Shifting Leadership Imperatives
Priming the Organisation for Transformative Growth

RESEARCH INSIGHTS

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Insight beyond information

SHIFTING LEADERSHIP IMPERATIVES

Crises can be opportunities to drive change at the most fundamental level. Today, leadership roles and responsibilities are being redefined as businesses grapple with disruption of many varieties: technological, geopolitical, competitive and workforce-related. With no surety about when the pandemic will truly end and about what future crises may emerge, CXOs are taking multiple and varied steps to build leadership resilience. The end-goal, however, is common: preparing the organisation for transformative change and growth. Recently, **IMA India**, in partnership with **Project Management Institute (PMI)**, conducted a research study that sought to understand how top managers are viewing internal business transformation and leadership imperatives, and reinventing their businesses for a new normal. The insights in this paper, drawn from IMA's report, **'Reinventing the Business for Transformative Growth,'** highlight emerging practices in leadership based on in-depth conversations with business leaders across industry sectors.

BUILD NIMBLE AND AGILE LEADERSHIP

'Agility' was the one word used by nearly all the 10 CEOs we interviewed, to describe today's biggest leadership imperative. In a nutshell, agility means *being able to respond quickly and easily to emerging issues* – which is crucial in a disruptive environment. Keeping options ready when Plan A falls through, is more important than ever. **Continental Auto Components India,** in fact, uses a formal system to measure agility among its leaders. This helps it identify the individuals who are best able to operate in an uncertain environment.

Agile leaders always have a 'Plan B'…

DECENTRALISE LEADERSHIP WHERE POSSIBLE

The pandemic has driven some organisations to restructure and decentralise their leadership and decision-making. Mobility restrictions pushed **Schneider Electric** to *dissolve its existing hierarchies* and *authorise employees at the local level* to take full responsibility for the business in their geography. Previously undiscovered talent came to the fore and levels of trust and motivation jumped as people felt better rewarded and recognised for their achievements.

…they decentralise to enable greater empowerment

BD India has adopted a 'servant leadership model', which, simply put, is about *leaders helping their teams resolve problems and deliver outcomes*. This demands leaders to possess such characteristics as the ability to exert influence without authority; understanding the softer aspects of organisational structure; and a strong process orientation. Ultimately, what underpins decentralised leadership is the reality that *learning is neither a linear process nor a one-way street*. It is vital for leaders to help employees understand their role and purpose in the organisation, and coach them along their journey. Leaders who manage to do this are the ones most likely to build a 'happy' work environment, one that encourages people to stick around for the long term.

Leaders as servants…

ADOPT A CONTROL-TOWER MINDSET

In driving change, it is not enough simply to establish robust structures or deploy specialised skill-sets. Equally important is the

Adopt a 'control-tower' mindset

creation of strong review processes. In this regard, *a 'control-tower' mindset helps both to track and differentiate between leading and lagging indicators of performance.* Used judiciously, such indicators can help determine if things are headed in the right direction. The other key element of such a mindset is to *empower employees.* The leader's role here is to ask people the right questions, check their progress towards defined goals in a structured manner and push them to think critically. In the absence of such mechanisms, the chances of straying off-course increase dramatically.

OVER-COMMUNICATE

In a hybrid world, *over-communication has become the new imperative.* A recent survey found that over 90% of Indian businesses regard communication as a key element of their corporate strategy, especially in a remote-working environment, and that technology plays an essential role in this. Attention spans are shortening, but in uncertain times, increasing the flow of information can reduce confusion and bring leaders closer to their people. At **Schneider Electric**, senior managers communicate with their employees about every single step of an internal transformation process now underway. This has helped prepare people for the company's big digitalisation push.

Over-communication reduces stress…

Meanwhile, at **Carrier**, continuous communication has helped manage conflict while fostering a culture of cooperation across functions and verticals in the midst of transformative change. The experience of **SECO Tools** illustrates just how important it is to communicate well: most of the challenges it faced while driving an internal transformation project were attributable to communication gaps between subordinates and managers.

…and helps build a culture of cooperation

OVER- RATHER THAN UNDER-MANAGE

In the new normal, the hallmarks of efficient leadership include strong process orientation combined with 'over-management'. **Crane Process Flow Technologies** believes in focusing on every minute detail of a problem and breaking it down into clear and distinct steps. Everything – from dealing with clients and taking orders, to hiring and even managing employees – is process-driven. This not only gives a sense of direction to people but also reduces risk and variability. **BD India** prides itself on its strong process orientation and has carved out a separate team whose sole responsibility is to drive big transformative changes and unclog the bottlenecks that hamper change-management.

Leading a diverse team requires a leader who focuses on every minute detail

The contents of this paper are based on a larger report, **'Reinventing the Business for Transformative Growth',** *published by IMA in collaboration with PMI, and which is available for download here. This paper is meant for the exclusive consumption of IMA's Peer Group Forum members and may not be copied, shared or distributed without explicit permission. The paper, together with a podcast version is also available on the* **IMA app***, which can be downloaded from Google Playstore and Apple Appstore, and the Knowledge Centre of our website www.ima-india.com. IMA Forum members may log in using their personalised website access codes.*