

## Re-Thinking Leadership: Current and Future Challenges

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### ABSTRACT

The literature of LEADERSHIP (and Leaders, etc) is legion. From Plato's great work- The REPUBLIC to uncountable others such as several of Shakespeare's plays where the concept is explored through intense drama writers have put forward many ideas and views that suggest what Leadership connotes and just how puzzling and complex it can be. There are paradigms that also surface: for instance, one posits that God is the ultimate Leader and all subsequent follow HIM- either by expanding or by challenging and even negating HIS expectations and wishes. The discussion proceeds unabated!

**Keywords:** Leadership, Leaders, Expectations, Results, Challenges.

### Future Leadership

In what follows I take liberty to state and share a few thoughts about what may broadly be termed **Future Leadership**.

Leadership is probably one of the oldest themes in most management literature. Indeed, even if we begin with Plato and his notion of the philosopher-king we are looking back more than two thousand years. Recent excavations around several different sites reveal that mankind have been considering the issues and challenges associated with Leadership for eons. One particular focus becomes clear: while the responses to good and bad leadership may differ the end-results were chiefly similar: continuity of good leaders and discontinuity -sometimes assured by death -of bad leaders. The late entry of so-called **democracy** and even parliamentary process(es) has not altered basic assumptions too much. The emphasis still remains on *efficient delivery of promises*.

Expectations naturally vary from time to time as well as specific locations where such leadership is executed. From appointments of leaders made and sanctioned by God Almighty to numerous forms of appointment by nomination and election, etc. The mandate eventually given and obtained by leaders does shed light on subtle ways of ensuring that bad leaders, in particular, were efficiently and presently, removed while those perceived to be good were enticed and encouraged to stay on. Of course, many nations evolved their own unique frameworks for leadership choice as well as tenure.

However, notwithstanding details- and observing broadly the more general and consensual patterns- certain expectations and associated behaviours emerged. I venture to list and describe a few key ones below, with the proviso that these are neither exhaustive nor limiting. I hope that readers will be able to utilise my categorizations as these inspire and/or upset them and come up with unique and better working frameworks.

**TRUST**

From Day One TRUST has been paramount in terms of our expectations of good leaders. Without Trust nothing much seems achievable while given Trust the sky seems to be the limit (in common parlance). But this TRUST-word can be tricky and, indeed, problematic. For different cultures and individuals define TRUST in unique and even particularized manner. It is vital, therefore, to have the key players involved agree on the primary definitions.

**POSITIVITY**

We all know that the absence of POSITIVITY can be highly debilitating. Thus, we yearn for the positive in our leaders. It cannot be denied that when and where positivity exists and works as the operatus mundi plentiful gains are expected as well as frequently obtained. The challenge here is how properly to ascertain and use positivity.

**COMMUNICATION**

Especially in our current time most want to see that COMMUNICATION at all levels (from bottom up especially but also from different sides) operates in a happy but minimally in an efficient manner. When and where such communication channels are absent there is bound to be irked employees who may resort to unpleasant means to make themselves heard/known.

**CULTURE**

Good workplace CULTURE is increasingly another must. The challenge here is huge and daunting. But experience

shows that the time and energies spent on arriving at a consensus pertaining to culture at the workplace results in constructive acceptance of decisions arrived at.

**ADAPTABILITY**

For organisations and teams to thrive it is crucial that they remain nimble and ready to adapt to changing circumstances. There will always be challenges and unforeseen interruptions disrupting set agendas, etc. The willingness to adapt and change without too much loss always gives a distinct advantage to organisations by keeping them nimble.

**EXEMPELARY CONDUCT**

This last element of good and positive Workplace Culture is never to be taken for granted no matter how compelling the reasons to do such may be. All organizations experience loss of staff and hiring of new. Habits die hard but some habits hinder rather than help progress. These can be insidious and must be nipped ASAP.

When the above enumerated six characteristics obtain an organisation may be said to be optimally directed. Of course, there will be CEOs that insist on doing things differently from their predecessors and even their other contemporaries. The point is to be consistent and not change just because someone else is.

At the end of the day though much is always dependent on circumstances -both within and without. With experience most leaders are able to manage expectations and also maintain their own unique positionings. This understanding provides the necessary confidence needed in trying times.

## Biographical Statement of Author(s)

**Prof. Kirpal Singh**, a Colombo Plan scholar is an internationally respected poet, fictionist, and thinker. For over 20 years he taught English Language and Literature at the National University of Singapore and at the Nanyang Technological University, before being asked to join the Singapore Management University where he taught Creative Thinking.



He has many books to his credit, including the highly provocative *Thinking Hats & Coloured Turbans: Creativity Across Cultures* (2004) which contributed several original insights into the nature of creativity, especially in terms of language. Kirpal has written and published three collections of poetry and edited many literary journals and books. He was a founding member of the Centre for Research in New Literatures, Flinders University, Australia in 1977, the first Asian director for the Commonwealth Writers' Prize in 1993 and 1994, and chairman of the Singapore Writers' Festival in the 1990s.

Singh is an internationally recognised scholar whose core research areas include post-colonial literature, Singapore and Southeast Asian, literature and technology, and creativity thinking. He has won research awards and grants from local and foreign universities. His research articles and critical writings have been published in international journals such as *Ariel*, *Diogene*, *Commonwealth Novel In*

*English*, *Literary Criterion*, *Quadrant*, *Southern Review* and *Westerly*. He has written three books of poetry and edited over 15 publications, including the prestigious literary journal, *World Literature Written in English*. He has attended international writers' festivals in Adelaide, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Toronto and Kent, to give readings of his works. He had the distinction of being the first Asian director of the prestigious Commonwealth Writers' Prize in 1993 and 1994. In addition, Singh is a member of several international literary journals and associations. Currently, he is involved in conceptualising and promoting creative thinking in Singapore's undergraduate education system at the Singapore Management University (SMU). In 2004, Singh became the first Asian and non-American to be made a director on the American Creativity Association's (ACA) board.

Kirpal is also the first non-American to be elected to the Board of Directors of the ACA-American Creativity Association where he has served as the Vice-President and Chairman of ACA since 2006. As the author of more than 150 articles and essays, Kirpal is an authority in several fields of literary endeavour. Currently, he is an esteemed Futurist invited to share his visions of the future with audiences worldwide.

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