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Organisations as fulfilment engines

Mohit Kishore

Institutions need to address themselves to the higher purpose of their existence..

What is the true purpose of an organisation? Is it merely the creation of wealth, or must there be a higher purpose to it? The East may have some answers to this question.

Indian culture, as a result of its philosophical foundations in Vedic traditions, has never eschewed wealth. However, it has repeatedly stressed that the real purpose of life is a higher fulfilment whose end goal is self-realisation.

Thus, material wealth of any form cannot become the end of any enterprise or human life. It may certainly be one of the outcomes, but is not the central purpose.

Our institutions in all spheres - be it business, education or Government - seem to be losing sight of the higher purpose of their existence and have increasingly started viewing themselves as a means to an end. What then could be the higher purpose that an institution must seek to address itself to?

While there could be many ways of looking at this issue, one possible answer is that the reason for the existence of any institution is to provide an arena for fulfilment for its end-users (customers) and constituents (employees and other stakeholders).

What might such a fulfilment-centred organisation look like across these two dimensions of external and internal stakeholders?

CUSTOMER FULFILMENT

The big question here is - which customer purpose is this organisation trying to fulfil? Unfortunately, the industrial era mindset is one of viewing customers as being no more than `wallets' waiting to be tapped. This is not to suggest that such firms are unethical - they are only responding to shareholder and investor expectations by behaving in a manner that only focuses on financial goals.

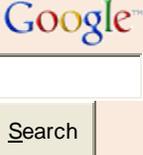
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Stocks	<p>Additionally, given the complexity of large organisations and the degrees of separation between the producers and end-consumers, it is no surprise that organisations view customers as abstractions.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quotes • SE Diary • Scoreboard • Open-End Mutual Fund 	<p>The post-industrial world needs to view customers and their needs in the light of purpose fulfilment. Every customer is essentially seeking fulfilment of some sort through the consumption of goods and services. This fulfilment could be at a basic level of survival, or at the highest level of self-actualisation.</p> <p>What if a business organisation were to align itself to this hierarchy of needs and claim as its mission the goal of raising the customer to higher levels of fulfilment?</p>
Foreign Exchange	<p>This may mean the creation of increasingly sophisticated products for which there may not be a market at the moment. The exact opposite of this is seen in many privately- owned electronic news media outlets.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rates 	<p>In the interest of `what sells', these outlets cater to the lowest in their `customers' instead of raising the bar to challenge their customers to evolve. They need to realise that producers of goods and services have a moral responsibility towards customers. In fact, this is a far higher form of corporate social responsibility than the contribution of a share of profits towards social causes.</p>
Shipping	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ports 	<p>THE INTERNAL PERSPECTIVE</p> <p>Within the organisation two axes of fulfilment must be clearly defined - the first is the fulfilment of customers through the work done by a worker, and second is the fulfilment of the worker himself, and the two reinforce each other. However, as pointed out earlier, the distance from the actual customer, and the abstract way in which tasks are parcelled out means that the average worker no longer feels connected to the customer's purpose or even his own purpose.</p>
Archives	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yesterday • Datewise • Resources • In Focus 	<p>The way out of this alienation is to erase the boundaries between the firm and its customers, and allow customers to `infiltrate' with their views and allow these to actively influence corporate strategy.</p> <p>The second dimension i.e. the worker's own fulfilment. This involves a systemic reevaluation of how careers are viewed from the traditional give-and-take transactional model to a fulfilment-oriented model. In the latter model, a service mindset (seva) will be very important. Seva, in the Vedic/ karma yoga context, is a work offered without any anticipation of reward, because the work itself is the reward in that it offers an opportunity to expand oneself from one's narrow selfish ego, towards a greater humanity.</p>
	
Group Sites	<p>While this may seem like lofty idealism, it is easy to see its practical function. Activities performed without anticipation or anxiety for future rewards must necessarily bring greater focus to the work at hand, and hence, a greater quality in the outcome, as well as greater fulfilment.</p>

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In conclusion, India is well placed due to its unique cultural and historical context to bring alive the vision of fulfilment-centric organisations. The question then is whether we will choose to replicate the path taken by the West and its attendant pitfalls, or will we at some point integrate the best of the East with the West.

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