

Leadership: Meaning and Purpose

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Abstract

Leadership is one of the most important aspects in human beings and animal life. It has been described as the process of social influence in which one person is able to enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task. The danger that leadership may be perverted is why ethics are so important to good leadership. Ethics are the inner compass that directs a person toward what is right and fair. Effective leaders possess some reputable traits and these traits are the distinguishing qualities or characteristics of a person and character is the sum total of these traits. This paper aims to identify traits that make leaders effective in different situations of human life. The list of leadership traits were given is used as a framework to identify traits in an eminent business personality – Bill Gates.

KEYWORDS – leadership, ethics, traits, business, Bill Gates

INTRODUCTION

Leadership plays a pivotal role in human lifetime. Leadership is a universal activity evident in human beings and in animals. It involves attaining greatness without compromising on rules. One must be courageous enough to face the world and achieve success. In today's world, leadership qualities and abilities are a must to survive. Leadership is one of the most important aspects in the organizational context. However, defining leadership has been challenging. It has been described as the process of social influence in which one person is able to enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task. We have a definition more inclusive from Alan Keith of Genentech who said "Leadership is ultimately about creating a way for people to contribute to making something extraordinary happen" (Kouzes.J, and Posner.B.2007).

With reference to leadership, it is evident throughout classical Western and Eastern writings (Bass, 1990) that there is a common belief that leadership is vital to effective organizational and societal functioning. Leadership is easy to identify in normal circumstances but difficult to understand precisely. Fiedler (1971), for example, noted: "There are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are leadership theories — and there are almost as many theories of leadership as there are psychologists working in the field." A definition of leadership also requires that we differentiate it conceptually from power and management, because these concepts are often confused with leadership.

We will not be where we are today had we not had people, down the ages, who possessed the quality of looking ahead, thinking for tomorrow. Seers, prophets, writers

and thinkers have guided the destiny of humanity and history is replete with examples of such personalities. The need and value of leaders are felt distinctly during times of change. And 'change' is what distinguishes the world we live in at present. So much so that the only thing that does not change is change itself. This explains why the concept of leadership now occupies the centre stage. Take any great leader, in history or fiction, you would find that change is always a precondition to these people assuming leadership roles. In other words, changes necessitate leaders. Rapid changes require not simply a few leaders but leadership qualities in as many as possible. True leadership is sometimes hard to distinguish from false leadership, which is merely a form of pretending. Hence the current dominance of leadership qualities in the realms of academics, business and industry.

The danger that leadership may be perverted is why ethics are so important to good leadership. Ethics are the inner compass that directs a person toward what is right and fair. Only if a person has an inner ethical compass can he or she be sure that leadership qualities will not turn to evil ends. Learning to lead with good objectives is the sole purpose of this present study. So let us begin by saying that those who do harm are not leaders at all; we may recognize that they are influential and persuasive, but we will not think of them as leaders.

CHARACTERISTICS OF GREAT LEADERS

Leaders may be born or made. There are certain characteristics found in some people that seem to naturally put them in a position where they are looked up as a leader. Whether a person is born a leader or develops skills and abilities to become a leader is a debatable one. There are some reputable traits found in effective leaders. **Traits** are the distinguishing qualities or characteristics of a person, while character is the sum total of these traits.

Traits of a Good Leader are

1. Authority
2. Ambitious
3. Aggressive
4. Boldness
5. Charisma
6. Competent
7. Conscientiousness
8. Courageous
9. Demanding
10. Decision-making
11. Emotional-stability
12. Forward-looking
13. Generous
14. Goal setting
15. Hard working
16. Honest

17. Imaginative
18. Innovative
19. Inspiring
20. Intelligent
21. Interpersonal relationship
22. Knowledge
23. Passion
24. Pragmatic
25. Proactive
26. Risk-taking
27. Self-assurance
28. Straightforward
29. Stress management
30. Team building
31. Vision

These qualities may be innate or can be developed. Great deeds, achievements and conquests have been possible only because of leadership the fact of which is evidenced in literature and history. Great warriors like Alexander the great, Napoleon and Greek warriors were determined to conquer the world with their armies. It all happened because of their leadership abilities. In the developmental process of quality leaders, literature plays an important role. It informs how men ruled earlier and suggests how one should rule in the current. Leaders are always admired and considered indispensable. They make a difference and absence of leadership is always fatal to any enterprise or society. Two factors seem to have motivated most leaders – interests and passion.

Reading of literature helps in understanding leadership as epics, stories and novels deal with heroes and other such exemplary characters. Further, disciplines like art, history, philosophy and social sciences supplement understanding of the concept. The use of literature to understand leadership inherits some problems owing to the vastness of the subject itself. Secondly, choosing the specific material to identify leadership is not easy. And finally the selected material has to be interpreted and then used to understand leadership as a role. Interpretation is an art and it requires experience. It is not merely confined to the search for meaning, but also includes providing insight. *The Harvard Business School Bulletin (June 1984)* published a write up on a workshop on leadership organized by The Harvard Business School. It covered some of the ideas with the title ‘The Search for the Heroic Man.’ It started with the example of Henry Ford who built one of the largest factories in the world to transform iron ore and rubber into automobiles. J.M.Burns says in his book *Leadership (1980)* that he has used Henry Ford as an example for ‘Transformational leadership.’ Ralph Stodgill (1948) in his influential paper argued that the importance of personal traits of leaders depended, to some degree, on the situation in which a leader functioned.

Providing the 21st century world with leaders who possess vision, versatility and understanding, would be a bigger challenge. According to Max Weber, the first Sociological thinker who vastly contributed to the study of leadership, this role demands both passion and perspective, and more importantly it requires a balance between the

two. In other words, it demands an ability to look at reality with a wider perspective, developing a vision for the future and a passionate commitment to values and purposes. In *Othello*, Shakespeare developed the play based on the idea of 'difference' between appearance and reality, or between masks and faces.

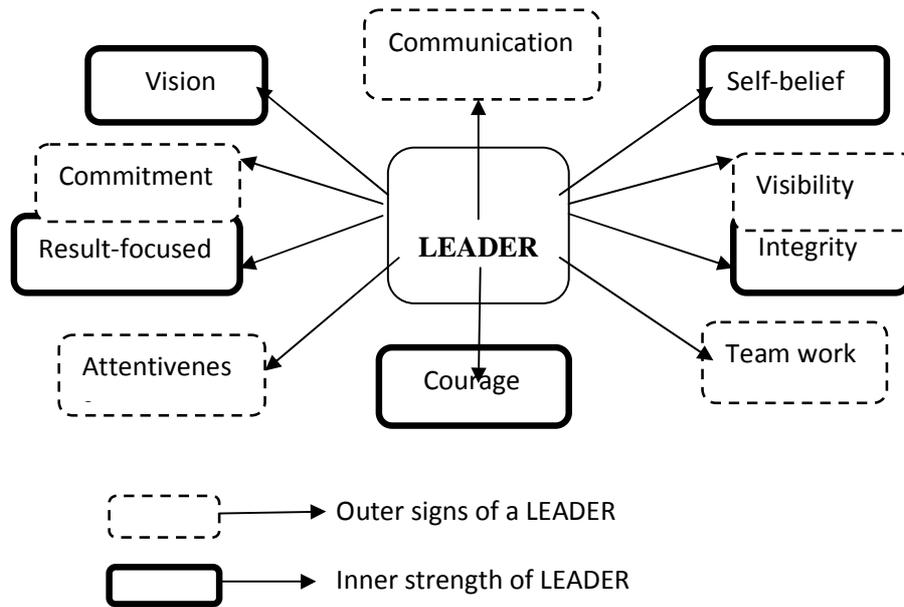
In this perspective, the dramatist portrayed the goals of all major characters: Othello, Desdemona and Iago appear to be highly ambiguous and often put people in the ambiguous situation and act towards it. Discussions on such serious issues against the back drop of his play, has proved its pedagogic value in the course of leadership. The other useful issue for discussion can be success and failures. Individuals often find it easy to believe that success in their lives depends on their talents and choices, while failures are more due to the destiny and malevolence. The best piece of Literature to discuss this theme is Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, describing the responses of the people and importance of situation that shape history.

Henry Ibsen's *The Wild Duck* (1950) shows masks people wear, the illusions under which they live, decisions they take and the symbols they use to communicate subtle ideas. In Miland Bokil's *Thirsting for Water* the author demonstrates the use of catalyst for understanding leadership role. It also uses concepts of self-fulfillment and highlights the difference between success and satisfaction.

Famous fictional works are now used in B-schools to teach leadership, one important example being the use of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* by Sloan Institute of Management, MIT, Massachusetts. Okonkwo the central character is an exemplary study in failed leadership. Though there have been far reaching changes in taste, appreciation and interpretation of imaginative literature in recent times, especially in mainstream literature, character has continued as the mainstay of fiction and drama. But theories and schools of criticism and their dominance have kept character study at bay. To cite one extreme, characters have been understood only as 'locales of linguistic energy.'

ASSESSING LEADERSHIP QUALITIES

All leaders need strong personality traits to assert influence and influence function: some of the attributes are internal, such as vision, but they always have to be complemented by external qualities such as high visibility to get the most from team members. A team leader needs to be both a facilitator and an inspirer— a business team depends upon its leaders to provide it with the facility to make decisions and support to grow. Let us see a couple of examples of how leadership is perceived and understood by listing qualities, traits etc.



This was developed by the UK's Consultancy and it is influenced heavily by the example of famous Sport stars. The model indicates the five internal and external skills, that a leader possesses.

This paper aims to identify traits that make leaders effective in different situations of human life. The list of leadership traits given above is used as a framework to identify traits in an eminent business personality – Bill Gates. He is well-known in the current perspective of leadership. Business is considered as an important area of human activity and the present research, it is hoped, would be of interest to everyone. The purpose of the research is to study the type of clustering of traits in a particular domain and also to identify those that run common to the categories. The correlation between trait sets and performance is analysed.

CONTINGENCY PERSPECTIVE OF LEADERSHIP

This method is based on the idea that most appropriate leadership style depends on the situation. Most of the Contingency leadership theories assume that an effective leader must be insightful and flexible. And also, leaders should possess high emotional intelligence, particularly a self-monitoring personality. Fiedler developed a contingency model of leadership that mainly describes the relationship between leadership style and the favorableness of the situation. Fiedler explains that situational favorableness by using three terms.

They are the *leader-member relationship*, which is the most critical variable in determining the situation favorableness and the *degree of task structure*, which is the second most important input into the favorableness of the situation and finally the *leader's position power* obtained through formal authority, which is the third most critical dimension of the situation. This leadership theory assumes that the best leadership style depends on the level of situational control and that the situation can be arranged to fit the leader's natural style. It seems that leader-member relations are actually an indicator of leader effectiveness (as in Path-goal theory) rather than being a situational

factor. This theory considers only two leadership styles whereas other models present a more complex and realistic array of behavior options.

Fielder's contingency model may become a historical footnote, but it does make an important contribution by suggesting that leadership style is related to the individual's personality. Leaders might be able to change their style temporarily, but they would prefer a particular style for long term. Another well-known contingency approach was that of House (1971), who focused on the leader's role in clarifying the paths that would lead to followers' goals.

BILL GATES

Bill Gates undoubtedly has been a phenomenon in the business world. Not only is he known for business success but also as a person who wants to be seen by people as a god human being with compassion and ethics. Bill Gates and his characteristics that made him an influential business leader have been taken up for analysis. Let me raise some questions about Bill Gates' leadership style and ability:

- i. What behaviour traits or skills does Bill Gates possess or utilize?
- ii. What theory and concepts of leadership best describe and explain Bill Gates' leadership style?

AN INFLUENTIAL LEADER

Let us consider that Bill Gates as one of the influential leadership characters of our time. Des Dearlove says, "Bill Gates is the modern business phenomena; the greatest of all cyber tycoons. His is not simply a story of technical brilliance and enormous wealth. It is one of the remarkable vision and an obsessive desire to win. It is also about a leadership style that is radically different to anything the business world has seen before." Bill Gates was born on October 28, 1955 and brought up in Seattle. His father William H Gates II is a Seattle attorney and his mother Mary Gates, was a school teacher and chairperson of the United Way International. Gates attended the public elementary school and then the private lakeside school. Then he discovered his interest in software and started creating computer programming at the age of thirteen. In 1973, Gates entered Harvard University. While in Harvard, Gates developed a version of programming in windows BASIC for the first micro computer. Later, he left Harvard in his junior year to devote his time to Microsoft. He dreamed that computer will be on every desktop in the offices for its value as user friendly mechanisms. Gates' foresight and his vision for personal computing have been central to the success of Microsoft in particular and software industry in general.

TRAITS IN BILL GATES

What traits, behaviours or skills does Bill Gates possess to be a universal personality? How do they help in defining him as leader? I have listed below several traits that Bill Gates exhibits in his leadership approach.

The traits have been collected from articles on Bill Gates

1. Vision
2. Knowledge
3. Assertive
4. Authoritative
5. Competitive
6. Charismatic/Dynamic
7. Demanding
8. Generous
9. Ambitious

VISION

The most important factor behind Bill Gates' prestige and success is his visionary abilities. He saw the potential for every web desktop computers in every home and office. While the then computer majors could not guess what was in store, Gates had the vision how big a success the PC was going to be. This must have involved not simply the conceptions of a machine but its link to individual, societal and organizational needs

KNOWLEDGE

Bill Gates possesses knowledge of personal computing and programming. He has been working with the computers from the age of thirteen and has excelled in the field experience. A high school teacher told his students to clarify their doubts regarding computers with Bill Gates and also he himself went on for three years to read computing magazines and programmes.

ASSERTIVE/AUTHORITATIVE

Bill Gates is assertive in nature. He always says what he thinks and is known to have a hot temper in the board meetings. He fosters an environment of constructive criticism and enables and encourages his co-workers to act quickly to solve technical problems.

COMPETITIVE

'Competitive' is the word used quite often to describe Bill Gates. He is intensively competitive and never lags in his desire to beat his competitors. To him money is not the motivator but winning is! He is very much interested in retaining and enhancing America's competitive edge in technology.

CHARISMATIC

"The word charisma (origin from the Greek word ...(kharisma), "gift" or "divine favor," from ..., "to favor," from ..., "favor") refers to a rare trait found in certain personalities usually including extreme charm and a 'magnetic' quality of personality along with innate and powerfully sophisticated personal communicability and persuasiveness." - (Wikipedia.) According to Gates, charisma is personal magnetism. It gains a lot of respect from the large groups of people. In the IT industry, intellectual capital is the most crucial aspect. Bill Gates' charisma attracts and hires the highest talent available. This is the most important characteristic of Bill

Gates because industrial growth occurs with ease. According to Gates nothing is unavailable.

DEMANDING

Bill Gates is considered to be extremely demanding. He fired a President after only eleven months of service and is particular about setting demanding standards. An intense businessman, Gates took only two to three days of vacation in the first five years of Microsoft existence. Gates is demanding and strong in his vision. He refuses to surround himself with yes men.

AMBITIOUS

Bill Gates was not sure of his ambition. In 1975, when Microsoft was started, personal computers were widely dismissed for neutralized hobbies. He and Paul Allen, his high school friend and cofounder of Microsoft immediately recognized the implications of the microprocessor for business as well as professional use and its potential to revolutionize the everyday life for billions of people worldwide. In 1981, IBM selected Microsoft to be the main supplier of Operating Systems for the first personal computers. This was Microsoft's first big step towards establishing fine standards for PC industry. We know very well that it is an understatement to say its windows operating systems and office PC softwares are dominant today. Bill Gates has taken his ambition beyond Microsoft as well. He actively tries to make a difference in some of the most poverty stricken regions of the world.

LEADERSHIP THEORY APPLICATION

Bill Gates has experienced and earned enormous success in Microsoft. In his vision, he also made others enjoy enormous success as well. Bill Gates is not, however a universally great leader. He possesses more of the traits that great leaders have and few traits that hinder effective leadership such as willingness to allow anger to take control of his actions and use of strong language.

Another hindrance for effective leadership in Gates one may find is insistence on micro-managing his company in the early years. We may conclude here that his success depends on the visionary abilities, coupled with relentless ambition and aggressive business practices. This combination results in a very powerful leader, provided that the situation speaks his personality.

Bill Gates leadership style can be explained by using Fiedler's contingency model of leadership. This method is prescriptive in nature. This model dictates or explains which leader will be the most effective in any particular situation.

Here, Gates tends to operate most effectively in the task oriented situations. His leadership traits combine with his knowledge to make him the most important expert in the software computing industry. He is also charismatic and earns great respect from his coworkers.

His past experiences in life have shaped him into a successful leader of today. At the age of thirteen he started writing software. In Harvard, Bill Gates developed the vision that has today become one of the famous software companies in the world. Though Gates might carry other traits that may prompt application of other models, he fits much more significantly the Fielder model.

CONCLUSION

Technological innovations, knowledge accumulations, theories, inventions or other such leaps are a common feature of today's world. If performance was really about possessing subject knowledge and technical skills, then the world should have by now become a place of prosperity and well being. But no such thing has happened and we know that it is unlikely as long as we do not bother to learn ourselves as well. This 'learning ourselves' is very important to success whatever the field might be. Who are these leaders? What do we expect from them? What makes them different from others? As children we had our heroes both real and imaginary. We made them ideals of behaviour and tried to emulate them. But the business of growing up makes us forget some and remember others. The point to be had here is that we require models. Even the practice of narrating stories from the puranas and the epics, highlighting the behaviour and exploits of the character is definitely an attempt in the direction of providing children models of behaviour. The cognitive, emotional and intellectual capacities we carry are a combination, networking of the imprints we allowed our parents, grandparents, teachers, and such others to make on our minds. When something greatly influences us, we invariably think and reflect on it. Such cognitive attention would surely give us an idea of factors, antecedents and other ingredients that went into creating that influence. This, combined with an understanding of the context in which it occurred, gives us the ability to design our model of action or behaviour.

Literature Studies earlier on attached importance to character study, a cousin of personality studies in the fields of political science, history and psychology. In literature, character study either started with inspiration and moved to admiration-appreciation or relied on psychoanalysis that tended to dwell on sickness and not strength. Characters need to split into thoughts, feelings and emotions, traits, attributes, characteristics etc. for a working understanding of them. A human brain is supposed to be a self-organising mechanism. We need to feel this mechanism material for self organization and one of the effective ways to achieve this is to expose ourselves to personalities in closer details can make one improve capacities for self-direction, self-regulation and self-correction all qualities of a successful leader. The present study has dealt with a great personality of a particular field and identified the qualities/traits responsible for his success. Based on the review of literature, it is also analysed what leadership style can be applied to the selected personalities. Generosity is a trait much more valued especially when it is found in a business personality. A business leader in comparison requires to control more his team/employees as evident from traits listed under him – assertive, authoritative, competitive, demanding and ambitious. Whatever the learning, the first impulse in us is to look around for working model. No learning is exempt from this condition. Instead of simply hero-worshipping leaders let us study them in detail and depth to find out how much a leader we too are.

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