

LEADERSHIP TRAITS AND THEIR IMPACT ON MARKET STRATEGIES.

H.M.U.N. Herath
Department of Agricultural and Plantation Engineering
The Open University of Sri Lanka.
P.O.Box 21, Nawala, Nugegoda, 10250, Sri Lanka.
E mail hnher@ou.ac.lk

Saliya de Silva
Faculty of Economics
Saga University
Saga, Japan.
E mail saliyalk@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Sri Lanka holds a dominant position as a leading exporter of black tea. It has a reasonably diversified product line including both orthodox and CTC teas. Sri Lankan tea industry is operating in a diversified geographical market which gives it the strength to sustain future demand fluctuations. However, the global tea market is quite competitive and the demand is shifting from unbranded bulk tea to value added tea products. Sri Lanka is moving forward with value added operations and this move is initiated by the private entrepreneurs in the industry. Product innovation acts as the key to success in today's competitive markets and those firms having experience in the international markets try to gain advantage with new products and compete with the dynamic firms in the fast growing global tea market. This paper therefore attempts to study the contribution of leadership traits in formulating strategies to gain competitive advantage in value added tea marketing. The study was carried out employing qualitative case study methodology. Data were gathered mainly through personal interviews with founder entrepreneurs of nine leading value added tea export firms in Sri Lanka. After analyzing the cases there was evidence to suggest that product and process innovations have been strategically used by the entrepreneurs to gain competitive advantage. Leaders proved their ability of risk taking through self-motivated moves into value added tea marketing. Hard work, determination and perseverance were identified as important leadership traits. Commitment, enthusiasm and self-confidence were remarkable characteristics of all leaders. Their future visions and clearly set directions have contributed towards successful market strategies. Personality traits of leaders showed a positive influence on their leadership behaviour demonstrated through successful business strategies. The key areas of impact identified through the study are branding and value addition, pioneering in product and market innovations, market development and superior product development.

Key words: *Leadership traits, value addition, tea, strategies.*

Introduction

Large scale plantation cash crop sector and the small scale subsistence food crop sector symbolize the sectoral dualism in agriculture in Sri Lanka. Paddy, home gardens and traditional slash and burn cultivations embody the subsistence sector while Tea, rubber and coconut are grown as major cash crops and managed as large plantations. Tea plantations were established during the colonial period and still remain the major export crop in the country. Although Sri Lanka has been exporting tea since the colonial period, it has not been considered an export commodity but a raw material in the form of bulk tea.

Present day consumer demand however has shifted towards specialty teas and the markets have become more competitive with varieties of value added tea products. In view of this shifting demand in the global tea market, several innovative Sri Lankan firms have taken up the challenge and ventured on value added tea production and exports with the vision of winning the competitive edge through value addition and branding. Such innovative endeavours invariably require a considerable capital investment and radical move in marketing approaches. The firms that leap forward to confront the challenges lying ahead in the highly competitive global market, requires strong leadership to inspire change and competition. Creative leaders encourage, stimulate and guide the process of innovation which is a natural human activity demanding good planning from the leader's end. Such leaders are believed to possess personality characteristics that can change the direction of the organizations towards gaining advantage through competitive market strategies. It is a universal acceptance that organizations that do not confront change or do not feel the need for innovation will stagnate, decay and die (Adair, 2007:83).

Without good leadership, desired change will not happen in time. The attitudes personal qualities and skills of leaders in organizations stand out as a group of vitally important ingredients in innovation. Leaders need both personal qualities and professional skills to involve others in decision making and the management of change (Adair, 2007:125). As such investigating how personal qualities ascribed by these individuals could contribute to motivate the followers in their organizations alongside the expertise developed through years of experience in the field, is considered important in terms of organizational development. Hence this paper aims at analyzing the personality traits of innovative leaders of Sri Lankan value added tea export firms with

the view of understanding the contribution of such traits towards formulation of successful market strategies in gaining competitive advantage through value addition.

The next chapter in this paper presents a justification of the method used for data collection. This study being a qualitative study based on interviews attempts to validate the method of data analysis adopted in the study, through the description of methodology with evidence of literature. The section following the description of the methodology, which is results and discussion presents the information of case studies which are analyzed in comparison to equivalent contexts in literature followed by the brief discussion on the impact of the traits on strategic making. Finally, the findings and limitations of the study are presented in the conclusion.

Methodology

This study on leadership traits and innovations demands in depth analysis of personality traits, behavioural patterns, and cognitive factors associated with decision making, creativity and forecasting etc. The study focusses on the present situation of the value added tea industry and further investigates how leadership traits of innovative leaders contribute towards successful innovative business strategies. This chapter briefly compares the two main methods of social science research; case study and questionnaire survey and continues to justify case study as the preferred method adopted in the research.

There are several methods of conducting social research out of which survey and case study methods are widely used by researchers. Case study method employs a longitudinal approach while survey method employs a cross sectional approach. The main advantage of a longitudinal case analysis is that it allows an in depth study of things over a period of time. In case analysis the researcher has the advantage of observing the relationships through various techniques of inquiry including interviews of members of the firm, participation in and observation of their work, analysis of past records and so on for a fairly long period of time (De Silva, 2006) Case studies tend to be selective and focus on one or two fundamental issues pertaining to the system being examined, while in surveys the researcher selects a sample of respondents from a population to represent the system being studied.

Studying about human behavior or personality traits is a very complex process due its subjective nature and the methodology applied in the study demands coverage and analysis of a wide range of quantitative measures. Leadership qualities are hard to be measured using quantitative parameters for instance, numbers, ratios and percentages. Analyzing such qualities using selected cases enables an in depth investigation of the phenomenon as well as the relationships and emerging trends. Therefore case study method was adopted.

Literature on case studies as a method of social science research have emphasized that case studies have the potential of achieving high conceptual validity i.e. identification and measurement of the indicators that best present the theoretical concepts the researcher wants to measure (Starman, 2013). Since many of the variables that social scientists use in their research, for instance leadership traits in this study, are difficult to measure the analysis demands "contextual comparison". Quantitative research is challenged by the risk of "conceptual stretching" by analyzing together dissimilar cases to get a large sample, while case studies allow for conceptual refreshments with higher validity over fewer number of cases.

Hence, nine case studies were developed in this study using data gathered through interviews with leaders who have pioneered in value added tea production in Sri Lanka and selection of the companies for case studies was done using the records of tea exporters issued by the National Chamber of Exporters, National Chamber of Commerce and the Tea Board. The criteria for selection included pioneering companies in product innovation, firms with a wide range of value added tea products and those firms that continued new product development. English letters (A to I) were randomly allocated to identify these companies in the results and discussion section to maintain their anonymity.

Gathering data was done through interviews conducted with the Chief Executive Officers of the firms using an interview guide. Recorded interviews were transcribed and information related to the strategies adopted by the firms, product innovations as well as market innovation practices were extracted. Qualitative data gathered through interviews were supported with statistics of value added tea export quantities and value of exports obtained from the Sri Lanka Tea Board and the customs. Company web sites and published as well as unpublished reports of relevant organizations were used as sources of information. Descriptive and qualitative data analysis was adopted in studying the contribution of leadership traits to innovative market strategies and their effects on the value of sales or the sales volumes. Out of the nine lengthy case studies covering a number of aspects related to leadership and organizational development, information and sections which are pertinent to this paper were selected and discussed in the following section.

Results And Discussion

Leadership is determined by a set of attributes containing cognitive capacities, personality dispositions, motives, values and an array of skills and competencies related to a particular leadership situation (Dubrin, 14). As such information gathered through personal interviews with leaders of value added tea export firms are discussed in this chapter with the aim of emphasizing the role of leadership attributes in changing organizations and the path of traditional tea industry towards a competitive industry through product and market innovations. The attributes discussed in the following section include clear vision and direction, risk taking, personal enthusiasm and commitment and finally self-confidence.

Clear Vision And Direction

The ability to imagine difficult and better future conditions and ways to achieve them is a special characteristic possessed by a leader (Dubrin, 2014). Thus, being a visionary leader is far from an ordinary task. As described by Spears, foresight is a characteristic that makes a leader to understand lessons from the past, realities in the present and likely consequences of a decision in the future (Spears, 2010).

Having a vision is therefore important for innovative leaders for the reason that, it is unlikely for them to see the direction that they should be heading towards without a vision (Sloane, 2009). Analysis of the cases presented in this paper provides evidence for this and it makes clear that the vision of the leader has been successful in mobilizing the followers to achieve company goals.

Schien emphasizes that the leaders of organizations must have certain insights and the skills to articulate, communicate, and implement the vision (Schien, 2004). Likewise, the visionary leaders of the case study firms have evidently communicated their visions as reflected by successful market performance as discussed in this section.

Having engaged in the tea industry for more than ten years before starting his own business, the CEO of case study firm 'C' could foresee the future trends in the foreign beverage market. His capability to visualize the future potential in the European beverage market created by the growing demand for carbonated drinks, paved the way for an innovation in tea industry. Skillfully visualizing the market opportunity for ready to drink tea in the European market and having identified the market segment i.e. Younger generation, this CEO succeeded in making tea, a popular beverage through his product innovation 'Ready to drink iced tea'. Strongly advocating the need for a clear vision to go after targets and ambitions this leader pioneered in ready to drink iced tea production in Sri Lanka.

CEO of firm 'D' demonstrated his visionary leadership when he turned out to be the first among those entered the Russian market soon after the transformation of the former Soviet Union to independent Russia. He had visualized the huge market potential in Russia free of competitors, immediately after market liberalization. The CEO himself had committed to visit Russia where neither transport facilities nor banking services were available. Having explored the situation as a visionary leader he had inspired his team to start operations in the Russian market where neither multinational companies nor their brand competition was present. As noted in literature (McLaughlin, 2001) such actions of leaders transmit energy to their people, giving them a new sense of hope and confidence in implementing the vision.

The brand of tea owned by case study firm 'F' is the world's first producer owned brand of tea that brought back the real taste of Ceylon Tea to the customers worldwide. The visionary leader of this company is an icon in the global tea industry. His vision was to build a genuinely ethical brand of tea of his own. The first tea bagging machine was imported to Sri Lanka by this leader in 1980 to facilitate the value added tea production (Fonseka, 2009:5) Continually working towards the vision of single origin tea he was determined not deviate from his vision and direction amidst the pressure of the multinational companies. Launching of his own brand was a realization of a childhood dream to establish his own brand of authentic Ceylon Tea. His vision of making Pure Ceylon Tea world famous through branding and value addition was regarded rather useless by his counterparts who were misled by the multinational companies dominating in this country at that time. However, authorities as well as other producers had failed to visualize the immense potential for the promotion of Ceylon Tea through value addition.

Visionaries who are successful at manifesting their visions base their leadership on an inspirational, positive picture of the future, as well as a clear sense of direction as to how to get there (McLaughlin, 2001). The CEO of case study firm 'E' the youngest among the group of CEOs interviewed, exemplifies this character. Having a very clear picture of the future of his business right at the inception the CEO worked hard with a strong positive mind. He had worked on the positive picture that he had visualized at the outset. Visionary leaders are believed to be positive personalities focusing on opportunities and not bothered about the obstacles they encounter. This young visionary CEO is a leader who was not disturbed by the hardships and obstacles on his journey to become the award winning businessman today. He had worked out his plans according to his means and capacities and gradually expanded operations. Relying on the clear and positive vision about the future the leader had skilfully managed his finances, in order to maintain continuous production and exports.

It is emphasised in past studies that visionaries showed much higher levels of brain activity associated with visual processing and procedural memory (Dubrin, 2014). Having analysed the cases discussed above this fact was reiterated and made apparent, as the leaders have formulated strategies with their foresights about future markets which is described by Spears (Spears, 2010) as a character deeply rooted in the intuitive mind.

Risk Taking

Innovative business endeavours are often associated with risk. As the Japanese proverb says; "unless you enter the tiger's den you cannot take the cubs" (Adair, 2007:26). Therefore, those leaders who try to introduce new products or processes should always be prepared to accept risk. It is virtually impossible to innovate without accepting an element of risk. As revealed through the study, risks encountered by the leaders are many fold .Committing investment capital to introduce new and innovative products, risk in the form of financial loss due to market failure as well as risk of losing resources due to mistakes done by the product designers during the Research and Development (R & D) process.

According to the findings of the study all nine CEOs interviewed, had started the value added tea business by investing their own capital rather than depending on government funds. According to the CEOs, neither government funds nor loan schemes had been tendered to these entrepreneurs, despite their contribution foreign exchange earnings. When the local state banks searched

for collaterals to release a loan, most of the enthusiastic leaders had taken the risk of mortgaging their properties in order to invest in the new business ventures.

According to the respondents they had taken the risk of investing on branding and value addition which demand a huge capital investment, since the state banks were neither flexible nor encouraging business.

In the case of firm 'E' the CEO had strategically managed the level of risk in investment through the gradual expansion of the business. He had initially invested only a small sum of money to start the business. He had opted to purchase tea from the auction for value addition with the financial assistance of his clients in Canada and gradually expanded business as a strategy to minimize the risk component.

The leader of case study firm 'A' had focused attention on a different component of risk involved in value added tea marketing. That is the risk of dealing with unknown or unfamiliar customers whose transactions could not be relied upon. The strategy adopted by him to minimize this kind of risk was dealing with a group of familiar and reliable customers through a clearly established channel of sale.

On the other hand, firms that are engaged in innovative product development cannot get away from two other elements of risk; risk of financial losses due to market failure and the risk of losing resources due to mistakes committed by the product designers. This can be attributed to the autonomy given to them to harness their creativity in product designing. As any business grows it becomes necessary to delegate responsibility and to encourage people to use their initiative. That means allowing people to do their own jobs in their own way. As described by researchers, a top management which is destructively critical when mistakes occur will hold back initiatives (Adair, 2007:25).

As literature reveals, leaders who facilitate team creativity demonstrate the value of listening to half developed ideas of employees and building upon them. They hesitate before dismissing an ill-formed idea or an imperfect proposal for it may contain something useful (Adair, 2004: 80). CEO of case study firm 'B' an exporter of organic tea best represents this characteristic. As revealed during the interview he is ready to welcome novel ideas of the members of the R&D team, engineers as well as other staff members. The R&D team has full freedom but the team is headed by the CEO who would take the final responsibility of the product ensuring quality and consistency. There he had strategically averted the possibility of making mistakes and thereby minimized the risk of product failure.

Not all leaders of the case study firms were prepared to bear the risk of financial loss due to mistakes committed by employees. The leaders in two firms (C and F) had adopted a totally different approach and they had imposed strict control on designing. They emphasized the need for direction and proper guidance from the leader in order to avoid the waste of time and other recourses. In the case of case study firm 'F' the authority is held by the CEO or the management who would guide the R & D teams based on the requirements of the clients.

The CEO of case study firm 'E' supported the idea that the leader should have a control over the new product designs. According to him rather than the design itself the marketing side of the innovative product has to be considered. The tastes and preferences of customers in different countries are best known by the leader who frequently visits and associates with them. Hence, his consent for the design is seen as important while encouraging the R&D team to come up with their own creations.

CEO of case study firm 'I' showed the minimum control of the R & D teams and managers due to their distinctive market strategy. The chairman operates from Canada and strongly believes in the capabilities of the well qualified marketing team in his organization established in Sri Lanka. As presented by Jack Zenger and Joseph Folkman in their study published in the Harvard Business Review, innovative leaders quite often try to build up a reciprocal trust between themselves and the work teams. Warm and collaborative relationships with the work teams would build up this trust which makes them to believe that they would not be punished for their honest mistakes (Zenger and Folkman, 2014).

The potential downside of freedom given to a colleague or team, as explained in literature includes mistakes, failures or financial losses. The leader must be willing to accept the consequences or to accept the element of risk. The cost of failure is a major concern for innovators but the important thing is not to discourage the people who try to develop new things. Developing a culture of accepting honest mistakes without harsh penalties and seeing mistakes as a normal part of business, are considered essential by-products of innovation (Adair, 2007:24).

The CEO of case study firm 'H' responds positively to such situations and believes that it is possible to learn better from failures than otherwise. His employees are exposed to decision making by bearing the cost of their mistakes by the organization. The leader believes that it is possible to develop a feeling of ownership in the mind of the employees when they are given the opportunity for decision making.

It is said that mistakes are by products of progress, learn from them but do not dwell on them. This exactly matches with the philosophy of the leader of case study firm 'E'. He believes that human beings can make mistakes but they cannot continue to make mistakes. The CEO being the main decision maker in his organization, others are also given the opportunity to participate in decision making, although it is a costly task due to the risk of making mistakes. But he believes that providing guidelines could minimize the mistakes

Personal Enthusiasm And Commitment

Enthusiastic leaders have a drive that compels them to give not hundred percent but hundred and ten percent. They tend to be intellectually stimulating and highly motivated persons who will intern motivate their colleagues and followers. If not for such stimulating characteristics of the leading personalities of the innovative organizations, Sri Lankan value added tea industry would not have reached the present level in the competitive international market. According to the study most of the leaders in the study sample have initiated the value added tea business out of sheer enthusiasm to develop value added tea exports when the authorities were still supporting the bulk tea exports.

These pioneering value added tea company leaders who had worked for reputed organizations had moved out to start their own businesses, driven by personal enthusiasm and commitment towards the value added tea business. For instance the CEO of Case study firm 'D' had started his firm after quitting his job in a reputed a tea company where he had been working for about 17 years. According to Trehan who writes about 'why enthusiasm is an essential ingredient in leadership' the entire outcome will be positive, when leaders approach every day with a positive attitude. Leaders set examples for everyone, and if they exhibit enthusiasm, it becomes very contagious (Trehan, 2009). Similarly, this leader has noticeably transmitted enthusiasm to the whole organization by moving around with the employees and working with them rather than commanding them from a distance. He motivates followers by working very close to them and promptly attending to their needs.

Trehan also mentions in his article that enthusiasm goes hand in hand with passion. When you have a passion for something, it really shows. When analyzing cases of the nine leaders in the study it was made obvious that all of them have had some kind of attachment to the tea industry for example either born in tea growing areas, have studied and researched about tea or have been tea tasters themselves previously. This attachment apparently had developed a passion towards tea which eventually resulted in developing innovative value added tea products. Similarly, it is emphasized by Dubrin in his writing that passion goes beyond enthusiasm and often expresses itself as an obsession for achieving goals. Further it is described that passion is a character especially evident in entrepreneurial leaders (Dubrin 2014).

In analyzing the case studies it was found that the CEO of case study firm 'B' for instance, had demonstrated personal enthusiasm, strong commitment and passion towards tea especially value addition so that he had left behind his reputed career as a scientist. Driven by the strong passion and enthusiasm he had established his own company which pioneered in organic tea production.

A leader will face highs and lows, but the key to overcoming any obstacle is enthusiasm. Enthusiasm will set the tone for any situation (Trehan, 2009). The young enthusiastic leader of case study firm 'E' substantiates this through his life experiences in developing the business to the status quo. The young tea taster who had worked for several organizations which were felt by him as not growing faster, had initiated his own business out of enthusiasm to develop a dynamic organization. Intensely constrained by resources, he had started the value added tea operations without possessing either a tea bagging machine or a factory. His enthusiasm and commitment had brought him a long way to make him an award winning businessman in the country within a short period of time.

Enthusiasm is a behavior that can be taught. As a leader, you can teach the others around you to feel the same way. When someone is excited about what they do, success usually follows (Trehan, 2009). This holds true with the leader of case study firm 'F' who taught the valuable lesson in the value added tea marketing to all other value added tea exporters in the country. His undoubted enthusiasm in launching a brand of pure Ceylon Tea had taken the industry a long way, beating the monopoly of the multinational companies in the global market. His enthusiasm and commitment had not only taken the brand name of the company but the reputation of Ceylon Tea beyond the borders.

Self Confidence

Self confidence in theoretical terms is demonstrated by doing what you believe to be right even if others criticize (Trout, 1996). This personality trait is rather difficult to quantify even with the level of achievements or time spent for business or with the level of investment or commitment of resources. It can only be measured through carefully observing the behaviour of the leaders. The CEO of case study firm 'G' is a person who demonstrated a strong sense of personal identity and act according to his wishes ignoring other's criticism. According to literature sense of self identity is a trait reflecting self-confidence (Northouse, 2004). He is psychologically powerful enough to go against the tide and challenge the perceptions of the public. Trout explains that '*people usually determine what is correct by finding out what other people think is correct*'. According to the author this acts as a weapon of influence which determines the way to behave at the same time making the person vulnerable to attacks of profiteers (Trout, 2004:23). This exemplary leader demonstrated his personality and self-confidence by not 'following the herd' as explained by trout. Despite his position as the founder and the CEO of the organization, it was found in this study that he did not hesitate to humbly peddle his bicycle to the nearby factory rather than driving the car. Being a person who had worked in Japan, and having many links with Japan, he was not persuaded by the trend in importing luxurious Japanese vehicles through which he could have easily become a millionaire. Instead he had used his contacts with Japan to promote Ceylon tea in Japan.

It was with self confidence that the CEO of case study firm 'I' established his products in the North American markets. Being the CEO of a small company based in Sri Lanka he was confident that he could win the markets in the North American region, with his exposure to the foreign markets. This was a market not reached by any of the Sri Lankan tea companies before, due to the fact that they could not sell bulk tea there. This leader had completely deviated from the usual pattern of tea marketing and strategized to operate the business in Sri Lanka while he was living abroad.

All the other leaders interviewed for this study have undoubtedly faced the challenge of their new business ventures with utmost confidence of their capabilities and strengths. Taking examples from several case studies; leader of Firm 'C' had the confidence to overtake the local operation of a foreign company with self-confidence, leader of firm 'H' was confident to overtake the responsibility of a reputed company handed over to him by British ownership. Similarly, the leaders of two other firms (D and A) were quite confident of their success when they decided to move out from their well-established occupations to start their new businesses. The founder of case study firm 'B' confidently left behind his academically reputed career and became an entrepreneur.

Impact Of Traits

These leadership characteristics identified through the study are considered distinctive traits that demonstrate the strategic decision making of the innovative leaders of the value added tea export firms. In addition to the traits discussed above i.e. vision and direction, risk taking, enthusiasm, determination and self-confidence which have been commonly demonstrated by the leaders who were interviewed, more traits were identified through the study that have contributed to the decision making of the firm leaders, thereby contributing to the development of the value added tea marketing. These leadership traits exhibited by the CEOs while operating their businesses, managing their organizations and responding to customers, were captured through the case studies and are elaborated with examples in the next chapter.

As discussed previously, the founder of case study firm 'G' is a person who has had several years of exposure to the Japanese culture since the parent company was based in Japan. With his exposure to the value rich Japanese culture, this leader could recognize the importance of such values in any business environment. Governed by values such as being polite, humble, respectful to others etc. his business strategies were formulated ensuring ethical standards. Keeping away from fierce market competition, opting for minimum advertising and obliging to provide prompt feedback to customers were among noticeable business strategies perfected by such values.

The leader of Case study firm 'F' strongly believes in maintaining high quality and safety of food commodities and therefore ensures Tea is handled under extremely hygienic conditions within their factories. He had been constantly considering about offering the best quality tea for the Ceylon tea lovers. This care for the customer in terms of quality is well demonstrated by ensuring the freshness of the raw material i.e bulk tea used for value addition. Quality of the final product is never compromised by this firm by keeping additional volumes of bulk tea stored in the factory. Instead they take the trouble to get down the required volumes of garden fresh tea for each consignment. That commitment to values has taken their brand a long way to the customers worldwide rewarding the strong belief of the founder that the success of his brand largely depends on the trust, confidence and more than anything the respect of the consumers to the company.

Case study firm 'I' is operated as a marketing firm rather than a tea company by its CEO who lives abroad and who is not confined to the role of a traditional marketer or a trader. His capacity to think 'out of the box' or rather divergent thinking has made him an innovator in the field of value added tea marketing, enabling him to penetrate the North American market with hundred percent value added tea.

Leader of case study firm 'D' was following the model 'leading from the front' (Ranasinghe, 2003:118) characterizing the leader's active involvement in every important aspect of the business. In spite of having different departments and managers to handle business operations, he is inclined for cost leadership style with less specialization. He believes in 'on the job learning' as an effective method and is involved in directing the R&D teams, quality assurance, financing and customer relations etc. using his overall knowledge about the different aspects in marketing and management.

Environmental sustainability and the welfare of the small scale framers were the major concerns of the leader of case study firm 'B'. The mission of this leader is to see the socio economic development of small farmers while the environment is protected. Abiding by the notions of environmental sustainability and socio economic development through fair trade organic farming he had successfully penetrated the European market.

Starting its operations in 1999, the CEO of case study firm 'E' had strategically developed a steady market overseas by patiently analyzing the market environment. He had been successful in developing the firm gradually without committing large investments at once and swiftly moving forward to be in par with many other leading firms. Promptly supplying his products to meet immediate market demands was a successful strategy followed by this firm leader to capture the potential market opportunities.

The distinctive trait identified through the interview conducted with the leader of case study firm 'H', was his drive for continuous learning. This leader in the age of sixties had spent well over forty years in the tea industry and considers his knowledge is still very limited and therefore keeps on challenging himself with exploring modern trends in business and educating himself with new findings which has resulted in innovative products.

Conclusion

Having analyzed the cases it was found that the leaders interviewed for the study possessed many common traits for example, clear future vision, ability of risk taking, self-confidence, passion, enthusiasm and commitment. Firm leaders included in this study were far-seeing individuals who had communicated a clear vision successfully to the members of their organizations. Having an inspirational and positive picture about the future was identified as a characteristic that motivates followers to go after

targets and succeed in capturing markets. The success of the innovative tea export firms in winning the global tea market through value addition could be attributed to the personality traits of the firm leaders as described throughout the study.

Similarly, their ability and willingness to bear the risk, which is a common leadership characteristic observed in this study had proven themselves to be risk takers who initiated pioneering and self-motivated moves into value addition. Further, leaders had maintained different levels of autonomy within organizations as a strategy. In some cases restricted autonomy had benefited the organization in terms minimizing the risk due to mistakes, while in others the reciprocal trust developed through the freedom given to work teams, have benefited the organization in terms of developing new products that were supportive in winning global tea market.

Commitment, enthusiasm and self-confidence were remarkable characteristics exhibited by the leaders in the case study firms. Moreover, traits such as hard work, perseverance and determination were identified through the study as vital attributes in terms of formulating strategies for market development. Successful market strategies, for instance penetrating foreign markets, fair trade marketing, brand building and securing markets have been evidently complemented by traits such as divergent thinking, passion for social welfare and quick decision making respectively.

Finally, distinct traits such as adhering to a system of values, caring for customers and being loyal to customers, have resulted in founding ethical business standards, developing authentic brands and ensuring customer loyalty thereby popularising Sri Lankan value added tea products among customers worldwide.

This study on personality traits was however, constrained by the methodology itself due to the complex nature of measuring the parameters described throughout the study. Case study methodology as a measure of building conceptual validity in qualitative social research was supportive in overcoming the difficulty. The main data gathering technique being semi structured interviews posed another question in taking appointments with the CEOs amongst their compact schedules. In most of the occasions interviews were carried out within the organizations and the CEOs intermittently attended to urgent matters such as overseas telephone calls and responding to work teams etc. The contribution of the CEOs is acknowledged here with much gratitude.

References

- Adair, J. (2007). *Leadership for Innovation*, Kogan Page, New Delhi.
- Dubrin, A. J. (2014). *Leadership Research Findings, Practice and Skills*, 8th ed., Cengage Learning, Boston, USA.
- Fonseka, D.C. (2009). Visionary Leadership and the Case of Dilmah, *Sri Lankan Journal of Management*, vol 14 ,No 2, pp 1 - 17.
- McLaughlin, C. (2001) *Visionary Leadership*, The center for visionary leadership in Washington.
- Northouse, P.G. (2004). *Leadership Theory and Practice*, 4th ed., Sage Publications.
- Organization for economic Co-operation and Development-OECD (2005). Oslo Manual: *Proposed Guidelines for Collecting and Interpreting Technological Innovation Data*, 3rd ed., OECD Paris.
- Schien, E.H. (2004). *Organization Culture and Leadership*, 3rd ed., Jossey-Bass USA.
- Sloane, P. (2009). Ten Tips for the Innovative Leader, *The Innovative Leader*, Kogan Page.
- Spears, L. C. (2010). Character and Servant Leadership: Ten Characteristics of Effective, Caring Leaders. *The Journal of Virtue and Leadership*, Vol 1, Issue 1, pp 25-30.
- Starman, A.B. (2013). The Case Study as a Type of Quantitative Research. *Journal of contemporary Educational Studies*, Volume1, pp 28-43.
- Trehan, R. (2009). *Enthusiasm and Leadership*. Illinois, US.
- Trout, J. (2004). *Trout on Strategy*, Tata McGraw –Hill Publishing Company Ltd, New Delhi pp 1-143.
- Ranasinghe, S., Weerawardene, J. (2003). The role of leadership in innovation and competitiveness of export firms: A Sri Lankan perspective, *Sri Lanka Journal of Management*, Vol 8, number 3 and 4, pp 104- 123.
- Yin, R.K. (1994). *Case Study Research, Design and Methods*, 2nd edition. Newbury Park, Sage Publications. pp1-153.
- Zenger, J., Folkman, J. (2014). Ten Traits of Innovative Leaders, *Harvard Business Review*, December 2014.