

HEART Leadership Model

Leadership Capabilities Which Transcend Time

THOUGHT PAPER

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One question that repeatedly surfaces in our leadership development assignments is - *“What makes an effective leader?”* While the question has always elicited keen curiosity, the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored its importance, infusing renewed interest in it.

For us, leadership has always been, and more so now, about the **HEART** - the willingness to dedicate the most crucial part of you for a larger cause - your people and your organization.

Through this thought paper, we share with you our **HEART** model of leadership capabilities – capabilities that are timeless!



Human First

Best leaders are those who place humanity and human relations over any other consideration.



Emotionally Intelligent

The ability to understand their own and other's emotions and how that drives behavior, and using this knowledge to spur action.



Agile

A willingness to abandon attributes that have propelled them so far and experiment with adaptive leadership behaviors is what makes leaders agile.



Resilient

Resilience is not just about springing back from a crisis, but it is also about springing forward into the new normal.



Technologically Authentic

To thrive in this digital era, organizations must intertwine technological capabilities with human capabilities.

While some of the leadership traits in it are not new or surprising, some of them are certainly tougher to master, mostly because they require people to actively learn new skills and operate. Most importantly, these traits are unrelated to a person's position or experience. They transcend such limiting definitions.

1. Human First

True leadership reveals itself in the actions of a person and the best leaders are those who place humanity and human relations over any other considerations. **Their go-to mantra is: people come first. Period.**

To this end they prioritize internal meetings over external meetings, even over all the external pressure to cater to the customer first. They care deeply about their people as well as their families' health, their needs, fears, and take all the necessary steps to ensure their safety. They never miss (in fact, they actively seek out) **opportunities to personally check-in with team members about how they are doing.** They make an effort to remember important personal details of employees (like the names of family members) and display a genuine interest in their career path. **While interacting with employees they give them their undivided attention.** Such authentic communication makes employees feel valued and cared for helping them unleash their full potential.

2. Emotionally Intelligent

EI has always been touted as a key skill for leaders to have, but very few have focussed on it. It is the **ability to understand one's own as well as other's emotions, and using this knowledge to spur action is what sets great leaders apart from the rest .** Here's how emotional intelligence is a vital leadership differentiator:

- **Self-awareness:** This is the ability of the leader to assess their capabilities realistically and to draw from their experiences through self-reflection. **Such leaders accurately recognize their emotions and its impact on work, enabling them to compartmentalize the two.** They do not let their impulses and moods drive conversations or decision making. They can self-regulate their emotions through honest introspection. Such **candor enables these leaders to embrace differences of personalities and ideas** at work and in decision-making because they realize that differences bring fresh perspectives to the table.
- **Empowers others:** Along with providing clear guidance and sharing plans, **leaders with a high EQ decentralize decision making throughout the organization and empower others to make crucial decisions.** They are not reluctant to let others make mistakes and support their subordinates even if their decisions go wrong.
- **People Coach:** As coaches, emotionally intelligent leaders **foster independence of thoughts and actions through an emphasis on continuous learning and personalized instructions whenever possible.** Exceptional leaders go beyond traditional employee engagement and development practices to pass on strategic tactics, business principles, and life lessons from their treasure trove of experience.
- **Instils trust:** Exuding a timeless leadership attributes, ethical leaders exhibit and encourage a commitment to fairness, instilling confidence that

no one will be penalized as long as they are working with honesty. Such leaders know how to **withhold their opinion until everyone else has had a chance to speak up their minds without the fear of “consequences”**. Before embarking on any new work **they ensure that they relay their expectations clearly and everyone is on the same page**. It is not their style to blindsides employees with unpleasant surprises, invoking employee engagement, innovation, and creativity.

- **Influences support:** Leaders with high emotional intelligence do not use the power behind their title to bulldoze ideas or to overcome skepticism at work. Instead, they try to **diagnose the root of disagreement and use rational reasoning or emotional appeal to persuade detractors**. They rally support with a commitment to the growth of others which inspires team members to reciprocate with gratitude and loyalty.

3. Agile

Certain attributes help propel people to leadership positions, but it is their **willingness to abandon these very attributes, and experiment with adaptive leadership behaviors is what makes leaders agile**. Some distinct features of agile leaders which give them an edge over others are:

- The courage of being **comfortable with discomfort and the unknown** is a key agile leadership muscle.
- **Humble acknowledgment of their limitations** and an equally important understanding that there is a lot to be learned from team members (both equals and juniors).
- A **passionate pursuit of organizational mission** and ensuring a horizontal (and not just vertical) flow articulation of the same across levels to **render transparency**.
- **Establishment of competence hierarchy rather than a bureaucratic hierarchy** where decision-making power trickles down and is not the sole privilege of only a few.
- **The ability to act promptly, fail quickly, and take corrective measures** with a focus on outcome rather than tedious meetings.
- Support risk-taking and learning through a culture that **allows for small failures and rapid feedback**.
- **The ability to break down a problem into small bite-sized pieces** which can be solved in a sprint through cross team collaboration, while never losing sight of the bigger picture.

4. Resilient

With increasingly volatile businesses in uncertain times, companies that have the most resilient leaders are going to thrive. **Resilience is not just about springing back from a crisis, but it is also about springing forward into the new normal. It is about the ability to forge ahead despite of hurdles that keep surfacing**. A resilient leader sees a crisis as a temporary setback, maintains a healthy positive attitude throughout the turbulence period, and finds ways to move forward even during adversity. Following are the characteristics of a resilient leader:

- **Motivation:** One hallmark trait of a resilient leader is motivation- the drive to achieve for the sake of achievement beyond their own expectations and that of others. Such leaders **see setbacks as an opportunity to bring about a turnaround**. They do not let setbacks push them towards depression or frustration but **remain optimistic even when the score is against them**. Their unflagging energy and persistent curiosity makes them **open to exploring new approaches and accepting change as the only constant**, regaining control even when the tide turns against them.
- **Communication zealots:** A resilient leader's capacity to thrive in unfavorable circumstances depends on their ability to communicate their plans and intentions to others. As they respond swiftly, they share their plan with others for faster recovery. **With effective communication, resilient leaders are able to minimize the impact of the external shock and stay ahead of rivals even when the future is uncertain**.
- **Versatile:** This is the capacity of resilient leaders to **draw upon a wide repertoire of skills and behaviors to read and respond to change even if it requires them to step out of their comfort zone**. They take feedback in their stride and constantly incorporate it in their leadership toolkit for swift and agile decision making.
- **Slick social skills:** A resilient leader builds a **rapport that binds people with a common purpose**. They know that nothing gets done alone and having a network in place. In times of need, helps them move things in the direction they desire by cutting through all the ambiguity.
- **Growth mindset:** A leader's mindset determines the information they absorb from their surroundings and how they use it to navigate the situation they are in. This mindset sets them apart from leaders with a fixed mindset who perceive hindrances as a threat to their authority. **It gives resilient leaders the ability to add to their talents to take on new challenges and accomplish new goals**, giving them the wherewithal to bounce back from misfortunes.

5. Technologically Authentic

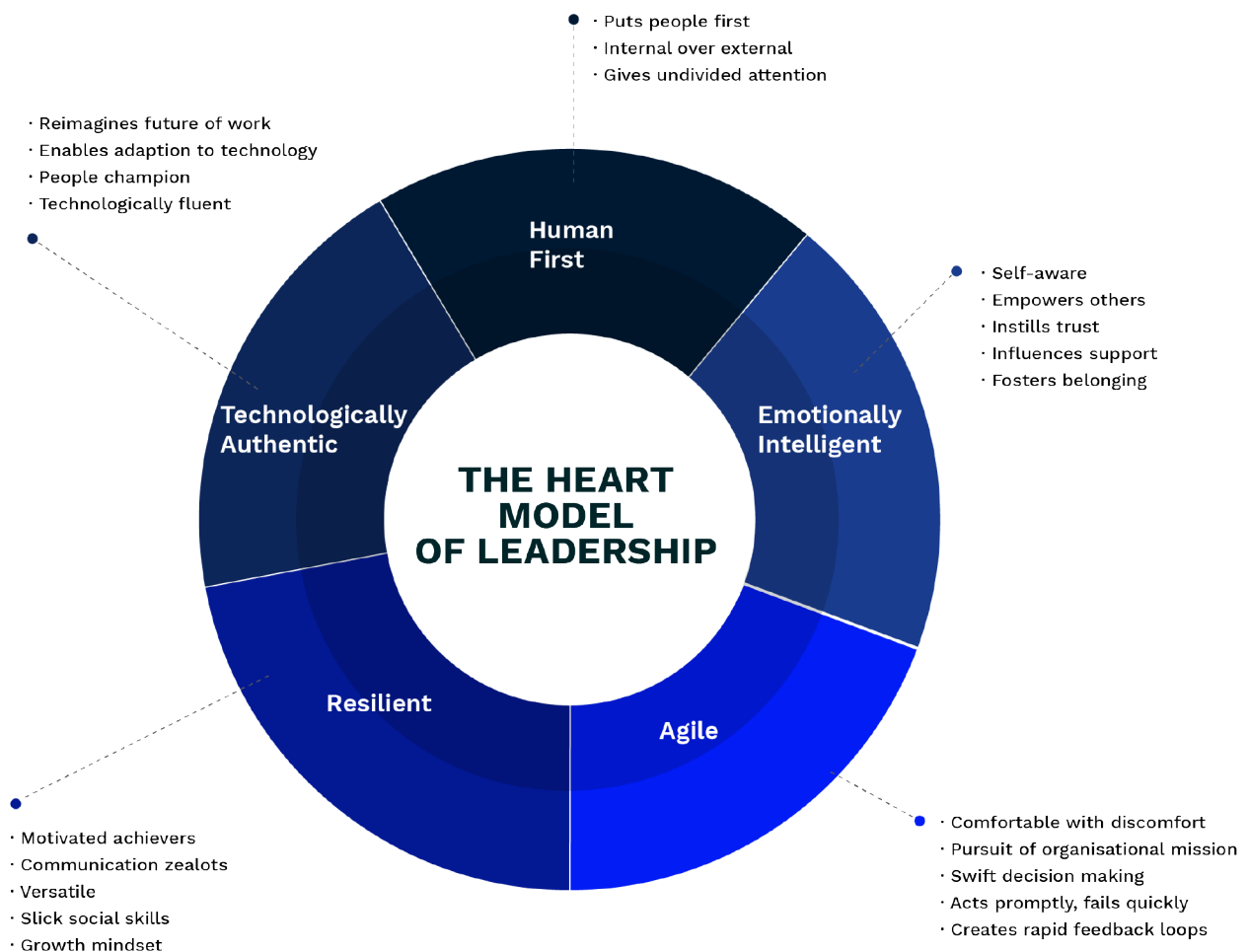
To thrive in this digital era, **organizations must intertwine technological capabilities with human capabilities.** The onus lies with the leaders to transform themselves to enable the technology and the people to work together seamlessly. Here's how they do it:

- **Rethink:** New technologies bring new possibilities, new questions, and new problems. Leaders with differential capabilities embrace these possibilities and reimagine the future of work to explore new opportunities. **They use tomorrow as a starting point for work that needs to be done today.**
- **Enablement:** Leaders do not just embrace the new possibilities, but **they become the enablers for their team to adapt and embrace the latest technologies** so that the mundane tasks can be taken care of by technologies, whereas people bring in their creativity, innovation, and ethical judgment to take business decisions.
- **Technological fluency:** The **ability to persuasively speak about, and use digital technology to make bold decisions, an openness to experiment with cutting edge technology, and leveraging new technology to build**

efficient systems are timeless leadership qualities that help companies move forward.

The HEART model – A holistic leadership ecosystem rather than a 'holistic' leader.

While the current crisis is frightening and tragic, it has also brought about crystal clear clarity about timeless leadership capabilities. The HEART model proves as an invaluable capability framework for organizations to gauge their leadership potential, however it also spans a wide-ranging set of skills, and it would be a fallacy to look for all of them in one single hero. Organizational success resides in recognizing and working with people who exhibit a few of these skills and bringing them together to learn and better leadership attributes missing in them, creating a holistic leadership ecosystem rather than a 'holistic' leader.



About the Author



Mainak brings over 24 years of experience spanning business and HR roles across geographies. This has given him a unique understanding of the link between HR and business strategy. He also holds a patent for HR capability development.

Mainak's experience includes human capital strategy, culture, talent development (performance, leadership development, career pathing, competency, learning, engagement, diversity) and talent acquisition (including on-boarding and background check). He has also implemented HRIS platform and HR metrics to improve performance.

Recently he has been helping start-ups set up efficient and effective HR teams and processes. In addition, Mainak is a recognized Executive Coach and Leadership Development expert.

Mainak's previous work experience includes stints/projects with Accenture (Consulting and HR), Hewitt Associates, AbsolutData, Heidrick & Struggles, Evalueserve, Sterlite Technologies and Upstox.

Mainak holds a MBA from the Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta, and is a certified executive coach.

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