DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP PIPELINE: SOME INSIGHTS FROM INDIAN ORGANIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The paper attempts to review how different companies perceive, practice and groom leadership in different organizations depending on the stage of their growth phase. One major controversy involves the locus of leadership in organizations. Some believe that leadership is inherent in the social influence processes occurring among members of a group or particular people or an organization, and leadership is a collective process shared among the members. The opposing view states that one person has more influence than other members and carries out some leadership functions that cannot be shared. The case lets discussed point more towards the first viewpoint which states that leadership is a collective process operating at all levels and is consciously taught in the organization. Some of the ways for developing leadership with the organizations are discussed in the paper below. The challenge is effective management of talent which is trained to act as leader to now pull the organization out of the crisis.

***Keywords*:** leadership, psychometric testing, coaching, competencies

INTRODUCTION

The success and failure of organizations rests to a great extent on how companies perceive, practice and groom leadership within the organizations. At the level of theorizing, a major controversy involves around the locus of leadership in organizations. Some theorists believe that leadership is inherent in the social influence processes occurring among members of a group or an organization, and leadership is a collective process shared among the members. The opposing view is that all groups have role specialization, including a specialized leadership role wherein one person has more influence than other members and carries out some leadership functions that cannot be shared without jeopardizing the success of group's mission. Which assumption is made about the nature of leadership determines whether research will be focused on the attributes and actions of a single formal leader, or on reciprocal influence processes and the leadership functions performed by a variety of people in the organization, including informal leaders. Both approaches appear to provide unique insights, and both may contribute to a better understanding of leadership in large organizations.

While one can explore the literature for both the view points, and some lessons can be drawn from leadership in Indian organizations. A review of some of the successful organizations shows that leadership development is more a process which includes steps like leadership identification through psychometric testing, coaching-mentoring, career planning, competency based development and action learning.

Psychometric testing

The task of grooming leaders begins with identifying potential candidates from the employee pool to groom and train to be leaders. Many organizations use the psychometric testing method to filter latent applicants from the others so that a focused approach can be administered toward them to train and develop. Infosys Technologies Ltd. uses the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) to identify potential leaders based on test score. Wipro Technologies and Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) use the Enneagram techniques for identifying individual personalities. The Enneagram technique is used to identify the personality type of the employees and determine how they tick and develop good relations with co-workers and serving as better employees or leaders in this case. This technique is useful as it creates self awareness and esteem and creates relationships based on understanding and dignity. ICICI Bank also uses the psychometric tests to identify potential candidates and gauge their responses to situations. These tests consist of a variety of questions and candidates responses to each of the questions helps build a character sketch. Questions around a particular trait may be asked in different ways to ensure consistency of responses and eliminate fakeness.

Coaching Mentoring and Career Planning

Providing coaching and mentoring and also planning the career graph of promising employees is an approach taken by organizations like Bharti Airtel (BA).

Bharti's Management Trainee program, christened as Bharti Young Leaders' Program has been designed to provide young leaders an accelerated path to reach their career goals. The Young Leaders Program, has successfully groomed young leaders of BA year on year. These employees have now gained senior positions at various locations within BA. The goal is to nurture and create a pool of potential talent (Young Leaders) who can deliver superior business performance. Provide Young Leaders with a holistic understanding and exposure to the business and the organization. Facilitate Young Leaders in gaining insight into their own strengths, development areas, and provide opportunities for self development. The search is for people who can achieve results, are customer-centric, have strong business acumen, innovative, can think fresh and deliver more. The company has equal opportunities for fresher's who go through the year-long Young Leaders program; and also take laterals for senior positions within the organization. The aim is to attract the top talent in the market, which is the 'best fit' for a dynamic organization like Bharti. On joining, the YL's go through a one-year rigorous trainee program. This program offers challenging work assignments complemented by a learning component. This combination of practical work experience, formal training, and support by career development mentors provides participants with a unique opportunity to develop and assume challenging responsibilities within the organization.

The program is divided into 4 cycles - 0-3 months, 3-6 months, 6-9 months and 9-12 months, which includes Central and Unit induction, cross-functional and functional projects, on the job assignments, Project Reviews, Mentoring Programs, Training and Development exposure, Generative Leadership program, appraisal & assessments.

The community at Bharti is constantly in touch with the central and business YL Team and their progress is closely monitored. Their information and development is also shared on a monthly basis through a monthly newsletter, which also helps the previous year's YL's stay in touch. The program emerges into a long leadership talent development program based on the Bharti Leader profile and the leadership competencies framework. This provides a source of in-house replacements for key leadership positions, a means to attract top talent laterally, and therefore, deliver superior business performance. Various leaders of Bharti Airtel take time off from their busy schedules and make a presentation to the group. The overview of the various businesses at Bharti and interactions with the top management are extremely inspiring for the Young Leaders. After the induction, the YL's are assigned 2 cross-functional projects for 6 months to facilitate the integration of functional / cross-functional exposure with live issues confronting the organization from which the organization can derive value. Projects are cross-functional in nature and are in the function other than the YL's specialization. In order that the YL develops the capability and the competence to become the future leader of Bharti, the input at this stage is a structured intervention build around providing the YL an exposure in the area of Leadership development.

Similarly at Infosys Ltd. the leadership development program has been refined to suit the particular needs of Infosys and is termed as the 'nine pillars' for leadership development in Infosys.' These nine pillars form the backbone of the personality development program and each leader can choose from these pillars for personal development. Depending upon the individual's need to grow and the company's sensitivity to these needs, every individual is groomed to lead the company in the future. The chosen employees -- identified as high potential employees undergo a three-year 'leadership journey' that includes training, participating in personal development program, interacting with other participants, understanding the company better and resolving real business issues. 'The nine pillars for leadership development' incorporates the 360 degree feedback, development assignments where high potential candidates are trained at various functions of the company through job rotations and cross-functional assignments. This helps employees to acquire new leadership skills outside their own areas of expertise and experience. Next there are culture workshops, feedback intensive programs, development relationships for one to one interaction and mentoring. Also, leadership skills training are organized to acclimatize the next rung with leadership roles and to groom them through their own rich experience. Systemic process learning helps individuals to gain an overall view of the company and its diverse and complex systems, business, operations and processes. Thus succession planning also forms a part of grooming leaders of tomorrow.

At Biocon the leadership development is based on the philosophy of equipping employees with know-how to find the best solution, rather than to teach 'one way to do it'. The organization believes in the following principles:

- Start early. Leaders are identified across all levels especially at the junior levels

- Provide cross-functional exposure to the potential business leaders
- Global exposure in tie-up with well-known institutes
- Exposure to training from classroom training to experimental learning
- Devise customized career plans for each of the profiles
- Identify skill-sets intrinsic to the company's DNA.

Similarly at TCS leadership development is through a program called 'Thought Leadership'. This focuses on innovation, excellence in practices, increasing productivity and raising the benchmark in the industry.

At the Aditya Birla Group, there is a three-tier coaching programme that prepares the climate for leadership. Building leadership has to start at the junior level as one cannot ignore the foundation and build the roof. Leadership has different values at different levels. For example, at the junior levels, it is taking initiative. While at senior levels, the crucial leadership trait could be strategic thinking. According to the thinking at the Birla Group, organizations erroneously focus only on truly high potential (executives), who by definition are self-driven. Actually it is the next level of people that requires handholding, care and nurturing. At the same time leadership is not everyone's cup of tea; one has to hone it under diverse circumstances. It includes the following processes:

- Working abroad/ international experiences
- 360 degree feedback to assess and critique leadership attributes, skills and traits – senior managers/ executives
- Assessment center solely for leadership development
- Mentor with admired senior
- Rotational job assignments – senior managers/ executives
- Spending 10 to 24 percent of top leadership teams' time on talent management issues
- Career development process to retain high potentials
- Lateral move attractive to high potentials

The leadership development program consists of developing the vision, selling the vision, finding the way forwards, and leading the charge.

GE has several affinity groups like the Women's Network, GE Volunteers, Hispanic Association, HealthAhead, Veteran's Network, African American Forum, Aian Pcific American Forum etc. These groups organize several events and activities for the development of the members. Several guest sessions are organized and speakers share their personal experiences. The topics around these sessions are Motivation, Leadership, Imagination, Building a Personal Brand. These groups also organize shadow sessions, where an employee who is interested in a particular role is given an opportunity to shadow someone excelling in that role. Based on the same, some of the competencies may be enhanced.

Development of Leadership competencies

Development of leadership competencies at Wipro is carried out through eight Wipro Leadership Qualities, which are based on Wipro vision, values and business strategy. In order to identify and help leaders develop these competencies a 360-degree survey process is adopted. This is an end-to-end program, which starts with the obtaining of feedback from relevant respondents and ends with each leader drawing up a Personal Development Plan (PDP) based on the feedback received. The PDP is developed through "Winds of Change" which is a seven-step program that helps in identifying strengths and improvement areas, and determining the action steps. The contents of this program include focus training to set and develop specific objectives, competency based performance appraisal, 360 feedback, customer inputs to increase customer responsiveness, meet your people program to enhance work place relationships, HR preview and planning, early opportunities and a life cycle development program for managers at each stage for example Entry Level Program, New Leaders' Program, Wipro Leaders' Program, Business Leaders' Program, Strategic Leaders' Program.

The various leaders of Bharti are encouraged to take time off from their busy schedules and make presentations to the group. These interations with the top management are extremely inspiring for the young leaders.It ensures the making of the future Bharti leaders and develops the key competencies that are central to their development. It also helps them explore their own potential for higher performance. Enables their transition from a 'young leader' 'YL' to an 'active contributor' in the organization.

Godrej encourages leadership by the following list of leadership competencies. These include some broad factors like-

- Making things happen regardless of constraints

- Training for setting ambitious goals,

- Contextual goal planning,

- Demonstrating relentless execution,

- Overcoming obstacles resourcefully

- Having a vision and providing direction by thinking into the future, energizing vision, breaking vision into practicable milestones, integrating conflicting/ different visions, foreseeing consequences and accordingly vision correction.

- Infective passion and two-way communication by ownership of goals (self and team), helping others connect goals, active listening, inspiring communication,

- Negotiation

- Persuasiveness

- Personal humility.

- Entrepreneurship by encouraging creativity and innovation, intuiting/ sensing the business potential of an idea/ market/ customer need, risk taking, analysis (and fleshing out of business model), good judgment.

- Being customer focused by proactively understanding customer needs, setting up systems for fulfillment of customer needs and increase customer satisfaction, customer communication (both to and from) and

- Commitment to quality.

- Developing team players by understanding of team/ organizational processes,

- Creativity in achieving win-win, encouraging boundary-less-ness to employees below, influencing others,

- Organizational savvy,

- Relationship building and networking.

At GE, the company believes that there are 5 growth values that are inherent for employees to possess and master in order to be a successful leader within the organization. These 5 values are:

- External Focus
  - Ability to connect with a broad group of stakeholders
  - In tune with outside customers, environment, sees around corners
  - Educated on global issues and curious about the world

- Clear thinker
  - Embraces ambiguity and uncertainty, is adaptable
  - Connects strategy to purpose in a way that inspires
  - Decisive, uses knowledge, experience, network and instinct

- Inclusiveness
  - Welcomes opposing thoughts and ideas and is humble
  - Works collaboratively, respects individuals and cultures
  - Drives engagement and commitment

- Imagination and Courage
  - Generates innovative ideas and makes it happen
  - Encourages risk taking and learns from success/ failure
  - Challenges bureaucracy and non- value add work, drives speed and simplicity

- Expertise
  - Domain depth, credibility built from experience and results
  - Continuously develops self and passionate about developing others
  - Leverages technology to win

The annual appraisal process maps the employees' performance to these 5 growth values and those who are not meeting the mark or the expected level of performance are reviewed. A Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) is drawn for these set of individuals around 2 categories namely: behavioral anchors and performance. The expectations under each of these categories are set and the tasks needed to be performed are mentioned. The manager or coach then reviews the PIP at regular intervals of 1 month each and the progress or results obtained are discussed and documented. Based on the documentations and the performance of the individual the plan is edited or in some cases the manager continues with the plan as agreed during the starting of the PIP. A PIP is generally active for 3 months and has 3 reviews with the employee. After the third review the PIP is inactive or in some exceptional cases even extended.

GE also has a program known as the Employee Development Program (EDP) for development of leadership competencies. The process works as follows:

- The EDP application form has 6 questions on behaviors demonstrated by the employee and reason for interest in the EDP program

- 2 additional questions on training attended and educational qualifications

The individual responses for each of the 6 questions are the first level elimination. Applications are expected to elaborate on the initiatives carried out, tasks and responsibilities as a part of their role while answering these questions to highlight their skills, competencies and accountabilities.

The second level elimination is a comparative study of responses on the below questions against applications shortlisted from the first round:

1. Please tell us why you should be selected for this program

2. Describe an example where you demonstrated drive and commitment to move ahead

3. Describe an example where you demonstrated leadership

The purpose of the EDP is trying to find participants for the first level leadership program that GE has to offer and is therefore looking for applications that showcases an appetite for stretch assignments, curious about the business/portfolio/job and continuous learning, basic communication skills and has a passion for the core/current role. The responses are validated against the information provided by the applicant against the criteria in the application that the manager's fill out.

The same competencies were then further evaluated in an interview and candidates selected. Feedback sessions are also scheduled for employees that do not make it through the EDP program.

Organization Development Intervention

At Infosys Technologies another novel method used for leadership development is Action learning. It is an organization development exercise and it involves solving real problems in real-time conditions and community empathy to nurture a social conscience amongst its leaders.

CONCLUSION

Desperate times call for desperate measures. The adage seems to have found the perfect fit in the Indian corporate realm right now. While some firms are pressing on the panic button, the smarter ones are developing leaders and are aligning support functions with other departments.

The economic downturn automatically gives organizations a chance to rethink their future path, re-skill and redeploy their people, and focus on managing their top talent on leadership development while shaking out their bottom sigma tail.

While it is very tempting to reduce expenditure by employee layoff, this is the time to bolster employee morale through leadership development initiatives and employee engagement, and to use the time to match star performers to critical jobs, understand and assess levels of current and required competencies and skills, and put in place the right development plans.

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