

MANAGEMENT THINKING FROM THE WISDOM MANAGEMENT LITERATURE OF INDIA

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MANAGEMENT is an integrative discipline in that it includes relevant concepts and techniques developed in many other disciplines. Of course, integration is more than a mere collection of knowledge from other disciplines. Integration itself produces additional valuable concepts and techniques (Herbert, 1975). Since the dawn of scientific management, management scholars and practitioners have been endeavouring to integrate different levels of human experience – science and religion, ethics and politics, traditionalism and modernism etc. – into their management thinking. Nevertheless, we have reasons to believe that the Mainstream Management Literature of the West (MMLW) is still lopsided towards “skills”, while it is high time to recognize that management is a function of both “skills” and “values” (Chakraborty 1991). For holistic managerial effectiveness, managers should equip themselves with both “skills” and “values”. And possibly because of giving too much emphasis on “skills” MMLW is bulging with many newer and newer management concepts and techniques which we consider are not at all positive necessities for organizational management.

It is however cheering to note that some management thinkers, particularly of India, have started working against this lopsidedness, both individually (Chakraborty) and institutionally. Mention may be made especially of the “Management Centre for Human Values” (MCHV) of “Indian Institute of Management Calcutta” (IIM-C). Since its establishment in 1992, the Centre has been dealing with the values dimension of management. The Centre has been conducting national and international level management development workshops on “Management by Human Values: Indian Insights”. And for that purpose the Centre is taking lessons from Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi and Sri Aurobindo – the four pillars of the contemporary wisdom literature of India – and many other great minds of India and other countries of the world. The Centre has turned also to the source of their wisdom: The ancient wisdom literature of India, Vedic and others. Thus, in the process, we are coming up with a whole new genre of management literature what we like to describe in the present paper as “The Wisdom Management Literature of India” (WMLI). The rationale for giving such a nomenclature or title is two fold: (i) the theories, principles and practices integrated into this new management literature have been and are being explored mainly from the wisdom literature of India; and (ii) the objective of this integration is to prepare wisdom managers for future organizations. In this connection it should be noted that the knowledge of “what is” does not automatically lead to an understanding of “what should be”. The latter task is dependent on wisdom which embraces yet transcends knowledge (Chakraborty 1987).

We have however reasons to apprehend that since it is based on Indian thought or ethos which is essentially spiritual, this new management literature is difficult to be readily accessible and acceptable in its entirety to the management scholars and practitioners who have already developed their secular management logic from MMLW, particularly to those who have no idea about the

range, depth and height of the traditional or ancient wisdom of India and no experience or belief in the spiritual dimension of life. At the same time, we are confident that even without going straight away to the spiritual dimension of life management scholars and practitioners can derive huge benefits by studying WMLI as a human values approach, as opposed to an engineering approach.

For all practical purposes, therefore, the study of WMLI can be a journey in two phases: (i) Human Values for Management Development; and (ii) Indian Insights for Human Values. But under all circumstances we should be ready to think hard because some propositions reveal their truth only on deeper thought. We will have to appreciate that in many soft areas of management poetic interpretation is more expressive than scientific explanation; subjective experience is more useful than objective verification. Lest we will miss many deeper issues of organizations and the individuals engaged therein.

Human Values for Management Development

Theoretically, managers manage organizations to accomplish organizational goals. After all, any management is goal directed. In reality, however, managers manage organizations to accomplish individual goals, organizational goals and societal goals. In our everyday material calculations all these goals may be complementary to each other, may be conflicting too. That is, what is beneficial to an individual may or may not be beneficial to the organization. Similarly, what is beneficial to an organization may or may not be beneficial to society. Then, in conflicting situations what should managers do? Should they be guided by economic imperatives alone or by ethical considerations too? Should managers allow individual-organization or organization-society exchange relationships to move downwards to a parasitic level or should turn them towards a transcendental height? Should a manager elevate his position from a transactional manager to a transformational leader? In essence, can a manager elevate his position from a knowledge manager to a wisdom manager?

WMLI emphasizes that a manager is a 'man' first; a human indeed. Therefore, to prepare wisdom managers, WMLI has indicated a difference between a man and a human by highlighting some of the perennial human values. Ordinarily, we all are instinctively aware of the basic difference between a man and a human. We are instinctively aware of the basic qualities of humaneness. However, for ready reference let us mention some of the qualities of and hindrances to humaneness, which have been termed in WMLI as human values and disvalues, or higher self values and lower self disvalues (Chakraborty 1998):

Human Values	Disvalues
Gratitude, Loyalty, Humility, Patience, Gentleness, Dignity, Honesty, Sincerity, Sharing, Forgiveness.	Jealousy, Greed, Arrogance, Vindictiveness, Sychophancy, Backbiting, Anger, Deceit, Vanity, Hypocrisy.

We, average individuals, in our mundane lives live with both these values and disvalues which guide our attitudes and activities. And it is our proposition that since life is a 'flow concept', the course will be either from values to disvalues or from disvalues to values. That is, we tend to live more and more either with values or with disvalues. Thus, however skillful the managers be, there is no guarantee that they will exercise their skills for good causes. Since skills are ethically neutral, they may be used for both good and bad purposes. WMLI has therefore given emphasis on imbibing values in all the individuals engaged in an organization. In one sense we all are managers in our organizations; big managers or small managers depending upon our decisional areas and their relative importance in the organization. And all human beings possess the potential to be

educated by values. Of course, managing an organization by human values largely depends on its very top executives. WMLI also recognizes that. It is our theoretical knowledge and practical experience that any improvement or deterioration in the management of an organization starts from the top, not from the bottom. To our understanding, a practical way of managing an organization by human values requires at least four steps: (i) articulation of values in clear terms; (ii) use of values in setting organizational objectives; (iii) measuring of living by values behaviour; and (iv) paying for living by values behaviour (Tanmoy 1999).

Indian Insights for Human Values

WMLI takes the individual at its central focus. The idea is: I cannot be a good manager if I cannot manage myself. Thus, while MMLW starts from organizational management, WMLI from the management of self. Understandably, while MMLW deals with the management of living, WMLI focuses on the management of life.

In simple terms, we can think of Indian Insights as the spiritual realizations of the ancient seers of India. To get the spiritual contents integrated into the WMLI one should be acquainted with the quintessence of Indian thought or ethos (Chakraborty). And to delve deep into it one should study the ancient wisdom literature of India. To our knowledge, the ancient wisdom literature of India is a vast treasure of valuable discourses given to us by our ancient seers in the field of total management of life. Therefore, our management logic dictates us to assert that the study of this literature can induce us to live more and more on human values, if we can properly explore the psycho-philosophical messages contained therein, integrate them into our logico-rational thinking and practise them in our everyday mundane life. When experience is counted everywhere, why not the experience of our ancient seers? No doubt it is a tough course. But only on that plea we should not avoid it, particularly when we take many tough courses to achieve external success or even to reach a wrong end in life.

As Indian insights are essentially spiritual, finally comes the question of the spiritual dimension of life. While MMLW is founded on the material world, WMLI focuses on the spiritual world. It is implicit in MMLW that there are two different ways of looking at the life and the universe: material and spiritual. On the contrary, WMLI emphasizes that there is a symbiotic relationship between the two: all of our material activities should be guided from a spiritual base. We have learnt from Indian insights that life is a journey from the mundane to the spiritual, from the lower self to the higher self, or from lower truth to higher truth. And this journey begins from the fundamental question of 'who am I' and 'what the universe is?'. Our answer to this will determine our attitudes towards life and our behaviour patterns in our domestic life, in our organizational life, in our social life and everywhere else. We can illustrate this point with two fundamental belief systems and the resultant attitudes and behaviours:

Fundamental Belief Systems

Material World	Spiritual World
Belief:	
<i>≈</i> I am the body; I have a soul.	I am the soul (spirit); I have a body.
<i>≈</i> Death means my death, when my body gives up the soul.	Death means the death of my body, when the soul gives up the body.
<i>≈</i> The universe in its entirety is of the stuff of matter.	The universe in its entirety is of the stuff of biles.

Attitude:

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| ✍ Body is the main concern, which is ephemeral, temporary. | Soul is the main concern, which is perennial eternal. |
| ✍ All efforts are primarily oriented towards satisfying bodily pleasure: physical, sensual, mental, etc. | All efforts are primarily towards attaining permanent spiritual upliftment. |
| ✍ More and more desire for physical pleasure and material comfort in one mortal life; as though physiological needs are limited, psychological greed is limited. | Desire for physical pleasure and material comfort reduces with spiritual upliftment as overcoming a desire is more delightful than satisfying a desire. |

Behaviour:

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| ✍ Consumerism, Acquisitiveness, Happiness by grabbing, Combative for parasitic gain. | Self-abnegation, Renunciation, Delight by giving, Collaborative for transcendental gain. |
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Now, leaving aside all deeper thoughts, just applying simple, secular, linear management logic, let us think for a moment, even in probabilistic terms, which one of the two beliefs, attitudes or behaviour systems is more helpful for managing our everyday mundane life (Tanmoy).

References

- For Indian thought or ethos, see ibid, p. 232-240.*
- Herbert G Hicks and C Ray Gullett, (1975). *Organizations: Theory and Behaviour*, Singapore, McGraw-Hill, Inc. p. 15.
- S K Chakraborty. *The Convenor of MCHV, is possibly the pioneer in this line.*
- S K Chakraborty, (1987). *Managerial Effectiveness and Quality of Worklife: Indian Insights* (New Delhi: Tata McGraw-Hill, p. 3.
- S K Chakraborty. *Managerial Effectiveness and Quality of Worklife: Indian Insights, op. cit., p. 232.* S K Chakraborty has defined Indian thought or ethos as “that corpus of theories, principles and practices which has blossomed and reached perfection in the geographical territory called Bharatvarsha, long before other cultural waves crossed into her shores”.
- S K Chakraborty, (1998). *Values and Ethics for Organizations: Theory and Practices*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, p. 30.
- We know that there is a dynamic interrelationship between activities, attitudes and values. That is, activities are guided by attitudes and attitudes by values. Again, by controlling activities attitudes can be changed, and by changing attitudes values can be imbibed.*
- S K Chakraborty, (1991). *Management by Values: Towards Cultural Congruence*, “Values serve the process of becoming, in the sense of transformation of the level of consciousness to purer, higher levels. They help us to distinguish between the desired and the desirable, between the delectable and the electable between the short-term and the long-term, between the preya (the pleasant) and the shreya (the good). Skills are concerned with the method of doing, in the sense of speed, dexterity, efficiency etc. Values are, therefore, essentially subjective, skills essentially objective.” Delhi, Oxford University Press, p. 1.
- To our understanding, managerial effectiveness becomes holistic when it is effective to all—individuals, organizations and society, for short-term as well as for long-term. That is, decisions yielding benefits to some individuals, groups or organizations but at the cost of others or decisions yielding spurious short-term gains at substantial long-term losses lack holistic managerial effectiveness.*
- Tanmoy Datta, (1999). “Quality of Worklife: A Human Values Approach”, *Journal of Human Values, MCHV*, July-December, p. 141-142.
- Tanmoy Datta. “Quality of Worklife: A Human Values Approach”, *op. cit., p. 143.*
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