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October, 2012

Education of the kind that opens minds and encourages people to think independently and responsibly is not a cost, but an investment with potentially very high returns. No amount of money spent in developing our people will ever be wasted if we leverage such investment wisely. To unleash human energy without planning for its utilization is counter-productive for the sponsoring organization, but not the individual.

There is a strong correlation between investment in learning and development and the returns on such an outlay.

When it comes to returns on investment in learning, the results are astounding and at times unbelievable. In fact the percentages defy imagination. For example, a procurement manager in a reasonably large local company recently attended a 2-days workshop on negotiation skills. He invested Rs 12,000 from his own resources, as his company did not sponsor him, thinking it was a waste of time. At the time, he was managing a budget of Rs 500 million/annum. The insights he gained in the learning program helped him save the company Rs 7.5 million annually which is a mere 1.5%. The following month his performance was appraised favorably and he got a raise of Rs 30,000/pm. As a result, in that financial year, he earned Rs 180,000 on top of his usual pay. Even though this example does not seem far-fetched, his personal ROI worked out at a whopping 1,400%! Where on earth can one find such handsome and outlandish ROIs??! And yet, such events are silently happening in pockets all over the world, every day. The manager in this illustration believed in himself and consequently chose to make an investment in building his professional capability. Not only did he gain, but his company won also.

It is only when organizations start believing in people and in their infinite potential to learn, grow and contribute, do they begin to see phenomenal results in top lines and bottom-lines. It remains a fact that the more individuals learn about themselves and others, their role and responsibility in life, their job and its larger context, the better they are able to perform and contribute as empowered associates in their organizations, or as inspiring entrepreneurs in their own businesses.

People who complain about the high cost of education or training, need to be reminded of the quote: ♦If you think education is expensive, try ignorance.♦ Human energy can only be channelized towards constructive ends through greater awareness, which comes not only

through acquisition of knowledge, but also from its correct use. This implies the need for character development, which is an essential ingredient in the learning process. Lack of integrity makes knowledge dangerous. The global economic devastation and social upheaval being witnessed these days, point to this fact.

To treat learning, training and education as a mere cost item in the budget is a travesty. I fail to understand, why this mindset continues to prevail amongst the educated in many organizations, more notably in public sector corporations. Pakistan International Airlines (PIAC), Pakistan Railways, OGDCL, Pakistan Steel and many other entities are either making huge losses or wasting resources. Could it be willful neglect and/or a deep sense of insecurity? There is no excuse for poor governance and lack of investment in people, particularly when it is known that people make the essential difference in making their organizations profitable, growing, sustainable & admired or otherwise. None of the bodies mentioned here need to be in the dire straits they find themselves in. When will commonsense ever become common practice? What stops us?

There are examples of organizations in other parts of the world also, in particular in China, Brazil, Russia, India, Nigeria and other economies that are growing rapidly. Here too, there are examples of people being treated as machines and made to follow their superiors blindly to accomplish an unvarying succession of mind-numbing motions. Such approaches that play on fear to extract compliance instead of commitment, and apply the carrot and stick approach, may work in the short term, but ultimately fail.

Education of the kind that opens minds and encourages people to think independently yields high returns. This comes from a deep sense of ownership which can only truly be instilled, if you care for your people's wellbeing and their development with the intent of seeing them flourish to the best of their abilities.

No amount of money spent in developing our people will ever be wasted if we leverage such investment wisely. However, to unleash human energy without planning its utilization is counter-productive for the sponsoring organization, but not the individual. All too often, potential benefits from training programs are lost because of the absence of an encouraging environment which ensures that the new insights and tools gained in learning programs are applied in the workplace.

It is important to keep in the forefront of your mind that the aim of training is to somehow positively impact an individual's present or future ability to add ever greater value to your organization. To this end, the edict: Management is measurement helps.

Let us explore some approaches that can help you get the maximum returns from your investment in developing people. This can be achieved when the desired changes in workplace practices are implemented as a result of

greater involvement and participation that follows any learning experience.

To start with, you need to integrate all the trainings being imparted through your internal and/or external resources with other management systems in your organization. This means ensuring that all training decisions and actions are carried out with reference to your organization's performance management systems, strategic planning processes, and career development initiatives. Training must therefore be carefully planned and should be clearly linked to measurable workplace outcomes. It is futile to provide training opportunities where it is simply used as a reward and its goals aren't clear to all concerned.

Consequently, the process of training and development must follow a well thought out sequence. First, a thorough training needs analysis (TNA) needs to be carried out involving HR and the line functionaries. Second, you must see to it that the trainer is adequately skilled in imparting knowledge to audiences selected for training and that the contents and exercises are carefully tailored to meet the learning objectives established in the TNA. The third, and often neglected component, is follow-up. Mechanisms must be in place to provide reinforcement to the learner for his or her efforts to implement what has been learned.

All of the above come to naught when continuous support and encouragement is not provided to the employees/associates to see application of what has been learned in the workplace. For example, if people have attended a workshop on project management, the training will only add value if appropriate resources and coaching is provided on an on-going basis to the teams engaged in quality improvement or other projects of choice.

In short, getting value from training and other learning initiatives requires a strategically integrated approach, which needs plenty of planning and pre-work, and, above all, follow-up. It's a shared responsibility on the part of attendee(s) and their manager. In this regard, the line plays a critical role in helping to create the conditions under which training will be useful and its impact enduring.

Expectations from the planned training programs need to be clear from the outset and these must be documented. These can include: a) how you expect them to apply what they will learn. b) how the trainees are expected to share what they have learned with other members in the organization. c) what the trainees need from you so that they can effectively apply their learnings, and d) when you plan to meet them to discuss the training and how it can be applied to your workplace.

During the planning phase of any training, it is also worth asking your people who have been selected for the learning program whether there is anything that is likely to hinder their ability to apply what they are going to learn. Ask this question again after the training. It is only you and your managers who need to take an active role in the decision-making and follow-up of trainings that is necessary to achieve desired ROI's. Not to do so will breed frustration and cynicism amongst your people, and this will lead to poor performance overall. To avoid this

pitfall, meticulously link training initiatives to both individual and organizational needs and help remove barriers to the application of learnings.

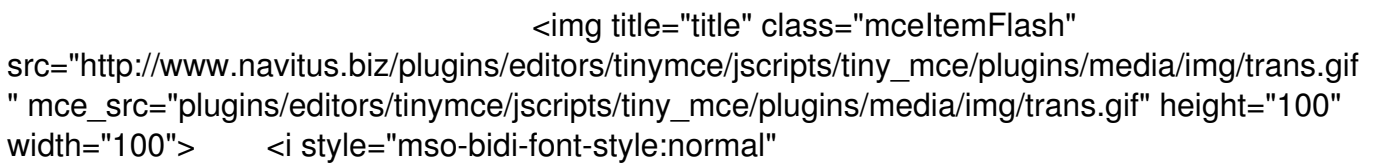
Of course, training is not a solution to all problems. Performance gaps can occur for many reasons, for example, inappropriate staffing, outdated policies and procedures, flawed business strategy and/or unavailability of resources that can include necessary funding, technology etc. Therefore, remain open to the possibility that other solutions may be more relevant for your organization.

Make the difference between training that is just cosmetic and training that brings forth the spiritual powers of your people for perpetual growth and expansion on your enterprise. Develop a culture in your organization that encourages people to learn from their mistakes. Propagate the value of experimentation; while at the same time insist on obtaining impeccable service delivery to internal and external customers.

As leaders and managers in your organizations, it is your prime responsibility to create a corporate culture where learning is celebrated and where people dare to live out their dreams that are also aligned to your vision, values and corporate strategy. This will not be easy, but it is your challenge. Embrace it.

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mce_style="font-size:12.0pt;font-family:"> <p class="MsoNormal" style="mso-pagination:widow-orphan" mce_style="mso-pagination:widow-orphan">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. </p>
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<p class="MsoNormal" style="mso-pagination:widow-orphan" mce_style="mso-pagination:widow-orphan">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. </p> <p class="MsoNormal" style="mso-pagination:widow-orphan" mce_style="mso-pagination:widow-orphan"> </p>
<p class="MsoNormal" style="mso-pagination:widow-orphan" mce_style="mso-pagination:widow-orphan">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.</p> <p class="MsoNormal"> </p>
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 <i style="mso-bidi-font-style:normal" mce_style="mso-bidi-font-style:normal">Rethinking the Future</i> ♦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, <i style="mso-bidi-font-style:normal" mce_style="mso-bidi-font-style:normal">Megatrends 2000</i> 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 print out 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.