Leadership for India Inc: Practical Concepts and Constructs
Prof. C Bhaktavatsala Rao
Prof. Ajit Singhvi
Department of Management Studies
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras

Week - 11
Leadership Philosophies
Lecture - 53
Lonely at the Top

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Hi Friends, welcome to the NPTEL course Leadership for India Inc: Practical Concepts and Constructs. We are in week 11, discussing Leadership Philosophies. In this lecture, we will focus on the topic of Lonely at the Top. Leadership involves taking responsibility for all that happens in the broad canvas of an organization.

The larger the organization the greater are the issues and the lonelier would the leader be. An apex leader, who is ultimately accountable and responsible for all that happens and does not happen in an organization, can indeed become very lonely. Despite the presence of a leadership team and despite having the best of alignment, individual predilections often cause the CEO to be solely and singularly responsible.

Balancing collaboration with objectivity and togetherness with equidistance, the CEO should network with internal and external stakeholders and industry peers to draw and provide energy. Success as a leader is the ultimate antidote to loneliness. Success

founded on values and metrics enables a CEO to connect freely and passionately with the entire organization by being one of them.

The mistakes typically being process and behaviour related start small, but over time become certain erroneous ways of conducting leadership processes and this applies to a leader feeling extremely lonely at the top as well. This is the summary of this topic. Let us look at details.

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Leaders, in the ultimate analysis, are individuals at the apex of an organization or a movement, equipped by competencies and positioned by performance and circumstances to lead. Leaders lead and transform and of course, manage their organizations and movements to achieve national wealth and social good.

Business history has several instances of leaders who brought corporations up to great heights from humble beginnings either as professional leaders, entrepreneurial leaders or technocrats. Similarly, social history has several hundreds of leaders who inspired and led several social, religious, political, theological and national movements.

While corporate leadership tends to focus on the apex leader, the one who has full executive powers for an organization for singular appreciation as well as deprecation, leaders do need teams to strategize, execute and deliver results. Even leadership of movements of whatever nature requires a close group of stalwarts on whom the leader

relies to create the organizational vehicles, channel mass energy, manage controlled behaviour and finally, deliver results.

These are the sound principles of organization which we have covered in the earlier lectures as well. As much as a singular leader a leadership team is also indispensable for directed and inspired growth of a company with structured and focused delivery.

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If this is the organization structure, what are the challenges for the leader and why does he feel lonely? The leader and the leadership team are expected to share and live by a unique thesis of collaboration and collectivism – and yet, in practice, they experience a disturbing antithesis of divergence and conflict too.

The way the organizations are designed the structures are drawn up and the processor put in place, collaboration and collectivism are to be followed in letter and spirit. However, as an organization functions divergence and conflict do take place.

What are the issues of divergence? Converting organizational diversity in terms of functions, domains, people, genders, backgrounds into one business unity is a requirement of leadership and that is one challenge leaders have.

Harmonizing the dissonance of individual ambitions of the leaders as well as the individuals in the organization, that is another challenge. The third challenge is that, so much energy is spent on achieving the goals that the moment the goals are achieved the

energy tends to get dissipated. Leaders should not let their energy get dissipated once the desired end goal is achieved. This is true of both national leaders as well as corporate leaders.

Logically, leaders and the leadership teams would never openly want their goals and successes defeated by their own goals and successes, that is, they keep the company ahead of their personal interest. Ironically, it is also a reality historically, in part. The spat between Cyrus Mistry and Tata Sons is a striking example of the leadership dissonance spectre that haunts the best of companies.

While on paper and mostly in practice leaders would like to keep the interests of the company ahead of the personal interest. There are also in instances where leaders tend to keep their personal interests or extra company interest ahead of the company interest. So, this is where the divergence, dissonance and complacency factors of leadership come in.

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So, why is it lonely at the top? By virtue of the pyramidical structure yes, it is lonely at the top. Every organization be it a small scale organization or a mega corporation or a conglomerate, has scope for only one CEO. This has been discussed when we looked at the organizational structures and this is true particularly of the apex leaders.

While they may have closely aligned leaders at the helm of functions, business units or regions, the inner motivations as well as the intrinsic challenges are never shared with

anyone by the CEO to the extent it could be an open book. The biographies of corporate chieftains reveal how corporate leaders, the effusive as well as the reclusive ones, nurtured aspirations and agendas that had to remain embedded within them, at least partially.

Interestingly, it appears as if this is not so true in the case of leaders of movements that is the difference between corporate leaders and national leaders. National leaders seem to be more of open book style leadership whereas; corporate chieftains tend to be more of closed book leadership styles.

This is attributed to the fact that movements typically require their leaders to maintain mass contact to sustain energy and support. On a closer review it would also emerge that the leaders of the movements also tend to be lonely unable to share their inner visions and turmoil even with their close followers.

The reasons for loneliness at the top therefore, merit analysis and discussion as well as meaningful solutions. It is a philosophical issue that confronts leadership and therefore, it is best discussed as part of this week's course and much of this would also be applicable in some form of the other to the leaders of strategic business units, heads of global functions or regional heads working with the global apex leaders.

So, it is a kind of pandemic requirement of leadership that is to be lonely structurally. But to be together by spirit, by feeling and by the way of working and that is the challenge.

Research has established that the life of a CEO is indeed lonely. Such a perception could be unsettling for new leaders. More troubling is the finding that 60 to 70 percent of CEOs find such isolation affecting their performance adversely. The reasons are the following: the smaller the corporation they flatter the organization structure and more together the leader and the team members stay.

However, organizations have to grow continuously. Moving up the scale and scope canvas increases distance between the leader and the team members. And, when people come to the top when the organization becomes very large they tend to be fewer touch points are the top and it is more so in diversified and geographically dispersed corporations.

This distancing becomes especially true in rapidly grown startups. The leaders thus get drawn into a vicious cycle where it is easy to lose touch with reality.

In professionally managed organizations, the risk is ostensibly somewhat mitigated because structures and process are established for frequent communications, but it is never eliminated. Direct reports often nurture strong business unit functional or regional perspectives which cannot always be inconsonance with what the apex leader has.

Moreover, organizations have overlays of aspirations on getting to the top position based on performance differentials of respective businesses, functions or regions as we

discussed when we talked about functional leadership models in today's contemporary milieu every function asperse to reach the CEO level. That is, the heads of every function be it R&D, operations, marketing, finance or HR or even legal would like to reach the position of the chief executive officer which means that there are functional aspirations.

There business aspirations, as also individual operations which make sure that there are certain agendas which are not completely shared between the board, the CEO and the senior leadership team. So, within the apparent alignment at the top there is therefore, a latent misalignment leading management institute such as Harvard, Stanford and Wharton are involved in strategic management research in this important area of the loneliness at the top.

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What are the causes for the loneliness? Loneliness may get even harsher when the top-rungs are plagued by contentious issues and solutions that do not offer adequate relief it also gets impacted when there is internal strife within the organization. The issues could be simple or complex, but there would always be pressure at the top.

The lonely leader is beset by the following factors, one the ownership itself could be fractious that is the shareholding of a company could include the promoters, it could include the private equity investors, could have institutional investors such as life insurance corporation and mutual funds and finally, the retail investors.

So, the fractious nature of ownership has its own pressures that are put on the CEO, then the businesses could be declining. They may not be growing as envisaged. There could be technological obsolescence that could be staring at the business in its phase, there could be failures of senior leaders, the leader himself or herself could be inadequate to the task that is ahead and there could be employee strife.

If these kinds of factors beside the leader at the top, the lonely leader becomes even lonelier. Each of these issues mentioned above requires resolute decisions and actions, many of which may not be palatable to other seniors. That, in itself makes the leader highly pressured and even more lonely.

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There is also this issue of Sub-Par leadership team. A CEO typically relies on the group of CXOs reporting directly to the CEO. That senior leadership team plays a major role in defining the loneliness paradigm of the apex leader. One of the grievous mistakes leadership make is to ignore the need for highly competent, empowered and yet collaborative CXOs.

If you have incompetent or divisive SLT members there would be divisions within the SLT. There would be many hidden agendas. Vertical divisions would take place within the organization. There would be excessive checks and balances. There would be sub-optimization of value chain.

When in an organization which I have experienced when the SLT is very much organized in terms of functional specializations, whenever the members of the SLT visit they would visit individually, but not as a group. When an operations SLT member visits he would look at the R&D and say that this is not functioning well in R&D, although it is beyond the limit of that individual leader.

Similarly, when an R&D leader would visit, the R&D leader would say that nothing is going well in the operations that is people who are trying to use their normal leadership interactions and processes to take care of their hidden agendas to prove to the very apex leader that something else is going wrong in some other division and my division is pretty good.

When the leadership focus shifts by force from management of business and organization through SLT to management of a divided and incompetent SLT itself, the leader would become even more lonely and distraught.

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There are also leaders who are extremely task oriented and such leaders tend to be even more lonely. If a leader is authoritarian, he would suffer from the loneliness syndrome far more than the leader who is people oriented and inclusive. Some task leaders control or compete with their own team members unfairly and obsessively.

We have discussed this as one of the critical leadership mistakes. As a result, the CXOs and other employees do not reach up to the leader, add into the loneliness. For the benefit of completeness of this particular lecture let us recall that particular serious mistake of the leaders. There are many ways in which a leader unfairly competes with his or her leaders and managers.

Denying information and inputs and questioning team members for incompleteness. Circumventing structures and processes to make the team members weak. Claiming credit for oneself as the apex leader all the time and placing blame on the leadership team members all the time again.

Publicly ridiculing or chastising the team members and frequently changing team members. These are the 4 ways by which an apex leader tries to compete with other leadership team members and each leadership team member could also compete with the other direct reports to him or her adopting the same kinds of devious principles.

The lonelier a leader is the more demanding he could become and vice versa leading to a vicious cycle. The result of such actions is that team members lose their initiative and energy apart from failing to utilize their faculties such a framework sets wrong example to the organization resulting in poor strategy and execution.

Therefore, even if a leader is task oriented the leader would do well to avoid the common mistakes which we have highlighted earlier as the leadership pitfalls.

Organizational 'Friends' – No Counter to Loneliness

Leaders tend to overcome loneliness by letting a few people, irrespective of the level, come close to them. If not encouraged as blind loyalists, they are seen at least as favourites. If Machiavellian, such favourites also create greater distortion in the leadership dynamics. Loneliness is never compensated by favouritism. Favourites:

- Misconstrue every observation of the leader and attempt to act in a highly transactional manner
- Fail to understand the importance of constructive differences and pillory everyone who differs with the boss
- Wear the proximity with, and loyalty to the boss, on the sleeve; as a result, favourites themselves lose connectivity with all objective people
- Eventually end up driving greater wedge between the leaders and the followers

Favourites may act as extra-constitutional authorities. While providing conversational comfort to the lonely leaders, they may end up expressing the leader's personality through their personality, and contribute to the leader becoming even more lonely.

Having friends in the organization is not a counter to loneliness. Some leaders tend to overcome loneliness by letting a few people irrespective of the level come close to them – it could be an executive assistant, it could be a personal secretary, it could be a divisional manager, it could be just a young entrant who has joint the company, anybody and it could be even a member of senior leadership team as well. If not encouraged as blind loyalists, they are seen at least as favourites.

If Machiavellian, such favourites also create greater distortion in the leadership dynamics. Loneliness is never compensated by favoritism for CEOs. What do favourites do? They misconstrue every observation of the leader and attempt to act in a highly transactional matter. They would say the leader said this, the leader wants this; whereas, the leader might not have wanted that in the manner it is being conveyed by the favourite.

The favourites fail to understand the importance of constructive differences and pillory everyone who differs with the boss. They wear the proximity with and loyalty to the boss on the sleeve as a result favourites themselves lose connectivity with all objective people. And, favourites eventually end up driving greater wedge between the leaders and the followers while seeking to be the connect between the leader and the followers.

Generally, favourites become extra-constitutional authorities in organizations while providing conversational comfort, mind this phrase conversational comfort to the lonely

leaders they may end up expressing the leader's personality through their sub-par personality and contribute to the leader becoming even more lonely.

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So, what has the responsibility of organizations been in tackling leader loneliness? Because there is a strong organizational logic for leader loneliness, there must be some organizational ways also to mitigate the loneliness. The CEO as we know, is charged with the responsibility of fulfilling multiple stakeholder needs including those of investors, employees and communities.

So, this growth-oriented responsibility is fulfilled through unbiased and proactive growth oriented strategies and execution and creating wealth for all the stakeholders. If this result can be demonstrated, leaders would be looked upon as members of the team that is one approach to be done. The second way is to be equi-positioned and equi-distanced with all business units functions and regions deciding on inter se priorities in an objective and clinical manner.

The CEO should be engaged equally with the leaders who report to him directly or interface with him regularly compared to the leaders who interact relatively less. Similarly, he is expected to be unbiased he should not be giving extraordinary importance to high performance individuals by eulogizing them or chastise low performing ones by protecting them or chastising them. For all you know, today's stars could turn into tomorrow's laggards.

And today's losers could be transformed as tomorrow's winners. So, from the view point of developing the organization the leader has to interact, but at the same time be equidistance with all the stakeholders that is the challenge for the leader. A balanced leader understands that he needs to be close to people, but also distance with people. He should be objective, but also should be emotionally connected and this is the challenge which only leaders with lot of equanimity and wisdom can handle.

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There is also the strategic responsibility and loneliness because the CEO takes bets on the future of the organization and the CEO alone can take such bets and that is usually proprietary information or confidential information. Contemporary organizations have a host of departments and consultants to analyze, chart and script future options.

Yet, it is typically the CEO who needs to exercise the final judgment based on his own education, experience, instinct and intuition which we covered earlier. It also must be based on empathy, sensitivity and responsibility, points we covered earlier too. The decisions a CEO takes are, therefore, not always the ones which is leadership team appreciates individually or collectively at times. And, sometimes, even the well intentioned decisions of the CEO go awry. This adds to the loneliness at the top.

The board of directors can help a CEO overcome the loneliness with its sagacious counsel and shared vision. While such a proposition is true, the very same considerations

that influence the CEO to be equidistance with his team also cause the boards to exercise independence and objectivity of equidistance with the CEO.

So, this question of equidistance is a very powerful question which the leaders have to grapple with. You we need to be close, but also we need to be distant and the CEOs most probably and most often are not in the best of the positions to handle this.

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There is also this extreme point that is a compulsorily lonely leader can be toxic. A leader who worsens the loneliness paradox of leadership by being obsessively lonely can prove himself to be toxic to the company. That is, the leader decides whatever I do, I am destined to be a lonely person because I cannot share my strategic information, I cannot share my confidential information, my decisions are different from the senior leadership team decisions.

And I cannot be explaining as this CEO all the logic I have in terms of my decisions and my execution. So, such a leader is likely to be unwilling to share the power and responsibility of leadership with others and keep the counsel alto himself or herself.

Such a leader can lead to suppression of leader faculties in the organization. So, all these things are interrelated negative cycles. As a result, even a lonely leader can become a compulsively lonely leader trying to make the best out of his loneliness instead of

breaking the loneliness barrier. And trying to mix with the rest of the leaders and managers in a positive manner and that is the toxicity of compulsive loneliness.

There are many ways in which a compulsively lonely leader can damage the organizational morale one by becoming more reclusive, it becomes even more difficult to reach up to the leader who is compulsively lonely, turning more authoritarian, more impatient, more demanding and more task oriented. Creating organizational silos.

The compulsively lonely leader would not like this silo of his CEO office to be broken by anybody and that is the role model for the rest of the functions to create their own silos. And, finally, by trying to perpetuate oneself partly due to the insecurity of loneliness and partly due to the wrong comfort such loneliness provides the leader ties to perpetuate himself or herself.

The chronically lonely leader thus combines all the leadership mistakes in himself or herself with a view to remain the central source of authority, power, responsibility and accountability in an organization.

There must therefore be an introspective effort on the part of the leader and the supervisory board to mitigate the ill-effects of loneliness. These are all insights and learning's that are not available easily in textbooks nor is this spoken about very openly in practical leadership contexts, but these have arisen from the actual observations on the leadership canvas over decades of my working with leaders, reviewing with leaders and studying leadership.

And these need to be appreciated for all the goodness of leadership which we have studied, for all the excitement that leadership offers in terms of structures, processes and leaders, unless we are clear about these philosophical undertones and take appropriate actions to minimize the negative undertones we will not be very successful as leaders and this is the lesson I want to drive home through this weekly module on leadership philosophies.
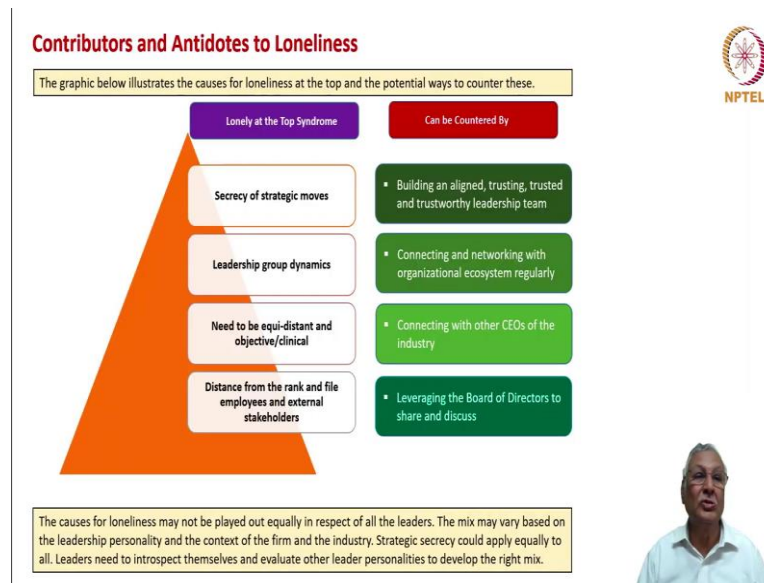
The contributors and antidotes to loneliness: The graphic below illustrates the causes for loneliness at the top and the potential ways to counter these. Distance from the rank and file employees and external stakeholders that is point number 1; 2nd need to be equidistant and objective clinical in the dealings; point number 3 leadership group dynamics – the hidden agendas and the differences between leader views and leadership, team views these have been discussed by me earlier.

And, the secrecy of strategic moves and how can we counter all of these things? The secrecy of strategic moves can be counted by building an aligned trusting, trusted and trustworthy leadership team, that is the senior leadership team makes the leader less lonelier more strong.

The leadership group dynamics can be countered by connecting and networking with organizational ecosystem regularly. The need to be equidistant and objective clinical can be handled by connecting with other CEOs of the industry and the distance from the rank and file employees and external stakeholders can be countered by leveraging the board of directors to share and discuss. While there are four very powerful reasons why loneliness as the top level syndrome is something which cannot be wished away.

There are also process related structure related measures that are available to counter such loneliness. The causes for loneliness may not be played out equally in respect of all the leaders because the context vary. The mix may vary based on the leadership

personality and the context of the firm and the industry. Strategic secrecy could apply equally to all, leaders need to introspect themselves and evaluate other leader personalities to develop the right mix.

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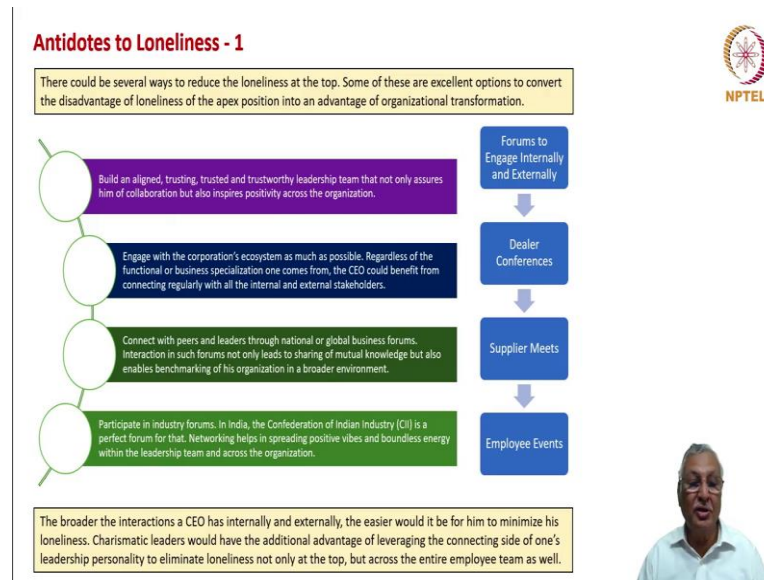
We discussed some antidotes to loneliness. Let us discuss them in a little more detail. Some of the antidotes are really very good options not merely as a counter to the loneliness, but also as an effort or a process contribution to improve the organizational functioning.

Building an aligned trusting, trusted and trustworthy leadership that is point number one. The SLT should be very strong very cohesive very collaborative and very much aligned with the leadership that itself is a great strength for the leader and brings the leader out of the cocoon. Similarly, the SLT members despite their divergent viewpoints would be together when handling crisis or when handling growth opportunities. Secondly, one should engage with the corporation's ecosystem as much as possible.

Regardless of the functional or business specialization one comes from the CEO could benefit from connecting regularly with all the internal and external stakeholders which means that the SLT agenda or the monthly review agenda must cover all the functions, irrespective of the background of the company the current compulsions. For example, environment safety and health could be seen to be a distant function, but that should be core and central to the discussions in SLT.

Similarly, R&D, even if it is considered to be a matter between the marketing R&D and the CEO could be discussed in a leadership forum so that everybody is engaged uniformly. There are many forums to engage internally and externally such as dealer conferences, supplier meets, employee events all of these things should be utilized fully.

Then connecting with the peers and leaders through national or global business forums because interaction in such forums widens one's business horizon, exposes one to the kind of talent that is available in the industry and also probably makes new relationship for growth in future.

And, the participation in industry forums provides additional gravitas to the company and to the leader besides also helping the industry address certain common issues. So, whichever way being an externally network person and being also an internally engaging person is a great thing for a leader to do.

Charismatic leaders would have the additional advantage in this process. They would be able to leverage the connecting side of one's leadership personality to eliminate loneliness not only at the top, but across the entire employee team as well because a charismatic leader has the aura of effusiveness, ability to connect with everybody, ability to engage with everybody and that could be infectious in an organization in a positive sense.

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Another antidote is the equi-distance vis-à-vis togetherness. The value the board brings as a springboard to support the CEO's passions and to evaluate the strategic options developed by him or her could be immense. This board purpose should be less of detailed performance review, but more of broad agenda review.

The board must represent multi-industry, multi-regional and multi-cultural expertise with whom this CEO can engage in both formal and informal meetings beyond the requirements of corporate law and governance that is how the perspectives of the CEO would be enhanced.

And, through such engagement with the board the CEO would be able to fend off the loneliness syndrome of the top level. It would not be sufficient for a CEO to meet with or interact with the board members only on a quarterly basis when the board meeting is called. The CEO should have the freedom to lift a phone and talk to the board members at any point of time. Similarly, the board member should be open to engage with the CEO on a regular basis.

That is why progressive companies say that apart from being a member of the board for board meeting purpose, each board member should take up some mentoring activity related to the company which brings the board member closer to certain senior leadership team members, executive leadership team members and also the CEO himself.

Having an industry veteran, management guru or leadership philosopher as a coach or mentor would also be helpful for the first-time CEOs and entrepreneur CEOs, even those CEOs who are moving into taking up hitherto unseen challenges who are expect to take complex and painful decisions would be benefited by having a mentor or a coach.

Expert coaches help leaders overcome their frailties if any, they resolve the conflicts that are inevitable and explore the latent strengths for the common good balancing professional and personal life and harmonizing business and social responsibilities, are two other powerful ways to reduce, if not eliminate, loneliness at the top.

So, given all this what is the success mantra for leaders to avoid the shadow of loneliness at the top. It is more than just developing a few antidotes to loneliness the best way is the durable success of the corporation or the entity the CEO heads. Nothing succeeds like success and success achieved in the right manner.

Articulating the pathway to success is also an effective way to inspire an interact with the larger organizations. Great leaders who drive successes are unlikely to be lonely as they share their successes with the teams and followers. Every success needs to be celebrated in an organizational context just as every failure needs to be analyzed with equanimity.

Great leaders also do successful things with, rather than without, the followers. They typically invite, motivate and inspire, rather than force and control the teams on the journey as a result they are unlikely to be lonely.

The fourth point is that the great leaders grow the businesses continuously with their team members ensuring that there is always room at the top for capable and successful potential leaders. Great leaders also do not let success become the barrier between them and the broader organization.

Success does not mean having a bigger corner room and having a whole floor to oneself. Success means celebrating the success, learning the lessons of success and taking the

success with humility along with the leadership team members and also the broader organizational members.

Great leaders are always humble and curious and continuously find ways and means to stay connected and to inspire as well as get inspired by the rest of the organization. What have we done well what could we have done better these are always the questions which the CEO must introspectively question for himself and also pose before the rest of the organization.

And, finally, this is the most difficult part great leaders display focus and courage unequivocally and take gutsy but calculated risk for their organizations and own up for the executing teams. They do this while ensuring high level of competency and commitment in the organization. This is the success mantra for great leaders who refuse to be cowed down by the syndrome of loneliness at the top.

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While whatever we have discussed are the causes for loneliness and potential measures for mitigating loneliness, I would like to now propose a novel and creative approach to reinforce leadership at the top-most level while also driving away leadership loneliness at the top I call this leadership twinning mantra.

Despite all the organizational role structuring and process refinements the role of leaders tends to be highly singular and centralized, but it calls for different types of skill sets all packed in one single role.

Neither a team of different leadership specialties coming together nor having supervisory leaders is the best solution for achieving the best leadership quotient from the CEO and his leadership team. The concept of shared leadership model proposed by me in this part of the lecture envisages that for each apex leadership role, all responsibilities and accountabilities shall be co shared co owned and co delivered equally by two leaders to accomplish the best deployment.

One approach could be to have two leaders with complementary skill sets in the twinned model, while the other could be to have predominantly left-brained and right-brained leaders fulfill each twin-leader role. Leadership twinning is a concept based on brain neuroscience that is scientifically validated and practically supported. Let us discuss this little more.

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If you look at leadership over time, you will find that the functions become departments, departments become divisions, divisions become businesses in a company. Similarly, singular performers become directed performers they become joint performance. And finally, they become accountable performers as they grow up in career and in organizational life.

There would be departmental execution, they would be interdepartmental collaboration, there would be checks and balances within departments and there would be interdepartmental checks and balances too. As the scale, scope and complexity of organizations increases all of these things become necessary.

To avoid delay in recognition of failures, organizations are layered vertically and horizontally with these kinds of departmental structures, process structures and execution methodologies. They collaborate, but all the same they also question each other while forming this value chain of the company. This is how the leadership works in a large organization.

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And, the jigsaw puzzle of trust and verify is reflected in several organizational structures. These operate all the time as regular business process. Some of these are summarized with evolution of the system below.

Those who are working in organizations will easily relate themselves to these kinds of trust and verify mechanisms within quotes production produces, but production planning counts while quality verifies. Production cannot self-certify that this is my production.

Accounting records the transactions particularly the financial transactions and finance tallies and consolidates. Departments and people transact, but internal audits check the veracity and integrity of all this processes. The above has been the traditional structure. It

has not however, stopped leadership missteps, business failures and occasional malfeasance.

Investors and regulators became more concerned therefore, and new departments began to be established. Ethics, compliance, risk management, disaster recovery, business continuity, forensic and so on. These departments can multiply as well as with time. There is another dimension, too. In the early days, all departments used to be consolidated into just two broad divisions technical and commercial. Over time not merely due to the increasing scale, but also to avoid departmental cartelization, every department almost started getting a C-suite officer.

Earlier a CEO would have only a chief technical officer and a chief commercial officer reporting to him as members of the SLT. Today, every function is represented in the SLT, from ethics and compliance to R&D to operations, marketing – you name the function you will find that the SLT of any evolved corporation has such representations.

Despite all the above looking at the broad range of business failures one would wonder if the management processes as they evolved provide an infallible solution which is a question that troubles us.

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So, how do we define responsibility and accountability? These are all based on the reality that each leader has the singular responsibility of running the organizations affairs

in an optimal manner. That is what the leadership is all about. Leadership is trusting and becoming trustworthy.

So, the multiple qualities attributes processes and models of leadership including succession planning are the enablers and filters for the right leader with the right competencies to occupy the right role. Then we have these leadership philosophies which I have been discussing over the last few lectures.

And these philosophies help the leaders avoid the pitfalls and all of them have a common thread. These underline the enormous responsibility and accountability that dwells on the leader to discharge his or her singular role in an exemplary and inspiring manner. So, we have to take a contrarian view.

If all this has been built into leadership, are we expecting far too much from a singular leader, is there any way in which we can try out certain innovative solutions and that is the shared leadership approach that I am proposing in this part of the lecture. To strengthen the leadership competencies.

And utilize them better to counter the leadership pitfalls and even avoid them, leadership twinning could be the right formula. The shared or joint leadership model at the apex level may not be relevant or applicable in all situations – nevertheless, it has many merits that support a wider deployment in organizations.

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Let us look at how the leadership responsibilities are currently organized in various companies. The higher the level we are looking at and the greater the scale and scope of an organization the positions proliferate. We could have a chairman and MD and CEO there could be an MD and a CEO, there could be a CEO and a COO, there could be an MD and JMD. Therefore, there are at least four categorizations and four combinations that are feasible as twinned responsibilities on the phase of it.

However, the roles are different you cannot say that the chairman and the MD will share responsibilities or will act on one single role as twinned leader mechanism. It is not possible, because the role of the chairman is to ensure superintendence over the functioning of the company.

And, to ensure guidance on vision strategy and to provide appropriate inputs for good corporate governance, good environmental empathy, even good social responsibility that is the role of the chairman of the board whereas, the MD is charged with the strategic and operational management of the company. You cannot say that the chairman and MD should share the corporate governance role or the strategic and operational management role together that is not possible and nor is it desirable.

Similarly, if you want to look at MD and CEO together, they are expected to operate under the superintendence and guidance of a board of directors with diversity of experience. They need to perform two different roles MD and CEO. CEO could be more operational execution oriented person and managing director would assume part of the CEO responsibility and part of the board responsibility. The board itself gets divided into independent that is non-whole time directors.

And non-independent whole time directors with different roles. Non-whole time directors can be non-independent too if they assume a specific responsibility in a company and independence of directors is related to material pecuniary relationship with the company of a director over a sufficiently long period of time.

In addition to all of these positions, we have the position of the chief financial officer who is expected to report to the CEO of the company and also to the board of the company. An audit committee of select directors of the board acts as an independent reviewer of accounts, interacting with external and internal auditors.

And there exist other board committees for investments, risk, compliance, remuneration and so on. So, implicit on all this is bifurcation trifurcation and further division of the overall responsibilities of governing the company in such a manner that there are proper devolvement's, proper devolutions, but at the same time proper trust and verify mechanisms. These are not the same as having two types of capabilities looking at one singular role.

And, my mantra is that there could be two types of leadership capabilities working for one single role because that single role of the CEO or this CXO has so many dimensions that it is becoming impossible for one single leader to address them adequately and with full capability. And, that failure to address is causing loneliness on the part of such stressed individual and the way to relieve that stress is to make 2 people share co-work, co-own such responsibilities.

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Let us also look at what the audit committees can do and cannot do. The audit committee certainly is the ultimate stop for the whistle blowing mechanisms in the company and also works as an ombudsman of sorts. There are many further nuances both from regulatory and company perspectives which are expected to support the several divisions and superintendence mechanisms. However, all these mechanisms expect remediation to be carried out only by the CEO.

And the other C-suite officers who alone have the day to day knowledge and execution capability. So, you may have a huge superintending board and several committees, but the remediation has to be carried out only by the CEO. So, all the stress of correcting the matters still falls on the singular person, the CEO and if the CEO has certain functions to be remediation that falls on the C-suite officer responsible for that function.

Therefore, we need to look at the position of the CEO the CFO and the CXO and see how those stress levels. Those inadequacies to handle the 360 degree requirements of skills and capabilities could be handled. In battles between the heads of production and purchase, production and sales finance and all other departments only those respective departments have the responsibility to improve implement corrective processes. Again, the same issue even as you go down under the hierarchy.

The above leads us to wonder if different functions, departments, are responsibilities that are headed individually constitute the solution or they actually causing the problem, is there something else that could be the problem and therefore, is there something else that could offer a solution.

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The root cause according to me for a firm's bad performance is usually bad decision or bad execution or both without addressing the root cause for bad performance, mere structural redefinition would not help. Better process do help to an extent. But essentially leaders and individuals need to be better at decision making and execution.

Leaders despite their skills, do make bad decisions or do turn bad at execution or be bad at both – simply because leaders are also human. Let us look at the situation where for the purpose of discussion the entire shop floor needs to be digitalized. Now, that responsibility vests with either the chief digital officer or with the chief operating officer or the chief manufacturing officer, depending upon how the CEO decides.

But, if you really think about this kind of major transformation neither of the two leaders can accomplish this completely. Just because a leader is handling the IC engine power pack for an automobile, we cannot expect him to do the automotive electric power pack. But, at the same time somebody who is working in the battery industry cannot be expected to provide a solution to the vehicle engineering related to the battery. So, it requires more than the skills that are currently available in leaders to make the transformation happen.

We may aim to achieve precise and clinical leadership through various processes and metrics of leadership and leadership development. However, leaders as humans are also subject to pressures as well as biases both internal and external.

This is the reality that the leaders face while outwardly they are praised for their competencies and they themselves express their confidence in handling new challenges, the fact also is that the canvas of transformation is so huge these days and would be even more intense in the future days, that it would be impossible for the leader who moves up in the normal way to handle all these stresses and strains of transformation.

Being confident and objective which should address the issues of pressure and bias respectively is the art of leadership. It is humanly impossible to be perfect and virtuous at all the times and in all cases.

This is the limitation which leaders must realize and organizations also must realize. It is therefore, not uncommon to see even seasoned leaders wilt under pressures of the street or be mesmerized by their successes and make mistakes. So, this fallibility of leadership in these times of massive transformation must be recognized and must be addressed and that must be addressed through both competency factors as well as through structural factors.
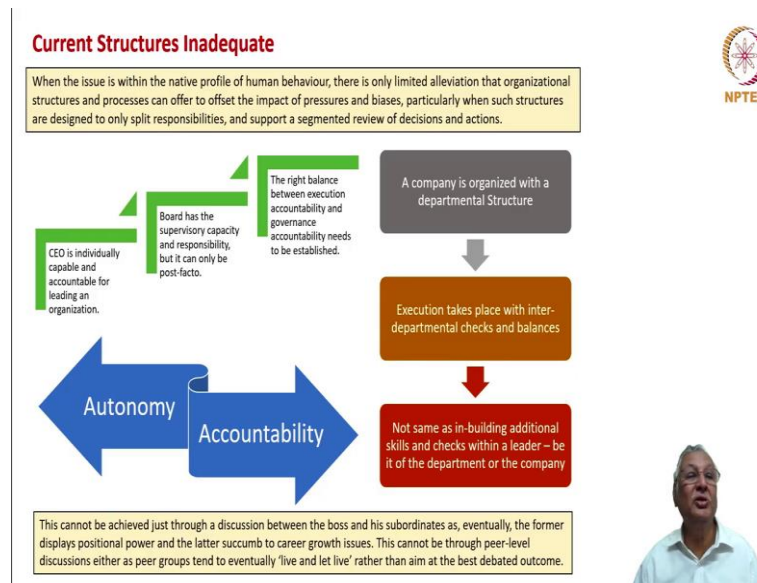
I would say that the current structures are inadequate because they are not being proactive. When the issue is within the native profile of human behaviour, there is only limited alleviation that organizational structures and processes can offer to offset the impact of pressures and biases, particularly when such structures are designed to only split responsibilities, and support a segmented review of decisions and actions. We have seen that actually there has been greater split over times rather than convergence.

The convergence if at all is taking place only at the CEO level and in some cases where it is a conglomerate at the CXO level, but if at all there is only a split of responsibilities that has been happening even at the senior levels and at the same time each function, each business and each company is facing huge challenges of transformation which requires completely different way of doing things. So, when you look at the CEO board functioning.

CEO is individually capable and accountable for leading an organization he has the capability and he needs the autonomy and the space. Board has the supervisory capacity and responsibility, but it can only do it post facto at best every quarter the board cannot sit on a day to day basis to review the performance of the CEO.

Therefore, we need the right balance between execution accountability and governance accountability and this autonomy-accountability balance can come up in a very serious

manner when the companies are also facing the challenges of inadequate capabilities and unmanageable transformation.

When a company is organized with a departmental structure, execution takes place with interdepartmental checks and balances, but that is not the same as in building additional skills and checks within a leader be it of the department or the company. That is, if a production division or a production leader is undertaking the production activity if the capability to build quality, check quality and certify quality is also built into that leader as a skill, as a capability, as a mindset, then the leader would be in a position to handle the issue of quality production.

If the leader is not able to handle that together then two departments have to co-existent possibly trust and verify or have a kind of confrontationist approach. So, this kind of change we require in the organization cannot just be achieved through a discussion between the boss and this subordinates as eventually the former always displays the positional power and the latter would succumb to career growth issues.

This cannot be also through peer level discussions either as peer groups tend to be eventually live and let live rather than aim at the best debated outcome. So, there are inadequacies in the current structures and we have been trying to address the inadequacies by creating more structures, more roles and more trust and verify mechanisms, instead of trying to make the roles more fulsome and the leaders more capable to handle those expanded and transformative roles.
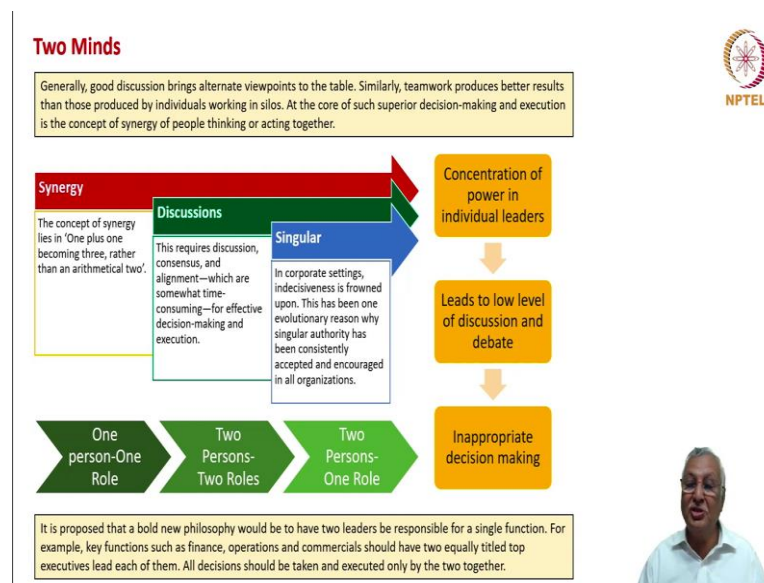
So, the mantra says 2 minds are better than one, it is one of the very common colloquial usage of two minds syndrome, but it has got lot of substance. Generally, good discussion brings alternative viewpoints to the table. Similarly, teamwork produces better results than those produced by individuals working in silos. At the core of such superior decision making and execution is the concept of synergy of people thinking and acting together.

What is the concept of synergy? 1 plus 1 is 2, but 1 plus 1 under the concept of synergy could become 3 and it is no more an arithmetically equation. Discussions, consensus, alignment which are time consuming help effective decision making and execution which is the reason why the Japanese way of doing things even though seeming to take lot of time, ultimately ends up being effective.

And, in corporate settings, indecisiveness is frowned upon this has been the one single reason for encouraging singular authority in organizations. Looking smart, looking decisive, looking fast, looking kind of aggressive is considered a great quality to have in organizations that has actually perpetuated a system of singular authority and then we are trying to correct that inadequacy of singular authority through the trust and verify mechanisms.

So, we have a situation where we have 1 person 1 role and that role itself has been expanding because of the transformations companies and industries are undergoing. Why

not we have 2 persons, 2 roles was the common response to that. That is, you split the role into 2 and have 2 persons, but that does not solve the problem because each role again is becoming more expansive.

The solution I would propose is that 2 persons should handle one role. It is not dividing the role into two parts and 1 person being responsible for that. Every single activity every single thought will be handle by 2 persons and that will avoid the concentration of power in individual leaders, it will also release the leaders from the feeling of inadequacy irrespective of this skills they do not have.

What in current organizations leads to low level of discussion and debate and therefore, inappropriate decision making would be reversed because there is a greater thought process and action capability that is being made available for a single role. It is proposed that a bold new philosophy would be to have 2 leaders be responsible for a single function.

For example, key functions such as finance operations and commercials should have 2 equally titled top executives lead each of the functions, all decisions would be taken and executed only by the 2 together.

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Two-Mind Superiority

The rationale for two minds taking one decision as well as supervising one execution is clear—two minds are better than one, especially when the function is too complex to decipher, or when multiple solutions require multiple viewpoints.

Having two equally endowed executives to share everything enables each of them to overcome their pressures and biases through the critical thinking of the other.

Having another powerful co-owner for decision-making and execution enables the two-member team to take bold decisions that each, individually, would probably not take.

There are, of course, risks that the two leaders could form a mini-cartel rather than a critically thinking team.

As long as this two-member team concept is not limited to just one function but covers a few other important functions, besides the CEO role itself, the risks of such collusion would be low.

There would be higher costs associated with the concept but can be more than adequately compensated with greater infallibility and greater value building that such pooling of strengths provides to the organization.

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The 2-mind superiority works like this the rationale for 2 minds taking one decision as well as supervising one execution is clear – 2 minds are better than one, especially when

the function is too complex to decipher, or when multiple solutions require multiple viewpoints. So, in the context of a completely digitized workshop, you need a digital officer and a manufacturing officer work together for the digital workshop.

Because the workshop has become one it is not a workshop of machines managed through IT and software. No, it is a digital workshop. Therefore, you need one officer, but that one officer's role has to be met by 2 officers – one manufacturing officer and one digital officer who believe that they all need to work together, they both need to work together on all the issues relating into the digital workshop.

Having two equally endowed executives to share everything enables each of them to overcome their pressures and biases through the critical thinking of the other. Having another powerful co-owner for decision making and execution enables the 2-member team to take bold decisions that each, individually, would probably not take.

There are, of course, risks that the 2 leaders could form a mini-cartel rather than a critically thinking team. Obviously, such a trend has to be nipped in the bud. As long as this 2-member team concept is not limited to just one function, but covers a few other important functions besides the CEO role itself, the risks of such collusion would be low.

There would be higher cost associate with the concept, but can be more than adequately compensated with greater infallibility and greater value building that such pooling of strengths provides to the organization.

So, what kind of shared leadership model we could have? Left and right parts of the brain, could they work together? The shared leadership model proposes that every critical apex leadership role, especially the CEO role, should have two leaders part taking in every aspect of the role.

A practical approach is demonstrated below. The approach the shared leader deployment should be to select leaders based on domain skills that complement each other's. Suppose, you are looking at a commercial function –to head the commercial function, one could be a sales oriented leader, another a marketing oriented leader. To head a finance function – one leader could be a growth oriented fund raiser and another a precision oriented cost accountant.

To head the operations function – one could be a production expert or supply chain expert and the other a quality expert. We also looked at the case of the digital workshop, where one could be an operations expert, another could be a digital expert. And finally, when it comes to the corporate CEO – to head the overall company one could be conceptual and the other analytical or one could be a thinker and the other a doer.

The logic is that, by putting together these skills at the leadership level. And getting them to co-share, co-own and co-deliver all responsibilities and accountabilities, the firm gets the best domain leadership capability. There is much to support such a skill based joint approach.

So, what is the neuroscience that supports this? Ever since Roger Sperry, the 1981 Nobel Laureate, brought out the concept of the neuroscience, a lot of research has focused on lateralization of brain through left-brain and right-brain functionalities. Right-brained individuals are expected to be more intuitive, thoughtful and subjective; while left-brain ones are expected to be more logical, analytical and objective.

It is not that the two sides of the brain are completely compartmentalized – the brain does work holistically with the various parts of the brain including the left and right conversing through the corpus callosum, which joins them.

The point that is being made here is that the twin-leader approach has enormous potential to bring together not only complimentary domain skills, but also bring forward a winning fusion of intuitive and logical, reflective and executional and subjective and objective skills, which are all very essential to accomplish top-class leadership. If organizations look beyond the immediate costs of the shared leadership approach utilizing 2 individuals of complimentary competencies to jointly perform the same role, the value that could accrue would be immense.

It is a philosophical take on how to manage companies in the age of transformation.
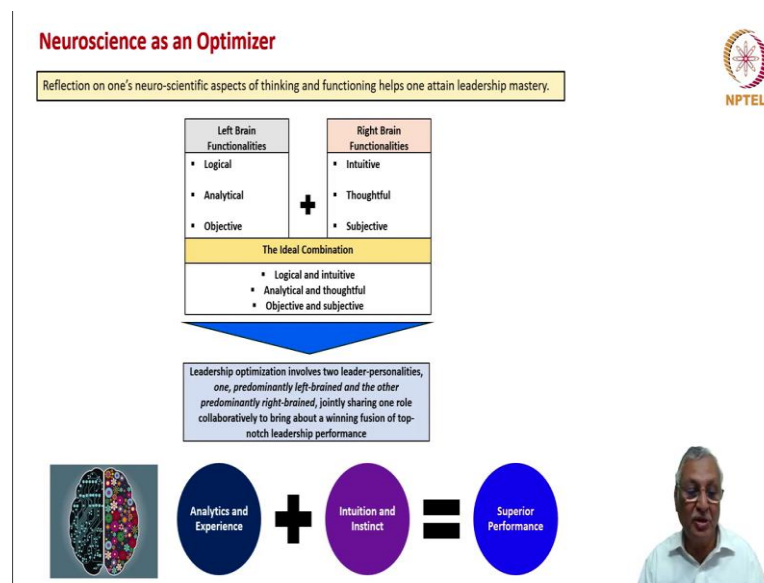
Neuroscience is also an optimizer. The reflection on one's neuro-scientific aspects of thinking and functioning helps one attain leadership mastery. What are my left brain functionalities? Logical, analytical, objective and, my right brain functionalities – intuitive, thoughtful, subjective. The ideal combination, I should be logical and intuitive, analytical and thoughtful, objective and subjective.

The leadership optimization if it happens in just one individual is great. It involves 2 leader personalities one predominantly left brained and the other predominantly right brained, jointly sharing one role collaboratively to bring about a winning fusion of top notch leadership performance.

Because it is so difficult to achieve all of that in one leader particularly when functions, businesses and industries are undergoing huge transformation. It behoves us to explore the other alternative of having leadership twinning. So, one brings analytics and experience, one brings intuition an instinct.

And together they provide superior performance to the company. And, that is the neuroscience optimization that could trigger enhanced performance of leaders, reduce the stress and strain of leadership, reduce the loneliness syndrome and lead to better performance of leaders as well as their firms.

This is indeed a kind of Utopian idea, but could be workable, Infosys came very close to implementing this kind of philosophy. Start-ups come close to establishing this kind of philosophy. Start-ups are established by a few co-founders with complementary skills. When the co-founders lead the start-up at inception as well as in growth phase staying together, with a prior understanding to pass the baton, the leaders will be able to avoid the typical loneliness blues. The example set by Infosys is worthy of emulation.

We had Nandan Nilekani co-founder and the second CEO, S. Gopalakrishanan co-founder and the third CEO, S. D. Shibulal co-founder and the fourth CEO, supplementing the skill sets and also stepping in into the shoes of N. R. Narayana Murthy the chief co-founder and the first CEO.

We also had other co-founders K. Dinesh the first director, N. S Raghavan another co-founder and the first director, Ashok Arora co-founder in the first director, who provided their sage counsel during the formative and early growth years. The togetherness of the co founders ensured that the start-up spirit of co-sharing and co-owning strengthened the leadership team even as the company grew phenomenally and leadership transitions became inevitable.

Even this is not the same as leadership twining, it was leadership togetherness. It was a bond that was there from the beginning of the company and continued till each and all of

them left their executive positions and moved on to other domains or other avocations of engagement.

But, leadership twinning takes this concept even higher and further saying that two of such leaders should work together on a single role and bring more value to that role and provide more peace and stability to the organization, while driving growth and value creation. That is the point that is being made here.

Thank you. We will meet again in the next lecture.