
The conscious organization

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Abstract

New paradigms in science and in management are recognizing that consciousness pervades the evolving order of the natural world and is the essential foundation for organizational transformation. We describe seven properties of a consciousness-based organization: efficiency on a par with nature's principle of least action; spontaneous and frictionless coordination; creative inspiration akin to artistic genius; doing well by doing good: prosperity and social value; harmony with the natural environment; spontaneous change in an evolutionary direction; and leadership which promotes full human development. Specific practices to develop consciousness in organizations are identified. These qualities and practices are illustrated through a fictional story of a manufacturer of top quality, environmentally friendly solar energy technologies.

Consciousness: the foundation of a learning organization

A "learning organization" grows by sharing collective knowledge gained through experience and reflection (Senge, 1990). The cultivation of consciousness – the capacity to know – builds a foundation for a learning organization.

The purpose of this paper is to present a new understanding and new practical approach for organizational growth based on theories and techniques regarding the full potential of human consciousness.

According to an emerging new paradigm in science and in business, consciousness is the fundamental and pervasive substance of the universe, that "gives rise to matter rather than matter giving rise to consciousness" (Harmon, 1988, p. 35). Wheatley (1992) has reviewed new theories in science and their implications for management. These theories describe a conscious universe which is self-organizing (Jantsch, 1980), self-evolving (Prigogine and Stengers, 1984), and contains an implicate order interconnecting everything in nature (Bohm, 1980).

Ray writes of a new paradigm of business based on "wholeness and connectedness" and "doing business from our most profound inner awareness and in connection with the consciousness of others and the earth" (1993, pp. 4-5).

Hagelin (1998) presents a quantum physicist's perspective that the unified field and pure consciousness are identical. He further argues that the holistic intelligence of the most basic level of nature can be harnessed in the administration of human institutions by promoting the experience of pure consciousness.

By enlivening the deepest level of consciousness within us, business activity can be the flow of that natural order through us, rather than imposition of our dominion over nature.

An authority who has articulated a system for enlivening the fundamental element of consciousness in management is Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Managers and organizations can enliven the intelligence of nature in human awareness, he writes, and thereby attain "administration as problem-free, ever-progressive, and ever-evolutionary as the administration of the universe through Natural Law" (1995a, p. 8).

Qualities of a conscious organization

We use the term “conscious organization” to describe that quality of management which could be possible if the properties of consciousness seen to be in the universe could be fully enlivened in human organizations. The following paragraphs discuss seven properties of a conscious organization:

Efficiency on a par with nature’s principle of least action

Modern physics holds that all known laws of nature function through this principle of least action (Hagelin, 1998). The conscious universe spontaneously computes the path of least action, just as a stream spontaneously flows downhill. Margaret Wheatley has reflected on the value of learning to manage as nature manages:

What is it that streams can teach me about organizations? . . . This stream has an impressive ability to adapt, to shift the configurations, to let the power balance move, to create new structures. But driving this adaptability, making it all happen, I think, is the water’s need to flow. Water answers to gravity, to downhill, to the call of ocean. The forms change, but the mission remains clear. Structures emerge, but only as temporary solutions that facilitate rather than interfere. There is none of the rigid reliance on single forms. . . It is time to stop now. It is time to take the world off our shoulders . . . and look for an easier way (1992, pp. 15–17).

Maharishi has used the expression “automation in administration” in suggesting that leaders engage “the evolutionary power of Natural Law” to work for them (Maharishi, 1995b, p. 127). In an organization enjoying such automation, things would seem to run almost by themselves. The members would display a high degree of personal self-sufficiency, full expression of individual creativity and intelligence, excellence in action, coherent social interactions, and frictionless achievement without strain.

Spontaneous and frictionless coordination

Simultaneous coordination of numerous elements is evident in the organizing power of natural law. Consider, for example, the vast number of automatic processes continuously taking place in our body – self-regulating homeostasis, respiration, cardiovascular activity, metabolism in each cell – and the synchronized movements of celestial bodies in

the universe. In a similar way, within a natural-law based organization, all the parts will be spontaneously aligned in a coherent wholeness. A conscious organization will enjoy a kind of superfluid coordination of people whose awareness is established on a common, transcendental ground. Those working in such an organization will commonly experience fortuitous coincidences in which the work of others is found to spontaneously support what one is trying to accomplish.

Creative inspiration akin to artistic genius

Peak performing individuals have explained that their finest actions are computed by an intelligence of nature. Consider this description from the German composer Johannes Brahms: “the powers from which all truly great composers like Mozart, Schubert, Bach, and Beethoven drew their inspiration is . . . the infinite energy of the Cosmos” (Pearson, in press, p. 261). Brahms recounted how this elevated experience naturally leads to peak performance in composing:

Straight-away the ideas flow in upon me . . . and not only do I see distinct themes in my mind’s eye, but they are clothed in the right forms, harmonies, and orchestrations. Measure by measure, the finished product is revealed to me when I am in those rare, inspired moods (Pearson, in press, p. 260).

We project that in a natural law-based organization this kind of creative inspiration could be found in any job. Engineers, for example, could have fully elaborated product and process ideas compose themselves in their awareness; and because those ideas flow from the level of natural law that is always economical and always holistic, those product and process ideas will be most efficient, most free from problems, most aesthetically pleasing, and most healthy for people and the natural environment.

Doing well by doing good: prosperity and social value

Since consciousness interconnects everything, management grounded in this level is said to promote progress and fulfillment for the individual, the corporation, and the larger environment (Maharishi, 1995a, p. 11). Indeed, just as different expressions of life support each other in the ecology of nature, so also in a natural law-based ecology of

business, individual organizations will fulfill their own interests while benefiting the greater social whole in which they operate.

Harmony with the natural environment

A concern of responsible businesses today is how to protect the natural environment from pollution. A conscious organization working on a par with nature would be able to attain pollution-free progress – for in the conscious universe, as described by Maharishi:

... each area of infinite variety in creation always expands but does not create pollution, because in this theme of evolution in Nature, the part is always well-connected with the whole, so that the total organizing power of Natural Law is persistently available to every stage of evolution of everything (1994, p. 299).

Spontaneously changing in an evolutionary direction

For many organizations today change is problematic. About 80 per cent of major organizational change initiatives are said to fail. A fully alert state of consciousness provides the greatest freedom and potential for creative change. The conscious organization takes on the qualities of spontaneous evolution and self-organization (Wheatley, 1992; Ray, 1993) which science has observed in the systems of the natural world. In such an organization, as in nature, evolutionary change is spontaneous, continual, and without resistance.

Leadership which promotes full human development

In a conscious organization, the primary task of leaders will be to promote the full development of all the individual members. This is the epitome of transformational leadership – to lead others to lead themselves (Manz and Sims, 1993). While each conscious organization will function in a unique manner that fits its circumstances, what will be common to all conscious organizations will be that they engage in practices to harmonize the individual with the cosmos. In our consulting we work with leaders who are utilizing a set of practices to develop conscious organizations – including the mental procedure of Transcendental MeditationSM[1], the holistic Maharishi Vedic Approach to HealthSM[2], and the architecture of Maharishi Sthapatya VedaSM[3]. The story below illustrates the kind of organization that can be created by

systematically applying such technologies to actualize the full potential of consciousness.

Sunshine energy systems: a conscious organization

Sunshine Energy Systems[4] is a fictional example depicting a conscious organization sometime in the twenty-first century. The characters in our story are Jose, a newly hired director of energy transmission technologies, and Mary, a founder and general manager at Sunshine.

Mary: Welcome, Jose. I just finished a conference with the insulation research and development group. You might be interested in a project they reported on. They have developed an electromagnetic radiation shielding material with better performance and lower cost than anything we've seen before. And the source of the material is a by-product from the manufacturing of solar energy collection devices by our company and other manufacturers.

Jose: I am very impressed with the waste management practices in this company. It appears that there are practically no by-products from manufacturing which end up dumped into the environment.

Mary: That's right. In the mid-twentieth century Buckminster Fuller (American architect and engineer) pointed out that in the functioning of nature, there are no waste products. The outputs of one process become inputs to other processes in the great unified system which is our universe. That image of the functioning of nature has become the ideal for process integration within our company. Jose, it sounds like environmentalism is a pretty important value for you.

Jose: Yes, it sure is. I joined Sunshine to fulfill my personal mission of helping to move the world from fossil fuel-based energy systems to non-polluting solar power. I noticed that Sunshine has been expanding throughout the world because you are offering energy supply and distribution systems which are not just the cleanest, but also the least expensive. I wanted to be a part of what you are doing.

Mary: Well, we are certainly happy to have you, Jose, we respect your values and your expertise in low resistance energy transmission devices. You're going to help us to continue to lower the cost of delivering clean energy. How has your first month of work been going?

Jose: This is an exceptional place to work, and I have no doubt it is because of how this company nurtures our creativity through meditation classes[1], through diet and health education[2], even through design of the buildings[3]. I've really enjoyed the smooth coordination which I've seen within my department and in our interactions with other departments. I've never

experienced anything quite like it. Just today I got the idea to do an analysis of energy loss at every point in the system from the capture of solar energy in our orbiting collectors to the wiring within our customers' buildings. Even though my department only builds a part of that total system, I thought to get together a cross-departmental team to think about the end to end flow and all the connections. The idea was immediately and enthusiastically endorsed by everyone.

Mary: It is a common experience here that we are thinking in ways that anticipate each other and will easily synchronize together. We call this coherence of collective consciousness.

Jose: It seems to me that just as Sunshine creates low resistance energy transmission systems, so also Sunshine has created a low resistance culture, where people work together without friction or loss of energy.

Mary: That comes from our collective coherence. Lasers are an example of a coherent system – because the photons are in synch with one another, a laser can have great power with minimum expenditure of energy. We have been employing specific practices to cultivate a coherent field of consciousness within our organization, which has paid off in achieving exceptional business results without wearing out our people.

Jose: Mary, I've brought the energy transmission group production control reports which you wanted to discuss with me.

Mary: Thank you, Jose. I wanted to use those numbers to talk with you about our approach to quality management at Sunshine. Jose, how many TC82 transmission connectors were produced in the past 12 months?

Jose: We made 80,000 of the TC82.

Mary: And how many of the 80,000 performed within specifications?

Jose: All did. At least, we have no evidence from testing or customer response of any defects whatsoever. Mary, I want to understand more about the quality management practices that enable Sunshine to achieve this kind of unprecedented reliability. I suspect it has something to do with the intelligence of nature which you have been talking about.

Mary: We are proud of our quality achievements and we attribute them to a three-fold approach. First, we can't be a leading technology company without extensive, ongoing education, training, and knowledge management. We aim to provide our personnel with the best knowledge for the work they do. Second, our company continually invests in research and training on quality methods and is committed to applying best practices; even sharing our practices with other companies, including our competitors. Third, we have found that as we invest in developing coherent individual and organizational consciousness, errors have become less and less; and in some cases, like the

TC82, errors are completely absent.

Our engineers have reported that detailed ideas for complete product designs bloom in their minds – like the experience that some musical composer has written about. These intuitive solutions, they report, turn out to become the most holistic, economical, error-free, environmentally friendly, and aesthetically pleasing products. We believe that without the consciousness component, we could never have gone so far with our quality successes such as the TC82.

We wouldn't be the world leaders in clean and economical energy systems unless we had attuned ourselves to natural law through the technologies of consciousness. We can make products that are friendly to the natural environment because we as individuals and as a collective entity are friendly with nature within ourselves. Natural law is the most creative engineer and the most efficient manager. Our foremost approach is simply to attune ourselves to the managing intelligence of nature.

Conclusion

We have presented a vision of a conscious organization which achieves continuous learning and growth by attunement with the holistic intelligence at the basis of nature's functioning. For practitioners, the implication is that new levels of efficiency, quality, pollution-free progress, fulfillment, health, and prosperity can be achieved by adopting specific practices to harmonize the individual and the organization to the cosmos. Research on such organizations can be guided by the seven areas of growth which we have outlined in this paper:

- (1) efficiency on a par with nature's principle of least action;
- (2) spontaneous and frictionless coordination;
- (3) creative inspiration akin to artistic genius;
- (4) doing well by doing good: prosperity and social value;
- (5) harmony with the natural environment;
- (6) spontaneous change in an evolutionary direction; and
- (7) leadership which promotes full human development.

Notes

- 1 Among meditation practices which have been adopted by business people, the Transcendental MeditationSM technique is the most thoroughly researched (Murphy and Donovan, 1996). For a

- review of international applications in business settings, see Schmidt-Wilk *et al.*, 1996. During the practice of the Transcendental Meditation technique there are reductions in heart rate and oxygen consumption, and increased electroencephalographic (EEG) coherence indicative of a state of profound restful alertness, distinct from eyes-closed relaxation or sleep (Alexander *et al.*, 1986). Other research indicates that practice of the TM technique promotes growth or improvements in a variety of areas, including decreased anxiety (Eppley *et al.*, 1989), reduced health insurance utilization (Orme-Johnson, 1987; Herron *et al.*, 1996), increased productivity and improved relations in business settings (Alexander *et al.*, 1993), ego development (Alexander *et al.*, 1994), creativity (Travis, 1979), fluid intelligence, constructive thinking, self-actualization, and reaction time, among other measures (Cranson *et al.*, 1991; Dillbeck *et al.*, 1986).
- 2 The Maharishi Vedic Approach to HealthSM is a comprehensive system of prevention and treatment based on 40 aspects of the Vedic literature (Nader, 1995), including Yoga, Ayur-Veda, Sthapatya Veda, and Jyotish. This approach is described in Sharma (1998). For further information about the relationship between natural law and health, see the website of the College of Maharishi Vedic Medicine: www.mum.edu/CMVM. To subscribe to an online newsletter please e-mail CMVM-NEWS-request@mum.edu and include the word "subscribe" as the first word of the message.
 - 3 Maharishi Sthapatya VedaSM is a traditional system of architecture which designs buildings so that human creativity is naturally in harmony with the creation of natural law. Such a structure is said to promote the harmony, health, and good fortune of the inhabitants. The design takes into account several principles:
 - site selection, e.g. with respect to sloping of the land, adjacent roads and lakes;
 - orientation with reference to east, west, north, south;
 - dimensions and proportions of the building, and placement of rooms;
 - non-toxic materials, and energy efficient construction and heating.Further information is available from Maharishi Global Construction, 500 N. 3rd St., Fairfield, IA, USA, 515/472-9605, website www.mgc-vastu.com/.
 - 4 The story of Sunshine Energy Systems is adapted from Chapter 13 of Harung, H.S. (1999), *Invincible leadership: Building Peak Performance by Harnessing the Unlimited Power of Consciousness*, Maharishi University of Management Press, Fairfield, USA. Books may be ordered by calling 515/472-1101.
- SM Transcendental Meditation, Maharishi Vedic Approach to Health and Maharishi Sthapatya Veda are registered trademarks or common law trademarks licensed to Maharishi Vedic Education Development Corporation and used under sublicense. Information about Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's Transcendental Meditation program can be found at the web sites www.tm.org and www.mum.edu.

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