

Personal reflection on leadership



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In my brief professional career at IBM, I was part of a software development team where I was the youngest and least experienced person. I vividly remember that we had a team manager, highly experienced and professional but an ineffective leader. He would perform his tasks but did not go that extra mile. On the other hand, one of my teammates-very less experienced compared to the manager was a true leader, his duties did not ask him of any such commitments, but he always went the extra mile to help the team. He took me under his wing, motivated others in the team, and found innovative ways to solve the problem. He created an environment for high competence. He gave me so much confidence through his mentoring that I was performing at the highest level in no time. He created a synergy among the team that even the client praised. His actions reminded me of a saying from Jack Welch, former CEO of GE “ *Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others* ”. In my opinion, he was the true leader because he positioned the team at the centre of everything and took the responsibility of growing everyone.

This experience was one of the most influential leadership lessons I have come across till now. I am definite that I will have a clear picture in mind when I embark on future leadership roles.

Before pursuing my degree at Cass, I had the opportunity to look around my brother’s nascent IT firm which is primarily focused on web-based services and providing internet marketing solutions. Though a well rounded firm, I sensed a lack of strong innovation and new products. This might jeopardize the company in the long run. Ideally, after completing my graduate studies, I

am keen to join him and oversee the launch of new products, specifically, something along the lines of an automatic website builder. Furthermore, I am also keen to move the company's operations to different cities in the country where there is an opportunity of further growth. Taking charge of being the Product Head and institute such changes will require strong leadership skills.

Innovative Leadership : Launching a technologically advanced product in my organization will require me to adopt innovative leadership characteristics and work seamlessly across different sets of people having varied skills.

A good innovation leader is characterized by the ability to excel on two conflicting skills: creativity and discipline. Creativity involves skills such as idea generation and conceptualization while discipline involves the skill to implement and launch. A successful leader should measure the weight of both and take actions accordingly (Roland Bel, 2010). Furthermore, Innovative leaders are characterized by the following attributes (Jean-Philippe Deschamps, 2008)

1. Mix of Emotion and Realism
2. The Acceptance of Uncertainty, Risks, and Failures
3. High Degree of Passion
4. The Willingness to Proactively Search for External Technologies and Ideas
5. The Courage to Stop Projects, Not Just to Start Them
6. Talent for Attracting Innovators and Building and Steering Winning Teams

According to the author if an individual needs to bring an innovative change in the organization, he or she should possess at least some of the qualities listed above so that they are successful in bringing new products or services in the market.

Adaptive Leadership and change : Coming back to my tenure at IBM, what my colleague did differently with others in the team was that he forced us to think differently than other teams, bringing out the best in everyone. Each one of us was flexible in taking any type of task, further increasing the team's flexibility and productivity. According to Ronald A. Heifetz and Donald L. Laurie (1997, p132-141) “ Organizations today require adaptive leadership where challenges reside not in the executive suite but in the collective intelligence of employees at all levels”. This is where the success of many future ideas and entrepreneurial ventures will lie. I believe bringing in such a change will be one of my biggest challenge once I take the leadership role. Moreover, Adaptive change will require people to work in new ways, new relationships and take on new roles (Ronald A. Heifetz and Donald L. Laurie, 1997).

I intend to carry out such changes through the implementation of different project management techniques such as Lean and Agile (Schwaber, 2004). These techniques have been successful in recent years as they are quite adaptive in nature. These techniques forces employees to adapt quickly, learn new things constantly and learn from their mistakes. In Particular, these techniques are found to be useful in major tech companies and technologically driven products and hence will suit the company style. I have already had experience with such techniques at IBM and hence I will be able

to use my knowledge and skills to implement it within my future organization.

A lot of companies such as IBM or Google make 'transformation of employees' their top priority. They continuously invest in employee transformation and hence are able to meet the challenges of the changing environment. When I was working in IBM, I remember going through multiple trainings and workshops and these trainings did not just include technical trainings. Trainings such as communicating effectively, leading in teams, how to conduct meetings etc were equally important. According to Mike Pedler et al (1989, pp1-8) "an organization which facilitates the learning of all its members and continuously transform itself is a learning company". My future goal will also be to change my organization into a learning company through employee development programs and knowledge management systems (Pedler et al, 1989) as currently there is lack of such learning.

My skill model : The skills model provides a good overview of the skills which are necessary for an effective leader (M. D. Mumford et al, 2000). Appendix 1 lists my score in the three components which are described in the model

Technical skills : The high score in this regard can be attributed to my experience in software engineering and working on a complex product while I was working in IBM. My daily tasks almost always included problem-solving and analyzing product requirements in detail. According to Mumford et. al (2000, p. 24) "the experiences required in the course of leaders' careers influence their knowledge and skills to solve complex problems". My

background and experience will help me tackle problems during the development stage of the product.

Human Skill : Throughout my professional experience I worked with different sets of people with varied skills and experience. The entire project in IBM consisted of over a hundred people in India, and the product had multiple features that required expertise and collaboration from multiple teams. This meant communicating with various team leads and delegating responsibilities. Though I had quite a rich experience working in teams, there is still development which needs to be done in this regard. For e. g.: Participating in Toastmasters club at CASS will improve my communication and leadership skills. The experience of working with people from different cultures and backgrounds in CASS will further improve my people skills.

Conceptual skill : Since my duties at IBM were essentially technical I was largely uninvolved in the strategic decision-making process. My low score represents my lack of experience in this skill and needs the most development. Conceptual skills require working at an organization level and working with ideas (Peter G. Northouse, 2013). I plan to intern at a start-up company so that I am able to have experience at an organizational level. It will give me an overview of the challenges which are faced by new organizations when launching new products or services. Furthermore, not to forget the mentoring I will have from my brother who has been heading the company for a couple of years now. Learning from him will improve my understandings and will help me tackle issues at a higher level.

Additionally, I will have to broaden my knowledge base further and enhance my entrepreneurial skills to be successful in my future goals. Though Leadership theory and practice can greatly improve a person's leadership skills a competent business leader is one who possesses a clear vision for his or her company, is keenly aware of emerging trends and possesses the ability to capitalize on them.

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