

1-1-2013

Front Matter of Volume 8 Number 1

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Recommended Citation

Qureshi, T. A. (2013). Front Matter of Volume 8 Number 1. *Business Review*, 8(1), 1-6. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.54784/1990-6587.1212>

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Business Review

January - June 2013



RESEARCH JOURNAL
of
THE INSTITUTE OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
KARACHI-PAKISTAN



BUSINESS REVIEW

Volume 8 Number 1

January - June 2013

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BUSINESS REVIEW



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Editorial Perspective

“I have learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did but people will never forget how you made them feel”

Maya Angelou

“I am enough of an artist to draw freely upon my imagination. Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited, and Imagination enriches the world”

Albert Einstein

Re-Imagining the Corporate World: Some Rambling Thoughts

In life, as in research, nothing is more exciting than the willingness of a seeker of truth to embrace new challenges to create new values and goals, new ideas and the reason to be in the world. The eagerness with which he pursues such a goal stems from the belief that life does not, because it cannot, take new meanings, unless it is given new meanings and the world remains empty and devoid of values and the goals it does not possess and the meanings it does not have. It comes to have such profiles only when man engages creatively to add meanings, values and purposes to its worldliness.

The task equally exciting for the creative thinker, teacher, corporate manager and a research scholar is his ability to use other’s passion, vision and imagination to accomplish his desired goal. Ironically, however, not too many executives in the corporate world and not too many teachers in the schools of business education seem to have captured the transcending imagination and the humanistic vision of a liberal thinker and few indeed have written about it. In the corporate world, it is hard to find a man who is a humanistic visionary to imagine the “world to be” – a man of enough liberal bias to think our life in his thoughts, a metaphysical poet to sing our life in his songs, someone with ironic intelligence to ask the questions we do not ask for fear of painful answers. In the corporate world, managerial inspiration, motivation and administrative experience can play a positive role in the self-education and the cultural development of a corporate thinker. This is indeed an audacious attitude and, at IBA, we are in the company of learned men who are equally inspired and motivated by similar goals and ideals. As seekers of truth and knowledge, ethical and moral values, we are well within the IBA’s tradition of academic excellence and ethico-moral distinction.

Moreover, we owe our audacity to the Qur’anic admonition that “over each learned man there is one more learned.” For us it is a pedagogical conviction, sanctified into a religious belief. But, it is

not confined to religious bias alone. Education has both a moral and a social purpose. It is therefore important to emphasize the role education can play in the corporate management. To desire such a desirable goal and a system of business education, our research orientation must stress the importance of critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, cross-cultural and inter-disciplinary research. Inter-cultural competency, qualitative evaluation, incremental and differential learning must play a decisive role in the construction and reconstruction of the corporate world. After all, in relation to the corporate world, we need to remember that the quintessential of management is to make knowledge productive. Management, in other words, is a social function, and in its practice, it is truly a liberal art.

To fulfill the task education has to play in the corporate management, a research scholar must therefore embody inter-disciplinary and inter-departmental approach. To be a research scholar, he must be a man of broad vision and a large perspective. As a seeker of truth, a research scholar needs to embrace the axiomatic assumption that stewardship is of the total management and therefore as a research scholar, he must search for the truth everywhere or nowhere at all. Moreover, re-imagining the corporate world demands a radically questioning research in which value is not glossed over and over shadowed by the fact ridden knowledge.

Good management is good not because we think it is good but because a certain value orientation is attached to it as an *essential* attribute of its basic assumptions, presuppositions and attitudinal disposition. The word essential used here is descriptive of what is intended and meant over and above a tacit or implied definition. An essential attribute is that without which something, anything, will not be what it ought to be. For instance, sugar will not be sugar if it is not sweet. Sweetness is an essential attribute of sugar and only he who has tasted sugar knows the truth about it. Education in its pedagogical intensity creates the *taste* of knowledge in the mind and the heart of the seeker of truth. It helps him to understand what it means to be in relation to what he knows. Thus, without adjectival qualification, management remains a vacuous concept. Veracity and sustainability are the essential attributes of good management and good administration.

Socrates disturbed the conscience of man when he asked: “is something good because you like it or should you like it because it is good?” Such questions are devastating to subjectivism and relativism, the two seemingly invincible foes of the corporate management.

Aristotle was a philosopher who has left behind a legacy which will never let a seeker of truth and a lover of wisdom – a teacher and a research scholar – live in bad faith, if he has committed himself to the fidelity to truth over and above anything, however dear and however near to his sentimental attachment. It embodies a thought, hard to endure and harder still to live with. Pedagogically, one could not possibly think a thought, more radical and revolutionary, predicated on his love of truth, exceeding his love for anything he loves.

Very few of our institutions of higher education, including the business education, and not too many of those who teach there can endure, gracefully and without resentment, the few words spoken with such a disarming honesty and devastating pedagogical intensity. Defending himself against those who were dismayed by his criticism of his teacher, Aristotle, without fear or trembling, observed: “Dear indeed is Plato but dearer still is the truth.”

Ironically, corporate world has suffered gravely at the hands of pragmatism, its closet ideological ally. Originally, pragmatism derived its *élan vital* from the veracity, fidelity and the workability of truth. The pragmatist loves the truth because truth does not lie or deceive. Truth is always truth because what else could it be? Truth has never forsaken and betrayed the man in whose loving heart it has found a place to abide. The pragmatist stresses the role played by the truth in the practical affairs of man and for its being instrumental in solving the problems of management in human affairs. According to pragmatism, a belief, an idea or an assumption is intrinsically true if and only if it works. Truth works, falsehood does not. Honesty works; dishonesty and deceit are antithetical to a belief in the essential nature of honesty. That is the reason why men of worldly wisdom and managers of corporate affairs find in pragmatism something so inviting. It has become incumbent upon a corporate thinker and a teacher in the school of business education to translate this wisdom into his teaching practice and the working assumptions of corporate management. Another reason why pragmatism, as a source of the philosophy of thought and action, has such adept impact upon the theory and practice of business ethics is the place it assigned to “value” and “decision” in the corporate world view. During the days of its youthful and creative enthusiasm, the value orientation of pragmatism prevailed and vigorously sustained its business proclivities under the stewardship of corporate management. Its corporate ethicismpredicated fact on value, knowledge on virtue and power and authority on the will to truth.

But then it fell victim to its last temptation. In disregard to the purity of truth, pragmatism let itself belure into the snare of *expediency*, making it the sole criteria of truth. Consequently, vulgar pragmatism opened wide the flood gates of skepticism, relativism and subjectivism. It defiled the purity of human heart, which, according to Kierkegaard, lies in *willing one thing*. Mysteriously, the Sophists smiled over the lost glory that was Greece and good old Socrates must have felt very sad over the demise of transcendence in the human world.

Nothing is more inimical to our transcendental perspective and creative vision than the notion of the world which has the “thus it is and it cannot be better” tag attached to it. Nothing indeed is more anti-thetical to the progressive and dynamic view of the corporate world than our acquiescence to the “given” world bereft of creative will, evaluative judgments and transcendental vision. Our subservience to the world as it is based upon our disregard for the dialectic between ‘fact’ and ‘value’, between the “thus it is” and “thus it ought to be.” We live in a “given” world which we must accept the way it is. The “given” world in which we live is an acceptance phenomena. But this world is also the world we can alter and change to conform to our moral evaluations and transcendental vision. We can change the “given” world, the world as it is, into the world as it ought to be. The dialectic between *is* and *ought*, between *fact* and *value* is indeed an expression of man’s creative discontent. It is the power behind a creative man’s passion to think and re-think, to imagine and re-imagine, to construct and re-construct the “given” world into a world based upon a paradigm in which his evaluations and idealizations become a passion for other’s creative endeavors and a pedagogical focus in a new and compelling way. This world, the world of his creative and co-creative acts, is the world the corporate man can call “my world”. This world is his world; it is his “portion of the world.” For this portion of the world Qur’an holds him responsible.

We must therefore understand that only the worlds exist: yours and mine, his and hers, ours and theirs, materialistic, idealistic just or cruel, ethical or immoral etc. Corporate world is one of these worlds and man, as its creator is responsible for its worldliness. “The world” is a vacuous concept, barren and empty totally devoid of any adjectival qualification and *it does not exist*.

The dialectical interplay of thus it is and thus it ought to be, of acceptance and alteration, fact and value is discernable in all stages of historical development of the socio-cultural phenomena. Social reality and the reality of the corporate world is no exception to this dialectical movement. We must, however, remember that corporate reality, like the social reality, is a very stubborn fact and it does not yield easily to the pressure of our creative will and evaluative judgments. It offers tremendous resistance to our idealizations. But, ultimately, under the persistence of our will to truth, it gives way to our creative rage against the ugliness of injustice, falsehood, deceit and deception, disorder and disharmony. In this awful struggle between the antithetical forces, corporate man lives a life of trial by existence, seeking a resolution of the antagonistic compulsions in a synthesis which transcends both the *given* and the *imagined* modes of reality. It is a onerous task and it imposes upon the corporate man the burden of making and remaking the corporate world into a world as it ought to be. His success in this project glorifies his will to truth and beauty, virtue and honesty. It ennobles his character and beautifies his mind. It deepens his vision and enlarges his perspective on the world he can call *his world*.

This process of onward movement towards the higher and a still higher stage of socio-cultural reality is an empirical fact about history. It is called “historicism”. But, in re-imagining the corporate world we should not let the lure of historicism detract our attention from the paradigm in which “historical man” and his “world-making and world-shaking” acts play a decisive role. Historicism has unwisely neglected this aspect of man’s being-in-the-world. It has assigned the role played by man to an ‘impersonal’, “abstract” and “vacuous” concept called *history* which, like *the world*, does not exist.

History does not exist, only historical events exist. Historical events are an extension of human actions, choices, decisions, judgments and evaluations. Sometimes human wisdom and folly have created historical circumstances; sometimes human ignorance, prejudice and venomous hatred have created havoc in the world. There have also been the glorious times when man’s creative will and the will to truth have provided a glimpse of the “best of all possible worlds”. History is an autobiography of man. Apart from human actions, history does nothing and it means nothing. Historical events do not make much sense without the causal efficacy of *human factor* and, without *human metaphor*, historical circumstances leave much to be explained. Modern man has lived and suffered so much history so intensely that no amount of mystification about it can make him forget his feeling of pain and joy, disillusionment and betrayal at the hands of those who have acted as causal factor in the making of historical circumstances. We will not be stretching our imagination too much to say that “time past and time present are both contained in time future”. But today, where is the glory that was Greece? Yesterday, who was responsible for *The Rise and Fall of Roman Empire*? Who, if not man, made ENRON fall apart? It was not history because history does not kill, man does. History does not fight wars, man does. History did not build Taj Mahal, man did.

In history and in the *lived-world* of man, the dialectical interplay of “thus it is” and “thus it ought to be”, of acceptance and alteration, vice and virtue, hope and despair is discernable in all stages of the socio-cultural development. Social reality and the reality of the corporate world is not an exception to this dialectical movement. However, social reality, like the reality of the corporate world, is a very stubborn fact. It does not yield easily to the pressure of our creative will and it does not submit to our ideas and ideals easily. It offers tremendous resistance to our idealizations but, ultimately under the pressure of our will to truth it gives way to our creative rage against the ugliness of injustice, falsehood, deceit and deception, disorder and discord. It is a situation laden with tremendous struggle and it imposes upon the corporate functionary the onerous task of making and remaking his world into a world to be. His success in this regard glorifies his will to veracity and beauty, virtue and honesty, truth and justice. It ennobles his character and beautifies his mind. It deepens his vision and enlarges his perspective on the world he can call *his world*.

The one single factor which has played a decisive role in the formation of historical events and the construction and reconstruction of the corporate world is human character. More and more, year after year, institutions of higher education, including business education, are redefining the role of normative sciences, particularly the role of ethics and morality, in the corporate world-view. It is being felt that, as a professional desideratum, we must be willing to incorporate into our system of business education and the theory and practice of corporate management the emerging trends of character ethics and the contemporary moral issues. Professionalism demands a radical change of our attitude towards the existing corporate paradigm. It teaches us that we shall not grow professionally, if we do not outgrow our tendency to acquiesce and our fascination for the *status quo*.


Corporate world suffers from fatal flaws. Our redemption from the flaws of our situation lies in making our calling the passion of our life. If and when we live passionately, devoted to what we do, and feeling the way we feel about the beauty we love and the truth we speak, only then shall we know how to celebrate the markings we ought to uphold to celebrate the glory of our profession.

The corporate man, like an educated man, is not a complete man but he is essentially a good man. A corporate manager cannot be called a good professional unless he enjoys the distinguishing attribute of ethical and moral character.

In dismay and in despair, we have painfully learned, and circumstances have repeatedly confirmed our feeling that in the corporate world we shall solve very few of our problems if we do not find the place for ethics in the management of economic affairs. We shall not know the purpose of the world if we persist in our flippant attitude towards the liberal and humanistic ideals we can be proud of. Pedagogically we need to integrate into our system of education the belief that our image of perfection and our quest for excellence transcend the petrifying *status quo* and the taken for granted attitude resulting in the acquiescence to the unquestioned and the unexamined beliefs and ideas. It is an educational concern and to achieve the goal we are seeking, we must think of education not only as a formal or specialized training but, equally importantly, education in its intellectual, ethical and moral intensity.

To reimagine the corporate world, we need to make a case for the corporate man, remembering that “being a virtuous man” is the defining characteristic of professional excellence. As a professional proclivity, a good corporate manager should make his passion for excellence his *raison d’être* and the reason to be who he is. His character is his moral strength. He is inspired by the creative will. The creative will is the will to power and the will to power is the will to truth. Like an educated man, let the corporate man take his mandate from his passion to become what he is capable of becoming.

Such inspiration sounds superfluous and, given the society in which the corporate man lives, it is indeed superfluous in many ways. The ethical and the moral climate of the corporate culture has repeatedly impressed upon us the need to re-imagine the corporate world, to create and re-create a new vision of its worldliness. Once again, the audacity that challenges the corporate man, inviting him to “dare to be wise” (*SapereAude*), is grounded in the strength and the tenacity of his ethical and moral disposition.

What makes a man invincible is his character. Human life is inviolable because of the beauty and the sanctity of man’s character. That is what makes him rich; in nothing else is he poor. When character is lost, everything is lost and nothing remains but the sad remembrance of what used to be. In its pristine beauty, human character cannot be other than what it is. That is its essential attribute. Let us praise the glory of man’s character; let us celebrate the story of the corporate man. 

(To be continued)

Tufail A. Qureshi