Cover Story

Build human capital potential....not personal brands

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How do you define and perceive thought leadership?

AK: Thought leadership to me is about new frameworks, new creative ideas or any new paradigm or simply about any innovative thinking that is capable of bringing a new perspective to a problem. It"s also about raising the collective passion for a larger purpose.

Most importantly, it is not only about soft stuff but is an amalgamation of hard stuff (actual business outcomes) and soft stuff (Capacity to raise passion).

How it differs from mere leadership and creates competitive edge for organization?

AK: Thought leadership thrives essentially on any creative and pioneering idea, which has the potential to challenge the conventional wisdom. Look at Gandhi"s idea of non-violence, which was a totally novel idea that demonstrated its power to displace the most powerful. Such creative ideas initially look fragile and unsustainable; however, they have the potential to change the stereotyped mindsets. How the idea of non-violence received global acceptability in bringing about social change is further exemplified by Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela. Essentially, this can be defined as thought leadership.

Thought leadership in HR- Does it makes business sense and how?

AK: Thought leadership makes perfect business sense. Paradimic changes from personnel to the HRD have effectively enhanced the contribution of people to business outcomes. I consider late Dr. Udai Pareek a thought leader who gave us a new paradigm of the HR framework in 70s after his L&T work, and since then the concept has become popular for use in the Indian business world. Post liberalization, transition to HRD and its potential has helped India manage its workforce to deliver in the evolved environment. Today, progressive organizations spend good deal of time and money to build its HR. Douglous Mcgregor"s Theory Y several decades back which was based on the prevailing industrial environment was refreshing and compelled the industrial organizations to think and reflect. This is precisely how thought leadership and HR can correlate.

What are those key things that one could do to be perceived as an HR thought leader?

AK: I don"t think one can simply take a course on "Five Steps to becoming a Thought Leader". I am amused to see certain blogs suggesting quick-fix programmes to become a thought leader. Dorie Clark, CEO of Clark Strategic Communications shares six steps to become a thought leader;

> *Robust online presence*
>
> *Flaunting high quality affiliations*
>
> *Give public speeches*
>
> *Appear on TV*
>
> *Win some awards*
>
> *Publish a book*

However, I am afraid thought leadership is not about personal brand building.

Thought leadership is a serious thing. It requires thoughtful engagement to pursue an idea or a thought against craving for building a personal brand through social media or networking. Thought leaders generally avoid the limelight. This is because serious work and implementation of such work speaks for itself, and therefore where is the need for a crash course to develop this ability. I think what is required by HR professionals is to seriously engage in building the potential of its human capital and avoid the temptations of building personal brands without making a difference in their respective organizations.

What is usually expected from a thought leader?

AK: Thought leaders should pursue their work with tenacity and demonstrate the utility of their ideas. It was a privilege for me to demonstrate the potency of intangibles in producing tangibles results while I was with the Bank of Baroda (2005-2008) by following the ideas of thought leaders such as Dave Ulrich.

What are the attributes/characteristics of a true thought leader?

AK: Thought leaders are not "Chest beating" types. They quietly work with conviction and pursue relentlessly the use of ideas in an actual business setting. They are collaborative, research driven and authentic. They don"t do things to get awards yet awards come to them without striving for them.

Does failure / success contribute to making an effective thought leader?

AK: Failure and success is part of pursuing an idea. Failure also contributes to strengthen the determination. Success of course enhances the confidence.