Response to Michael Maccoby's article:
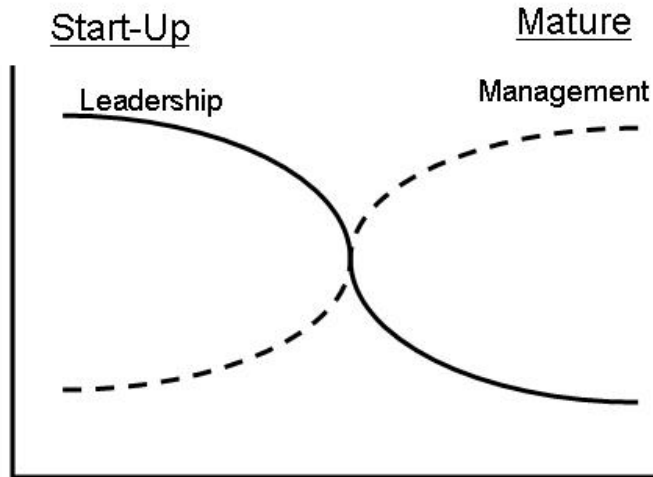**Developing Research/Technology Leaders**

Roger Smith

In his Mar-Apr 2007 article in The Human Side, Michael Maccoby stated that "typically, tech start-ups with visionary leaders are under-managed, while large, mature technology companies are over-managed and under-led." This is a very interesting observation of the shift from visionary leadership focused on major objectives, toward managed control of small implementation details.

A simple model of this trend might suggest that at its outset, a start-up has very few resources in motion and must move mountains with fewer people, equipment, and relationships than a larger and more established enterprise. In this situation, all they have driving and motivating them is a vision of a larger objective, with little understanding of the difficulties that lie between them and their goals. This lack of understanding makes it impossible for them to over-manage themselves, so they must rely entirely upon leadership and vision.

However, as a company becomes successful and enters a phase in which they have many operational resources delivering products and services daily, they are faced with innumerable repetitive actions and repetitive problems. Under these conditions, leadership must recast itself as a constant manager of all of the small problems that occur every day. Burdened, distracted, confused, and exhausted by these small battles, the "leaders" of the organization cannot retain the necessary energy and time to chase big new visions. It is all that they can do to cope with the daily crises that must be solved to keep the organization operating.

In the figure below we try to capture this trend as a simple model that can aid us in understanding this situation, and perhaps assist us to exploring it in more detail.

Start-Up   Mature

Leadership   Management

Vision of   →   Organization of
the Future   the Present

Few Major   →   Many Small
Concepts and   Concepts and
Components   Components

Size of Company

Manage an
Organization

Lead a
Team