

Pulling the Strings

Mansi Kapoor*

Symbiosis International University, Pune,
India; mansi.kapoor@scmspune.ac.in

We are all in the labyrinth of our own making, crying for help, to be rescued, to be set free.

The distressed SOS calls can't be heard any longer because they are now becoming deafening.....

Three Vices have taken a tenacious grip over most of us- Greed, Selfishness and Instant gratification.

Greed fuels corruption, selfishness gives rise to stress and wanting instant gratification causes us to ignore the long term consequences of our actions.

The angst has no voice or expression and hence has seeped into our lives to make it banal, purposeless and ironically anxious.

Leaders, sometimes unwittingly, in order to give some sense of direction and purpose, resort to such interventions which further perpetuate the trivialization of the human spirit and ultimately wrecks havoc in the work place.

Every morning brings a new battle and every night, a fervent prayer.

Those, who have reached the centre of this gigantic labyrinth, have become like the mythical Minotaur. Not realizing, that it is actually he, who is in captivity due to his own half beastly nature.

"The Crisis in business is spiritual, all management ideas till now have been external directed paradigms, developing behavior and skills, not character and values. But meaning and richness must flow from the mind to work and not the other way. We need a fundamental shift from the current reductionist, fragmentist, and materialistic paradigm to one which recognizes relationships, consciousness and the spirit as the right approach."

S. K. Chakraborty, Centre for Human Values, IIM Calcutta.

1. Why Spiritual Beliefs?

A paradigm shift in the basis and the manifestation of leadership is quiet discernible. From a task driven leadership, we are seeing the shift to a purpose driven leadership. From being power centric to now becoming people centric. Whilst, we appreciate the "why" of this shift, it's time now to focus on "how" to take the leap of faith. ***It's the spiritual beliefs of leaders that can not only cause change but more profoundly, transcendence which is the need of the hour.***

When we talk about the spiritual beliefs of leaders, we are essentially trying to understand, how, firstly, leaders nurture their relationship with their own selves. This

relationship is the foundation on which other meaningful relationships can be built and then also sustained.

Secondly, spiritual beliefs compel a person to find answers to the meaning of life. This quest puts an emphasis on long term views and horizons. A rich long term view goes a long way in putting things in the right perspective and again, it is this long term perspective that is the root of sustainable growth and development. Because, in the short run scheme of things, we as humans tend to be only extractive, but the long term perspective gives us the reason to provide nourishment and enrichment.

Thirdly, leaders with spiritual beliefs will realize the true nature of power. Power is real if accorded by people, by expressing their trust in leaders. Often, people with no

*Author for correspondence

spiritual compass tend to get deluded by having a sense of power. Leaders with a grounded belief system will understand that real power belongs to the people who they have the privilege to serve. Hence Power that empowers will be sustained, and power that corrupts will not last.

Most importantly, leaders with spiritual beliefs can be powerful levers for not only change but transcendence thus driving excellence within their organizations organically.

2. Eudemonia

The good life, according to Aristotle has social and political dimensions, and a good life is achieved together.

Human flourishing is the goal of endearing organizations.

Flourishing rests on happiness...Happiness, which is not seeking pleasure and avoiding pain. That's instant gratification. We are truly happy when the highest drives of our nature find fulfillment. According to Aristotle, these are the drives to

Know

Master Skills and Virtues

Connect with other people.

Work on Common projects.

Hence further translated these drives mean that knowingly or unknowingly we are searching for: Meaning, Mastery, Engagement, Transcendence and Fun.

Research done by Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan¹⁴ from the University of Rochester on their Self Determination Theory, found that humans are not the profit motivated creatures that liberal economics believed. Humans will work harder at projects for less money if these projects are meaningful, challenging, socially engaging and fun to do.

Hence true happiness. Is Eudemonia... The joy that comes from fulfilling what is highest and best in our nature.

Hence, Eudemonia causes Human Flourishing giving rise to Excellence organically. Leaders merely have to play the role of a catalyst and witness the bonding and release of energy.

3. Mastery

Each person, who embarks upon a career, does so with enthusiasm, energy, aspiration, but somewhere along, people just go adrift ...

Targets, politics, negativity, turfism, power play, jealousy slowly and steadily take over, making the 'cubicle dweller' weary. Life becomes but a set of chores, the job at hand simply fills up the day, deadlines and targets are meant only to be put off for another day.

Excellence then means only compliance.

According to Danah Zohar¹³, author and business consultant, Leadership theories and Systems Thinking is at the root of successful corporate practices and has led to a significant contribution in management practices. But, she adds that so far most theories are centered on behavior of man which is observable and rewards which are extrinsic. The author says "but what we can observe about men, is only the tip of the ice berg. To drive effective change, we need to cut through layers of involuntary subterfuge to get to the core of beings. To be effective and sustainable, theories have to take their cues from a deeper analysis of individuals and also the connections they form with their leaders who influence and craft a vision. Meaningful work in a liberating atmosphere is itself rewarding because it leads to fulfillment through self discovery."

Most "star performers" today, are people who have not really mastered themselves but have gained cunning expertise on gaming the system. This happens when, Organizations get too dependent on systems and procedures, they have a myopic view of goals. Or, talk about team performance, but recognize and reward individuals.

Excellence is like a symphony, a subtle sound, somewhere in the backdrop can make the symphony a creation of a genius. Any individual who does his task to perfection, however big or small, contributes in a big way in the overall scheme of things.

Rewards that have an element of surprise will continue to energize organizations and will not render systems free to be manipulated by "clever" and "smart" people. This requires diligence and sensitivity and a rich understanding of the Company's purpose.

4. Inspiration

Sometimes, experts tend to work in silos because of developing narrow perspectives. But, often we find what we most need in unexpected places, when we have finished the "active search" The Eureka moments always come in a flash.

Insights and fresh ideas come from stepping aside in other realms of creativity.

A discussion on Philosophy, Poetry, Literature, Stories can stir the soul, inspire and give great solutions. Organizations could do well to provide tenure based scholarship or sponsorship to their employees to attend creative workshops or courses.

5. Transcendence and Meaning

At a very basic level, people strive to build meaningful relationships and to bond. The cacophony and strife are but unintended consequences of wanting to be appreciated the most, loved the most, admired the most etc, remnants of the childish cravings in most of us. Nothing delights more than public praise from “people who matter”. The spot light has to be on, at all times, at any cost.

Leaders should gently allow people to transcend the pettiness, the meanness, and give people the courage to let them allow their goodness to come forth and shine.

The compassionate leader knows that this play between people gives momentum, but he should be wise not to let the play take over.

Real energy comes from powerful intentions, from a feeling of being connected to a source greater than ourselves. The origins of great organizations are in strife, they are sparked by revolutionary ideas, great intent, and burning desire for change. As these organizations, grow in size, along with complexities, creep in banalities, the systems tire and burn out. Vision statements become but, grand artifacts, heritage items on display, ostentatious and proud.

People need to be energized and revitalized, the founders spirit has to be living in every heart. Leaders must ensure that the spark that started the organization continues to ignite the passions of people who continue to build the organization.

6. Fun

“Wisdom ceases to be wisdom when it becomes too proud to weep, too grave to laugh, and too selfish to seek other than itself”.

Khalil Gibran.

One of the most liberating experiences is laughing at one's self. It reminds us not to take ourselves that seriously and helps us to remember the locus of our control, which any ways only extends to our inner selves. If each one of us tries to take control of our own emotions, manage our own expectations, be skeptical towards our own inten-

tions, our experiences with the world at large would be much richer. Most of us tend to do the reverse and get frustrated when people ‘just don't seem to get us’.

Irreverence, in right measures can often provide the spark to innovation and excellence. But it takes a leader of mettle to handle this spark and turn it into a flame.

7. Conclusion

“The most beautiful and deepest experience a man can have is the sense of the mysterious. It is the underlying principle of religion as well as all serious endeavor in art and science. He who never had this experience seems to me, if not dead, then at least blind. To sense that behind anything that can be experienced there is a something that our mind cannot grasp and whose beauty and sublimity reaches us only indirectly and as a feeble reflection, this is religiousness. In this sense I am religious. To me it suffices to wonder at these secrets and to attempt humbly to grasp with my mind a mere image of the lofty structure of all that there is.”

Albert Einstein

Leadership theories have been evolving with the evolution of management literature. Starting with, Taylor's Scientific Management we have now come full circle, to understanding chaos and trying to tame this force.

The change notwithstanding, the heart of all theories will always be how we view ourselves as human beings, coming together to serve a common purpose, to be a part of something greater than ourselves and the soul of all theories will be Leadership.

Ironically, what is happening now is that while people are coming together but the purpose is not a common one anymore. Most of us are only searching for personal glory, and in only pushing for our own agendas, we have become like the mythical half human, half beast Minotaur. And this is the source of complexity.

Complexities can only be dealt with effectively by not greater complexity but profound simplicity. Simplicity sounds easy but actually comes by deep introspection, profundity and clarity of purpose.

Simplicity can probably be achieved if our hearts, minds and souls are aligned, ie if we have the courage to align our feelings with our thought, and our thoughts with our actions. But for this to happen we need to at least acknowledge the power, strength and the truth of our inner most feelings. Or to put it simply, acknowledge the presence of the spirit living in all of us.

What happened to the Minotaur in the end? Here's an excerpt from the story:

Ariadne gave the sword and the ball of string to Prince Theseus. "Hide these inside the entrance to the maze. Tomorrow, when you and the other children from Athens enter the Labyrinth, wait until the gate is closed, then tie the string to the door. Unroll it as you move through the maze. That way, you can find your way back again. The sword, well, you know what to do with the sword," she laughed.

All of us, have strings attached, strings that are connected to the source, but we need to have a compelling reason and great courage to pull them and be free or else find Theseus amidst us.

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