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## The spiritual organisation

**Mohit Kishore**

*The organisation of the future must be a spiritual one*

People who work in a `nine-to-five' kind of workplace must often wonder why `work' is structured the way it is. The modern nature of work has its underpinnings in the Industrial Revolution and its many factories. These factories presented an interesting challenge in how a large number of workers were to be efficiently managed to produce a desired level of output. Frederick Taylor successfully studied and analysed work in factories, with his simple motto being reduction in variability — in other words, viewing people as mere parts of a machine that had to work together to produce a desired product. Needless to say, this view of work and human resources could not last for long.

People do not necessarily work to satisfy an economic function. People work for various other reasons including fulfilment of their potential, following their passions and so on. Such motivations are much truer of the modern knowledge worker who works more in the realm of ideas and analysis as opposed to actions and objects. Yet, I find that most organisations still largely view job roles along the lines of the `parts of a machine' model described earlier. With most modern professionals spending a significant chunk of their waking hours at work, work ends up being an important sphere to achieve a lot of life goals apart from economic goals. Work may even become a path to spiritual development (suddenly shifting the focus from the here and now to the next world if there is one!). The Industrial Revolution (and the Protestant Reformation) on the other hand, made society focus more on this world, with work being an important component in it. The Industrial Revolution and the modern knowledge economy are at opposite ends of the spectrum in the nature of work they create. And yet, very little has changed in the approach that modern organisations have towards people.

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Most organisations that claim to be modern in all respects — be it technology, strategy, CRM, operations and so on — manage to be extremely archaic in their people practices. I find a huge hangover from the industrial era still permeating the hallowed corporate hallways. It appears that the `modern' knowledge worker lives in a world populated by access cards, nine to five regimes, appraisals that tend to measure performance in the way a car's performance would be measured and so on. It is thus no surprise that the very term human resources seems to convey a view of people as input-output machines (pay salary, will work).

In my view, the organisation of the future must be a spiritual one. Its goals must be closely aligned with the life goals of its stakeholders. In such an organisation, I would give people the freedom to choose what they want to do, within broad constraints. The underlying theme would be that people inherently love to work when the kind of work they do is closely linked to who they truly are. This concept finds support in the *Bhagawad Gita* too, where Lord Krishna commands Arjuna not to be a coward, and to be true to his *dharma* (the true nature of one's personality). The current approach to hiring, on the other hand, seems to be one of `filling open positions'.

Second, the spiritual organisation would pay closer attention to the non-work goals of employees. This may mean allowing employees to spend significant chunks of time pursuing these goals even during the `working day'. Career growth paths would be super-customised and not standardised. Thus, on a broad level, a spiritual organisation would place self-actualisation before profits, and this paradigm would present itself in the organisation structure, hierarchies, roles, career paths, approach towards customers, products and so on.

It is not as if organisations have been entirely oblivious to the way people view work today. A lot of new age companies — technology companies like Google, start-ups and others — do experiment with people practices to foster a culture of flexibility and openness. Hierarchies too are becoming a lot more informal. However, if one looks at the entire spectrum of organisations and not just a few nimble new-age companies, there is still a long way to go. People have progressed from being mere `resources' to `human capital', which is the most important non-substitutable resource in this knowledge economy. It's about time this change is acknowledged and capitalism turns into human capitalism!

*(The writer, an alumnus of XLRI, is working with a*

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