

Resilient Leadership – A Case Study of Sir Winston Churchill

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Abstract

Resilient leadership is the ability of a leader to see failures as temporary setbacks and recover quickly from those failures to bring organisations back to normal. Resilient leaders maintain a positive attitude and a strong sense of opportunity during periods of turbulence. The characteristics of a resilient leader include: having a vision, being self-conscious, being attentive, having courage, having a positive attitude, having motivation, having composure, having reasoning, having tenacity, and being able to collaborate. The present study focuses on how resilient leadership is paramount in these post-pandemic hard times in organisations across the globe. A majority of the organisations in the world were badly affected by COVID-19, except a few industries like pharmaceuticals, software and services, and fast moving consumer goods (FMCGs). This case study showcases the resilient leadership of Sir Winston Churchill during World War II against the tyrant, blood thirsty, warmonger Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Germany. This article analyses the attributes of Sir Winston Churchill as a resilient leader and why the same kind of vision, composure, and tenacity are required for business leadership, and leaders of the world, to overcome the unprecedented pandemic of monumental proportions, which posed the greatest challenge to mankind.

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of leadership behaviours or styles on organisational performance. Right from IOWA leadership studies that identified three styles of leadership, viz., Autocratic, Democratic, and Laissez-faire or Free-Rein, to the present resilient leadership style, different prominent leadership thinkers, researchers, and management gurus across the globe have come up with various leadership styles that best fit organisational effectiveness. In most of the studies, it was found that no single style or behaviour is sufficient or suitable for organisational success. Resilient leadership is just one leadership style that is most effective in turbulence situations where leaders have to bounce back quickly to the new normal situation with their abilities, and run organisations successfully against all odds. This paper aims to throw light on the importance of resilient leadership in the post-pandemic times in organisations across the world, where the organisations were severely affected by COVID-19, in terms of performance. The authors have taken the case study of Sir Winston Churchill as a resilient leader – how he has shown courage and responded quickly, and firmly resisted the invasion of Britain by German Nazi forces, and how he defeated Germany in World War II. The resilient leadership is not only effective in political systems, but in organisations as well. This article has been written to discuss the characteristics of a resilient leader and how resilient leadership is important in these hard times of the pandemic all over the world, to bring organisations back to normal functioning.

Introduction

Leadership is one of the areas on which continuous and rigorous research is being done over centuries, to explore and understand the importance, impact, and effectiveness

Human Resilience

Human resilience is a physical and psychological response against all odds during the course of life. Human resilience is the ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune

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or change. Resilience is the process of adapting oneself during adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or stress due to family and relationship problems, serious health issues, work pressure, and financial burdens.

Being resilient means bouncing back when we face failures. Overall, resilience gives us the power to overcome setbacks, so that we can live the life we have always imagined. Resilient people are aware of situations, their own emotional reactions and limitations, and the behaviour of those around them. To manage emotional feelings, it is essential to understand what is causing them and why. Being aware, resilient people can maintain, manage situations, and think of innovative ways to tackle problems.

Ten Characteristics of Resilience

- Having vision
- Being self-conscious
- Being attentive
- Having courage
- Having a positive attitude
- Having motivation
- Having composure
- Having reasoning
- Having tenacity
- Being able to collaborate

An Individual can Know Whether He/She is Resilient by Looking at the Following Traits

- You find yourself accountable for mistakes, rather than finding fault with others.
- You are the best judge of your own self.
- You are never ashamed of asking for help, if you really need it.
- You want to be yourself, and never compare yourself with others.
- You plan well, but you also know that not everything goes as per plan.
- You are better equipped to take care of yourself.

What is Resilient Leadership?

A resilient leader is a person who sees failures as temporary setbacks; they can recover from failures very quickly. They maintain a positive attitude and a strong sense of opportunity during periods of turbulence. When faced with ambiguity, a resilient leader finds ways to move forward and avoids getting stuck. Resilient leaders have the ability to sustain their energy level under pressure too; to cope with disruptive changes and adapt resilience is a crucial characteristic of high-performing leaders.

Brief Biography of Sir Winston Churchill

Sir Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill (30 November 1874 – 24 January 1965) was a British politician, army officer, and writer. He was Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from May 1940 to July 1945, when he led the country to victory in the Second World War, and again from October 1951 to April 1955. Apart from two years, between October 1922 and October 1924, Churchill was a Member of Parliament (MP) from January 1900 to September 1964, and represented a total of five constituencies. Ideologically an economic liberal and imperialist, he was for most of his career a member of the Conservative Party, as leader from October 1940 to April 1955. He was a member of the Liberal Party from May 1904 to March 1924. Winston Churchill became Britain's prime minister on 10 May 1940. It is for his leadership through the fraught years of 1940-1941, through Dunkirk, the Battle of Britain and the Blitz, that Churchill is best remembered. Crucially, he rallied the nation in defiance of Hitler.

As a Prime Minister, during most of World War II (1940-45), Winston Churchill rallied the British people and led the country from the brink of defeat to victory. He shaped the allied strategy in the war, and in the war's later stages, he alerted the West to the expansionist threat of the Soviet Union.

Winston Churchill – A Resilient Leader

Winston Churchill is quite eloquent in criticising Nazism and he was determined to stop Adolf Hitler's war juggernaut. There was no talk of surrender. He delivered strong speeches and visited areas that had been bombed

by the Germans in the hope of raising the morale of the British. Many people believed that Churchill was a key factor in the British victory. He had many aforementioned characteristics of a resilient leader, which are discussed below.

Vision

Churchill was a visionary; he envisioned the world, engulfed in a dangerous conflict, with a polarised Europe engaged in a fight for its life against an aggressive, encroaching, marauding German military. In his role as Prime Minister, Churchill showcased the British fighting spirit, and under his leadership, the country survived heavy and relentless bombardment from the German Air Force Luftwaffe, the extended duration of two deadly World Wars, and the threat of invasion from the Nazi regime.

He created a vision and a will to “Keep Calm and Carry on”, and his remarkable resolve influenced the British people to follow his example, despite the potential perils. During his 60-year prominence in British politics, Churchill’s style of leadership consisted of the “Great Man” trait theory and the visionary style of the transformational theory. His writings and oratory contributed to his power to mobilise British forces and inspire the world as well.

Self-Conscious

Sir Churchill had the ability to stick to his gut instinct and step up to make decisions, rather than wait for others to take charge, which is a trait of a successful leader. After the defeat of France, Churchill was quite aware of the fact that the German Nazi’s next target undoubtedly would be Britain, and history is testimony to it.

Attentive

From 27th May to 4th June, 1940, about 2,26,000 British and 1,10,000 French troops were rescued, codenamed Operation Dynamo, from the channel port of Dunkirk, Northern France, by a fleet ranging from small civilian boats to Navy ships. The Dunkirk evacuation, also known as the Miracle of Dunkirk, is an example of how caring, considerate, and tactical Winston Churchill was.

Courageous

During the colonial war in South Africa, Churchill was assigned to report on the war for the *Morning Post*. He was famously captured only two weeks later by the Boers, when the armored train on which he was travelling in Boer-occupied territory was ambushed and derailed. The following month, having spent his 25th birthday imprisoned, Churchill made a dramatic escape by climbing over a wall, riding a freight train, hiding in a coal mine, and eventually boarding a train into Portuguese East Africa.

Positive Attitude

Churchill’s vociferous speeches and broadcasts raised the morale of the British people while sending a strong message of defiance to Germany and a call for support to the United States. Churchill’s policy was ‘victory at all costs’ through ‘blood, toil, tears and sweat’. At the age of 65, in 1940, Churchill was aggressive and offensive to the enemy, and worked tirelessly to forge and maintain the Grand Alliance against Nazi Germany. V for victory salute – he came to personify the British war effort.

Motivation

During the winter, German air raids became heavier, intensive, and relentless. However, the repeated heavy raids failed to crush the morale of the British people. The ‘Blitz’ spirit kept them going. And Churchill played his part in keeping up morale. He made sure he was frequently in the public eye, constantly travelling around the country, visiting ammunition factories, shipyards, and the troops, making sure their morale was high and intact.

He was famous for his inspiring speeches, and for his refusal to give in, even when things were going badly. Some of the best inspiring quotations of Churchill are:

- “Success is not final, failure is not fatal; it is the courage to continue that counts.”
- “You have enemies? Good. That means you’ve stood up for something, sometime in your life.”
- “If you are going through hell, keep going.”
- “Success is stumbling from failure to failure with no loss of enthusiasm.”

- “To improve is to change; to be perfect is to change often.”
- “It is not enough that we do our best; sometimes we must do what is required.”
- Through his extraordinary speeches and inspiring words, he could ignite and motivate his people to stand firm to stop Adolf Hitler invading Britain and to win World War II.

Composure

Winston Churchill said, *“Laugh a little, and teach your men to laugh ... If you can’t smile, grin. If you can’t grin, keep out of the way till you can”*, while talking to his officers in the trenches in France in 1916.

Winston Churchill epitomised the words “Keep Calm and Carry on”, and these words stimulated the indomitable resilience of the British people in keeping Nazi Germany at bay. His life, as we have seen, was pummeled by heavy waves of adversity that could have capsized him many times, physically and mentally, but he stayed on beam and sailed ahead.

Reasoning

On 18 June 1944, Churchill warned the British people that the ‘battle of France’ was over and the ‘battle of Britain’ was about to begin. His words were proved right. As early summer gave way to July and August, the threat of invasion loomed over Britain.

Tenacity

During the war, Churchill had a habit of placing himself in danger by walking outdoors during air raids on London. His bodyguard, Walter Thompson, said that Churchill “would never leave Downing Street until the guns started up, then he would walk through the barrages around St. James’s Park to his office”. When Thompson complained that Churchill was placing himself at risk, Churchill replied that he would not die because he had “important work to do”.

Churchill’s world seemed to have ended when his Conservative Party was voted out of office. Once again,

he refused to accept defeat, re-launching himself on the international stage with a powerful warning about the Soviet ‘Iron Curtain’ that the Russians were drawing down across Europe. He also made repeated appeals for closer Anglo-American unity and greater European integration, themes which continue to dominate British foreign policy. He returned as a peacetime Prime Minister in 1951.

Collaboration

When Hitler launched his sudden attack on the Soviet Union, Churchill’s response was swift and unequivocal. In a broadcast on June 22, 1941, sticking to his earlier criticisms of Communism, he insisted that “the Russian danger...is our danger” and pledged aid to the Russian people. Henceforth, it was his policy to construct a “grand alliance”, incorporating the Soviet Union and the United States. However, it took until May 1942 to negotiate a 20-year Anglo-Soviet pact of mutual assistance.

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor (December 7, 1941) altered, in Churchill’s eyes, the whole prospect of the war. He went at once to Washington, D.C., and with Roosevelt, hammered out a set of Anglo-American accords: the pooling of both countries’ military and economic resources under combined boards and a combined chiefs of staff; the establishment of unity of command in all theatres of war; and agreement on the basic strategy that the defeat of Germany should have priority over the defeat of Japan.

Without any exaggeration, we say that Winston Churchill was the principal architect of the grand alliance, and safeguarding it was his primary concern the next three-and-a-half years.

Conclusion

Over centuries, many studies on leadership have proved that no single leadership behaviour or leadership style will be suitable for all the times; different behaviours or styles would be required to manage the organisations efficiently and effectively. From previous studies, it can be understood that situations demand certain leadership behaviours, to be successful. Resilient leadership is one such style which is apt for the present pandemic situation, to bring the organisations back on track, in spite of

passing through hard times. From the case of Sir Winston Churchill, it can be inferred that resilient leadership is very much needed in turbulent times, to fight against all odds. This could be applicable even to business organisations that are facing enormous troubles during the COVID-19 pandemic situation.

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