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Social Intelligence and Leadership

Dr. Arpita Palchoudhury

Assistant Professor, Department of Engineering Sciences,
Ramrao Adik Institute of Technology, Nerul, Navi Mumbai, India

Abstract:

Leadership skills can be perceived to be inborn, but can also be developed, as one moves up the corporate ladder. Social intelligence is a skill which can fuel leadership capabilities. It has been observed that, leadership and social intelligence can be correlated. Socially intelligent people tend to become popular leaders. Such leaders are not only friendly and outgoing, but can also motivate people towards the common goal. They possess the power to control performance and coordinate their team-mates to work effectively to achieve the objectives. Such leaders also have the skills which make them socially acceptable, loved and adored. They can resolve conflicts amicably, without creating any bad blood amongst the team members. In this paper, I have endeavored to establish the correlation between social intelligence and leadership .

“The challenge of Leadership is to be strong, but not rude; be kind, but not weak; be bold but not bully; be thoughtful, but not lazy; be humble but not timid, be proud, but not arrogant; have humor, but without folly.” - Jim Rohn. Leadership is a skill which one may perceive to be inborn, but can be developed as one sails through his professional life. The notion that “Leaders are born , not made” has been largely dismissed by scholars who have studied the attributes of leadership. Business leaders, in general may have many attitudes and attributes in common, but these are not necessarily the qualities they were born with. To become a leader, one has to be hardworking and committed to the goal. It has been found that one who is motivated to lead, can acquire the required skills and become an effective leader. The terms management and leadership are often used almost interchangeably, but not every manager is a leader, and not every leader is a manager. The Manager or the boss has to set goals, develop plans and assign work but that does not make him a leader. Leaders are usually found to have some social skills that make them friendly and outgoing. They possess some unique qualities that motivate others to follow their direction and work towards a common goal.

Effective leaders encourage, teach and guide followers -not subordinates. Leadership is not a badge of honor. Leadership is a job with responsibility. It is that situation when the leader takes over the responsibility at the appropriate time and brings victory to his team. Jim Collins in his book , “Good to Great” mentions about five level of leaders where level 5 leader is at the top of the pyramid. He is the one who stands for humility and professional will. He is a passionate leader and doesn’t mind who gets credit for successful venture. His duty is to lead professionally with humility without looking for any credit and contribute his best for the organization’s growth. Captain of the Indian Cricket team M.S Dhoni is the symbol of level 5 leadership, who is not only a passionate player but also delivers his best, in the most stressful situations, without minding who gets the credit. He showcases a cool, calm and charismatic demeanor. Always exuding a mood of candor , when among his team mates, he goes on to build trust and confidence, in them. He is ready to spread fame in case of success and take blame in case of failure. His social intelligence being so high, no doubt he is referred to as “captain cool”. Dhoni is also a visionary leader who thinks through clearly and coolly. He knows the knack of bending both hard and soft skills effectively and intelligently. Corporate India need to imbibe this social skill and also learn the lessons of his leadership style.

Successful leaders know how to motivate others to get the results the leader envisions. Social intelligence is essential to this process, which includes understanding how others react to their ideas and suggestions. Their emotional quotient is also high, as they have the ability to recognize their own as well as others’ emotions and react appropriately. Leaders with social skills use their self- awareness and self –control to manage group relationships in a positive way. They can easily perceive the changing feelings and moods of people and adjust their words and behavior accordingly. It may be as simple as delaying a difficult conversation until the other person is in a more receptive mood. The ability to communicate effectively , to listen carefully to others and to get the message across, is something which make them stand out and acceptable. Writer Stephen Covey puts it very aptly by saying, “Seek first to understand , then to be understood”. The best leaders have also mastered the art of diplomacy and tact. Their social intelligence make them skilled enough to understand

how words , gestures and actions can be interpreted from different points of view. Thus, they avoid offending their followers. They are tactful enough to say or do the right thing without hurting another person's feelings. Diplomacy and tact require sensitivity to what is appropriate in dealing with others, including speaking and acting without causing pain, embarrassment, or discomfort. Tactful leaders, treat others with great respect and consideration which makes them socially acceptable and popular.

An influential leader very well understands the importance of empowering followers. Obviously he cannot do everything alone, so he needs to empower team members to actively participate and lead as well. A socially intelligent leader understands how to delegate work among individuals and teams so that efforts are coordinated and people use their time efficiently. Empowering others means respecting their abilities. When you empower someone in your team, you give that person the authority to make certain decisions and carry them out without close supervision. The person becomes responsible for the results or letting him/her decide how to reach the results. It has been observed that leaders who possess social skills are not only great communicators but also friendly , outgoing and empathetic. They are just as open to accepting positive and negative outcomes, as they are expert at getting their team to support them and be excited about a new mission or project. Socially skillful leaders are also very good at managing change and resolving conflicts diplomatically. They may sometimes tend to leave things as they are , but they will never sit back and make everyone else do the work. They set an example with their conduct and behavior.

Socially intelligent leaders resolve conflicts between their team members, customers or clients without creating any bad blood or controversy . They are blessed with the gift of the gab which influence team members. They are very much open to ideas and boost the morale of followers by endorsing their potential. They praise effortlessly, which encourage team members to work with enthusiasm and zeal towards the achievement of the goal. Effective leaders have a solid understanding of how their emotions and actions affect the people around them. The better a leader relates to and works with others in tandem , the more successful he/she will be. Socially intelligent leaders are self –aware, motivated, self –regulated and empathetic, which makes them much loved, admired and popular. They ultimately become role models for others to follow. A great leader is indeed socially intelligent.

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