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Tufail A. Qureshi

Institute of Business Administration, Karachi, Pakistan

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Editorial Perspective

Unless the danger is seen in time galloping specialization can bring any company to the brink of chaos. The remedy? Top managers with the breadth of vision only a liberal education can provide.

Clarence B. Randall
The Folklore of Management

The *summum bonum* of a liberal education has always been the cultivation of a sense of right and honour, of duty and commitment. It has always emphasized the importance of the development of character. The philosophy of liberal education aims to provide a lively feeling for values and a vivid sense of the beautiful and of the morally good.

Einstein's observation about technical schools and the cult of specialization has a direct bearing upon the *raison d'être* of the institutions of education and more so about the schools of business education. He believed that "the school should always have as its aim that the young man leave it as a harmonious personality, not as a specialist."

More and more, in the modern world, the management of human affairs and large business organizations rests on rectitude and honour, no less than on good judgement, specialized knowledge and a transcendental view of the world. The reality of such a view, including the corporate world-view, is characterized by its perspectival variations and horizontal unfoldment. It is a *gestaltan* view of man's being-in-the-world. Liberal education aims to provide a unified and unifying vision of the *world to be*. Besides, a deep sense of moral orientation has always been the core component of liberal imagination. It has always deepened the humanistic outlook, unfolding new horizons and new perspectives of the given world-view.

The notion of transcendental movement, the vitally dynamic principle as the *élan vital* of liberal education, is antithetical to the petrifying notion of reality as unchanging and unchangeable. Our *lived-world*, including the corporate world, is a reflection of the glory of man's creative will, as much as the failure of his imagination to envision a future qualitatively different from the present. Liberal education derives its creative vitality from the silent intimations of the world as it ought to be. Sadly, the cult of specialization has resulted in our disregard for the transcending vision and humanistic attitude. However, under the force of the experienced reality of the lived facts pertaining to the corporate world, the need to work ethics and moral vision into the executive orientation and evaluative

judgements of our business management has become an overriding imperative of business education. Today, more than ever before, we have come to realize the need to decisively set aside the misleading and dubious belief that in the business society and the corporate world, ethical and moral predilection does not correlate with the executive disposition and propensity for business management. Again, to correct this erroneous belief, we cannot over-stress the need to draw the transcending vision and the moral responsibility, envisioned by liberal education, into the fold of the pedagogical concerns of our business schools. We must exert creative will to remove from our business education the stigma that the ideal of moral attitude and ethical persuasion does not harmonize with the values of corporate world and that, from the economic standpoint, such predilections are unpragmatic and unpractical.

In *The World According to Drucker*, Jack Beatty has so aptly pointed out that:

“Drucker discusses economic life in terms of values, integrity, character, knowledge, vision, responsibility, self-control, social integration, teamwork, community, competence, social responsibility, the quality of life, self-fulfillment, leadership, duty, purpose, dignity, meaning – but rarely money. He defends profit, but as if it were broccoli: a distasteful obligation of managers who would rather be reading Kierkegaard.”

Discussing *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Covey makes a compelling distinction between “character ethics” and “personality ethics” and their relative managerial effectiveness in a corporate society. He stresses the importance of good moral judgment, authentic self-hood and the strength of character, making our corporate management almost a moral condition. In contrast, he describes the features of personality oriented ethics as a function of the personality structure, socio-cultural habits and attitudes, presentation of the self in society and its contribution to social, public and human relations.

In his *Good to Great*, a book inspired by the quest for the essence of excellence, Collins offers a profoundly endearing profile of an executive who builds enduring greatness, and lives according to the dictates of character ethics. Ironically, the place of character ethics in the corporate culture is, to our great dismay, a much neglected theme of the business education. In order to respond to the ethical and moral yearnings of human nature, inspired by character ethics and its value orientation, our corporate world-view has yet to whole heartedly address the limitations inherent in its paradigm.

It is said that the corporate world-view suffers from a highly vitiating proclivity to gloss over the creative vitality of the moral vision. This self imposed and consciously cultivated attitude constitutes a major flaw in the corporate world-view. It is also responsible for the attitudinal disposition of the corporate functionary

and his apathy for character ethics. Character ethics, it must be emphasized, defines the structure of personality in terms of temperament, a way of thinking rooted in the authentic and self-regarding disposition.

When we think about the corporate world, we realize that not just market forces but nearly all the forces, ethical, religious, moral, social, political, cultural, philosophical, economic etc., define the distinctive features of its worldliness. The plurality of its perspectival variations and their *gestaltan* unity implies the richest and the most diversified concept of the “world.” Therefore, in order to restore our faith in the veracity of truth and to enlarge the domain of our corporate culture, our teaching methodology should take into account the diverse core components and various profiles of the corporate reality to draw them into the fold of a unified vision of the corporate world. Moreover, of special interest to us should be the need to integrate into our research methodology diverse strands of departmentalized learning and specialization. Such a philosophy of education with a pronounced liberal bias is the unique combination of a corporate world-view blended with the depth and breadth of creative and transcending vision. Finally, a combination of corporate outlook and liberal attitude will enable us to creatively respond to the gatherings of human crisis looming at the horizon of the corporate world. What we need most today are men and women deeply entrenched in specialization in the respective fields of their professional orientation but fully endowed with the wisdom, passion and the courage to transform the corporate world into a human situation, responsive to the fulfillment of human ethical and moral aspirations.

We must therefore keep in mind that, in order to be constructive, our critique of the corporate management must spring from within the corporate system. In view of its scope, the intended critique will, of necessity, be partisan and partial. Dialectically, it will be passionate and political but, in relation to its own methodological assumptions and presuppositions, also honest and brutal. Such a radical attitude is more than a critique; it is an experience. As an experience, our critique must be written from the point of view of a transcending vision, i.e., the standpoint which opens up the widest possible horizons of the corporate world-view. Such an experience of perspectival variations resulting in a *gestaltan* view will deepen our appreciation of the inter-disciplinary and inter-departmental research. It will, above all, save a corporate thinker from falling into the lure of the snaring cult of specialization.

There are signs signifying that under the force of circumstance, the corporate thinker’s aversion and apathy to ethics, philosophy, humanistic studies and inter-disciplinary research is now beginning to draw into the fold of his world-view methodological approaches from other disciplines which are also profoundly interested in the ramifications of man’s hyphenated relationship to the world, i.e., man’s being-in-the-world.

In their refreshing book, *The Knowledge-Creating Company*, Ikujiro Nonaka and Hirotaka Takeuchi have given a dynamic account of the problems related to the creation of knowledge. They have attempted to identify links (relations) between various sources of knowledge – corporate and intangible – to explore how the managers identify these links (relations) in a corporate knowledge creation process. Phenomenologically, it is crucially important to note that in philosophy as well as in life the important thing is not *what* the given relationship is but *how* the real or perceived relationship is experienced. Therefore creative intuition and intentional constitution both converge upon the phenomenon of *How Japanese Companies Create the Dynamics of Innovation*. The book focuses not only on the empowering nature of the ‘objective facts’ but also embraces “highly subjective insights, intuitions, and hunches” which include “ideals, values, and emotions.” It owes its strength to “a shared understanding of what the company stands for, where it is going, what kind of a world it wants to live in, and how to make that world a reality”. In order to describe the *worldliness* of such a world, Nonaka and Takeuchi draw heavily upon the views of Plato and Aristotle, Descartes and Locke, Kant, Hegel and Marx. Of particular interest to a curious reader is their discussion of the views of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Wittgenstein, James, and Dewey. The authors use phenomenological method to analyze the mode of human “being in the world” (*Dasein*), as the source and the origin of knowledge obtained through reflection. The study substantiates the existentialist view that: “for human reality to be is to act ... the act must be defined by an *intention* since the intention is a choice of the end and since the world reveals itself across our conduct, it is the intentional choice of the end which reveals the world.” The thought here is that he who wishes to know, must act toward an end.

The compelling observations by the critics of corporate world-view have made it clear that the cult of exclusively departmentalized training is bound to result in the loss of a unified and unifying vision of knowledge. Such a loss is laden with deep philosophical consequences for the corporate world-view, the *gestaltan* nature of reality and the phenomenon of transcendental movement in the corporate culture.

We cannot perpetually ignore the fact that there is a limit to the ambition of specialization. Fidelity to truth must be the overriding concern of all specialization, genuine research and authentic teaching methodology. Truth loving people cannot stray from truth for very long. But the trouble with us mortals is that we do not outgrow our naïve assumptions and unexamined presuppositions until the threatening complexities of our being-in-the-world begin to gradually move in on us, pushing us to the point of rethinking about our taken for granted attitude. Such a situation calls for an honest review of our belief in the invincibility of the corporate world-view with special reference to specialization. If the undertaking is carried out in good

faith, it will deepen our understanding of the impending danger inherent in the “galloping specialization.”

Our romance with the invincibility of the corporate world-view was shaken by the stunning collapse of Maxwell, BCCI, Poly Peck and the ENRON. The history of these symbols of corporate glory lying buried in their ruins seems to suffer from an obsessive compulsion to repeat itself. The financial world-crises of our times has deepened our consciousness of the impending danger lurking behind the gloom at the horizon of the corporate world. This is not an unfounded apprehension. It issues from the evidence provided by the indictment of the corporate world-view by the events in the recent past. This colossal failure of management is not an example exaggerated for the purposes of argument. It is an example of the downside of specialization and the fact that it lacks contextual depth and perspective to unfold the creative and dynamic possibilities inherent in our concept of the corporate world. It is an example of the sad demise of the ethical and the moral and our failure to envision the *world as it ought to be*. It is an example of how our cultural aspirations have been betrayed in the past by the *lure of scientism* and the *cult of specialization*. It is also an example of the sad loss of transcendence and the disappearance of creative vision resulting in our failure to imagine the “given” world from across *the world to be*.

In our educational institutions in general and our business schools in particular, it is necessary to emphasize the need to produce good managers, efficient executive officers, skilled and competent corporate functionaries. But it is not enough. In order to be true to our calling we must also teach our students cardinal virtues to make them see that, without being a good human being, it is not enough to be a specialist. We must inculcate in their professional orientation an abiding tendency to see the realities of the corporate world from a socio-cultural standpoint. Such an attitude will result in the refinement of their character and deepen their humanistic outlook. In the politics of corporate experience, such an orientation is based on the belief that in order to know the truth, we must *want* to know the truth. In this regard, it is not true that our corporate functionary is by orientation an ethically inclined person committed to moral imperatives. But it ought to be.