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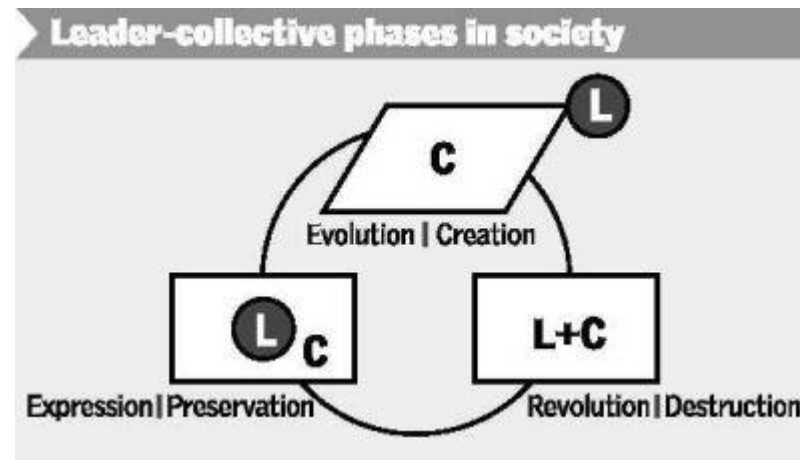
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The New Manager - Management

## Leadership phases in society

*Beyond personality-centric models of leadership.*



Mohit Kishore

Stagnation is the bane of any social order in that it disallows a full expression of society's potential.

Leadership is the lever through which society casts itself out of periods of stagnation towards periods of possibility.

There appear to be essentially three phases of leadership in society (or for that matter any institution or organisation). These three phases represent three states of being or collective will, and not necessarily a sequence.

Expression: Capturing the mood of the times

The first phase is the formation of a strong collective mood due to various circumstances.

This leads to the arrival of an individual who effectively expresses the current state of the collective

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consciousness, and is thus elevated to a leadership role. Political history is rife with examples of such leaders who brilliantly capture a prevailing mood to their own advantage. Such leaders may later be viewed harshly by history, but the fact remains that the collective will, at least temporarily, was in sync with the aspirations of these leaders. Thus in this first phase, the leader is very much a part of the collective, and a representative of its wishes. This phase may be termed as an `Expression Phase'.  
 Evolution: Arrival of a transformational leader

The second phase of leadership in society occurs with the arrival of a transformational leader. This leader's views may often not even match the will of the collective on a number of issues. He may craft a completely new agenda or vision for the future yet unforeseen.  
 Yet, the persuasiveness, and the moral character of such a leader may cause the collective to suspend its current way of looking at things in favour of a completely new future. So, in this second phase, the leader is almost outside the collective, and yet successfully charts a new path for it. This phase may be termed as an `Evolutionary Phase'.  
 Revolution: Collapse of old orders

The third phase of leadership is a complete erosion of boundaries between the leader and the collective. This tends to occur in certain mass movements where the objectives to be accomplished become so ingrained in the collective that the leader may just become a figurehead, while the collective marches on, often crafting strategies and tactics on the go. This phase is based on a sense of distributed ownership, and is also characterised by a breakdown of existing norms and institutions.  
 This phase may be called as a `Revolutionary Phase'.  
 The entire process may be quite long drawn, and when finally the goal is accomplished, society reverts to the first phase, wherein a leader is selected who will preserve and maintain the current will of the collective.  
 TRINITY

Interestingly, the three phases have a close relationship to the Indian idea of cycles of creation and destruction. The triumvirate of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva represent the tendencies to create, preserve and destroy at a cosmic level. Thus, the evolutionary phase of leadership represents a creative era in which society reinvents itself. The preservation phase represents an era when society maintains the status quo. The revolutionary phase represents a destructive period when all old ideals and institutions may be cast aside in favour of a desired future state, sometimes without even knowing the precise contours of the future state.  
 It is interesting to note that in the first two phases, leaders continue to operate within the boundaries of existing institutions, while in the third phase the desire for rapid change far exceeds the need to preserve and work with existing institutions. Also in the first phase, there is a fairly precise articulation of how the future looks, while in the last there is only an articulation of how the future must not look. In sum, viewing leadership through the model of these phases enables us to get beyond the current personality-centric or heroic definition of leadership towards a new definition that is based on the complex relationship between what society `needs' at a given point of time and how it chooses to accomplish the same through a tool called the leader.  
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