# Contents and Methods of Leadership at Press Agencies

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***Abstract:*** *Leaders at press agencies are in charge of building visions, setting goals, developing guidelines, making political decisions and generating motivation for employees to carry out their tasks in order to bring about positive achievements. To fulfill those responsibilities, they have to master the appropriate leadership substance and method, which will be discussed in this article.*

***Keywords:*** *leadership, management, leadership contents, leadership methods, press agencies.*

**1. Leaders at press agencies**

According to the Press Law of 2016, the head of a press agency is the EditorinChief (for printed and electronic newspapers) or the General Director or Director (for radio and television stations) whose duties are numerous. They include:

– taking responsibility for all activities of the press agency within the scope of its assigned tasks and power.

– developing and running the press agency.

– approving content of the publication, specialized pages, radio and television channels and programs.

– directing the appropriate implementation of the principles, purposes and regulations stated in the license.

– monitoring human resources, training and fostering journalists, reporters and employees, managing assets and facilities of the press agency.

With the above tasks, the heads of press agencies (hereinafter referred to as the "EditorsinChief") perform the role not only of leaders bearing responsibility for all activities of the press agency within the scope of their duties and power, approving and directing activities, etc., but also senior managers who are responsible for constructing, organizing, managing human resources and facilities, etc. In other words, they perform a 2in1 function, both as leaders and managers.

"A leader is the head of an organization as well as a decision-maker whose power and position are regulated by the constitution and law, coordinating with non-powerful factors to direct, create changes and achieve the set goals"(1).

The EditorsinChief of a press agency holds the top position, and bears responsibility for issuing political decisions, inspiring and motivating subordinates to perform their tasks in order to bring positive changes to the press agency.

Unlike the leader, the director clears the way and organizes activities to achieve the goals set by the leader.

In a Vietnamese press agency, although Editors-in-Chief are both leaders and senior managers, they perform different functions in each job position. From a scientific perspective, the similarities and differences between leaders and managers of a press agency can be distinguished as follows.

As for similarities, both leadership and management are processes of thoroughly mobilizing all resources to implement strategies and goals. Leaders set out strategies, goals and visions while managers turn them into reality. Leaders and managers must both rely on each other to accomplish the agency's goals. Whereas managers rely on leaders for direction and implementation, leaders rely on managers to realize ideas and goals.

| **Differences** | **Leaders** | **Managers** |
|---|---|---|
| *Functions* | *- outline visions, set goals, develop guidelines, formulate policies and issue political decisions.*<br>*- focus on strategic issues and long-term goals.*<br>*- can be associated with abstract and macro aspects.* | *- realize visions and goals set by the leaders by planning, arranging the implementation, operating and monitoring the plan.*<br>*- focus on tactical requirements, specific and short-term goals.*<br>*- usually have to deal with real problems.* |
| *Objects* | *- people*<br>*- focus on leading people.* | *- resources (people + materials).*<br>*- focus on managing tasks.* |
| *Methods* | *- educating, persuading, motivating, inspiring, and setting examples.* | *- commanding, enforcement based mainly on punitive regulations and current laws.* |
| *Tools* | *- power, prestige, morality, intelligence and the art of observing and using people* | *- policies, laws and plans.* |
| *Public service* | *- belong to political field*<br>*- leaders are politicians* | *- belong to the administrative field*<br>*- managers are administrators.* |

**2. Leadership content**

With the aforementioned distinction in leadership and management, the EditorinChief or leader in a press agency is mainly responsible for the following tasks: making political decisions, building and connecting strong human resources, inspiring and motivating subordinates, developing values and fostering agency culture.

***2.1. Making political decisions***

Every decision serves as a political foundation for the development of the press agency. There are different types of strategies and decisions at each stage of the

agency development. In order to reach practical and feasible decisions, leaders must have the following skills:

– Analyzing situations, properly assessing the agency's actual situations, and identifying the agency's problems and conflicts that need intervention and resolution.

– Accurately defining the goals and visions of the agency based on the actual situation and prospects for development. The vision for a press agency must be not only global, inclusive, both broad and long-term but also specific, clear and feasible with definite indicators of the time to achieve the goal and the change in quantity and quality.

– Anticipating changes that may happen in the future if the press agency follows the decision. In other words, the leader has to establish a clear roadmap to realize his decisions which serve as the legal basis for subordinates to implement.

– Careful discussion with groups before officially upholding the decision.

***2.2. Inspiring and motivating the implementation of strategies and decisions***

A leader's essential quality is to make others follow his or her will. Decisions issued by leaders must be supported and voluntarily implemented by subordinates in order to be effective. Therefore, a leader must have the ability to arouse excitement, trust, determination and effort among staff, which can be shown in the following dimensions:

– The staff agrees and feels confident with the decisions that the leader makes.

– They clearly see the development prospects of their organization and its individuals.

– They have a desire and pride in being dedicated and performing tasks.

– They give their best effort to accomplish the task.

Working in an environment of spiritual values and high creativity, journalists highly appreciate inspiration and motivation in creating meaningful work. In order to inspire and motivate subordinates, editors-in-chief must have the following skills:

– Communicating effectively and persuasively about strategies, decisions, visions and goals.

– Envisioning a bright future for the agency by implementing strategies and decisions.

– Building a clear roadmap.

– Being a dedicated coach and mentor who pays attention to each employee.

– Building the image of a positive leader in the eyes of subordinates, peers and superiors. That image is not only reflected in appearance such as demeanor, appearance, and posture but also attitude, communication style, intelligence, morality, style, ideology and determination.

***2.3. Connecting resources to implement decisions***

If allocating resources when making decisions is a central task of the manager, the EditorinChief of a press agency must focus on building strong resources and connect internal and external resources to make strategies and decisions possible.

Resources needed for the agency development are generally divided into such groups as human resources, financial capital, scientific and technological resources, and social capital which would include social relationships with partners, traditions of coordination and cooperation, policy environment, etc.

To connect external resources in decision-making, leaders need to:

– Analyze, identify and accurately assess the current resources of the press agency based on advantages and challenges. Thereby, the leader clearly determines the deficiencies that need to be supplemented or improved via linking resources with external parties.

– Recognize opportunities and challenges of policy environment, economic environment and science-technology for the development trend of the press in general and the press agency in particular to consider whether it is possible to apply any policies and advances.

– Have a clear direction in building internal and external relationships, seeking alliances and support from external members based on the activity. For example, they may take advantage of existing relationships with other press agencies, businesses, partners, governing bodies, or state management agencies in order to facilitate their strategies.

– Distribute human resources to carry out activities of external cooperation. The same process holds for connecting internal resources to make decisions. A leader can adjust his direction to:

– Check whether the capacity of resources meets the requirements for implementing decisions.

– Build appropriate human resources to implement decisions.

– Regularly monitor and evaluate the implementation of the decisions.

***2.4. Developing the agency's values***

Each press agency has its own values and unique brand. The leader's responsibility is to understand the core values of his agency and make decisions to maintain and develop its values, brand, reputation and influence. To do so, a leader's development strategy needs to focus on the following key issues:

– Ensuring that the agency operates in line with the principles and purposes licensed by the governing body and the Ministry of Information and Communication.

– Focusing on human resource development while building brand journalism.

– Focusing on researching and meeting the needs of the modern public market.

– Focusing on applying new and innovative communication methods to increase product quality and efficiency.

– Expanding social charity activities for the community.

– Connecting resources and the public to solve social problems (e.g. the Covid-19 epidemic, poverty, violence, environmental pollution, etc.)

– Focusing on social values: the press agency must contribute to socio-political

stability, promote national economic development, enhance people's knowledge, develop culture, improve people's spiritual life, improve the right of public access to information, widen freedom of speech, praise good deeds, criticize bad deeds, support the disadvantaged in society, etc.

***2.5. Building a strong team***

Staff is the most valuable resource to realize the decisions issued by the leader, therefore they contributing to the development of the press agency. Working with people is the toughest issue which shows the leader's talents. To build a strong team, editors-in-chief need to pay attention to the following requirements:

– *Choosing the right person.*

Each agency has its own criteria to recruit personnel. Based on the requirements and the agency's practical conditions, leaders set up criteria to select suitable employees on the basis of a balanced and fair assessment related to competence, qualifications, experience, ethical qualities, soft skills, etc. Digital transformation journalism with its high demand for product quality puts different media agencies in fierce competition with each other to attract the public. Staff at press agencies, therefore, must have digital competence with requirements for creativity, skills for exploiting information and satisfying the public's needs. Leaders need to develop criteria for selecting reporters and editors who can create digital journalism as well as offer:

– Skills in multimedia and creative journalism.

– Skills in exploiting and verifying digital data.

– Mastery of digital communication technology.

– Professional ethics.

– *Arranging staff in the right positions.*

Editors-in-Chief must look at employees from perspectives of qualifications, capacity, strength, experience, ethics and style to put them in appropriate positions. In that way, their capacity and strength can be promoted and become more valuable to the press agency. Leaders need to absolutely avoid misplacement, prejudice, willpower and idealism when appointing staff. Allocating human resources requires the leader's holistic view on the basis of putting the agency's interests and sustainable development as its top priority.

– *Regular training and retraining.*

Leaders need to create conditions for managers and reporters to study and improve their professional qualifications and participate in courses organized by the Ministry of Information and Communication, the Association of Journalists and other domestic and foreign organizations. Press agencies can also open training courses by themselves relevant to their needs and financial conditions.

– *Dismissing unqualified employees.*

Many press agencies now follow the model of economic autonomy, so Editors-in-Chief have to tackle the issue of how to ensure productivity and quality of the

workload with the least number of employees. Unqualified staff affect the working spirit and the quality of press agencies, so laying them off is necessary. However, this is not easy due to pressure from relationships or from a humanistic perspective so the leader must be very fair but decisive when doing this. Irrespective of temporary or contract employees, conducting a layoff is "an art" so leaders should try to help them find a new workplace or provide them with some financial support.

**3. Basic leadership methods**

A leadership method is a system of ways that Editors-in-Chief use to make subordinates understand their will, strategies, decisions, goals and vision. Depending on specific situations, conditions and circumstances, leaders of press agencies can utilize any appropriate method. However, there are some basic practices that can be applied at press agencies.

***3.1. Administrative methods***

Like managers, leaders are fully authorized to use administrative methods, orders, strategies, decisions and ask subordinates to comply. These methods are effective in urgent situations where decisions need to be implemented immediately. However, they should not be abused because it will create vulnerability resulting in psychological tension and negative reactions. The art of leadership is persuasion, inspiration, and motivation rather than coercion and commands.

***3.2. Methods of advocacy, encouragement and persuasion***

These are sustainable and effective methods in leadership. A leader is someone who "speaks for others to follow," so the art of convincing others through advocacy, encouragement and persuasion is important.

The leader needs to acquire the art of persuading subordinates and possess the ability to communicate in a persuasive, impressive way that can touch people's hearts.

The methods of encouragement and persuasion mean that leaders can evoke the intellectual potential and strengths of the subordinates to carry out the assigned tasks. "A highlevel leader does not let people see that he is leading them, but lets them see his passion, enthusiasm, interest and acknowledgement of their abilities and strengths"[(2)]. In other words, the leader needs to share his vision and motivate his staff by showing the feasibility of achieving the goals. Being aware that they play important roles in the leader's decisions, the staff will strengthen their honor, pride, enthusiasm and sense of responsibility to actively carry out the assigned tasks. It is worth noting that encouragement and persuasion can only be effective when leaders know how to combine it with leading by example.

***3.3. Exemplary methods***

Uncle Ho said: "It is unreasonable to ask subordinates to do right if the leaders are doing wrong. A leader must think with his own head, see with his own eyes, hear with his own ears, go on his own feet, speak with his own mouth and do with his hands." Leaders must match their words with deeds and be exemplary in terms of their lifestyle, personal quality and professional competence.

Leaders who talk too much and do too little, say but do nothing, or say one thing but do another will lose the trust of their subordinates and encourage others to imitate them. Editors-in-Chief who do not obey the law or journalism ethics will attract reporters who write fake news or exaggerate things to pursue their personal interests. Therefore, leaders of press agencies must strictly train themselves in ethics, professional competence and leadership skills to set an example for their staff to follow.

***3.4. "Holding-two-ends" methods***

If the journey to the achieved outcome has a departure, a road and a destination, leaders should "hold the two ends." In other words, they had better know the starting point and the accomplishment they should gain whereas managers and subordinates organize the journey by clearing bushes and overcoming obstacles. For example, leaders of the Hanoi Radio and Television Station have set a deadline for their goal of completing their digital transformation by December 2023, but the responsibility to turn that goal into reality belongs to the deputy directors and heads of departments.

The essence of this approach is decentralization, delegation and empowerment. Leaders improve the autonomy, self-determination and self-responsibility of subordinates and avoid being overworked which can quickly lead to mistakes in decision-making.

Decentralization is achieved by giving authority in an orderly manner across all levels of management in an organization. Power is distributed among different levels in the organizational hierarchy.

In press agencies, leaders can choose among the following four main approaches to decentralize power. Based on the organizational structure, these are:

– Vertical decentralization: giving power to subordinates. For example, the Editor-in-Chief assigns authority to the deputy Editor-in-Chief.

– Horizontal decentralization: giving power to different functional departments and divisions to perform tasks.

Based on the level of tasks, there are:

– Selective decentralization: the Editor-in-Chief appoints a certain department to make decisions on certain tasks in the package. For example, when the Editor-in-Chief wants to digitize the publishing process of an online newspaper, each department in the press agency is responsible for a part of the project.

– Overall decentralization: the Editor-in-Chief assigns one department to make decisions on the entire task package. For example, he designates the personnel department to deploy the digital human resource recruitment project for the press agency.

Delegation is entrusting one's authority to another person to make decisions. Delegates perform duties and authority on behalf of the leaders but should adhere to the principles that they just perform supplementary jobs that fit their capability.

Empowerment is a way of doubling a leader's influence by maximizing others' work potential. Empowerment is an art, allowing the leader to control tasks rather than doing them by himself.

Leaders check on the subordinates' performance during meetings via regular reports on the quality and progress of the assigned tasks. Leaders provide advice, make suggestions, and give more information or consider additional financial or human support if they are needed.

***3.5. Methods of inspection, supervision and evaluation***

Inspection, supervision and evaluation are important to ensure that press agencies are operating in line with their license. These methods are carried out from the early stages of policy formulation and decision-making as well as during the process of organization and implementation. Inspection and supervision help leaders identify unusual situations or manifestations of errors so that they can take timely measures to guide each situation. Inspection and supervision enable leaders to give accurate feedback on the subordinates' performance and to reward and recognize their contributions. Positive feedback motivates employees to improve their knowledge and skills and give their best effort to complete the work.

In order to properly monitor and evaluate, leaders have to use qualitative and quantitative survey methods such as observation or document analysis.

***3.6. Democratic methods***

President Hồ Chí Minh had a high appreciation for people's role as the great power in any revolution. Therefore, leaders must know how to rely on the strength, will and aspirations of their staff.

In press agencies, leaders need to uphold democratic methods by respecting their subordinates, promoting them, and relying on collective opinions when making decisions. Every important policy related to the agency's destiny or the staff's livelihood needs to be raised for discussion and there should be a general consensus before making it official. Leaders must set clear and specific goals so that subordinates can understand and seek consultation.

This method not only gives opportunities for staff to thoroughly understand the mission, vision and strategic plans issued by their leaders but also helps them to feel valued and respected.

Democratic leadership methods are the opposite of an authoritarian approach which occurs when leaders decide everything rather than listening to others. Autocracy is the acquisition of all power, doing whatever you like without thinking about the organization. Authoritarian dictatorship is associated with orders and coercion, which will easily lead to breaking the law, while disregarding the leaders' directions or setting up interest groups to manipulate others.

Democratic methods require leaders to thoroughly grasp the principle that all decisions need to take the interests of the agency into consideration. Leaders need

to be constantly close to their staff, while trusting their intelligence and creativity. A leader, no matter how talented or experienced, cannot fully see all aspects of the problem, or be wise enough when deciding all issues related to the agency's development.

However, democracy does not mean following all of the people and being reluctant to make decisions or being timid in searching for unique directions. Therefore, leaders of press agencies must train to equip themselves with enough talent, decisiveness and bravery to take responsibility for each situation that arises.

**Conclusion**

Leading a press agency is a glorious but stressful job. As the person who takes the highest responsibility for establishing the position, reputation, and brand of the press agency while developing its culture and economy, leaders need to focus on creating changes through defining visions, making decisions, creating strong human resources, and inspiring and motivating subordinates to perform their tasks. Appropriate leadership methods include motivating, persuading, setting an example, decentralizing, delegating and inspiring democratic leadership. Leadership is an art which requires Editors-in-Chief to have strong qualities and capacities, especially adaptability. In the context of the current digital transformation of the press, when people talk a lot about "digital thinking," strategies in information technology, innovation and data governance by leaders, then it is hoped that these issues will be explored in depth in future studies.

(1) Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nguyen Ba Duong, 2014, *Science of Leadership – Theories and skills,* Truth national political publishing house, p. 68.

(2) Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mai Duc Ngoc (chief editor), 2016, *Coursebook on science and art of leadership,* A scientific research at Academy of Journalism and Communication, p. 136.