

Encouraging leadership over management



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As defined by Stephen Covey, “ Effective leadership is putting first things first” while “ effective management is discipline, carrying it out”. This offers a brief glimpse on how leadership is different from management. We try to define a leader on the basis of a plethora of qualities such as; a leader should have the charisma, is a motivator, a good listener, a visionary and should be responsible. Leaders can motivate as well as direct people towards the goals and also find out ways for achieving them. Leaders also have the willingness to accept responsibility not only for their own decisions, but also for the decisions of their subordinates. Thus, an effective leader would refrain from passing the buck when it comes to taking the onus for the executed work.

Management or managers, on the other hand, have their focus set on the present and the immediate goals. While the managers have the blue print of each task in hand and do not encourage deviations from it, the leaders have a keen eye towards possible innovations or better ways of doing things which may be divergent from the norms already set. This is the reason why a leader can start something new while a manager may be roped in to execute the task in a particular way. To put it into a nutshell, although the concept of leaders might be confused with that of managers, and vice versa, in practice, leaders are the real game changers, whilst managers are ones who have the responsibility of executing the tasks as envisioned by a leader.

The world is changing rapidly and with it the ways and means of executing work is going through irreversible change. Earlier, the tasks would be well within the scope of each role, but now, each task is multiple layered and further embedded with many other tasks, demanding more from each role.

At this juncture, a manager is bogged down by the “ how” and “ when”. The pressure is deafening, and following a set procedure, while sticking to guidelines, may not always be the solution. It becomes imperative to innovate and find simpler and easier ways of doing things and excelling at them. The reason is quite simple. Competition is stiff, and unless you are doing outdoing your competitor, you may as well quit.

Thus, it’s time that we emphasise on the emergence of leaders from amongst us, who would not only have the required knowledge base, but also have the courage to envision a new path.

There are many theories that try to capture the essence of a leader. Some believe that a leader is born and that the leadership qualities cannot be acquired, while some believe that a leader acquires the qualities over the years with experience. There are few who believe that the birth of a leader is situational and they will arise when the occasion demands. The inspiring role of Sir Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of Britain in World War II, is an excellent example of a leader rising up to the occasion. He led Britain to victory and believed in the philosophy that “ success consists of going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm”. His words in his speeches motivated the British people and encouraged them during the troubled times and paved the way to victory.

A leader would always try and create a new path where none existed before. To accomplish that, sometimes, the leaders have to fight resistance and indifference. It is the common attitude to feel secure in mediocrity and predictability, not wanting to change or challenge the present. The thought

behind that is the level of comfort that predictability brings. A leader will twist the shackles to break that state of affairs and bring in new light, focusing on things hitherto untouched. Sir Richard Branson, an English businessman, investor and philanthropist is another example of a good business leader. He is the founder and owner of the Virgin group which consists of around 400 companies. He started quite young and showed signs of becoming an entrepreneur at the age of sixteen. With his distinctive leadership, using himself as the personification of the Virgin brand, he created the entire group from scratch and has reached great heights today. A leader like him can always see the bigger picture hiding in the clutter.

As per Kurt Lewin, leadership is of three types. This definition is based on the behaviour of the leaders -

- Autocratic leaders - Mussolini and Hitler are pretty good examples of autocratic leaders. For them, their own decisions were the most important and they definitely did not encourage the concept of discussion with the subordinates. Autocratic leaders assume that they are superior to others in every capacity and hence the decisions in day to day affairs as well as long term strategic decisions should be taken by them.
- Democratic leaders - These leaders involve their subordinates in decision making. The team has to agree on a decision and unless that happens, the final decision is not taken. This helps to bring new perspectives and insight into the matter as a lot of people are involved in the ideation.

- Laissez-faire leaders - These leaders have a completely non-interfering style of leadership and allow the subordinates to come up with solutions as well as take final decisions. Though on the surface it seems pretty righteous, in reality it sometimes makes the team seem rudderless as the leader leaves everything on the subordinates.

A manager is responsible for the proper and timely execution of a task in hand. For achieving this, they set rules and norms that they themselves have been following and implementing. The focus of a manager is always on the procedure, or in other words, a manager is always process oriented. They are responsible for getting things done in a preconceived way. For a manager it is very important that all the organisational level activities are carried out in a smooth way and they do not encourage waywardness. For this reason, it is important for a manager to implement control and authority over the affairs through which they get the job done.

A manager would always look up to a leader for solutions and answers. This is because the world of business is highly dynamic and the problems keep getting tougher, demanding innovative solutions. As the older methods become redundant, newer technologies and techniques take over. The situation demands immediate countermeasures that can sometimes spell survival. A leader is a visionary who focuses on matters that may encourage or hinder the growth of his business. A leader will ask questions and look for answers. They will be a risk taker. Such risks can sometimes be based on calculations and sometimes on pure intuition. But the success that may follow the risk would not only increase the stature of the leader; it would also make the organisation trust him more.

A manager's scope is limited to executing the task at hand through various subordinates, that too within a stipulated time period. Major decisions which can affect the very survival of the organisation with respect to policy formulation, strategy designing, etc., is most definitely taken by the leadership of the company. Thus, it is important that the managers try to look above the scope of the fixed norms and broaden their horizon for organisational level decision making.

A manager may have a limited scope or a myopic vision towards the emerging future but a real leader will not be swayed by immediate tasks. They will put organisational perspective first and think way ahead of their subordinates. Visionary business leaders like Lakshmi Niwas Mittal of Arcelor Mittal and Martin Sorrell of WPP have achieved great success owing to their belief in their vision and their hard work towards it.

For a technology-driven, fast-paced world, the scope for ambiguous decision making is nil. It's important that the organisation not only survives this race, but also gives strong competition to its peers. For this, it is important that managers are encouraged to become leaders and the paradigm of responsibility shifts on the shoulders of the managers as well. A manager's role should not be limited to executing the tasks but they should also think as a leader and get involved in the bigger picture. This will help in streamlining the process as well as create future leaders who can step in, if and when the organisation requires them. Thus, the organisation has the responsibility to create leaders instead of just managers who will not only envision the future course of the organisation but also help in achieving it.

Encouraging the emergence of leadership over management is the need of the hour if the organisation wants to achieve fairly impossible targets and goals that today's business world puts forth. Just managing the day to day affairs and carrying on the usual course of business is definitely not enough. Innovation and experimentation is important. Carving out a niche out of a crowd of hundreds is important and making a mark is important. A leader's role encompasses all these and more. Although there is an ongoing debate over the differentiation between a leader and a manager, what we need perhaps is an amalgamation of both where the leadership qualities are given their due importance over managerial qualities.

Leaders can create a difference with their charisma and inspiring words. The motivation which is piqued through effective leadership is the one through which even impossible targets can be easily achieved by the employees. An effective leader is thus someone who can definitely make a difference in the lives of his employees as well as the organisation as a whole.

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