

<p style="" class="MsoNormal">Kamran Rizvi, Navitus
June, 2013</p><p style="" class="MsoNormal"> </p><p style=""><p style=""></p><p style=""> </p><p></p><p> </p><p class="MsoNormal"><i style="mso-bidi-font-style:normal" mce_style="mso-bidi-font-style:normal">There are numerous instances where I have seen managers 'hang' when faced with conflicting ideas. They need to 'reboot' themselves in order to use contradictions as a springboard for immediate and lasting success.</i></p><p> </p><p class="MsoNormal">If it weren't for our curious minds, would we ever learn anything new? Could we ever improve the way we think and behave? Could we ever create and innovate? </p><p class="MsoNormal">What triggers curiosity in us? The very things that frustrate and confuse us! We experience cognitive dissonance when confronted with conflicting ideas and beliefs that are ever-present in our thoughts and in our environment. Making sense of the contradictions we come across turns our frustration into positive energy that empowers us to act in constructive ways.</p><p> </p><p class="MsoNormal">Change is the eternal reality individuals and organizations have always faced, confront today, and will continue to encounter through time. However, it is our understanding and adherence to never-changing principles that help us thrive in change. Knowing what to change, and what not to, is of the essence. Everything is <i style="mso-bidi-font-style:normal" mce_style="mso-bidi-font-style:normal">not</i> up for grabs! </p><p class="MsoNormal">It is a known fact that organizations need to continually learn, improve, and grow to survive and remain viable in the long run. These are eternal requirements and imply the need for us to adapt to change continuously. Such contradictions in life are everlasting and come in all shapes and sizes. They are built into the very fabric of nature - within and around us.</p><p> </p><p class="MsoNormal">A colleague once asked me, "Who has been your best teacher?" I thought for a while. Names flashed through my head, but none stood out. I thought for a while and went to the white board in my office and drew a big circle. In it, I placed a question mark "?". I am eternally grateful to my colleague for asking me such an innocent question. I spent that entire day pondering on what gives rise to questions in my mind. Voila!! I found the answer: Cognitive dissonance had been fueling my curiosity all along. Seeing contradictions as a blessing changed my life forever. It's in small moments like these that big things happen, but only if we make time to reflect deeply. </p><p class="MsoNormal">Consider this: We are forever caught between the need to control and at the same

time, to empower; Leaders need to exhibit courage, while also having capacity for compassion; Managers need to focus on goals and at the same time need to show the flexibility of mind by de-focusing, to create and innovate. Short-term goals must be met while also taking decisions and actions that will impact the long term and build sustainability.

Everything we take for granted today was once viewed as impossible by many. Take flying for example. The governing paradigm almost a century ago was that ♦only lighter than air can fly♦. Thank God there were a few who had the audacity to challenge this thinking. Today we have thousands of immaculately engineered planes, each weighing over 600 tons, transporting a vast number of people across continents, at the speed of a bullet! Our continuing success depends on us viewing cognitive dissonance as a blessing.

The world-wide web is yet another example which glaringly illustrates the power of contradictions to inspire innovation. The "www" marvel is the most centralized system on earth. Yet it has liberated individuals to access knowledge, while remaining connected with each other globally. The internet has transformed human possibilities beyond belief!

The truth I cherish the most is that mortal beings can become immortal. Social philosopher, Charles Handy is widely regarded. He is seen as the guru of the modern workplace. Many of his predictions have already come true, including the demise of the traditional organization and job and the emergence of talented individuals and entrepreneurs being outsourced for their expertise in specialized fields.

Handy concedes disparagingly that, "In a business, quarterly reports and an average lifespan of 40 years for big companies tend to put immortality on the back burner." He finds this short-sightedness ill-founded; institutions, he declares, can be immortal. "The Mitsui Corporation and my old Oxford College are both over 600 years old, both still going strong and thinking far." He continues to amplify his point, "You can only look ahead as far as you can look back"

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Building trust with others and between people in organizations is the only real way to achieve greater efficiency, reduce costs and create sustainability. However, to enjoy the fruits of trust, you will need to make yourself vulnerable! This proposition is inherently counterintuitive. By not leveraging this contradiction, many local organizations in Pakistan, are failing to achieve their full potential. Owners of thriving businesses refuse to let go at their own peril! As a result, they are unable to attract talented professionals, and when they succeed in doing so, they are unable to retain them. This should not come as a surprise. Competent and committed individuals need space in which to perform at their best.

There are no perfect solutions to anything, and no one can predict exactly what the future may hold. Only by believing in the higher laws and by making sense of the ambient paradoxes, will we be able to

build admiring institutions that last.

The Empty Raincoat ♦ By Charles Handy

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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 FedEx♦ed 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.</div>