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A paper presented at the British Academy of Management Conference 2002 (BAM2002), London, UK, 09 - 11 Sep 2002.

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Questions on Leadership and Organisational Culture

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Paper submitted to the Leadership and Culture Track of the
British Academy of Management Conference 2002
London, September 9-11, 2002

Abstract

The paper gives an overview of the debate concerning the role of leadership in creating and changing organisational culture. Chaos and tension theory, duality and harmony, balance and system theory will form the basis of the argument for the need for a new framework.

It will be argued that an open minded, multi-disciplinary approach is needed both at a theoretical and practical level. The idea of "best practice" will be challenged and a historic overview of organisational structure and culture will demonstrate the masculine nature of current organisations. Based on psychological research the observation will be made that many organisations' underlying philosophy is that 'Business is fight' and though more and more is said about people only a minority of organisations take the idea of 'business is people' truly on board.

The paper will ask a series of questions about leadership and the role of a harmony based organisational culture. The author, however do not intend to provide answers. By openly expressing her personal views about these questions she would invite you to re-examine your views in an unorthodox way. She would like to open a discussion for researchers and practitioners about 'level five management' and corporations where 'the hungry spirit' can be fed.

Questions on Leadership and Organisational Culture

Introduction

The books and articles on culture and leadership would fill the shelves of a small library, with the volume of publication suggesting that we know so much about these issues. However, when I set out to find answers to my questions I soon realised that there are many unknown areas in this field with no black and white solutions.

I set out to find answers to simple questions like: Why is it that there are so many problems in organisations? Why have the so-called magic formulae like pyramids, matrixes, TQM or ISO 9000 followed so enthusiastically by some organisations failed to give satisfying answers or long term solutions? Why is it that some leaders can manoeuvre organisations through waters full of icebergs whilst others only succeed in sinking Titanic size ships even in calm waters? These questions have been in the back of my mind for years and, as noted below, my quest to find answers has resulted in even more questions.

Twenty years ago in a visionary article, Peter Drucker described the organisations of the 21st century.

" Twenty years from now, the typical large business will have half the levels of management and one-third the managers of its counterparts today. Work will be done by specialists brought together in task forces that cut across traditional departments. Coordination and control will depend largely on employees' willingness to discipline themselves. Behind these changes lies information technology. Computers communicate faster and better than layers of middle management. They also demand knowledge-able users who can transform their data into information. Clues to what the new, information-based organisations will require come from other knowledge-based entities like hospitals and symphony orchestras. First a "score", a set of clear, simple objectives that translate into particular actions. Second, a structure in which everyone takes information responsibility by asking: who depends on me for what information? On whom do I depend? Information-based organisations pose their own special management problems as well: motivating and rewarding specialists; creating a vision that can unify an organisation of specialists; devising a management structure that works with task forces; and ensuring the supply, preparation, and testing of top management people. Solving these problems is the management challenge for the rest of the century". (Drucker, 1988, pp 1-2.)

Drucker's vision will certainly provide a big enough challenge for the 21st century as well. When we look at the current state of organisations we can readily acknowledge the level of technological improvement, however we can hardly fail to notice that organisations in general are still far away from the existing harmonious, supportive and responsible culture that Drucker is talking about.

Why are organisations in chaos?

Why are organisations the scenes of fighting, conflict and tension rather than harmony? Is it because it is still the early days of the business enterprise evolution? Or is it to do with the clash between the masculine and feminine approach or the limitations of human understanding? Perhaps the root of the problem resides in the organisational culture or with the individual?

Early days?

We could argue that the business enterprise evolution is still in its infancy and that chaos is a necessary preliminary stage of any evolution. Chandler's (1954) historic overview made me realise that perspectives as to the management function involving work and tasks in its own right only distinguished themselves around the turn of the 20th century. Arguably it was only when Pierre S. du Pont restructured his family business in 1925 that the second phase of the evolution began that ultimately led to the command-control organisation of today, with its emphasis on decentralisation, budgets and controls. According to Drucker (1998) we are now in the third period of change, with a shift from the command and control organisation to the information based organisation, the organisation of knowledge specialists.

Clash between males and females?

If we look at the evolution of organisation from a different perspective, we could argue that organisations are historically created and dominated by men and reflect the male thinking pattern and value system. Until the Second World War there was a very clear division of labour between men and women. Men were the 'hunters', the 'fighters' the 'bread winners' who went out to find the food for the family whilst women looked after the children, prepared the meals, created homes and looked after the different domestic and social aspects of family life. After 1945, however, the majority of women had, either by choice or force of circumstances,

entered the labour market, although in most cases they also kept their domestic responsibilities. Moir and Jessel (1998, p.155) quotes the economist Sylvia Hewlett who sums up the status of working women in the 1970s.

"The spirit of the decade was to pretend that there were no differences between men and women. Well, the results are in. More women than ever are working outside the home, and at least some of them have broken into the previously closed ranks of executives and professionals. But despite all of this 'progressive change', most women are in worse economic shape than their mothers."

Power in the professions is overwhelmingly male. In 1980 some 99 per cent of company directors were men and 98 per cent of British university professors were male. Why? One explanation is that women may not subscribe to the same definition of conventional success as do men. Connie Hutt, an early British pioneer on the study of sex differences (quoted in Moir and Jessel, 1998 p.157) argues that male and female academics conceive their professional identities differently. Men are more concerned with academic prestige and institutional power, whilst women focus on developing students, fostering scholarship and promoting institutional service.

There are probably only two ways by which to change women's inequality of achievement; the first is for women, in so far as they can, mimic men. This would involve a conscious effort to take more risks, be more aggressive, suppress the value of personal relationships, acquire a fascination for status, office politics, competition, and achievement, with the comparative neglect of health, happiness and personal well-being. The second, and perhaps an idealistic aim, would be to change the very definition of conventional success from its present, predominantly male, nature to something involving a wider and more catholic set of achievements.

Adherents of the first view suggest that the women who succeed in a male world are exactly those who behave as 'honorary' men. (Moir and Jessel 1998). There is a widespread agreement that males are more aggressive than females in all societies. In a review of cross-cultural studies of sex differences, Ember (1981) concluded that "the most consistent and most documented cross-cultural difference in interpersonal behaviour appears to be that boys

exhibit more aggression" (p.551). Males also differ from girls as regards the related traits of dominance, competitiveness, and criminal behaviour in nearly all societies (Lynn, 1995). In the most comprehensive cross-cultural study of sex differences in competitiveness, carried out in 43 countries, males were found to be significantly more competitive in the great majority of cases (Lynn, 1991). In this survey it was also found that males value money more highly than females in virtually all countries; the reason for this is probably that money is a symbol of competitive success. The higher prevalence of crime among males can probably be understood as partly attributable to the stronger male aggressiveness.

Virtually all authorities agree that the greater male aggression has a biological basis, partly determined by the male sex hormone testosterone (Lynn, 1995).

The leading exponents of the view that cross-cultural differences impact personality traits are Segall et al (1990) and Berry, Poortinga, Segall and Dansen (1992). Their general view is that intelligence and personality differences among different peoples are brought about by dissimilar socialisation and child rearing practices. For instance, if people in economically developed nations tend to be more competitive than those in underdeveloped nations and traditional societies, this is because children in economically developed societies are brought up to compete. With regard to male-female differences in aggression, these authors concede that hormonal sex differences are involved, but they believe that cultural differences in child rearing practices strongly modify the extent of sex differences.

Organisations in the 21st century arguably still mirror and follow the male thinking pattern. Women, though more and more reluctantly, still tend to conform to and obey the structural and cultural constraints of their work place. Most of them suppress their innate female qualities of supporting, nurturing and caring, particularly if they have the ambition to get into and survive in higher layers of the organisational hierarchy. However it may increasingly be the case that these female qualities of trust, co-operation, respect, support, team victory as opposed to individual victory are the building blocks and prerequisites for 'success' in knowledge based organisations.

System theory- the limitations of human understanding?

There is an ever-growing need for an interdisciplinary approach to organisational research and for bridging the communication gap between the different disciplines. Attempts have been

made since the early 1950s to develop an ultimate system for research that would enable effective communication between scientific, social science and humanistic research (von Bertalanffy, 1951, Boulding, 1956, Snow, 1959), with a system seen here as " an organised or complex whole; an assemblage or combination of things or parts forming a complex or unitary whole." Indeed general systems theory is concerned with developing a systematic, theoretical framework for describing general relationships of the empirical world. An ultimate but distant goal would be a framework which could tie all disciplines together in a meaningful relationship. (Johnson, Kast & Rosenzweig, 1963).

It has been argued that an overall framework would be necessary if we wanted to avoid the danger of turning the interdisciplinary movement into undisciplined approaches. One approach to providing an overall framework (general system theory) would be to pick out phenomena common to many different disciplines and to develop general models which would include such phenomena. A second approach would include the structuring of a hierarchy of levels of complexity for the basic units of behaviour in the various empirical fields.

The hierarchy of systems approach might include the following nine levels, each of which adds to the complexity of the previous level.

1. Static structure - can also be called frameworks because this is the beginning of organised, theoretical knowledge in almost any field.
2. Simple, dynamic system with predetermined motions. Can also be called clockworks.
3. Cybernetic system - control mechanism like the thermostat where the transmission and interpretation of information is an essential part of the system.
4. Open system - or self-maintaining structure. Can also be called the level of the cell where life begins to differentiate itself from non-life.
5. Genetic-societal level - represented by the plant

6. "Animal" level - characterised by increased mobility, teleological behaviour and self-awareness.
7. "Human" level - the individual human being considered as a system. Characterised by self-consciousness, self reflective quality and the capacity of speech.
8. Social organisations - content and meaning of messages, nature and dimensions of value systems, the transcription of images into historical records
9. Transcendental systems - the ultimates and absolutes and the inescapables and unknowables

If we look at this hierarchy it is easy to appreciate that social organisations are more complex systems than the human individual. As a result it is not possible for the human brain to capture the fullness and total complexity of this system (Hofstede, 1994). What we cannot fully capture we tend to simplify or break down into its components. When we try to make sense of organisations we use simplified models that are perceivable for the human brain. However, through simplification and modelling we tend to lose some of the important attributes. Models are but a simple static snapshots of an ever changing complexity at we cannot fully comprehend (Illes, 2001).

Though the evolution of management organisations were described as static frameworks, cybernetic systems other contemporary approaches make many references to a living cell type of organisation. The definition of the workforce is also in constant change, starting from a perception of labour as horse power equivalent, a machine substitute, through to labour as but one of the resources of factor input to the modern perception of labour in knowledge-based societies as the biggest asset and competitive advantage generator through knowledge creation.

Organisational culture?

One of the early definitions of culture (Jacques,1951) suggests that culture is ' the customary or traditional way of doing things, which are shared to a greater or lesser extent by all

members of the organisation and which new members must learn and at least partially accept in order to be accepted into the service of the firm.'

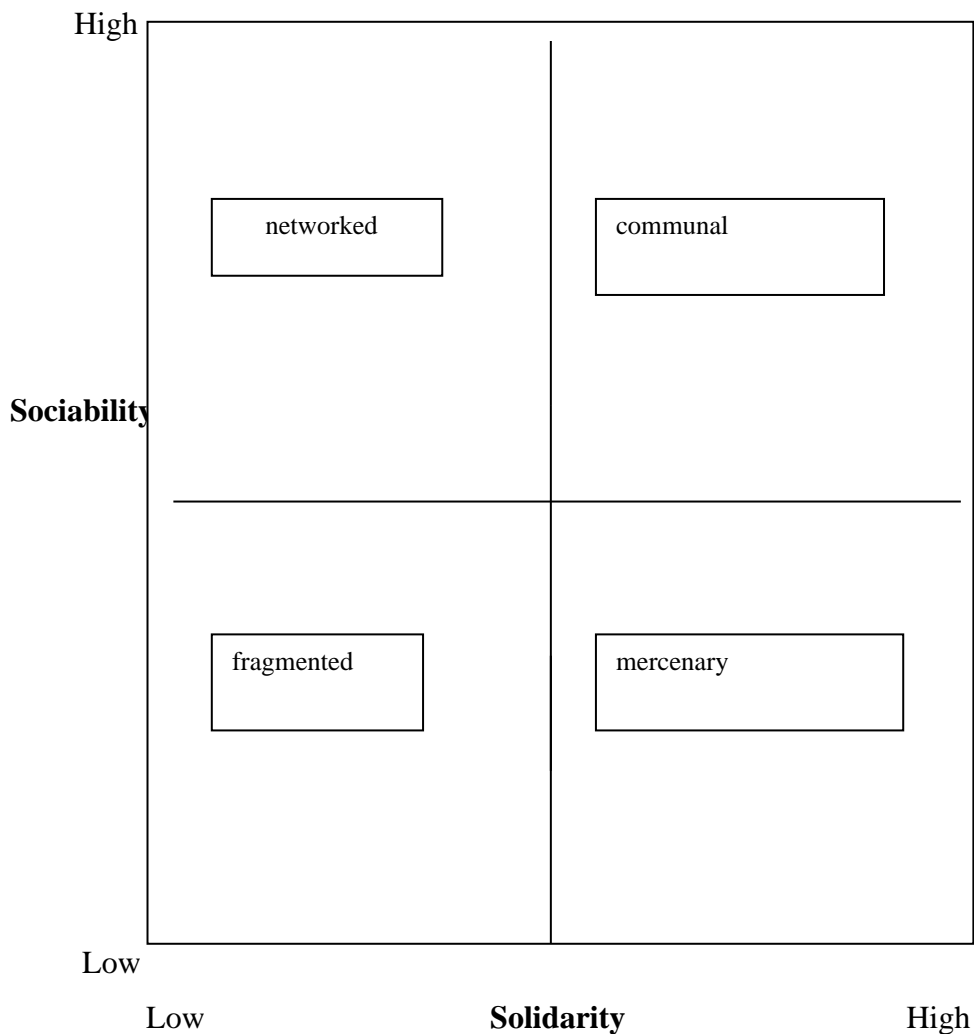
Globalisation and the rapid change in every area of economic and social life provided an exciting research opportunity for scholars in the field of organisational culture and climate. If we only mention the two latest handbooks (Askanasy, N, Wilderom, C, Peterson, M Eds. 2000 and Cooper, C.L and Cartwright, S. Eds. 2001) we see straight away that it would be impossible to cover all aspects of research into organisational culture. The authors who contributed to these comprehensive handbooks talk about the debate between culture and climate, the dynamics in organisations, the relationship between culture, climate, commitment and careers; the impact of culture on mergers and acquisitions, sociological perspective on organisational culture, assessment and research methods in the organisational culture field, culture and change, just to mention a few.

Kay (1995) suggests that distinctive organisational cultures could represent a source of long term competitive advantage because they are not easy for competitors to replicate. Schein (1995) argues that without looking at the particular culture of an organisation it is not possible to understand its strategies. Evans (1993) uses the metaphor of "glue" and says that culture is like the glue that holds different parts and aspects of the organisation together. The language of organisational analysis has changed considerably and the relationships are increasingly mapped through 'networks' or 'clusters', rather than hierarchies. The flexible, modern organisations are not held together by reporting relationships, functions or departments but by shifting relationships of collaboration, interdependence and reciprocity (Goffee and Scase,1995).

Goffee and Jones (2001) analyse the social architecture of organisations. They develop their model on the well-established traditions of sociological analysis which identify two distinctive types of social relations: sociability and solidarity.

Sociability is an aspect of social life that refers to affective, non-instrumental relations between individuals who are likely to see each other as friends. In its pure form, sociability represents a type of social interaction which is valued for its own sake (Simmel, 1971, quoted in Goffee and Jones, 2001). Solidarity, on the other hand, describes task focused co-operation between unlike individuals and groups (Durkheim, 1993, quoted in Goffee and Jones, 2001). It does not depend on friendship and it is not sustained by continuous social relations.

Goffee and Jones, (1995, 1998) suggest the following four distinctive corporate forms: the networked, the mercenary, the fragmented, the communal.



(adapted from: Goffee and Jones, 2001 p.5.)

The *networked* organisations exhibit high levels of sociability but relatively low levels of solidarity. The fit between person and organisation works best for networked cultures where individuals are extrovert and are energised by relationships, possess good social skills, and are tolerant of ambiguity and differences. People in this culture are affable and loyal to others, they are patient and prepared to build long-term relationships.

In a *mercenary* organisation people are goal-oriented, keen to complete tasks once started and motivated by clarity of structure rather than ambiguity. They are instrumental rather than affective in their work relations, and are energised by competition and success. They address rather than avoid conflict.

In a *fragmented* culture individuals tend to be introvert, learning best through self-contained reflection. They are motivated by autonomy and independence and are analytical rather than intuitive. They are capable of managing their own development and they are able to separate idea evaluation from personal relationships.

The *communal* culture is almost like a 'cult' where individuals are idealists and obsessive. They are prepared to make sacrifices for the greater good and are attracted to teams. They are able to identify wholeheartedly with the organisation and are prepared to place the organisation above private and family life.

Goffee and Jones (2001) analyse these cultures in great detail and point out the negative as well as the positive sides. They argue that some personality types would perform better in certain cultures than in others.

Individual challenge/responsibility?

Perhaps there is a natural personality 'fit' to these types of organisational cultures, however, for an individual applying to a specific job, it would be very difficult to decide whether the culture would fit his or her personality type. It may be more reasonable to suggest, that those individuals who have a well developed IQ and have a high level of emotional and spiritual intelligence would be able to fit into any of the above mentioned cultures. Unless we have a well developed IQ, EQ and SQ we could easily fall prey to the 'pull and push' games of organisational politics. The challenge comes in the guise of organisations providing appropriate learning opportunities. Developing an IQ is seen as a natural part of Western education, however, even raising the issue of the importance of emotional and spiritual intelligence in an organisational context is very much in its infancy. (Goleman, 1996, Zohar and Marshall, 2001).

Handy (1997) talks about the hunger that cannot be satisfied by material wealth. He argues that human beings have a strong desire to look beyond their own personal interest and work for the good of their communities or society as a whole. Surely, life should be about more than constant competition and the chasing of supply or demand curves! Surely there should come a time when we look more critically at the overpowering economic theories of markets and ask simple questions starting with why? For example why is it necessary for us to buy, and buy, and buy? Why are we falling into the prey of media programming, peer pressure etc. and acting out our obedient roles of consumers, thereby paying dearly for all the consumables that do not really make us any happier? Why do we not realise that one can be happy indeed much happier in a 'gift economy' than in our current acquisitive society where ... "social code ...lays down that to possess is to be great, and that wealth is the indispensable appendage of social rank and attribute of professional virtue. Hyde points out that, by way of contrast, in a gift economy 'to possess is to give -and here the natives differ from us notably. A man who owns a thing is naturally expected to share it, to distribute it, to be its trustee and dispenser. " (Hyde, 1999, p.15).

Studying culture at a national, organisational and even individual level has become increasingly popular over the past 20 years. We've learnt a lot but there are still many questions and a lot of unknown or less known areas. Hofstede's famous dimensions have considerably merits in culture studies, however perhaps it is now time for us to revisit his categories and add to them by incorporating the expanded knowledge base that prominent researches have contributed to the field. Just to take one example, Tayeb (2000) gives a summary critiques of Hofstede's (1994) fifth dimension. Hofstede has been strongly criticised for dividing the Confucian values into a 'positive' pole on the one hand and a 'negative' pole on the other (Fang, 1998, Yeh and Lawrence, 1995). Perhaps the best -known symbol of East Asia is Yin Yang - the Chinese philosophical principle of dualism in the manifest worlds (Cooper, 1990). The Chinese believe Yin and Yang exist in everything and that everything embraces Yin and Yang. Each Confucian value has its bright side and dark side and attempts to set these values on either pole of Hofstede's fifth dimension have been strongly criticised as they are essentially intertwined and cannot be set in opposition to one another (Fang 1998, p.15).

Yin and Yang qualities

<i>Yin</i>	<i>Yang</i>
Feminine	masculine
Cold	warm
Dark	light
Back	front
Soft	hard
Arched	straight
Round	angular
Earth	Sky
Moon	Sun
Low	high
Small	big
Decorated	simple
Narrow	wide
Horizontal	vertical
Natural	geometrical (Collins, 1996)

If these qualities are intertwined and if they are there in everything then one could argue that they are there in all of us and that they are, or should be, there in human organisations. In this case we need to rethink and perhaps redress the balance of our business cultures.

"Business needs both masculine and feminine energy to give birth to its dreams. It has traditionally favoured the male energies of logic, analysis and the word. The macho way we 'work until we drop' encapsulates the hard masculine energy that business is usually conducted in. But living in such imbalance produces stress and exhaustion. It also denies the receptive creativity, the hunches and intuitions and the powers of image and symbol, which we associate with feminine energy. Masculine energy can manage a project, but it does not have the openness to make the people in the project feel embraced as part of the whole. It drives but it does not nurture. Ironically,...it is the masculine energy way in which business thinks that makes it so difficult to change. The "mind" of business is hard, logical and forceful - it confines its focus to what it considers to be concrete, practical reality. If it could open to the receptivity, openness and creativity of female energy, the business world would

discover new perspectives and practices. It would have spirit." (Firth and Campbell, 1997 p.166).

The same authors go on to say that "Every human being is composed of 50% masculine and 50% feminine energy, ...[but] this is not about gender. The most common representation of what I mean is the yin and yang symbol, where a whole circle is made from the combination of opposite shapes and colours. Most men tend to be overbalanced in masculine energy and most women in female energy, but this is not an infallible rule.It's not about good and bad or positive and negative. We are not seeking to eliminate one or the other here - we are trying to develop and balance them. As with all things, problems arise with imbalance."(Firth and Campbell, 1997 p.165)

Human beings like to experience the balance of Yin and Yang energies around them and the new successful organisations who aim to create knowledge will provide an opportunity for their employees to develop the balance of these qualities within themselves, seeing this as a mechanism for improving the balance of these qualities within the whole organisation.

Lessem and Palsule (1997) talks about the four worlds of knowledge and they argue that the four most pervasive sources of knowledge, or historical based philosophies, are pragmatism, rationalism, holism and humanism. Only by tapping into all these four sources a knowledge can an organisation create new knowledge.

Firth and Campbell (1997) talks about the need for the individual to balance the four aspects of physical body, mind, spirit and emotions, and Secretan (1997. P.223) asks a challenging question : ' Will it [profit] be our master or servant?' and gives his answer by a case study illustration. The company he talks about was established in 1947 and in the first page of their annual report one can find the following statement: "Each one of us should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in it's various forms.

1Peter 4:10"

This company has the following four goals:

1. To honour God in all we do
2. To help people develop
3. To pursue excellence
4. To grow profitably.

The first two are end goals and the last two are means goals. For example the company believes that '...profit is a means in God's world to be used and invested, not an end to be worshipped.' The paradox is that a commitment to being of service to others makes money. This company is very prosperous and states that ...'the common link between God and profit is people'.

When I have read these and similar cases over the past 5 years I have tended to put them aside and use them occasionally in my lectures as a best practice, whilst still believing that the world of business was a 'tough place' where only those survive who have accepted and followed the 'cut throat' competition approach.

The Harvard Business Review published an article by Jim Collins (January 2001) on Level Five Leadership. This report gives an account of research that was conducted in the United States to find out if a good company could become a great company and if so, how. For five years the research team studied companies that shifted from good performance to great performance and sustained it for 15 years. From the Fortune 500 companies they could only find eleven companies which had fulfilled this criterion. To the surprise of even the research team the data showed that what gave these eleven companies the competitive advantage was that they had a Level 5 leader.

The level 5 hierarchy

Level 5 Level 5 Executive

- Builds enduring greatness through a paradoxical combination of personal humility plus professional will.

Level 4 Effective Leader

- Catalyses commitment to and vigorous pursuit of a clear and compelling vision; stimulates the group to high performance standards.

Level 3 Competent Manager

- Organises people and resources toward the effective and efficient pursuit of predetermined objectives.

Level 2 Contributing Team Member

- Contributes to the achievement of group objectives; works effectively with others in a group setting

Level 1 Highly Capable Individual

- Makes productive contributions through talent, knowledge, skills and good work habits.
(Adapted from Harvard Business Review, January 2001, p.70)

Level 5 leaders have the capability to integrate a high level of personal humility with a high level of professional will. The article uses the metaphor of the window and the mirror.' Level 5 leaders, inherently humble, look out of the window to appoint credit - even undue credit- to factors outside themselves. If they can't find a specific person or event to give credit to, they credit good luck. At the same time, they look in the mirror to assign responsibility, never citing bad luck or external factors when things go poorly. Conversely, the comparison executives frequently looked out the window for factors to blame but preened in the mirror to credit themselves when things went well.'

The window and the mirror does not quite reflect reality in that Level 5 people would never admit that they themselves were actually responsible for the transformation of their companies.

Can Level 5 people be developed? According to Jill Collin's article there are two kinds of people: those who do not have the Level 5 seed in them and those who do.

'The first category consists of people who could never in a million years bring themselves to subjugate their own needs to the greater ambition of something larger or more lasting than themselves. For those people work will always be first and foremost about what they get - the fame, the fortune, power, adulation, and so on.

The great irony is that the animus and personal ambition that often drives people to become a Level 4 leader stands at odds with the humility required to rise to Level 5.' (ibid. p.75)

Conclusion

This paper did not set out to find answers it only sought initially to ask questions about our current state of organisational culture and leadership. Questions lead us to further questions and perhaps ultimately to our standing back and reflecting on why we are in our current state of chaos, fragmentation, fight and rivalry and how we could move towards a different, more harmonious means of wealth creation. The history of organisations replicates the masculine thinking patterns.

'Fight or flight', 'Business is business', relentless competition, rationality and ego based decisions are still very dominant elements of organisational culture.

Women entering the workplace have had to conform to the masculine culture in organisations. There were no other patterns. However over the past two hundred years women have become a critical mass and have gradually started to change some aspects of the workplace, having brought their specific female energies to the organisations in the form of serving, caring, nurturing. For example women have helped to bring 'emotions' out into the open in the workplace. An alternative philosophy of 'Business is People' has started to emerge and men have also started to buy into it. Perhaps the time is approaching when organisations will seriously start considering how to redress the balance between yin and yang energies. And here I am not talking about some quick fixes that could be neatly documented and then filed and forgotten. I am trying to refer to the humble learning process that starts with the life - long commitment of the individual to self-improvement and spreads on to the organisational culture.

The global challenge is organisational and individual at the same time. We need to start looking deeper than the surface. Evans et.al (2002 p.381) suggest that "the 'deep structure' that has a strong influence on the lives of people, as well as on long-term organisational performance, is the structure of development, which touches on most aspects of life in an organisation - the orientation and skills of those in leadership positions; the balance between strategic development and functional execution,...and many other issues that fall under the umbrella of 'organisational culture'.

Perhaps it is timely to reflect on what we could individually contribute. Perhaps it would be a useful exercise to 'look into the mirror' and to internalise the pain that is around us in our

organisations and also in our societies and examine our hearts and minds with great humility and see how we could make a contribution. Perhaps we could start looking at the Level 5 behaviour as our aim. If we started to practice the balanced approach of strong willed masculinity and humble, serving femininity on every level by projecting out respect, trust, love, success and prosperity to the 'external' world, then more people might be inspired and encouraged to start feeding their 'hungry spirits'.

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