

Cultural Paradigm of High Performing Organizations: An Ethnographic Study in India Context

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The concept of organizational culture has gained wide acceptance as a way to understand human behavior. Each aspect of organizational culture can be seen as an important environmental condition affecting systems and sub-systems. It is believed that organizational culture reflects the personality of organizations. It comprises of the assumption, values, norms and tangible signs of organization members and their behavior. The examination of organizational culture and its impact on corporate performance become essential in management studies. The role of culture is increasingly recognized as an important variable in understanding behavior in organizations. Culture can affect managerial attitudes, managerial ideology, business governmental relations and technology transfer, etc. Therefore, understanding the cultural characteristics of high performing organizations has become more crucial than ever before. This paper examines the cultural paradigm of high performing organizations in India through ethnographic study.

INTRODUCTION

With modern globalized economies and increasing competition, corporate enterprises worldwide are under tremendous pressure to ameliorate their performance. Early western thinkers were of the opinion that the principles and theories of management and administration were universally applicable. The concepts of planning, organizing, staffing, and coordinating are present in any culture. However, these concepts specifically vary from one culture to another. Western management theories are being adopted and even imposed on non-western situations which may have different logistics, priorities and patterns of behavior (Virmani, 2002).

The compatibility and reconciliation of western and non-western management techniques across cultures is an issue that needs to be addressed by developing insight into the ways in which people and organizational changes are being managed in the organizational frame of reference. In India, as well, there has been a global outlook on management and administration. The difference in practices is the result of the norms and expectations of the community and people at various points of the time.

The success of Japanese methods of management and failure of western management practices in Japanese companies, have led to the thinking that culture directly affects

management process. This idea gives clout to the idea that any management must align itself to the local context in order to most effectively succeed (Putti, 1991). The role of culture is increasingly recognized as an important variable in understanding behavior in organizations. Culture can affect managerial attitudes, managerial ideology, business governmental relations and technology transfer (Amarchand and Kumar, 1995; Mohe, 2008). The socio-cultural impact on management systems is crucial for the successes of corporations, and with international growth of corporate powers, it is of utmost pertinence to understand role of culture on effective management of organization.

The study of organizational culture is a relatively new field and its origins lie in anthropological ideas from the early part of the 20th century. Tylor (1871) used the term “culture” to describe a complex whole that includes knowledge, belief, art, moral, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. Shortened description of culture is “how are do things around here.” Ralph Linton (1945) described culture as “a configuration of learned behavior...shared and promoted by the members of a particular society.” In his classic work Kluckhohn (1952) *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* arrived at the thesis that culture is behavior, shared behavior within a group of people who share common purpose and values of life. Two things stand out; culture is the way of life of an identified group of people. Culture is learned behavior; culture is transmitted from one generation to the other through idioms, rituals, besides formal and informal learning. The processes of enculturation mould the members to shared norms and traditions which in turn influence their behavior. Today instead of studying societies and tribes, researchers are interested in social interaction. These researchers are studying behaviors at work, interactions with employing organizations and customs and procedures within organizations.

Culture can be studied at various levels. At the micro level, it may be studied in terms of socio-culture. Culture within one group is often portrayed as consistent within a nation thereby producing a so-called “national culture”. However, there can be distinctive social cultures within a nation. The research of Hofstede (1983,1992), Trompennars (1993) and Veser (2004) suggests that different national cultural orientations will lead to differing beliefs and preferences, which subsequently will have an impact on the effectiveness of alternative human resource management strategies. Barry (2008) critically opined that National culture is widely viewed as a constraint on management practice. However, that view is increasingly inconsistent with available empirical evidence. Building on earlier work, Barry’s article maps out key assumptions that must be met for cross-cultural management research using national culture (mean) scores, such as those available from Hofstede (1992), to yield relevant and interpretable findings. It is found that these assumptions are either inconsistent with available empirical evidence or have not been adequately addressed empirically. For national culture to act as a constraint on management, cultural differences within countries should be small relative to differences between countries. Evidence shows, however, that this is not the case. The article suggests that cross-cultural management research needs to proceed differently in the future and provides specific recommendations in this regard. However these recommendations cannot be addressed as a consequence of the errors regarding the assumptions of national and international cultural influence.

Bercovitch and Foulkes (2012) also examine how culture affects the process and effectiveness of international mediation. They further developed a theoretical framework to examine culture, its dimensions, and how these may impact on mediation.

Culture can also be examined at the corporate level. This is known as “organizational culture.” A great deal of emphasis is being placed on examining organizations as units, their own cultures within larger socialite cultures (Dyer, 1984). Organizational culture has been described as the glue that holds organizations together by providing cohesiveness and coherence among its parts (Schnieder, 1980). It refers to a system of shared meaning held by members that distinguish the organization from other organizations (Robbins, 1995). In other words, organizational culture represents the key elements of the work environment in which employees perform their jobs and also corresponds to a unique set of features that the organization values. An organization’s culture is determined by a variety of elements including business environment, values, rites and rituals, cultural networks, ideas and skills possessed by its employees (Hardesty, 1988). Connolly’s (2010) study also provides a short history of ritual studies in anthropology, and then argues that business rituals can be investigated as a critical event, or conversely, a critical event can be analyzed as a type of ritual. Studies of corporate rituals as condensed public drama can delve directly into the actual cognitive, emotive, and neurological processes of meaning creation by various stakeholders, and can capture multi-level enactments of organizational descent, power and hierarchical order, as well as shifting images of future possibilities.

Many studies have compared national culture with other types of culture, and in particular, with organizational culture (Morden, 1995; Clark and Mueller, 1996; Smith, 1992). Few studies have focused on comparisons between the influence of national cultures and other levels of culture. Pizam (1997) compares nationality and industry cultures and the impact on managerial behavior in the hotel industry. He concluded that national culture has a stronger effect on managerial behavior than the culture of the hotel industry. Barbara, Anne and Hafiz’s (2004) paper investigates whether Human Resource Management (HRM) in Greece is maintaining its national character or whether it is converging towards a model that potentially clashes with the country’s traditional, societal values. This issue fits in the wider convergence–divergence debate that has been the concern of many cross-cultural researchers.

The fact that there are only few studies comparing national and other levels of culture might be because of the thin and unclear boundaries between the different layers of culture. Wang’s (2010) study shows that Macau has experienced integration of Chinese and Western cultures for centuries, yet it still retains many aspects of the traditional Confucian culture. Under its influence, enterprises form of Chinese entrepreneurs in Macau are dominated by family enterprises. Enterprises put more emphasis on merits of loyalty and diligence in their choice of employees. Their staff management focuses on the will of the people and interpersonal relationships. Macau, with a small geographical area, forms a typical “acquaintances society”, therefore relationship plays an important role in the operation of enterprises.

Alfons (2011) attempted to move away from classical cultural values studies and delve into new directions of cross-cultural research. His study focuses on the question of which collaborative practices emerge in the interface of Western and Indian branches of four Multinational IT Service Providers (MITSP); IBM, Accenture, Atos Origin and Philips. As a consequence of Global Sourcing strategies, front and back office employees in MITSP’s are now collaborating in geographically distributed project teams in the development and maintenance of client software. It further suggests that all companies formally strive for synergy but in the daily cooperation between the project teams power struggles and ethnocentric strategies dominate. The new cultural practices that emerge are a reflection of these power struggles between the Dutch and Indian project teams.

Organization culture to a large extent may determine whether the organization succeeds or fail (Dyer, 1984). It is further proved that organizational culture affects employee productivity, job satisfaction and commitment (Ouchi, 1981). And it constrains organizational strategy and policy (Schwarz and Davis, 1981). It is therefore the key variable in organizational analysis for managing change effectively.

Culture is the sense mental programming is often difficult to change. Yet if it changes at all, it does so slowly. Also culture is easier to change if there is belief in change, embedded in the organization culture. The process of changing a culture would involve identifying gaps between the existing culture state and the desired culture states and taking measures to seeking overlap between two situations (Hardsky, 1994). In fact, Japanese demonstrated that they could blend indigenous culture with managerial imperatives. Their success has underlined the thesis that culture and management need to be blended and integrated Indian have an immediate inquiry to explore this in the Indian context (Sinha, 1996).

Recent studies done by Fernanda (2011) emphasize that organizations that consciously embrace values such as social justice and environmental sustainability develop rich “CSR cultures” over time with specific structures, practices and symbolic manifestations. This type of organizational culture shapes the company’s identity, purpose, and outlook, generating unique histories and meanings. Gao (2010) also investigated the relationship between intercultural training and the organizational performance of multinational corporations. Fifteen multinational corporations operating in China participated in the investigation. It was also discovered that cultural differences could give rise to serious management problems and intercultural training could significantly improve the organizational effectiveness by overcoming such differences. Allen (2011) describes the fundamental dimensions of a security culture, a concept that builds on the experience of “safety culture” in several high-hazard industries. He emphasizes his point with a description of the challenges of “managing” the emergent phenomenon of culture, and how trust can be cultivated.

It is cleared that many scholars and cross-cultural researchers have identified and discussed the importance of culture and its impact on human resource management. Yet, a common understanding and agreement on the definition of culture (including variations of culture) has not yet been reached. However, the cultural and behavioral characteristics of organizations have a measurable effect on organizational performance. Organizations with a participative culture not only perform better than those without such a culture, but the margin of difference that widens over time suggests a possible cause-and-effect relationship between culture and performance. Much more research will be needed to substantiate these findings.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY IN INDIAN CONTEXT

Due to increased mobility in the global labor market and the internationalization of business, many organization are confronted with the challenged of managing an increasingly culturally diverse workforce. In the Indian context, globalization has given rise to many business and technological opportunities. The recent success of software companies is just a beginning in this direction. Similarly, communication revolution such as the advent of Internet encouraged the business econometrics industry to incorporate multi-cultural variables. The mushrooming of business process outsourcing (BPO) units and call center’s medical transcriptions centers are good examples for how globalization is affecting the Indian middle class. On the other hand, India’s own companies are rapidly expanding their operations in the global market. This means

Indians will be increasingly managing people with different work values, attitudes and behavior and vice versa. Therefore, it is important for us to recognize that managers within the organizations hold particular sets of assumptions, ideas and beliefs about how to manage their work force, which is strongly influenced by socio-cultural background. These conditions require proper adaptability and flexibility because of such varied cultures within one system. However, literature surveys indicate that there has been very little exploratory or basic research undertaken to identify cultural variables, which have a bearing on corporate and non-corporate management in India.

Of late, multinational corporations have realized the value of being global and local at the same time, and they have been searching for cultural fit in the countries they operate. With the globalization of economies and increasing competition, corporate enterprises world-wide are under tremendous pressure to align their management strategies to local contexts to enhance their performance. Therefore, understanding of cultural characteristics of high performing organizations has become more crucial than ever before. This paper an attempt has been made to search for cultural paradigm of high performance organizations in India. It begins with a brief description on the background of the study and followed by cultural analysis of four Indian organizations through ethnographic approach.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The present paper is based on the ethnographic work carried out in four Indian organizations in the metropolitan city of Hyderabad, India. These organizations are identified as high performing organizations because of their rapid growth for the last ten years. These organizations are unquestioned leaders in their respective fields and they have registered continuous growth during the last decades besides earning a brand image indicating quality and contribution to society.

PROFILE OF THE ORGANIZATIONS

The Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) is India's foremost research lab. It has made revolutionary biotechnology advances in the country and demonstrated the application of biology in various fields such as pharmaceuticals, agriculture and security etc. Its research contribution is globally recognized.

Satyam is one of the largest Indian I.T. company providing software solutions worldwide. It operates in nearly 45 countries across six continents, and provides customized solutions to some of the largest corporations in the world.

The Bharat Heavy Electrical Limited (BHEL) is the largest electrical engineering and manufacturing enterprise in India. Besides registering consistent growth during last decades, it is known for its innovations in the energy and infrastructure sector. It is a multi-location corporation competing effectively with organizations such as ABB and Siemens.

Tecumseh, originally an Indian company in the field of refrigerators and allied products, was taken over by the global industry leader, the Tecumseh Product Limited ten years ago. It operates from 30 different locations and has presence in US, Brazil, Canada, France, Italy and India among other countries. It has consistently improved upon its own performance.

UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL CONTOURS THROUGH AN ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH

This study first attempts to understand how these organizations enculturate new members. Enculturation is the process by which one acquires membership and psychological ownership of the organization, one becomes part of. It's mostly informally where members learn the culturally accepted behavior through observation, imitation and mentoring. In all the four companies studied, it was discovered that all new entrants learnt the cultural "ropes" by observing the behaviour of those who were already in the organization. While the organization manual had given broad indications about what they expected of an employee, they soon discovered that desirable and acceptable behavior in the organization was best understood by observing the successful elders. In BHEL and Tecumseh coming on time was sacred. In CCMB and Satyam it was not so. The scientists and software engineers operated on flexi time; however most came before time and left after the office hours. There were very few truants in all the four companies. All the members accepted the norms.

Likewise, most of the new comers discover early in their careers that in Satyam seniors/juniors were addressed by the first name, so was it in Tecumseh. But in BHEL and CCMB, one was addressed by his first name only by peers and superiors. Superiors were addressed differently. All employees in Tecumseh, BHEL and Satyam were expected to keep their workspace organized and clean. However, this was not so of CCMB. Some scientists' desks were clean and well organized, others were not so and that was also accepted. CCMB recognized individual differences and idiosyncrasies of some scientists.

Although, all these organizations had published documents on their corporate values; i.e., ideal and desired behavior expected of the employees of the company, only some of these were descending as observable in behavior. The value of time at BHEL was best noticed when the employees worked overtime to meet deadlines and to fulfill their commitments to customers. Likewise, working in a team, cooperating and collaborating was a desired behavior, practiced widely. Whenever there were differences among two team members, other members of the team and supervisors intervened to sort it out. The BHEL employees were overzealous in showing their loyalty and pride in the company. While traveling in bus at the end of the shift, one often heard employees talking about what they achieved in the day and how well BHEL was regarded in the country. They all introduced themselves as belonging to BHEL; working in BHEL enhanced their self esteem.

In Tecumseh one could observe employees, right from the shop floor to the administrative offices, exhibiting high concern for customers. They knew from their superiors and through announcements on the Boards and Newsletters that they existed because of the customers. Their salary was in reality paid by the customers. This was drilled in day in and day out, non-verbally as well as verbally. And they all worked for customers, meeting their expectations.

Satyam stated in its brochure that its employees must uphold the following values:

- ❖ Belief in people
- ❖ Pursuit for excellence
- ❖ Entrepreneurship and
- ❖ Customer orientation

Even though, the Satyam employees worked for the clients who insist on strict secrecy, one could see that those working on a project were always willing and open to share ideas and assist in finding solutions. Trust was the basis on which they operated within the project. Meeting

customer expectations was uniformly emphasized across the organization. In CCMB also one could see that scientists valued understanding among the scientific community. They also valued of achievement, new discovery or an innovation that made a valuable contribution to the field in which they were researching. Collegueship was also valued and members of every lab operated as members of an egalitarian family extending help whenever required. They were also generous in sharing knowledge but also equally open to sharing results, particularly instruments and ingredients for running experiments.

While there was no formal coaching of values in any of these organizations, employees acquired them through observation of behavior of elders and colleagues, superiors and subordinates in the organization. There was one value that was shared across these organizations: the value of entrepreneurship and excellence. They must achieve something more than what they have done in the past or what others have done elsewhere. This kept motivation levels high.

Rites de Passage

Organization culture also follows the *rites de passage* which indicate admission or transition of membership of the employees from one level to another, leading to superannuation. In societal culture *rites de passage* are often concentrated around birth, adolescence (sacred thread, ghotul, circumcision) adulthood, including marriage, and of course death where membership ceases for good.

Likewise, in a corporate culture a member passes through various stages of work life such as entry and induction, training and development, performance evaluation and promotion from one level to the other, and later, separation or retirement. While the rites and rituals vary from one organization to another, there is one shared custom of celebration, which marks transition from one level of membership to another in the organization. While in CCMB and Satyam celebration is marked by distribution of sweets to colleagues in the work group or division and shower of good will and greetings by all of them, but in BHEL and Tecumseh, promotion is celebrated differently; there is a formal assembly of colleagues to celebrate the occasion.

Entry and Induction

In the four organizations, all the members (with few exceptions) are recruited at the entry level; software engineer in Satyam, graduate engineer in BHEL and Tecumseh and Scientist level I in CCMB. Recruitment is a rigorous process. BHEL and CCMB both public sector organizations announce the openings through ads in Employment News and national newspapers; Satyam and Tecumseh also advertise but they prefer campus recruitment. Recruitment is done in several stages. Vetting the vitae, group interview, personal interview and sometimes meetings with the heads of divisions in which they would be placed. At every stage there is filtering and only those who meet the profile are presented to the heads of departments. The emphasis, towards the final round is to ensure the cultural fit, interpersonal adaptability and attitude towards team work. There were several examples where candidates were rejected in the final stage because their inconsistency in their behavior and attitude were questioned. All the four organizations consider this induction phase important for grooming employees for a long career. While there are variations in the process of induction, its basic purpose is to facilitate employees to understand the organization and its challenges and acquire a sense of belonging to it. In CCMB induction is through participation in the research activities, attendance in meetings and seminars, and discussions with the senior scientists. It is informal. Those who enter the organization come from similar work environments, or from academic institutions. However, in

Satyam, BHEL and Tecumseh, induction is a formal process; its duration varies. In Satyam induction programmes are organized by the Satyam Learning Centre and followed up by a shorter programme organized by the unit in which they are posted. While the first enables the young associates to understand the breadth and length of the company, the second inducts them into the business model of the vertical and horizontal they get attached to. The Satyam Learning Centre, whose ELTP programme runs into several weeks, not only enables the Associates to learn about Satyam vision and values, work systems, performance management and development plans, but also about the details of the organization. It enables the smooth incorporation of new associates into the Satyam system. ASSET, a soft skill programme is tailor-made for associates for a particular vertical. There are also unit induction programmes where associates learn about a particular unit. Tecumseh organizes an induction programme only when it inducts large numbers of graduate trainees. It relies on brief training and long mentoring which equips a new employee with the skills and knowledge to become a part of the organization. BHEL has a very structured induction programme. It inculcates knowledge about the company in totality, its structure and function, its technology and R & D system, and its strategy for growth. In all the four companies there is a system by which every executive is evaluated, towards the end of induction programme and a prognosis of his future in the company is recorded on his personal dossier.

Learning on the Job and Continuing Education

While learning on the job is emphasized in the four organizations, whether it is research or IT or manufacturing, it is supplemented by continuing education programmes for its employees. The nature of continuing education is dependent on the outcome of the performance appraisal where employees' strengths, weaknesses and improvement areas are highlighted. In BHEL, the executive who moves from one level to another has to undergo training programmes on supervisory, middle management, general management, advanced management, strategic management and even functional area programmes designed to equip executives to discharge higher responsibilities. Likewise, some are nominated for behavioral programmes; others on health and safety, environment, quality, computers and customer oriented programmes.

Satyam organizes programmes in technical areas, management areas, software skills, domain training, project management, team effectiveness, and change management. The project leaders are trained on negotiation skills; senior managers on strategic management, business leadership and performance management systems. Every employee charts his career path; once vetted by the reviewing officer, it is implemented by the human resource management group. For the top management Satyam organizes a retreat, a learning workshop where all general managers, presidents and CEOs sit together and discuss industry's future, and operating strategies for the company. Sometimes a leading global consultant is invited to the retreat. The corporate division is then charged with task of implementation.

In CCMB development opportunities are provided to scientists through participation in seminars, and conferences related to employees' fields of research. All scientists who have done significant work on projects, and who need to sound their findings with professional colleagues in other parts of the world are encouraged to do so. Sometimes scientists are sent to global labs on deputation. Reciprocally, CCMB receives senior scientists from abroad who spend several weeks if not months with a particular research lab.

Tecumseh does not have its own learning centre but it nominates their executives to external programmes where they may enhance their skills and competency. The senior executives are

often sent to other branches in other countries to learn about new work practices to be implemented upon their return.

Performance Management System and Intra Organization Mobility

All the four companies in the study have elaborate performance management systems. An executive is expected to set his annual goals and objectives, and his project manager is required to confirm it. Towards the end of the year the executive measures his achievements against the objectives set. This is then reviewed by his superiors who share their feedback. It is interesting to note that in Satyam almost all objectives set are measurable, in Tecumseh and BHEL nearly 75% of objectives are measurable and in CCMB the process milestones achieved are the only indicators of performance. Perhaps in the scientific labs, it has not been possible to establish measurable parameters of performance. Yet, in all of these companies there is an annual performance review, countersigned by the Reviewing Officer. This record constitutes an important input towards development and promotion decisions related to the employee.

CCMB, Satyam and Tecumseh are structurally flat organizations. There aren't many levels of hierarchy nor are there many avenues for promotion. Therefore, they have an elaborate system of review, reward and recognition on the job. Every employee or group achieving excellent performance is generously recognized, sometime financially rewarded. But financial reward is a rare event in all the four organizations. BHEL has several layers of hierarchy and high performers get promoted at least once in five years. While graduating from team leader to project leader is an important event in Satyam; in CCMB; a scientist is up for promotion review every five years; promotion to higher level is a big event in Tecumseh and BHEL. These call for wide celebration. Celebration is a must, howsoever big or small it may be.

The superannuation of an employee in the organization is an important event in all the four organizations. Here, the members of the group or division pool their contributions and organize a function. CCMB organizes a grand farewell party for retiring scientists where the Director is always present; so is the case in Tecumseh. But in BHEL it is a divisional and departmental affair. In Satyam there aren't many examples of superannuation to date. In Tecumseh, retired employees are engaged to work in the company as long as they are physically fit.

EVERYDAY LIFE IN THE ORGANIZATIONS

Everyday life in the organization is an important area where one can capture the holistic understanding of organizational culture. Some of the important areas are discussed as follows:

Communication and Information Sharing

Communication is the life line of an organization, so is availability of relevant information. In all four of the organizations studied, there is open communication and information sharing. Withholding information and communication is seen as sacrilege. Although each company has its own mode of communication and information exchange, Satyam operates on intranet for internal mail. This is a platform that is used organization-wide, across all locations in six continents. In Tecumseh notice boards disseminate information. These are located in all the nooks and corners of the company. Employees are free to respond; HR coordinates the exchange. In CCMB, it is CCTV which is located across the campus. In BHEL there is a notice board system, but they more often use informal channels of communication. The employees learn what is happening in the company faster than the receipt of formal communication. In the other three

organizations, communication is instantaneous with little room for an informal grapevine. The CCTV at CCMB flashes throughout the day with information regarding research projects, seminars, canteen administrative facilities and birthday greetings; news related to important research projects are also flashed. Congratulations for publication achievements, promotion and superannuation are also conveyed through CCTV. Satyam intranet is a state of the art technology where information is not only shared but can also be sourced. It is the platform for knowledge management; in order to avoid information overloads, there are points of contact and dissemination in every circle or vertical. Information relevant to the employees are frequently updated and communicated on the intranet. Information of interest to all associates in a given location is routed differently. Information about awards won by the company is shared on the intranet platform. Depending on the nature of information, dissemination and the recipient audience, group mail IDs have been created by Satyam. In Tecumseh, quarterly newsletters from the CEO are sent to all the employees, thus keeping them informed about the progress of the company and future plans. In addition, there are monthly and quarterly meetings which act as a forum for sharing information, discussion and decision.

Besides formal channels of communication, there are also informal channels in all the four organizations. During tea and lunch breaks, small groups meet and exchange information; they casually talk and enjoy discussions about achievements as well as faux pas of individuals and of the company. Informal communication is functional in the company by releasing tensions and creating bonhomie and belonging. It is also true that the people with shared interests converge. Informal exchanges at group and project levels strengthen belongingness to the organization. In CCMB any new scientific research is always shared and every scientist knows the area of research that colleagues are engaged in. In BHEL sharing of information during the change of shift is critical. It is structured; it enables the new shift employees to understand the work completed by the first shift and the tasks ahead.

Open and Cohesive Work Groups

Information sharing, knowledge sharing, and open culture is an accepted norm and value in all the four organizations; so are the employees' attitudes of cooperation and collaboration in their work groups; Tecumseh and BHEL have shop floor work groups engaged in special tasks. These groups are cohesive and members support each other. Cooperation to achieve their group goals is assured; this cooperation to support other groups that need assistance from time to time is also assured. In CCMB this is visible when one research group needs assistance from another. This is also seen in Tecumseh and BHEL where operations and maintenance groups have to work hand at hand. It has been observed that group work is never affected because of the absence of one member. Other colleagues willingly carry the extra work load as this action will be reciprocated by other employees. Employees openly seek help from each other while performing their job and seniors or superiors often help juniors and subordinates. This is reciprocal. One telling example is from BHEL where a member suffered partial paralysis. In order to keep his current pay, the colleagues helped him by carrying out his assignment in rotation. This was also observed in Tecumseh where colleagues came to each other's help in solving technical problems experienced on a shop floor. In CCMB there are examples of group leaders working on joint research projects where two groups were required to collaborate for speedy results. CCMB records show that most of these joint projects deliver successful results. One sees cooperative culture outside the lab too. A colleague who was injured in an accident was looked after by colleagues in rotation in the hospital, until he fully recovered.

Cooperation does not mean absence of differences. There are examples where differences were openly argued about but later sorted out. In Tecumseh and BHEL, differences on shop floor is a regular phenomenon but they are always resolved to the satisfaction of both. If they cannot resolve issues alone, a superior intervenes and sorts it out. Institutional mechanisms are in place to promote cooperative behavior.

Power Distance

Hofstede (1983) pointed out that the national culture of India reflects high power distance. There is an unequal relationship between superiors and subordinates and this inequality is an accepted behavior. However, in these four organizations this is not true. Each of them has low power distance.

Participant observation has shown that all the four organizations nurture good working relations amongst superiors and subordinates. The superior, a formal head, may be the boss but behaviorally he operates as a colleague. In BHEL, the superior-subordinate relationship is informal. They mingle freely. Subordinates do not require special permission for reaching out and speaking to their superiors. All executives are accessible at all time. They share common dining table; use boss's office for discussion, and they have freedom to reallocate work to achieve timely results. This contributes to the quality of work life and reinforces trusting relationships between employees of one company.

Tecumseh, a multi-national company with Indian origin, also practices this informality of relationships among superiors and subordinates. They call each other by first name. The bosses do not mind walking up to the subordinates in case they need to discuss something. The performance appraisal system is not confidential; everybody knows where he stands. They can seek information about their group, about themselves and the organization from the superiors with ease. In Tecumseh feedback on individual's work progress and his future plans are regularly given. This actually leads to enhanced understanding and cooperation. It has also encouraged openness among staff and has enabled employees to converge their energy on meeting the business goals. The employees' involvement in Tecumseh is high and commitment to work equally high. The culture of mutual discussion among employees and superiors, employees, vendors and customers has also empowered people to give high performance.

In Satyam, project leaders, team leaders or divisional leaders are accountable for performance, but they work with their teams as peers. The whole work group celebrates success together, sometimes goes for picnics along with their family members and meets socially for birthdays. However, there are occasions when all of the project leaders across one division sit together to deal with common problems. Since project leadership rotates, such meetings broaden their horizons and enable project leaders to take charge and improve performance. Satyam bosses also walk up to subordinates when they need input. Every employee collects his tea from a common pot and buses his or her own trays in the canteen cup; even superiors do not allow someone else to do his or her errand. Nobody is subordinate. This attitude has created a peer culture in Satyam. Employees are accountable for themselves, their work, and their responsibilities. However there is a collective work culture, and inconsequential of power distance.

In CCMB it goes a little further, nobody posts his or her designation on the doors. There is a strong value for expertise and knowledge and this can be in any corner, within any scientist, senior or junior. Sometimes senior scientists do not allow juniors from their projects to pay for tea in the cafeteria but it does not reflect a hierarchical attitude. Rather it shows concern and care

for the young colleagues. A great example of team work in CCMB is the authorship of publications. Always, all CCMB publications carry joint names, sometimes authorship is given to all of the members of the team who have worked on the project. The project leader does not take all of the credit; everyone gets it. This is part of CCMB culture.

Likewise, in Tecumseh and BHEL, one notices team culture even beyond their work groups. For making gas turbines or compressors it requires support from different groups such as engineers, maintenance, finance, etc. And the support is always available both in Tecumseh and BHEL. Sharing of work is the credo in these companies and cooperative work culture promotes high performance. Regular interface and interaction between interdependent work groups ensure cooperation. In BHEL and Tecumseh executives concentrate on setting targets and goals, monitoring work, providing resources and supporting the employees on the shop floor to accomplish goals. They mediate between the workers and supervisors when required. And the employees carry out tasks as per manufacturing plans. Each employee has a role which is interdependent on others. It's the contribution from one to the other that ensures performance. In Satyam external support is seldom required; every work group is self sufficient in completing the task assigned. However, in CCMB, support from staff in the lab and outside is very critical for success. The support is always available; it does not require any intervention from superiors.

Leadership and Decision Making

All the four companies operate with assigned leaders of projects. All these leaders work in consultation with the leadership team. More often than not they use a consultative style of decision-making. Every team is autonomous, but they operate in different forms. In BHEL, once they agree on the goals, members of the team have the freedom to achieve their agreed upon results in any fashion they find. This autonomy enhances the commitment of the employees. They work more sincerely for the achievement of their desired results. There are no examples where a team misused the freedom that they earned. The leadership style in Tecumseh is also consultative. Every member has the freedom to express his or her opinion; once discussed openly they arrive at a consensus. This approach gives freedom to the employees to try out new approaches and help them to learn different ways of improving performance. Employees on the whole greatly appreciate the freedom to try out new methods of doing work. Here mistakes are treated as lessons from which to learn. Thus performance keeps improving in all the organizations. In CCMB, though the team leaders have more expertise and experience than other employees. They always consult the young scientists. Sometimes they have reported that these consultations have improved their judgment. Most scientists enjoy autonomy; everybody works on his or her own method and follows flexible work schedule. Employees in this system set their own working hours, which are then given to others to oversee. As indicated by the CCMB scientists, research requires freedom of thought and experimental work culture in order to generate the highest quality performance. CCMB provides autonomy to the scientific community, but makes scientists accountable for their own work. In several laboratories, scientists decide on their own timings, without any constraint from group leaders. They work during the day or at night and make decisions as to how to conduct their own experiments. This culture of empowerment has contributed to the high performance of CCMB.

Dealing with Uncertainty

Earlier scholars' studies have shown that Indian organizations are characterized by high uncertainty avoidance. This, however, was not true of the four organizations studied. In CCMB,

work is full of uncertainty, in Satyam every project is a different project, every assignment calls for different rule of the game and every customer is a different customer and has to be dealt differently. Everyone has to deal with uncertainty. For Tecumseh and BHEL, the degree of uncertainty is not as high and yet the employees are prepared to deal with all eventualities. There were several occasions when they faced uncertainty in their projects. One related to the deadline in BHEL and the other related to employee welfare in Tecumseh. Both of these were dealt with effectively. It was obvious that employees in all the four organizations had high achievement orientation, ambiguity and uncertainty did not matter. There was no case where an employee wanted to achieve his objectives at the cost of other colleagues. There were no examples of undercutting. They all followed win-win strategy.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The study surfaces three cultural characteristics which distinguish high performing organizations.

- ❖ Competence based membership, which is the hallmark of CCMB, Satyam, BHEL and Tecumseh.
- ❖ Commitment to time, tasks, objectives and goals, this is what drives their high performance.
- ❖ Contribution to the organization and its environment, this makes high performing organizations a valuable.

Unlike Indian culture, where family and kinship define the pattern of relationships, in these high performing organizations, it's the competency and merit that earn one's membership to the organization. Cooperation, trust, win-win behavior and quality of relationships are key cultural characteristics. What is right, valued and preferred are well-defined and adhered to. Organizational values are their anchors.

In all the four organizations studied, employees are aware of their individual identity, but primarily as a part of the working group, division or organization to which they belong. It is their collective orientation and culture of team-work that contributes to their high performance. In all of these organizations it is also interesting to note that the employees differentiate between work relationships and personal friendships. To them, achievement of work objectives is important, but nurturing personal friendship is also valued. High performance, it appears is the product of task competence as well as competence in inter-personal relations.

Commitment to time, deadlines, organizational goals, and excelling in work performance, are the essences of high-performing organizations. Most societies and organizations have varying time orientations, in terms of past, present and future. However, in these four organizations, the past is not considered important. Creating a preferred future is the key. And, present accomplishment is certainly of importance. While current achievement is important, future promise, plans and goals are of greater relevance to these enterprises. It was widely observed that in all the four organizations, including CCMB employees believed that time once lost, was lost forever; meeting deadlines was sacred, optimizing time as a resource was of utmost concern.

Another distinctive cultural characteristic relates to employees' concerns and contributions to the organization and society at large. Not that individual members were not concerned about their personal growth but most of them believe that their growth will come only when the organizations grow to have a brand equity and respect in the society. Employees who were interviewed highlighted the contribution their organizations had made to the society, BHEL in

the field of energy, CCMB in the biotechnology and the new economy, Tecumseh in the quality of life and Satyam in driving the growth of the national economy. Being part of a high-performing organization is not enough for the employees. They are equally concerned about the role the organization plays in the development of the larger society to which they belong.

There is another aspect which needs to be flagged. Indian national culture (Hofstede, 1983; Trompennar, 1993) is deeply embedded in hierarchy, kinship, relationship and a concern for people. This study does not endorse the same. In high performing organizations membership is based on competence, not relationship and kinship. Commitment to achieve organizational excellence, assertiveness in behaviour (not aggressiveness) and personal dignity are also important for those who are part of high-performing organizations. Lastly, what sets these organizations apart is their culture of appreciation, appreciating others for whatever they are worth, whether it is CCMB or Satyam, Tecumseh or BHEL.

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