

CORPORATE ORGANIZATIONS AS COMMUNITIES – A LEADERSHIP AND OD ALTERNATIVE

Gareth Morgan wrote a very interesting book in 1986, titled – Images of Organization. He uses metaphor to see and understand organizations. His premise is that *a way of thinking* and *a way of seeing* is how we understand our world - and this applies to corporate organizations as well. His metaphors range from organizations as machines, organisms, brains, cultures, political systems, psychic prisons, instruments of domination and so on.

The popular and current view ingrained in many of us looks at organizations as “rational engines/ machines of economic performance”. Most of our Leadership and OD interventions accordingly and understandably, are based on this engineering metaphor.

AN ALTERNATE SOCIAL VIEW

The modern workforce has a clear preference for non-hierarchical, flat and democratized work places.

This paper suggests that viewing corporate organizations as “communities” will provide a powerful alternative to Leadership and Organization Development. The moment an organization is born, the birth of the community also takes place simultaneously.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY?

Community may be defined as a group of individuals who share a common purpose and a mutual concern for one another’s welfare. At the core of community are four pulsations - sense of belonging, trust, voluntary action and accountability.

CHARACTER OF COMMUNITIES AND RENEWAL

All communities grapple with some existential questions either explicitly or implicitly. These are:

Identity - Who are we? What do we stand for??

Mission - What is our purpose? What do we do? What more can we do? What else can we do?

Culture and Process – How do we do, whatever we do? What are our principles?

Associational Life – How do we feel in this community? How deeply connected are we?

The answers to these focus questions, in a large gathering of members, provides the impetus for renewal of communities. Asking these questions, from time to time, propels regeneration and vitality of communities.

MIND SETS – A QUALITATIVE SHIFT

The focus and finesse of Leadership and OD interventions requires a qualitative change of direction:

FROM	TOWARDS
Corporate Vision – defining a future	Shared Purpose – creating a future
Leaders as Action Motivators	Leaders as Social Architects
Problem- centric	Possibilities- centric
Focus on Leaders	Focus on members
Refining Structure and Systems	Build Social Capital
Mandate	Invitation
Entitlement	Voluntary Accountability / Enterprise
Managerial Supervision	Self -Organizing Groups
Recipient	Membership and Citizenship
What is in it for me?	What is in it for all of us?
Team Building -managing differences	Nurturing connectedness
Fear and cynicism	Hope
Blame and shame	Healing and generosity
Focus on deficiencies	Focus on strengths
Speed and Scale	Depth and Quality
Deductive, linear thinking	Associative, lateral thinking

These illustrative shifts have implications for Leadership and the OD practitioner. The role moves from Change Management to Community Building. From leader led transformation to community led transformation. From facilitators to social architects.

Belonging and membership go together.

MEMBERSHIP AND CONTRACTS

In our view, the structure of belonging runs along two parallel dimensions – the first is the quality or maturity of membership and the second is the nature of the “contract” in the members subjective reality.

Membership Quality / Maturity	Nature of Contract
1. Associate Member	A. Economic Contract – money
2. Professional Member	B. Professional Contract – skills, role and resume
3. Institution Member	C. Psychological Contract – values and belonging
4. Co- Founder	D. Integration and Ambassador
5. Founder	E. Stewardship

Taking this further, their interplay is useful to understand:

Membership	Stance	Contract	Belonging
Associate Member	- Interested but not committed - Recipient	Economic – High; Professional – Formative	Tentative Holds a VISA
Professional Member	-Skills and Resume Building focus -Quid pro quo exchange -Contractual outlook	Economic – High; Professional– High; Psychological – formative	Task ownership – high; Institutional connect – low to medium; HOLDS GREEN CARD STATUS OR WORK PERMIT
Institution Member	- Values advocate - Mobiliser - Spirit of contextual flexibility and offerings- stays though thick and thin	Economic – hygiene; Professional – high; Psychological- high; Ambassador – formative	Voluntary Accountability -High; Institutional Connect high; HOLDS CITIZENSHIP STATUS
Co – Founder (not necessarily chronological on a time scale)	- Purpose Advocate - Shapes medium term destiny - Engages with toxicity and healing - Engages with paradoxes	Economic – hygiene; Professional – integrative; Psychological – Intense; Ambassador – High; Stewardship – formative	Social Architect; Ownership strong Plenipotentiary behavior Stakeholder intimacy DIPLOMATIC PASSPORT
Founder (not necessarily chronological on a time scale)	- Originator - Promoter - Path finder	Stewardship – High	- Community Possibilities; - Community risks; - Fusion of institution and personal identity; - STATESMAN - VISIONARY

There is scope for this structure of belonging to supplement current thinking on talent pipeline. What if one postulates that the key to talent management is to accelerate the progression of individual members through the maturity scale?

HUMAN PROCESSES OF BELONGING

Leadership and the OD Practitioner acting “with the community” and not “on the community” can actively nurture higher states of belonging and membership, by establishing seven human processes in the community:

1. **Catharsis** – providing non-evaluative and facilitated settings for members to purge themselves of their negativity and toxicity that builds up from work and relationships at work.
2. **Togetherness** – nurturing human connectedness and quality conversations at work
3. **Equalization** – building bridges of empathy between and across structural hierarchies. Encouraging those in leadership roles to be “ego- neutral”, “vulnerable” and self- aware.
4. **Absolving Shame and Blame** – fostering a “no blame, no shame” ambience. A space where mistakes are not failures and forgiveness flows hand in hand with learning and growth
5. **Rejoicing and Grieving** – harnessing gatherings of members to rejoice and grieve in solidarity
6. **Humour** – encouraging cartoonists to caricature the idiosyncrasies of the community and creating the courage to laugh at ourselves.
7. **Spirituality and Consciousness** – invoking the “spirit” of the Institution, its legacy, saga and stories of virtue, meditative listening and holding hands and sometimes even letting go without rancor. Bringing a slice of the throbbing life outside into the community.

Institutions are created in the minds and hearts of members.

Leaders and OD practitioners have the potential to play the role of Social Architect to mobilize the community towards a sense of belonging, trust, voluntary action and accountability.

Let the spirit live on, even as we cross many thresholds of excellence and achievement, from generation to generation.

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August 2018

Inspired by – Peter Block – Communities – Structure of Belonging