The Paradox of Change: Within Or Without

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Abstract:

It will be interesting for us to know that change has been the only constant factor in our lives. Beginning from our childhood till death, it is change that shapes our lives and as a matter of fact helps us to mould ourselves to the external changing environment. But, is change so easy to deal with – In reality, owing to our cultural conditioning, accepting change becomes intrinsically difficult. Hence, it becomes very difficult for management to understand and interpret the cognitive processes of human beings within any organization – Models may be developed and training modules may be formulated to enhance the accommodation of any changing process, but, at the end of it all, the human mind is very difficult to change. In our daily schedule, change is often not welcome, to disrupt the flow of work. So, one may ask, what is that attribute which restricts change ? – The answer perhaps is very simple – 'Culture'. Culture can have many attributes within itself, at the macro as well as at the micro level. It is culture that shapes and moulds us, and, as a matter of fact, that little chip of culture within us remains, and restricts us from accepting and accommodating change.

Key Words: Culture, Change, Conditioning, Accommodation

1. INTRODUCTION

As an integrated pattern of human knowledge, from the macro and micro perspectives, culture shapes our behavior, values and beliefs, and as a result, has it's roots in social learning. The social animals that human beings are, social learning provides the base on which the superstructure of culture is founded. It determines the acceptable limits of human behaviour and defines the mainstream values.

Culture can be understood at the macro and at the micro levels. For our knowledge, let us bifurcate culture into two distinct parameters –

1. The *Societal Culture* – Since our inception, the culture, the environment which we encounter – Whichever notions of good and bad, the beautiful and the ugly, we imbibe from the surroundings since childhood. This is the culture (at the macro level) that shapes us from childhood. It runs in our veins, and as a result, it can be said that

we have our roots in societal culture. It can be inferred that it is that culture which shapes our society at large, and the societal attributes, the customs and the rituals that we inherit, at the individual level. Changing the society is not easy a task. We know of our various reformists and revolutionists, the pressures that they confronted in bringing about any change within the society.

2. The *Organizational Culture* – The culture that we encounter at the organizational level – or so to say at the micro level. After stepping into the corporate life, an individual comes to know about his own organization, it's vision and mission, about it's achievements and goals and, therefore, feels one with the organization. Restructuring an organization, to bring about a change in it, is also not easy a task. Pressure points will be felt and change agents will be looked down upon. As pointed out earlier, disruption in the flow of work is not all welcome. Change becomes easy if an individual feels his personal goals and objectives in tune with the organizations goals and objectives. It encompasses the organizational history, the values and ethics that have gone a long way to shape and mould that very organization and that which sets it apart from other organizations. Whenever there exists a difference in personal goals and the organizational goals, cognitive dissonance occurs, and restrictions form individuals becomes prominent.

The way of life, in both these cases, hence, becomes, culture – with it's distinctiveness of the shared feelings, rituals, emotions and values. Then, what remains our point of concern is that there is no single, generalized or universal viewpoint from which the claims of the different cultures can be addressed. Therefore, there remains the critical problem of accommodating and assimilating the uniqueness of different cultures within oneself. With this, the little chip of culture consciousness within every individual becomes a great obstacle. This becomes the source of resistance to change and other forms of defiant behaviour within an organization.

It would be quite interesting to draw a simile between the two different levels of culture and change dynamics, both at the macro level as well as at the micro level. Culture becomes the most critical term and with its criticality change becomes all the more difficult. A change in the behavioural process of an individual within an organization can be seen when there is restructuring or remodeling. This very change can be felt within the individuals of a nation when power replaces power and there occurs a *change* in the system. The pressure of change becomes all the more critical because of the political undertone that cuts at all levels of the organization as well as all the different strata of the nation. Hence, change becomes a dynamic force altogether.

2. OBJECTIVE

The idea of drawing out a macro and micro perspective of culture and change dynamics has taken shape due to the similarities in the functional attributes of an organization as well as of a nation.

1. Any organization can be visualized as a miniature nation altogether. There is a board that develops the system for the organization to function. The employees working for the organization come from different corners of the world, having different cultural backgrounds, one distinct from the other. This creates the problem of assimilation and the accommodation of the 'other', because that which is not 'self' is the 'other', the sole bipolar opposite. There also exists a seat of power to *curb* any disturbance lower down the line and to *rule* the organization in a way so that it functions quite distinctively from its competitors. It can be seen that there occurs a fine powerplay at all the levels of the organization – it just gets normalized within every individual. Moreover, with the normalization process within every individual, governance within any organization is not loud enough. For every disturbance there is an iron-hand to handle that. With the seat of power intact, employees within any organization must engage in organizational citizenship behaviour. There can be one organizational citizenship behaviour – owing to their uniqueness, each organization has one distinct organizational citizenship behaviour. This behaviour must be sanctified by the seat of power, that is the top level governing body. Leaving aside the individual cultural backgrounds, we have the two distinct cultures – the high context and the low context cultures. People from high context cultures can be characterized as fast, masculine or the *harder* types. People from the low context cultures tend to be feminine or the *softer* types.

2. Now, let us see how a nation takes shape and functions. A nation, like India, has people from different cultural backgrounds with their own uniqueness - People from the 'south' are very much distinct from the people of 'north' and that people from the 'east' are different from the people of 'west'. With backgrounds and cultures so unique, there always exists a notion of the 'self' and the 'other' within – this divides the people within a nation, without any sort of accommodation or assimilation. Let us take the example of Canada, the nation known as the 'melting pot' – the cauldron being the nation state of Canada and the different cultural ingredients poured into it for mixing. Even then there are basic critical differences amongst the various cultures which pose a tacit barrier towards assimilating and accommodating the 'other' cultures. This very notion of the 'self' and the 'other' has divided the whole world into two distinct bipolar opposites – the great divide drawing a line between the Orient (East) and the Occident (West). With so many people being citizens of a nation, there cannot be total anarchy. Hence, the seat of power rules to create a *system* within a nation. Again, owing to their uniqueness, each nation has one distinct system. It is just that when power rules a nation it becomes stated as 'politics'. It will be interesting to note the origin of the word itself. Politics has been derived from the Greek word 'polis', which means the state and '-tics' is the suffix of the word tactics, which refers to the strategy of handling a nation. Now, with the one 'system' within a nation, there can be one national citizenship behaviour, which requires to be

sanctified by the seat of power. Anyone violating the national citizenship behaviour would be tackled with an iron hand – perhaps, this can in a way answer as to why someone is exiled, in a way, thwarted out from one's country.

Just as a story within a story, there is culture within a culture. To draw an analogy, just as water seeps in through the pores of the soil, in the same manner, power seeps in through every nook and corner of the organization and the nation. In our daily work schedule we do not feel the presence of power in our surroundings – Its uniqueness lying in not being visible, but omnipresent, every time. We have to delve deep into the pages of history to understand and know how power has evolved.

In the case of organizations, during the Industrial Revolution era, workers used to be known as 'hands' – the mere dehumanization of the overall human being in its totality to just 'hands', that is importance being given to only that part of the individual which would produce. The presence of power was visible due to the existence of the master and slave notion. Now, in today's times, the humane aspects of an employee are given importance. But then, has power vanished ? The answer is that instead of power being 'without' it has its seat 'within' the individual – The person is actually under continuous surveillance and self-guard.

Earlier, punishment used to be given to wrong-doers before the presence of the king and the citizens of the state. It used to reflect the brutal aftermath of every crime. The notion of punishment changed with time, after the concept of the pan-opticon originated. The father of pan-opticon was Mr. Jeremy Bentham (1832) – With his design of the ultimate and the ideal prison evolved the notion of the pan-opticon. Let us see how the design was made – Tiny prison cells in a circular framework and the seat of the guard being at the centre of the circle, in a tall tower like structure. The crux of the design lay in lighting – all the cells would be flooded with light but the seat of the guard would remain dark, without any light. The prisoners would know that the guard was in total vigilance and watching them. The interplay of presence and absence of the guard would make all the difference. Even if the guard would be actually absent from his seat there would not be any defiant behaviour on the part of the prisoners, since the guard could not be seen due to darkness, there would be no speculation on his presence – The guard would actually be present within them. The surveillance would be from within. The feeling that 'someone is watching' would induce self-surveillance. This paved the way for the development of close circuit cameras, hidden cameras and aided self-controlled behaviour. Gradually, we become normalized into the process of powerplay.

Thus, the power-*full* hand would be tacit and invisible, but, so strong that even it's absence would induce a sense of fear. With such power packed factors there can be two ways to bring about change, within a nation as well as within an organization – persuasion and coercion.

The paper makes an attempt to correlate the society (at the macro level) and the organization (at the micro level) and their nuances of functional attributes.

3. METHODOLOGY

Cognitive processes of human beings is very difficult to quantify and given numerical interpretations. This very paper is founded on human behaviour, perceptual nuances, human psychology and the social set up of human beings. The following methodology was undertaken to reach a conclusion regarding whether or not it is feasible to construct an ultimate and ideal organizational culture –

- Organizational Interceptions

- Study and Observation

- Newspapers and other secondary sources of information.

- Survey carried out during the summer internship programme, as a part of the MBA curriculum (in the year 2005), at the NIIT Ltd. Though the survey was conducted with a view to market the Oracle 9i course to the prospective SBI employees, the same has been interpreted from the perspective of organizational change and development.

4. FINDINGS

1. The very first finding that causes a stir is the recent global recession in the U.S. – Also termed as downturn, depression, this very incident was a striking example of a lack of organizational culture. The subordinate to primary (or the sub-prime) crisis was the aftermath of lending to subordinate real-estate investors who put their money into structured investment vehicles (SIV) leaving aside the promising primary investors, at a heavy rate of interest, with a view to reap quick profits. It is one of the striking events of failure of corporate governance. Big financial players like Lehmann Brothers had to wind up their business. The recession in the U.S. had its terrible consequence on personnel management – Organizations had to undertake critical decisions in manpower retrenchment. The incident witnessed heavy job losses and insolvency. Again, going back to the pages in history, the U.S. had earlier had a similar downturn, popularly known as the Great Depression of 1929. It could be gauged that there was no learning from the past – a learning in its true sense, which would produce a change in behaviour due to experience. It can only be said that the individuals could not identify their personal goals along with their organizational goals, as a result of which there was cognitive dissonance – Hence, even top management executives sought to make quick money. Though the recession did not have its severe reflections in India, it can be deciphered that the downturn was symptomatic of their individual lifestyles. There was no one to stand up and protest. Yet, the pressure of the recession (stock markets went red, huge retrenchments worldwide, work at low pay, lay-offs) was faced by one and all the world stands witness to it for the second time.

2. Any sort of restructuring within an organization creates disturbance in every corner due to resistance to change. The State Bank of India stands witness to it. In an effort to create a strong foothold in the banking sector, amidst top private financial players, the State bank of India sought to train its officials in Oracle 9i program. There was sheer resistance from the employees aged 55-60 years (who consoled themselves by being on the verge of retirement) who had to pay Rs. 30,000 for the course, but, inevitably would be reimbursed on its successful completion. The company first sought to take the persuasive course of action. When it would not work, they had an exit-policy for their employees, the tacit and coercive course of action. If change is for the betterment of anything, it must be a welcome. It is to be understood that if the organization stands up to the expectations of the external customers, then it would reap nothing, but profits, and in the long run would prove beneficial for the employees.

3. Now, coming to a nation, we would find that just as the management seeks to normalize the employees, the nation seeks to normalize the citizens in different situations. It will be interesting to note that the divide and rule policy works even better today. Perhaps we are yet to get the things right. There are numerous classes in our society – but that's not the end – there are sub-classes that have been given shape. A caste has been created within a caste. That is again not the end. There exists a mainstream and the marginal – the one that exists at the centre and the other that exists at the periphery. The immense stratification has developed the 'powerful' and the 'suppressed'. Each cultural background has given birth to each class. – Each has been so developed that, in all its uniqueness, it would be so different from other that they would never be 'one'. Moreover, each culture has different perceptions over the same subject – this provides the crux for the overall differentiation. The immense perceptual biasness has divided the whole world into two – the Orient and the Occident – Giving shape to two different, bipolar mindsets, which would only breed the existing differences. The division within the division only makes the scenario too grim and critical.

4. Even the geographical divide has divided us mentally. Canada boasts of multiculturalism – there is co-existence of a number of cultures. It will be interesting to note that the population of Canada is mostly composed of immigrants. The criticality remains in the identity of the 'Canadian' – should the individual identify himself as Canadian or should he identify himself as one from his homeland (from a different country) ? – The notion of multiculturalism has only raised the question of fractured identities, leading to an individual's dehumanization. The different cultures can assimilate each other to a certain extent but can never accommodate each other due to the existence of the 'self' and the 'other'. The idea of a 'melting-pot' only gives way to Hamlet's existentialist dilemma.

5. CONCLUSION

The underlying crux and truth of the matter is that we are mentally divided – We have our ingrained perceptions owing to our cultural inheritance, and we do not wish to change, in any case. By socializing and communicating, we crave for a bit of belongingness – not to forget that existence of the little chip of 'you' and 'me' which is deep rooted within us.

Man must manage himself first – only then can he be fit to manage his job within an organization. Honesty and integration helps to go a long way. The quality of life must be so that there remains little scope for defiance. Individuals working in organizations must consider their workplace with respect at the onset. Only this can lead to a positive behaviour towards the organization. Once this is done, our personal goals must be in tune with the organizational goals. There should be no scope for dissonance at the workplace. On the part of the organization, top management must develop programs for continuous training and development of its employees. It should be the duty of the management to convince the employees that they are likely to gain in the long run. Change is rather not welcome to disrupt the regular smooth flow of work. At least one of the ways to implement change can be to connect it to the organization citizenship behaviour.

A positive way of life goes a long way to develop a positive outlook towards even the darkest of moments. We must not forget that various companies like FedEx, IBM, and GE had found opportunity during periods of downturn. Entrepreneurs must cash on honesty in performance, not only towards the employees, but also towards the society as a whole. We can have numerous examples of companies going in for corporate social responsibility and also social auditing, as TATA.

As far as the nation and society is concerned, even if we cannot come to terms with the differences and reconcile with the truth, at least we can try to tolerate the existence of other classes and sub-classes. The damage has been already done by giving various names to different sections of the society. But, the sense of work ethics can do wonders in bringing us together on a single platform. Even if we cannot change culture and cultural differences, we can try to objectively interpret the events and opinions of different individuals around us. The more we try to be subjective, the more will we be driven towards perceptual biasness, thus, leading towards errors in judging others.

The technological advancements and the innovations in designing nuclear weapons has only fuelled these differences – the weapons are prepared with a view towards destruction – and man destroying man can only occur when there is sheer intolerance towards each other. The movie '*Avatar*', by director James Cameron, vividly portrays the limit of tolerance of a community. Seen in a management perspective, viewed both at the macro and micro levels, man must know his limits and must respect his behavioural boundaries. It takes immense courage to say a 'no'. "I see you" - At the end of the movie, this is what Jake (the human in the *avatar* form) lets Neytiri (the female character from the Na'vi clan) know, and in return comes to know the same

from her – The very line points out the acceptance of the existence of the 'other' (for both of them) in their own respective ways. In another instance, Michel Eyquem de Montaigne's essay 'On Cannibals'(1580), vividly portrays the fact the existence of a completely different world of the cannibals (the remote tribe who consume human flesh) – During the Renaissance, the Europeans could not even believe that any community can exist, in contrast to the *then* popularly known religious sect of Christendom- That whatever is not one's own practice is called 'barbaric'. To quote Montaigne –

> ". . . I do not find that there is anything barbaric or savage about this nation, according to what I've been told, unless we are to call barbarism whatever differs from our own customs. Indeed, we seem to have no other standard of truth and reason than the opinions and customs of our own country. There at home is always the perfect religion, the perfect legal system--the perfect and most accomplished way of doing everything. These people are wild in the same sense that fruits are, produced by nature, alone, in her ordinary way. Indeed, in that land, it is we who refuse to alter our artificial ways and reject the common order that ought rather to be called wild, or savage. In them the most natural virtues and abilities are alive and vigorous, whereas we have bastardized them and adopted them solely to our corrupt taste." [1]

The point of reference has been made to reflect that it is the very trait of human beings to consider themselves as 'perfect' – The word, which in turn shows that there exists no scope for one to change for anything better, because being perfect means being the best. This thought of Montaigne has also been brought out by Oscar winning film director Satyajit Ray, in his film '*Agantuk*' – The debate between the characters Manmohan Mitra and the lawyer, Prithwish Sen Gupt sums up to what we call 'barbarism' and being barbaric. We forget to realize that had we all been perfect, so to say, then this world would have been the best place to live in, which in actuality is not to be. Hence, this *anagnorisis* is yet to take place.

The good and the bad exist together – they both are the sides of the same coin. But, what may be good to you may not be good to me. Hence, from management perspective, proper analysis is a must to arrive a particular decision regarding something or someone.

The thirst to 'know' the 'other' and the attempt towards cross-cultural programmes goes a long way in reducing the great gaps in perception. Moreover, the trickle down effect of communication has powerful impact in uniting everybody as 'one'. Good leadership practices go a long way to create a 'concern for people' environment, simultaneously by maintaining a task oriented environment. CEO of IT giant HCL, Mr. Vineet Nayar practices a transparent 360 degree feedback system by which workers put their feedback about their bosses and as well as their bosses' bosses, and at the end puts his own feedback for all to see through the intranet. Infosys chief mentor, Mr. N.R. Narayana Murthy, maintains a very friendly environment with his workers, with a belief that a good leader is always a necessity, but, there must be followers

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[1] Michel De Montaigne : *On Cannibals (1580)*: Retrieved from the OLPC Wiki
http://www.wsu.edu/~wldciv/world_civ_reader/world_civ_reader_2/montaigne.html

to follow the leader. To quote Narayana Murthy – "*I want Infosys to be a place where people of different genders, nationalities, races and religious beliefs work together in an environment of intense competition but utmost harmony, courtesy and dignity to add more and more value to our customers day after day.*" [2] – This echoes the dream towards 'oneness' within an organization, which is meant to serve the society.

Hence, an effective leader must possess charismatic quality, who will be able to convince everyone about the fruits of hard labour. The most important fact remains in learning from past experiences. Those events triggered by assignable causes can always be rectified – it is to be remembered that man - made mistakes can be solved by man alone. Those events that have their source from chance causes, need to be analyzed first and then proper precautionary measures must be put to force to tackle any such mistakes in the future. The essence of *change* lies within the human soul. After all –'Where there is a will, there is a way' – It may sound philanthropic but the aphorism still reverberates.

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