

In Search of Human Potential: The Notes of an HR Professional

Dr. Rajeev Mishra

The HR philosophy believes that anybody can do anything and everything. More or less in the same way of the great spiritual traditions of the East. Perhaps, what is missing is a congenial and creative environment founded on mutuality, openness, trust, autonomy, and cooperation.

Although HR fraternity preaches about unlimited human potential and talks about leveraging the same with best of HR practices, there are hardly few who demonstrate this belief in real life. Organizations are replete with feeling of distrust, partisan politics, leg pulling, hypocrisy, arrogance and lack of autonomy. People are talking about flat organizations but continue to manifest superiority and one up-man-ship. In such a scenario HR professionals have to come to the rescue but they are more interested in playing the role of “Daroga Sahib” or “Hawaldar Sahib” rather than earnestly and selflessly working towards development of the ‘resources’ of humans.

The success of HR professionals does not lie in procuring a ‘skill pool’ but to convert their sleeping minds and spirits into energy, devotion, loyalty, and commitment to the organization.

If the organizational milieu is amicable and encourages initiative and ‘we’ feeling then the learning and contribution of people will be much faster and long lasting. It is a well-known fact that there is no qualitative difference between an abnormal and normal person. The difference is of extremes only. Every one of us utilizes defense mechanisms like rationalization, suppression, repression, displacement, projection, regression, intellectualization, emotional insulation,

etc. to keep our self-concept intact against the innumerable attacks on our ego. But over indulgence to the extent of avoiding reality is destructive and dysfunctional to self and others.

We need to chisel an environment where people can come up with their ideas; where they can unleash the powers of their creative instinct; where their contribution is recognized and respected. There should not be any fear or obsession, there should not be ignorance caused by personal predilections. There should not be individualization or self-aggrandizement to the extent of idolizing the superiors and paying homage on their altars making it as the paramount mission. We need to be truthful to ourselves and to the system.

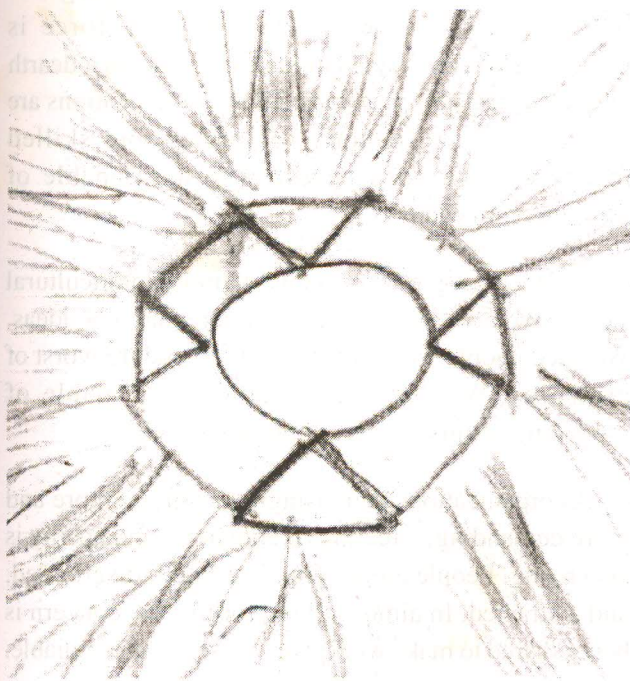
Role of Training

The organizations of today need to alleviate fear by offering an open and autonomous environment. They need to dispel ignorance by forming a learning culture where result oriented need based practical and realistic training is imparted without any lethargy or laxity. Training is an activity that can enable people to realize potential. It is very unfortunate to see that in the name of training all sorts of gimmicks are going on. The training outcome has become less important and the activity in itself has hijacked the most attention.

Like modern art, trainers are busy in offering something abstract and vague with their own interpretations without producing concrete results and without leaving any evidence of the same for future. Organizations are accepting such training because they feel that something different will lead to something good. But no one wants to be an odd man out by criticizing such obvious absurdities.

Training and development can do miracles if taken seriously. Before taking any such initiative the commitment of employees and management must be ensured. No learning can be effective unless people feel its necessity and works with the trainer to bring in desired change. Back to the work place the trainees must be given opportunities to utilize their recently acquired skill set. Mostly it happens that when people return to their work place they have to confront a situation where there is no preparedness to assimilate them.

Before accepting any training program we must check its reliability and validity that is being ignored today. While reliability relates to the consistency of outcomes, the validity indicates whether the training is producing the same results what it is supposed to produce. Many outbound programs are being organized spending millions of rupees but hardly any one tries to ascertain whether they are producing the expected results.



The management would feel that they have done a great thing for team building, leadership, mutuality, stress tolerance, trust building, and risk taking. But artificial and unrelated situations employed in training sessions cannot be equated with reality where stakes are high, where pressures are too acute, where we are squeezed to meet deadlines by fair means or foul, where everyone keeps on fighting for scarce resources and opportunities to prove one's worth, where emotions get buried and number game dominates all the considerations. There is a need to develop tenacity and tolerance among employees with several rounds of sensitivity training sessions.

Human potential and Buddhist philosophy

When people sit together in isolation and introspect, ruminate and share their thoughts, experiences, point of views, concerns, feedbacks and feelings a certain evolution is bound to happen.

The organizations of today need to learn a lot from Buddhism and Upanishads. Both the philosophies emphasize that human beings have immense capabilities. But they get carried away mostly by imagined or illusory obstacles, which mar their journey towards self-realization.

Overwhelmed by the suffering of mankind, Buddha left his palace and went in seclusion to find out causes behind human suffering as well as its remedy. After attaining enlightenment, Buddha realized that wrongly directed materialistic desires and selfishness works the biggest obstruction on the way to realize one's potential. He suggested the 'Eight Fold Path' - Right Knowledge, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Conduct, Right Means of Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mind Control, and Right Concentration.

If we feel better and more capable than others, then we need to be more receptive and open to people.

If people prevail upon their narrow conceptions and start looking at the interest of all, if they forsake selfishness and clasp selflessness, if they give up their obsession with "I" and recognize the worth of "We", if they abandon feeling of superiority and arrogance and treat others like oneself, then only an environment

congenial for self realization can be evolved. Buddha never felt that he was omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. He never projected that he was intellectually better than others, and understood this world more than others. He admitted that he was like others having similar capabilities as well as frailties. He told his disciples that any one could become Buddha. He exhorted to his disciples that they should take him as a teacher or guide who had already trodden a path to understand and decipher the causes behind human suffering than treat him as God or Supernatural Being.

If we feel better and more capable than others, then we need to be more receptive and open to people. One of the most devastating vice of the organization of today is arrogance - which could be a consequence of lack of faith in our own capabilities. We need to 'live' our own ideals of simplicity and sensibility of Buddha and Gandhi.

Human potential and philosophy of Upanishads

The Upanishads emphasize that purity of mind is more important than purity of body.

Upanishads exhort people to worship and adore the Spirit or Atman within and not innumerable gods. "Whoever worships another deity (than this self) thinking He is one and I am another he does not know". Man constantly desires to escape from doubt and despair. In the philosophy of Upanishad we find a constant faith in life, a zest for living, an effort at self-conquest and a search for truth. The meaning attached to life is in a constant endeavor to attain perfection. They declare that neither sacrifice nor rites and ceremonies nor worshiping many gods, nor much knowledge shall lead to perfection.

The Upanishads inspire about the facility of divine instinct in everyone by which "the unheard becomes the heard and the unknown becomes the known".

In Gita, man is asked to perform action with the detachment of spirit and without desire for the fruit thereof. The action may be altruistic but whether it binds the soul or otherwise, depends upon the motive or the desire, which impelled one to do it. If one performs all actions including daily duties without anger, without attachment, in the spirit of selflessness,

without desire for fruit, such action will free individual soul and will lead him to perfection.

There is an urgent need to reframe HR policies with a wider and deeper perspective. The existing appraisal system has to be made more comprehensive, objective and realistic. It should measure performance of the people and not the relation of the individual with the boss. It must also weigh the impact of unforeseen external factors. The compensation system has to be based on the principle of equity. The promotion or reward policy must be non-discriminatory and should be based on certain concrete and definable parameters. Special attention must be paid to the individual career development.

Demand of current situation

The leadership of today must adopt a broad approach. They must introspect and re-look at their styles. Manpower of today is more demanding than ever before. The opportunities are tremendous but there is acute shortage of talented skill pool. Such a predicament has led to inter-sectoral permeability and mobility that was never witnessed in the past to such an extent. The pace of technological growth has been phenomenal due to which reason obsolescence has multiplied. The mergers, acquisitions and consolidation have become common phenomena. Boundaries of organizations are no more restricted to one country only. Even smaller companies are vying for intercontinental stakes. Though work force is increasing with a very swift pace but there is a dearth of quality manpower. Almost all the organizations are suffering due to paucity of trained and skilled manpower. We need people who are capable of adapting with changes.

We need people who can work under multicultural forces. We need people who can generate new ideas. We need people who have tenacity to endure worst of pressures. We need people who are capable of producing results by stretching themselves.

As organizations increasingly becoming more and more demanding, a feeling of alienation and apathy is also rising. People are feeling distraught, disgruntled, and distracted. In almost all the forums the concern is being shared to make workplace attractive and amiable.

Some critical questions

As a first step certain questions are to be clearly discussed. Are we committed to harness human potential? Are we sincere in our approach to understand people vis-à-vis their emotions, motives, ambitions and aspirations, the kind of career paths possible to them, where they are now and where they want to be in the times to come?

Do we have the will and readiness to evolve a congenial and creative, truthful and trusting environment? Do we have enlightened and humane leadership that has the required simplicity and sensitivity? Are we capable of abandoning arrogance and hypocrisy? DO we have the creativity and innovation to device systems and procedures, policies and processes that are equitable and unbiased?

People should feel that they are needed in the organization and their role and contribution are recognized and valued. Involvement and participation of employees should be encouraged. Information should be shared to the maximum extent possible. There should be ample opportunities to grow personally and professionally. There should be mutuality, autonomy, and freedom. Without these people cannot realize their potential for their own progress, through

which the progress of organization, societies, and nation can be achieved.

Drawing clues from the Upanishads we may say that the infinite is in the finite. "Tat Twam Asi" means people can develop creative faculty that is conventionally ascribed to Brahman. The human potential could create gods and goddesses. It could create demons and spooks. It is the third eye of Rudra that could create as well as destroy. It drives all the virtues prevalent in this world and destroy the evils. We need the solemnity to create a culture and environment pertinent for realizing this very potential. Where every one can strive with single-minded devotion and commitment to attain what is proclaimed in the central thought of Upanishads., "Sat-Chit-Anand" - meaning, "absolute truth" and "pure delight".

Stated in a different way:

**Can organizations be a venue of
"absolute truth" and "pure delight"?**

About the Author:

Dr. Rajeev Mishra is Head - Learning & Development,
Eicher Motors Ltd.. Pithampur