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Prof (Dr) Upinder Dhar
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Case Study 06

Rise of a Business Leader*

"If you say No you are Not Organized and if you say Yes, then You are Eager to Succeed"

Dr Umesh Deshpande just finished an important meeting with his top team, reviewing the company's performance in the quarter which was about to complete and visualizing the strategies for the upcoming one. Each one of them was responsible for a critical piece in the huge jigsaw puzzle which they were solving. As the team walked out, rushing toward their desks with plans already pictured in their eyes, Dr Umesh took a deep breath, and started recollecting his journey of the past 27 years in the Indian automobile sector.

Dr Umesh was born in a middle class, educated family in the State of Maharashtra, India. Most of the boys in his family went on to become engineers while girls opted for the medical profession. His father was a front-line ex-army personnel while his mother was a teacher. He owes his success to his parents who he regards as his icons. His mother taught him how to face the word, self-made attitude and do things within the limited resources. He inculcated humane aspects and concern for the people from his father. One of the other important aspects he gained from his father was the attitude of facing the problems and challenges.

In 1993, he started his career by completing his undergraduate studies in Automobile Engineering. Thereafter he completed his Diploma in Business Management (DBM) and opted for a job with a TATA dealer. He worked as a sales and service representative for the well-known vehicle TATA-SUMO. A self-made man, he did not take any financial support for his higher education either from his family or friends thereafter.

He worked with the company for two years and accumulated money for his higher education. In 1996, he joined his dream multinational organization. The multi-national automobile company had gone through multiple challenges and reaped the rewards

** This case was developed by Sourbhi Chaturvedi (Ganpat University, Gujarat), Vineel Bhurke, Anjali Chandra Kumar (S. P. Mandali's Prin L. N. Welingkar Institute of Management & Research Development, Mumbai), Purvi Pujari (Bharati Vidyapeeth's Institute of management Studies and Research, Navi Mumbai) and Ajinkya Joshi (K. K. Wagh Institute of Engineering Education and Research, Nashik) during the 2nd Online Case Writing Workshop organized by the Association of Indian Management Schools (AIMS) from December 14-16, 2020.*

of adopting a collaborative culture with its employees. It had the loyalty of its huge customer base in India and created a mega brand associated with luxury, premium engineering and customer delight.

Later Dr Umesh went on to complete his MBA (Marketing), MMS (Production) and Ph.D. from Pune University. He also completed the first level of German language before moving to Germany on a company assignment. He has a vast experience of more than 27 years in the field of automobile engineering. Over the years, he has not only absorbed the company's philosophy into the core of his personality but has become a living example of how this philosophy works, by putting it into practice.

He believed that hard work played a significant role in his career growth. He worked for around 19 hours per day and continues to do so even today. He used to start his day at 4:00 am, travelled for 35 km on his bike to work and then attended evening college till 8:00 pm. After dinner, he used to utilize the public study room facilities till 11:00 pm. Such strenuous work had a negative impact on his health and once led to his hospitalization. Hard work and passion to accept challenges has helped him to scale new heights.

He has handled diverse portfolios during his tenure. At present, he occupies the position of General Manager in a prestigious multinational automobile company. His purpose in life is to become successful. Although he is a hard worker and target driven, he believes in empowering people. He states that nothing can stop you if you have the inner urge and a winning attitude. One should collaborate with others, involve them and provide encouragement for a win-win situation. If we want to succeed, we should accept challenges and say 'Yes' to any type of problem.

Embarking a Journey in Automobile Industry

Dr Umesh started his career after completing his Bachelor's in Engineering in Automobile and joined an Indian multinational company after completing his bachelors. Being an independent person, he went ahead pursuing his higher education and took up a job in his dream company in the technical field in 1996.

In 1997, he was called by his superior and informed that he will be required to move to south India for sales activities and was sent to the Bangalore office for the training, the very next day. After completing his training of 4 days he was posted in Hyderabad. The company had no official posting in Hyderabad and the company was facing different challenges in the region. Umesh took charge of the centre and voluntarily

called all customers and informed them about his posting in the region. He also appealed to the car owners to get their cars one by one and repaired all the cars for them. While doing his work he got the feedback mechanism into place and after servicing the cars called each customer for their feedback. He switched from sales to production and then to the paint shop but in all roles, he believed that effective communication was the key. With this experience, he learned the first important lesson in the industry - "Make your customers your friends".

Soon he was sent to Germany in 2003, to work in R & D department for the company. A new challenge stood in front of him, which was the language barrier. He worked hard and learned the language and not only that he told his subordinates and other German colleagues to correct his language and make him learn the language. His keenness to learn and his agility helped him to handle the profile successfully for one and a half year. After completion of his international assignment, he was called back by the company to India, took charge of operations in the paint shop, and continued working for the organization with dedication and managing his team well.

His passion toward his work opened teaching opportunities for him and he was called by his faculty to teach engineering and management students. He soon completed his Ph.D. and being an avid learner, he wanted to gain more knowledge. While his work life was hectic, he still managed to find his passion and interests and started practicing calligraphy. He is the go-to person in his organization for writing special messages. He believed in co-creating and took his grandfather's work of farming with great interest and learned more about it. During his learning about farming, he also learned about the village lifestyle and politics. As a leader, he believed in empowering his staff but was a target driven person. He managed different suppliers but maintained a good relationship with all and called them business partners rather than suppliers. While working for a company for so long he still continues to be a part of it and has also faced challenges in his tenure.

Challenges faced by him

Dr Umesh Deshpande faced several challenges at various junctures in his professional career and took them head on, turning them around into opportunities for growth. He recollected and summarized these challenges and his responses in the following manner.

1. **People related challenges:** Balancing the energies of the team members, subordinates and superiors for an optimum output is an important part of

leadership. Sometimes due to cultural differences, language barriers and attitude issues one is not able to manage the same. Younger colleagues especially those with higher aspirations may prove to be difficult to handle. However, he concluded that continuous and positive communication is the key to understanding people and making them realize how best they can contribute. This is also a very positive and empowering approach which can save the leader his critical time being used in micro-management. Ultimately, he concluded his wisdom as “Five fingers of the hand are not equal” meaning every individual is unique and needs to be treated with dignity. It is humane to err but any error is only the first step of learning. “One is bound to make mistakes but should not repeat them” is the motto developed by him as part of his leadership style.

2. **Business related challenges:** For an OEM (Original Equipment Manufacturer) the relationship with suppliers is a critical success factor. The company and the suppliers are interdependent. Hence it is necessary to treat the suppliers properly. As a good practice, the suppliers are called as and treated as “Business partners”.
3. **Technology related challenges:** The speed of technology is a two-edged sword. On one hand the company has to keep pace with the competition and lead the technology front. On the other hand, with the advent of new technology, it is forced to develop a market for it. Automotive manufacturer companies have to comply with the standards and norms concerning environmental pollution and safety. That adds to the need and urgency to adopt newer technologies to fulfil these mandatory requirements. The company has to balance this situation by continuous communication between the technical R & D team and consumer insights gathered by the market research team.
4. **Situation related challenges:** Dr Umesh faced challenges early in his life to balance job and education. Time management, sheer determination and hard work were the important virtues which he credited his success to, in overcoming these challenges. He also attributed his success to the support he received from his family to a great extent. Another situational challenge faced was the language barrier during his tenure in Germany. He could overcome this challenge with the help of basic training from Max Muller Bhavan in India before going to Germany. But the real skill that helped him was his open mindedness and ability to get integrated in the local culture. Because of that, he could learn the local dialect of German language and the technical language used by the research and development team.

5. **Pandemic related challenges:** The COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 posed a challenge to humanity globally causing major disruptions in all transactions. However, Dr Umesh could sail through smoothly because of having done an advanced adoption of modern communication technology before the pandemic era. This helped him to ensure that there is no disturbance in carrying out regular business process related activities. Restructuring of daily routine activities by extensive use of modern communication technologies helped him to take out more time for rejuvenating activities such as gardening.

Leadership philosophy: The 10 Success Mantras

Every leader has his own success principles / mantras and our protagonist Dr Umesh Deshpande has derived his success philosophy from the company he is working for. The 10 success mantras out of which first eight have been derived from the company's philosophy while the remaining two have been added on subsequently.

1. **Purpose:** There are two important pillars for any organization - technology and human skills. Technology is continuously growing and must be compensated with human skills. If not, the house will tilt to either side and ultimately collapse. For this we need to rigorously propagate the development of our people.
2. **Learning:** According to Dr Umesh if you want to succeed in life you should become a lifelong learner. The organization was very supportive to sponsor his masters and the doctorate degree and also granted him support including leaves to appear for the exams.
3. **Effective communication:** In 1997, he was the first professional from his organization to land in Hyderabad. There were 200 units in the booking stage and 11 units were sold. Few had some small issues and the customers were agitated. He approached all the customers and communicated to each one to make a way out. All problems except one which was beyond his control were sorted out. So, with effective communication the problem was resolved successfully for an issue for which no training was provided. Communication from both sides (company and customers) is very important for business. If you are willing to connect with people, they are willing to give you a chance. According to Dr Umesh, the bottom line is "Be sensitive to people". He believes in "Connect to the people for success" as people are the building blocks for success.

4. **Agility:** Agility is one of the very important philosophies. An individual should be agile in adapting to the situation in the organization. The organization kept exploring his abilities in production, sales, service supply chain and paint section. He kept on moving from one section to another such as production, assembly, sales and the paint shop.
5. **Pioneering spirit:** Dr Umesh had the opportunity to serve the departments that had a lot of challenges. He always believed in what his father taught that never show your back to any difficulty, take the bullet on your chest, do not give up without giving a try to solve a given problem. At least your conscience will be clear that you put 100% effort within your capacity. This attitude was well-recognized and he continued in the paint shop for 15 years and reached the position of General Manager.
6. **Drive to win:** Once he had the opportunity to go to Germany and work in the R & D department of the company, where he had to interact with German colleagues. For this he spent six months learning the local German dialect - Swabian. This is a rural dialect which is more difficult to learn. By getting integrated into a culture, language and system you will be able to win customers and get more acceptance from the local team.
7. **Empowerment:** Solving technical problems is easier than solving human problems. A way to address this is to empower people. We all know that the fingers of our hand are not equal so are the employees. All have unique abilities and limitations. We need to be sensitive to their issues and understand their psyche/ego. Empower the subordinates to be open to speak with their bosses, even about their mistakes.
8. **Customer orientation:** Most important principle or philosophy of the organization is being customer centric. It is very important that the customer knows you are there for them. If an employee understands that he is receiving his salary because of customers, he will walk a step further to serve them better.
9. **Diversity:** It is important to include people from all walks of life in any work such that their diverse life experiences enrich the collective wisdom and help in co-creation.
10. **Co-creation:** In the year 2016, Dr Umesh was given the task of rectifying problems with the business partners. He was not the logistics expert, but he understood that if you treat suppliers with respect and co-create with them, they will give back

respect to you. You have to define your thin line of how much to open up with people and how much to restrict.

Culture: A significant influencing factor in shaping leadership

Culture is something that one could simply understand as an ecosystem of common values, beliefs, norms and ideals which constitute the way of life of a group of people or community and which influences their behaviour. Bass (2008) put forth that culture affects leadership behaviour, goals and strategies of organizations.

Dr Umesh Deshpande is a senior executive who has spent 24 years with the company and has overall 27 years of professional experience in the automobile manufacturing sector. He has grown considerably as a professional during this period. Starting as a manager in the sales and training department, he rose through ranks while getting an all-round experience across departments including Paintshop, Assembly and Logistics. Interestingly, he was even sent to the headquarters of the company in Germany as Manager in the Research and Development Department. Such diverse assignments gave him an opportunity to absorb the nuances of the work culture in the parent country, relate it with the work culture in India and make a comparison. Such a comparison was useful to identify the strengths and limitations at both ends (the work situations in both countries) and develop a unique style of his own which would be effective while working in India. Moreover, since the work culture is a subset of the overall culture of a society or a country, it has implications on the behaviour of people in a broader sense and in this case, the behaviour of customers in particular.

The diversity of cultures and its influence on customer behaviour

Dr Umesh noted that the German culture is essentially process driven. It directly or indirectly gets inculcated right from childhood. He further observed that the reason for this structured approach in thinking and actions is due to the fact that the availability of resources is abundant relative to the number of people who are going to use it. Naturally, their attention is better utilized in developing systematic ways of putting the resource to its best use, rather than on competing to acquire it.

While comparing this with the Indian scenario, Dr Umesh further observed an opposite situation of more people forced to compete for limited resources. This, he added, has made Indians better explorers, and able to think on their feet, quickly devise ingenious ways of problem solving. Indian culture is driven by judicious utilization of limited resources and the same reflects in their behaviour as customers.

Traditionally, an Indian customer of automobile would have the mileage or “average” of a car as the prime or the only criteria while making a purchase decision, whereas people from different cultural backgrounds are likely to consider various factors such as comfort, safety, luxury, environment friendliness of technology used in manufacturing, pollution level during use, etc., while purchasing. He observed the changing mindset of the Indian customers over the past two decades. He saw that the customer mindset in India is rapidly changing, giving way to higher order qualitative aspects of the car ownership rather than just the economy in its use.

Luxury cars have gained ground in India, not limited to the metro cities. A recent survey (Mint, 2018) on luxury car markets across India reported that, during the past decade (2008 to 2018), while top metro cities in India such as Mumbai and Delhi maintained their ranks in top 10 luxury car markets, they lost their share to relatively smaller markets such as Surat, Ludhiana Hyderabad and Bengaluru. It is also a generally known fact that cities such as Aurangabad and Kolhapur in the Indian state of Maharashtra have become hotspots for luxury car sales. Indian customers are now willing to spend on luxury cars more than ever before. Luxury car sales figure in India was between 15000 and 17000 units in the first half of year 2019 (IBEF, 2020). Dr Umesh attributes this change to increased awareness level of customers fuelled by penetration of internet and social media leading to higher aspirations as well as more informed decision-making during purchase.

This cultural difference is also reflected in maintenance of the automobiles. Whereas in Germany, a defective or broken part would be promptly replaced, in India it would go through scrutiny and efforts would be made to delay or avoid the replacement by way of repairs, resulting in low efficiency or sometimes even further complications. However, even this trend is being changed through better customer awareness. Finally, the same technology which is manufactured at the headquarters is available everywhere and can be adopted everywhere including the Indian market, while mindsets may vary from market to market, according to Dr Umesh.

Leadership style of Dr Umesh Deshpande: Influence of cultures

Dr Umesh recollected that as a child from a middle class educated Indian family, he inherited a certain set of values which were the resultant of the socio-cultural ambience of the 1970's and early 80's which he experienced while growing up. It was a time when India had recently achieved self-sufficiency of food grains through the green revolution while the general resources required by the common man to lead a comfortable life were scarce. The economy was majorly dependent on agriculture, the

manufacturing sector was being strengthened, while the services sector was yet to emerge. This also had the dark backdrop of war tensions with neighbouring countries, draining precious resources of the country. Dr Umesh's father, employed in the Indian army was witness to this and he influenced Dr Umesh as a guiding star in the early days of the career. His father narrated to him the war experiences which had lasting impressions on Dr Umesh as a young boy. As a commanding officer, his father had to perform the duty of keeping the morale of the soldiers high. It was possible, his father said, only because of the humane treatment that he gave to his soldiers. This was an important learning for Dr Umesh which led him to adopt and further develop the principles of "Communication" and "Drive to win".

Similarly, the early exposure to the farming activities on the family farm equipped him with an attitude to experiment and learn. Later, organic farming became a source of recreation and inspiration for him which enabled him to withstand tremendous work pressure by offering an opportunity to balance work and life. During early days of his education, Dr Umesh imbibed the values of hard-work as he had to support himself by working simultaneously. Every day he had to get up early to travel to the workplace, attend evening college and study in a public library till late evening. This lifestyle became a norm for him even in his professional life and led to the principles of "Agility" and "Purpose".

The German culture experience

As part of the company policy, he was sent to Germany along with his family, not alone. He interprets this policy as an effort to ensure holistic well-being of the employees rather than cost cutting. He also imbibed it as a practice while managing his team later in India. During his stint in Germany, he had to overcome language barrier by learning Swabian (Schwäbisch – a dialect of the German language) (Wiki 2020) and further learn the technical German language to be able to work as manager at the research and development department. While in Germany, a visit to a doctor for a test for his daughter led him to observe how children imbibe structured ways of thinking and action in Germany at an early age. As compared to the German children, his daughter exhibited different traits during the test.

He concluded that as in India resources are limited, children learn to explore their surroundings for resources and put them in the best possible order to achieve a task in the simplest manner. Whereas the German children were more amenable to follow structured but seemingly complex instructions and to achieve the same task in the most desirable way. Such observations gave him insights into the best features of both

cultures. He could then combine those while training his team back in India and get the required results from them.

Conclusion

This case is a wonderful example how the personal attributes of a leader resulted in him being an exceptional leader. His tendency to extend his personal beliefs and cultural ideologies to his workplace made him very successful as a transformational leader. There are four factors to transformational leadership, (also known as the “four I’s”) - idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. Dr Umesh Deshpande has showcased and adopted all these factors during his professional tenure and personal life too. He has been a role model to his subordinates, given inspiration to his team members to stimulate them and has been exceptionally good in rendering individual attention and consideration to everyone working with him.

He had ten success mantras which guided him in both his personal and professional life. There are numerous instances in his life where he has incorporated these mantras and solved the challenge in front of him. He expressed his wisdom in the final one liner, “Job does not give happiness, happiness lies inside!” which mirrors this totally self-made leader.

Questions

1. What are the leadership styles which have been followed by Dr Umesh Deshpande during his journey towards being an exceptional leader?
2. What are the main attributes of a transformational leader?
3. Discuss the success mantras followed by Dr Umesh Deshpande - the main protagonist - and how they resulted in him being an exceptional leader.
4. What is the role of culture in developing a leadership style?
5. What are the differences between Transactional and Transformational leadership style?

Teaching Note

Rise of a Business Leader

Synopsis

The case is about a protagonist – Dr Umesh Deshpande - who, given his humble background, has risen in his career as an exceptional leader showcasing great attributes of a good leader and had overcome multiple challenges during his tenure as a General Manager in a multinational automobile company and his personal life too. He has embodied the idea of Transformational leadership in all facets of his life. Right from the start of his educational life, he had shown the tenacity and perseverance needed to be successful. During the early days of his career, he had been instrumental in solving many tough situations while dealing with an unfamiliar culture, adverse situations concerning customers and subordinates and had been inspirational to all his team members. The case proceeds to highlight his innovative and inspirational style during handling of the crisis situation at Hyderabad, his tenure in Germany and initiating organic farming.

Target Learning Group

This case is targeted at graduate and postgraduate learners of a management course or corporate employees who wish to learn regarding the various leadership styles and the attributes of successful leaders. This case presents an opportunity to understand the nuances of being an exceptional leader by analyzing the working style and culture of this leader.

Teaching Objectives

1. To introduce the learners to the concept of Transformational Leadership style.
2. To introduce the concept of success mantras of an exceptional leader.
3. To help learners understand the connection between culture and leadership.

Teaching Strategy

1. Introduction to the case: 15 min
2. Discussion of various leadership styles: 45 min
3. Discussion of questions: 50 min
4. Conclusion: 10 min

Discussion Questions and Suggestions

- 1. What are the leadership styles which have been followed by Dr Umesh Deshpande during his journey towards being an exceptional leader?**

The various leadership styles should be discussed here keeping the focus on why the style of the Protagonist Dr Umesh Deshpande seems like that of a Transformational leader. In transformational leadership, the leader acts as a role model and as a motivator too who offers vision, excitement, encouragement, morale and satisfaction to the followers. The leader inspires his people to increase their abilities and capabilities, build up self-confidence and promotes innovation in the whole organisation.

- 2. What are the main attributes of a transformational leader?**

The main characteristics of a Transformational leader must be discussed here like being inspirational and collaborative, etc. Here, the leader seeks the requirement for a change in the existing organisational culture, gives a vision to his subordinates, incorporates mission and implements the change with the dedication of his followers. Leader lays emphasis on the values, ideals, morals and needs of the followers.

- 3. Discuss the success mantras followed by Dr Umesh and how they result in him being an exceptional leader.**

The success mantras need to be discussed here along with the situations in which they were applied by him.

- 4. What is the role of culture in developing a leadership style?**

Culture plays a significant role in creating a leadership style. Examples from Indian culture, the family background of Dr Umesh and influence of the German culture must be discussed here.

- 5. What are the differences between Transactional and Transformational leadership style?**

Transactional leaders focus on the role of supervision, organization, and group performance. They are concerned about the status quo and day-to-day progress toward goals. Transformational leaders work to enhance the motivation and engagement of followers by directing their behaviour toward a shared vision. While transactional leadership operates within existing boundaries of processes,

structures, and goals, transformational leadership challenges the current state and is change-oriented.

James MacGregor Burns distinguished between transactional leaders and transformational by explaining that: a transactional leader is a leader who exchanges tangible rewards for the work and loyalty of followers.

Transformational leaders are leaders who engage with followers, focus on higher-order intrinsic needs, and raise consciousness about the significance of specific outcomes and new ways in which those outcomes might be achieved.

Background Reading

Learners are encouraged to study the theories of Burns and Bass on Transformational Leadership and read the research papers on the same topic. Additional reading material is suggested in the references.

Leadership Styles: Transformational and Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership or transactional management is the leadership that focuses on supervision, organization, or performance. It is an important part of the Full Range Leadership Model. Transactional leadership is a style of leadership in which leaders endorse compliance by followers through both rewards and punishments. Through a rewards and punishments system, transactional leaders are able to keep followers motivated for the short-term. It “occurs when one person takes the initiative in making contact with others for the purpose of an exchange of valued things” (Burns, 1978). Transactional leadership is generally attributed to two factors.

1. The leadership of the first conditional reward is viewed as both an efficient and constructive relationship between the leader and the followers. These followers get bonuses, merits, or recognition with the organization that they are with when they meet certain goals depending on what the company is (Bycio, P., Hackett, R.D., & Allen, J.S, 1995). The rewards, from this contingent reward, is solely based on an agreement between the leader and follower.
2. The second factor of transactional leaders is management by exception. This can be active or passive. Active leaders are always evaluating performances of employees. Passive management makes assessments after the task has been done and will only let one know about the problems after they occurred (Howell & Avolio, 1993).

Transformational leadership is a theory of leadership where a leader works with teams to identify needed change, creating a vision to guide the change through inspiration, and executing the change in tandem with committed members of a group. Transformational leadership is when a leader's behaviour influences followers and inspires them to perform beyond their perceived capabilities. Transformational leaders inspire people to achieve unexpected or remarkable results. It gives workers autonomy over specific jobs, as well as the authority to make decisions once they have been trained. This induces a positive change in the follower's attitudes and the organization as a whole. Transformational leaders typically perform four distinct behaviours, also known as the four I's. These behaviours are inspirational motivation, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration.

Transformational leadership helps to boost the motivation, morale, and job performance of followers through a variety of mechanisms; these include connecting the follower's sense of identity and self to a project, collective identity of the organization; being a role model for followers in order to inspire them and to raise their interest in the project; challenging followers to take greater ownership for their work, and understanding the strengths and weaknesses of followers, which allows the leader to align followers with tasks that enhance their performance. It is also important to understand the qualities of a transformational leadership can bring to a work organization.

Transformational leadership enhances commitment, involvement, loyalty, and performance of followers. Followers exert extra effort to show support to the leader, emulate the leader to emotionally identify with him, maintain obedience without losing any sense of self-esteem. Transformational leaders are strong in the abilities to adapt to different situations, share a collective consciousness, self-manage, and be inspirational while leading a group of employees.

Takeaway

The main takeaways of this case study are, in-depth learning regarding leadership styles and challenges in front of a successful leader. This case will also be helpful in showcasing the connect between leadership and culture. The learners will be able to appreciate the significance of developing an innovative and collaborative culture in an MNC.

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