

We need leaders who are analytical in approach and at home with the latest technology, along with a heart filled with empathy and a deep caring for society

# NEW LEADERSHIP MODELS IN THE POST-COVID WORLD

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Leadership has always taken the centre stage in any crisis situation and this has been most amplified during the black-swan pandemic event that the world is undergoing. As we gradually emerge from the restrictions imposed in response to the coronavirus, multi-faceted changes are simultaneously underway.

I have always been a proponent of distributed leadership and was happy to see it take roots. We saw many instances of greatness and most of all tremendous agility and resilience that has always been the hallmark of humankind. Whether it was healthcare leaders who selflessly devoted their entire energy, scientists who developed new drugs, corporate leaders who adapted to economic restrictions or administrative officials, and even the ordinary person who managed the different predicaments of keeping supply chains moving and workers cared for, inspiring leaders took up the challenges of the pandemic. This was the reason that we could surmount the crisis and emerge stronger.

Leadership is a complex issue that does not lend itself well to a cogent definition. The one that I think is the most critical requirement of leaders is doing the right thing when no one knows what needs to be done. I remembered the illustration given by Yuval Noah Harari, where he ascribed the reason for

the success of *Homo sapiens* over the better-endowed Neanderthals to their ability to collaborate, thereby coming back stronger by learning from their mistakes.

Exemplary exercises of collective team efforts cutting across geographies and functions helped in developing vaccines and rolling them out in the shortest possible time. This demonstrated the human spirit of being able to come together, stay together and work together for a common objective. We saw ordinary people donning the role of true superheroes, without being prompted. This spontaneous outpouring of greatness is the true mark of leadership.

Leadership is the unique ability of blending a secret sauce using hardware, software and humanware. The proportions differ in different situations, but the way leaders engage would be different going forward. I think a more humane approach would emerge in the days ahead, where we marry the tech with the touch in a judicious manner.

The value unlocked in overcoming the pandemic-induced constraints will be difficult to give up, so our engagement and way of work have to adapt to newer protocols adjusting to the changing paradigms. This, in a way, helps us to refine the new normal by reviewing the basic tenet of leadership—

speak what you think, do what you say and be the person you are. I believe the future belongs to leaders who are comfortable with their vulnerabilities. Being able to open up their insecurities, capable of admitting that we do not always know how to react, is important as it is only then that they can forge diverse collaborations, so critical for coming out with solutions to combat the challenges optimally.

Let me share some of the pointers I see emerging out of this experience that would define our leadership journey going forward.

First, a thorough analysis of crisis always helps in eliminating some long-held beliefs and is a good way of getting rid of redundancies. It is believed that a leader needs to be with the team, in a high-touch environment, in order to ideate better and execute well. However, while spending months physically away from team members, adopting newer technology enablers and

most importantly, being able to think deeply helped leaders adapt to and create a completely new way of work. Collaboration has and would always remain the order of the day, but the manner in which we do it has transformed forever. I envisage a simpler world where we need to be more mindful of what is really required as there is little chance of returning back to the suboptimality that we have bid goodbye to.

Second, humane values have always been the bedrock for leaders. This is expected to get amplified as we see a world where nobody is safe unless everybody is safe. This credo is going to gain more currency and great institutions would be measured by the value they create beyond their walls. The community aspect of leadership is going to emerge as the key. Leaders always move communities; their ability to take divergent groups towards a common goal would come into sharper focus.

Third, sustainability would take up a new meaning graduating beyond the narrow aspect of environment, to embrace the social aspect of it. CII was a pioneer of imagining a different India with our India@75 initiative that started under the tutelage of visionary Professor C K Prahalad in 2007. Under this campaign, many programmes have commenced for sustainability, so-

cial empowerment, technology and economic growth as a whole that CII has led, including through a strong volunteer programme. Innovation, skilling, start-ups and social compact are just some of the initiatives that are going to emerge as the fountainheads for newer leadership and ways in which leaders engage with their environment.

Finally, in this globalised world, geography is fast becoming history, but I strongly believe that today technology offers us the opportunity of also being hyperlocal. For example, Indian business integrates with the world while maintaining its strong local roots.

To conclude, within the emerging scenario, I would ideally like to see leadership models to emerge, evolve better governance protocols and embrace development philosophies. Models that are rooted in the Indian psyche and homegrown would guide us to another idea on leadership, that of right and relevant models of leadership.

The dawn of a new type of leadership will evolve going ahead, that is analytical in approach and at home with the latest technology, with a heart filled with empathy and a deep caring for society. Profits with a purpose would be the credo of industry as it evolves a humane face to lead the new post-Covid world.

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