



## Redefining the Leadership Style: Beyond the Conventional

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### Abstract:

*Often it is debated which of the leadership styles defines benchmarks of success to ensure team performance as desired. The success or failure of every strategy that's crafted at the top of the pyramid depends on Bottom of the Pyramid Leadership (BPL). Also it is strongly advocated by many globally acclaimed eminent scholars that some distinct leadership style would be honed by years of experience, instinct, and relentless practice. Apparently all such infinite advises seem to be unworkable in this highly unpredictable and turbulent environment leaving the board-rooms shallow. Paradox and uncertainty are increasing at the heart of leading organizations and many are not comfortable in trying to shape the environment to resolve the ambiguity. Perhaps this involves lot of research and consultancy that calls for painstaking exercises on the part of a leader by sidelining his fundamental domain. Some continue to believe that effective leaders are flexible, responsive to new situations. While flexibility is important there is an apprehension of being interpreted as weakness. The two most acclaimed corporate chiefs of this bygone era, Percy Barnevik, of Asea Brown Boveri, and Jack Welch, of General Electric, dismantled bureaucratic structures using both soft and hard skills. They coach and cajole as well as command and control. The "leader as coach" is yet another phrase more often seen in business books than in the real world. Acting as a coach to a colleague is not something that comes easily to many executives. It is increasingly common for executives to need mentoring. This conceptual paper attempts to unleash some of the fundamental beliefs that are fixed with the cultural and social thought process that can be contemplated to identify a new style to lead the future groups.*

**Keywords:** BPL, Corporate Governance, Schools of Leadership Thought, VBL

### 1. Size Does Matter: Leadership Logistics

None of us is as smart as all of us. The Lone Ranger is dead. Instead of the individual problem-solver, we have a new model for creative achievement. Steve Jobs, Walt Disney headed groups and found their own greatness in them (Bennis). "He or she is a pragmatic dreamer, a person with an original but attainable vision. Inevitably, the leader has to invent a style that suits the group. The standard models, especially command and control, simply don't work. The heads of groups have to act decisively, but never arbitrarily. They have to make decisions without limiting the perceived autonomy of the other participants. Designing an atmosphere in which others can put a dent in the universe is the leader's creative act". Leaders always communicate through decisions and their thought provoking extrovert approach that leaves an impact on the organizational members. Conventional leaders were supported even when they failed in their attempts which may be due to autocratic style, but of-late there has been a growing realization about events that takes a turn around due to the leaders rational and scientific thought process. Leadership is more considered to be a 'trained trait' rather than an inborn quality. Today's leaders don't follow rigid role models but prefer to nurture their own leadership style. They regard leadership as drawing people and disparate parts of the organisation together in ways that makes

individuals and the organisation more effective. A crisis of leadership is brewing. Given the recent global economic meltdown of financial markets, the need for effective leadership has never been more evident than it is today. This crisis has led to a call for organizations to evaluate the leadership potential of current employees and new hires. The rules of the business game are changing, unexpected competition is coming from many places, and "current leaders represent what...business needed in the past, not in the present or the future." The most important priority for organizations is to discover new leadership potential, develop it, and find the best way to grow it. To be effective and successful in any leadership position, an individual must fit the demands of a particular position, as well as its leadership requirements. Organizations and individuals can identify leadership styles and match employees to key positions that drive organizational and individual performance. Employees with strong potential can then be enrolled in leadership development programs that enhance their potential, hone their leadership skills, and place them in appropriate positions of authority. By using appropriate Leadership Style Inventory to gauge not only the leadership style but the dominant leadership pattern with the organizational position, organizations can develop Visionary Leaders at every level. Let's examine some of the styles of successful leaders for clues that help us in identifying what a leadership performance could be:

## 2. Curt to the Courteous

Leadership was once about hard skills such as planning, finance and business analysis. When command and control ruled the corporate world, the leaders were heroic rationalists who moved people around like pawns and fought like stags. When they spoke, the followers adored orders and put them to action. Now, leadership is increasingly concerned with soft skills – teamwork, persuasion, communication and motivation. The trouble is that for many executives, the soft skills remain hard to understand and master. After all, hard skills have traditionally been the ones which enabled people to climb the top of the corporate ladder. The entire career system in some organisations was based on using hard functional skills to progress, but when executives reach the top, the ones they possess becomes insufficient and unmatched. Corporate leaders may find that although they can do the financial analysis and the strategic planning, they are poor at communicating ideas to employees or colleagues, or have little insight into how to move their people together. The modern chief executive requires an array of skills. Some suggest that we expect too much of leaders. Indeed, "renaissance" of men and women are rare. Leadership in a modern organisation is highly complex and it is increasingly difficult – sometimes impossible – to find an all encompassing individual to lead. Among the most crucial skills are the ability to capture your audience – you will be competing with lots of other people for their attention. Leaders of the future will also have to be emotionally efficient. They will promote variation rather than promoting people in their own likeness. They will encourage experimentation and enable people to learn from failure. They will build and develop people. Is it too much to expect of one person? I think it probably is: In the future, we will see leadership groups rather than individual leaders. This change in emphasis from individuals towards groups has been charted by the leadership guru Warren Bennis. In his work "*Organizing Genius*", he concentrates on famous ground-breaking groups rather than individual leaders.

## 3. Components and Constituents of a model 'Leader'

However, the role of the new model leader is ridden with contradictions. Paradox, mismatch and uncertainty are increasingly at the heart of leading corporate houses. Irrespective of house of factors that influence the work environment, one commonality is ambiguity. Indeed, we know that ambiguity at the work place does not allow any leader to survive for long and hence need to be redesigned and resolve. This would call for a good research on the factors that influence the working environment both internally and externally so that problem areas can be identified, analyzed and streamlined for improvement. Its easier said than done however, it needs lot of flexibility on the part of leaders in order to be responsive to dynamic situations. Higher the flexibility higher can be the cooperation through proficient team members

with required skill and help strike a balance. While flexibility is important in this new leadership model, it should not be interpreted as weakness. The two most lauded corporate chiefs of the last decade, Percy Barnevik, of Asea Brown Boveri, and Jack Welch, of General Electric, dismantled bureaucratic structures using both soft and hard skills. They coach and cajole as well as command and control. The "leader as coach" is yet another phrase more often seen in business books than in the real world. Acting as a coach to a colleague is not something that comes easily to many executives. It is increasingly common for executives who need mentoring. "Heroes are rebels with a cause. Rebels because they challenge the traditional ways of thinking and refuse to follow the herd. They have a cause, a vision, that's larger than life." (Sharif Khan). From a small-town Polish boy born to a retired army officer to become Pope; from a hard life in Nazi occupied Poland, his mother died of kidney and heart failure, an older brother died from scarlet fever, to become quite possibly "man of the century." How did such an unlikely candidate for the head of the Roman Catholic Church rise so quickly to such prominence? Swami Vivekananda, Adi Shankarachari, Dalai Lama, etc., are of the same intensity who exhibited their courage, passion, compassion, ebullience, and effectiveness in reaching the hearts of everyone around. What leadership lessons can we learn from such global spiritual leaders who moved the world? Here is a brief timeline snap-shot of Karol W Josef's exemplary leadership:

#### 4. Knowledge

1958: Pope Pius XII names K. W. Josef auxiliary bishop of Krakow. By this time, Josef was a professor of ethics and had two doctorate degrees; he had studied theology in clandestine during the oppressive Nazi occupation of Poland. Leaders are voracious readers. Specialized knowledge is the key to leadership along with general studies. While Josef had two doctorates in his field, he also studied philosophy and literature and was also a playwright and a poet. If you were to take an hour-a-day reading up in your field and applying the knowledge, within a period of five years you would become an 'expert' within your field. People are hungering and thirsting for a leader with knowledge and experience. As a chaplain for university students in Krakow, he used to go on frequent camping and kayaking trips and offered counseling and mentorship to the students. On these excursions, he would usually take an hour or more to be alone to reflect, read, and pray. These moments of solitude gave him a strong internal compass and knowledge of self required of great leaders.

#### 5. Humility

Elected Pope John Paul II during 1978 to crown the 264<sup>th</sup> pope and first non-Italian pope in 456 years; refuses formal papal coronation in favor of a simple inauguration ceremony and chooses not to use the royal plural "We" referring to him plainly as "I". Swami Vivekananda addressed his first speech by delivering eloquently as 'my dear brothers and sisters of America', again signifies the magnitude of humility he maintained throughout. Pope was not impressed by the trappings of power and its symbols and made that clear from the day he was elected. He had a very simple, plain, and honest way of communicating that endeared people to him. He exemplified the servant-leader role by embodying one of the titles of the Pope: Servus Servorum Dei (Servant of the Servants of God). Swami Vivekananda's philosophy of 'Servant Based Leadership' (*Daasasya Dassah*, as he put it), also enlightens us on the simplicity of guiding people through his knowledge and wisdom to serve them with humility.

Leaders are just humble. We can learn from Pope and Vivekananda's example by not isolating one self in the corner office or ivory tower with each successive promotion, hiding behind closed doors and a sea of fancy titles, diplomas, awards, certificates, and press-clippings. Like the leaders of the yore, the leaders of today need to be accessible to the people with open doors, seeking to understand and encourage a mutual dialogue. Leadership by walking around and talking to the people and listening to their needs withers ambiguity, earns respect and trust.

## 6. Emotion

Visits his homeland, Poland, during 79 for the first time as Pope and speaks to his people, inspiring Solidarity, the first independent labor movement in the Soviet bloc. Risking his life against the totalitarian Communist Regime in Poland, he returned to his homeland and did not speak in the typical, official 'visiting dignitary' tone. He spoke from his heart, from the gut, soul-to-soul – in their language. The people of Poland saw themselves reflected in him; he encouraged them to not crawl like animals but walk tall and 'be not afraid.' The crowd went wild and a flame of rebellion and counter-revolution was lit in the collective consciousness of the Polish people, sparking the Solidarity movement for independence and freedom that eventually toppled the Communist Regime. Similarly when Subhash Chandra Bose rose to the occasion of freedom movement, he expressed his emotional concern over the issue and lauded at public saying that "you give me the blood, I will give you the freedom", signifying the unity aspect associated with courage and compassion.

Leaders are emotional. Intellect alone is not enough; both brain and heart have to be intertwined. If the leader wants to win his people, he would have to pay out apprehensions and speak from the heart. The leader who speaks from the heart almost always wins over reason alone. The complexity and challenges of our times call for leaders to develop all of their capabilities. Emotions often seem to be a mysterious aspect of what it means to be human. Our intent has been to create a framework so that the "mystery" is replaced with an understanding of how to identify and develop one's emotional capacity. We believe that leaders who develop 'emotional dynamism' would be able to leverage the power of their emotions. Like a master pianist who captures the power and majesty of a composition, an emotionally dynamic leader brings forth the "music" of the organization in all its complexity and inspires others to achieve their own potential as they contribute to the organization.

## 7. Forgiveness

Meets with assassin Ali Agca in prison during 83. Just two years after the assassination attempt on his life by gunman, Mehmet Ali Agca, and several months of painful recovery, the Pope visited Agca in prison and offered forgiveness. (Much later, in 2000, the Italian government granted clemency to Agca, on the Pope's request).

Leaders are willing to forgive. 'To err is human and to forgive is divine'. The former is a follower and the latter is a leader. We are all fallible human beings that make mistakes. The mark of a true leader is his or her willingness to forgive. It's also a smart leadership strategy in the long-term. While there's no excuse to keep someone who consistently fails to learn from their mistakes, the boss that fires an employee for making a big mistake is often blundered for doing so. After all, there's always the risk that the next person hired could potentially make the same disastrous mistake. But by offering forgiveness to the person that errs, that person is unlikely to repeat that same mistake, and will most likely remain fiercely loyal to such leader.

## 8. Responsibility

Offers a day of apology for sins committed by members of the Catholic Church over the centuries in 2000; visits Israel and pays homage to the victims of the Holocaust. Josef was the first pope to visit the Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland in 1979, and later in 2000, he visited Jerusalem's Yad Vashem in remembrance of the six million Jews who died in the Holocaust, praying for reconciliation between Christians and Jews and apologizing for the sin of anti-Semitism by Christians. The day that former U.S. President, John F. Kennedy, took full responsibility for the Bay of Pigs fiasco, was the day he became a leader.

Leaders take full responsibility for their organization. Blaming and complaining is the mark of a loser. We can make excuses or we can make progress – but we certainly can't do both. To be a leader, you must take full responsibility for your actions, your team, and ultimately the whole organization or cause you lead.

### 9. Uncommon Leadership

1982 – 2003: Receives PLO leader Arafat; Meets Gorbachev as first pope to meet with a Kremlin Chief; visits Cuba and meets with Castro; becomes first pope in history to enter a mosque. Despite criticism from many corners on the controversial issues he supported, he stood for what he believed in and had the courage of convictions. As a leader, he was tough but flexible. His flexibility allowed him to meet famous, and infamous, world leaders and address difficult issues that made him unpopular in certain circles. But he also had the inner toughness and steely resolve to break down walls and foster reconciliation. As Pope and head of the Roman Catholic Church he knew his role was to unify the Church while serving as an apostle of justice and peace. He stood his ground and never wavered, even if it meant alienation.

Leaders stand for what they believe in. Leadership is not about winning a popularity contest. Stand up for what you believe in. Be strong and be firm. A divided mind is weak; a united mind, clear and singular in purpose, is powerful beyond measure.

*An Overview of LSI (Leadership Style Index)*

The LSI, which is relatively new, is comprised of four basic styles that encompass two dimensions and are assigned to four quadrants.

Style	Description	Characteristics	Examples
<b>Commander</b>	When goals are narrow and short-run, and performance and specific results are required.	Intuitive, takes charge, demands loyalty, insists on compliance, expects results, and finds workable solutions.	Jack Welch Walter Wriston of Taking First National City Bank of New York Indrani Nooyi
<b>Logical</b>	When goals are broad and future-oriented, and performance is important.	Uses analysis and reasoning, is good at structured problem solving, is systems-oriented, looks for new directions and innovative improvements, and expects commitment.	Bill Gates Warren Buffet Steve Jobs L.N. Mittal
<b>Imaginative</b>	When goals are broad and future-oriented, and are of a world-changing nature.	Envisions new opportunities, creates future visions, is very creative, empowers others, engenders trust, uses heuristic solutions, and tends to have charisma.	John F. Kennedy Pierre Wack of Shell Anil Ambani Chandra Kochar
<b>Supportive</b>	When goals specific and seemingly made reachable short-	Relates well with others in a cooperative environment, is considerate, gives	Pope John Paul XXIII. Narayana Murthy Ratan Tata

	ranged-targets, and demands organization / behavioral restructuring and transformation.	approbation to peers, and always tries for mutual agreement (does not like conflict).	(very few of the current day business leaders has been identified to possess this style, as it plays significantly in boosting the morale)
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## 10. Conclusion

A welter of research is pursued globally over the best styles of leadership since yore and yet to confirm as a single best model to fit-into-all corporate houses of today. However, some of the major indicators as were observed in the discussion above are somewhat close to the perspectives of what a leader of today could manage to equip and lead the groups under the burgeoning crisis. In a nutshell:

- Affiliative leaders create emotional bonds and harmony along with the kind of resonance that can help boost performance and maximize employee retention. This kind of leadership is very useful in repairing broken trust in an organization. Affiliative leaders create strong personal ties to facilitate business activities.
- Coercive leaders demand immediate compliance. They make tough decisions and generally put the job at hand before harmony. They must take care that their hard-and-fast attitude doesn't stifle communication.
- Authoritative leaders mobilize their organizations toward a common vision. They are tenacious, aggressive, and have winning as their primary goal. They sometimes miss the larger mission of leadership, which is articulating a vision.
- Democratic leaders build consensus through participation. When they are uncertain about direction, they solicit feedback from all parts of the organization. This style can have its drawbacks. If you rely too much on this approach, it can create a quagmire of meetings, with consensus remaining elusive.
- Coaching leaders develop people for the future. They delegate well and stretch their employees. The downside is that coaching leaders can become prone to micro-management and may stifle creativity.
- Inspirational and transparent leaders make things better on the ethical and moral perspectives of organizational performances.

These are just some of the facets of leadership indicators that have come of age which proved their worth and magnanimity. Every future is based on the past. If the past is forgotten, future cannot be made. Undauntedly the approaches based on such strong philosophies will only be facilitating the future corporate houses to design a truly global leadership style (GLS) to result in the best.

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