



Managing in the New Landscape

Can India Lead a New Dream?

India can set the stage for a New Golden Age. An era when quantity is not anymore the major measure of success, where ownership is not the main measure of happiness, and where decent life encompasses all our brothers and sisters across the globe.

India is already a leader in innovation within the broad spectrum of social entrepreneurship. It is also beginning to shift the focus towards the preparation of a future generation of business students.



“First they ignore you. Then they laugh at you. Then they fight you. Then you win.”

– Mahatma Gandhi

The world around us seems to be changing at a mounting pace, the number of key issues is increasing and we have difficulty coping with them. We wonder what the underlying forces shaping our world are, and fear that some day tectonic shifts will totally transform the social and business landscape. We are no doubt living in a world of transformation; the world of tomorrow will be very different from that of today. It is a strange period in human history. On the one hand, we can really be proud of our achievements. We have made spectacular progress in all fields of life—science, technology, engineering,

medicine, construction, transportation, telecommunication and many others. We have also made tremendous leaps in the development of ever more powerful artificial intelligence. On the other hand, we can see more and more signs of serious problems in all areas of life. Climate change is only one of them. It is a very serious issue, but the growing population is the most worrisome one of all. Other key issues are proposed in Exhibit I.

All these key issues are systemically linked to each other, creating a meta-connected core issue—**the growing global divide**. Many of these issues have one common denominator—a point of no return; unfortunately this is not too far away.

Very soon we will enter into the infinite space of the virtual world. But if we carry

the principle of dominance into it; if we bring the struggle for power, for ownership and for control alongside, we will harvest the destruction of our civilization. It was the principle of dominance which has led humanity into the disastrous situation we are living in today.

The day when Artificial Intelligence (AI) becomes equal to biological intelligence will represent the beginning of the end of our dominance. We will not be able to withstand the AI power which will quickly become superior to us. Singularity is the end of loneliness for the biological intelligence on our planet¹. However, if AI will be premised on partnership and care, we will gain powerful new allies and be able to discover the infinite fruits of the virtual universe. Ray Kurzweil, the leading thinker of AI, proposes that singularity will be reached by 2045. Furthermore, he believes that the non-biological intelligence will be a billion times more powerful than human intelligence today².

While the rest is yet to be seen, and while many are still skeptic about Kurzweil's vision, it is not surprising for those who use their imagination. One needs to go beyond traditional linear thinking and imagine the upcoming transformations and their impact on all of us living on this planet.

The advent of the virtual world gives us a second opportunity to turn things around and perhaps create a world where everybody can have a decent life; where

education is accessible to everybody who wants it; where finally we will be able to leverage all human creativity and talents through the reinforcement of powerful artificial intelligence. This will allow us to move throughout the virtual space at the speed of thought. We will live in the Metaverse composed of the real universe and literally an unlimited number of virtual universes.

Our world desperately needs a new vision. We need a new dream. We need a life system allowing a decent standard of living to all people on the planet – not only the privileged ones. We need to find a way to curb the growth of the world population, and we need to master the transition from the oil-based civilization into one powered by sustainable clean energy.

We are living in a time marked by incredible challenges and horrible threats, but we also have fantastic opportunities with historical importance ahead of us.³ Today we are in the middle of the worst economic turmoil in modern history. It was created by greed and the illusion of infinite growth. It was facilitated in part by apprentices of artificial intelligence working for the financial industry. We can see other industries becoming victims of insatiable and uncontrolled greed for growth and profit as well. We have a unique opportunity to redesign and reinvent not only the financial system but the society and the economy as a whole. We can develop a more equitable society based on partnership and care, leading towards new ways of life⁴. We can create new economic systems based on transformational socioeconomic system. We can redirect entrepreneurship towards the creation of social values in addition to profit. This would lead towards an economy in service to society.

It seems that the opportunity is proportional to the scope of the crisis. This time

Prof. Mario Raich is a future thinker, a pioneer and a creative mind in strategic innovation. He coaches managers in many industries and is an international management consultant who has worked in almost every region of the world. He is fluent in German and Swiss-German, English, French, Italian, Polish, Spanish. Raich has worked in top executive positions with large global organizations like: Xerox, Citigroup, and Zurich Financial Services. He has also founded several companies in different industries (publishing and consulting). Raich has been the Chairman of Learnità LTD (www.learnita.com), a London based company since 1997. His academic assignments include working as Visiting Professor at HEC in Paris and ESADE Graduate School of Business in Barcelona, and as Associate Professor at GSM of the Educativ University in Altdorf. He is the Founding Director of the Institute for Strategic Innovation. He is also the coauthor of BEYOND (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) a best selling book currently published in many other languages.

¹ According to the Singularity Institute for Artificial Intelligence, Singularity is the technological creation of smarter-than-human intelligence. <http://www.singinst.org/overview/whatisthesingularity>

² Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity is near. When Humans transcend biology*. Viking Penguin, 2005, p. 126

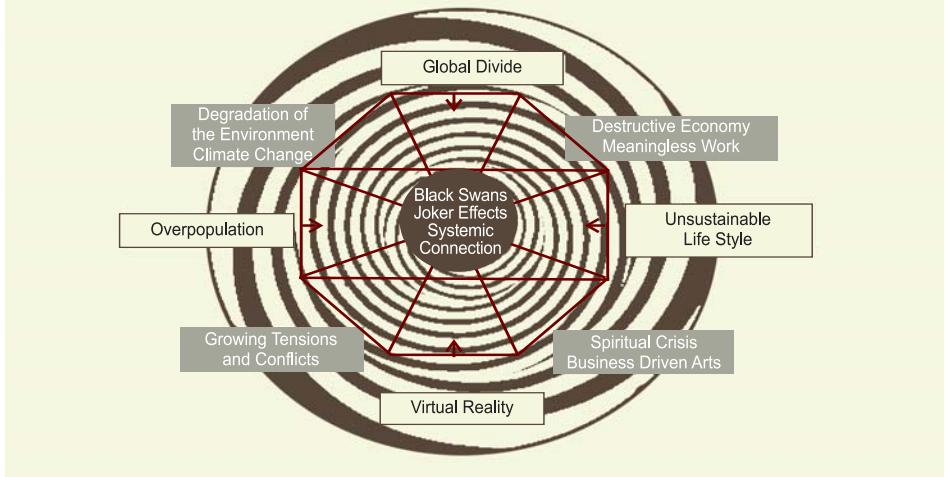
³ Mario Raich and Simon Dolan deal with more details with the issues of transition towards the new age in their book *BEYOND*. See more in: www.beyond-comfort-zone.com where readers can continue the dialogue and discussion on this topic.

⁴ Read the extraordinary essay of Riane Eisler (2008), *The Real Wealth of Nations: Creating a Caring Economics*. Berrett-Koehler Publications.

Dr. Simon Dolan is Ramon Llull University Chair Professor of HRM and OB in ESADE Business School, one of the world leading academic institution. He was previously a full tenured Professor of Human Resource Management and Organizational Behavior at the University of Montreal and a part-time professor at McGill University, in Canada. Dolan has written extensively in the fields of human resource management, organizational psychology, occupational stress and culture reengineering. He is the Editor of Cross Cultural Management: An International Journal, and serves on the editorial board of several international scientific journals such as Human Resource Planning, Management Research, Career Development International, and others. His multilingual and co-written more than 35 books, one of which are on the "best selling" lists. His two recent English books with Palgrave Macmillan released in 2006 and 2007 are *Managing by Values and with Stress, Self-Esteem, Health and Work*.

Dolan is the chief director of the Institute for Labor Studies in ESADE, and provides leadership to the various research projects dealing with managing people undertaken by the institute. He is the founder and president of a Montreal based Management Consulting firm (GESTION MDS MANAGEMENT INC), which has been providing consulting services for over 30 years the world over. He is a popular and much sought after speaker worldwide and has delivered over 600 speeches and presentations. He is the coauthor of *BEYOND* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

Exhibit I: The Key Issues Humanity is Facing



around we can go beyond the existing social and economic framework. We can switch off the mechanisms of greed and fear. We can replace growth with transformation leading towards sustainability. Is this possible? Is this a dream? Who will lead this dream? In this article, we submit that perhaps India can play a major role in this world transformation. And the moment to undertake the leadership towards this dream is now.

The catharsis due to the global crisis will prepare the ground for the fundamental shift towards a new world. The great transformation is driving towards it, speeding up the change, and in particular, the transformations in technology. Some observers claim that entrepreneurship is starting to refocus on the well-being of humanity, on the preservation of the ecosystems, and the building of a sustainable future; social entrepreneurship seem to be on the rise (Bornstein, 2004; Nicholls, 2006) (see Exhibit II).

What Does This Mean?

This new world is only possible if we can shift the fundamental paradigms in society, economy and business. We need to change the basic assumptions of

modern civilization. This means that we have to transform the existing social and economic frameworks and we need to find a new way of life.

Society: We need to contain the population growth and overcome the paradigm of dominance. We need to move towards partnership and care.

Economy: We have to move from growth towards a dynamic balance of both growth and transformation.

Entrepreneurship: The focus of entrepreneurship has to be redirected towards a portfolio of values where present society and future generations are equal stakeholders.

India seems to be on the road to developing an "innovation-oriented society". If, in the past, India was viewed as the hub for cheap outsourcing, the economic crisis is creating a substantial change of mind. India's goals were very succinctly captured by the slogans used to promote the 2005 and 2006 national R&D expositions in New Delhi: "Think Innovation, Think India," "Mind to Market," and perhaps best of all, "The World's Knowledge Hub of the Future." In support of such ambitious goals, meeting sponsors reminded us that, "India has 380

Exhibit II: A Glimpse of the Future: The World in the Year 2050

The focus of the world has shifted to the Pacific and India is a key player in this new world. India was one of the pioneers of the transformation of society and economy shifting towards new frameworks and reinvigorating entrepreneurship. People are living scattered across the planet connected with an ultra-high-speed network allowing free connection with the virtual world anywhere and anytime.

A large part of social life, of education, of art and of work has been transferred to the virtual world where anyone can create his own universe. The work is executed by intelligent robots, by virtual entities and by humans supported by advanced artificial intelligence.

In the spirit of Mahatma Gandhi, society is based on partnership and care. Partnership and care are the fundamental principles of action. These principles have been extended to the robots and the virtual entities. The majority of people can have a decent life style, if they choose to. Everybody has access to free virtual education. The Global Virtual School already has over two billion students. People are organized in real and virtual clans. Their centers of activities are Rings connected with all other Rings with a virtual network. A Ring is a building which creates a hub for social and cultural activities of the clan. Many people have begun to organize themselves around virtual rings and virtual clans.

People do care for each other within the clan; they also care for the future generations and are taking care of the environment by avoiding damage to the ecosystems. Humanity has recovered from the 'peak oil' which has nearly led to a total economic disaster. Today, solar power provides the largest part of the energy. Even commercial planes are powered with solar energy.

A silent network of roads covered with solar universities and 11,200 higher education institutions turning out around 6,000 PhDs, 200,000 engineers, and 300,000 science graduates and postgraduates annually, and that R&D investment has been growing at a compounded annual growth rate of more than 40%⁵.

Innovative minds are an excellent source for changes, but we also need to overcome the false paradigm of infinite availability of energy and resources and establish the paradigm of minimal interference with the environment. Finally, we need a new

cells is providing electrical power for the new society. In addition, the deserts are converted into energy gardens. Transportation is accomplished through with silent, fully automated electric engines. The economy is multidimensional and is thriving in the whole Metaverse, thanks to the transformation principle. It is based on a new value creation framework based upon social and economic values, which take the life style requirements of the population and the needs of future generations into account. Social entrepreneurship is thriving.

Business is based on advanced economics driven by transformation leading towards eco-friendliness and meaningfulness. It is operating simultaneously in the real and the virtual reality. Business respects the principle of minimum interference with a minimum of collateral damage. 'People' at work are humans, robots and virtual entities. Virtual entrepreneurship is thriving.

Humanity was successful in the creation of the Artificial Intelligence Entities as allies and partners of mankind and a Cyberworld is emerging. This is the first stage of the Great Transformation in the new world. It is the beginning of a new cycle bringing us further into a New Golden Age. It is a civilization at the dawn of the emerging Metaverse wherein the perspectives of the infinite virtual universes are different, people are no longer obsessed with ownership and dominance. It is an age of creation and discovery. People accompanied by their new powerful allies – the Artificial Intelligence Entities – are on their way to create and discover the virtual reality. The Artificial Intelligence finally came of age and is quickly progressing towards a super intelligence with intellectual abilities far beyond any biological being. Cyber wisdom has a huge impact on the world and the way of life.

social and economic value creation framework focused on universal human values (eg., a decent life style, access to education) and on the balance of values. Society and future generations are becoming stakeholders as important as the customer and the shareholder. In this regard, some observers claim that India is showing the lead by displaying the most innovative social entrepreneurs. For instance, systems for rainwater harvesting for schools, pioneered by Barefoot College, are exported around

the world. The Suisse- based Schwab foundation, said in its 2007 Annual Report that while in most countries social entrepreneurs, even the leading ones, are not recognized, and have even been labeled as 'crazy' by their environment, this is not the case in India. The innovative social entrepreneurs in India receive national awards and are considered as national heroes. In this sense, India can inspire other countries to do the same.

Purpose and meaning will regain their key importance in business, leading to engagement and passion. Value creation will be hybrid (i.e., real and virtual), focused on a balanced values portfolio, with society and future generations as key stakeholders. At the same time, the shareholder will focus more and more on non-financial values. And what is happening already in India in this context? Well, how many national scale, socially relevant, market-oriented, impact making businesses can you name in your country? In India, **AMUL** was created. It was created by government initiative and with the intent to generate change in the way milk was produced and distributed on a massive scale. The vision was big, there was passion, there was capital (direct and indirect), there was terrific leadership, sustained and involved engagement with the grassroots, and the formation of partnerships to create the impact via the business model. It has had its impact, but more change is obviously needed. Similar and more impact could be delivered by engaging and unleashing the entrepreneurial energies of millions and by providing the right leadership, vision, management, partnerships, and capital.

⁵ Source: *BusinessWeek* - Insight, January 30, 2007.

India, according to some estimates, has the largest number of NGOs per capita. Most of them are doing a glorious job in their respective domains, impacting the lives of citizens in localized spheres of activity. But given the size and multitude of problems confronting the country, the Indian NGOs are not capturing the world media attention, and perhaps a different approach is required.

What Could This Mean for Business?

Business leaders face the question whether they should wait for the transformation to happen or should actively prepare for the new society and new economy. Or should they even try to impel the coming of the new order? In view of the new world, their actions may well be judged from the point of view of compliance towards universal human values, eco-friendliness and meaningfulness. We can see many references to the request of customers and, later on, legislators for **eco-friendliness**. The millions of eco-minded organizations could create a powerful alliance of people caring for the future. The surge in the search for meaningfulness on the job is an indication of people looking beyond

the greed based on economism which has dominated us since the last quarter of the past century.

The business context will lead to completely new business models. Energy will change from being a commodity to a key resource enabling the new way of life and the new economics. Its value creation will have to be extended upstream to the education of the consumer about possibilities for local energy production. It may be extended downstream as well, to the level of energy deployment enabling the consumer to store, save and optimize their use of energy.

More and more people are questioning the soundness of the pursuit of sustainable growth. Therefore, the organizations which are able to move from growth towards transformation will not only enjoy the advantages of being the first to do so, but will be greeted as pioneers of the new world.

On the other hand, the development of the **Metaverse** will not only bring threats, but will also bring **immense opportunities**; for example, it will allow the creation of truly global organizations thriving in the whole Metaverse. Small local organizations will have the same chances as the behemoths of today. 'Big', 'large' and 'global' will acquire a new meaning. It will be rather the virtual reach than the physical presence which will be of importance; it will be the share of mind, rather than the market share, the amount of social rather than economic values. One of the key elements towards the dream becoming reality is the reinvention of the business schools.

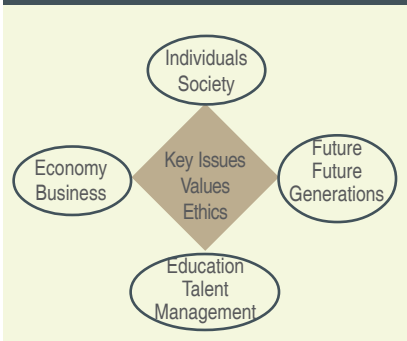
Reinventing the Business Schools

Business schools have a heavy impact on

society and the economy because they educate the key players. The schools which focus on the executive elite have a particularly big responsibility. The role of education in the transition towards the New Golden Age will be different. Learning will have to shift more towards the creation of new knowledge and know-how and their deployment in practice. Thinking and reflection will become again more important. The concept of meaningfulness will play a crucial role in the schools as well. The classic teaching and repeating of old knowledge will finally be overcome. Education will become the foundation of the new framework (see Exhibit III).

Business schools are supposed to be the hotbeds for talent development. They are supposed to be the incubators for executive talents, enhancing and developing their creativity. Today students are increasingly buying the brand and less the content of their teaching. Business schools have become preachers of the so called 'best practices' following the principle of teaching and repeating. And furthermore, recent surveys of senior executives in Spain and Portugal conducted by the Institute for Labor studies in ESADE, propose that the business schools do not adequately prepare their graduates for the tasks to be completed in their respective organizations. The survey, conducted for the purpose of collecting information about the EU initiative labeled 'new skills for new jobs', revealed that by and large the universities provide neither relevant 'hard' nor 'soft' skills for their graduates. With a few exceptions, business schools and other faculties in the EU (ie., via the proxy of Spain and Portugal), seem to be preoccupied in training their students for yesterday's economy and financial

Exhibit III: Education Needs to be Centered on The Individual and Social Key Issues





realities and not for tomorrow's⁶. This is quite troubling.

Upper management in many corporations is populated by people with diplomas from business schools. But business schools have lost their initial purpose to be the educators of the executives, which was to make them aware of their responsibility for the business as well as the society.

Business schools have become providers of diplomas with the right brand necessary for a quick career. It is no surprise that they have fallen into the trap of perceived unlimited growth and primary focus on shareholder value. Instead of challenging the developments in the economy and business they have been busy riding on the waves of growth. The challengers and the pioneers became followers of the more-of-the-same principle and were busy spreading the flavor of the month. They loudly acclaimed innovation and transformation in the business world, but did not follow their own advice.

Therefore, it is not surprising to find out that public opinion has begun to blame the business schools for the disasters occurring in the economy. Business schools have adapted so well to the existing economic system that they have difficulties envisioning something else. This, despite the warnings from powerful voices like that of Henry Mintzberg reminding us that *"Corporations exist to serve society and not vice versa. If they don't serve society, they have no reason to exist"*. These warnings have not been heard or have certainly been ignored⁷. How

⁶ Results of IPP Portugal were published by Expresso, July 11, 2009; IPP Spain were published in ABC on July 26, 2009.

⁷ "Henry Mintzberg in the News", McGill News, January 31, 2008. www.mcgill.ca/news/2002/fall/mintzberg/#tpt_anchor_content

much more does Mintzberg statement applies to business schools! So what would Business Schools with the right purpose look like? In the following section we describe a possible future scenario. (see Exhibit IV)

Indian business schools are well aware of the debate over their future. In 2008, the Indian School of Business (ISB) in collaboration with the Strategic Management Society hosted a conference for discussing innovative business strategies for emerging India. About 60 Deans from Leading

International and Indian Business Schools discussed the future of Business Education. As Indian firms emerge into the global scene, they bring with them their unique brand of innovative practices, which has created the need for rethinking of strategic tenets and the respective skills that students in business schools need to acquire. CEOs from companies such as Airtel, Reliance Petroleum, ICICI, Biocon, GE, Nokia, Satyam Computers, Tata Sons, Bharat Forge, and others who are putting India on the global map and are some of

Exhibit IV: A Proposed Platform for Future View of The Business Schools

The new "business schools" are based on the principle of apprenticeship. The students (= talents, candidates) need to find a company willing to accept them as a trainee for two years, before they can apply to a Business School. They get a basic salary from this company and a corporate mentor from the executive team.

In the first year the focus is on the students' key issues and his LEMBA (Leadership, Entrepreneurship, Management and Business Acumen) profile and the key executive drivers: APOSA (Achievement, Power, Ownership, Status and Acceptance). In addition the students have to understand the context (society and economy). Time allocation: 2/3 school and 1/3 assignments within the selected company assisting the executives and participating in projects.

All students have to sign the code of conduct for executives. After the successful graduation they will become members of the Executive Group. The main purpose of this group is the well-being of humanity. All students are participating in the transformation projects or projects aiming at

the creation of social enterprises.

In the second year the focus is on key corporate issues and AKIM (Advanced Key Issues Management) based work. Time allocation: 1/2 school and 1/2 work on the key issues of the company. In the third year the students will spend most of their time at the corporation and on assignments in other companies following senior executives in their work. The School will mainly provide coaching, guidance and supervision of the progress in development.

The Business Schools have the task of permanent development of talents from stage I to stage IV (see below) recognizing that talents are the link between business, society and the future. Research and Development of the Business Schools is focused on the development and application of leading edge management thinking and management methods, and the creation of leading edge thinking and provocative concepts. In addition they have the task of the creation and development of new ideas for structure and organization.

Stages in Talent Development

Levels of Talents	Activities and Characteristics
I. Candidates	Attraction towards a particular topic or area of activity. Above average ability.
II. Acknowledged Talent	Proven ability. Aptitude for working independently.
III. Master Talent	Creative productivity. Driving self development of his areas of talent.
IV. Teaching Master	Coaching and teaching other talents.
V. Extraordinary Talent	Guru, internationally acknowledged.

India's biggest success stories can help us understand the nature and competences of future managers.

The Creative and Spiritual Society

With the focus on the right values, creative society can generate the kind of solutions we need to overcome the existential key issues. It allows creative individuals to develop the full potential of their creativity supported by the Artificial Intelligence Entities. The frontier of virtual reality gives the necessary space to explore them further and to test their impact on humanity. New powerful methods to find creative solutions will be developed. We need to move from searching into finding creative solutions.

Therefore the first step towards the development of a creative society is the overcoming of the 'gender issue' which leads to a gender creativity gap. We are losing a big part of the human creativity potential at a time when we need every bit of creativity. We are missing the feminine way of thinking and doing which is crucial for a society noted by partnership and care. The gender issue goes much deeper and further than just gender equality. It is the polarization of the masculine and the feminine through the whole population and society which affects not only women but also males with feminine abilities. The dominance of *reason* came at the expense of intuition and emotional intelligence. Again, in this regard, India can take the lead in the same way it championed women to be involved politically and elected women to the top prime ministerial and presidential positions in one of the world's largest democracies. The same can be perhaps extended to senior management positions. Historically, the status accorded

to women in India has not been equal to that of men, but significant changes are taking place. Perhaps, these can be accelerated.

Beyond Capitalism

Socialism and communism have shown their weaknesses and people are losing trust in capitalism. Today we have a vacuum; we don't have any alternatives to replace the reigning ideology.

It seems that we have to go beyond the capital; worse – it will destroy itself. Taming or reforming or reinventing capitalism is not an option. It has been demonstrated that it is a wild beast, which behaves only behind the bars of a strong governmental cage. Whenever it is freed it devours everything.

Capitalism also leads to mental health problems in the very same people who support it. Sound mental health is a universal goal of any human activity. Capitalism has destroyed it by actually impeding people from staying healthy⁸. Some of mental health issues stemming from capitalism include:

- ▶ Greed for power, position, prestige and money.
- ▶ Envy regarding other's achievements, success, rewards.
- ▶ Egotism about one's own accomplishments.
- ▶ Suspicion, anger, frustration and paranoia.
- ▶ Anguish through constant comparisons.

Capitalism is highly volatile; it goes wherever it encounters the most favorable conditions (safety, security, stability, low

taxes, growth potential etc.), and this is where there is already a lot of it. Capitalism is also highly destructive; it transforms nature and even the human society into dead matter and virtual numbers. Thus, we desperately need alternatives to which we could aspire and which would provide us with new meaning and new direction for the human society. Capitalism is transforming nature (ie., our ecosystems) and will result in death (ie., extinction).

Can we imagine a world where capital would not be the main driver? We know of only a few societies in the known human history, but most probably the whole Stone Age (about one million years ago) was functioning without it.

A Call for Action

We are in midst of the Great Transformation. We will either move into a new world or go back to the stone age. It is a time of tremendous opportunities and complete disasters. It is up to us to decide what action we will take and towards what purpose.

We are at a turning point in the history of human civilization; as Martin Luther King Jr., said: "We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now."⁹

In society and at the corporate level we need to begin to venture into the future and develop initiatives to create social values and prevent activities that are destroying the opportunities of future generations. As employees, we can help the organization to take society and the future into account and to start initiatives creating values for the society.

The way to avoid surprises is by focusing mainly on the future and the development within society, in addition to daily business. This means things like:

⁸ For more information, see: Dolan S.L., *Stress, Self-esteem, Work and Health*. Palgrave – Macmillan, 2006.

⁹ Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence, by Rev. Martin Luther King, April 4, 1967 http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/publications/speeches/Beyond_Vietnam.pdf

- ▶ Using curiosity to look around and learn more about the future!
- ▶ Continuing learning on all levels
- ▶ Encourage strategic thinking within management
- ▶ Developing innovation, entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship within the company
- ▶ Actively striving for operational and strategic excellence.

India's Possible Alternative Development Path

India has a unique opportunity to become a leader of the future development by rethinking the way of its development through:

- ▶ Focusing on selective growth
- ▶ Moving towards partnership and care: overcoming the gender issue
- ▶ Creating a dynamic balance between growth and transformation
- ▶ Focus of entrepreneurship towards a portfolio of values
- ▶ Going back to its roots: leveraging its own history and culture. Drawing on its own cultural heritage
- ▶ Adding a badly needed dose of spirituality into day to day life
- ▶ Making the jump from a country in development towards a society living in the real and virtual world
- ▶ Finding its own path for development. Just following the so called developed countries is a recipe for disaster for all of us!

The initial purpose of entrepreneurship was to create and implement solutions for survival, later on for a decent life. Only very recently it was diverted into making profit.

India can provide leadership in redirecting entrepreneurship into a portfolio of values which are focused on its initial purpose. Entrepreneurship

needs a legal and ethical framework, otherwise it may be abused. Many criminal activities linked to ownership, status and power are misusing entrepreneurship. If we do not have a meaningful purpose we will continue to have one bubble after another with all the disastrous consequences until one day we may not recover at all.

Once people have secured their survival they want to do something meaningful. Meaning comes from something which is considered useful. But it is always useful in certain context only. Economic values are certainly determined by the context.

As one of the first steps we need to bring meaning back to work! If we succeed to bring meaning back to work, not only we will enjoy working and corporations will become useful social entities again, but we will also contribute to the solutions of the key issues of our world and to the development of a new society (Magala, 2009).

Conclusion: Towards the Implementation of Great Ideas

India can set the stage for a New Golden Age. An era when quantity is not anymore the major measure of success, where ownership is not the main measure of happiness, and where decent life encompasses all our brothers and sisters across the globe. Obama's slogan: "Yes, we can!" can become meaningful for all people in India as well. It can become a country where the "gender issue" has been overcome at all levels and all members of society are participating in the development of the future.

India is already a leader in innovation within the broad spectrum of social entrepreneurship. It is also beginning to shift the focus towards the preparation of a future generation of business students.

One particular example that calls for the attention is the case of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning (School of Business) in the Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh. There, in addition to the traditional business curriculum, a key ingredient in the teaching is ego reduction. This is achieved by improving the students' Spiritual Quotient (SQ). Students are taught the benefits of team effort and shared vision. Emotional Quotient (EQ) is stressed as well through theatre, debates, awareness programs and a study of the epics.

The human race has demonstrated again and again in history that it has an ability to cope with disasters and catastrophes. Therefore we can claim "Yes, we can!" We have never been so close to both global extinction and to the New Golden Age at the same time. It depends only on us whether the 21st Century will be the turning point towards the decline or towards a new development stage – a stage in which quantity will not be the major driver and when a decent way of life for all will be of more concern than power and control over the planet; a world where globalization is a benefaction to the majority of the world population, and positive achievements will be shared across the globe.

Hence the Obama slogan "Yes, we can!" will become meaningful for all people without exception. The first step in this journey is overcoming the fear of "leaving the comfort zone and going beyond", and to do that, we may wish to adopt the famous words of Victor Hugo:

"There is nothing more powerful than an idea whose time has come."

Staying On Top, Always

What do GE, Louis Vuitton, Nestlé, P&G, Unilever, Siemens, Mercedes Benz, Kellogg's, Ford, Toyota, Sony, Tata, Godrej, HP, IBM, etc., stand for? "Visionary companies, great companies, world-class companies, etc" are the terms that come to mind when one reads these names. Nomenclature aside, what do these companies signify? They are all truly going concerns. Their long-standing association with a variety of business environments across generations is a definite indication that they are economic vehicles (automobiles) built for generations. Several interesting parallels can be drawn between every bit of these companies and parts of any automobile. Of course, there are differences too.

The soul of a car definitely does not lie in its consoles. Rather, it is in its engine. As long as that's built for generations, the rest can be changed as and when warranted and desired. These companies, along with many others, have been the economic engines of the society for centuries. However, these economic engines have known what it is like taking rest. The drivers are the leaders who steer their respective companies in the most befitting direction. They keep changing. Who selects the driver? The car owner, the shareholders as represented by the board. While in the driving seat, the leaders see through their industry's windshield. Once in the driving seat, they need to decide the speed and the direction. The car's speed is defined by the car's condition and this in turn reflects how effectively, efficiently and frequently the maintenance is carried out. They know that a bend in the road is not the end of the road unless you fail to make a turn. They are adept at taking turns,

following, overtaking, applying brakes and coming to a screeching halt when needed. Never to put off the engine, by the way. Depending on the business environment (the weather), they use their portfolio techniques, the wipers. When it is dark they use strategic headlights to steer their way through. They constantly recharge and refill their adrenalin with new strategies and structures. .. the parallels can go on and on.

In *Built to Last*, Jim Collins and Jerry Porras conclude, "we found that creating and building a visionary company absolutely does not require either a great idea or a great and charismatic leader." They present the evidence that great ideas brought forth by charismatic leaders might be *negatively correlated* with building a visionary company. Their greatest creation is the *company itself* and what it stands for. And they stand for a sublime purpose.

What it takes to stay on top, always? No single answer though. A lot has been written on this topic, right from *In Search of Excellence* to the recent *How The Mighty Fall*, apart from numerous research reports and white papers. What all of them seem to communicate is that they never give up. They are masters of managing discontinuities. They are public limited companies but their spirit is unlimited. They don't take their success too seriously. Nor do they get bogged down by occasional failures. For, they understand, "Nothing fails like success nor succeeds like success", as Allan R Cohen says in an interview in this issue. After all, sometimes, committing to success can also lead to failure.

Dr. Nagendra V Chowdary



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