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Editorial

In the last issue of South Asian Journal of Management Research, in the editorial note I mentioned about humor. Humor can increase the happiness and reduce the stress.

Stress is most vulnerable condition in the organization because experts as well as non-experts are handling the stress situation of the employees. Some scientists still argue that they know little about stress whereas many people claim that they know everything about stress. And the result is handling the stress improperly.

Job stress has several impacts on individual employee and organization. Most of the employees in modern organization experience stress. It can have a damaging effect on employee, especially managers. It can affect the effectiveness of the organization as well as employees. The problem of stress is very much relevant of change that is spreading across the globe in all the fields. The employees are unable to cope of with changes. Organizations are doing little to handle the change process. For any organizational process the change must be helping the employees in improving the ability of organization to cope up with the change in its environment.

Lazarus's view on stress is that an individual perception of the psychological situation is the critical factors for stress. It includes potential harms, threats, and challenges on one hand, and on another an individuals ability to cope with them. The ability or inability to cope with stress is the perceived ability of an individual. Coping strategy differs from individual to individual in a different manner.

Less research is available on coping strategies of stress. Readers can contribute research articles on coping strategies of stress.

Dr. Babu Thomas
Editor
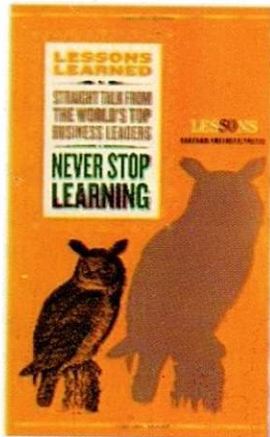
Never Stop Learning: Straight Talk from the World's Top Business Leaders

In the foreword to this anthology of essays, Jeanne C. Meister argues that corporate learning is going to be an increasingly important source of competitive advantage in the years to come. And, as Meister correctly points out, these essays will give readers an opportunity to understand how "practitioners are reinventing, reimagining, and rethinking corporate learning". What does the term "corporate learning" mean here? Meister is not using the term as a synonym for organizational learning since there are more organizations in the world than corporates; so, by logical implication, we can infer that corporate learning is an important subset of organizational learning. And, then again, the levels, interest, and pace of learning of a set of executives who belong to the same corporate will not be the same. It is therefore important to differentiate clearly between what organizations know, what corporates know, and what executives know. What is known in these different loci furthermore is not the same as what is learnt from these loci. The overwhelming need that is being addressed in books such as this is for action learning which should be collaborative, engaging, innovative, mobile, and even wearable. These then are the terms that Meister identifies as the key attributes of action learning. Those who design learning programs will gain by keeping these attributes in mind while doing so. Traditional models of education and learning may find it difficult to come to terms with these new modes of

learning, but must remember that it is possible to harness new forms of recreational devices and social networking technologies. And so, as Meister puts it, "the workplace of iPhones, iPads, video games, business simulations, and corporate social networks will change forever how and where we learn. Our job is to ensure we never stop learning".

It is however a good idea to understand what the default model of learning is in order to envisage what new approaches are possible. Dan Parisi of BTS argues that most educational institutions in the Western world were content to use the model of teaching and learning that was used in medieval monasteries; this is the "lecture and scribe method". Here an abbot would read out from an ancient manuscript and the monks present would transcribe a copy for themselves. This is not so much a pedagogical method; it is more of a problem created by lack of sufficient learning material. Producing such learning material so that each of the monks gets a copy of the study material by personally transcribing what was being read aloud or the phenomena that were being described in the form of a lecture becomes the be-all and end-all of education. There was, according to Parisi, no breakthrough in teaching methods until Christopher Columbus Langdell introduced the case method at Harvard Law School in 1890. Variations of this method were then taken up by the different professional schools at Harvard and elsewhere,

but only after a lot or resistance had to be overcome at Harvard itself from the traditionalists. Parisi is probably hinting in passing that the transition from the traditional approach to case teaching, which is now well-entrenched in professional schools to the more "visceral" forms of learning like business simulations will throw up analogous challenges for professional educators in the near future. What Parisi is advocating then is the need to develop experiential forms of learning that will include both intellectual and visceral approaches to learning by combining the case method with business simulations especially in corporate universities and managerial development programs in order to make the training program as relevant as possible. Likewise, Karen Kochner of the CIGNA Corporation argues that it is possible to incentivize learning programs in the domain of health by interpellating potential learners through social networking strategies. This is a productive way of engaging and communicating both with internal and external audiences; there is also a high probability that given the right set of incentives, these audiences will change their health behaviors for the better.

While experiential learning is the way ahead, it is important to be tactful while offering such programs. So, for instance, Karie Willyerd of Sun Microsystems argues that the best way to train top executives is to give them an opportunity to play a game such as "run-the-company-for-a-week". The advantage of doing so is that it will make it possible to align the learning process of top executives with the strategic direction and goals of the firm. Adults learn best through mutual interaction and sharing of experiences rather than through routine rote-learning in the form of lectures. Tactical approaches to learning that are anchored through work experiences will carry more conviction in terms of their eventual applicability. The use of training games and business simulations will take care of the residual stigma that adult learning programs still connote for many people who have not yet bought into the ethic of life-long learning and associate the process of learning with their time

in school and college. For Willyerd, then, the question that has served to provide pedagogical direction as the Chief Learning Officer of Sun Microsystems, especially in the context of requests for new training programs, is simply this: "how do I align this to strategy?" The significance of this question relates to the need to quicken the pace of both learning and implementation by finding "ways to align learning initiatives with business strategy". The best way to do so as Wendell C. King, the Dean of Academics, U.S. Army Command, points out, is by identifying and adopting "innovative learning tools". King argues that there is immense learning and training potential in internet communities where Army officers set up sites such as the "company-commander.com as a community of practice". Specialized sub-communities of practice then were set up to help members of the armed forces who were focused on particular types of jobs. What these communities spontaneously addressed were gaps in the traditional approaches to teaching. The takeaway for King is that it is important to go beyond the "Army schoolhouse system", and foster supplementary approaches to learning through net-based communities of practice. If however these communities are integrated with the systems already in place, then, the pace of learning may be even more satisfactory. The learning contexts that King is invoking here include training programs conducted by the U.S. Army Command and the General Staff College.

Not only are the levels and patterns of interaction in online and offline communities increasingly complex, even the ontological distinction between these communities is getting blurred. As Marilyn Carlson Nelson, of the Carlson Companies, argues, it is not easy to learn from offline experiments and take the learning forward into the next set of business transactions as used to be the case earlier since off-line activities are nowadays discussed routinely by on-line communities. This blurring of lines and the complex forms of interaction between these communities is demanding new forms of executive training, which will involve developing new types of cases, games, and simulations. Carlson is also

asking for business school cases to be discussed and examined by faculty and case discussants in a range of professional schools in order to set out the significance of the varying levels of semantic over-determination from a multi-disciplinary point of view. Such an approach will tease out a range of socio-economic and environmental implications that are not reducible to a mere calculation of "return on equity", as is often the case, in business schools. She invokes the example of the Carlson School of Business at Minnesota where faculty and case discussants work across cultures and geographies to make their training programs relevant in a number of industries. Analogously, it is important in employee socialization to have new employees work across a range of organizational silos so that they are able to appreciate the opportunities and constraints across different functions. Carlson is using such cross-training approaches both in the context of management education and industrial training programs effectively as a crucial differentiator of its offerings. This preoccupation with corporate learning and training programs is taken up again in the last three essays of this book, but a number of essays that precede these are about the behavioral pre-requisites of individual learning. While these essays have a number of interesting insights on offer, the relationship between individual learning strategies and organizational learning strategies and the forms of alignment that determines their relationship to a firm's value chain could have been explained with greater clarity in terms of the book's editorial strategy, which is not made sufficiently explicit since there is no named editor from HBS Press who can give it a specific direction.

A simple instance of the relationship between individual learning and performance *vis-à-vis* organizational learning and performance emerges in the context of the differences between the approaches of successful salesmen and successful sales executives; the former is selling a product or service, but the latter is selling the team. It takes a certain amount of work experience to understand the affective difference between these approaches. This is the essence of the takeaway in an essay by Andris

Zolters of the Kellogg School of Management. He therefore argues that determining the degree of 'job-fit' is about matching opportunities to the skill-sets available and not a reward for past performance since a different set of skills may be necessary to succeed in a future assignment. Not everybody who does well is necessarily aware of their own strengths and weaknesses. Bob Cancalosi of GE Healthcare, for instance, noticed that when an employee made a formal presentation, he was often not even aware of whether he physically moved about much in the room during the presentation. If the level of self-awareness is so low in terms of physical movements, the less said about thought processes the better since most are condemned to remain unconscious. How then will trainers help to cultivate the ethic of self-awareness in leadership training workshops? Whatever they do must be mediated with enormous tact and caution and they must intervene only in the best interests of their respective trainees. Myles Downey, an expert on coaching, explains that the inhibitions experienced during a performance are often self-imposed, but there is an organizational element as well given the need for control. In order to spot and remove inhibitions on performance, however, leaders in supervisory positions must not only identify unused potential but also the moments when employees keep "getting in their own way". And, needless to say, a person will get his own way only when he stops getting in his own way. This is often the case in setting an effective learning agenda in "workshops and conferences", where, as Victor Newman of KnowledgeWorks points out, it is possible to learn actively rather than sink in the stupor that is induced by pre-set presentations that are not sufficiently customized to the needs of a particular audience. Newman's interest in advocating activist approaches to learning and the specific set of techniques that he has developed are listed in this book but not discussed at length. These techniques however should make it possible for those enrolled in training workshops to co-design such training programs. The great challenge in the deployment of such activist techniques is whether it will get an executive out his comfort zone to try out something new. Nick Adamo of

Cisco Systems, for instance, argues that multidimensional growth even within a specific vertical presupposes a willingness to try new things without worrying too much about "scar tissue", i.e. the wounds of previous battles. Moving both vertically and horizontally in terms of career paths is important to invigorate employees and give them a sense of professional well-being. The scar tissue problem however requires the maturity to learn from the past and move on. Domenico De Sole of The Gucci Group therefore argues that it is important to differentiate between mistakes at the level of the individual and those at the level of the system. Focusing on the latter will make it more likely that employees will proactively report mistakes in order to create better organizational routines and processes.

And, finally, the essays return to the original theme which is the need "to align corporate learning with strategy". Terry Kristiansen of Toshiba America cites an instance where they had to put together "an action learning team in place" from a cross-functional perspective. Not only were the presentations made by such teams successful, but such teams were perceived to have "the potential to understand business issues, investigate them, determine solutions, and deliver long-term results". What is required to make such results possible then is not a definition of learning as a discrete event, but rather as a continual process. The task that Jason Zeman of Watson University sets himself is to visualize what such programs will be like through the use of virtual classrooms by using, for instance, the iPhone through which trainees can access pod casts on a range of subjects. The use of the iPhone as a learning device is a simple but effective way of removing inhibitions that prevent learning in actual classroom situations. By making small but continual investments in pod casts, trainees begin to understand "how easy it is to continuously develop themselves" through the combination of both easy-to-use devices like the iPod and learning platforms like computers; getting these devices and platforms into harmony means that the learning chain has to be "streamlined" effectively. By doing so, it is possible to give end-users many more options in terms of what, how, and where they will learn. They will also be able, as George Wolfe of Steelcase Inc points out, to find a way to "transfer learning into performance" by providing "just-in-time" learning to a "multigenerational workplace". This, in a sense, is the main agenda of a corporate learning program which, unlike research-based academic programs, is not a disinterested pursuit of knowledge and learning in itself. Wolfe argues that it is also a good idea to work with internal "performance consultants" within the context of a corporate university. These performance consultants will be able to determine to what extent performance expectations are being met and how high the performance standards should be set for a hypothetical employee in a given domain so that the firm as whole can meet the expectations of its stakeholders. A specific instance of the development of a tool that will facilitate this process is "the Gilbert's Grid", which will not only situate expectations of the employees, but list constraints, contingencies, and so on that can affect the performance of the firm and suggest solutions in a timely fashion. The wager in such tools is to "get this right *upstream*" before the launch, for instance, of a new product or service. It is also possible to identify the relevant stakeholders for any given performance initiative in order to get their acceptance, understanding, and buy-in at the earliest. Learning then can be leveraged into successful organizational performance only if certain processes are in place. What essayists in books like this are trying to identify are precisely those processes so that the process of learning can be a source of competitive advantage and source of self-esteem for employees in the knowledge-based era.

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