

BOOK REVIEW

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Dr. Ashish Arya, ***HBR's ten must reads on Leadership***: *If you read nothing else on leadership, read these definitive articles from Harvard Business Review, Massachusetts, Copyright 2011 Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation, Printed in India by Replika Press Pvt. Ltd., pp.1-217 (ISBN: 978-1-4221-5797-8) (pbk.:alk.paper)*



ABSTRACT

Purpose

The purpose of writing this book review is to make the readers of leadership get an overview of the classic book from Harvard Business Review (HBR). The book is basically a compilation of

ten best articles on leadership from the data bank of HBR. One of the most important features of the book is that all the articles are backed by research. Reading on leadership is required more than ever before in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic, as it has created new challenges and opportunities for the global business environment. This book is a one to be read in this hard time.

Design/methodology/approach: The book was read and written by the primary author and was read and critically reviewed by the second author. There were two primary reasons for doing so: One, to remove any biases towards a concept or thing developed in writing by the primary author, and two, to give valuable insights in writing the manuscript.

Findings

Several helpful principles and strategies are explored in this book which can be discussed in the board room, and can be strategized to develop an action plan for the future of

leadership in the organization. The book is written in easy-to-understand language and without hardcore technical terminologies, which broaden the spectrum and appeals to the readers most.

Originality

This book review is an attempt to acquaint the readers of leadership with this masterpiece on leadership.

INTRODUCTION

The book 'HBR's ten must reads on leadership' (Harvard Business Review, 2011) is from Harvard Business Review, published by Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation, in the year 2011, consists a total of 217 pages. The book is written in the English language. The printed copy of this book is priced at INR. 587 in India, whereas in the USA it costs USD 11.19 (as found on an e-tailor site). The average time taken to read an article was one hour thirty minutes.

As claimed by HBR, the book is full of groundbreaking ideas and primarily intended for individuals who want to improve their own, their team's and their organization's performance. But after reading the book, we believe that the recommended audience for this book are the ones who possess authoritarian power, such as - The CEOs, Business Heads, Functional Heads, Head and Deans, Team Leaders, Branch Managers, etc. Because, they better understand the language of productivity and profitability for the organization as they are directly responsible for it. Unlike traditional books - which consist of conceptual chapters written by an author/(s), this book is a compilation of ten best articles

on leadership, extracted from the data bank of Harvard Business Review.

CRITICAL REVIEW

The book 'HBR's ten must reads on leadership' theme vouches that "*If you read nothing else on leadership, read these definitive articles from Harvard Business Review*". Of course, this is so true for this book. If you search for content/write-ups on leadership for the particular keyword 'leadership' on recognized databases, apparently you will end up finding more than two lakhs results on Scopus, around ninety thousand results in the database of emerald, and more than twenty-eight thousand reads itself on the HBR website. Considering this, we strongly believe that 'HBR's ten must reads on leadership' has done justice to the title and the theme.

The book strikes in its **first article** itself by asking a million-dollar question, - What makes a leader? To which the author of the article Daniel Goleman, a well-known name in the field of Emotional Intelligence responds, "*It is not the EQ or IQ, but it is the Emotional Intelligence (EI)*". The author talked about the five skills that differentiate a great leader from a good one. In his extensive research work on EI he found out that, when one division of an organization had a good number of people with EI capabilities, the division outperforms others by twenty percent. The best news in the article was that EI though a personality factor can be developed by working on the correct part of the brain.

The book further incorporates the viewpoint of the two famous authors in the next two articles, in which the focus on the concept of leadership is shifted from personality to practices.

In the **second article**, ‘What makes an effective executive?’, the author Peter F. Drucker answered the question by saying that all effective leaders have one thing in common, “*They get the right things done, in the right way*”, and they do so by following eight practices. These practices not only give them the required knowledge but also help them converting the knowledge into action.

In the **third article** ‘What leaders really do?’, John P. Kotter takes the discussion further by suggesting that organization needs to groom their people so that they can climb up the hierarchy. This requires both leadership and management skills, but without differentiating between the two, an organization will not be able to produce leaders-managers which is the need of the hour at the top/corporate level.

The **fourth article**, ‘*The work of leadership*’ by – Ronald A. Heifetz and Donald L. Laurie, takes the discussion from self to the organization, from the moment of a rise to the moment of fall; where change becomes the necessity, and which is tough on all actors in the organizations. The author has termed these challenges as ‘*Adaptive Challenges*’. Like the world is suffering right now from COVID-19 pandemic which has made all of us sit back on our rocking chair and rethink about the direction ahead for ourselves and our organization. The authors suggest a set of six actions that starts from getting to the balcony, to the field back and to visualize the patterns behind those adaptive challenges. The chapter is also an inspiration for people in academic consultation as it shows how meaningful outcomes can be produced by collaborations (Prof. Ronald is an academician, and Donald L. Laurie is a consultant).

The **fifth article**, ‘Why should anyone be led by you?’ By Robert Goffee and Goreth Jones, is a question to all who wish to lead a team or/and an organization. This question can stun even the best of the leaders. The study admits that undoubtedly we need leadership to set/determine the strategic intent for the organization, i.e. - “*vision, energy, authority, and strategic direction*”; but to win people heart, mind, and soul of the followers, a leader should have something ‘extra’ and that ‘extra’ is the qualities expressed in this article. For instance- showing that you are a human and do possess certain weaknesses, will create a sense of help for you in the eyes of others.

The **sixth article**, ‘*Crucibles of leadership*’- by Warren G. Bennis and Robert J Thomas, depicts that the mark of true leadership is the strength of an individual to pick up from those transformative negative events or crucibles where others might fail. Individuals should learn from those events and develop an “altered sense of identity” in themselves. The authors have also found out ‘four basic skills’ that are common in the people who went through these crucibles.

The **seventh article**, ‘*Level 5 leadership*’ by Jim Collins, is again a big idea in search for producing or developing great leaders. In his work, Collins found that the organizations that accomplish and sustain leadership for a longer duration are the ones that had level 5 leaders. These organizations produced returns on stock as high as three times the market’s, for around 15 years, after a big transformation phase. This level 5 leadership is characterized by a sense of “deep personal humility and intense professional will” which can be developed by

incorporating certain measures like - finding how the level five differentiate from the other four levels and inheriting leadership skills at all four levels first to get to the ultimate one. The **eighth article**, 'Seven transformations of leadership'- by David Rooke and William R. Torbert, is about transformational leadership. In their study, the authors found that great leaders are the ones who change the rules of the game. In comparison with the first four levels of transformational leaders i.e., achievers, experts, diplomats, and opportunists, the fifth (individualist), sixth (strategist) and seventh level (alchemist) transformational leaders strongly affect the successful transformation of the organization. This level-by-level development in executives is possible if one (or his organization) can work out on his action logic (i.e., how the individuals react and maintain themselves when they interact with the external environment or when their "power and safety is challenged". The authors have also suggested a mechanism for this development. The **ninth article** 'Discovering your authentic leadership'- by Bill George, Peter Sims, Andre N. McLean and Diana Mayer took the discussion to a higher level of self-cautiousness. In this article, the authors say that you may have done all sort of hard work to become a great leader, but you may still not be able to win people's heart, mind, and soul, or otherwise trust, as people believe those who exhibit their authentic self and not a copy of someone else. You may have developed learning throughout this book review, but until you pour that learning into the petri dish filled with your crucibles, your true/authentic self cannot be recognized. This article provides a path to become an authentic

leader by examing eight questions. One of which can be asked here: "What does being authentic mean in your life?"

In the **final article**, 'In praise of the incomplete leader' – by Deborah Ancona, Thomas W. Malone, Wanda J. Orlikowski and Peter M. Senge, the authors say that no executive can live up to the standards of being a single-handed flawless winner for the organization, reason being the complex nature of the business environment. And in this article, authors have proposed a model to impeccably deal with this incompleteness. The model starts with the fact that a leader is not the master of all, and he must collaborate with those who complement his strength and offset his weakness. The author has explained four leadership capabilities that all organizations need: Relating (building relationship), Sensemaking (change is eternal, therefore analysis of the problem should make sense in the current situation and should not be fixed with past learning), Visioning (creating a vision which others also want to follow) and Inventing (execution with a new way, a new thought), and have suggested leaders diagnose their strength in each capability.

CONCLUSION

Indeed, the book has some core strengths, and the logic of leadership is developed as a concept from article one to the tenth article. All the articles are written by experts, that contribute to the journey of developing great leaders. The book is written in easy-to-understand language and without hardcore technical terminologies, which broaden the spectrum and appeals to the reader most. More than anything else, all articles are well investigated through the lens of research

which generates a sense of confidence to apply the explained principles.

However, we feel that the book has missed two themes that can be covered in the future series of this book. First, the book misses the gender dimension of leadership. As males and females are genetically different, there might be certain key traits and behavior which can help in developing great female and male leaders from merely good ones. If known, they can be used in gender-oriented leadership development programs. Secondly, the book does not have a dedicated article on 'leadership in teams'. As we all know a team is a complex set of different personalities that has its own set of behaviors, which may require some differentiated traits to work on from being good to a great leader in team leadership. While

pondering the articles, few traits and behaviors can be spotted that deal with differentiated teams (for example, the tenth article talks of distributive leadership, the seventh article talks about types of transformational leaders, and the fifth article talks on - why should anyone be led by you?). But these interpretations may merely be guesswork as they lack the solid foundation of research, unlike the featured articles.

Still, these excuses are not enough to miss this masterpiece which is a journey of articles for becoming good to a great leader. As said by the famous economist Dr. Brian Arthur- "*What differentiates great leaders from good leaders, is their ability to understand the new rules of the game*" and this book certainly helps in this direction.

References

1. Harvard Business Review. (2011). HBR's 10 Must Reads on Leadership. 217. Boston, Massachusetts, US: Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation.