



The magnificent seven

Leadership building in a B-school is more about minds and behaviour than about skills and practice

Allow me to first frame my wish-list for what corporates want from their employees, especially those in leadership positions. These are largely behaviour traits or mindsets, which clearly cannot be the responsibility of business schools alone. It is my firm belief that these are not 'nice to do' things, but imperatives of survival for business and society.

Clearly, certain analytic skills and basic familiarity with the nomenclature of functional 'languages' like accounts, finance, marketing, HR *et al* are necessary, and I will take them for granted. My focus is on the following seven mind-sets and behaviour traits:

- There should be deep commitment to the triple bottom line: profit, people and planet.

It is easier to accept this idea at the global level; the real problem is in embracing and implementing it at the local here-and-now level in the hurly-burly of daily life.

- The stress should be on 'we' rather than 'I'.

This is a no-brainer both ways, depending on the context in which the question is posed! Biologically, the instinct for survival makes the 'I' supreme and, yet, whenever there are two or more people involved, the 'we' comes into play. Organisations would ideally like to align the 'I' and the 'we' - and attempt to do so through devices like the performance management system, the reward and recognition process, etc. But if the mental paradigms and role-models emphasise the 'I', the concept of the *wunderkind* seduces us. Business Schools and the corporate world need to work together on a long-term basis to address this fundamental schism.

- Ethics and values are a must.

For too long have too many in positions of power believed that commercial/business success is inherently in conflict with ethics/values. And yet we lament the absence thereof and long for a world where 'success' would not necessarily mean having to sacrifice basic human decency, based on trust and respect. The good news is the emerging groundswell of belief that, in fact, sustained business success *sans* ethics/values is not possible, even if we forget the desirability aspect of it.

Here too is a fundamental mental paradigm

shift, which practitioners and educational institutions have to work on together, if society is to survive in the Brave New World:

- where win-lose must necessarily, even from the most hard-nosed and selfish point of view, yield place to win-win;

• where the ability to listen, trust and respect are not pooh-poohed as 'soft' skills meant for the weak and ineffective, but become the cornerstone of the foundation that strong leaders need;

• where a higher-order purpose, which drives people to outperform and reach for the stars, is not the realm of esoteric armchair philosophers, but the blood and gut of highly successful business people and organisations; where truth, compassion and a spirit of service (*satya, prem and seva*) are not things to be ashamed of in the world of success and achievement, but are in fact critical success factors.

- Multi-disciplinary and a holistic approach from the tyranny of

'either or' to the power of 'and'.

Creating synergy out of seemingly conflicting forces and objectives and the ability to create win-win situations have been the hallmark of the most successful change initiatives I have seen. This is a paradigm shift, which will become increasingly important as we move from competition to co-operation, to a world where sustainability becomes a major challenge, and where we face threats to things we have taken for granted and ravaged over the course of civilisation: air, earth, water and climate.

The following three points ensue from the four elaborated above.

- Changing the game: innovation
- 'Glocal' mind-set
- Execution: the shop floor/marketplace versus the air-conditioned suite.

There is enough talk and literature on each of them. The problem is, as the poet says,

*Twixt the act
And the intention
Falls the shadow.*

How do we move from shadow to light? Is this poetry or a hard-nosed business reality? And who will have the courage to stand up and be counted?♦



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