

# DIVERSITY: HAMPERING WORLD LEADERSHIP IN AN ERA OF GLOBALISATION?

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Topic: Diversity and Inclusion': part of the solution or part of the problem for effective organisational leadership in a rapidly globalising world?

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INTRODUCTION

*The term leadership has many meanings...It is a word taken from the common vocabulary and incorporated into the technical vocabulary of a scientific discipline without being precisely defined. As a consequence, it still carries extraneous connotations which create ambiguity of meaning.*  
(Takala, 1998)

Thus, the fulcrum, upon which the ideas of diversity, inclusion and globalisation are balanced, is one whose meaning is highly contested and shrouded by uncertainty. Rather than merely defining leadership, we shall look at its application as it deals with the issues of diversity, inclusion and globalisation. Three seemingly divergent case studies from India will illuminate the trajectory of leadership studied in this essay. Though the goals, processes and outcomes of these case studies are starkly different, they are connected by a common thread of development and empowerment through organisational leadership.

The topic of this essay seems to assume that the concept of globalisation is axiomatic and while this essay does not deny the benefits that arise from the process of globalisation, it will keep globalisation at par with diversity and inclusion. This shift in emphasis has a Foucauldian touch to it. During an interview, Foucault was once asked why he was interested in politics and he redefined the question to 'how' was he interested in politics. He believed that this shift allowed him to move beyond the preoccupation of abstractions and models, of western philosophy, that ultimately lead to very little working knowledge about concepts of politics and power (Rainbow, 1984). Similarly, by shifting the emphasis on the words in the question, this essay will be able to have a more comprehensive understanding of the fulcrum of this essay – leadership.

This essay does not imply that diversity, inclusion and globalisation are necessarily at loggerheads and it seeks to understand the balance between these concepts and states that neither diversity and inclusion nor globalisation can perpetually hurt or help leadership. They are merely tools to be used to achieve the ends of leadership as defined later in this essay. Towards substantiating these claims, three case studies will be examined, after identifying some theories and problems of leadership, in the context of diversity, inclusion and globalisation.

## LEADERSHIP: THEORIES AND PROBLEMS

There are a variety of theories on leadership and each one is wrought with problems, however they do give a good indication of the range of ideas that people acknowledge and apply. One could start with the Great Man Theory about a leader who is born and will rise from a situation of turmoil. He has almost mythic proportions of charisma, with not only a duty but also a right to lead (Yukl, 1999). Behavioral Theory states that leaders are made up of a variety of actions and are not chosen because of their innate charisma. According to this theory, a leader can be created and leadership can be learnt (Bolden et al., 2003). The Contingency Theory states that no one leader is always the best, different situations call for different leaders and they must be chosen accordingly (Bolden et al., 2003). The Participative Leader is, as the name implies, one who takes into account the ideas and opinions of other people before making a decision (House & Mitchell, 1986). The Relationship Theory, also known as Transformational Leadership, describes a leader who brings out the best in his followers. This leader often has an ethical or moral superiority that induces this change in people (Yukl, 1999). A leader will rarely fall into specifically one category and will have characteristics from a variety of theories. Thus, the problems of leadership often transcend the boundaries of each theory and can be applied to leadership as a whole.

One major critique of leadership is the fact that inequality is an inherent part of the concept. The leader is a superior being with more power than his followers. Some forms of egalitarian leadership do exist, like democratic leaders whose source of power lie with the people who elect them. Yet even in such forms of leadership that attempt to bridge disparity of power, one cannot deny that a leader is more equal than his followers. As the current Prime Minister of India, Dr Manmohan Singh has much more influence over decisions that affect the country than he did as the Minister of Finance in 1991. Thus even leaders must fit into a pyramid of power with the strongest leader at the apex. This is acceptable at a national or organisational level where there is a chosen leader who must abide by certain laws and rules. However, how would this inequality come into play in a global setting?

This inequality or exclusion can occur in three basic forms. The first idea of exclusion is the neoliberal one which identifies social exclusion as an unfortunate but unavoidable part of the economy, the second states that the term 'social exclusion' is just a new phrase for the word 'poverty' and the third view of exclusion defines it as a removal of rights over resources that people traditionally had access to (Beall 2002). These forms of exclusion are also seen as problems of citizenship of the State, but we cannot term them problems of citizenship in the global context because there is no clear understanding of the idea of a global citizen. There are no laws and rights that people can legally hold onto, merely rules and suggestions in treaties and agreements between nations with no direct accountability to people. Thus the idea of a global citizen is extremely ambiguous and it is in this grey area where inequality, exclusion and injustice can be played out. If we were to state that inclusion hampers globalisation and consequently discourage diversity, we could end up supporting structures that justify exclusion. This is why we must question globalisation.

There is no clear definition of globalisation. Beall describes it as, "...*the big idea that captures everything from cultural fusion to global financial markets, from international crime syndicates to the Internet but, as a stand-alone concept, it tells us very little about "how globalization is reshaping our lives."* Nevertheless, there is increasing evidence to show that there are those who, to a greater or lesser degree, are excluded by global processes..." (Giddens, 1999, Beall, 2002)

At the same time, one does not propose a cessation to the process of globalisation. As Clare Short, the UK Secretary of State for International Development stated, "*I think talking about stopping it is like trying to stop the industrial revolution and keep feudalism. History is moving. The world economy is reordering. This is a fact of history. But the question of how it is managed and controlled and how the fruits are distributed is completely open to human intervention. So working to understand it and get clear ideas about how we make sure its fruits are distributed fairly between nations and within nations, and that there aren't lots of excluded people, is the crunch issue of history now.*" (Short, 1997 in Beall, 2002).

This brings us to the goals and objectives of effective leadership, i.e. access to resources necessary to lead a life that is acceptable and of value to the individual in question. This understanding of leadership can coexist with diversity, inclusion and globalisation as is emphasised in the following case studies.

#### CASE STUDIES: MAGARPATTA, BARIPADA AND WAGHOLI

All the case studies have various social, economic and geographical similarities: they are set in the state of Maharashtra in India and were undertaken in the recent past by farming communities. These sites were chosen to prove that diverse ideas of leadership and development can occur even when other significant similarities exist.

The first case study is Magarpatta, a township on the outskirts of the city of Pune. By the 1990s Pune was hit by the IT boom and this completely changed the demographics and the structure of the hitherto quiet city. In order to accommodate the growing economy and migrant population, villages on the outskirts of the city were rapidly converted into suburban areas. The *Magars*, a largely agricultural clan, lived on the outskirts of Pune and realised that soon they too would have to give up their land and decided to take matters into their own hands. They formed the Magarpatta Township Development and Construction Company Limited (MTDCC LTD.), amalgamated all their land and created a township called Magarpatta City. Thus, the advent of globalisation resulted in a massive transformation for a community that originally depended on agricultural produce for their income. They now earn through shares and investments. As Manik Sharma, a General Manager of Magarpatta City, stated, *“In a nutshell, these farmers not only get a fair price for their lands at the current rate, but also get dividends on the company shares they hold, lease/rent amount from tenants, employment in the company, contractual work in the city, and plush homes with amenities,”*. Entrepreneurial activities are encouraged and the *Magars* get priority when job opportunities arise. While engaging with globalisation most agricultural communities, like those in Nandigram and Singur in West Bengal, lose their land and become impoverished. However in the face of similarly overwhelming forces of globalisation, the

*Magars* used their organizational leadership to create a situation of empowerment where they could determine a quality of life acceptable to them.<sup>1</sup>

The second case study is Baripada a small village in north Maharashtra, India that is home to a tribal community called the *Koknas*. Unsustainable practices of consumption lead to a rapid depletion of resources and by 1990 most of the forest cover was gone, the land was barren and a third of the wells were dry. This gave rise to mass migration to cities and creation of breweries to supplement the family income, it also led to an increased dependence on additives like alcohol and tobacco. Around this time, Chaitram Pawar returned home to Baripada after completing his undergraduate degree in commerce. He was appalled by the state of his village and along with the help of an NGO called *Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram* he mobilised the village and they decided to change their lifestyle. Strict restrictions on access to forest produce, compulsory schooling and health care were implemented. People were also required to guard the forests and help build check dams to harvest the available water. The funding that they received was put into a joint account or invested into small employment generating schemes like *jaggery*<sup>2</sup> production for the local people. In the last twenty years, a massive transformation has taken place: the forest has regenerated, they have enough water and supply water to five other villages in addition to their own, the amount of arable land has increased from 15 hectares to 120 hectares and crop rotations have increased from once a year to three times a year. There has also been an improvement in the health of the community, literacy levels have increased, most of the population that had migrated from Baripada have returned and dependence on addictive substances has decreased substantially. The leadership in Baripada is extremely transparent where every villager has the right to participate in discussions, join committees and vote when decisions are taken. Thus Baripada's leadership, though not directly contributing to the global economy, did succeed in giving its people access to resources and a quality of life chosen by them.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Information was sourced from Ganguli, R., (2008) *The Magarpatta model for land acquisition*. Infochange India

<sup>2</sup> Hindi word for 'traditional unrefined sugar'

<sup>3</sup> Information was sourced from Shukla, S. (2009) *Baripada case study* in *Community Conserved Areas in India: A directory*. Ed. Neema Pathak. Kalpavriksh, Pune, India.

The third case study takes place in the village of Wagholi in Maharashtra, India. The villagers protested against the attempts of the Maharashtra Industrial Development Cooperation (MIDC), a state run cooperation to encourage industry in Maharashtra, to acquire farmland from Wagholi and the neighbouring villages for non agricultural activities. In 2007, the villagers realised that the names on the land titles had been changed without their consent. The MIDC had acquired the land without informing the owners. The land was going to be used to create a special economic zone (SEZ) where manufacturing units would be set up. 4,500 farmers on 5,000 acres of land were affected by this change. The farmers came together and protested against this injustice. The villagers decided that they wanted to continue with their agriculture as Smita Kolte, one of the villagers said, *"All we want from the government is water, electricity and good rates for our crops. Then we can manage our own 'development'. They do not need to bother"*. The farmers repeatedly talked to the MIDC, different political parties, the government and various NGOs and organisations. In 2009, the State scrapped the SEZ. In this case, the leadership achieved its goal in terms of access to resources and quality of life while rejecting the dictates of a non-inclusive and monolithic idea of globalisation.<sup>4</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Thus, if the goal of effective leadership in the global socio-economic context is indeed to enable people access to resources and a quality of life acceptable to them, then all the three instances of leadership mentioned above could be termed successful. The problem of leadership, in a global context, lies not with a perceived antagonism between diversity and globalisation but arises when external bodies try to define, for individuals and societies, what facilities and resources and lifestyles people should aspire for. This brings to mind Sen's argument about development and governance. According to Sen, the role of governance is ensuring a minimum standard of life that the individual or the society, in question, deems worthy (Sen, 1999). Diversity is essential to human survival. The fact that there are billions of minds on this earth is proof enough that there will be diversity of thought and action. Diversity is a given and has existed since the inception of

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<sup>4</sup> Information was sourced from Asher, M. (2007) Why farmers hate Videocon, Reliance, Mahindra ... Civil Society June 2007

the earth. Modern economics tells us that we are going through an era of globalisation and that this is a new, non-negotiable. Thus, effective leadership should be inclusive in nature and respectful of diversity and globalisation, such that it makes these tools part of the solution in leadership.

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