

“Your People Do Not Care How Much You Know Until They Know How Much You Care”

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Leader and Leadership

“Leadership is about becoming a mentor for your people, being with the people and not about searching ways to motivate your team to be able to lead them better.”³

A common query, “what is leadership and what makes a good leader” remains boundary less and without common acceptance. From Plato and Socrates, the Greek philosophers in the past to present day leaders and organizations, leadership has intrigued people and has been a field of interest because people have perceived leadership in different ways; based on beliefs, knowledge, experience, training, expectations. Stogdill posited arriving at a single common universally acceptable definition on leadership does not seem to be a possibility and therefore we will continue to have a number of definitions as different people continue with their attempts to understand, explore and define leadership (Stogdil, 1974)! Multi-dimensional complexity of this subject has therefore led to evolution of different approaches, theories and concepts. P G North house observes that rate of change is outpacing leaders’ ability to learn and unlearn (Northhouse, 2013). Despite expansive research, J. C. Rost also recommended that it is difficult to come up with a common definition for leadership (Rost, 1991).

Leadership as per oxford dictionary is defined as “an act by a person to lead a people/ group/ organization and/ or displaying an ability in this respect.” On similar lines a ‘leader’ is a person, an individual leading from the front and commanding a country, organization, group and/ or a person. Leadership thus entails *people, process and action*; it is concerned with how leaders affect and connect with followers. From a business point of view leadership is getting things done (Lunenburg, 2012). Leadership has always been special as also complex in an employee – organization dyad since leadership is associated with almost every individual, situation and outcome. Richard Bolden emphasizes for nations, regions and an organization to be successful, leadership is critical especially in the present times more than it has been in the past. He identifies key areas for the future to be; leadership 2020, changing nature of society and dynamics of work with evolution and changing face of leadership. This demands the need to create future potential leaders by creating a supporting environment for people to develop skills and competencies. Organizations need to identify the right talent at an early stage, right people and shape them to becoming future leaders (Bolden, 2004).

Gagan Anand

Gagan Anand comes from a humble middle class family. Today a successful and accomplished leader as Country Manager is leading Cyrus India office; an international specialty insurer operating in Lloyd’s and London market, Continental Europe and USA. He completed his schooling from Mount Carmel Delhi where Principal V K Williams shaped his children for discipline, time management, habit and culture. Gagan’s character sketch is a reflection of early childhood learning and is defined on core values taught by his principal leading to his grooming and development. Moving to 10th standard was a turning point in his life strengthening the desire for success. Thereafter there was no looking back and he joined Delhi University to become a Commerce graduate.

To know more and do more always made him feel incomplete and he enrolled in a BBA programme at a private college affiliated to Wigan and Leigh University UK alongside his graduation. This was challenging and tough as the decision was made against all odds and financial constraints. Hard work, determination and perseverance paid favourable results and Gagan emerged as one of the brightest students in BBA. To do an MBA was the next obvious choice but financial constraints did not favour him. Given his performance and

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³ www.businessnewsdaily.com/3647-leadership-definition.html

attitude in life the institute director identified his leadership capabilities and offered him a job as a branch administrator at one of the BBA institutes to help pay his MBA fee and earn some pocket money as well. His joy knew no bounds and Gagan started his first job alongside his MBA programme. While this was just the beginning, confidence and a defined character sketch to live with core values started shaping his path to success. After completing MBA his first company was HCL deluxe now called Fidelity National Information Services Inc – a leading global provider of technology and services to financial service industry with an integrated business model of US based financial services and India based IT professionals/programmers. First one month training period changed the company dynamics when despite being asked to process only 5 orders/ hour as part of learning, Gagan clocked 15/ 20 orders/ hour with 100% accuracy and productivity targets and soon overtook well seasoned analyst by processing 10,000 orders in 12 weeks with nil errors. It was a colleague Anant Keskar who recognized Gagan's talent and submitted his nomination for recognition as champion of the month employee which he rightly deserved and earned. Very soon he earned the six sigma green belt quality training fostering organizational efficiency. For Gagan learning has never stopped in life as he has always wanted to do more.

Leadership exposure and experience

*"I define leadership as knowing when to be in front to lead and guide a team and when to step back and let others take lead. Much like an athlete who knows exactly what position to move to on the field at any given time, a true leader understands delicate balance of how to help others become leaders, fuel career ambitions and give them chance to shine."*⁴

Gagan always had the freedom, liberty to do things and he effectively capitalized by doing things differently. His motto was "*How and Why I should do things which are different from others?*" He was emerging as a passionate, dedicated and hard working employee – *know more, be more, do more*. On one of occasions when Gagan was not selected for the post of process analyst and people expected him to feel demotivated, he instead worked on two new projects continuously for 18 h and gave the output with positivity proving his worth once again. Recognizing his talent the company was ready to offer him a new role having served for 3 years with three back to back ratings 5. Gagan however moved on to set up back office for Churchill Insurance; Royal Bank of Scotland being the second employee.

Rahul Bhattacharya has been Gagan's boss for 10 ½ years in three different environments starting from the first assignment under whose mentorship Gagan was infused with the concept of people centric leadership. Empowerment, delegation and allowing 2nd layer of emerging leaders face challenges has been part of his learning process. Rahul taught his team *how to make people think, quiz for options, develop creative ability to evolve solutions, know more and do more – focus on converting the intangibles into measurable outcomes*.

After a successful, smooth transition and exit from Churchill Insurance, Gagan joined operations at XL insurance; a pro-active insurance service, independent and intermediary quality insurance services for personal and commercial clients - company with a personal touch. Rahul continued to be his boss and with people oriented culture very soon the company grew with strength of 450 people. As part of the learning process Gagan believes and advocates, "*every 6 months update your resume by adding at least 2/ 3 bullets to assure own self that you are doing significantly well*" – a true self-assessment to navigate and be on course. He also advocates identifying interest, passion and a particular domain area should to be chosen by people to excel and grow. In line with his self-assessment philosophy Gagan started losing threads, interest and realized that his self-learning had stopped. He quickly moved on to MetLife Insurance with a title and position of AVP - largest global providers of insurance, annuities and employee benefit programs with over 90 million customers in over 60 countries. In his brief stay at MetLife people admired and followed him for he connected with his people and recognized everyone by name. He also initiated creative concepts like "Time with Gagan"; a Friday one hour mentoring session for people to discuss learning and development aspects. He introduced department driven rewards and recognition programs to build people strength as he was always working to convert individual brilliance into team strength with his strong impetus on people

⁴ www.entrepreneur.com/author/dan-schoenbaum

driven leadership style. While his initiatives were well received, Cyrus Insurance offering diversified range of insurance to both large multinational and small and middle-market clients was looking for a suitable candidate to start Cyrus India operations. Gagan was experiencing that *quick changes in resume have a 50/50 effect; good and not so good at times and one needs to guard against this.*

Gagan and Cyrus India

John Hopkins from Cyrus interviewed Gagan and despite Gagan's best efforts not to clear the interview his CV was far too impressive for his immediate selection as the first employee for Cyrus India operations. Taking risk is second nature for leaders and Gagan took the offer of creating vision, values and road map for Cyrus India. *Daily learning is a challenge in starting something from scratch*; building support systems like information technology, human resource, finance and travelling to USA, UK and Bermuda to assess what work India office can do! During the initial days Gagan worked under Parnell Kapok the first country manager. However John Hopkins had already identified Gagan's leadership and wanted him to take over as country manager soon after Parnell left in a short period. Gagan refused and requested to be tested in his new role before officially assuming the title and position because Gagan believes that *"your career is like a test match cricket and not 20/20, play the game as each ball comes."* Under Gagan's leadership, today Cyrus India office is a successful and happy family of over 200 people with a people driven culture of learning and development creating a vision and mission through people. Cyrus India is continually evolving as a quality organization. Gagan's leadership for people development focused on creating a climate and ground zero policies and practices. He organized the India management team, moved Cyrus India into higher leadership circle with its affiliation to NASSCOM and has never looked back. He believes integrity, honesty, hard work and patience have been a testimony to his leadership *"what you are today is based on what you have done in the past and what you will be tomorrow is shaped by what you are doing today."* When John Hopkins moved out of Cyrus, Gagan requested his successor Johnson too for yet another year before making him the country manager. Having spent two years of testing period Gagan rightly earned the seat of country manager Cyrus India for his people driven leadership skills; doing something different, instilling motivation and enthusiasm in people, mentoring and creating a path for people to grow as organization grows.

Leadership Philosophy and Practice

Gagan believes that leadership has two parts; people centric component and process centric component. He sees a lot of leadership intent in all his layers; people aspiring to assume higher leadership roles. He identifies five key areas; process management, new work, financials, softer aspects – company values and the people. In this he gives maximum impetus to people because if people connect with people the advantage they get is that the other four goals are automatically looked after. Goals are achieved through people and achieved better and faster if people are satisfied and growing. On the contrary, if leaders concentrate on other four goals and give lesser importance to people, there is an imbalance and fire-fighting. His approach and philosophy - *people centric leadership* makes him connect with people and demonstrate empathy, leadership quality where in people trust their leader and do not lie. He interacts with all his layers on personal and professional front very effectively. His interactions are aimed at value addition through formal and informal learning as in a mentor program which he introduced with his initiative comprising of close room discussion with his people on fifteen things that they want to learn and move ahead; where they want to be from where they are now. He gets a list of things that people want to learn; different leadership styles, stress management, how to give an effective presentation, conflict management, managing financials, connecting with people, connecting with tough people, connecting with clients and customers, interpersonal and interdepartmental communication. Gagan has been able to harness a good list of topics to set up smart goals translate them into appraisals for his people so that the learning and developmental programs are effective. So far Gagan has conducted around 20 sessions to make his people ready for next leadership roles. Each month a topic is discussed in detail along with case studies; what, why, how, who, when and where coupled with activities happening around; experiential learning to understand better so as to be able to translate learning into practice. At the end of each session people write down five things that they have learnt and of these three critical things that they are going to implement within one month. During the subsequent session people share what they had promised themselves and what is it that they have achieved

and what has been the learning and value addition. In a way people not only learn but also implement making it a habit, a culture; converging theory into practice. Kakabadse in a study identified that a vast majority of people in leadership positions and roles were seen to be more of reactive than being proactive. As a result very few people actually led from the front in their leadership positions and primarily displayed an attitude of concern for their reputation and/ or pleasing shareholders (Kakabadse, 2007). Goffee and Jones posit that whilst there are always sufficient number of people available to fill in leadership roles and positions it is the absence/ decision to decline doing of leadership; practice, gap, asymmetry in leadership becomes more wider and visible (Goffee and Jones, 2000). The result is that filling these leadership roles is a huge challenge. A leader should constantly be on the move and achieve the unachievable. However, as motivation is both; intrinsic and extrinsic, for it to happen regularly and consistently a good leader should keep seeking motivation and even goad it (Nonaka, 1995). Emerald Group Publishing Limited also suggests that leadership is a choice based credit system of a leader and hence developmental and incremental in nature and nurture. Consequently, leaders need to recognize that the choices they make for organizational activities have to fit their own view. Pursuing the fit between one's own view and planned organizational activities ensures that leaders continuously improve.

Gagan experienced that it was difficult for people to appreciate others and to start with, he forced them to appreciate others for good work, howsoever small or big the act is. He strongly believes that leaders have to recognize good work by their team and appreciate the people doing it. People for the first time may do it because he is forcing them to do so, the second time it happens and soon becomes a habit and a culture. Gagan connects with his people making them believe that this transforms them from being good to great; expanding their comfort zone and aligning with individuals, teams and the organization. This program came out to be very effective. With his second layer of leadership he captures five most essential things that they want to learn to grow to next level and excel. Here the emphasis is on sustaining at higher levels. He has been able to generate a list of approximately ten themes; a structured curriculum enables him in taking leadership to the next level. Alongside he believes and ensures in making employee friendly policies and procedures – putting in place mutually agreed principles on growth, rewards and recognition, benefits, gaining technological edge, work life integration, workplace facilities and culture, discipline and basic administration and so on. A classic example is that of company study policy. Gagan is a firm believer and shares with his people; *do not come to Cyrus only to gain experience, come here for qualifications as well*. As part of study policy Cyrus Insurance has a tie up with three different institutes worldwide; India based institute on Insurance, UK based CII and US based AICPCU offering a variety of courses in insurance domain. People are asked to opt for a course based on what they aspire to be in insurance sector; risk engineer, claims expert, career in compliance, operations and so on and then company helps them choose the best course. People pay the fee upfront and once they complete the course not only is the fee reimbursed but monetary benefits are also provided as incentives for additional qualification (s). This could have been done the other way round too by paying the fee and asking the employees to clear the exam and undergo the course. But Gagan believes that if employees paid from their own pocket, motivation that they have to clear and enjoy future monetary benefits and incentives attached to their qualification (s) acquired works stronger and brings the best in people. Practices such as; referral incentives, reward and recognition; managers nominating people in various categories, quick spot light award, award for the day, award for good work, quarterly recognition, employee of the year and manager of the year give an edge to Cyrus India's higher retention. Gagan is a proud leader for the fact that his people are able to build a strong CV value; experience and qualifications. He also admires experiences of people leaving and subsequently wanting to join back. Culture created by Gagan attracts people and helps sustain higher retention. Partnering with human resource through annual appraisal and training ensures growth and development of individuals and the organization. Encouraging in house subject matter expertise has been part of Gagan's initiative not only to save money but also encourage own people build on confidence and develop in the field of training. Training by in house experts makes practical implementation more meaningful because of both; trainer and trainee being part of the same system. This leads to empowerment and delegation with responsibility and authority. Gagan has therefore been able to harness greater overall bench strength.

"In my experience, leadership is about three things: To listen, to inspire and to empower. Over the years, I've tried to learn to do a much better job listening actively, making sure I really understand the other person's point of view, learning from them, and using that basis of trust and collaboration to inspire and empower. [It's about] setting the bar high and then giving them the time and resources to do great work."

Larry Garfield, president, Garfield Group

Leadership Challenges

Rost discovered a total of 221 different notions, acceptances and hence definitions on leadership. Being spread across a wide spectrum of different approaches these definitions were both narrow as also expansive propositions (Rost J. , 1993). Bass therefore was of the opinion that searching a single, universally acceptable and common definition of leadership would be meaningless and futile (Bass, 2000-2008). Present day and the future brings increased complexity and challenges in understanding, comprehending and defining leadership due; socio-economic-politico milieu, technology (dot.com burst), multigenerational workforce, cultural and demographic challenges with increasing diversity and e-environment.

Gagan deals with 12/ 13 managers across various departments and the top challenge is that not every manager is aligned with organizational goals. It is a mixed bag; 60% managers are aligned ensuring that the goals are achieved. They engage in regular communication, connect with their team members and move ahead as a team. The other 40% do not assign the required priority; feel a particular work to be important. Gagan lives with the philosophy that *80% effort on people leads to putting only 20% effort on rest of the goals*. However, people generally put all their effort on the management of all organizational goals at one time other than focusing on people. Leadership demands connecting vision with individual needs, goals and aspirations. White paper published by Oracle brings out that organizations are found wanting in preparing front line leaders; leadership acumen is found wanting. As per 2010 IBM Global CEO study, most important organizational capability over the next five years will be “leadership”, it has been so till date and will continue to be in the next decade without losing effervescence (Oracle, 2012). Stephen Drotter suggests concept of leadership by autonomy and principles akin to those suggested by Daniel Goleman (Drotter, 2003). Survey conducted by Hay group revealed that 77% graduates believe people skills get in the way of getting the job done. Generation awkward research by India, China and USA by Hay group polled 450 human resource directors and recent graduates. Key findings of research are; *89% of leaders and human resource directors are worried about quality of future leaders, 71% leaders believe that less than a quarter of graduates have required people skills, 80% human resource leaders believe lack of people skills leads to toxic workplace environment and 83% of sample from all countries face competition to attract and retain people since they feel absence of skills will keep them devoid of high performance* (Naidu, 2014).

Cyrus India being a global organization, Gagan emphasizes on grooming sessions, training and development programs and initiatives for second and third level leadership. Gagan works towards connecting with his people on the relevance and need for these grooming programs and requirement at all levels. He thrives on the returns that are accrued and has always been successful because it is all about people. A training on conflict management helps people deal with conflict better and hence spend their time on more constructive projects increasing productivity while dealing with conflict - advantages of training definitely out weigh hit and trial methods.

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture is a description of organization – something an organization is and has - a way of life and this strongly is related to leadership (Davies, 2000). Boal et.al suggest that the role of leadership is critically important for achieving higher performances and setting up cultures that promote such an environment (Boal, 2000 & 2003). Bass, Avolio and Schein bring out that when culture is an integral part of organizations; thinking, feeling and responses of leaders are moulded by culture (Avolio, 1993). Edgar Schein observed that leadership and organizational culture are intertwined. He illustrates the inter-connection by looking at relationship between leadership and organization culture in context of organizational life cycle (Schein, 1992). Brown recommends that good leaders need to develop skills that enable altering aspects of culture in order to improve organizational performance (Brown, 1992).

Gagan with his people centric leadership philosophy continuously strives to create a culture of growth and progress for people and the organization. In this, while perceptual cultural differences in moving from west to east do come up as challenges, a win-win attitude by Gagan fosters a culture of appreciation for Cyrus India. When good work is done it does not incur cost to company to acknowledge and appreciate the doer on a job well done. People need appreciation for job (s) done well, they need a pat on the back and this inspires and motivates them. Inspiration and motivation boosts people to put in their best and translate efforts for strengthening organizational effectiveness. People also want to grow and if one wants to retain talent especially in India there have to be opportunities for growth and promotions every two to three years which is across organizations. Indians primarily emerge as go getters, wanting to do well in their job, move to the next level and switch companies if enough opportunities are not available in a particular company and hence retention and engagement always emerge as top most leadership challenges. Gagan with his people centric philosophy and creativity has always overcome such and many more challenges without disturbing the broad global company policy ensuring greater connect between people and the organization.

Becky Malby suggests that *leaders; repeatedly connect organizations to its purpose and principles – how to act in organizations, are attentive to organizations identity, seek to understand the context, let go the need to control and instead work together with employees and customers, develop capacity, make the difference, seek challenges, give time and space, practice what they preach, amplify what works, know responsibility and use hierarchy appropriately* (Maiby, 2006). Cyrus India also has high dependency on other offices all over the world and Indian culture like any other national culture warrants certain statutory holidays every year but there is a gap and it has been a challenge in connecting with on shore people on this subject too. So the challenge is in accepting and appreciating each other's culture in order to maintain a fine balance at all times. Emmanuel Ogbonna and Lloyd C. Harris share leadership leads to creating organizational culture and vice versa; intertwined translating into the measure of organizational effectiveness and performance – organizational culture, leadership style (s) and practice of leadership together form a dynamic relationship in achieving organizational effectiveness (Harris E. O., 2000). Central theme of leadership is to create and define an organizational culture. For this leaders need to move from inside to outside and back to inside to be able to connect people within and outside the organization. Akbar Ali shares that “to be a good leader one has to make a difference and facilitate positive changes.” Katz and Kahan suggest leaders need to practice a *strategy for outperforming competition by monitoring and measuring processes and practices, motivating and inspiring people, creating talent team (s) to become indicators of effectiveness of organizational culture* (Kahan, 1978). Office management has been another area of challenge. In India around eight to nine hours' worth of productivity is expected to be delivered which Gagan personally feels is an ask on the higher side. An average Indian can produce worth nine hours productivity by working sincerely for just about 6/ 7 hours. But during visits and inspection Gagan experiences discomfort in on shore people when they see people moving and/ or taking a break, being happy and taking things comfortably. Gagan puts it on record that he has been able to successfully demonstrate output through numbers, his team is second to none and has been able to gain the confidence of everyone. Gagan has given complete freedom to people to work as per their convenience and results are seen to be very encouraging. People come for work even on holidays, work for late hours and accomplish targets.

Bob Anderson suggests that the spirit of leadership needs to be kept alive always for moving ahead since; *individual beliefs, values are shaped with experiences and vice versa, culture simulates or retards individual development and finally the attitude that gets shaped guides actions* (Anderson, 2008). Peter Murphy and Peter Dunn also share that leaders are being held accountable, especially senior leadership when efforts are not leading to positive changes; he therefore suggests that leadership efforts need improvement to make people response ready to emergencies and in building newer skills (Dunn, 2012). Gagan's leadership has led to co-creating a document laying down the objectives, goals, vision and mission so as to identify Cyrus India culture. Gagan triggers his people to find answers for:- *do employees rate their senior leaders highly on being in touch and effective?, have you provided the “vocabulary” of how to talk about culture in a way that focused choices can be made that shows up in our mission, vision and values? And are people feeling actively informed, involved and engaged?*

Manfred and Korotov observe that leadership development is beyond existing theories, concepts and approaches (Korotov, 2010). Every organization based on its employee competencies and goals needs to create a tool box and put concepts and ideas into practice. Organizations need to re-enforce people practices (Hughes, 2010). To this end, a framework that emerges based on Gagan’s people centric philosophies is as shown in figure 1. A correlation between influence on people and organizational and environmental opportunity indicates four key people driven leadership practices.

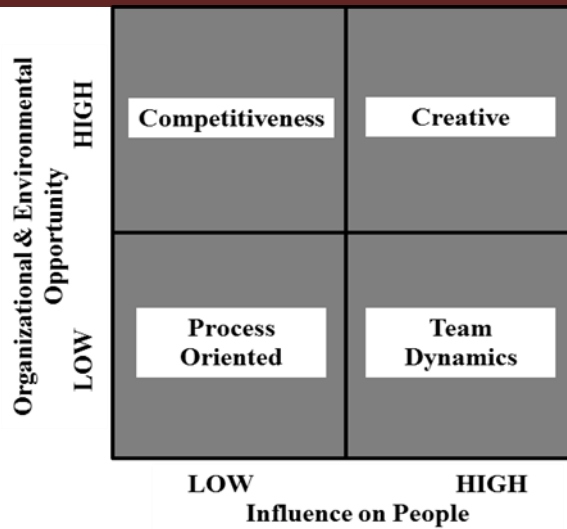


Figure 1: Proposed framework for People Centric Leadership

Creative people centric leadership: High influence on people and high organizational and environmental opportunities promotes high personal and organizational achievement with a response ready team to face challenges and complexities. *Team Dynamic people centric leadership:* High influence on people and low organizational and environmental opportunities promotes interpersonal connectivity and team work to deal with situations and challenges. *Competitive people centric leadership:* low influence on people and high organizational and environmental opportunities shapes a culture of competition. *Process oriented people centric leadership:* low influence on people and low organizational and environmental opportunities shapes adherence to established processes and practices with reduced flexibility and freedom. People driven leadership translates intangibles like; *speed, flexibility, employee competence and commitment and continuous learning into measurable outcomes.* In order to operate in the quadrant of creative people centric leadership with high influence on people and higher organizational and environmental opportunities, Gagan advocates regular sharpening of skills, developing an out of box thinking and aligning people with organization. The key is to focus on people – most important asset any organization can ill afford to lose. Leadership is everyone’s business, it is a relationship and the best leaders are best learners. It takes practice and more practice to become a better leader because leaders make a difference with their inspiration and choice. Gagan makes his choice and attributes his inspiration and passion to his character sketch from school days and strongly promotes all leaders to be students; have a learning attitude. He has a scrap book of his credits; appreciation received and visits this book time and again for motivating and reassuring himself. He also has a 60 second speech on himself for himself; sharing in front of the mirror boosting his leadership attitude. Having been positively influenced by people in life Gagan lives with the philosophy that, “*a person needs to grow first to become a leader and then as a leader needs to ensure that his people grow.*” This has earned him the prestigious award of being one of the most talented leaders in the outsourcing industry for the year 2014 at recently concluded Asia BPO summit.

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ⁱ This case is solely developed for class discussion in programmes of management education. Case has been compiled from real life lived experience of the participant and secondary data. Case study does not represent or endorse the views of management on issues of the case. Author may have disguised certain names identifying the case to protect confidentiality where needed.