

Samuhik सामूहिक पहल Pahal

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Developing an
Organizational Culture
That is Responsive and Flexible

CONTENTS

03

Reflections and Opinions

**“Culture Eats Strategy
for Breakfast”**

Nisha Subramaniam

**What is Organizational
Culture?**

Hridaykant Dewan

**Moving Beyond Program
Design**

The role of cultural diagnosis
tools in improving the design of
organizations

Sujatha Rao

12

Interview

**Jodo Gyan and the Fine
Art of Building a Learning
Organization**

Samuhik Pahal Team

18

Resources & Reviews

**Introducing Frederic Laloux’s
“Reinventing Organizations”**

K Desai

20

Ground Zero

**Developing an Organizational Culture
That is Responsive and Flexible**

C Sutar

“Culture Eats Strategy for Breakfast”

Nisha Subramaniam

In 2009, I saw these words on the blackboard. It was part of an ‘Organizational Behaviour’ course, as part of my Bachelor’s Degree Program in Sociology. I sat through the organizational culture lectures, fairly frustrated and puzzled - wondering, what on earth might this ‘culture’ be. It was all things - intangible, unmeasurable ways of being and working. Yet this is what makes or breaks an organization. I was grateful for all things tangible. I told myself, I would never want to deal with something this grey, complex and messy.

Through my first few years as a Program Manager at Teach for India, I knew I was hitting a wall, when I tried to work ‘around’ and not ‘with’ culture. My learning curve that started with me trying to get the core work done ‘despite’ people, got sharpened, twisted and turned into learning the ropes of working with people and taking them along. It was my first dip into that messy and complex thing called culture.

“Kanavu means dreams... We aspire to empower teachers, community actors and students to provide holistic education.”

In 2018, I sat in a difficult space as a member of a small co-founding team of four where we wondered what’s happening? Why aren’t things feeling as they should? Why are we great friends, yet not able to use each other as sounding boards for the difficult things at work? Why are decisions taking forever?

In that moment, I knew we had to stop looking for answers amidst our plans and google docs. It lay in that complex, messy and grey parts of our work - in culture; not so much in what we do, but in the realm of how we do it.

Culture ate strategy for breakfast, lunch and dinner and we sat there, hungry for change.

Kanavu and the Hunger for Change

From the time I was an unassuming college student to being an ambitious manager and then a rookie entrepreneur - ‘culture’ shadowed me, like a wise monk, ever patient to put me on the path to pursuing the seemingly elusive excellence. As a rookie entrepreneur of a 3-year-old organization and as a parent of a 3-year-old child, culture has held most answers for the tough questions across life and work.

Kanavu means dreams; we are a small team of four with big dreams. We dream of a rural India where one’s circumstances don’t dictate one’s destiny. We aspire to empower teachers, community actors and students to provide holistic education.

We work collectively to lead change across five affordable private schools in Cuddalore in rural Tamilnadu. The work we do is challenging, gratifying, complex and essential. It keeps us grounded in the pursuit of building Kanavu as a sustainable organization.

As a small team with very varied backgrounds, working styles and beliefs, we bring an eclectic mix of perspectives and work experiences, in creating Kanavu. Living in one of the school campuses and working

together brings with it, its own share of joys, pulls and pressures. So, what is the role of culture in this journey?

The Dance of Decisions

We are a team with a lot to say and keen ears to listen. What this meant was terrifyingly long meetings and extended decision-making hours. A need to share one's own perspective, listening deeply to each other and waiting for consensus to appear was a way of working.

But often, consensus never made its appearance. What crept in instead, was exhaustion and divergence. Everyday operations made it tough to find that kind of time for long drawn out discussions, leading to overall disbelief in our abilities to make decisions.

A series of honest conversations showed us patterns of behaviors and mental models that made it clear that while overall ownership for Kanavu was abundant, ownership of tasks was unclear. When those juggle balls were thrown at us, we never knew who had to catch what.

This revelation pushed us into a design phase of reimagining the Kanavu whole, into smaller parts; verticals emerged and process flows were established. With some beginner's luck thrown into the mix, things began to flow and flourish.

What this allowed us to do, was to know where the buck stopped, for an aspect of our work. This nurtured a culture of ownership, while sparking initiative across verticals as well. For a young organization which is very heavy on everyday operations and very hands on with our stakeholders, this created mindspace and depth of impact, across different facets of our work.

Mirror! Mirror! On the Wall!

Kanavu works with 55 teachers, 5 school leaders and over 20 community actors - empowering them with skills and opportunities. A large part of our work involves 'reflection.' If you asked any one of us on the co-founding team, what's at the

core of our work, we'd tell you it's reflection - except the time we realized it wasn't really an internal strength. Let me explain.

“When we see us standing through some of our toughest decisions, we know it happened because of the strength we draw from how diversely we approach a problem.”

What's going well? What can we do better? What patterns are we observing? These are questions you'd hear us commonly ask. Except, we weren't asking ourselves these questions enough.

While we were dialed into our stakeholders' trajectories, we weren't reflecting enough on our paths, our strategies. We weren't all doing it at the same time. This meant that each one of us felt different pressures at different times.

This was detrimental to our culture. As a very tightly knit team, this left most of us confused about the health of our organization and its individual programs. Each one of us were on our own journeys. This led to conflicts.

This revealed to us, a part of our culture that needed focus - we needed to get into a habit of reflection. Reflection and articulation were then woven into our common spaces, meetings and work flows.

Does all of this make the journey of organizational culture sound heavy and more like a toil? Well, it's not really, because it's also a journey of learning and growing.

What makes it beautiful is that we are in this together. When we see us standing through some of our toughest decisions, we know it happened because of the strength we draw from how diversely we approach a problem.

That Kanavu provides a space for each of our workstyles to flourish is a huge source



The Kanavu Team in a Meeting

of strength and joy. The culture of respecting diversity and taking the approach of strength-based leadership has percolated to our stakeholders as well. As a way of working, we are able to play to our stakeholders' strengths, building immense confidence in a diverse set of leaders.

Does this mean, our culture no longer eats strategy for breakfast? Well! No; not for breakfast surely; however, it does step in for a nibble or two, showing us those ends that need refinement. We fall back on our current culture of connectedness, reflective practice and agility to keep moving and changing.

A variety of tools for reflection and mentors' perspectives enrich this journey. It continues to be grey, complex and messy – but it also makes one feel alive with the curiosity and stamina to explore this, as a lifelong reflective practitioner.

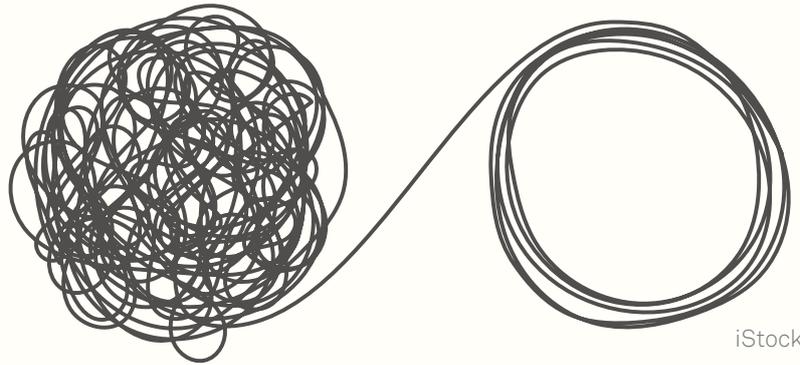
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What is Organizational Culture?

Hridaykant Dewan

Organizational Culture: What Is It and What Is It Good For?

There are some work places that seem happy and cheerful and those in them appear motivated and receptive. And then there are other kinds of organizations where you sense tensions and an attitude that says, 'it is not my responsibility; I am doing a job.' With some organizations, collaborations seem easy to nurture, and with others they become too dependent upon individuals, and, thus, transitory. An organization has an internal and external personality that is reflected in the people who work there and affects all those who come in contact with it.

We know that these patterns of behavior and relationships are reflective of the culture of the organization. New persons getting into the organization are drawn into this and they either imbibe or adapt to these patterns of behavior or they have to leave. Other structures and people coming into contact with the organization also sense the kind of relationship they can build and can expect from the organization.

The challenges of setting up and building an organization and of ensuring mindfulness in a large existing structure are related, but manifest in different ways. The environment or the culture of the organization may be

euphemistically called its DNA. Anyone joining it, starts assimilating and reflecting it.

This culture is the essence of how people in an organization feel about their work, the way they relate to each other and how they function in their day-to-day routines. It is the sensibility that can make team members ask each other questions fearlessly, relate to each other as working collaborators, individuals to be respected, listen to (and not only 'hear') each other and to be alive to gestures and emotions of colleagues.

Organizational culture can entail a sense of friendship and a genuine relationship of appreciation, criticism, trust and support that in turn fosters a spirit of a collective and cooperative enterprise. On the other hand, it could be an environment of suspicion, mistrust, competition, hierarchy, and extremely differential behavior.

Why Are Organizations the Way They Are?

The question is how do organizations come to be on different positions on these axes. Is it because of their goodness and commitment to goals or it is the quality and clarity of purpose? Is it to do with the leadership's style of functioning? Is it to do with the people who are chosen and added to the organization? Is it to do with the world outside, the situation where the organization

is and the practices in that environment? Is it to do with the decision-making structures of the organization and the way new members are assimilated so as to give a sense of ownership and self-confidence? Actually, it is all and none of these.

Leadership matters and a charismatic leader can make colleagues feel happy and motivated besides feeling convinced about the organization's purpose. Similarly, an organization could have been set up by a group of like-minded close friends who share a dream and have had many conversations around it before coming together. It may be careful in the selection of new members/workers/employees.

In order to convey a spirit of participation, it may develop multiple levels of structures for decision making. A small organization may decide that all decisions would be taken collectively and everyone in the organization would participate. We may avoid the use of terms like hiring and use 'on-boarding' and create other such forms. There may be organizations who are in areas of work that are in vogue and in demand, and are not under the stress of competition.

But none of this is sufficient for ensuring that individuals do not feel stressed. Collective decision-making processes can degenerate into factional or relationship mobilizations and acrimony.

The purpose of the organization can become just maintaining form and process, rather than pursuing the goals it set out to do. Simple decisions can take a whole lot of energy of the organization, leading to impatience and suppressed anger among the team.

This does not happen starkly, all at once. But slowly the dissatisfaction and unhappiness vortex draw people in and terms like co-workers, team members, on-boarding etc., become just labels and do not reflect what they were intended to mean anymore.

Clearly organizational culture is a complex manifestation of the interplay of all the factors mentioned above and of some others as well. Culture of an organization is not only a function of the kind of people who form it or who are recruited into it. People and their motivations are important ingredients of organizational culture. But they have to be scaffolded by systems and processes that are transparent and a working environment that is not very stressful or insecure for any individual.

Does Organizational Size Matter?

It requires efforts to ensure alignment to the organization's values to the best extent possible. A motivated young person joining a large system may become frustrated and demotivated very soon. In a small organization she may come in conflict with equally motivated and dedicated individuals. There is a need for adjustments within competing and 'apparently' conflicting motivations.

“Leadership matters and a charismatic leader can make colleagues feel happy and motivated.”

The organizational structure has to accommodate and provide spaces for the urge of each member to contribute in a significant manner, to feel valued and respected or even revered, and find an expression for the spirit of doing something new and different, something that is not a legacy of the history of the organization but something that is innovative.

In smaller organizations keeping such balances have challenges that are very different from the concerns in a larger organization. For a small organization, there are fewer avenues for expression and an intense competition for this. Besides, small organizations are more flexible and can take

many roads. There is often no clear criterion for choosing other than the ability of the person who argues the case for a particular future direction. Personalities of individuals and the chemistry between them become critical constraints.

“The balancing of organizational goals and efficiency with individual desires and aspirations become crucial factors that determine the atmosphere.”

Larger and older organizations on the other hand have the baggage of history and slots already cut out for people to fit into. More spaces for expression might exist, but that is limited by the slots and the direction and manner of work already taken. There is less space for flexible participation and contributions to multiple strands of work.

The Same Size Does Not Fit All

Apart from the size of the organization, aspects like its nature, such as being a for-profit or a not-for-profit institution, its revenues sources, clarity of purpose, its public interfaces, its motto or its theory of change, the ground conditions of its work etc. can affect the working atmosphere. The balancing of organizational goals and efficiency with individual desires and aspirations become crucial factors that determine the atmosphere. Organizations need a culture that ensures that each member feels contributive and has real access to open forums that are ‘hearing’ and responding to what is being felt. They also need to create possibilities and support systems for people to change roles, and to ensure that norms apply equitably.

The markers of hierarchy and status in the organization need to be subdued to the extent possible and an awareness needs to exist preventing it. These are easier said than

put into reality of functioning beyond the skin-deep form. Even though the form is also useful in reminding people of the underlying intention. Human relationships, aspirations, desires and belief systems are complex. They are all in the cauldron of the functioning. Structures and processes have to consciously avoid becoming feudal or worshipful.

My experience suggests that maybe no magic formulas exist. A healthy organizational climate has to be constructed and scaffolded each moment. As a new organization you can start with being fully aware and checking alignment with the goals and the roles. You can mark territories for each of the persons in the team. But as the work and the organization grows, and grow it must, for that is what people have come together for, new negotiations and adjustments are needed.

Sometimes, expectations that all decisions have to be participative and context-based make for confusions and tensions. The sooner a transparent structure of decision making is set up, it becomes easier to have a good working atmosphere. The structure should be aligned to the roles and responsibilities of people. It must be universally applicable to all and should not be open to case-by-case adjustments. This does not mean being bound by unfeeling rules and traditions but having a core set of values and norms that everyone follows.

It is not the benevolence or the magnanimity of the founding team, the experts or the seniors that makes them listen to voices with concern and attention but a necessity assigned by the role they occupy. The moment the role is handed over, and there must be systems in the organizations to ensure this, they need to step away from functioning the way they did. Organizational culture is built from ground up and top down - both working in alignment recognizing the importance of each role and being uncompromising in confronting transgressions of core values, structural processes and assigned roles.

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Moving Beyond Program Design

The role of cultural diagnosis tools in improving the design of organizations

Sujatha Rao

The Importance of Organizational Design

All social purpose and civil society organizations are committed to improving the impact of their programs. Understanding the issue or problem that is being addressed and designing impactful solutions is at the heart of most non-profits, NGOs and social enterprises. Founders, program managers, field-level implementers and monitoring and evaluation personnel spend a lot of energy, time and resources in diagnosing and understanding the problem, designing solutions, articulating their theory of change and action, and implementing these programs until the final beneficiaries are reached. This external program focus is a time consuming and resource intensive exercise.

The consequence of this is that many civil society organizations fail to focus inward into the organization and diagnose the issues, challenges, and problems that it faces internally. Not enough time and resources are spent in diagnosing and assessing whether the culture, structure, relationships, roles, communication processes and work flows of the organization are in service of its vision and purpose.

When issues emerge with programs in their design, implementation, or evaluation, the programs and their components are redesigned and/or implementors are put through technical training and capacity building. Rarely do organizations pause and ask the question, “Are our culture, structure and processes enabling us to achieve our mission and purpose.”

Why Organizational Design Gets Neglected

There are many reasons for this neglect.

First, civil society organizations are busy workspaces. Reaching beneficiaries quickly and ensuring the success of the program is time consuming. Very few organizations have the luxury of reflecting on their internal design while they are busy solving the day-to-day issues of program implementation.

“Rarely do organizations pause and ask the question, ‘Are our culture, structure and processes enabling us to achieve our mission and purpose.’”

Second, many organizations do not perceive their internal organizational design to be of relevance or importance for them to achieve their goals and purpose. There is often a sense that a good program will achieve the outcomes that the organization wants to achieve.

Consequently, civil society organizations spend time and resource on technical knowledge and capacity building associated with programs rather than on internal organizational building.

Third, most civil society organizations work with limited resources and prefer to spend any additional resources they have on programs – mostly in scaling these up and increasing their scope – rather than

on building their internal capacity through organizational design and development.

Fourth, not many organizations have a clear understanding about organizational development and how intangible aspects of organizations such as culture, relationship, trust, clarity of purpose, team motivation etc. can be evaluated.

Finally, most funding organizations support directly for programs and rarely fund internal organizational design and developmental needs of NGOs. So untied funds, that can be spent on internal organizational development, are rarely available.

Research and data from around the world overwhelmingly conclude that the ‘internal design’ of an organization is as important as ‘external program design’. In many instances, the quality and effectiveness and impact of a program can be significantly impacted by factors such as motivation and relationship of staff, clarity of purpose, organizing and communication structures, clarity of role, clarity of work processes, autonomy and decision-making power and trust between employees.

An anchoring feature of this is the culture that an organization builds – consciously or unconsciously - and the impact of culture on all aspects of the organization.

Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI): Diagnosing to Redesign

Over the last decade, a lot of work has occurred in this domain. More and more tools are available today that can help organizations take the first steps towards better organizational design – that is *diagnosing the organization and its culture*. These cultural diagnosis tools provide ‘windows’ through which organizations can take the first steps towards deeper understanding of their internal workings.

While a number of such diagnostic tools exist today, a personal favourite of mine

is the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI) developed by Cameron and Quinn (2006) based on the Competing Values Framework (CVF).

The CVF helps organizations understand their underlying value drivers, current behaviour preferences, and where they wish to be or move towards. CVF presents a model that helps organizations understand their own ‘effectiveness criteria.’ It helps organizations understand what is it that they value between alternate choices; how these values drive organizational decision making; how they influence the structures, processes, and functions that organizations adopt, and how and why different values compete for attention, causing stress and tensions.

Using a simple 2x2 matrix, the CVF helps organizations understand the multiple competing pressures that they face, and the underlying cultural patterns being developed.

The OCAI tool uses the CVF 2x2, four quadrant matrices, as the model through which an organization can diagnose their internal culture. The OCAI itself is a simple, interactive tool consisting of a set of 20 questions that can be answered by all staff and the leadership team within an organization.

“Research and data from around the world overwhelmingly conclude that the ‘internal design’ of an organization is as important as ‘external program design.’”

The tool enables the answers to these questions to be visually represented across two scenarios – the current stress and tension of the organization and their preferred values and the future direction that the organization wants to move towards.

By enabling all members of the organization to participate in this diagnosis, deeper, underlying stresses and tensions in the organization can be revealed. This diagnosis then makes it possible for dialogues to take place between individuals, teams and organizational leaders. This can provide powerful data on how to re-design the organization more purposefully.

Thanks to tools like the OCAI, it is now easier for organizations to take stock of their 'internal worlds' and to begin the process of designing themselves to better suit their purpose and mission while improving the effectiveness of their programs.

Considering the enormous impact that civil society organizations have on improving our

socio-cultural world and societies at large, such diagnosis is an essential first step.

It is something that all civil society organizations – small and large – can undertake with greater confidence and with minimum efforts and resource spend to improve their impact and serve their constituencies better.

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Jodo Gyan and the Fine Art of Building a Learning Organization

Samuhik Pahal Team

Jodo Gyan is a not-for-profit social organization that has over two decades of successful experience in supporting schools across the country in mathematics education. These methods are based on the premise that children learn when they are engaged in activities which are meaningful to them. They are also working extensively with the governmental schools systems in multiple states currently.

Samuhik Pahal: What are some of the underlying principles and values that form the bedrock of Jodo Gyan as an organization?

Usha Menon: An important underlying value for us is the recognition that all of us are in this together doing something to reach a goal. This understanding that all of us are participants in a process is a very important basis on which we work together.

“But I feel the motivation of the members is also determined by the idea of transparency, specifically financial transparency.”

- E. K. Shaji

It contributes to the sense of unity of purpose which is there. So, of course, sharing of this purpose is also something which goes through different stages.

In the beginning when people come, they proudly think, “Achha... Jodo Gyan kuchh achha kar raha hai.” And they say that they would like to be a part of it. It is only slowly

that people start to understand more deeply what is that “achha cheez jo kar rahen hai” - what is that good thing - and so, that brings people together.

This also made us come to an understanding that there will not be too much difference in salaries because otherwise how can we have that shared sense. So, we had talked and thought about this and we kept the ratio of differences in the salaries of the highest and lowest paid person as 1:3.

So, over the years, we have tried different ways and means of building this sense of togetherness. Some things have worked better, some have not. But this whole idea was that when we take a decision which involves some people, at least those people have to be consulted.

Broadly, the idea is that people know what is happening in all the teams; and, when something is happening which will affect the team itself, they are consulted.

So, based on this, we developed this idea of maximum consultation. So, the need to consult happens in the field. And we feel that the development of technology, mobile phones etc. has really facilitated this way of consultation.

We see that collectively, together, all of us are doing the work. And creating this sense is a process which needs continuous effort.

Almost needless to say, there is total financial transparency in the organization. So, when money comes into our organization, we are transparent about where it comes from and where it goes.

As a non-profit social enterprise, we face many challenges; things are not that easy. But all these processes - always trying to create a common sense of purpose, continuous consultation and communication, and financial transparency - build up the sinews and the strength to deal with these challenges.

E. K. Shaji: The members of the organization have a shared understanding which is very crucial. But I feel the motivation of the members is also determined by the idea of transparency, specifically financial transparency.

That has played a very important role overall, ensuring participation; but it has also brought a lot of difficulties. It has not been very easy.

For example, on what basis do we decide the salaries? Or how do we take a decision which has financial implications? So, all these things have actually been very tough, honestly speaking. But we continue to pursue these goals. That is one point which I wanted to share with you.

The second point is that when members interact with teachers, teacher-educators, policy makers and bureaucrats etc., they carry with them substantive experiences gained with children through classroom processes, curricular and pedagogic practices etc.

That has also played a very important role in influencing the curriculum and pedagogy of schools, governments, and other organizations we work with. They are able to sense that we have a connect with real processes.

It has helped us in conversations inside and outside Jodo Gyan – to keep the focus on actual teaching learning processes flowing from our classroom interactions.

Samuhik Pahal: Tell us a little about your recruitment and induction processes since you believe strongly in the need for an

apprenticeship model for inducting new recruits. What impact does this process have on the evolution of your organizational culture?

“The context of use shapes answers to the big questions on how to do a thing” - Usha Menon

Usha Menon: We have, in between, tried to advertise and then dealt with people coming in. But more often than not, we need people who we feel can really become a part of the organization. This also ties up with larger issues related to organizational culture and how we see work itself, including the organization’s work.

Of course, apprenticeship is another way; apprenticeship not in the classical sense but that you work together in doing things. You participate in an activity which is very different from allocating a work.

It’s not that you are allocated a piece of work, you do that work and you then give the output. But it means that we work together. Even if there are skills which are to be learnt outside, they need to be applied in a different context. So, it’s very important to work together, because skills and knowledge change when the context of use is different.

The context of use shapes answers to the big questions on how to do a thing: how is something to be organized; what is the time frame to be allocated; where is the focus to be given; etc. Participation is also very important in processes for building work culture.

So, we are always open to people joining us. When we meet people, who like the idea of what we are doing, people who can become a part of us, we start conversations and keep widows open. For us, that is the main method of recruiting.

We are still working out processes for development for a person who has joined us recently. Maybe we should see that for two years the person applies herself in an area where the work is more or less established or at least it's something developing but with somebody to guide her. Then maybe after two years, we need to have a process of review, to relook and see how it can be bettered.

Salary can become an issue for people to continue. But we still have many people who have stuck around. We have a team. We are together. As a group we have been continuing till now for more than 20 years.

E.K. Shaji: You see, there is one point which I wanted to add. If we look at the workshop team, maybe we can say that people who are genuinely interested and motivated joined and stayed with us. That is a very significant factor.

“So, Jodo Gyan as an organization comprises of different communities of practice. The practices are different, yet interlinked.”

- Usha Menon

Usha Menon: Family pressure also plays a role...

E.K. Shaji: Yeah. One additional point which I wanted to make is about recruitment. We have put out advertisements only twice. And out of 70-74 people, there are only two that joined through so-called recruitment. Now, there is not even a single person working with us who was 'recruited' in that way. They could not stay for whatever reasons.

Usha Menon: See, apprenticeship can be understood very differently as well. Apprenticeship in its older sense was a relationship between an ustad and a shagird. There was not that much of sharing of the larger goals with the apprentice though.

So, in today's world when we talk about apprenticeship or a new recruit in a community of learners, we see it more in terms of practices of modern science where the recruit also understands the larger picture in which a particular activity is being performed.

Let us say, you are going to become a physicist. You become a physicist by not just reading books. There is a lot of intuitive implicit understanding involved in becoming a physicist. You can imbibe that only when you become a part of that culture by working together.

So, it is very important that new recruits recognize and understand the significance of the apprenticeship process. It's not as if you have a few weeks of training and you start producing work. It is not that kind of a thing at all. It is only by doing, actually participating, that you can understand and become a part of the community.

In professional fields like teaching, knowledge of the fieldwork, which is the teaching-learning process, is extremely important. Otherwise, words can be used that may miscommunicate.

But this focus on learning in practice is not adventurism. It is not something which you just try and do. You learn certain things needed for practice by working with and learning from other people who are involved in a similar practice and have been doing it for some time.

You have a question to answer, a problem to solve. So, you learn by discussions, dialogues. One tries to learn from the experiences of others. If somebody tries to solve a problem successfully, it becomes a resource to be used in other places. Slowly, the ideas of building a community of practice develop.

So, Jodo Gyan as an organization comprises of different communities of practice. The practices are different, yet interlinked.

All these communities share a core understanding of what is education and the changes in educational practice that we want to bring about to make education meaningful for children, for everyone else involved in the process and for society at large.

That broad idea is shared. But there are specificities of each practice. These involve not just a set of skills or a set of knowledge. It is a process of becoming something. It is a form of creating an identity and a way of imbibing values. Within Jodo Gyan we are aware that values are imbibed when you make choices. So, it is a slow and holistic process.

Samuhik Pahal: Some organizations believe that their operational model/program/intervention is what enables them to carry-out work on the ground, and that organizational culture/values may not necessarily be important aspects that one needs to work on.

In other words, they feel that if there are strong intervention models and programs and capable people on the ground for execution, that would suffice. At times they just focus on hiring people to do the 'job' on a need basis instead of nurturing people/building an organizational culture etc. Would this approach work? What is your take on this?

“All the understanding that we have about work models can only be emergent in nature, informed by practice, developed collectively, and understood and modified according to felt needs.” - Usha Menon

Usha Menon: See, this approach that relies on organizational modeling, work design and over-specifying things will not work. There are always contingencies, changes

and unexpected things. What is adequate and appropriate can never be specified beforehand.

Each person needs to be empowered to be able to assess the situation and take appropriate decision and action. There can be backups. Nowadays it is easy, because of better communication facilities.

But even then, we have to still find out whether a specific course of action is okay or will it create a lot of problems? Even to ask that question itself needs a certain level of understanding.

So, in one way of looking at developing organizational culture, it is the set of core values on the basis of which the model of working has been created that has to be internalized, if one needs to work appropriately.

Otherwise, you will have an empty shell where everything is happening, but the content in the actual core of the thing will not be there. But it's also true that we cannot just create a culture with values only. There is a need to have an organizational design or a flow which is appropriate. Very often, the first part, or the culture, gets neglected.

It is only a social, nonprofit enterprise that can create this culture. Need for shared goals is extremely important for building that kind of culture. So, no matter what people like Peter Senge or others say, it is not possible for a corporate or profit-oriented organization to build that kind of culture.

Because human beings work for some meaningful goal. And profit making can never be a meaningful thing no? So, a new genre of organizations, non-profits, have a very big role to play in the coming times where another model of development which we and the earth needs requires to be thought through. The culture that we talk about has to be varied and accommodative of changes and differences.

Many of our people still very much live within the oral tradition. Looking at things very analytically can be quite alien cultural practices for us. So, whoever would lead an organization needs to have a sense, an understanding, that can aid in the development of new mediums and new ways of communication so that appropriate models of working can be created.

There are no readymade models which can be applied in practice. All the understanding that we have about work models can only be emergent in nature, informed by practice, developed collectively, and understood and modified according to felt needs.

E.K. Shaji: Context is also crucial. Again, this is always an issue when we were asked to do programs for – say – 30,000-40,000 schools. And the solution that we were given was that – “You recruit people; you train them. You already have content; then implement it.”

“Democratic functioning is also something that needs to be learnt. It’s not that everybody has already been oriented to that kind of a culture.” - Usha Menon

And we have seen that some organizations have taken our content, recruited people, got some government orders, and then they tried to implement it. They split the content into episodes and asked the teachers to follow.

The teachers found it very strange because it is something they were forced to do. They were also not a part of the problem-solving process. So, that program continued for nearly 1.5-2 years. But later, the schools, the education department, finally decided not to follow that program.

Samuhik Pahal: Having a design, having some content, and then recruiting people is something which currently many

organizations are doing. They don’t put that much effort into organization building. They put their entire effort in implementing and they see people as just implementing agents and pay them quite a good salary. These models are growing. How do you see this?

Usha Menon: In education, there’s a close relationship between pedagogic approach and content. They are very closely linked together and especially, the spirit of the content, of the module, can only be understood in practice. Videos and other aids can help, but only to a very small extent. It can help, provided there is a live classroom.

So, there is already an orientation of extending to larger areas with more people only if we have a strong possibility for observations in live classrooms.

One has to participate or at least observe. And then one has to have the ability to try out and see how to modify and internalize the approach. Once that is there, then one may expand.

But one cannot go from one or five or ten, to 10,000. That is too much. At each stage the factor of scaling up can be, maybe 20, or better still 10, or even ideally five. But even such a limited expansion needs to involve different types of people as support.

The first stage needs to be properly tried out, rooted, grounded. Its efficacy has to be seen before one should think about expanding the scale of intervention. Very often, that time is not taken.

E.K. Shaji: There is one more question that I wanted to ask you. What are the challenges, you know, we face when we talk about developing an organizational culture and what are the processes one goes through?

Usha Menon: Leadership needs to understand its role. Democratic functioning is also something that needs to be learnt. It’s not that everybody has already been oriented to that kind of a culture.



Usha Menon and E. K. Shaji in Conversation

Actually, you usually come up from a very hierarchical structure with markers for privileges etc. So, to leave that, to be equally respectful to everyone, to have patience, all this needs to be imbibed slowly.

The leadership has to create appropriate structures for it. It involves a lot of hard work. I can understand why some people who start organizations would find this difficult; because there is also work to be done outside. It's a big challenge.

E.K. Shaji: Another challenge that we face is in creating an organizational culture in which people are happy - where there is no or very little stress, there is proper communication, there is a shared understanding, and there is maximum possible consultation.

This has always been a struggle and sometimes we also skip the internal routines and we get into the more external work.

So, looking at Jodo Gyan's experience, how do we fare when compared with other organizations?

Usha Menon: Different people have different abilities. There will always be a lot of things to do. And if you're working, one should have a realistic understanding, especially if one is working with governments. The leadership of the organization should rest with 2, 3 or may be 4 people. One person has to look at the outside factors; another person may focus on the internal aspects; and, very good communication has to take place between both these facets. Because any decision, anything that you do, has got both components, and there is a need for amalgamating these.

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Introducing Frederic Laloux's "Reinventing Organizations"

K Desai

Increasingly, employees and managers (and service professionals such as doctors, nurses and teachers, etc.) are disillusioned with the way we run organizations today. Survey after survey shows that the vast majority of employees are disengaged at work, while organization leaders complain that their organizations are too slow, siloed and bureaucratic for today's world.

Many of us long for soulful workplaces, for authenticity, community, passion, and purpose. We all somehow sense that there simply must be better ways to run our businesses, nonprofits, schools and hospitals. But do we know how to do so?

Laloux's work (book and talks) can help us understand possible gaps between individuals and their organizations, when they operate under different paradigms. His book "Reinventing Organizations" explores issues faced by individuals in organizations. It shares key insights from ground-breaking research into the emergence, in different parts of the world, of truly powerful and soulful organizations that have made a radical leap beyond today's management thinking and practice.

The book can be broadly divided into three parts – evolutionary history of organizations, common features of the next-stage organizations, and how to create and transform into these.

In the first part of the book, Laloux's takes a sweeping evolutionary and historical view. This section explains how every time humanity has shifted to a new stage of consciousness, it has also invented a

radically more productive organizational model. Could we be facing another critical juncture today? Could we be about to take such a leap again?

The second part of the volume serves as a practical handbook. Using stories from real-life cases and examples from different sectors such as businesses and nonprofits, schools and hospitals etc., this section describes in detail how this new, soulful way to run an organization works.

The book tries to show how these organizations are structured and how they operate on a day-to-day basis. They can inspire others because they aren't based on a purely theoretical model and do not constitute an inaccessible utopia. They provide us with very concrete ideas to help push our own organizations forward and embrace the next evolutionary steps.

"Laloux's work (book and talks) can help us understand possible gaps between individuals and their organizations, when they operate under different paradigms."

In this second section, Laloux explains as to why the future belongs to self-managing organizations. Here he describes his understanding of concepts such as 'wholeness' and 'evolutionary purpose' and discusses why they represent important breakthroughs.

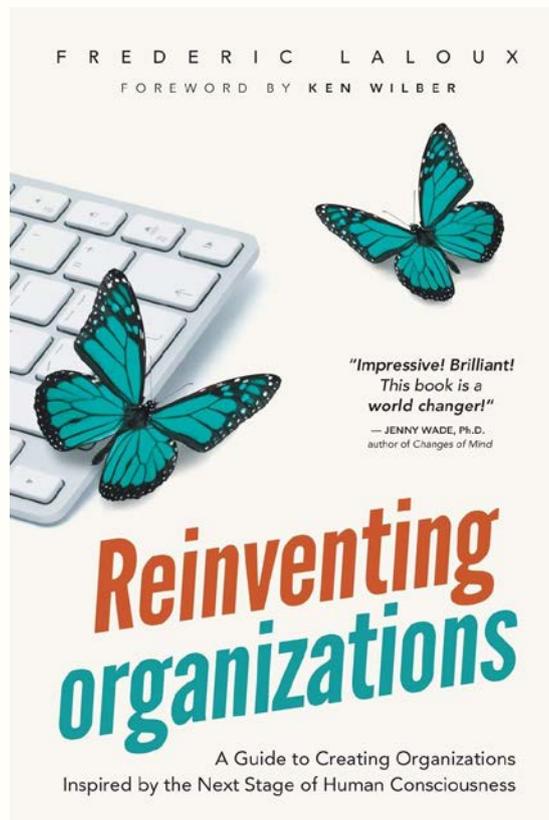
By 'wholeness' he means the process of people bringing their whole self and full humanity to work, without wearing a mask. By 'self-management' he understands a decentralised mode of management without the formal authority of hierarchy or 'bosses.' 'Evolutionary Purpose' refers to the integral process of unfolding of the organization that is coeval with an understanding of the organization as having a soul of its own, like an independent organism that evolves over time. Rather than being controlled by people, the people sense where the organization needs to go and follow it.

The third and final part of the book examines the necessary conditions for these new kinds of organizations to thrive. It tries to answer the following questions. What is needed to start an organization on this new model? Is it possible to transform existing organizations? What results can you expect at the end of the day?

For those who find it difficult to read a dense 360-page management book, a 150-page illustrated version is also available that conveys the main ideas of the original volume and shares many of its real-life stories in a lively, engaging way.

About the Author: Frédéric Laloux was trained as an engineer in Brussels. He obtained an MBA from INSEAD and then graduated from a coaching school in Colorado. He worked for 10 years in an international strategy consulting firm before becoming an independent corporate coach. In 2014, he self-published *Reinventing Organizations* in English.

Bibliographic Details: Frederic Laloux. 2014. *Reinventing Organizations: A Guide to Creating Organizations Inspired by the Next Stage of Human Consciousness*. Brussels: Nelson Parker. 362 + xviii pages.



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Developing an Organizational Culture That is Responsive and Flexible

C Sutar

Nonprofits with strong cultures are better positioned to serve their beneficiaries and the larger cause. What methods are organizations adopting to operate with purpose and synergy?

How effectively a nonprofit contributes to a cause is mostly determined by how it unfolds shared values, vision and mission in its day-to-day work. Over the last few years, nonprofits have actively started reflecting on this, and other aspects of organizational culture, to strengthen themselves further. While values remain sacrosanct, the approaches to reinforce those values are diverse. Organizations such as Gubbachi (Karnataka), Maarga (Karnataka), ASWA (Telangana and Andhra Pradesh), Shiksharth (Chhattisgarh) and Patang (Odisha), for instance, have preferred to implement a responsive and flexible approach to organizational culture.

The journey of these organizations and their accumulated experiences offers interesting insights into the importance of identifying

the values that guide the organization, the process of translating these values into day-to-day operations, encouraging active participation from team members, and ways of assessing and reviewing organizational culture.

Identifying Values

Patang, a youth-led nonprofit organization based in Odisha, believes in developing young people's potential through training, and by creating opportunities for them to use their knowledge, skills and power to stand up for equity and justice.

Nirupama from Patang says, "Patang was started as a platform for young people to learn and grow and take leadership for social change. We were very clear that one person should not run it but empower local youth leadership. The values of how we understand leadership, how we look at volunteering and learning, diversity, how we look at democratic values within the organization is at the core of our everyday functioning."



11th Anniversary Meet of ASWA

Patang volunteers go through a comprehensive self-exploration experience, which leads them to understand their responsibilities towards themselves and their communities.

“In the first year itself, we said it is time to think about the values that will guide us. We organized an extended workshop with a facilitator in identifying the values that resonated with us, and we took the values down to the team...”

- Somya from Gubbachi

This immersive experience takes them on a self-to-society journey, and supports them to work on causes like education, child rights, women’s empowerment, etc. in their own communities or in partnership with other organizations.

Amma Social Welfare Association (ASWA), another volunteer-focused organization from Hyderabad, believes that serving other humans is not a favor but our responsibility. The organization focuses on language and literacy interventions in government schools, well-being programs, blood donation drives, and financial support for disadvantaged students, food distribution, and relief

activities in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.

Volunteers from across various age groups are encouraged to join ASWA and contribute just one hour per month. The guiding values and principles followed by ASWA are transparency, quality over quantity, equality, democracy, and collaboration.

Sreenivasa from ASWA says, “By itself, volunteer-[driven] organizations don’t have any power. The power comes from responsibility. Our duty, when we work with volunteers, is to help them understand the value of responsibility, and the importance of managing relationships.”

The cofounders, core members and volunteers - all work together on important events. ASWA ensures that it’s not just the founders or the core team members who get to be in the limelight. It is fundamental for the ASWA team to give out the message that everyone is equal and must support each other.

Started in 2015, Gubbachi Learning Community works for the educational inclusion of out-of-school children in Bangalore. It is perhaps one of the few organizations that we spoke to that identified their values through a structured process.

Somya from Gubbachi says, “In the first year itself, we said it is time to think about the values that will guide us. We organized an extended workshop with a facilitator in identifying the values that resonated with us, and we took the values down to the team.

Gubbachi Learning Community



Collaborating to Learn

We keep coming back to it, and we have found that it has worked well in terms of modeling behavior.”

The Gubbachi team has decided to only focus on delivering their programs at a micro-level and achieving consistency and completeness instead of scaling.

“Operationally, we are very fluid. There are some things that we ask team members explicitly; but largely only intervene when necessary...”

-Ashish from Shiksharth

Somya says, “We make our program visible to the stakeholders in the spirit of ‘authenticity’ – one of our main values. There are certain things we do and certain things that we don’t do. For instance, we call out knowledge gaps in facilitators and enable them before engaging with children. And among the things that we don’t do is that we don’t work with Children with Disabilities as we don’t have that expertise.”

Somya feels that authenticity can only be modelled through every action.

Shiksharth - which operates from Sukma, a Naxal-affected region in Chhattisgarh - is a nonprofit with many exceptions for organizational culture. They work for conflict-affected tribal children by improving access to safe spaces and providing contextually relevant education.

The line between personal and professional space doesn’t exist for Shiksharth’s team members in the conventional sense – all 20 employees live together in one house and work from the same area. In their experience, the conventional understandings of organizational culture don’t work for them.

Ashish from Shiksharth says, “The core team actively focuses on developing organizational culture. Operationally, we are very fluid. There are some things that we ask team members explicitly; but largely only intervene when necessary. The important values that we look out for in our team members are humility, perseverance, willingness to learn, and competency – in that order.”



Patang

Youth in Action

Having a shared vision is what keeps the team together in an unsafe environment like Sukma. The Shiksharth team doesn't follow any hierarchy. It believes that everybody is a co-owner of the organization.

"We make our expectations clear, and we make it clear what we want to achieve, but how we want to achieve we leave it for the members to decide," adds Ashish.

Karnataka-based Maarga aims to unleash the process of self-actualization among youth from low-income communities in Bengaluru and to help them identify their potential. As an institution located inside a slum and run by a team of mostly women residents, Maarga has deep roots in the local communities.

Prabhakar from Maarga says, "We have a horizontal structure, and we promote women's leadership. We work in an integrated manner but with a degree of independence. The main reason for this is that team members should be able to make timely decisions when they are in the community instead of waiting for confirmations from leaders."

Approaches to Organizational Culture

Each organization has a different way of developing organizational culture. But mostly, the organizations that we spoke to appeared fluid, flexible, and informal in their approaches.

ASWA, for instance, has an informal induction process for their volunteers. The process spells out the whys and hows related to the organization and how volunteers can pitch in.

Sreenivasa from ASWA says, "We ask volunteers to be a part of a specific team - blood donation, school education, etc. We ask them to take on small responsibilities based on their interest. Generally, we avoid passive participation as we believe that only responsibility will take them to the next level."

The organization faces specific challenges like volunteer availability for planned activities, and access to skilled volunteers. They have 50 active volunteers across eight projects and a few others at rest who are available if the need arises.

Odisha-based Patang tailors their approach depending on the group, its current level of understanding, and factors in language, region, and other cultural constituents.

Nirupama from Patang says, "We have to take volunteers from what they know to what they don't know, factor in their life experiences, and then we move them towards pushing their boundaries. But first, we accept them as they are and wherever they are. When Patang was started in Odisha, we drew on the experience of running youth programs in Delhi. But we decided to factor in and tailor it to the needs and context of Sambalpur."

Malaya from Patang adds, "We don't see volunteers as instruments of change, rather we see them as partners in change. They are not a means to an end. But development of youth volunteers is an end in itself."

"We have a horizontal structure, and we promote women's leadership. We work in an integrated manner but with a degree of independence..."

- Prabhakar from Maarga

When it comes to team members, the Patang team encourages accountants to participate in workshops to understand where funds are being used. The team also realigns and encourages movement of people from one project to another to promote intermingling, acquaintance, building big picture understanding and respect for each other's work.



Gubbachi, on the other hand, endorses the ‘apprentice model’ where each new joiner is tagged to an experienced member of the team.

Somya from Gubbachi says, “We believe that a dry induction program doesn’t get new team members anywhere. The important thing is that they must know how the organization is organized. Doing this also helps us understand the person’s way of functioning and learn how things are working for them.”

Review meetings are an essential element for enhancing teamwork and reflect the overall manifestation of organizational culture.

Prabhakar from Maarga says, “We have a review meeting every Saturday. These review meetings are meant for the volunteers to share their experiences, bitterness, or anxieties. Our volunteers are very raw and come from neglected families. They don’t have much understanding of society. The meetings help them understand issues in the larger context.”

According to Prabhakar, there is a marked difference in how the volunteers think after undergoing this process.

The Shiksharth team has a reflection process every month where individuals discuss the challenges they face in implementing organizational values.

Ashish from Shiksharth says, “In our work, perseverance is tested often. We are dependent on the government for permitting us, once a government school agrees to implement our program. Sometimes it takes months to get these permissions. To add, the overall environment here is anti-Civil Society Organizations. Our team navigates through collapsed systems every day, often coming face to face with matters the administration doesn’t want them to see. The monthly reflection process helps put things in perspective and prioritize.”

“We have failed a lot of times. We struggled a lot handling the team. It has all been self-taught.”

-Ashish from Shiksharth

Like many organizations, Shiksharth doesn’t have an allocated budget for training or workshops on organizational culture, nor are

facilitators ready to visit Sukma to deliver these. Sixty percent of their funding is from individual donors and reserved for field operations only.

“We have failed a lot of times. We struggled a lot handling the team. It has all been self-taught,” adds Ashish. Only two women work for Shiksharth currently – understandably, many are reluctant to come to Sukma. But the Shiksharth team is committed to making the team well-balanced with respect to gender. It has encouraged women’s

participation by offering privileges like better pay packages, period leaves, and better living conditions to make women feel welcome.

For Gubbachi, their emphasis on organizational culture showed its effectiveness when the team came together to tackle the challenges caused due to pandemic lockdowns in March 2020.

Somya from Gubbachi says, “After addressing the immediate challenges of the pandemic, it was the team that said distributing groceries



Patang

Volunteers Making Issue Based Art



Non-purposive Outing

is great, but when can we start working on education? The team said that they could not sit back – if the children cannot come here, we go to the children. Our ability to reflect on our value system, the respect that we give each other, is what guided us.”

By May 2020, the Gubbachi team had reached 37 government schools and distributed worksheets to children from disadvantaged communities. Gubbachi teachers have been working with children in safe, semi-open community spaces as schools remain closed.

In Conclusion

Organizational culture ‘checklists’ and quick fix managerial processes have little or no relevance in the fluid and diverse environment in which Indian nonprofits operate. Founders across the organizations we spoke to have mostly focused on authenticity and building trust. In fact, many organizations are preferring to leave out highly competent people if they feel they could be cultural misfits and have refused to work with funders who seemed

only interested in optics and photo-ops. Building human relations, ascertaining long-term effectiveness of processes, fostering adaptability of team members, and encouraging learning through immersion are some of the areas which organizations have prioritized.

Developing organizational culture is an unceasing exercise that needs strategic review from time to time. But it is also a process that requires a significant amount of investment of time and resources for better outcomes. Tight budgets, competing priorities, and dependence on funding cycles have been restricting organizations from taking professional help. For now, organizations continue to make incremental changes relying on their good sense and pragmatism.

You can reach out to the organizations featured in this story at: info@gubbachi.org.in (Gubbachi), info@aswa4u.org (ASWA), team@patangindia.org (Patang), info@shiksharth.in (Shiksharth), and maarga.karnataka@gmail.com (Maarga).



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