A unique leadership solution for project managers

Business, Leadership

There is a plethora of literature dedicated to underpin the differences between leaders and managers, but what is missing there is an equal quest for finding solutions for situations where project managers need to " lead" the project proceedings in spite of not being empowered to do so. Caught between the demand of the situation and the limitation imposed on them, they often feel stifled and out of wits about what to do and how to do.

Therefore, this study learns about the nuances of such situation through acase studyand then reviews appropriate literature to gather the elements of solution and analyse their efficacy to answer the study questions and hypothesis, before arriving at final conclusion and recommending a comprehensiveleadershipsolution for the project managers. 2. 0. Glossary EI: Emotional Intelligence, which is a described set of elements that help humans to maintain control over all actions by providing the right set of approach to deal with situations.

Servant Leadership: A style of leadership based on transformational leadership traits. XYZ Media: A media house that publishes newspaper CD: Creative Division of XYZ Media PD: Printing Division of XYZ Media 3. 0. Background: Case Study John is a project manager of XYZ Media where he is in charge of the Printing Division (PD). The XYZ media has two divisions like PD and CD (Creative Division), where PD publishes the content produced by CD. Thecommunicationbetween CD and PD is not good mostly due to the reason that employees under CD get more parks and rewards than the employees under PD.

This often disrupts the production process and resultantly John draws flak from the leadership of XYZ Media. To find a solution to this problem, John

tries to discuss the issue with Sam, the project manager of CD, but Sam too is aware of the reason behind the problem and hence avoids any discussion under one or the other pretext. Now John is perturbed with the decreased state of production and increased state of hostility between two divisions, as he is not empowered to " suggest" the management to clear the disparity in perks and reward system between two divisions.

John is caught between the desire to " lead" towards finding the solution and the rule that asks him to " manage" the production. However, at the end of the day, John's performance would be evaluated by the state of production. Under such a situation, what could be the best possible leadership solution for John, who knows what he needs to do, but is not clear about how to do that towards solving the problem. The above situation brings in the research questions of this study: 1. Is it possible for the John to utilize leadership skills even under limited scope?

2. Will it be ethical for John to practice leadership skills even in the presence of official leadership? 3. Will such practice be beneficial for John as well as the XYZ Media? The above set of questions generate the following secondary hypotheses: 1. It is very much possible for John to utilize leadership skills even when they are bound by limitations. 2. Such practice will not only be ethical but also beneficial for John and XYZ Media. The above hypotheses produce the final hypotheses of this study:

" Cultivation and application of emotional intelligence in the mould of servant leadership style could be the leadership solutions for project managers working with limited power of decision-making". 3. 1. Perceived Difference between Leaders and Managers The argument that leaders and managers

are distinctly different species is not anything new, but its significance has risen considerably due to the changing jobculture, where multitasking is becoming the order of the day and thus neither the leaders nor the managers can be restricted within any charter of jobs.

However, the researchers clearly claim that there is a gross difference between management and leadership, since managing is all about successfully meeting the responsibilities and leadership is about directing the course of action (Bennis, 1989). Bennis (1989) even presented a short list of differences between leaders and managers in his book On Becoming a Leader, which goes like below: • The manager administers; the leader innovates. • The manager is a copy; the leader is an original. • The manager maintains; the leader develops. • The manager focuses on systems and structure; the leader focuses on people.

• The manager relies on control; the leader inspires trust. • The manager accepts reality; the leader investigates it. • The manager has a short-range view; the leader has a long-range perspective. • The manager asks how and when; the leader asks what and why. • The manager has his or her eye always on the bottom line; the leader has his or her eye on the horizon. • The manager imitates; the leader originates. • The manager accepts the status quo; the leader challenges it. • The manager is the classic good soldier; the leader is his or her own person.

• The manager does things right; the leader does the right thing. The above list could be annoying for both the working and aspiring managers, since the above list wants to establish the fact that leadership is the be-all and end-all in the organizations, where managers are just hubs of functioning. Perhaps

Bennis chose to ignore the fact that there is a plethora of instances where managers have risen to the rank of great leaders (Baum) and from that perspective it can also be said that managerial zone is the breeding ground of corporate leaders.

Some significant points too are missing from the list, such as leaders enjoy freedom of decision-making or managers have no choice but to imitate. However, Kotter (1999) has taken a more realistic path while explaining the differences between leaders and managers in his book John P. Kotter on What Leaders Really Do, where he admits that leadership and management are two distinctive and complementary systems of action and both are necessary to do well in a businessenvironmentthat is volatile and increasingly complex in nature.

Kotter'sobservationcan add to thefoodfor thought, as he opines that management is about coping with complexity and leadership is about coping with change. This clearly points at the proposition that leaders should also have a clear idea about the complexity of management to become a successful change agent. On the other hand, Zaleznik (1977) expressed his surprise at the rate with which chief executives feel threatened after expressing an idea, where the issue of authority becomes important over the potential of the idea. This shows how managers suffer in the event of overstepping the territory earmarked for them.

This state of affairs generates the impression that the position of leadership is a special zone for special people and managers are destined to be labelled as " imitator" forever. This automatically evokes the question like " are leaders born or made? " The notion of considering the leadership qualities as

a package of inherent " traits" reigned for a great deal of time, before other theories came up and provided more clues about the mechanism of leadership, besides underpinning several possible styles of it. Does that mean people who don't show the sign of possessing such qualities have no chance to lead?

Aren't such qualities be learned and practiced? Yes, they can be learned and leaders can be made too, assure the researchers like Covey (1992) or Greenleaf (1977). Even the propagator of Emotional Intelligence (EI), Goleman (1995) too asserts that the elements of emotional intelligence can be learned and mastered through conscious practice, while pointing at their clear association with leadership qualities. However, that needs to be substantiated by literature review in order to find the leadership solution for the project managers like John with limited powers. 4. 0. Literature Review

The bare essentials of leadership need to be reviewed first, because that could be a pointer to the job similarity between the leaders and managers. Researchers consider three elements as the bare minimum for the leaders. 1. Effective Communication: Leaders must be able to create and maintain a smooth flow of communication with all the followers and associated and in the process should be able to convey their messages clearly and, finally, should be able to garner the desired feedback from them. From this perspective, " leadership is the art of influencing and directing people in such a way that will win their obedience" (Leadership, 2008).

2. Vision: This refers to the ability of gauging the incoming situation by analysing the present situation, where leaders should be able to look both inside the box and out-of-the box to see both the small and the big picture

and exploiting them towards achieving the desired outcome (Greenleaf, 1977). 3. Application: As Covey (1992) would put it, leaders should be able to identify and prioritize the " what" and " where" factors of the chosen course of action, in order to control it and to make necessary changes towards achieving the goal.

The above parameters easily make their way in the case of a project manager like John too, since he too needs to communicate and needs to apply vision and application towards running his publishing projects, no matter how much shackled he is with limited power. And he has reasons to be inspired too, as Maxwell clearly stated in his book, 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership that leadership is a " set of principles, which can be learned and applied" (Das, 2006). While addressing the needs of aspiring project managers, many suggest about acquiring leadership, communication and negotiation skills (Olivia, 2008).

Some choose to break down the elements to create a list (Ponce, 2009) like below: • Execution • Communication • Leadership • Experience • Influencer •MotivationTherefore, it can be seen that there is a lot more common between the bare essentials for leaders and managers, where the ability to effectively communicate stands out as the most critical for both the groups. This state of affairs thus automatically generates the question: Isn't the art of communication learnable?

Before one feels comfortable with the thought that managers too can rise in ranks by learning the art of communication, there are other views that can again push back the role of managers into a tight compartment, like when Garner (2009) refers to the functions of left brain and right brain while

distinguishing the leadership from managers, where he argues that managers mostly use left brain, which is governed by logic and the leaders use right brain, which is a seat of creativity, vision, intuition and imagination.

This again creates the impression that managers are destined to follow the path created for them by the leaders, since they are driven by the left brain. To make things further complicated, Ambler (2008), airs his opinion that management can be taught but leadership has to be earned, since leadership is a choice. However, his perspective looks wider when he brings in Napoleon, Churchill or Kennedy into discussion, who led public and not the stockholders or employees, and hence were free from the tensions of producing tangible results like the corporate leaders.

If viewed from spiritual dimension, the issue of leadership can again appear a little complex from the perspective of the managers. In such an endeavour, Houston and Sokolow (2006) presented eight key principles in their book The Spiritual Dimension of Leadership, which is a sort of roadmap for the aspiring leaders, and which at a glance might look away from the managers. 1. Intention: The leaders should be able to convey their real intention behind the course of a chosen action. 2.

Attention: They should always visualize the needs and benefits of their teams and should reflect a progressive attitude by being attentive to the programs undertaken. 3. Unique Gifts and Talents: Leaders should have some special skills and talents and should be able to exploit such talents to a high degree. 4. Gratitude: The leaders should have a balanced level of interpersonal emotion, greater acceptance, and deep sense of appreciation. 5. Unique life lessons: The leaders should have the ability to convert their

life-experiences as well as others as examples of problems or solutions regarding various situations.

6. Holistic Perspective: This refers to the ability to establish leadership intentions as pro-people. 7. Openness: Leaders should be frank and free to share and accommodate ideas towards finding solutions. 8. Trust: This should be the concrete bridge between leaders and followers (Houston and Sokolow, 2006). In any case, the above list clears a simple fact that effective communication happens to be most important trait of leaders as well as of managers. However, the question, " Is the above list truly away from the project managers?

" still remains alive and it propels this study to review the scientific framework that arrests the key drivers of the above traits, presented by Goleman (1995) under the title of Emotional Intelligence (EI). 4. 1. Emotional Intelligence and Leadership Goleman (1995) defines emotional intelligence as the capacity to recognize one's own feelings as well as others, to motivate one's self and to effectively manage emotions in all actions. In the process he underpins five components as the key drivers of EI, which contains subsets of elements in them, thereby presenting a list like below: 4.

1. 1. Component 1: Self-Awareness Self-awareness requires three abilities like emotional awareness, accurate self-assessment and self-confidence, which are intertwined, where emotional awareness would help to recognize personal emotions and their effects, accurate self-assessment would help to assess personal strengths and weaknesses, and self confidence would create a mental state of sureness about self-worth and capabilities. 4. 1. 2. Component 2: Self-regulation Goleman (1995) lists five requirements to

achieve self-regulation, like • Self-control: Ability to manage disruptive impulses;

• Trustworthiness: Maintaining standards of honesty and integrity; • Conscientiousness: Ability to takeresponsibilityfor personal performance; • Adaptability: Ability to be flexible in handling changes; • Innovation: Having a mind open to ideas. 4. 1. 3. Component 3: Motivation According to Goleman (1995), all humans need to acquire four abilities to enable their motivation switch, and they are • Achievement drive, which is an attitude to improve or to achieve a chosen standard of excellence; • Commitment, which is an ability to align individualgoalswith goals of the group or organization;

• Initiative, which is the ability to remain ready to act on opportunities; • Optimism, which is also an attitude of relentlessly pursuing goals despite obstacles and setbacks with a belief of positive outcome. 4. 1. 4. Component 4: Empathy Goleman (1995) sets the criteria of attaining a good state of empathy with the abilities like • Service orientation, which helps in anticipating, recognizing and meeting customers' needs; • Developing others, which is a knack of underpinning others' developmental needs and to work on them;

• Leveraging diversity, which is also a knack of seeking and nurturing opportunities through diverse people; • Political awareness: Insight to fathom the emotional status of a group and its possible relationship with power; • Understanding others: Insight to gauge others' inner needs, drivers and potentials. 4. 1. 5. Component 5: Social Skills Goleman (1995) presents six subsets of elements in this category, thereby clearly showing its

importance in effectively managing EI. • Influence: Ability to pursue effectively; • Communication: Ability to send clear messages;

• Leadership: Ability to guide and inspire groups and people; • Conflict management: Ability to effectively negotiate and resolve disagreements; • Building bonds: Ability to nurture instrumental relationships; • Collaboration and cooperation: Ability to work with others to realize shared goals; • Team capabilities: Creating group synergy in pursuing collective goals (Priest, 2005). Are they learnable? Yes, claims Goleman (1998) that the above set of components are indeed learnable, thereby clearly positioning them over and above the influence of IQ (Intelligence Quotient) or gender.

Therefore, two points are clear from the above review: that the researchers of both leadership and emotional intelligence agree on one plane that high level of leadership skills require a fine-tuned state of emotional intelligence and both are learnable. These two points thus also highlight the fact that project managers too can raise themselves by acquiring and practicing the elements of emotional intelligence and leadership. However, it is still to be seen whether • It is possible for the managers to utilize leadership skills even under limited scope;

• It will be ethical to practice leadership skills in the presence of official leadership; • Such practice will be beneficial for the managers and the company. 5. 0. Discussion An astonishing point-by-point similarity between the required elements of servant leadership and EI could provide the answers of the above queries. Servant leadership is the new avatar of transformational leadership, and according to its mentor Greenleaf (1977), servant leaders should be " servant" first and should be able to offer a 24/7

selfless service, besides clearly reflecting the intention of creating servant leaders out of all their followers.

Greenleaf presents a set of 11 traits that an aspiring servant leader should possess. 1. Calling: Servant leaders should possess an intrinsic desire to serve, and proving that through actions. 2. Listening: They should possess excellent listening skills and the ability to derive the essence of others' views. 3. Empathy: They should possess the ability to empathize. 4. Healing: They should be able to facilitate others to release their hidden pains and sorrow. 5.

Awareness: They should possess a knack of keeping track of the events around and to utilize them in their actions. 6. Persuasion: They should be able to strongly persuade their followers to get things done, instead of issuing orders. 7. Conceptualization: They should be able to read situations. 8. Foresight: They should be able to envision the future by exploiting logic and wisdom. 9. Stewardship: They should be spirited enough to create servant leaders out of the followers through imbibing all possible virtues of servant leadership in them.

10. Growth: They should be driven by an innate desire to bring out the best in their followers. 11. Building Community: They should be able to create a vibrant and homely atmosphere in the workplace. Are the above qualities learnable? Yes, confirms Greenleaf (1978), and thus the joint assertion of Goleman (1998) and Greenleaf makes it clear that the all the elements of leadership are learnable and applicable, and these elements eventually form a package of trait in a person, which gets automatically reflected.

This proposition clearly nullifies any absolute role of power in executing leadership qualities. Thus it also serves answers to the research questions raised in this study: 1. It is very much possible for John to utilize leadership skills even under limited scope, because it mostly involves various types of communication, driven by positive intention and with the help of a balanced emotional intelligence, all of which can be learned and utilized. 2.

It will be perfectly ethical for John to practice leadership skills even in the presence of official leadership, since he is not going to dictate or direct the leader on sensitive issues like implementing reward or perks parity between CD and PD, and instead, solely engaging himself on providing selfless service and inspiring the employees of PD (who work under him) to do the same. No official leader could get upset with such development in his/her company. 3. Such practice would be beneficial for John as well as XYZ Media.

John's adoption of servant leadership would surely enhance the performance of the employees of PD and that would automatically bring more benefits to the company and earn the confidence of its management. While the above answers substantiate the secondary hypotheses of this study, it also substantiates the final hypothesis that " Cultivation and application of emotional intelligence in the mould of servant leadership style could be the leadership solutions for project managers working with limited power of decision-making".

6. 0. Conclusion and Recommendation The review and discussion clearly show that John as a project manager can easily solve the issue of rift between PD and CD by knowing what he can do and how he can do, and for that matter he needs to fine-tune his EI and adopt the policy of servant

leadership that aims to serve selflessly, which in turn would set an example before his set of followers and soon they would mitigate the difference between them.

Such practice would also earn him the confidence of the leadership of XYZ Media and that would create the avenue for him to explain the problems arising out of perks disparity and to pursue the leader to take measures for implementing uniform reward system in XYZ Media. Thus the recommended steps of John could be like below: 1. Deciding to adopt servant leadership style and learning its elements 2. Deciding to fine-tune EI and learning its elements 3. Creating a new approach and attitude towards life and its ways 4. Applying the new pro-world view in the workplace 5.

Earning confidence of his subordinates, i. e. , the employees of PD 6. Motivating them to walk extra mile to " make up" any communication gap with CD, even if that is initiated by CD. 7. Restoring the production process with an inspired group of employees 8. Earning confidence of his leader 9. Explaining him about the crisis related to employee grievance and pursuing for its redressal 10. Earning the justice for PD employees 11. Bringing more prosperity for XYZ Media References Ambler, G (2008) The essential difference between leadership and management [online] available from http://www.

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