The Role of Thought Leadership in the Effective Implementation of the New Education Policy 2020

C A Annie Stephen[1], Junitta Stephen[2]

[1]Faculty of Commerce, Kristu Jayanti College, Bengaluru, India
[2]Student- B.Com H.on, Christ University, Bengaluru, India

ABSTRACT

Gone are the days when teaching used to be a clogged system of book learning and examinations. Today, the education system has seen a paradigm shift and continues to incorporate changes in tune with the changing environment and systems. Thought leadership is also termed as opinion leadership and are the people who possess expertise in a certain area. They create revolutionary advancements in their area of expertise while creating a roadmap for others to follow and in this endeavour they provide a method, process, guidelines or a set of best practices. They engage in inspiring people with their own area of expertise and help people who move and inspire people with innovative ideas; turn ideas into reality, and know and show how to replicate their success. Likewise, with the onset of the New Education Policy, teachers are required to cater to the holistic need of the students. The application of thought leadership can be effective in NEP as the expertise areas of each individual are brought up to use and form a pool of resourceful deliverers. The blend of thought leadership and NEP may give better turnouts.

ORIGIN OF THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

The phrase appeared for the first time in the 19th century in a written description of Henry Ward Beecher from 1887. Ever since then, the meaning and connotations have evolved and changed with time. Currently, there are a few definitions of thought leader and thought leadership that seem to be widely accepted.

In the most simplest form, according to the Oxford dictionary, thought leadership refers to, "intellectual influence and innovative or pioneering thinking" .

In 1994, Joel Kurtzman, editor-in-chief of Strategy & Business magazine, stated, "A thought leader is recognized by peers, customers and industry experts as someone who deeply understands the business they are in, the needs of their customers and the broader marketplace in which they operate. They have distinctively original ideas, unique points of view and new insights." This led to the coining of a new term and the start to a new era.

The changing role of Teachers with NEP 2020
A new and comprehensive National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education, NCFTE 2021, is being formulated as a result of the offset of the National Education Policy 2021. A new and well defined framework will be developed after constructive discussions with all stakeholders which includes the various State Governments, relevant Ministries / Departments of Central Government and various expert bodies, and will be made available in all regional languages of India. They also intend on factoring in the requirements of teacher education curricula for vocational education to adapt to the changes. The Teachers would also need to accommodate the new changes proposed on the NEP 2020. The NEP gives the teachers more autonomy and freedom to choose different aspects of pedagogy, in order to teach in the most effective and suitable manner and make classrooms a centre of true learning.

A very critical aspect of any students' holistic development is to focus on the socio-emotional learning of students as well. All teachers adopting and introducing effective pedagogy and novel approaches to teaching will be recognised which will improve learning outcomes in their own classrooms. Teachers along with the students will be given continuous and ample opportunities for self-improvement to learn the latest innovations and advances in their professions and further carry it forward in their classrooms as well. The teachers are instruments of the formative stages of the implementation and the adoption of NEP 2020. Hence, it is imperative that the teachers too should exercise due diligence and upskill and upgrade themselves in order to match up to the expectations of the latest NEP deliverables.

What it takes to be a successful thought leader

Even with the evolving nature of thought leadership, there are certain characteristics typically associated with thought leaders. Some of the most common criteria of becoming successful thought leaders are as follows:

- Expertise in a particular and distinguished niche
- Ongoing involvement in (or awareness of) the developments of that particular niche
- A clearly identified, unbiased and holistic point of view
- Credibility
- A supportive and encouraging following

Not everyone can fit into the same coat and not everyone deemed by others as a thought leader will actually look the same and be one. One of the important parts of successful thought leadership is their ability to distinguish themselves from the rest. However, the in-exhaustive list below shows the various common traits among noteworthy thought leaders which is the easiest to identify.

- **Expertise in a particular niche –** People are much more likely to listen to whatever you might be talking about if and when you possess the direct and necessary experience and expertise in that niche area. Irrespective of the duration of pursuing or attempt to master that niche, if whether one has been working in a specific area professionally for two decades, or have faithfully pursued a hobby since their younger years' experience and mastery in a particular area gives them a upper hand when contemplating and positioning yourself as a thought leader.
- **Ongoing involvement in (or awareness of) that niche –** Despite the years of advancement and experience, thought leaders must always keep surface and keep up with the current conversation in their relevant field. Considering that one's past experiences are valuable and important, it's even more important to connect these to the latest trends and developments of what is currently happening in the industry.
- **A clearly identified point of view –** It is always important to have a unique quotient or a distinguishing factor that sets a person aside from the crowd in that particular field. It lets people know what it is they're getting when they decide to follow a person, read their content, share videos, or any requests you as a speaker for a live event.
- **Credibility –** Birds of the same feather flock together. By associating with fellow though leaders, one tends to develop on themselves and be further inclined into becoming better leaders. This is something that will be achieved through a combination of your past experiences, current standing and endorsements from your network. If you are consistently known for working with people who have a bad reputation, or have no examples of why you should be seen as a leader in your particular field, then no one will take you seriously. By building your professional experience, and working with other thought leaders, industry insiders and reputable professionals – you automatically enhance your credibility.
- **A supportive following –** Shel Israel, a Forbes Contributor once wrote, "You cannot be a thought leader if others don't follow." Without followers, you are someone with tightly held convictions. But that's not enough. A leader in its general sense also needs follows to qualify as one. So in the same manner, a thought leader is of no use if there is no one to follow that thoughts that he delivers and goes by. While you don't need the whole world to put stock in your opinion (as a matter of fact, if you have strong opinions, people will definitely disagree with you), you do need some people to believe in you to further support your credibility.

Thought leadership is the key that unlocks a whole new level of professional accomplishment and achievement as well as career and personal satisfaction. To increase a leader's strategic visibility –ie. the visibility and standing with the people who truly matter and add value to you – then thought leadership is one of the easiest and most relevant paths to achieve that.

As a recognized thought leader, you will have the soon possess the strong power to persuade, the status and authority to move things in a new direction, and the clout to implement real progress and widespread innovation. People want to affiliate with those who are well known and in the light of fame due to which, thought leadership also results in follow up invitations to join corporate boards, serve on government commissions and participate in industry-wide committees – opportunities to raise your profile from the local to the national to the international forum.

In addition to the above, in the growing pace of increasing influence and budding popularity of the platform so does the opportunities to create a significant impact on a larger scale arises and extrapolates, to inspire and bring about meaningful ripples of change that can last long after we pass on. As a thought leader, we are fortunate to have the opportunity to leave a lasting legacy in the form of transformed teams, communities, industries, systems, governments and other social groups.

What is thought leadership today?

The concept of thought leadership is rather hazy today. However, Wikipedia refines this concept further more to give this concept clarity. According to Wikipedia, the definition of thought leadership is, "an individual or firm that is recognized as an authority in a specialized field and whose expertise is sought and often rewarded."

According to Forbes contributors, Russ Alan Prince and Bruce Rogers, a thought leader is, "an individual or firm that prospects, clients, referral sources, intermediaries and even competitors recognize as one of the foremost authorities in selected areas of specialization, resulting in its being the go-to individual or organization for said expertise." The second part of their definition claims that a thought leader is, "an individual or firm that significantly profits from being recognized as such."

The term "thought leader" might sound like another corporate jargon or technical buzzword but the meaning is actually treasured by individuals' businesses and educational institutions and the like today. A thought leader is someone who willingly offers guidance and insight to those around them. In other words, he is one who has a positive reputation of being of aid to others with his knowledge and valuable insight. The highest takeaway would be on the part of the students which again falls in line with the NEP 2020.

It is often believed that thought leaders draw on the sleeping past, analyze the live present and illuminate the lustrous future to create a comprehensive, unique, and impactful view of their current area of expertise. This unique ability allows all of them to bring and lay down a point of views to the table that cannot be obtained ready on any platform. However, presenting and sharing their original and insightful thoughts and strategies is only one part of being a thought leader. Knowing how to successfully lead a crowd or the masses is equally crucial as well.

"I believe thought leaders are not only on the cutting edge in terms of their ideas, but the also know how to inspire and influence others." Leaders could be an epitome of great ideas, but true thought leaders have the courage to express their ideas and inspire others to implement them perfectly as per plan.

Additionally, Akram said thought leaders not only create new ideas, but they also know how to deliver results to back up their hypotheses.

HOW TO ESTABLISH YOURSELF AS A THOUGHT LEADER

There has been a striking increase in number of students opting for online courses, evidence of spike in demand for online and MOOC courses, its subsequent noted benefits, and worldwide appeal of online learning has not been strong enough to eliminate the critics. "Fifteen years ago the question of higher education quality assurance was one only a small number of insiders concerned themselves with". The ever-changing global landscape of higher education is disrupting and further tangling traditional practices of academic quality assurance. Several commonly known disruptions due to technological advances, the political climate, and the strict prevalent regulatory world we live in have shifted the focus of quality assurance from being primarily and largely input focused (e.g., number of teachers with advanced degrees) to becoming more and extensively outcome focused.

The higher education leaders must not only be in and along track with the current quality assurance debate, but also need to be thought leaders in the disciple of quality assurance as well. This means they must be skilled situational leaders who know how and when to be transformative in the area of quality assurance. They can optimize risk to take advantage of new and evolving opportunities by thinking outside of the box. Quality assurance thought leaders have a clear vision, set high standards, reach attainable results, and evaluate to improve.

Thought leadership is an ongoing process developed over time, requires patience, demands hard work, and an extreme willingness to listen and constantly learn and adapt from others, "Those leaders who can observe and connect information from a number of sources are generally well positioned to create ideas that are informed by the needs of the students. Following are the ways to improve Thought Leadership.

1. Clarify your area of expertise
Dunlap is of the notion that thought leaders need to be absolutely clear and consistent with their personal insights within their own areas of expertise. By creating a niche and unique market or having specific area of expertise could really benefit you to build personal brand and establish credibility in the field of expertise.

"Don't attempt to be a thought leader in every area related to your industry," Dunlap said. "Instead, focus on what you know best and hone in on that message repeatedly. It's more effective to go deep on a few topics than to spray across too many complementary topics."

2. Step back from your business agenda.
As a thought leader, it is vital to understand the issues that crucially impact the audience and offer useful and educational advice driven in line with these issues faced.

Taking part in events and gatherings like charity events and source interviews may not boom or increase your bottom line immediately, but the long-term results can be extremely beneficial to the thought leader, his business and audience.

Making your presence felt among the audience that you are an updated and well-rounded professional, it can steadily and positively build on your reputation and credibility as a thought leader.

3. Keep updated with your industry.

We are a part of a dynamic environment and each and every single industry is constantly evolving at different paces–with some faster than others. As a thought leader it is important for him to stay abreast with the changing trends in the environment and can share and comment on this existing and prevalent trends.

"You must constantly learn [about] your industry, as well as the macro forces at work in the broader economy," said Akram. "Being a thought leader requires forward thinking, but you must also have the discipline to study market dynamics to find patterns. From there, you can combine what you have learned, analysing those patterns with your vision to solve real-world problems."

4. Listen to others.

Thought leaders are not all knowing and do not always possess all the answers, and they are never done learning or quit it either. Mark Rogers, Psy.D., founder and CEO of Insights Without Borders, noted that it is always important to admit what you don't know and remain humble enough to listen to what others have to say and learn through different views and patterns of thought. Learning from others in your field is a great way to stay connected and expand your knowledge on a topic.

"True thought leaders genuinely understand and listen to each other's stories," said Rogers. "They treasure [the fact] that we are all in the human journey and the authors of our own lives."

THOUGHT LEADERS FOR THE FUTURE

There are many definitions of the term "thought leader," ranging from an expansive interpretation encompassing strategic implementation and sculpting corporate culture to the streamlined definition of a forward thinker in a specific field. Russell Yardley, in his LinkedIn guide to thought leadership, states "thought leadership means positioning yourself as the go-to person on a particular subject. It's about leveraging expertise into opportunities". Two famous historical figures framed the concept of thought leader perfectly. John F. Kennedy commented, "The greater our knowledge increases the more our ignorance unfolds." Ancient wisdom from Socrates echoes this as well: "The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing." Personally, the process of dissertation exemplified this same construct and goes in line with the other and above mentioned school of thought very closely; it means to remain humble and is aware of the fact that he has there was so much to learn and adopt in the vast expanse of knowledge lighted the fire that drove continuous research and the quest for discovery.

Gibbons-Klein offers a PLEASE strategy (personal, less, engaging, answer, sync, and exciting) to improve the quality of thought leadership. Concepts need to be personal; clear and concise; engaging to hold attention; answers a significant question; in sync with needs, trends, and style; and exciting enough to hold attention.

Key Traits and Characteristics of Thought Leaders

Effective thought leaders have several common strengths and traits. Becoming a followed thought leader, one who is relied upon for futuristic strategic thinking, can be a valuable differentiator. In "Three Key Qualities of Successful Thought Leaders," Russ Alan Prince identifies drive, expertise, and presence as key qualities of successful thought leaders.

Drive refers to the presence of undying passion and strong and clear purpose, which supports the time and energy needed to become a leader in a specific field. Thought leaders who set high standards, develop a clear vision, reach attainable results and evaluate results, and upgrade their knowledge base and skill set are simply using common sense. Technical expertise and professional presence are foundational aspects to the profile and reputation of the thought leader.

In addition, the ability to embrace failure, persevere, and emerge triumphant despite it all is a valued skill. Thomas Edison's teachers said he was "too stupid to learn anything." He was fired from his first two jobs for being "non-productive." As an inventor, Edison made 1,000 unsuccessful attempts at inventing the light bulb. When a reporter asked, "How did it feel to fail 1,000 times?" Edison replied, "I didn't fail 1,000 times. The light bulb was an invention with 1,000 steps."

To this end, the leader who views himself or herself not as the expert, but rather as the instigator of ideas and one who stimulates the evolution of ideas, is often the true thought leader. In education, this could involve published scholarly articles, blogs, a website etc., as well as having an active presence on social media to connect with like-minded leaders. Thought leaders apply for awards to build their brand of recognition and credibility; for example, Online Learning Consortium's (OLC) Digital Learning Innovation Award.

An effective thought leader is one who challenges assumptions about leadership, looks for ways to simplify, flattens organizational hierarchies, and encourages more transparency and communication. He or she focuses on getting out of the way, so people at lower levels of the organization can make timelier decisions based on data, and the effective thought leader will also support team members when they fail. It is meant to focus on employee engagement-understanding that diversity and is not all about fairness but rather about competitive advantage-and team dynamics. Traditional wisdom identifies generational differences as a differentiation regarding thought leadership. Arguably, it is important to understand generational differences; for example, Baby Boomers may respond better to a more authoritarian approach while Gen Xers relate more to participatory management. However, underlying the differences, reliability, credibility, and trustworthiness are the most significant traits regardless of the generation [6].

Why Thought Leadership and Quality Assurance?
True thought leaders in higher education strive for quality assurance practices that do not merely ensure minimum standards are met and force a particular design or pedagogy based upon their own pre-existing biases of what postsecondary education should resemble [1]. Rather, true thought leaders will drive quality assurance practices rooted in constant continuous improvement through self-examination of their practices and their effects on outcomes. What do we mean by outcomes? One good example is Entangled Solution's quality assurance framework with standards around five outcome-focused metric areas: (1) learning, (2) completion, (3) satisfaction, (4) placement, and (5) earnings [7].

More focus on outcomes keeps student success at the center. Too much focus on inputs may stifle creativity, growth, and change.

When referring to inputs, we need to define what we mean. We do not necessarily mean the number of faculty with advanced degrees, but rather one critical input is the quality of the course design. Thought leaders understand as an "input" if course design is not of high quality it could impact the outcome of student learning. Therefore, an organization like

Another important aspect of thought leadership in quality assurance is ensuring students play a role in the quality-assurance practices at the institution. Entangled Solutions also believes students' opinions matter especially after a period of time when reflection can occur. Other organizations, such as the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and International Quality Group (CIQG), echo Entangled Solutions. In her coverage of the CHEA 2017 and CIQG 2017 conferences, Marklein writes there is a "growing interest in capturing and incorporating a student perspective on the quality of their education" [2]. Student perspectives can favorably impact the practice of higher education particularly when students are provided a meaningful role within QA practices. In this instance true thought leaders must not view themselves as the experts, but rather as the instigators of ideas and ones who stimulate the evolution of ideas as related to quality through the experience and perspective of the students.

CONCLUSION

Today's higher education leaders must not only be up to speed on the current quality assurance debate, but they also need to be thought leaders in the disciple of quality assurance. We shared several examples of thought leaders currently paving the way for more innovative and effective practices in the future. The leaders in such organizations as Entangled Solutions, The Quality Commons, and C-BEN are skilled situational leaders who are transforming in the area of quality assurance. They are optimizing risk to take advantage of new and evolving opportunities by thinking outside of the box. The characteristics and type of thought leadership needed to drive high-quality design and delivery of online/hybrid programs of the future are clear. A humble and hungry problem solver is the ideal thought leader in the field of education. Thought leaders of today view themselves as the instigator of ideas and those who stimulate the evolution of ideas, not as the experts. They must constantly scan the higher-education environment, as well as the world at large, to look for new and innovative ways to practice effective quality assurance.

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