Would Gandhi Have Recycled: Does Evolving as a Leader Correlate with Increased Corporate Social Responsibility?

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ABSTRACT

Vertical leadership assesses how a leader thinks, feels and makes sense of the world. This number one trend in leadership development posits that leaders evolve through predictable, sequential stages of increasingly broadening awareness, allowing for more mindful action. In a world with increasing complexity, exponential change and ever-growing interdependency, leaders must be more agile. And many corporations are demanding that their leaders address these complex shifts in the marketplace with a greater awareness and commitment to social responsibility. How does vertical development in leaders correlate to their attitudes and behaviors toward corporate social responsibility? And how does this leadership development relate to the status of a corporation’s social responsibility?

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is the view that corporations owe a duty to their stakeholders beyond merely following the law and maximizing profit for stockholders (McWilliams & Siegel 2001). CSR has evolved into many schools of thought. Conscious capitalism is one example that of a non-profit organization that is founded on four principles: a higher purpose (beyond making money), a stakeholder orientation (not just stockholders), conscious leadership (who can bring this greater awareness to bear), and conscious culture (that integrates the interdependency of our world) (see www.consciouscapitalism.org). Another related concept that emerged in the late 1990’s is the triple bottom line (TBL) (Elkington 1997). The TBL redefines the current business model to have a broader framing of value as does CSR, but succinctly describes the triple bottom lines - profit, people, and the planet – that need to be accounted for in the overall system.

As a leader evolves to a broader, more inclusive awareness, starting with her department to her industry and finally moving to the broader society, is this increased awareness more likely to cultivate both an awareness of the TBL or the sustainability of the corporation, the people and planet? According to Leadership Agility, a cutting-edge vertical leadership model, when a leader evolves to a certain level they “are more likely than they were at previous levels to be attuned to the health of the natural environment and the well-being of the larger society”. Although at lower levels either consequences or a personal belief or values system might encourage corporate social responsibility, researchers found that at higher stages, the percentage of leaders committed to these causes increases significantly (Joiner & Josephs 2007).

This paper posits a conceptual framework that describes the connection between leadership development based on the leadership agility model and the framework of the TBL. Vertical development of leaders in general and leadership agility is growing in the acceptance and validity. Research shows that the evolution of a leader can be accelerated by as much as a factor of five with the proper training (Brown 2014). Thus, a framework to understand vertical leadership and corporate social responsibility, specifically the triple bottom line will provide organizations with 1) insights into how to recruit better leaders, 2) help in the training and development of leaders, and 3) a foundation for creating a greater alignment with the corporate stakeholder, mission, and definition of the bottom lines.
REFERENCES


