Paper

Analysis of the leadership qualities in Sun Tzu’s the Art of War

# The Art of War

Sun Tzu’s Art of War primarily deals with the tactics of winning battles. Based on methods of conflict analysis and minimizing operational efficiencies, the Art of War is a relevant methodology for the corporate and business sector too. It takes into account the analysis of conflict resolution methodologies, minimizing effort and maximizing the performing efficiency of armies. For him, the best winner is one who wins without fighting. In addition to writing about the war fighting strategies, Sun Tzu has put emphasis on leadership styles. Throughout his book, he has put a large emphasis on the leadership style. Contrary to the recent literature on leadership abilities, Sun Tzu described the qualities of a leader some 2500 years ago (Tzu, 2014). His leadership equation involves both the leader and his followers. For the reason of his large emphasis on leadership abilities, the Art of War can be referred to as the handbook for leadership (Tzu, 2014).

According to Sun Tzu, a leader has a vital role in deciding the fate of his team. The qualities of a leader decides what way the team would be taking in achieving the specific task. Contrary to this, if the leader is not sure about the tactics which are planned to employ, the team can surely meet the defeat (Chow Hoi Hee & Gurd, 2010). Such tactics of leadership displayed by Sun Tzu remains much relevant. In the modern-day, even the technologically advanced countries employ such tactics to make their mark in world affairs. This proves how leadership is a matter of intelligence and persuasion. Sun Tzu’s leadership qualities are however broader which includes traits such as humanness, trustworthiness, harshness and most importantly the courage (Chow Hoi Hee & Gurd, 2010). He also focuses on the strength of character, which he believes remains the main quality above all. Sun Tzu’s characterization of a leader must possess all such qualities to ensure an effective and inspiring leadership role.

A leader should have a dynamic character since he has to look after too many different affairs concerning strategy making (Chow Hoi Hee & Gurd, 2010). This is how leadership remains a fluid process and Sun Tzu has laid emphasis on different attributes, just to minimize friction between different stakeholders. Some of the following qualities, Sun Tzu believe are crucial in deciding about the leadership characterization.

# Intelligence

Intelligence along with competence is the primary aptitude, a leader must possess. His ability to manifest competence and to use his intelligence in the vital tasks at hand remains much important. The use of intelligence is adjudged when professional tasks are at hand. This could be achieved if the leader is technically proficient and professionally sound. Such abilities also help in gaining the faith of his followers and help in leading through example (Wee, 1994). They have to evolve themselves through constant learning and adequate knowledge, which as a result help them in dwelling in a different situation. The interesting thing in all this remains that relying alone on any ability is not workable. If the leader manifests a single ability and is not capable of dealing with situations through employing manifold abilities, his leadership authority could be questioned at any time (Wee, 1994). Therefore, in order to efficiently built and use his intelligence, a leader needs to communicate with his followers timely and effectively along with putting his thoughts frontward in a systematic manner.

# Ability to win without conflict

This is an undeniable fact that there are many resources at the disposal of a leader. He employee these resources time and again to encourage team building and ensure success. For a leader, Sun Tzu thinks that efficient use of resources remains a pressing task. A good leader will always keep a handful of resources with him to avoid disruption in any kind of situation (Wee, 1994). One of his theory dictates that a leader must have the ability to win without fighting. This is actually employing the least resources to achieve a big task. Although it appears problematic, a leader must have trained himself beforehand in displaying such tactics. He emphasis winning without fighting as he believes that not every battle requires employing military tactics or need a skilful approach to deal with. For such situations Sun Tzu said, “To fight and conquer in all your battles is not supreme excellence; supreme excellence consists of breaking the enemy’s resistance without fighting (Tzu, 2014)”.

# Knowledge of tactics and strategy

Although a leader remains at the helm of affairs in drawing, planning and executing strategy, at some points in making strategy, the followers make slight changes depending upon their individual roles. This is what should not be kept aside or different from the leader. The knowledge of tactics and strategy is the primary and foremost aspect that should always be in the notice of the leader (Van Creveld & Keegan, 2000). The knowledge of strategy and planning is not limited to military maneuvering or capabilities in hand, rather it broadens to the level including escalation, de-escalation and positioning of the forces. In such situations, the leader must employ a practical approach to ensure the safety and security of his forces. As minimum loss can ensure success and long-lasting triumph. The knowledge of tactics and strategy should be based on the proven abilities of the soldiers and how they have previously demonstrated these abilities. According to Sun Tzu, ‘the best strategy in this wake remains to resolve the situation by reducing the chances of conflict and without escalation (Van Creveld & Keegan, 2000)’.

# Trustworthiness and Loyalty

A leadership role for Sun Tzu is much broad and all-embracing. Under the command of a leader, there are numerous human and non-human factors. A good leader demonstrates the abilities to tactically deal with all these factors. The non- human or material factors remain under the control and authority of the leader (Smith, 2012). It remains of nil importance as to how these non- material factors are displayed and are used. However, a leader first needs to make sure that soldiers or employees under his command are trustworthy and loyal. If any time a leader observes that someone from them does not display such attributes, he should be made a lesson for others. Any kind of tactic, or otherwise the strategy is finally dependent on the manner how the workforce adjusts themselves with the final layoff plan. If anyone among the team adopts an individual approach that can threaten the broad plan, it can disrupt the team plan and can raise a question mark over the role of the leader (Smith, 2012).

# Humanness and Courage

It is not always essential that a leader in the military or in any organization should adopt a stringent approach for accomplishing the tasks, rather this could be achieved by following a lenient approach. Though Sun Tzu’s values and approaches are interpreted in a much stringent manner, his approaches toward gaining success are not based on the strict manifestation of strategies (Dimovski, Marič, Uhan, \DJurica, & Ferjan, 2012). In his book, at the various instance, he has taken into consideration some human aspects which he believes if ignored can arouse friction between the leader and his followers. He believes that since people under command can face unavoidable circumstances, therefore the leader should pay attention to their needs. Lastly, Sun Tzu considers courage as the apex of all leadership traits. He believed that if a leader comprehends to all the above-mentioned abilities but lack the courage, he can never be considered a good leader. Therefore, courage remains the greatest ability of a leader as it is displayed by practically manifesting the abilities (Dimovski et al., 2012).

# What a leader must avoid?

For Sun Tzu, excluding some essential requisites, there are some traits, which a leader should avoid in any circumstance. For example, recklessness and coward behavior. If the leader is reckless, there exist various chances that the leader might get killed from the circumstances, he paid a little heed toward. Similarly, if a leader is a coward and does not have the power to deal with the situation audaciously (Sloan, 2012). The situation can turn dramatic and might sweep out of his control. Worries and fears which turn a leader coward should be avoided, there should not be anything that can become a source for disrupting the leader from his mission. If any such unavoidable thing exists, the leader should keep it away from his close allies too. Similarly, a temperamental leader can be provoked easily (Sloan, 2012). Therefore, one who desires to become a leader must keep his emotions away from his followers so they cannot have the power to drive their leader. It can strikingly effect positive attitudes as well.

# Conclusion

Sun Tzu’s Art of War though timeworn but remains relevant to this day. The book is compiled in a sense which includes a practical approach along with the manifestation of abilities. Sun Tzu’s book does not incorporate a military approach, rather it includes the traits which could easily be applied in the corporate or commercial sector. A leader portrayed by Sun Tzu remains an ideal image of how a leader should be. Irrespective of the circumstances around, a leader should remain steadfast and open to adopting any kind of approach. The practical manifestation of qualities mentioned by Sun Tzu assures dynamism and vitality in being a leader.

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