

Infusing Spirit into Western Leadership Models

Based on an interview with **Prasad KAIPA**, executive director of the Center for Leadership, Innovation and Change (CLIC), Hyderabad, India and on his paper, "A New Leadership Model from India," (*ISB Insight*, December 2008), December 2009.

One of the messages of crisis is that it is time for managers to change—or at least revise—their ways of dealing with people. Prasad Kaipa urges business managers to move from now-inadequate Western leadership models to more holistic frameworks. He proposes enriching existing models with “wisdom” practices that will enable leaders to “ignite the genius within” their people and organizations.

BIOGRAPHY



Prasad KAIPA is executive director of the Center for Leadership, Innovation, and Change (CLIC) at the Indian School of Business Hyderabad (www.isb.edu/clic) as well as the founder of the Kaipa Group. In the past 20 years, he has provided advice on leadership and innovation issues for over 100 business leaders in companies including Disney, Maxim Integrated, Adobe, and Boeing. He holds a PhD in physics from the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras. (www.kaipagroup.com)

Prasad Kaipa praises the strengths of Western management and leadership models but urges managers to address their weakness. Indeed, largely inspired by the industrial-age value of “efficiency”, they tend to rely primarily on power-based techniques to motivate people. “But the economic crisis has revealed the limits of globally applied Western models,” says Kaipa. To deal with persistent leadership challenges, like how to get people to do their best, or to go above and beyond the call of duty, Kaipa proposes to bring spiritual values into the picture. His “wisdom leadership model” shows leadership excellence to be built on a triple foundation of best business practices, science and technology, and heart and soul.

Mutually Enriching Models

Even though the concept of continuous improvement came from Japan (kaizen principles), it is companies like General Electric that embraced this notion and thus achieved exemplary levels of manufacturing efficiency and productivity. Western leadership models have tended to neglect “soft” issues like creating meaning and generating passion, but nowadays, “innovation and creativity are becoming more important for business growth than pure mechanical productivity and cost-cutting. Just think of Apple and Google,” says Kaipa. “For people to be creative and to be willing to share knowledge and direct their passion to their work, managers have to apply their hearts and souls to making

them feel good.” Kaipa says that India is a good place to look for examples, because it has maintained an uninterrupted focus on spiritual issues over the centuries; “who you are” and “what you feel” are as important as “what you do”. This holistic perspective fills in gaps in efficiency-oriented models and shows that the best leadership includes close attention to the human factor (*see insert, “Spotlight on the Human Factor”*).

From “control and command” to alternative solutions

“Leadership is no longer a matter of control and command,” says Kaipa. “People should be viewed as not only the problem, but also the solution.” ●●●

...

Humility: a motivational tool

Wise leaders are not just managers but also collaborators. For example, Om Prakash Bhatt was appointed chairman the State Bank of India (SBI)* in 2006, a time when the bank's market share and reputation for customer service were in decline. Bhatt's "wise" response was to ask the bank's top twenty executives to partner with him. He thus gave former rivals a sense of importance and benefited from their support to remotivate the workforce, the key to solving many problems. Bhatt ultimately enrolled 9000 bank managers and union leaders through this partnership strategy, and he successfully drove a change in mindsets of SBI employees. Employees' self-image shifted from over-qualified paper-pusher to the chairman's partner. Business wise, the result was a 200 percent SBI stock price increase, organizational growth, and numerous awards.

Brave choices: a remedy to distressful situations

"Wise leaders explore options and make courageous choices. You can, in fact,

*The State Bank of India is a 200-year-old institution and the world's second largest bank. It supports 25 percent of the Indian economy, employing over 200,000 people in 15,000 of its own or associated branches, including 82 foreign offices in 32 countries.

choose to interpret the current downturn as a sign to look for new strategies in a plethora of directions." For instance, in a show of wisdom leadership, when faced with an employee request involving prohibitive costs, Biocon** CEO Kiran Mazumdar Shaw explored atypical alternatives and chose a quick, smart solution. Field reps had requested PCs to create reports on client meetings, and reading between the lines, Shaw detected their desire for modernization. She proposed the easy and affordable alternative of using coded mobile text messages instead of PCs to communicate client information to the office.

"Wisdom leadership means looking at the top line as well as the bottom-line," Kaipa concludes. "It completes Western models by integrating a timeless focus on spiritual perspectives with modern scientific principles and the latest management practices." ■

**Founded in 1978, Biocon was India's first biotechnology company. In 2008, it was the world's 7th largest biotech employer (approximately 3600 people) and was ranked it among the top 20 global biotechnology companies.

Spotlight on the Human Factor**Levels of leadership functionality**

- ❶ **Dysfunctional:** Manager who is incapable of translating knowledge into action.
- ❷ **Functional:** Manager who shares knowledge but does not have a personal stake in getting the job done.
- ❸ **Efficient:** Manager enthusiastically applies knowledge and scales up operations.
- ❹ **Effective:** Efficient manager who is not only process-focused but also able to get the best out of people.
- ❺ **Great:** Leader who builds unique value through alignment of head (intellect), heart (passion & commitment) and hand (action), inspiring others to do the same.

Wisdom Leadership: Spirituality + Management + Science**Spirituality Perspectives**

- Purpose and passion
- Sensitivity
- Self awareness and development
- Respect & compassion
- Heart and soul

Management Practices

- Best practices
- Focus, follow through, efficiency, and effectiveness
- Concrete action and outcomes

Scientific Principles

- Technological tools and frameworks
- Objectivity and evidence-based models
- Intellectual rigor

How to Motivate People

Knowledge, know-how, and technical competency are prerequisites, but to progress from "efficient" to "effective", and then from "good" to "great", managers should focus on the following.

- > Be yourself, offer and engage passion and intuition as well as logic and emotion.
- > Trust others, provide them with meaning, consider their hearts and souls as well as their minds.
- > Use both soft skills and hard facts to engage and inspire employees.
- > Question your reflexes, explore all opportunities, make courageous choices.
- > Motivate people intrinsically (self interest) instead of extrinsically (risks or threats of lost jobs, markets, etc.).