

## Cultivating Corporate Culture Change

Newton's first law states that 'Every body continues to be in a state of uniform motion, unless it is impelled by an external force.' This is true for humans too. We all get complacent in our comfort zones sometime or other. We enjoy doing things that makes us feel good and are relatively easy. We like to surround ourselves with people who blindly agree, think and support us unconditionally. A good boss is the one who shuns this luxury and immerses himself or herself in the uncomfortable, unfamiliar world of differing opinions.

A company can grow strong and capable of absorbing high level of change, without displaying any dysfunctional behaviour, i.e. become resilient only when the work place encourages differing opinions. This is one lesson we can learn from the collapse and debacle of Enron. Organizations have obligations to all stakeholders and not limited to shareholders alone. Executives at Enron made decisions that were wrong, without meeting many obligations. Some of their decisions may have involved illegal activities. Many may question the professional conduct of the company auditors, and allege that their personal interest clouded their judgment. Let us leave those discussions for others and focus only on the key management failure — curbing dissent.

### Corporate culture & management failures both start at the top

It is the job of the leader to provide the vision for the group, although merely dreaming a good idea is only half the story. The more important half is getting the idea implemented and reinforcing

its use throughout the organisation. The *Panchatantra* puts this very well.

A leader executive should have the ability to get the company's support of his vision by providing the necessary framework and help the people in the organization to achieve it. This will all depend on what we can call as corporate culture.

Organizational culture details the psychology, attitudes, experiences, beliefs and values – both personal and cultural – of an organization. It is the specific collection of shared values and norms, which control the way employees interact with each other and with stakeholders outside the organization. It also refers to organisational beliefs and ideas – the kinds of goals members should pursue and the appropriate standards of behaviour they should use to achieve it.

Organizational values develop organizational norms, guidelines and expectations that prescribe and control appropriate behaviour by employees towards one another.

Organizational culture and corporate culture are not exactly the same. Organisation culture is a wider and deeper concept. It is what an organization 'is' rather than what it 'has'. Corporate culture is the total sum of the values, customs, traditions and meanings that make a company unique. Corporate culture is "the character of an organization". The values of corporate culture influence the ethical standards within the corporation, including managerial behaviour.

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Senior management may determine a corporate culture and impose corporate values and standards of behaviour, specifically reflecting the objectives of the organization. In addition, there will also be in existence an internal culture within the workforce. Work-groups within the organization have their own behavioural quirks and interactions, which to an extent will affect the whole system. Unlike organizational culture, corporate culture can be 'imported'. Namely, new recruits will have expertise, language and behaviours gained independently of the organization, but their presence can influence the culture of the organization as a whole.

Corporate culture is an organisations self-concept and is comparable to an individual's personality. The basic elements of corporate culture coalesce during the organisations formative years and are an aggregate of sub-cultures developed in response to the unique challenges faced by the organisation. Culture is thus inherently multifaceted and complex. The prevailing beliefs, behaviours and assumptions of the organisation is a guide to understand whether an action is inappropriate or not for individual employees to engage in. Organisational culture thus reflects the inter-relationship of shared beliefs, behaviours and assumptions that are acquired over long time by members of the organisation.

### Beliefs

Beliefs are a set of integrated values and expectations providing a framework for shaping what people hold to be true or false, relevant or irrelevant,

उद्यमेन हि सिध्यन्ति कार्याणि न मनोरथैः |  
नहि सुप्तस्य सिंहस्य पविशन्ति मुखे मृगाः | |

– पञ्चतन्त्र

What is necessary for achieving a goal is effort;  
mere desire does not help.  
No prey will enter the mouth of a sleeping lion.

— Panchatantra

appropriate or inappropriate, good or bad, in oral and written statements.

Intended or unintended messages from the top management, regarding what employees plan or think they have to do, is company belief.

### Behaviours

Company behaviours are observable actions and the way employees actually operate on a daily basis. Belief reflects intentions that are often difficult to discern, although it is easy to verify behavioural patterns objectively.

How employees park their vehicles, how they talk, who they talk to and whom they do not, what they wear to office, how and who do they officially communicate and to whom they do not, how decisions are made, how conflicts are managed are all behaviours associated with an organisation's culture.

### Assumptions

Assumptions are the unconscious justification we use for continuing to apply certain beliefs and behaviours in our routine. When employees' belief and behaviour patterns succeed in a particular situation then they blindly start relying on those patterns when similar circumstances arise in their workplace. If similar situations occur frequently, then the application of these beliefs and behaviour to resolve the issue is normal. The application of these beliefs and behaviours becomes routine without any conscious thought process and when this occurs, we refer this pattern as unconscious assumptions.

### How company culture affects operations

Collective beliefs, behaviour and

assumptions affect daily business operations in any organisation. This can happen at two levels:

- The overt level representing observable, intentional and direct influences on operations (e.g., goals, policy and procedures, communication and messages, corporate philosophy etc.); and
- The covert level characterised by obscure, unintentional and indirect influences on operations (e.g., informal ground rules, unofficial guidelines and the way things are around there).

Covert level culture is very difficult to change. They lie either below the surface of our awareness, or because employees are reluctant to discuss them openly fearing negative repercussions from the top management.

An organisation overtly operates along the lines of its beliefs and observable behaviour. Covertly, employees' collective assumptions influence the organisation. The combination of these elements can be blatant or subtle.

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Culture is an organisations true lifestyle and the company's relevant practices convey it to the outside world. Typical practices that showcase company culture include:

- Oral and written communications, memorandums, presentations;
- Organisational structure, line and staff relationship, the way power and status are defined both formally and informally;

- Measurement and control of time and quality;
- Formal policies and procedures found in employee manual and followed; and
- Supervisory techniques, recruitment procedures, reward systems, compensation outlay, career plans etc.

Stories and legends, myths and rituals, company heroes, awards and banquets, corporate symbols and logos, the design, use and allotment of available infrastructure facilities also add up to culture. A corporation's cultural beliefs, behaviours and assumptions, whether directed or not, are a powerful means of justifying and reinforcing business operations.

Company culture helps employees to understand the various facets of important decision-making. However, culture based understanding severely limits the possible responses to developing employee expectations. Employees make certain decisions and behave in accordance to their expectations that normally confirm and reinforce to the companies culture's original patterns. Although company culture reinforces a strong corporate identity, they can also negatively restrict introduction of newer beliefs, behaviours and assumptions that may otherwise contribute to greater success in the rapidly changing market environment.

It is rare to find a company culture that has developed due to a carefully constructed plan. Most company cultures unfold over the years of the company's existence, without conscious design. Culture is the result of the companies many policies and decisions that have accumulated over time.

## Culture development in an organisation

Evolutionary development of a default company culture is generally through an unplanned emergence of beliefs, behaviours and assumptions, emerging from a history of isolated decisions made under a particular set of circumstances. When culture development is evolutionary, it is unplanned and a reaction to sporadic short-term needs, rather than to long-term requirements. These beliefs and behaviours, when successful to resolve the issue, reinforce it and are taken for granted, finally evolving into assumptions. Once this process is completed, no one questions these now familiar beliefs and behaviour, as its use becomes a normal business practice. With the passage of time, employees repeatedly draw on the successful solutions. Practices that develop during the company's formative years and during crises in its history create a complex configuration of beliefs, behaviours and assumptions, establishing company culture. Although some of these continue to be relevant and appropriate, many outlive their shelf life. Some may even begin to have a negative impact on the business, fostering inconsistent multiple cultural messages, encouraging contradictory sub-cultures, resulting in destructive conflict.

Evolutionary cultures rarely drive new strategic initiatives successfully. Evolutionary response to a new idea is a 'hit or miss' proposition, as there is no planned alignment between culture and change required. The strategy degenerates into 'spray and pray' approach. Take a blind shot, stand back and pray to god almighty that you hit the target correctly.

You will now have realised that in

such circumstances you are not likely to implement decisions correctly, yielding results that are either poor, or, at best, mixed.

The architecturally developed corporate culture, in contrast, is better than the high risk, evolutionary type. In this case, the culture development involves intentional planning and consciously putting forward a process that increases the likelihood of it supporting the necessary changes. Although divergent subcultures may also form during its development, it fosters supportive interaction between them and is not self-destructive. This type of culture, being transparent and in public domain is more easily manageable. In this case, the top management defines the specific characteristic of the desired culture, conducts a culture audit, determining gaps between existing and desired culture, and identifies detailed action plans to fill in the gaps.

Strong culture exists when employees respond to stimulus due to their

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alignment to organizational values and operate like well-oiled machines, executing processes with only a minor tweaking of existing procedures. Conversely, in a weak culture, there is little alignment with organizational values and control and processes are mired in extensive procedures and bureaucracy. Where culture is strong, people do things because they believe it is the right thing to do, being deeply involved in a cohesive in-group action for unanimity, overriding their motivation to realistic alternatives. Employees do not

challenge organizational thinking, in spite of having a different idea, thereby reducing innovative thoughts. This occurs in organisations where there is heavy reliance on the ability of a central charismatic figure, or where there is an evangelical belief in the organization's climate, or where avoidance of conflict is at the base of their identity. In these cultures, the company turns down defiant members as negative influence, because they bring conflict.

When company culture allows people to challenge ideas, suggestions and plans, only then can one create an organization of thinking, committed people who are capable of producing innovation and productivity, very much essential to succeed in today's market scenario. However, if the company culture does not allow dissent, and castigates people suggesting alternatives, for not being "team players", then it can only produce an environment of fear, stagnation and antipathy. Innovative organizations need to cultivate individuals who are prepared to challenge the *status quo*, group think and bureaucracy, and implement new ideas and procedures effectively. Not allowing appropriate dissent will eventually kill a company.

Cultural management in an organisation is very important and lack of it can be catastrophic. Companies that have grown under the umbrella of governmental regulation and in a protected environment have a lacklustre and laid back bureaucratic culture. Employees born and nurtured in this culture will find it difficult to respond with the quality and speed necessary in a fast-paced market condition. Delays in approval from relevant company authorities are common. Although most strategic decisions appear appropriate, their implementation become difficult.

Moreover, the decisions generally fail in deregulated market conditions, as the established culture is inadequate and ineffective to rise up to market expectations. It is not that the company ignores strategic initiatives, but that they simply do not make sense to the employees when they view from an outdated perspective.

### Can you change company culture for the better?

Success and survival in the ever-changing market today requires change. The challenge of the company leader is to be a positive instrument of change. 'Top leadership' affects culture more than 'management'. Corporate culture is very hard to change, especially in companies with very strong specific cultures. A clear vision of the firm's new strategy, shared values and behaviours, provides the intention and direction for the culture change. It is very important to keep in mind that we must manage culture change from the top of the organization, which should be very much in favour of the change, in order to implement it in the rest of the organization. To show that the top management is in favour of the change, the change has to be notable first at this level. The behaviour of the management should symbolize the kinds of values and behaviours the company needs, along with steps to modify and support organizational change.

Changing company culture is not possible without strong resolve and a wide-angle view of the situation from top management. A clear, unambiguous strong vision (why the organisation exists), mission (what the organisation is going to accomplish), and strategy (how it is going to work towards its objectives) from top management is necessary, if we have to develop and implement any newer structured cultural plan. It is also important to assess

the degree of consistency between the existing and expected culture. This is a critical element for success in implementing a focused cultural change. If the existing organisation culture is inconsistent in its beliefs, behaviours and assumptions with the one envisaged, it is important to alter the current culture to a more consistent level, so that implementation efforts succeed. To introduce counter-cultural changes, we have to alter the existing culture to support the new initiative. Improving infrastructure, integrating material assets and capital facilities, or upgrading product market technology is not very important, in comparison to blending cultural elements.

Culture-dependent human behavioural changes is often more crucial for a company's success than changes you obtain from brick and motor. Lack of culture integration between employees is one of the major reasons as to why attempts to effect change and achieve desired goals fails. Mastering tangible facets of transition is easy, but to master the skill with intangible human factors is not simple.

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Let us study the following case to explain the difficulty of this process.

#### A case study

Company X is a conservative old-fashioned company with a very strong market legacy. It merges with a smaller company Y renowned for its innovative research and development technology, humanistic operating style, 'work hard play hard' work ethic with liberal provision for flexi-time, weekend offs, on-site day care and transparent profit sharing financial structure. The larger company X

is merging company Y's operations with its own, concentrating more on the technical facilities, overlooking and eliminating many of company Y's humanistic considerations of flexibility and creative autonomy that made company Y thrive.

This approach may make many talented employees chafe at the newer rigid and stifling atmosphere. Employees resent the archaic 'big company' rules and procedures that have now superseded the fruitful, congenial atmosphere the Y employees had successfully used and cultivated among their colleagues. Productivity drastically dips, even though turnover rises.

Although this is common in a merger and acquisition (M&A) scenario, it is also a common occurrence when a contemporary employee joins a conservative concern. Misalignment of cultures get even more compounded by the lack of cultural management skills on either side. Newer recruits, unhappy with the company culture, leave the organisation, and all efforts to bring about changes are lost. When cultures are misaligned or poorly managed, the company's long-term business prospects inevitably suffer, without anybody realising the gravity of the situation.

#### Developing a positive working cultural environment

Three types of working relationships can produce a positive cultural environment:

1. Two separate but mutually supportive cultures coexist in an organisation (Co-existence).
2. The dominant culture prevails. It is either through natural attraction or due to greater moral strength. In this case, one group proactively alters its culture by aligning with the superior dominant culture (Assimilation).

3. Co-existence and assimilation are no doubt good options, but a true cultural merger results only by transformation. This occurs when two or more dominant groups integrate themselves in resources, thoughts and in heart, mind and soul, to create a new more powerful entity with substantial positive changes, in comparison to the individual cultures. Transformation involves identifying the strengths and weaknesses of individual organisations and exploiting them to create a synergistic union, benefiting all.

### Rejection – The bitter truth

It is imperative that organisations avoid this option. This is likely when change efforts result in separate and hostile cultures marked by resistance, territorial contentions, miscommunications, lack of trust, lack of cooperation or very little cooperation, missed opportunities and malicious compliance including sabotage. Unless managers possess or gain the necessary skills for integrating two or more disparate groups of cultures into an effective working relationship, all efforts of synergistically combining cultures will fail outright, producing performance below expectations or par at best.

### Effecting cultural change

Changes in culture can sometimes lead to tensions between company and individual interests. It can result in ethical and legal problems, particularly relevant in employee integrity, control, equitable treatment and job security. In any case, cultural changes in organisations are important and inevitable. Culture innovations are bound to be difficult because it entails introducing something new and substantially different from what prevails. People often resist changes and hence it is the duty of the management to convince people that the likely gain will outweigh

the losses. We cannot achieve cultural change by accident. It is possible only with a defined strategy of high involvement and a measurable action plan. A culture is effective only when it aligns with the company business strategy and ensures that the company reaches its long-term goals.

Cultural traits must be consistent with requirements necessary for driving new decisions. Inconsistency will lead us nowhere and implementing decisions will become very difficult. Overlaps between the existing beliefs, behaviours and assumption may be small or may vary greatly. If the organisations current culture is vastly different, without any commonality from the new cultural requirement, the chances of success in achieving change is rather slim. The odds in implementing a new culture increases as the difference in similarity between the existing culture and the required initiative increases. People cut the weeds growing in their garden lawn for years without success. They will be able to eliminate the problem weeds only by striking at their roots and plucking them out in their entirety.

In case of discrepancy between the current culture and the objectives of the new one, the existing culture normally wins. This being the case, effective management of corporate culture is a prerequisite for successful implementation of new initiatives. Never leave it to chance. As corporate culture is durable; it requires investments in time, effort and resources for any modification. Planning a business strategy is a cornerstone of effective business management. Resilient organisations today view culture change as a key resource crucial to manage business. How it skillfully implements changes that arise from planning, and manage it as any other business asset, will determine its survival and success. Learning to man-

age change proactively is one of the most basic fundamental skills an organisation must possess to position itself on the scale that goes from survival to market leadership.

### Discuss and debate

Personal corporate culture experiences have a great influence on the overall behaviour of individual managers. You are a smart manager when you encourage your people to express differing views, challenge your views, urging them to make creative use of conflicting opinions and alternatives. Encourage your people to disagree with you freely by responding objectively and not defensively, even when they say you are wrong. When things are not going your way get smart, not mad. As long as no one hurls hostile or angry accusations and insults, respect all opinions, depending on the merits or demerits of the case. Cultivating an open corporate culture helps one to make progress.

Supporting others means supporting them as individuals and contributing to their self-esteem. It is not just supporting their ideas. Look for good ideas in their thinking, arguments, humour, suggestions, musings and in the way they bring out their experiences on the issue. Show appreciation by saying how the idea proposed will benefit all. If you have better ideas, introduce it as a friendly amendment and request for comments. Give open credit to others for contributing to your thinking. Freely acknowledge others tact, frankness, patience, good humour, quick wittedness and imagination by words, gestures and expressions of approval. Do not get smug, when things go your way, but become solicitous, asking others how it will influence their ideas, events, proposals or decisions, their thinking, etc.

You are a good manager. Likewise, are you a good subordinate? Do you

have the guts to challenge your boss? Do you sit back and protect your job by agreeing with everything your boss suggests? Are you just like a typical subservient government employee during the British rule of India! Blind agreement will not protect your job. Enron's employees have learnt this bitter lesson. Every employee has a boss. It is our responsibility to our bosses to be honest with them, and to tell them what we really think, even if we disagree. In fact, we should be much more forthright, especially in disagreement.

### Saying no to your boss

When you appreciate your boss' opinion, do it genuinely. The point is not to just agree to whatever your boss says, but to make and feel that you deem it right by complementing the views. Admire your boss' decision. Be careful not to butter so much that your boss realizes it to be plain flattery!

If you have to say 'no', do so diplomatically. Convince with your ideas, using appropriate words, that what you are trying to say is better. Prove yourself by putting forward considerable reasons to believe. Do not overtly show that you are better and cleverer, otherwise your boss will like neither you nor your views. Whatever choice your boss makes, do not go against or try to persuade that it is incorrect. If you were convincing enough, the decision would surely include some or many parts of your suggestions, if not all of them. There is an advantage of complimenting your boss, as it could benefit in the long term like if you show yourself to be submissive, your boss may, prefer you and your suggestions in more or less important matters. This element of liking you would make it easier to say "no" whenever needed.

In a corporate career, there will be times when we may have to refuse our boss outright. In all such cases, it is bet-

ter that we are calm, tactful and be prepared with an explanation as to why we

are unable to perform the task or function at this time. Discussing the matter will give your boss an opportunity to respond with inside information on your selection to do the task, the kind of motivation that was involved in the assignment of the task to you. Respect your boss, as you say no. It is important to remember that just because you are saying no to your boss, does not mean that you have to be rude or dismissive, but explain you would love to help, but now is just not the time. In case the discussions do not yield a suitable solution, explain in detail your predicament of refusing to complete the task and ask for reprieve. If your boss continues to insist your participation, you can choose to do it under protest or continue to refuse. You can however also offer an alternative solution as to how to get the task completed by assigning others or a team to complete it or by working jointly with him. In any event, document the situation, circumstances and any action taken against you for future reference.

If you refuse to do something because of workload demands, you need to carefully document why the request is unreasonable. If your manager threatens to take action against you, seek out a senior colleague who then can represent you and mediate the situation. This should be a last resort tactic, as it can create a rift between you and your boss. If the task presents a moral dilemma, follow your conscience if your company does not have the code of ethics that would allow you to refuse to do something, such as lying to a customer or investor, and will protect you

from any reprimand. The *Samayochita Padyamalika* guides here.

नानुतात् पातकं किञ्चित् न सत्यात् सुकृतं परम् ।  
विवेकान् न परो बन्धुरिति वेदविदो विदुः ॥

— समयोचिन् पादयमालिका

**There is no sin graver than falsehood;  
no noble deed greater than adhering to truth and  
no friend greater than one's own conscience.**

— The Samayochita Padyamalika

If you are reprimanded or fired for refusing to do something on moral grounds, seek external assistance by filing a complaint to the official authorities to rectify the matter or, obtain an attorney to intercede on your behalf. God willing, you will never get to this situation, but sometimes legal counsel can be the best recourse.

In case none of this work, you always have to option to quit the organization, keeping your self-respect, belief, moral and social values intact. In any case, do not ever forget the world of the almighty is round and suitable options for a righteous person never end.

Opposing others means opposing their views and not the individuals professing them. Find fault with ideas and not the persons presenting them. Acknowledge the merits of the position before criticising. Criticise only if you have ready data, evidence and arguments. Another way is to support a different and opposing position. Instead of attacking a bad idea, introduce an alternate good idea. Let people finish talking even when you think they are wrong, rather than interrupting to correct them, showing your displeasure and impatience very evident.

Every one of us, including our peers, should discuss issues openly/ frankly, keeping the best interests in the area of our expertise clearly visible. Give the boss as much information and as many options as practically possible. Do not be afraid to fight hard, presenting your views forcefully for what you believe in. Do not compromise on your

moral values and social ethics, and be well within your legal rights. No doubt, we have to be professional about it, but also be candid. However, once the boss has made a decision, the discussion, arguing and dissent must stop. You have an obligation to support your boss in that decision. If you expect it of your people, you should do no less. However if your boss's decisions makes you compromise on your moral values and social ethics, you have the right to refuse or follow the directions issued.



One of the most important trait one has to follow both as a subordinate and as a boss is to 'Practice what you preach'. Always try to be ethically, legally, and socially correct. If you want your subordinates to be ethically and legally right, you as a boss should also be ethically and legally accurate. You cannot expect your subordinates to follow moral value systems, if your actions and behavioural traits are far away from morality. Values are the foundation of a company and it is very crucial to build strong values, otherwise the company will never prosper.

### Moral values

The ethical aspect regulates human behaviour. When this quality is absent, one's behaviour causes disturbance in society and so it is necessary for organisations to pay attention to this fundamental aspect for proper functioning. To follow the laws of

ethics is mandatory for a well-organised group in society and every member owes responsibility towards it. Morality or ethics is the science of conduct. Professional ethics is the study of what is right or good in conduct in a specific profession. Ethics is thus a relative science. What is good for one person may not be good for another. What is good at one time and at one place may not be good at another time and at another place as ethics is relative to the person and to the surroundings. Even though values may vary from place to place and group to group, only confusion will prevail wherever we try to disregard or violate it.

In today's world, people are casual and careless and it is discouraging to try to keep our morals standards and our ideals high. The so-called smart sophisticates will ridicule and laugh at us, by proclaiming in brittle banter that such things are out of date. Whatever said, Truth is truth and falsehood is falsehood. You cannot link truth and falsehood. They are as wide apart as the north and south poles. If you want ethical perfection, and love dharma for the sake of the supreme, we ought to stick to truth however crucial and tense be the situation, disastrous and threatening the crises we have to face. However inevitable and indispensable it is to achieve your company business target, you should ruthlessly avoid falsehood. Although we can cite a few exceptional instances, from religion, where speaking untruth is appropriate, they are a matter of exception, and not applicable to all times and all persons. Remember that working in an industry does not compel anyone to lower the moral standard. This mischief happens when misleaders deliberately exalt material values over spiritual values for personal gain. It is never too late to mend and if the heart were, cleansed of the dross selfishness and self-aggrandizement, and have righteousness enthroned in it,

you can achieve the most spectacular industrial success, keeping the moral standard high.

### Conduct and character

We know that ethical or moral values regulate human behaviour. A human wills, to obtain the objects of desires. Willing results in actions called conduct or behaviour. When you express your will, it becomes conduct. There are various sorts of desires, and sometimes, there is conflict of desires. That desire which obtains victory is termed 'will'. The inner disposition, which makes the will possible, is character. Character is thus the aggregate of peculiar qualities constituting personal individuality. Company culture should encourage good conduct. Good conduct is the root of material and spiritual prosperity. In addition, good conduct increases fame, prolongs life, destroys all calamities and evils, and brings eternal happiness, begetting virtue. Wrong actions, taints character whereas virtuous actions develop a noble character that the world honours, trusts, and adores. Learn to eradicate vices like lust, anger, greed, pride, and selfishness and cultivate virtues like purity, forgiveness, generosity, humility, and selflessness.

### The hermit and the hunter

The story of 'The Hermit and the Hunter', my late father told me during my younger days, is worth remembering to stress my point on moral conduct and character. Long ago, a soul was born to a poor family in a small village in the kingdom of Kashi. When the boy grew up his parents sent him to Taxila, for higher education. He learnt his lessons well and took to the life of an ascetic. One morning, while going through the forest, he sat down near a lake. The magnificent serenity of the place charmed and calmed his mind. The morning forest breeze refreshed him. He sat close to the water. A yard away, upon the calm water, floated a

lotus in full bloom. The hermit gazed long at the lotus. More and more attracted towards it, he took his face closer to the lotus and smelled it. Suddenly a sweet voice startled him. It said, "Young hermit is it right for you to steal the fragrance of my flower without my permission?"

The hermit saw a goddess like figure looking at him. She had emerged from amidst the water of the lake. "Who are you?" asked the hermit with reverence in his voice. "I am the presiding Sprit of this lake. You ought to have addressed me in your heart and sought my permission before enjoying the fragrance; you should not have stolen it", said the supernatural being. "Have I really stolen anything, O Sprit of the lake?" asked the hermit. Instead of answering, the supernatural being suddenly disappeared.

The next moment the hermit saw a hunter, looking violently rude, entering the lake. The fellow washed his face and drank from the lake. He plucked the lotus, as it was at hand and handled it roughly. Scattering the lotus petals on the lake banks he left the place. The hermit felt sad for the flower and sadder for the spirit of the lake. Soon the Spirit appeared before him again. "How is it that you blamed me for merely smelling the lotus, but kept quite when the hunter destroyed it?" he asked. There was a sad smile on the divine Spirit's lips. "Young hermit, if there is a small dab of mud on one's clean white clothes, it attracts everyone's attention. Nobody notices the dirt in the body of a pig that rolls in mud. You are pure in your soul. Every action of yours ought to be keeping with the dignity of your soul. You deserved a cautioning. The hunter has a long way before he comes to a stage when he can understand what I have to say," said the Spirit.

The hermit bowed down. "I am

grateful to you, O sweet, compassionate Spirit. Pardon me and point out again if you see anything wrong in my conduct," he said. Displaying a divine smile, the Spirit disappeared.

### Disagree without being disagreeable

You believe that your position is right, and want what is best for your people. You want things done in the way that works best for your department. Argue your points strongly. So far so good, but do not overdo it.

**Listen to this essence of all the codes of religious conduct and stick to this: Never do unto others what you would not like to be done unto you**

— The Panchatantra

and sharp intellect is necessary for this purpose. Cultivate it consciously. Do not do to your colleagues what is not good for yourself. Do not do any act, which does not bring good or which injures another and makes you feel ashamed for it. Do that act which brings good to others and which is praiseworthy. Do as you would be done by. Do unto others as you wish others should do unto you. The *Panchatantra* says this is the essence of all the codes of religious conduct.

श्रूयतां धर्मसर्वस्वं श्रुत्वा चैवावधार्यताम् ।  
आत्मनः प्रतिकूलानि परेषां न समाचरेत् ॥

— पञ्चतन्त्र

Now what is the criterion, by which we judge right or wrong, and good or bad? "Right and wrong" and "good and bad" are always relative to the surrounding circumstances. What is right in one situation is not right in another. Right and wrong vary according to time, special circumstances etc. It is very difficult to define these terms precisely. To speak an untruth to save another's life, charged unjustly by the unjust officer of a state, is right. Untruth has become a truth in this particular case. To speak a truth, which brings harm to many, is untruth only. Similarly, to kill a dacoit who murders the wayfarers daily is *Ahimsa* (Non-violence). *Himsa* (Violence) thus becomes *Ahimsa* under these circumstances. Forgiveness befits an ascetic who leads the life of renunciation. However it cannot befit a ruler who may forgive one who has injured him personally, but he cannot forgive the one who has done the greatest harm to the public.

Selfishness clouds understanding. Therefore, if we have even a tinge of selfishness, we cannot detect what is right and wrong. A very pure, subtle,

Even in the corporate world, only do that work which is right, that will give elevation, joy and peace to the mind and avoid wrongs that bring depression, pain and restlessness to the mind. That which helps you in your spiritual evolution is right and that which obstructs and hinders is wrong. That which leads to unity is right and that which leads to separation is wrong. That which is in accordance with the injunctions of the Holy Scriptures is right and that which is not in accordance is wrong. To work in accordance with the divine will is right and to work in disharmony is wrong. To do good deeds to others, to serve and help others, to give joy to others, is right and to give pain to others, to injure others is wrong. This is the secret of *dharma* (righteousness) and essence of *Karma Yoga* (The knowledge of action) leading you to the attainment of eternal bliss. Right and wrong refer to the moral standard, as law. Good and bad refer to it, as an end. We will have to adjust our conduct according to this moral standard. That which is in accordance with a rule is right. That which is worthy of achievement is good. Only religion gives the ultimate data upon which we can build ethical science. We



cannot win every battle in our quest to win the war. In any case, you take final decisions only after looking into the best interest of the organisation as a composite whole. You are only a part of it. We have to recognize this aspect and negotiate accordingly. Let us also remember that we have to work with the same people again in the future and this reason alone is good enough to make us realise that it is important to “disagree without being disagreeable”.

Agreement is not a necessary conclusion to any discussion. A negotiation aims at getting a ‘yes’ for an answer. However, a discussion or inquiry concerns discovery and a quest for new knowledge and insight. This quest can continue for hours, days, weeks, months, years, decades or even generations. A discussion need not be conclusive. In fact, it is not in the best interest of discovery and truth if it is so. Continuing dialogues increase rapport among participatory colleagues and makes fine grained distinctions and contributions possible. As philosopher, Descartes reminded us in his ‘Meditations’: “Systematic doubt is one of the most powerful weapons in the war against ignorance in the quest for knowledge. By it good ideas survive to serve us better and bad ones get ditched, their failure serving to instruct us”. The price of premature closure of a discussion could be high, that is to say false security and ignorance. For that reason, alone it is important to agree to disagree and argue it out until we reach some conclusive evidence.

### How to manage this issue

Cultivate a constructive culture. Encourage members to work to their full potential resulting in high levels of motivation, satisfaction, teamwork, service quality and sales growth. Create an environment, where quality is valued over quantity, creativity is valued over conformity, cooperation is

preferred over competition, and judgement is on effectiveness of the system and not the component. The cultural norms are consistent and support the objectives behind empowerment, total quality management, re-engineering, transformational leadership, innovation, methodology, and vision to focus and utilise resources with continuous improvement. Promote an environment where employees feel good about what their company is trying to achieve and cooperate to achieve it. People are passionate and have similar goals in the organization. Even though they do not always accept the actions of management or others around them, they see their job as important.

Corporate culture should empower employees and not limit their self-beliefs that are an important guide towards attaining goals. Inner beliefs determine outer behaviour. Change in the existing beliefs can change one’s life. Conscious awareness of our existing inherent beliefs is not a one-time thing, but a full time commitment to remain alert with our inner self. All time mental awareness leads to constant monitoring of our thoughts, a process that can change persons limiting beliefs into empowering statements. Company culture should focus on what is possible and not otherwise. Constantly reminding persons of their shortcomings does not help improve but only strengthens their weakness and the belief that it is impossible. This over time becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, very difficult to erase. Avoid it like plague. Culture should make beliefs work in our favour and disengage ourselves from any self-defeating thought patterns, as empowerment lies on one’s own beliefs. If you believe you can achieve your goal you will, but if you believe you cannot, you simply will not. Keep in mind self-belief is the key to your success.

Employees view the organization

as an extension of them and feel good about what they personally achieve through the organization. Align individual goals with the goals of the organization so that they make things happen. Let the culture of the organization be, such that it is more like a family that provides personal fulfilment, transcending ego with people consistently bringing out the best in each other. Create a culture, where leaders do not develop followers, but develop other leaders, who not only have the ability to capitalise on the local emerging opportunities, but also create and exploit opportunities in the global marketplace. Treat employees as knowledge workers, giving a freedom to innovate, and interact with seniors in a learning environment, but at the same time loyal and flexible to the customers. Establish a corporate culture that run all the way through the business, with clear values, beliefs, business principles, and operations with a suitable emphasis on human resources and customer satisfaction.

No doubt, the top management is responsible to foster a culture where differing opinions are encouraged and set an example by words, action, philosophy, and principle for an appropriate corporate culture essential to manage the organisation. However, every one of us can also do this within our sphere of influence. Avoid the temptation to love individuals who cannot offer a different perspective, and are only yes men/women. Do not surround yourself with people who are so afraid that they will not dissent. They are no good any ways. Creativity and original thought is a reward in any decision-making process. Hang on and encourage only those people who have mastered the art of disagreeing without being disagreeable. Maybe then we can avoid being blindsided by events similar to the one Enron has encountered.