



TEAM LEADERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE COMPETITIVENESS OF INDIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR BUSINESS LEADERS

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Abstract

Competitiveness opportunities for India are fast expanding. Leadership plays a critical role in achieving and sustaining competitiveness. Major opportunities for scale-up in leadership for competitiveness has been identified across levels in our research. Among many dimensions, team leadership has often emerged to be a dimension with high potential. Brief background to leadership in context of competitiveness is given. Working definitions of key concepts are evolved. Finally, implications are drawn for thought leaders. It will be better for competitiveness of India, if progressive firms and organizations move towards team leadership models that value collective views, grass-root values, long-term horizons and social/ethical responsibility, building on best of heritage and global practices.

Key words: Team Leadership, Sustainable Competitiveness, Spirituality, Values

COMPETITIVENESS OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDIA

Changing global environment and discontinuity creating opportunities for new strategic paradigms to achieve and sustain competitiveness. The combination of forces such as regionalization of markets, rapid technological change, shorter product life cycles, and increasingly aggressive competitors has radically altered the ground rules of competition. Increasing competition can force firms and organizations to move more quickly and boldly than before, and to experiment in ways that do not conform to traditional administrative theory. Among many strategic paradigms evolving to achieve competitiveness, flexible systems management (Sushil, 2000; Volberda, 1999), value-based leadership (e.g. Siddiqui, 2005) are examples of paradigms with potential. On competitiveness front, new paradigms are evolving to enrich classical theories (e.g. Smith, 1776; Porter, 1990).

Slow pace of improvement of competitiveness on many fronts for India hints at the enormous potential and the need for dynamic leadership that can mobilize masses for the rapid transformation needed urgently and lay sound foundations for sustainable competitiveness. Even after more than a decade and a half of liberalization, India ranks below middle ranks (that too among select countries only) in most global competitiveness rankings (an example is given in Table 1). While many critiques often discount those rankings, it is a good starting point for comparison. China has moved much ahead with

leading global market/production share of 30-60 per cent in many goods from electronics to laptops and mobile phones. In contrast, India had less than 20 per cent of global share in best of her industries such as software services. The similar pattern of low global share and slow improvement is visible in many industries from manufacturing to emerging industries such as ICT and nanotechnology. At the same time, trade deficits are touching record heights and divides (economic and now digital) are widening.

Table 1 Trends in Competitiveness of Select Countries

Country	NCR		WCY	
	2003-04	2002	2001	2000
USA	1	1	1	1
Singapore	5	5	2	2
Canada	3	8	9	8
Australia	16	14	11	10
Japan	19	30	26	24
Korea	25	27	28	28
Malaysia	28	26	29	27
China	32	31	33	30
India	42	42	41	39
No. of Countries	68	56	56	52

Source: NCR (2004) and WCY (2002)

Several dimensions of competitiveness opportunities as well as challenges have been emerging in ongoing research. The Department of Management Studies (DMS), Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, has taken many pioneering initiatives to nurture leaders and explore several critical dimensions (e.g. technological, organizational, growth) through several Ph.D., master's degree projects and sponsored research or consultancy. Weaknesses on competitiveness as emerging above have become apparent on several fronts such as balances (e.g. at macro level in terms of trade, fiscal, technology and human capital), low competitiveness (e.g. became apparent in several industries we evaluated from auto components to engineering construction, software, telecom and emerging industries such as nanotechnology) and negative or very slow enhancement (Momaya, 2001). All these hint at many competitiveness opportunities for India and associated leadership challenges.

LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES IN EMERGING ERA

Continuing liberalization and internationalization (many people refer to it as globalization) is opening up new challenging opportunities for leadership teams in India. A study (Gaur, 2006) supports the point of view that the demands of leadership are changing in the new

economy. There is increasing realization on the part of senior executives about the importance of leadership for all organizations across the board. Leadership here is not just get along or go along, it should meet the moral challenges of the context. Performance culture that is getting popular in India puts emphasis on culture and leadership as keys to good strategy execution (e.g. Thompson *et al.*, 2006). Creating a strong fit between strategy and culture is considered necessary. A corporate culture grounded in socially approved values and ethical business principles is a vital ingredient in a company's long-term strategic competitiveness. The authors discuss strong versus weak cultures, adaptive and unhealthy cultures. Citicorp, Coors, Ford, General Motors, Kmart, Kroger, Sears, and Xerox are examples of companies whose unhealthy cultures during the late 1970s and early 1980s contributed to ho-hum performance. It seems that decline in ethics and values that resulted in many corporate scandals in the way be a root cause of sustained loss of competitiveness of dominant countries in the West as seen longitudinally in Table 2. The disappearance of integrity from the list of the top ten most important competencies for the new economy in India is surprising and alarming (Gaur, 2006). Integrity of leaders is a competency that is not negotiable in most great organizations. The challenge of leadership becomes complex when individuals of different nationalities, backgrounds, cultures and values need to interact closely. Luckily, rich heritage of India can be of help.

Table 2 A Longitudinal Glimpse of Competitiveness Gains by East Asia
Share of World GDP (percent)

Country/Continent	1950	1998	Change
USA	27	22	-5
Western Europe	24	18	-6
East Asia	10	26	+16
India	<2	<2	<1

Notes: # An estimate

Source: Adapted from Sugihara (2005)

India has rich tradition of nurturing leaders in all walks of life and has contributed her fair share to the world historically. Leadership provided by pioneers such as Gautam Buddha to Swami Vivekanand, Maharshi Arvind and Mahatma Gandhi and their team has benefitted masses much beyond Bharat. Contributions of such leaders (often called *Bhagwan* or *Rishi* or *Guru*) have been well received across the world. Leadership teams need to build on such rich heritage to nurture leadership very much needed to take the country to its rightful place in the galaxy of countries.

Leadership at corporate level is very crucial at this stage if India is to transform rapidly. Excessive focus on few industries such as software cannot give contributions needed to make to the world in terms of production and trade. Verdict of electorate in states pursuing aggressive IT strategies hints that masses want balanced improvement that reach grassroots. Success of numerous business-models that leverage needs of masses with

social conscience such as Aravind Eye Hospital, Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) gives confidence that good things can work in India. Progressive firms have been learning from such models. Capable firms in India are gaining confidence of facing the challenges of tough competition and transformation, creating physical as well as technical/socio-economic infrastructure in record time and even venturing in tough markets such as Europe and Japan. Emergence of explicit mechanisms, programmes and institutes of leadership hints at the importance progressive firms (e.g. an IT major) in India are giving to the subject.

Excessive focus on Anglo-saxon models of leadership can be risky as real competitiveness gains in many industries in the last half century have been made by countries outside the Western world (Table 2). North American management and leadership paradigm is that people are things, "Commodities," (Covey, 1991). American management has given lip service to tapping the potential of its most important resource-its people. "The greatest waste in is failure to use the abilities of people," lamented Deming. Significant advancement that countries such as Japan and Korea made can be partly attributed to their leader's appreciation for such people paradigm and implement better human resources management systems. Interestingly, some popular competitiveness reports still ranked the USA at No. 1. For India, percentage of leaders/professionals that can tap into original best practices of leadership prevalent in the non-anglo-saxon countries (e.g. in East Asia, that made real strides in economic development in the last half century, Table 2) is quite low, as most of professionals depend on English language as predominant source of knowledge acquisition. Luckily, some balanced thinking is also emerging. Drawing from time-tested concepts in Chinese, Japanese, Greek, Indian, Islamic and Christian philosophy, Siddiqui (2005) has discussed about wisdom, values, virtue and purpose, change and business value, and their importance in creating growth-focused and profitable organizations.

Other pragmatic views on leadership are also evolving. A leader is she or he who takes the first steps towards something that she/he deeply cares about, and in ways that others wish to follow (Maira, 2004). Careful observers of today's ground reality will affirm how important these views are today. Business lost considerable trust in greedy decades in the USA. Deming believed that fundamental transformation is required to halt the decline of Western industry. Management must change fundamentally, and transform its attitudes, mind-set, basic paradigm. Covey (1991) suggested interesting "how to" component to transform the paradigms of people and organization from reactive control-oriented management to proactive empowerment-oriented leadership as seven habits. Useful inferences can be facilitated by evolving working definitions of key concepts.

WORKING DEFINITIONS OF KEY CONCEPTS

Many definitions, perspectives and ideas on leadership and leaders exist. Attempt has been made below to evolve simple, yet pragmatic working definitions of key concepts for better understanding.

Leadership

The generic process-oriented definitions are more relevant. It is the process of inspiring others toward achieving group goals.

It is a broader concept than leaders, hence we need to go beyond leaders as individuals. Study of leadership should also include two other areas: the followers and the situation (Hughes *et al.*, 2006).

Leader

A leader is the most important component of the leadership triad: leader, followers and situation. A working definition can be given as: leader is a person, who plays a key role in shaping leadership towards great goals. Glimpse of leader attributes and behaviour is given in the Table 3. It is evident that attributes are many, rarely to be possessed by one person, and hence the importance of team.

Table 3 Leader Attributes and Behaviour Universally Viewed as Positive

Trustworthy	Having admirable values	Coordinator
Just	Excellence oriented	Win-win problem solver
Honest	Positive	Team builder
Foresighted	Dynamic	Decisive
Plans ahead	Confidence builder	Administratively skilled
Encouraging	Motivational	Intelligent
Informed	Dependable	Communicative

Source: Adapted from Hughes, *et al.* (2006)

At the country level, politicians, bureaucrats, entrepreneurs and professionals are four important classes that can be source of leaders. Glimpse of views about each of them being perceived as leaders of the society in five large countries are given in Table 4. Although based on a global survey and with some limitations, it does provide a clue to potential areas of improvement. Two snapshots were taken to get a glimpse of emerging trends. For large emerging countries, politicians and bureaucrats can play the most critical role. Rapid scale-up in competitiveness for China can be partly attributed to role played by them. Kind of improvements China achieved over the period (particularly on politicians and entrepreneurs) is remarkable.

ABILITY, MOTIVATION AND ATTITUDE

Ability is what you are capable of doing. Motivation determines what you desire or aim at. Attitude determines how well you do it.

– Lou Holtz

Table 4 Positions of India and Select Large Competitive Countries on Leadership Perception Index (Scale=0–100, higher the index, better the perception in the country)

<i>Human Resource Category Country</i>	<i>China</i>	<i>Germany</i>	<i>India</i>	<i>Japan</i>	<i>USA</i>
<i>Politicians as Leaders of society</i>	98.53 73.33	62.48 48.16	58.52 70.27	62.39 72.34	66.70 75.23
<i>Bureaucrats as Leaders of society</i>	92.90 84.94	69.50 55.84	74.51 44.70	70.05 59.07	84.85 64.20
<i>Entrepreneurs as Leaders of society</i>	75.47 43.87	67.55 64.77	50.88 –	71.85 50.82	78.84 92.07
<i>Professionals as Leaders of society</i>	43.64 43.38	56.45 87.40	34.03 30.40	54.33 73.63	80.10 83.82

Note: 1. The upper no. in a cell is for year 2008 and the lower no. in the cell is for year 2005 of the National Competitiveness Report (IPS-NCR).

Source: IPS-NCR 2005, 2008

Team Leadership

Team leadership is the process of building exceptional teams and organizations that make great and lasting contributions in the domains that have vast impact for masses.

Here an important assumption is that a team is superior to manage organizations than an individual. A criteria can be sustainable competitiveness of the organization towards “good to great” or “build to last” preferably with visible team with continuity of exceptional leadership. While nurturing many leaders can be a good outcome, real team leadership nurtures exceptional teams. If the organizational competitiveness declines significantly due to departure of a leader, there can be lack of team leadership. Japan provides a useful example. Change in leader (e.g. prime minister or CEO) has hardly any impact on competitiveness as capable teams sustain excellence.

Competitiveness: Competitiveness has relevance across levels and many aspects of it including definitions across levels are given in Momaya (2001). Here only a working definition in context of country competitiveness of India is given. Competitiveness of a country can be defined in terms of collective abilities of a country and industries from the country (incl. of firms, institutions and other organizations) to achieve environment of adequate opportunities for masses to achieve holistic development (including educational, economic and social). Recent worldwide crisis has again highlighted the need for responsible competitiveness. In this context social and environmental dimensions of competitiveness assume increasing importance in addition to economic dimension for a large country such as India that is home to more than 1/6 of humanity.

MAKING SENSE OF LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS AND TEAM LEADERSHIP

What shall be characteristics of leadership? Life and message of great leaders such as Vivekanand give good hints. “Give me a few men and women who are pure and selfless, and I shall shake the world,” (Vivekanand, 1999). He emphasized faith, strength, education, service and ethics. Life of Mahatma Gandhi, who could mobilize masses, also contains many learning points. Concern for poor, truth and non-violence are universal and have motivated new thought across the world. Recent leadership thoughts such as “Principle-centered Leadership” draws on such universal values (Covey, 1991). Covey hints that antidote of each of the following “deadly sins” is something that is based on natural principles:

- Wealth without work
- Pleasure without conscience
- Knowledge without character
- Commerce (business) without morality (ethics)
- Science without humanity
- Religion without sacrifice
- Politics without principles

Developing Team Leadership

There is considerable research on teams as well as leadership, but pragmatic empirical evidence or coherent theory of team leadership are still very limited. For instance, a search on “leadership” in title fetched 465 books on an Indian bookstore; it can be many fold on global bookstores. So there is info-glut on leadership topic. However, search on “Team Leadership” on the same bookstore fetched only 4, all from the U.S.A., bit dated (6-10 years) and unavailable. Clearly, most of lessons in team leadership for Indian context will have to be learned through difficult to locate indigenous innovators, balancing best of practical insights from the West as well as the East. Luckily, some researchers, including in India, have given thought. Khandwalla (2003) has given due attention to role of leadership discussing the role of effective and creative teams, key drivers of competitiveness in emerging knowledge-based economy. He emphasized transformational leadership for team creativity. Transformational leadership is visionary, empowering, inspirational leadership that turns on team to heights of achievement and transforms bringing subordinates into responsible, enterprising initiative takers.

In light of the working definitions given, developing team leadership is going to be a tough challenge for most firms and organizations in India. Because we are setting very high standards of team excellence and wish our organization to graduate from “good” on the journey to “great”, it is going to be a very demanding journey. An attempt is done to give examples below of ideas that we can try in our contexts.

- Develop explicit identification of team leadership process (including formal elements) in a given context, including sub processes, roles, expected performance levels. An example of sub-processes is given in Table A1 in Appendix.
- Classify long-term and short-term processes and have proper cycle times mapped on calendar so that action, review and learning can happen.
- Since, lot of team leadership links with HRD processes, proper coordination with HRM processes as well as competitiveness and strategic management processes should be aimed at.
- Leadership demands best of physical fitness. Hence, promote activities that encourage holistic development of teams and individuals that includes dimensions of physical, mental as well as vital in addition to logical.

Implications for Leaders

India still has rich environment for harnessing leadership through spiritual and other paths. From the classical Vedant and Gita (for simple form refer to e.g. Yadav, 2002) to modern perspectives on *Yoga* and *Vedanta* (Hart, 1991), the choice, knowledge, guidance from practitioners are ample to start experiments. Since it is still an immature science, knowing what to do is not the same as knowing when, where and how to do it; hence the need for experiments. Pragmatic ideas can emerge from such experiments in search of truth and competitiveness. Here are few ideas for experimentation:

- Gaps in leadership in individuals identified in the survey (Table 4) indicate vast areas of opportunities. India ranks quite low in overall average as compared to other leading large countries on almost each front. India got high scores for politicians, but much lower scores for bureaucrats as compared to China. Unfortunately, politicians in India have very low score on educational level. Decline in perception about politicians is a signal demanding urgent action. The shortage of capable national leaders has been felt for quite some time, once the great leaders of independence era died. Hence, there is urgent need for breakthrough innovations and experiments to improve educational levels, experience and capabilities (particularly teamwork) of leaders in India.
- Balance the focus on leaders as individuals and leadership as a team process.
- Tough or tender, transactional or transformational, leadership is a popular subject. But setting a personal example for courage, fairness, and human concern may ring longer in people's hearts than leadership models, pep talks, and carrots and sticks (Khandwalla, 2003). Hence, encourage such attributes in individuals and teams.
- Undertake experiments in team capability building. We can begin by sports or physical activities. For instance, team preparation and participation in run for common causes such as freedom or health. Encourage team to excel collectively.
- Persist in developing people and teams for tough challenges.

- Since, the definition of leadership we adopted focuses on group goals, the challenge is to have group goals that have excitement for individuals as well as relevance for masses in a given local context. Goals that leadership teams tried to achieve during independence journey of India is a great example. Now organizations such as Amul, SEWA, Aravind Eye provide examples of leadership with lot of learning potential for Indian contexts.
- At personal level, experiment with values and evolve vision that can inspire team excellence
- Experiments in building self-confidence for indigenous innovations. Most of the competitive countries such as China, France, Germany, Japan, Korea gained such confidence decades ago. From KG to PhD in any subject, including professional domains such as sciences, engineering, technology, medicine and management, one have choice of learning in national language. Most of faculty and students in best of institutions (where such confidence can start) still don't feel even confident of reading in national language; naturally journey to writing and operating in national language environments will test best of leadership.
- Transformation of India from a soft state (easy target for many kind of terrorism, dumping and inequalities) to a smart state (e.g. attitude of zero tolerance for terrorism) (Goswami, 2006), will demand courageous experiments of team leadership.

REFLECTIONS

Experiencing energy of growing young population, India has many competitiveness opportunities and tough leadership challenges. Appropriate leadership is an important prerequisite for many transformations and reforms needed for rapid scale-up in competitiveness across levels – firms, organizations, industries and country as a whole. Leadership challenges are quite difficult for India as the character, capabilities and skills needed for the transformations are inadequate, particularly for top leadership in polity and bureaucracy. At the same time, India has many leaders, in its villages, on its factory floors, in its schools and in many other walks of life. These are people who are making small but well-directed contributions for competitiveness. The real challenge is about team leadership that can channelize energy of such dispersed centres into movements that make India a developed country. Many such challenges on economic, political, social and technological fields must be addressed, if India is to march forward rapidly to meet rising aspirations of masses while balancing on key fronts such as environment, energy, trade, savings and investments. At the same time balances with continuity forces (see Sushil, 2005) such as our sustainable values (e.g one enshrined in Gita and Ramayan; Yadav, 2000) should also be strived for. This paper is just a beginning to inspire ideas; much research and experiments across levels and disciplines will be needed to unlock huge potential of team leadership for competitiveness of India. Universal, ageless tenets of several faith and practices that have withstood several massive invasions and keep guiding millions gives us the confidence that the transformations are happening and will help masses of India regain their confidence, health and joy of contributing to a great country.

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APPENDIX

Table A1 An Example of Team Leadership Processes in Context of a Research Lab

<i>Processes/sub-processes</i>	<i>Key /Actor(s)</i>
Identification & selection of members	Team leader / mentors
Orientation & awareness training	Team members
On-the job training	Team leader/members
Mentoring	Mentors
Collaborating, learning & feedback	All

- Notes:**
1. The example is based on several experiments being evolved in our nano-lab called “Strategy and Competitiveness Lab” at the DMS, IITD.
 2. Most of these processes are directed at nurturing leaders, most join the lab as volunteers.

FLEXIBLE PEOPLE ARE STRONGER

Water is fluid, soft and yielding. But water will wear away rock, which is rigid and cannot yield. As a rule, whatever is fluid, soft, and yielding will overcome whatever is rigid and hard. This is another paradox - what is soft is strong. Water flows humbly to the lowest level. Nothing is weaker than water, yet for overcoming what is hard and strong, nothing surpasses it.

– *Lao-Tzu, Taoist philosopher*

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S SPEECH AT THE WORLD'S PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS, CHICAGO

Sister and brothers of America, it fills my heart with joy unspeakable to rise in response to the warm and cordial welcome which you have given us. I thank you in the name of the most ancient order of monks in the world; I thank you in the name of the mother of religious; I thank you in the name of millions and millions of Hindu people of all class and sects.

I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true. I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and nations of the earth. I am proud to tell you that we have gathered in our bosom the purest remnant of the Israelites, who came to Southern India and took refuge with us in the very year in which their holy temple was shattered to pieces by Roman tyranny. I am proud to belong to the religion which has sheltered and is still fostering the remnant of the grand Zoroastrian nation. I will quote to you, brethren, a few lines from a hymn which I remember to have repeated from my earliest boyhood, which is every day repeated by millions of human beings. "As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, sources in different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to thee."

The present convention, which is one of the most august assemblies ever held, is in itself a vindication, a declaration to the world of wonderful doctrine preached in the Gita: "Whosoever come to Me, through whatsoever form. I reach him; all men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to me." Sectarianism, bigotry and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often and often with human blood, destroyed civilization and sent whole nations to despair.

Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now. But their time has come; and I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honour of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal.

– *Swami Vivekananda, September 11, 1883*