

# Fostering An Organization And Culture For Perpetual Revolution

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## INTRODUCTION

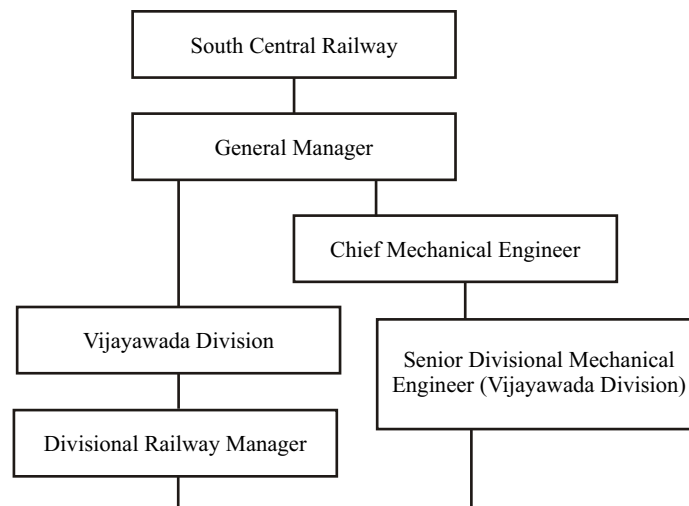
Improvement in productivity and quality levels of organizations by ten or fifteen percent will not suffice to meet the needs of accelerated changes in the present day civilization. A quantum jump in improvement on a sustained basis becomes a compulsion to cope with changes buffeting organizations. Complacency and rigidity in an organization portends disaster for its viability and survival. It has to acquire a new dimension of working by embracing flexible structures, softening or even dismantling the permanent rigidity embedded in current models of vertical growth as the only avenue for career progression. Senior management must be in touch with frontline workers for implementing the culture of change.

## ETHOS OF PERPETUAL REVOLUTION

A few management principles for bringing out perpetual revolution in the realm of organizational behaviour are depicted in the ensuing paragraphs.

The author was the Senior Divisional Mechanical Engineer for Vijayawada Division of South Central Railway for three years during the late 1990's. He held this independent senior management post carrying the functional responsibility for Mechanical Engineering activities of the Division. He empowered his team, resulting in significantly improved results in productivity and self-efficacy of the division. This paper reflects on the processes deployed to achieve these spectacular results.

### Annexure-1. Organizational Structure



Senior Divisional Mechanical Engineer	
Products/Services handled	Preventive maintenance of Railway coaches, wagons and Diesel locomotives and offering service to Rail users.
Geographical spread of working area	<div>Visakhapatnam to Gudur Vijayawada to Macherla Vijayawada to Miryalaguda Vijayawada to Narasapur</div> <div>} Covering about 800 KMs.</div> <div>Maintenance of various depots and workshops in the area.</div>

## CREATIVITY THROUGH EMPOWERMENT

Intimate contacts with frontline workers were nurtured. Mr. Venkateswara Rao was a high skilled Fitter who demonstrated originality and positive attitude. Due to technological change, Air brake-operated carriages were replacing conventional vacuum brake-operated carriages. Every train must have a Guard's Brake van as the last vehicle. In the early days of production of these coaches with new technology at Coach Production Center at

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Perambur, Chennai, adequate number of Brake vans (Air brake type) were not manufactured. There was thus a mismatch in the receipt of Brake vans for running super fast express trains with Airbrake technology between Vijayawada and Chennai/Secunderabad/Visakhapatnam. When this issue was raised with middle and junior level managers of the division, they did not come out with a proper solution.

The following is an edited transcript the author had with Mr. Rao during his visit to the coach maintenance depot.

NVR:	Mr. Rao, I am sure you know the problem of deficiency in Airbrake vans?
V.R:	Yes Sir. I am aware of the problem.
NVR:	I am fully confident of your creative abilities to solve the problem.
V.R:	I am lucky that you repose such a high level of confidence in me.
NVR:	Can you please suggest a way out?
V.R:	In one train composition we have 18 passenger-carrying coaches and one Guard's brake van. The production unit at Perambur has supplied us some spare passenger carriages. If you permit me, I will take two out of the available spare coaches, and modify them into brake vans by running a few extra pipelines for enabling the Guard to operate the brakes.
NVR:	Excellent idea, Mr. Rao. Please go ahead with the proposed modification. Please do not hesitate to inform me if you require any further support from me.

**Result:** A willing, creative and knowledgeable worker found a creative solution to a crisis situation. Profits of the Railway Division received a fillip.

## DETERMINANTS OF REVOLUTIONARY CHANGE

Now we will take up a few dimensions on management of change.

1. The key to successful implementation of change requires changing several aspects such as organizational structure, culture, physical setting and the very nature of work itself simultaneously. Every entity must be included in the magnetic aura of change, without any reservation. A few examples are include :

- Creation of profit / cost centers.
- Direct communication with knowledgeable persons within the organization.
- Casting off the ego in talking to all sections of employees for improving organizational effectiveness.
- Coaching people for improving skills.
- Accessibility of managers to all employees below them without let or hindrance.
- Building lateral relations with human values such as empathy.

2. Instilling strong action-orientation is vital in order to achieve results. This requires decentralization for unleashing imaginative approaches by all sections of employees. Every job has to be harnessed to its full potential and every employee has to play his role effectively as a harbinger of change. For instance, a penchant for indefatigable industry and engineering creativity, so as to bring down the process cycle time drastically can lead to quantum leaps in organizational effectiveness. Mere intellectual arguments are of no avail for committed, well-prepared people ready to translate their dreams into practical realities, defying the hurdles in the way. In this connection, the enthusiasm propagated by our illustrious past President, Dr.A.P.J. Abdul Kalam "Dreaming big and high" is worth imbibing.

## 3. HOW TO REDUCE PROCESS CYCLE TIME IN INDUSTRY?

The following matrix enumerates some parameters for reducing Process Cycle time:

S.No.	Activity	High Process cycle time	Low Process cycle time
(a)	Renewal of coil springs on Railway vehicles.	Lifting of the vehicle body frame by means of overhead crane.	Innovation: Develop a gadget for changing springs in position and reduce process cycle time by 50 percent.
(b)	Write a letter to sister department for executing even petty works and play safe in owning responsibility.		Train a few intelligent workers in the concepts and practices of multi-skills and implement job enrichment programs. Multi-skilling has the potential to reduce process cycle times even by 70 percent.
(c)	Excessive bureaucracy in the implementation of company policies.		Smoothen the hierarchy and introduce more informal discussions on the shop floor and facilitate drastic reduction in process cycle time.
(d)	Taking excessive time on process activities such as "Make ready activities", "Do operations", and "put away activities"		Examine critically with a view to eliminating, combining, rearranging or simplifying those activities for minimizing process cycle time.

## 4. TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT (TQM)

Along with reduction in process cycle time, process capability also has to be improved by vigorously pursuing Total Quality Management (TQM).

The process capability index (CP) is the ratio between “Tolerance prescribed (T)” and “Actual Standard Deviation ( $\sigma$ ).” [ $CP = T / 6\sigma$ ]. Two practices must be followed simultaneously:

(i) Improve quality by increasing the Numerator :

This can be done by focusing on up-stream activities such as marketing, design and engineering.

(ii) Improve quality by reducing the denominator:

This can be done by focusing on down stream activities such as manufacturing, delivery and services.

Introducing 'Quality Circles' can reinforce the two practices.

**5. Fear of failure must be avoided at all times.** A manager must remember the time-honoured adage, “Failures are building blocks for success”. One should never be afraid to fail even in trying circumstances. Even if the initial failure is big, bold, or embarrassing; with proper organizational culture, it may open up possibilities to attack the problem with renewed vigour. A case demonstrating how an apparent failure can be turned into a resounding success is presented in Annexure-2. The next venture can be a great success; “persistence aided by courage and conviction is the mantra”.

#### **Annexure-2 : A case on converting failure to success**

Mr. Ravi was the Divisional Mechanical Engineer (Power) of Hyderabad Division in South Central Railway. He was recently promoted to head the running and maintenance activities on Prime Movers (locomotives). In a summer season, there was a spate of Engine failures and the movement of traffic was disrupted. The failure as a leader on the part of Mr. Ravi caused embarrassment to him and he felt he is losing face. On the inaugural day of introduction of a new train, the locomotive failed at the Railway platform itself when the General Manager was flagging off the train. Mr. Ravi had completely lost his credibility. What bothered him even more was his loss of credibility in public. The next day Mr. Ravi met his boss and asked for leave to have relief from the predicament. The boss did not sanction leave and encouraged Ravi to prove his mettle. Ravi brooded for a day and came out with a firm resolution “Now or never afterwards”. He mobilized men and materials and camped at work site (overhauling shed) for ten days. He took the sane advice of experienced supervisors and workers and improved all the systems related to the maintenance of locomotives. He motivated and built a strong team. As a consequence, failures came down to zero after a week. The General Manger applauded him on phone for the achievement. Ravi learnt the lesson: If failure is big, success can be bigger. If there is will to act on the right lines, even big failures get metamorphosed into outstanding successes.

## **6. BECOMING EMPOWERING LEADERS**

A leader's power and influence increases when he shares power with others. As team members receive more power, they can accomplish/contribute more. Since the manager shares credit for their accomplishments, he becomes more powerful. A truly powerful leader makes team members feel powerful and enables them to accomplish tasks on their own. Full-fledged empowerment includes the four dimensions of meaning, competence or self-efficacy, self-determination and impact. These are now briefly discussed.

Meaning is the value of a work goal, evaluated in relation to a person's ideals or standards. Work has meaning when there is a fit between the requirements of a work role and a person's value system comprising of beliefs, values and behaviour. A person who is doing meaningful work is likely to feel empowered.

Competence or self-efficacy is an individual's belief in his capability to perform a particular task well. Managers must make use of the full potential of their work force for improving organizational effectiveness.

Self-determination is an individual's feeling of having a choice to initiate and regulate actions. A high-level form of self-determination occurs when a worker feels that he can choose the best method to solve a particular problem. Sales force must be given freedom to use their reasonable judgment in matters such as giving discounts to the customers, when they reach the capability of self-determination. This empowerment acts as a powerful motivator.

Impact is the degree to which the worker can influence strategic, administrative or operating outcome on the job. Instead of feeling that there is no choice but to follow the company's course, he might be allowed to have a say in the future of the company.

Some very effective empowering practices are:

- Providing a positive emotional atmosphere through informal meetings and recreational events' providing scope for empowerment.
- Rewarding and encouraging in visible and personal ways e.g., by inviting a worker to a company Dinner/meeting.
- Expressing confidence in team members' abilities when they surpass the targets and also during chance encounters both in work and non-work arena.
- Fostering greater initiative and responsibility in the assignments e.g., telling a worker 'you are the foreman of this work center for implementing the change'.

- Praising initiatives taken by workers who take risks and display initiatives that lead to success.
- Practicing super-leadership: Encouraging team members to practice self-leadership is the heart of empowerment.
- Understand the difference between delegation and empowerment because delegation deals with a specific task, whereas empowerment covers a broad range of activities and a mindset about assuming more responsibility for making things happen.

## 7. REENGINEERING

Spurred by the success of empowerment for adding value to the products, the author implemented 'process teams' in place of 'functional departments' in the carriage-overhauling unit at Vijayawada. The aspects of the changes included:

- Introduction of multidimensional work teams in place of conventional simple task teams, by multiskilling (in fitting, welding, electrical rewinding' etc.) The sense of job-satisfaction increased for all workers, since work became more satisfying after reengineering and the workers achieved a greater sense of completion, closure and accomplishment from their jobs as members of process teams.
- Encouragement for change of people's roles from controlled to empowered by keeping some money (to the tune of a few thousand rupees as imp rest cash) with the workers, empowering them to buy on their own a few vital materials from local market for advancing the target dates of completion of the project on hand.
- Emphasis on education from traditional training, for highlighting the focus on 'character'.
- Honour the results achieved through indirect means of compensation (such as: on the spot cash awards, recommendation for posting of the worker as per his choice and issue of commendation letters).
- Development of intrinsic abilities, by reinforcing knowledge and skills.
- Actualization of valued change by workers, transforming them from protected to productive type.
- Spread of self-awareness: Inculcating in every employee the feeling that "Every job in my organization is essential and important. I do make a difference"
- Revolutionary change from supervision to coaching.
- Conscious changing of organizational structure, from hierarchical to flat. Everybody is a manager in his/her own right.
- A change in the mindset of the junior executives from scorekeepers to leaders.
- Reengineering the organizational ethos for taking human effort to its pinnacle of glory.

## 8. YOGIC VISION

It may be recalled that 'Sun Micro systems' Vice-President, Raduchel stated "Our company has become a vortex in which you really have a constant state of disequilibrium". A constant state of disequilibrium is something all of us must get used to so that we do not get trampled. It is sad to watch the average company, small or large, trying to succeed in the herd by moving may be "a little faster than yesterday" or "delivering a little better quality or service than yesterday". From inside the herd, the real competition is not seen: the company off to the side and heading in the opposite direction that just reinvented their industry. As one consultant said of a client obsessed with process improvement, "while they are calmly shampooing the carpet for the umpteenth time, the competition is busy pulling it out from under them".

Modern business, science and technology can be successful only when organizations do not blindly follow others and only when individual impetus and brilliance are allowed to flourish. The Bhagvad Gita states "Ya Nisha Sarva Bhutanam tasyam Jagarathi Samyami". (When other people see darkness, the yogi sees light by his careful vision.) Business theories are apt to change from time to time. A circle has four quadrants. When all the four quadrants are traversed, a new circle has to necessarily emerge. Re-invention is akin to destruction of darkness that a yogi accomplishes. It has emerged as an important organizational imperative now.

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