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‘Will to prepare’ is more important than ‘Will to lead’

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The world is full of aspirations and people wanting to lead, But very few are focusing on preparing for tomorrow.

If the top leaders were to be asked today on how certain they felt about their strategies, you would typically get a pause before they begin to respond. In their response, preparing for an unpredictable future would feature without fail.

The issue about uncertainty cannot be over emphasized or under emphasized but the issue does not necessarily be that of unpredictability of what next. As we begin to see the resilient leaders manage business in the given times, one key leadership attribute stands out, the “Will to prepare”.

While the world is full of aspirations and people wanting to lead, very few are focusing on getting ready for tomorrow. Therefore the will to lead is not translating itself into how leaders prepare themselves for the next decade of challenges, knowing very well that some challenges cannot be foreseen.

The implication is significant, the lack of preparation on part of leaders is reflective on Organizations not preparing adequately to be nimble footed to meet the challenges.

There are 3 issues that are essential to be mentioned as a starting point of this discussion:

1. The complex inter-linkages between different economic drivers is yet to be fully understood. A seemingly simple event or occurrence in one market, one industry, one company seems to set off a chain reaction in ways we did not believe could actually take place. Well, we never did imagine Countries really go bankrupt or a global brand cease to exist because another industry got some fundamentals wrong
2. Domain expertise is relevant but ability to manage disruptive change is more essential. Therefore the traditional leadership skills around understanding domain knowledge or industry over a period of time suddenly do not assure the organizations of successful navigation. The search for these skills have increased the gap in availability of leaders and thereby increasing the pay for change leadership skills (Also read:
3. Pressure on costs continues to increase the leverage and consolidation of capabilities. The ability to house services, capabilities in the most cost effective parts of the organization. The ability to find opportunities to deliver superior customer experience is combined with the ability to deliver the experience seamlessly. However, this will need all the ideas an Organization can find. The ability of an Organization to harvest and note lose ideas from their employees and stakeholders is more relevant today

Therefore, how are Organizations and their Leaders actually preparing?

Like most people who claim to go to the Gym, preparation continues to be a talking subject more than actually a consistent effort over a long period of time for achieving sustainable fitness. It is not the intent that is missing but the will to keep at 'preparing process' as it needs significant will to stay at it. But however, the leaders that do this well continue to demonstrate sustainable capabilities and returns. The key differentiator is the sheer will of these leaders to spend time, effort and resources in preparing for the future.

What does "Will to prepare" entail?

The "Will to prepare" can be described as an intrinsic behaviour in Leaders that compels them to continuously seek "What next", deliver "value in the last mile" and "continuously align resources to the future".

There constant urge or intrinsic curiosity to keep understanding what's next and anticipating the change. This attribute is specifically identifiable through these behaviours: The ability to peel away layers of information, trends, and analytics and zero into actionable areas that will impact the future. This is heady combination of curiosity and eye for insights results in the next behaviours. There isn't any profound or unique quality in this but the fact that these leaders use this as a continuous behaviour to prepare themselves and their organizations sets them apart. Leaders with this focus also build these capabilities into their Organization structures and key leaders in the succession pipeline.

Value in the last mile

In an time where every month and quarter matters, these Leaders focus on the last mile delivery of customer processes. They are not driven by mere need to have superior execution, they focus on maintain service delivery both to employees and customers as in this process, they stay close to the ground. This is in part driven by their need to understand or 'sniff' emerging changes and feedback so that they can ensure continued relevance to their stakeholders in ever changing situations.

Align resources to the future

This is a real challenge that these leaders do very well both in their lives as well and in their Organizations. The ability to create a compelling argument of what next leading to driving investments and allocating resources. These leaders in these process are able to let go of even fondly held beliefs, processes, practices, behaviours and shift into what is essential for the future.

Why should Organizations focus and reward "Will to prepare"?

Drive behaviours that drive sustainability

So often leaders demonstrate their aspirations to lead but rarely do they demonstrate that their ability to prepare is a key quality that will ensure their success when they do step into the hot seats. Organizations must step away from the temptation of recognizing will to lead to ensure that they build leaders who can demonstrate that they are willing to prepare and commit to the long term.

Competencies are rigid and obsolete at times

In such a dynamic world, Competency Models are the first thing to go obsolete. There are many a compelling reason for Organizations to do away with Competency Models with proficiency levels and just focus on driving behaviours across the Organization that build sustainability. In a world where competency models almost deliver "entitlement mentality" of behaviours, so often you find them so internally focused than based on stakeholder expectations.

Will to prepare when recognized builds leaders deep with-in

The real issue in talent shortages at the top is on account of not focusing on will to prepare. When Organizations prepare, they constantly prepare a bench of leaders with focus on the future. This pool is under constant preparation to lead and therefore when called upon, settle down and deliver results. The ability to therefore drive the "will to prepare" behaviours deep within the Organization ensures a continuous pipeline of leaders.