

## **Theme: Reinventing Work, Reinventing Organization**

### **Topic : Contours of work and organization in future**

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The word ‘organization’, with all its synonyms and varied interpretations, is undoubtedly at the heart of public administration or management, so, a profound understanding of the shape of the future ‘organization’ cannot be complete without realizing how ‘work’ will possibly, be performed by the organization in the near to distant future.

History is replete with numerous examples to explain that the process of reinventing work has been going on since the discovery of fire and the advent of the wheel, the difference across centuries being that the Industrial Revolution was the trendsetter, the major noteworthy episode which brought about the creation and entrenchment of the industrial organization, wherein hours of work and worker-output became basic yardsticks of measuring work. As years rolled on alongside colonial expansion, the maze of stiff capitalist competition gripped industrial enterprises and business empires, making the rapid ascent of industrial organizations based on efficiency, a reality, a harsh reality indeed. Further on, the world wars, the assembly line and the prosperity of the American society played host to an incredibly faster change and a domino effect, and brought forth mega corporations that were to dominate the global economic horizon, and these transnational companies crossed blue waters, establishing their outposts in the developing

world, thereby reinventing work, the work culture and the structure of organization.

### **Reinvention of work has limitations**

Though organizations and businesses may attempt to generally re-orient work processes, an inevitable feature of the on-going automation will be a continuation of the paramount role of the human element in non-routine processes. For example, though the usage of automation tools will aid the processing of equities and financial derivatives, the basic process of delivering them to customers will require tact, initiative, enterprise, and of course, when the environment is challenging, a rare mix of sound common sense and convincing abilities, and work as observed from this window, will not observe any reinvention, with the centrality of the human element remaining intact.

### **Nature of work reinvention**

The knowledge worker, as enunciated by Drucker, is here to stay, and as is the case now, will continue to be definitely and prominently visible in sectors such as bio-technology and advanced healthcare and defence, not to forget his/her presence in the high-value information technology sector and its highways criss-crossing the developed and developing worlds.

Perhaps one significant feature of work reinvention will be strengthening of team-work, which will gain further value, be rewarded more, and occur more frequently. Teams have traditionally comprised people who have not only worked cohesively and in unison, but also been acquainted with each other reasonably well, often working in the same organization and for the

same manager. A new form of teams, called swarms will redefine work in future, by forming quickly, attacking a problem or opportunity and then quickly dissipating. Swarming is an agile response to an observed increase in ad hoc action requirements, as ad hoc activities continue to displace structured, bureaucratic situations (Gartner Inc.)

Reinventing work will also go on apace due to the increasing use of the virtual world. As the workplace becomes more and more virtual, with meetings, conferences, seminars and symposia aggressively transcending time zones and longitudes, corporate organizations will find reason and opportunity to get more efficient, and realize their dreams of global aggrandizement, this despite the presence of participants who ‘virtually’, to be frank, hardly know one another. This being one of the contours of reinvented work, it is not to be forgotten that the traditional workplace will nevertheless, remain in vogue, specially for the sectors where financial transactions in cash, bullion or the like cannot be conducted elsewhere than at the workplace.

Amidst all this, one more trend perhaps will be the order of the day in future. Reinventing work will mostly be the precursor to reinventing organization, but in a few exceptions, organizational change will prefix work reinvention. Yes, this refers to the on-going relocation of the manufacturing and services (mainly information technology) sectors, to emerging Asiatic powers, and the possible future relocation onward to the African continent, as wages and prices rise in emerging markets. A highly intricate web of the quantum of technological literacy in society, compatibility of the native dialects with technology, and the reaction of the local populace to this kind

of immigration decides the extent of corporate rearrangement & the type of work environment to be put in place. This apart, the growth of ancillary industries (like food which come in their wake, to cater to the immigrants and lure newer markets) and culture parks, play their part in removing not only the ghettoized impressions, but also the psychological sensation of leading a 'gated' community life.

While corporations of the future will necessarily have to re-orient work to accommodate employees' personal, social and family matters, employees shall have to confront a blurring of the personal and professional spaces. The hours of work are bound to increase, with the private sector leading the way, and work will perhaps lose its exact meaning, in the context of a definite number of hours of performance, followed by personal time. As employers get even more integrated with employees, work will be interspersed along the 24-hour day with pockets of personal time. The groundswell of financial targets will make sure that work becomes a continuum, with the crests and troughs representing the work and no-work zones in a 24x7 period. The flipside of this is that individuals will find it a herculean task to assimilate the confusion and complexity created by overlapping demands, those that have surfaced due to the clash between the new face of work and the existing personal domains. The individuals who cannot cope with the underlying "expectation and interrupt overloads" will endure performance shortages.

A clear line of demarcation, will obviously, continue to exist between orientation of work between public employment and private employment, and while countries will find it hard to rein in the winds of privatization, an

occasional upsurge of left-wing demands, finding expression in the rise of left-wing or left-of-centre dispensations as has happened in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, will probably happen. The dynamics of organization in the public sector will continue to remain employee-oriented, with a desire to meet achievable targets trotting alongside laissez-faire treatment being meted out to the employees, this being contrasted with the gruelling work pressure of the private sector, exacerbated by the top management's tendency to put aside employee-centric considerations which may cut profit margins. Reinventing work in favour of the organization has always been the hallmark of the private sector, while protection of the interests of the employee has been the cornerstone of the government's employment policy in most countries.

### **Nature of workforce**

Further, work reinvention is bound to happen with a marked shift in favour of the fairer gender. As women grapple with social and familial pressures, they will occupy positions of equal status and dignity in family and society. The woman of tomorrow is bound to be more confident, assertive, independent, and with the necessity to bestow a good lifestyle to her kids, she will surely be as employable as any man of similar talent and capacity to work and perform.

It has been well said by Peter Drucker, "Executives owe it to the organization and to their fellow workers not to tolerate non-performing individuals in important jobs". The future of work is bound to incorporate, in meticulous detail – standards, benchmark and yardsticks to eliminate all chances of inefficiency. Grading of employees according to performance

levels will perhaps become the trend, and corporate will not hesitate to offer dirt money to those hyper-talented individuals who will keep the organization well above the red line.

### **Nature of corporations**

In the days to come, we will have traditional corporations in the manufacturing sector, with their hierarchies providing workplace not for millions, but thousands. A peep through the looking glass may perhaps showcase companies where a harmonious blend of machinery, automation and robotics has replaced the human element to a large extent.

If existing trends are any indication, then the organization of the future will have flexible hierarchies, depending on the nature of the work undertaken. For example, if an employee with a high level of technical knowledge in a IT firm is designated Dy Chief of Technical Operations, and he possesses a reasonable knowledge of financial derivatives and foreign exchange, he may be appointed to a position in the hierarchy pertaining to financial management, and those placed above him in the hierarchy may have to report to him in technological issues and decisions. The organization of the future is going to be built on performance, so efficiency is the norm and buzzword.

### **Drivers and motivators of tomorrow**

The passion to work and the purpose to fulfill will be the most important drivers and motivators of tomorrow. Work will be satisficing only when interest is inherent in it and a gigantic pay package may provide happiness, but not comfort. Today, as the younger generation pursues careers, they have to remember that they must follow the diktats of their heart –

work in the arena that affords them maximum emotional and psychological anchorage. Pursuing a career just for the sake of satisfying familial pressures will prove to be counter-productive over the long-term. When we are passionate about the work we do, there is no element of exhaustion, hence, no fatigue, and thereby, no waste of effort and time.

Tomorrow, reinventing work will have a fundamental feature - assessing those individuals who continue to derive inspiration from the work they do. High levels of intelligence or efficiency displayed by the employee are no guarantors of true and sustainable success in work and the workplace. Therefore, when individuals opt for careers, they must work where they enjoy working.

Many organizations suffer because of this lack of affinity to the work done. Factors such as competing pay packages, and the rise of income in sectors different from the one employing X or Y, are causes for dissatisfaction at work. Perhaps management theory has come a full cycle, with salary, remuneration or pay occupying centre stage, and issues like dedication to work being relegated to the background.

### **Rise of security firms**

As wealth increases, the gap between haves and have-nots widens, and countries come to terms with inequalities of living and income, clouds of crime will begin encroaching the safety and serenity of civic life, placing undue pressure on the armed forces and their civilian counterparts, thereby creating a playground for the rise of security firms – companies which maintain private armies or mercenaries, which may be loaned to corporations

or organizations of national or global importance, with emphasis on oil companies. A striking example was the situation in Iraq in 2004-05, by when the leading oil companies had managed to cobble an armed contingent 10,000 strong( with support from firms contracting out security personnel), primarily for the purpose of protecting oil assets and furthering their commercial designs, and this could to be contrasted with the British armed presence in Iraq, which was 9800 strong.

### **Role of B-schools**

Quite closely associated with the competitive environment is the sterling contribution by B-schools in training individuals and providing management oriented inputs. As competition grows in intensity, the onus will lie on B-schools to suffuse students and executives with ideas which will translate into financial sustainability for the organizations they will hopefully work for. B-schools have often been criticized as being ethical wastelands but their efforts in delivering concepts and practical solutions to work and organization specific issues through case studies and a host of other academic paraphernalia will make work more dynamic and challenging.

### **Role of social entrepreneurs and the non-profit sector**

One more aspect of work and organizational reinvention deserves special mention - the role of social entrepreneurs and the non-profit sector. This is a sector where work is measured by the extent of devotion to the cause of the NGO concerned. Social entrepreneurs will be in great demand in future and wings/departments of governments, will need the assistance of Non-Governmental Organizations to implement programmes and schemes in a more efficient manner. As the official channels of work execution are

saddled with enormous workload, the non-profit sector is the solution in sight for governments now and in future as well.

### **Regulatory power of governments and trade unions**

Governments have been grappling with issues facing the workforce since the arrival of liberalization and privatization at a pre-eminence, and it is highly unlikely that they will tinker with the employment figures, unless the financial situation so warrants. But, it is the certainty of a backlash which prevents privatization from dislocating people from government companies. Despite a surge in the hunky-dory capitalist bandwagon, proponents and critics alike know pretty well that government should regulate work, not downsize work. In the coming years, as the pressure on the fisc widens, governments will find it excessively tough to maintain statistics pertaining to public employment.

Trade unions, today, with political overtones, have become irrelevant in those areas of the developed world, where capitalism is the only word that enjoys maximum currency, and citizens supporting socialism or its moderate variants, are admirers of trade unionism, but they have to see eye to eye with the unfolding reality. Tomorrow's workplace may not find a trade union spanning the length and breadth of the organization, but a smaller grouping of individuals to cater to the needs of employees, region-wise. As cultural barriers get watered down, and the urge to stay afloat takes precedence over collective bargaining, trade unions are bound to be less effective and they will be supplanted by regulatory authorities appointed by the state, with vast powers of regulating work and the workplace, and the numerous humane considerations that accompany work.

Thus, the future organization is bound to witness significant changes and as workforce grapples with the challenges of tomorrow, the workplace will remain as vital as our home. The arena of reinventing work is not definite, and it cannot be broken down into water-tight compartments, so, the processes of reinventing work and reinventing organization will take place simultaneously along with the reinvention of society and civilization. Perhaps, the accumulation of years of undercurrents, or the singular path-breaking events like the Industrial Revolution, will have to happen again, in form and to an extent hitherto unknown, for work to exhibit different facets. Just as there are two sides to every coin, the success and failure of individual countries will depend on the effectiveness of methods employed to maintain productivity, output and growth. Whatever be the terms described above, at the heart of human activity lies work – a companion which provides necessity, comfort and luxury to the world’s mushrooming population.