DILEMMAS FOR HR PROFESSIONALS
PRESENT AND FUTURE?

Insights and Perspectives
Dilemmas For HR Professionals
Present and Future?
About the Journal

The National HRD Network publishes a semi-academic quarterly journal where in each issue is dedicated to a theme. The Journal publishes primarily three categories of articles:

- Conceptual and research based.
- Contributions from thought leaders including a limited number of reprints with due permission.
- Organisational experiences in HR interventions / mechanisms.

About this issue

The theme of the current Issue is “Dilemmas for HR Professionals Present and Future?”.

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NHRD firmly believes in and respects IPR and we appeal to the contributors and readers to strictly honour the same.

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Editorial Note

Dear Readers

Why this special issue on Dilemmas for HR Professionals: Present and Future? Because I feel it is becoming increasingly clear that HR professionals, both young and old at entry, middle or senior level are facing them at their workplace. I often meet HR professionals from different organizations who talk to me about the stresses that they have to cope –up while facing various dilemmas in work place. Even students from premier institutions in India, where I teach future HR managers are also facing them. I often notice that when they ask for a one-on meeting to resolve them beyond class room sessions. I have also met many line mangers who passionately tell me about the dilemmas they see while partnering with HR professionals in initiating various HR interventions in organizations. So as we always promised our readers, we decided to bring about this issue which is not only very contemporary in nature but also a topic wherevery little is available as references for HR professionals to lay their hands on to gain insights and broaden their perspective.

So why this increased occurrences? Perhaps with passage of time the term “Human Resource Development” has become paradoxical to some extent to many HR professionals. While acknowledging the fact that humans are living beings of arguably the highest order, their development certainly assumes a path that perhaps is based on a basic tenet of a long term facilitative process of self-actualization. Resources on the other hand tend to point out a notion that can be routinely managed, put to use in a flexible manner and can be quickly replaced like other available resources based on purely short-term benefits of the organizations.

Many scholars believe that “Profit at any cost’ paradigm that many organizations follow today has led to an unprecedented crisis, because management of these organizations tend to focus on human beings as only resources in short term. Research has shown that treating employees as short –term resources instead of a holistic view dehumanizes them and strips them of any motivation to contribute their unique strengths to the growth of their organizations. To make individuals more creative, innovative and productive, one needs to see a connection to a higher purpose and work that is aligned with their unique strengths. When leaders in the management team in organizations are aware of their strengths and support their growth, every employee can become more evolved versions of themselves. A good HR professional can play a very important role of a catalyst in this transformation process, provided he/she is not engaged to resolve a dilemma that what he is being used by his management? Does he/she sees him/herself as one who is being used to create processes and systems that look at employees like other resources which are static, predictable and replaceable in nature or a supporter of creating an organizational philosophy, where employees are nurtured by increasing their potential through support and recognition and valued as whole human beings rather than simply tools or resources. Unfortunately in many organizations today, HR professionals are frustrated because they see the prevalence of the former one.

As aptly quoted by researcher Muhammad Burdbar Khan from Lincoln Business School, University of Lincoln, England, UK “In modern day, Human Resource Management (HRM) is seen as a mere variant of management control aiming intentionally to ‘colonize’ the identity of the individual employee which points to the contradictions between the idealised HRM theories and its practice commonly referred to as the difference between rhetoric and reality.”

Unfortunately researchers Janssens and Steyaer shared a similar perspective when they said “A strict market-based perspective in mainstream HRM pushes HR practitioners to draw on an
economic criteria rather than social values to legitimize their practice. There is a basic assumption in this perspective that human resource is a cost that ought to be minimized, and that the value of HR rests almost solely on its contribution to bottom line of productivity and profitability.”

In fact Greenwood while putting his views across on ethical analyses of Human Resource function commented “since essentially concerned with the treatment of humans, HRM is an inherently ethical activity and HRM debate and practice automatically raise ethical implications.” But unfortunately Thomas A. Kochan, George Maverick Bunker Professor of Management at the MIT Sloan School of Management once wrote “Human Resource Management faces a crisis of trust and a loss of legitimacy in the eyes of its major stakeholders.”

In a survey done by SHRM for a sample size of 748 HR professionals, as high as 54% had observed that they have often experienced conduct in the workplace that violated the laws of the land or the ethical standard in professional organization.

So what are the dilemmas today HR professional are facing? Based on the discussions I had with a motley group of professionals I have come across the following. Though the list is not exhaustive by any stretch of imagination it does reflect on what is going on in minds of today’s HR professionals.

Do I follow my business leaders or ask questions when required?

Is my role only administrative or do my role also envisages my entitlement to provide advice on people issues?

My Insights/knowledge about sensitive data especially about conduct and behaviour of senior leadership and their impact on organizations morale. Do I become a whistle blower or keep mum?

Do I communicate official policies/ processes/guidelines even when my own beliefs/values contradict them?

Do I look at only organizational interest or take into account individual interest as well?

Do I remain impartial even under hierarchical pressure in the organization?

Do I concentrate on short term implication of HR processes or I need to focus on long term?

What I am to bring about in people higher productivity or innovativeness?

It is of crucial importance therefore to analyse the underlying dilemmas that Indian human resource professionals are facing today at their workplaces. Human Resource function today has assumed an important place in organizational success in India, especially in view of rapid globalization, increased economic turbulence (VUCA), global competition, constant revisions in employment laws, changing values and value conflicts arising out of co-existence of multi generational workplaces. Research has shown that these dilemmas in HR professionals can lead to build not only interpersonal but also intrapersonal issues such as stress, feelings of guilt, shame and compunction among HR professionals impacting their performance. Researchers Maguen & Litz aptly referred them as “Moral Injury” - a term that refers to a severe inner conflict caused by an “act of moral transgression.”

In addition to these impacts at intrapersonal and interpersonal level, ethical dilemmas of human resource professionals could also impact the organizations adversely as human resource being a key management function might have a serious impact on the well-being as well as the functioning of the employees.

By resolving these dilemmas, HR professionals would not only become more effective in their roles but
also they will be able enhance their ability to influence different stakeholders in organization. If these dilemma are rightfully resolved and are taken into consideration while designing, developing and implementing HR processes and policies it will be able to dovetail the individual interests of employees with their organizations. Furthermore, it will also help HR professionals achieve the requisite balance among the different stakeholders, both internal and external at work place,

Both HR and business leaders in organizations need to play a very important role in understanding and then resolving these dilemmas by incorporating ethical and normative values at workplaces. A very high degree of skills and maturity are also required by organization leaders today to help build constructive partnerships between HRM function and other critical stakeholders to balance individual, organizational and above all societal interests. This will enable our future HR professionals to develop more enabling approaches to balance conflicting employee-employer interests coupled with innovative ideas that are based on social values rather than strict shareholder oriented economic philosophy. I would like to end this debate with an apt quote from Muhammad Burdobar Khan from Lincoln Business School, University of Lincoln, England, UK,

"The HR function will continue to face challenges in balancing business imperatives and ethical values but as long as the corporate and HR leadership remains committed, no challenge may be insurmountable."

On behalf of the editorial board, I would like to thank Dr. Joseph George for wilfully accepting my request to guest-edit this important issue on Dilemmas for HR Professionals: Present and Future? He has worked hard to talk to contributors in right earnest, explained the objectives of this journal issue and laboriously followed up with them to make sure he received their contribution in time so that we can release our issue without any delay. I am confident that our readers will enjoy reading this issue and would like to keep it as a reference for their future use. I personally feel that this issue should be our small contribution to what HR Guru Dave Ulrich had commented sometime back about our profession ” The HR profession has arrived. The lingering self-doubts can and should be replaced with self-confidence."

Thank you - Joseph, for making this meaningful contribution!

As always, in line with our continuous endeavor of touching upon contemporary HR issues, I am happy to inform you that the July, 2017 issue will be dedicated to the theme of “HR Analytics” which will be guest edited by Ramesh Soundararajan.

Happy Reading!

Dr. Pallab Bandyopadhyay
Managing Editor
Dr. Joseph George Anjilvelil is an alumnus of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS). His PhD thesis (TISS) was on the Evaluation of Organization Development (OD). His M.Phil. thesis (TISS) was on Learning Styles and Entrepreneurial Orientation.

Since 2011, Partner with Workplace Catalysts LLP, Bangalore, he is coach and facilitator of Leadership and OD and advisor to start-ups, for clients in manufacturing, infrastructure projects, IT services, Big Data analytics and financial services. Prior experiences based on line, staff & consulting assignments spanning over 2 decades, have been with organizations such as Wipro, Spaco Technologies, CCMC and Blue Dart Express.

As professional, he is a life member of NHRDN, and member of the OD Network (USA). Recognized by the Society of Human Resources (SHRM, India) as a Subject Matter Expert (SME) in Learning and Development, he is also a member of CII’s Innovation Forum.

As academic he has presented papers at TISS’ Innovation Forum, the Entrepreneurship Development Institute, the OD Network USA, the Global OD Summit, IIM Bangalore, and other forums. His paper “Process Consulting and Adaptations of Organisation Development in the IT Industry” was published in the Routledge Book “Business Models and People Management in the Indian IT Industry” edited by Rowley and Mallik.

A certified coach, trained Assessor, adept in Neuro Linguistic Programming, Job Profiling and Psychometry based assessment processes, he also teaches and shares his academic thought for institutions such as TISS and the Christ University. He has also been certified by National Training Laboratories (NTL) in OD. He has also engaged courses at the Sumeedhas Academy for Human Context and the Academy of HRD.
Guest Editorial

Prologue

Teenagers in any generation are more likely to be abreast and comfortable with technological advancements. With robotization too, they will engage the world anew. In our times, there's however, a phase transition in teenage evolution, that even early adults are to come to terms with soon enough. They will have to consider the intersection between social benefits of technology and ethical considerations to be designed within intelligent systems such as robots. A catchy example is that of the self-driving car. Decision rules will be prioritized in the machine learning mechanisms of this project. When faced with volatile humans jumping the lines to cross roads at short notice, what will the car decide? Perhaps, the passenger’s safety may be a no-brainer. What about ecological impact? Should the vehicle get off the road and destroy inanimate objects in its veered path or merely minimize loss to life by colliding into one of five human beings who come in the car’s cross-hairs? What limits will the prototype be terminated for: either / or logic of machine learning routines, or dilemma resolutions of ethical nature?

These dilemmas to be confronted by car designers are due to lack of precedence or imagination of such possibilities where mimicking of nature is fraught with bordering on the powers of divinity. Apparent simultaneity challenges us between at least two options marked by conflicting outcomes of goal-oriented actions. The advent of dilemmas is likely to compound in the future. Ethicists and cognitive scientists will have their work stretched. How does this forebode for those in the Human Resources profession, with no more than primal senses and bare intellect on test in dilemmas they may face everyday? Would this robotization antecedent be construed as a Skills Gap in a static social lag conception of economic factors of production? Or a more holistic appreciation of justice in human life, in which economic emancipation is one among other components that makes employeeeship worth the employer and the employee in their mutual context?

Identity of Dilemmas

Karl Popper mentioned in 1959 in his preface to the book, The Logic of Scientific Discovery thus “The central problem of epistemology has always been and still is the problem of the growth of knowledge. And the growth of knowledge can be studied best by the growth of scientific knowledge”. It is common place to infer that publications such as the NHRDN Journal will subscribe to similar intent. The presenting dilemma for me as Special Edition Guest editor, was of resolving the tensions between connotations of a Journal and the evidence the NHRDN Journal publications have historically presented us with.

A cursory glance at previous NHRDN Journal editions will indicate a relaxed attitude to the rigors of scientific empiricism. Our history is that of subjective narratives in such publications, than for dogged insistence of original empirical work. Even so, would that deter the growth of scientific knowledge? Perhaps that is the point from which to begin this edition’s journey. Hence, I have interviewed Dr. Subrata Pandey, who when at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, edited the special editions of the Indian Journal of Social Work (IJSW) on Human Resources Development. In the 1994 issue of IJSW was a special anthology of Conflict Management literature. The proximity of this edition’s theme of dilemmas with the management of conflict is not to be missed. Perhaps, however, the similarity between the two may also end with this recall.

Conflict is, in a way, the awareness of or the frustration with the futility to persist with a chosen path to a goal. Interpersonal conflict occurs between interdependent parties, at least two of whom perceive that their own goals cannot be reached between them. The word dilemma is value laden, and has a relatively more phenomenological origin. Spoken language often hints at deep subjective experience that circumscribes lack
of achievement. In ethical dilemmas, for example, coercion and control; conflict of interest; and personal integrity meet with considerations of beliefs in a just world for a self that tends to organize toward social responsibilities. Thus, there are more elements than not being able to meet a goal, that characterize a dilemma.

For those more indulgent in typologies and taxonomies, a leaf out from Dr. Pandey’s syllabus on Management of Conflict is laid out below. Dilemma or Conflict types, and indicative areas in HRM are listed below for a quick scope of this issue.

1. **Intra-psychic** – This is the origin of cognitive and psychological dilemmas an individual faces within the self, due to over learnt mannerisms or untested beliefs or non-contextualised values. e.g. depression, anger, procrastination, self-esteem dips or such emotional troughs

2. **Inter-personal** – e.g. Task Allocation Vs Relationship Building Issues OR Interaction style issues or Social Power Asymmetry Manifestations

3. **Intra-group** – e.g. Group think phenomena Or paradoxes like the Abilene Paradox or Process or structural constraints affecting group outcomes

4. **Inter-Group** – e.g. Cross-cultural norms OR Differences in Organization design Assumptions in post-merger scenarios

5. **Inter-organization issues** e.g. Institutional Conflicts, regarding collaboration rules, e.g. Industry-Institute / University working groups solving eco-system maintenance / development issues or NGO and Sponsor debates on perceived and experienced autonomy in self-determination.

**Special Issue Outline**

Dr. Pandey’s views are taken as from an authority figure on Management of Conflict, with emphasis on the Philosophy of Science, that he is known to exude. An introduction to the dimension of dilemmas, as contextualised to management, and of course human resources development is therefore useful to the prognosis and the opening up toward what we know of as publication trends in this Journal’s history. This edition too, draws on contributions from similar milieu from which past contributors made previous editions possible. Scientific empiricism being what it is in HRD in India; we often have witnessed deflections towards near journalistic assertions; wherein opinions have assumed authority and bypassed the need for rigorously investigated facts. Methods of enquiry apart, the inculcation of the scientific temperament among practitioners will require us to honestly recognize, accept, and transform our professional efforts for most aspects of the profession. We are on the cusp of a credibility crisis in industry; where opinions of professionals even if approximated from face valid constructs based on modicum research evidence; will meet with alternate evidence from extra-professional sources such as big data or social media. Without the thinking, germane to science, our treatment of dilemmas would continue to be impoverished.

In this edition, the scope of dilemmas in the HRD profession is given prominence through a width of variety. In a sense, then, it may be possible that our tensions are systemic enough to cut through the entirety of the profession. Contemporary stakes include the model of the human being in the minds of employers, the model of organization itself as viewed by its investors, and the role HRM has in making employees effective within organizations. So, as you uncover this edition, we have voices from the past, the present and possibly the future represented through their conceptions of dilemmas here. Also herein are contributions from diverse experience levels, professional specialisms and gender; so that we may find the more easily discernible connectionist or comparative perspectives. This adult tagging to known learning is likely regarding both the phenomena of dilemmas and the profession per se.

The variety of author cosmologies represented here from both India and the overseas are done to enlarge the probabilities of growing knowledge about dilemmas in HR. This treatment not only encompasses the traditional western-eastern world view tensions but also embraces a metropolitan median via a relatively trans-national perspective from Israel and the USA. You will find herein, environmental variety by industry sectors, as
also by location, given how interconnected organizations and members of society now are. There is a variety by skills required to reflect the specialisms that our profession reveals too. From social media expertise to OD consultants, from performance management leadership to HR analytics leadership; from mergers and acquisitions canvases to confronting robotization with a human face, from industrial relations dilemmas to those of comprehending organizational culture; from volatility in our work environments to stress we cope with physically and psychologically in our bodies; the scope of practitioner skills addressed is also to do with attempting to leave fewer stones unturned.

**Knowing How**

Consider a news excerpt from the Mint (2016) “According to a report by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI), 66% of the 180 million Internet users in urban India regularly access social media platforms. The most popular activities on social media include maintaining one’s own virtual profile on the likes of Facebook and Twitter, posting and sharing an update as well as replying to something a friend has posted. While college students (33%) form the largest demographic of active social media users in India, working women and non-working women register just 7% and 11% respective share in that user base”. Yet, it is likely that the online edition of this journal will be more archived than accessed for insight, given the information boom that has a numbing effect on our attention spans. The IAMAI study also indicates that publishing and reviewing of articles find lesser users than updating personal status on social media such as Facebook and Twitter.

Nonetheless, we strive for resilience in the focus of the term ‘Journal’. In this issue, specifically though; contributors’ biases treat the subjective, ideographic interpretation of phenomena; even if you occasionally infer objective frames from which they report these experiences to narrate their truths to explanatory power. Qualitative methods have a tendency to shore up richness in data, even if subjective in record of observations. In research undertaken on the objective end, the convergent thinking it promotes via arduous quantitative procedure leaves the researcher more accomplished on effort. Perhaps, our emphasis on practicality is unintentionally dependent on a reduction of truth standing on pedestals of such intellectual effort itself. This leaves possibilities of a polyvalent phenomenon systematically abdicated.

The filter of simplicity we use for enquiry become our enemies, in what can be termed as oversimplification of truth. That’s the unspoken shadow of best practices for example, or for that matter the bite of the illusive silver bullet in policy or practice form when we hear “Tell me that one thing to do to…” We in perceptive oversight, miss the distinction between conveying truths for simple comprehension and comprehending truth in its complexity. Given its phenomenological essence, the future treatment of dilemmas may invite more qualitative research methods, even if it contains embedded quantitative units of analysis. There is much responsibility on the HRD professional in India, witnessing clashes of societal and organizational cultures. Professional intent and experienced practices need agile alignment. So, let me quote Thomas Kuhn here. “We must now ask how changes of this sort can come about, considering first discoveries, or novelties of fact, and then inventions, or novelties of theory. That distinction between discovery and invention or between fact and theory will however immediately prove to be exceedingly artificial. Its artificiality is an important clue…” Kuhnian philosophy of science is founded on principles of natural science or pure sciences where factual and theoretical novelty are intertwined in scientific discovery.

Those precepts don’t unhinge very much when we find that employees get cynical about processes that formalize their relationship with the organization in their own experience – whether by performance appraisal through their supervisors, professional development mandated by their tradesmen, or even larger organizational processes such as mergers or acquisitions brought on by their investors. If there are yet corners of your mind unlit by the flame of dilemmas, the failure as scientist to kindle the appropriate place in the space of this text, is my own.
Knowing Why

Progressing through knowledge landscapes in human resources management, will benefit from a scientific temperament, no matter what one’s start-point education or ongoing awareness in it may be. Dilemmas are nonetheless, a frame through which to validate the collapse of professional routines, that accompany the impossibilities of known learning. E.g. Rejecting the competency approach with most recently experienced rigidities in its implementation is like throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Behaviourally anchored confirmations of competencies are an example of insufficient explanation, as the same behaviour may represent a spectrum of motives. To blame mismatches between the forms of behaviour and the language of competency dictionaries is what designers may term as the form factor alone. Whether prompt action arises from impulsiveness or from well considered initiative cannot be explained by behaviour alone. At the same time, the absence of a desired behaviour cannot conclude the absence of the competency either. A pensive, reflective person searching for errors in potential decisions may suspend immediate judgment and withhold decisions so as to come from a sense of responsibility in decision impact. Such is the kaleidoscope of human tendencies. The traversing from idiosyncratic artistry in competency mapping to technological standardization with adequate explanation of related variables for application in context is no pushover. Staying on the buzzword layer of competency understanding without knowing its roots via the method of science is a penury in professional perspective. This nature of embodiment of competencies in the practitioner will make for placid, and yet self-deceptive utility of the term. Personality theory, job analytic procedures, and task environment variables are all but some of the places to look for in explanation of competencies. Reverse engineering a technology platform with standard competency libraries, to your context of application can be far more error prone and deceptive, despite its apparent convenience and/or comprehensiveness. Dilemmas that arise from lack of holistic appreciation of competencies belong squarely to the HR practitioner’s domain of responsibility. The responsibility to tease out noise in the information in an internet dependent world from the works of science in publications, is also that of the HR practitioner. Consequently, the responsibility to sense the Gestalt in our own professional worlds via requisite contact with and concern for fellow human beings at the workplace is also that of the HR professional. Without requisite capability in recognizing, framing and naming the nature of meaning or phenomena in our midst, we are likely to get caught between simplistic extremes of most human experiences we term as dilemmas.

Essential reflections indicate however, that extreme positions as between positivism and anti-positivism, lends lower energy or yield in the growth of knowledge. Paradoxically, here too an intellectual humility, and not merely intellectual honesty, enables appreciation of paradigms unlike the ones one may be familiar with. So, if you are feeling guilty of neglecting either end of the research spectrum – quantitative or qualitative; humility is a productive stance to acknowledge the other end of the methodological extreme. Ancient Latin gives us a philosophical recourse for such a dilemma in perspective. In medio stat virtus. (Virtue lies in the middle). Multi-method and interdisciplinary enquiry is no more a flight of fancy in researcher communities. Liberating oneself from the emotionality of self-reccriminatory guilt by giving up one’s own resentment towards oneself in unfulfilled outcomes of past research experiences is a mindful stance. Denying the consequence of intellectual growth through such an experience is a regressive stance in one’s own development. You, here may be either a scientist or a beneficiary of science, as its everyday user – the HR executive. If you are donning the mindset of the laboratory technician, then you probably take away insights from this edition to be a more effective practitioner in HRD.

Epilogue

In closing, my call to introspection may appear like a judgment from the fringe in light of the above backdrop. Dilemmas if not worth anything, at the very least, can challenge our paradigms. Getting back to Kuhn on the structure of scientific revolutions, “Discovery commences with the awareness of anomaly, i.e. with the
recognition that nature has somehow, violated the paradigm-induced expectations that govern normal science. It then continues with a more or less extended exploration of the area of anomaly. And it closes only when the paradigm theory has been adjusted so that the anomalous has become the expected. Assimilating a new sort of fact demands a more than additive adjustment of theory, and until that adjustment is completed – until the scientist has learned to see nature in a different way – the new fact is not quite a scientific fact at all”. If dilemmas are not new, what’s new in our experience of them? If you were to read the rest of this edition, would you find in dilemmas a regular pattern of recurrent structure, rather than isolated episodes in author experiences?

If you come from a problem-solving frame, you may want to resolve dilemmas as if they were problems to be solved. If you come from a leadership frame, you may want to embrace dilemmas, so that they are the very least managed. Leadership itself is a choice. Will we choose to live in spite of those robots, and not because of them? Will organizations serve society because of a proficient HR profession or in spite of the profession? Shall we recognize dilemmas, and surpass our known ways to deal with them?

Would this hint of the rose scent on ascending its ladder of thorns? Happy Reading!

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Reflective Commentary on the HR Profession Via the Dilemma Perspective

Interview with

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As a full-time faculty, he taught management (MBA level) for more than a decade at Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Bombay, and Jamnalal Bajaj Institute of Management Studies (JBIMS), Bombay. At JBIMS he was also awarded “Fellow of GIC (General Insurance Corporation) Chair Reader” for two years (1986-88). He has guided several Masters and Doctoral level dissertations in Behavioral Science and Management Studies; currently associated with some Institutes and Universities as Ph.D. Guide & Examiner in the area of Management Studies. He has served as a Member of Academic Council of TISS and National HRD Academy; was also a Member of the Board of Research Studies at TISS. He was nominated and served as External expert on the Research and Recognition Committee and also a member, on the Board of Management Studies, University of Bombay (2003 to 2005). He guest edited The Indian Journal of Social Work’s special issues on Human Resource Management.

He was invited to the National HR Conference – 2007 Technical Session 20th June 2007 IPM, Sri Lanka to address the gathering and speak on “Human capital in the Knowledge Organization: A competency Approach for Organizational Capability Building”.

He was invited to The Assessment Centre Study Group of South Africa ACSG Conference 16 – 18 March 2011 Breaking Tradition – New Frontiers for Assessment Centres to facilitate a workshop on “Method Engineering for Assessment Centres” on the 16th of March 2011 and deliver keynote Address “Competency Based HR Practices in India: Yesterday and Tomorrow – Lessons for South Africa” on the 18th March 2011.
Reflective Commentary on the HR Profession Via the Dilemma Perspective

These notes forming the commentary of the HR profession in our times are excerpts from conversations in November – December 2016, exclusively for this Special NHRDN Journal Issue.

Dr. Joseph: Dr. Pandey, thank you for your time and consent to participate in the process of understanding dilemmas in Human Resource Management. At the outset, what are the considerations in identifying dilemmas as a practitioner, from a scientist’s point of view?

Dr. Pandey: There is a graduating current phase in which dilemmas for the HR profession are in pressing conditions that surely require mitigation. What was once done by disciplining as in the era of Industrial Relations, or by serving through Development for the Welfare of people, can now be done only through inspirational leadership. Currently, the paradox is also this that HR is perhaps one profession that is difficult to fully automate. The degree of automation reaches a limit despite several HR processes that are already automated. On the other hand there are a variety of happenings that are tending to align with corporate goals and strategy, guided by values within broader principles of effectiveness.

It is almost impossible to figure out what each human being autonomous, as he or she is, is doing or should be doing. If indeed possible, then the person who knows such may play God, controlling, predictively through reward and punishment for example. Thus, the dilemma is manifold.

Firstly, management is one of the most undisciplined areas of science. There is a crisis beneath the dilemma. It is a nervous escape to generalization, without requisite investigation of truth regarding the phenomena. E.g. In the pursuit of practice, HR managers escape ‘best practice’ errors with statements that approximate “The context was different. I was checking the practice out in a new environment”. It is more likely, that at the heart of the practice lay a lopsided design. That this design would vary in impact across environment is not there in the practitioner’s manual of operations. A range of practices now are already being revisited due to the inadequate investigation of truth. From business process reengineering to the bell-curve of performance management, there are several such candidates at the level of management as process.

At the level of the individual, the dilemma finds a different form. There is feverish pitch in the advertising of apparent theory of practice; when in fact, the intent of persuasion is commercial gain. This poses a genuine problem for new learners. What they effectively need may be captured in 2 pages; when the commercial reality is the spawning of the idea in approximately 10 books of the same theme. A bandwagon effect to try out emerging practice implies about 5 to 10 years of unassailed trending of a management practice. There is a crisis in HR management that very few are willing to call out – and that is that the responsibility for theory is hanging on one side of the balance. But, as a natural practice, things emerge in such a condition, and different phenomena beg our attention. Position is an ineffective alibi for the kind of responsibility required to take custodianship for theoretical relevance in HR management.

Position, as ascribed by status and other associated privileges, is driven by survival instinct. As against this, the responsibility or accountability disclaimer is hardly questioned. The resultant outcome is that practitioners do not know under what conditions particular practices may hold good.

Dr. Joseph: That may sound alarmist and even loaded for a non-reflective practitioner. What may we spell in discourse that can bridge the gap between action and reflection?

Dr. Pandey: There is a sub-text to all of this. The time-space contextualisation is a special condition of social sciences. But, the errors of the method of pure sciences are carried over to the social sciences without much questioning. In the pure sciences, engineering is the applied layer, even as technology aids deskilled use of the root concept. In HR, for example, if competencies are to be used by a regular employee as technology for human assessment; and the application layer does not root itself in science, the errors of engineering spill over
in human scale, that are hardly recoverable in form or service. So, this is like saying that the Thinker, the Researcher and the User layer has blurred in HR practice to the extent that the profession has dented its maturity. The technologist, the engineer and the scientist are not distinct anymore in the larger field of HR practices. From arbitrariness to intuition based proxies, several alibis have substituted truths based on scientific inquiry in HR. The dilemma therefore is the pitiful imitation of science, when in fact common sense is proliferated without checks and balances.

In the larger world, the publishing industry's anxieties derive a near political mileage in HR industry practices. This may be so in the West, just as it is in commonplace experience in Indian workplaces. The pristine joy of original inquiry or the first order benefit to the curious learner is naively surrendered to the 2nd order impact of fleeting value. Branding and the power of money lures many an unethical practice too, and extrinsic symbols, have also substituted parsimony in inquiry and the value for substantive truths. E.g. Writing a paper or ‘n’ number of papers on the same concept is done more for commercial gain, than for the advancement of HR informed by the social sciences.

The second level of the dilemma is a philosophical question. Should we imitate at all in HR? i.e. should ‘formism’ from the pure sciences find place in HR? Would that be a forced practice? Since the former methods were available, there is a bias of availability that has led us to the current crises. The consequence of this is an articulation challenge, to the researcher, practitioner and consultant in HR practice. As mentioned before contextualisation is not without basis in HR. Finding the truth in a manner that qualifies the conditions for effective practice in contexts other than the investigated context requires a shift.

The pure sciences represent laws of the inanimate world. The social sciences represent animate subjects, capable of autonomous functioning. The curiosity to know this difference is scant, and has resulted in a very disjointed understanding of social realities. There is a near blind belief that the methods of pure science can be replicated in social worlds. The unit of analysis in animate subjects implies recognition of the human being beyond physical parameters – in inseparable unity of mind, emotion and soul. Language indicates this schism most. E.g. ‘resources’ as suffix do not lend credibility to humans as thinking or talking beings. ‘Capital’ as suffix also could not hold sway. The ‘human’ thinker is the parallel of ‘engineer’ and is a spurious conversion at that.

So the corollaries to this are at least dual.

a) The practice of science in HR and the inadequacy of science per se
b) The use of prevalent methods, and the inadequacy of these methods per se

Distinguishing science from non-science, valid from non-valid knowledge are pressing responsibilities in this nature of dilemma. Life in general is not the same, and a mix of the two kinds of sciences is also not exactly acceptable. This may be considered as an esoteric concern that does not trouble the MBA learner per se. It does however concern a few people.

The philosophical crisis is the simultaneous dehumanization of the thinking and acting human being. Linguistic symbols of such reductionary tendency is the unconscious epithet of ‘capital’. There is however a competing perspective in terms of a heuristic appreciation of human ‘resources’. Intentionality of forceful application without substantive backing in methodical inquiry, is like saying “I don’t know how; but …” and the brute force of the practitioner is upon the practice. Such omission or commission happens under certain conditions. The dilemma underlying this may be between the tendency to see quick results vis-à-vis true or genuine service orientation. True science is seen as confusing at times, due to insufficient method / time that people give it; as also the stress it may produce because of inadequate preparation. Due to performance anxieties, even knowledgeable incumbents may produce inappropriate past methods due to lack of contextual insight. If so, then traditional apprenticeship may suffice, irrespective of structured HR education that gives the semblance of a reserved or qualification bound profession. The assumption then may be that even the immaterial part of one’s being may work consistently.

Dr. Joseph : Now that is a conscience stirring reflection. Given the unvarnished insights you have on the origin, nature and state of our dilemmas, what may we do to come to terms with it? How may we overcome the crises?
Dr. Pandey: Well, at another level, the individual employee or in venerable terms the corporate citizen, is a phenomenon that represents operative dilemmas. He or she applies for posts that recruiters advertise in concealed terms. The reality of the job is masked, and irrelevant criteria are passed off as practice in recruitment advertising. There is a serial extension from consumer or soap advertising to hide beneath social concessions, because such practice may not be considered illegal. The sense of normality therefore is distorted from the beginning of the employee’s life-cycle.

Similarly, as in medical practice, in spite of the Hippocratic oath, the cure of the patient is linked to hospital bed occupancy than the frugal efficacy of treatment. Such discriminatory practice abounds in HR policies too where outcomes are aimed at from shoulders of agents. The owner-agent nexus makes for uneasy balance and the crises of job satisfaction ensues due to this nature of dilemma. The CEO/owner and the Functional Heads spend disproportionate time resolving conflicts that arise from this kind of cynicism producing organizational deviance. Even in selection of candidates based on competency criteria, professional convictions find scant compliance, as pressures to find alternative criteria to fill vacant posts are plenty. Decisions are influenced by ‘management’ demands, where not so obvious risks or threat to the professional permeate the work climate. Power based decisions may mean that a survey tool is abused to generate data, even if truths are absolutely evident. This leads to ensuring that ‘deluxe’ rooms are occupied before ‘economy’ rooms are catered to, speaking from a hotel ‘service’ metaphor.

For the individual HR practitioner, who is not motivated by ‘business’ alone, the dilemma is of matching role incumbency criteria to own motivations. There is no 100% fool-proof solution. There is neither that ONE tool that can be replicated everywhere. The profession does lack the discipline to base its practices on knowledge. E.g. in the Management of Finance, you cannot expect to get away as easily with decisions that are not professionally standard practice.

These are era based dilemmas affecting HR practices, which are nearly forced into system issues. There are conflicts that naturally occur, and those that are engineered. E.g. Politicians engineer narratives where rationale for solutions evade them. That makes for the one-sided view that polarises. In social leadership, in organisations too the leader identifies with one’s personal needs. As the leader notices the mass, he consciously or unconsciously advocates that need – and then the leader can have – and not necessarily rationally – a mass following.

Dr. Joseph: I imagine this perspective comes from your strong functionalist orientation in that if conflicts or dilemmas are inevitable, one may at least try to tame the force of such tensions. Would that be your take on the nature of mitigation?

Dr. Pandey: Yes, conflict is inevitable. It is undeniable in nature. Every innovation for example has conflict at source. The scientist either refuted the data or resisted the data. In science, the paradigm is up for dumping, when rival data replaces it. Contrary to common sense, a good amount of evidence indicates that any point of time, there are a set of prevailing theories. Data running against this trend may not be perceived at all, and if the evidence is scary to the prevalent theorists, there may be wilful dumping. This is not exactly an availability bias. This is like a group of scientists, approximating the character of politicians. They maintain their own narratives, and when opponents get rival evidence, they dump the earlier paradigm, as in an exclusive either/or reality.

Consistently, this is known to have happened in pure sciences and reported by philosophers from the Berkley traditions of Thomas Kuhn too. The trend can easily extend into social sciences too, like in Marx theory of dialectics. There is a relationship these phenomena have with Indian philosophy like Shankhya, Vasisashaiki, Purusha and Prakriti, just as the Yin and Yang of Chinese philosophy. Underlying these is the principle of tension or dynamism, and a process therein leads to an outcome. Even in our thought process, behaviours, or competency approaches of functional and dysfunctional dimensions of competencies; we have this phenomenon. The Cosmos is built this way – with a negative entity AND a positive entity. In nuclear physics, it is discreteness that helps understanding. Break atoms even in contemporary times, you get mesons. Emptiness and somethingness are at the base of these constructs. The attempt to resolve this underlying tension between the negative and the positive is the process of learning. Duality thus is a precondition to learning, and is embodied in our experience.
In other words, the behaviour related to a problem would indicate in the person – either a positive predisposition or a negative predisposition, although the observed behaviour may be the same. There was a time when conflict management was called conflict resolution, but semantically did not capture the essence of the phenomenon. This is due to the fact that not all conflicts can be resolved. In fact, at times, conflict is deliberately created to make new things, for good. Irrespective of the value – good or bad, science is neutral. Every innovation results however, from a creative tension.

When spanned across organisations, the contours of thinking are limited to the entity of the formal organization. There is a social structure to this social entity to achieve a social purpose, rather than a goal. Goals shift more easily. Within this social entity, anything that is contradictory to its Purpose, something needs to be done within the organisation, either in its structure or process. That is how organizations adapt or innovate. Those organizations that adapt quickly are learning organizations; whereas those that learn swiftly are either agile or nimble organizations.

If the Purpose is at the root of tensions, then a call for alignment between individuals and groups may be required. At other times, the leader takes the initiative to align people or purpose to each other. Leadership as a process itself a result of conflicts. However, whether the issue comes up for resolution to the leader or not is a different question. The internal imbalances within an organization are clearly distinct from forces in a firm’s environment, even if related to it. Standards - Systems, procedures, practices, norms of different kinds are then to be manipulated to resolve the tensions within the organization. Only when these impersonal routes fail, do we get to the level of the personal system. That’s when a leader’s potential for influence is born. This is true for several kinds of social systems. State, family, or groups, for example. Seen this way, Leadership is the process of

a) resolving the conflict at hand, and

b) keeping the resolution sustainable for a period of time.

The longer the resolution, the more visionary the potential of the leader’s influence. Any live organization has its inherent dualism, while attempting to economise its effects through rules, procedures and systems. Existing norms of individuals get activated in dynamic tensions. Random ideas are then seen as conflicting with systems.

Dr. Joseph : So do leaders have the clarity of approaching dilemmas with a method at all?

Dr. Pandey : Assuming that the leader is contextually attuned, and is able to negate the influence or reduce the effect of the environment on the internal organization, a fresh appraisal of the norms is possible for the leader. This leader then uses the active agency of those won over with his influence to induce alignment or change. The other angle is to look at it from the active agent mass point of view. They were looking for something new to resolve momentous dilemmas that was difficult to perceive otherwise, for which they needed the leader. That which was earlier learnt, especially implicit learning, as against written down procedures, seems to be of no use to resolve the ongoing dilemmas. This is germane ground for alignment that a leader can facilitate for members in the organization.

The autopilot mode no longer serves the organization, despite explicit coding. The hint of the resolution however comes from within the organizational experience itself. The leader’s insight also comes from the same system, in which the experience of dilemma is had. The common active agents – who form the masses that require the leader’s agency, do not have sharp perception of the emergent resolution, but is born of their cognition itself. This is the beauty of dualism.

A Popperian perspective is that science is building up with refinement of theories, cumulatively and ongoingly. A Kuhnian theme is that the dominant faith of scientists contributes to the truth of the day, irrespective of data running rival to the strong views of that faith. Over a period of time, therefore, a new paradigm makes the old paradigm subservient or cast away like in a political game. Rulers of the emergent paradigm do not allow the old paradigm to come in the way of new socialization, due to its threat potential. At most it remains a small part, but has no material effect. Thus, like dormant bacteria, these rejected data forms accumulate over time and then contest with the ruling paradigm to reassert itself through its believers. They consume or annihilate the
older paradigm. But it is interesting to note that the language used by the respective followers of the two paradigms are distinct, even if the words used by them are similar. The meanings their words have are different in each paradigm. A communication between the two paradigms is the casualty. It simply is non-existent in a Kuhnian argument.

Even reframing is only a remote possibility, because in such contest the rival paradigm is sought to be made irrelevant. The upstarts are considered false or rebel.

In leadership theory, too – similar phenomena are observed. Minority views are considered rebellious. Consider, the rise of talk of meritocracy in what was earlier considered a humanistic if not paternalistic private sector employment scenario. Meritocracy is brought through in capitalist paradigms, often preceded by the mediation of an excellence philosophy in operations like Deming or Juran or Baldrige. This advocacy of excellence is done in a language that makes for surrogacy of success. Benign accommodation of mediocrity is ejected ruthlessly to make the profit machine efficient. Order is attempted in chaos with principles like meritocracy.

Dr. Joseph: Maybe I am listening to some radical reframing of leadership phenomena. What can you say to the layman reader of the NHRDN Journal in this respect?

Dr. Pandey: Searching for explanation of such observations – e.g. the Tata corporate governance episode, is what social scientists can do. There is no direct control on such phenomena. That such shift happens is however undeniable. The resolution between action and impact in this is at root a conflict or human dilemma. Profit may not be the only goal, and therefore allied goals like employability, trusteeship, and sustainability are used to purge the upstart paradigm. There was no prevalent socialised language to coalesce all these goals, and even if vague these goals become contestable beyond the clarity of profit as a goal. The business excellence modelling tries to put divergent goals into a sort of cycle to provide for control in chaos, in an attempt to resolve conflicts or dilemmas.

Conflict as we said earlier, is inevitable. Being inevitable, the first option is to try to understand it. At each level, then; from the within person intra-psychic level to that of society at large, conflict is to be understood. Even if a matter of degree, terrorist activity may be uncivilized, but they are trying to demonstrate through conflict the advance of their paradigm. Radicalism is a value judgment about such militant agenda in such contestation. The idea is to understand the principle or phenomenon of conflict.

E.g. Anything to do with a malaise treated in a mental asylum is an intra-psychic conflict. Not all conflicts are at this level, as you may know. That is at the extreme end of the continuum. At mid-range, other theories may aid our understanding. CEOs’ value conflicts, employee value conflict with organisation values (conflict of socialisation) are at mid-range issues of mental health.

Then there are person-situation conflicts. “If I behave this way, then I can anticipate an outcome for myself. If I behave that way, I will be avoiding it”. Once achieved, how would that feel? That’s the person-situation conflict when in a state of imagination. In an approach-avoidance conflict, for example, there are two competing outcomes. Like that of a diabetic who wants to have sweet and yet live with its negative consequences. This happens because the same goal has at least two distinct inconsistent outcomes. Some goals – two or more at times, could be mutually exclusive.

When there are two active elements, the spirals are between two people at the interpersonal level. The popular conception of ‘personality-clash’ captures a glimpse of this level, but does not capture its essence or even solve it. Mistakenly people in organizations consider it solved by just calling the conflict by its popular name. When positive energy is constructed, and the receiver’s threshold or perceptual differential is broken, reciprocation would be in a positive spiral. Negative energy gives rise to negative consequence. It sucks energy, and retaliation in turn reaches a stage that makes the person abominable and avoidable. Belittling the person or even destroying the source of that energy could be a potential resolution. If no such resolution is possible, the one in conflict takes flight and avoids the conflict.

Understanding conflicts can have great power in terms of choice of impact, as the source of conflict and intent
of resolution get aligned. When I first wanted to classify conflicts at each unit of analysis, I found that there was enough science already around the phenomenon. But we did not have the engineering or application part of it. Different people have put in different scientific layers in these theories.

**Dr. Joseph**: Practitioners seldom consider even a philosophical explanation of their experiences, whether for meaning or purpose to their roles. They are more in tune with buzzwords, with the voracious appetite of news media sensationalism and stock market capitalism that fuels it. How do you characterize the evolution of the management sciences that spawned HRM?

**Dr. Pandey**: 200 years ago – we had science, but not physics. Then came the physical sciences. All this began with natural philosophy as a special form of philosophy. Fine data is now available like diamonds in that field of inquiry through knowledge of the scientist. The world of the scientist and needs of the society had to then reconcile. Engineering is relatively new, as it is about application. The definition of engineering is to solve social problems using scientific principles. Today, perhaps, more than in the 1980s or 1970s, the relevance of interdisciplinary enquiry and application is greater, whether from an everyday angle or from a space research standpoint.

Society always went by the minority view. The Larger Good happened if the few in the minority behaved responsibly. They had some ecological considerations. Otherwise bad prevailed for a long period of time. Upheavals of moral kind therefore was not far behind. Today, for example, a predominant western paradigm is the disproportionate income of CEOs that could be compared to kings with physical assets in the past. Fundamentally flawed researches are carried out to prove the worth of particular CEOs against other CEOs, where causation toward success is motivated, rather than value-free. Publications pit one CEO against another, without attention to method of science.

The current day conflict in organizations is the non-existence of gap between management thought and action. Maturing thoughts in the laboratory before applying it in the field is scorned upon. The impatience to act in the field, leaves us with a ‘take-it-or-leave-it’ mannerism across the business world. HR too exists in such an environment. Practitioners throw out valid thought by lock, stock and barrel, due to their lack of understanding of science.

Immediacy between thought and action is the commercial bias that we have around us. How are we to conclude that Japan, Russia, China or even Australia did not have more mature thoughts for application that could be better than what we take from the West? To claim something without validating substance, has become the way of life in a media dominated and media-led world. HR too exists in such an environment. Practitioners throw out valid thought by lock, stock and barrel, due to their lack of understanding of science.

The frivolity of our times is that like brokers of thought leadership, there is a tribe of people who market thought; as if even truth is market led. In pure science, this is less likely to work, due the nature of the experimentation and verification involved. In management, opinion holds greater sway even today. But you can track this trend, in that even the marketer for the trend is from the West. That we are not allowed to get to the truth in management is the dilemma we are faced with today. But over a period of time, anything without fundamentals gets exposed without market intervention itself. That is possibly in the way of Nature.

Management as a field today is adversely affected by the poor maturation of scientific thought in management. In HRM too, such phenomena catch up. Fundamental human issues are affected in HR. The fundamental right to investigate the truth and find out how it differs from propaganda that are ‘empty’ is rarely perceived. It is probably nature’s way, that the truth would be discovered some day. But that may take too long. So, it is not surprising to find such traces of the phenomena, in autobiographical accounts of leaders, (sold as books), which despite its cogency for reading, does not guarantee valid truths. Even in generation ‘Y’ the so called ‘entitled’ class are unable to see through this, and their dissent, if any, is fairly impotent at getting to the truth. In society at large, and particularly in organization, it is a terrible situation. The conflict of truth with the era is still
“the leader is everything” as if there is no other way. By taking this view, the whole of the organization is incredibly incapable. Even the Boards of organizations make this error, assuming that a single CEO leader can swing their fortunes. If results happen by chance, the Board members attribute it to their decision, without looking at what exactly led to the results. To illustrate - these members, understand wear and tear of machines as affecting productivity; but they are unable to perceive rundowns in management thinking. This is one reason why so many companies are falling off the charts quicker than before. This is not specific to HR.

In Finance, or even in Production noisy theories of application are reduced to a large extent. The cause and effect is easier to locate in Finance or Production. In HR, it is still difficult. Predetermined productivity may come from robots, but human beings cannot do the same. We have not understood this in the management of organizations. Do you recall the rise and fall of MBO, and then the march of Excellence models? Now only end measures are called for, without looking at the process. Emphasis on outcome is now foisted with approaches like Balanced Scorecard. After MBO, the importance of Goal setting itself had gone, as a virtue almost fallen off. With the new scorecards, again goals on four different corners became important. Finally, and fundamentally, the relationships between the four outcomes are forgotten.

Double-loop learning – the development of principles – and then triple-loop learning – the ‘how-to’ process – are not happening in these organizations. In service organizations, this nature of fallacy and verification is even more difficult to discern. When new principles are resisted, it is because of past misery in jumping from one practice to another in organizations. Even the wasting of novelty happens overtly, and yet, people in the organizations are unable to see it. Our eyes can see everything, but cannot see the eyes that see. Not myopia, but a form of blindness nonetheless.

The need for institutions that allow for learning conducive to truth is therefore steep. It’s acceptance will be very difficult today.

Dr. Joseph : Well, there’s more we could have dwelt upon, but for your busy schedules and my limitations in enquiry for such a befuddling topic as dilemmas in HR. I thank you nonetheless, and am glad your views will find way to publication for a change. Thank You indeed.
VUCA and the HR/OD Practitioner

About the Author

Raghu is a post-graduate from IIT Madras who has focused on human behaviour. He brings together his Yoga Sadhana and understanding of technological systems to bear on his central quest: “how can every one of us be the best that we can be?” He uses Theatre and Puranas to enable people to discover their own leadership style. He is now engaged in creating a Coaching Academy "Awakening Arjuna". Look up www.raghuananthanarayanan.com for more details.

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In our work with people we (Consulting team of FLAME TAOKnoware) focus on the hidden parts of the proverbial ice berg- the meaning making processes of people. In laboratory learning contexts the superficial layers of thought-action give way to an understanding of feeling- thought. We often come across a deep conflict between the identity processes of the individual and their role taking modalities. This conflict is rooted in the idea that one must suppress ones own natural ways of feeling and thinking, and adopt ways that are appropriate to a “professional” context. We have spoken about these conflicts at length in some of our papers and blogs

https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/dharmakshetra-self-worth-raghu-ananthanarayanan;
https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/bricolage-jugaad-indianness-part-1-gagandeep-singh;

To give a short summary of our understanding: one's identity is shaped in very Indian ways; this implies that ideas of self and the world are based on implicitly internalized memes. To give some example- time is cyclical and birth and death are punctuation marks in an endless journey; role discipline is an internal affair and based on ones own commitment to a dharma. Organizations are not seen through this implicit lens, but through a set of learnt ideas that are based on a western frame. Time in this frame is linear and Role discipline is an externally established idea. The difference between a “Jugalbandhi” (Indian term from its vocal music traditions literally meaning ‘entwined twins’) and an orchestra is a good analogy.

Let us examine the word “dharma” to illustrate a point: Dharma is a word of contextual primacy to Indian living. It asks of a person to make choices that enliven oneself and one’s context simultaneously. Western ideas of ethics and morality are more or less defined. So the idea of dharma does not lend itself to the dynamics of
structural control as easily as a statement of “values” and ethics. Dharma Sankata is a commonly understood term where the person who experiences the pulls of a dilemma has to delve within and take responsibility for making choices.

How does this impact Organization Culture? When a person treats one’s own meaning making framework as illegitimate, along with it, the most authentic and powerful areas of self are kept away from the theatre of action. While in times of ‘peace and calm’ one can manage this internal split, in times of stress or crisis, the deeply held (often core) ways of being come to the fore. The individual experiences an inner conflict, and tries hard to control these powerful subconscious impulses. This causes a lot of internal waste of energy in the individual. Work arounds or plain and simple withdrawal is often the coping strategy.

The deeply held preferences are making their presence felt even in fairly every day transactions: Big Mac has found it necessary to Indianise their offerings. The Bollywood cinema has a huge appeal all over the world as does the big Indian wedding. However, Indian Managers rarely give themselves the authority to influence their organizations based on their own insights. The choicefulness from inner realization as denoted via dharma can help get out of this reticent mind set in our times. Indian Multinationals are making a mark in the world, Indian Managers are leading many Global Corporations and being Indian can only be an asset and not a liability.

What are the key challenges facing organizations today? While there are many in the so called VUCA (volatile-uncertain-complex-ambiguous) world, I would like to focus on these three dilemmas that challenge dharmic spaces, since they allow us to see how we can leverage the positives of our identity in responding to them:

1. To distinguish between what is changing and what is not
2. To distinguish between what is Global and what is not
3. To distinguish between making money and building organizations that last

**Dilemma 1: To distinguish between what is changing and what is not**

A few decades back we started hearing the term “design for obsolescence”. Organizations came to face the reality that to have a steady year on year growth and income, they had to ensure that consumers buy regularly. The fashion industry is the obvious icon of this idea, but if we look at many of the things we use, we are made to feel foolish and unhappy if we do not have the latest gadget. The speed of change in the technology we use or the proliferation of choices we have in the material world leads us to believe that the change is deep and profound.

Let me illustrate how this confusion manifests itself in human behavior. I was gifted a very nice book for the new year: “Drawn Together”1. The author Leah Pearlman has had a distinguished career in Facebook. She quit and started Dharma Comics because in her words “…my life looked great from the outside. But what was going on inside? Dharma Comics gave me the courage to finally look. And do you know what I found? Me! A perfectly human human.” It is very easy to get caught with the changes we are creating in our immediate and not-so-immediate environment without realizing that the “perfectly human human” has changed very little in the last million years or so!

This then is one vital differentiation for the HR/OD professional to make: what of the human being is changing, what is enduring and where does the person’s angst arise from?

The newest area of science that is exciting for a HR professional is neuro sciences. While it speaks a lot about neuro plasticity and learning, one of its major area of study and interest is stress. Stress is generated when the old brain, the mid brain and the new brain are in conflict. Most of the strategies that are put forward to deal with this stress come from Eastern practices of Mindfulness and Yoga. We are naturally placed to take advantage of this rise in empirical evidence from the West on the brain’s functioning.

Let us look at a related and Organization wide issue: In our work we find that the difficulty in distinguishing between the process of conducting a business and the content of the business is rendering choice-making difficult for the average HR professional. The content is visible, measurable and definable while the underlying human dynamics is not. Content and strategy can be changed easily, human behavior and culture change
slowly. The ability to distinguish between the visible and measurable areas of a business and the invisible and non-measurable is key to focusing on what really matters in human reality. The impact of the non-measurable on the measurable is immeasurable!

Let me illustrate, every organization develops a strategy. They have a more or less robust way of tracking trends, calculating the EBITDA (Earnings before Interest, Tax, Depreciation and Amortization) of possible alternatives and so on. But the strategizing process is often poor: Dialogue and discussion about the contextual challenges, evoking and inviting innovative thinking on the impacts as well as grounded action is seldom seen as important. They are time consuming and imply encountering human dynamics. There are two consequences of this focus on the visible at the cost of the invisible: firstly, the strategy is simply a number crunching game, and it is converted into a set of goals and driven ‘down’ the organization. Most of the people who have to implement the strategy do not really understand the variables and the connections. They cannot make meaning of situations in ways that enable the strategy to get reflected in everyday decision-making. Secondly, the process of creating capacity is not fully understood. At best the idea that new competencies are needed to execute strategy is acknowledged. But, technological capability is a combination of the new techniques as well as the way people feel about the new, the way they resolve new conflicts and the way they collaborate across the new techniques. The processes that energize the contextualization and meaning of strategy are underinvested in.

This is where the HR/OD professional has the opportunity for greatest impact, and when the person is not alive to the invisible processes, the opportunity for impact is lost. The pressure to do something is answered by looking at new computerized methods of creating efficiency, or following the latest trend.

Another area of confusion is the multi-location, multi-skilled nature teams that constitute task groups. These groups are “networks” but the picture-in-the-mind of the members of the group is often derived from the classical hierarchy. HR/OD professionals who have not understood the new process reality often flounder. In one of the multi locational and multi organizational collaborative projects we were asked to “trouble shoot” we found two dysfunctional processes. Firstly, the tendency to get caught with cultural difference as a catch-all for problems between team members. So, when a Chinese Team was not able to deliver the required specs of one part of the Mechatronics product, it was attributed to the negatives of the ‘closed’ culture. Secondly, when we examined the issue we found that work design and work definition that had been done by the HR people in consultation with the Project Head followed the “Fix job responsibilities and create role clarity” mode - a vestige of classical organization thinking. Deriving a way of defining the customer–supplier linkages of the value stream and using that to define how the individual adds value and ensures workflow was missing. When we redefined work on this basis, lo and behold, the cultural issues vanished! There were some lingering issues of the way people addressed and understood each other, and how they preferred to deal with conflict, but the roots of the conflict were removed and what remained was much less toxic. The HR/OD fashion of looking at diversity was way out of synch with reality because the job description and appraisals were designed on an unreliable premise of the system.

(This concept has been examined this in great depth in our book “Organization Development and Design: The Tensegrity Mandala”)

Dilemma 2 : To Distinguish Between What is Global and What is Not

The word role is used as though it has a unique meaning. In our experience, it does not. Role to a western mind is a task anchored idea, to an Indian mind (and we discover so in people from China and Japan too) it has stronger relationship connotations that are often more compelling than the task implications of the word. Let me illustrate. While coaching leaders in a very large IT organization, I have come across two seemingly different issues that have the same root. Women leaders find it very hard to be part of the team because they feel that the informal consensus building processes are denied to them. Discussions at the coffee corner or the smokers’ corner for instance are not natural or desirable conversation spots for them. They cannot strike up the casual camaraderie there, that their male colleagues create among themselves. Trying to do so has possibilities of being misunderstood, especially in an Indian context. So, they come to a meeting and hear only
the tangible task elements of decisions. They have no idea of the other contextual information available to the larger decision community. Decisions relayed by their bosses have a similar lacuna. They do not feel part of the community, and their “role clarity and their ability to shape their role” is considerably diminished. Men who work for women bosses have spoken about another issue, they don’t know their bosses’ thinking! Read between the lines: the informal channels through which we built a relationship with our bosses is missing. We need to feel the relational security so that we know how to interpret the task.

The idea that people are different is given lip service. Programs in diversity or understanding culture are often superficial. The HR/OD professional who can listen deeply can sense these differences and initiate institution building processes that can enable trust building at a deep level. Lack of trust has huge consequences measurable in the quality, timeliness and cost of the outputs of a team. In another example, a Chinese person working in an Indian Multinational sought a reading list from me. He wanted to know different versions about the Independence movement. He wanted to read papers on Caste relations and how they are evolving. His HR manager, an Indian was not knowledgeable enough and was too shy of having an honest conversation about these realities. When I spoke with him in another context I discovered that his understanding was not only superficial, it was confined to what is written about the country by conventional text-book writers. When I probed further, I discovered that he was very uncomfortable with both his lack of study as well as the types of criticisms he read. But, he said, “we are a global company and we must not speak about parochial things”.

I have come across this suppression of one’s indigenous heritage or history in the false idea that being modern and professional means hiding all that is inherent and traditional. Dr. Brice Gibb and I worked in an organization to introduce the practice of self managing teams and quality circles. During one of the sessions, the manager of the shop floor came up to us and talked about the ways his father would conduct panchayats. He belonged to an old and respected family that had kept alive many of his community traditions. He spoke about the idea of a “Koodam”, the space in a traditional home where collective processes of consensus building took place. The rules of the game when a Koodam was called were very similar to what we were teaching. These were 1. “no blame” 2. “no status or role differentiation” and 3. “Commitment to the group dharma”. The moment we endorsed his understanding, he was in his elements, his posturing fell away, he was warm with his team, rediscovered his humour and really built a community of people who were committed to making world class armatures. By the way he was working in a “foreign Multinational”, and the president of his division was very interested in the methods we were employing and we eventually co-authored a paper with the American Consultant based on many “Indian” concepts!

The idea of global that is indistinguishable from homogenization is deeply internalized by many Indian professionals. In the process, they deny a great resource namely their intimate understanding of the local, the indigenous and the positives of the heritage. The price they pay internally and the value they withhold from the organization is immense. If one looks at the innovations spawned by the close association of several researchers in the “Mindfulness” the EQ movement (Jon Kabat -Zinn and Daniel Goleman to name the most prominent) with the Dalai Lama one would have to rethink their idea of Global= Western and become more respectful of their indigenous wisdom. One is not suggesting an ill-considered deployment, but one where the ideas can be brought forth, experimented with and added to the mosaic of what makes the current world truly global. Nowhere are indigenous ideas more critical than in the area of understanding human beings.

The HR/OD profession is therefore ideally positioned to make critical contributions to the growth of his/her own organization by deploying appropriate wisdom and to contribute to global knowledge in this area.

Dilemma 3 : To Distinguish Between Making Money and Building Organizations That Last

One has to just take a casual look at the number of start-ups that shut down to appreciate the importance of distinguishing between being in business to make money, and building an organization that can remain in business. Often the idea of being an entrepreneur is confused with being an expedient profiteer. Peter Drucker in one of his early works on Management argued that the task of the business manager is to create value. He argued that the gross profit a company needs to make to remain in business is greater than one just trying to make money. It has to invest in R&D, in its people and build for the future. Buckminster Fuller has argued that
many outcomes are spin offs of the ability of a person or a group to follow a meaningful purpose. Money is the fallout of a business focused on creating real value for the customer. If one takes the present global crisis into view, that purpose ought to include sustainability of our environment. No great business is ever built on answering the question why are we in business? By saying “to make money”. The traditional business families in India have lived by this maxim and have contributed to philanthropic causes as part of the way they are.

We see many HR/OD professionals become excited with the prospect of helping start-ups make money. They then often end up bringing in a very utilitarian perspective into their work. They focus on “hiring the best”; “firing the dead-wood”; “applying the bell curve” and so on. Indian craft groups are a great source of learning for us. They may be a fundamental meme in the Indian mind. Craft groups respect their lineage, and this includes many culture building and trust-enhancing practices that are embedded in their everyday work. On the surface, they seem old and meaningless. But they build in a process of learning, teaching and improvement. To illustrate, crafts groups induct their neophytes to the trade by making them responsible for the tools used, then they are taught small tasks. The craftspersons often discuss the work in progress, they refer back to old stories, use analogies drawn from other arts like music and dance to innovate on the work they are doing. Above all, they treat the work as sacred, since it is their source of livelihood.

If one compares this with some of the stories one hears about Steve Jobs of Apple, the parallels are amazing. His obsession with creating a great product was very much like the craftsperson. His discussions with his design group reflect many of the characteristics we see in the craft groups. When the devotion to the primary purpose of creating value is lost, the organization resorts to unethical ways. Wells Fargo is an institution in crisis in USA. Kingfisher in India has become synonymous with marketing hype covering up corrupt practices at the heart of the enterprise.

The opportunity that the HR/OD professional has in creating a sense of purpose that is meaningful, enabling practices that build trust and pride at the heart of all the members of the team engrossed in a work-a-day world is immense. We have also seen that the way trust and pride is built up is unique to the core group that leads the business. The unconsciously imbibed ideas of self, the world and money they hold influences the whole organization. Often in India, these modes are recognized, but held in self-censorship or self-hate. “This is a brahminical organization; this is Marwari” and so on. Thus, an intrinsic and instinctive sensing and response is sought to be covered up and oppressed, but shows through anyway. Often the drive to create, to excel and often the core of a dharma lies in this deeply internalized cultural mode. Where this is owned up, we have seen people joke about it, but in the owning up there is also the freeing to look at the positives and the negatives and to evolve. HR/OD processes cannot go against the grain of this energy. Making money is never the essential dharma of any committed entrepreneur I have met in India. My book “Leadership Dharma- Arjuna the Timeless Metaphor” (Productivity and Quality Publishers- 2016) examines this struggle between the driving dream and the pragmatics of business that leaders face.

The HR/OD professional is the custodian of the heart of the organizations, its grounding in an evocative meaning and purpose to work for.

Conclusion

In the rush to respond to the world often defined by the term VUCA, we find HR/OD professionals getting carried away. They forget that people do not change with every change in technology or organizational redesign! Individuals learn new ways of coping based on their deeply internalized ways of meaning-making and choice-making. These ways are civilizationally defined and internalized through belonging to one's family and community. We have found that when we are able to help the leaders and managers of Indian organizations, or the Indian part of Multinationals to trust their own intuition they have been able to come up with meaningful responses to the challenges they face. Also, reclaiming their authenticity enables them to be more assertive and powerful in their ways of expressing themselves. For example, many “captive” IT organizations internalize the identity of being captive. This enhances all the self-deprecating tendencies we have discussed above. Enabling the managers to acknowledge this process has released them from a subservient way of role taking and allowed them to be innovative at the technical solutioning as well as begin to
“shape” their roles rather than passively accept what is offered. The benefits arising from this impact not only their own sense of well being but also the organization. When HR/OD practitioners start to see how a deep understanding of the positives of the Indian mind can be leveraged for creating vibrant and wholesome organizations, they will start playing leadership roles with impact.

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What’s App with Performance Reviews?

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What’s App with Performance Reviews?

This paper traces the evolution of performance management trend in Western companies from the start around 2011 to the present. As the movement towards replacement of the legacy annual performance appraisal system matured, certain new guiding principles and consistent design patterns emerged. One thing is certain, in the new world of performance management, there is no one size fits all solution. Each company, each CEO and each HR executive have to decide for themselves what performance management design best fits with their strategy.

We have just witnessed the media firestorm that has broken out over the sweeping changes in how companies do their performance appraisals. From the start, a few leading brand companies dropped performance ratings and shifted their annual performance review to a more frequent, manager-centric, feedback-rich process. Questions started to surface whether rate-less management was a passing fad or an unavoidable pivot towards a new workplace with the focus on development rather than compliance. The Performance Management Revolution (HBR, Oct. 2016)

Colorful metaphors have been put to work to mark a radical breakaway from the familiar annual management routines. Catchy headlines such as “Kill Your Performance Ratings,” “Get Rid of Performance Review!” “Abolish Performance Appraisals!” and “The Trouble with Grading Employees” (WSJ, April 2015) attracted the attention of business executives. The language of performance has started to shift and for some of us it marked the coming of the new age in Human Resource Management. History will judge but for now, it may have been one of the most radical leaps forward in organizational practice since the invention of management itself. (HBR, Oct. 2016)

The Historical Context

It is important to remind ourselves of the historical context for this practice. The legacy annual performance appraisal systems came in existence in the industrial era when both military and the government organizations set the standard. As hierarchies dominated the world order, the goal of managing performance was to exercise control from above and ensure compliance in the ranks. Management was equivalent to oversight over individual employees. The system was set up to specifically catch those who were failing to deliver. On paper, it was a perfect system to go after “the guilty” and spotlight “the top performers” and “high potentials.” The A, B, C employee calibrations became the norm and spread across most high performing companies.

Today’s business objectives have radically changed. Companies have long shifted away from the industrial style business models. And yet, organizational practices have often stayed as they had been a decade ago bringing with them the command and control era. The disconnect was jarring and was getting in the way of doing business. Disruption and reinvention was everywhere in the business for at least a couple of decades. It finally came down to the realization that high performance today could only be possible through innovation, collaboration and continuous learning for employees at all levels regardless of the rank.

A call for the radical overhaul of the internal appraisal systems first came from the hi-tech sector known for its low tolerance for the tradition. Professional Services have followed with their relentless emphasis on efficiency and ROI. Now the trend is spreading across other industries affecting every type of organizations including the government, education and the military. A global shift towards a more inclusive, development focused performance system has been unleashed and it seems unstoppable.

Just Another Upgrade, Perhaps?

If you took away the hype, and faced the facts: Performance Management overhaul is just another much overdue upgrade to the next generation organizational operating process. Compare this trend to your daily technology upgrades that have become a normal way of life in our crowded consumer society. Reminders pop up on our screens every day urging us to get on to the next version or to download a new and improved app.
Whether we like it or not, we are reminded that the old system is no longer supported. Why should traditional performance appraisal be an exception? The individual decision will be up to each company at a time: to upgrade, to postpone or to carry on business as usual. There will be consequences to each of the decisions you will make.

Take Adobe. Profiled in Fortune as the world’s #124 largest capitalization company last year, Adobe ditched annual performance reviews already in 2011 replacing them with frequent “check ins.” This radical HR move has paid unexpected dividends. How Adobe Keeps Employees from Quitting (Fortune, 16 June, 2015)

The company accelerated its product development cycle, improved its market performance and kept its employees engaged and motivated out competing its rivals in Silicon Valley’s most intense talent market. Four years into its transformation, Adobe is leading in the market performance. The company’s stock price has increased from $30 to over $80 since performance management transformation has been launched.

Of course, many factors have been responsible for Adobe’s success. The company’s innovation in how they manage people and the organization was among the key factors. Performance management was leading the way.

In the couple of years that followed from 2011, a few technology pioneers cautiously followed Adobe’s bold move. But in the first half of 2015 the flood gates have opened towards a wave of innovative moves starting with a handful most visible brands such as Accenture, Microsoft, Cisco, Deloitte and new ones joining in the performance transformation movement almost every day.

The discussion of the transition away from performance ratings heated so much that it spread further across the business press (New York Times, The Wall Street Journal and Fortune) ending up with a feature in the life style magazine such as Vanity Fair

Who Owns The Performance Conversation?

Kevin Cox, CHRO of American Express, challenged his audience at the Academy of Management while receiving the Academy award for his innovative HR leadership. He asked the academic crowd to pay attention to where the conversation about performance management should really belong. CHRO’s challenge to the researchers and to fellow HR professionals was to take the lead on this important org. transformation and not to surrender to the media hype. The matter is much too complex and too central to organizational success to give media the decision and influence power on what to do with critical organizational processes.

The bigger and more strategic question looming over the current media coverage of internal HR issues is the extent to which we are witnessing across the board CONSUMERIZATION of HR. Performance management is not the only process under review. Recruitment, on boarding, learning – all are undergoing change. The exposure to the external world of social media, analytics and marketing is leaving its unmistakable footprint on the internal HR process.

Granted, the future of work may ultimately be shaped by a handful of still fledgling technology start ups whose nimble free agents are disrupting the status quo. They start with the new attitude, new tools and with big data defining the new space for HR with virtually little resistance

When it comes to larger and more mature firms the rate-less environment represents a largely untested territory with land mines along the way and questions raised about differentiating talent; deciding on variable pay and paying for performance and not the least managing for risk and compliance.

But when Accenture’s 300,000 employees were “freed” from ratings, joining the likes of Adobe, Microsoft, Dell and Deloitte, it was clear that abandoning performance ratings was more than a fad or a domain of the tech start ups. “Accenture is freeing its employees from Performance Reviews. (Quartz, 2015)

GE Enters The Scene

When the announcement about GE dropping performance ratings and launching a brand new comprehensive performance development process hit the news wires, it became official that the trend grew into a movement.
Why GE had to kill its Performance Reviews after more than Three Decades. (Quartz, 2015)

If there has been an enduring icon of performance excellence out in the market, it definitely has been GE. Now that it officially announced embarking on its new performance development agenda and internalized the "rate-less" model, there was no doubt among corporate practitioners that the tide has turned and the next generation performance management is finally and legitimately under way. With GE on board, the conversation was propelled to the level of every company’s organizational strategy level.

Even as GE has come on board with its "no ratings" PD@GE solution, performance management overhaul still remains to be a vastly uncharted territory for the vast majority of organizations. The new design is "just out of the box" and has not come with any guarantees and possibly with some unintended consequences.

The full scope of change remains to be unknown particularly for mega size global multinationals such as Accenture and GE. In the next couple of years, as the first cycle of these corporate transformations comes a full circle we are going to learn a lot about corporate performance and the accelerated change management process. All eyes are on Adobe, Accenture, GE and other pioneers to further test out their process and come back to their peers with lessons learned and recommendations tested.

Research is Slowly Catching up with Practice

As the new practice of performance reviews evolved, the new corporate conversation has matured from boldly "crossing the line of courage" to the well thought through methodical change management process. What is exciting to witness is how most strategic HR practitioners among us are taking risks unheard of before, stepping up to the challenge of leading the charge and shaping the future of work. As a practitioner community we are just beginning to figuring out what is really at stake in the successful implementation of the new performance management model.

One thing is clear, strategic practice and “on the job” experimentation preceded any research and consultation. More trend watching and further analyses of this transformation away from the established convention is under way.

Evidence is building to support the case for the broadest scale performance management overhaul. HRPS, SHRM's Executive Network, held an expanded panel discussion on this topic at its annual conference in April 2015, New York based Neuro leadership Institute has unveiled their own trend analysis of companies dropping performance ratings (Neuro leadership Summit 2015). Josh Bersin of Deloitte partnered with Markus Buckingham to overhaul Deloitte's performance system and collectively they wrote about the reasons for the change in HBR. SIOP’s Leading Edge Consortium in October offered a two day long comprehensive overview of trends and research from the Industrial psychology perspective (Leading Edge Consortium ). SHRM has run a series of webinars in October to throw more professional light on this evolving trend. World of Work partnered with the Center for Effective Organizations (CEO) to contribute their share of research by studying companies—“the before” and “after” analyses of companies that have gone rate less. A special issue of World at Work Journal on this topic was published in Q2 2016.

What’s up with The App?

Media firestorm aside, the role technology plays in Performance Management Revolution is instructive. Technology has both led to the old process ultimate failure as well as to its ultimate resolution. It is instructive to note that the new “rate-less” practice developed in defiance of the old clunky system and ahead of the helpful new one.

Having abandoned “the platform,” companies took matters into their own hands and internally designed new Apps to be installed on the employees mobile device. In the space of a couple of years, an eco system of new companies has developed with solutions to enable the fast paced, simplified process and create an efficient, just in time connection between the employees and their managers.

If you wanted to know the state of your health and wellness or the weather and the market, just turn on your smart phone or your smart watch. With most current information on your fingertips you yourself will know when
to dial up or to dial down on your diet, your exercise or when to take an umbrella or call your broker.

Why should knowing your performance be any different? Additional to your manager’s feedback, the coaching advice will always be available and waiting on the same app and at the same time. This future is already here and it is upon us to accelerate its adoption and acceptance with the minimum fall out and maximum return on performance investment.

**The Revolution has Just Begun**

No question, the future of the new Performance Management is just beginning to take shape. By going “rate-less” companies are abandoning the ineffective, outdated tradition but the new practices are just beginning to take shape.

Managers have now re-entered front and center on the performance stage. Major investments into management development and supervisor training have raised the bar on the expectation for the day to day supervisory role. But managers will not have to do their jobs unassisted and alone. Analytics and Social technology are destined to be the 21 century most valued management tools. The signs are clear. Technology and Data will upgrade the managerial process to the next levels of effectiveness.

We are still in the early stages of the massive disruptions that are coming with the 21st century business organization. As the “rate-less” approach to managing performance is moving to the apps, it is taking on a key strategic role in driving innovation, collaboration, and organizational effectiveness. The companies regardless of size and legacy are learning to change fast, take on new counter intuitive practices and prioritizing agility and learning over stability and control. Long live performance management on the app.

Here are some concrete steps that have proven to have worked for those companies that have succeeded.

a. **Always start with your Company’s Strategy.**
   
   It all depends on the outcomes you are looking for. If innovation is your goal, the legacy annual review will not work for you. If on the other hand, no changes are expected, you might as well keep what worked for you before.

b. **Accelerating Performance Cycle.**
   
   Once or twice per year appraisal is just too little too late at the current rate of change companies are experiencing now. In most cases, quarterly reviews are most common. New, fast moving organizations are making manager conversations even more frequent.

c. **Simplify documentation**
   
   Requiring managers to do a lot of documenting and recording takes them away from talking to their employees—the most valuable part of a manager’s time.

d. **Focus on manager’s conversations.**
   
   Managers are the backbone of the new performance system. If there is one cause you need to commit to regardless of your change status, it is your management development.

e. **Separate performance management and rewards.**
   
   We learned from behavioral economics that managing performance and assigning rewards is not a combination that leads to employee increased motivation. At minimum, use performance review time to discuss performance only. Save rewards conversation for later.

f. **Invest in developing HR capability.**
   
   Performance management transformation requires stewardship from HR. Most HR organizations are not prepared to lead in such drastic steps. Make sure you are ready.
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Cultural Paradox in M&A Scope Deals

About the Author

Sachi heads the HR function for the Consumer Business Unit (CBU), a strategic unit of global IT services and consulting organization, Wipro. In her career spanning 14 years she has played multiple roles within HR (Employee Relations, Talent Hiring, Leadership Development, OD and M&A). Having worked in Europe, US and India, Sachi enjoys integrating her understanding of different cultures and facets of HR to address complex challenges facing businesses today. Sachi has been associated with Wipro’s M&A journey during its two waves of 2006-2007 and 2015-2016. In 2006 she led the due diligence of three deals and played the role of HR integration manager for one of the cross-border acquisitions’ of Wipro. From 2012 – 2016 as Global Practice Head for Workforce Transitions and M&A practice she was responsible for building the team of ‘transition and integration’ specialists and develop scalable processes and tools to further evolve Wipro’s HR M&A capabilities.
Introduction

A unique period is looming in the mergers and acquisitions (M&A) space. Leaders who are facing uncertainty and disruption in core businesses, are using M&A as a means to refocus and transform their business. F. Scott Fitzgerald (1936) once said that the test of a first–rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposing ideas in mind at the same time and yet retain the ability to function. Organizations need to develop a similar cultural capability of holding opposing beliefs and values when managing this new breed of acquisitions. Researchers began to analyze the role of culture in M&A since 1980s and in this article we will review the relevance of traditional approaches and make a strong case for acquirers to develop a level of cultural readiness in terms of mindset and capability before initiating work on entering scope deals in the M&A space.

M&A appetite has continued to grow for last 3 years and as per the latest edition of EY’s Barometer, all trends point to an M&A up-tick in 2017 as well. What sets this current wave of M&A apart from previous ones is the fact that the deal palate is undergoing change and more and more acquirers are willing to look beyond traditional M&A approaches and scale economies.

Depending on the strategic rationale, there are broadly two types of deals - scale and scope. In a scale transaction, the primary aim of the acquirer is to seek enlarged presence in a particular market and achieve economies of scale i.e. reduce costs, achieve larger market share and consolidate power in an existing market. Some of the large acquisitions of 2016 like Monsanto-Bayer and CSC’s acquisition of HPE’s Enterprise services were scale deals.

On the other hand, in a scope transaction, primary aim of the acquirer is to acquire an asset, which can help opening new markets or adding product lines, expand cross-border reach or diversify the company. Over the last couple of years, majority of acquirers are leaning towards such transactions, acquiring assets that can serve as their Trojan horse for a much broader business transformation within their organization. For example, the acquisition of Success Factors, a provider of cloud-based human capital management solutions marked a new era for SAP, a firm that was not as well known for acquisitions. The SAP CEO called Success Factors a ‘crown jewel asset’ that in combination with SAP will create a cloud powerhouse. Similarly, the acquisition of Lunar, a design firm by strategy consulting firm McKinsey is meant to pivot McKinsey’s business into the new age.

Cultural Paradox inherent in Scope Deals

Scope acquisitions are an interesting and challenging way for businesses to ramp up growth and deliver breakthrough performance. Interesting, because the acquiring company enters a new world of opportunities. It is a new S-curve for its product or service, a new source for innovation. At the same time, such an acquisition is a challenging one, because the acquiring firm faces the dilemma of keeping the acquired company independent in order to preserve its distinct culture and yet – it has to think of ways of collaborating and working together in order to inject new thinking into the acquiring firm’s DNA. This runs against the grain of conventional understanding in M&A deals. When McKinsey acquired Lunar, the CEO of Lunar in his statement said, “While we are becoming part of the McKinsey family, we will also remain Lunar. Better but not different”. Being better meant combining decades of design and development experience of Lunar with McKinsey’s depth in management consulting, business strategy and operations to create an end-to-end offering for customers. This kind of counter-intuitive approach to comprehending the possibilities of culture is now conceivable via scope acquisitions.

Developing such an integration approach, which can help both the firms become better and yet remain different, is a unique paradox. Such deals present tough choices to leaders, even to those who make culture a priority. Traditional integration approaches of either keeping the entities stand-alone or developing “best of both” cultures keep the journey less bumpy and help the companies in avoiding culture clashes. However, are
these traditional integration approaches able to help combining companies transform themselves? Here we will review the relevance of transitional approaches and make a strong case for acquirers to develop a level of cultural readiness in terms of mindset and capability before initiating work on entering scope deals in the M&A space. The current phase of M&A provides unprecedented opportunities to HR professionals working in M&A space. The time is ripe to go past process-oriented approach towards integration and develop a new perspective on culture and its role in scope deals.

Why are Traditional Approaches not relevant in Scope deals of today?

Researchers began to analyze M&A from a cultural perspective from the mid-1980s and large amount of quantitative and qualitative studies have focused on analyzing the impact of organization cultural differences on M&A performance. The assumption that cultural similarity creates a sense of cohesion and differences lead to post combination conflict, stress and clash has dominated the M&A field (Read foot note1 in reference section). Viewing cultural differences from this traditional lens affects integration approach of scope deals in two ways:

1. **An over focus on compatibility** and with it the procedures consisting of comparing and measuring cultural differences. Traditionally, cultural differences are considered detrimental to integration and hence during scope deals, most acquiring companies avoid integration i.e. keep the entities independent. This thinking needs to change, instead of having the degree of cultural similarity or differences drive the integration strategy, we need to start viewing integration as a set of management interventions and practices which will help in leveraging the differences.

2. **Traditional approaches emphasize consistency of culture across all levels of the organization.** When applied in acquisitions what this means is that one of the organizations – either the acquired company or the parent company, must be assimilated into the other. Harding, D & Rouse, T in their 2007 HBR article titled Human Due Diligence propose that in scale transactions, the culture of the financial acquirer becomes predominant. On the other hand, in a scope transaction intended to transform the acquirer’s business the culture of the target firm is likely to become the dominant culture. Many organizations call this strategy as “reverse integration”. Such a thinking makes the executives at acquiring companies’ think that they have to overhaul their business from top to bottom. Even this kind of approach is not beneficial in the end; the acquiring firm should not undervalue their own competitive assets or make the mistake of thinking that the acquired firm has all the cards.

So, what is the right approach?

A merger or acquisition is founded on an investment thesis—a definitive statement of how the deal will create value for the buyer. It is often backed by projected synergies to justify the deal to the investors. The right approach is one, which helps the leaders in meeting the strategic and financial goals. The goal of a scope deal can range from something as basic like increasing revenue by cross-selling to transforming the organization by unlocking one or more long-standing constraints on a business. Basic synergies of increasing revenue by cross-selling are relatively less risky, easy to quantify and achieve. Transformative synergies are more difficult to define and achieve.

Experience reveals that, not all companies are cut out to be successful integrators of transformative assets. Apart from a solid business case and integration capabilities the acquiring company requires a cultural make and mindset to achieve success. One of the most known examples of such a successful integrator is Alphabet (erstwhile Google). Google has a reputation as an innovative company and it owes a lot of its success to its acquisitions. It acquires a lot of related but disparate assets. Acquisition of You Tube has been one of the successful scope deals. In 2006, You Tube’s acquisition was derided as Google’s folly. You Tube with its Build-it-Now culture was a model for the more nimble, faster paced company. Google’s CEO wanted to inject the same energy into Google, spurring the mother company to innovate more quickly in its rivalry with fast-moving Facebook. You Tube was a cultural phenomenon but it was bleeding money.

Whilst the financial numbers of You Tube are not shared publicly, in 2013, analysts and investors estimated that
their margin was around 30-35%. Viewership grew by 50% in 2012 alone. YouTube has been part of Google’s growth narrative ever since the acquisition. “It acts as a bulwark against younger tech firms that know Google can be toppled as internet use shifts from desktop to mobile and soon, to living room devices.” As an acquisition it has benefited the parent company, the acquired company and the users.

Google also talked about keeping YouTube independent. So how did they achieve this success and synergy? What is that they did differently?

In the June 2016 article Is the LinkedIn Acquisition Microsoft’s Attempt to Build Its Own Alphabet?” author Benjamin Gomes - Casseres has referred to Google’s Alphabet Model in which the company acquires businesses or technologies that have promise but are still risky, and it nurtures them to see where they lead. In the Alphabet model, the array of related but independent businesses are managed differently from its core business. They are kept independent and synergies come when target companies are made to play with the core where it makes sense, from a strategy standpoint.

I would like to emphasize on the words “play” and “where it makes sense”. What this means is

1) Integration is not an end state but an on-going interaction between the two companies.
2) Coming together for certain decisions is selective and purposeful.

For organizations steeped in tight control, adopting such a strategy is an innovation in itself. In order to mobilize the whole organization to patiently cultivate the target company requires extraordinarily large amount of preparation and “cultural readiness”.

Cultural Perspective to cultivate the Target Company

Transformation requires change in both the organizations. To kick-start that journey an acquirer can benefit from few emerging perspectives of culture

1. Ambiguity perspective – A fruitful view of understanding cultural encounters

Proposed by Martin and Meyerson in 1991 this perspective is most useful to manage cultural encounters in scope deals. From the ambiguity lens, corporate culture is viewed as fragmented, consisting of many sub-cultures with both different and shared values. If leaders and integration teams hold this perspective when the two organization cultures meet, they would neither characterize post-integration contact as being in harmony nor to be in conflict. Instead, individuals share some viewpoints, disagree about some, and are ignorant of or indifferent to others (Martin and Meyerson, 1991). When this perspective is applied to communication or change management every situation of conflict is understood as an opportunity to build awareness and become more curious.

2. Cultural Ambidexterity: a Lens to leverage the polarities inherent in scope deals

The concept of ambidexterity has been around for a long time. It refers to two diametrically opposed, yet complementary organizational capabilities–

(a) alignment: to compete in mature technologies and markets where efficiency, control and incremental improvement are prized AND

(b) adaptability: to compete in new technologies and markets where flexibility, autonomy and experimentation are needed.

In order to succeed in the long-run, an organization needs to master the act of balancing between these two organization capabilities. The standard approach is to create structural ambidexterity, that is, to create separate structures for different types of activities.

Scope deals are an inorganic way for an organization to acquire complementary cultural (& organizational) capabilities. The integration decision to keep the entities separate is like structural ambidexterity – allowing the parent company to manage alignment and leveraging the newly acquired firm to bring adaptability. In the
article, Building Ambidexterity into the organization researchers Julian Birkinshaw and Cristina Gibson argue that using structures as a means to separate these activities within an organization are useful but not sufficient. For organizations to achieve competitive advantage, employees need to learn to do the “balancing act” between two poles of adaptability and alignment. “It is far better to enable individuals to create an ambidextrous organization through their choices about which activities to pursue in the course of their day-to-day work. Ambidextrous individuals are an attribute to any organization”.

The day employees are able to make choices between adaptability-oriented behavior and alignment-oriented behavior the two companies can co-exist and succeed in the long run. To enable employees to do this, organizations need to build the requisite work environment for employees to make decisions. Every employee needs to be skilled in leveraging opposing capabilities and having a repertoire of responses to be able to interact with the world with a wider set of capabilities. This could indeed be a new dilemma for employees, who do not wish to entertain more than a threshold of ambiguity in their range of productive choices at work, leave alone align or adapt with values adjacent to their efficacies.

In this article, we have made the first step towards recognizing the shortcomings of traditional approaches used to analyze the role of culture in deals. It is important to recognize that as leaders in acquiring organizations, we need to make a dramatic shift in the behavior and culture of the organization to realize the transformation synergies. Preparing an organization for such a cultural journey requires consistent and methodological preparation. This could be the onset of dilemmas that HR leaders need to embrace in order to partner with businesses while they combine to unlock economic value for differently abled firms via M&A deals.

I have the hindsight perspective from playing my role via HR to present some specific challenges that either reframe the goals or the processes that accompany HR partnership with businesses in M&A scenarios. Let me state some of these below.

1. The risks and rewards in scope deals are very different from the challenges that come with a vanilla approach of scale - consolidation and managing cost synergies.
2. Traditional Approaches in which cultural differences are viewed as source of conflict and cultural similarity between two combining organization is seen as source of cohesion and better performance have outlived their relevance.
3. Scope deals offer a unique cultural choice - the leaders from the acquirer’s side have to deal with this inherent struggle between preservation and transformation of their own culture.
4. Integration approaches focusing on either keeping the entities separate, best of both cultures or reverse integration cannot help in unlocking the real transformational synergies of scope deals.
5. In order to unlock new opportunities, acquiring firms must view integration as an on-going process and not as an end-state. Acquiring firms must focus on creating a right environment for the target company to grow. Focus should be on enabling interactions and connections and joint working where it makes sense.
6. New cultural theories like Ambiguity perspective and Cultural Ambidexterity can help in developing the environment in which the target company entity can thrive and grow.

The conflicts these present to the incumbent HR professional can vary depending on the personality, the value and belief system of the professional, his/her interpersonal orientations, cultural affiliation and indeed functional capabilities of the incumbent’s host team. Essentially, therefore, HR as a function too, will lose its edge in facilitating M&A activity if it is slow to repurpose itself on the wave of dilemmas such strategy choices of scope deals precipitate. People lie at the heart of all M&A scope deals and a lot rides on HR teams and their capability as change agents to achieve the strategic goals of the firms’ financial transactions.
References:
Benjamin Gomes-Casseres. (2016) Is the LinkedIn Acquisition Microsoft’s Attempt to Build Its Own Alphabet?’ , Harvard Business Review, June
Luckerson V (2016), A Decade Ago Google Bought You Tube – and It Was the Best Tech Deal Ever, June

1: Studies like Buono and Bowditch, 1989; Chatterjee et all, 1992; Datta, 1991 found that organizational cultural differences weaken the integration effectiveness. Cartwright and Cooper (1993,1996) found that organization culture compatibility brings about M&A success.
My Social Media is not your Father’s Megatrend

About the Author

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Introduction to Social Media related dilemmas

What do you think is common between Mr. Narendra Modi, Mr. Donald Trump and South India’s own Mr. Rajnikant? For the purpose of this article – let me draw a parallel – all three have attempted to use the figurative tag for social media ‘#So-Me’ connoting a complex set of ‘esoteric’ objectives for spreading their message and also promoting their own persona for a traceable influence. The two of India origin among the three realized that their future fans could be aligned to India’s Demographic Dividend. They are known to have commissioned curated efforts, which changed the way our country viewed social media. The advisors to these sexagenarians surely looked at data (Internet, Mobility, Consumer Behaviour et al) and were able to get these two Leaders to spend large sums of money for this ‘Promotion’. There is an ongoing tension in filtering the issues involved from the personalities in play. Let’s look at the objectives of these two approaches wearing a ‘People Function’ hat and see what turns up:

1. ‘Engagement’ of Fans / Followers
2. Attraction and Retention to ‘causes’
3. Improving Promotion of self / Brand

Let’s keep the same hat on and look at how our own organizations are approaching the above objectives – This becomes the subject of my article.

I have given myself permission to define a dilemma for what it means to me. A dilemma may be defined as a situation in which a difficult choice has to be made between two or more alternatives, especially ones that are equally undesirable. We can use dilemma to describe a situation in which HR incumbents are faced with a conflict in their minds and this conflict leads to inaction. It is this inability to act that is attempted to be understood better in this article. This action is significant as it would have meant delivering value congruent to the HR profession’s objectives.


In 2000, 0.5% of India were on the internet. In 2016, 34.8% of India’s population were on the internet, representing 13.5% of the world’s internet’s users. Internet live statistics claim that 462,124,989 of more than a billion Indians were on the internet by 2016. In 1997, the Pew Research center, claims that 36% of all adults in USA went online. By 1998, that number went up to 41% in USA.

Yahoo, AOL and the New York Times got their home pages in 1997. Multiple sources from within the Internet tells us that Six Degrees (www.sixdegrees.com -1997) was the first ever social network. This enabled its users to ‘create a profile’ of themselves and make friends with other users. It managed to attract over 3 million users and was sold to Youth Stream Media networks for 125 MN in 1999. Friendster and My space followed. Early users will also remember Ryze.com which became popular as a professional networking site in the early 2000’s. Plaxo.com and Orkut.com and other attempts. Fast forward 20 years and just two examples of social media related business success viz – Facebook and WhatsApp forces any observer to explore the phenomenon in detail. Let us explore the factors, which may have influenced the rise and spread of social media from 1997 to 2017.

The ‘Social’ nature of humans is well established from Aristotle’s times who had said – “Man is by nature a social animal; an individual who is unsocial naturally and not accidentally is either beneath our notice or more than human. Society is something that precedes the individual.”

This ‘social’ nature of human beings has also been linked to our evolution itself. Would this mean that human
beings will, at all times seeking tools which would aid them to form communities around a ‘cause’? I wonder if this need is what led us to seek comfort in groups which led to formation of network and which ultimately led to the creation of the ultimate Tech-enabled ‘network’ – The Internet.

Expert views on social media have shifted from Tofflerian assumptions from sociology, to the Information Society views of Naisbitt and now to what Josh Bersin declares of micro-trends on technology platforms that HR professionals are being exposed to. In India, we can remember promotional plans from Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in early 2000 were centered on ‘free’ access to Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. Perhaps, the analysis by these ISP’s was that ‘Internet’ for most or at least the potential consumers, were actually the users of Social Media itself. If the marketing function latched on to this data-point early enough without hassles, what may have prevented the HR function from using the Internet and social media to solve ‘human’ (read employees’) problems especially when ‘humans’ are flocking to social media and the Internet?

Social Media as a Tool

While attempting to explore the dilemma embedded in the question above, I recollect an incident which happened during an Uber ride to the city recently. During this ride, I had received a call from an IT SME co-founder client of mine. The ‘animated’ conversation went about on an ‘advisory mode’ on the call that lasted for about 15 minutes. The Uber partner (as the drivers are referred to by Uber) was giving me curious glances via the rear-view mirror during the call. He wanted to know how I gather the data and ‘other things’ to speak and (according to him) convince the person on phone. I told him that I use Google to search relevant information from the Internet. He next wanted to know, if he could access similar information. It was my turn to be surprised as I had found him to be one of the savvier partners within the ride-hailing community from the way he used the features of the app itself. Maybe it’s my mistake to take his familiarity with the app and extrapolate it within an ability to use a tool (smartphone in this case) effectively. So, for the remaining portion of the ride, I ended up in demonstrating the search feature from the same smartphone using which he had reached my home with ease to pick me up.

I could not help but relate this to the situations I come across with some HR teams I get to interact across India. Thought leadership has a new frontier, as this, due to the ‘live’ access and availability of the medium. Most HR pros seem to be awe struck with the tool itself. The second category would claim to ‘be on Social Media’ – but would shy away when asked about instances from their current or past roles when they used their social media knowledge / presence to solve a work (read People) related problem. However, their curiosity peaks when mention is made of being assessed as a preferred employer. Social media ratings are common overseas. The context in India is different though. Traditional survey agencies like Great Place to Work manage to bypass the power of social media ratings yet. Within the companies surveyed though, privacy of personal identity may have meant control over demeanor for leaders in a non-digital hierarchy. This privacy often gave a cover of anonymity for leaders’ whose original hand in significant actions could be wielded behind the camera as it were. There are probably other factors too, that prevent HR professionals from exploring possibilities that exist in its use.

1. **Fads are fads are fads, as value is value**: The nascent stage of any information boom is about differentiating substance from form. Impostors often ride on waves than on becoming symbols of impact to the profession themselves. Especially in complex professions like HR, where understanding self is often pre-requisite before understanding others whom we serve, this is slow realization. Mistaking the number of followers on a channel for substantive influence is one such erroneous anchoring. Here is where tools like klout (https://klout.com/corp/score) can moderate one’s overestimation of online presence.

2. **The ‘performer’ may not be your online role model**: To the extent that task maturity and social media presence may not be a direct correlation, curation of a social network or a blog does not equal mastery in the profession. Performing a reference check of a candidate to be hired is not the same as communicating the candidate reference check process on a “AMA” (Ask me Anything) forum on Reddit for aspiring learners. Of course, uninterrupted runs in one’s professional role is not the sole criterion for task maturity
either. The lines of formal hierarchy and influence are thick, and too concrete in India for social media to break the glass ceiling before communication is open on social media.

3. **Avoidance online, is a signal leakage anyway:** Without a genuine authenticated presence in the real world, transition to the virtual medium gets tough. The dilemma for users online, is what kind of communication they will want to avoid.

Top down communication is about not giving up control in a hierarchical world. A first easy option the user may toy with is to check if they could engage employees or their professional pools online without revealing their identity. Masking one’s identity online is a higher game – a needless experiment for a formal leader who has yet to establish online identity. Unwilling commitment is stressful for the user. No hunger for online presence is also fatal.

Bottom up communication is more of an openness to face insecurities squarely. The longer a leader avoids the virtual media, the more the disconnect with the larger world of ideas. Consuming the fruits of virtual connect, without contributing to the netizens on their media is viewed as unfair game. A signal leakage as this detracts digital inhabitants.

4. **Online Responsiveness is a double-edged sword:** One of the lasting conditions online is that of the nature of the medium. Responsiveness fuels the medium. It signals competence and courtesy, en masse. Responsiveness online is like reciprocity in real life influence. Ethical influence is about a ‘giving’ identity. These responsive users acquire a credibility over time with consistent presence and prompt contribution. In the ambition to achieve both competence and courtesy in image, some people may act on impulse, blurring the boundary between discretion and valor. It takes skills to master the medium. Without mastery in responsiveness, the medium holds the message of the user as hostage.

5. **The Narcissist Individual is not the Organization of Individuals:** The boundary between personal reputation and organization reputation is fuzzy on social media. Dilemmas arise because of how the web 2.0 world of netizens want to game your online presence. You write a blog, and others can leave comments on it to wrest a point of view or cheer you in visible agreement. The ‘audience’ can anonymously and even asynchronously suck the user into the medium, beyond the user’s original conception. In teasing temptation, the audience can trip the user’s indulgence, especially if he/she is perceived as craving for attention online. There are many studies that examine narcissistic tendencies of social media users.

6. **When do I post online, and what do I reveal there?** Psychologically, maturity is expected of those in unrestrained youthful gusto on social media. Professionals without experience need to learn faster to demonstrate emotional flexibility between generations. The challenge is of how does the professional test the waters without damage to reputation or job security. The dilemma is of when to express on social media and on what.

7. **Where on the web of social media do I leverage my kind of influence?** Perhaps, one of the most intriguing aspects of online presence is to be able to decide on which platform an HR professional should wield influence. Would it be Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter or a personal webpage? This is akin to deciding what would be fair trade in exchange of impressions and expressions online. While this may be a trigger-point, the dilemma in intent this represents is about deciding between being ‘voyeur’ and ‘influencer’. Lurkers are welcome, but yet not reputed online. Crossing the hump of uncertainty in between such identities can push the experimental voyeur to being an active participant. I’ve often wondered, if pioneers on social media in HR like the early lists of HR influencers that SHRM India would curate, went online despite resources available to them, or because of resources available to them.

The above are but some of the ways to understand user hesitation or tentativeness toward social media. Being both outspoken and tactful is of paramount significance on social media. Take away one of these two skills, and it tends to take the other away too. The mindful discretion to balance tact with truth is a choice of the user. Presence on social media is like being a fish in a fish bowl. The willing disposition for the user to be seen is a consequence of the new age of radical transparency. Newer generations or the digital natives enact
themselves as if their private lives could seamlessly occupy public space. This seamlessness suffers a sharp
disruption when a young college pass-out enters a formal organization, and employee policy on social media
takes comes into force. Being oneself then can happen largely only after-office hours, and the workplace is
seen as a disengaging factor in life.

Let me explain this state of conundrums, further with an example or two that I was part of. One dates back to the
time a professional body, NIPM (National Institute of Personnel Management) Kerala chapter (www.nipmkerala.org) was faced with a challenge of conducting a National conference (32nd Annual Edition for the www.nipm.in) in Kochi during September of 2012. As Co-chair of the IT & Systems committee, my partner chair and I had a tough time convincing the Organizing Committee about the need for having the website for the conference ready about 4 months in advance of the event with an online registration channel. Having done this, the entire committee was surprised by the result – we had to close student registrations for this national conference in June (just 2 weeks after the website was launched) to save registration slots for our own Educational institution members as we got an online confirmation of 80 students from a college in Tamil Nadu. The conference had an overall target of 200 student delegates. This visible ‘success’ gave this committee the freedom to create its own path for fresh approaches and the said conference became one of the first few from our state which was streamed live via the internet. The conference (#ncon2012) holds the record for attracting the largest no of delegates in NIPM’s history.

Having attended the national conferences of the Society For Human Resource Management (www.shrm.org) in 2012, 2014 and 2015, I have grown to respect the work that SHRM has been doing for generating and sharing quality content for keeping its member HR professionals engaged. In 2012, SHRM got together a group of social media influencers and put them inside a ‘Bloggers Lounge’ in Atlanta and gave them a free hand to design ways to reach out to the over 15,000 delegates connect to social media. The team came up with the idea of ‘Hive’ a 2000 sq. feet space where Kiosks manned by volunteers from the bloggers lounge were seen encouraging delegates to create (yes, create) social media accounts and help them understand the possibilities that exist for creating solutions for business problems using social media as a tool. This bloggers lounge, comprising of contributing volunteers have grown to over 50 each year - continues to be a special feature of all conferences. However, the social media adoption rates by HR teams across US do not show effective numbers, when one looks beyond the top quartile of companies. Social media influencers continue to strive towards bridging the gap. However – articles such as this one (http://www.talentculture.com/five-reasons-why-social-media-should-be-on-your-hr-radar/) written in the 19th year after the first social network was launched, by an author who continues to be an SHRM Social media influencer, proves that there is still a long way to go even in the US before HR teams can claim to have used social media tools for supporting business needs.

SHRM India too has instituted an invited Social Media influence squad for the two annual conferences (SHRM Tech and SHRM India annual), which it organizes in our country. However, the efforts to popularize Social media and its ability to be seen as a tool and solution for HR’s problems seems to be done in a relatively haphazard manner. I see the lack of collaboration between efforts around proven Social Media related strategies by the homegrown professional bodies – viz NHRDN, NIPM and ISTD. NHRDN does not have its own influencer squad yet. NIPM instituted a social media cell in 2016 while ISTD does not have any active social channels.

When we look at the situation from a function based lens, we see that the efforts to build solutions started around the most critical problem – that of attracting Talent. Marketers or marketing minded HR professionals got the prime slots for leading successful interventions around the Talent sourcing objective. As a result, the Talent attraction function in the top quartile firms consists of professionals from Marketing / Sales background (surprise?) as against HR. This is a lost opportunity for the HR function itself as Talent attraction abilities has a direct connection with bolstering the Employer Brand. Branding as a term as well as an approach has often been a taboo for many in the HR profession. This sort of stigma attached to branding has also resulted in Employer branding as an approach being led or delegated to marketing teams in a majority of organizations – hence missing the intrinsic punch, which it could have had.
Does lack of measurement in HR affect Social Media effectiveness too?

Traditionally, the HR function has been averse to measuring itself on impact. This means that functions like Finance, Marketing and Sales which confront the competitive spaces of business are better placed due to their inherent ability to publish measures of their business impact. Barring few chapters in major metros – there are no efforts by professional bodies to position measurement criteria for success. Even those that exist are usually disjointed in effort and remain unseen or quickly forgotten. The attitude toward knowledge sharing and curation is yet of consumptive variety. Substantially declarative knowledge, or that which is generated between people is yet weak formation online. At times, procedural knowledge in ‘how to’ adopt policies and practices is blogged or micro-blogged on twitter. These appear on emerging themes like diversity, work-life balance or women at work.

Over the last decade – there have been many results around Talent Attraction, Employer Branding, Employee Engagement as well as Learning and Development from among the top ten percent of Indian firms. On careful observation one can see that some of these originate as customization of their parent global firms’ strategies to their employees in India. This factor itself adds to the dilemma as HR folks who would start looking at it through an aspirational lens initially will soon find their interest waning. They tend to attribute the ‘global’ nature of that knowledge to quickly come to a self-defeating conclusion about its relevance to their ‘local’ situation. The original practice was after all ‘not invented / practical here’ (NIH). Given below are few advanced approaches towards Talent attraction which gets obscured by this ‘NIH’ feeling:

1. Targeting ‘Candidates’ vs ‘Job-seekers’
2. Amplifying Employer brand by focusing on unique ‘Candidate Experience’ approaches
3. Focus on look at ‘Work’ itself as a way to attract top talent to any firm regardless of its size / location.
4. Employees as the brand ambassadors for a company and its culture – Employee Advocacy

The dilemma is exemplified when one finds that the Fortune top 25 Best employers have been successful in using the advanced approaches for garnering business results as well as in exemplary Talent attraction and retention. In addition, these approaches add to the companies’ Brand Reputation – e.g. Wegmans, a privately held, 100 plus years old company whose consistent results can be connected to the four points above as seen in this article - https://qz.com/404063/new-york-city-is-getting-a-great-grocery-store-in-wegmans-and-an-even-better-employer/

High Tech is a reality for sure, so why not explore benefiting from the ‘High-Touch’ possibilities?

John Naisbitt, the author of 1980 best-seller ‘Megatrends’ had then predicted that ‘the more we become surrounded by Technology, the more we value human touch in our lives’. Social media in combination with Instant Messaging tools has potential to be used as platform to facilitate better ‘touch’ between stakeholders across diverse business needs. The plethora of WhatsApp groups, which improved communication between, teams resulting in better collaboration – most importantly impacting the supervisor-subordinate relationship. I feel this opens up an opportunity for the People function to facilitate creation of such platforms – taking care to measure the results at each stage.

One of the ‘results’ of a ‘High-Touch’ approach, which I saw delivered for my previous employer located in a Tier 2 city, is worth mentioning here. The Organization Effectiveness (OE) team were tasked with creating a solution for improving Internal communication. As the team went about sprucing up the email and PowerPoint templates in an open Internet environment, a group of employees decided to create a Facebook group and this spread its tentacles quickly. Open internet itself a novelty in those days of 2009 (it still is in our country I gather). I was watching this development with interest, seriously pondering about that ‘Social Media Policy’ which was waiting to be rolled out. It was only after I got a request to become the administrator for that group that I really got to share the excitement which had made over 80% of the employees as members within a quarter of its existence. Lo and behold, the OE team decided not to further polish those templates as this group took away...
the need which existed for Internal communication. This group became the informal discussion board for the entire company and we were careful not to get into too much measurement around engagement beyond what Facebook itself had instituted. There was a point when the parent company in USA became worried about some Facebook related (US centric) issues and I decided to move out of my administrator role for this group. There was no categorical way anyone would term the group ‘official’. I continued to remain a member and could contribute to the engagement that the employees were generating – with their own content. As for the company – the share of referrals toward employee hiring zoomed to 70%, which for an IT Product company was kind of unimaginable before – hence a bonus for something which was an internal discussion platform. That firm does not exist now as it did till 2014 but this virtual group continues to exist within a new avatar – Alumni WhatsApp group, which a former Facebook group member from that firm created.

The Internet is much more than Social Media, yet….

Indian firms, both in metros as well as small towns still look at internet as a nuisance and ‘time-wasting’ distraction for employees at ‘work’. This is strange for me to fathom as it’s a no-brainer that most business solutions can be enhanced with the Internet (World beyond Google too) these days – why should any department leader seeking solutions to business needs continue to be inindecision about enabling the Internet for employees? If a company is confident about its ability to attract top Talent, why shouldn’t it open this platform while all solutions originate within its own premises? With smartphones getting smarter by the day and Internet access being cheaper in India – isn’t it time to think about using it as an enabler? This irrational inertia is also adding to the dilemma that exists around Social media as well. The paradox seems to be that internet users are willing to pay for music, films and entertainment online by even granting mobile application access to or through their social media accounts. When it comes to bread-winning information, which is largely unpaid for, the same internet users are not social media savvy.

Heads-Up on the Speedways ahead

Any thought about future in my opinion should start with questions – so here are some questions for the HR professionals:

1. How can HR function reposition its Internet strategy to catalyze the application of a consumer and digital lens towards sustaining business impact?
2. Can any contemporary HR leader miss out on the Internet strategy? How can ‘Social’ be included in / play a pivotal role in that strategy?
3. How can HR catalyze the repositioning of Employer brand towards attracting a generation of employees who are ‘cause’ motivated?
4. Want to connect to a disruptive example? Let’s think about what happened with the Arab Spring. Notice that the ‘cause’ was created and spread via social media – with such successes from ‘Crowd-Advocacy’ being all around us, why are HR teams averse to taking lead for generating results from Employee-Advocacy Platforms?
5. Why are we in HR averse to designing practices which will garner benefits embodied in this ‘Platform thinking’ – even when we use many curated platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter without much fuss?

Summary Inferences

Having been serendipitously introduced to formal management education in 1997, I’ve beenimmensely lucky to be able to stay curious, connected and watch the growththat was happening in Technology and the Internet. I recollect being introduced to ‘The Internet’ in 1998 from my B-School’s computer lab where 50 of us got to share a 90kbps dialup connection. Now in 2017, I’m accessing the internet free of cost from the terrace of a 14-floor high building in a Tier 3 city of one of the most ‘Digitized’ states of my country. My Crystal ball gaze from this vantage point is as follows:
1. The Internet has catalyzed democratization of information and its flow and ‘SoMe’ (A popular #tag usage for Social Media itself) is the train to be on for anyone wishing to stay connected to this ‘flow’.

2. Consumers (read Employees), are already harnessing the power & choice via internet to communicate, discuss, share and transact through various social and location aware tools.

3. To attract and retain and generate business results from top Talent, Employers would be forced to provide newer and relevant ways to live, work and play.

I believe that the disruption is still waiting to happen in India. HR or rather the People function would not want to be caught napping for long in a digital era. It was not so long ago that a Fast Company article ‘Why we hate HR’ got so popular that it required SHRM to get Prof. Dave Ulrich to defend HR profession from the author Mr. Keith Hammond. If a group of employees bring up such a case against HR in the future, it’s likely to happen on the social media platform Glassdoor.com!

I sign off with forward looking thoughts from Dr. Lisa Barrett about Emotions and Control. Dr. Baret believes that patterns of neural activity, get easier and easier for our brain to recreate, like well-trodden walking paths that grow deeper with each passerby’s footsteps. She adds that we don’t want those patterns to become paved roads. As every experience we construct is an investment, it pays to invest wisely. She suggests cultivating the experiences you want to construct again in the future. And yes –quoting Mr. Thomas Friedman, the author of the famous book (2005) titled ‘The World is Flat’ from the keynote address he gave to HR Professionals at SHRM’s National convention at Orlando in 2014 – “Normal is Average – and Average is Dead”. It is evident to me, that my age on Social Media is already different from the preceding age of the Megatrends. I am wondering what your view maybe. Do let me know on my twitter handle https://twitter.com/anisharavind @anisharavind.

Reference Links used for this article


8. 40 Inspiring Social Media case studies (Singapore) https://www.slideshare.net/happymarketer/40-inspiring-social-media-case-studies/19-KEY_TAKEAWAYS1Mostly_anyone_who_is

9. HR and Social media – SHRM India resource - https://www.shrm.org/india/hr-topics-and-strategy/hr-and-social-media/Pages/default.aspx


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Dilemmas in The Realm of Leadership Talent Development

About the Author

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Dilemmas in The Realm of Leadership
Talent Development

“I view my primary job as strengthening our talent pools. So I view every conversation, every meeting as an opportunity to talk about our talented people”

Jack Welch

Disclaimer: The ideas expressed in the article are the author’s professional point of view and her organization may or may not subscribe to the same.

The evolution of HR has been quite significant in the last couple of decades. We have witnessed the function emerge from pure labour welfare, personnel services role to the strategic HR role that it plays today. Like most other HR processes – the process of talent management and development has witnessed interesting developments over the years. While significant strides have taken place in the area of talent management, there are some challenges which HR professionals and organizations continue to face in this area. Leadership Development itself gets formal when organizations go past a critical size in terms of number of employees. In early stages, the process is even viewed as an expense, rather than an investment. While this paper will leave readers to their own definitions of leadership development in their context, it is the process of leadership talent identification and development that will be in focus here. So, the scope for us here is as follows.

1. **Process for identifying and Mapping Talent** – Does the process need an overhaul? How can we move beyond the all pervasive 9-Box model: what is really meant by potential and performance in a talent context?

2. **Scope and Canvas of Talent Development** – Do we need to revisit the scope, canvas and the landscape of development opportunities?

3. **Ownership of Talent Development** – where does the onus lie? How can we get the top team to own talent development and make it an organizational imperative?

4. **The Role of the developing Leader as individual**: Which models of development should the person pursue? Is there a best way to develop talent – or does each path needs to be customised?

Let us now examine each point in necessary detail to come to recognize valid concerns that become dilemma moments in managing leadership talent.

**Process for identifying and Mapping Talent:**

**Moving beyond the Nine Box: An imperative or an option?**

The one talent management process, that has stood the test of time and has, by far, emerged as the most ubiquitous process is the Nine Box Performance – Potential Grid. A “nine-box grid” is a tool used to evaluate and plot the talent pool based on two factors: performance and potential. Typically on the horizontal axis is “performance” measured by performance reviews. On the vertical axis is typically “potential” referring to an individual’s potential to grow one or more levels in a managerial or professional capacity. Typically the horizontal axis has three levels of performance and the vertical axis has three levels of potential. Managers make a judgment on where each employee is placed. (Refer Figure 1)
Defining and prescribing what organisations understand by “Performance” has been relatively straightforward and underpinned by Performance Management systems that are in operation in many companies. However gaining agreement on what is meant by “Potential” has been fraught with difficulty with no commonly agreed definition emerging” (Sparrow P., Hird M., & Balain S., 2011)

A high potential employee is defined as someone who is capable of rising to and succeeding at a more senior, critical role. Companies use various criteria to identify and define high potential talent: Ability to assume greater responsibilities within two to four years, flexible and mobile for career advancement, ability to stretch beyond current skills or role, functional and technical competency, Cross-functional capability, identification as a potential successor for a leadership role are some of the many criteria deployed to define potential (Corporate Leadership Council, 2006). Research from DDI points to 4 clusters - Leadership Promise, Personal Development Orientation, Mastery of Complexity and Balance of Values and Results (Rogers & Smith, 2003). They also argue that identification of leadership potential does not equate with diagnosis of leader development needs.

The nine box grid enables senior leadership team to discuss about whom to bet on in the talent pool and what to do to develop and grow the succession pipeline. It is simple, straightforward and made easy to implement, getting everyone in a room to discuss who they like and dislike and provide an assessment of the organisation’s talent and bench strength to aid future resource planning, to diagnose training and development needs, and provide greater focus to development efforts, discuss careers, help set expectations for development and to motivate and engage talent within the organisation.

Despite the overwhelming usage of the Nine Box matrix, the utility of the nine box for achieving the above mentioned development objectives remains suspect. The disconnect with this model is not because it is not a useful description or yardstick, but because of how it is used to classify people, or put them into boxes. Organizations also go beyond a nine box classification, to further classify talent as global, regional or local, or functional, technical and general management.

Figure 1: The Nine Box Performance and Potential Matrix

“Defining and prescribing what organisations understand by “Performance” has been relatively straightforward and underpinned by Performance Management systems that are in operation in many companies. However gaining agreement on what is meant by “Potential” has been fraught with difficulty with no commonly agreed definition emerging” (Sparrow P., Hird M., & Balain S., 2011)

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So, the dilemma arises, when extra-rational considerations are permitted to vitiate the data based reasoning to categorize talent on models, such as the 9 box. At times, the dilemma is compounded due to developmental agenda competing with suitability criteria for positions that need to be filled. The executive top management ‘will’ to share in the talent philosophy of the firm is an ongoing dynamic challenged by this dilemma.

Talent Classification does not determine or establish true potential, nor enhance understanding on how to leverage it. What decision makers seek is ‘level of confidence’ with respect to the talent decisions – for instance, can this person deliver as a “plant head” or an SBU Head or as a “Functional Head”. This is the predictive power rationale for validity of the process. What are the development opportunities that need to be provided to enable the person to succeed at the next level? This is the explanatory power of the decision, as conditions necessary for success are to be ensured. What are the possible derailers that need to be addressed to enable the person to perform at the next level? This is the fallibility disclaimer, in that the leader has thresholds of stress beyond which, dysfunctional outcomes of the talent prediction process kick in. Both research and practice demonstrates that organizations want to improve succession, talent development, mobility and retention then, and going beyond the Nine box is a discernible trend.

Jane Yarnall and Dan Lucy (2015) conducted an interesting research to investigate the impact of using the grid on employee engagement and motivation, to understand how helpful the grid was in driving and supporting a culture of development, and the experience of managers using the grid to rate employees. Their findings show that the grid process is failing to engage a high percentage of employees, demotivating people categorized as low in potential or performance, and majority of those rated as high in performance and potential, feel that the process did not change anything for them. Movement from a higher rated box in one year to a lower rated box in the following year was particularly upsetting for employees and without exception reduced their engagement levels. Besides, as the study illustrated, the aftermaths of the classification – irrespective of the talent rating – destroyed more than what it delivered? These findings and our own experiences induce us to introspect - what are we achieving by foisting this process on the organization? Despite some of the painful experiences, we continue to propagate and use the grid for talent management and development. The fact that leadership development continues to feature at the top of the pile for most CEO’s as a burning priority continues to underscore that somewhere between talent classification and substantive talent development– there is a certain gap in the target experience.

Developing Talent – the Scope, Canvas and landscape revisited:

At a more fundamental level we need to understand the following challenges around talent development –

2.1 Is it appropriate for organizations to turn the logic upside down and change the development ‘eligibility’ criteria?

2.2 Should we continue to put values around potential and as a consequence – do developmental quotas make sense?

2.3 Is acceleratation of leadership development a fact or a fiction?

Let us examine the above more closely for our understanding.

2.1 Reversing the eligibility criteria - Who should develop and where is the maximum ROI for development?

One outcome of talent classification is to help organization decide ‘where’ to invest, and ‘whom’ to invest in. Interestingly most organizations believe that the maximum ROI on development investments are generated by the inverted L (the top three boxes) of the matrix. Individuals placed in these boxes are put on accelerated development programs, nominated for elite courses and conferences and given very special/plum projects to lead or manage.

The argument for targeted investment for the High-Potential (Hi-Po’s) only, is that organizations have only limited resources and therefore they cannot spread themselves too thin, and the investments decisions are
based on the maximization principle – invest where ROI is high. This logic is contestable in terms of justice principles – by far, a fair expectation in a humanistic process such as human resources development. The approach is akin to feeding an overfed child. A person is identified as talent because he/she has demonstrated potential and is already ‘there’. “Potential cannot possibly be a correlated measure for someone who is a high performer. Think about it. If anything, it is the opposite. A low performer has greater potential to improve than a high performer” (Martin Knowles, 2014). A person with weak potential not only needs more development investments – but will benefit more from it - ROI is maximum where investments are absolutely required. 

The consequent dilemma then is in the operationalization of ROI. One form of the dilemma alone is on scoping parameters of ROI success. Would it be future revenue growth-led in criterion; or would the ROI be based on established standards of performance? The corollary in scientific terms is the need to push the boundaries of research in discriminating the constructs of ‘potential’ and ‘performance’.

Organizational practices are also built around this baffling logic – initiatives planned at retention are supplemented with development opportunities. Organizations are, and rightfully so, keen to retain their Hi-Po’s, but using development avenues to signal ‘talent’ materially defeats the intent of development. Development opportunities serve well when they are made available to people that deserve it (and will benefit) from them. This perhaps partially at least, explains why talent pipelines are running dry and why it is difficult for organizations to build internal successors. The nested dilemma of having leadership talent categories is then the perception of equity for the generic organizational citizen, whose involvement on the job and accommodation of talent policies beyond his/her control goes unaccounted for in the equations of investment in talent development.

**Case illustration:** A useful metaphor from Indian society is the approach used by coaching classes – (classes to help students excel in various competitive exams) is to admit students only in the 90% range and then claim to achieve cent per cent results. An identical approach used by an organization is illustrated. : An elite team of already identified ‘high potentials’ were identified for grooming as future CEO’s for the organization. A huge investment, in terms of time and money was made on this development initiative, since this was a global program over an extended timeframe. The individuals were mentored by competent coaches from within and outside the organization, and were given opportunity to travel across the world and to work on identified projects in addition to the perspective building sessions. This huge investment was made for a team of 18-20 people . The outcome – only 4 of them made it to the CEO level and the balance got disillusioned because they did not see much ‘happening’ to them after all the investment. The program lost its sheen and was not seen as either aspirational by the employees nor credible by the senior management. Worse still, the ones that were not chosen for this ‘elite’ program – got disillusioned, as in a ‘survivor’ syndrome, that left more bruised than healed in the guise of development.

**Attributing Values around Potential – The Impact of the labels:**

The problem with 9 boxes are the labels assigned to each box. Being in the upper right of a 9 box is better than being in the middle, and being in the lower left is bad. This poses another dilemma around disclosure of talent ratings, whether to let talent pool know they are identified as talent – and of what kind. Managers often find the middle box (medium potential - medium performance) as the most safe haven. Middle of the ground does not require managers to take a position on the assessment of their talent rating and also justifies the existence of the normal distribution. Often this is the most populated box in the entire grid.

Managers already struggle to differentiate between “performance vs. potential” and “what vs. how” during the 9 box assessment process. They struggle even more when asked to explain 9 box results to employees who are concerned about what their placement in different boxes means for their careers. (Steven Hunt, 2017)

Again, identified Hi-Potent who are declared as talent – become more susceptible to obvious derailers. E.g. A disproportionately high self-confidence sanctioned by the organization as system – often ends in behaviours bordering around arrogance, decreased interpersonal effectiveness due to the more than proportionate limelight, more demanding, less patient. And since the organizations are all about ‘showcasing’ the talent pool they become more susceptible to attrition due to the inability of the organization to match their unreasonable
demands and expectations. Some of this genre of dilemmas arise due to poor design of success profiles. If the success profile, is not anchored in the desired ethos of the firm’s governance, or bears sharp discontinuity with the identity of the organization, talent decisions will get sour. On such basis talent decisions may appear flippant despite the sophistry in measurement and overlays of performance and potential identification processes.

i. Can Potential be Determined by Quotas

One of the other issues we have created with the use of the nine box is the establishment of quotas – defining the optimum percentage of population that needs to belong to each box! “….we have 10% in the top right, 10% in bottom left, 10% spread around the outside and 70% in the middle. Then we invest in the top right future leaders and, lets be honest, do nothing with the rest. Then we review it a year later, no-one really wants to, and guess what, very little has changed.” (Martin Knowles, 2014). Our fixation for managing talent in the top 10-15% may apparently make life relatively easier for the HR/ organization – but surely it does not serve the purpose for which it was originally developed.

ii. Natural versus Instant:

We are living in a “fast food world” where instant gratification is the norm. The problem with this ‘fast world’ approach is that speed gains precedence over process rigor. Accordingly, organizations become less patient with development processes that span over a period of time, despite the excessively higher costs of replacing talent from external sources.

Developing talent is not akin to fixing a fast food dish. It is a process – and leaders need to comprehend this elemental feature. As a process, development in human beings mimic nature. It takes time to mature and evolve and in emotional growth or interpersonal effectiveness, there are no obvious short cuts. The challenge for most leaders is the willingness to acknowledge that there are no “intensive” shots or doses for developing great leaders overnight. The dilemma springs from the apparition the process represents, in that people are eager to offer ‘accelerated development’ as if learning can be turbo-charged as development on booster rockets.

Acceleration of Development – Fact or Fiction:

Albert Einstein once said that everyone is a genius, but if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.

Quite often people are moved to roles on the basis of their past performance. In behavioural economics terms, this is the outcome of an availability bias. However, such transition does not necessarily turn out to be successful. The person is unable to transition into the new role in the expected timescale of their sponsor. So, what do we do? We blame the process or worse the person who was moved, label them as incompetent or write it down as a margin of error without considering the real issues about why they could not transition. Thus, such outcomes are spoken away without sufficient exploration or understanding of its root causes, much to the detriment of HR’s reputation.

Case Illustration: This is an example where a new business venture was being launched and the person to lead that business was to be identified. Since this was a new venture, the stakes involved were high, the role required someone with a start-up experience. The candidate selected for the role was a high performer with exceptional track record, who had strong functional knowledge. The organization, believed that people learn ‘on the go’ - and did not believe in preparing people for the role. The person moved to the role – with disastrous results - the business mounted huge losses, high employee turnover, dissatisfied customers and low market credibility. The consequence was obvious - the person was asked to leave.

What was not taken into consideration was that the “star performer” lacked experience of leading large diverse teams, managing people across levels, stakeholders and environment. Incumbent experience, and knowledge apart, counterbalancing tendencies of the person for the target position were not checked for.
Control versus Autonomy:

It has been established that growth and development of any living organism depends on the environment - the more conducive the environment - the better the growth prospects. A tree can grow into a mighty Oak or a bonsai – the former needs support only in the initial stages of its growth, whereas the latter requires support on an ongoing basis. The key here is determining the appropriate balance between nature and nurture.

The implication of the above dilemma is as follows: developing leaders involves “throwing them to the sea” at times – so that they can learn to swim. While this provides a great opportunity for developing people, there is an inherent risk of “losing face” in the case of failure. What do we know about deploying such development crucibles that can ensure a win for both the developing leader and his/her sponsor organization?

Case Illustration: A manager in a large corporation grew to become one of its most successful leaders. As his team grew and expanded – the pressure of always “looking good” and “being right” – grew proportionately. This started impacting his choices and decisions relating to people development. He grew risk-averse and refrained from “exposing” his team members (implicitly himself) to any risky (read failure-prone) situation. Over a period of 10 -15 years – the team that worked with this leader, had very limited exposure. While they grew in rank and grades – more because of loyalty to the leader, rather than essential growth in capability – their personal growth was stunted. The people working under this leader demonstrated lack of confidence and resultant risk aversion.

This perhaps also explains the anxiety (real or perceived) a leader experiences when required to broaden diversity of talent. Leaders develop only under such crucibles!

Positioning of Development - ‘Outside’ or ‘Inside’ of a Manager’s role?

“When do I find time to mentor people - should I be chasing sales / market shares / production numbers - or spending time on these activities? If I send my people for their learning initiatives, how will I deliver my targets?” This familiar manager-speak is a developmental cop-out. As HR professionals we often hear managers lamenting the fact that HR takes away too much of their time – especially when asked to develop talent – more so when they do not have a line of sight on how this will help them achieve their business goals. The anxiety of not being able to achieve targets is a performative bias, irrespective of the reality of these stated intents in outcome.

The problem is not them – but how the development agenda is positioned! Most of the development initiatives are positioned to imply that they (the managers) have to come ‘outside’ (the ‘performance’ context) and do ‘extra’ work. However, if the positioning of these initiatives is embedded within the ‘performance context’ - the idea gets more traction. For instance, managers, who are often unable to find time to identify breakthrough ideas, or researching best practices, data mining and modelling, business analysis, etc. They can leverage these opportunities for capability building. All of these are challenging projects which not only help to build capability but provide leaders with solutions to their ongoing business problems. The useful knack is to nudge pertinently and allow the manager to see the ‘connection’.

The Role of the developing Leader as individual:

Few dilemmas are experienced by individuals in the development process. Should the person own the process or wait for HR to show the way? Which models of development should the person pursue? Is there a best way to develop talent – or does each path needs to be customised? Very often we find individuals aspiring to be CEO’s or General Management – since these are the most extolled career paths in many organizations. Does the 10-20-70 rule of development help people universally?

The onus of ownership as beneficiary in the development process is ultimately that of the developing leader. The inherent dilemma is in qualifying the moment in which the individual has ‘signed on’ the development contract with the sponsor. While paper compliances like a bond agreement, or a non-compete clause in action learning phases could provide legal cover, they may be mere alibis. The psychological contract in development is way above a loyalty bond. It is in the relationship between sponsor and leader, the institution and its talent
pool - that the penny drops. How can an individual break free from personal dilemmas of pursuing personal aspirations vis-a-vis organizational aspirations? Leadership development is a social process, and for leaders now to assume that they are unassailable as individuals, is a mark of arrogance and naivete of how the world works.

The dilemma arises because in the mutuality, unless the leader signs on from within his or her own inner volition, the authenticity in the process is doomed. Facilitating leadership development then is about delicate engagement moments in which the tacit and the explicit make for the universe for the leader in the talent pool and the facilitator. A permissive leadership facilitator, may do the sponsor disservice in not reporting excesses of a leader exploiting development avenues at the sponsor’s expense in cultivating harmful coteries, both within the company and externally among key suppliers or technology partners.

There is merely a thin line that divides individual leader commitment to development from ethical disseminators of distress and decay in leaders’ value systems. HR leaders need to strengthen their acumen in identifying leaders’ tendencies on such bandwidth.

In Conclusion:
As HR professionals building great people for business or an organization is one of the most significant expectations that our organizations have from us. Great teams and talent are not built in a day. We create that large pool by continuously identifying and building capability which translates into potential.

The area and subject of talent development is the most critical matter for most organizations – globally. The need of the hour is to introspect if the tools, processes and systems that have been deployed, continue to be relevant or needs revisiting. With organizations working under the matrix of technological advancement, talent management and succession planning are two critical aspects that need dedicated effort. It’s time to look beyond grids and boxes in order to build talent.

While some sort of categorization will be required by organizations – is it time to move away from the nine box and arrive at a more relevant and simple classification? For talent development to become a reality – both the line managers and the individuals need to own the process in its entirety. HR will be required to reinvent itself and challenge the status quo on the development ownership, personal involvement and leverage technology to keep the processes contemporary.

I am reminded of a quote by none other than Lee Iacocca “I hire people brighter than me and then I get out of their way”.

References:
Siddharth SN is Head - Business HR at SPAR India, a Landmark Group company. Prior to this he has been Chief People Officer assimilating HR leadership experience across economic sectors. He has been in various HR verticals and also done a stint in business development. He is a keen group facilitator and executive coach. Siddharth has published research articles in areas of Roles, Stress, Flow and Organization Citizenship behaviour. His books on HR Analytics, Compensation & benefits design and People Manager Checklists are available on Amazon. Siddharth is also the Secretary of NHRD’s Bangalore chapter.

Manasa, Vaacha, Karmana : HR in the Experience Economy Businesses in India

About the Author

Siddharth SN
Manasa, Vaacha, Karmana: HR in the Experience Economy Businesses In India

Preliminary thoughts

Being comfortable writing research articles, writing an article comprising of episodes in caselets was new territory. Camouflaging the real identities of organizations and individuals has been effected in the four caselets here in to ensure confidentiality. Caselets are what we may refer to as the diminutive form of a classical case study. While many sources are acknowledged in sentiment, listing them even obliquely would give away the identity of the organizations referred in the article. Hence, no such clues are listed in the reference section either. The caselets are however, based on the author’s experienced realities.

Introduction

The economy has today moved from the product economy to the services economy, and most recently to the experience economy. This has in effect meant moving from inside-out to outside-in. Inside out would be producing goods for the customer, or a service for the customer. Outside-in is creating a feeling in the customer. Creating a feeling has automatically implied that the creator of the feeling would first need to gauge the “current reality” in the customer. In effect, the “value zone” employee first needs to be open to the customer’s “current reality” and then be empowered to take decisions that creates a feeling in the customer.

The paradigm, “Atithi Devo Bhava” (May the Guest be regarded as God), possibly forms the base of the collective unconscious around treating visitors in India. At a subtler level, this could also lead to a spirit of sacrifice towards guests’ needs vis-à-vis one’s own needs. With the advent of the service economy, and now, the experience economy, resolving the tension between a guest who comes home and a paying customer who seeks a service could be seen as the first dilemma that exists in the Indian context.

In this article, four caselets of organizations have been presented. Caselets by themselves are neither positive, nor negative. They are in shades of grey that invite the reader to create their own learnings and actions from there. In these caselets are two kinds of businesses; those that have a class of employees who bring niche techno-functional skills (eg. Clinician specialists, airline pilots) and the other kind of businesses that do not have such specialists (such as retail), or have almost all employees who are techno-functional specialists (as in Information Technology). Differential treatment of such employees where present within the organization is the second possible dilemma that would seek to be surfaced and resolved in organizations.

Delivering exceptional customer experience – MVK model

The following model for delivering exceptional experience in the new economy is reflected across 4 organizational experiences of the author. Situated in Indian culture, the model consists of three words – Manasa (refers to the mind), Vaacha (refers to what is spoken or espoused), Karmana (refers to actions). These terms are explained in Table 1, below, so that the reader may search for the construct’s relevance in the narration of the caselets. The reader then also has the benefit of contrasting the reading experience with the author’s analysis of the model’s treatment in a positive and a negative caselet scenario. Let’s attempt familiarity with the model’s terms in the table first.
Table 1: MVK model for delivering experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top Leadership</th>
<th>Manasa</th>
<th>Vaacha</th>
<th>Karmana</th>
<th>HR Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary role</strong></td>
<td>Create anchors for alignment. Make the anchors simple and a few in number. Could be vision / mission / values. Stay with them for at least a couple of years.</td>
<td><strong>Ongoing role</strong></td>
<td>Constantly hold dialogues to get ideas on what is working and what isn’t</td>
<td><strong>Mindful role</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Secondary role</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Facilitate CEO and Board to share focus in Business Anchor points. Socialize with CXO team on implications. Create opportunities to recognize Sr. Leadership team for aligned behaviours. Flag mis-alignments and set time lines for realignment.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Middle Management</th>
<th>Manasa</th>
<th>Vaacha</th>
<th>Karmana</th>
<th>HR Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mindful role</strong></td>
<td>Help Frontline employees put together innovations and test them out before presentation at the top management level</td>
<td><strong>Primary role</strong></td>
<td>Constantly communicate the vision/values to the team at meetings, explain reasons for decisions, etc</td>
<td><strong>Ongoing role</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Secondary role</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Design and run communication ‘instances’. Ensure enduring messaging. Validate and celebrate worthwhile ideas. Institutionalize rewards, recognition, development of managers.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Front line</th>
<th>Manasa</th>
<th>Vaacha</th>
<th>Karmana</th>
<th>HR Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mindful role</strong></td>
<td>Create innovations and possibilities – both for customers and organization.</td>
<td><strong>Ongoing role</strong></td>
<td>Capture blocks or exceptions that are constantly required to create the desired experience for customers. Communicate to middle management to fine tune policies and procedures</td>
<td><strong>Primary role</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Secondary role</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Ensure last mile connect to employees through line HR. Create mechanisms for group coaching and ideation. Create successes for employees who are aligned to anchor points, through career growth. Celebrate successes publicly.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Organization 1 – a low cost airline

The organization relied on getting together individuals from varied backgrounds for two reasons: those from existing carriers would not join, and, the company could not pay astronomical salaries either. Pilots joined from the air force, cabin crew from among fresh graduates and engineering staff from among Indians who had either retired from other Indian airlines, or those who had worked abroad and wanted to return to India.

The entrepreneur’s intent was to ensure that much of India’s population should be enabled to fly. A number of steps were given as top-down directions with an assumption that the airline would be a sustainable one. Pilots were to be put up at guest houses, no food and water to be given away free during the flight, all front-end customer facing staff (commercial) would be outsourced. Aircraft maintenance hangars would be hired from other operators instead of building them for own use. Information technology based web portal would be used for ticket booking instead of relying on travel agents – thus hoping to cut costs and passing them on to the final customer. Each of these had their positives and negatives. Not giving free water to customers meant that front line staff had to constantly apologize to customers and felt drained at the end of the day. Not allowing travel agents participate in the business meant instantly creating a large group of individuals in the ecosystem who would actively discourage customers from travelling on the airline. Hence, some of these decisions had to be rolled back – largely because there was no consultation before directing their implementation.

In the beginning, the operations began in a positive way. Customers, both seasoned travelers and curious first timers started frequenting the airline. Success meant that more investment flowed into the company and led to expansion pressures. This meant that staff had to be onboarded rapidly and operations started across locations in the country.

At a subler level, this led to a number of implications at the human level. What was just a small set of closely aligned individuals at the beginning who shared a passion for the vision of the founder, was soon replaced with a multitude of those who joined largely for a job from other callings in life.

Pilots joined from other companies. They had taken up the profession for the life style it had offered – for the star hotel overnight stays and the plush sedan pickups and drops that were a norm in the industry. To be told that they would have to drive down on their own daily to the airport and that overnight stays away from home were minimal (those would be in serviced apartments) resulted in their not wanting to join the company. That meant that the investors’ expectation for expansion would not become a reality. The entrepreneur had to give in to the demands of “star hotel” stays and crew pick up and drop. This meant a feeling of hurt and many grievances among those who had joined the airline and had been operating till then. They felt terribly let down by this “compromise” by the entrepreneur to the new joiners. The dilemma was, should the entrepreneur stick to his dream of building a truly low cost airline, or compromise for the sake of growth.

In order to bring the top leadership team to a common level of agreement on the purpose of the company, the HR Head proposed having a workshop. That was turned down by the entrepreneur who felt everything was very clear to everybody and it was just an attitude problem of not wanting to cut costs.

The entrepreneur in an attempt to control costs, then began to differentiate between the different sections of employees. Cabin crew and engineering staff onboarding would be done in a local hotel while that of senior management and pilots would happen in a three star hotel. This meant rumblings of dissatisfaction from day one for new employees.

Staff on rolls of the airline were entitled to a certain restricted number of free tickets annually. This was highly valued by the employees who were not originally from the industry. However, those who came in from other airlines did not like the restriction when compared to other airlines of the day. Those most affected by the perceived inequity were the front line customer facing commercial staff. All requests to the management to give them even one single ticket a year were turned down in order to control costs. Front line employees openly expressed their unhappiness to every visiting leader that though it was they who made it possible for customers to travel, they were themselves not given staff travel tickets. Sometimes, they expressed this to customers too.
The construct of “saving costs” were interpreted differently by different departments. This led to angry reprisals at frontline employees as well as some heads of departments who had taken decisions based on a tradeoff between company’s long term interests and immediate costs. Sometimes, tradeoffs between customer experience and immediate costs had to be made since nobody knew for sure what was the organization’s stand on customer service. Since the decision making principles had not been arrived at by the leadership team, every decision at the front line meant that the employee would be taking a risk in his mind. So, de-risking became the norm of customer service. This meant sticking to rules and precedents. Saying no was more acceptable in the than saying yes to the customer as an organization. This habit also percolated within the organization where departments would treat their internal customers in the same way.

Finally the entrepreneur agreed to a workshop with his top management team. After two years, the entrepreneur engaged an external consultant to run an “initiative” on customer service. This meant a large investment on t-shirts and open houses. However, there were no efforts on alignment of the values of the organization. The initiative proved short-lived since the tools, decision making norms, capability, capacity and the reward mechanisms were missing.

Let’s see how the MVK construct can help us understand the episodes narrated above. Refer Table 2 below.

**Table 2 : MVK model at the low cost airline**

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<tr>
<td><strong>Top Leadership</strong></td>
<td><strong>Primary role</strong></td>
<td><strong>Ongoing role</strong></td>
<td><strong>Mindful role</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Create anchors for alignment. In <strong>reality</strong>: Did not articulate and educate on non-negotiables. It was deemed to be “understood” without explaining.</td>
<td>Constantly hold dialogues to get ideas on what is working and what isn’t In reality: Dialogues never happened since the entrepreneur did not believe they were required.Any communication that happened was top down</td>
<td>Display behaviour consistent to the values of the organization (eg. if the nature of business demands conservative spending, do not hold top management meetings at expensive resorts) <strong>In reality</strong>: It was common for top management to not thoroughly stick to principles of ‘low cost’. Earned credibility was compromised.</td>
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<td><strong>Middle Management</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Ongoing role</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Help Frontline employees put together innovations In reality: Most of the time at work went in dwelling on approvals or just becoming a channel for getting approvals on decisions. So, putting together innovations was not a priority.</td>
<td>Constantly communicate the vision/values to the team at meetings, explain reasons for decisions, etc In reality: Could not do so since the situation was one of a “moving goalpost”. Without explicit articulation, one could never be sure one was absolutely right in decisions one took.</td>
<td>Get feedback from frontline to fine tune and calibrate existing policies and procedures to help create experience In reality: Got inputs, but could not implement actions since ‘listening’ was not happening from top management.</td>
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Organization 2 – IT services company

The organization had been in existence for over twenty years when the entrepreneur who maintained a low profile, placed trust in handing over reins to a young and energetic CEO. The organization was making close to $600 mn in annual revenues and was known to have the culture of the land – hierarchical. Growing the company into a billion dollar revenue getter meant changing a hierarchical organization to one where every employee, especially at the front line could fearlessly add value to clients and be creative in problem solving.

The new CEO, a lifetime employee in the organization made quick changes. She began to invert the pyramid – from one of authority to one of power. Having an astute understanding of the mechanisms of working of the industry, she had understood that it was no longer about revenue or cost. It was about creating “Value” for the customer. And this could only be created by the last mile workforce – the software engineers.

With a focus on empowering employees, the CEO began to make internal power centres accountable to the employee. HR, IT, Finance, Administration; were all placed on a common IT portal to deliver service on agreed SLAs. Policies were made public documents to reduce any use of authority for decision making on individual instances.

As a next step, she conducted a 360 degree feedback for herself and the top management team and boldly published her own report on the organization’s intranet. This sent clear signals to the entire leadership team that they were accountable not only for results, but were also accountable to employees about the way they went about achieving those results.

Much time was spent by the CEO on travelling to locations across the globe addressing employees on why she felt it was vital to place the employee first, even before the customer. This formed the crux of the message of the CEO. She made it clear that it was the organization’s responsibility to take care of the employees, who would then completely take accountability to make the customer successful. This message was instantly welcomed by the employees who were largely from Gen-Y. Innovation portals and “talk to the CEO” channels helped breakdown mental silos in the company and helped individuals fearlessly express newer ideas and drive innovation. Managers at both senior and mid level found themselves having to reskill themselves in the way

Table 2: MVK model at the low cost airline

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<td>Front line</td>
<td>Mindful role</td>
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<td>Primary role</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Create innovations and possibilities – both for customers and organization. <strong>In reality:</strong> Fatigue from decision making paralysis was too draining to focus on innovations.</td>
<td>Capture blocks or exceptions that are constantly required to create the desired experience for customers. Communicate to middle management to fine tune policies and procedures <strong>In reality:</strong> Paralysis in decision making was an accepted way of life. Learned helplessness got institutionalized.</td>
<td>Create an experience for customers by leveraging the empowerment provided by the anchors (vision/values). <strong>In reality:</strong> Could not do so since there was perceived injustice to lower rung employees. What was very normal in other airlines was not present in this job. Empowerment did not exist, hence, any job took inordinate number of approvals and got delayed.</td>
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Table 2: MVK model at the low cost airline

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they managed their teams. While those who found it extremely difficult left, such numbers were less than 1% of the entire number of managers.
Sales training and alignment to one message ensured easier decision making at all levels and an energized workforce that helped grow the organization’s fortunes. Over a period of 5 years, the organization grew to reach annual revenues of $4 bn. The reader may like to imagine how the MVK model applies in this caselet and contrast it with the author’s analysis in Table 3 below.

Table 3: MVK model at the IT services company

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Top Leadership</strong></td>
<td><strong>Primary role</strong> Create anchors for alignment. In reality: CEO turned the <strong>mindful role</strong> Display behaviour consistent to the values of the organization (eg. if the nature of business demands conservative spending, do not hold top management meetings at expensive resorts) In reality: Positive and negative reinforcement for behaviours of alignment/non-alignment sent a firm message out to the organization.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Primary role</strong> Constantly hold dialogues to get ideas on what is working and what isn’t In reality: Open houses and regular online contact, blogs helped communication happen.</td>
<td><strong>ongoing role</strong> Get feedback from frontline to fine tune and calibrate existing policies and procedures to help create experience In reality: Engagement survey actions and following up action items from frontline employees happened due to well orchestrated intranet and tools.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Middle Management</strong></td>
<td><strong>Mindful role</strong> Help Frontline employees put together innovations. In reality: Stopped being critical of innovations. Started having dialogues on ‘possibilities’ at the client locations.</td>
<td><strong>Primary role</strong> Constantly communicate the vision/values to the team at meetings, explain reasons for decisions, etc In reality: Since the CEO was quite visible, this role took at back seat. Middle managers did not have to do much communication to reinforce.</td>
<td><strong>ongoing role</strong> Get feedback from frontline to fine tune and calibrate existing policies and procedures to help create experience In reality: Engagement survey actions and following up action items from frontline employees happened due to well orchestrated intranet and tools.</td>
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</table>
Table 3: MVK model at the IT services company

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Front line</strong></td>
<td><strong>Mindful role</strong></td>
<td>Create innovations and possibilities – both for customers and organization. In reality: Started tapping at their own creativity and becoming entrepreneurial and consulting to the customers.</td>
<td><strong>Ongoing role</strong></td>
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In service of the reflection, we now go to another service sector industry, that is in dire need of attention in India – namely the health sector.

**Organization 3 – Healthcare experience organization**

Started by a successful gynecologist, the organization began with the purpose that women in India should get the best gynecological and obstetric care. To ensure a positive experience, the founding team consisting of a few family friends took care of every single detail in the hospital – right from the colour of the curtains to the colour of the uniforms of the staff. One of the founders managed managerial aspects while another managed daily operations. The Doctor herself managed all clinical affairs including doctor management. Given the single unit operations, the founders ensured flawless delivery of experience to customers and patients by having daily conversations where they would consult each other on some of the decisions to be taken. They also took case-to-case decisions on managing employees and adopted a fairly benevolent style.

Given the potential of the business model, a few investors convinced the founders to accept investment and begin expansion. To achieve this, the founders hired lateral entry managers to put together a team. The managers came in from traditional healthcare where patients were recipients and the hospital was the provider. Increasing inflexibility of the operating team on adapting to a mindset of delivering an experience, where the customer was at the centre of the universe, led to frequent disagreements and one by one, most of the newly hired operating team left. Central to this was the reason that there wasn’t one single statement or set of guiding principles for the operators to take day to day decisions. While the founders would resolve dilemmas over a conversation in the past, not all founders were open to having such open conversations with “employed managers”. Whilst all this was happening, the organization had grown to four units across the city. Not resolving the dilemma of whether to be open and inviting the senior management team for authentic dialogues led to constant “guessing” and “hypothesizing on the part of both the founders as well as the senior management team.

To put things in place, a professional CEO was then hired. It was also felt that it would be valuable to bring in an external professional to fuel the next phase of growth. The CEO who had worked in large multi nationals saw reason in the HR Head’s diagnosis of empowering the front line employee’s decision making space. The CEO alongwith the HR Head convinced the board that it was imperative to put in place a customer promise and shared values. With the help of an external facilitator, the board arrived at the shared values of the organization.
These were then propagated across employees by the leadership team of CXOs and reinforced through role plays, gamified learning and other tools by HR. Measures were put in place, such as the Net Promoter Score and Engagement scores. Specific initiatives were implemented for employees and for customer experience. Hostels for nurses were spruced up, rewards and recognition for recognizing displayed values, incentives for nursing staff and many more steps were implemented.

The efforts paid off in very short time. Net promoter scores moved up from the forties to the eighties. Attrition came down from the seventies to the twenties. Engagement scores moved up from the forties to the eighties in around a year.

The organization went in for subsequent rounds of investment and expansion. With every such round, more senior lateral hires joined the organization. The CEO and the top leadership were more focused on resolving operating issues than spending time on sustained alignment. Without this focus, managing power dynamics and perception management began to appear in pockets of the organization. This led to an erosion of the belief of the employees in the values. Attrition began to get back to earlier levels.

Table 4 : MVK model at the Healthcare services provider

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<tr>
<td><strong>Primary role</strong></td>
<td>Create anchors for alignment. In reality: Board articulated customer promise while working with CEO and HR Head.</td>
<td><strong>Ongoing role</strong> Constantly hold dialogues to get ideas on what is working and what isn’t In reality: CXOs irrespective of functions, led the roll out across organization. Hence, it was perceived as an organizational imperative.</td>
<td><strong>Primary role</strong> Display behaviour consistent to the values of the organization (eg. if the nature of business demands conservative spending, do not hold top management meetings at expensive resorts) In reality: With leadership team also meeting customers and doing regular floor walks, this was well earned.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Middle Management</th>
<th>Mindful role</th>
<th>Primary role</th>
<th>Ongoing role</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Help Frontline employees put together innovations In reality: Happened through what were branded as ‘Learning meets’ when mistakes were celebrated as learnings and processes were fine tuned based on these. This also brought out innovations that could be implemented on the floor.</td>
<td>Constantly communicate the vision/values to the team at meetings, explain reasons for decisions, etc In reality: Aligned recognition program and grievance handling mechanisms ensured that the values moved from the ‘Wall to the hall’.</td>
<td>Get feedback from front line to fine tune and calibrate existing policies and procedures to help create experience In reality: Issues that meant values needed compromising on were constantly dialogue on and sorted out.</td>
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Table 4: MVK model at the Healthcare services provider

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<tr>
<th>Front line</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mindful role</td>
<td>Create innovations and possibilities – both for customers and organization.</td>
<td>Ongoing role</td>
<td>Primary role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In reality: Kept customer experience at center of all decisions made – without any fear of repraisal.</td>
<td>Capture blocks or exceptions that are constantly required to create the desired experience for customers. Communicate to middle management to fine tune policies and procedures</td>
<td>In reality: An incentive program that encouraged entrepreneurial behaviour by employees was extremely successful.</td>
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The reader may well extend his/her reflections into how the MVK model works in an operative, dynamic and potent manner in the body of a healthcare service organization he/she has been affected by. Another sector that promises employment opportunities, can do with effective everyday experiences. Let's go to the retail sector now.

Organization 4 – Retail organization

The organization was fairly successful as a national retailer of sports goods. When the incumbent CEO retired, the new CEO put in place a number of steps to inject vitality into the organization. Thenew CEO after settling down in the organization, put together a vision and mission. This brought in higher decision making clarity at all levels at stores. The HR team put together a well designed program to help assimilate the vision and mission. This included reward mechanisms, dialogue forums and innovation channels. Corporate staff were asked to work once a month at stores to appreciate the realities at the ground level. Career paths were designed that allowed employees to move seamlessly between corporate and stores to build a career.

Overall annual attrition reduced from the eighties to the forties. With this early win, the HR team put in place a people manager credentialing program that would ensure that all people managers in the organization had a common language to communicate on people.

In addition, a competency model was crafted that brought to the fore, behaviours that created success. Much effort was put into creating the model – by running critical incident interviews, thematic clustering and external benchmarking. The model was used to create succession plans and talent management processes.

All these steps injected competency, clarity and capacity in the organization to support and sustain growth. The organization with it’s new found energy continued to grow and expand across states.

The implications as analyzed by the author for this caselet is tabled for the reader in Table 5 below.
Table 5: MVK model at the retail organization

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<td></td>
<td>Create anchors for alignment.</td>
<td>Constantly hold dialogues to get ideas on what is working and what isn’t.</td>
<td>Display behaviour consistent to the values of the organization (eg. if the nature of business demands conservative spending, do not hold top management meetings at expensive resorts).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In reality: CEO articulated vision and mission whilst working with HR Head and Marketing Head.</td>
<td>In reality: Open houses, skip levels and store visits of senior leadership team ensured this.</td>
<td>In reality: Senior leadership team ensured to have lunch and coffee at the staff canteen. This helped earn credibility in the eyes of employees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Middle Management</strong></td>
<td><strong>Mindful role</strong></td>
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<td>Help Frontline employees put together innovations</td>
<td>Constantly communicate the vision/values to the team at meetings, explain reasons for decisions, etc.</td>
<td>Get feedback from front line to fine tune and calibrate existing policies and procedures to help create experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In reality: Worked on a few cross functional projects to make this a reality.</td>
<td>In reality: Constantly ran group coaching programs to get ideas and also communicate expectations</td>
<td>In reality: Held skip levels and “get to know” sessions with employees to get feedback and then worked on it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Front line</strong></td>
<td><strong>Mindful role</strong></td>
<td><strong>Ongoing role</strong></td>
<td><strong>Primary role</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Create innovations and possibilities – both for customers and organization.</td>
<td>Capture blocks or exceptions that are constantly required to create the desired experience for customers. Communicate to middle management to fine tune policies and procedures.</td>
<td>Create an experience for customers by leveraging the empowerment provided by the anchors (vision/values).</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>In reality: Kept customer experience at center of all decisions made. Knew that good work was instantly recognized.</td>
<td>In reality: Felt safe to surface and confront issues at the workplace. Group coaching used extensively to run self help projects.</td>
<td>In reality: The incentive program had high equity and hence build an entrepreneurial mindset among the front line.</td>
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Conclusion

Since the experience economy is dependent on every employee staying connected with his own mind-speech-action alignment and to create a positive memory for the customer, it becomes quite apparent that not having alignment cannot create sustained delivery of experiences. An unhappy or confused or risk minimizing employee cannot be expected to deliver next level experience for a customer when his own self is in an “away” mode.

Using the MVK model would help organizations achieve alignment and success in delivering desired experience for the customer. Aligned employees for valuable customers. The author acknowledges two parting thoughts on the process of management too.

- Is it possible, that when a management practice from a different culture is super-imposed on a natural orientation of the host culture, gaps between intent, action and outcomes arise?
- Is it that our obsession with ‘action’ as ‘work’ (karmana) to the relative exclusion of ‘thought’ or reflection (manasa) has meant a rootless grounding of the eventual practices at our places of work?

These questions if explored methodically, may help us appreciate service experience issues from a contextual whole. Designing for effectiveness in context need not then, be a dilemma anymore.

References:

Coping Strategies for HR Dilemmas and where Organization Development Fits In

About the Author

Based in Israel, Allon Shevat is an unconventional practitioner of OD. During the past three decades Allon has accumulated thousands of hours experience with industry leaders all over the world: Fortune 500 companies, start ups and medium size businesses. He works globally with projects in North America, the Middle East, Japan, India, South East Asia and Australia.

Names of senior managers from Johnson and Johnson, Comverse Billing, Nova Taiwan, Microsoft, Intel, Soma Networks Canada/India, Ace-Office Depot, Thales UK, Airwide Solutions, Paz Energy, Ness India, Philips, Teva, Siemens, Visa, Symantec, Schlumberger, Renault, Leumi, Strauss, IBM, Israeli Defense & security services, hotel chains as well as start ups and government agencies all over the globe count on his services.
Regardless of geography or culture, managing dilemmas is an integral part of the HR profession. Many of these dilemmas stem from the fact that corporate HR, whether located in Bangalore, Shanghai or Tel Aviv, will generally formulate policy at home base and expect it to be implemented (albeit with variance) throughout the organization.

HR managers with whom I have worked over the years in complex organization development projects within global organizations constantly have had to cope with tough dilemmas. The way that they cope with these dilemmas is influenced by their understanding of the HR role.

• An administrative HR leader will mitigate the dilemmas and lose out on opportunity for change. The more the dilemmas are mitigated, the more Organization Development will be perceived as irrelevant or disruptive.

• A strategic, dynamic HR leader will amplify the dilemmas, creating windows of opportunity for change as well as better conditions for HR/OD cooperation.

To illustrate, I will provide an external consultant’s perceptions of HR dilemmas, how they are handled, and the implication that the various coping strategies have on leveraging external Organization Development support. It is likely that some readers would find both the irony and realism in the episodes as they are from real experiences in consulting engagements.

I do understand that the reader will be left with a dilemma of what may be ideal or effective action in his/her context. An attempt will be made to aid the reader toward resolutions in their worlds, but not without the ethical duty of acknowledging the consultant’s stance – that the client takes responsibility for his/her considered actions – even in the face of dilemmas.

In order to get to the phenomenon, let us refer my learning diaries. These have a typical anecdotal narrative that I draw from to construct satire, pithy blogs or elevator pitches in board rooms. They give me a resourceful base from which I will contrast HR capabilities on two ends of a spectrum to begin with. Names are of course disguised to protect the characters in the episodes.

“In Nicki’s case, the cooperation between us has been superb. In the course of my work in her organization, I find that I don’t take a step without her.”

“In Claire’s case, there is no cooperation, rather a cat and dog syndrome. I don’t plan to spell out who is the cat, but it isn’t me.”

Claire and Nicki have dealt with complex dilemmas very differently. Claire has constantly made choices which mitigated dilemmas, which have made our working relationship into nightmares. Nicki’s choices on the other hand have enhanced dilemmas, making our partnership a major source of mutual learning which has yielded great value to Nicki’s organization.

Claire

Claire was a senior secretary-cum-recruiter who worked her way to the top HR position by dint of hard clerical work, endless self-sacrifice and sycophancy. She has been in her organization from Day One. Claire is a process lady, disciplinarian, administrator and door keeper to her CEO. She is very proud of her diplomas in coaching and change management.

I work with Claire’s boss directly and he has asked that I “keep Claire in the loop”, whatever that means to him. “OD is way over her head, Allon, but we all owe it to her”, the boss has told me many times. I always wonder about the “we”.

Coping Strategies for HR Dilemmas and where Organization Development Fits In
Claire views her role as the long implementation arm of the CEO. “The boss thinks and I execute; he has enough problems of his own; he needs a few loyal people next to him, for heaven sakes”, is a succinct way of summing up her approach.

Nicki

Nicki is an astute, practical, wise, discrete and caring professional. She sees her role “factoring the human resource into the equation” everywhere possible

Nicki worked her way up the HR ladder after her education in Labour Studies. Nicki aims to impact all strategic decisions which are people related, along with delivering thoughtful and rigorous implementation. “Since I own all the decisions for better or for worse, I might as well push back as early as possible when needed, since I am going to own the blame down the path,” is a way to sum up her approach.

Nicki’s boss with whom I studied at McGill University hired me directly yet I chose to do all my work using Nicki as my focal point. I urge her into getting involved in all the work I do.

Claire and Nicki Contrasted

Claire fears for her role and status. Nicki fears for the organization. Claire is compliant. Nicki is brave. Claire wants order and process driven compliance. Nicki wants success; she cares very little for order. “What use is order, if it gives us the wrong result?” An administrative and compliance based focus by HR leadership mitigates many of the HR dilemmas and negates the need to leverage external help to create meaningful change.

A strategic and dynamic focus by HR enhances the dilemmas and creates windows of opportunity for leveraging external support to impact meaningful change. I shall illustrate this with three short cases. Let’s take a look at how perception of the HR role manifests itself in 3 critical HR dilemmas: challenging authority, lessons learned and dealing with diversity and examine how opportunities are lost and gained.

Dilemma of Challenging the CEO’s Authority: Downsizing 10% of the Workforce

When a CEO decides to downsize, HR faces strategic, operational and moral dilemmas. When the CEO orders that the downsizing is “across the board”, the complexity facing HR is jacked up even higher.

Claire’s boss dictated a 10% cut across the board. For Claire there is no dilemma. Claire immediately had a conference call with her entire HR team at 10am San Francisco time, explained the reasons for the cut; Claire put on a positive spin that “this was a step in the direction of agility and growth”. Many of the people in the call dozed off as it was the middle of the night local time. At the end of the call, she sent out an email with a “resizing tool kit” which she has acquired in her online coaching course. Claire also commissioned an engagement webinar of 15 minutes which was supposed to “pump up” the morale.

When Nicki’s boss dictated the 10% reduction in force “across the board”, Nicki stayed up all night and put together a 20 slide power point spelling out alternatives to the 10% cut. Nicki sent me her ppt via Whatsapp asking for comments.

Nicki loves details whilst her boss is impatient. So we narrowed 20 slides down to three. Nicki ambushed the CEO in the parking lot in the morning and they had coffee until 11 am. Within a week after marathon discussions, the 10% cut became 12% in North America and 8% in India; “across the board” became growth in the New Product Introduction Unit and a huge cut in the Hong Kong and Kuala Lumpur branches.

When Claire’s boss says jump, she asks, “how high sir”. When Nicki’s boss says the same, Nicki automatically starts to push back, challenge and advocate. And of course, OD is not the hand maiden of the status quo but rather loyal opposition. That’s why I bring value to Nicki and not to Claire.

I had no involvement in the failed downsizing effort in Claire’s organization; in Nicki’s organization, I helped her succeed behind the scenes.
Dilemma of Lessons Learned: The Global Sales Offsite

Every year, the entire Sales Team meets in a different exotic location to share information, socialize, rub shoulders with senior management, strategize and critique product road maps.

Last year, feedback about the offsite which was held in Koh Samui, Thailand was mixed, with overall satisfaction scoring 6.8 out of 10, citing a lack of equilibrium in involvement and participation. Satisfaction was much higher among the participants from home base.

Both Claire and Nicki’s CEO have asked HR to work with Sales Management to ensure “a bang for the buck” in this year’s offsite which is to take place at a resort in the Stanley Area of Hong Kong.

Claire met with the Head of Sales and together they proposed several changes to last year’s format. Claire and the Head of Sales wanted more dialogue, openness and engagement, as well as more disciplined participation. So, discussion groups should be smaller; each discussion group will have a leader whose native language is English or speaks English very well, discussion topics will be circulated beforehand so folks can prepare, and the coffee area will be closed during presentations and discussion time.

Claire’s boss, the CEO, sent the revised plan to me with an email which read, “Shevat, for some reason, I feel that Claire did not run this by you. The suggestions ain’t too bright. Please meet with me ASAP.”

I met with the CEO. During the meeting, Claire burst in and stayed, ruining the meeting and the subsequent offsite, which was a disaster.

Nicki made 45 phone calls to various people at all levels to see what went wrong in last year’s conference. Since there was so much variance in what she heard, Nicki called me and asked me to sample “as many people as you need to understand where this went wrong last year” Nicki and I met within a week to combine our findings after which we semi “precooked” the results of a meeting with the Head of Sales, who was more than pleased to get some help in redesigning the offsite.

Based on our joint findings, Nicki wanted making Asia Pac and Mid East staff feels much more comfortable in the upcoming offsite by aligning the methodology. So, several changes were made to offsite design; there were to be less discussion groups in which embarrassing “private opinions” were solicited in the presence of management. Speakers from Asia Pac and Europe would be preferred to speakers from the North American home base. Mingling time would be extended yet much more structured. Cell phones would be banned entirely during all sessions and enforced by cellphone-neutralizing technology.

Due to Claire’s agenda of maintaining control, she could not let go enough to do a lessons learned and make the proper adjustments in the offsite. She did not challenge her parochial assumptions and avoided all dilemmas. Claire avoided using external help, avoided all the dilemmas of lessons learned as augmented by global organizing.

Nicki understood that only by lessening her control could she regain control and thus the lessons learned exercise enhanced dilemmas and the offsite was a raging success.

The Dilemma of How to Deal with Diversity

Following negative press, the HR committee of the Board of Directors in both Claire and Nicki’s organization have asked that “more emphasis be given to diversity in the coming year” and has asked for a quarterly review at the Board level.

Claire panicked. Her approach to diversity is very USA ethnocentric and thus driven by legal compliance. Claire puts emphasis of the way in which job descriptions are worded, avoiding linguistic faux pas and ensuring that the organization is compliant to the letter; Claire immediately hired a very expensive lawyer to “keep us all out of the mud”.

Claire feels especially distressed by diversity related events not covered by the law. She is distraught by people praying in their cubicles, the many languages that people speak in informal corridor talk and some of the ethnic jokes tossed around in jest. To deal with her distress, Claire decided to do Diversity Training every quarter, as opposed to once a year as required by law.
Nicki was not fazed by the Board’s decision because “it is driven by bad press and in a few weeks, everything will be forgotten and there probably won’t be any Board review”. Yet Nicki did use the Boards’ request to get more resources to devote to the diversity issue.

And whilst Nicki certainly wants to avoid litigation, Nicki sees diversity as a tool of value creation much more than compliance.

And Nicki believes that diversity is not only about quotas, but everyday organizational behavior. As a matter of fact, Nicki sees tolerance in everyday life as a major enabler of diversity. For example, when people come late to meetings, argue a lot, or dither in execution, she points out the huge value an organization can derive from so called deviant behavior. Nicki has been heard saying that “being late is not a federal crime”, and “dithering” can indicate thoughtfulness and not malingering. Nicki’s plan is to focus on what every single person can do to embrace diversity to enhance enrichment and value.

Claire hired me to do a course on “Asian and Middle East Culture”, which I politely turned down. In the quarterly review process, the Board noted that whilst diversity seems to be “under control”, the legal costs have soared. Claire promised corrective action.

Nicki asked to weave in some tolerance related issues to the ongoing work I am doing, “without creating too much noise or making it into a special project. I want diversity to be a way of life, not a project.” Nicki’s Board did review the diversity issue in upcoming quarter and then buried the issue because “things are under control.”

**Implications**

Because of the many years I spent in armed forces training roles, I cannot overcome the need to focus on the “implications and take aways” that I suggest that my readers ponder.

1) An administrative and compliance based focus of the HR professional mitigates the dilemmas an HR leader faces.

2) A strategic and dynamic focus of the HR professional is both enabled and enables challenging authority, questioning basic assumptions (especially of the corporate home base) and preference of content over form. This leads to more risk taking and exacerbates behavioural dilemmas.

3) An administrative and compliance HR professional will see an external OD consultant either as a threat to his/her authority or as a “mere” trainer. A strategic and dynamic HR role focus leads the HR professional to leveraging external OD capabilities to better cope with the complexity. Strangely this leads to the better HR managers choosing the more skilled consultants.

4) The preference of “calling out the dilemmas” and focusing on dynamics and strategy is impacted by personality, the CEO’s behaviors and expectations as well as emotional intelligence.

5) Formal HR education can better inform HR professional about the behavioral alternatives at his or her disposal.

**Summary**

Whether headquarters is based in the west, the east or the Indian subcontinent, the HR profession is prone to dilemmas.

The pervasiveness of dilemmas is due to processes like recruitment, learning and development or employee assistance programs being complicated by the impact of local mores of HQ, which is further complicated by contextual settings with all the variations of local practice. Dilemmas are germane when one central headquarters policy is meant to be implemented in other locations.

Many of these dilemmas can be solved by the HR leader himself/herself, and other dilemmas are best deal via leveraging external support from organization development.

**So what is to be done?**

Professional cross-learning enables will improve management of dilemmas as well as better leveraging external OD resources.
A productive relationship between HR and OD is a prerequisite for effective leveraging of external OD resources. It is very rare for an OD intervention to carry any lasting impact unless the intervention is vigorously supported by HR. Likewise, HR supported externally by OD know-how can more easily overcome many of the obstacles that dilemmas create.

And finally, a word of warning. Technology tends to baffle us into believing that many things are more similar than they really are. And my hope is reading this article has provided readers insight into complexities which lie `beneath the veneer` of apparent similarity, whilst providing communality via the prism of the HR dilemma.
“Trick or Treat”–Insights From HR’s Engagement with Corporate Culture

About the Author

Kartik is a leading Leadership Development (LD) & Organization Development (OD) consultant, Executive Coach, and Group Facilitator operating from India. With twenty years of corporate experience in top management roles in Human Resources (HR) prior to his OD and LD consulting, Kartik brings a significant appreciation of the challenges of the real world of executive teams working often in volatile / dynamic contexts and highly matrixed contemporary global structures. With his intimate engagement with the evolving behavioral sciences movement in India, he brings to his work an additional and distinctive flavor of humanistic and phenomenological technologies of understanding behavior and the psychodynamics of teams and organizations. Kartik is also a qualified musician, and has performed in several concerts in India. The Transformative Alignment Map (TAM) framework was born out of Kartik’s dream of finding a space of correspondence between South Indian (Karnatik) Music and the fields of behavioral sciences and OD.

Rachna is a consultant in the areas of Strategic Human Resources, Organization Development, Capability Building and Talent Management. A Human Resource and Learning professional with 12 plus years of experience, her primary areas of work have been in organization effectiveness, leadership development, change management, talent management and group facilitation. She believes very strongly in the spirit and potential of people and systems and works towards unleashing this energy and potential for increased organizational health where people are more productive, successful and fulfilled. She is certified in and administers several psychometric instruments including the MBTI and FIRO B.

Vishwanath (Vishy) specializes in the areas of Executive Coaching, Facilitation, Leadership development and Family Business Advisory. He is a business professional with over 20 years of organizational and consulting experience across a diverse set of industries. Vishy holds a MBA in Human Resources from XLRI Jamshedpur, India and during his career has held a wide range of HR and business portfolios at both the India and Asia Pacific Level. He is a credentialed Professional Certified Coach (PCC) with ICF (International Coach Federation) and also a Certified Professional Coach of the International Coach Academy (ICA). He is certified with The Leadership Circle (TLC) and is also a part of the Coaching Hub, an experienced group of coaches and facilitators based out of Singapore.

Now located in Austin, TX, Vishy enjoys music, trekking, traveling and writing and has co-authored a case study for the Indian School of Business, Hyderabad, India and been published in journals in India.
Aparna sat, seemingly lost in thought, eyebrows furrowed, chin in her palms … A thin glaze had formed over her coffee, untouched even after fifteen minutes of its being served. Her coach sat a few feet away, his face inscrutable .. or did it have a hint of a smile, a smile emerging from memories of his own “HR Head”days, ten years ago? After what seemed like eternity, Aparna “unpalmed” her chin and said “Gosh, I am realizing that no matter which way we change in HR, we are going to impact this site’s culture .. that’s for sure. So, it is a big responsibility .. can’t take it lightly”.

We believe that it is quite the usual thing for HR leaders like Aparna to go through such a process. As key protagonists in the organizations’ theater, many HR leaders believe that it is a significant part of their responsibility to engage with the culture of the organization, as “creators”or “curators”and sometimes (rarely) as “subvertors”. But culture being outside the realm of physics, chemistry, or math presents a unique situation –it falls in the realm of wicked questions and defies being reduced to a solvable puzzle. And these wicked questions, wicked as they are, throw people often between the horns of many dilemmas. “Should I do this or should I do that”, or “If I go this way, what are the likely impacts, and what if I go that way”–seemingly fundamental questions. We believe it is “par for the course”for HR leaders to go through such tricky and problematic paths if they do believe they have to engage with culture. This paper attempts to explore the nature of dilemmas that HR leaders go through when they work with corporate culture. Of course, our tongue-in-cheek observation is also that many HR leaders follow what Bion might call basic assumption “flight”by keeping themselves busy and immersed in anything other than culture (and oh, there’s so MUCH that keeps them busy –prompting us to aver that the transactional “busy”ness of HR is their primary defense against engaging with the organizations culture–probably because such stuff as culture is seen as “messy”).

We start this paper with an attempt to get at a reasonably coherent understanding of organization/corporate culture, its value, and its connect with an HR leader’s role. Moving on from there, we will look at the nature of dilemmas and why understanding of dilemmas is important for HR. We then introduce you to the framework of
the Transformative Alignment Map (TAM) that we have architected (www.taminsights.com) and look at some critical dilemmas that get constellated between various psychological locations that people invariably take up. Two carefully chosen vignettes from the real life of HR leaders are then shared and studied from the TAM perspective. We conclude with a peek into some likely future dilemmas of HR leaders and our overall inferences and conclusions.

Head this way Organization and Corporate Culture

Aha, the C-word!! When we asked a few people about what they thought of corporate culture (no, sorry, we did not ask for definitions, those are aplenty in all sorts of textbooks), here’s a sample of what we got –

“Corporate culture is a hard thing to get right”

“It’s a moving target that means something different to everyone”

“It grows and evolves over time and is the result of action and reaction”

“It is the lingering effect of every interaction”

“I don’t know …”

Going back in time, according to British sociologist Chris Jenks, the concept of culture originally referred to the cultivation of crops. It then got extended to “cultivation of human beings” with the advent of sociology and anthropology in the 19th century. When did it get to study of organizations? In 1952, Elliott Jacques first wrote about the concept of organization culture in his book “The Changing Culture of a Factory” in 1952. Of course, the late twentieth century (1980 and beyond) was the golden era of “popular writing” on organization and corporate culture with books like “In search of excellence”, “The IBM Way” etc getting published, even as more scholarly work like Edgar Schein’s “Organization Culture and Leadership” became widely known.

How has culture been viewed over time? From a modernist perspective (broadly post-industrial, post-urbanization, 1960s-70s, affirming the power of human beings to shape their environment, believing in objective reality “out there”), writers such as Hofstede and Schein come to mind. Hofstede studied national influences on organization culture while Schein fused anthropology with clinical psychology and his management consulting practice to offer us the model of three levels of culture, ie– artifacts, values, and basic assumptions.

Switch to a symbolic-interpretivist perspective (1980s, believing in reality being subjective and depending on how people give meaning to phenomena within specific contexts), and you immediately see how culture is seen as an “experience within a context”. Here Geertz is indeed famous for this line from his landmark book “The Interpretation of Cultures”, “… that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning …”.

A third and still evolving lens is perhaps the Post-Modern lens (1990 and after, deconstructing organizational texts, destabilizing ideologies, revealing marginalized and oppressed viewpoints) where culture is seen as illusion, perhaps one more way of the powerful to manipulate and control others through power veiled behind culture. In the postmodern view of culture, the practice of deconstruction is not to settle one view of culture with a destabilizing alternate, but to explicate the ongoing struggle over “meaning” which invariably becomes the container in which organizational life exists.

And maybe there are more ways of looking at culture. We are told that we are living in a post-post modern world where post truths and alt-facts prevail …so be it. Culture may be objective, it may be subjective, or inter subjective, or post-subjective .. what really matters for us, dear HR practitioners, is –

• The value of culture (why is it important, what does culture serve) and

• Why is it important for HR professionals
Value of corporate culture, particularly for HR–

Our view, leaning largely on our conviction in the philosophy and practice of Transformative Alignment©, is that there are at least four vectors of culture’s value (any form of culture, no less corporate culture) that would immediately interest HR practitioners

1. Culture for managing steady performance - As Kotter and Heskett assert, culture can have a significant effect on a firm’s ongoing performance. Their research suggested that firms with cultures that emphasized all the key managerial constituencies (employees, customers, stockholders) and leadership at all levels significantly outperformed firms that did not have these traits, and by a huge margin. As traditional custodians of the organization’s performance management infrastructure, it is clear how much HR would be interested in this value of culture.

2. Culture as catalyst for profitability and strategy - Culture well aligned to strategy can not only act as a business enabler but significantly enhance the profitability of the organization, reveals a report in 2015 by the Tata Strategic Management Group (TSMG). It is often quipped –“Culture can eat strategy for breakfast”. Well, we believe that if culture and strategy can sup together, such meals can be truly flavorful and delightful. In an era where HR is increasingly expected to be a true strategic business partner, it makes ample sense for HR to mindfully shape culture and strategy together!

3. Culture as the container of interpersonal connect - Third, we believe that culture acts as a beacon inside organizations as to how people can and ought to interact with each other. How communication would happen, how development of people will be pursued, how people will collaborate –these questions lean significantly on the compass of culture to provide direction. Given the human-centric role of HR, this is a critical focal area for HR to look at.

4. Culture as institution building and container of ethos– We are told that the Greeks used the word “ethos” to refer to the power of music to influence emotions, behaviours, and even morals—over time, it seems to refer to the underlying “character”of a system. And “institutions”can be conceived of as stable, valued recurring patterns of being. Culture as practiced both reflects the underlying institutional ethos of an organization AND builds it. HR has a role in shaping the institutional voice. Upholding a values-based organization, shaping the contextual wisdom of the organization, and standing up for what “dignity”ought to mean for the organization –these are HR’s imperatives (notwithstanding our rather “angsty” observation that today not many HR leaders are even aware of this imperative, caught as they are in the straitjacket (and comfortable cocoon) of BAU (business-as-usual))

Pause here What are dilemmas and why is the understanding of cultural dilemmas important to HR?

A person we know from a popular OD listserv quipped that the phrase “Human Resources”itself is a kind of dilemma for a well-meaning leader –“human”indicates …well …being human .. and “resources”indicate an extractive possibility.

The word “Dilemma”comes from Greek and is usually understood as a problem that provides two possibilities for resolution none of which are either more acceptable or more preferable than the other. And hence the coinage - ‘on the horns of a dilemma’. The dichotomy is often artificial and the choices are usually multiple leading some to coin words such as ‘trilemmas’or ‘multilemmas’.

HR, in our belief, engages with dilemmas in at least two discernible ways –

1. Help the organization understand its culture-related dilemmas and help it make sense and move through

2. In the process, meet, greet, and engage with ITS OWN DILEMMAS as a function that in turn engages with the organization’s dilemmas

For the first, we share some possible threads of thought below. For the second, we will present you two short vignettes of dilemmas actually being faced by HR Heads from our consulting and coaching network.
HR and the organization’s culture-related dilemmas –

We believe that one of the crucial roles the HR leader in an organization plays is his ability to understand, recognize and help the organization navigate through various cultural dilemmas it faces. As we had mentioned earlier, given the difficulty in understanding fundamental aspects of a culture and lack of readily available frameworks that help navigate through these dilemmas, HR heads often tend to disengage with these issues. Letting cultural dilemmas fester in an organization leaves organization members confused about ‘how to act or behave’ often leading to conflict and a lack of direction.

Some of the dilemmas often relate to the phase of the organization. For instance, a well established ‘mature’ organization can often slip into a culture where the basic assumptions around organization’s success revolve around improving efficiency, productivity, reducing costs etc. While the organization begins to resemble a well oiled machine, it is now that the organization can fall prey to an agile, young disruptive competitor because its own energies around creation and innovation have not been alive. This is the time when the organization begins to wrestle between its old culture and way of thinking and what the context now demands of them.

Similar dilemmas exist in start up organizations when they move toward the mass adoption phase of their product and now need to look at ‘consolidation’ and ‘stability’ from a phase of adrenalin fueled innovation and speed. It is the role of the HR leader to engage with, understand and keep the culture in alignment with the context.

The organizations can often face such challenges within the organization as well. A classic example of this is during an acquisition or a merger. Cultures collide, fireworks ensue and no value gets created. Organizations that pay heed to cultural alignment emerge stronger and are able to deliver to customer needs much faster. An oft repeated dilemma is when a large organization acquires a much smaller and more agile one. Should one allow the smaller entity to continue in its own vein and its own culture or should it integrate with the larger organization? Integrating means letting go of some of its distinctive capabilities and not integrating means not being able to leverage the capabilities of the larger organization. In such a space, HR leaders can play a crucial role in advising and handholding the organization in seeking the optimal shifts and culture building processes.

And as we have seen in countless examples, a failure to do so can have serious repercussions that directly impact the bottom line, not to mention the morale and engagement of the workforce.

Illuminating some HR dilemmas around culture, using the Transformative Alignment Map (TAM©) –

In their work on TAM ©, the authors conceive of four psychological worlds operating in all human systems as follows –

1. The World of Structure & Order
2. The World of Flow & Unfolding
3. The World of Connectedness & Nurturance
4. The World of Autonomy & Initiative

These four worlds are inhabited and populated by human beings in all kinds of systems – systems within themselves and systems that they engage with in the world outside. These worlds in turn exert pulls that make people and systems think, feel, and act in certain ways.

- The World of Structure & Order (WSO) exerts a pull towards Roles, Structures, Continuity and Traditions.
- The World of Flow & Unfolding (WAI) exerts a pull towards Creativity and Change.
- The World of Connectedness & Nurturance (WCN) exerts a pull towards Caring, Relatedness, Touch and Intimacy
- The World of Autonomy & Initiative (WAI) exerts a pull towards Individualism, Goal Directedness, and Expansion
Contrasting pulls and conflicting pulls generate dilemmas. In particular, when it comes to engaging with culture, HR has to contend with many dilemmas. In the contrasting pulls between WSO and WFU, we encounter “The dilemma of consistency v agility”. Between WAI and WCN, we see “The Dilemma of Facilitative/Inclusive v Pushy/Individualistic”. And there are more …but for now, let us look at these potent dilemmas. Potent because they arise and locate themselves in the hub between such contrasting counter pulls. We look into these and study them with the help of a couple of real-life examples (we have masked the company name/industry and the persons’ names to protect their confidentiality).

**Consistency v Agility**

WSO generates a pull towards Roles, Structures, Continuity and Traditions. WFU generates a pull towards Creativity and Change. Consistency on one side of the see-saw and Agility/Flow on the other. Here is an example of a dilemma from a “mature stage” organization seeking to “reinvent” itself.

Rajan joined one of India’s leading car manufacturing companies a few months ago. The MD of the company, to whom Rajan reported, had hired Rajan with a mandate to usher in a new and transformation oriented culture in the company, once known for its “best practices” and which had now acquired some staleness, and a sense of “entrenched in memories of past glory”. What Rajan encountered after he joined astonished him. The company was, as he recounted, “almost like ‘too far gone’in its culture of ‘don’t rock the boat’, and ‘respect hierarchy unquestioningly’.” Rajan had to deliver quickly on his mandate, yet he had to reckon with this huge and powerful (and obdurate) past. Every idea he came up with was met with a “speak to the HAND” kind of gesture as SOPs after SOPs and one blue-book after another was shown to him. “Nobody was fighting explicitly with me, yet nobody was even looking at my ideas”. What should he do? Drive change? Ease it in? Win small battles? Go for the jugular? Yield? Become one among the crowd? Give up?

And in his own function, he was faced with a different dilemma. In the past, before he had joined, his predecessor had run the function focusing on one aspect of WCN – build relationships, be “good”, do “employee welfare”, do motivational programs and in general live out the psychological driver of “Be Nice”. Now if Rajan had to help the larger company move to embrace transformation and change, his own team had to get out of the “be nice” mode and learn to challenge dogmas and shibboleths, and embrace their assertiveness. Learn to be more of WAI. This would mean showing a new face, one that they were not accustomed to, the organization was not used to, and risking losing their “good standing” with other managers and leaders. What should they do? Stay as they are? Start questioning things? Point out the elephants in the room? Let sleeping dogs lie?

**Facilitative-Inclusive v Pushy-Individualistic**

WCN generates a pull towards Relatedness, Touch and Intimacy. WAI generates a pull towards Individualism, Assertion and Expansion. “Being facilitative-inclusive” on one side of the see-saw and “pushy-individualistic” on the other. Here is an example of a company having gone through a merger, seeking to find a “forged” identity.

“Subs” Subramanian, is the HR Head of a global “large” IT services company with a significant presence in India. His company had recently acquired the IT services arm of an Indian IT products and services company (thereby increasing the size of the India arm, and India’s significance to the global company) and came face to face with the reality of the confluence of the two cultures – of the acquiring entity and of the acquired entity. In the eyes of the acquiring company, the company they had acquired was “filled with very nice people, collaborative and helpful … but lacking chutzpah, and the killer instinct”. “If we have to work together to make this marriage work, we need to get them to be more like us”, was the view of “Big Jim” James Plesinsky, the combined entity’s COO, who was from the acquirer. “And that’s YOUR job, Subs”, Big Jim had said.

Cut to Subs’ own team which had an equal proportion of HR leaders from both the entities. In an offsite designed to explore the team’s current and desired culture, things were on the boil with members from both the acquirer and the acquiree stressing the need for “their way of working”. To add to this cauldron, Subs himself had a high-WCN in his TAM-Self score and he was from the acquirer company which was a clear high-WAI. In a
side conversation, the consultant explored with Subs –‘How do YOU blend the two, Subs? High-WCN in a high-WAI world –and you are greatly successful .. maybe there’s a lesson or two that YOUR experience can teach us?’

You will notice by now, dear Reader, that we are not offering solutions to these dilemmas. And these offered are but two of many dilemmas that you as an HR practitioner are likely to face. Wicked questions have no solutions, but can be approached with compassionate wisdom and insightful perspectives.

So what wisdom and perspectives can we think of here? The context that we are dealing with is a multi cultural global scenario. So, what does all of this mean? What does then inclusion truly mean? What are our biases - unconscious and otherwise? How do we engage with the richness that diversity brings in? (for example: how do we engage with people coming from different countries? different genders? different generations (millenials for instance)). How do we integrate without diluting? How do we keep multiple realities alive and safe to engage with? How do we hold space for differing value systems and identities?

These are going to be the key challenges going into the future. And with these challenges will come new dilemmas .. Take a peak

What do we see as future dilemmas for HR?

The world as it lies ahead is both exciting and anxiety provoking. Automation, 24/7 connectivity, breakthrough technologies, big data and analytics, the digital natives joining the workforce are all going to have a seismic impact on the way a workplace looks, acts and relates. All of these are going to have a deep impact on how cultures will evolve in organizations and the dilemmas that organizations will face soon. Some of our thoughts on the key dimensions of culture that HR will need to think through and act on are listed below:

Touch and Engagement:

One element that a culture often defines is the nature of and extent of ‘touch’in a system. With the 24/7 connectivity and the explosion in people’s personal and professional networks, the question of what is the “right touch”in a system will become a crucial question. Finding the right balance and the ‘right modes’(F2F, electronic, voice etc) for touch will be an important question to ponder. Creating and sustaining social equity in an organization would become a crucial challenge.

For an organization, the deeper question of ‘engagement’ with employee will become centerstage. Given the above - dispersed work space, a very presentist view and a light touch model, basic assumptions on ‘psychological contracts’ of employees will need to be revisited.

Given these, the very understanding of how HR can help the practice of WCN will undergo a change.

Space

Another element that will need redefinition will be the aspect of space. With the physical confines of an office space already been broken and remote working becoming a norm rather than an exception, questions around what defines workspace, personal space or how these spaces coexist will become an important part of the cultural assumptions that will need to be confronted. WSO will not be limited to physical structures –it never was—but the reality of morphing virtual structures as a meta-structure will emerge!

Time

We believe there will also be a distinct change in the ‘time orientation’ some of which we are already beginning to see. The time horizons are likely to shorten with ‘near term orientation’ becoming the norm. While we see this as a trend, an important consequence of that is also the loss of the ‘future’ or the collapse of the narrative of the future. How we balance these time orientations at a cultural level will also define an organization’s ability to succeed and grow.

From a TAM perspective, the very near term focus, an almost complete absorption in the moment arises from the WFU whereas the medium term arises from the WAI and the more long term preservation arises from the
WSO / WCN. Balancing these time orientations across the worlds will become an increasingly important dilemma to engage with.

Power and Authority

In fragmented and distributed organizations, definitions of power, expertise and authority will need to remodeled and cultural assumptions around them will require deep shifts which HR would need to confront head on. As you will notice, each of the worlds has different assumptions of where power arises from. As the context changes, the HR leader must be aware and willing to work with each of the worlds to become aware of and articulate the cultural tenets that provide the gateway toward success and well being

In summary

We would like to bring your attention back to the fundamental aspects of the article.

It is our firm belief that the HR function and leader plays a crucial role in defining, creating and navigating through the cultural dilemmas of organization. Absent a strong foundational belief system, and the associated framework and tools, HR will find itself being accosted by the dark side of “trick or treat”, where the “treat” is often a disguised trick! Horns of a dilemma are passe – you can easily see and swing between the horns, however nasty they may be. Tricks and Treat-like tricks are another thing altogether. Not for the faint-hearted HR person.

TAM as a framework resting on deep and sustaining philosophical foundations and knowledge, and as a tool-suite can help HR leaders to frame the dilemmas in a way that is easily understandable and work with. It can also therefore provide a means of exploring the actions that can help resolve, balance or transcend the dilemmas in proactive ways, as several companies that we work with attest.

It is our fond hope that between trick and treat, HR leaders will discover the space for the dance.

Bibliography

Like Matador on the Horns of a Bull

About the Author

Vivek Patwardhan

Vivek began his career with Tata Electric Companies [now called Tata Power] and worked for a brief period with Herbertsons Ltd. He worked with Asian Paints for over thirty-three years and retired in May 2009. He now works as Executive Coach and HR Consultant, and volunteers time on the Thane HR Group in Mumbai. Vivek has edited a book on Industrial Relations and even wrote travelogues, pen sketches and some articles on positive psychology as well. He also served at TISS as TISCO Chair Professor of Industrial Relations. To keep au courant, he has commenced video based blogging with profiles who make Industrial Relations effective for organizations in India.
Dilemmas are the proverbial ‘caught-between-the-devil-and-the-deep-blue-sea’ situations. Usually one can see a choice of two options, but adopting any; by itself is not a very happy prospect. That's when you slip into the dilemma feeling. To complicate the matter, when I think of a dilemma, I think of Arjun and Lord Krishna at war. It is difficult not to get influenced by the thoughts from folklore and mythology. They become one's practical philosophy. There is something in dilemmas that raises deep questions. The obvious effect is one of leaving you thinking as well as disturbed. Lay persons like me spend a long time searching for answers until one is exhausted.

Thinking of the Bhagwadgita, I am reminded of Ashtavakraugeeta. It is written by Sage Ashtavakra. Ashtavakra was a young Brahmin whose body was bent at eight places. People laughed seeing him walk. When King Janak invited pundits for a discourse, Ashtavakra's father attended. Ashtavakra went to the 'durbar' of King Janak in search of his father. Seeing him everybody laughed. King Janak laughed too. And Ashtavakra also laughed heartily. King Janak said, "There is a reason why we are laughing, but why are you laughing?"

Ashtavakra said, "Because I was told that this is a conference of pundits, but I see only an assembly of cobblers here! They are looking at my skin, my body - but not the 'real me.'"

While searching for a solution based on business exigencies, deliverables, due process, and dignity and rights of people we find ourselves tied in knots and bent at several places. The business manager sees the problem superficially, as one of those hurdles to achieving his goal, while the Employee Relations (ER) manager sees it in the context of rights and obligations, and the eventual solution reveals the essential persona of the organisation.

Let us now get real with some truths I have known:

The Unemployables

When I accidentally discovered that a certain worker [let us refer to him as ‘B’] was a leprosy patient, I called him to my office. I asked him if he was indeed a leprosy patient. B answered affirmatively, and stood still. Both of us did not speak for a while, and for me, time almost stood still. I asked him if he was under treatment and discovered that he had stopped treatment. He volunteered to say that he was no longer in the infectious stage. When I asked for his medical records to seek the doctor's advice on his fitness for work, he offered to resign. He further requested for some ex-gratia amount in addition to his dues. He said that the fact that he was called by me [Personnel Manager] was enough to arouse curiosity of other workers in the factory and it would not take much time for them to know of his ailment. Quitting was inevitable under these circumstances, he said. I recommended hospitalisation or treatment but it was undoubtedly a weak suggestion. I knew and I agreed with him that if other workers discovered his ailment they might refuse to work with him. B resigned and he when he left, was paid his ex gratia payment. All of this took place within a very short time.

While I had not asked for his resignation, I had felt a sense of relief that he had chosen to quit his job. I wondered if I should have persuaded B to accept treatment and rehabilitation. I knew it would be fraught with some reputational risk like a blot on employee relations. Sometimes I wondered if that was really any consideration at all, for if I really believed that treatment and rehabilitation was the right path, which I did. Maybe, I should have proceeded with that decision? When B told me that other workers would know of his ailment, he had perhaps concluded that he had become ‘unemployable.’ But the question remains if the organisation, in the instant case represented by me, should concur with this view.

The future of a leprosy patient who loses his job is bleak, if at all that word connotes what the future holds for him at all.

It also raises the question of the employers’ responsibility towards employees. And of human dignity and rights.
Here is another true story:

A food product manufacturing organisation employed women in large numbers, almost ninety percent of its total employees. The employees were represented by a labour union. Over a period, the employees got embittered with the Union General Secretary also an employee like them. Let us call him Nakul. They en masse joined another union which was led by a leader known for his violent ways. The management had no option but to deal with the new union. Almost all employees, including women employees had shifted their allegiance to the new union. All the employees then signed a petition to the management demanding the summary dismissal of Nakul. They threatened to resort to a general strike if he was not dismissed.

What followed can be guessed easily, in that, the organisation terminated the services of Nakul. They later paid him some compensation and settled the issue with him.

It is important for any management [which is the ultimate torch bearer for all HR or ER issues] to follow the process. There is no justice without following due process. One aspect of it is to ‘hear the other party’. Procedural justice is what the management of every organisation owes to its employees. He could not be subjected to a ‘trial by the masses.’

The reality is that such a process takes inordinately long time. And delays introduce complications. Nakul had become unemployable. What do you do with such an employee? With the threat of an imminent strike hanging over the organisation, business considerations take priority over propriety. Should they really?

It also raises the question of the employers’ responsibility towards employees. And of human dignity and rights.

Let us now consider another case.

Commerce vs Compassion

A fitter working in a company met with an accident, and died on the spot. He was married for about two years when his wife got pregnant with their first child. The union asked the management to provide employment to the deceased worker’s wife. Coming from a family with modest means, she did not even have an education worth the while.

There were two options before the organisation: Firstly, provide a job to her. And secondly, pay a handsome compensation, much more than the statutory minimum, so that her future needs are provided for, at least in the short term.

I have seen the Tatas taking the first option. This provides great security to the lady. But given the socio-economic background with lack of employable skills; I have seen such survivors like they were fish out of water. Their sense of pride takes a beating. They find it difficult to hold the job and difficult to give it up too. Yet the organisation surely shows generosity toward an ex-employee’s wife. We may say that it is the organisation's way of atoning their failure to provide a safe workplace.

On the other hand, a sumptuous compensation leaves it in the hands of the lady to decide her future. Some help in the form of counselling or advice on investment planning can be offered; but no employment. We can’t say that this is unfavourable to her in any way. Why should an organisation employ a lady who is not fit for any role within it? Why should an organisation carry dead wood from her first day of employment?

For the decision maker, the question is what is just and fair? Isn’t justice done when he pays statutory compensation and discharges his liability? Isn’t that the limit where the employer’s liability ends? What is the justification for paying more than the statutory compensation? And if more is to be paid how much is considered enough? Who takes that call?

I have seen some organisations taking the second option. It is commerce over compassion. Must it be always like that?

It also raises the question of the employers’ responsibility towards their employees. [Where does it end?] And of human dignity and rights.
Let us discuss one more case.

Discrimination and Disability

The HR Head of an organisation short-listed two ladies for the post of Chief Accountant, after a series of interviews. They were well qualified, had relevant experience, and both were ‘selectable’ on their merit. But Nilu was decidedly more suitable than Shalu. Her competencies were distinctly superior to Shalu’s. Both Nilu and Shalu were asked to go in for pre-employment medical check-ups. In this process, Nilu declared there that she had tested positive on her pregnancy test, and that she had learnt of it after the last interview, just two days before the employer’s medical check. The doctor noted this in his report. The HR Head made offer to Shalu, not to Nilu.

There is an issue here. Admittedly Nilu is not an employee as yet and therefore the organisation has the discretion or the power to make an offer to the person of their choice. But the dilemma arises because we examine the process of decision making. While doing so we also examine the underlying beliefs.

The decision maker wants the work of his organisation to proceed smoothly. He is entitled to such a consideration because the purpose of recruitment is to get the work done without much interruption, by a competent person. When no contract [of employment] is entered into; its violation cannot arise or even be alleged.

Another belief which also can be read into his action is that he equates pregnancy with disability. That is tantamount to discrimination. The Washington Supreme Court has held in the case Hegwine v. Longview Fibre Company, that “pregnancy-related employment discrimination claims are matters of sex discrimination.”

It also raises the question of the employers’ responsibility towards the society. [Where does it begin and where does it end?] And of human dignity and rights.

The Clash of Values

All dilemmas see a clash of values. Two values dearly held by the decision maker. What is a value? It is something you stand for as well as something you do not stand for. In a sense both values define his identity. When faced with a dilemma the decision maker is faced with deciding which rides over the other.

Take the ‘unemployable’ leprosy worker’s case. As a person born in a family of doctors, it pained me that I wanted the worker to receive medical treatment. As the worker pointed out, even after he was cured or even after advising other employees that he was not in the infectious stage, it would have been almost impossible to have him work in the factory. As a doctor’s son, I am given to look at the patients in a more empathetic way, I have valued their rehabilitation. As a business manager, I know that getting him accepted by other workmen is a herculean task. With my not-so-well-developed persuasion skills it could as well be an impossible task. As a business manager, the ‘cost and benefit’ aspect will get questioned. I get caught between concern for people and concern for results. My decision may look simple and obvious to people, but nobody will ever understand my travails unless they realise that it is a clash between two identities.

The case of compassionate employment or the case of discrimination of a pregnant woman in employment also see clashes of values. I grew up in a Tata Colony. I had seen how a lady whose husband passed away in a tragic incident was offered a job. Although it was hailed as a very good decision by all at the time of the decision, I also saw how she became a persona non-grata in that office. Incidents such as this leave a mark. We do not know how it gets ‘cooked in our personality’. When we are faced with a decision in which we subconsciously draw on that experience we realise what meaning we made of that experience. We see compassion conflicting with allowing space / freedom to a person within boundaries set by a business manager. There is a large group of business managers who do not accept unlimited liability. Yet we hold Ratan Tata in the highest reverence because he undertook unlimited liability while providing for the victims of 26/11 terrorists attack on The Taj. So what is the right thing to do? Isn’t it all about the decision maker and the way he made meaning of his life experiences?
Let us discuss Albie Sachs for further insights.

The Outlaw and The Lawyer

Just in case you haven’t read this story earlier so you refuse to believe it, let it be known again, that the story is a true one. You are welcome to check facts via Wikipedia.¹

Albie Sachs was a South African (SA) lawyer who mostly defended black people. He was declared an outlaw. He went to UK and then to Mozambique where he was teaching law. SA agents placed a bomb in Albie’s car which almost killed him. He lost one hand and an eye in this attack. Later when SA gave up apartheid, he returned to SA and became the judge in the Constitutional Court. In his 15 years on the Court, Sachs helped place South African justice at the forefront of human rights justice. His judgments are quoted in many courts outside SA.

How does he make judgments which uphold human values? Remember his experience with atrocities and his oppressive apartheid government. Yet this is what he has to say:

“Finally, the story of the story needed to be told. How do I actually make my decisions and write my judgments? When teaching a course at the University of Toronto I opened with the words ‘Every judgment I write is a lie.’ It captured the attention of the students. I explained that the falsehood lay not in the content of the judgment, which I sought to make as honest as possible, but in the discrepancy between the calm and apparently ordered way in which it read, and the intense and troubled jumping backwards and forwards that had actually taken place when it was being written. I felt a need to dispel the notion, induced by the magisterial tone we judges conventionally adopt, that judgments somehow arrive at their destination purely on rational autopilot. This led me to find out that there were at least four different logics involved in any judgment I wrote: the logic of discovery, the logic of justification, the logic of persuasion, and the logic of preening. And ultimately my thoughts went to the relationship between reason and passion, then to the concepts of human dignity and proportionality: these interconnected and indivisible concepts ran right through the book.

Having grown up in the tradition of the enlightenment I am loathe to embrace anything associated with alchemy. But I readily acknowledge that many of the processes that affect our decisions do so in mysterious ways that though not unfathomable in principle, in practice are rather difficult to define. The way life experiences enter into judicial pronouncements, or at least, into my judicial pronouncements, falls into this category. So I simply state that although the alchemy between my oversaturated life and the intense work I do on the Court is strange, it is none the less full of challenge, bafflement and delight. And if the question which emerged from writing this book is ‘How do life experiences affect the legal decision making?’ the answer is ‘In unexpected ways.’²

Just as the legal decisions are finally judged by the Supreme Court, the decisions of ER manager – I am using this description to include business managers who make the decisions affecting people – are judged by employees. They speak their approval or disapproval by communicating their happiness or otherwise with ‘their feet’. It is here that ‘the logic of discovery, the logic of justification, the logic of persuasion, and the logic of preening’ which Albie Sachs refers to comes into play. The fact is that too little communication, much less discussion; happens with employees in such critical cases. These discussions create bonds with organisations even if the employees register disagreement. Lack of communication, and the lack of discussion deprives opportunity of creating a discussion on what we stand for and what we do not stand for – or in other words, deeply held values. Without such a discussion also a decision that does not appeal to the employees may have merits, ‘but it is no more a decision than a mule is a horse. Alas, all of us, HR managers from time to time give birth to these unsatisfactory hybrids.’³ These dilemmas create persona of the organisation and also answer employees’ question ‘what if it happens to me.’

There are no easy answers. In a dilemma; a right is pitted against a right. The decision maker must follow his conscience. Yet he must act responsibly. I understood the word responsibility in a new light when I read Osho. He says, “The fact is that "responsibility", the very word, has to be broken into two words. It means "response

¹See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albie_Sachs
ability”. And response is possible only if you are spontaneous, here and now. Response means that your attention, your awareness, your consciousness, is totally here and now, in the present. So whatever happens, you respond with your whole being. ....This ability to respond is responsibility.”

The decision maker is the final arbiter of these dilemmas where he is to make a choice between two difficult options. Nobody envies him. He shapes the personality of the organisation; and he reveals his own. Yet, he is like a matador who is like proverbially 'on the horns of dilemma’ - neither horn of the bull being comfortable.

**Such are the wages of leadership!**

*Endnotes*

1 Albie Sachs in ‘The Strange Alchemy of Life and Law’ p 7-8.

2 Adopted from W. Somerset Maugham’s statement ‘A play that does not appeal to an audience may have merits, ‘but it is no more a play than a mule is a horse. Alas, all of us dramatists from time to time give birth to these unsatisfactory hybrids.’ The Summing Up
Dynamics in the HR Analytics Era
A Gen Y and a Gen X HR Professional Converse

About the Authors

Gen Y - Siva is currently HR Business Partner for technology teams powering Amazon. In located in Bangalore, India. Siva has worn multiple hats in his career including people analytics, business partnering, and leadership hiring. He is passionate about building great careers; successful teams and helping leaders take right people decisions. Incidentally, Siva also started his career as an intern with Trimble, working with Suku.

Siva Subramaniam

Gen X - Suku is currently the Director of Global HR Analytics & Reporting for Trimble Inc based in Colorado, USA. Before this, Suku was a Strategic HR Business Partner for 15+ years, traveled globally and has had an interesting career journey that includes acquisition and integration of 12+ companies. Suku is passionate about transformative people development interventions. Suku was a HR Program Manager with Amazon before joining Trimble in 2009. He worked for Virtusa Polaris and Lucid Technologies before that. Suku is a recipient of “HR Leadership Award” by Asia Pacific HRM Congress 2010 and one of the Top 50 “Most talented HR Leaders in India” by ET Now and World HRD Congress in 2013. He is a member of SHRM and a life member NHRD and ISTD.

Sukumaran Mariappan

DISCLAIMER: Views in this interaction are personal explorations of the contributors, and not statements of the organizations they work for.
Dynamics in the HR Analytics Era
A Gen Y and a Gen X HR Professional Converse

We’ve been often taken by surprise when we look back at conversations we have at work. When data compresses need for decision oriented conversations, what kind of conversations do we really have at the workplace? That’s when it struck us both that we need to write down our conversations sometime. What we present below is an excerpt from several conversations we have had recently around HR analytics. We hope you will read through the mind-sets we reflect as representatives of a generation each, and grasp the dilemmas we are faced with. We recognize that, as reader, your context will present you with the responsibility of your own resolutions with regard to HR analytics that serve you best.

Siva: Hello Suku, Hope you at enjoying your winter in Colorado.

Suku: Hi Siva, I do enjoy all the four seasons in Colorado. I love this place.

Siva: Suku, I have been thinking a lot of late about People Analytics. Many critical people elements today are difficult to measure. Have we reached an inflection point that this has changed? What do we mean when we mention the term People Analytics?

Suku: Ability to measure people’s behavior has always existed. The ability to connect dots from multiple data sets is being enabled by technology today. We live in a day when machine learning algorithms are predicting human behavioral patterns, artificial intelligence that observes information so vast as market behavior and automatically buys and sell stocks. People transactions and decisions themselves throw up a lot of data. What if we can identify a kind of behavior in a certain role that normally results in a promotion? And then provide advanced insights to people managers on the likelihood of someone from their team getting promoted? Or gaps in otherwise obvious fits? Advanced data science and technology enable this today even though it is complex and difficult to arrive at.

Siva: Interesting! What could analytics do for people decisions? What are some of the tactical and strategic people decisions that people are working on?

Suku: Analytics could enable people decisions in relation to the quality and depth of data that you have built in your organization. Analytics could help local tactical decisions like the right management span for a manager, to strategic long term decisions like the probability of internally filling a leadership role. Helping HR and business leaders gain “insights based intelligence” about the workforce forms a strong foundation to make better people related decisions. There is an increasing demand for leaders and employees to eliminate several pages of policies which form a basis for making some of the people related decision.

A friend of mine was rewriting a policy for a company sponsoring employees’ Green Card applications. The person asked me if I have a point of view on the process. I told him to write a document that talks about why people apply for Green Card (GC), the application process itself, the timeline to obtain the Green Card in various categories and privileges people get when they get GC. I also advised the person to include the cost of an application including legal expenses, details about how many applications the Company processed in the last two years, the impact of setting precedence in the US, etc. all of which could educate a manager who is making a decision. I also recommended to keep the approval process simple by having the manager write a recommendation for the Company to sponsor the Green Card such that it gets approved by a level in senior management. If the organization is large and volume of the application requests is expected to be too many, I suggested having 2 or 3 levels of approval. The approach here is to coach line managers with the information they need to make the right decision and have a simple approval process to keep the checks and balances in place. So now the data is rich-text, and numerical, therefore triangulated in context summary for the required decision. You get the idea, now?
Siva: Got it! Data and opinion, but this time delivered with insight. Offbeat example, but your point is taken. However, there is a strong opinion among business leaders that they are not fully convinced that HR has the expertise to do insightful analytics work. Why is this concern there?

Suku: Integration of multiple disciplines like neuroscience with IT, Big data, business intelligence tools, and advanced technologies helps businesses translate huge amounts of data into actionable insights that drive superior performance. However, on the other hand, researchers also say that HR organizations are continuing to struggle to add greater value to businesses. This in addition to the perception that critical people elements are impossible to measure. Leaders continue to debate if HR is ready to deliver credible insights through analytics. Personally, I believe that focusing on quality of the data and working backward from clear problem statements and presenting insights in a simple way will be critical to establishing credibility. My sincere advice to organizations that are starting their journey in people analytics is to focus on answering questions leaders have with simple analysis. Then build your brand and credibility internally, before starting to invest on tools OR do “cool” advanced analytics with ‘R’ or ‘SAS’.

Siva: Many HR Leaders hesitate to take the first step primarily because there’s a perception that building impactful analytics capability requires lots of investment. What’s been your experience?

Suku: I don’t believe so. You’ll be amazed at what data arranged in proper rows and columns can do for you. We can start our analytics journey with just Advance MS Excel add-ons. Essentials, like defining key metrics, dashboards and publishing regular insights, can help leaders understand insights about the workforce. Collecting a list of talent-related questions from business leaders and trying to find answers to those questions with workforce data surely doesn’t need huge investment. We need a vision, leadership support and credible resources doing analytics to start with.

Siva: HR leaders rely a lot on intuition and judgment. Analytics brings a lot of insights to the table. How do you balance?

Suku: People decisions are complex. After all, we’re dealing with non-machine and living human beings. It mostly comes to choosing between a set of equally right decisions and not between a right and a wrong decision. Fun! Isn’t it? One of the key challenges in people analytics is the continuous cross-hair between intuition and insights, and this will have to evolve over a period. Never try to prove that your insights are better than the intuitions of a business leader. That (seriously); won’t help you in your journey. I would suggest placing our insights, asking for the leader’s opinion on it. Have them challenge your insights. This approach will help us to evolve and improve credibility over a period. At the same time, don’t let bias be a part of your insights. It is always good to calibrate thoughts and mature your data modeling to produce actionable insights.

Essentially then, dialogue and discussion are both required in the process; although these are dramatically opposite conversations styles. The counterproductive conversation in this process is debate, because then the conversation is polarized too quickly without making mutual commitment count. It is not about WHO wins in conversation, but about WHAT problems are served with data and HOW. By now, you may not even ask, WHY analytics will be required.

Siva: People decisions are both an art and science. By transforming HR with data and insights, you are making it more a science than an art. Are you saying that people management has to be a science and not art?

Suku: Analytics will help to transform HR more as science intensive. However, there is no way we can remove the “art” aspect of people management. In fact, designing for heuristics within analytics frames could also be delightful art. In our core role, though, we are attempting to help leaders make important decisions based on data and insights instead of non-verifiable intuitions and sometimes idiosyncrasies, bias or conflicting individual opinions. You can never remove subjectivity from subjective decisions. The point is to support decision making by bringing to the table objective insights. We’re using data and learnings from past decisions to improve our decisions. Executing the whole mission of evidence-based decision making has a strong “Art” aspect to it. While data crunching is a science, Storytelling is an art. Doing logistics regression and identifying potential list of high potential employees who may leave is from science. Defining interventions to engage with
those employees and minimize the risk of leaving the organization is an art.

Siva, I would like to understand your perspective on a few aspects. Business strategy pivots functional strategies. How do you see HR Analytics influencing business strategy bottoms up?

Siva: An organization’s ability to make well-informed decisions will play a key role in how it adjusts to the new micro and macro-economic & market realities and emerge as a clear successful leader. Analytics play a significant role in making the decision based on data and insights, and it is a powerful way to create competitive advantage. HR Analytics can address macroeconomic decisions for global corporations including interesting problems like what would be the cost advantage of locating a product line in a certain geography.

Suku: As a representative of next generation HR leaders, what do you think about the role a business sponsor has in shaping analytics?

Siva: Every business leader is expected to champion “evidence-based decision-making model”. Business leaders who managed the business for several years have their intuitions and opinions on what is going on and what is going to happen in their business. Leaders investing time in codifying this experience into data-models will help in fostering maturity of people analytics models. What could be a dilemma, however, is that making analytics habitual in the organization requires extreme effort. It forces you into defining things that matter to organizational success very well. If you don’t have strong alignment with leaders, and not so well defined set of people processes, you’re likely to struggle. I also sense that business leaders may bypass HR far too quickly to P&L triggers with analytics; rather than make optimum use of human potential. How could HR leaders hold their own if such a trend comes about?

Suku: HR leaders needs to continuously work on improving the credibility of their data analysis and their prescriptions to make better decisions. Business leaders and HR leaders work towards a common mission of maximizing human potential” for their organizational success. When the mission is same, resolving the differences is not difficult.

Siva: Suku, one big need for anyone actively engaged in Analytics is the ability of storytelling like you do with data. Analytics professionals can do a lot of complex research, but may not be skilled at presenting insights in a digestible form. This limits their ability to create urgency over actions necessary. How does one build on this?

Suku: Several thousands of reports have been published on a daily basis about various interesting topics. We don’t have time to read everything and take actions. Hence our ability to write and tell stories are vital for long-term success. Every organization publishes so many useful insights and reports in many forms. The challenge is in taking meaningful action that helps in transformation. It is an art and I am learning quite a lot about this aspect in my journey in analytics. Storytelling is an art that’s perfected by practice and coaching.

Siva: What does a high impact people analytics team look like? What is the composition of the team?

Suku: You will see data analysts, business analysts, data scientists, software engineers, and program managers in a matured analytics team that does advanced people analytics. You need capabilities to do research and tell stories. You also need to master the art of collaborating with HR Business Partners, HR leaders and business leaders for your long term success and creating higher value to business. You don’t need all these capabilities to start your People Analytics journey.

Siva: So what motivates you to do analytics work? What are indicators that help you make a decision when you hire for your team?

Suku: I have been a Strategic HR Business Partner for 15+ years supporting regions and global business groups in small, mid-size and large multi-national organizations. My opinion about how HR can be truly be strategic kept changing now and then. I now strongly believe that HR needs to capitalize data and insights to be a true catalyst, an employee champion and an executive coach to the line managers. So, at this stage, I have my thumb rules.

I try and answer a couple of questions when I am hiring; Are you a person who has an excellent understanding of business context and strategy; have clarity around how HR programs, policies, and interventions drive value to
the business? Are you an analytical thinker who can understand that data are not simple sets of trends and numbers? Do you enjoy interesting correlations therein can be drawn to understand how and why people act in a particular pattern? Are you passionate about connecting the dots? Are you a great story-teller? Are you a person with a growth mindset and a great collaborator? Are you an individual who is comfortable dealing with the power of intuition, bias and multi-generational viewpoints? Are you a curious person who always ask who, why, what, where and how? Are you comfortable playing around with technology? Are you ready for new experiments? If your answer is “Yes” to most of my questions, then you have a bright chance of being successful in People Analytics function.

Siva: There’s possibility of bias, in that profiles considered expert at number crunching, like cost accountants, or industrial engineers – who are not educated in HRM may end up on the algorithm side or even on the analytic side of HR. What can such analytical profiles do to become adept in HRM?

Suku: I think you are referring to those educated in Pure Sciences like Physics, Chemistry; Technology, Engineering, Accountancy or Mathematics and Statistics streams, right? In my opinion though, there is a need for us to teach behavioral science and impact of technology on human life to every engineer as part of their curriculum, and not just at a theoretical level. This is why I believe even IITs have a School of Humanities now. There is acknowledgement for humanizing analytical profiles. We have to get more adept at it. If HR can catalyze this process, its vitality as a profession will be valued even more; else HR will become the dilemma for the organization!

Siva: That’s a tough one already. Let me add another one? Companies like GE are rolling back their traditional appraisal processes for new paradigms. Does HR analytics have the ingredients to make Performance Management system redundant?

Suku: All people programs need to connect and add meaning to the big picture. Traditional appraisal process are rolling back not just because of people analytics. Several hundred (or thousands) person hours of time are being spent to complete the process every year. We are asking our ourselves what is the impact or business value created by spending this time and how it impacts employees and the organization. Such process needs to be changed to suit the dynamics of workforce and business needs. That being said, I do believe that analytics can be a good change ingredient to simplification and helps identify the right areas to focus on.

Suku: I have a question for you now. Imagine a future enabled by HR Analytics. How could senior HR leaders develop emerging HR professionals for this future. What are we missing now?

Siva: Our expectation on coaching and mentoring is not going to change much given this new future. We like our HR leaders teach us the big picture and involve us in solving large business problems. We would like them to assess us and give more weight to competencies and abilities we bring to the table rather than our age and years of experience. We want them to consistently push us to convince them with evidence/insights. We would like them to review our ideas and opinions with an open mind and challenge it with big goals. I’ve been at least lucky in this respect; and have had opportunities to work regularly with HR leaders who have been an exemplification of the above expectations.

Suku: That’s a good punch line to end with, I guess. It was great talking to you on this, Siva.

Siva: Likewise, Suku. I will cherish this memory.
HR Dilemmas: Stress in Work Life

About the Authors

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Dr. Jallavi Panchamia is an Assistant Professor at Adani Institute of Infrastructure Management, Ahmedabad. She has obtained her Ph.D. in the area of Organizational Behaviour from CEPT University, Ahmedabad and has more than 11 years of experience in academics and research. She holds Bachelor of Engineering (Chemical), MBA (HR), UGC-NET (Management) and DBEM from EDI. She has published papers on organizational culture, organizational role stress and perceived organizational support and HR dilemma. Currently she is working on psychometric assessment & its application and change management issues.
HR Dilemmas: Stress in Work Life

Prologue

I was invited few months ago by the editor of the NHRDN Journal to share my views about the dilemmas which HRD professionals are likely to face in the times to come. Interestingly, the ‘times to come’ have already arrived! Being in the field of stress management research for the past four decades, I thought it would be nice to share some ideas and experiences. Around 1980, I conducted the first comprehensive Stress Management Program, under aegis of management development center (MDC) of Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad. It was a week long MDP, possibly the longest program offered in the country. The coverage was exhaustive. We had inputs on physiology, psychology, dietetics, meditation, yoga and management. Such MDPs were repeated over the years and decades. I also got an opportunity to train HR professional in how to conduct a ‘stress audit’ for their own organizations. At the initial juncture, 1980 to 1985, there were approximately 15% cases who reported stress afflictions. This figure increased to 30% by 1990. However, something very unusual happened after 1991, the year which is known for opening up of the Indian economy! The incidence of stress affliction increases to well over 90% in the next five years! This is no seasonal disorder, it is a full blown epidemic.

I sought the academic help from Dr. Jallavi Panchamia to help put together the ideas of relevance. She is my co-author here.

Introduction:

Rapid and consistent growth of organizations in the 20th century ensured a secure and long-term employment to employees. The overall work life of an employee was relatively stable, in spite of the phases of economic ups and downs at different levels in the organizations (Pestonjee and Pandey, 2013). In that era, things were quite predictable, organized and well defined at the workplace in the organizations. Since last few decades of the 20th century and especially first one and half decades of the 21st century, dynamic changes have been seen at workplaces and employees’ work life in organizations. The rapid growth of information technology and new communication technologies has changed individual life considerably. The changed situations have posed various kinds of challenges and demands on individuals in organizations, which has led to the stress among employees. Stress among employees is an emergent concern for organizations nowadays.

Stress is the response of people to the unreasonable/excessive pressure or demands placed on them. The extent to which organizations enable (or disable) their workers to achieve organizational and personal goals affect how individuals appraise and manage work stress. Understanding the factors that account for the different responses of individuals to the same stressful stimuli may aid in building a work environment that provides a good fit between the worker and the organization (Chan, 1996).

Research in the area of HR intervention for stress, mostly done in India, have been presented here, as a window to dilemmas the HR professional may be coping with or facing, without much overt acknowledgement in our times.

Executive Burnout in India

According to Sharma (2006), Burnout is a typical stress syndrome which develops gradually in response to prolonged stress and mental and/or emotional strain. The results of studies revealed that executive burnout is caused by both personality and role-related factors. Stress personality was found to be the major determinant of burnout among the executives. The other important predictors of burnout include role stagnation followed by self-role distance and role expectation conflict. Sharma suggested individualized HR intervention based on the determinants of each of the dimensions of burnout. Burnout audit can be undertaken once a year in the whole organization or within a critical department to identify the burnout-prone cases. Employee assistance programs can be offered to help employees deal with their burnout proneness. HR professionals can do job
analysis from stress context and adopt suitable employee policy for person-job fit (Edwards, 1991). This very approach will reduce role expectation conflict and self-role distance found as determinants of executive burnout in the Indian organizations. Sharma further suggested that the HR professional may design training programs imparting stress management techniques for those having high burnout proneness as identified during the burnout audit. It is found that employee-centric work culture in organizations fosters an environment of employee engagement and well being, which in turn helps employees cope up with burnout more effectively. These interventions depict that the role of the HR professional has not just been limited to HR practices and policies, but rather enlarged to being a counselor and culture builder.

The 3-H Model of HR for Stress Intervention

According to Pestonjee (2014), human resource professionals have failed to provide the required guidance to help employees manage stress. It is seen that financial compositions are associated with stress. The HR department does not provide legal or mental health protection to their employees, as they themselves are not aware of the negative effect of stress on individuals. They are more concerned with cognitive abilities of individuals, increasing productivity and lowering costs. It is advised to train and groom HR people to understand occupational stress and its impact on individual’s performance, physical and mental health and their general life itself. As per the recommendations given by Pestonjee, the company physician should be given importance in organizations, as they may have data and information about the organizational tendencies responsible for high stress among their employees. It is advised to look at HR from the Hand-Head-Heart approach. The HRD movement along the years can be categorized by this 3H approach. Initially, man power was classified as Hands, and if hands work; you get paid. The next phase of the HRD movement concerned the Head approach, where cognitive abilities were also given importance along with the hands. The third H depicts the Heart approach. It was based on the philosophy that having happy or productive employees are possible, when their feelings and emotions are taken care of along with ‘Hand’ and ‘Head’. This is a holistic approach of positive psychology, which focuses on an individual’s optimism and happiness quotient. It is said that the more you take care of the Heart factor, the better you can manage occupational stress. HR professionals need to give more emphasis on Heart factor by considering their employees’ EQ, since emotional quotient in employees play major role in productivity in comparison to their IQ. HR professional have started understanding the significance of the employee’s emotions and feelings at workplace. At the time of hiring, apart from mandatory cognitive ability, EQ could be evaluated to make better hiring decisions. EQ facilitates employees build and maintain relations with peers, enhances productivity, and manages job stress related to interpersonal relations. Singh (2006) predicted that IQ can fetch you success in job to the extent of just 20%. A larger share of success on the job in organizations, depends on the EQ of an individual.

Apart from considering the 3-H approach, HR professionals should focus on ergonomics factors and empowering their employees. It is the responsibility of line managers also to develop a more holistic environment for their subordinates. Moreno (1934) proposed the theory of ‘sociometric choices’ during the second world war, which applied effectively in a team context. According to this theory, if team members get opportunity to choose with whom they want to work with and at what level, the performance of the team increases. Line managers are advised to know about the sociometric choices of their subordinates.

There are mainly two factors that can lead to higher stress in jobs, namely - precision of operations and accountability (Pestonjee, 2014). It is important to have a strong support system to cope with stress. The support system can be categorized into three classes. The first is one’s own internal support system like one’s personality, stress tolerance level and optimistic traits. The second support is from family and friends. Third support system can developed from the organization side, in terms of supportive leadership, HR policies and practices and peer group.

HRD Intervention and Executive Health

Pestonjee and Muncherji (1991) described various types of stress related diseases executives are prone to and suggested HRD interventions to promote the overall health of the executives in the organization. According to Pestonjee, healthy executives are a basic prerequisite for progressive organizations; therefore it is important to
see that anxieties, depressions and stresses generated by the activities in the organization are minimum.

The study depicted the performance appraisal process as a major source of stress in organizations. Many individuals experienced stress when being evaluated by their supervisors, since the stakes are high with feedback on performance. It was advised that the HR professional should conduct such appraisals in as calm, rational, and fair a manner as is possible.

HRD professionals establish ‘Career Management Programs’ to help individuals cope with career related problems and plan effectively for the development of their careers. It is important to plan the career path for each individual in the organization, since career issues can increase the stress level among employees.

**Stress as an interface area between clinical psychology and HRM**

There is a dilemma in the contention between the role of HR and clinical psychologists in combating the stress among the employees (Pestonjee and Pandey, 2013). The role of psychologists in organization has gone significantly beyond the care for individual employees having mental health issues. Psychologists can suggest appropriate action plans for stress intervention and prevention. HR can implement the practices and measures suggested by them in organizational context. Psychologists can monitor the happenings in the organization and predict the trends in issues of employees’ well-being. They can offer interventions by coaching and psychotherapy for groups or individual employees (Hansson and Michael, 1993). Psychologists can recommend HR executives on workable and effective forms of organizing that respect the interests of all stakeholders.

**Issues of work-life Balance**

Today’s organizations are improving their HR practices and policies which address work-life balance issues to support their employees cope with stressful jobs, intense competition and time-pressured lives (Nord et al, 2002). Before instituting work-life balance initiatives, HR should appraise the culture of the organization to determine if it is open and equipped to support work-life balance programs (Reynolds, 1999). Culture-readiness appraisal should be achieved through an employee survey assessment or by a thoughtful judgment made by the organization. This assessment should bring to the fore, the peculiar work-life balance needs of different employees in the organization. It is important to have support from top management in implementing work-life balance programs to curb stress issues among employees.

**Stress and Technology**

Pestonjee and Mehta (2016) suggested HR professionals to take a strategic perspective towards HR functions of organization. It is believed that high performance work systems foster an organizational culture, which focus on congruence of an individual’s goal with the organization’s goal. It is evident that technological advancement shape today’s work environment, which are indicative of work intensification that is responsible for employee strain and distress (Chesley, 2014). Chesley found that higher technology use, especially when it extends job/work into personal life, is linked with higher levels of stress among employees. However, it is also associated with gains in productivity. Technology obsolescence is another major area of concern that contributes to job stress along with technological advancement. We would like to invite the attention of the HR professionals to the theoretical model suggested by Pestonjee and Mehta (2016).

**Stress Audit**

When an organization decides to have a scientific peep into the mental-cum-physical health status of its key executive group, we call it a ‘stress audit’. Stress audit is an attempt the organization makes to study, explore, and control the various types of stresses which the individual employees experience by virtue of their organizational membership.

Pestonjee and Muncherji (1994) mentioned certain key organizational issues which relate to health and how
HRD systems can help in redeeming the same. Performance appraisal involves highly stressful experience for many employees when evaluated by superiors. Career Path navigation is another HRD variable which leads to stress. Each career stage is characterized by different issues and problems responsible for stress. HR professionals could help reduce these stresses. HRD departments may establish ‘career management programs’ to help employees cope with such problems and plan effectively for the development of their careers. Certain organizational development (OD) interventions such as job enrichment, job design, role efficacy, workshops/labs and the like could also be used to reduce stresses experienced by individuals in organizations.

**Workplace Spirituality**

Spirituality is the state of ultimate well-being, which is qualitatively different from what is ordinarily experienced. It is regarded as a state of inner peace, and tranquility (Husain, 2011). Most of the causes of stress are related to social, emotional and psychological disorders. According to Husain, the cause of mental suffering and ailments is the absence of spiritual synergy and the disturbance in the existential rhythm which impeded the growth of the human being. Beyond the use of bodily strengths, we can utilize the mental and spiritual strengths. As we are of a finite biological life, our mental and spiritual capacities are also likely to be finite. Stress is generally perceived by the presence of negative thoughts. The spiritual practices may provide strengths to individuals to cope with the stresses in work life by reframing insecurities of negative thoughts.

**Future HR challenges for Stress Management**

The modern world of work has some characteristics which were not observed in the past. Future organizations will face extremely uncertain and volatile external environment hence will require more complex system than ever before. Future managers will need to work with a fast pace to achieve their target and organizations need to shorten their long term planning. Only those organizations will be able to survive in future, which are investing in R & D for technology innovation (Pestonjee& Pandey, 2013). The future organizations will be more flexible and adaptive to their external environment, many jobs which are dominating today’s job market will be extinct in future or could only be of archival value. These macro-level factors have affected individual and group level organizational variables. In future, employees would be consistently striving to maintain their employability rather than securing the current employment, which leads to high stress for individuals and whole organization. Gradually, HR needs to change various roles in order to cope up with such characteristics of future organization. It is equally important for HR to play the role of counselor along with the role of business partners in the organization. HR professionals may face great dilemma in opting between appropriate role dimensions for dynamic situations in the future organization.

**References**


De - Humanization and Robotization of HR Function: An Educationist’s Concerns

About the Author

Dr. Kalra has a Master’s degree in Psychology from Lucknow University and a Ph.D. from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, (TISS), Mumbai (Bombay).

Before joining Great Lakes Institute Of Management, (GLIM), Gurgaon, in July 2015, he was with IMI for 6 years, from July 2009 to July 2015 as Professor of OB & HRD and Dean Placements & Corporate Relations. He was with MDI for about 13 years from October 1996 to June 2009. Earlier to that he was with IIM – L from May 1985 to October 1996, NITIE Mumbai from April 1978 to May 1985. At all these places he has experience of conducting large number of programs in the behavioral science areas. He has been a guest faculty to a number of public and private sector organizations. He was rated as the most popular professor by the MDI students in the Business Schools survey done by the Mint (Sept. 12, 2008 Issue, page B26), he was also given the Best Faculty Award in the student’s choice category by the PGHR batch of 2009.

Besides teaching, training and research He is also actively involved in consulting for various organizations, such as Power Trading Corporation (PTC), Tourism Finance Corporation of India (TFCI), Indo-Gulf Fertilizers, HSS among several others. He has published around 90 articles in various national and international journals like Economic and Political Weekly, Indian Journal of Social Work, Indian Journal of Industrial Relations, Journal of Applied Social Psychology (U.S.A), Asian Case Research Journal, Journal of European Industrial Training (JEIT), International Journal of Indian Culture and Business Management (USA).

In his paper in JEIT he has developed a new concept of Human Potential Management (HPM). One of his papers on ‘Self Development’ has won the Best Paper Award. He is presently interested in the areas of Self oriented HRD Interventions, HPM and cross-cultural dimensions of leadership. He is Delhi Batch custodian for TISS Executive Education in OD and Change and also continues as human process facilitator for post-graduate students in several Institutes.
De - Humanization and Robotization of HR Function: An Educationist’s Concerns

Context Setting

Before we even come to Business analytics and the HR analytics function, let us look at the history and evolution of technical education in our country. At the time of independence, the founding fathers of independent India, particularly our first Prime Minister, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, who was also a great visionary; felt if India had to become self-reliant and grow at a faster pace to catch up with the developed world, then as a nation, we needed to invest in heavy and basic Industry like steel, aluminium, mining, fertiliser, power etc. As a result of this nation building emphasis, large industries like Hindustan Steel, Hindustan Aluminium, Hindustan Zinc, NTPC, Fertiliser Corporation of India etc. got established. They became India’s Public Sector economy. Pandit Nehru used to call these as Temples of Modern India laying the strong foundation of modern India. Along with this, he felt that to accelerate the process of growth we should also have high quality technical and scientific manpower. To achieve this, high class technical education IITs (Indian Institutes of Technology) were established in collaboration with leading technical institutions of United States, Germany, England, Russia etc. on the pattern of institutes like MIT, where technical education was blended with liberal arts, social sciences, literature, humanities and so on; so that we produce top quality engineers, scientists and managers with soul and ethical sensitivity. It was felt that the IITs should “embody the students with values…… facilitate appreciation of social issues and problems in technology management…..”(IIT Review, 2004).

Highlighting this aspect of engineering education, Conlon (2008) points out that “…the engineers need to understand the wider social context in which they work...(in their education), focus of ethics education should be broadened to focus on the social structure and the way it enables and constraints socially responsible conduct…..” He further points out “…focus on employability alone is not sufficient to prepare socially responsible engineers….. the engineers need to understand the wider social context in which they work.”.

In fact with this kind of positive mind set, initially technology actually complemented and helped HR function by creating data-warehouses where lot of operational and routine HR data could be stored and retrieved by the press of a button. This took away lot of drudgery from the HR function and HR professionals could spend more time on meaningful Strategic Human Resource Development and Human Relations oriented issues & problems to improve the overall culture, climate & environment of the organizations. Overall this gelled with the HRD oriented philosophy of HR function. Further with the advent of knowledge-driven organizations, the challenge before organizations has been to create, build and sustain an empowering climate & culture in such organizations which facilitates people to use their full potential (as in HPM). Over a period of time, labour welfare became a part of traditional personnel administration and gradually we moved to Human Resource Development. With the advent of knowledge industry and knowledge-driven work forces, the industry started looking at human beings as central part of the whole system rather than a cog in a wheel. In a sense, these features became incidental to the distinctions between the erstwhile public sector and the emerging private sector.

In that sense in the initial period, technology actually helped in improving the status of employees in work settings. If we look around, we also notice that technology in general and information technology in particular, also improved the pace & quality of work by influencing and invading every possible professional domain of life, be it manufacturing, management, medicine, HR, and so on. At the same time, on the negative side automation also reduced employment by making many jobs redundant.
Content in Context

In fact, technology has invaded practically every aspect of our life, for instance in the domain of communication, email has practically made surface mail redundant, mobile phones can make us talk to anyone instantly by click of a button and through video phone/video conferencing we can actually see and partially experience people whom we are talking to. In the field of teaching/e-learning it has tremendously increased our reach and as a tool it has really helped humanity as a whole.

Having said all this, we need to take a pause and reflect and ask, is technology in general and information technology in particular, panacea to all human problems? As a HR professional, I really don’t think so. I am particularly referring to this because today you do come across some highly tech-savvy HR professionals who do behave as though technology and technology driven analytics can provide solutions to many HR problems. No doubt, as a tool because of data storage/warehouse, it has made operational aspects of HR easy to handle but at the same time it has led to another set of HR problems, which in pre-technology era many of us could not have imagined. Let me illustrate this through an interesting example, when about three decades back, we were still in the era of large main frame systems like IBM 1401, Burroughs 6700 & 6800 etc. All these IT applications for commercial organizations had just started and were in their infancy stage. One of my colleagues from the IT domain then commented that in few years the whole field of HR will become redundant as technology would be able to resolve many of the HR problems. Mainly, the belief was that automation would reduce the requirement of large workforces and as a result of this one would face lesser HR problems and almost no or low requirement of HR professionals and thus almost end HR as a profession.

Contrary to this, a reality-check tells us that technology driven organizations have thrown much more complex problems with newer HR challenges. For example, in pre-technology era one could not have imagined the kinds of problems/issues which virtual teams could have – as there were no virtual teams – and more so if the teams are geographically spread out across the globe. Similarly HR challenges faced by ERP implementation etc are extensions of such a genre of problems. All these kind of technology interventions have led to new kinds of HR challenges and a re-examination of earlier systems and structures as well as human adjustment problems associated with these. As a result of this, some of the earlier not-so-visible HR domains like OD, L & D etc. started coming to forefront to deal with or address the new kind of problems caused by rapid technological change.

At least up to this point, HR still did not seem to completely lose its HRD oriented focus, may be more so because in terms of its value base, both the technical education (specially IIT based, as stated above), as well as professional HR education, from institutes like Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) and other well-known schools of social work was blended with ethics education and focus on sensitivity to social issues. Here, it may also be worth mentioning that HR or Labour Welfare as a profession has evolved from the field of professional social work, where in any case social and societal problems get addressed very prominently. This in any way helps them develop sensitivity to contemporary social issues.

The paradox is that in the last few years, with the advent of analytics driven decision making tools like Business Analytics, HR analytics etc. and lot of focus on skill development oriented courses, HR in particular and business as a whole seems to be losing its soul. The tragedy is that on the one side, during the initial years, our founding fathers thought of integrating/blending ethical and value based education with engineering education to develop socially sensitive and responsible engineers, but on the other side in the context of analytics oriented skill development, some of these aspects are not being given the kind of attention which they deserve.

As a result of this, the field of analytics poses many ethical dilemmas. In this regard, Buytendik (November 8, 2012) points out that “There is an increasingly strong ethical dimension to technology design and use.” Giving
an illustration he points out that if as an analyst of an insurance company, one finds out that sitting in front of a computer for too long a time makes one susceptible to neck and back problems. With this kind of data about one’s prospective clients, is it ethical to reject such kind of clients/customers or charge them a very high premium, in spite of the fact that at the time of purchasing the insurance policy one did not have such a problem. Tracking the data about such customers by the company does not seem to be ethical. Similarly, as a Business Manager in a large private speciality services hospital at the time of epidemic, where you are left with last few beds, would you allot the bed to someone who can pay you more or the one who is more critical?

**Concern for Connect**

Perhaps, keeping these kind of issues in mind, Rachel Alt-Simons (December 16, 2010), points out that “we need a soul to make analytics successful….. Our business would not be run by a computer – we need people with a feel for intuitive decision making….. “. In this respect and in the context of many of the issues raised above, HR has to play a proactive role in helping the management to sensitise the business world towards the ethics of analytics, but here again, paradoxically, HR itself also needs to look into the ethical issues in the domain of HR analytics. In the context of the use of analytics in HR, Bill Boorman, (MD of Technology & Innovation, Recruiting Daily.com), points out that in the HR function, we need to be cautious in using data analytics. He says, “particularly in the HR function, we should be considering the question of ‘because we can, doesn’t necessarily mean we should be using it or drawing conclusions from it‘ “. To illustrate his point, he gives an example, where Laszlo Bock, Head of People for Google conducted an experiment, where for a particular job, 50 percent of the candidates, using people analytics data, were selected by the computer and the remaining 50 percent by the traditional 13-part interview process. The results indicated that the larger percent of the successful candidates were interviewed by humans. (Bryan, 2015)

The importance of ethics in HR is also highlighted by Renjini Mary Joseph (2015). In the context of employee data she points out that “the source of most HR information is employees' records. This implies the need for confidentiality, sensitivity and ethical usage of private and personal information”. We are all familiar with the benefits of HRIS but many of us are also aware that quite a few organisations do share or even sell this kind of data, (for instance our mobile numbers) as a result of which we do keep on getting unsolicited calls from various sources. Is it ethical for mobile companies to share/sell their customers’ data to marketing agencies? Highlighting this aspect Vicky Bryan says, “ As analytics plays an increasingly influential role in helping organisations make certain business decisions, HR professionals need to help and train line managers in understanding the implications of this process…. “

With the increasing importance of analytics, in the last few years, analytics as a skill has become very important and lot of educational/training institutions have seen this as a good business opportunity and have started courses in Business Analytics. Around 95 percent of enrolments in these skill oriented courses are of engineers, where in majority of their cases, their earlier education was not blended with ethical & value based education and most of these courses focus only on the technical aspects. In this respect, leave aside value based education, they even lack long term employability skills even in IT sector as highlighted by R. Srinivasan in the Hindu (March 12, 2017). In his article IT’s new, improved skills problem, quoting McKinsey report, Srinivasan points out “that almost half the IT industry’s four million strong workforce of technology and software professionals will be “irrelevant” in the next three to four years.”

In a broader sense this implies that many of the new technical institutions have seen the growth of IT sector as a business opportunity in terms of churning out a workforce which does not seem to be future ready. With the growth and demand of analytics, the same type of pattern seems to be getting repeated. In the context of IT sector, quoting Cap Gemini’s Srinivas Kandula, Srinivasan (Hindu, March 12, 2017) says that “ The trouble is, that the private education sector” is so returns-focused that it does deliver quantity but at the cost of quality. Kandula admitted “that intake quality was so bad that most of the candidates could not even say what subjects
they were taught in the final semester of college…….This is a frightening situation” and if not taken care of in a coordinated way by the government, industry and the education sector, the overall scenario could be grim. (Srinivasan, The Hindu, March 12, 2017) In my view, the same could even hold true for Business Analytics if we don’t wake up.

In 2011, when IBM’s calculating and computing processes crossed its 100 years since incorporation, the Watson supercomputer it runs was promoted to acquire a legendary continuity with change and the age of collaborative social computing. Its help is acknowledged in solutions all over the world, in healthcare, weather, data analytics, energy solutions and soon. Indian companies in the IT sector were pushed against the wall as it were, on such prowess. Its response was to follow, given its younger pedigree. Wipro launched its artificial intelligence platform Holmes (Sood, 2016), and Infosys launched MANA (Sen, 2016) in keeping with the times. TCS had launched Digitate (Sood, 2015). Overall, the signals these trends represent, is the unstoppable surge of computing power without human intervention elements. This makes for a shift in manpower planning for firms—lower numbers of employees and for more specific and less vanilla skills.

In a few years, therefore, the question is, what can we do? If we want to save ourselves from this kind of situation, then as HR professional and educationists we have to see that our analytics education/training is sufficiently blended with value based education also as a core, so that we just don’t create mechanical minds but more humane, socially responsible analytics professionals, who could, rather than becoming slaves to the tools, raise questions on its use in specific situations on case to case basis. Further as HR professionals - as said earlier, we need to ask, as pointed out by Boorman, should we necessarily use analytics dominated decision making (to be seen as scientific & objective), because we can, even if it may not be required in all the cases. In conclusion, in my view, some of these kinds of interventions will be able to retain the human core of HR function without robotizing it where it is not required.

In no way, am I saying that it should not be used at all. Use it judiciously when required. I also feel that Business Analytics courses should also have courses which could make them socially responsible analytics professionals.

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Book Review
The New Leaders - Transforming the Art of Leadership into the Science of Results

Reviewed By

Mr. G. Inbavan an a.k.a Inba, Founder & Chief Practice Officer Inba has 27+ years of Corporate and 7+ years of Consulting experience in all facets of People Practice from Organization Development and Effectiveness, Learning & Development, Personnel Management to Industrial Relations domains.

Since July 2009 Inba and his wife have set up an independent consulting practice, People Dimensions@Work focusing on Organization Development, Team Effectiveness, Leadership & Talent Development, Executive Coaching, Employee Relations and Employee Well Being.

Inba is an accredited Executive Coach of Coaching Foundation of India - CFI. Inba is also a Member of the International Association of Coaches. He is certified in 'Coaching from a Systems Perspective' from Society for Organizational Learning - SoL.

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March 2017 - Bangalore
Book Review
The New Leaders - Transforming the Art of Leadership into the Science of Results

This book was first published by Little, Brown in 2002 under the title, ‘Primal Leadership’, about 7 years post the publication of the seminal work on Emotional Intelligence - EI by Daniel Goleman. However, even after fifteen years, the book is so contextual in its construct and applicability, that it might seem that it was published recently. In that sense, it is a gold mine for people with accountability for creating a robust Leadership Pipeline in their respective organizations. Along with Daniel Goleman, the book has been co-authored by Richard Boyatzis - Professor of Organizational Behaviour and Chair of the Department of Organizational Behaviour at the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University & Annie McKee - University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education and Director of Management Development Services at the Hay Group in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Goleman who is allied with Hay/McBer consulting firm in work on leadership transformation has drawn on their rich database for this book. Hence a rich combination of the Father of EI along with an Academician and a Practitioner of Leadership development founded on actual data from the field.

I would like to reproduce the introduction for the book written in 2002 in Google Books, to validate my earlier submission of it being a ‘gold mine’:

“As business reinvents itself at broadband speed, what makes leaders effective has inevitably been transformed. Old assumptions and old modes no longer hold; a new style of leadership that works has emerged amidst the chaos of change. This new leader excels in the art of relationship, the singular expertise which the changing business climate renders indispensable. Excellence is being defined in interpersonal terms as companies have stripped out layers of managers, as corporations merge across national boundaries, and as customers and suppliers redefine the web of connection. Best selling author Daniel Goleman argues that emotionally intelligent leaders are now ‘must-haves’ for business today. But many readers have been left with, So now what do I do? The New Leaders answers that question by laying out the map for transforming leadership in individuals, in teams and organizations”.

The core of the book is built around the concept of Primal Leadership and how it connects seamlessly to the more advanced discoveries about the functioning of human brain. The authors state that the Primal Leader’s task is an ‘emotional’ one and hence, the criticality of the ‘HOW’ of leadership as opposed to the ‘WHAT’ of leadership. They state, “Quite simply, in any human group the leader has maximal power to sway everyone’s emotions. If people’s emotions are pushed toward the range of enthusiasm, performance can soar; if people are driven toward rancour and anxiety, they will be thrown off stride”. The importance of the ‘HOW’ is connected with the design of the human brain: what scientists have begun to call the open-loop nature of the limbic system, our emotional centers. They detail the case of the shutting down of the News division of BBC and the message being communicated to the 200 odd impacted employees by one Executive as opposed to the communication of another Executive who was sent in after the first Executive botched it up. The second executive ‘resonated’ with the impacted employees and hence, the same message was received by the employees who ended up cheering him. With this example they introduce the concept of ‘Resonant Leadership’.

The authors detail 6 Leadership styles, viz., Visionary, Coaching, Affiliative, Democratic, Pace setting and Commanding. The authors mantra for successful leadership -
“Leading with Style - The Right One at the Right Time”.

In Part 2 they deal with the transformation to becoming a ‘Resonant Leader’, they bring in the concept of 5 Discoveries that a leader needs to go through, viz.,

Discovery #1: My ideal self - Who do I want to be?

Discovery #2: My real self - Who am I? What are my strengths and gaps?

Discovery #3: My learning agenda - How can I build on my strengths while reducing my gaps?

Discovery #4: Experimenting with and practicing new behaviours, thoughts, and feelings to the point of mastery.

Discovery #5: Developing supportive and trusting relationships that make change possible.

They state that ideally, the progression occurs through discontinuity - a moment of discovery - that provokes not just awareness, but also a sense of urgency.

In Part 3 of the book, the authors overlay the emotional framework that they outline for leadership to Teams and the Organization at large. They provide the reader with multiple examples from real cases which explains the concepts in an application oriented manner which the reader can easily connect with and understand.

Tucked in the Appendix section is a very interesting discussion around EI Vs IQ. In this the authors have analyzed data from about 500 leadership competency models of organizations of all hues and size. Their findings is that 80-90% of the competencies are contributed by EI and only the rest by Cognitive competencies, which they refer to as ‘threshold competencies’. This itself can generate a vibrant discussion on this topic.

On the whole a very formidable treatise on Leadership which is very contextual to the current times - VUCA, and challenges faced by organizations big and small. A must read for every professional, who even remotely has responsibility for this critical process.

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Book Review
Snakes In Suits When Psychopaths Go To Work

Reviewed By

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Suvro has close to 16 years of cross functional experience in the fields of HRIT and HRIS, HR business process consulting and as a Generalist HR in multiple industries. He has been instrumental in and led concept-to-execution-level work in large scale complex HR projects for more than 3 $50bn+ global customers, and HRBP assignments. Suvro has been associated with Human Capital Studies and practice, associated with multiple international and national HR forums and is a free-lance writer on articles associated with Human Resources. His interest areas include Employee Econometrics, Operations Research techniques and their implementation in HR areas, HR metrics and Employee branding.
**Book Review**

**Snakes In Suits When Psychopaths Go To Work**

Quoting the 1955 Jo Hari framework during an introductory SKIP-level workshop had an obvious question from a participant employee – why does Human Resources as a function still use what appears to be ‘Palaeolithic’ frameworks (couldn’t artificial consciousness, predicate calculus, ontology and such contemporary elements replace them, in a world that has far moved ahead?). I am still not sure why we do, except that it possibly requires a deeper observation over time to believe that what drives behaviour at workplace today regardless of generations of employees, gender, the industry and culture, are something fundamental that do not change over time, and in most cases, are highly convergent.

The book ‘Snakes in Suits’ for example, is a 2006 non-fiction book by industrial psychologist Paul Babiak and Criminal psychologist Robert D. Hare, that can only increase in relevance and go high on prominence, even in 2017 and onwards – like it always has had been, for all these years.

With workplaces under increasing stress, it is not unlikely to have the Dark-Triad (narcissism, Machiavellianism and Psychopathy) emphasizing the ends-to-the-means in multiple circumstances at work and decision-making. The book fundamentally pivots around this theme, with subtle and every-day examples of tremendous manipulations, deceptions, flawless facades masquerading dark intents, personal gains, unbridled greed and overarching ambitions.

A lucid, approximately 320-page expression based on depth of years of research gives us insights into what appears to be a few thousand years of manipulative behaviours arising out of both genetic disposition and environmental influence (nature and nurture, respectively) – trampling others for promotions, power, fame and gain – and the effect of such behaviours on colleagues and corporations and how seamless leadership skills are, with psychopathic traits; and why despite our knowledge and observation of these traits around, we succumb to it with absolute inaction.

The book portrays the 5 steps that are characteristics to look out for - use of social skills and charm from an employment stage (1-Entry), finding out the pawns to victimize and patrons to use as shields (2-Assessment), creating stories using self-serving biases and malign against others (3-Manipulation), creating a defense through confrontation using techniques of character assassination to maintain and drive agenda (4-Confrontation) and then finally throwing out even the patron to gain the ultimate position or source/chair of power (5-Ascension).

With a tremendous ability to read into people and their weaknesses, excellent oral communication skills delivered with apparent confidence and aggression (jumping into conversations without social inhibitions that hamper most people), masters in the art of impression management, there are people at workplaces who stand out – like the ‘perfect invisible predator’. The book cautions that like all other complex social behaviours, there can be people who are charming, effective, socially facile communicators and are still honest. The thin line is where people use these abilities with insincerity not caring about feelings of others and as tools to take unfair advantages – as against the normal social need to be liked and respected.

The book clearly differentiates between psychopathy, narcissism and Machiavellianism in laymen’s language – all of them being personality disorders – and where they converge in specific cases. Psychopathy, according to studies quoted in this book, is referred to as the ‘mean side of the dark triad’, combing features of both narcissism and Machiavellianism with aggressive and antisocial tendencies.
In specific cases, leadership behaviour when encouraged through large incentives and extremely high target-setttings is prone to achieving the ends regardless of the means. The desire to stay on the top and getting what one wants whether it is deserved or not, is a road map to amoral personal and corporate success. Though organizations have evolved methods of formalization and standardizations (typically rule-breaking psychopaths will find it challenging in highly structured traditional bureaucracies, organizations that emphasize structured interviews, team-play, high levels of accountability through structured goal-setting and performance measurements, etc), the book elaborates how large organizations are actually a lure for psychopathic personalities – by virtue of their tremendous manipulative power (right from the interview, through appraisal discussions, to promotions and connections to patrons). It is easier to see through manipulations in a junior level or technical role, than at higher positions where job-requirements entail stuff like ‘critical thinking’, ‘strategic planning’, ‘freedom to act’, ‘leadership’ etc; because gut-feel and ‘chemistry’ becomes important in deciding the candidate, that is precisely where the psychopathic traits succeed in manipulations, and that is just the start. It is a common knowledge amongst executive recruiters that more than 15% of resumes from senior executives contain outright lies, and the same is there on social media like LinkedIn.

There is something uncannily cold in the behaviour of psychopaths, under guise of social warmth. Unconcerned about the impact of their behaviour on others, most of their responses are not based on cognitive and intellectual appraisal of the situations – and the decisions they take reflect this coldness. A talented corporate fraudster, the book mentions, easily comes across to executives as an ambitious and enthusiastic player, where competence and loyalty are ‘assumed’ and not challenged/tested. It is therefore important to keep an eye out on an executive who repeatedly engages in activities indicative of lack of integrity, is prone to engage in speculative ventures/accept unusually high business risks, displays poor attitude towards compliance with regulatory or legislative obligations, is evasive of the audit team, etc

There are solutions available to control entry and breeding of psychopaths in the organization. The first solution is to slow down and spend time on questions (3 levels down on each question) – were goals really achieved? Was there a trail of bodies left behind, or a triumphant team? Was the achievement sustainable or manipulated as a one-off spike for the sake of a Board review? Has this person even talked about failure at all, without a direct question on it?

The book cautions labelling someone a psychopath looking at isolated characteristics, or not being formally trained to decipher traits. It however remains to be one of the most powerful gauges to enhance awareness and increase observation on the environment around to not make it a psychopathic fiction.
Message from Editorial Board

Since your journal has become online since January, 2016, you need to make sure that your email id is updated with NHRDN national secretariat. Without your correct email ID we will be not in a position to send you the issues at regular interval. In case you or your fellow professionals and members have any problem in receiving the journal online do write to Pranay Ranjan (pranay.ranjan@nationalhrd.org) at national secretariat.

As you also have noticed that all our issues are theme based and therefore we do not publish any article in a particular issue that is not related to the theme. So our request to future contributors will be to plan your contributions based on the future themes only and send me your contribution only at me@nationalhrd.org. Please also note that final decision to include your article will be based on the decision of the guest editor for that particular issue and the editorial team. We would also like to know about the themes/contemporary issues that you want to focus us in our future issues. Please send your suggestions and feedback to me@nationalhrd.org after reading this issue.
Network HRD Network

The National HRD Network, established in 1985, is an association of professionals committed to promoting the HRD movement in India and enhancing the capability of human resource professionals, enabling them to make an impactful contribution in enhancing competitiveness and creating value for society. Towards this end, the National HRD Network is committed to the development of human resources through education, training, research and experience sharing. The network is managed by HR professionals in an honorary capacity, stemming from their interest in contributing to the HR profession. The underlying philosophy of the NHRDN is that every human being has the potential for remarkable achievement. HRD is a process by which employees in organizations are enabled to:

- acquire capabilities to perform various tasks associated with their present and future roles;
- develop their inner potential for self and organizational growth;
- develop an organizational culture where networking relationships, teamwork and collaboration among different units is strong, contributing to organizational growth and individual well-being.