

It's Not Just a Game!

The Morningmare...

I had an unusual start to the day. Actually the arrival of the dawn was as usual – my eyes popped open at 7am, the school-goodbye of my big baby boy, chitchat with mom, cup of tea with wife, the regular natural chores, and at 8am my home gym greeted me with clockwork precision. The only out-of-order inaction was an arm-length distance from my email and whatsapp – I was not gonna let some wise spoilsport dilute my excitement. You see, the control freak in me had precisely timed the kick-start of my excitement as well! The clash of the titans had been set to record on Tata-Sky the previous night. What followed was 90 minutes of horrifying fascination that had been preceded by billions just a few hours before my day had begun! 7-1. That can't happen to Brazil! Such fictitious odds don't exist in the betting world. The Germans are great, but surely not 7-fold greater! The outcome was uncanny. Something terrible had happened. There has to be some serious business learning here...

Fortunately, this turned out to be one of the simplest business case studies to crack. Brazil played without its two leaders – their main striker Neymar (because of injury) and their captain Thiago (because of yellow-card breaches). The exclusion of their key leaders is the only tangible difference and logical explanation that one can conjure to explain the fiasco. The headless team was completely demoralized, it was no longer a well-knit unit that could regroup and rally back after early setbacks in the game. A perfect illustration of how things can go wrong when you don't have strong leadership and a well-knit team.



Case closed! Or is it? Did the Brazilian collapse happen because of lack of leadership or too much leadership? You see, the team was so used to its leaders being around that they were unable to deliver when left on their own! The next question is, was it the lack of team comrades' or too much of it? The failure of a few defense players, and their resulting demotivation, rubbed off onto the entire team. What better example of a team that is so well-knit that their emotions stand together in all their successes as well as their failures! Clearly we seem to have figured the ball game all wrong. The Brazilian collapse paradoxically happened because they had great leadership and a well-knit team in place!

Hmmm... but the above explanation sounds cuckoo! General sense dictates that a team devoid of leaders and team spirit will seldom win. The case deserves to be reopened, for something has gone amiss here. Perhaps the entire role of leadership and team members needs to be re-examined in the context of the present day's ecosystem.

A leader is not a package deal unless he is constantly working towards making himself redundant. A true test of great leadership is not all the successes that follow when that particular leader is on the field, rather its continued accolades when the leader steps aside. A true team member is one who has walled himself against the emotional influences of his teammates, and is always playing the leadership role within his own tiny universe. If only each Brazilian player had held on to his own position and territory to his personal best, without worrying about the scorecard and the performance of his fellow teammates, the final outcome may not have been so embarrassing.

Unfortunately, the game environment doesn't allow for the above revised definition of a leader and a teammate. We are so used to crediting all the outcomes to 'leadership' and 'team spirit' phenomena that we sometimes end up butchering human individualities. The world needs to change if another Brazilian side is to be saved a similar humiliation in the next world cup.

So how do we change the world? By not constantly bothering to change it! Instead of forever worrying about how the world is going to write his obituary, a leader needs to start thinking of innovative ways to be 'forgotten' by the world – this can only happen by ceaseless championing on the power of systems, above his personal leadership style! Similarly, an individual within a team should continuously focus on his 'individual' excellence instead of constant empathy for his 'team' mates. Perhaps (& ironically), tomorrow's changed world may remember the leaders who made themselves redundant a little more for their new leadership style, and the individuals who focused on their personal excellence that allowed them to contribute more positively to their team in the end...