

THE ORGANIZATIONS OF THE FUTURE

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When we look into the future we see a world driven by increased competition, which requires quick decision making. Employees are looking for more meaning in their work and personal lives. This requires the integration of all facets of the job into the core functions. In this scenario, India is well poised to tackle the future, given its inherent strengths in philosophy and craftsmanship.

Creating the future

A wise man once said that our future is predictable within a set of options, which are given from the past. We look at the drivers of change in the past and in the present and we tend to extrapolate those very drivers when we predict the future. Then we perform actions to *manage* the future and in doing so we *create* the very future that we envisioned.

The change drivers

The two main drivers of our age (and hence the future!) are Information Technology (which in turn leads to Globalization) and mankind's quest for a more meaningful life. The first driver, the IT revolution has enabled quick communication and has led to the integration of systems across the globe. Globalization of systems has made available a wide range of choices to consumers and has led to the rise of consumer awareness and

consumer activism. Due to the increased competition there is need for more flexibility and quicker decisions.

The other prime driver of change has been the so-called "awakening of mankind". People all over the world are disillusioned by their materialistic existence and are turning towards philosophy and spirituality to provide meaning and purpose to their lives. People are looking for experiences beyond simple employment and satisfaction. The increasing demand for self-development programmes, self-help books and meditation / yoga courses are proof that there is a general movement of mankind on the need hierarchy towards self-actualization.

In Keynesian times the primary focus was on providing employment, this gave way to the Human Relations view, which emphasized not only employment but also the need to keep the employees comfortable. Today employees are no longer looking for just employment or a comfortable work environment, they are also looking for a challenging and meaningful job. Companies too are taking efforts to go beyond comfort to make jobs enjoyable and exciting. They emphasize vision and mission statements, intrapreneurship, empowerment, and employability to add meaning and significance to routine and mundane tasks. Both employees and customers are more sensitive and conscious of the social, ecological and ethical aspects of business.

The mingling of these two drivers (IT Revolution and Mankind's Awakening) have had their impact in the organization. Companies have responded to the *need for quick decisions* and the *need for meaning* by launching movements like empowerment and job enrichment, which are combined with techniques like TQM, TPM, Kaizen, Customer

Focus and 5S to enhance competitiveness. All these initiatives involve each and every employee from the CEO to the junior most technician.

The essence of all these developments is the integration of the various facets of a job into one. The employee not only looks after the task that he / she is assigned, but also keeps in mind peripheral issues like quality, maintenance, innovation, marketing and housekeeping. Work is becoming more complete and integrated for everyone as compared to the past.

The integration of all aspects in the job is like the work of a potter, carpenter or blacksmith in a traditional society. The craftsman is an entrepreneur who looks after all aspects of his / her job like in addition to simply production of commodities.

Organizations of the future can be seen as elaborate networks of craftsmen each of whom looks after all aspects of his / her job (quality, maintenance and housekeeping).

Employees will be completely involved, looking at their job in totality and will be empowered to make significant integrated decisions within their area of work. In other words we could describe this phenomena as "the return of the craftsman".

The situation in India

When we look at India we see the same drivers as the rest of the world, but with a difference. The globalization has had a greater impact and assumes greater significance in India due to years of protectionism, while the collective awakening in India is almost at par with the rest of the world. The reason why we are not far behind the west in the spiritual awakening is because Indians were traditionally philosophically inclined and

quick to jump on to the new trend of "quest for meaning". The religious upbringing and access to philosophical literature and gurus made it easy for Indians to switch to spirituality.

Another factor in India's favor is the survival of the craftsman. The industrial revolution came late in India and when it did – it attracted members from the artisan classes to seek employment in factories. Something similar happened in the west, but the difference is that in India the transformation from traditional craftsman to assembly line worker is very recent and hence yet incomplete. Most Indian workers still consider their workplace to be sacred and retain the pride and arrogance of their artistic forefathers. It will not be difficult to retain the craftsman's instinct in the Indian workers and mould it with technology and standards suited to the new products.

Given the fact that Indians are already on the spiritual path and that they have retained some of their old craftsmanship, India is already in an advantageous position to compete with the rest of the world.

India's strategy for the future

India has always imitated the west; we have not only accepted their standards for development, but have also followed the same path used by the west to achieve those standards. If our strategy continues to be to imitate the west, then by design, we must always remain second to them.

The American business model, which was considered to be the paradigm for success, has been largely replicated with little or no modification in several developing countries

including India. Most management ideas and practices evolved from the west are centred on core American values and hence they cannot and should not be blindly imported to developing countries such as India where the cultural, social, political, economic and judicial environments are vastly different than that of the United States.

In order to beat the west we must look within for our inherent competencies and capitalize on them. We must define our own standards for development and adopt our own path to achieve those standards.

Indian values and ideals must be used as the building blocks of our strategy to come up with creative methods of competing beyond the traditional discriminators of price, quality, distribution, productivity and financial wizardry.

We must maintain and reinforce our strengths in spirituality and craftsmanship and simultaneously look for creative Indian solutions for efficient communication systems, flexible organization structures and effective employee retention policies to compete in world markets.

All said and done....

We have looked at the future using our knowledge of the past. Except for some chance events, people will act according to their predictions and create their own future.

Information Technology and the Awakening of Mankind promise to revolutionize the organization into a flexible and dynamic entity with networks of empowered and intelligent workers free of the drudgery of routine and mundane tasks. So at the

beginning of the new millenium, can we all look forward to a more exiting and enriching work-life?

We may try hard to create our vision of the future, but there are other forces at work. People all over the world are at different levels of physical, mental and spiritual well being. For them, the future is just an extension of the present and the year 2000 does not promise any drastic transformation.

What we have discussed academically needs to be tested in the edifices of brick and mortar within which these men and women carry on their business. Corporations may evolve and change their form but people will remain the same. They will go on with their work as usual, their thoughts and actions guided, not by grand visions of the future but by immediate personal needs and eccentricities.

Simple concepts, which get packaged as management philosophies will claim to revolutionize the work place again and again. Taylorism returns as BPR, Theory Y is called Empowerment and Motion Study / Workplace design evolves as 5S, the consultants and management institutes are busy churning out fodder for CEOs, but essentially things are simple:

People want to be cared for and respected. Companies want commitment and integrity. The successful marriage of committed people and a benevolent organization creates wealth for society. The marriage counselor comes in different forms: the supervisor, the consultant and the arbitrator. The new jargon keeps us engaged.

Distracted from our daily drudgery, we expect something exciting at the start of the new millenium...