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## Decoding Diverse Dimensions of Entrepreneurial Leadership with Special Emphasis on Persuasive Communication

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# DECODING DIVERSE DIMENSIONS OF ENTREPRENEURIAL LEADERSHIP WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON PERSUASIVE COMMUNICATION

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## ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to study diverse dimensions of entrepreneurial leadership with special emphasis on persuasive communication, which we believe is critically crucial. In fact, it is persuasive and empathetic, rather than coercive and hegemonic communication, which ensures success of any business venture. After dealing with implications of the term, 'leadership' and its theorization by scholars over the years, its entrepreneurial aspects will be discussed. Entrepreneurial leadership cannot be imagined without its communicative dimension. The premise of this paper is that persuasive communication holds the key to successful entrepreneurial leadership. Thus, we intend to privilege communicative persuasiveness as the core of entrepreneurial leadership today via taking into account its various facets such as clarity of business vision, rationality of thought, effective and empathetic articulation, etc. We are of the considered opinion that until persuasiveness in communicative entrepreneurial leadership praxis is accorded place of centrality, entire implementation process of the business vision and strategies may get impeded.

*Keywords: Entrepreneurial Leadership, Communicative Entrepreneurial Leadership, Persuasive Communication*

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## LEADERSHIP AND ITS ENTREPRENEURIAL DIMENSIONS

In common parlance, a leader is the one who has the ability to lead, and whose conduct is emulated by others gladly and willingly (Gert and Duggan, 1979). Leadership is equated with an action that serves the interests of the community (Burns, 1978) in the sense that it is regarded as a social strategy which is integral to the interests of the community. An entrepreneur too has to act like a leader in every situation he is faced with (Schumpeter, 1939) as the success of his enterprise depends mainly on his ability to lead, envision and put in practice his business vision in a viable and sustainable manner. Even during 1920s and 30s, researchers talked about diverse traits of people who became successful leaders. In fact, the evolution of leadership theories can be attributed to Bass (1990), Yukl (1981), Northouse (2001). A leader is characterized by his personality traits, which would make him stand apart, lead and pave way for others. His mission and vision are depicted in his actions that are ultimately followed by the followers (Howell & Shamir, 2005) and teammates within an organization.

Many theories on leadership reflect that a leader who has the ability to transform lives of others has three core components a) he can communicate his vision, b) he possesses a charismatic style and c) he takes actions that are totally intended towards implementing his vision (Bass 1985, Bennis and Nanus 1985, Conger & Kanungo 1987, Locke et al 1991). These theories imply that the leader who possesses these traits certainly affect organisational outcomes. Barling, Weber & Kelloway (1996) conducted an empirical study to examine the effects of charismatic leadership and performance of the business and found a significant relationship between charismatic transformational leaders and the business performance. Shamir, House and Arthur (1993) also found that transformational leadership is positively related with the performance, attitude and the perception of the followers.

Successful entrepreneurs too are regarded as transformational and charismatic leaders by theorists like Isenberg (1987) and Peters (1988) who have discussed the importance of vision and its positive impact on organizational performance. This view has been proved empirically by Westley & Mintzberg in 1989, Kotter in 1990 and Filion in 1991. The success of an enterprise is largely dependent on the vision of the entrepreneurial leader. Entrepreneurial leadership could be conceptualized as a phenomenon "leading to direct involvement, a process that creates value for organisational stakeholders by bringing together a unique, innovation and package of resources to respond to a recognised opportunity" (Darling, Keeffe & Ross 2007).

Morris, Schindehutter and Laforge argued that for achieving this, entrepreneurs take into consideration three-dimensional effort comprising innovativeness, risk-taking and proactiveness. The success of an entrepreneurial leader is regarded to be dependent on various activities such as being innovative in the challenging and ever-changing environment marked with exciting activities (Darling, Keeffe & Ross 2007). Entrepreneurial leadership is all about the ability to explore newer dimensions hitherto unexplored and marching forth with clarity and confidence to carve a future that guarantees safety, security and success in all walks of life. McLagan (1995) is of the view that entrepreneurial leadership is about exploring new opportunities for all the stakeholders so that it can add joy to their lives and serve as the basis of the future hope.

## COMMUNICATION AS THE CORE OF ENTREPRENEURIAL LEADERSHIP

Indubitably, communication is pivotal to entrepreneurial leadership. The success of an entrepreneurial leader is dependent not only on the factors like intelligence and education; it is rather his ability to

foresee the future and deal with complexities to motivate the followers to have faith in his leadership. Darling & Beebe (2007) underscore the importance of effective communication in entrepreneurial leadership. They strongly argue that communicating with others around to bridge the gaps between being innovative and exploring opportunities is an essential task that entrepreneurial leaders perform. Most of the time of an entrepreneurial leader is spent in planning, communicating messages, expressing his ideas and opinions, listening and responding to others (Weirich and Reinstein, 1999, Windsor, Curtis and Stephens, 1997). Karl Weick (1995) in his theories has proven that facilitation in an organisation can be done only through communication. Researches done by Klemmner and Synder (1972), Barker (1980) and Weirich and Reinstein (1999) prove that on an average 90% time in a day's work of a leader is spent in communication.

Darling & Beebe (2007) in their paper have given a paradigm of Key Entrepreneurial communication priorities namely Paradoxical Thinking, Inclusive Behaving, Controlled Reflecting, Purposeful Trusting, Intentional Focussing, Instinctive Responding. All of these factors rotate around Relational Being which is the central integrative point in the paradigm of key entrepreneurial communication priorities. They have argued that a successful entrepreneur has to focus on these communication priorities to enhance organisational leadership so that he can achieve the desired results. Morris et al underscore innovativeness, risk taking and proactive attitude as factors that bring success to the entrepreneurial leaders, but these are largely dependent on how well they are perceived and communicated. The intra-communication on the part of the entrepreneurial leader plays a first stage role in exploring the ideas to make things happen in the right direction. Then obviously, they need to be communicated well to personnel at various levels since the organisational objectives cannot be achieved by him solely. Hence he has to employ effective, persuasive, convincing, influential, and powerful communicative strategy to put across his ideas.

## **PERSUASIVE COMMUNICATION VIS-À-VIS ENTREPRENEURIAL LEADERSHIP**

We argue that just being communicative is not the success mantra for an entrepreneurial leader as whatever he conveys/ communicates has to be persuasive, convincing and influential in all aspects. McLagan (1995) in his study observes that sharing of vision on the part of an entrepreneurial leader with the employees and stakeholders must become a source of joy for them thereby offering them a glimpse of a better future. It is not possible to communicate effectively in any business arena without persuasiveness as its core. Most of the paradigms offered by Darling & Beebe also revolve around effective communication without using the term 'persuasiveness,' which in our view is the locus of being effective. This paper thus attempts to lend prominence to the persuasive dimension of communicative entrepreneurial leadership, which actually forms the core of effective, convincing and successful communication.

The growth and success of entrepreneurial leaders in our opinion depend on the persuasive and efficacious communication. Likewise, the development of an enterprise too can be viewed as a process (Gibb, 1993), whose success is purely reliant on the way it is communicated to the followers/ team leaders/ managers and other stakeholders by the entrepreneurial leader. The process of development can be analysed in three stages.

The first stage is when the idea is conceived, analysed, and deliberated upon. It is obvious at this stage that until an entrepreneur is not able to persuade financiers, bankers and his team leaders/ followers about viability and success of the project, he cannot move ahead convincingly. He has to exhibit leadership and communicative abilities emanating from a persuasive core. Actually praxis of

communicative persuasiveness is a complex and well thought out process. While practicing persuasive communication ethics, one has to rely on certain facts that are well-researched, analytical ability of the entrepreneur, understanding of the external environment, and the trends of the market wherein business is conducted.

At the second stage, the process of putting ideas into action starts when an entrepreneurial leader starts working out the logistics concerning arranging capital/finance, required infrastructure, HR, etc. It is not possible to put ideas into practice without successfully persuading fellow workers. Here again, role of an entrepreneurial leader becomes crucial as he is the one who, by persuading with the help of interpersonal and communication skills, implements his business vision/plans with the help of team members. The third and final stage comprises accomplishing the desired outcome. It can be achieved through earning profits, or in the form of completion of a project that paves way to start a new one. This too is totally dependent on persuasive skills of an entrepreneur. Thus, in all three stages discussed above, leadership skills with persuasiveness at their core are required which involve confidence, integrity, inspirational behaviour, positivity and ability to take decisions in extremely complex and challenging situations.

In today's world, with advancement in technology and growth in entrepreneurial opportunities, notion of entrepreneurial leadership has gained tremendous limelight. For managing human resource, leadership abilities are a must. In fact, success of a business venture depends on how well the leader is able to communicate with and motivate his teammates/followers. Leaders, in fact, empower employees to act out a vision (Özaralli, 2003). They operate by inspiring (Jameson, 2013) and developing the capacity of their employees to align and synchronise different kinds of relationships among different stakeholders of the organisation. Thus, an entrepreneur has to act like a leader in order to achieve strategic objectives (Mintzberg, 1973) through communicative praxis hinging on persuasiveness. Besides being convincing about the organizational vision; he has to be considerate enough to take on the board various stakeholders' perspectives and thus take decision that ensures success of the business enterprise.

## IMPORTANCE OF PERSUASIVE COMMUNICATION

All personal and professional relationships are based on communicative abilities of an individual (Lewick & Bunker, 1996). The importance of communication increases manifold when it comes to managing a business or running an organization. Successful business leaders use communication for building a healthy rapport with their employees, clients, various stakeholders and business partners. Persuasive communication is crucial, which entrepreneurial leaders must acquire. It involves the act of convincing or guiding colleagues towards adoption of certain attitudes, actions, and ideas through rational means. It is a positive and result-oriented mechanism by which an entrepreneurial leader communicates with his teammates. The strategic planning which involves envisioning the future of an organizational setup becomes too subjective a task after a certain point; nevertheless, it can be backed with logics, facts and figures, and past experience as well. It eventually depends on the judgment and the analytical ability of an entrepreneurial leader.

Persuasion being the ability to influence (Bandura, 1994), the success of an entrepreneurial leader is principally reliant on his persuasive skills as without convincing, influencing and motivating his followers and stakeholders profitably in a desired manner, no entrepreneurial venture at any stage can become a success. The business environment by and large remains complex, dynamic and unpredictable (Miller, 1988), and therefore, to be a successful entrepreneurial leader, utilizing opportunities through persuasive articulation becomes inevitable. In a scenario where an

entrepreneurial leader has to communicate with diverse stakeholders who have varied opinions, subjectivities and backgrounds, he needs to have mastered the skill of persuasive communication. A persuasive entrepreneurial leader is efficient and effective enough to influence people to act in the way he perceives apt. He actually knows how to handle diverse business situations/ problems to resolve conflicts thereby articulating plans and accomplishing objectives.

## **VARIOUS FACETS OF PERSUASIVE COMMUNICATION**

Entrepreneurial leaders today emerge as risk-takers rather than merely being risk-aversers. Equally vital are the guts in an entrepreneurial leader vis-à-vis taking risky decisions that are akin to walking on razor's edge. Imperative to such risky decisions are analytical understanding and deep insights into sustainable business strategies. Apart from these, communication is as much crucial as the fundamental vision of a business venture. Within the arena of communication, however, its persuasive dimension is central/ pivotal simply because in business arenas, tempers usually run high culminating in disasters of one sort or the other. More often than not, reason behind such disasters is lack of participation of all stakeholders, of transparency, and of polite, firm and empathetic persuasiveness (Campbell & Babrow, 2004). Communicative persuasiveness in fact tides over diverse range of negativities that inadvertently creep into the process of thinking and planning the future of a business enterprise.

A successful entrepreneurial leader does not evade those negativities; he rather faces them in a way that the possibility of their re-emergence is diminished permanently. Persuasiveness as a communicative principle allows participation of all stakeholders via duly acknowledging their contribution. An entrepreneurial leader would always ensure participation of key stakeholders at every level of envisioning, planning and implementation of business strategies. Nevertheless, he can never afford to compromise decisiveness, rationality of thought and efficiency in the implementation of his business vision as it amounts to incompetence.

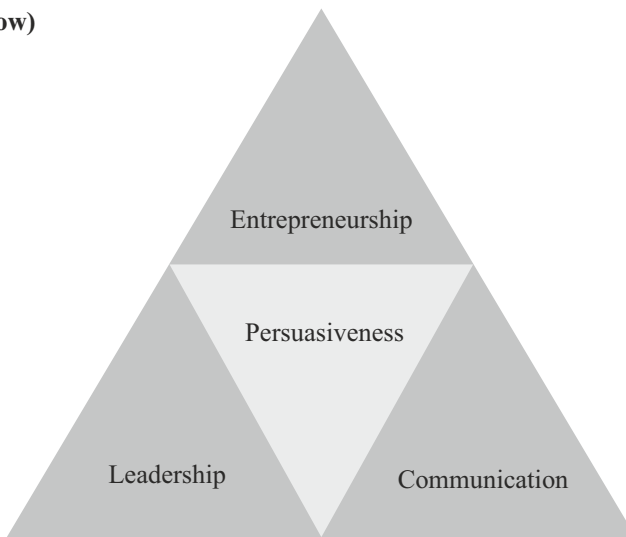
An entrepreneurial leader has to be a master of basic communication skills so that he can effectively communicate business strategies (Sharma & Arora, 2015). More, he should also be emotionally intelligent to be able to overcome all communication barriers that may hamper his earnest endeavour to achieve carefully-set business targets. An entrepreneurial leader has to be a firm believer in team work. At one level, he has got to be able to have a broad overview of the entire situation he is working in; at the other, he should be aware of every single agent/ stakeholder involved at different stages in the implementation process of his business vision. It is basically a task which is extremely challenging given its proportion, scope and intensity of impact. This paper assumes that considerable degree of success in a business enterprise depends on the persuasive dimension of communication. It implies that entrepreneurial leader cannot afford to lose sight of compassion, care and concern while he plans and implements his business strategies. Compassion basically is a ploy/tool to overcome all behavioural aberrations and obstacles that tend to impede success of a business venture. It is also the mainstay of communication ethics (Jensen, 2013) which makes an entrepreneurial leader morally upright, humanly sensitive, ecologically aware, intellectually convincing and practically trustworthy.

Another aspect which is intrinsic to persuasive communication is entrepreneurial leader's integrity (Froiland, 2011) as it is the fundamental measure of his conscience, which enables him to do the right in most adverse circumstances; to take a decision amidst most hostile circumstances; to offer a clear roadmap in the face of multiplex impediments; and to see hope amidst utter despair. Integrity, in fact, endows him with the power that helps him under all circumstances, and remains behind everything that he thinks, plans, articulates, or does. In case the power of integrity of an entrepreneurial

leader's conscience paralyses, he cannot straighten his back to take firm and lasting decisions that can shake off the status quo to transform and reinvigorate the business environment.

## PERSUASIVENESS AS THE EPICENTRE OF COMMUNICATIVE ENTREPRENEURIAL LEADERSHIP

(See the figure below)



The above figure shows how communicative entrepreneurial leadership is a triumvirate comprising communication, entrepreneurship and leadership. It has been figurally represented as a triangle, epicentre of which consists of persuasiveness. This persuasiveness ensures participation of all stakeholders and due consideration of their divergent viewpoints. Since persuasive communication in entrepreneurial leadership emanates from participative communication ethics, it should thus remain operational at every level of planning, decision making, setting up of goals, and achieving them eventually.

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