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Innovation: The Bedrock Of 21st Century Success For Indian Organizations

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ABSTRACT:

Tumultuous macro economic milieu, coupled with stiff global competitions are leading to a dominant buyers market. The customer today is not only highly demanding and aware, but also through power of net can connect with other customers through word of chat and is virtually in a position to influence the sellers. In such a scenario, producing innovative products and services is no option. For companies to promote innovation, need very radical paradigm changes; identify, nurture and sustain innovative competencies and have patience for them to bear ultimate results on top and bottom line.

What the world saw in Industrial Revolution in the 18th century, India finally experienced in 1950s and 60s. The 70s brought focus on costs as the fuel imports became a heavy burden on the exchequer. The 90s saw process improvements and technology development as enabled by the LPG era (liberalization, privatization, globalization). Cheap Chinese products have redrawn focus to already squeezed costs. Meanwhile the internet has empowered customers and no longer they believe in remaining Kings. They need to be wooed as Queens. What the developed world has gradually experienced and their industry matured in last 250 or so years, India has experienced in last six decades and the key has been rapid adaptation to change; the only constant in Indian industry transformation has been change. All around everyday we see a new model of car, bike, mobile and a host of electronics. India is gradually emerging as an auto hub and a call center for the world. What's the connection. Apparently it is not incremental kaizen but radical innovation. An agrarian illiterate society becoming call center for the world – unthinkable, unimaginable and unimplementable but true.

Traditionally Indian society has been brought up through values of ahimsa, satya, brahmacharya, achori and akaam, of which later our father of nation, Mahatma Gandhi championed the cause. Organizational structures were drawn from family patterns, wherein authority was identified in toto and not from the task role. Organizations acquired a network of social and inter-personal linkages diluting the task relationship. This coupled with dominant parent egos of their parents, children were brought up to look up to authority with respect, reverence and obedience and abstain challenging the directions and status quo. Then what is making us succeed in the 21st century and paving way for the future economic power.

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Research and development in private sector is still in very nascent stages and govt controlled R&D is too bureaucratic to yield any tangible results. Traditionally we cannot boast of much creativity; we are more experts in reverse engineering and copy pasting.

History is testimony that all major innovation in the world were witnessed during the great wars – the flying machines, the nuclear developments, the space developments, the mobile, the high speed four wheelers, the psychometric assessment based recruitment and what not. The peace time saw consolidated of such psyche - the one lac Nano, the gold plated Titan to match with jewellery, Titan with pointer to Mecca; all these innovations have one thing in common – identifying the psychological need by looking around coupled with the fear of getting wiped out by Maruties and Rolexes.

Revolutions have started with rebels. Overnight rebels become kings. Contrarian funds have attracted huge investments; are the so called Indian society taught behaviors are resented, do people love the angry young robinhoods, do people internally nurture self to become anti heroes. Organizations – family, job companies, society, states, countries – have practically killed innovative humans, and promote them to behave more as automatons, and then they blame them that they are not thinking enough for betterment of results. In the name of pseudo love and pseudo respect, subordinates are not challenging their superiors. Acceptance and tolerance, the enemies of innovation are backbone of todays' organizations culture. Rebels are thrown off; differences in opinions are shrugged off. Will such status quo thinking promote innovation? Are organization cultures actually self defeating?

The human being is primarily now being guided by his mind and this phenomenon is here to stay. The mind only concentrates on past or future. What is life as governed by mind; some happy or bitter memories of past; some dreams of future. The monkey mind cannot stay in present; on the contrary it avoids present – the gift to mankind. If it resists present, how can humans be aware and without awareness no innovation worthwhile can be anticipated. On the face of it, mind function looks more logical – the mind leads to more efficiency, but does it makes us effective as the Guru said, doing the right things vs. doing the things rightly. Innovation of course prefers the former, organizations in word the former but in action the later, human being in heart the former, to please the bosses the later.

Innovation comes from angry and driven people, said, Tom Peters. Such people will exhibit insubordination and disrespect, which positively can be seen as impatience to create something new, not existing hither to fore; the job of leaders is to convert their negativities by a positive challenging culture to nurture the right innovative competencies. If Organizations have to succeed in the cut throat world of competitors, they have to come up with innovative products and services, for this they need to identify their innovative employees, they need to recruit contrarians, then they need to nurture their innovative competencies and then be patient for the results to fruition as innovation needs not only skills but lot of luck.

To sum up, what behaviors organizations need to identify innovative employees. The people who constantly waging war in the box for people to come out towards out of the box thinking, who question the status quo, who are living in present aware of themselves and their surroundings, who make their and others lives difficult by constantly new learnings and questions.