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META PROCESSES FOR ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE IN DEVELOPING SOCIETIES

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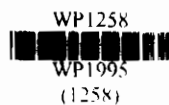
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Abstract

As societies in transition, involved in modernisation, nation building, socio-economic transformation, and increasing globalisation of their economies, developing societies must evolve forms of organizational excellence appropriate to their context.   Several meta processes drawing their strength in part from the organizational and behavioural sciences are presented. These are : revitalisation of sick organizations, institutionalisation of durable excellence, nurturance of creative excellence, development of .competitive excellence, and nurturance of missionary excellence. These processes can be combined in various ways to raise organizational quality.   A better understanding of these meta processes may contribute to evolving high performing organizations in developing societies, possibly in the rest of the world also.   These meta processes can enlarge current notions of organizational development, human resource development, and transformational leadership.

Introduction

With the exception of North America, Japan, and possibly South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore, Asian and Pacific rim societies are developing societies. Despite considerable variation in culture, form of government, per capita income, level of industrialisation and urbanization, and quality of life, most are still transiting from traditionalism to modernity. In the process they are experimenting with new technologies, work organisations, and political and economic institutions. They need to evolve new forms of management because their traditional modes of management are not equal to the task of development; nor can Western or Japanese models be transplanted in alien cultural soils without significant modification.[1] These societies face many challenges: of achieving rapid economic growth without disruptive inflation or inequality, of globalisation of economy without foreign dominance, of marketising the economy without damning the underprivileged and the unskilled, of modernisation of industry without massive unemployment, of participative grass roots development without the heavy hand of governmental bureaucracy or political interference arresting initiatives, and so on. The organizational and behavioural sciences have to contribute much to nation building and socio-economic transformation in these societies because the problem is not just that of mobilising large enough resources for investment. There is an all-important institution building aspect to socio-economic development, involving the institutionalization of new values, new mind sets, new individual and collective skills, new mechanisms of decision making, and the development of transformational leadership, collective learning ability, and innovative functioning.[2]

The attempt in this paper is to focus on some meta processes of management that are vitally important for societal development. These processes relate to the way sick organizations can be rejuvenated, durably excellent institutions can be built, competition as well as cooperation can be effectively fused, organizations can harness creativity and innovation, and pursue effectively developmental missions. Mastering these processes and harnessing them for development may be more important for poor societies than the influx of dependency creating or autonomy eroding billions of dollars in aid or in foreign private investment, for they are processes that strengthen the viability of the organizations of poor societies and improve their capacity to solve age-old problems and tackle contemporary challenges.

Revitalisation of Sick Organizations

In many developing societies in Asia, Latin America, Africa, and Eastern Europe, enterprises and institutions are falling prey to their inability to cope with complexity, turbulence, unfamiliarity with new technologies, tasks, and markets and competition. In India there is widespread sickness in both enterprises and not-for-profit organizations. An esteemed 2000 medium and large companies, over 200000 small scale units, and nearly 50% of state-owned enterprises are sick, and the volume of funds tied up in sick organizations is estimated to be rising by 15% to 20% per annum on a compounding basis.[3] There is no count of poorly performing NGOs, academic institutions, health organizations, government bodies, and cooperative societies. Goals of development and quality of life both are at risk. The scene may be worse in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.[4]

Western work on turnaround management has extolled surgery involving downsizing, closure or divestitute of loss making plants and products, and adoption of a suitable niche, price, or innovation-based competitive strategy.[5] A study that examined 65 turnarounds from the developed as well as developing countries found, however, that non-surgical turnarounds from sickness were not only far less expensive in terms of human costs but were in fact generally much faster than surgical turnarounds.[6] Among non-surgical turnarounds there was a particular mode called the transformantional turnaround that seemed to be not only painless but also extraordinarily quick in revitalising even very sick enterprises. Its chief features were that it involved more or less simultaneous management actions on a number of fronts,

including particularly mobilisation of various stakeholders in the organization (employees, unions, owners, customers, financiers etc.), participative decision making, extensive communication exercises, decentralization, team work, strong efforts to motivate employees by incentives and redressal of long standing grievances, much better financial control, formal and expert attempts at diagnosing the organization's ills, plant modernisation, improvement of various management systems, a large number of quick pay off actions, and the highlighting of the superordinate goal of organizational survival. While the average annual improvement in profitability was less than 4% in the case of the quintessential surgical turnaround, it was 11% in the case of the non-surgical transformational turnaround. This sort of turnaround was mainly practised in developing countries although there were a few examples also in the West.

Transformational turnarounds seem usually to be brought about through transformational leadership.[7] Usually a new chief executive or a top management team with this kind of leadership characteristics leads the turnaround. An Indian study of five transformational leaders indicated several traits of transformational leadership pertinent in a developing country context.[8] These included ability to take risks to achieve results, clarity about the rescue or other organizational mission, purpose, and goals of the organization, team building ability, ability to be calm in the face of stress, ability to manage the interfaces with external stakeholders, ability to plan well, and several interpersonal traits such as concern for the individual's work related as well as personal problems, openness and receptivity to the ideas of others, ability to evoke trust and confidence and accessibility to others in need.

Revitalization management may be substantially trainable.[9] Training programmes are available to increase the achievement drive of managers, their entrepreneurial behaviour, their communication skills, their creativity, their leadership and interpersonal competence, and their stress tolerance.[10] Special programmes can be designed to train managers in certain thumb rules or "heuristics" pertinent to revitalization of a sick organization. These decision heuristics include initially seizing control of the management of receipts and disbursements to tide over liquidity crisis, interacting with a wide cross-section of internal and external stakeholders to get a feel for the afflictions of the organization and what could be done about them, searching for and quickly implementing several quick fixes and quick pay off projects or decisions, frequently reviewing operations and results with managers, developing or changing policies and fixing targets participatively, appointing task forces to examine key problem areas and recommend innovative solutions, initiating some sort of short-term planning and management by objectives, keep drumming into the rank-and-file the missions and goals of the organization, especially the survival goal, keep on identifying for managers challenges and challenging tasks and keep on pushing managers to take them up. A wide assortment of OB and management tools could be used for revitalization, such as SWOT, action research, brainstorming, HRD, MBO, and OD tools of survey feedback, team building and role clarification.

Institutionalization of Durable Excellence

Plagued as many developing societies are by a weak work ethic, poor team work, conservatism and traditionalism, lack of familiarity with new technologies and international markets, excessive statism and excessive short term orientation in private enterprises, the best of enterprises and institutions of these

societies are prone to malfunction.   It is not enough to know how to revitalise them; it is necessary to institutionalise excellence in them so that even in unfavourable operating environments, crises, or under a transient or weak top management their efficiency, growth, and effectiveness would remain at a reasonably high level.

Studies of institution building have underscored the importance of developing external and internal commitment to the organization through nobles values the organization embodies.[11]   Some other studies have underscored attention to sound birth processes, starting processes, development processes, renewal processes, and institutionalisaton processes that help organizations to develop capabilities (appropriate to pursuing goals), become innovative, and make an impact in their domains.[12]   Studies of durable corporate excellence in the West and Japan have highlighted the importance of such deeply held core values as quality, service to the customer, innovation, and commitment to the welfare of employees.[13]   These are often combined with structural flexibility, decentralization, and considerable operating autonomy to managers to respond to evolving situations. Indian studies indicate that certain policies and styles of management may also contribute to institutionalization of excellence. In a study of 50 Indian public enterprises several corporate policies seemed to be associated with institutionalised excellence.[14]   These included policies of offering novel products that conferred considerable monopoly power at least for a while, strong market orientation, team decision making, paternalism, human resource development emphasis, decentralization, recruitment of innovative professionals, and a penchant for comprehensive systems of management.   Altruistic, professional and participative styles of top management seemed to contribute to institutionalized excellence in another

study of 90 Indian corporates.[15]   For durable excellence, patriotism and social and ethical concern, professionalism and consensual decision making may be a distinctively Asian alternative to Western modes of management. Such renewal mechanisms as periodic reorganization studies, "exnovation" (that is, junking of former innovations that no longer work), survey feedback, SWOT, and long range planning and forecasting may also contribute to institutionalized excellence.[16]   These studies suggest that excellence gets institutionalized into an organization by a combination of an altruist ideology (social concern related values), strategy of seeking monopoly markets by offering novel products, long term orientation, processes of collectively attempted organizational development, consolidation, and renewal, periodic bouts of pulse taking and learning, and emplacement of sound professional management systems of human resource management and development, financial, operations, marketing, and strategic management.

Nurturance of Creative Excellence

According to Toynbee the historian, one reason why poor societies remain poor while those with initially comparable resource endowments forge ahead may be that the former live in a cocoon of taboos and traditions and the latter break out of it.   Great civilizations arise because of innovative elites.[17] Some econometricians have provided evidence for the importance of technological and managerial innovation in raising productivity in leading Western countries.[18]   Thus if human creativity could be properly harnessed in striving for socio-economic transformation of developing societies, the quality of life in poor societies could improve dramatically.   There has been a great deal of research on creativity at the individual level[19]. However, for harnessing it organizationally it is important to understand better the

processes and mechanisms of management that fructify into a stream of successful innovations[20].

Some early work in the West indicated that the organic mode of management contributes to organizational innovativeness.[21] In contrast to the bureaucratic mode the organic mode downplays hierarchy and structuring of activities through rules, standardization and formalization. Instead it emphasizes flexibility, extensive horizontal, diagonal as well as vertical interaction, widespread information dissemination, the importance of expertise in decision making, team work, and so on. It is a mode commonly found in first rate R and D labs, ad agencies, and academic institutions. In a recent Indian study of 90 corporates, the use of the organic style of top management was significantly correlated with the organization's perceived innovativeness.[22] Such a mode is fostered when a sizeable organization is reengineered into one with numerous, more or less autonomous, team managed responsibility centers[23].

The entrepreneurial mode also seems to be associated with innovativeness of the organization. In an American study, following a major technological innovation in an industry, much evidence of entrepreneurship and secondary innovation appeared.[24] In the aforesaid study of 90 Indian corporates, the entrepreneurial style of management was significantly correlated with the organization's perceived innovativeness.[25] The entrepreneurial mode of management is driven by a vision of grandeur and rapid growth. The management goes for risky decisions if the potential pay offs are large. Big opportunities are often seized on the basis of gut feel, rather than on the

basis of extensive formal analysis.[26]

It stands to reason that an entrepreneurial – cum – organic mode of management should strongly spur innovativeness. In an Indian study of 75 corporates, a policy structure was identified, labelled the pioneering – innovative (PI) mode, that may especially spur organizational innovativeness because it combines many of the features of the entrepreneurial and organic modes.[27] The PI mode consisted of such policies as proneness to pioneering in the country novel, relatively sophisticated technologies, products or services, to taking high risks if the expected returns were high, to creativity and innovation, and to informality and adaptability. In another Indian study in which a large number of pioneering and innovative entrepreneurial ventures were compared with run-of-the mill ventures, a number of policies were identified that were distinctive of the pioneering and innovative entrepreneurs[28]. These included continuous rather than sporadic search for new growth ideas and in-house further development of these ideas, build up of resources, expertise, and capabilities before going in for collaborations, tendency to opt for new markets with little competition, emphasis on quality and reliability of products as major competitive tools, tendency to start small, learn fast such as through pilot ventures, and then grow rapidly, increasing professionalisation of management and decentralised decision making as the organization grew, emphasis on rewarding competence, on team work and on looking after the employees as if they are members of the family, and on building an influential network of contacts.

Nurturing creativity in organizational settings is difficult because the free-wheeling needed for creativity is often negated by rules and regulations,

hierarchical relationships, functional and role specialization, departmental boundaries and so on that characterise most sizeable organizations. The problem is even more difficult in conservative and traditional work cultures. And yet creativity can flower even in the organizations of developing societies with the kinds of organizational growth and competitive strategies, policies, styles of management, and structures outlined above. There are also mechanisms for specially fostering creativity[29]. One is group brainstorming which aims at piling up novel ideas before they are evaluated. Analogues are the suggestion scheme with handsome rewards for innovative and practical ideas, and quality circles. Then there is intrapreneurship, in which persons and teams with far out ideas are given modest resources and facilities and considerable freedom to develop and test their ideas and present them to management for a scale up, or further development, or kill. Parallel groups given the task of developing entirely different approaches to a problem are a third mechanism. Periodical spring cleaning of obsolete rules, procedures, roles, technologies – exnovation – is a fourth mechanism. Innovative teams or task forces is a fifth mechanism. Creativity training is a sixth mechanism. And so on.

Development of Competitive Excellence

Management of competitive excellence is a multi-dimensional challenge. Organizational strategies for local competitive excellence may differ from strategies required for global competitive excellence, and strategies for short-term competitive excellence may differ from those required for long term competitive excellence. An additional complexity is that there are many different forms of competition and no one management formula may work for responding to all of them.[30] Further, domains of activity or market

structures differ widely, so that a competitive response in an unconcentrated market may differ substantially from one in an oligopolistic market[31]. There are, however, some general features of competitive response, such as intelligence gathering about the moves of actual or potential rivals, the need to adapt quickly to competitive actions of rivals, the need for a high degree of internal cohesion for meeting external competitive threats, the need to be resourceful, the need for having a sensible, quite focussed competitive business strategy that takes into account the nature of the market as well as the organization's core competencies, a sharp focus on a few goals such as profitability that matter a great deal for survival, etc[32].

There has been a great deal of research on competitive strategies, mostly though in a Western context[33]. Several "pure" or generic strategies have been identified, such as the niche strategy, the price strategy, the product quality strategy, the innovative offerings strategy, etc. Research has also sought to identify organizational structures and systems that contribute to competitive excellence, such as strategic business units, divisionalization, productivity, efficiency, and quality linked incentive systems, training requirements, MIS, excellent marketing and manufacturing management, etc.[34] Much of this work is hortatory or based on impressionistic research; but it does provide a large menu of options and possibilities.

A good many of the management approaches relevant to revitalization of sick organizations, institutionalized excellence, and nurturing of organizational creativity are relevant for competitive excellence. For instance, for short term competitive excellence the organizational mobilization and quick pay off components of effective turnaround management may be of considerable interest.

For long term competitive excellence the emphasis on core values, a strategy of venturing in new areas, build up of sophisticated management systems etc characteristic of institutionalized excellence may be particularly interesting. For competitive excellence based on creative and innovative products/processes, the imperatives of creative excellence may be of great interest.

A feature not widely emphasised in relation to competitive excellence is the management of cooperation. Competitive excellence may not be possible for organizations without their mastery of the management of cooperation. This is especially so in developing societies where organizations are often quite small by global standards and efficiency and innovation levels are also rather modest by these standards. Without a great deal of internal cohesion it would be difficult for these organizations to make the heroic efforts required to withstand the competitive threats of multinationals. Equally, if the organizations of developing societies are to break into lucrative but high entry costs markets of the developed world, they will have to band together in consortia to tackle these markets[35]. They will also have to consider strategic joint ventures with foreign partners for gaining relatively inexpensive access to technology, products, and markets[36]. Industry associations will have to play a much bigger role in gathering market and technology related information for dissemination to member firms; also they will need to disseminate various innovations, to organise training programmes, undertake R and D of benefit to all members, and work closely with labour and government to ensure industrial peace, high productivity, and rapid domestic and foreign growth[37]. Government and industry will have to work closely together to trigger and maintain exports-led growth as in the Asian tigers[38].

Managing for competitive excellence in a developing society context requires the creation of a peculiar organizational culture in which there are many seeming contradictions: a strong desire in management to "win" in the market place, but also the willingness to share with stakeholders the spoils of a "win"; the need to be flexible and resourceful without losing focus vis-a-vis priorities or ethical sensibility; tight control of operations to check costs without taking away managerial autonomy, flexibility, and ability to seize new opportunities;

the ability to compete fiercely without turning rivals into enemies, since these rivals may someday need to be harnessed for cooperative ventures.

Management of Missionary Excellence

Developing societies abound in great tasks of socio-economic regeneration, many of them centering on poverty alleviation, literacy, improvement of health, development of science and technology, people's participation in development, and greater social and economic equality. These are commonly sectors in which institutions pursuing profits have a relatively limited role to play while institutions of a missionary nature, be they NGOs, government organizations, or health and academic institutions, have a much greater role. In the success or failure of these missionary organizations is bound up much of the success or failure of socio-economic development. Even in developed societies in which saleable goods and services are in plenty but "public" goods and services are short, the quality of life tends to be poor[37]. The effective management of not-for-profit missionary organizations is therefore a major challenge in all contemporary societies[40]. If the effective management of competing organizations is an emerging area of concern in many developing

societies in the wake of globalisation and liberalisation, the effective management of public service organizations is also a very important area of concern in order to avoid lop sided development and to reduce the human costs of globalisation and liberalisation.

Among missionary organizations some of the most important may be strategic developmental organizations (SDOs)[41]. These are organizations that perform a developmental function in their respective domains. Three types have been identified. The first is the apex SDOs that have not only developmental but also regulatory functions in their domains (such as the Reserve Bank for the banking sector, and various central or state government ministries). The second type is the spearhead SDO, set up generally by the government to spearhead the development of a new activity, product or service, such as the IITs and the IIMs, National Dairy Development Board, etc. and such public enterprises as Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited or National Thermal Power Corporation whose national self-reliance goals eclipse in importance their profit goals. The third is the local SDO, best exemplified by an NGO set up to catalyse local socio-economic change and development[42]. These missionary organizations, especially the SDOs among them, have some sharply differing traits compared to commercial organizations[43].

Many of these SDOs are either parts of governmental bureaucracies or funded by them, and so subject to pressures for rule orientation, standardisation, financial conservatism, etc. On the other hand they often have fuzzy missions, considerable uncertainty about how to proceed with unfamiliar and complex tasks, and therefore must take risks and operate in an organic, flexible mode for success. They must be led by persons with a strong sense of

council or structure for mission accomplishment in which complementary organizations are represented.

(5) The beneficiary group of a missionary organization needs to be given a voice in the activities and decision making structures of the missionary organization. It is not enough merely to give a say to the beneficiary group in the affairs of the missionary organization. The beneficiary group needs to be mobilized by propaganda, catchy slogans, spearhead teams, cooptation of its spokesmen, some incentives, some immediate tangible benefits of associating with the missionary organization, etc.

(6) It is necessary to orchestrate various strategies — entry, learning and growth strategy, team building strategy, network creation strategy, "user" mobilization strategy, commitment building strategy, etc.

(7) Since missionary organizations are often embedded in or controlled by governmental bureaucratic systems, cultivation of key officials in the government to support the initiatives of the missionary organization pays. At the least they should be kept informed and periodically met personally by the leaders of the missionary organization, invited to see the organization's activities and impact, sought advice from, etc.

(8) Missionary organizations are often strong in commitment to a cause but weak in management systems, particularly financial, planning, and project planning and execution systems. Some strengthening of these yield good dividends.

(9) Just as missionary organizations need to have entry and penetration strategies, they must also have a withdrawal and re-direction of energies strategy once the mission is accomplished or can be accomplished by others. That is, it should aim initially at doing what is not attempted by others, and once it breaks fresh ground and lights

the way for others to enter, it should redefine its mission and move on to something else that is worthwhile. Its leadership must develop this self-dispensing capability.

Concluding Comments

Each of these five meta processes of excellence sketched in this paper - rejuvenatory, durable, creative, competitive, and missionary - involve processes that cut across organizational types, contexts, etc. They can be combined in various ways depending upon organizational context, purpose, and need. They may be specially important to ensure high performance in the organizations of developing societies, possibly developed societies as well. All the five meta processes are people intensive both in the sense of drawing their strength from the participation of stakeholders in decision making and implementation and also in the sense of moulding stakeholders' behaviour for certain ends. The stakeholder involvement and moulding approach is to an extent distinctive for each meta process - empowerment of demoralised stakeholders through transformational leadership for rejuvenatory excellence; training and skilling, encultivation into certain abiding values, goals, and systems for durable excellence; freedom to take risks, innovate and experiment for creative excellence; resourcefulness, strategising, ability to compete as well as cooperate for competitive excellence; and commitment to ideals, domain strengthening passion and self-dispensing proclivity, ability to network with other organizations, to coopt the control environment, to learn from the field, to work with and learn from - not exploit or oblige - the intended beneficiaries, for missionary excellence. Much work needs to be done in probing these meta processes intensively, in extending the boundaries of the nature of leadership, OD and HRD to encompass the distinctive stakeholder involvment and moulding needed in each meta process, and in developing further

tools and strategies of each meta process for catalysing excellence in different operating contexts.

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