Mahendra Singh Dhoni: A Leadership Study of an Enigma

Hardeep Singh
Assistant Professor,
Centre of Professional Enhancement,
Lovely Professional University,
Phagwara, Punjab (India)

Abstract
The article is about the talismanic former wicketkeeper and skipper of Team India. It is a study depicting arrival of a young man full of immense potential, his technique of stewardship leading into staggering success with some share of controversies along the stunning journey. Dhoni was handed over the captaincy of the team in 2007 and he took the cricketing world by storm with his unique style of leading the team. The case elucidates the journey of a small town boy who emerged as a stellar performer for Indian team. Under his leadership, Indian team went on the scale tall mountains courtesy his sheer grit and determination. The entire team had great belief in him and he as a skipper was liked and adored in the cricketing circles. His attributes of being mentally tough and leading from the front inspired players to put their best foot forward in every match in tricolors. Without an iota of doubt, Team India blossomed under his leadership and continues to do so as he passed the baton to young sensation and virtually the king of batting Virat Kohli.

Keywords: Captain, Leadership, Great, Enigmatic, Performer

Introduction
Leadership, the quality of changing the attitude and behavior of your co-workers and instills in them the trait of zeal and confidence. This can be said for the leaders who are leading in different fields. However, as far as, Cricket is concerned which is predominantly a team game; the role of a captain becomes all the very crucial. If we try to come draw a conclusion about the greatest leader of all time, Mahendra Singh Dhoni’s name will top the list. His out of the box thinking and absolutely unusual way of leading the side led India to many memorable victories even from the jaws of defeat. Once he said, “We are not thinking about what may happen if we achieve or what may happen if we don’t succeed because those two things are beyond our control.” which simply concludes that he as a skipper is a genuine risk taker with ample amount of cricketing acumen. On number of occasions, he has used in instincts to take decision on the field and that too with great deal of precision. These are some of the traits which make him stand as an iconic skipper and arguably India’s finest captain, ever produced.
In a surprising turn of events, Dhoni was handed over the captaincy of the team in the year 2007 before the team was leaving for South Africa to take part in the T20 world cup. That year he was made the captain of ODI team too and then in 2008, he took charge of the longest form of the game. Being him at the helm, India won four major titles including 50 Over World Cup in 2011, Champions Trophy in 2013, World T20 Championship in 2007 and also became the No. 01 test side. His leadership prowess, immense confidence, humility, ability to deal with adversities, cool demeanor and great utilization of the resources earned him the sobriquet” Captain Marvel” Although the picture is not all that rosy. He has also encountered severe criticism when team faltered. But like every determined athlete, he has come back more strong and wise.

He asserts, “I never predict what will happen in cricket. We believe in each other and we believe in the process.” The article is also a study of this Dhoni’s philosophy of moving ahead with sanguine attitude and believing in the process.

**Early life and credentials**

Dhoni hails from very unconventional cricketing centres of India that is Ranchi, Jharkhand(of course, he has put Ranchi on the cricketing map now) and was born on July 7th 1981. From the very beginning, he was good in football and played at the club level too. Primarily, he would play as a goalkeeper. His football coach spotted the talent and asked him to play cricket. He did a good job and got selected for the Vinoo Mankad Under-16 tournament. After this, he played for Bihar in the Under-19 side and by the time he was 18, he made his debut in Ranji Trophy for Bihar.

Soon, he found recognition for his efforts in the 2003/04 season and got selected for India A team for the tour of African minnows. He performed well and caught the attention of another talisman of Indian Cricket and the then Indian captain – Sourav Ganguly. However, his burst into the Indian Team happened when he went with the Indian contingent for a tour of our eastern neighbor, Bangladesh. It was superseded by a swashbuckling 148 against Pakistan in the home series. Mahendra Singh Dhoni announced his arrival at the international arena. He became a sensation with this scintillating inning. In 2005, his marauding innings of 183 runs in just 145 balls, won the game for Men in blue. Dhoni cemented his place in the Indian side.

**An investigation of Leadership Style**

He had a vision to succeed and an astute mind to support that vision. His golden period began with the T20 WC triumph when he was helmed at the leadership position. A very lucid and innovative thinking was on display throughout that tournament. With no experience of leading the side, Dhoni without worrying too much about the result, went on to lift the trophy of inaugural edition of game’s shortest format. The team exhibited a perfect amalgamation of cricketing abilities and mental strength guided by the enigmatic leader. A good leader ensures that the ambience in the team is healthy and everyone in the squad is given ample opportunities to perform.
Dhoni was instrumental in developing camaraderie in the team and his composure was also rubbing off to his team mates. In spite of very young, he dealt with his success with level headedness and humbleness. He remained grounded despite elevating to the peak. Understanding very well that in any sport victories and losses are bound to happen, he was never seen overly ecstatic with wins or pessimistically dejected with losses. He knew that winning and losing are part and parcel of the game. This made him leader awe inspiring. Many of decisions came under scrutiny but he had a cricketing mind of his own.

He gave the last over of the final of World T20 to a relatively rookie Joginder Sharma. It was followed by heady euphoria as India lifted the title and everyone went gaga over this masterstroke by him. His biggest risk or another masterstroke probably was on display in the final of 50 over world cup in 2011 when he promoted himself over the man of the tournament Yuvraj Singh and that too when he was completely out of touch through the World Cup Campaign. But true to his instincts, the gamble paid off, Dhoni did not disappoint and played a magnificent inning helping India putting its hand on the coveted trophy after a wait of 28 years. He was not a leader(still he is not) who loves the limelight; he had great words for Gambhir’s crucial innings and acknowledged his performance as their partnership proved pretty crucial in the run chase. As a captain, the quality of identifying the skills set and backing the players with the same made him a captain of captains. Through his simplistic approach, awareness of the game and self belief, he made himself a trusted and the most respected leaders in the cricketing fraternity. There occured the lows in his career too but then Dhoni being Dhoni accepted his mistakes without passing the buck to others, He remained humble in times of adversity. India was leaving for United Kingdom for the Champions Trophy and simultaneously the spot fixing scandal erupted just after the culmination of IPL-6. Dhoni was cornered though he chose to stay mum and instead focused on his cricket and let the performance did all the talking by winning the coveted ICC Champions Trophy Title 2013. Dhoni is an exemplary leader when it comes to motivating others. This deportment was showcased by him during the semi final of 2011 world cup where India was locking horns with arch rivals Pakistan. The venue was absolutely jam packed and all cricketing eyes were glued on this marquee clash. There was pressure, the world cup was at stake as the enormity of the game was massive. Amidst all the talking and hysteria, Dhoni kept his calm and fostered his troops to remain in a state of tranquility and asked them to focus on the game by taking it just a cricket match. His motivation was fructifying as India thrashed Pakistan and registered their date for the summit clash at the Wankhede, Mumbai. However, after all the glory, came the testing period as Indian team suffered a series of losses. The need of hour was to showcase grit and determination. In words of Navjot Singh Sidhu, ”Character is not made in crisis, it is exhibited” and Dhoni showed that in ample measures and silenced his critics with his superb performances.

Dhoni’s elevation to the captaincy was done on the expense of many star players, still he managed to extract the best from these senior players and former captains courtesy his great man management skills. Furthermore, he was also not insecure of losing the limelight to another player as many a times he was found missing in team celebration after receiving a trophy. A similar trait was at exhibition when he gave the little master, the ultimate
glory of receiving the world cup title. In 2008, after the series win against Australia, he asked former test captain Kumble to receive the Border-Gavaskar trophy as he was the Indian skipper at that point in time and Dhoni got the test captaincy mid series. Also, in the last match of the series, he gave Sourav Ganguly the captaincy during the fag end of the match as it was former captain’s last international appearance. Humility has always remained a potent tool of his leadership style. He remained unflappable and composed and led his team very well. Such kind of mindset is imperative to win at the top level.

A Startling Decision

With the debate and scrutiny whether Indian Team is heading in the right direction under his leadership, Dhoni, being the epitome of enigma, announced his test retirement mid way in a series against Australian down under. It is pertinent to mention here that India earned the no. 1 position under his leadership after a string of brilliant performances. He sidelined himself from the purest form of the game citing the strain of playing all formats. The great Sunil Gavaskar once said,” You take away all the name and fame from Dhoni, still he will quietly walk to the sunset”. It takes a lot of boldness to suddenly step away from an arena where you belong to like no one else. But Dhoni, a man of few words and plenty of substance chose to bid adieu test cricket on his own terms. He seemed invincible some time back. However, Dhoni started fading as a skipper. Being at helm of affairs, it was MS Dhoni and his company marching on and decimating the opposition all the way. For a longer period of time, he had the midas touch, but as his side started finding themselves in hot soup by losing a string of matches, especially overseas in the purest form of the game, Dhoni’s captaincy was subjected to intense scrutiny and criticism. His poor run as a skipper also coincided with the rise and rise of young batting sensation Virat Kohli who incidentally made his India debut under Dhoni. With Kohli garnering enough mileage to be the next captain, Dhoni’s chances of redeeming himself went weak resulting him relinquishing the captaincy in all formats.

Conclusion and Discussion

There is nothing like constant in any field. Failure is an integral part of success and a gallant commander acknowledges that with his wisdom. Dhoni’s leadership qualities is worth praising as he took some firm decision and backed them with his instincts for the welfare and good of Indian Cricket. With age catching up and reflexes not getting stronger, he finds himself in a credible crisis after a dismal show in 2019 ICC 50 Over World Cup. He hasn’t played any international game after that heart breaking semi final loss to New Zealand. He has been eyeing a comeback in international cricket and toiling hard in the nets, preparing for IPL where he represents the very enviable Chennai Super Kings where he is celebrated as a demigod. It goes without saying that he holds a very special place in Indian Cricket all thanks to his massive achievements and unparalleled stewardship. Every time the clouds of pessimism hovered around, he bounced back with unprecedented performances.
MS Dhoni, certainly finds an exceptional place in the cricketing folklore of India as he categorically is the most loved skippers of Indian cricket. But then, failure and disappointment dictate terms. For Thala, Dhoni, (the nickname he has got representing the Chennai Super Kings) the glorious phase began in the year 2007 – when he became the captain of national side and that fairy tale continues till the Champions Trophy 2013. In a Cricket love nation, where there is considerable scrutiny if you are Indian Cricket Captain, Dhoni has carved a niche for himself. Overall, Dhoni has been full of luck in drawing less criticism in comparison to other Indian cricket captains.

Due to dwindling performance and mounting pressure and the arrival of new sensation called Virat Kohli, it was time for Dhoni to pass on the baton to King of batting. He did that rather mysteriously mid series against Australia in 2014 by announcing his test retirement and subsequently giving Kohli the one day captaincy after few years. He still has the hunger and desire to play the game as his fitness is second to none but then time is a force to reckon with. One think is for sure, whenever he leaves, he will do that with a smile, an enigmatic one through and probably showing the full face of his blade.

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