

TALENT MANAGEMENT AND BIOSPHERICAL NET: LOCATING TWIN ASPECTS IN ASHUTOSH GARG'S THE CORNER OFFICE

M. ROSARY ROYAR

Associate Professor, Head (Retired), The Research Centre of English, Fatima College, Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India

ABSTRACT

The corporate world hires people of high acumen and sharp intelligence. The employees need to possess the drive to promote the undertaking of the concern. Goal targeted life speaks of their style and they need to prioritise everything but the firm's business needs to be the prime factor and everything else has to be pushed to the next category. None can escape the push factor. What gets edged and reaches the centre and what reaches the periphery have to be constantly checked for a healthy living. The article intends to give a brief glimpse of talent management and ecological perspective for the two are inseparably intertwined. When they begin to take separate tracks it leads to collapse at different levels – individual, family, organization, society and at large community. Our life is never isolated; individual growth and ecology are well-knit; and people especially in the corporate world govern but at the same time contribute to the growth and development of society at different dimensions. The second part tries to look at Rahul, Raj, Iqbal, Sangeeta and Anita recruited in a multinational company, Trust Corporation. As decades roll by, their progress in the company is to be analysed. Their family life and career form a parallel structure. How does their competitive tendency to reach the ultimate position of Chairman and occupy the chair in the fabled corner office drive them? What does Ashutosh Garg propagate in his novel *The Corner Office* (2013) ?

KEYWORDS: Talent Management, Economic Development, Competency, Self-Realization, Dichotomy, and Ecosystem

INTRODUCTION

I have met hundreds of corporate managers

On their deathbeds over the years.

Not one of them, in their dying wish to me, has said,

I wish I had run a bigger company.'

'I wish I had made more money.'

'I wish I had more power.'

All of them, unanimously, have said,

'I wish I had been a better husband.'

'I wish I had been a better father.'

'I wish I had been a better human being.'

An eighty-year-old Jewish rabbi, speaking at an international conference. vii

The corporate sector almost unobtrusively governs the world system. Having gained such force and power, it keeps

extending and establishing branch firms which manifest evidentially the success performance of the target-oriented teams, leaders and individuals. Examining their culture and system from within and pooling in the need of the market from the external point of view, they fuse subjective and objective schemes to become exceptional in the global market space. If this is the economic development, Huggan and Tiffin bring in the view of Wolf Gang Sachs and Escobar that the environment itself implies the marketability of nature; the global urban-industrial system, supported by the nation-state provides a rationalisation for the control and management of natural resources. They state:

The epistemological and political reconciliation of economy and ecology proposed by sustainable development is intended to create the impression that only minor adjustments to the market system are needed to launch an era of economically sound development, hiding the fact that the economic framework itself cannot hope to accommodate environmental considerations without substantial reform. (32).

It is explicit that economic development takes place at the cost of environment. Talking about sustainability in the global ecocracy era has hidden meaning and economic development, nevertheless, keeps scaling higher. At the same time, it cannot be denied that the responsibility of protecting the environment lies on the industrial / corporate sectors.

Corporate Sectors carry an image and an index that it looks for talented candidates. On absorbing them, the firm develops strategies like making them go through training process that alters the ego consciousness and shifts their entire focus to the development of the company. Talent management's key factor is to motivate and retain employees. It engages the employees in such a way with the ultimate goal of high performance that reaches the maximum productiveness. Spelling out job responsibilities, priorities, performance expectations, the sector aligns individual's performance with organizational strategic goals. The organization promotes leadership development. Leadership abilities infuse goal – driven activities. The organization structures the career progress and provides the process of establishing training goals that links to goal attainment. Any organization follows the dictum of recruit, retain, reward along with providing chances to make people develop and perform. The top managers have the responsibility of training their immediate subordinates to develop their skills. The HR wing is expected to care for each individual in providing them well furnished houses and making them have annual medical check- up.

A great corroboration that exists with high performance, although totally neglected, is the environmental ambience. If the employees prove their performance and attest the business strategy, the hidden layer needs to have correct moral ethos. If not, the success performance cannot keep the career pathing towards progress. On the other hand, there will be a decline though the reason may not surface at the required moment. The inner realm has a definite way of deciding the destiny of an individual both in the professional and personal life. Career strategies and development begin to bog down the self on an unequal level causing one to slide down the career progress. Competency is appreciated but its journey needs to be introspected. Moral ecology is the right tool to measure the organization's and individual's success ratio.

Moral ecology avows the moral diversity in the world and this diversity relates also to psychological diversity. Each behavioural strategy manifests itself in the form of a moral norm. Moral ecology describes behavioural strategies that promote high levels of cooperation within groups and enjoy success depending on the environment it exists. Allen D. Hertzke correlates the destruction of the human environment with the destruction of natural environment. He says that human responses to the moral environment also have ethical weight and practical import because they determine the capacity for the system to sustain healthy life. He lists out certain features like marital breakdown, sexual revolution etc and their weakening effect on the social system. Jozef Keulartz says 'Morality is objective because it emanates from the essence of human nature

which in turn is seen as an integral part of a universal order'. He continues that one man's licence does not infringe on the other man's liberty since every human being takes part in a cosmic nature characterized by perfect harmony. He distinguishes that a human being reflects this harmony only to the extent that he realises his own nature (110). Failure of understanding one's self and accountability can lead to moral chaos and societal disorder.

Deep ecologists find that self-realization is contingent on the self-realization of all other beings, human and non-human around us. The self-realization, as advocated by deep ecologists, revolves around a 'transformation of the egoistic self into an ecological self'. Keulartz refers to the social ecologist Bookchin's view that liberatory social transformation depends on renewal at the most personal level. To state Bookchin's view:

The self is seen as an organic whole, yet as a whole in constant process of self-transformation and self-transcendence. The replacement of the 'hollowed-out' ego of consumer society with such a richly developed selfhood is one of the preeminent goals of social ecology. (119)

Arne Naess, deep ecologist, deduces the demand for ecocentrist egalitarianism from the ultimate norm of self-realization. According to him, Keulartz says that self-realization is all about as an all-embracing, Cosmic Self, of which all individual things are but temporary manifestations. Self-realization requires the effort to break all the bounds imposed on our egos by engaging in a process of ever widening identification with others. This process of self-deepening and self-broadening cannot be confined to fellow beings but to plants, animals and even complete ecosystems. As the sense of belonging to nature occupies our self-consciousness, we will start to treat other life forms with more compassion and respect for their intrinsic value. If we hurt other creatures we hurt ourselves (118-119). If human beings arrive at this level, exploitation of fellow beings and ecosystem cannot pervade life. Competence will create healthy atmosphere in the work place.

In *The Corner Office* (2013) by Ashutosh Garg, Trust Corporation is a multinational company and jobs in it were much sought after in business schools, as well as in the professional community, such as chartered accountants and lawyers: ... managers in human resources had always endeavoured to provide an environment where every manager could aspire to become the chairman of the group (2-3).

While it charts the future of the employees' career, its policy also needs to be looked at:

[It] was well known for its policy of hiring young managers and grooming them in its culture, providing them training in various businesses and giving them excellent career opportunities. All the board managers, directors and even the chairman of the company had started their careers with Trust Corporation as management trainees and worked their way up. None of them had felt the need to work for any other (2).

The organization's thrust had been to recruit young people and equip them with sound training in different avenues. The company's success is that its employees stayed on, fulfilling their aspiration. Aspiration gear has been accelerated and so it is not a passive or inactive pursuing of career.

In 1980 over three hundred young men and women had applied for five management trainee positions in the corporation. Selection process spread over four months and it was an arduous task for the human resource department to sift through the mass of applications. 'The applicants had been through grueling group discussion and several rounds of interviews before their selection' (5). The interviewers had quizzed them on several matters ranging from specialization of their education, current affairs, world economy, sports and family background. At the final round, they were invited to dine with the board members. Due to this practice and strict procedures of interviewing, the Trust Corporation has been informally referred as The Trust School of Business.

Selection to this category took place once in every five years to avoid 'unnecessary and unhealthy competition' (4). The five who got selected came from varied family backgrounds with different qualifications. Yet there were certain common features. They were of middle-class families, and a generation of post-independence children- the 'baby boomers' of India. The late seventies and the early eighties presented 'heady career and growth opportunities for the educated and fired by ambition, they were all determined to change their country and the world' (4). It gives us a promising picture of career and the consequent impact it would cast not merely at the personal but at the national and international level.

The selected five were flown to New Delhi for their final round of meetings with the board of directors. The management training programme was 'extremely intense and every trainee was expected to work round the clock for the entire one-year period' (13). They were given classroom as well as on-site training by top management and senior managers. They were shown the facilities of the company, spread over India. HR observed individual's likes and dislikes, their threshold for work pressure, their interpersonal skills and what business of the company appealed to them. They had gone through the training programme with 'fierce determination'. The company's philosophy is to let the best person win. 'All the five of them needed to start their climb up the steep and opportunistic 'corporate ladder' (14). Rahul Jain, from Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, Raj Dhingra from Chandigarh, Sangeeta Malhotra, the youngest of the group, Iqbal Mohammad from Lucknow and Anita Fernandes, Delhi are the five selected.

As they get introduced to each other and live together going through the training programme, their experience was enriching. But each one harboured 'intense competition and rivalry' (6) that would travel along with them as their respective careers progressed over the years. In the knowledge domain, their educational qualification shows their ability and the status they held. Rahul is an engineer from IIT and has an MBA, IIM Ahmedabad, majoring in marketing. Sangeeta is also from IIT but has done her MBA at Harvard, USA. Iqbal is a chartered accountant, hired for the finance function of the company. Raj has his MBA and Anita specialized in human resources with an MBA from Xavier Labour Relations Institute, Delhi University.

Rahul's father was a mid-level Government of India Officer who taught him the value of honesty and he married Lata an independent young lady and had good social life. He was an excellent worker and taking up additional jobs, he travelled extensively to different countries and gave guilty gifts to his two children who never had time with him. They managed to spend annual holidays at Disneyland, California Walt Disney World, Florida, theme parks in Malaysia, Hong Kong, Australia and New Zealand. On one such holiday time in Singapore, Rahul suffered mild pain and the doctors found a blockage of over 96% in one of the main arteries and put a stent in the block artery to avoid further damage. Since it might be considered as a 'sign of weakness' (113) and lest it impedes his career on the idea that he is not fit for higher responsibilities, they conceal it from the company. Soon after, at his fortieth birthday Lata held a large party and it was a success. The work pressure increased exponentially. At thirty he became deputy general manager. 'He performed well and delivered

record sales and profits' (114). He got a chance to work on Long Island, New York for two years. At 43, he joined the board of directors. He had excellent relationship with the public and the people of the company. His children made them proud and started their career in multinational companies. Taking advantage of tax laws he launched several products enhancing the market. He became a director-in-charge bringing in record profits.

Raj's father Dr. Jagdish Dhingra had a clinic in his garage and was content with it. Raj became a chain smoker in school. His yellow, nicotine-stained fingertips and nails bore evidence of addiction. At college he discovered his weakness for fairer sex. Paying a princely sum of Rs.10 he had sex with a Nepali girl. Paid sex fulfilled his physical needs. He defines that his life has been 'swings and pendulum' (25). After getting selected for his aggressiveness and intuitiveness, he marries Lovely for he wanted an 'undemanding wife who he could control' (27). Lovely was commanded to stay under the custody of his parents. In two years they had two sons. His 'appetite for regular sex' found fulfillment in Barbara, his secretary. Accused her of stealing money, he got her sent out, for the company became aware of the rumour. He never checked his drinking habit.

He could 'quell his conscience' (68) at his various affairs. His flexible conscience kept changing as he swindled the money of his power sector, paying bribe to get projects sanctioned and getting money from bureaucrats and politicians he hoarded wealth. As years passed he involved Lovely who invested in land, jewel and other schemes and used relatives as benomies. Being a workaholic, his work in power division fetched two quick promotions and he was the youngest deputy general manager. He had heart attack after a satisfying sex with Barbara in a hotel and Lovely came to know of his affair. He started to drink even more heavily. As he was politically well-connected, when they heard about inordinate wealth the company did not want to jeopardize the political relationships, he had built for the company. Lovely had inherited his parents' wealth and with the questionable wealth, Income tax authorities raided her house. She quickly worked out divorce and left him with nothing. Barbara demanded and left with two crores for herself and their son. He had no family as his children studying in Australia did not want to have any contact with him. Spending several months in rehabilitation, he could not give up drinking. The barman was the only friend for on his resigning, friends left the moneyless man. He attests that he is a complete failure.

Sangeeta, tomboy in her earlier years, is from an army officer's family and lost her virginity with a neighbour's son. As an intelligent person she passed JEE and entered IIT. In her college days, college hunk Arun raped and left her in the park at night. To get rid of her memories, she went to Harvard Business School, USA. Her parents married her to Ajay Sharma, a young army officer to whom before marriage she says 'my career is of prime importance' (34) and lays other conditions that they would have separate homes she would not move with him on his transfer; would maintain her maiden name and have no time for children. Later he was shocked to learn that she was a US citizen and the army would never give him permission to take her to sensitive areas. Marriage ended in divorce, in a short span of time. She was in software division because she was 'aggressive, outgoing, had a pleasing personality' (80). She travelled extensively to Europe and USA and reached the rank of deputy general manager in the software division. On detecting a malignant tumour, she underwent the operation. But her life style changed. 'She would attract men towards her like bees to honey and she would use them and discard them when she was satiated' (131). She was clear that there would be no emotional involvement and her conscience never bothered her. 'Sangeeta is not setting the right example for the younger managers' (132) was recorded in her personal file.

Virtual revolution had brought about a change in India and she delivered excellent results. In order to get a contact, she invited the client to her hotel room for a drink and had sex and succeeded in getting the contract and the applause of the chairman. She had a promotion to the rank of executive vice-president and 'personal life was a complete mess' (165). At 49,

doctors found a growth near lungs and the cancer had erupted. 'The major software companies were delivering billions of dollars in profit' (167) but Sangeeta's was in the low hundreds of millions of dollars. The chairman offered her the position of managing director. She asked him for a day to think over. But at home drinking, she picked up her revolver, 'put the muzzle of it into her mouth and gently squeezed the trigger' (171).

Iqbal's family had built a 'huge empire of carpet manufacturing and trading, and real estate'. Minor workers produced excellent carpets to the 'ever hungry markets of the Western World'. Getting lower invoices, they paid less income tax. From minority status, they got 'strong political patronage' (37) in real estate business and they donated cash lavishly to elections. At school Iqbal was the darling but one senior boy coaxed him into homosexual relationship. Collapse of the family business built up intense anger in him. But he managed to emerge as a chartered Accountant. Through political favour, he got selected in the company. Samina, his wife, was the victim of his anger. After slapping her, he 'experienced a strong sense of control as he saw her shrink away, tear in her eyes, a shocked look on her face' (85). The intense anger against Samina had triggered an asthma attack and he was rushed to the hospital. When the boy baby was born, he slept in another room to be undisturbed. She delivered two more sons. The three boys were very scared of their father. He had addiction to chewing gutka.

At work, he prepared intelligent comparative analyses of the various businesses and interacted with the top management. He became a 'source of power' (92) for the finance director and supplied the details of loopholes in the lives of employees. Given a weakness for food Iqbal and Samina put on weight. The doctor was shocked to see the rotund man and warned 'Diabetes, coupled with blood pressure and excessive obesity, is a killer' and unless he reduced 20 kilos, he was a 'walking time bomb' (138). He blamed Samina for providing such food but never changed his food habits. He managed to get several pack sizes resulting in lower tax burdens and a better price for the consumer that led to the company's revenues and profits. He managed to get export incentives for the company in addition to tax rebates and set off the previous year losses. Increasing profit by 2 percentage, he was given a standing ovation. He became a chief financial officer. As he 'successfully alienated himself completely from the family' the sons had built a separate life and purchased separate apartment. After losing money in stock market, he started to vent his anger on Samina and slapped her. Younger son intervened and Iqbal slapped him on his face. All of them walked out of Iqbal's house, never to return again. He got in touch with a broker and carried on deals in the company's and personal name. His greed ate him up. To stop further deals he could not and 'insider trading was a serious offence' (178). The broker exposed everything and he was suspended. He got severe asthmatic attack. Since he 'tortured and terrorized' (180) his family, they did not come to the hospital and he was alone in the world.

Anita's father was an officer in the Indian Administrative Service and uncles and aunts worked in defence services, police, railways and bank. Anita wanted to avoid the bureaucracy, and so got into HR. she had a crush for a local hero Michael who played Spanish guitar and as years passed by, he, with no work, realized Anita could be 'his meal ticket for the rest of his life' (47). After marriage they settle down in Delhi. She had to pay for his drinking. She was afraid to ask him seek a job for he was blackmailing and taking advantage of her insecurity by making sudden disappearance. When the baby was born, he looked after her quite comfortably. At a time of industrial dispute, she negotiated and brought about union that the vice-chairman appreciated her. Michael had become religious and they bring up their daughter in the Roman Catholic tradition. Michael suffered several silent strokes and medical attention did not help. He became bed-ridden and demanded her full time while she was moving up the corporate ladder by her hard work and successful implementation of a major review of terms. Michael, a complete wreck and full of self-pity, could not be managed. He suffered a second stroke and Anita's prayer was intense. As an invalid, he was sent to a home for the physically challenged and the daughter blocked the mother out of her

life. The new chairman cut off many privileges of employees. She who had meteoric rise objected to the cut down ratio and resigned. Left alone, she decided to dedicate her life to God.

The above narration about each individual, focusing on personal and professional life shows a kind of dichotomy. Professional success does not correlate with the family management. Allen D. Hertzke links the individual freedom and the tragedy of commons in moral ecological aspect and says that some individuals abuse their freedom to the detriment of family, community and society. He adds that these moral contaminants push beyond the culture's carrying capacity to sustain healthy norms of behavior. As Lata balances, Rahul escapes; all the three of them prove their competency but they have failed in maintaining healthy behaviours. Anita as HR checks people and warns like Sangeeta and Raj who reproach her but Michael wrecks her life.

Hertzke analyses that family lies at the centre of moral ecological nexus. If the family is the sanctuary of life, it helps to love and be loved and become aware of its members' dignity. Weakening of the family is an effect of moral ecological disruption. Sangeeta had discarded the family system and fulfills her sexual urge by crossing the boundary; Raj uses women and Iqbal has least regard for the fairer sex; Anita values family but she is pushed to be a loner; all the four are stranded; with no network of relationship, their microcosmic world shatters; the company has reaped its profits in all branches but the agents are in ruined state.

Marital breakdown is another aspect and moral ecologists point out that liberal notions of autonomy and self-fulfilment have been extended to the contract of marriages. Raj never cared for family except by sending money; Sangeeta went in for divorce as if she waited for it and her touring internationally had trapped her with other men; Iqbal lived with the family but oppressing the wife and the children resulted in disintegration; Anita's circumstances had driven her to the edge; Rahul also had not spent time with children but Lata sustains the family.

Sexual revolution, Hertzke points out, has eroded the cultural ecosystem that provides habitat for marriage. Liberated individuals have altered the moral ecology. Moral ecological understanding suggests that the altered thinking in sexual aspects has caused the erosion of family structure. Sangeeta and Raj have adopted use and throw policy; Raj's sexual urge needs another human being but he never ever thought of the being; he ruthlessly gets Barbara dismissed; it is unfortunate that their son had to grow without knowing the father; Iqbal never loved Samina but had sex for the purpose of producing children; Anita never transgressed the border but Michael had used her for he could not pull himself to earn. She had to pay for him that when she resigned, she was left with nothing.

The ant colony in the biosphere renders human a lesson to work together; team work earns the support and efficiency of all but the team that got employed began to look at each other as a dangerous potential being; Rahul was keen at his promotion that he studied each of them and maintained a superficial work relationship; he confessed that he had to be cautious; Iqbal would never allow Sangeeta to the top position and so he turned out to be an informer about the rest of them regarding misdemeanor, moral and financial corruption, family collapse and slowness in work. Raj and Iqbal resorted to unethical ways of earning and kept progressing; Sangeeta was ruthless to Anita reprimanding her to mind her own business when Anita cautioned her of her relationship with men. Team work may be a good policy but it is not implemented by the team.

Tree speaks explicitly that we create room for the other. Each branch never crushes the other to death but grows strongly while linked to the branch and trunk. So in an organization the boundary needs to be respected and the management needs to get strong and become rooted; the ocean flows only up to the boundary; the tidal waves do not wash away the sand;

such co-existence with due respect for each other has to emanate from each, however competent be the person; the tidal waves keep rising; the rocks and boulders cannot prevent the flow of water; God's engineering is marvelous; man is given the capacity to think creatively and not adhere only to logical thinking. Paradoxically the Trust Corporation employees seek an underhand dealing and that causes the pitfall for Raj and Iqbal. An eagle teaches us to take advantage of stormy situation for it flies above the storm wind, hovers and creates pressure to fly higher. Rahul could not be open about his heart surgery; all the others Raj, Sangeeta and Iqbal get into the centre of the storm to be swallowed up and that occurs gradually. Their competency had been sold to compromising and goal achieving at the cost of morality and sanctity.

Migratory birds make intercontinental travel just by flying in an orderly and harmonious manner; the birds forming V shape follow the leader; the sick ones are never left alone; they are cared for to join the next trip; if the leader bird becomes weary / sick, it takes back position and the next takes the command; their untaught but instinctual collaboration makes us marvel. In human organization, they cannot accept each other; Anita is condemned by the rest of them though she has made impressionable record; Raj and Sangeeta want his power unit and virtual world to have sole supremacy respectively; Iqbal understands that finance is the only powerful sector. Instead of coordination, they work in a cut-throat manner and all of them suffer from sickness malignant and killer diseases – heart attack, asthma, sugar, diabetes, and arthritis. Susan Rowland refers to Bernstein's concept of Environmental Illness Complex, EIC, which cannot be attributed to a body believed to be separate from psyche. Bernstein suggests that the psyches of these sufferers come to bear the suffering of polluted nature, which in turn sickens their bodies (83). The characters are inwardly polluted and their dichotomy tells upon their bodies.

The Trust Corporation employees are so mechanical and have no link with nature to relax. They sacrifice their families, and their inner attitude had also conditioned them to devalue life and family. Success is the creed they follow and they do not have any sort of biophilia. Glen A. Love quotes Edward O. Wilson's view that our existence depends on this propensity – biophilia, our spirit is woven from it, hope rises on its currents. He says that sociobiology provides a way of seeing the world that is incidentally congenial to the inner direction of biophilia (76). The employees are totally cut off from this inner ethos and they do not seem to even throw a passing glance at the environment. The luxurious, cosy, enclosed rooms with its architecture, has segregated them from the world of nature that they are mechanical but not animated beings.

Above all the Trust Corporation needs to be examined against the background of environmental protection. It is also known as 'cradle to grave' organization. Set up in twentieth century, it is a subsidiary of a major American liquor manufacturing corporation. It is an exploitation of the environment for seeing the size of the Indian Population, the company has decided selling alcohol would be an attractive business proposition. To enter the market, they distributed free alcohol and the principle was that once the consumers got used to the heady brew, they would come back for more. 'Over the years alcohol had generated large cash flows' and after seventy years of selling alcohol, it had diversified into software and power. 'The alcohol, business was churning out more than 100 percent of the profits every year, more surplus cash than Trust Corporation could handle' (2).

The company has exploited the land resources, extracted the wealth, and capitalised its income on the human capital of India and had succeeded in causing irreparable damage in the lives of millions and in turn the family members. Pushing the natives to poverty condition, the company had its surplus amount to be invested in other businesses. It is ironic that its name is Trust Corporation when it transgresses trust and practices implicit treachery by quickening the march to the grave and causing destructiveness in the mental, physical and ecological spheres. A systematic but apparently non-criminal mass killing has existed in the Indian soil unquestioned but supported and promulgated by people of great competency.

Ulrich Beck's argument sums up the environmental crisis:

.....the ecological crisis involves a systematic violation of basic rights, whose long-term effect in weakening society can scarcely be underestimated for dangers are being produced by industry, externalized by economics, individualized by the legal system, legitimized by the natural sciences and made to appear harmless by politics.

(qtd.in Clark, 87)

The Corner Office presents an ecodrama of social killing and an ecological disaster of death and destruction that pervades society imperceptibly.

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