INDIAN INSIGHTS INTO HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN ORGANIZATIONS

by

Debashis Chatterjee
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INTRODUCTION:

This paper expresses an emerging paradigm in human development in organizations. It highlights a radical shift in perspective in the way managers negotiate the reality of their existence. Drawing upon the eternal laws of nature from the world's most ancient spiritual traditions, the paper recreates a rationale for their continuing relevance in human development in Indian organizations at the turn of the century. Finally, the paper articulates the essence of 'personal mastery' in organization as a shift in the managerial consciousness:

From

Organization as construction ... Mind map of reality/Idea ...
Idealizing the real ... Intellectual exercise ...
Brainstorming ... Job enrichment ...
Managerial capability ... Quality circles ...
Balanced personality ... Virtual reality ...
Organized living ...

To

Organization as creation ... Real ground of body-mind experience ...
Realizing the ideal ... Emotional culture ...
Thought calming ... Self-enrichment ...
Managerial capability ... Quality consciousness ...
Integrated person ... Virtuous reality ...
Toward whole life ...

Organizations are not human inventions. They are neither the outcome of man's crafty thinking nor quite the marvels of our industrial-technological civilization as we often tend to believe. The story of organizations is to be found in Nature's manuscript - the unwritten book of Nature which scripts in vivid details the fundamental quest of all life forms to manifest...
their fullest potential for collective action. A honeycomb is a realization of the organizational instinct inherent in the bee. The basic design of the honeycomb is an intricate hexagonal structure with walls that slope at a precise angle of thirteen degrees to the horizontal. It is an act of sophisticated civil engineering which prevents the honey from running out. Bees also demonstrate the air-conditioning mechanism implicit in natural intelligence by crowding themselves into a dense mass when the honeycomb is created. The temperature of this mass is held constant between thirty-four and thirty-five degrees Celsius which is necessary for secretion of wax. All these happen as the unerring instinct of the bee begins to orchestrate itself with the laws of Nature. The honeycomb is not a building which is laboriously constructed brick by brick. It is an outcome of spontaneous creation; a piece of architecture that emerges from the blueprint of conscious nature.

ORGANIZATIONS: FROM CONSTRUCTION TO CREATION

In trying to understand the nature of human organizations one ought to make a distinction between creation and construction. While creation is a living process, construction is a finished or unfinished structure of frozen life. Creation is multi-dimensional and dynamic; construction is sequential, progressing step-by-step. A tree growing from a seed is creation; a building rising from its foundation is construction. In the tree the form emerges from inside-out; in the building
the form is given shape from outside-in. When a small plant emerges from the soil there is something very magical about it - the tiny twig is already a whole structure of multi-cellular compartments complete with intercom connections of intercellular intelligence and painted with a soothing shade of green. While creating a plant, the intelligence inherent in the seed performs a multiple and simultaneous range of functions with effortless ease. In construction parts are added on to conform to an idea of the whole; in creation it is the whole which conceives, manifests and becomes the whole. Creation is the emergence of the whole as the whole.

Any human organization has both a creative aspect and a constructive aspect. While the energy and vision of its members constitute the creative element of the organization, the functional division of the organization into Design, Manufacturing or Marketing constitute the constructive element. Creation provides the organization with its core impulse, or the spirit of enterprise. Construction provides the tools and mechanisms for channelizing impulse into activity.

Creation and construction have to maintain a fine balance if the organization wants to remain healthy. Obsessive focus on construction -- structures, systems and procedures -- will constrict the life-breath of the organization and suffocate it to death. While the creative energy of the organization is the invisible domain of organizational life, it is nevertheless
real. We often confuse invisibility with non-reality and forget to nurture those subtle elements of organized activity like trust, integrity and co-operative spirit. When neglected, these invisible aspects become very visible as symptoms of organizational disease like rapid turnover, excessive bureaucratization, spawning a culture of sycophancy and the like. Managers often find it very tempting to tamper too much with the constructive element of organizations. The reason is very obvious -- it gives greater visibility to their management functions and brings greater rewards. A design man is obsessed with an exotic design that will show him up as a performer irrespective of its value for the organization.

Very often the process of construction of organizations leads to rigid "constructs." These constructs are nothing but ideas or perceptions resulting from repeated sense impressions. For example, a new performance review system was introduced in an Indian organization by an external consultant employed by the CEO. This CEO, who had previous experience in the army, was inclined to change the existing 2-pages long performance review form of the Company with a more lengthy one with greater provisions for supervision and control. The consultant duly complied with the CEO's desire and produced a 10-pages long form which soon replaced the existing one. The initial enthusiasm of the personnel department in introducing the new tool and the exaggerated reports of its effectiveness with which they fed this CEO reinforced in him the infallibility of his command and
control system of management. The accumulation of selective feedback on his management style created a construct or mind-map which prompted the CEO to disregard such symptoms of organizational disease as increasing employee resentment and absenteeism. When after a time lapse, the same CEO discovered that "ordering around" is resulting a anger and hostility among employees and stoppage of information flow from the junior staff, he began to question unrealistic assumptions that went into his construct and blocked his perception of reality. Most CEOs become acutely aware of the non-functional corpse of their constructs, but very few of them are wise enough to enliven their frozen mental maps with the creative impulse which is inherent in their own consciousness. Instead, most CEOs search for solutions in other constructs, alternative mind-maps, quick-fix consultants who would repair the non-functioning part of the organization or replace it with a new model. This is an easy way out as it saves the CEO the pain involved in confronting his deeply ingrained beliefs and clearing the cobwebs of his own mind.

FROM IDEA TO EXPERIENCE

An effective manager has to be an uncompromising truth seeker. A manager’s ability to take effective decisions is a function of his ability to process reality. Very often, reality or truth is confused with facts. However, facts may or may not
always tell the truth. We all know how a craftily arranged set of numerical facts can produce a healthy looking balance sheet for a sick Company. In the same way a sub-standard product can find a good market for some time when some of the facts about it are highlighted while others are ignored by the marketing personnel. It is abundantly clear to us that facts can be mere constructs which are sometimes contrary to truth. While facts can create certain idea of reality -- reality itself is function or direct experience. To put it in another way, our direct experience of reality alters the premises of the reality around us. To use a simple example, nothing makes us aware more acutely about the reality of our teeth than the experience of the toothache. Thus, there is something living and vital about a lived experience that makes it more powerful than the idea of it.

In the context of the organization a manager has to experience and process two kinds of realities. One is the reality of outer environment while the other is the reality of the inner environment -- the ground of his body-mind-senses complex. The manner in which he manages his inner reality has a direct bearing on his ability to process outer reality. The ancient seers of India who were forest dwellers and learnt their lessons from Nature made atma-vidya (knowledge of their higher Self) the starting point of their understanding of reality. Much of their wisdom can be found in the Vedanta -- the essence of the Vedas. Vedanta describes the constitution of a human

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being as a progressive manifestation of the energy of consciousness from the subtle (sukshma) to the gross or physical (sthula) level. Their experiential understanding of organization of the inner reality of a human being was described in terms of interconnected sheaths (kosas) like the layers of an onion. These sheaths appear in order of increasing subtlety beginning with the gross body (sthula sarira) and ending with the casual body (karana sarira). In this case organization happens not through an imposition of geometric form on matter but through an exposition (or manifestation) of conscious energy which assumes one form and the next. Unlike constructed mechanism (like a watch), án organism like the human body is a spontaneous process. The constructed energy of a mechanism unfolds in a sequential manner like in the progression of seconds and minutes on the time scale of a watch. The creative energy of an organism (like the human body) unfolds in a burst of infinite processes united in a wholeness - like the metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly, or the flowering of a bud in a riot of colors. Interestingly, the Chinese expression for nature is tzu-jaṇ which means spontaneity.

FROM BALANCED PERSONALITY TO INTEGRATED PERSON

The Vedanta does not see the mind as an abstraction distinct from the body but as an integral extension of the body. The Vedantic expression for the mind is antahkaran, which means
"the inner instrument." The Vedantic seers had explored and experienced the reality of human life as a play of consciousness that stretched beyond the frontiers of body-mind framework and the limited boundary of conscious thought. The Upanishad describes the mind-body sheath as monomaya kosa beyond which was the sheath of intelligence which they called vigyanmaya kosa. When seers had experiential visions of inner reality they saw that the body was only a local expression of a universal field of conscious energy and the mind only an inpulse of individual consciousness in a field of universal consciousness. Body-mind was therefore experienced not as discrete but as one continuum of consciousness. Sri Aurobindo describes the realities of the Self not through an idea but in terms of lived experience: "Know therefore thy body to be a knot in matter, thy mind to be a whirl in universal Mind and thy life to be an eddy of life that is forever."¹

The experiential knowledge of the ancient sages have been more and more validated by the findings of quantum physicists and neuro-scientists. Two important findings of quantum mechanics today are (a) matter cannot be reduced to its fundamental units and (b) even the smallest particles of matter exist, not in isolation, but in a web of inter-relationship. One is amazed to know that several thousand years ago the sages of the Upanishads described their experiential reality of the world in the cryptic expression -- vasudhaivya kutumbakam -- which translates as "the world is a network of relationships".
There is yet another ground on which modern physics and ancient metaphysics meet. While analyzing the minutest constituents of matter, quantum physicists found out that matter sometimes appeared as a particle and sometimes as a wave. This was accounted for by Werner Hiesenberg in his well-known uncertainty principle which explained that the observed reality of matter is not a static entity but is qualitatively influenced by the consciousness of the observer. Hiesenberg attempted to measure the extent to which the scientist influences the behavior of observed objects. It follows therefore that at some point during observation, the observer and the observed become connected. Curiously enough, the complex Sanskrit word, satchidananda, which is an ancient Indian expression for an enlightened being crystallizes the same truth in terms of human experience. Satchidananda is a combination of three words, sat, chit, and ananda. Sat, means truth or reality, chit is the process of perception of reality. Ananda, stands for bliss or ecstasy that is the outcome of being one with reality. When perception is pure, the observer and the observed become one. The result is ecstasy which is the essence of all creation.

When we begin to understand the integral nature of our being and its inner-connectedness with the universe our goals spontaneously shift from striving toward a balanced personality in the social sense to being an integral person in the universal sense. A balanced personality seeks social recognition and tries to act according to the prevailing norms of expected
behavior in society. An integral person begins to experience his spiritual affinity with the universal order; his inner nature becomes one with outer Nature.

FROM VIRTUAL REALITY TO VIRTUOUS REALITY

Virtual reality is the new buzzword in business. The Newsweek\textsuperscript{2} describes the year 1995 as "The Year of the Internet" and dishes out a "formula for software nirvana" and the "vision of the future" as a technological paradise. The informal and technological paradise constructed in cyberspace signals to me that we have come so far away from our own reality that it is time for us to halt somewhere and renew our search for a lost paradise of our human and humane values. The lost paradise of our human-ness can come back to us only if we can reclaim the lost paradigm of faith in our spiritual self and our hope for a sustainable universe. Faith is not blind superstition, it is a vision of the truth about our sacredness. As India’s mystic poet Rabindranath Tagore once said, faith is the song of a bird in the dark of the night who knows that dawn is not far away. Hope is the outcome of faith. We still hope that the earth will survive the scares of nuclear holocausts, earthquakes, global warming and deforestation because we have faith in something larger than a human being, we have faith in humanity.

Virtual reality can construct a heaven of information but can it give us the experience of real freedom? We can simulate sex on screen but can we experience love? A computerized
forecast may tell us how the organization is going to do in the near future but can it tell us how the members of the organization are going to feel about what they do? Virtual reality points to us however that mere accumulation of facts is not reality, but a pretence for reality. We believe the computer-experts when they tell us that sense-based data is virtual or illusory and that they can fool us by constructing the illusion on screen. Yet we call it primitive superstition when a Buddha or a Shankaracharya teaches us that sensory life is maya or an illusory construct of reality. Buddhist metaphysics tells us that our entire universe is governed by the law of Dependent Origination. An object or idea arises out of the womb of another and this in turn gives rise to another and so it goes on-ad infinitum. According to this law no structure in this world is permanent or unchanging. So, it follows that all acts of construction is impermanent or aniccam. This phenomenon can be realized through panna or right knowledge which will teach us that everything that bears a name and form is in flux. To be attached to name and form is to be committed to selfishness and the illusory ego which weakens any organized activity.

The Sanskrit word maya has the same root as the English word measure. The world of sense perceptions is the limited world of facts and measurements. The human sense organs are unable to process even a millionth part of the total sensory stimulus present in their immediate environment -- how can we
then trust our sense organs to process reality? Yet, most managers make decisions on data based on their sense impressions. These decisions of course produce positive results in a limited time frame; but they also produce negative and unintended consequences beyond the control of the decision maker. Downsizing an organization makes it lean and efficient, but in the long run it creates a social burden in the form of unemployment which the organization as a unit of society has to bear.

**FROM SYSTEMS THINKING TO GOING BEYOND THOUGHT**

If a manager needs to decide effectively, he has to sharpen his tools for decision making. The computer of course helps him in processing outer reality, but his inner reality is processed largely by his thinking, or so we think. We all know what we think in the conscious state, but we rarely bother to inquire how we think. Buddhist psycho-philosophy gives us a brilliant exposition of the art of effective thinking. Buddha's relentless questioning of the nature of reality created by our thought structure led him to the realization of Truth.

The principle of systems thinking has entered the vocabulary of business management as a result of a pioneering book called *The Fifth Discipline* by Peter Senge. According to Dr. Senge, systems thinking is "the conceptual cornerstone that underlies all of the five learning disciplines of this book." Systems thinking indeed helps us to describe and continually
clarify the nature of systems and patterns that emerge as we negotiate organizational reality. Yet, systems thinking cannot but have a limited range of applicability as thought itself is a system, the dimensions of which are limited by the thinker. Therefore, how can we expect a limited system like thought to make sense of unlimited sensory data presented by reality. If we begin to apply systems thinking to understand the nature of a flower, we will surely come up with a botanist’s view of the organization of the petals and sepals of the flower, the physicist is likely to see the flower as an arrangement of atoms and molecules, the chemist might give us an account of the flower’s chemical composition and the poet will describe the flower by putting together a set of beautiful words. Each of these views involves systems thinking. But the reality of the single flower is so vast and infinite that all the previous systems put together can only comprehend a fragmented portion of it. Thought itself is a fragmented system. When we think of a tree, we usually do not think of its roots -- although the roots are essential parts of the system we call tree.

Thought expresses itself in a systematic verbal structure or a language which has a logic and a limitation of its own. While an Englishman has one word in his language to describe frozen water (ice); the Eskimos have at least half a dozen words to describe various states of ice. When an Englishman thinks of ice, his reality is much less complex than when an Eskimo thinks of ice. In a lighter vein we may say that if a centipede were
to think about the system involved in moving its hundred feet, the creature would be too confused to be able to walk!

Although systems thinking is very crucial for organizational learning, we have to go beyond the dimensions of conscious thoughts to what the Vedantic mystics have described as illumined consciousness. The Sanskrit word rishi which translates as "seer of totality" is an apt expression for a consciousness which goes beyond the structure of thoughts. While an ordinary thinker is like a blind man who must feel his way inch by inch with his walking stick, the rishi can see a whole horizon by the power of his illumination. The organization needs as much of rishi-consciousness as systems thinking.

**FROM IDEALIZING THE REAL TO REALIZING THE IDEAL**

The Fifth Discipline underlines the key importance of Personal Mastery in the context of organizational learning. Personal Mastery is much more than a set of acquired skills and habits. Its dimensions extend beyond a discipline to what may be called a state of consciousness. The consciousness of the rishi is the classical Indian ideal of Personal Mastery. The process involved in attaining rishi consciousness may be broadly described by the work chittasuddhi which means purification of perception. According to the classical Yoga Sutra of Patanjali the energy of our ordinary mind is always dissipated by our sense organs which open outward. If this outgoing tendency of
the mind could be restrained from time to time by conscious acts of discipline like silence as opposed to speech; calming of thoughts through conscious breathing as opposed to storming the brain, our mind would acquire greater purity of perception. The psycho-philosophy of Yoga teaches us that silence gives us greater freedom of expression than speech and thoughtlessness can bring greater freedom of awareness than conscious thinking.

The primary and ultimate goals of Personal Mastery as stated in the Upanishad are two: mukti and ananda (freedom and joy) -- all aspects of human development in the organizational context flow from and merge into these two fundamental human aspirations. It may be mentioned here that freedom to choose is often mistaken for real freedom in organizations. Technology has created for the manager a whole range of choices so much so that many managers become compulsive choosers. Where is the freedom in "having to make a choice?". When there are 57 channels on our television we succumb to the temptation of choosing a channel although we may have other significant things to attend to. Mukti essentially means the freedom of our pure consciousness from the limitations on it imposed by our body-mind-senses.

Organization reality is enmeshed in structures and interlocking systems. If we begin to idealize this reality and assert that our freedom and joy lie in maintaining the existing system we would never rise to our true potential as human
beings. If instead, we are to attain a high ideal like serving the community through our work then we will be inspired to overcome the limitations of our organizational and societal systems and create new ones to serve our ideals. All great achievements in Personal Mastery have come about through people who have dared to make real or real-ize the ideal rather than those who merely idea-lized the real.

FROM INTELLECTUAL EXERCISE TO EMOTIONAL CULTURE

Human nature is not a position but a disposition. The word position conveys a sense of something fixed or immovable. For instance, when we say that a particular executive is pushy, ambitious and prone to cardiac failure and call him a "Type A" person, we create a fixed mental map of the person as of a certain type. This label of "Type A" may not always hold good as the psycho-physiological reality of a human being often changes according to time and circumstances. It may not be right to label someone as "angry" or "sensitive" as the person concerned may not always be so. It is perhaps more accurate to say "anger" is his dominant disposition -- otherwise we may lead ourselves to perceptual errors when we deal with this person.

The classical Indian psychologist viewed all Nature, including human nature, as a combination of three basic dispositions. They are sattwik (possessing an illumined consciousness), rajasik (dynamic by Nature) and tamasik (prone to inertia and sloth). It would be understood from these
distinctions that effective managerial decisions will neither come from a lazy or a *tamasik* manager, nor quite from a *rajasik* or a "driven manager" whose drive alone may not lead him in the right direction. Effectiveness is a function of "illumined dynamism" which is a function of *sattwa-rajasik* temperament (where illumination precedes dynamism). Cultivation of qualities of *sattwa* or illumination requires a great degree of emotional culture. A disproportionate emphasis on intellectual culture in our organizations and learning centers needs to be compensated by more sensitivity to our emotional well-being. Indian thought calls emotional culture, *hridayvritti*, the culture of the heart. Classical Hindu-Buddhist psycho-philosophy recognizes the heart as a seat of intelligence and cognition. Hence, the ancient dictum: "learn by heart." Emotional culture therefore has a great relevance of organizational learning. Organizations often demand high-stress performance which in turn demand greater coping ability on the part of the managers. Emotional traumas, dealing with anger and frustration is a test of what may be termed "managerial copability", rather than capability. As rapid and unforeseen changes occur in today's organizations "copability" will be a key factor in determining success in management in the years to come. This will require increasing attention to our emotional self.
FROM ORGANIZED LIVING TOWARD WHOLE LIFE

Total quality management has so far looked into the issue of job-enrichment by bringing greater refinement to systems in the job. However, it has often neglected the issue of self-enrichment through quality consciousness. Quality Circles are a reality of organizational life all over the world. Cultivation of Quality Consciousness will need to be brought to the mainstream of management education for Quality Circles to have an enduring effect. This will result in a spontaneous shift of the managerial focus from job enrichment to self-enrichment.
References (marked in numerical order)


6. Ibid.