

SUSTAINABILITY FOCUSED INNOVATIVE VISIONARY LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

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Abstract *In the rapidly changing times, we face several challenges. An idea can really change one's life, provided the implementation of strategy with innovation and vision is in the right place. Standing out from the pack depends on how well a leader communicates, leads and motivates the people around him. These life skills are critical success factors for developing strong business relationships and career advancement. The changing world of work has brought about the birth of a market that instantly recognizes the importance and nurtures the top performers to become visionary leaders. A visionary leader is effective in manifesting his or her vision because s/he creates specific, achievable goals, initiates actions and enlists the participation of all the employees. 'Visionary Leaders' require core values, clear vision, empowering relationships, and innovative action. Today, as we enter the new millennium, thousands of new visionary leaders are emerging in all fields of human endeavor around the world, leading a revolution energized by power of the soul. The article is a strategic primer on why and how businesses succeed and sustain even in turbulent times through various traits of effective visionary leaders.*

Keywords *Vision, Leader, Visionary Leadership, Sustainability, Traits, Sustainable Development*

“Sustainable development, democracy and peace are indivisible as an idea whose time has come”.

-Wangari Maathai

In 21st century, a pro-active involvement of individuals is required to lead the organizations. An enterprise needs good, if not the best visionary leaders to stay and sustain in the competition. Companies must carefully harness the leadership strategies and build an organizational culture that fosters growth of talented workforce. Careers paths are been taking unexpected sharp turn which prompts to new and innovative leadership styles, lifestyle and entrepreneurial attitudes. The speed at which dramatic organizational changes are taking place, calls for a paradigm shift in the approach to visionary leadership in the organization. These trends affecting work roles are driving the organizations to adopt innovative styles of management with a new perspective towards leadership.

Leadership is a critical management tool for sustenance of any economy. The various types of leadership styles can be visualized from ages, through our epics, and people like Kautilya, Swami Vivekananda, Mother Teresa to Anna Hazare. For instance, Arthashastra, the treatise on economic administration was written by Kautilya in the 4th century BC. In all probability, this treatise is the first ever book written on Practice of Management through effective leadership and vision. It is essentially on the art of governance. It is astonishing to observe that the concepts of visionary leadership have been explicitly explained by Kautilya in

his work. The importance of vision, mission and motivation was captured when he advised his Swamy to rule through *Prabhu Shakti (vision)*, *Mantra Shakti (mission)* and *Utsah Sahkti (motivation)* which provokes the thought of visionary leadership and qualities required for the same.

A great leader shows ability to make decision and act boldly in the face of setbacks and adversity. Leaders are sensitive to and are aware of the needs, feelings and motivation of those they lead. Visionary leaders develop ability to predict and anticipate the future. These qualities will trigger sustainability in every aspect.

A visionary leader is effective in manifesting his or her vision because s/he creates specific, achievable goals, initiates actions and enlists the participation of all the people. There are as many leadership styles as there are leaders. The various studies of business people and psychologists have developed useful and simple ways to describe some styles of leadership, which can help aspiring visionary leaders to understand which styles they should use or adopt as per the environment.

The objective of this paper is to show that the innovative style of visionary leadership can bring in sustainability in the era of cut throat competition. This paper describes vision speaks about the different leadership styles, the traits of an effective visionary leaders and the different aspects of those traits that help in bringing in the sustainable development.

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VISION AND LEADERSHIP

Vision is widely regarded as important in leadership, strategy implementation, and change (Collins and Porras, 1994; Doz and Prahalad, 1987). Vision is frequently confused with, or even deliberately combined with, terms like mission, goals, strategy, values and organizational philosophy (Levin, 2000). Despite the often-diverging terms used for vision, many definitions share common characteristics, including:

- Vision is about a desirable future (Collins and Lazier, 1992)
- Vision is essential for leadership (Bennis, 1990). It is a process of inducing others to act toward a common goal.
- Vision is basis for business strategy and planning (Hay and Williamson, 1997).
- Vision creates a sense of direction for organizational members (Levin, 2000; Lipton, 1996).

On the other hand, there are as many leadership styles as there are leaders. The various studies of business people and psychologists have developed useful and simple ways to describe some styles of leadership and the traits which make them effective.

The modern world is fast changing. It requires leaders with a key component of 'vision' for future added to their characteristics. As we talk about vision being a vital character for a leader and also being team player, shared vision inevitably leads to teamwork. Riechmann (1992) stresses the importance of role models. Excellent leaders in high-involvement and high-impact teams model for others by setting a personal example in meeting high standards, and invest considerable energy to champion the common goals of the organization. In effective teams, leaders empower others and foster collaborative efforts. Leadership traits apply to more effectively in teams rather than individuals (Richard and Shelor, 2002), but the literature seems to be silent on its application to leadership teams. Since a collective of leaders increases the complexity of the leadership process compared

to a single leader, the role of traits, as evidenced in research by Carpenter (2002), becomes more important with teams than with individuals. Collective leadership is seen more widely in today's world.

Trait theory and behavioral theory were popular in 1940s and many theories like situational approach, transformational and transactional approach become popular and are in practice later on. The use of trait and behavioral theories depended on many variables and no consistency could be achieved. The basic tenet of these theories, is that leadership is strongly influenced by the situation from which a leader emerges or transforms and which evolves into visionary leadership.

Figure 1 describes the common characteristics of leadership. Now, what we add to this table is visionary skill to match the current changes in the characteristics and expectations from a leader today.

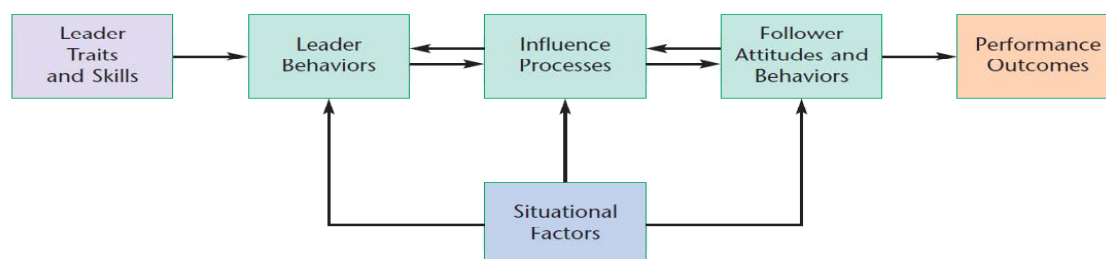
Leadership styles vary according to organizational structure, people, environment, and task. Leaders promote loyalty among subordinates by keeping an open mind, being self-aware, and being inquisitive. The leadership style an individual uses is often a reflection of the individual's attitudes about workers, their competence, and how to get work done. Different situations will require different styles of leadership in order to maximize the productivity and well-being of subordinates.

Transformational leadership

Transformational leadership can be seen when leaders and followers make each other to advance to a higher level of moral and motivation (Burns, 2003). Through the strength of their vision and personality, transformational leaders are able to inspire followers to change expectations, perceptions and motivations to work towards common goals. There are various components of this leadership,

- Intellectual stimulation:* This encourages creativity and to explore new ways of doing things by enhancing intellectual skills.

Figure 1 Characteristics of a Leader



Source: Yukl, 2006

- ii. *Individualized consideration*: This involves offering support and encouragement to every follower. This persuades followers to feel free to share ideas and leaders can offer direct recognition for individual contributions.
- iii. *Inspirational motivation*: Through this the leaders become an epitome to the followers and help them experience the same passion and motivation to fulfill their goals.
- iv. *Idealized influence*: This provokes the followers to trust and respect the leaders and later it helps them to internalize the leaders' ideals and ideologies.

Transactional Leadership

The relation between two people in an organization is based on the level of exchange that transpires. Exchange need not be money or material, it may be anything. The exchange and bonding between two people are directly proportional. In the organizations' managers announcing rewards for positive outcomes is known as 'Transactional Leadership'. The relation is all about requirements, conditions and reinforcements. Leaders who demonstrate this kind of relationship are 'transactional leaders'. These leaders are interested in looking out for oneself, having exchange benefits with their subordinates and clarify a sense of duty with rewards and punishments to reach goals (Rosner, 1990).

This style of leadership starts with the idea that every member in team should agree to obey their leader's vision and follow. Leaders, at their discretionary have right to "punish" team members if they does not adhere to the rules framed by leaders. This is ideally type of management, not a leadership type as it focuses on short term tasks. However, a visionary leader has to focus on the most minute to acute issues as well, which makes him a perfect role model for the followers, also it develops mutual trust.

Baggett (2007) mentioned that 'leader's enthusiasm is often transferred onto the team and he or she needs to be supported by "detail people." This is the reason as to why organizations need both transactional and transformational leadership. The transactional leaders (or managers) ensure that routine work is done reliably, while the transformational leaders look after initiatives or ideas that add new value' which justifies our discussion.

Visionary Leadership

Visionary leadership is an imperative for shaping a group of followers into teams and gradually develops them as high performance work groups that serve as competitive advantage to business. Visionary leaders are successful at manifesting their vision based leadership on an inspirational,

positive picture of the future, as well as a clear sense of the path to reach the goals. Great leaders give real thought to the values, ideas and activities that they are most passionate about and pursue. They achieve them only by setting realistic, demanding goals and then going after them relentlessly, with the help of other talented men and women who are equally committed and engaged. The effective visionary leadership has to customize and concentrate on situational basis and necessity of change. The effective leadership can be seen only if it sustains till it achieves goals set.

The visionary leaders are noted for their situational and transformational attitude and approach which compels followers to transform the old mental maps to create the culture of innovation. The visionary leader must create his or her concept of what the organization can accomplish. They create innovative strategies for actualizing their vision.

EFFECTIVE VISIONARY LEADERSHIP

"Management works in the system. Leadership works on the system" – Stephen R Covey

An effective visionary leader is a blend of traits and results. Visionary leadership is an imperative for shaping a group of followers into teams and gradually develops them as high performance work groups that serve as competitive advantage to business. The future leadership is a game changing and future focused to come together and paint innovative and exemplary methods of facing these challenges, says Ravindran, CEO, SHRM India (Times of India, 15th Feb 2012). Visionary leadership continues to grow in rapidly changing contexts in which leaders are expected to work, and put more focus on traits of leadership, the role of balanced approach for sustaining relations, styles of thinking and adaptability, and leading diverse and geographically dispersed employees. The effective visionary leadership has to customize and concentrate on the type of business, necessity of change, and has to put more effort on developing organization culture. The effective leadership can be seen only if it sustains till it achieves goals set. In this regards, visionary leaders should create learning opportunities for employees to learn new skills. Leaders must develop high tolerance levels towards the employees, which will allow them to take risks, make mistakes and learn.

The visionary leadership focuses on change. The transforming leadership approach leads to change. The new changed system will ultimately have to stand on its own feet, but every new system needs support and nurture. Leaders are required to lead from the front and to develop effective strategies to recruit, retain, and develop effective successors. Visionary leader has to act as change agent for the employees. They should become a catalyst for employees to change. Every leader is expected to be solution oriented rather than problem specific.

TRAITS OF EFFECTIVE VISIONARY LEADERS

One of the most crucial elements of leadership is the content and communication of the vision. A good vision must not only inspire and engage followers but it must also make the followers believe that it achievable by them collectively. Most inspiring visions have a common theme of dealing with change by making people work together towards ideal goal (Sashkin, 1988). An effective visionary leader should have a vision with good implementation strategy that inspires the followers to engage enthusiastically. To understand the crucial difference between a vision with good intentions, and a vision good implementation, we are here analyzing the traits of visionary leaders that inspire the followers to enthusiastically engage themselves in pursuit of its implementation.

Self-Significance

A primary assumption in visionary leadership is self-significance. Self-significance manifests itself in such aspects as self-awareness, self-confidence, and self-interest. These are the fundamental basis from which leadership grows. Leadership is about having the right confidence to make decisions. If someone refrains to make and commit to decisions, all of the communication and empowerment won't make a makeable difference. Not only does confidence allow leaders to make the tough decisions that people expect from a strong leader but it is also a reassurance to the employees. It allows leader to handle meetings with authority, to accept sincerity and have an open communication. Greater they perceive his/her force of will, the more faith they will have in the leader and his/her vision. As a leader, consider the delivery of company speech, the delivery might for sure

Figure 2 Traits of Effective Visionary Leader



Source: Model developed by authors

inspire the employees/followers if done with intensity and depth; else it can have adverse effect done otherwise. Hence the visionary leader should have self-significance in every facet of approach. In short he is an 'ideal' person.

Action Oriented

The second assumption on the visionary leaders is, the leader should be a "man of few words, and more of work". They believe in proper alignment and execution of organization's strategies combined with effective change management schedules which will result in the success. Leaders visualize the future and develop sound plans and strategies and make scheduled and incremental changes in the organizations. Aligning Man, Method and Management (3M method) behind the vision ensures a sustainable and meaningful approach towards achieving the goals. At an individual level, leaders need to create a 'safe' environment that enables followers to fulfill their optimum potential and give their best. Visionary leader takes action, produces results, leads from the front, sets an example and do what is asked of others.

Value Creator

Third assumption of visionary leadership is, the leaders are Value-driven, and should have passion for key issues, focuses on vital themes, and become an employee champion. This trait of leadership concentrates on a visionary leader who understands the external business realities like updated technology, economics, globalization, demographics etc. The leader has to serve the internal and external stake holders like customers, and employees, he has to craft best practices for man, management, and different methods as discussed. Lastly Leader has to ensure that professionalism has been maintained across the line. The ideological orientation serves the function of valuing various phenomenon in the more conscious decision making part of a person's adaptation to the context. There is a value aspect and emotional aspect of attitudes to various objects or people and in general to the environment in addition to the ongoing activities, valuation here may refer to past and future activities, projects or policies. This trait makes visionary leader to think and plan each step carefully by understand and read between the lines about an organization.

Risk Takers

Risk Taking is critical element of visionary leaders, and it is essential for achieving goals/ success. Risks are necessary to make wheel move, and there will be a potential risk on behalf of personal or followers or organizations. It can be coined as a "Gut feel" of a leader that provokes him to take

risks. A leader is a risk taker and an innovator. He should recognize good ideas, actively support them, and encourage action. One may call them early adapters of innovation. Olle Bovin says "Leaders are pioneers - people who are willing to step out into the unknown." Leaders are learners and must be able to learn from their mistakes as well as their successes. So must they encourage their group members and support them through their mistakes. Without mistakes, there is no learning or growth.

All changes and innovations involve risk and challenges. Innovation and vision takes place when new ways of doing things and new ideas are generated and the risk is handled properly. It enables the change and opens opportunities that were impossible to see before the change occurred. Mr. Ajay Bindroo CEO, Super max Pvt Ltd is of the opinion that employees have to be given ample opportunities to take risks and execute innovative and fresh ideas, which often drive business results. The opportunity to take risk empowers them to do things differently and challenges their parameters. (Times of India, 15th Feb 2012).

Innovators

In the emerging era, innovation is the key success; an effective leader needs to stimulate innovation round the clock. The firms might have to re-invent in terms of strategies, objectives and vision continuously. Innovation and leadership are closely related. Visionary Leadership always has keen focus on bringing about a better future. In this sense, leaders are necessarily innovators and visionary. The visionary leaders intentionally 'bring into existence' something new that can be sustained and repeated and which has some value or utility. The innovation is always related to some practical 'in-the-world' value. It is about making new methodologies, or processes, or managing people bringing forth something 'new' which allows human beings to accomplish something they were not able to do so previously. The visionary leader needs to unlock the power of leadership at all levels of the organization and facilitate everyone to think strategically with long term vision. The leader must orient every person of his firm to shed the restrictive or parochial mindset and to think globally.

Delegators

This trait of leadership is often misunderstood, rather overlooked, as the perceptions of the leaders believe that their personal involvement in every single detail will get the things right. The successful delegation of authority as a leadership style takes time and energy, but it's worth the time and energy to help employee involve and employee empowerment succeed as a leadership style. The ability to

wisely and effectively delegate is a quality far more smooth than others, and yet one of the most crucial to a leader's success. A visionary leader is an executive, a man who manages time, resources and people and who hone the people skills and plan for future requirements. The focus may be lost for a leader if, they concentrate on small details, without delegation rather leader uses valuable time to prioritize the important and urgent issues. This in turn leads to greater success. One more advantage of delegation is that it increases the morale, and boosts the confidence of the employees. The level of trust increases. "There are those who seem to think a proof of executive ability is to be fussing around all the while. Not so. The real leader flutters not. He knows how to delegate work. He is the one who directs and, therefore seems least busy of all." (Brett and Kate, 2010)

Well Balanced

Visionary leaders are well balanced in their approach. They should be clear with their vision, along with ability to empower relationship, and innovative action. It freezes down to: a visionary leader requires to be balanced in emotional, mental, and physical attributes along with integrity and strong core values. Any absence of the above attributes will make the very purpose of visionary leaders.

Entrepreneurial Spirit

Last but not the least trait expected out of the visionary leadership is entrepreneurial spirit. Leaders should have a clear understanding on organization goals, and operations in a fast changing market place. Along with this, visionary leader should build trust and confidence of employees and communicate effectively. If employees are unclear about the vision of leader and in-turn organization, they will be unable to focus all of their efforts on achieving the company goals. By reinforcing the goals through effective communication, it builds trust in the employees and it will become as a habit over a period of time and the performance go higher even in the absence of supervision. Entrepreneurial Leaders discover emerging business opportunities and empower employees to act on the vision. They execute through inspiration and develop implementation capacity through interpersonal relationships (Kotelnikov, 2001).

FOCUS TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability is the capacity of a system to engage in the complexities of continuous improvement consistent with deep values of human purpose (Fullan, 2005). Sustainability does not simply mean whether something can last. It addresses how particular initiatives can be developed without compromising the development of others in the surrounding

environment, now and in the future (Hargreaves & Fink 2000). Sustainable leadership matters, spreads and lasts. It is a shared responsibility that does not unduly deplete human or financial resources, and that cares for and avoids exerting damage on the surrounding educational and community environment (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003). Imposed, short-term targets (or adequate yearly progress) transgress every principle of sustainable leadership and learning (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006).

Seven aspects of the traits discussed about visionary leadership, which leads to a sustainable future:

- i. Depth: It matters
 - Vision matters. It preserves, protects, and promotes deep and broad learning for all in relationships of care for others.
- ii. Endurance: It lasts
 - Vision lasts. It preserves and advances the most valuable aspects of learning and life over time, year upon year, from one leader to the next.
- iii. Breadth: It spreads
 - Vision spreads. It sustains as well as depends on the leadership of others
- iv. Justice: It does not harm the surrounding environment
 - Vision does no harm to and actively improves the surrounding environment by finding ways to share knowledge and resources with neighboring schools and the local communities.
- v. Diversity: It promotes diversity & cohesion
 - Vision promotes cohesive diversity and avoids aligned standardization of policy, curriculum, assessment, and staff development and training in teaching and learning. It fosters and learns from diversity and creates cohesion and networking among its richly varying components.
- vi. Resourcefulness: It conserves expenditure
 - Vision develops and does not deplete material and human resources. It renews people's energy. Visionary leadership is prudent and resourceful leadership that wastes neither its money nor its people.
- vii. Conservation: It honours the past in creating the future
 - Vision respects and builds on the past in its quest to create a better future.

The way an organization manages its human resources is increasingly seen as a source of sustainable competitive advantage (SCA), (Huselid, Jackson, & Schuler, 1997; Becker & Gerhart. 1996; Welbourne & Cyr, 1999). The routines, processes, and cultural norms that are part of an HR system can become a valuable resource by virtue of their effect on employee behavior and attitudes. While some HR activities are largely routine and administrative in nature,

others are increasingly seen as a source of sustainable competitive advantage.

The management of today's organizations spends a lot of its time apparently trying to sustain in the business of cut throat competition (Hollingworth, 2009). Leaders need a personal route towards the sustainability, (Jones, et al, 2008). The most common trait among successful leaders is the ability to develop and communicate a vibrant and compelling vision of the future (Manga, 2004). Leaders who can create a fundamental transformation in the learning cultures of the organizations and professions make the real difference. Visionary leaders need not be heroic leaders; rather they need the ability to engage the organization in creating a shared vision for sustainable development. Visionary Leaders create and sustain an intention in the approach, design and development of the enterprise in order to work for continuous improvement.

In order to bring the direction of the organization's development in line with sustainability, leaders need a scientific understanding of the conditions that define sustainability (Nattrass, 2002). Thus, a major role of leadership is to be the architects and caretakers of the corporate culture. In mobilizing an organization around sustainability initiatives, the leadership has to be aware of how the culture works in relation to other key structural components and processes in the organization. Leaders in the design of organizational cultures will face challenges along the way. First of all is the challenge to be authentic in declarations of values and the kind of culture that they espoused. In addition, a continuous challenge is in being perceived as "walking the talk" of the values and vision in everyday practice. Implementing sustainable leadership practices will have an effect on profits and 'bottom line'. The great challenge of the twenty-first century will be to change the value system underlying the global economy, so as to make it compatible with the demands of human dignity and ecological sustainability (Capra, 2002).

CONCLUSION

Visionary leadership is arguably the key factor in determining and enhancing the capabilities of synthesizing future changes in demographics, human needs, along with developing a very clear and specific vision for the organization system. Leaders play a critical role as change agents in the transformation process which is quintessential. Successful change efforts necessitate the leader to articulate a compelling vision that appeals to both internal and external stakeholders; communicate a sense of urgency, led by example, show strong personal commitment, and enable stakeholders to contribute to their full potential. Successful change management, therefore, requires the organization to overcome several leadership challenges, and to develop a

focused and proactive strategy to address change.

The leadership has to encourage innovation at all levels, and also has to promote it. All the organizations should spend some valuable time to implement this style of leadership and imbibe it in the process. This will bring forth more ideas, more possibilities and enable more people amongst the followers to start having practice and interest in the decisions, risks and change. That personal interest and trust that a leader generates among any followers is the key.

Visionary leadership is arguably the key factor in determining and enhancing the capabilities of synthesizing future changes in demographics, human needs along with very clear vision for the system. In "Leaders", Bennis and Nanus (1985) has rightly mentioned, "Leaders articulate and define what has previously remained implicit or unsaid; then they invent images, metaphors, and models that provide a focus for new attention". Visionary leaders bring in sustainable change through the willingness to do the inner work of self-knowledge and self-development. They commit to being conscious co-creators of social and planetary transformation and inspire and enroll others as partners in their vision for the world. Through daily practice, they become more authentic, sincere, transparent and trustworthy. Their goals, plans and directives create a field of possibility that is real, grounded, relevant and achievable for greater sustainability.

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