Chairperson's Special Address

EPITOME OF 'LEADERSHIP' FOR LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS

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*I*N an increasingly chaotic world of today's national and international scenario if any organization intends to function 'efficiently' and 'effectively' and survive and grow over a period of time, then it has essentially to be a 'Learning Organisation'. What is or What the Learning Organization looks like, we find no single view point. Even so, the learning organization could be defined "*as one in which everyone is engaged in identifying and solving problems, enabling the organization to continuously experiment, change, and improve, and thus, increasing its capacity to grow, learn and achieve its purpose* (Richard, 2000)". Thus, in the learning organization all employees look for problems, as for example, understanding the special needs of a customer. Employees also solve problems, which means putting things together in unique ways to meet the customer's need. The essential focus of a learning organization is on 'effectiveness' in sharp contrast to 'efficiency' and at times even going beyond the 'effectiveness' via innovations. In fine and spacious words, it may be observed that the learning organization is an attitude or philosophy about what an organization can become (Daft, 2000).

Web of Interacting Elements in a Learning Organization

As may be seen in the Exhibit titled, "The Web of Interacting Elements in a Learning Organization", a Learning Organization assumes the presence of several interdependent and interrelated elements such as a specific kind of leadership, team based structure, empowered employees, open information, participative strategy and a strong and adaptive culture. In the context of these interdependent and interrelated elements it may be heightened that the role of leadership is of supreme importance as it is leadership which ensures the creation and maintenance of the presence of other elements of the Web. Hence, after briefly explaining the interactive elements other than leadership, we propose to analyze in this research article as to what kind of leadership style would be most appropriate for a Learning Organization ?

Elements Other Than The Leadership Style

Team Based Structure: In learning organization, the traditional structure, which separates managers and workers, is broken into as 'directed teams'. These teams comprise employees with different skills and who rotate jobs in order to produce ultimate product or service. These teams deal with the customers directly and affect changes and improvement as needed. Team Managers have the authority to take decisions about innovative ways of doing things, if they so desire. As a matter of fact, in learning organization, bosses are practically eliminated.

Empowered Employees: People (all employees) constitute a major source of strength of the management of a learning organization. In such an organization, employees are treated very well; they

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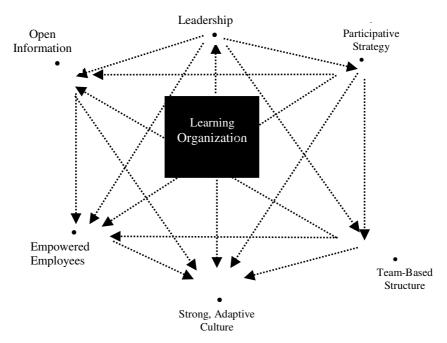** *Professor of Management & Director of Colleges G.G.S. Indraprastha University, Delhi, India.*

Exhibit: The Web of Interacting Elements in a Learning Organization (Daft, 2000)

are paid competitive salaries/wages ; working conditions are maintained at a high pedestal so that they can work comfortably; and, adequate opportunities are provided for their personal and professional development. Quite often we also find a provision for sharing the profits of the organization by the employees. Employees enjoy adequate authority/power to take decisions that may be required for performing effectively. This empowerment could be in the shape of directed workteams, quality circles, jobs enrichment and employee's participation in decision making and absence of close supervision.

Information Sharing/Communication: Generally a learning organization is flooded with information so as to enable the employees to solve problems and be aware of what is going on. In such organizations sharing of information is upto to the last degree. Truly speaking employees are allowed to have open access to all company databases, aside the facility to communicate with any other person in the organization.

Participative Strategy: Traditionally the formulation of strategy has been the responsibility of the Top Executives, meaning thereby that it is formulated at the top and imposed on the organization. In case of learning organization, strategy emerges bottom up as well as on top down. True that Top Executives shape a vision and direction that all employees support and believe in, but they do not control or direct strategy alone. Everyone contributes. In such organizations strategy may also emerge from partnerships with suppliers, customers and even competitors (Gerstein and Shaw, 1992).

Strong and Adaptive Culture: A strong and adaptive culture[1] (key values) is another element of a learning organization. The vital aspects of this adaptive culture are as thus: (a) Equality is one basic cultural value. Each employee is valued and the organization assumes the place for creating a web of relationships which allows people to be wholly engaged and develop to their full potential; (b)Activities which create status differences such as assigned parking spaces, executive dining room, etc. are repudiated; (c) Emphasis is found on treating everyone with the care and respect which, in its turn,

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1 Culture is the set of key values, beliefs, and understandings shared by members of the organization. It creates a sense of belongingness, community feelings, and caring that supports other elements, such as teamwork and participative strategy formulation.

creates a climate of safety and promotes experimentation, frequent mistakes, and failures that enable learning; and (d) The Status Quo, i.e. the on going way of doing things is questioned as the learning organization believes in risk taking improvement and change. This approach of functioning opens the gates to creativity and improvement. Thus, who are innovators/ creators of new ideas, work process, products, etc. are rewarded as to exemplify the improvements/ risk-taking with a view to promote learning. Even the failures are rewarded in a learning organization (McCune, 1997).

Leadership

We now turn to the element of leadership which is utmost superior. Indeed, it is this element which has been focused in this article. It need not be reiterated that it is through the leadership that an organization develops and continues to enjoy the status of a learning organization. In order to examine that what kind of leadership style is most subservient for a learning organization, we would like to divide the whole discussion in two parts: one, describe the roles which the leaders have to perform in a learning organization; two, briefly examine the various kinds of leadership styles in order to reach to the conclusion as to which one is ideally suited to the kind of organizations we have chosen for this study.

Roles of Leaders in a Learning Organization

The view that leaders set goals, make decisions and direct the subordinates, reflects an individualistic and traditional approach. The learning organizations are required to think in terms of "control with" rather than "control over" others. To "control with" others, leaders have to build up relationships on a shared vision and shape the culture that can help to achieve. Leaders help people see the whole system, facilitate team work, initiate change and expand the capacity of the people to shape the future (Daft, 2000). On analysis of this, it is observed that in a Learning Organization, the leaders have three distinct roles:

Forging a Shared Vision: Vision is the ultimate aspiration level and, shared vision is a picture of an ideal future for the organization. Thus, the vision includes what the organization will look like, what could be the performance outcomes, and underlying values. Vision may be forged by the leaders or with the help of employees' participation; howbeit, this must be widely understood and imprinted in employees minds. Since the vision represents desire in terms of outcomes ; hence, employees are free to identify and solve problems that help achieve that vision. Without a shared vision, employee action may not add to the whole because decisions are fragmented and take people in different directions (Daft, 2000).

Structure Design: Placing an organizational structure, covering policies, strategies, and formats that support the learning organization is another vital task of the leaders. Advantage such as horizontal relationships, including teams/committees/task forces wherein cross section of employees communicate, are exploited for developing boundrylessness structure. In such a structure, the employees are allowed to reach out to each other's departments rather than competing among themselves. The employees are made to understand that they have to take on new roles and learn new skills almost on a continuous manner. If required, employees will have mobilestations because teams are continuously re-organized to solve problems.

Servant Leadership (Daft, 2000): A learning organization is actually built by servant leaders who works to fulfill subordinates needs and goals as well as to achieve the organization's larger mission. Such a leadership operates on the assumption that work exists for the development of the worker as much as the worker exists to do the work. As a matter of fact, servant leaders operate on two levels: one, for the fulfillment of their subordinates goals and needs ; and, two, for the realization of the larger purposes or mission of their organization. These leaders give up things such as power, ideas, information, recognition, credit for achieving the targets. They truly value other members of the organization, share power, encourage participation, enhance others' self-worth and unleash people's creativity, full

commitment and natural impulse to learn (Daft, 2000). Ultimately, they turn out to be the instruments of brining in the subordinates higher motives to work and connect them with the organizational mission and goals. They are devoted to building the organization rather than acquire things for themselves. To put it differently, the servant leader does not want himself to be recognized as single actor or hero for personal recognition.

Search for the Leadership Style

Conventionally, we have been talking about a large number of leadership styles such as autocratic, laissez-faire, democratic, participative, etc. Any of these and several other models of leadership that we usually talk about under the broad headings of 'trait approach to leadership', 'behavioural approach to leadership' and 'contingency approach to leadership' does not fits into the structure of learning organization (James, Edward & Daniel, 2003). However, it is in nearly last two decades of the 20th Century that some other kinds of leadership styles came to be advocated under the broad head of 'change leadership'. These styles include Charismatic and Transformational Leadership. Let us understand these leadership patterns along side the traditional management function of leading which is categorized as transactional leadership style.

Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership is one in which a leader clarifies subordinates role and discuss requirements, initiates structure, provides rewards and displays consideration for subordinates. Obviously, therefore, the transactional leader's ability to satisfy subordinates may improve productivity. They may also excel at management functions ; they are hard working, tolerant and fair minded. They take pride in keeping things running smoothly and efficiently. They also evince a sense of commitment to the organization and conform to organizational norms and values. However, they often emphasize on Plans, Schedules and Budgets in contrast to the real level of outcomes/performances.

Charismatic Leadership

It goes beyond the techniques of transactional leadership. "The fire that ignites follower's energy and commitment, producing results above and beyond the call of duty (Klein and House, 1995)," is what we mean by the phrase 'Charisma'. And, the Charismatic Leader is one who has the ability to motivate subordinates to transcend their expected performance. Expressing differently, a Charismatic leader has the ability to inspire and motivate people to do more than they would normally do, despite obstacles and personal sacrifice. Subordinates eclipse their own self-interests for the sake of organization. These leaders are able to create their impact generally from (Conger and Kanungo, 1987):

- stating an elevated vision about an imagined future that employees identify with;

- shaping a corporate value system for which everyone stands for; and

- trusting subordinates and enjoying their complete trust in return.

If compared with transactional leaders, charismatic leader are less predictable. They create an atmosphere of change, and they may be obsessed by visionary ideas that excite, stimulate, and drive other people to work hard. They are able to generate an emotional impact on their subordinates.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational Leadership is identical to Charismatic Leadership, excepting that it is additionally focused on bringing about innovation and change. Transformational Leaders are instrumental in brining about marked changes both in subordinates and the organization. As a matter of fact they have the capability of leading changes in the organization's mission, strategy, structure, and culture, aside

promoting innovations in processes and products. They do not depend merely on tangible rules and incentives to control the behavious of employees, but also employ intangible qualities such as vision, shared values, and ideas to build relationships, give larger meaning to diverse activities, and find common ground to enlist followers in the change process (Daft and Lengel, 1998).

On the basis of the succinct description of the three major kinds of leadership styles, it is evident that the vision, attitude and functions of leadership in a learning organization more or less resembles to Transformational Leadership excepting that it needs to be supplemented by specificity of attitude and operational philosophy as may be possessed in respect to the employees of the organization. To reiterate, the leadership has to think in terms of "control with" rather than "control over" subordinates. Further, they have to have the specific attitude and detachment power, ideas, information, recognition, etc. in favour of the subordinates. They ought to possess unselfish and philanthropic attitude on the whole. To put it straight, they have to be the leaders possessing the characteristics/traits of a true '*karma yogi*', as described by Lord Rama in our religious granth, "*Geeta*". Thus, to conclude we may say that learning organization need to be headed by 'Gracious Transformational Leaders.'

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