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Corporate Perspectives
On The Vedic Meditative Practice Upasana

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A business corporation capable of evolving, termed a learning corporation, has a conscious quality. It is the *systemic* version of a rigid structure-preserving corporation that would be expected eventually to run into problems and end up as a failure. The conscious corporation analogy can be used to simulate the sequence of processes that occur during *Upasana*, a Vedic technique of meditation. In this essay, it will be argued that (1) the Vedic view of consciousness is parallel to the postulate that successful business corporations have a conscious quality, and (2) if the *Upasana* process sequence is considered as a *competence model*, in the Chomsky-ian sense for corporate consciousness, the executive functionary in a successful corporation is effectively a practitioner of *Upasana*.

The individual biological organism is more than a mere aggregate of disparate body functions. Angyal (1941) remarked that there are no irrelevant properties to the component subunits of a biological organism. The feature is a definitive characteristic of systemic organizations. The idea of transformation of an aggregate of functions to a system was used by Sri Aurobindo in order to explicate his integral yogic method for a transition of the mind to a "higher" status beyond common experience (Sri Aurobindo, 1977). *Upasana*, a Vedic meditative technique devised by the Indian Mystics, is a method of effecting a similar transformation by individuals in themselves. A descriptive account of this technique is facilitated by using a convenient parallel available from the dynamics of business corporations.

The Conscious Corporation
Organization as a System

A business organization is a system, a unified whole, and therefore, by definition, cannot be separated into parts without losing some part of this character. As an autopoietic (self-organizing) system, it is characterized by a measure of autonomy vis-a-vis the environment (Jantsch, 1980; Progogine & Stengers, 1984; Jackson, 1991; Lewin, 1992; Capra, 1996) and consists of elements or units linked through certain processes—generation, promotion, communication and dispersal of ideas—that govern the organization. These activities act as the binder between the various human elements of the organization, thus leading to the idea of a *conscious* corporation. The physical or spatial boundary of the corporate unit is secondary to the unity thus established by the binder ideas. An example would make these notions clear and elucidate the result of transformation of an aggregate of functions into a functional system.

Systemic Nature of Conscious Corporations–An Illustration:

It is an important property of a systemic organization that the component units are closely linked and they have no preoccupations or properties that are irrelevant to the system, just as in biological systems (Angyal, 1941). Secondly, the inherent properties of the component units have a determinant role on the success of the organization. These are the features that lend a consciousness-like property to the corporation, in close similarity to biological organisms. An illustration of these points is provided by the Honda story (Taylor, 1996). Honda, "the fairy-tale-come-from-nowhere auto success of the 'eighties" suddenly started falling apart in the nineties when the Japanese economy sank back to reality. Business dried up and export sales sagged. A great business collapsed in a discontinuous, sudden and shocking way. What happened was that the leg-

endary Honda engineers were behaving as if the rest of the company did not exist and were pushing the engineering to the cutting edge, ignoring the signals from the market. The loss of focus on `customer delight' brought the company to the edge of chaos. In short, the 'consciousness fabric' of the organization was torn by the engineers' preoccupation with technology. The loss of organizational consciousness was quickly recognized and remedied by the intuitive CEO, Nobukiko Kawamoto, by side-lining the engineers.

What did Kawamoto's call exactly accomplish in terms of a process change in the individual corporate mind? Putatively, the process in principle is as follows (Murthy, 1994a): The executive builds a reasonable working principle that integrates holistically into the corporation goals and implements it to find out if it yields a successful strategy for the corporation. This may be seen as probing the system. The probing throws up some more parameters of the corporate system to the surface. The system is then considered together with the fresh parameters and a new holistic individual strategy is conceived and implemented for corporate success. The iterations end when the system is sufficiently holistic and a successful corporation ensues.

In this effort the role of leadership at all levels is evident. In Honda's case, all the organizational units chose to respond to Kawamoto's call; thus it helped the individuals to discover and attain *corporate* consciousness. In this cycle, the leader acted as a cybernitician. An alignment of individual goals to corporate goals ultimately emerged, eliminating the dual controller-controllee distinction between component units. Thus the cycle represents the cybernetics of *corporate* consciousness in the *individual* corporate functionary. This willful surrender of individual choice to the corporate goals is what is labeled here as development of corporate consciousness in the individual corporate functionary. It might even be a marker for the establishment of a truly biological type of consciousness in the argument; the distinction is not crucial here, but it does add force to the thrust of the essay and so is discussed in the next section. It will be seen later on that this putative process sequence in the alignment of the individual to the corporate function is identical to the Vedic `Not This, Not This' method of *Upasana*.

The Case for Consciousness in Corporations
Complexity and consciousness (Earley, 1997)

Bateson (1972) applied the concept of "mind" to systems in general. He proposed that any system, not just organisms or human beings, that satisfies certain criteria will be able to develop the phenomena normally associated with mind—learning, memory, decision making, and the like. In his view, mind is a necessary and inevitable consequence of a certain complexity, which begins long before organisms develop a brain and a higher nervous system. He also emphasized that mental characteristics are manifest not only in individual organisms but also in social systems and ecosystems.

Consciousness is the most evolved mechanism for increasing autonomy in a system. It gives a system the opportunity to respond to situations in the way that is most appropriate to the needs of the moment. Instinct, learning, or more primitive forms of autonomy do not have the same flexibility and creativity that consciousness has. It might be fair to say that consciousness is the form that autonomy takes in the most complex systems.

Characteristics of consciousness

Bateson's (1972) points are captured in Ornstein's (1972) four main functions of consciousness :

1. Simplification and selection of information: The "editing" of information that goes on in the mind.

2. Guiding and overseeing actions.

3. Setting priorities for action: When there is a discrepancy between our stored knowledge about the world and an event or when discrepancies arise internally, as when you rearrange furniture because it is not in line with another piece.

4. Detecting and resolving discrepancies: Since the information selected to enter consciousness is usually about changes in the external and internal worlds, discrepancies arise and need to be resolved.

Epigenetic behavior

In evolutionary biology, the Baldwin effect states that development of adaptive behaviors through learning increases the probability that genetic adaptations to a similar effect will eventually be installed. Dennett (1995) claimed that the Baldwin effect is not an alternative to natural selection, but only an important extrapolation from the well-known phenomenon of genetic assimilation. He insisted that the Baldwin effect is "a crane, not a skyhook." A crane stands on the ground and lifts things off the ground while things hang apparently without support from a sky hook. When consciousness is a sky hook, it is a "mind-first" force or power or process, an exception to the principle that all design, and apparent design, is ultimately the result of mindless, motiveless mechanicity.

The epigenetic behavior can provide the substrate for consciousness in biological organisms because of its "look ahead" quality.

Behavioral epigenesist as the substrate for consciousness

A little reflection would make it clear that the functions of consciousness as detailed by Ornstein (1972) exter-

nally manifest as epigenetic behavior; corporate epigenetic behavior may betoken corporate consciousness just as human consciousness is betokened by human epigenetic behavior. Consciousness is an ability to self-organize from experience and may as well occur in a corporation as in an individual.

The analogue of the gene in the social sphere is habits. Habits are not themselves behavior but dispositions to engage in particular responses or forms of action. Habit is an adaptation and is a bridging concept between the biological and the psychological and social. Habits can be passed on by the imitation of the behavior of others. According to Hodgson (2001), there is a strong case for considering habits as units of cultural inheritance. Within the Dawkins' (1982) framework, replication of habits does not occur through replication of the "software" of the habits themselves, but behavior is the vehicle for replication of habits.

From the foregoing, the alignment of individual goals to corporate needs may be rephrased as epigenetic self-management (also see Murthy [1996] for further clarification of this idea). Reorganization of individual habits can form the mechanistic basis for effecting this change, which must occur during learning by corporations. Within this new theoretical framework, the task of the present essay may be redefined: it is to examine whether the Upasana processes can be the "conscious algorithm" for implementing the epigenetic self-management by the individual corporate functionary.

Vedic Cybernetics of Human Consciousness

Vedic terminology:

In the narrative of this section, note is to be taken of the following points:

1. The term 'Veda' is used in the wider sense to designate all related literature, such as the Upanishads.
2. In general, Vedic terminology is employed according to its use by Sri Aurobindo (1970, 1971a, 1971b, 1977) and Swami Gambhirananda (1958), and it is safe to state that it is generally the extant terminology in the recent literature (Swami Bhajananda, 1981).
3. In addition, some common words are used here with a Vedic connotation. Thus the words "inquiry," "discovery," "truth," "realization," and "practice" must be understood in the introspectional and directly experiential sense. Truth is used in the sense of the correct Law of Truth that generates other truths at a lower level, as when we say, "Relativistic mechanics holds true at all speeds of a body, while Newtonian mechanics holds only at low speeds relative to light." Inquiry refers to an empirical search for a progressively wider truth and not necessarily by a logically sequential process. Realization

is an experiential term; it does not always lend itself to a precise verbal statement. Practice refers to the particular mystical practice used by the practitioner for the inquiry. Discovery is again an introspectional term, not objectively demonstrable to another person except by initiation into the practice itself. When the word begins in the upper case, it denotes that the word is used in its wider and subjective sense. Thus Knowledge denotes not knowledge of a particular thing but the introspectional experience connected with knowledge.

4. The focus here is on the parallel between the putative introspectional processes in a practitioner of *Upasana* and the human interactional processes involved in the transition of a self-seeking manager into an organizationally conscious management executive of a successful corporation. Therefore, the process notions during *Upasana* are drawn freely from various schools of mystical thought, such as dualism (*dvaita*), qualified monism (*visishtadvaita*) and non-dualism (*advaita*), without commitment to any one of them regarding the nature of Reality and the like. In this context, it is appropriate to remember Swami Sivananda's (1997) enunciation:

The *Sutra*s or aphorisms of Vyasa are the basis of the *Vedanta* philosophy. These *Sutra*s have been variously explained by different commentators. From these interpretations have arisen several schools of philosophy.... Dualism (*Dvaita*), Qualified Monism (*Visishtadvaita*) and Monism (*Advaita*) are the three main schools of metaphysical thought.... Madhva [exponent of the dualism *or dvaita* philosophy] said: - Man is the servant of God - and established his *Dvaita* philosophy. Ramanuja [exponent of the qualified monism or *visishtadvaita* philosophy] said: - Man is a ray or spark of God - and established his *Visishtadvaita* philosophy. Sankara [exponent of non-dualism or *advaita* philosophy] said: - Man is identical with Brahman or the Eternal Soul - and established his…. *Advaita* philosophy".

Thus, the pinnacle of experience within each of these mystical states is different from the other.

A systems transformation in the subjective experience of the Universe must correspond to the respective psychic bent, although the present descriptive account is in the non-dualistic language. Where necessary, a comment will be added to underline this important point.

Vedic inquiry into human consciousness:

In Vedic culture, the concept of *Rishi* is very important. A *Rishi* is an accomplished inquirer who has "realized the Truth" (i.e. realized the systemic, holistic, connected nature of the Universe). *Rishi*s are seers and singers of the Truth. Any one can attain this status through various

kinds of practices, one of which is *Upasana*, as detailed in the *Upanishad*s. An important feature of these empirical practice-oriented pursuits and discoveries is the reproducibility of the experiences. In this sense, *Rishi*s are spiritual scientists who grew constantly in their pursuits by "living the discovered truths" (i.e., their discoveries changed the way they perceived the Universe and they shaped their lives as an expression of their discoveries).

The corporate model will now be mapped on to the Vedic view of cybernetics of human consciousness. The description will hinge on the role of a cybernetician, much in the manner of corporate leadership in a successful organization.

Upasana

Upasana is roughly translated as *Upanishad*-ic meditation, aimed in part at engendering *higher mental attitudes with regard to daily avocations*... (Gambhirananda, 1958; italics ours). It entails the use of a "knowledge-by-identity" technique. This technique is what is known as the *Neti, Neti* or "Not This, Not This" one. It consists of three steps (Murthy, 1994b):

1) Superimposition on a constituent subsystem as if it is the whole and pursue the consequences; realize that the system is incomplete.
2) Repeat the process with hierarchically higher agglomerations and systems.
Every stage is associated with a level of consciousness. Unless one crosses that level, the next one will not be cognized.
3) Stop when the system is complete and whole.

The similarity with the process, described earlier on in connection with evolution of corporate consciousness, is obvious. In this arduous journey in the Vedic style of inquiry, which is termed "Realisation of Truth," there are many helpers. These are basically interactive powers of the psyche, symbolized as "gods." Although a detailed description of these gods and their separate functions in aiding the Realization process are beyond the scope of this account, some examples are in order. *Indra* is the power of Intelligence, while *Maruts* are the powers of Thought. *Brahmanaspati* is the power that promotes Aspiration on the path to higher levels of Realization. Each power is extolled in many Vedic hymns; it means a tactical submission of one's psychic functioning to that power with the aim of generating some new beneficent state of consciousness— "Foster by this [submission to] the gods and let the gods foster you" (*Gita*, III, p. 11).

The Role of the Leader and Cybernetician
Agni in the Inquiry

Prominent among these powers, and relevant in the context of this essay, is *Agni*, the Fire. Around him are built the rites and the ritual of the Sacrifice. Thus, while the rites have been noted as an example of fire worship, the meaning held out actually is of a different kind. *Agni* is the symbol of the Illumined Will (Sri Aurobindo, 1971). He is the mediator, facilitator and messenger (*Devadutah*, according to the Vedic mythology) between man and the gods, the various psychic powers. He leads the sincere seeker towards the Brahman or Universal Truth. The theme recurs throughout the Veda and so through the Indian heritage of rites and rituals, philosophy and tradition. *Agni* participates almost in every action in the acquisition and internalization of Knowledge.

The closure or end-point to this inquiry into the Truth is the elimination of duality of subject and object (or render the duality subordinate to Bliss, within the conceptual framework of dualism). Yajnavalkya, the great Rishi, in conversation with his wife Maitreyi, stated that Brahman (the systemic, connected Universe) is known only when duality is eliminated (or when duality is subordinated to Bliss). He stated:

> Because when there is duality, then one smells something, one thinks something, one knows something; [but] when to the knower of the Brahman everything has become the self [or, in the dualistic framework, has become the source of Bliss], then… through what should one know That owing to which all this is known [or, what use is it to be able to tell one sense-object from another]? (*Brihad*, 111.8.1)

This is further supported in the great debate of Yajnavalkya with another great *Rishi*, Gargi, in the tradition of the great debates on philosophical issues in the courts of scholarly kings. Yajnavalkya said "this *Brahman*, O Gargi, is never seen but is witness… It is never known but is the knower"(*Brihad*, 111.8.1).

Thus *Agni* has achieved over the millennia such an identity and reality in the minds of aspirants and the culture that he is everything for man, the Individual Self--the problem, the diagnosis, the solution, the process, the implementer--a totally holistic symbol of Individual consciousness, on its way to the Universal Consciousness.

The Corporate and the Individual Parallel
The parallel can be seen within this essay in the following sequence:
1) Successful business corporations have a conscious quality--they respond to the environment in a nonrepetitive manner and so have a great adaptive ability.
2) This adaptive ability is a result of close links between

component subunits-- engineering, marketing, finance, and the like--and it also has the consequence of eliminating the duality of the controlling and controlled units.

3) Whatever differences the "consciousness" or "learning" make to the corporation would be reflected in the consciousness of the corporate functionary, in terms of increasing alignment of its goals to those of the corporation. Thus it is not crucial here to firmly establish the existence of consciousness in systems other than biological ones although it would provide stronger relevance for the discussion of a mundane activity such as the corporate function in a spiritual domain.

4) The close links are substantively aided by leadership that acts as a cybernetician in the management of change from one pattern of action to another.

5) The difference that consciousness makes to the corporation is of the same sort that makes a difference to individuals when they abandon habitual action, which is automatic, in favor of creative action, which has the quality of conscious choice.

6) Therefore, the conscious human organism may be modeled as a successful learning corporation in contrast to a static, structure-preserving corporation which is like a habitually acting organism with automatic behavior.

7) Thus consciousness may be seen as functioning to establish close linkages between constituent subunits of the organism, using the analogy of the successful corporation.

8) Next it may be noted that this is how the Vedas have visualized the cybernetics of consciousness, in that they see the organization of the universe as systemic and connected. Consciousness of the individual is a progressive process of realization of this universal connectedness, thereby eliminating the subject-object duality.

9) *Upasana* is the Vedic method of inquiry into this systemic Universe, involving a process of mapping of the Individual introspectional experiences onto a systemic Universal whole, thus "expanding" consciousness. The Vedas propounded the cybernetics of consciousness that brings about this transformation.

10) So, having defined *Upasana* as a method of bringing about a transformation in the Individual such that he/she identifies with the Universal, we propose a parallel scheme for the cybernetics of inquiry into the corporate consciousness and Universal Consciousness.

11) In this superimposed scheme, *Agni* (along with other powers) is the equivalent of corporate leadership. The corporate functionary is the counterpart of the mystical practitioner of *Upasana*. The functionary learns to attain a more complete corporate consciousness, even as the mystic endeavors to attain Universal Consciousness as

by means of the *Neti, Neti* technique.

Conclusion

Models of behavior can be two-fold: performance models and competence models (Chomsky, 1976). The former are case-specific and implementational, while the latter are wider in their explanatory power; the spiritual model for corporate behavior presented here is a competence model.

The scheme detailed in this essay has two practical implications:

1) The model explains the development of corporate consciousness by a corporate functionary within the framework of the *Upasana* processes; it models a mundane behavior with its conceptual framework in a spiritual domain. Thus it fullfils an important goal of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo to bring about a synthesis of yoga and life. Further, the model may help fashion new intracultural goals for corporate training.

2) It represents the human mind as a system of functions, evolving with a single leap from an aggregate of habitual predispositions in the animal into a system of thoughtful actions in man. The sudden emergence together of various behavior functions, generally accepted as definitive of human nature may be paraphrased by the systems transformation. Therefore the scheme imparts useful meaning to techniques, such as meditation, that claim to expand consciousness.

Author Notes

1. All the English translations of Vedic mantras quoted in the text are from Sri Aurobindo's (1971 a) *Secret of the Veda and Hymns to the Mystic Fire* (1971b) and the quote from the *Gita* is from Sri Aurobindo's (1970) Essays on the *Gita*.

2. The quotes from the *Upanishads* are from the English translations of *Upanishads* by Ramakrishna Math, Calcutta, India.

3. Abbreviations : *Brihad = Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*

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