

EXCELLENCE FOR SUSTAINABILITY

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BOOK REVIEW

The author having worked on his Doctoral Thesis on the subject of Managerial Ethics takes up for analysis a newly published book. He reviews it in the light of other works on the subject that he had critically read in the course of his doctoral research. This piece could be seen as a pre-publication review of Manifestations of Excellence in Management: contemporary trends towards sustainability authored by Sorab Sadri, with research assistance from Sharukh Tara, Jayashree Sadri and Bijoy Guha. This is a very timely book being published shortly by Himalaya Publishing Co., Mumbai (2013). It is perhaps so entitled because the argument posited therein takes the reader in the Kantian sense from a quest for excellence of itself (an sich) and for itself (fur sich) to the need for business sustainability in a competitive world and the role of excellence therein.

Sadri caters to the subject of “Managing for Excellence” that is a specific subject offering for postgraduate students of Management Sciences in many leading academic institutions like the University of Pune and covered at the University of Mumbai and other leading citadels of learning as well. This simple-to-read textbook covers the syllabus for a very important and yet complex subject that the authors have examined from the perspective of inter-disciplinary scholarship thereby allowing the student to understand and appreciate the finer points of excellence. Unlike other works, (of Sadri) written solely for consumption of research scholars and professors, this particular work is (allegedly) aimed precisely at the needs postgraduate student of management sciences.

The very nature of the curriculum for this subject offering is such that it is difficult to find a single facilitator to do justice to it. Hence, the authors (correctly) opine that the subject should either be taught by a team of experts or be handled by a sufficiently senior (experienced) scholar who can convert it into an interactive and seminar-presentation based offering. Walking their talk, the three authors courageously teamed up to write this student friendly book. They have inserted a proviso in the Prologue namely, should this subject offering be converted into a seminar based offering, the presentations must be of very good quality, be thoroughly researched and be properly vetted. It would be advisable that this subject offering is not left to the whims and mercies of professors, who merely teach in several institutes at once and have little time to update their notes. It is imperative that Visiting Professors continue with either management consultancy or research to update their knowledge and skills. If not, they will regurgitate the same tripe ad infinitum and ad nauseum much to the chagrin of the students. Consequently, they either depend on their gift of the gab or on the borrowed notes from colleagues, rather than on a deep understanding and their knowledge of the subject. Under the circumstances, woe - betide the student!

During the several years of practicing the art of management and facilitating it as a visiting faculty at the postgraduate level what often puzzled me was the fact that there is no textbook, in the subject Managing for Excellence that could do proper justice to the course offering and this has perhaps prompted Sorab Sadri along with assistance from his associates to write one. This book presents the reader with a collage of concepts and issues that combine to make up excellence in organizations. The subject itself is so vast and specialized that it is nearly impossible to write a simple book. What compounds the issue is that it is very often covered in the fourth semester of the two year MBA program and often quite hurriedly so.

The vastness of the subject coverage notwithstanding, an attempt has been made by the three authors so that the lecturers facilitating the postgraduate course get a gist of what needs to be covered as well as a general framework within which it can be reasonably covered. The lecturer, the author argues, can then build on the text based on his/her own academic preferences. These seemingly amorphous subjects are connected with a thin silver lining of excellence. An attempt has been to expose the reader to a plethora of knowledge in this field and the only thing that is purely original in the textbook is the manner in which the facts and data have been arranged to enable easy comprehension. The ideological position adopted has been one of critical social science founded on the dual principles of bounded rationality and social humanism. All along the term, excellence has been used as a concept rather than as a finite point. In fact, it is very much like a horizon that you move towards but never actually touch it. It is only when excellence is converted into business sustainability that its meaningfulness is truly brought forth.

Excellence for them is a people centered and people governed attitude. It has a strong financial ramification and given the positivist nature of organizations in India, the person at the top must have a basic knowledge of how financial, capital and securities markets function. So a chapter has been wisely inserted to cover that area. Since the impact of excellence is ultimately going to fall on the people, it was necessary to see how the changing economy affects the people management function. The new variable that this work addressed and included in this larger calculus was the knowledge worker. The author further argues that ethics without governance is puerile whereas governance without ethics is totalitarian. Hence, he builds a symbiotic relationship between ethics and governance has so that the reader is clear about the need for and the importance of both ethics and governance in business. This (ethics and governance) is just what differentiates mere managers from business leaders in the corporate world. The same argument has been developed and enriched from earlier works, mainly: *The Theory and Practice of Managerial Ethics* (1999) (2008) and again in *Geometry of HR* (2002) as well as in *A Strategic Approach to Human Resources Management* (2009) only to be repeated at length in *Business Ethics and Corporate Governance*: (2011),

Quite understandably, when a political economist (Sadri), is assisted by a corporate governance specialist (Tara), a behavioral scientist (Jayashree) and a production-operations expert (Guha) to speak on excellence the most difficult thing was to find a commonality of vision, purpose and design. In this case the task was made simple perhaps because the personal relationship equation of the four was excellent. Perhaps, they were extremely conscious of the fact that they were writing a student friendly textbook meant for the postgraduate scholar and yet they were determined to put forth something that they

passionately wished to say. To that extent it is not a mere simplification or regurgitation of derived knowledge. The author has in every chapter added from experience of academia and research on the one hand and from corporate management and consultancy on the other.

In my opinion, this book could perhaps be seen as a logical outcome of the evolution of Sorab Sadri's thought between 1993 and 2011. The primacy of ethics in management strategy especially in respect of People Management was highlighted in *Business Ethics: Concepts and Cases* (1998). Thereafter in *Geometry of HR* (2002) ethics and governance were treated as twin concerns of People Management. In the *Theory and Practice of Managerial Ethics* (2009) ethics was taken out of its realm of philosophy and metaphysics and placed plumb into the sphere of corporate strategy. Following Jayashree's conception of "the strategic triad" the twin concerns of ethics and governance were shown to be auto-correlated and critical to management in *A Strategic Approach to Human Resource Management* (2009). In *Business Ethics and Corporate Governance: towards organizational excellence* (2010) the argument was extended to show that ethics and governance combine to provide the conditions within which organizational excellence could flourish. However, Sadri had always argued that excellence in itself was not enough since at the end of the day the corporate world wants results and a fair degree of growth. His idea made so much sense that it has prompted Sadri to pen a forthcoming tome entitled *Business Excellence: concepts, criteria, confluence and commentary* (2013) wherein he argues that excellence should lead to business sustainability. In each of these books the authors have something to say and are not writing a textbook per se. This book is different in the sense the argument has gone well beyond the concerns of ethics, governance and people management. It actually transgressed into the realm of Business Strategy. It covers a large canvas of issues in simple language sans simplistic logic. The author views various aspects of modern business as these views, he believes, individually and collectively contribute to excellence and sustainability. More importantly, this book represents an intellectual cauldron within which one can find a continuum of thought on one hand and an emergent collective consciousness of the author and his three associates on the other.

The present book under review is divided into three parts: The first is entitled *The State of Art* and consists of six chapters. The first deals with the concept of excellence per se, while the second treats quality as an essential aspect and ingredient of excellence. It looks at quality as a vital aspect of excellence and sustainability. It is only logical that in the modern age of the intellect, the knowledge worker is crucial to all management and so in the next chapter we have treated the question of managing the knowledge worker. In the postmodern capitalist world economy, the question of money cannot be overlooked and since the Indian corporate world is structurally positivist, the treatment of how the CEO understands money i.e. finance and banking is dealt with. Once money enters the managerial calculus and with it, its management, good governance becomes that much more important especially in the light of the Lehman Brothers debacle abroad and the Satyan fiasco at the home turf. The sixth chapter takes up the earlier theme first expounded by this author (in 1999) in positing a strategic triad. Picturing a triangle, we can have business ethics and corporate governance at the nodal points on the base with organizational excellence at the apex of the triangle. The area covered by the three sides of this triangle represents value centered organizational culture. The first part thus lays the basis of the ensuing argument.

The second part is entitled The Building Blocks and consists of eight chapters. The first chapter in this part talks of how excellence can be leveraged since business sustainability is the ultimate corporate goal. Then the question of change is taken up since change of the sine qua non of all developmental growth and it needs to be understood and appreciated. The third chapter looks inwardly towards the question of building a corporate culture that assists competitive organizational behavior whereas the fourth looks outwardly and examines how the customer is managed. After all, converting a customer into a client is the mission of every marketing activity. The fifth chapter once again looks internally and treats the question of supply chain management since it is crucial to excellence. The sixth chapter then, once again, looks outwardly and deals with the issue of brand management that is vital for any strategic attempt towards sustainability. Since no organization can be an island unto itself and is very much a social citizen the chapter examines the question of corporate social responsibility and going beyond it. Currently, when functions and structures are simultaneously collapsing on the one hand and where change is at once non-linear and non-Newtonian, on the other, the last chapter in this part looks critically at the emergent disembodied organizations. Herein the issues of BPR, BPO, and KPO are examined within the context of ERP. Hence, this part presents the meat of the argument.

The third part of the presents a continuum in the future and is entitled The Transformational Journey since the aim is to transform a merely competitive organization into an excellent one that is sustainable from a business viewpoint. This part contains four chapters. The first takes up the question of quality once again but with a difference: how it holistically contributes to excellence and sustainability. The enigmatic statement made by Jayashree Sadri in 1999, a specter is haunting us, the specter of mediocrity, seems to ring true even a decade on. Hence, the next chapter examines how OD can be used to transform the mediocre into the excellent. Thereafter the authors look at a futuristic view of excellence and end the part (and the book) with a chapter on the journey from organizational excellence to business sustainability. Therefore, cumulatively this part gives the reader their final prognosis.

However we must realize that knowing Sadri this prognosis is final only as far as this book is concerned. Since this a student friendly textbook that doubles up as a reference text a bibliography is given at the end of the book along with chapter wise questions so that both the teacher and the taught are put at ease in understanding what they have to say.

The sheer brilliance of the Epilogue speaks volumes for Sadri's conviction dedication and resolve. He proclaims (rather pompously) that "Management", as we define it today, has come a long way in 100 years that it has been around. With Fredrick W Taylor applying 'science' to work – it has always been a journey towards excellence: in doing better than what was recognizable then as best. We are indeed very fortunate in that the management practitioners, thinkers and contributors did not decide to end the journey at any point of time – as did proponents of another set of people who led grouped human activity: Religion and its cohorts.

The development of management thought is then traced to the point that performance triumphed with the arch-metric of market share, from which profits flowed: thus market dominance was "Excellence". In the scramble for wealth creation, they argue, there was a huge waste of human capital: in chasing down every rainbow to find the proverbial pot of gold. This 'plug and play' practice actually destroyed a corporation's value – since each

reached its level of incompetence in diverse fields. Managers had become a Jack of all trade and master of none!

The author goes on to say that new breed of managers and management thought needed to address mankind – the symbiotic forces of interdependence and completeness. The 1990's brought to the fore a more comprehensive and balanced thought, approaches and practices. "Excellence" got a new meaning in 'Value Creation' – a la Porter by going back to roots, 'sticking to the knitting' viz. 'Core Competence' propagated by Prahalad and Hamel and mapping a course on a 'Balanced Scorecard', created by Kaplan and Norton, to satisfy all stakeholders. The examples above again highlight these. But we were talking Business: the love for lucre still retained primacy of place. Everything still had to reflect in the healthy Economic Bottom-line – though its trappings had changed to include a more qualitative framework (reflected in growing numbers of annexure to Annual Reports e.g. Emission levels, Top management remuneration declarations etc.).

Mounting concerns with Environment, shift of markets (read pots of gold!) from Developed West to the Developing BRIC, Fraud at unimaginable scales and simple immorality have caused Thinkers & Practitioners to pause at the end of the 20th century. The jury he says is still out – but the outlines have started to emerge. "Excellence" would be reflected in 'inclusive growth', performance could entail the 'Triple Bottom-line', governance and ethics will mandate functioning towards 'sustainability'. Here it is very difficult to disagree with the logic.

Thus, Sadri entreats all who have come so far to treat this treatise as a still shot, a 'frame' from a movie. He has expounded on the foregoing in great detail in this book – representing the state of art. However, he confronts a whole new paradigm in the first decade of this millennium! Giants of Industry have disappeared in days – and those who have survived are on ventilators. USA looks more 'socialistic' than the earlier self-proclaimed Socialistic countries: there is more 'government money', thus Governmental interventions, in industry are more than ever before. Governments (& Politics) are a more integral part of operations – trade in the name of his or her Majesty! A moot question that needs to be researched and answered is "Are all the practiced theories of management, based on 'free enterprise' with its (questionable) checks and balances relevant?" We, he says, are not yet that far to attempt answers – analysts are yet to establish root causes of such a massive collapse. They hold forth the theme that mankind needs to cure, not palliate or relieve – to repeat the same again. In this sense they use the Hegelian "circular" logic rather than the oft encountered Cartesian "linear" logic.

Strangely, this 'bubble bursting' is not a new phenomenon in management. History is replete with the incidents of stock-market crashes, "great depressions", economic bubbles in different parts of the globe e.g. the Asian bubble of the early 90's. But what is the learning from the past or are we (contributors to management) ostrich-like, content to bury our heads in the sand and pronounce "This too shall pass". There is yet another set who will crow about the 'failure of capitalism' and communism having failed (except in totally unrecognizable, disruptive forms) as a serious economic engine, have no further advice to give. And furthermore, he astutely points out that we have an even more serious challenge: that of Biological Sustenance. (a) Climate change is upon us – yet this does not seriously factor or appear on SWOT analyses of businesses! It is perhaps 'an' issue not 'the' issue, a

‘Threat’ rather than a ‘Weakness’; we quibble over per capita emissions – when any idiot will say that tonnage matters; we prevaricate, individuals refuse to sign protocols which all the others agree to, sermonize and teach others about transparency and market access while continue to protect our turf do our own thing. It is time we realized that finger pointing will not save the Earth. (b) Incurable diseases and afflictions with long gestations and courses coupled with increased longevity leading to the graying of population.

Sadri enigmatically asks “have we set in motion irreversible change – of Nature itself? Like dinosaurs before us we will perhaps be happy to pass on – without an epitaph.” What then, he asks, will happen now to the art and science of management? Another point of inflection has certainly been reached. Consider the back-drop against which business/management has to play out:

He says the world is polarizing again: both along lines of Political affiliation and Religion (something far more dangerous). Politics and Economics can coexist but Religion can rip societies part. On the one hand the global village is making trade boundaries disappear; on the other political compulsions (‘axis of evil’) and increasing Governmental inclusion in Business is creating blockades. A barrier more pernicious than the “Iron Curtain” seems to be coming up. Sadri goes on to state that Oil, the current Holy Grail, is mainly located in Islamic countries. As of yore, the developed world’s (coincidentally Christian) quest for the same, complicated at this time of history by the presence of Israel (Judaism), has resulted in some kind of a triangular Crusade.

The pace of Technology, our magic wand since Industrial Revolution, has fallen way behind the pace of Change (much of it self-inflicted). Convergence, Mergers & acquisitions are leading to highly ‘unstable’ (by yesterday’s yardstick) conditions: “...now, whatever we do is not enough. Incremental change is what we are used to: the kind we could manage gradually, with careful planning, broad consensus-building and controlled execution. Now, we must not only manage change: we must create change, big change - and fast. If we stop for a leisurely consideration of issues, the situation will alter in front of our eyes and our careful judgments will not apply”. (James Champy)

Without the technological fountainhead, idea-based innovations have an exceedingly short life. Intellectual Property Rights are virtually indefensible with the advancement of Information Technology. The beginning of the age of hyper-competition and the end of sustainable competitive advantage through core competence are clearly visible. These truisms hold – but for very brief periods only. So Sadri states that cultural diversity (and confluence) is rewriting the unstated norms of business-engagement and ethics:

- Place of trust, loyalty and affiliations in business and governance
- ‘given word’ vis-à-vis ‘written word’
- Interpretation of the words corruption, human rights etc. (as a wag put it “If it is not OK to bribe, why is it OK to tip?”)
- Social Engineering in all its senses: social, security & political

Mounting imbalance in wealth distribution amongst Peoples: “Fortune (?) at the Bottom of the Pyramid”. Food and shelter have again surfaced as serious needs – even in ‘wealthy’

countries, particularly with the sub-prime crisis in the USA. Are we looking at Maslow's Pyramid inverted or at "Death of Capitalism" and a new world order? Is it possible for individuals and communities to co-exist in different dimensions at the same time? And what is better motivator: fear (stick) or reward (carrot)? Evolution has clearly answered this in "survival of the fittest" – does fear actually trigger actions for a very big reward – existence?

In casting around for pointers to the future (and perhaps a sequel to this publication!) I have not come across anything substantive as yet proclaims Sadri. This suggests that there are themes that are worth looking at:

Collaboration: Andy Grove in recounting the story of INTEL Corp. speaks of the 'force multiplier' that collaboration provides. His contention is that symbiotic development, especially technological development, yields factor (not incremental) returns on effort. It is not surprising that the most successful enterprises (e.g. Microsoft & INTEL) have piggy-backed on each other at different phases of their growth. With passage of time, it is impossible to distinguish between 'cause' and 'effect'. Convergence is a facilitating environment for this to happen, through sharing of knowledge and skill – leading to complementarities. In many researched books, though passed off with tongue-in-cheek titles, women (managers) are biologically hard-wired to actuate this. Tom Peters has been expounding the cause of women in this role vociferously since his treatise "Thriving in Chaos". I cannot help but agree that we certainly need to break the glass ceiling – at least to facilitate the complementing process. Or that we are going to limit generation of excellence in the hands of 50% of the mankind at best! Management is no longer a 'hunting, fishing' game, they say. It is more about gathering, nurturing and consolidating – very 'womanly' activities. We certainly think that more women will populate the Board Rooms in times to come – initially as a reaction to 'affirmative action' on gender equality but subsequently own the gender-merit. Perhaps Sadri is right after all when he argues that one of the reasons for technological development slowing down is the cost of (fundamental) research. Undue emphasis on quick returns (some kind of myopia!) with metrics like 'innovation to cash cycle' has spelled the decay of Science and the proliferation of idea-based fads. Frontiers of knowledge have expanded so much that pushing the boundaries take far longer and require more resources (read investments) – it is often unthinkable for a single corporation or even industry to 'go it alone'. The situation is exacerbated by sharply declining margins. Reportedly, Xerox for instance, took two decades (50's & 60's) to commercialize the plain paper copier; one can find very few examples like this today in the private sector – and they argue because of the cost implications. Such research-based developments are more feasible (economically) with more pooling – though it also entails sharing the spoils. A caveat follows he argues: we need to beware of the perils of cartelization and monopolies with such an approach. One need to encourage this development in the spirit of 'friendly competition' and 'enlightened self-interest': Greed must be reigned in. Profits must be shared over a period of time and not plundered – in the vein of what is being proposed for Earth. Thus, a control regimen needs be put in place – without stifling the cause, while ensuring that everything is not blandly the same.

Conservation: Sadri states emphatically that not everything can be collaboratively and should be done! Enterprise it self with wither and businesses will be left either to robbing Peter to pay Paul or distributing poverty rather than wealth. Business will need to distinguish

it self – through innovation and marketing. TQM's bedrock has been conservation of resources “War on Waste” and continuous reduction in “Cost of non-Quality”. This is as mentioned, the foundation. We need to take transpose this theme denominator management to the numerator – revenue generation. The challenge is resolving the oxymoron ‘grow yet conserve’: do more with less at a scale and intensity factor times. The call is to move from ‘small step’ to ‘strides’ As is well documented, the “Reduce-Reuse-Recycle” theme has paid rich dividends for environmental conservation. Sadri considers (rightly) these actions more as revenue generation than stretching resource use. Consider, as examples, houses/construction material made of recycled material, packaging raw-material (papier-mâché) from used paper and a host of similar anecdotal instances – revenue generation or resource use? Perhaps both together: more with less! Some manager/marketing-guru will have to work through the details and find a way to convince people that parting pays.

Compete: The author argues that the very basis for evolution has been innovation fuelled by competition (survival of the fittest variety). So the question is posed: “how do we keep the wheels of business turning and taking us forward – without competition to drive innovation? Is the thought of non-competitive growth and sustainability for real? Can we not think of non-competitive growth much in the way medical practitioners today talk of non-invasive surgery? Is it an oxymoron? There are thinkers who say there are.” W Chan Kim & Renee Mauborgne in their excellent book “The Blue Ocean Strategy” had very eloquently argued that competition turn oceans red – indicating that in ‘fighting’ competition we bleed too heavily. To stymie this bleed, we need to side-step competition, forsake ‘more of the same’ thinking and revisit the need-want-demand of the customer to reorganize the USP and UBPs of product and service. They posit that major innovations – the ‘breakthroughs’ – in product/services have come from the approach, aided and abetted by technology. Henry Ford revolutionized personal transportation with his “Machine that changed the world”. Cars were in use; but mass-affordable cars were not around. Ford figured out the way: the assembly line provided the solution. Is it a triumph of technology or of lateral thinking? Henry Ford got his idea of the ‘assembly line’ from the ‘dis-assembly process’ of the meat packers of Chicago! Nothing in the T-model was really new and there was no competition with the personalized, hand-crafted carriages. Ford just re-deciphered the need-want-demand of horse-cart owners. They argue that as Kim and Mauborgne put it “Our research confirms that there are no permanently excellent companies just as there are no permanently excellent industries. And we have found, we all, like corporations do smart things and not-so-smart things. To improve the quality of our success, we must study what made the difference and how to replicate it.” Economists like Sadri have long argued that statisticians influence managers to think of the ‘area under the curve’; to exploit the ‘greatest good from greatest numbers’. However, there are increasing band of thinkers who are propagating and urging the pursuit of Outliers and Tipping Points: simply put (without the jargon!) – study of the those ‘on the fringe or outside the curve’. These are fewer in number and unlock the secrets of whole new paradigms. Breakthroughs are then possible – more predictably and without the business of ‘social engineering’ according to Sadri. The current crisis in the Indian IT & BPO industry is the scramble for competent man-power. The constant merry-go-round, of skilled manpower – job hopping, body shopping and snatching/shanghaiing is surely draining the industry and leading to lowered overall efficiency. Time has come, and there are portents, of non-compete agreements and collaborative efforts to groom human potential

towards a common end. Michael Porter has outlined in his book *Competitive Advantage*, the benefits of ‘good competition’. We can like Sadri see it in the Japanese Industry. For instance, one first thinks of Japanese Cars before the Brands- people do it the other way for American Cars: Brands before Origin!

Sadri started the book with the 3 C’s: CHANGE, COMPETITION & CONTRACTION. These were/are relevant in full measure for business yesterday and today. The ‘Red Oceans’ will not disappear nor can be wished away. Lucre will lead to Greed and more – so collapses and bursting bubbles (economically speaking) will continue to plague us. The author recognizes the shift in human needs and wants – issues on the back-burners have been brought forward; consciousness has realigned and groups are reformatting. He asks us to look beyond the birth-rebirth cycle and if reborn, be different and move on to a better plane of existence. New thoughts and their applications need to generate a positive spiral that the Change-Competition-Contraction triad has done and is doing, albeit decelerating. We are sure that excellence will continue to be pursued in a new avatar.

He ended it by stating that up until the dawn of Industrial Age, for eons humans learned to live with nature. Mankind coped with its vagaries and forces. Importantly, we were not disruptive. With the Industrial Age, our discoveries and rapid technological advancement required us to fight nature – we have tried to subvert it towards our needs and in a lassie-faire manner, damned the consequences. Information age made boundaries disappear – paving way for knowledge (of disruption!) to spread far and wide and fast. With “Cyberia” and access to global scale: domination, greed and avarice resurfaced. Mercifully, he says, awareness has also followed. Hopefully this awakening, he concludes, will lead to a new definition of excellence: embodying symbiosis, inclusiveness and continuity.

Without question this is a book every manager in waiting and every manager in action must read at some point in their career. Having gone through the book, readers will concur with the critique in that it is a profound treatise which is shrewdly being camouflaged as a textbook. It makes too serious a reading to be a mere textbook but its style and language is so lucid that it can easily pass off as one. My appeal to the students is to read it first as a textbook and then put it away. Thereafter the same students are advised to pick it up six months later and start afresh to get a new meaning from it just before they graduate. And, after graduation to revisit the book but only after having spent a few years in the corporate world to savor its delight.

To paraphrase Will Durant in his masterpiece *Story of Philosophy*, “some books are to be glanced through, some are to be read at leisure whereas others need to be chewed on and seriously studied”. The title of this book hints art being of the first variety; the table of contents, the Prologue, Schema and Epilogue try to pass it off as being of the second variety; but an intelligent reading of the book will lead the reader to irrevocably place it in the third variety.

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