

Why all this fuss about Creativity in management now?

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Why all this fuss about Creativity in business now, when the closest to the use of the word creativity in business up to some years ago was when we referred to entrepreneurs, those who risk their time, effort and money to enter into a new business venture.

Of course, looking at modern history of management, any idea of creativity in business would have suffered severely with the advent of “scientific management” propounded by Frederick Winslow Taylor in the beginning of the twentieth century. Scientific management was developed in response to a serious motivational problem at that time, which was called “soldiering”, workers trying to do the less amount of work in the longest amount of time. Taylor proposed that managers had to go around with stop watches in their hands measuring productivity and establishing high targets to stretch people to work harder. He wanted to remove all possible brain work from the shop floor. “ In the past, the man has been first; in the future the machine must be first.” The debate about man and machine which was ignited by Taylor, lives on as the new machines and their ancillaries, mobile phones, text messages, email, web surfing , cad cam etc are still dominating our lives. A scientific bias in management dehumanises business with the danger the it loses its contact with the outside world, particularly the important world of customers.

Can you now understand better the character and context portrayed by Charles Chaplin in the classic movie “Modern Times”?

But what about “modern management”?

As the economies grew in the late nineteen fifties and sixties, mostly due to the reconstruction of whole industries after World War Two and the advent of new consumerism with a wider availability of white goods, motor vehicles, travel and leisure, the demand for people to work in factories was growing faster than their availability. The idea of outright dismissing people who do not reach set tight working standards advocated by Taylorism was becoming unproductive and unfeasible as people were having a choice as to where to work. They can leave one job any time and knock on another door. It was at this stage that besides having managers who are disciplinarians and strict organisers, it became necessary to have them capable to motivate people. Here therefore the advent of different motivational theories. People are not necessarily subjected to sanction if they did not work, but an alternative theory, called Theory Y, focuses on the participative style of management which assumes that people will exercise self-direction and self-control in the achievement of business objectives to a degree that they feel committed towards these objectives.

This was a big breakthrough, giving management no excuse for failures. It challenges them to discover and rediscover new ways of organising and directing human effort. A

challenge indeed based on the assumption that you are dealing with complex humanity, with its differences, diversity, social contexts and overall change.

Besides being skilled in organisation therefore, the manager has to be a skilled motivator. And that was the case up to the nineteen eighties.

A new decade brought with it new challenges and new opportunities. The nineties saw the fast moving change in business ever with new technologies, new communication frameworks, new life styles, new attitudes. The service sector was growing as improved efficiencies in the manufacturing sector meant less labour intensive industry, and more time for leisure and pleasure. The tourism, leisure, telecommunications, travel, hospitality, retailing, health care, security and safety business was growing. So did the financial services sector and the housing sector. This meant that people now had to learn new skills, to use the computer, first as a word processor, than as a tool to design and manufacture, to prepare financial accounts and provide statistics, and to start and sustain relationships with customers. The internet meant that you are working in a virtual office anywhere in the world.

It is no longer an issue therefore of being a good organiser and a good motivator, but management has now to be a trainer of people, a developer and coach of new skills and techniques as people are learning and relearning new skills with new software being installed, and faster more efficient equipment becomes a prerequisite for a competitive business.

The Manager is therefore an Organiser, a Motivator and a Developer of people. Interesting, it is not an either or, alternative solution. It is not a question of being a Motivator or a Developer. Or a Developer or Organiser. These are added factors to a sum of skills and attitudes. $M = O + M + D \dots$

And this was at the end of the nineteen nineties. And it is at this stage that yet a bigger change came about. For God's sake we cannot waste the human brain! Far away are the years when business only needed arms and hands from its employees. Make sure to leave all the thinking outside the work place. For all I know it can all be filled with anti capitalism, anti free market notions, left leaning political stuff... very dangerous.

The key issues in business have now changed. How can we become more competitive? How can we add more value to what we are doing? How can we become more cost effective? How can we develop new products? Differentiate our products? How can we innovate? How can we sharpen our competitive edge?

Management of course realised that there is nothing mysteries in thinking. Thinking can be used and consumed. It is a utility. But thinking is also a skill. People need to learn how to think. And not necessarily in the manner we have learnt in the old fashioned educational institutions. But we can learn how to be creative... how to think outside the box. Laterally. Haven't you already heard about this?

The Manager therefore must not only be skilled in Organising, Motivating and Developing, but must master the skill of Creativity. But to be creative, you need to be empowered...

Funny word is “Empowerment”. We all talk about it today in local and national politics, in education, in business. Applying it means applying full human potential, uncasing human intellect, emotions and spirit to achieve more, and improve things. “Giving power” is to unleash human potential.. Management is starting off from quite a different premise from that used by Taylor. The idea behind empowerment is that humanity is a variable, can be changed because it is itself both an instigator and a product of evolution. The process of humanity is the result of human creativity. This is why persons have potential, seeds developing into a tree. Empowerment is based on human potential, it unleashes human creativity.

Creativity therefore is a necessary tool in the process of human thinking and evolution. It is not a matter of who is creative and who is not. It is a matter of learning and designing an environment where people can become creative.

“I never discovered anything with my rational mind” says Einstein. Intuition is not a dirty word!

One interesting experience is that of Valerie Bobo, founder of Mona Lisa, a Paris based “growth and innovation” consultant. Bobo decided to resort to artists’ creativity in business. She brings artists into company board rooms so that they can contribute their creative process particularly regarding business change in strategies and tactics. Artists have contributed to an attitude of “openness and discovery” in workshops for senior decision makers. They also provided content regarding trends in society. Artists are often ahead of society, and it is always beneficial to observe and understand the way they think about people and society. They are therefore a major contributor to the end product of creativity, innovation.

Entrepreneurial flair was once confined to the business promoter and the businessman. The creator of the business. All others are *executives*, they are there to materialise the creative flair of the owner.

Entrepreneurial flair is now necessary in management as it needs to create and recreate business models and environment to counter act and speedily react to moves by competition, fast changing customer needs.

Business has developed a number of methods to make this possible:

Training in creativity forms part of a management course syllabus. Managers are being trained in different brainstorming methodologies.

Suggestion schemes in companies are becoming more popular. Employees are given recognition for contributing to new ideas in business processes or products. Most companies are introducing or improving on their suggestion schemes.

Product development and innovation is not only in the realm of a “product research and development” department, but product development teams are mostly interdisciplinary and inter departmental. A number of companies are encouraging their employees to spend time on the development of new products. This is particularly the case in ICT companies where cutting edge innovation is critical in the competitive process.

Empowerment has superseded delegation in a number of modern businesses. Companies have moved beyond delegation, in widening considerably authority limits, and staff are empowered to take decisions which were previously only within the remit of supervisors or management.

Two major forces that had a strong influence on this change are: the intensity of customer orientation in business, as more companies are competing in a more crowded market, and where customers are becoming more discerning; the intensity of adaptation and adjustment that is being made by humanity to the world of information and communication technology. We are still at the early stages of the adaptation process, and the road ahead can be a very bumpy one.

In response to all this, business had also to adapt its structures, styles and systems of control. The concept of TQM (Total Quality Management) in business addresses the issue of “delighting customers, beyond what they expect” by means of a “continuous development” process which considers the business as a holistic entity, and where relationships with all stakeholders need to be safeguarded and enriched.

Another business concept is the Balanced Scorecard, which attempts to overcome the deficiencies of measuring corporate success only through financial ratios, when the true factors of success such as customer satisfaction and retention and employee loyalty and commitment, often went unmeasured. The Balanced Scorecard provides a framework to overcome this deficiency by providing a framework of measurement and analysis that is consistent with the strategic mission of the business, and which is organised around three other perspectives – customer, internal business process and people learning and growth. People in the guise of either employees or customer are given their due importance as enablers for the company to achieve success.

This further stresses how essential it is to have people in business who are knowledgeable and understand the process of creativity. This has a direct bearing on the manner they perform in the company whether in specific roles that necessitate this aptitude and skill such as in marketing, product development, research, process reengineering and consultancy, or whether they have more generic roles at director, executive or

management level. There is no doubt that this surge in interest in creativity will be giving us better performing people and an enhanced quality of life.

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