
*OD can't be defined, it has to be experienced!*  - Anonymous

In line with the above quote, the authors have integrated their field experiences of organizational development (OD) with yoga, process work, vaastu and systems thinking in writing this book. An organization has customarily been depicted in the shape of an “inverted pyramid” which subsumes the complexity of cultures, systems, structures, and processes with the organization’s limitations and advantages. However, the authors here have proposed the Tensegrity Mandala framework to describe an organization suitable for 21st century challenges. Tensegrity is a mix of “tension and integrity” while mandala refers to a pictorial or geometric design usually enclosed in a circle, representing the entire universe. The book is divided into two sections with a distinct focus for each section. Section A covers the conceptual underpinnings of the Tensegrity Mandala framework while Section B deals with a wide range of applications based on the consulting experience of the authors in the OD field.

Chapter 1 explores a new language and a new paradigm of organization design. The authors argue that traditional concepts of organization design and language reinforce a rigid, hierarchical, and simplistic image of the organization. Such representations have a limited impact in the Indian context where there are concerns around power and class. The alternative, they suggest, is to deploy lenses of tensegrity and mandala to understand organization design.

Organizations are perceived as an interplay of four universes which co-exist as well as compete for scarce organizational resources. Chapter 2 focusses on the building blocks and key elements of the Tensegrity Mandala model as an interplay of the four universes, viz., wealth, customer and markets, technology, and employee; and the resulting interaction outcome being six tensions. These tensions are critical to the model and are pervasive across organizational processes. This chapter covers linkages between these tensions and how these tensions, if not in equilibrium, impact the health of an organization.

Keeping these six tensions in a state of equilibrium along with organization flexibility and responsiveness to the four universes is the focus of Chapter 3. A set of 12 nodal roles and leadership set roles is critical for holding the Tensegrity Mandala model in equilibrium. Two key questions answered here are: who/what determines the nature of tension(s) and how these tensions are changed. Answers come by understanding the concept of role, role interlinkages and behaviour interplay of roles, both internally and externally, along with role effectiveness. For an organization to realize the benefits of the Tensegrity Mandala framework, it is essential to work with role alignment on role sets.

Organizations are perceived as living systems with an identity (or personality) of their own with specific traits and characteristics. The authors contend that as a natural consequence of having an identity, the existence of a shadow cannot be denied. Identity and shadow coexist but the latter is often not discussed. Chapter 4 delves into the “shadow aspects” of an organization’s identity and emphasizes that it is the role of the leadership to understand and manage the shadow part of the organization’s identity. Most often the leadership avoids acknowledging and dealing with shadow manifestations or pathologies resulting in serious consequences for the organization, including its demise.

Chapter 5, Section B, takes the readers to the tools and techniques for applying the Tensegrity Mandala framework. The focus in this chapter is on the process of mapping and diagnosis of organizational health across organizational levels. A step by step process to understand the dilemmas underlying each tension and how these create stress in the system is illustrated here. A series of narratives based on the authors’ experience is presented to explain the diagnostic process.

An attempt has been made in Chapter 6 to link the six tensions to key business processes that are embedded in each tension. This enables the diagnosis to get linked to the design and deployment realities. This chapter examines intervention designs that impact the organization as a system, with its key constituents—business processes, structures, and policies. Details of illustrative meta-process links from each tension, including the maturity levels for each process are covered here. The diagnosis process presented is intense, dialectical, and aligned to both the tacit and explicit processes.

Chapter 7 explores the domain of cultural transformation. A roadmap for mapping convergence and alignment within members of an organization is provided by focussing on links between key business processes and each tension and enabling teams to integrate both the invisible
culture and the visible business processes as a whole. The chapter also takes a very hard look at the individual leader/manager and how the individual manager maps his/her role effectiveness within the organization. A very different take on performance management is presented using the Tensegrity framework with "role" as the key building block.

Chapter 8 looks at defining Organization Dharma as an additional universe in addition to the four universes explored in the book. The authors call it "universe or voice of Gaia", which if integrated within the Tensegrity Mandala model, would cause the underlying tensions of strategizing and investing to undergo a radical shift. This in turn will help organizations evolve and transform on journeys that benefit mankind as well as ecology.

In summary, the authors have provided a new model to look at organization design based on their practical experience. This would be a useful work book for practitioners and managers working in the OD field, rather than a resource for scholars and researchers. However, the universality and usefulness of the model as a generalized tool remains to be tested.

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