Leadership and Management of Public Sector Undertakings in an Emerging Economy

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W. P. No. 2018-01-04
January 2018

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Leadership and Management of Public Sector Undertakings in an Emerging Economy

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Abstract

Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) contribute significantly to the growth and economic development of any country. This study explores the key managerial challenges faced by the leaders and managers of public sector organizations. We interviewed 42 senior managers of PSUs from various industries representing 12 Indian states representing all the regions of India. Specifically, three key managerial challenges emerged in our study: political interference and lack of autonomy, rigid rules and HR practices, and lack of employee motivation. Positive leader personality, communication skills, change- and relation-oriented behaviors, HR skills, and decision-making emerged as top leader qualities. Staffing, training and development and performance management emerged as the top priorities of HR departments of PSUs. Public-service motivation, job security and work environment were the top reasons for continuing to work in PSUs for Indian leaders. Implications for theory and practice are discussed.

Keywords: Public sector undertakings; leadership; management; emerging economy; India.

INTRODUCTION

Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) contribute significantly to the economic development of any country as their services are aimed at overall welfare, and also because they support other institutions and businesses. They function quite differently from private sector organizations. Private firms are owned by entrepreneurs or shareholders, while public agencies are owned by communities (Boyne, 2002). Private and public organizations also differ in their sources of funding, and public organizations end up being controlled by political forces rather than market forces. The short and uncertain tenures of politicians make it difficult to bring about gradual changes in a public enterprise (Fernandez & Rainey, 2006). Public organizations experience more turbulence, interruptions, and conflicts in their decision-making than private organizations (Nutt, 2006; Geetha-Taylor & Morse, 2013). Formal rules, multi-layered hierarchies, organizational silos, lack of economic incentives, and divided political leadership at the top of public bureaucracies tend to stifle innovation in PSUs (Gupta, Chopra, & Kakani, 2018).

Private entities can ignore some of the demands from users or governing authorities (Boyne, 2002), but public enterprises seek to balance these expectations (Nutt, 2006). In many cases, public enterprises have few rivals in provision of their services, and even if present, public sector managers enjoy a dominant position in the market (Boyne, 1998), while the private firms face competition. Public monopoly is assumed to result in poor performance since officials have little incentive to keep their costs down or to look for innovative methods of service delivery (Boyne, 1998; Okubo, 2010). They rely on excessive formal procedures that hamper innovation; they seem to have the counter-productive obsession with rules and structures (Gupta et al., 2018). Also, PSU leaders have lower managerial autonomy than their counterparts in private sector (Boyne, 2002).

Regardless of the sector, leaders and mangers hold a vital role in shaping the organization and delivering results. In general, leaders carry critical responsibilities such as managing organizational change, developing the organizational culture, strategizing, and managing crises.

Leslie and Canwell (2010) observe that leaders must possess insights for successful change within complex systems, cognitive skills to handle demanding environment, emotional intelligence to motivate people, and must be proactive in building leadership at all levels of the organization. Strategic thinking, operational delivery, and effective governance are necessities of any organisation and require mastering of technical and behavioural skills. Compared to the amount of research on leadership in private companies, studies on leadership in public sector organizations have been somewhat scarce (Gupta, 2016; Gupta et al., 2018). Hansen and Villadsen conclude that compared to other disciplines, "leadership theory has generally received little attention in public management research" (2010: 247). Orazi, Turrini, and Valotti (2013) suggest public sector leadership to be a distinctive and autonomous domain emerging in public administration/public management studies, although the debate is still not as developed as business administration studies. Public sector leadership research has experienced neither the volume nor the integration of the mainstream (Van Wart, 2003, 2013).

Since the country's independence in 1947, Indian PSUs have been the focal points for policy-making, and have also shaped the economic, social, and political developments. Especially in an emerging economy like India, their contribution is critical in balancing the development of all sections of the society. Because of the lack of private capital early on, the public sector was seen crucial for establishing self-reliance, regional balance, equal employment opportunities, and infrastructure development (Jain, Gupta, & Yadav, 2014). The Nehru-led socialist policies, especially the Indian Policy Resolution 1956, envisioned PSUs to lead the economic and industrial development of the nation (Makhija, 2006).

For a long time, however, the Indian PSUs have been criticized for lacking efficiency, mired in corruption, and offering poor quality of services (Khatri, 2016). Especially in a developing country like India, where their social and economic importance is high, they need more attention than has been given in research till date (Gupta et al., 2018). Roberts (2017) noted that literature has not paid enough attention to those parts of the world in which governance falls below

expectations. While findings on public sector from research in Western countries may be applicable to India to a limited extent, the unique Indian political, social, economic, and cultural context dictates research studies of Indian public sector undertakings in their own right. Researchers (e.g., Gupta et al., 2017; Khatri, 2011, 2016; Orazi et al., 2013; Roberts, 2017; Šiugždinienė, 2006) have noted that leadership styles depend more on contextual factors such as the cultural and social environment in which the public sector organization operates, and also called for country-wise studies on private and public sector leadership.

In the present study, we take a broad view (pan-India and across industries) of Indian PSUs since we find that the research in Indian public sector has focused more on the banking firms. Through in-depth qualitative analyses of responses of 42 top leaders of Indian PSUs, we investigate the challenges faced in leading PSUs, skills required for public sector leaders, top priorities for the HR departments of PSUs and the prime motivators to continue working in PSUs. Through this study, we aim to paint the ground reality of Indian public sector organizations and managerial challenges they face.

BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Leadership in Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs)

Public sectors managers are believed to be motivated to contribute to public service, whereas private sector firms look to satisfy individual customers (Box, 1999). They are also less materialistic than private managers (Boyne, 2002), and unlike private sector managers, public sector managers are less motivated by pay expectancy (Moon, 2000). Various studies conclude that public sector workers are more intrinsically than extrinsically motivated, value job content, self-development, recognition, autonomy, interesting work, and the chance to learn new things (Buelens & van den Broeck, 2007). Organizational commitment is believed to be lower in the public sector because of the inflexibility of personnel procedures and the weak link between performance and reward, and it is often difficult for public employees to observe their

contributions to the success of their organizations (Boyne, 2002). The public sector jobs are intrinsically motivating for individuals with high public sector motivation since these individuals embrace work characteristics such as high task significance (Perry, Hondeghem, & Wise, 2010). Employees in public organizations are motivated by job security and stability (Buelens & van den Broeck, 2007) attribute greater value to work that benefits others and the society, want to be involved in important public policies, they believe in self-sacrifice, and thrive on greater responsibility and integrity (Kakabadse, Korac-Kakabadse, & Kouzmin, 2003; Khuntia & Suar, 2004). Satyawadi & Ghosh (2012) note that employees in the public sector enterprises value pride in their work and social status of the job more than the employees in the private sector.

Public sector leaders report higher satisfaction with the level and importance of position held, and consider 'formalization and red tape' as constraints (Rainey, 2003, 2009). Leadership style has been found to have significant influence on subordinate's job satisfaction and outcomes (Madlock, 2008). Rules, laws, and oversight activities take away more discretion from public leaders than those in private sector, since their duties and responsibilities are clearly stated (Hooijberg & Choi, 2001). Resources in public sector are less readily available than private organizations, and hence public leaders have to manage with whatever little that is accessible. Also, there is a constant uncertainty for leaders of public enterprises as their positions and transfers are controlled by politicians to a large extent. Handling labour interest, political interference, and user expectations are challenges that public sector leaders often encounter. Communicating and sharing necessary data with stakeholders and external agencies are important responsibilities.

Given these challenges, many researchers have studied the competencies required to lead public organizations. Van Wart classified leadership behaviours in three categories : task-oriented – involves activities related to planning, innovation, and problem solving; people-oriented – includes personnel management, motivation, and employee development; and organization-oriented – relates to strategic planning and aligning all areas of the organization (van Wart, 2003, 2004, 2013). Orazi et al. (2013) summarized public sector leadership to be a mix of skills such as

making a personal impact, giving purpose and direction, focusing on delivery, thinking strategically, getting the best out of people, and learning and improving oneself. According to Silong, Mohamad, Hassan, and Ariff (2008), leaders in public sector need abilities in communication, teamwork, problem-solving, relational skills, conflict resolution, project management, public relations, interpersonal skills, professionalism, visioning process and strategic thinking, technical specialized skills, change management, research skills, and leadership training, coaching, and developing subordinates.

Uniqueness of Indian Public Sector Undertakings

Before India's independence in 1947, occupations were separated by castes and communities, and the interaction between different parties for business deals had an informal nature. The British Raj tried to formally organize India's economic activities, with a hope that the new values would also cascade over to smaller organizations and the informal sector, becoming a part of the way of working. However, the older values continued to exist with the new ones in a cultural coexistence (Sinha & Sinha, 1990). Even today, informal styles of working and relational exchanges dominate Indian organizations. Indian public sector organizations have a soft work culture, where work seems to be displaced from being the main activity by non-work activities like social obligations, etc. (Purang, 2006). The tendency to differentiate between insiders and outsiders induces favourable treatment towards known people, which makes the system vulnerable to corruption and incredibility (Khatri, 2016).

Hofstede (1980) noted that Indian organizations have large power-distance, weak uncertainty avoidance, and tend to be masculine and collectivist. Indian social systems are steeply hierarchical and Indians are highly status conscious (Gupta & Singh, 2013). Indian employees have a different cultural orientation than those of other countries, and have a different understanding regarding job status (Sharma & Bajpai, 2010; Gupta, 2016). They prefer to work in superior-subordinate type of settings rather than as equals (Kothari, 1970; Gupta et al., 2018).

Hierarchical organizational structure is prevalent in Indian organizations, which follows top-down communication primarily (Budhwar & Boyne, 2004).

In the Indian context, leadership is hence very crucial to the development of an organization. Leadership behaviour in Indian public sector is found to have significant bearing on job motivation, industrial relations, and internal motivation of employees (Talukdar, 2013). The senior-junior exchanges have an emotional basis, where the supervisor nurtures and looks after the subordinate's well-being, at the same time, the subordinate displays loyalty, gratitude, obedience, and respect towards the leader (Khatri, 2011). Paternalism is one of the prominent characteristics of Indian organizations in general (Aycan et. al, 2000), and public sector enterprises in particular. There is asymmetric distribution of power, and decisions are unilaterally taken by the boss (Khatri, 2011).

Studies on leadership qualities in public sector organizations (PSUs, public administration) across various countries have found that it is a non-generalizable concept (Ferguson & Hasan, 2013; Gupta et al., 2018). As discussed above, the socio-cultural as well as politico-legal environments across countries are very different and therefore there is need to study the qualities of leaders that may enable them to succeed in their respective country contexts. Leadership requirements may also vary with the different stages of development of the country. The study of Indian PSUs provides us with an opportunity to understand leadership qualities not just in India but also in other developing countries.

Research Questions

Replication studies are needed in social sciences (King, 2011; Yong, 2012). Findings that have been established in other country contexts need to be continuously revalidated in different work contexts in order to provide evidence of their generalizability. Given the uniqueness of the Indian cultural, political and economic contexts, it is important to validate that the findings of studies

undertaken in the Western context will apply to the Indian context. For moving to a more generalizable leadership model, it will be necessary to explore the characteristics of leaders in India that are similar to the characteristics identified for Western country contexts, as well as to examine characteristics that differ. The research questions for the present study are the following:

RQ1: What are the leadership challenges present in Indian public sector undertakings (PSUs)?

RQ2: What leadership skills are needed to manage Indian PSUs?

RQ3: What improvements are needed in the human resource management departments at the Indian PSUs?

RQ4: What keeps people motivated to work in Indian PSUs?

METHOD

Sample and Data Collection

First, we conducted literature review to document the research on related topics till date and identify the research gaps. We used an open-ended questionnaire to collect the responses from 42 leaders working in PSUs in different parts of India. The participants were attending a training program on management and leadership at a premier business school in India. These participants were working at managerial and executive level in their respective organizations. The geographical locations of these leaders were fairly dispersed – PSUs in the following states were surveyed: Gujarat, Maharashtra, Bihar, Telangana, Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Andhra Pradesh – the North, South, East, West and Central parts of the country. The organizations surveyed belonged to industrial development and planning, services (water, education, healthcare, electricity and power, tourism), manufacturing (cement and mining), trade and finance, and agriculture (including poultry and warehousing). This diversity of geography and areas of operation allowed for an overall view of the Indian PSUs. An open-ended questionnaire was given to the leaders and they were asked to answer the following four questions:

1. What are the top five leadership challenges present in Indian public sector undertakings?
2. Describe top five leadership skills are needed to manage Indian public sector undertakings?
3. What should be top five priorities of the HR departments of Indian public sector undertakings?
4. What are top five reasons that motivate you to work in Indian public sector undertakings?

Participants were asked to write open-ended answers to the questions. Each participant received multiple blank sheets to write their answers. In order to ensure confidentiality, participants were given a choice not to mention their name, designation, and organization to which they belonged. Forty-two out of 49 participants responded to the questionnaire. Eight out of forty-two participants chose not to mention their details (name, designation, organization) on the response sheet. Table 1 provides a description of the participants' designations and the organizations to which they belonged.

TABLE 1

Participants' Details (Designations, Organizations)

S. No.	Participant Identifier	Designation, Organization
1.	P. 1	Regional Manager, Gujarat Industrial Development Corporation (GIDC), Gandhinagar, Gujarat, India
2.	P. 2	Chief Engineer, Water Resources Division, Shivaji Nagar, Amravati, Maharashtra, India
3.	P. 3	State Programme Officer, Bihar Education Project Council, Patna, Bihar, India
4.	P. 4	Deputy General Manager, Singareni Collieries Company Limited, Ramagundam, Karimnagar, Telangana, India
5.	P. 5	Chief Engineer, Andhra Pradesh Medical Infrastructure Development Corporation, Sultan Bazaar, Koti, Hyderabad, Telangana, India
6.	P. 6	Manager, Assam Trade Promotion Organization, Maniram Dewam Trade Centre, Betknehil, Guwahati, Assam, India
7.	P. 7	Sectional Engineer, Water Resources Department, Shivaji Nagar, Amravati, Maharashtra, India
8.	P. 8	Director - Tourism Promotion Unit, M. P. Tourism, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India
9.	P. 9	General Manager, Andhra Pradesh State Financial Corporation, Hyderabad, Telangana, India
10.	P. 10	Executive Engineer, Shakti Bhavan Extension, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India
11.	P. 11	Deputy General Manager, Assam Industrustrial Development Corpn. Ltd., Guwahati, Assam, India
12.	P. 12	Managing Director, Hydro Power Development Corporation Ltd., Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh, India
13.	P. 13	Anonymous – Respondent did not mention his/her designation and organization on the survey
14.	P. 14	Anonymous – Respondent did not mention his/her designation and organization on the survey
15.	P. 15	Administrative Officer, Bihar Education Project Council, Patna, Bihar, India
16.	P. 16	Senior Development Officer, Assam State Development Corpn. for S/C Ltd., Guwahati, Assam, India
17.	P. 17	Anonymous – Respondent did not mention his/her designation and organization on the survey
18.	P. 18	Director (Projects), M. P. Tourism, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India
19.	P. 19	Asst. Manager (Agricultural Engineering), Kerala Livestock Development Board, Pattom, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India
20.	P. 20	General Manager, H. P. State Industrial Development Corp., Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, India
21.	P. 21	Deputy Director (Administration), Rajasthan State warehousing Corporation, Jaipur,

		Rajasthan, India
22.	P. 22	Executive Engineer, Haryana Power Generation Corp. Ltd., Panchkula, Haryana, India
23.	P. 23	Executive Engineer, U. P. Power Corporation Ltd., Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India
24.	P. 24	Anonymous – Respondent did not mention his/her designation and organization on the survey
25.	P. 25	Manager - Production & Value Addition, Keral State Poultry Development Corporation, Pettah, Trivandrum, Kerala, India
26.	P. 26	Chief Engineer, Andhra Pradesh Medical Infrastructure Development Corporation, Koti, Hyderabad, Telangana, India
27.	P. 27	Superintending Engineer, Andhra Pradesh Medical Services & Infrastructure Development Corp., Nuzyid, Andhra Pradesh, India
28.	P. 28	Asst. General Maanger, Andhra Pradesh State Financial Corporation, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, India
29.	P. 29	Deputy General Manager (Legal), Dakshin Gujarat Vij Company Ltd., Surat, Gujarat, India
30.	P. 30	Company Secretary, Gujarat Energy Transmission Corporation Ltd. (GETCO), Vadodara, Gujarat, India
31.	P. 31	State Programme Officer, Bihar Education Project Council, Shiksha Bhawan, Patna, Bihar, India
32.	P. 32	Additional Manager, Singareni Collieries Company Limited, Kothagudem, Telangana, India
33.	P. 33	Anonymous – Respondent did not mention his/her designation and organization on the survey
34.	P. 34	Anonymous – Respondent did not mention his/her designation and organization on the survey
35.	P. 35	Superintending Engineer, Gujarat Energy Transmission Corporation Ltd. (GETCO), Vadodara, Gujarat, India
36.	P. 36	Asst. Manager (Tech.), Assam Financial Corporation, Guwahati, Assam, India
37.	P. 37	Anonymous – Respondent did not mention his/her designation and organization on the survey
38.	P. 38	Executive Director, Andhra Pradesh State Financial Corporation, Hyderabad, Telangana, India
39.	P. 39	Executive Engineer & Deputy Secretary, U. P. Power Corporation, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India
40.	P. 40	Asst. Manager (P&A), Malabar Cements Ltd., Palakkad, Kerala, India
41.	P. 41	Anonymous – Respondent did not mention his/her designation and organization on the survey
42.	P. 42	General Manager, Assam Power Distribution Company Ltd., Tezpur Zone, Somitpur, Assam, India

Data Analysis

All the data collected via the open-ended survey were entered onto an excel sheet by the second author. The interview transcripts were studied intensively to identify common themes of meaning. The first and second authors worked independently on the coding process. Differences in categories were discussed and resolved. We analysed the prominent points in the responses to develop a concrete understanding of the perception of leaders regarding the above mentioned questions. The interview transcripts were content coded and a list of most frequently cited words was prepared. Data saturation (the point at which no new categories emerge) emerged before all responses were analysed indicating that the size of the sample was sufficient (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The themes generated by the different authors were compared for consistency, and discrepancies were discussed to determine whether the categories required modification. We attended to the text as a whole as well as examined the meanings of the statements. Next, we assigned labels to the themes (categories and patterns) that emerged. Each response was then examined to highlight convergence and consistency in the themes and their linkages across participants. Next, across responses, the themes were merged together into meaningful yet distinct major themes. Finally, the themes were joined into a text that captured participants' responses in its completeness. The present study puts forth overarching core themes of 'public sector leadership and management: challenges and opportunities' that captured the participants' responses. To protect the identity of the participants, all the names have been changed and pseudonyms adopted.

RESULTS

The results of our analyses are provided in Table 2 below. Next, we describe the themes that emerged from the data.

TABLE 2

Theme Illustrations

Categories	Exemplary Quotes
Challenges of Leading Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs)	
Theme 1: Political Interference and Lack of Autonomy	1. There is bureaucratic style of management where everything is decided by the CMD as per his skill set or on direction from government. (P. 23) 2. Leaders experience a lack of flexibility in exercising powers at all the levels and often there is lack of clear goal of the company by the top executives. (P. 4) 3. There is uncertainty in the term of office (P. 5) and excessive government norms/regulations/interventions constrain the freedom that leaders have in decision-making. (P. 5, P. 8, P. 13, P. 14, P. 18, P. 21, P. 25, P. 26, P. 35, P. 39, P. 40) 4. There is a lack of good leadership talent and whatever talent exists, it feels powerless due to high government, political and bureaucratic interferences. (P. 36, P. 38)
Theme 2: Rigid Rules and HR Practices	1. There is lack of provision of training and orientation of personnel for their upgradation. (P. 31) 2. There are tedious, redundant rules or business processes and less empowered employees who are bound by old rules of working. (P. 23) 3. Professionals do not join/head PSUs due to poor salaries and perks. Moreover there are no rewards/punishments to outstanding/erring employees. (P. 18)
Theme 3: Lack of Employee Motivation	1. PSUs have "excessive dose of unionism" and often there is union pressure on the leaders of the organizations. (P. 25, P. 39, P. 40) 2. These unions form pressure groups inside the company owing to their affiliations to political parties and hinder the efficient functioning. (P. 40) 3. There is a huge mismatch between the manpower that exists and the talent that is needed in such organizations. (P. 13, P. 25, P. 32, P. 42) 4. There is a lack of trust among subordinates due to lack of transparency in policy-making thereby leading to lower satisfaction levels. (P. 41)
Leadership Qualities Required to Lead Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs)	
Theme 1: Communication Skills	1. Leaders should have good communication skills with the employees (P. 1). The leaders should be able to associate well with employees and have better relationships with them (P. 4, P. 6). 2. Given the high interference in the working of PSU leaders by government/political bosses, the leaders should be able to communicate well with government and political bosses (P. 1). 3. They should be able to convince the government about their ideas and vision (P. 5, P. 13, P. 19), should be able to get political patronage and support (P. 9), liaison better with the government (P. 20) and be diplomatic when working with political bosses (P. 39).
Theme 2: Positive Personality	1. PSU leader must be honest and a person of integrity (P. 2, P. 10, P. 25, P. 26, P. 38). 2. They should have firm determination and dedication towards their work and have full faith in their abilities (P. 8, P. 24).

	3. Such leaders should also be knowledgeable, should own responsibility and should lead-by-example when it comes to work and behavior (P. 10, P. 15, P. 21, P. 25, P. 33, P. 37).
Theme 3: Leader Behaviors	
3a. Change-oriented Behaviors	1. The leaders must think like business professionals and identify profitable business opportunities (P. 9, P. 39). 2. They should be able to understand the business of their PSUs and implement innovative business processes (P. 23). 3. The leaders should have the capacity to analyse the situation and make innovative strategies to achieve the goals of their PSU (P. 31, P. 34, P. 35). They must be able to focus on the future, identify the needed change in the organization and manage the transitions (P. 23).
3b. Relation-oriented behaviors	1. Leaders should have the capability to mix well with their subordinates (P. 2, P. 6, P. 9), maintain good industrial relations (good relations with the unions of the organization) (P. 4, P. 14). 2. They must give due attention to their co-workers and their subordinates (P. 7) and forge strong bonds with them (P. 11). 3. They must meet their employees regularly and take feedback from them (P. 21, P. 29, P. 31).
Theme 4: HR Skills	1. Leader must be able to hire proper financial, production as well as personnel managers. (P. 5) 2. The leader must be able to put the right person at the right time on the right job (P. 20, P. 39). 3. Leaders must invest on management trainings for their employees and must expose them to better people-management practices (P. 26).
Theme 5: Decision-Making Skills	1. The leaders must be able to take well-thought decisions based on proper logic and rationale and not based on political influence (P. 14, P. 17, P. 27). 2. Decision-making powers must be decentralized and lower and middle level managers must be empowered to take business-related decisions (P. 7, P. 13). 3. They should be able to take calculated risks in their decisions and must be consistent in their decisions (P. 38).
Priorities for HR Departments of Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs)	
Theme 1: Staffing	1. Filling all important vacant positions, including the ones at lower levels is of prime importance (P.1, P. 3, P. 5, P. 15, P. 42). 2. Having a continuous process in recruitment at all the levels and having the ability to have the qualified professionals for the right place (P. 6, P.9, P. 18, P. 19, P. 26, P. 28, P. 37, P. 39) and selecting efficient and productive manpower who can work dedicatedly is essential for PSUs (P. 11, P. 21).
Theme 2: Training and Development	1. Capacity development of the existing staff members by either in-house trainings or through associations with other organizations to impart knowledge and skills to the employees is essential (P. 4, P. 26, P. 32). 2. HR departments must provide adequate training facilities for employees based on merit (P. 11, P. 18).
Theme 3: Performance Management and Compensation	1. There must be a well-managed performance monitoring and evaluation system in place (P. 14, P. 16, P. 22, P. 25, P. 37). 2. PSUs must do away with the system of 'annual confidential reports (ACR)' and

	replace them with the completely new performance management system (P. 23). 3. Providing better promotional avenues and salary hikes in a timely manner was an area of concern in PSUs (P. 11, P. 12, P. 17, P. 19).
Theme 4: Development of a Positive Organizational Culture	1. HR departments must conduct cultural as well recreational activities for employees on a regular basis (P. 4). 2. The organizations must have a shared concern for the well-being of employees (P. 7, P. 28, P. 30). 3. PSUs must have a more trusting culture based on accountability, honesty and integrity (P. 27, P. 40).
Motivating Factors to Work in a Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs)	
Theme 1: Public Service Motivation	1. I would like to improve the growth, productivity and efficiency of their PSUs as the progress of the PSUs is directly related to the betterment of their society and economic growth (P. 3, P. 4, P. 7, P. 10, P. 15, P. 19, P. 23, P. 26, P. 29, P. 32, P. 33, P. 36, P. 40, P. 42). 2. Jobs at PSUs are a means to provide employment to our countrymen and are a real service to large population by using government money (P. 4, P. 7, P. 26).
Theme 2: Job Security	1. Public sector jobs provide security to the employees (P. 4, P. 9, P. 12, P. 17, P. 22, P. 24, P. 33, P. 37, P. 38, P. 39). 2. PSU jobs provide freedom from hire and fire policy that many private sector organizations have (P. 14), and provide stability of employment (P. 32).
Theme 3: Working Conditions	1. Public sector job provides me identity, social recognition and a satisfaction of working for the government and creating an impact on the society (P. 15, P. 18, P. 25, P. 28, P. 40, P. 41). 2. Public sector jobs provide me with opportunity to handle huge amount of resources (manpower, finances) thus giving them a very rich work experience (P. 26). 3. Public sector jobs provide good career growth opportunity (P. 11, P. 20, P. 30, P. 41), independence and flexibility at work (P. 12, P. 33), better freedom of work and less red-tape (P. 20) and more opportunities to work in different areas and meet various professionals (P. 20, P. 24).

Challenges of Leading Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs)

The first research question was related to understanding the challenges of leading Indian PSUs. The responses of the participants were classified into four board categories: political interference and lack of autonomy, rigid rules and HR practices and lack of employee motivation. These challenges are described below:

1. ***Political interference and lack of autonomy:*** The sub-theme included issues relating to government and political interference. Coordination with the government and political interferences were cited as major challenges. Keeping the political bosses happy and being in

their good books is a challenge that public sector leaders faces. Often, a lot of public sector organizations have politicians who are chairpersons of the boards of governance. Such boards do not have sufficient representation of professionals. Politicians pressure leaders to take non-profitable/non-professional decisions that undermine the effectiveness of public sector organizations. Also, a lot of times pressure groups form inside companies that align themselves to the ruling political parties. There is "bureaucratic style of management where everything is decided by the CMD as per his skill set or on direction from government" (Participant [P.] 23).

Due to excessive political interference and rigid rules and norms established by the government, a lot of participants reported lack of autonomy and freedom in decision-making for the top leaders of the public sector organizations. Co-ordination with the government (P. 1), delayed budget approvals and political interference in decision-making (P. 3, P. 12) are a significant challenge for leaders of PSUs. Leaders experience a lack of flexibility in exercising powers at all the levels and often there is lack of clear goal of the company by the top executives (P. 4). There is uncertainty in the term of office (P. 5) and excessive government norms/regulations/interventions constrain the freedom that leaders have in decision-making (P. 8, P. 13, P. 14, P. 18, P. 21, P. 25, P. 26, P. 35, P. 39, P. 40). Government policies are not in line with the commercial logics (P. 9), there is centralized decision-making (P. 14) and political pressure (P. 16), thereby, impacting the long-term strategy making. Technocrats and professionals do not join PSUs (P. 18, P. 19) and even when there are well-qualified professionals, bureaucrats – who do not have background/experience about the work – do not want to listen to the professionals (P. 21).
Indian PSUs are being used to fulfil government's agendas only (P. 23) without any consideration to their efficiency and effectiveness. There are frequent changes (transfers) of the CEOs/other top managers leading to lack of consistency in the long-term vision/goals of the organizations (P. 25). All these factors lead to rigid systems and procedures where decision-making is often delayed (P. 28). Often times, there is a systems failure (P. 29) and

competent people leave such workplaces (P. 33). Thus, there is a lack of good leadership talent (P. 36) and the talent that exists, feels powerless due to high government, political and bureaucratic interferences (P. 38).

2. ***Rigid Rules and HR practices:*** PSUs often work under rigid rules and policies that have been formed by the government. Participants noted that they face various constraints in redefining the HR practices of their firms. Training and development of their staff members is often a concern. There is "lack of provision of training and orientation of personnel for their upgradation" (P. 31). Government norms and regulations often constrain the performance of leaders. Participant 23 (P. 23) observed that there are "tedious, redundant rules or business processes and less empowered employees who are bound by old rules of working".

   The incentives to perform (in terms of money) are often fixed and leaders cannot change those to motivate their employees. The participants reported that "professionals do not join/head PSUs due to poor salaries and perks. Moreover there are no rewards/punishments to outstanding/erring employees" (P. 18). Other participants observed that "there is lack of promotion/consideration in connection with the performance of the employees" (P. 19, P. 29, P. 31). "Security of jobs and assurance of pay-checks have a demotivating effect on personnel who perform better" (P. 39). "To take action against workers found detrimental to the interest of the PSU" is often a challenge (P. 42). One participant noted that "in PSU, labor management is a big challenge due to the protected environment" (P. 28). Another challenge that was reported is the hiring of qualified professionals. Participants noted that "recruitment of competent manpower" (P. 33), "recruitment of efficient executives" (P. 37), "hiring qualified and efficient persons" (P.14, P. 42) is a problem in public sector organizations.

3. ***Lack of employee motivation:*** A lot of participants reported *employee unions* as a big challenge of leading public sector organizations. Participants observed that often PSUs have

large number of employees (P. 5). Employees form unions and PSU leaders have to get work from those unions. Participant 25 (P. 25) observed that PSUs have "excessive dose of unionism" and often there is "union pressure" on the leaders of the organizations (P. 39, P. 40). These unions form pressure groups inside the company owing to their affiliations to political parties and hinder their efficient functioning (P. 40). Participant 9 (P. 9) mentioned that "subordinates need to be motivated from time to time" and "taking work from your subordinates" is a challenge for leaders in PSUs. Attitudes of employees in public organizations are a challenge and leaders need to motivate with incentives other than money (P. 9). There is a huge mismatch between the manpower that exists and the talent that is needed in such organizations (P. 13, P. 25, P. 32, P. 42).

"Making people accountable for the failures as well as the success" and "developing and sustaining their morale" (P. 15) is a challenge. Well-qualified "professionals do not join/lead PSUs due to poor salaries and perks" (P. 18, P. 31), "no decision-making power is given to employees" (P. 21, P. 23, P. 26), and "employees are fearful of taking risks" (P. 22). To motivate large number of employees, having diverse skills is, therefore, a big challenge (P. 27). Also, there is a lack of trust among subordinates due to lack of transparency in policy-making thereby leading to lower satisfaction levels (P. 41). In such conditions, it is often difficult to motivate the workers to work for profitability of the PSU and change their mind-set (P. 42).

Leadership Qualities Required to Lead Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs)

Below mentioned are the leadership qualities that were identified by the participants that are needed for leading PSUs. The qualities were broadly classified into five categories: communication, positive personality, leadership behaviors, HR skills, and decision-making. We next describe briefly each of these qualities:

1. ***Communication skills:*** Participants observed that leaders need to be good at communication with different stakeholders (P. 3, P. 9, P. 10, P. 11, P. 29). One, they should have good communication skills with the employees (P. 1). The leaders should be able to associate well with employees and have better relationships with them (P. 4, P. 6). They should be persuasive in their communications (P. 12), should be able to convince others about their arguments (P. 41), and should engagement in mutual (two-way) communications (P. 20). They should also be good listeners (P. 25). They should plan regular meetings with employees and take feedback (P. 21).

   Second, given the high interference in the working of PSU leaders by government/political bosses, the leaders should be able to communicate well with government and political bosses (P. 1). They should be able to convince the government about their ideas and vision (P. 5, P. 13, P. 19), should be able to get political patronage and support (P. 9), liaison better with the government (P. 20) and be diplomatic when working with political bosses (P. 39). The leaders should also be able to maintain cordial relationship with unions (P. 40).

2. ***Positive personality:*** A positive leader personality emerged as the strongest theme among the responses of the participants. Almost unanimously, leaders observed that a PSU leader must be honest and a person of integrity (P. 2, P. 10, P. 25, P. 26, P. 38). PSU leaders should work as if they are working on a mission (P. 3, P. 19), should have no ego (P. 4, P. 19, P. 28) and should personify simplicity (P. 8, P. 19, P. 28). They should have firm determination and dedication towards their work and have full faith in their abilities (P. 8, P. 24). They should be self-motivated, have a positive outlook, be patient and optimistic in their approach (P. 6, P. 24, P. 41). Such leaders should also be knowledgeable, should own responsibility and should lead-by-example when it comes to work and behavior (P. 10, P. 15, P. 21, P. 25, P. 33, P. 37). They should be self-learners and should demonstrate ability to learn and improve over time (P. 14, P. 31, P. 32). They should constantly update their knowledge and keep track

of recent developments in their domain of work (P. 42). They should lead by example – first do and then show the way doing, and also be open to criticism (P. 30).

3. ***Leadership behaviors:*** The participants identified important leader behaviors that were further segregated into two broad categories: change-oriented behaviors and relation-oriented behaviors. Below, we describe the two types of behaviors:
   a. ***Change-oriented behaviors:*** The change-oriented behaviors are related to developing and planning a long-term vision and strategy for the organization. Participants identified that leaders must have visioning capacity (P. 3, P. 4, P. 13, P. 32, P. 37, P. 38) and should do proper planning of their actions based on research (P. 6, P. 31). The leaders must think like business professionals (P. 9) and identify profitable business opportunities (P. 39). They must keep the growth of their organizations and the good of the nation (public) in mind (P. 17, P. 18, P. 27) at all times. They should be able to understand the business of their PSUs and implement innovative business processes (P. 23). The leaders should have the capacity to analyse the situation and make innovative strategies to achieve the goals of their PSU (P. 31, P. 34, P. 35). They must be able to focus on the future, identify the needed change in the organization and manage the transitions (P. 23). They should instil a feeling of ownership in their employees and inspire them to work for the growth of the organization (P. 23, P. 26, P. 29).
   b. ***Relation-oriented behaviors:*** The leaders must have the ability to build positive and close interpersonal relationships with their employees. They should have the capability to mix well with their subordinates (P. 2, P. 6, P. 9), maintain good industrial relations (good relations with the unions of the organization) (P. 4, P. 14). They must give due attention to their co-workers and their subordinates (P. 7) and forge strong bonds with them (P. 11). They should have the ability to work with employees have different backgrounds (P. 29). The leaders should work as if they are one of the team members (P. 24) and be accessible to the employees (P. 18). They must meet their employees regularly and take feedback from them (P. 21, P. 29, P. 31). They should be able to organize people

(P. 14), motivate and inspire them to work for the organization's goals/vision (P. 23, P. 29, P. 32). They should be appreciative of the efforts of their people (P. 25) and be friendly towards them (P. 37).

4. ***HR skills:*** Participants identified that leaders need to have proper HR skills. The most significant skill that was highlighted by the participants was the ability to spot the right talent within or outside the organization and place it at the right position (P. 13). Participant 5 (P. 5) mentioned that the leader must be able to hire proper financial, production as well as personnel managers. The leader must be able to put the right person at the right time on the right job (P. 20, P. 39). Also, the leader must invest on developing skills of their employees (P. 13). Leaders must invest on management trainings for their employees and must expose them to better people-management practices (P. 26). They must always ensure that there are suitably trained employees in the organization (P. 32). Lastly, the leaders should have understanding of performance management practices and should work towards incentivising better performance and penalizing the poor performers (P. 18). The leaders must work towards institutionalizing better wage/incentive policies (P. 32) and performance-based incentives (P. 39).

5. ***Decision-making skills:*** One of the most significant tasks of leaders is to take decisions. The leaders must be able to take well-thought decisions based on proper logic and rationale and not based on political influence (P. 14, P. 17, P. 27). Participants mentioned that leaders must be able to take bold decisions about their work and organizations (P. 6, P. 12). Also, a recurring theme was that the decision-making powers must be decentralized and lower and middle level managers must be empowered to take business-related decisions (P. 7, P. 13). Given the delays in decisions that occur in the PSUs, participants mentioned that the leaders must be quick decision-makers in uncertain environments (P. 18, P. 25).

An area in which the importance of taking proper decisions was highlighted was the financial decisions. Participants mentioned that the leaders must be able to take better finance-related decisions (P. 23) that may actually lead to financial independence of the PSUs (P. 39). They should be able to take calculated risks in their decisions and must be consistent in their decisions (P. 38).

Priorities for HR Departments of Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs)

The participants identified four major priorities for the HR departments for the PSUs. These were: staffing, training and development, performance management and compensation, and culture development. We describe below each of these.

1. ***Staffing:*** Participants overwhelmingly felt the need to have a better staffing (recruitment and selection) HR practice in their organizations. Filling all important vacant positions, including the ones at lower levels was of prime importance for many participants (P.1, P. 3, P. 5, P. 15, P. 42). Having a continuous process in recruitment at all the levels and having the ability to have the qualified professionals for the right place (P. 6, P.9, P. 18, P. 19, P. 26, P. 28, P. 37, P. 39) and selecting efficient and productive manpower who can work dedicatedly is essential for PSUs (P. 11, P. 21). One participant (P. 23) identified the need for planned recruitment. He observed that "PSUs either recruit in bulk or do not recruit for many years". Having a consistent recruitment and selection policy that can ensure a sustainable and regular flow of manpower is needed (P. 15, P. 26). Some participants highlighted the needed for "identifying possible future leaders and then investing in their development" (P. 33, P. 39).

2. ***Training and development:*** The second most important priority of the HR department was reported to be training and development. Capacity development of the existing staff members (P. 1) by either in-house trainings or through associations with other organizations to impart knowledge and skills to the employees is essential (P. 4, P. 26, P. 32). Existence of training and development programs (P. 7, P. 8, P. 9, P. 10, P. 12, P. 19, P. 20, P. 21, P. 24, P. 25, P.

27, P. 29, P. 34, P. 35), providing adequate training facilities for employees based on merit (P. 11, P. 18), providing orientation programs for employees (P. 31, P. 39), development of employee skills at all levels on a continuous basis (P. 14, P. 16, P. 21, P. 22, P. 23, P. 36, P. 38, P. 40), and trainings for the development of personality and soft skills (P. 26, P. 30) were identified as important areas under the training and development HR practices.

3. ***Performance management and compensation:*** The third area of importance was identified as performance management and compensation. The participants highlighted the need for having a well-managed performance monitoring and evaluation system in place (P. 14, P. 16, P. 22, P. 25, P. 37). Participants (e.g., P. 9, P. 10, P. 11, P. 12, P. 15) highlighted the need for having promotions based on merit. Others (P. 5, P. 8, P. 22) mentioned the need for having well-defined timelines for tasks followed by proper monitoring and timely reviews (P. 22). One participant (P. 23) highlighted the "need to do away with the system of 'annual confidential reports (ACR)' and replace them with the completely new performance management system". One participant (P. 40) also highlighted the need for "making self-appraisal compulsory for every employee irrespective of their status or cadre".
   The participants identified the necessity of having better compensation and incentives at par with private sector (P. 2, P. 5, P. 7, P. 31, P. 40). Providing better promotional avenues and salary hikes (P. 11, P. 12, P. 17, P. 19) in a timely manner was an area of concern for many participants. Also, punishments along with rewards were highlighted as important (P. 10). Other benefits such as healthcare (P. 7), social security (P. 15), retirement benefits (P. 18), accidental benefits, safety and security (P. 2, P. 24, P. 42), better residential facilities (P. 2) were highlighted as important by some participants.

4. ***Development of a positive organizational culture:*** Another important area of work for the HR department that was identified was the development of a positive organizational culture. The elements of such a positive culture that were identified were: conducting cultural as well recreational activities for employees on a regular basis (P. 4), having a shared concern for the

well-being of employees (P. 7, P. 28, P. 30), emphasizing flexibility, creativity and risk-taking (P. 8, P. 40), developing teamwork (P. 13, P. 24, P. 31, P. 38), participative, friendly and family-like work environment (P. 14, P. 18, P. 20, P. 21, P. 22, P. 30, P. 39), quick grievance redressal mechanism (P. 25, P. 31, P. 42) and a more trusting culture based on accountability, honesty and integrity (P. 27, P. 40).

Factors Motivating to Work in a Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs)

Lastly, we analysed the responses of participant on the question of 'what motivates them to work at a public sector undertakings?' The participants mentioned that the factors that motivate them to work at PSUs are: public service motivation, job security and working conditions. We describe these themes below.

1. ***Public service motivation:*** A lot of participants saw their jobs at a PSU as an opportunity to serve the nation and society. Many participants mentioned that they would like to improve the growth, productivity and efficiency of their PSUs (P. 2, P. 8, P. 13, P. 19, P. 21, P. 23, P. 35) as the progress of the PSUs is directly related to the betterment of their society and economic growth (P. 3, P. 4, P. 7, P. 10, P. 15, P. 19, P. 23, P. 26, P. 29, P. 32, P. 33, P. 36, P. 40, P. 42). They saw their jobs at PSUs as a means to provide employment to their countrymen and as a real service to large population by using government money (P. 4, P. 7, P. 26).

2. ***Job security:*** A major motivator for the participants seemed to be the job security associated with the public sector job. Participants observed that public sector jobs provide security to the employees (P. 4, P. 9, P. 12, P. 17, P. 22, P. 24, P. 33, P. 37, P. 38, P. 39), provide freedom from hire and fire policy that many private sector organizations have (P. 14), and provide stability of employment (P. 32).

3. ***Working Conditions:*** Surprisingly, given the challenges and problems associated of working in PSUs (please see the section on 'Challenges of Leading PSUs' above), a large number of participants reported that the working conditions at PSUs are one of the motivating factors for them to continue to work. Participants observed that a public sector job provides them identity, social recognition and a satisfaction of working for the government and creating an impact on the society (P. 15, P. 18, P. 25, P. 28, P. 40, P. 41). Some participants reported that public sector jobs provide good career growth opportunity (P. 11, P. 20, P. 30, P. 41), independence and flexibility at work (P. 12, P. 33), better freedom of work and less red-tape (P. 20) and more opportunities to work in different areas and meet various professionals (P. 20, P. 24). Public sector jobs provide them with opportunity to handle huge amount of resources (manpower, finances) thus giving them a very rich work experience (P. 26). Others reported that they were very satisfied with the benefits of a public sector job such as pension (P. 22), pay structure and other monetary benefits (P. 28), and good working environment at the PSUs (P. 38, P. 42).

DISCUSSION

The observations from the responses of leaders in Indian public sector organizations showed similarities as well as differences with the literature. We classified the responses to the question on challenges faced by public leaders, into three themes viz. – political interference and lack of autonomy, rigid rules and HR practices, and lack of employee motivation. Among the three, political interference and lack of autonomy challenge was found to be the most frequently mentioned. A large number of leaders reported political interference and pressure, and lack of autonomy in decision making as major challenges. While earlier studies (e.g., Nutt & Backoff, 1993; Boyne, 2002; Gupta, 2016; Gupta et al., 2018) have highlighted the existence of red-tapism, excessive rules and procedures, our study highlighted that in a developing country context such as India, this was reported as the most significant and important challenge that the leaders face while discharging their responsibilities. Interference from politicians and

governments is something severely constrains the decision-making freedom of leaders, limits their ability to adopt more forward-looking HR practices and has a negative impact on the organizational culture. Our study shows that employees in public enterprises find frequent transfers, lack of proper internal and external communication, and uneven power distribution as undesirable and de-motivating (Joshi & Srivastava, 2012). The second and third themes in order of importance were related to HR practices and employee motivation. From the data we deduce that leaders consider staffing, training, motivating, and setting up performance management system as important challenges in PSUs. The responses reiterate the case for lack of training (Singh, 2003), and reward/punishment mechanisms (Perry & Porter, 1982). Motivating the workforce, handling labour issues, and managing with the available manpower were the other challenges raised. Talukdar (2013) had also highlighted the role of leader behaviour in job motivation of employees.

For the responses to the question on skills required for leading public sector organizations, we identified five themes – communication skills, positive personality, leader behaviors, HR skills, and decision-making. Most of the leaders interviewed, opined that having a vision for the organization, a business mindset, and ability to plan and execute strategies were required for leading a public organization. The need for business acumen and strategic vision for public sector leaders was also emphasized by Dulewicz (1994). Moreover, a good understanding of the organization and its finances, technical skills, and problem solving ability were other significant points of focus. Also, the confidence to make bold decisions and take calculated risks, as well as involving subordinates in decision making were reported as necessary decision related skills. People-related skills came next. Taking care of subordinates, maintaining cordial relationships, motivating employees, building teams, and valuing employee feedback were mentioned as the important people-skills for a leader. The first three of these are consistent with the leader characteristics mentioned by Khatri (2011). For the HR-related skills, leaders considered HR responsibilities such as hiring right people, reviewing skills of functions, and training and development of workforce as important points for attention. Also, possessing good

communication skills and ability to handle different agencies convincingly emerged as unanimously agreed task related traits.

The theme was of 'positive leader personality' stood out in this section. Traditionally, Indian society has laid a lot of emphasis as leaders and their ability to exhibit positive qualities (Sinha, 1990). In line with other studies on public leadership in the Indian context (e.g., Gupta et al., 2018), our study got overwhelming support for the need of developing a positive mind-set, ability to stay motivated in spite of challenges and difficulties, working hard, and owning responsibility (leading by example). Regarding values, leaders are expected to be honest, patient, willing to sacrifice, diplomatic, trustworthy, open, and most importantly, be a role model worthy of respect – this last characteristic finds support from Khatri (2011).

For the question on HRD priorities, we found four broad themes in the responses – staffing, training and development, performance management and compensation, and development of a positive organizational culture. The theme that stood out in this section was the need of 'staffing'. Overwhelmingly, participants felt the need to revamp recruitment and selection strategies in their PSUs. Indian Public Sector undertakings are over-manned, and downsizing of manpower is difficult because of opposition from labour and archaic and complex labour legislations (Planning Commission, 2002). A lot of participants observed that there is a big mismatch between the talents that are needed to run their units and the existing talents. This came out as a recurrent theme across the answers of participants for different questions and represented as a significant challenge that leaders of Indian PSUs are faced with. Also, imparting training related to management and soft skills on a regular basis is lacking (Singh, 2003). Research studies (e.g., Sharma, 1992) had noted that as compared to private organizations, lesser money is spent and fewer employees are trained by Indian public sector organizations. The trend seems to have not changed much even now.

A large number of participants felt that a proper performance management system had to be formed, so that employees could be rewarded or punished, and good performers could move up in the organization. Likewise, Joshi & Srivastava (2012) observed that there was no system to reward good work or contribution of employees in Indian PSUs. Many also felt the need for certain perks and benefits such as healthcare, conveyance, recreational activities, and financial benefits. Regarding salaries, few participants had the opinion that salary had to be at par with private sector and that there had to be a timely review of wages. For promotion and rewards, seniority systems still dominate the public sector enterprises, and the seniority based career growth provides stability and progression in career (Gupta, 2016).

Concerning organizational culture, a large number of participants felt that a proper organizational design with less hierarchy, and giving more freedom in decision making through delegation of power had to be prioritized. Khatri (2011) had highlighted the asymmetry of power in Indian public enterprises. Participants recognized that the Indian PSUs are highly centralized and there is a big power difference that exists even now. The lower and middle management are rarely involved in decision-making and there are also problems of co-ordination between different departments and agencies. In an environment like this, problem-solving through discussion and feedback mechanisms were necessary. Thus, a lot of participants felt that motivating and engaging employees must be a priority for HR departments. Consistent in the responses of a majority of participants was the aspect of training and development. Leaders thought that there had to be training at all levels, attention to software and technical skills, and continuous upgrading of skills. This lack of uniform training at all levels was also pointed out by Sharma (1992). Recruiting personnel with the right qualifications, carrying out planned hiring and placing the right person at the right position in the organization was highlighted as an area of critical importance for the HR departments.

For the question regarding the motivation of participants to work in the public sector, we found five themes emerging. The most prominent of them was public service motivation which means

working for a social purpose (Perry & Wise, 1990). A large number of employees saw their job as a way to serve the nation and the public, bring about change in the society, create employment, and help the common man. This observation regarding task-significance is consistent with the findings of Perry and Wise (1990). Many leaders also sought to achieve some higher organizational purpose which, according to them, means upliftment of PSUs, raising efficiency and productivity, and competing strongly with private sector were targets they were working towards. Some leaders also mentioned reasons related to their function in the organization, like improvement of processes, development of training systems, and guiding the organization. Our study shows that PSUs provide higher level of perceived job security, and this psychological influence on Indian employees is still prevalent. This was also consistent to the findings reported in Indian as well as international public sector leadership research (e.g., Buelens & Broeck, 2007; Joshi & Srivastava, 2012; Perry et al., 2010; Sharma & Bajpai, 2010).

Advantages like government association, recognition, job security, less work load, flexible routine, and the opportunity to exercise authority suited them. A large population of India has a strong fascination for public sector jobs, mainly due to the job security and employee benefits they provide. Time-to time, the Indian government has rescued public organizations from financial difficulties to protect the jobs of those employed. Having a 'government job' has traditionally been associated with attaining respect in society, and securing advantage in the marriage market. Due to caste-based and gender-based reservations, public sector and government jobs are also critical agendas in state-level elections - winning parties can extend reservations to certain sections of the society once they occupy office. Some participants quoted reasons such as working in public sector, like career growth, good experience, exposure, supporting family, and job satisfaction. There were also leaders who reported reasons pertaining to their abilities: they felt that they had the skills to manage the employees, handle responsibility, and that they understood the organization better than others. Some others had a passive outlook towards their job and said that they were in their respective organizations by chance, or based on the government's direction. A very small fraction of the participants stated financial Benefits and

salaries as their sources of motivation. This supports the observation of Boyne (2002) that public sector employees are less materialistic.

Implications for Research and Practice

As we pointed out earlier, there is lack of focused research on public sector leadership, especially in an emerging country context. Our motive for this study was to explore the challenges and opportunities for leadership in the Indian public sector organizations. Although research work has been done to establish the cultural characteristics of the Indian organizations, we could not find a study similar to ours, which takes a close view of the ground reality in public enterprises. The study confirms some of the typical characteristics of Indian public enterprises researched in the past, and also highlights the problems faced and areas for improvement in HR practices. Organizational research on Indian public sector is scarce, and given the importance of these enterprises, the sector needs more attention (Roberts, 2017). We hope that our findings would open up avenues for research in the future. The themes that come out of the study need to be studied specifically.

The challenges for leadership emerging from the study can guide appropriate changes in management practices. The responses about skills required to lead Indian public sector organizations could be used for establishing a framework for proper selection and appointment of leaders. These skills expected from leaders of public enterprises, could be kept in mind while setting up training programs for them, and also for developing leaders for the future. The perspectives on HR priorities can be used to improve HR practices in these organizations. The responses of leaders to the question regarding the reasons for working in the public sector could be taken as the factors of motivation for developing a suitable culture and designing policies for the workplace. Since these are responses of people occupying leadership positions, we see that their responses reflect an inclination for collective improvement, and hence if this data is used for improving the work related policies of public sector, it is bound to develop the organization as a whole.

Strengths, Limitations and Directions for Future Research

We were able to directly access a large sample of full-time leaders of PSUs from different industries working in different parts of India that are generally considered to be difficult to approach and gain an access to. While conducting the study, we were aware of potential limitations associated with this methodology and took steps to minimize their influence by adopting suitable procedural controls (keeping the survey very short, respecting the time of the respondents, ensuring confidentiality of responses and maintaining anonymity, and conducting through analyses of the responses).

The study has some limitations that can be addressed in future research. Our study is a qualitative one and based on a survey, and so it has its shortcomings due to these features. A detailed quantitative analysis would be required if the significance of particular themes is to be evaluated. While the small sample size of 42 leaders is small, we believe that it is adequate for a qualitative study. Although we have tried to take an overall view of Indian public sector organizations, the situation could be different in those organizations that are not covered in the study. For instance, the military and armed forces could have different challenges and priorities. The comments of the participants could fall into multiple categories, or the responses could be organized under different themes than those we have used. More data and specific questions would be required if one were to depict a clearer picture. Further research, both quantitative and qualitative in nature, is required to revalidate the comprehensiveness of the themes described in this study. Also, further research is needed to examine whether the themes identified in this study can explain differences in the performance of PSUs (leadership and management). Finally, the findings are restricted to the Indian context and can only be generalized to public sector organizations in nations having similar cultural, social and political contexts.

CONCLUSION

The present study tries to understand the challenges of leading a PSU, the skills required in leading such an organization, the priorities for HR departments, and reasons for motivation of people to work in the public sector. Our motivation for this exercise was that given the importance of the sector and the difficulties of privatization in India, we expect them to continue to hold importance in the near future. We clubbed the responses to the questions under broad themes to understand the overall picture. The themes identified in the study show that there is a dominant role of Indian cultural and political contexts in influencing the experiences of leaders working in public sector organizations. At various instances, we also find support from the available literature. We hope that the themes emerging from the study will lend support to earlier findings and also guide research and practice in future.

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