



Authentic Leadership - A Challenge For Women Leaders in India

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Introduction

In any system, the leadership is a vital facet that decides the survival with preceding success. It is necessary that the leadership should be dynamic for the effective sustainability of any system, culture and even any society. Leadership is not meant as dominance, decision or ruling on and for the people. Any leadership style should promote the optimistic impact as an individual as well as for the people. Leadership is a complex dynamic process that is continually evolving with the duration of time and situations. It is based on individuals, their values, and the particular situation and circumstances involved with the individual. Creating a behaviour or leadership style takes time and requires the right combination of attributes and impacts to give it a value. It is analogous to the work of a great artist or performer whose skill and ability have been developed and honed by years of practice and experiences as well as circumstances. Leadership is a generous term in that one size does not necessarily fit all. "Leadership is a process whereby individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (Northouse, 2007). Another defines leadership as the "quality of the behaviour of individuals whereby they guide people or their activities in an organized effort" (Novicevic, et. al., 2005). The first definition given here is associates the leadership with a process, whereas the second one relates to the behaviour of an individual. However, both identify the role of an individual within a group or team or individually in a situation to act in a seemingly beneficial manner to the group. Over the decades, this leadership concept has kept on evolving, and the innovative facade of leadership in present epoch is Authentic Leadership, it works on the principle that a leader can prove their faithfulness by nurturing genuine relationships and by giving importance to all the people involved with them. *Authentic leadership* is a generic term that correlates with the genuineness of an individual. It conveys to the follower that the leader is the real thing as compared to others. It comprises of various elements like knowing own self, hearing and observing others, valuing self and

others, balancing between emotional and cognitive intelligence. It is life familiarity that opens up the heart of an individual to have compassion for the challenges along the whole life's journey. It seems a very soothing and faultless structure, but in real life, everything and every time one can't get the perfectly designed situations so the faultless structure does not have its immortal existence. Sustaining the roots of authentic leadership in real situations can be considered as a huge challenge which comes on the trail by every authentic leader in every field. This will get more critical when we start its counting in regards to women leaders in India. The position of women in India itself is a big issue to be concerned and so getting authentic women leaders involves lots of obstacles. In this paper, the author is putting the centre of attention on the emergence of authentic leadership, its impact and position in Indian society. The paper further gives its reflection on the challenges which are faced by the authentic women leaders of India and pointing the measures by which these challenges can be overcome.

Conceptualization of Authentic Leadership

With the passage of years, adjectives have been placed in front of the word leadership for making a positive attempt to further define the term and narrow the focus on a particular type of leadership. In the recent time, the adjective *authentic* has been placed in front of the word *leadership* in an effort to add to the study and the foundation of the leadership and expansion of its application in organizations. "The 'development' of authentic leadership stems from positive organizational behaviour (POB) and positive organizational context, which reflect human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today's workplace" (Novicevic, et. al., 2005). "The concept of authenticity has its roots in Greek philosophy (to thine own self be true)" (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). The term authenticity as used to refer to owning one's personal experiences, thoughts, emotions, needs, wants, preferences, or

beliefs — processes captured by the commandment to know oneself or own self and it “further implies one acts in accord with the true self, expressing oneself in ways that are consistent with inner thoughts and feelings (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).

"The idea of 'being true to oneself' has manifested itself in the form of authentic leadership, which focuses on those behaviours that indicate that leaders are self-aware and regulate the self accordingly" (Leroy et. al., 2012). *Authentic leadership* focuses on the individual and described it as “a process that draws from both positive psychological capabilities and a highly developed organizational context”(Bishop, 2013). With an understanding of the concept of authentic leadership, one can say there are four components of authentic leadership:

Awareness of self – in regards to an understanding of one's strengths and weaknesses and the multi-faceted nature of the self.

Moral perspective of oneself - it is based on moral values and it gets expressed in ethical decision making and nature.

Balanced processing of behaviour- it is an objective evaluation of information before making a decision that includes motivating others to work effectively.

Transparency - it relates to being true to one's value and expressing it to others too. It involves the open sharing of information about the thoughts and feelings of everyone.

Characteristic of authentic leaders

As the *Harvard Business Review* declared in January 2015, “Authenticity has emerged as the gold standard for leadership.” Authentic Leadership came with a new form of leadership, whose character was the ingredient that mattered the most. In 2003, Bill George wrote his book introducing the theory of Authentic Leadership. In it, he outlined five qualities that authentic leaders demonstrate. These are:

1. Understanding their purpose
2. Practicing solid values
3. Leading with heart
4. Establishing connected relationships
5. Demonstrating self-discipline

It is essential for authentic leaders to be guided by the enthusiasm, zeal and lead with purpose and values. Focus on integrity, genuineness, and perspective-taking is a part of Authentic Leadership that fosters supportive and inclusive environments in the whole organisation. Such type of leadership allows for a greater level of engagement, increased productivity, a

healthy level of competition and focused energy into that leads to creativity and innovation.

Authentic leaders should demonstrate behaviours which enable others to trust them in every situation, they should take ownership when they made a mistake and share responsibility for any mistake. They should show the necessary courage to push further up the leadership chain.

Status of women leaders in Indian society:

“I had no idea that being your authentic self could make me as rich as I’ve become.

If I had, I’d have done it a lot earlier.” –Oprah Winfrey

In Indian society, there is an amazing concept for women as they have two sides of personality, one as ‘work’ and another as ‘home’. “Globally, 22 percent of senior roles are held by women. Almost a third of businesses have no women in senior leadership roles. The survey further reveals that India ranks second from the bottom on the number of women in leadership roles like CEO/ Managing Director”. “As far as the presence of women in Board positions is concerned, India ranks fourth from the bottom, while Japan again ranks last in the list”. India ranks third lowest in the proportion of business leadership roles held by women, at 15 percent; falling below the global average, reveals an annual survey from Grant Thornton, conducted ahead of International Women's Day (March 8). India may be at very different stages of their development in various areas but they share certain illogical cultural features, such as strong hierarchy and patriarchal societies, which prevent women from reaching the top of the business world," said Pallavi Bakhru, Director, Grant Thornton Advisory Private Ltd. According to the report released- “Women in business: the path to leadership”- “We’ve heard businesses talk the talk on gender equality for decades now, but still too few are walking the walk. Aside from the moral issue of ensuring equal opportunity for all, a more representative blend of women and men in senior roles just makes good business sense. If an economy uses only half its most talented people, it immediately cuts its growth potential,” said Bakhru. It conveys the role and position of the women leaders in India. The number is not only less, but also stagnant in terms of development.

Dilemma of Authenticity among women leaders

In India, the biggest problem for women leaders is that by ‘acting the role’ of leader, those around them often feel like they’re being deceived. “Applying a gender-neutral framework to authentic leadership ignores the sex-related differences in leadership” (Eagly and Johnson, 1990; Sharpe, 2000; Eagly et al., 2003; Ely and Rhode, 2010) and “does not take into account

the gendered contexts in which women work” (O’Neil et al., 2008, 2015). Authenticity is crucial for all leaders, but for women, it presents a particular dilemma. While it is no longer rare or surprising to see women leaders, the image and traits associated with leadership are masculine. The dominant model of a leader in our culture is a man. The model is softening slightly as we see more women in prominent leadership roles, but the masculine norm remains firmly entrenched in our minds and expectations.

challenging for women leaders for various interrelated reasons:

1. “There is a double-bind dilemma for women in leadership” (Catalyst, 2007; Eagly and Carli, 2007). “A “think manager, think male” mindset is still the predominant perspective and masculine leadership behaviours such as assertiveness and competitiveness remain the norm” (Schein, 1973, 2007). Thus, women are caught between impossible choices. If they are highly ambitious and self-confident, then women may be criticized for lacking communal qualities; and if they are highly communal then women may be criticized for not being professional. “Role congruity and the lack of fit theories (Heilman, 1983; Eagly and Karau, 2002) explain this dilemma whereby the requirements of the leader role and the female gender role are often inconsistent”. Maslow (1971) discussed the authentic or true self as one who is not hindered by others’ expectations of them, and Kernis (2003) proposed that the true self is not developed through conforming to social norms or pressures. However, women need to stay within a narrow/ bounded range or band of acceptable behaviour that combines seemingly contradictory behaviours
2. The second reason behind the concerns of gender-neutrality applied to authentic leadership is that organizations themselves are not gender-neutral but are gendered. “Even the most progressive modern organizations have been created by and for men, and thus tend to have systems, policies, norms, and structures that favour the male life experience.” Behaviors and values which are regarded as the norm normally tend to favour the traits and characteristics of maleness.
3. The circumstance is a constant challenge facing women in leadership roles and thus a constant source of tension in striving for authenticity. “Organizations often reward individual achievements which result in women feeling less than authentic because their leadership styles and behaviours tend toward the collaborative and relational which are undervalued” (Eagly et al., 1995).

3. “One investigation of the relationship between authentic leadership, gender, psychological capital, and positive work climate found that the male authentic leaders provided a slightly less positive climate for female than for male followers” (Woolley et al., 2011). These authors proposed that the values of the male leaders and female followers may have been incongruent, or the operating definition of authentic leadership may be inherently masculine. “Following this argument, Ibarra (2015) also suggests that the operating definition of authentic leadership is based on individualistic nature (traditionally seen as masculine) vs. collective (traditionally seen as feminine) ideals”. Thus, female leaders may experience the feelings of being extruded with a greater difficulty and problems in obtaining her followers’, trust and acceptance as an authentic leader in male dominating society.
4. There seems to be a large chasm between female leaders who too easily sacrifice authority, and strong women who never push back once their minds are made up. Unfortunately, neither approach is effective in a long-term leadership position for women.
5. It’s easy to play the game and pander to what others expect us to be in the workplace. When the strong leadership becomes identical with negative labels or sign like ‘controlling’ and ‘demanding’, ‘commanding’ the female leader has not got the same status as men.
6. Because women are not sure how they ‘should’ behave as leaders, they become preoccupied about how they appear to others rather than concentrating on their own values and what they want to accomplish. Consequently, they focus too much on meeting others’ expectations and on creating the ‘right’ leadership image for others. This saps them of energy, creates constant frustration in them, and finally detracts them from their purpose as leaders.
7. "Women who by lead by mimicking men reveal a lack of professional identity," said Hathorn. It involves the usage of masculine style and Downplays their femininity. They avoid self-promotion because it seems too much like bragging, which is considered unfeminine and is restrained when negotiating on their own behalf. They used to avoid situations where their leadership style might be visible (e.g., decision making, delegating work). All such behaviours present them weak in the society.

These responses may make women feel comfortable in a difficult work environment, but they can derail a promising career. Most of these responses are not just expedient; they are inauthentic. They do not

necessarily reflect a natural woman but represent coping behaviours that are less risky and easier to work. But they also lead to lack of trust and credibility among colleagues.

Measures to overcome the challenges:

Authenticity can be best understood as acting in accordance with your core values and sense of purpose. When one understands what is most important and what we want to accomplish, one can be more effective in accomplishing own and collective goals. To be authentic, one must act consistently with our personal values, but to get results as a leader, one must adapt our style and approach to the situations and people at hand. One article says that "Professional confidence is not gender-based; it's all about **authenticity** and developing the qualities that resonate with who you are." There are times to be competitive and times where accommodation will be a more effective strategy. For this women do not have to change their values or character; it is needed to make purposeful choices about their behaviour and select the approach that is most likely to succeed.

1. The best women leaders should use styles that match their objectives. Moreover, they have a broad repertoire of leadership styles from which to choose. When trying to generate ideas or get buy-in for a new initiative, a leader might use a participative approach that gathers input from many people in order to spark creativity and win support. But in a crisis or when the time is short, a more directive approach can calm fears, get people to focus their attention on what has to be done, and spur them into action quickly. A leader who can handle both kinds of situations and achieve positive results is seen as both a consensus builder (rather than indecisive) and decisive (rather than autocratic).
2. It is required to find a spectrum of styles that feel right and help to get the work done. In order for a style to 'feel right,' it needs to be consistent with your core values and further your ability to accomplish your work and career objectives. Being clear about the values also allows being creative in the choices.
3. Another element of authenticity is that women need to be clear about what they want to accomplish for the greater good. Leadership, after all, is about leading others. When faced with situations that are threatening or discomfiting, having a sense of purpose gives reason to move ahead anyway. Instead of worrying about how they appear to others, strong leaders devote their attention to what must be done to produce desired outcomes. The commitment to that

overarching purpose is ultimately what defines a leader, gives meaning to work, and conveys authenticity to others.

4. Leadership development programs are especially valuable for helping women find effective ways to deal with the gender-related challenges of leadership. Women-focused leadership programs provide environments where women feel "safe" to experiment with different styles and decide which ones feel right and work well.
5. It is required to observe their traits, need to know how they interact within a team and work under pressure. It is required to be aware of the fact that with keeping the ego one need to focus on the requirements of the team and business. It is required to understand and set clear boundaries and expectations. Professional behaviour and authenticity have to go hand in hand so it is required to maintain the balance between the home and the workplace. "Often times a casual and collaborative leadership approach, which women gravitate towards, can easily be sabotaged by overly personal behaviour or even things like apparel".
6. It is required to create awareness for the stories and working of the women leaders in front of the world so that it motivates other women and make them think about their potentials. It is beneficial to explore the life stories and crucibles, and the process of their experiences, it develops a deeper understanding of themselves and feels increasingly comfortable being authentic.
7. It is essential to seek honest feedback from colleagues, friends, and subordinates about themselves and their leadership. One of the hardest things for women leaders to do is to understand how other people see them, which is often quite different than how they want to be seen.

Conclusion:

Authentic leadership is a contemporary leadership perspective which places emphasis on the leaders understanding of its true self and the actions present their leadership impact. One can say that authentic leadership, describes the leaders in heroic terms, which reinforces the stereotypical individual agency of leadership as opposed to recognizing or rewarding the relational aspects of leadership. Being authentic as a leader is hard work and takes years of experience in leadership roles. No one can be authentic without failure and challenges. For women, the challenges might be more, but with dedication and critical analysis, one can overcome those challenges and

can make the nation more progressive in the path of world development.

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