

Nurturing Individual Uniqueness in the Organization

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ABSTRACT

An organization is made up of people or humans, who are not like the animal herds. They are individual beings with each one bringing his or her own uniqueness. Carefully nurturing and harnessing this uniqueness can considerably enhance the creativity and productivity of the organization. This article examines this subject in the light of integral management. This essay takes an article on Harvard Business Review as a starting point for discussion and examines the problem of nurturing individual uniqueness in the light of a deeper and more integral vision of the management.

Keywords: Dream work-place, individual uniqueness, evolutionary perspective, reconciling with harmony, inner unity

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INTRODUCTION

A favorite pastime of management scholars and researchers is to sketch out the contours of a dream workplace by analyzing the values and practices of "most admired companies" which are able to create a work environment that leads to the highest motivation, productivity or satisfaction in work. This has given birth to many formulas which changes according to the ever changing economic, social and cultural environment. But there are certain factors which remains the same, because they correspond to something universal in work and life and in human nature.

The Dream Workplace and Individual Uniqueness

Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones present a recent formula of the great workplace in an article in the Harvard Business Review (Goffee and Jones, 2013) [1]. After interviewing hundreds of executives all over the world, they identify six factors which can build the ideal workplace. One of them is related to nurturing individual uniqueness, which they define in the following terms:

- (1) You can be yourself.
- (2) Individual differences are nurtured.
- (3) We are all encouraged to express our differences.
- (4) More than one type of person fits in here.

The Evolutionary Perspective

The old, traditional corporate world cherished uniformity and conformity. The new and emerging corporate world tends towards diversity and empowerment. However, even the new corporate mind looks upon diversity in terms of gender, ethnicity, nationality or religion. But ultimately, diversity means nurturing the uniqueness of each individual. Equality may be an ideal, but the inequality and variation are facts of life. People differ in their nature, temperament, motivation, values, behavior, way of thinking and feeling, knowledge, capacities and the skills and the level of their inner development. The extent of uniqueness depends on this inner development of the person.

When we are in the lower levels of development, our consciousness remains more or less diffused in the subconscious uniformity of the mass-mind. At this stage, we are driven by herd instinct and blindly follow all the customs, traditions and conventions of the group to which we belong. As we grow in our consciousness, especially in our mental development, we emerge from the subconscious mass and become more and more individualized and distinct from others and begin to think and feel for ourselves. In the slow process of natural evolution, this growth towards self-conscious individuality and uniqueness may take many centuries. But it can be accelerated through a process of education and a favorable outer environment which felicitates and encourages people to consciously develop their individual uniqueness.

But what is the need to develop or express this uniqueness of the individual? Looking at it from the traditional management perspective, it may appear that this uniqueness is not a very desirable thing because it may lead to much conflict, friction and divergence which makes it difficult for the management to bring them together and make them work or contribute to the common goals of the organization. But when you look at it from a deeper perspective, this culture of individual uniqueness has one big advantage because it helps in bringing out the higher potentialities of individuals. Every one of us has something like a unique genius within us. We become more and more aware of it as we grow in our consciousness. As we become more individualized, inwardly drawing back from our surface self, we enter into the deeper layers of our consciousness.

HARNESSING UNIQUENESS

This brings us to two important and practical questions i.e., What is the nature and content of this uniqueness and how to

manifest or bring it out in the modern corporate environment or in other words, what is the type of education and environment which can bring it out?

The most outer part of uniqueness is behavior, which means, not forcing individuals to conform to some fixed patterns of behavior. In such a culture of uniqueness, deviations from the common or most followed patterns are accepted without any negative reactions. For example, if someone wants to follow the 9–5 timing in an organization where flexi-time is the norm and people come at odd hours, it is fine or if someone wears the traditional business suit in an ad company where most people come in fancy dresses, it is also okay.

In the inner domains, first come knowledge, skill and talents. In a modern organization, most people possess, pursue or specialize in that form of knowledge and skill which are part of the core competence of the organization or related to its main products and services. However, some people in the organization may have a natural inclination, interest or talent in a different domain of knowledge which may not be directly related to the core competence or products of the organization but somehow complements or enhances their knowledge base. For example, a programmer in the software firm who is interested in higher Mathematics or Sanskrit Grammar or Philosophy. The culture of uniqueness will help encourage and provide whatever felicities it can give to such people to pursue their inclinations and interests.

Goffee and Jones [1] talk about an organization where complementary knowledge and skills are consciously cultivated:

- "For example, at LVMH, the world's largest luxury goods company (and growing rapidly), you would expect to find brilliant, creative innovators like

Marc Jacobs and Phoebe Philio. And you do. But alongside them, you also encounter a higher than expected proportion of executives and specialists who monitor and assess ideas with an analytical business focus. One of the ingredients in LVMH's success is having a culture where opposite types can thrive and works cooperatively. Careful selection is part of the secret: LVMH looks for creative people who want their designs to be marketable and who in turn are more likely to appreciate monitors who are skilled at sporting commercial potential (Goffee and Jones, 2013) [1].

- The third factor of uniqueness is nature and temperament. In Indian thought, it is called Swadharma, one's own self-nature. This Indian perspective classifies human beings into four types based on Swadharma. First is the one with a natural inclination for knowledge, values and ideas, who lives predominantly in his mental, moral and aesthetic being. Second is the type with an inclination for power, action, conquest, mastery and leadership, who lives in the consciousness of his will and vital energy. The third type is the one who tends towards mutuality, harmony, building relationships, organization and pragmatic adaptation to life. The fourth type is the one who has the natural inclination for service, helpfulness, and craftsmanship and material execution. There can be many other similar classifications. The culture of uniqueness will provide all the help it can to each individual to discover appropriate activities or occupations which are in harmony with his or her natural Swadharma and also encourage him or her to work in complementing harmony with others with a different Swadharma.

- There is one more facet of uniqueness which our modern mind, heavily influenced by the ideals of democracy, is unwilling to recognize; it is the extent of inner development-mental, moral, aesthetic and spiritual which we may call as the development of consciousness. In this domain, all are not in the same level of development. As we have indicated earlier, uniqueness is the result of this progress in consciousness. Those who are in the lower levels of consciousness tend to be more or less the same in the nature and content of their consciousness. As we grow in consciousness, we tend towards greater individualization. Ideally, leaders of the organization have to be at higher levels of development or in other words, live in the consciousness of their higher nature made of the intellectual, ethical and aesthetic being with well-developed faculties of will and vital force. But very rarely we find such ideal leaders. Most of the leaders in the corporate world live in the consciousness of their dynamic faculties of will and vital forces with a highly individualized ego, but without a commensurate development in the consciousness of their ethical, aesthetic and spiritual being. Here comes a major problem with individualization and uniqueness.
- A highly individualized vital ego without a corresponding mental, ethical or spiritual development can become a perpetual source of conflict and friction, because without this higher development, ego at the lower level cannot achieve unity and harmony with others.

RECONCILING UNIQUENESS WITH HARMONY

Here comes the remedy to the other practical question i.e., How to reconcile individual uniqueness with the need for

unity and harmony? There must be an equal motivation and encouragement towards inner development in the mental, moral and spiritual domain which leads to an inner unity and harmony with others. In the mental level, there must be a broadness in the mind which can understand with clarity and conviction that diversity is a fact and there can be a large variation in thinking, feeling, understanding and behavior and therefore an enlightened acceptance of the uniqueness of others and a willingness to learn from, work with and complement others who are different from oneself.

At a higher level, there must be a deeper bond between people in their minds and hearts. There is a growing recognition of the need for a uniting vision, mission and values in the new management thinking. A higher purpose or vision which brings a deeper and higher meaning to work beyond the self-interest of individuals, and provides compelling motivation to work together, can create a mental bond but it cannot unite the hearts. Along with a common purpose, there must be a mutual goodwill in our thoughts and feelings. To arrive at this goodwill, we have to consciously cultivate all thoughts and feelings which can forge this goodwill like kindness, forgiveness, helpfulness, sympathy, generosity, and understanding and reject everything which is contrary to it like anger, jealousy, ill will, resentment. When this inner unity and bonding at the psychological level is forged, then any amount of outer variation in behavior, skill, knowledge, thinking, and feeling can be allowed without much conflict or friction.

When an organization is able to achieve this inner psychological unity, it is ready to take the higher leap towards a still deeper oneness in the consciousness of our spiritual self which is the source of everlasting unity, where we can feel others

as part of our own self. This requires a yogic discipline of progressive interiorization. When a group of people are able to achieve this highest inner oneness, then all problems of diversity or uniqueness disappear. A deeper spiritual intuition develops in people and links all individuals in an orchestra of mutually complementing harmony.

CONCLUSION

An organization is not like an animal pack; it is made of human beings who are unique individual. For harnessing the full potential of human being this uniqueness of people has to be carefully nurtured and not suppressed in group-think. This uniqueness manifests itself at four levels i.e. behavior, knowledge, skill and talents, nature and temperament, extent of inner development. The individual uniqueness has to be nurtured at all these levels. But a highly individualized vital ego without a corresponding mental, ethical and spiritual development becomes a source of conflict because without this higher development, ego at the lower level cannot achieve unity and harmony with others. So for reconciling individual uniqueness with harmony, there must be an equal encouragement towards inner development in the mental, moral and spiritual domains. An organization as a collectivity has to strive towards a psychological and spiritual unity among people at the inner and deeper levels of consciousness. If we are able to arrive at this inner unity in consciousness any amount of variation or uniqueness in behavior, knowledge, thinking or feeling can be allowed without much conflict and friction.

REFERENCES

- [1] Coffee R, Jones G. *Creating the Best Workplace on Earth*. Harvard Business Review. May 2013; 80–90p.