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# CHILLED OR CHURCHILLIAN ARE WE BORN TO LEAD OR IS LEADERSHIP BORN OUT OF NEED?



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## Chilled or Churchillian - are we born to lead or is leadership born out of need?

It's context rather than charisma driving today's talent in businesses looking to 'level up' their senior teams, says Shasha Lu of the Cambridge Judge Business School



### **Are leaders born great - or is greatness forced upon them?**

According to Shakespeare's Twelfth Night Some are born great, some achieve greatness while others have greatness forced upon them. This reference to the context of leadership over the charismatic qualities required to do the job is as true today as it was in 1602 when the comedy was first performed.

This is also the case for today's leaders with the modern-day proviso that their 'greatness' is not born in the conventional sense, but 'borne out' of the context and the economic and political climate they find themselves in and, more importantly, how they adapt to rapid change, according to Shasha Lu, Associate Professor of Marketing and the academic programme director of the Cambridge General Management Programme at Cambridge Judge Business School, Executive Education.

Although the political ambition to level up the UK may have faltered in light of the Government decision to scrap the northern leg of HS2, for example, it's full steam ahead for a UK plc seeking to future-proof its people and performance through succession planning, a constant business imperative not put all your eggs in one basket when it comes to recruitment and retention and maintaining a healthy pipeline in identifying and training the strategic leaders of tomorrow.

In short, it is a levelling up of different leaders with wider skill sets and a focus on the main idea that greatness is not the gift of one person or a fixed trait, but a dynamic and adaptive process that depends on the situations and needs of the business whether it is attempting to steady the ship in a storm as in Act 1 of Twelfth Night or 'steady as you go' in terms of inspiring the day-to-day business agenda.

**"It goes beyond personal charisma - good leadership is about how they adapt to the conditions they find themselves in," she said.**

"A good example of this would have been Winston Churchill who was a strong and charismatic war leader. Many assumed he would sweep back to power in the General Election of 1945 due to his personal popularity and an outstanding war record.

"However, he was defeated by a landslide Labour victory because the situation had shifted – there was no longer a need for his type of leadership in a post-war Britain that was increasingly focused on building a social and economic consensus that would lead to the development of the welfare state and the National Health Service."

Similar strong leadership models developed during COVID based upon the common good of the country during a period of rapid change, she argues, although a different form of management arguably developed soon after.

“Businesses are looking to recruit and retain the next generation of leaders by providing support and training that enables them to transition to the next level so that they have the expertise, an end-to-end understanding of the organisation and a broad understanding of the key discipline required and a highly-effective approach to decision-making.

“You can’t teach charisma, but you can accelerate personal transformation and the understanding of context – when to step up and when to step back to allow others to take the lead,” she said.

Levelling up on talent broadens the potential of the business, she argues.

“It widens the perspective of those with leadership potential by stretching their strategic thinking and providing the tools to develop different mind-sets and problem-solving so that they emerge as highly effective and rounded leaders that can identify strengths and weaknesses, micro and macro challenges and how to transform threats into opportunities – whether your personality is chilled or Churchillian.”



**Shasha Lu**  
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