors – is at the root of all others. This dysfunction emanated as a struggle between the "old HP" and the "reinvented HP" that had emerged to revitalize the company. Divisions between

these two forces boiled over as the company embarked on the merger with Compaq Computer Company in 2001. Just weeks after the board voted unanimously to proceed, board member and co-founder's son Walter Hewlett abruptly reversed course and waged a bitter proxy battle to block the merger. Thanks to the leadership and vision of then CEO Carly Fiorina, the merger went forward.

Tensions resurfaced again in January 2005. With the stock price sagging, certain board members devised a plan to reorganize the company. When CEO Fiorina resisted one of the recommendations, some directors took matters into their own hands by leaking the discussions to the Wall Street Journal. Fiorina's outrage over this violation of trust led to even more negative energy – this time directed at Fiorina herself, who was fired by the board in February 2005.

In the middle of this intense period, Tom Perkins, who had previously retired from the board at the mandatory retirement age of 72, was hastily reinstated on the board without a well-structured nominating process, ignoring the concerns raised by CEO Fiorina. Perkins, who had many years earlier been an HP employee, was good friends with the longest standing board member, Jay Keyworth. Perkins and Keyworth would again form the core of the “old HP” faction, and would grow to resist the formal governance initiatives of incoming chairperson Dunn.

Dunn, who took over as chairperson in February 2005, perceived a board mandate to investigate the leak. According to her congressional testimony, individual conversations with seven of her nine fellow board members encouraged her to take investigative action. But, what about the other two board members (presumably Perkins and Keyworth)? Did they share similar concerns? What were their opinions about the

situation? Dunn may have missed a valuable opportunity early in her tenure as chairperson to synthesize the views of this “old HP” constituency.

Clearly, in February 2005, the HP board faced considerable challenges. The leak was only a symptom of overall board dysfunction. And, the path that Dunn chose would only continue to escalate this dysfunction and cause it to spread throughout the organization.

Dunn engaged an outside security firm to investigate. One of the investigative tactics was pretexting – a deceptive practice in which an investigator assumes a false identity to obtain confidential phone records of HP board members and reporters. When the investigation failed to reveal the identity of the leaker and a new round of leaks occurred in January 2006, Dunn redoubled her efforts. She requested that internal HP resources be assigned to the investigation. Kevin Hunsaker, an attorney responsible for monitoring HP’s compliance with its Standards of Business Conduct was assigned to lead the investigative team, reporting back to Dunn on a regular basis.

Here, the Lens of Organizational Dynamics reveals an additional constellation of risks. Dunn’s role as non-executive chairperson may have created ambiguities as to who exactly was overseeing the investigation. According to Dunn’s testimony before Congress, she did not perceive herself in the role of overseer. Yet Kevin Hunsaker clearly thought of her as the person in charge. Documents submitted to Congress show Hunsaker perceived that Dunn had approved the investigative plan of action, whereas Dunn claimed that she had intended to defer the decision to company management.

Hunsaker’s role as investigative lead put him in conflict with his other role as protector of the company’s Standards of Business Conduct. On one hand, Hunsaker was

expected to be an impartial watchdog. On the other hand, the board chairperson was depending on him to find the source of the leak.

The inherent power differential between Dunn and Hunsaker further confounded the situation. Dunn would consistently give Hunsaker, who was organizationally several levels below the CEO, positive feedback on his running of the investigation. When the investigation concluded in late April, Hunsaker was promoted – a decision likely influenced by Dunn’s favorable opinions. Thus, even though no formal reporting relationship existed, Hunsaker clearly perceived Dunn to wield significant influence in his career.

These three dynamics – role ambiguities, role conflicts, and power differentials – combined to move HP further down a risky path. But, at HP, there was one additional resiliency. The individual. Thanks to HP’s deeply embedded culture, each individual could be counted on to “do the right thing”. And that is almost what happened. Initially, one member of the investigative team raised a red flag through an email: “I have serious reservations about what we are doing. As I understand Ron’s methodology in obtaining this phone record information it leaves me with the opinion that it is very unethical at the least and probably illegal. If it is not total illegal, then it is leaving HP in a position that could damage our reputation or worse. I am requesting that we cease this phone number gathering method immediately and discount any of its information.” Alas, after reading the organizational tealeaves even this individual appears to have become caught up in the zeal of the mission, as reflected by a later email: “STRAP ON YOUR HELMETS FELLAS, WE’RE GOIN IN!!!!

What would have happened if, instead of acquiescing to the momentum, this individual had maintained his resolve? What if he had kept up the pressure on Hunsaker and others to stop the practices which he considered so onerous? Unfortunately, the Lens of Organizational Dynamics warns of strong pressures to conform.

The Lens of Organizational Dynamics further suggests that subtle signals sent by top leaders can undermine even the most passionate pleas from lower levels in the organization. Unless top leaders fully embrace the organization's values, the voice of the dissenter will ultimately get squelched – which is exactly what happened, even in HP's resilient culture emphasizing ethics and integrity.

Lens of Business Context

The Lens of Business Context scans key factors in the external environment – e.g. competitive climate, market dynamics, legal and regulatory environment, political climate, NGO interests, etc. – and examines their connection to the company's core economic engine.

Hyperactive competition and/or dramatic changes in customer markets are the most common risk factors. These conditions can lead managers to abandon prudence in the zeal to produce economic results. For example, increasing competition in the accounting industry coupled with the changing market dynamics of the “Internet Economy” posed key risks that contributed to the demise of Arthur Andersen.

It is notable, however, that these common external risk factors did not come into play at Hewlett-Packard. Instead, two other factors were most salient: the ambiguous legal status of pretexting and the public climate regarding privacy and identity theft.

If there had been a clear law banning pretexting, events would have unfolded quite differently. Instead, the legal status of pretexting was complex and required considerable legal analysis. Even after the situation became public in September 2006, there was considerable debate in the legal community whether HP had, in fact, done anything illegal.

Kevin Hunsaker did engage outside legal counsel to write a formal opinion validating the practice of pretexting. However, the law firm he chose to write the opinion was closely tied to the firm conducting the pretexting operation. Had Hunsaker chosen a truly independent counsel, he probably would have received a more conservative opinion. But, the combination of factors discussed in the previous section (role ambiguities, role conflict, and power differential) may have caused him to inch toward this more risky path.

Meanwhile, issues such as privacy and identity theft swirled in the public consciousness. Because they tap into an underlying public anxiety, these issues can be amplified by the media and become a lightning rod in a politically charged environment. In this case, a congressional sub-committee had drafted a bill to ban pretexting, but could not get it through Congress. When the HP matter became public, this sub-committee called a special panel to further their political cause.

The aspirations of State Attorney Generals are another force to be considered. The post of State Attorney General is often a stepping stone to higher political office, and winning a high profile case can be a career enhancing event. Thus, it is not surprising that California Attorney General Bill Lockyer would be quite interested in vigorously

pursuing a case that links a prominent company like HP with a sinister practice like pretexting.

Lens of Duty

Whereas the previous two lenses (Lens of Organizational Dynamics and Lens of Business Context) give focus to internal and external risk factors inherent in a situation, the remaining three lenses offer prescriptive advice.

The Lens of Duty is unique among the prescriptive lenses because it focuses on the responsibilities inherent in a decision – not the consequences that may result, and not on the character of the decision maker. The Lens of Duty calls for a leader to balance potentially competing obligations to various constituencies – shareholders, employees, customers, suppliers, business partners, the public, etc. These responsibilities cluster along three critical dimensions -- legal, ethical and economic². The Lens of Duty requires that leaders give explicit consideration to all three dimensions.

At Hewlett-Packard, the evidence suggests that Dunn gave explicit consideration to only two of the three dimensions – economic and legal. Dunn held the opinion that she had the responsibility to take extreme measures to protect sensitive and confidential information. She viewed this as both an economic duty and a legal obligation as a fiduciary agent. On the opposite side was the legality of the pretexting methods. Without a doubt, Hunsaker should have conducted a more thorough unbiased study into the legal status of pretexting. But, the biggest breach of duty was that Dunn apparently gave no explicit consideration to her ethical responsibilities. In addition to spying on directors (which she felt was justified because of economic considerations), Dunn's

investigation also invaded the privacy of reporters who were not suspected of any fiduciary breach. According to her Congressional testimony, she did not consider how the disingenuous appropriation of a person's identity to pry into their private records could be a violation of trust and integrity – values that HP held with such reverence.

The HP ordeal suggests that even the most well credentialed individuals may fail to explicitly consider all three dimensions of corporate responsibility. It is easy to look at them and think “how stupid they are”. But, in reality, these are not stupid people. They are not reckless people. These are well-intentioned leaders who became caught up in a game where the most important thing was to find the leaker – paying no attention at all to *how* they found him.

The Lens of Duty gives us this important perspective. Economic, legal, *and* ethical considerations must be integrated into the daily routine of decision making. Only when a leader has wrestled with, and agonized over these trade-offs can the art of responsible leadership be displayed.

Lens of Consequences

Whereas the Lens of Duty asks us to consider our competing obligations when making a decision, the Lens of Consequences focuses on the *outcomes* of these decisions. The Lens of Consequences evaluates outcomes along three dimensions: economic, social, and environmental. These are the dimensions of Triple Bottom Line reporting, a practice that aligns the results scorecard with key dimensions of long term business sustainability. Triple Bottom Line reporting is common in Europe, and is becoming more prevalent in the United States. Nearly half of the largest global companies now formally

report their annual results along these three dimensions, and the percentage has increased in recent years.³

Admittedly, this multi-dimensional approach is still controversial – especially in the United States. There are those supporters of Friedman’s model who steadfastly maintain that leaders must remain true to a one-dimensional quest to maximize financial dimensions. However, more and more, twenty-first century leaders recognize that a long term sustainability model requires outcomes to be balanced across all three dimensions.

The Lens of Consequences also calls for us to consider the risks – both internal (as seen through the Lens of Organizational Dynamics) and external (as seen through the Lens of Business Context). Studies probing the psychological processes underlying managerial decision making suggest that leaders are remarkably bad at factoring risk into their daily decisions. They tend to be overconfident in their knowledge, and tend to underestimate the likelihood that undesirable outcomes will occur. Judgment errors in assessing risk restrict the number of alternatives considered and may lead down ill-considered paths.⁴

Decision making at Hewlett-Packard illustrates these pitfalls. Leaders were overly focused on catching the leaker and did not adequately consider the risks. In fact, the process of revealing the identity of the leaker triggered even more board dysfunction – this time played on the public stage. Here’s how the situation unfolded.

The 2006 investigation was “successful” at finding the leaker -- longstanding board member, George Keyworth, who had been on the HP board since 1986. The fact that Keyworth’s identity had been revealed to the entire board angered Keyworth’s long time friend, Tom Perkins. Perkins, who had sought to keep the leaker’s identity

confidential, angrily resigned and stormed out of the May 18th board meeting complaining that Dunn had betrayed him (by revealing the name of the leaker). At first, Perkins denied that his resignation had anything to do with material disagreements with company direction. Only after several weeks had passed did Perkins begin to protest the pretexting methods. On August 14, Perkins revised his stated reason for resigning from the board, and through his lawyer demanded that HP file a revised 8-K publicly disclosing his concerns. This set in motion the long string of events that ultimately led to Dunn's resignation, the Congressional hearings, and felony indictments of Hunsaker, Dunn and others. (In early 2007, a newly elected State Attorney General scaled back the charges significantly – supporting the view that the primary issue was the ethical breach, rather than a legal violation.)

Overall, Dunn's strategy led to undesirable results when evaluated on economic and social dimensions. From an economic perspective, while the leak was stopped, countless hours were spent dealing with the aftermath – energy which could have otherwise been focused on building better products and more satisfied customers. When evaluated along the human/social dimension, the outcome was even more damaging. Despite the fact that Dunn and others were ultimately cleared of serious legal wrongdoing, a number of careers have been ruined, and the integrity of HP's esteemed corporate culture has been placed into question.

The Lens of Consequences calls for us to consciously expand the number of alternatives we consider to compensate for our human decision-making foibles. In the case of HP, one obvious alternative would have been to conduct an investigation, but limit the tactics so as not to invade personal privacy. However, let us think more out-of-

the box. Let's reframe the situation and consider a creative approach more in keeping with our model of responsible leadership.

As mentioned previously, the problem was framed by Dunn as a “board leak” problem. But the Lens of Organizational Dynamics suggests that the leak was only a symptom of overall board dysfunction. Thus, addressing the overall dysfunction and restoring integrity and trust should be primary goals. Instead of finding someone to blame for a specific problem, a systemic approach assumes that everyone in a dysfunctional system does something to enable or perpetuate its dysfunction. In other words, everyone is accountable. This approach would seek a “fresh start”, where, with the aid of an outside facilitator, all past baggage is discussed and then released – and a new set of “rules” are negotiated for how the board conducts its business moving forward.

This strategy is inclusive of all board members. It requires careful listening and respect for the diverse views held by different individuals. This is clearly opposite the direction that Pattie Dunn had pursued in her first year as board chairperson – quickly moving to enact formal board governance protocols that only served to further alienate Perkins and Keyworth. Instead, the alternative approach would start by building effective working relationships among all board members. This approach would have likely yielded better outcomes along both the economic and social dimensions. It would have strengthened relationships among the board members further enhancing their ability to debate the tough issues facing the company.

However, this approach is not without its own challenges. Let us explore these potential obstacles after we introduce the Lens of Personal Vision, and see how this Lens might have circumvented the problems that Dunn created for herself and HP.

Lens of Personal Vision

The four lenses that we have considered thus far focus on various aspects of a business *situation*. The last lens, the Lens of Personal Vision, focuses on the characteristics of the *person* in the position of leadership. As the last of the prescriptive lenses, it provides insight on what ought to be done by examining the leader's character – the sum total of all acts across a lifetime. Aristotle held the view that a *virtuous* character is necessary to lead a flourishing life.

But, what is a virtuous character?

To apply the Aristotelian notion of virtue in the modern era, I ask my students to envision themselves when they are 60 or 70 years old. I ask them to write a statement that describes what they would like to say about their life's journey when they reflect back from this vantage point. My students often write about the positive impact they would like to have in their roles within their family and community – as a spouse, a parent, a friend. Some mention the achievements to which they aspire as well as the legacy they would like to leave for the next generation. Many mention the struggle to achieve balance among all the competing aspirations.

I encourage my students to use their vision statements to articulate values core to their identity, and commit to live true to those values throughout their career. Some

derive their values through faith or religion – for others, values are transmitted through parents or other respected leaders.

Once written, the personal vision statement can act as a moral compass – keeping the leader on track. Simply reading one’s personal vision statement before making an important decision can add clarity and perspective to the decision process – perhaps acting as a tie breaker if the Lens of Duty and the Lens of Consequences produce several choices that appear equally advantageous.

The personal vision statement is the first step in harnessing the Lens of Personal Vision. Responsible leaders then need to implement a disciplined self-management process to put this vision statement into action. One way to do this is through journaling. Simply put, journaling is a method of “paying attention” to life. It can help a leader to stay on course – or, if need be, change the course. It can challenge a leader to ponder issues more deeply, rethinking key assumptions.

Many leaders dismiss journaling – either because they don’t have time for it, or because it is too uncomfortable. Even if journaling is done only occasionally -- during times of emotional angst -- there are substantial advantages. The process of asking oneself hard questions and then forcing oneself to write down the answers can open up new avenues for problem resolution. For example, this process may result in dissatisfaction with the set of alternatives on the table, and may inspire the leader to push for a more creative path.

Thus, through a combination of personal vision statement and journaling, the Lens of Personal Vision is a modern way for a responsible leader to embody Aristotle’s notion of a virtuous character – balanced, lifelong action leading to a flourishing life.

But, let's not kid ourselves. This process requires hard work. It is not as simple as snapping your finger or waving a wand. It requires deep commitment and a willingness to change and grow.

Now, let's go back to our example. In the last section, it was suggested that instead of assigning blame, Dunn ought to have focused on a strategy to leverage core HP strengths by building integrity and trust within the HP board of directors. As its chairperson, Dunn would have been in an ideal position to lead this transformation. However, she would have needed to overcome a fundamental obstacle, requiring a profound personal shift.

Dunn would have needed to take a serious look in the mirror and come to terms with her own role in the dysfunctional board. She would have needed to stop blaming others and start holding herself accountable. She would have needed to tone down her own ego, and demonstrate humility and respect for her fellow board members.

Judging from her conduct at the congressional hearing, this may have been difficult for Dunn. At these hearings she testified that she felt no sense of personal accountability for the fiasco at HP. This is surprising given the overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

The Lens of Personal Vision urges that leaders hold *themselves* accountable for their own actions. If they make mistakes, they need to acknowledge them, accept responsibility and move on. This is a most basic element of a leaders' character.

Responsible Leadership – A daily practice

A central tenant of the Five Lenses framework is that ethical considerations must be woven into the fabric of everyday decision making. Responsible leaders must pay careful attention to the implicit signals they send which may be in conflict with core organizational values. They must carefully balance their ethical duties with their economic obligations. They must be cognizant of decision making blind spots that might cause them to underestimate risks. They must think out-of-the-box to consider creative options that build on rather than detract from the core strengths of their organizations.

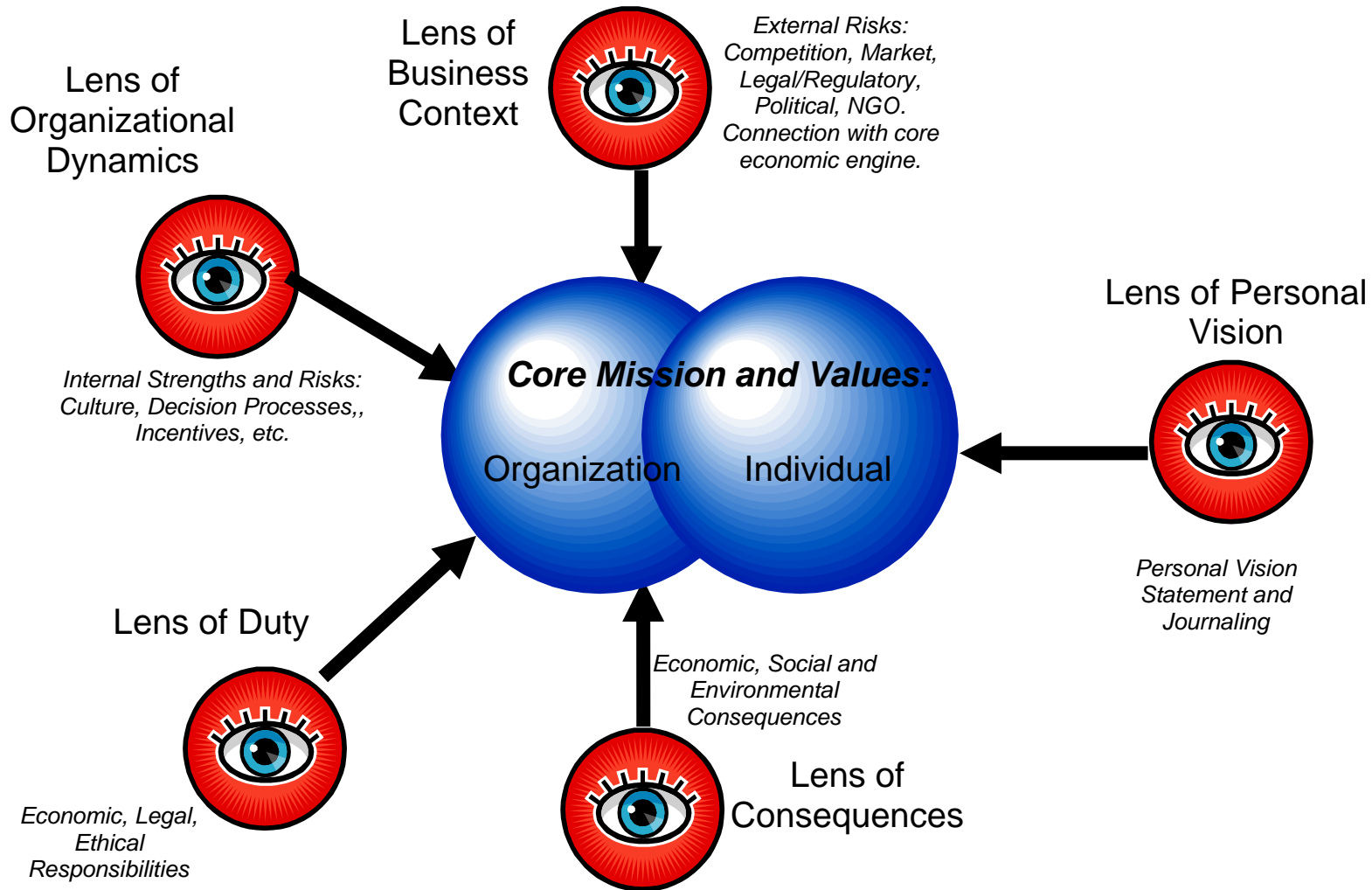
Most importantly, responsible leaders must continue to learn and grow as individuals. When dysfunction occurs, they must be accountable for their own role, and take responsibility for their actions.

All of this sounds so obvious.

But, at HP we see that even the most sophisticated leaders failed to do this. It is so easy to get caught up in the momentum that one loses sight of the big picture.

By explicitly engaging in the Five Lenses analytical process, leaders can remind themselves of the big picture. In doing so, they further the ultimate aim: a sustainable organization and a flourishing career.

Figure 1: The Five Lenses of Responsible Leadership



Notes

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¹The Hewlett-Packard case study is based on numerous newspaper articles, congressional testimony, as well as Carly Fiorina's book, *Tough Choices*. (New York: Penguin Group, 2006).

² The three-dimensional model for leadership responsibilities (Economic, Legal, and Ethical) is used in the Harvard Business School course on Leadership and Corporate Accountability.

³ KPMG International Survey of Corporate Responsibility Reporting 2005. 64% of G250 companies issue formal Corporate Responsibility Reports, and 68% of these issue formal reporting along all three sustainability dimensions – social, economic and environmental.

⁴ Messick, D.M., & Bazerman, M.H. Ethical leadership and the psychology of decision making. *Sloan Management Review* (Winter, 1996, 9-22). See also, Bazerman, M. H. & Watkins, M. D., *Predictable Surprises*. (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2004).