Presidential Address

MANAGING QUALITY
CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES IN THE INFORMATION AGE

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In a time terrorists play death games with hostages, currencies careen amid rumors of third world war, embassies go on flame and storm troopers lace up their boots, we stare in horror at the headlines. Banks tremble. Faced with this scenario, a massed chorus of Cassandra fills the air with doom song. The proverbial man in the street says the world has 'gone mad'. While the experts point out trends leading towards catastrophe.

The Human Perspective
This paper offers a different view. It contends that the world has not swerved into lunacy, and, that in fact, beneath the clatter and jangle of seemingly senseless events their lies a startling and potentially hopeful pattern. This paper is about that pattern and hope. It is for those who think that the human story, far from ending, has just begun. And this is "technology convergence- the human perspective".

Emergence of New World Order
A new civilization is emerging which brings with it new styles of human endeavors .It is the central event – the key to understanding the years immediately ahead. The new civilization of civilized society and elite class has witnessed people taking center stage. People decide their destiny and not destiny stand-alone. During decades gone by, people witnessed new world order, emergence of global village. People took control of their future; Berlin Wall crumbled – it was peoples' choice. People took center stage; one of the most powerful state, the USSR, crumbled like a pack of cards – sovereign boundary of the nation was re-drafted; new nations came in being. People took the destiny in hand;

 Eastern Europe – witnessed dawn of communism yet in tiny – Himalayan Kingdom, there is upsurge of Maoist Movement. Sub-Saharan African seen fall of Single Party System, Two Korean Leaders seen shaking hands, unification of Germany, perceived as threat. This unprecedented world order was not market driven, rather it was people's choice. It was people's choice that brought them at Center Stage to carve out future path.

We grope for words to describe this phenomenal and extra ordinary change. Some speak of a looming space age, others talk about Information age, few state about Electronic age, or global village. Zbigniew Brzezinski has told us we face a "technetronic age ". Sociologist Daniel Bell describes the coming of a "post industrial society". Soviet futurists speak of "scientific-technological revolution'. Alvin toffler talks about "super industrial society", we talk about "Technology convergence-the Human perspective".

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Technology Convergence

The Blurred Vision

Until now, the human race has gone through process of revolutionary change, each one largely obliterating earlier civilizations. The first wave of change – the agricultural revolution took shape in thousand years. The second revolution- the emergence of industrial society took only three hundred years. The present phase is even more accelerative. It is likely that this new order complete itself in a few decades. We, who happen to share the planet at this moment, may witness its cycling impact in our own lifetime.

Many of the changes we are witnessing today, are not independent of one another, nor are they random. For example, the crack up of nuclear family, the global energy crisis, the spread of cults and cable TV, the rise of consumerism, the emergence of separatist movement from Quebec to Corsica, may all seem like isolated events. Yet, precisely, the reverse is true. These and many more are seemingly unrelated yet events are interconnected. They are in fact, part of much larger phenomenon- the death of industrialism and rise of new world order, new world order. So long as we understand them as isolated events and skip its significance, we cannot design a cohesive response to them, because:

- ✍ As individuals, our decisions remain aimless,
- ✍ As society, we keep ourselves busy in reforms,
- ✍ As Governments, we stumble from crisis to crisis,
- ✍ Lurching into future,
- ✍ Without plan, without hope, without vision.

So profoundly revolutionary is this 'new age' – the age of information, the age of technology convergence, that it challenges all our assumptions, old ways of thinking, old dogmas and ideologies, no matter how useful were these in the past, no longer fits the bill, in fact it scares us.

The world that is emerging from clash of new ideas, new technologies, new geo-political patterns, new life styles, new modes of communications, plethora of inventions, proves one fact- that human will is able to cram the yesterdays cubbyholes into embryonic world of tomorrow.

Unmistakably moment has arrived, when we shed our Pollyannaish illusions. When we peep into chain of events-from fears of nuclear annihilation, ecological disasters to new relationships, from changing energy patterns to new life styles, we realize the truth. The truth encounters us in the form of endless introspection, soul-searching exercises-

- ✍ Why, technology, a brainchild of mankind, scares us now?
- ✍ Why there is perceived clash of civilizations?
- ✍ Why there is need to align techno sphere with mankind?
- ✍ Are technological patterns and evolution of mankind, two parallel events, never to meet?

Why should mankind be scared of its own creation? Why? Why? Why? Because we deny the very fact that technology is a mere aspect of vast spectrum of human achievements. We invented thousands of innovations. We discovered another thousands. We coined software, hardware, and information technology. We invented systems and adopted new life styles. We reached new horizons. We are marching beyond the horizon. Like impact of thundering hurricane, we lost focus. That essential ingredient, that noble vision, that we, the human beings are creative brains and curious souls and not mere followers of events. More and more amazing gadgets will come, more new epochs will unfold, more technological patterns will reveal themselves but the achiever will always be one. That tiny cluster of cells and gray matter, wrapped in muscles, bundled into frame of skeleton – the human being.

The Synthesis

The Phenomenon of Change

The magnitude of such an advance – its importance for future evolution itself – makes it critically necessary that we begin to guide it. The starting point is argument that either we control technology or it controls us.

The notion "Information age " refers to sweeping changes taking place in the context of evolution of societies and organization in altogether new environment with inevitable links to technological aspects and information flow. The changes are affecting every societies and organizations cutting across continents. The corresponding impact on the very basic fabric of a society, the organization and people is a logical corollary. Needless to say, the biggest challenge of managing quality in the information age the impact of phenomenon of change and human response to it. It all begins with people's perception of this phenomenon of change. When we talk of technology in human perspective, we are faced with two alternatives:

- ✍ Integrating HR with Technology
- ✍ Integrating Technology with HR

While the former concept treats technology as prime mover and HR a peripheral, the latter makes Human Resources, prime mover and technology a peripheral. It is in this context that human perspective to manage qualitative results takes center stage.

In this information age, traditional methodology has lost relevance. Information age, however in isolation, is a misnomer. In its essence lies that basic idea of "change". The resultant impact has many facets. It has indeed became a priority to accommodate this all pervasive phenomenon and using it to make "People" a productive lot .The qualitative aspect of human beings stands to gain most from it. Nonetheless concerns are equally important; paradigm shift is the way. The socio-organization in general, will derive ways in responding to the phenomenon of change. And human survival story will be repeated.

Concerns of New Age
- ✍ A new civilization is shaping. But where do we fit into?

- ✍ If we look around we find widespread evidence of psychological break downs

- ✍ Social work and mental health industries are booming every where*

- ✍ There is a harassed, knife edge quality to daily life

- ✍ Millions are in search of own identity or for some magic therapy to re-integrate personalities

Confronting Global Realities
The moment we talk about technology convergence or for that matter managing quality in the information age, we are confronted with inevitable global realities. Far from rhetoric of expansion, integration, interaction, opening of economy and concept of global village, much to our surprise, juxtaposed is happening. We are once again moving towards unipolar world. The time; widely perceived, as one denoting survival of the fittest. When we look for economy openings, we find, to the contrary, that our own grounds are missing. The era, we are witnessing, has proved that it is strong nations who prevail upon the globe and not the global village. It is this scenario, which makes the technology convergence aspect a complex reality.

Impact of Globalization: Understanding Complexities
Globalization era has ultimately descended on global business scenerio. It has brought unbelievable, unforeseen and unidentified elements and reengineered many more. The organization became an organic entity. The organizational internal components became analogous to an engine where each component works for single desired output. If business is about money, HR is about business, the information logistics being catalyst. This is what we call 'synergy' or 'alignment'. The core business no longer remained a component to lay maximum stress upon. The peripherals started occupying important roles. When we go back to fundamental HR ideology i.e. "HR is about integration", it makes sense.

Globalization is in fact compelling organizations to introspect strategies. This is significant in view of the fact that information has become the essential ingredient for business survival. As such, business

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* *In Washington, a President's commission on mental health announces that one fourth of US citizens suffer from some form of severe emotional stress.*

organizations are undergoing metamorphism. From HR point of view nothing could be more challenging than seeking alignment with complexities of transformational change. Therefore we need to play vibrant role along with business functions so as to create required acceleration and internal capabilities.

Globalization has far reaching socio-political-economics consequences. Global competition forced business institutions to struggle for survival. While new players joined business field. This changed global perspective and put tremendous pressure on business organization to identify suitable ways to search for corporate governance norms and challenging competitions. The changing business environment necessitated emphasis on people's integration. Globalization brought with it such elements, which ultimately widened the road to step in "Information age". The connecting links are even more pronounced and path setting. In nutshell, in the emerging business paradigm, management and development of sensitive Business-HR-Information link is the critical aspect.

The HR Perspective

| **Business** | **HR** | **Information** |

HR Basics

The basic HR ideology needs to be re-promulgated for the purpose of analyzing its effective links to "Information age ". The notion is based on concepts, some, of which need to be re examined.

- ✎ Human resources are most priced assets in an organization. Its effective management and optimum utilization is the key to success

- ✎ This success is linked to vital interrelationship between HR practices & Corporate objectives and Plans

- ✎ Corporate culture and business values have significant impact on excellence

- ✎ HR is concerned with integrating these aspects.

Moment we utter the word quality in our context, we refer to those individuals within organizations who make valuable contribution to management system and goal attainment. Productivity, probably determined in all business entities by interaction and use of system resources by people to maximize output. The concern in present context is human sensitivity to information logic. Perhaps, Information Technology is one such industry where cyclical up & downs in business produce immediate results in HR practices.

The Wake Up Call

The idea of "technology convergence –the human perspective" is indeed a wake up call to the protagonists of mankind.

- ✎ We the human beings, where do we stand?

- ✎ Are we assets or liabilities?

- ✎ Are we resources or prime movers?

The Basic Ingredients and Diagnosis

Any thought of organization, society, institution or nation is based on four basic ingredients viz manpower, material, money and machinery.

When we go for organizational diagnosis through one of the very obvious means of corporate balance sheet study, we find that Material, money and machinery are listed under assets and much to our dismay human resources, the priced assets are in fact placed on liabilities side. This diagnosis indeed is an eye opener and pointer to farcical situation, ever occurring to human endeavors.

The Oddessey
The human odyssey, a process in itself from business entity to nation building is of larger significance than what generally is perceived. This odyssey understanding is not an option but is a priority. A l ittle prevarication and we will be in berserk scenario. A corporation symbolizes an entity and process of evolution. A step ahead, organization churns out of consolidation process, symbolic of organic entity. Still ahead is institution, which avers process of revolution and stand for vibrant organic entity. Then comes nation building, a process of integration of resources with faith, belief and human endeavors.

Conclusion
Human beings will stay and will sustain nature's fury. They will sustain innovations. It is the human beings who innovated technology. It is the human beings who will advance technology. In the era of human endeavor it is the human beings who innovated information technology. It is they who will integrate the same. Technology will fear humane and not the other way. It is the human beings who made the history. It is the human beings who unfolded history. It is the human beings who will make the history .In this direction, the human beings innovated technology and entered into the arena of human information technology up-gradation. The impact of information will unfold any technology but with the human endeavor only. Let there be no error in understanding time tested truth and technological innovations. The information technology is limping fast and human beings are advancing the same. Information technology will have to align with our need rather than we to align ourselves with the information technology. It is we who have taken the central stage and not information technology. The endeavor should be technology innovation and not be for human destruction. Let us join hands in re-writing the history and work in the direction of "Sarve Bhawantu Sukhna ". "Om Shanti, Om shanti, Om Shanti".

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