

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND VEDANTA PHILOSOPHY

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The significance of transformational leadership has come to receive great attention during the last twelve years. A good amount of study has been done in this area, leading to a wider recognition that transformational leaders are extremely essential if we aim at corporate growth and economic development. For, it is the quality of leadership in business and government organisations that mainly determines the economic and productivity scenario.

This article tries to draw a parallel to the transformational leader, in the philosophy of the Vedanta. Though the Vedanta's Sattvic performer cannot be claimed to be the same as the transformational leader, yet he has a lot of things in common with the transformational leader. After an analysis of the similarities, a couple of suggestions for the transformational leader are also added.

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

It was in the Time Inc.'s conference on leadership, held in Washington in September 1976, that a sincere start was made to distinguish between the roles of a manager and a leader. The foremost objective of a manager was believed to be maintaining the balance of operations, while that of a leader was to create new approaches and imagine new areas to explore. Abraham Zaleznik was of the view that managers and leaders are basically different types of people, and that their orientations towards their goals, their work, their human relations, and their selves are almost diametrically opposite. This distinction between manager and leader, in due course of time, led to the two styles, transactional leadership and transformational leadership, as James MacGregor Burns puts it.

Transformational leadership is a style of leadership that harps upon change, innovation and entrepreneurship. It is imaginative enough to change our corporate life-styles to suit the changing and competitive environment, unlike the old style of transactional leadership, which tries to manage the things as they are. Noel M Tichy, who has done extensive studies in this area, says that this brand of leadership is a behavioural process quite capable of being learned and managed. "It is a leadership process that is systematic and consisting of purposeful and organised search for changes. This strategic transformation of organisations is not something that occurs solely through the idiosyncratic behaviour of charismatic geniuses. It is a discipline with a set of predictable steps."

Transformational leadership is pro-active as compared to transactional leadership, which is defensive or reactive. Whenever the transformational leader perceives a felt need for change, he sets in motion a process that inspires people to accept the change and thus he institutionalises the change. A change is normally always resisted, but the transformational

leader is able to create a vision and he throws his entire personality behind it. This secures a spontaneous commitment from the organisation for an acceptance of the desired change.

The transformational leader, unlike the transactional leader, does not use people as a means to get his organisational objectives fulfilled. In fact, he is intent on the development of the people, who in turn get inspired by him and try to emulate him. The transformational leader is able to guide the destinies of many, because he changes the very visions and perspectives of the people around him. People get so influenced by him that they are naturally transformed. The characteristics of transformational leaders are listed out by Noel M Tichy:

- (1) They identify themselves as change agents.
- (2) They are courageous individuals.
- (3) They believe in people.
- (4) They are value-driven.
- (5) They are life-long learners.
- (6) They have the ability to deal with complexity, ambiguity and uncertainty.
- (7) They are visionaries.

THE CONCEPT IN VEDANTA

The three qualities of human nature are Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. Tamas is the inactive, ignorant and sleepy, a state of stupor and heedlessness. Rajas is the active, dashing state, a state of passion. And Sattva is the calm peaceful state, a state of knowledge and wisdom. The effects of Tamas and Sattva might appear to be quite similar, but there is wide difference between the two, the difference between the stone and the sage. A person cannot reach the peaceful Sattva state unless he passes through the activity state of Rajas.

According to the Vedanta philosophy, there are two ideal life-styles in this world: the life-style of the renouncer of actions and the life-style of the performer of actions. The performer again can be a Sattvic person (one in whom the quality of Sattva is predominant) or a Rajasic person (one in whom the quality of Rajas is predominant). "The Sattvic performer performs actions, not because he is attached to actions, but with a view to set an example to the world. For, whatsoever a great man does, that alone the other men do; whatever he sets up as the standard, that the world follows" (Bhagwad Gita, III. 20-21). This Sattvic performer of the Vedanta corresponds to the transformational leader, while the Rajasic performer corresponds to the transactional leader.

ANALYSIS OF SIMILARITIES

We shall now make a comparative analysis of the characteristics of transformational leaders and those of the Sattvic performers.

(1) The transformational leaders identify themselves as change agents. They strive utmost to bring about the desired change that is felt necessary to improve the organisational effectiveness. They bring about changes not only in the organisational working, but also in the moods, images, expectations, attitudes and goals of the followers. They exert such a tremendous influence that the entire organisational structure gets meaningfully transformed... Vedanta believes that the world is in a state of constant flux and that, all that we perceive keep changing continuously. So the Sattvic performer has to effect changes in his

environment, if he has to set an example to the world. Merely following the existing practices will take him nowhere.

(2) The transformational leaders are courageous individuals. Once they take a stand, they are brave enough to take risks and ensure that their objectives are fulfilled. They don't back out of a process of change once they have initiated it. Fearlessness is an essential virtue that adorns these individuals.... Fearlessness is the watchword of the Vedanta philosophy and the Sattvic performer goes about performing his actions without any fear. As Swami Vivekananda, the modern prophet of Vedanta, puts it, "If there is one word that you find coming out like a bomb from the Upanishads, bursting like a bomb-shell upon masses of ignorance, it is the word fearlessness. Either in this world or in the world of religion, it is true that fear is the sure cause of degradation and sin. It is fear that brings misery, fear that brings death, fear that breeds evil."

(3) The transformational leaders believe in people. They have a very positive approach towards human beings. They believe in the innate ability and motivation of the people and work towards the empowerment of others in the organisation.... According to the Vedanta philosophy, all beings are but sparks of that one Divinity. The infinite potential is there in every being, and a being varies from another only in the degree of manifestation of the divinity. The Sattvic performer has imbibed this knowledge and hence spontaneously has a great regard for all human beings. He has tremendous faith in their potential and capacity and lovingly takes care of their emotional and other needs. To him, faith in people is not a virtue to be practiced, but it is a natural part of his existence. This faith in turn, generates the feeling in the people that they can dream the impossible and achieve the improbable.

(4) The transformational leaders are value-driven. They have a set of core values, which serves as their driving force and which permeates their actions. These values are regarded to be of paramount importance and are never compromised for anything; in fact, no price is regarded too heavy to uphold these deeply cherished values.... The Sattvic performer has already transcended the state of Rajas denoted by passion and frenzied activity. The divine values are a part and parcel of his life and he doesn't give way to emotional upheavals. Since he is characterised by fearlessness, he has the necessary courage to stick to his values.

(5) The transformational leaders are life-long learners. They view mistakes not as failures but as learning experiences. They have an amazing appetite for continuous self-learning and development. The tendency of learning goes along with a sense of humility and scientific enquiry.... "Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man," said Swami Vivekananda. And this manifestation takes place continuously throughout a person's life. The Sattvic performer has a great flair for wisdom and knowledge; in fact his unique attribute is that he is endowed with both wisdom and action. He takes pleasure in intellectual indulgences, and at the same time performs actions for guiding the world.

(6) The transformational leaders have the ability to deal with complexity, ambiguity and uncertainty. They have all the requirements of an increasingly complex world that demands complex problem-solving ability on the part of the leaders. They have a perfect balance between the cognitive and emotional aspects of their beings.... The Katha Upanishad presents the concept of Shraddha or deep-rooted faith in a very dramatic way. When a person has got this faith in himself, he finds no difficulty insurmountable. The Sattvic performer, because of his wisdom, is able to be constantly conscious of his infinite potential, which develops a lot of self-confidence in him. And as faith can move even mountains, the Sattvic

performer is capable of handling any complex problem in the organisation. Also, because of his cool and complacent nature, he doesn't get excited or tensed up and hence is able to tackle any issue in the best possible way. He is not at all overawed by the complexity, ambiguity or magnitude of a problem because of the absolute faith or Shraddha that he has in himself.

(7) The transformational leaders are visionaries. They have broad and inspiring visions. They not only have the capacity to dream, but also the ability to translate those dreams and images, so that their followers are inspired by the visions that they have. The net result is that they are able to change the way people think about what is desirable, possible and necessary.... The Sattvic performer is constantly working towards the goal of perfection and all his values and his entire personality are perfectly attuned towards achieving this objective. He is a source of constant inspiration to all those around him and he always radiates cheerfulness to his surroundings. People look up to him for guidance and because of these gradual attunements, they start sharing his visions, images and ideas. Thus a Sattvic performer is able to exert a tremendous influence on those who come in touch with him.

LESSONS FROM VEDANTA

Now we shall have a brief look at the other characteristics of a Sattvic performer, which will be of relevance and usefulness to the transformational leader.

(1) Our great defect in life is that we are so much drawn to the ideal, the goal is much more enchanting, so much more alluring, so much bigger in our mental horizon, that we lose sight of the details altogether. But the Sattvic performer pays as much attention to the means of work as to its end. If we take care of the cause the effect will take care of itself. "You have a right only over the action, but never over its result (for the result is taken care of by the action alone)" (Bhagavad Gita, II. 47).

(2). The one cause of misery is that we are attached, we are being caught. The Sattvic performer works constantly, but he is not attached and hence he is not caught in the net of misery. He reserves unto himself the power of detaching himself from everything, however beloved, however much the soul might yearn for it. That man alone will be able to get the best of nature, who, having the power of attaching himself to a thing with all his energy, has also the power to detach himself when he should do so. "The Sattvic performer who does actions, resting in wisdom and giving up all attachment, is not tainted by the evil of misery, as a lotus leaf by water" (Bhagavad Gita, V. 10).

CONCLUSION

Transformational leaders will be in great demand in the years to come. They will be virtually the supermen on earth, transforming the world with their soft, soothing, golden touch. Just as evolution can take place even consciously, so also transformational leaders can be consciously and assiduously cultivated and nourished. Let's hope that more and more transformational leaders will crop up to facilitate the establishment of the millennium on earth.