

LEADING THE CORPORATE FOR SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIVENESS: A CASE OF BAJAJ GROUP OF INDIA

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Abstract *Leaders play a very important role for corporate development and societal responsiveness. In the context of corporate social responsibility, there is a need for leaders who can visualize business more than a profit earning activity. A deep compassion for society, environment and people clubbed with the growth and production oriented motive for organization, is pre-requisite for the leaders who visualize their organization holding corporate social responsibility. In view of the above, there is a great need to assess various aspects of the leadership process being reflected by Bajaj Group at Hind Lamps and its impact on various Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities and corporate strategies. To ascertain the views of the staff of Hind Lamps about their managerial staff or seniors, the adapted version of Leadership & management style (O) questionnaire was used. Results revealed various functions and dimensions of leadership in Hind Lamps. The ethics and philanthropy based approach is still encouraging the Bajaj corporate to transform their organizational units with a social and environmental mission. A more positive approach in practicing transformational leadership at different levels may be required for effectively realizing the corporate social responsibility mission.*

Keywords *Corporate social responsibility, Leadership, India, Culture and values.*

INTRODUCTION

Today, the role of business and society is going through its most profound change in the last hundred years. Business is beginning to appreciate the fact that the goodness lies in symbiotic relationship with the suppliers, customers, owners, employees and the overall natural environment (Mohanty, 2005). Many believe that this change brings a major shift in the purpose of doing business that will have a substantial impact on the lives of generations to come. The companies, whose major objective has been to maximize profits for the benefit of their shareholders, are now focusing on serving the interest of society and environment at large. This, therefore, clearly establishes the stake of a business organization for the well-being of a society, of which it is a part. Therefore, many growing companies are paying genuine attention to the principles of corporate social responsibility. Corporate Social Responsibility is now a global trend that invites a great deal of attention and asks leaders and corporations to do the right things, that will give back to the world in which they operate, by achieving and demonstrating their awareness of engagement in social, human and environmental issues and concerns (Patterson, 2007).

A close analysis of high performing corporates show that a new leader must address three central tasks: reinforcing environmental values, building community culture and developing vision with environmental values. All are pre-

requisites to the success of the corporate for its social and environmental responsibility. Furthermore, a particular set of qualities are also necessary to support the task of leading in an organization for its Corporate Social Responsibility part, it does not necessarily ensure success. Effective leaders must also exhibit a highly developed set of skills. Many argue that leadership requires power. While power is certainly a pre-requisite, effective leadership is not merely the ruthless application of power to achieve organizational goals or personal satisfaction.

Traditionally four thoughts are well-known about leadership— one explains leadership in terms of general traits, second looks at behavior > behaviour [follow] especially in terms of managerial or administrative style, the third theory explains leadership in terms of situational traits and the fourth, more recent theory focuses on situational behavior but importance to learning a repertoire of responses to varied circumstances and situations, (Hunt, Hoskins, Schriesheim and Stewart, 1984). The traditional thoughts of leadership have not much to say about the environmental part of Corporate Social Responsibility. Therefore, the leadership based on the traditional sources and methods were not completely equipped to solve these social and environmental challenges effectively and sustainably and, therefore, leaders may require special effort and attention on the environmental challenges which they face in today. Corporates that formerly viewed environmental regulations as constrains are

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increasingly striving to view them as sources of competitive advantage and the 'environmental managers' are beginning to replace as 'environmental lawyers' in corporate culture (Gordon and Berry, 1961). In the context of Corporate Social Responsibility, there is a need for leaders who can visualize business as more than a profit earning activity. A deep compassion for society, environment and people clubbed with the growth and production oriented motive for organization, is a pre-requisite for leaders who visualize his/her organization holding Corporate Social Responsibility. This seems to be changing towards more participatory and open model of leadership rather than the traditional leadership model.

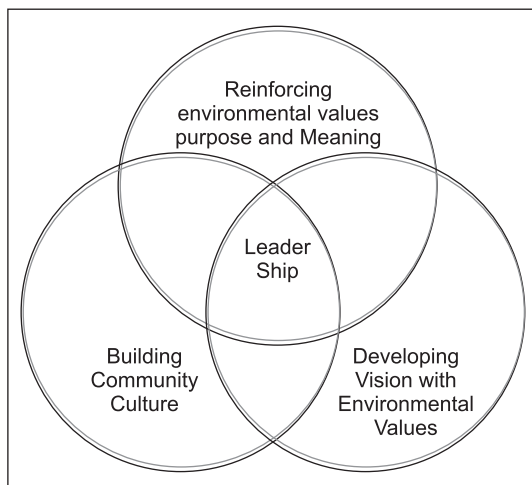


Fig. 1. Leadership Model for CSR

Source: Thomas J. Peters and H. Waterman 1982 (Adapted)

Other area of consideration in CSR includes the basic values of the organization which influences the behavior and actions of the leaders and defines their character and personality. Companies may be motivated to carry out CSR for moral reasons. Voluntary CSR goes beyond the usual economic confirms of social responsibility in contributing to the common good at the expenses of the business (Lantos, 2001). Many multinational companies have agreed with the ethical theories on social responsibility and have developed codes of conduct for issues such as child labour, gender or racial discrimination, promotion of human rights, etc (Mittal, 2007). The external world perceives and responds to an organization based on the way it goes about conducting its business. The world of business even today is going through a crisis of trust, where the credibility of business leaders and the very legitimacy of business organizations is being questioned. The scrutiny from government, media, analysts, investors and action groups is becoming more stringent everyday. In such an atmosphere of skepticism and cynicism, action alone can inspire confidence. People and society are looking for the soul of the corporation and its ethics. There are several forces that drive businesses towards a quest for values. For example, in many instances,

it is an enlightened founder or the CEO who sets the tone and drives ethics deep through the organization. This leads to the premise that values and business objectives are not mutually exclusive. Doing business with a strong sense of ethics is a win-win game for all. The values and behaviour of transformational leaders can influence strategic choices like CSR, through their impact on their field of vision of organizational members, their perception and interpretation of their decision and strategic decision making (Waldman et al. 2004). Customers, employees, suppliers and investors trust organizations that live by a clear set of ethics. In addition, "doing the right thing" is seen increasingly as good business practice because it helps not only to develop closer relationships with dependent communities and wider political circles, but also to maintain favorable relations with customers and the investors (Nash ICME, 2004).

It may be easy for leaders to get so wrapped up in their organization's pursuit of a social cause that personal ethics become compromised in the process. It hardly makes sense for Corporate Social Responsibility to be pursued at the expense of responsible and ethical action towards employees. Somewhere in between such conflicting forces, leaders have to make the difference.

Bajaj group has a history of ethics based on the Gandhian leadership. They have a strong belief that "Our wealth should be utilized for improving the quality of the society and the nation. We should never fail to spend at least a portion of our income on the social, economic and educational development of the provenance where we live." says Jammalal Bajaj. Bajaj have a strong belief that "given the right kind right kind of inspiration, excitement and motivation that reaches the hearts and souls of people, ordinary people can perform extraordinarily". This vision can only be practiced by the leaders who can promote the culture that Bajaj have nurtured in their organization by excellent motivation to every individual to put in their best performance in an enthusiastic and charged up environment. Constant communication on individual performance, business units, group performance and company's overall performance keeps employees updated and motivated. Bajaj fully appreciate it that when employees understand the big picture, and keep in the loop about performance and new developments, they feel part of the organization, and therefore, involved, excited and more loyal to the organization.

Hind Lamps Ltd. of Bajaj groups, the SBU of Bajaj electrical Ltd. also follows the footsteps of their veteran leaders and show their commitment for environment and society at large through a foundation named "Friends of Nature". Under this organization, they undertake various environmental activities in the nearby villages of their unit which are heavily polluted by the local glass industry. Besides, Hind Lamps, as an institution, also plays a leading role in facilitating various CSR activities under the leadership of various levels from

CMD to executive director and executive functionaries of “Friends of Environment”.

In view of the above, there is a great need to assess various aspects of the leadership process being reflected by Bajaj Group at Hind Lamps and its impact on various CSR activities and corporate strategies.

METHODOLOGY

Study Site

The study was conducted in Hind Lamps Ltd. of Bajaj group, about 70 kms. from Agra in Uttar Pradesh state of India. Bajaj group has its enviable position among the leading business houses in India. The group owes immense gratitude to their founding fathers whose vision and dedication over the years has greatly helped to build a business house that can set standards in Indian Industry along with working for society and the environment.

History of Bajaj Group

Jamnalal Bajaj was the founding father of the Bajaj Group. The adopted ‘fifth’ son of Mahatma Gandhi, and the ‘merchant prince’ who held the wealth for the people of his country. Trust - a simple word that contains a whole philosophy handed down by Jamnalal Bajaj to his successors. He valued honesty over profit, actions over words and common good over individual gain. The relevance of Jamnalal Bajaj’s principles and practices has and can only grow over time. His vision has stood as a beacon for generations that followed.

In his footsteps, his elder son, Kamalnayan Bajaj devoted his time, resources and energy to promote Gandhian activities. With characteristic foresight and pragmatic vision, he launched a steady diversification programme which gave the current name “Bajaj” both its shape and size. His unique management style created a work culture that matched well with the national spirit he had inherited. Jamnalalji’s younger son, Ramakrishna Bajaj actively participated in the freedom struggle of the country. All along, he furthered the cause of business ethics and practices. As such, the group, even today, continues to enjoy moral strength with financial muscle.

Shekhar Bajaj, Chairman & Managing Director (CMD) of Bajaj Electricals Ltd. drive against pollution is ubiquitous across the Bajaj Group. They work on pollution issues through other group companies as well as the group’s trusts. During a recent plantation drive, 11,000 saplings were given to the villagers of nearby areas. However, all these endeavours are never undertaken to prove that they are socially responsible. “These initiatives are needed for our survival” says Shekhar Bajaj. These features also give a cutting edge over other brands in the market. Giving back to people — who work and buy from Bajaj— it also gives

them pleasure. Even people appreciate such initiatives and participate enthusiastically in their programme and maintain their loyalty as customers. All through its rise to a leading position in business, the house of Bajaj has striven for the ‘common good’. Its philanthropic activities are being carried forward by the present generation under the stewardship of Rahul Bajaj whose vision for corporate is “Do whatever you think best, but be best at whatever you do” is the core strength of Bajaj group.

The vision of Bajaj’s which has percolated for four generations is the reflection of transformational leadership which is the need of the hour for societal development and business growth.

Sample

Purposive sampling technique was used to select the respondents for this study. Respondents included the key informants of Hind Lamps Ltd., all the Executive Managers, 50% of the staff including Assistant General Managers to staff below managerial level of Hind Lamps Ltd. as well as Friends of Environment personnel.

Tools and techniques

A mix of qualitative and quantitative tools and techniques were used to study the leadership style of Managers of Hind Lamps Ltd.

Leadership style Schedule: A specially designed schedule was used to take feedback from all the concerned staff (From Executive managers to below manager level staff) about their seniors and themselves. Responses were taken from the Assistant General Managers to foremen by allowing the respondents to select one statement from the given three statements, which they feel, was suitable for their current senior manager, i.e. Problem Solving- a) Gives personal involvement in problem solving when and where we require, b) Gets impatient when problems arise. (Lose balance, gets angry), c) Encourages staff and beneficiaries to solve their problems and learn from them. Likewise, the adapted version of the schedule for executive managers was designed and feedback of the executive managers were also taken as their self-assessment, i.e. Decision Making- a) I take all the decisions alone, does not consult others, b) I take decisions by consulting a few closer to me and ignore others,. c) I take decisions by consulting as many as possible, give everyone an opportunity to participate in decision making.

Key Informants’ Interviews: Personal Interviews were taken from the key informants such as, Chief Managing Director of Bajaj Electricals Ltd., Executive Director of Hind Lamps Ltd., all the Assistant General Managers of the concerned departments of Hind Lamps and key functionaries of Paryavaran Mitra.

Leadership Style of the Managerial staff

The most important task of a manager is to manage the human resources of the organization. However, effective management of human resources requires an understanding of the capabilities of subordinates, assigning them appropriate tasks, helping them acquire new capabilities, maintaining their motivational level, and structuring the work so that people can derive some satisfaction from doing it.

In order to ascertain the views and experiences of the staff of Hind Lamps of Bajaj Electricals about their managerial staff or seniors, the adapted version of Leadership & management style (O) questionnaire (Rao, 2005) was used. The results obtained were subjected to descriptive statistics by calculating percentage. The results of percentage distribution of the respondents on different functions and dimensions of leadership are as follows:

Decision Making

This part of the subsection deals with the individual's ability and style of decision making. Percentage distribution of respondents about decision making process of their seniors represent that, none of the respondents mentioned that their seniors take all the decision alone without consulting others. About 90.9% of the respondents expressed that their seniors believe in taking decisions by consulting as many staff as possible and give everyone an opportunity to participate in decision making. However, 9.1% of the respondents said that their seniors take decisions by consulting few closer and significant persons.

Problem Solving

This item indicates individual's attitude towards handling particular problems. The results revealed that 36.4% of the respondents indicated that their superiors take problems personally and try to solve them. About 4.5% of the respondents expressed that their bosses get impatient while facing problems. However, 59.1% of the respondents viewed that their immediate leaders encourage staff to solve their problems and learn from them.

Mistake Management

This part of the leadership style deals with how an individual reacts when mistakes were made by their subordinates. The result in percentage distribution showed that, about 13.6% of the respondents viewed that their superiors treat the mistakes of few favourites with understanding and protect them while nearly 4.5% of the respondents expressed that superiors cannot tolerate the mistakes, lose their temper and tend to reprimand and sulk. However, 81.8% of the respondents viewed that their seniors help them to learn from their mistakes by analyzing them.

Information Sharing and Communication

This item deals with the communication and information sharing style of an individual. It was revealed from the results that none of the respondents indicated that there is free and open communication and sharing of information in Hind Lamps. 19% of the respondents stated that, their seniors share information with a few close members of the staff, however, 81% of the respondents said that their seniors do not share the information normally and treat information as power.

Recognition and Reward

This part of the leadership style indicates the way an individual recognizes and rewards their subordinates work efficiency. 95.5% of the respondents expressed that their superior authorities do not recognize and reward anyone as they feel that recognitions and rewards spoil people. 4.5% of the respondents felt that their seniors recognize and reward few who are close to him/her. However, none of the respondents expressed that their seniors reward objectively.

Training and Development

This item shows the way individuals provide opportunities for training and development to their subordinates. Results revealed that about 91.9 % of the respondents viewed their superiors as trying their best to build competencies of the staff and believe in empowerment and development. However, 4.1% of the respondents said that their seniors did not sponsor developmental activities and used all opportunities for personal growth and development. This may be due to fear that they surpass them. 4 % of the respondents said that their seniors sponsor only few whom they consider suitable for training and other development interventions.

Expression of Emotions

This subsection deals with the style of how an individual expresses his/her emotions. 92 % of the respondents viewed that their superiors control emotions and express themselves when required, about 4% of the respondents said that they don't express any positive emotions, but express anger and annoyance freely and have no qualms in putting others down. Nearly 4 % of the respondents said that their seniors express their emotions selectively with few and they are warm, affectionate and came across as relation- oriented people.

Assignment and Work Allocation

This item deals with the work allocation system of an individual to his subordinates. Nearly 9.5% of the respondents expressed that their senior officers favour few closer to him/

Table 1 Leadership Style of Managerial Staff of Hind Lamps Ltd.

Leadership Style	Respondent (%)	Leadership Style	Respondent (%)
Decision Making		Training and Development	
Independent	0	Only few feels suitable	4
Participatory	90.9	do not sponsor any one	4.1
Consult few close	9.1	Believes in Empowerment & development	91.9
Problem Solving		Expression of Emotions	
Personal involvement	36.4	Express selectively	4
Get Impatient	4.5	Do not express	4
Solve problems and encourage to learn form it	59.1	Express when required	92
Mistake Management		Assignment & work Allocation	
Protect favourates	13.6	According to rules	19
Cannot tolerate	4.5	Few favourites	10
Coolly analyzes & solve	81.8	Considering individuals interest	71
Information Sharing & Communication		Support & Resources	
Share freely	0	Readily when needed	86.4
Share with few close	19	Few closer	9.1
Does not share	81	Do not provide	4.5
Recognition and reward			
Reward objectively	0		

her in assigning tasks and setting goals. However, 19 % of the respondents said that they follow rules and norms strictly without considering individual interest and competency. The remaining 71.4 % of the respondents expressed that their seniors set goals through dialogue with a definite view of encouraging staff growth.

Support and Resources

This aspect of leadership style deals with the way a leader provides support and resources to his/her subordinates. 9.1 % in same line of the respondents viewed that their superiors provide support and resources to individuals very close to them. 4.5% of the respondents expressed that their seniors do not provide adequate support and resources. However, 86.4 % of the respondents said that, their seniors provide support and resources when needed to the expert staff to develop competencies to work through problems and issues.

Impact of Leadership Style on Junior Staff

This part of the subsection revolves around the impact of the leadership style of an individual towards his/her subordinates, or how his/her subordinates perceive him/her as their senior. 33.3% of the respondents reported that their seniors possess a high degree of morality and satisfaction, about 14.3% of the respondents said that those who work with their senior officers learn much. Nearly 33.3% of the

respondents stated that their seniors encourage members to set goals independently and they assist by reviewing them occasionally. However, 4.8 % reported that their bosses characterized his/her staff as

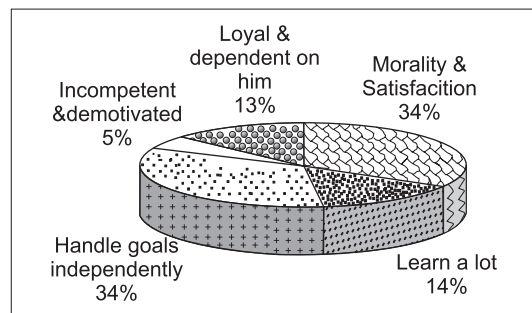


Fig. 2. Impact of Leadership Style on Junior Staff of Hind Lamps Ltd.

incompetent and de-motivated. 13.3 % of the respondent said that their seniors characterized them as loyal and dependent on him/her.

DISCUSSION

As far as analysis of leadership style is concerned, results revealed various functions and dimensions of leadership in Hind Lamps. Major findings indicated that, there was a strong trend of participatory decision making as reported by the respondents. However, few policy level decisions are used by consulting few key functionaries. It was also observed

that problems were considered as an opportunity to learn rather than prohibit further work efficiency. Leaders played a major role in this regard by their, personal involvement as a nurturant leader while facilitating the problem solving process and patiently analyzing and managing the mistakes of their subordinates.

Leaders have a major role of keeping communication channels open and sharing information. However, in spite of the nurturant and participatory approach to leadership, communication blocks were found as there was a very limited sharing of information from top to bottom and information was treated as power. It was further justified by the results, that senior managerial staff were unable to transfer the information related to environmental health and safety initiatives of the organization in line with ISO 14001 certification to the middle level staff and the other subordinate employees.

A need for positive motivational environment at the organizational level was also felt as recognition and rewards for high performing personnel did not exist, which was against the motivational principles. Due incentives and reinforcement always increase productivity and satisfaction which is in the interest of the organization since a positively motivated work force builds a healthy and reinforcing organization. Although leaders always believe in empowerment and capacity building of their staff, such conscious efforts at the ground level are yet to take place.

The organization was found to be emotionally charged in terms of positive as well as negative emotions. However, there was a need for more emotionally intelligent behaviour on the part of senior manager staff with regard to addressing the challenging situation charged with local caste based culture and political environment. Emotional intelligence is nowadays a prerequisite for playing an effective and efficient leadership role (Goleman, 1996).

Managerial staff of Hind Lamps allotted work quite judiciously, based on the individual interest as perceived by most of the employees. They also readily extended material and moral support as well as required resources to develop the expertise and competencies of their staff. There were different opinions held by subordinates about the impact of leadership style. However, except for the limited number of staff indicating that their managerial personnel was incompetent and de-motivated, the rest of the employees were satisfied with the impact of the leadership style.

The above results can be analyzed in terms of the Eclectic model of leadership style (Parul, 2000). Based on this model, it can be interpreted that the leadership style is dependent on the level of maturity and motivation of employees to be led, to be effective. As the organizational environment of Hind Lamps was not very motivating as perceived by employees, the top leadership has rightly started adopting nurturing

leadership style and treating the employees like a father figure. This observation was supported with the research findings (Sinha, 1997) that a nurturing style is identified as the preferred style for the superiors in India. Indian culture is marked with personalized relationships and there is a tendency to depend on a leader for guidance, support and direction (Sinha 1970). As soon as they grow in the level of maturity and become emotionally more intelligent, the organization can think of shifting to a nurturing task and Participatory style of leadership to be more effective. Thus a participative approach to management must follow a specific continuum to be effective. At the beginning of any new approach, without assuring the minimum motivation and maturity level of people, one cannot expect dramatic success through the participative approach. Therefore, the style of leadership must match with the organizational culture and motivational level of the people (Sinha, 1980, 1984).

As the situation suggests, one key decision that Hind Lamps Managers must take about each major environmental problem they face is whether to lead or lag behind their competitors on environmental issues. In some cases, they may be interested to pursue an environmental strategy in which it gets well in front of regulations or public opinion and in other cases they may be served by moving in lock step with industry or by reacting only in response to external pressure. If Hind Lamps lag, they may find themselves on the receiving end of unfavourable regulations, but if they take initiatives and lead, their action could increase their production cost and leave the company vulnerable to its competitors.

Managers at Hind Lamps may find their options to be broken down into those that help them shape events like forming partnership with stakeholders, and those that help them develop an optimal response to events, like re-allocation of resources and redesigning production processes. To prepare a strategy, Managers must decide where they want to be on the spectrum from strict compliance to environmental leadership for new heights of business of ethics along with production objective. In this regard leaders play a very important role for inculcation of right values. Current environmental issues span national, cultural, gender based, educational, social and religious boundaries. Effective leadership requires knowing how to navigate the path that will enable one to achieve vision and desired outcomes. Many people have built organizations that wither when the foundation leaders leave after accomplishing the mission. But leaders are expected to build a system, a system of values, culture and philosophy. This system was created by the veteran leaders of Bajaj group of India, which is being percolated for generations of leadership to follow. The ethics and philanthropy in their soul is still encouraging the Bajaj corporate to transform their organizational units with a social and environmental mission. Transformational leaders operate from a personal value system that transcends their agendas

and loyalties. In view of that, a more positive approach in practicing transformational leadership at different levels may be required which can elevate the maturity level of the followers and convince them to strive for higher levels of ethical standards for social and environmental activities of their organization.

Conclusion

The managerial values for green initiatives create a picture that Hind Lamps Ltd. is contributing towards CSR activities in a positive way. The organization believed that its first responsibility is to serve society by delivering them environmentally safe products. It was observed that the top management of Hind Lamps Ltd. has shown a positive attitude for development of environment friendly products and systems as a long term strategic plan to build a better image in the market place. This study also indicates a positive change in the managerial behaviour of Hind Lamps as they accepted that there is a need to upgrade their percent machinery and products to fulfill the aspiration of potential consumers in future. Leaders like, CMD of Bajaj Electrical Limited are projecting these CSR values that underline their organization's very mission and purpose. A green future is now being created by visionaries of Bajaj Hind Lamps with competitive spirit in their believes and social activism in their hearts. The products they wish to sell are not just consumables sold at a profit but are reflections of their corporate commitments to environmental concern and social responsibility. Leaders of Bajaj group are sensitive enough to needs and problems of their employees within their constraints but need to provide more guidance and support to employees to raise their level in transformational leadership continuum. This would help raise the motivational level of the workforce of Bajaj group for societal commitments and organizational growth and development.

* Acknowledgment: Paper is an outcome of Research Project "Green Initiatives and Corporate Practices: A study of Bajaj Hind Lamps, Shikohabad, U.P." funded by IIFM, Bhopal. Authors acknowledge the funding support of IIFM and the contributions of Dr. Parag Dubey, Assistant Professor, at IIFM and the co investigator of the project.

* Earlier version of this paper was presented in the annual conference of National Academy of Psychology (NAOP) at IIT, Guwahati in December 2008.

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