

Jagadguru Adi Shankaracharya – A Source of Learning Leadership Traits and Skills for Sustainable Management Practices

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Abstract

During the 8th century when a chaotic situation prevailed in the society, the very subsistence of the Hindu religion, culture and traditions were in peril and more proximate to vanish. At that time a great logician, a profound stalwart named Shankar, who left the world at an early age of 32, with an accolade of “*Bhagwadpad Jagadguru Adi Shankaracharya*” and referred as Adi Shankara or Shankaracharya brought a radical transmutation in the society. This paper attempts to study and develop an insight from the life, events, teachings, lineage and practices of “Jagadguru Shankaracharya” and drawing out the leadership traits, style and skills for sustainable management practices which is the need of an hour.

Introduction

During the 8th century when a chaotic situation prevailed in the society, the very subsistence of the Hindu religion, culture and traditions were in peril and more proximate to vanish. At that time a great logician, a profound stalwart named Shankar, who left the world at an early age of 32, with an accolade of “*Bhagwadpad Jagadguru Adi Shankaracharya*” and referred as Adi Shankara or Shankaracharya brought a radical transmutation in the society. Adi Shankaracharya re-established the “*Sanatan Dharam*” (Immortal Religion) by establishing five “*peeths*” / “*maths*” – monasteries with an affluent and most venerated lineage of “*Jagadguru Shankaracharya*”. The lineage is still in existence while many countries, culture and organisation disappeared. Adi Shankaracharya was the profounder of “*Advaita Philosophy*” and much advanced level spiritual and *Tantra* practices.

Till date all the scholars of Sanskrit language, Indian history, culture and ethos are of prevalent

opinion that Hindu religion would not have been in subsistence if “*Jagadguru Adi Shankaracharya*” would not have lived / taken birth. He has been prominent as an incarnation of Lord Shiva. We find lots of antediluvian scriptures, empirical as well as literally evidences to above said.

Religion is secondary but, the way “*Jagadguru Shankaracharya*” lived his short span of life and contributed to our rich Indian heritage, philosophy and to the vibrant path of “*Sansyas*” (renunciation), the same could be the best source of inspiration and a deep route to the ancient legacy which is still germane and contemporary as the Ultimate Truth which is beyond the shortcomings of transitory things. Religion, philosophy, science and management cannot be segregated and must be harmonized and synchronized so as to live, feel and practice a balanced and high profile life and prove to be a responsible member of the society, which in turn is a prerequisite for a successful and great leader.

The very rational behind the topic is to study and develop an insight from the life, events, teachings,

lineage and practices of “*Jagadguru Shankaracharya*” and drawing out the leadership traits, style and skills for sustainable management practices which is the need of an hour.

Review of Literature

Adi Shankara was not only a man of wisdom (*tattva jnani*), but was also a great expert in managing worldly affairs. His special qualities of patience, getting along amicably with one and all, amicable resolution of conflicts and fortitude in action and always with fortitude pinpoint him as a brilliant leader among men (Bharati Tirtha, 2011) Further; a great thinker, one of the noblest of Advaitaik philosophers, an inspired champion of Hinduism and one of the most vigorous missionaries in our country. He proved himself to be a great organiser, a far sighted diplomat, a courageous hero, a tireless servant of the country, selfless and unassuming who strode up and down the length and breadth of the country serving his motherland and teaching his country-men to live up to the dignity and glory of Bharat. In his noble quest, he believed that his mission can neither be accomplished by an individual nor sustained without institutions of great discipline and perfect organisation. Thus, he established matha-s (monasteries), opened temples, organised halls of education and even prescribed certain ecclesiastical codes (Chinmayananda, 1998).

Adi Shankara's leadership style was unique and it is still relevant in the modern context. In the scriptures the word Acharya is used instead of *Shikshak*. Acharya is one who sets an example himself, one who practices what he preaches and this was his way of teaching (Someswarananda, 2012).

According to Ramachandran (2011), Adi Shankara was not only a great thinker and the noblest of Advaitaic philosophers, but one of the most

rigorous missionary leaders in our country (Ramachandran, 2011).

Adi Shankara's management abilities, dedication to duty, respect for learning, an analytical mind, faith in one's own self and in the Supreme, unswerving sense of purpose and his vision finds relevance even in our times, even after 1,200 years and the missionaries he set in his lifetime continue to be the beacon lights of our society (Bharati Tirtha, 2011).

Krishnamurthy (2011) says that Adi Shankara's life and teachings are indeed a source of inspiration to the modern business leader. They impel him to be a better thinker and organiser, to be simple, yet profound, to be task oriented, but humane, to lead and to be led, to be intuitive and yet disciplined. In short, even a brief remembrance of Adi Shankara's life and teachings makes us conscious of the great force of divinity working in us in every moment of life.

Adi Shankara's values and managerial style have great relevance in a shrinking world of interdependence between people, amongst themselves and with the cosmic environment (Athreya, 2011).

Pathak (2016) posits that Adi Shanka has been one of the most important philosophers and religious leaders in Indian history and the Hindu Sanatan religion; and is widely revered as a religious reformer and the formulator and codifier of the Advaitaa Vedanta philosophy that is non-dualistic system based upon the Upanishads.

According to Kumar (2005), another significant contribution of him that enriched the spiritual life of common man was the establishment of a pilgrimage site and seat of learning in each of the four directions (chaar-dham). Such a network both celebrates and solidifies regional identities and

without journeying to these four spots, no Hindu's sacred itinerary is deemed complete. The four are:
a) Badarinath in the north

b) Puri in the east
c) Rameshvaram in the south and
d) Dwarka in the west.

Table 1: Acharyas, Math and Vedas Allocation

Sr. No.	Direction	Math / Peeth	Acharya	Ved
1.	North	Jyoteer Math	Totakacharya	Atharved
2.	South	Sringeri Math	Sureshwaracharya	Yajurved
3.	East	Govardhan Math	Padmapadacharya	Rigved
4.	West	Sharda Math	Hastamalakacharya	Samved

These are known as the *amnaya mathas*, and they continue to function today. Their heads have also come to be known as Shankaracharyas, in honor of their founder, and revered as Jagadgurus, or teachers of the world. Adi Shankara also organized the community of *ekadandi* monks into the *sampradaya* of *dasanami sanyasins*, and affiliated them with the four mathas that he established (www.advaitaa-vedanta.org, 1999).

The main goal for establishing peethas / mathas was to establish a regulatory system and keep “knowledge in circulation”.

Adi Shankara made it mandatory that the Namboodiris from Kerala should perform *puja* at Badri, while the Brahmins from Karnataka were assigned for Nepal. Likewise he ordained Maharashtra Brahmins to do *pujas* at Ramesvaram. This shows that a broad mind he had when it came to leadership in matters of national interest (Bharati Tirtha, 2011)

Adi Shankaracharya established "Akhadas" and are known as "*Dasnami*" also. Mainly there are two streams / branches of "Akhadas" one Shaiv and second Vishnu but, main goal of "Akhadas" are to protect the Sanatan Dharma. For these two branches there are mainly eight divisions and for these eight divisions there are total fifty two sub divisions which take care of the ultimate goal of protection of Sanatan Dharma. The head of each "Akhadas" is called Mahant and there is a central body above theses "Akhadas" called “Shri Panch” and head of “Shri Panch” is called Mahamandaleshwar, so, Mahamandaleshwar is the head of all fifty two mahants and above all Mahamandaleshwars region wise there are five heads called “Shankaracharyas. This is how the hierarchy is being formed and maintained. It is pertinent to note that all the sanyasis from the lineage of Shankaracharya are having expertise over the ancient spiritual practices and are devoted to the protection of sanatan dharma and there is a every possibility of having attained peak of spiritualism with most of the sanyasis.

Jagadguru Adi Shankaracharya – A Source of Learning Leadership Traits and Skills for Sustainable Management Practices

Leadership traits and skills for sustainable management practices

Just imagine how great Shankaracharya was that before 1,200 years he was having that vision of establishing such a big and great regulatory system and institutionalized the vision for the upliftment of the entire society.

Managers / CEOs must learn such leadership traits and managerial skills from Shankaracharya. Such an institutionalization of vision can also be done for an organization.

Leadership traits are the cornerstone for such institutionalization of vision.

More and more reading and most important is thinking on the personality and profile of Shankaracharya is more required and after that one must implement the learning in real life otherwise the real purpose will not be served.

Adi Shankaracharya also framed a governing constitution for the monasteries titled “Shruti Sar Samuddharanam” which governs the operations of

monasteries and provide guidelines for appointing head of monastery – known by “Shankaracharya”.

Leadership traits and skills for sustainable management practices

The object of establishing four peethas / mathas in all the four corners of the country was to unite the human virtues by surrounding geographic locations as well as efforts to be put by acharyas of peethas called / designated as Shankaracharya. The aim is of the unification. Managers / CEOs must learn the to unite, especially for large sized corporate having many branches across the country as well as across the globe by establishing

- a sound and smooth communication channels
- periodical meetings
- formal reporting channels
- MIS reports submissions

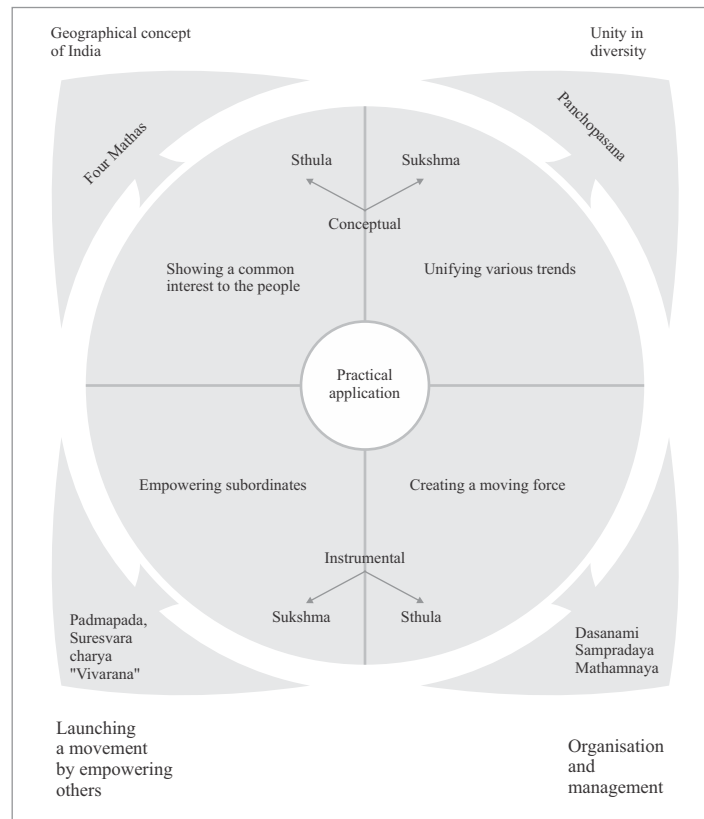
There should be a harmonization between all the elements making an organization a perfect one realizing the vision of the top level management.

'Lighthouse" is an excellent source of inspiration for a leader. It teaches one to be a path guide without any favour or partial outlook.

Different dimensions of practical application of Management are depicted in figure 1

(Someswarananda, 2012)

Figure1



Leadership Aspects

Shankaracharya was the best “Level 5 Leader” the world has ever witness on the planet earth and that at a very early age of life / in a short span of life line. Collins and his team have developed the concept of Level 5 leadership. Collins summarizes Level 5 leader as Humility + Will = Level 5. They are the visionary and nurturing leaders who do not want credit of results and all efforts but want success to sustain over a longer period of time transferring to the next generation, having a long lasting effect even though after they have relinquish the field. Qualities of a Level 5 Leader : capability to transform an organization from good to great,

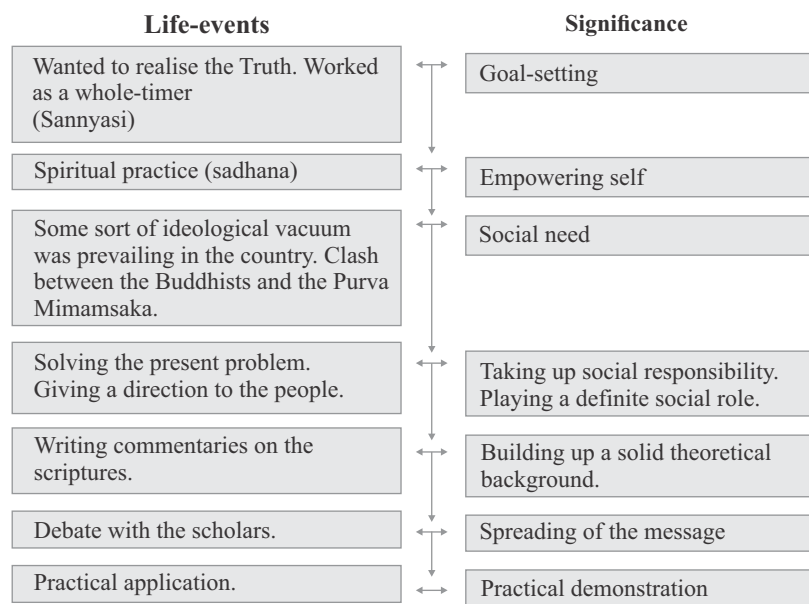
prefer talking about the company and the contribution of other people but rarely about their role or achievements, fearless, shy and modest

After going through the life span of Shankaracharya is very much evident and there cannot be a second thought that Shankaracharya was the best Level 5 Leader. Following points will substantiate the above:

- One of the key skills for a leader is the ability to handle differences, so as to arrive at synergy and harmony. Adi Shankara initiated and participated in necessary philosophical controversies with many. He respected his

- opponents. He engaged with them, rather than ignoring, suppressing or circumventing them. He ended up influencing all of them. Many became his disciples. He also learned in the process, the probable confusions in understanding Advaitaa (non-dualistic unity). This helped to make his later teachings and writings even more easy to grasp for grosser minds (Athreya, 2011)
- Decision making at a crucial time is a vital quality of a great leader. The fallout of a decision at a critical juncture is realised, many times with apprehension, by a manager. At the age of eight, Adi Shankara enacted drama in his life and made his first decision to become a Sanyasi. The episode of the crocodile catching Shankara's leg in the Purna River, his request to his mother for permission to become a Sanyasi through which a new birth could be had without physical death and his subsequent departure from Kalady are well known (Swaminathan, 2012).
 - Adi Shankaracharya promised to her mother to see her at her last moment of life and in spite of being a Sanyasi, performed the death ceremony of his mother by breaking the rule due to reverence for his mother.
 - Adi Shankara's patience in dealing with people is seen on many occasions. When he visited Mandana Misra, he was treated with lack of respect. Ubhaya Bharati questioned him on matters opposed to his Sanyasa asrama. Ugra Bhairava even asked for his head for his yajna. In all cases, Adi Shankara answered them with understanding and patience (Bharati Tirtha, 2011).
 - Adi Shankara also solved admirably a misunderstanding that had crept among his own disciples. When Suresvara wanted to write a commentary on sutra bhasya, the other disciples did not agree to it. Adi Shankara then asked Suresvara to elaborate on the bhasyas on Taittiriya and Brahadaranya Upanishads and he reconciled all of them (Bharati Tirtha, 2011).
 - Adi Shankara's compassion for his disciples was boundless. He blessed Giri with instant knowledge of all Shastras when the others called him a dunce. Eventually, he was known as Totakacharya upon getting sanyas. He had full authority over his disciples but he was not a dictator. He didn't stop Padmapada on a pilgrimage and when he lost his writings, Adi Shankara retold the passages from memory (Bharati Tirtha, 2011).
 - Humility is the hallmark of a leader. Adi Shankara, the leader, epitomised this great virtue of humility. In Banaras, when Shankaracharya was returning from the Ganga, upon blocking the way by *Chandala*, Adi Shankara asked him to move away and at that time *Chandala* reminded him the truth about the Atman (Soul) being part of the (Brahman) universal consciousness and the great master instantly realised his folly and the profundity of the *Chandala's* statement. He bowed low to the *Chandala* and composed five verses called *Maneesha Panchakam*. Such was the leader's humility (Krishnamurthy, 2011).
 - Significance of Adi Shankara's life events is summarised as per below figure – 2 (Someswarananda, 2012)

Figure 2: Leadership Lessons from Adi Shankara's Life Events

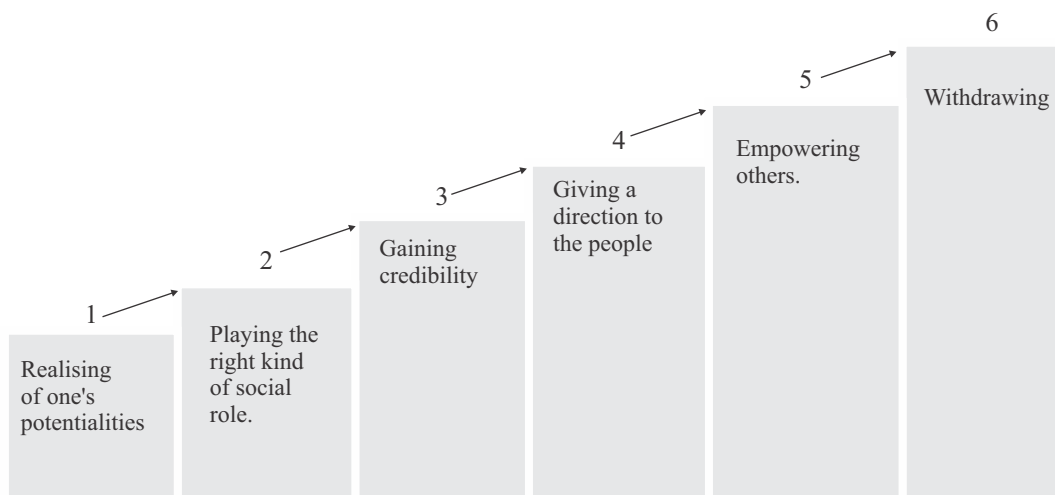


- Adi Shankara propounded Panchayatana practice for worshipping five Gods, Sun, Ambika, Vishnu, Ganapati and Shiva all on the same pedestal during those days when there was no consensus amongst the preachers and in absence of clear directions and guidance common men was in dilemma for going ahead

on the path of Sanatan Dharma. Panchayatana practice instituted by the Adi Shankaracharya is really a great hallmark in streamlining the spiritual practices.

- Different stages of Adi Shankara's leadership style is depicted as per below figure 3 (Someswarananda, 2012)

Figure 3: Adi Shankar's Leadership Style



Excerpts from Ancient Scriptures, Teachings of Jagadguru Adi Shankaracharya and Leadership Lessons

Adi Shankaracharya's three major works are the *Vivek-chudamani*, *Sariraka-basya* and *Saundarya Lehri*.

Vivekachudamani: The Crest-Jewel of Discrimination

The *Vivekachudamani*, literally "The Crest-Jewel of Discrimination," is perhaps the most famous non-commentarial work of Shankaracharya that expounds Vedanta philosophy. Having written pioneering and monumental commentaries on triple canon (prasthanatraya) comprising the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita and Brahma Sutras, Shankaracharya also composed several sub-texts in simple Sanskrit, called prakaranagranthas (philosophical treatises), with a view to reaching the message of Vedanta to common people. The *Vivekachudamani*, as its name signifies, is the crown jewel of such prakarana texts.

Some of the excerpts from *VivekChudamani* are as follows alongwith management lessons.

1

श्रोत्रियोऽवृजिनोऽकामहतो यो ब्रह्मवित्तमः ।

ब्रह्माण्युपरतः शान्तो निरिन्धन इवानलः ।

अहेतुकदयासिन्धुर्बन्धुरानमतां सताम् ॥ ३३ ॥

*śrotriyo'vrjino'kāmahato yo brahmavittamab |
brahmanyuparatah śānto nirindhana ivānalah |
ahetukadayāsindhurbandhurānamatām satām*
||33||

Meaning: A teacher is one who is well-versed in the scriptures, pure, un afflicted by desires, a

perfect knower of the Supreme, who continuously abides in the Supreme, who is as calm as the fire that has burnt up its fuel, who is a spontaneous ocean of mercy that needs no cause for its expression, an intimate friend to all good people who surrender to him.

(varma-vivekachudamani.blogspot.in/2013)

Lesson for the Leadership and Managerial Skills:
Above verse is more than sufficient to narrate who can be the best leader.

2

चित्तस्य शुद्धये कर्म न तु वस्तूपलब्धये ।

वस्तुसिद्धिर्विचारेण न किञ्चित्कर्मकोटिभिः ॥ ११ ॥

*cittasya śuddhaye karma na tu vastūpalabdhaye |
vastusiddhirvicārena na kiñcitkarmakotibhih*
||11||

Meaning: Actions help to purify the mind but they do not, by themselves, contribute to the attainment of Reality. The attainment of the Realism brought about only by Self-Inquiry and not in the least by even ten million acts.

Lesson for the Leadership and Managerial Skills:
Leader must introspect and continuously keep oneself enriched by the latest knowledge which can spontaneously lead to the fruitful actions.

3

अर्थस्य निश्चयो दृष्टो विचारेण हितोक्तिः ।

न स्नानेन न दानेन प्राणायमशतेन वा ॥ १३ ॥

*arthasya niścayo drsto vicārena hitoktitah |
na snānena na dānena prāṇāyamaśatena vā*
||13||

Meaning: Neither sacred baths nor any amount of charity nor even hundreds of pranayamas can give us the knowledge about our own Self. The firm

experience of the nature of the Self is seen to proceed from inquiry along the lines of the salutary advices of the wise.

Lesson for the Leadership and Managerial Skills:
Above verse signify the importance of mentor and guide. A Leader must help the people surrounded to awake their inner voice and exploit their best potentials.

#4

शान्ता महान्तो निवसन्ति सन्तो
बसन्तवल्लोकहितं चरन्तः।
तीर्णाः स्वयं भीमभवार्षाणं जना
नहेतुनान्यानपि तारयन्तः ॥ ३७ ॥

*śāntā mahānto nivasanti santo
vasantavalloka hitam carantah |
tīrnāh svayam bhīmabhavāṛṇavam janā-
nahetunānyānapi tārayantah || 37 ||*

Meaning: There are peaceful and magnanimous saints who ---like the spring season—are ever doing well to the humanity. They have crossed the dreadful ocean of (embodied) existence through their own efforts and without any (personal) motives; they help others to cross it.

Lesson for the Leadership and Managerial Skills:
Above verse is enshrined in the Principle of Trusteeship, as per Gandhian philosophy and Leaders must practice the Principle of Trusteeship in its letter and spirit.

Excerpts from Saundarya Lehri

“*Tatil-lekha-thanvim thapana-sasi-vaisvanaramayim Nishannam shannam apy upari kamalanam tava kalaam; Maha-padma tavyam mrdita-mala-mayena manasa Mahantah pasyanto dadhati parama'hlada-laharim.*”

Meaning : Those souls great, Who have removed all the dirt from the mind, And meditate on you within their mind, Who is of the form of sun and moon, And living in the forest of lotus, And also above the six wheels of lotus, Enjoy waves after waves, Of happiness supreme.

Lesson for the Leadership and Managerial Skills:
A leader must be aloof from all the negativity surrounded and should be focused in achieving goals just like a lotus blossoms while remaining unaffected of the mud.

At last, in a prayer to Vishnu, Sri Adi Shankara says

तत्पि भेदापगमे नाथ तवाह न भामकीनत्वम् ।
सामुद्रोहि तरङ्गः क्वचन समुद्रो न तरङ्गः ॥

Oh Lord, even after realising that the Truth that; there is no real difference between Jiva and Brahman, I beg to state that I am Yours and not that You are mine. The wave belongs to the ocean, not the ocean to the waves.

Leadership traits and skills for sustainable management practices

Leaders must not limit their thinking, horizon to their particular domain / department or task on hand. Leaders must have a broader view and a holistic approach to the situation, task, problem, issue, matter on hand. Leaders must document all procedures, policies, working guidelines and all such drafting, documentation must be shared with the next generations.

After going through and thoroughly studying most of the disciplines, streams of Management, one realizes that different streams, subjects are apparently different but, all are interconnected and correlated at the bottom, base and reaches to the single goal. So, being limited and stick to a specific discipline, stream of management will not pay dividends and is dangerous for an organization in a long run.

In addition to presiding Shankaracharyas, Adi Shankara's influence is inescapable, Mahatama Gandhi, an ardent votary of ahimsa and perhaps its greatest practitioner openly acknowledged Adi Shankara's inspirations.

Conclusion

It will be good if we start learning from Adi Shankaracharya in the modern context. Instead of being an obscurantist or fundamentalist, we are to look at the modern social needs and thus understand the significance of the life events of the Indian sages (Someswarananda, 2012).

The superior qualities, the methodology adopted, the executive actions taken and the principles of management exhibited by a leader in realizing the goal and objective he had set for himself are better assessed after the passage of at least a few generations. Adi Shankara lived 1200 years ago and took birth with the specific goal of reforming Hindu society decaying under the influence of *Mimamsaka* doctrines which emphasized shadow more than the substance. In a completely brief period of less than 32 years, Adi Shankara succeeded in establishing the tenets of Advaitaa, breaking the hold of *Mimamsaka* doctrines and reaffirming the eternal truths embodied in the

Upanishads. Only an extraordinary leader could achieve so much in so short a time, particularly being a one man band (Swaminathan, 2012).

It can be concluded that Shankaracharya was having three major virtues which a leader must possess.

- Devotion
- Knowledge
- Action oriented

Without a good combination of above three the real motive of realization of vision cannot be fulfilled. Therefore, a leader must be having a combination of all the three qualities so as to contribute some meaning full work in an organization.

There are manly three organs of the human being and each needs quality as mentioned below :-

- Intellect requires knowledge
- Heart requires devotion
- Hands requires actions

Shankaracharya was having all above qualities mentioned. A leader must be having a sound knowledge, sensible enough for having a human touch and must be working hard at ground level

and a missionary by actions.

But, it must be kept in mind that all the above come from the spiritual strength and therefore, spiritual practices invariably take out best from a leader. After going through the life and teachings of Adi Shankaracharya, a leader can learn to follow these practices:

- Doing right things at right time and in right way
- Framing a vision
- Strategic plans and implementation thereof for realisation of vision
- Developing world class leadership qualities
- Institutional excellence
- Knowledge based innovative organisation
- Effective supervision, monitoring and evaluating practices
- Proper delegation, effective communication and continuous motivation
- Ensuring timely corrective actions as and when needed

Thus, implementing a process of getting aligned with the people and providing leadership directions for devotion and commitment to work for a common goal, vision and mission to the maximum social benefit and in search of leadership excellence are the lessons and skills to be learnt for future leaders towards the sustainable management practices.

A critical question all leaders usually ask themselves “how to be effective in job / task”. The answer to this fundamental question could be found after understanding Jagadguru Adi Shankara's life and teachings.

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