

TEAM BUILDING: AN ESSENTIAL PREREQUISITE FOR LEADERSHIP IN THE INFORMATION AGE AND IN A COMPLEX SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

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Introduction

Leadership has been the bedrock of military functioning and a large part of an organisation's effort in the early years of an individual is spent instilling qualities that would allow him to overcome the greatest of adversities. Leadership in the military has always had its uniqueness, since leaders have had the exacting task of influencing individuals and their teams to achieve set objectives, even if it meant making the supreme sacrifice in battle.

Analysing the environment that we live in, being able to understand that it is dynamic, being able to perceive correctly the changes that are occurring and then being able to align the team and the organisation to be in sync with reality, is the hallmark of a good leader. The question then is, why do so many organisations fail to keep pace with change and then become irrelevant? The organisation probably keeps busy with its routine functioning and does

not spare time to analyse the environment in its entirety. The satisfaction with status-quo makes it so comfortable that resistance to change is strong. Culture of complete acceptance of a system and its functioning does not encourage questioning and reasoning, the two important factors that bring about change.

The most dramatic change that mankind has seen in recent history is the unprecedented growth of technology, which has resulted in ushering of the 'Information Age.' As authors James Dale Davidson and Lord William Rees-Mogg put it, "through all of human history from its earliest beginnings until now, there have been only three basic stages of economic life: hunting and gathering societies, agricultural societies, and industrial societies. Now, looming over the horizon, is something entirely new, the fourth stage of social organisation: Information societies".¹ The authors

¹James Dale Davidson and Lord William Rees-Mogg, *The Sovereign Individual: Mastering the Transition to the Information Age*, (Touchstone Rockefeller Center, 1999), 15.

further elaborate, “Information societies promise to dramatically reduce the returns to violence. The advantage of controlling violence on a large scale will be far lower than it has been in any time. The payoff for organising violence at a large scale will reduce and the payoff from violence at a smaller scale is likely to jump. Violence will become random and localised”.² Propounded in 1999, this should set us thinking why non-traditional threats and small scale violence have risen in the last decade and half.

There have been various incidents in the recent past that point to the fact that we live in an era of uncertainty. Counterterrorism, coastal security, piracy, disaster relief and many other eventualities have seen the involvement of the military which was otherwise designed to fight conventional wars. Each eventuality has had its unique set of circumstances, and adaptation has been the key to success. More often than not, when

disparate forces have been brought together at short notice without much time for preparation and rehearsals, it has been the leader’s ability to build teams that has delivered results. In this backdrop, organisations and leaders need to have a serious relook at the way they engage with individuals in their system and their teams.

Internet: A Paradigm Shift in Human Connectivity

It’s in the name: World Wide Web. The Internet has broken down communication barriers between cultures in a way that could only be dreamt of by earlier generations.³ Started as a means to connect few defence related computers through an exclusive protocol about three decades ago, the internet has grown into a mammoth living organism which as per a McKinsey Global Institute study of 2011⁴ has by itself penetrated almost a quarter of the world’s population with two billion people connected today. As per recent statistics in 2015 around

²Ibid.

³The New School, *Culture and Media Student Handbook* (New York: The New School, 2015)
<http://2012books.lardbucket.org/books/culture-and-media/s14-03-the-effects-of-the-internet-an.html>

⁴McKinsey Global Institute, *The Internet Matters: The Net’s Sweeping Impact on Growth, Jobs And Prosperity, Report, 2011*, <https://www.google.co.in/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=internet%20matters%20mckinsey> (accessed August 05, 2015).

40% of the world population has an internet connection, while in 1995 it was less than 1%. The number of internet users has increased tenfold from 1999 to 2013. The first billion was reached in 2005, the second billion in 2010 and the third billion in 2014. India is growing at a rapid pace and its internet growth is estimated to reach about 600 million by 2018.

The mobile revolution has been responsible for yet another transformation and has delivered the internet in the hands of the common man at a minimal cost. Accessibility, affordability and rapidity provided by the internet has ensured that information is made available and exchanged easily within no time; this has greatly influenced the culture, values and attitudes of individuals and organisations. Communities are no longer defined by geographical boundaries; they exist on the internet through social media. Commonality of interest allows people to join groups irrespective of their location. Moreover, diverse cultures, beliefs and traditions from across the world can influence the minds and thoughts of

individuals. The Arab Spring, Jan Lokpal and Nirbhaya movements in recent years could not have picked momentum in the short span, had it not been for the internet.

Organisational Culture & Climate

In the backdrop of transformations made in the Information Age, it becomes essential that we understand the impact such changes will make and how they will alter organisational functioning. Leaders too need to align themselves to this paradigm shift in human connectivity and suitably address the changing organisational culture.

What is Organisational Culture?

Organisational culture comprises the attitudes, values, beliefs, norms and customs of an organisation. While organisational structure is relatively easy to draw and describe, organisational culture is considered to be less tangible and more difficult to measure.⁵ Culture is the sum total of all the shared, taken-for-granted assumptions that a group has learned throughout its history. It is the residue of success.⁶ The Indian Armed Forces

⁵Martin T. Carpenter, *An Army Organizational Culture of Innovation: A Strategic Imperative for Transformation*, <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA449358&Location=U2>

⁶Edgar H. Schein, *The Corporate Culture Survival Guide*, (San Francisco, CA.: JosseyBass Inc., 1999), 29.

have always recognised this and fostered it through a strong Regimental System, principally aimed at keeping teams bonded through common purpose and traditions, referred to as '*esprit de corps*', a feeling of pride and mutual loyalty shared by its members.

Climate: Is it Different?

Organisation Climate is a quality of the internal environment that is experienced by the members, influences their behaviour, and can be described in terms of values of a particular set of characteristics of the organisation.⁷ Climate is generally short-term: it depends on a network of personalities in a small organisation. As people come and go, the climate changes.⁸ A healthy, positive and driven organisational climate can plummet the minute a boss with low self-esteem, personal agenda and lack of interpersonal skills takes over an organisation. Therefore, the manner in which an organisation is run by the leader will impact the perceptions of its members and will determine its climate within that time frame.

Internet and the Perceptual Process

Perception is a process that operates constantly between reality and us. There are three well-noted mechanisms of perception – selection, organisation and interpretation. Perceptual selection takes into account only those stimuli that are relevant and appropriate for an individual for a given occasion. Perceptual organisation is concerned with harnessing the perceived inputs and converting them into a meaningful shape or form. The final mechanism, perceptual interpretation, deals with inference from the observed or from perceived events or objects. In our day-to-day behaviour, interpretation is influenced by a large number of factors;⁹ the internet being the most prominent factor in the Information Age which provides endless stimuli for individual's perception and therefore strongly influences behaviour. We saw during the Kargil operations the manner in which, according to Major General Ashok Mehta, "India's first

⁷College of Defence Management, Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff, Compendium: Organisation Behaviour Vol I, 2011, Secunderabad: College of Defence Management 2013, 176.

⁸Martin T. Carpenter, *An Army Organizational Culture of Innovation: A Strategic Imperative for Transformation*, <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA449358&Location=U2>

⁹College of Defence Management, Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff, Compendium: Organisation Behaviour Vol I, 2011, Secunderabad: College of Defence Management 2013, 21-25.

war on television”¹⁰ affected the perceptions of an entire nation, drawing the attention of every citizen and influencing the manner in which countrymen came forward in recognising the role and heroics of soldiers. The internet and social media played a huge role towards garnering the support extended to families of martyrs both in cash and kind. Similarly, in the Information Age perceptions can be influenced and may not always be favourable to the organisation or its leadership. The resignation of Admiral DK Joshi, the Chief of the Naval Staff was probably an outcome of the perception that developed within a short period regarding the highly publicised safety standards of the Navy, to which as per his statement, he took moral responsibility and resigned. The statement ‘perceptual interpretation, which deals with inference from the observed or from perceived events’ can be better understood with the press statement released by the Navy at the time of the incident. “Taking moral responsibility for the accidents and

incidents which have taken place during the past few months, the Chief of Naval Staff Admiral DK Joshi today resigned from the post of the CNS”.¹¹

In the information age, the influence of internet has had its effect on both individuals and the organisation. It can thus safely be postulated that culture and climate will be highly dependent on the environment within which the organisation exists; therefore cultural influences and individual perceptions in the Information Age are bound to have a dramatic effect on both the organisation’s functioning and on leadership.

Information Age and its Impact

The perceptual process has been significantly affected in the Information Age as recent examples prove. This has influenced human behaviour which has resulted in many changes in organisational culture and climate. These changes may have occurred only in the past two decades, however, they also have been subtle.

¹⁰ A.K. Sachdev, *Media Related Lessons From Kargil, IDSA*, accessed on August 16, 2015, <http://www.idsa-india.org/an-jan00-10.html>.

¹¹ “Defence Ministry’s Statement on Admiral DK Joshi’s Resignation as navy Chief,” *NDTV*, accessed August 16 2015, <http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/defence-ministrys-statement-on-admiral-dk-joshis-resignation-as-navy-chief-552109> accessed 16 Aug 15

While organisations were coping with technological advancements and integrating them into their processes, individual perceptions were gradually changing with the new environment, creating a fresh set of expectations. The rules, styles and processes which worked earlier were no longer relevant and there may have emerged a sense of disconnect within organisations and their leaders. Primarily between the old school and the new. To find a way ahead and bridge gaps, an analysis of the past with the present against four essential factors of influence, control, authority and team thus becomes essential.

Pre Information Age Environment.

Due lack of direct availability of information and inability to connect at a scale beyond the immediate, the influencing factors were restricted to the local environment. The scope of exposure of individuals and organisations was also limited and so were their spheres of influence. This environment largely determined how organisations were designed or functioned which has been discussed below for better understanding.

Influence. Influence is the capability, not the right, to make another person do something without using authority.¹²

Earlier, a member of an organisation or a group had limited ways of being influenced. Individual's influence was determined by events in his or her immediate environment. Access to knowledge or information and ability to exchange views to form opinions was restricted. Therefore the opportunity to influence members of a group or organisation was available largely with elders of the family/society and seniors of the organisation. Individual perceptions and expectations could thus be worked upon by virtue of greater influence, to shape member integration within an organisation.

Authority. Socialist Max Weber defined authority as: "the legal right to make certain decisions".¹³ Since ability to influence was greater, exercising authority from the legal position of a leader was easier. Moreover, lack of availability of information and knowledge seldom allowed individuals to challenge decisions and authority of the organisation.

¹²Ichak Kalderon Adizes, *Mastering Change* (Adizes Institute Publication, 1992), 120.

¹³*Ibid.*, 109.

Control. Dr Adizes in his book *Mastering Change* says Control is; “when you have the legal right to decide, they know you have the power to punish and reward them, and they are persuaded by the content of your decision, that it is the right one. In this case you have control.”¹⁴ Ability to exercise control over the organisation and its individuals was easier since leaders exerted greater influence which assisted them in exercising their authority. This resulted in a more autocratic style of leadership, especially in military organisations.

Team. In the pre Information Age, the ability of a leader to have greater influence over his team, encouraged commonality of traditions, values and culture. This fostered shared perceptions thereby preserving homogeneity and team spirit within his group and the organisation. As Dr Adizes says, “good management is teamwork,” it can be safely assumed that organisations functioned with less conflict due to the inherent advantages of teamwork.

Information Age Environment. In the early years, the Internet was stigmatized as a tool for introverts to avoid “real” social interactions, thereby increasing their alienation from society. Yet the Internet was also seen as the potentially great connecting force between cultures and individuals all over the world. The idea that something which allowed communication across the globe could breed social alienation seemed counterintuitive. The American Psychological Association (APA) coined this concept the “Internet paradox.”¹⁵

Influence. Availability of Information at the click of a mouse has empowered individuals like never before. Traditional means of obtaining information and seeking knowledge has been transformed by the internet. Influence generating stimuli which determine individual perceptions and organisational culture, were earlier kept away by a strong organisational wall. The Information Age has made these walls permeable and allowed penetration of influence, resulting in

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁵*The New School, Culture and Media Student Handbook (New York: The New School, 2015)*
<http://2012books.lardbucket.org/books/culture-and-media/s14-03-the-effects-of-the-internet-an.html>

greater awareness and questioning. The increasing number of cases in the Armed Forces Tribunal as well as grievance redressals sought, points to a trend that individuals are more aware of their rights, not satisfied with outcomes of organisational decisions and are seeking the intervention of the courts.

Authority. The ages old maxim 'knowledge is power' is most appropriate to describe the relation between knowledge and organisational authority. To a large extent, it is no longer the prerogative of leaders to possess knowledge on issues of importance. Breaking-news, tweets, messages and discussions on forums, travel faster than any organisational communication. The advantage of knowing first, which earlier indicated a perception of the leader's position and authority does not exist in today's world. Lack of ability to control information and dilution in influence over the group, resulting in questioning authority would be an obvious outcome. The manner in which veteran soldiers were manhandled on the eve of Independence Day 2015 at Jantar Mantar is known to every serving soldier through instantaneous feeds on

social media. Since the information is out there for all to analyse, draw opinions and form perceptions, authorities can exercise control over the situation only by ensuring their influence through greater team building and leadership.

Control. The internet has provided individuals with a gateway to build perceptions, develop independent views, create awareness of rights and acts as a forum for expressing 'likes and dislikes.' We are aware of several incidents of insubordination and clashes in the Armed Forces, news of which rapidly spreads across the internet and on the social media. It is thus evident that in the Information Age, influence of internet and social media have certainly impacted control which otherwise could have been effectively exercised by leaders and organisations over individuals.

Team. The 'internet paradox' describes individual alienation contrasted with internet's power to connect civilisations. The reality is that though the web makes a larger team in cyberspace; the value of this team to the organisation is debatable. Unless garnered to create an advantage for the

organisation and the leader, the paradox will continue to lean in favour of individual alienation in the Information Age. The creation of the post of Additional Director General of Public Information (ADGPI) by the Army headed by an officer of the rank of Major General has been a step in the right direction to encourage team support. Positive engagement through the social media has resulted in tremendous benefits for the Army by conveying the work it does in out-of-sight locations and against heavy odds to the people at large, much better than many other organisations.

It can thus be established that organisation culture and climate which is an outcome of individual perceptions will be affected in the Information Age since stimuli through the internet penetrate faster than the organisation's views. A leader would have to ensure that his authority, control and influence over his team are intact to be able to shape organisational goals.

Pre-eminence of Teams in the Contemporary Environment

“Light is the task where many share the toil,”¹⁶ as stated by Greek poet and philosopher Homer, in a very simple way elucidates the concept of teamwork. Teams bring together complementary skills and experiences, jointly develop clear goals and communication that support real time problem solving and initiatives. They can adjust their approach to new information and challenges with greater speed and accuracy.”¹⁷ The Internet has brought in revolutionary changes to our existence and created an interwoven world, and can influence our everyday thoughts, actions and opinions. Traditionalist thinking thus needs to factor these changes to evolve a mechanism more adept at ensuring results and success. A reflection on three operations as case studies highlight the distinction required in approach as compared to conventional operations and the need for greater interagency coordination and teams thereof.

Retaliatory Strike Across Myanmar Border. The result of the attack on Army personnel in Manipur in Jun

¹⁶Homer, *thebiography.com*, accessed August 11, 2015, <http://www.biography.com/people/homer-9342775>

¹⁷College of Defence Management, *Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff, Compendium: Organisation Behaviour Vol II, 2011, Secunderabad: College of Defence Management 2013, 239.*

2015 is “that the Indian Army is reported to have acted with such alacrity due to a clearance from the Prime Minister. The reprisal was reportedly sanctioned in order to boost the morale of the army after the attack in which 18 soldiers were killed.”¹⁸ Were internet and communications technology responsible for decisions that were taken? Another important aspect of the operation was the team effort, at the tactical level of the Commandos, to the strategic level with the National Security Advisor along with the Army Chief including intelligence officials all coming together and steering operations from a local headquarters close to the operational area, while officials of the Ministry of External Affairs played their part in sync. One of the probable reasons for this laudable success is bringing together with alacrity the required team effort while dealing with this non-traditional threat.

Coastal Security Ops. 26/11 taught us that the essence lay in ensuring all stakeholders work together to a common purpose rather than follow individual agendas of every service or

agency whether at the district, state or national level. It is only teamwork that will deliver results by close coordination, sharing of intelligence and using the strengths of each stakeholder in a manner most suitable. Turf issues would need to be set aside which can happen only if teams are built for a common purpose. Considering that Indian Navy is the lead agency for Coastal Security in the country, the onus of team building would lie on its leaders and formation/unit commanders at every level whether operational or tactical.

Non Combatant Evacuation Operations (NEO) – Op Raahat.

Another recent operation which drew national attention and received accolades from all sections including international was Operation Raahat. The crisis in Yemen required swift evacuation of Indian nationals in Apr 2015 and the government under the leadership of the Prime Minister, put together a cohesive interagency team comprising various military and non-military agencies. India was able to take the lead, mainly because of leadership at the national level,

¹⁸“Myanmar strike against militants: The 'how', 'why' and 'what next' of Indian Army's covert mission,” *First Post*, June 10, 2015, accessed August 11, 2015, <http://www.firstpost.com/india/myanmar-strike-against-militants-the-how-why-and-what-next-of-indian-armys-biggest-covert-mission-in-peacetime-2287890.html>

forward staging Gen (Retd) VK Singh to lead the operations who put together a cohesive multi agency team. PM Modi's tweet "Seamless co-operation between organisations - MEA, Navy, Air Force, Air India, Shipping, Railways & State Govts greatly helped in rescue work (Twitter, 1:33pm- 06 Apr 2015)" acknowledging the success of this operation, not only conveys the importance of teambuilding as an important attribute while overcoming non-traditional threats but also highlights the importance of using tools available in the Information Age to boost morale as well as build teams.

Managerial Grid and the Team

While studying leadership styles, the managerial grid concept authorized and made popular by Robert R. Blake and Jane S Mouton clearly highlights the concept by dividing the four quadrants of their model into definite leadership styles and gives a clear picture of changing situations based on the varying degrees of mission accomplishment and concern for people.¹⁹ Teamwork requires the highest score on both accounts of concern for people and concern for task at (9,9) in the grid.

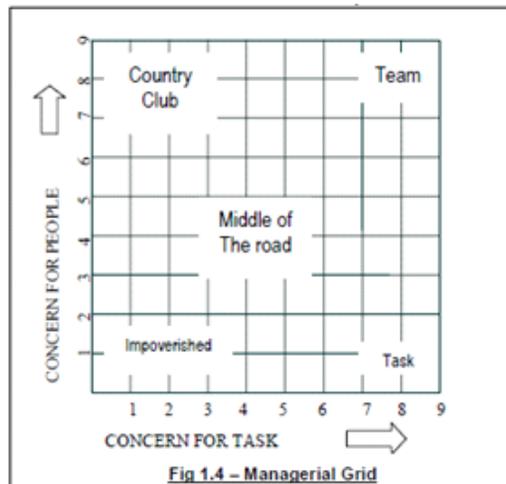


Fig.1. Managerial Grid²⁰

¹⁹ College of Defence Management, Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff, Compendium: Organisation Behaviour Vol II, 2011, Secunderabad: College of Defence Management 2013, 90.

²⁰ Ibid., 89.

The Managerial Grid also allows us to compare and establish certain other facts. As per the grid if we were to show greater attention to task while reducing our concern for people, we would lie in the zone of 'Task'. In the information age when maintaining influence over people by the leader and the organisation is extremely essential as has been illustrated through the paper, it would only be prudent that team building skills are shown greater importance in today's environment where individualism is more pronounced. Higher concern to people and aligning their personal missions with the organisation's vision would result in greater cohesiveness, shared progress and growth. It will allow the leader to move towards the 'Team' section of the grid, which is considered the need of the hour.

A further interpretation of the Managerial Grid, highlighted in the compendium published by the College of Defence Management, an ideal military leader should score (9,5) on the grid as shown in Figure 2. However, having undertaken this research and established certain environmental conditions, the author's argument is that we need to align the above (9,5)

interpretation of military leadership keeping in mind the changed complex environment of today and move towards the 'Team' section of the grid, to a (9,7) or a (9,8) score. This will be possible only if concern for people or human resources is shown greater importance by the military. This must not be misinterpreted as greater attention to the welfare of men, which must in any case continue. It suggests integrating the human resource into organisational decision making by a transformational approach to leadership which is good in the long term, rather than the erstwhile autocratic or authoritarian style which is only good for short term goals and compliments the 365 days syndrome/ approach.

The autocratic style may still be required to address certain specific military situations/ missions and thus must only be applied with care and thought and leaders should be able to vary their style according to the given situation. In the long run, transformational approach would be better suited for building effective teams and thus needs to be further assimilated into military leadership.

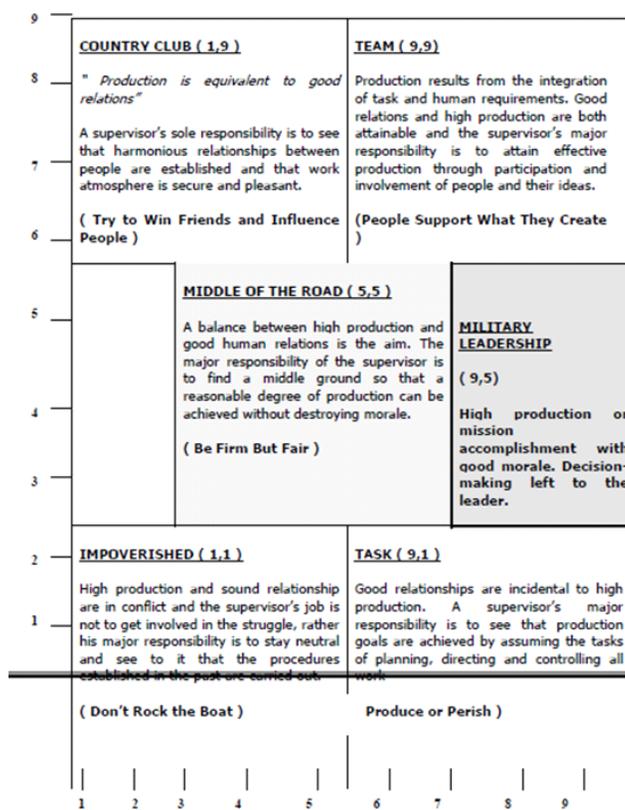


Fig.2. Explanation of Quadrants²¹

Transformational Leadership²²: The Way Ahead

In a complex environment when team-building and concern for people is essential, the need of the hour is a style of leadership that attempts a total fusion of the individual with the higher goal through an intense belief in the

cause, while simultaneously subordinating self-interest. According to James McGregor Burns, the proponent of this theory, transformational leadership occurs when “one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and

²¹Ibid., 91.
²²Ibid., 116

morality, power bases are linked not as counter-weights but as mutual support for a common purpose, transforming leadership ultimately becomes moral in that it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspirations of both leader and led and thus it has a transforming effect on both". Transformational leadership deals with broadening as well as elevating of goals and subordinate's confidence in their ability to go beyond expectations. To understand this concept it is essential to know the leadership characteristics that complement transformational style. These are listed below :-

Charismatic Leadership. Leaders arouse enthusiasm, faith, loyalty, and pride and trust in themselves and their aims.

Individualised Consideration. Leaders maintain a developmental and individualistic orientation toward subordinates.

Intellectual Stimulation. Leaders enhance the problem solving capabilities of their associates.

Transformational leaders do not only show concern for their men by looking

after their welfare, they transform the functioning of their organisation by also doing the following :-

- Providing a model of integrity and fairness.
- Setting clear and high standards of performance.
- Encouraging followers with advice, help, support, recognition and openness.
- Giving followers a sense of confidence of his intellect, yet being a good listener.
- Giving autonomy and encouraging self-development.
- Willingly sharing knowledge and expertise with followers.
- Yet remaining formal and firm and reprimanding followers when necessary.
- Be counted on and standing up for subordinates.
- Generating amongst followers, trust, strong liking, admiration, loyalty and respect.

Way Ahead

A transformational leader motivates us to do more than we originally expected to do. Such a transformation can be achieved in the following ways :-

- Raising the level of consciousness about the importance and value of designated outcomes and ways of reaching these outcomes.
- Rising above own self-interests for the sake of the team, organisation, or larger policy.
- Raising our need level on Abraham Maslow's hierarchy from, say, the need for security to the need for recognition, or expanding our portfolio of needs, by (for example), adding the need for self-actualization to the need for recognition.

In the Information Age, 'transformational leadership' provides us the opportunity to match individual needs, perceptions, and belongingness, thereby generating larger influence upon individuals of the organisation. It also allows us the ability to build stronger, cohesive, integrated teams which are required in the Information

Age and to match non-traditional threats. Transformational leadership goes beyond just increasing our effort towards concern for people by way of welfare measures, it provides a direction to shift towards the 'Team' quadrant of the Managerial Grid. In today's environment a more inclusive and reformist style like *progressive* teambuilding is the need of the hour. It would thus be worthy of consideration to adopt this style of *progressive* teambuilding as a solution to declining organisational influence in the information age. In order to face tomorrow's challenges of non-traditional threats the human resource strategy needs to look at *progressive* teambuilding as a solution. Therefore undeniably amongst the many traits a leader must possess, *progressive* teambuilding assumes greater pre-eminence in today's environment, for a leader to continue to stay relevant.

Conclusion

Change is inevitable and adapting to change is the hallmark of any vibrant organisation. Adaptation is also extremely important to remain relevant within the environment around us. An important aspect thus is to be able to

perceive these changes as quickly as possible, assimilate them and take suitable steps to align with the new environment. The Information Age has brought in changes which in many ways have altered our lives. Technology has penetrated human existence and transformed common functions of communications, social interactions, knowledge and the

internet has empowered individuals at every level of society more than any other invention in recent history. Disparate teams will play a crucial role to keep alive organisational interests and thus team leaders must explore newer methods to fine-tune their styles; transformational leadership offers one such avenue.



About the Author

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