

Leadership: Vision, Meaning and Reality 2015-16

PGP II, Slots XI and XII

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Introduction and Overview

Managers within organizations have to take tough decisions. The toughest decisions within organizations are not the result of “rational/logical” analysis. These decisions are a result of answers to multiple questions bordering on what is right and what is wrong. Strangely and ironically, they cannot be clearly compartmentalized or categorized as “right” or “wrong”.

As a manager, you too will face similar situations, in which you have to take a tough decision. Notwithstanding the circumstances, your dilemma will deepen as you will take difficult decisions involving a choice between right and right and wrong and wrong. The choice will call for a compromise. Additionally, you will also need to assess the situation and respond to the following questions: what is the difference between a sound compromise and a sell out? When do ethical ends justify dubious means? When do you take a stand?

These are only some of the questions that you, as a manager, will face. However, as you progress from the role of a manager to a leader, these very questions will test your mettle. You will reflect and look for appropriate answers to these key questions and in the process realise that there are some other questions which simultaneously need to be addressed: What is leadership? How is a leader different from a manager? How does one prepare to become a leader? Does a leader have a vision? Does a leader share a vision? What is meant by vision? Do you dare to dream? When can/do you dream and when do you come face to face with ground realities? Is it worthwhile to dream for a seemingly unrealistic vision? Or is it better to be “practical” and choose “not to be”? Is a leader just a hero? What is the difference between success and satisfaction? When is ambition a propelling, creative force and when does it become destructive? The list is endless and these are only some of the questions that need to be resolved by students aspiring to be leaders.

This course, or for that matter, any course, cannot, by itself, provide answers to these questions. This course helps you to debate, discuss, develop a perspective and seeks to provide an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of the dilemmas, complexities and subtleties of responsible leadership. It provides an opportunity to think, reflect and expand your mental horizon. It trains you to ask questions for which you know there are no textbook and concrete answers. Asking these questions, debating on issues and arriving at responses that help develop judgement which stimulates the senses and enables you to consider issues in the right perspective. In short, the course seeks to enable you to take not more correct decisions, but better decisions (hopefully!).

Another important contribution of the course is that it will introduce you to the world of literature and show how to interpret great works of literature and draw lessons from them. Literature is not only fascinating to read (especially when it is not to be read for examinations in degree courses!) but also immensely rewarding in the process of self development.

Objectives:

1. To understand key concepts in leadership such as decision making, vision, illusion, meaning, reality, myths, legends, symbols, rituals, beliefs, values, attitudes, will, ambition, virtue, responsibility, cleverness, intrigue, jealousy, personality, roles etc. with input from humanities.
2. To use such concepts in understanding the role of leadership and impact of culture on modern organizational life.
3. To understand relationships between organizational needs, role demands and personality differences, and
4. To develop skills for selecting and interpreting great works of literature so as to learn meaningfully from humanities for leadership roles.

Pedagogy

The course approaches the whole topic of leadership through a study of literature. Why literature? Many works of literature give glimpses of different aspects of leadership. They present the dilemmas of life. In many of the literary pieces you will read in this course, you will not find clear, inspiring tales of heroism or sainthood, although in some readings there are. Many of the characters in these works are simple people like you and me, with strengths and flaws. They are, in Nietzsche's phrase, "human, all too human". That is why they reflect life in its true reality. These works of literature will puzzle, fascinate and challenge you to interpret the situation and the characters in as conservative or radical a manner as possible.

Interpretation forms the essence of the course. These pieces of literature give insights into the thoughts and feelings of common and lofty people who are either leaders or are on the path to attaining leadership positions with common follies but great successes and failures ... narrated/presented in a highly readable and fascinating style.

In this course, students will form study groups of three to five and each group will take up at least one work and analyse it fully, reflect over it and present their understandings to the class. But before doing so, they have to meet the instructor, as a group, at least one day prior to the class and discuss what they propose to present in class. These presentations will be for about 20 to 30 minutes, followed by discussions and supplementary inputs by the instructor.

The class discussions tend to become quite interesting, with novel ideas and points of view presented with a new perspective. Interestingly, most students attending the course are quite astonished at their own ability to understand and interpret literature and see its relevance for gaining a holistic perspective of diverse situations, a must for all managers and leaders.

Two films, “The Making of the Mahatma” and “Les Miserables” will form a part of the course. In case you all think that there is a film which portrays leadership qualities, we can screen the same. These sessions in which we will screen additional films, based on interest levels, will be purely optional and outside the main course outline. The films are NOT a substitute for the main readings.

Grading Scheme

The following will be the grading scheme followed:

15% Class Presentations:

The presentations made by the various groups will be evaluated on

- (i) the quality of their interpretation (rather than merely summarising the reading)
- (ii) the issues generated for discussions and
- (iii) the innovative elements introduced to make the presentations more effective.

This will be a group grade in which all the members of a group will receive the same grade, unless there are good reasons to believe that some of the members have not contributed at all or only in an insignificant way to the group output.

20% Individual class participation and attendance: This will be based on the interest taken in the class and the quality of contributions to the discussions.

25% End-term Project: The project will be a group effort, and could be on any of the topics on leadership, maybe one of those covered in the class, maybe not. The output can be in the form of a written report or a short film. They could be based on a theme encompassing more than one reading given in the class or other material, or they could be a detailed reflective elaboration on one of the readings done in the class, including the presentation made in the class and the discussions. The grade will be a group grade.

40% End Term Examination: This could be either of the class room, or take home type. Of course, this will be an individual evaluation.

COURSE OUTLINE

Sessions

1. **Management Education and Humanities**

- a) Singh, S P (1998). "Two Organizational Roles: Manager's and Leader's," *Vikalpa*, July - September, 23(3), 55-61.
- b) Collins and Porras (1995). "More Than Profits" Chapter III. In *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*, London: Century.

The first session sets the stage for the course and dwells upon the distinctions between managers and leaders, role of values and is a "how to" guide for appreciating literature.

2. **Leaders in the Making**

Film: "The Making of the Mahatma".

This film traces the process of development of an ordinary boy named M.K. Gandhi into a Mahatma. How he became a leader, and what dilemmas he faced are vividly brought out in this film.

3. **Discussion on the Film**

4. **Dreams and Reality**

Cervantes: *Don Quixote*
Sheldon Kopp: *Tale of a Mad Knight*
Excerpts from Ortega's Meditations on Quixote

Don Quixote is a synonym for the eccentric, "unrealistic" dreamer who lives in his own world. But the class raises the question: Would the world be much better without such dreamers and cranks? Who is in fact the dreamer and who, the realist? Why does this eccentric inspire the world today so much so that the novel continues to be translated into a record number of languages, and people continue to read it and still feel nothing but affection for this mad knight?

5. **Heroism and Martyrdom**

George Bernard Shaw: *Saint Joan*

Joan d'Arc is the person best known for rousing the French as a nation and goading a Dauphin utterly without self respect into the King of France. What do we learn from this heretic turned Saint?

6. **Vision and Action**

Girish Karnad: *Tughlak*

Here is another dreamer, another visionary. But why do we feel so different towards him as compared to for example, Joan or Don Quixote? What are the qualities he possesses? Does he possess any such quality/qualities that led to his failure, and prevented him from becoming a leader who could command respect rather than fear?

7. **Ends and Means**

Vishakadatta: *The Signet Ring of Rakshasa*

Chanakya has fascinated people for the last two centuries. For him, ends justified the means. No holds barred. Yet he comes as a sharp contrast to Tughlaq. Why? In this immortal play, we look at the question: do ends justify means or means justify ends?

8. **Freedom and Social Responsibility**

Brecht: *Life of Galileo*

Galileo was threatened to be burnt at the stake for his view that challenged the beliefs of the Church. He recanted and led a life devoted to further advances in physics which did not offend the church. What is the responsibility of the leader when it comes to personal choices? Did Galileo sell out or did he choose a course of action that led to a better world, all things considered?

9. **Power and Ploy**

Sun Tzu: *Art of War*

This book written about 2500 years ago is probably the most widely translated and read book in military schools, and of late in business schools. While it tells you how to compete it also tells you a whole lot on how not to compete.

10. **Power and Greed**

Shakespeare: *Macbeth*

In this play 'power' and 'greed' are closely intertwined. Can power be wrested or vested? Does power beget greed for more power? In this vicious cycle, how do leaders operate? Do they become power centric or power hungry? Do they forget the cause of their followers in the search for the unattainable?

11. **Private versus Public Life**

Arthur Miller: *All My Sons*

Capitalism has its ugly side. It is never uglier than when it forces people to take decisions endangering others' lives. But some of these lives may be those of the near and dear. How do leaders take decisions that need a choice between what organizations demand and what they want to do? In this powerful play by Arthur Miller, we explore many of these uncomfortable issues.

12. **Taking a Stand**

Ibsen: *Antigone*

In this classic Greek play by Sophocles, two inflexible characters take positions and their positions are irreconcilable. It leads to a tragic series of events Greek tragedies are famous for. What were the *real* issues they were taking a stand for? Could they have achieved those yet reconciling with the other person's viewpoint? Or are ideals, by their very nature, incapable of any compromise? These issues arise when one takes a stand on a matter of principle, and this play beautifully brings out the complexities involved in resolving them.

13. **Moral and Amoral Judgement**

Conrad: *The Secret Sharer*

In this novel we explore the dilemmas a leader faces in making a judgement. Should all judgements be moral or can some also be 'amoral', and yet correct? Who decides what is right? Does one need societal consensus or can one follow one's instinct and conscience? What is right and what is wrong? Is there a dividing line?

14. **Ambition and Purpose**

Achebe: *Things Fall Apart*

In this novel set in Africa, we explore the raw ambitions of a man which still lead him nowhere. We explore such questions as: What is character? What is ambition? When does it become all destroying?

15. **Change and transformation**

Film: "Les Miserables"

The film explores the theme of change and transformation of a convict, Jean Valjean. The dilemmas he faces as he moves in life from being a misanthropic to a man capable of self sacrifice, how and where does he find inspiration, the moral trials he faces are well captured in the film.

16. **Discussion on the Film**

17. **Ideals and Reality - I**

Iravati Karve: *Yuganta*, Chapters "Final Effort" (on Bhishma), Kunti and Draupadi.

18. **Ideals and Reality - II**

Iravati Karve: *Yuganta*, Chapters on Karna, Ashwathama (Paradharma) and Krishna.

Sessions 17 and 18 are based on an interpretation of the immortal classic, Mahabharatha by Iravati Karve. We come across the famous characters such as Bhishma, Kunti, Draupadi, Karna, Ashwathama and Krishna. Everyone has his or her

own flaws. But how does one keep these flaws under control? How does one achieve a perspective and a balance between ends and means? These are the themes explored in the play. No one forgets the interpretations of the characters in the play, especially that of Krishna, the master strategist.

19. Success and Satisfaction

Bokil: *Thirsting for Water*

Success is one thing. Satisfaction is wholly different. They are neither mutually exclusive nor necessary complements. In the short story, we explore the makings of a leader who attains the position almost by accident, but who is able to derive satisfaction. We contrast her to another character in the story who is outwardly successful.

20. Self and Ethics

Bimalkar: *Satyadas*

In this powerful short story, we explore the meaning of ethics, self respect and the way one gets rich but gets degraded in the process. It raises powerful questions on the meaning of the term character.

21. Guest Lecture

22. Organizational Leadership

a) Manikutty, S (2003). "From a Manager to a Leader: Bridging a Gulf or Jumping a Chasm?" *Vikalpa*, October - December, 28(4), 53-6.

b) Collins J (2001). "Level 5 Leadership- The Triumph of Humanity and Fierce Resolve," *Harvard Business Review*, January, 67-76.

This will be a wrap up session. A CD titled "Passion and Discipline" (90 minutes) by James March, Stanford University will be screened. Some other works of literature will also be mentioned for further reading.

As of now we have scheduled session 21 for the guest speaker. However, it will be, to a large extent, dependent on the speaker's availability.