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Context to the nugget conversation

Raghu speaks about the evolving paradigm of leadership and how that is likely to look like a combination of Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva. Yudhishtira and Bheema might possibly be not as relevant as they were in a more predictable past.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Raghu, you have been doing this work for the last several decades, four decades. When you look at the paradigm of leadership today versus maybe two or three decades back and I think you alluded to it in the conversation. When I looked at the Mahabharata, Pandava archetypes, I got a sense that the relevance of the Nakula's style of leadership as compared to the Bheema style of leadership is greater. Can you talk a little about how the leadership ask has evolved over time in the state of business?

Raghu Ananthanarayanan (RA): See, I think all the five powers that we are talking about are critical. And if you look at organisations that have lasted for a long time either by design or by luck the right type of leadership has come up and somebody has recognised it and celebrated it. But what has happened is that the popular discourse and the popular idea of leadership till I think 20-30 years back has rested largely in the colonising kind of thing. You go, you capture market, this capture and market share and all of that. This Pepsi versus Coca-Cola model has been very prevalent. Now, when you are constantly looking at this and you are saying there is danger, there is danger, you tend to forget a lot of other things. Whereas when you take a Tatas, for example, when they say we also make steel, they mean it. I don't think many people know that the first people in the world to say, let's bring a social scientist to an organisation to see how to build culture was the Tatas. That is Nakula leadership, where you really understand the value of people and you invest in them for the long term. Now, very obviously last 20-30 years, innovation has become very, very critical. So, you see a lot of places like Microsoft and things like that, the real leader is the Sahadeva, but he has a Bheema type person who is doing the marketing face, but the real power, the access of the power is in the Sahadeva type of leadership. My feeling is that with the fast pace of change in the world and things like this, the Arjuna Nakula, Sahadeva will gain prominence. Contextual intelligence is going to become very critical, knowing how to really nurture key people and to create a core of institution-building people is going to become very important, innovation is going to become very important. It's not as though entrepreneurship or bringing order and predictability are not very important. But I think these will have to take the lead because if there's too much of building order it becomes static. If there's too much of this let's go and the start-up kind of a thing you don't build an organisation. The organisation building comes when all five in a sense dance with each other, but I think long-term you have to invest in key people. The faster the reality changes, the less you are going to be able to collect knowledge and collect ways of working and real that what they call site technology, we will

all be in the heads of people. It's only when you have the same thing happening over a long time that you can convert it into SOPs and this and that and knowledge can get spread, but if you are going to have to keep innovating, keep changing, its people who are key.

DJ: And in the book along similar lines, you talk about the ABCD of timeless leadership which I found, you know, it sort of, it felt easy to absorb the way you have sort of framed it. Awareness, Balance, Contextual Intelligence and Dharmasankata, understanding dharmasankata. Can you sort of expand on this about why do you say these are timeless and you single these out?

RA: See, fundamentally, I was trying to decode what I thought were the key aspects of the Mahabharata characters. Now, if you look at... let me give you a story from a Zen context. See there's a discussion about who is going to win and what does it mean to be in a fight between a sensei and a student. So, the sensei asks the student what do you think is the most important thing for you to focus on? He says, the knife, the guy says, you are dead. Then he asks the question again. What do you think is the most important thing to focus on? So, he says, I have to look at the guy and the knife. And then he asks again, what is the most important thing? So, it goes on like that till the teacher says, you have to look at the guy, you have to look at the knife, you have to know that there is a crowd around watching it and you have to know that there are pebbles on the ground that can trip you up. If you don't have this width of awareness, you can't win. And there's a book by Miyamoto Musashi about the types of stances you take. There he emphasises the stance of silence and the stance of space, which is completely relaxed. In yoga it's called Sthira Sukham, you are completely at rest but you are completely aware, that is balance. So, when you are there, you can be tipped off, you can be pushed but you won't fall, but if you are rigid, one push and you will fall. So, an organisation needs this balance.

DJ: State of equilibrium.

RA: A state of equilibrium, peace but readiness; that's Sthiram sukham. And contextual intelligence is obvious here. I mean, if I don't know the trends, you will be like Lehman Brothers. You will be preparing, one of your friends must have been doing that... the PPT, the famous PPT that was supposed to be presented next week. There were beautiful PPTs being presented about the long-term future of Lehman, except that next week it didn't exist. So, contextual intelligence is very, very key to know what are the macro trends, what is going to happen, how things are going to move, and now a business becomes more and more complex, from exchange rates to war and this and that. So, if you don't have contextual intelligence, how do you navigate, how do you make choices? And like we discussed before, for leadership it's always balancing of forces. It's not some victory somewhere and in so many fields here, you don't know who is your customer and who is your competitor, and who is your collaborator. In IT, you can be buying something from IBM at one level and working with IBM to deliver something at another level; in a third place, you could actually be fighting IBM for a job. In that context, it's all balancing of forces and how do you keep this going. And balancing of forces to me is also dharma. When it's not just your stakeholders who you are talking about like, talking about the Earth, you are talking about sustainability. So, all that requires an understanding of this balance of forces.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I happened to speak with Jennifer Garvey Berger, an Executive Coach and Author of Unlocking Leadership Mind traps. She speaks about the kind of leaders we need in the future.

JGB: *"I think that leaders in the future will need to respond not to the short term but to the long term; we are seeing that right now, not to the disconnected but to the interdependent. I think leaders will need to respond with their whole selves, their mind, their bodies, their emotions and to the whole selves of other people, their minds, their bodies and their emotions and in a much clearer way away from competition which has often fuelled humans and organizations and into a deep sense of interconnectivity because here we are all together and trying to find a way for all of us to thrive is going to be every leaders' job into the future."*

DJ: *And as you look around Jennifer any role models you see while it is still early? Any role models of leadership that you see emerging as you see different people deal with this crisis that's in front of us?*

JGB: *I mean, I have a bias here, but I am just finishing a blog today that highlights Jacinda Ardern, the Prime Minister of New Zealand who has had to face more crisis in her time as prime minister than other New Zealand prime ministers had to in many, many years, and I find her blend of clarity, humanity and experimental approach, I find that refreshing and incredibly helpful and hopeful for what great leadership looks like in the future."*

DJ: This does sound quite a bit like a combination of Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva as Raghu mentions!

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Jennifer Garvey Berger that is referenced: [The Full Conversation](#).

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About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock the human potential of senior executive's / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

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