

21st Century Leadership Challenges and Strategic Key Attributes

(Editorial Article)

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"A true leader has the confidence to stand alone, the courage to make tough decisions, and the compassion to listen to the needs of others. He does not set out to be a leader, but becomes one by the equality of his actions and the integrity of his intent." --Douglas MacArthur

The twentieth century may be remembered as the century of excesses. In every field, more things were done in the twentieth century than in any other century in history, and in many cases, more than in all previous centuries combined. The twentieth century had some of the most destructive wars in history, the development of the Atomic Bomb, the beginning of air and space travel, the colonization and decolonization of the Third World, improvements in the standard of living, the population explosion, the rise of the computer and technology, incredible advances in science and medicine, and hundreds of historically unprecedented changes. Every decade in the 20th Century also presented new challenges in social preferences, economic development, technology advancement, national security, cross border conflicts, global trade and also pattern of doing business by the corporates and small business houses.

21ST CENTURY GLOBAL CHALLENGES

The twenty-first century, which represents a world that is “volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous” —VUCA, for short and it describes perfectly what is happening in the global scenario today. This century faces different types of challenges in different fields requiring high level of strategic visionary leadership with high level of expectations. Some of them are:

- pact of VUCA, globalization and Industrialization 4.0

- Change of world order due to political forces and new alignments and demographic factors
- Population, migration, healthcare, life expectancy and quality of life, Environment care and climate change issues
- Sustainable change management to face frequent disruptions, crises, pandemics including nuclear disasters and terrorist activities
- Racial issues, conflict management and human welfare focus
- Emergence of new technology and disruptive innovation
- Knowledge driven digital economy and new talent management and developing human resources
- Aspirations of young generation (millennials)
- Life style changes, new consumer preferences and shifting customer requirements and expectations
- New monetary policies, products and services
- Need for developing next gen leaders
- Emerging New business models

And many more.

Therefore, global corporate and political leadership need to be more sensitive in recognizing the

expectations and mind set of people and to adjust to the new business environment.

Creation of new infrastructure as per the economic level of countries , their needs and technology assimilation would be required .

The digital revolution, which has impacted all businesses across diverse industries, including those from manufacturing, health care, education, Transportation, logistics, banking ,insurance and other financial services retail, hospitality, travel and tourism, aviation and real estate & construction, would be new business order. Over the past decade, many businesses are no longer in existence because of the impact of digital disruption, and for the rest of them, time is not on their side, and there is an imminent threat to their survival. The billionaire Bill Gates in his book “The Road Ahead” about twenty-six years ago predicted the impact of the Personal Computer revolution. Many of these predictions materialized. In the same book, there is also a phrase *”There would be urgent need to embark now on digital transformation journey”*.

CORPORATE AND BUSINESS LEADERS DURING CRISIS

A business crisis may happen because of internal or external elements or with the total impact of both. Business crises might be an occasion, circumstance, or public activity that undermines the organization's capacity to successfully work its business. Crises can grow into a disaster or long haul hindrance to business development if not taken care of with the effectiveness and affectability of all included. Crises regularly start at the nearby level, yet can influence an organization from one side of the country to the other or internationally.

Management failure, loss of leadership, hostile attempts of the takeover, product failure/recall, hostile takeover, financial catastrophe, hazardous material spill, toxic chemical release/leak, lawsuit, crash or derailment, natural disaster, employee sabotage/violence/misconduct, strike/boycott,

executive scandal/defection, an act of war, cultural conflicts, merger and acquisition issues, industrial accident, cybersecurity, and many more.

The genuine test of leadership doesn't happen when everything is going great. The crisis is the real testing time for any leader to sustain, think, and perform under pressure. How a leader demonstrates and responds during the hours of crisis will make them a responsible authentic leader one. That being expressed, there's no manual there that can be consulted by a leader during the hours of crisis. This is because, while there can be sure conventions set up that keep crisis from occurring, each new crisis is interesting in its particular manner, with its issues and peculiarities and will require an alternate strategy from the one utilized previously. However, sometimes, the key learnings generated from past crisis situations helps them to design a new feasible visionary strategy for future crisis management.

These challenges are interlinked to each other globally. With globalization, digitalization, innovations, technology and fast communication these challenges demand for new business order. All challenges, turbulent situations and crises , which any nation or society face have a direct bearing on corporates in their day to day operations . The rules of the business game were very much predictable in the 20th century, but the same is not true in the 21st century. Business leaders need to discover new rules of success wherein companies become resilient even in the most volatile situations.

In the BCG's new playbook, 'Beyond Great' It is clearly states that *“Companies have to go beyond the twentieth-century definition of great in terms of their growth strategies, operating models, and organizational structures, building new twenty-first-century forms of advantage.”* Leaders have to go beyond great, building sustainable business advantage benefiting all stakeholders, not just shareholders.

CORPORATE LEADERSHIP : VISIONARY INSIGHTS FOR CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Due to recent Corona 19 pandemic, this section becomes very purposeful as its effect has been very severe on Startups, Entrepreneurs MSMEs and Corporates with varying intensity. The true potential of a corporate leader is continuously under the scanner for the past 18 months or so globally due to ferocious Covid-19 which has taken the whole world under its grip. It is the common invisible enemy for all the nations fighting against it. The response concerning this pandemic situation is more than just a health crisis; it is an economic crisis, a humanitarian crisis, a political crisis, a security crisis, and human rights crisis. Every leader on the planet is facing the same potential threat. Every leader has reacted differently, in his or her own style. And every leader has been judged by their strategies and their results.

Corporate leaders have initiated various expected measures in their organizations with a special focus on 5 C's: Clarity, Control, Concern, Confidence, and Competence to develop and retain the confidence of the employees, community and customers and exploring new strategies to cope up with "new normal".

LEARNING FROM ETHICAL APPROACH WITH EMPATHY OF BUSINESS LEGENDARY RATAN TATA

Some of the organizations resorted to mass lay-offs as a means of cost-cutting during the crisis. Going against the wave of lay-offs, Ratan Tata emphasizes the organization to be sensitive towards the employees who stayed strong with the organization till now. He believes that layoffs are nothing but a knee jerk reaction to the crisis and display the lack of empathy of the leadership to deal with the crisis. It is noteworthy, that none of the TATA Group Companies have so far laid-off its employees. Apart from the visionary outlook in the present situation, Ratan Tata also questions the ethics and the empathy quotient of leadership that fail to absorb shocks like these and manifest choice of layoffs and unethical practices to survive the storm.

Tata further mentions : "Business is not only about making money. One has to do everything right and ethically for customers and stakeholders" "The current health crisis is a time to support 'our own innovativeness', invest in it and not dismiss something as being too far out but being something, we should look at and this situation does give us an opportunity to innovate."

STRATEGIC KEY ATTRIBUTES FOR FUTURE LEADERS

Following are some of the key attributes needed for future leadership to navigate to face the challenges situations caused by internal and external factors :

1. Have Self confidence, positivity and ensure self management
2. Be Awareness of situation and understanding of critical aspects of business and accept the challenges in totality with confidence and courage. Leadership is about taking responsibility, not making excuses.
3. Lead from front with empathy and agility
4. Always care for employees ,their families , community , society , nation and environment with strong emotional connect
5. Believing in team and constant motivation with trust building with coordinated and consultative approach
6. Prioritise with strategic plan and Revisit Strategic vision, mission and values as per changing needs and build strategic core team for preparing for a new order .
7. Believe in constant clear cut honest communication with all stake holders

8. Focus on transparency ,trust , governance and accountability
9. Take lessons from past failures
10. Always be future ready with new strategies with a culture of learning organization

Success Mantra for Future Leadership for Entrepreneurs and Startups Entrepreneurs, Start-ups, Small businesses, and MSMEs are the backbone of any country for job creation and economic development. They are also the pathfinders during the journey to economic recovery even during crisis times. Entrepreneurs spend much time, resources with passion into their start-up ecosystem. The real testing grounds for entrepreneurs or start-ups are during tough situations. Generally, it's very difficult for an entrepreneur or start-ups to sustain in their initial years.

Besides the key attributes, as mentioned in earlier paragraphs, following additional strategic key inputs for entrepreneurs and start-ups are useful :

- Perseverance
- Time management skills: Value your precious time, once gone will not come again.
- Presence of good leadership traits.
- Be a disciple of the 'problem-to solution' method of entrepreneurship based on building from the market opportunity rather than from the product.
- Take actions and move ahead: Create a strategy and emergency or backup plan and don't struggle with thought paralysis and over-thinking.
- Clear with your priorities.
- A belief or optimistic approach that even in times of crisis, people and organizations can emerge better off after the crisis than ever before. Instead of saying

that, I'm broken, say I'm healing, I'm rediscovering myself. I'm starting over. Be positive in your approach then you can surely succeed.

- Treat everyone with dignity and courtesy.
- Listen to your gut .
- Have confidence on your entrepreneurial spirit and Keep that optimism, Keep that faith and strength even in difficult times.
- To develop discipline and resilience in personal and professional life.
- Know what is urgent and important and what is not.
- Break down goals into manageable tasks, so that decision-making can be done with a clear focus, for long term plans. Review these tasks on a daily, monthly, and yearly basis so that it could be adjusted as per need.
- Celebrate every step no matter how big or small it is or how negative or positive is the outcome. Goals are great, but never become so singularly focused on the outcome that you as entrepreneurs/startups forget why it was even started in the first place.

Entrepreneurs/startups should enjoy this process. It is a rollercoaster journey. Always savor small wins. As saying goes that "Remember to dream big, think long-term, achieve daily, and take baby steps. That is the key to long-term success."—

- Utilise right set of influencers to grow your business, marketability, credibility, and name recognition.
- Creativity is the new productivity: In the age of artificial intelligence and machine learning, just being more productive won't work. The future belongs to the creative.

- Dare to fail too: Fearing failure and rejection is understandable but letting yourself become incapacitated by this fear can significantly hinder your progress. Have the will to learn and take a risk. Accept challenges and face difficult times with a calm state of mind. *Always remember, “If you are afraid of failure you don’t deserve to be successful”– Charles Berkley*

- Putting your customers first: When creating and marketing your product, you should have a mindset where you keep your customer first. Yet, many new entrepreneurs are so concerned about making money (understandably) that they forget the key to a sustainable business is having satisfied, loyal customers who will buy your product or go for your services over the long term.

Always remember the mission statement of Amazon, *“We aim to be Earth’s most customer-centric company. Our mission is to continually raise the bar of the customer experience by using the internet and technology to help consumers find, discover and buy anything, and empower businesses and content creators to maximise their success.”* This is an appropriate example for having a customer first approach, as it focuses on customer services.

- Inform your customers about updates: constant communication with the client is very necessary to avoid any sort of misinterpretations or any conflict of interest.

- Evaluate your revenue streams and bottom lines, minimizing costs, and maximizing your impact where it is needed. Identify your creative hours when you are more productive and that suit your working mentality and work life. Do not follow the work culture as decided by our society’s norms since, during this pandemic situation a complete shift has been noted. Nowadays, work from home is a necessity or demand of the situation, not the choice. A new concept of ‘work away from home’ is now emerging. So, therefore, with changing times, newer concepts of work culture are

developing, and we have to adapt according to the current ecosystem. The main aim should be clear even if small changes in the work environment are to be done as per the situation.

- Take more tea breaks or short breaks and this way you relax your mind and could refocus on your work with a clearer approach. The solution to all your problems starts pouring in during a calm state of mind. It is said that ‘the best things happen over a cup of tea’. Therefore, a tea break is a great option for teammates too. Remember to live your life while working on your enterprise. Enjoy each day and each moment. Learn to run the business and not vice-versa. Do not let the business run you.

- Make Decisions for the long term, not for the short term.

- Use support network: Take advantage of all government relief /concessions/moratorium/tax rebates/ packages. Avail benefits of the digital economy and social mobility and thereby ensuring the involvement of newer customers too.

INDIA’S CHALLENGES AND NEW PRIORITIES FOR ALL FOR NEXT 25 YEARS

Corona 19 has adversely impacted socio economic development process to a large extent . However, Indian political business and social leaders with their strong will power and commitment have come forward to revive economy and social life. Country has started showing growth on most of the fronts and this process continues.

PM Narendra Modi on the occasion of 75 the Independence Day address to nation presented the future road map for socio economic development of the country for all sectors for next 25 years as “Amrit Kaal” to better the lives of citizens, lessen the development divide between villages and city, reduce government interference in people's lives, and have latest technology so that we are not behind any country in the world.

Prime Minister highlighted on 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas and Sabka Prayaas (Cooperation, development, trust and effort put by all)' for the achievement of all goals with new resolutions.

His emphasis on the followings would have big impact on corporates, MSMEs, Youth , women , infrastructure, interconnectivity of transport ,travel & communication, export potential., agriculture and rural development and others for their new strategic business development initiatives with new vigour and infusion of confidence in business leaders, social organizations and one and all :

- The Gati shakti Bharat Master Plan with Rs 100-trillion infrastructure and emphasis on Atmanirbhar Bharat
- Quality exports with best competitive products as brand ambassador of India and to capture world market
- next-generation infrastructure, world-class manufacturing, cutting innovations and new-age technology"
- applying scientific research and suggestions to the agriculture sector to provide food security to the nation and to increase food production
- 'Chhota kisan bane desh ki shaan': for collective strength of small farmers ,SHG Women groups , new e commerce platforms
- Production-linked incentive plan
- Emphasis on Energy independent, green energy and National Hydrogen Mission
- Confidence in youth with 'can do generation'
- Hand-holding of deprived communities for their active involvement in their development process

And many more .

The corporate leaders have reposed confidence and have expressed total commitment to fulfill the expectations of New India with collective nation building spirit.

“The progress of one generation becomes the foundational premise for the next. And it takes a new set of people to come along and realise all the possibilities”

- Sundar Pichai, CEO , Google

FINALLY: AVOID CONFLICTS AND RECONCILE FOR HAPPINESS

In personal as well as in professional life, there are occasions of tension due to differences of opinion and disputes which are further heightened during crisis time, We need to develop a culture of avoiding conflicts with reconciliation and forgetting small irritating incidences. My final note:

Happiness matters: so reconcile

*“In a long journey of life
Some unknown people meet and become friends
And create imprints and impressions
Deep and everlasting*

*Natural, Emotional and Eternal
Always craving for care and affection
Sometimes momentary Ego and harshness creeps
in unintentionally*

*Just Ignore and reconcile
Move ahead with affectionate bonding
Appreciate personal feelings and touch
“Sorry, Regret, Excuse me” have miracle power
Friendship is like illuminating Sunshine
Nourishing and caring day and night
Like bouquets of rose fragrance*

*Treasure them as valuable gemstones
Move ahead holding hands together
Uplift in love and harmony*

*Remember... You are blessed
Happiness matters.”*

For further details on the theme , readers may go through recently published author's book “*Visionary Leadership in Crisis*”. Book may be ordered on email to: spgarg33@yahoo.co.in or from Amazon and eversion from Kindle .