



■ BY DR SUJAYA BANERJEE

in search of **authentic leadership**

India Inc. is in the midst of a huge crisis, whether we wish to acknowledge it or not, and the evidence is all around us. Our legacy of leadership is in trouble and the challenge is of authenticity and trust, rather than the competence to deliver results. We must believe that because leadership is about character in motion, it will sooner than later hamper the ability to deliver results. This leadership crisis is urgent and dangerous than all the other threats we face, only it is not recognized most of the times and often not acknowledged, in the maze of apathy and myopia of organizations, and also because Boards are focused on

What is leadership authenticity and what are the dysfunctionalities that top-management teams struggle with as a result? What can leaders do to build trust - the make or break glue of leadership?



They are recruited, promoted, rewarded, organized and trained to be competitors and not collaborators.

- The single biggest contributor to the top-management team's effectiveness is the team process.
- Team characteristics and processes were found to be the essential drivers of effectiveness. How a team works together, decision-making patterns, modes of conflict management are significant contributors to team effectiveness.

Despite clear evidences that companies need to improve their teamwork at the top, very few companies appear to be doing anything to bridge the gap between the desired performance and actual behavior. The most startling finding on this research is that CEOs are blissfully unaware of the high levels of dysfunctions found in their top-management teams. Team dysfunctions therefore, remains hidden and glossed over in most organizations.

Again, research is not throwing up issues of competence to deliver results as a challenge, or suggesting a change of the leadership mix at the top as a challenge for delivering business results. It is the ability to rise above individualistic compulsions and petty competitions, and the absence of selfless and intense ambition of greatness not for themselves but the organization they work for, which appears to be grossly missing.

What the research is referring to as top leadership dysfunctional behaviors is the antithesis of what Jim Collins described as the behaviors of Level 5 Leaders.

The black box between the good and great companies is a paradoxical leadership style that constitutes self reflection, conscious personal development, mentors, great teachers, loving parents and significant life experiences. Level 5 Leaders are humble, tenacious; however, most of all have the ability to build trust.

Warren Bennis describes these behaviors as the 5 Cs of leadership:
1. Congruity is authenticity. The extent to which the leader knows himself and reflects character each

delivering short-term results.

A global research conducted by Heidrick & Struggles, which covers 124 CEOs and 579 top executives from across industries uncovered the striking discrepancies between ideal and actual performances of the top-management teams. The findings are startling as they reveal that:

- CEOs assess their top-management team performances far more positively than other members of the team.
- Top-management team members see themselves as competitors and not collaborators.
- Not only do the team members see themselves as competitors, they are also rewarded by CEOs and Boards to successfully compete with each other.
- The biggest bonuses go to those top-management team members whose divisions are more profitable.



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day at work.

2. **Constancy** is the ability to present the same fact at work and home. No masks, no pretenses.

3. **Candor** is fundamental to build trust; it is the leader's own ability to acknowledge his/her shortcomings and thereby earn the trust of their followers.

4. **Care** genuinely means caring for one's followers, which naturally build trust. Caring is not about exchanging superficial concerns but actively exchanging concerns between professionals, and sometimes in their personal lives as well to make a difference.

5. **Lastly**, but possibly the most vital parameter for building trust is Competence. It is the ability to deliver on the job.

While the 5 Cs are insightful, let us understand Collin's Level 5 leadership traits and how they influence trust.

What the 'Level 5' leaders do differently?

- They create a climate where the truth and brutal facts of reality are heard (the ability to manage discordant information).
- They spend an inordinate amount of time with followers to genuinely seek their views.
- They create a culture where dialogue is common - asking questions first instead of imposing quick answers to tougher issues.
- They conduct autopsies to analyze failures without assigning blame (build a lessons, learn a culture).
- They do not claim instant credit for success and do not blame others when decisions go awry.
- They hire people for their character and innate abilities more than for competencies or knowledge.
- They are rigorous but not ruthless in making proper decisions.
- They invest in future leadership of their organizations, understanding that true leadership is not about short-term accomplishment but about leaving a legacy behind.

In sharp contrast to level 5 Leadership, top- management teams in most organizations appear to be plagued with traits which are the enemies of trust - mismanaging privileges, abusing subordinates to advance themselves, misapplying

power, covering- up mistakes and shielding the truth surrounding themselves with sycophants who further isolate the leader.

This may resonate for followers who are experiencing such leadership, however, if you are a leader who wants a good hard look at the mirror - here is an option.

Siebold Drapeau offers a list of great self-assessment questions for leaders where they can assess themselves as to where they may be on the Trust Barometer.

- The people I have hired are smarter or more talented than I am.
- I have played a significant role in the development of people who are away from my direct area of responsibility.
- At least two or three people in the organization regard me as an active informal mentor.
- I openly praise people who work for me.
- People who work for me feel free to disagree with me in public.
- I am considered trustworthy by my direct reportees.
- I know what my legacy to this organization will be.
- Everyone in this organization knows how we make money.
- I explicitly discuss the importance of trust with people in the organization.

While answering these questions, it is important for the leader to listen to the "voice inside", and interpret his/her leadership journey.

Let's take a look at the leadership competencies that a leader must possess to evoke trust.

In PDI competency terms, the competencies that appear to reflect trust best are fostering open dialogue; mature confidence and inspiring trust

Leaders who foster open dialogue

They promote free flow of information and communication throughout the organization (upward, downward and across), listen actively and encourage open expression of ideas and opinions.

Key behaviors

- Creates open channels of communication
- Keeps others well informed

- Expresses ideas clearly and concisely
- Promotes frank discussion on tough issues
- Expresses opinions without intimidating others
- Listens carefully while sharing inputs and feedback
- Asks questions to clarify ambiguous messages
- Encourages others to express contrary views
- Exhibits non-verbal behaviors that show receptivity to other ideas

Leaders who display mature confidence

They realistically appraise their own strengths and weaknesses, shares credit and visibility, maintains and projects confidence, even when not supported by others.

Key behaviors

- Projects self-assurance and unshakable confidence
- Stands up to criticism and makes 'lonely' decisions
- Maintains a sense of humor
- Readily shares credit and gives opportunities for visibility to other
- Realistically appraises own strengths and weaknesses
- Seeks and accepts constructive criticism
- Acknowledges own mistakes and limitations

Leaders who inspire trust

They establish open, candid, and trusting relationships. They treat all individuals fairly and with respect. They behave in accordance with expressed beliefs and commitments and maintain high standards of integrity.

Key behaviors

- Establishes open, candid, and trusting relationships
- Maintains high standards of personal integrity
- Behaves in accordance with expressed beliefs and commitments
- Collaborates as a team player; never undermines others for personal gains
- Treats others fairly and consistently

All these competencies have an intertwined theme of transparency, integrity, self-awareness and most of all authenticity. This kind of leadership

brings purpose and meaning and inspires organizations to greatness.

In the seminal book "Why should anyone be led by you?", Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones talks about the disengagement that is setting in with regards to the quality of leadership experienced in all walks of life - whether at work, in our spiritual lives, in sports or in politics.

Need of the hour leaders are those who excel at inspiring people - those who succeed in capturing hearts, minds and souls of their followers. Leadership is finally about results, however, great leadership is not just about performance - it's about meaning too.

The abiding theme in their book is that leadership is finally about authenticity and skill. The authors have developed an interesting two by two matrix which is a good test for leaders who may possess different levels of authenticity and skill thereby posing different challenges to themselves and their followers/ organizations.

Those who are low on both are obviously uninspiring leaders. Those who are authentic, however, are not respected for competence often sticks out as mavericks who may not appeal to their followers. Those who are competent, however, merely role-playing in their leadership roles may struggle to evoke trust, and will never manage to capture the hearts and souls of their followers.

Effective leaders are comfortable in their skin, in the knowledge of who they are high on self- awareness and the impact they have on others. They are authentic and evoke trust easily. Besides their endearing personal traits they are competent, skilled at delivering results, however, bring meaning to work through their distinctive and original personalities.

My vocabulary to describe authentic leadership is that it is the leadership of generosity. Effective and authentic leaders operate from a space of abundance.

This is my own theory on the evolution of leadership in developing nations because those who have risen to leadership roles have grown in times of scarcity (where sometimes the experience of poverty has been primary), admissions to schools, colleges were scarce with very privileged few being fortunate enough to be educated and have permanent jobs. Everything was scarce- jobs, resources, material comfort, opportunities, this has led to a compelling scarcity mindset which does not allow leaders to operate from the abundance of resources, power, affordability that has now become a reality in these countries. Coupled with a story on feudal orientation that enjoys power distances, we have uncharismatic leaders who make little or no attempts to engage with his followers or those who will manipulate their power and people with the insecurities associated with losing it (the power). The demand for authentic leadership is growing with every passing day, especially with traditional hierarchies' disintegrating, and only leadership can fill the void. Any CEO's most pressing need is for real leaders - not just role players, and down-the- line people are eagerly waiting for disenchantment to be replaced with leadership who can inspire them to their true greatness. 