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Enhancing awareness doesn't require a search-and-destroy mission against our internal fears or judgments. It only requires recognizing and acknowledging them.

Source: Presence, a book by Peter Senge, C. Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski & Betty Sue Flowers

Only when we learn to see the new, in the old will we arrive at a better understanding of the challenges we face in business, in society and elsewhere. I realized this when I moved to Vancouver BC, Canada, back in 2006. I was there for a couple years. It was an opportunity for me to learn, grow and explore OD consulting practices in North America. This was a big change for me as I had never lived in this part of the world before.

We rarely, individually or collectively, stop to think about the meaning and significance behind what we are observing and experiencing. Instead, we tend to react habitually to situations we face at work and in life. How most heads of states and institutions are responding to the prevailing global issues is a case in point. Today, we are witnessing degradation of our environment; the ever-growing social divide between the rich and poor; a global economic crisis; the potential dangers arising from biotechnology; and increasing ethnic and sectarian violence around the world. Can such unfolding events teach us something of value? They can, but only if we are willing to suspend judgment and reflect on what we see carefully, and that too, with an open mind free of bias.

While Canada is the same old world, how it works struck me as refreshingly new. Of the many new experiences, I would like to share the seemingly mundane example of public transport in Vancouver BC with you. Out there, as in Pakistan, people go about their daily business, but in very different ways. Regularity, predictability, courtesy, and precision are a norm. Even though I didn't know my ways around the city, this fact posed no problem. For example, whenever I needed to go somewhere, I put a call to Translink (Vancouver BC's public transport system). A very helpful agent always responded and enquired politely, Where would you like to go; what time would you like to reach your destination; and where do you intend to start your journey from? As soon as I

conveyed the required information, I was given a detailed route plan ♦ the train to catch - from where, and at what time; the bus number to take on arrival; time and location from where it departs; and the nearest spot to my destination at which to disembark. I ended up knowing my way from here to there in less than five minutes! And this convenience was available to all in this city. Relevant information was easily accessible on phone or the net. It made all the difference and was truly liberating.

Pakistan is a different ball game. Traveling in any of its major cities is convenient only for the few who have their own means of transport, although traffic and road conditions can be challenging at the best of times. The silent majority have to rely on public transport that is very unreliable and unsafe - an uphill task for the millions, every day, to make it safely and on time, from point A to B.

Reasons for this stark contrast appear to be self-evident at first.

♦Economics♦ ♦Education♦ I hear you say. But please suspend judgment. Pause. Reflect. Think deeper. The reasons for the stark differences are not necessarily the ones that come to our mind habitually.

We desperately need to enhance our awareness, by seeing and perceiving the situation afresh. In practice, this requires patience and a willingness not to impose our preconceived notions on what we are seeing. In the book, ♦Presence♦ (page 31) an example is provided from when the economist Brian Arthur and his colleague, the sociologist Geoffrey McNicoll, were working in Bangladesh in the 1970s. ♦They spent months observing, gathering information, and ♦doing nothing.♦ This was at a time when it was common for Western economists and institutions such as the World Bank to analyze needs of developing countries such as Bangladesh by simply applying traditional economic models without really questioning them. Eventually, Arthur and McNicoll developed a fresh understanding of how the ♦whole♦ functioned. They showed how conditions such as landlessness and large families were self-reinforcing over time and how standard ♦band-aid♦ fixes prescribed by international aid institutions only served to prop up the status quo. ♦This perspective helped shift focus of these institutions.

It might be worth asking why it is so difficult for us to change our attitudes and paradigms to seeing and understanding age-old problems we face in our businesses and in society. According to the authors of ♦Presence♦ not being able to ♦see♦ problems for what they are is universal.

♦Most change initiatives that end up going nowhere don't fail because they lack grand visions and noble intentions. They fail because people can't see the reality they face. Likewise, studies of corporate mortality show that most Fortune 500 companies fail to outlast a few generations of management not because of resource constraints, but because they are unable to ♦see♦ the threats they face and the imperative to change.


Just over a century ago, educated men came up with the concept of airships (like the famous Zeppelin). At the time experts could only ♦see♦ lighter than air devices fly. Thank God, soon after, some

people saw otherwise, and we now have jet aircraft weighing over 600 tons, that are much faster and safer, connecting people all over the world. This possibility always existed. It was only when we saw it through deeper awareness that jet planes and supersonics became reality. Many more breakthroughs in medicine, social justice, governance, communications etc., are hidden in nature's infinite store of possibilities.

Consider this: It is the job of public servants to serve. Elected representatives come into office with the intent to serve the very people they were elected by. Wouldn't it be nice, if our politicians simply passed a bill in parliament, making it mandatory for all government officials and their families to use the railways for domestic transport, use government run hospitals for all their healthcare needs, and send their children to government schools, colleges and universities for primary and higher education? Imagine the positive change this would make.

Status quo will prevail unless we learn to see our old world with a new set of eyes.

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No matter how big your organization gets, continue to empower your people at every level to deliver. Only this way will size lead to advantage.

It is always useful to explore the history of

any company to understand how they got to being what they are today. Corporate success usually follows some combination of visionary entrepreneurship and luck. When companies acquire early successes and achieve a dominant position in some market or markets they become profitable and usually follow a steep growth trajectory in their early years.

With the passage of time, however, pressures on managers come mostly from inside the firm. Building and staffing a bureaucracy that can cope with growth is the biggest challenge. External constituencies are neglected. The firm needs, hires, and promotes managers, not leaders, to cope with the growing bureaucracy. Top managers allow these people, not leaders, to become executives. Sometimes top management actively prevents leaders from becoming senior executives. Managers begin to believe that they are the best and that idiosyncratic traditions are superior. They tend to become increasingly arrogant and aloof. The problem is compounded when top management does nothing to stop this trend and often ends up exacerbating it.

A strong, insular and conceited culture develops. Managers fail to acknowledge the value of customers and other key stakeholders. They behave in an inward-looking, sometimes political fashion and fail to acknowledge the value of leadership and the talent available at all levels that can provide it. They tend to stifle initiative and innovation. They behave in centralized and authoritative ways.

Consequently, as organizations grow, whether in terms of sales, number of employees, range of products and services, market share, or whatever, they start to lose the advantage they once had. According to John Naisbitt in the book *Rethinking the Future* it is the small companies who are creating the global economy, not the Fortune 500. And these days a small company can be as small as one person. In his book, *Megatrends 2000* he gave the example of his neighbors Linde and Lito who have a publishing company called Western Eye Press. He continues, It's just two people and they publish wonderful photographic and guide books. They create them on Macintosh computers in their basement in Telluride. They printout the camera-ready pages on their own high resolution laser printer. Then they FedExed these pages to Seoul, South Korea, and the printer there manufactures their

books and ships them to distributors all over the world. Western Eye Press is a key player in the global economy and its just two people on this little mountain perch in Colorado. ♦

Large corporations and global conglomerates, if not careful, end up becoming highly bureaucratic, over-managed, rule-driven and inflexible by virtue of their size. In this day and age of cyberspace and nanotechnology, fetish with size of a business can become an impediment. This is particularly true for organizations that have grown significantly in scale in terms of revenues and market share. Organizations like Citibank have lost touch with their core constituents. It may be a major player with a strong brand image, but customers interacting with its frontline employees are often disappointed by their state of helplessness in resolving routine problems. This could be on account of slavish adherence to archaic procedures. Often, individual contributors in big companies don't take the initiative needed to listen and understand customer requirements with the intent to ultimately delighting them. There is a lot to be said for systems and processes, but if they are not customer oriented and responsive, the game is as good as lost.

Quality can now be replicated anywhere in the world. China is leading the way in this respect. With the falling of trade barriers and dropping of quotas, the Chinese have taken their global market share in textiles from 16% to over 50% in less than a decade. In recent years, the Pakistan market has been flooded with Chinese products (mostly electronic, light engineering) that are low priced and in much demand.

We no longer live in a world of big mainframes. We live in a world where the real power is large networks ♦ a lot of individuals connected together ♦ Facebook & Twitter are pointing the way. A network does not have any headquarters. Chinese excel in this field and have spread their global business through this means. Naisbitt cites Asea Brown Boveri (ABB) as a great example of a huge company that thrives and grows through networking. He quotes Percy Barnevik (Former CEO at ABB) as having said, ♦ We grow all the time, but we also shrink all the time. ♦ As the network gets larger, the nodes get smaller.

So, no matter how big your company gets, continue to excel by empowering your people at every level to deliver. Building agility and responsiveness is the key.