

Contributory article from Mr. Anand David, Director at Seek and Founder Director of Manford

Humpty Dumpty Organisations - reading the signs of change

Change we must – that is the only choice we have. We are either initiators or responders to change. Continuously evolving all the time, even in the most stable of situations, we grow up and grow out to stay relevant. Change, whether noticed or not, happens to us all the time, every where in all circumstances. To be blind or choosing to be unaware, is nothing but corporate harakiri.

Blackberry, Nokia, Sony Walkman, Kodak, Ambassador and Dyanora grappled with it. Solidaire- that seldom fails, Fly the GoodTimes with Kingfisher and the secure International and national public sectors are all replete with mega-corporate examples of stubborn resistance to change followed by humongous failure. What a mighty fall they had.

What then are the signs and lessons from the history of change:

1. Strangely we fail for the very same reason that brought us success in the first place. Success and confidence are humble companions. They feed one another and are graceful in their combined strength. However, when confidence tips over and loses its head to arrogance, trouble begins. It is then that success and arrogance become strange bedfellows- the beginning of the end.

Check the state of any super power that once was. Where is the Roman Empire or the Egyptian civilisation or the Mughal kingdom? In fact, where is the Great British empire where it was once said that the sun never set? Monarchies fell, Czars exterminated, Third Reich wiped off, corporate giants crumbled, presidents mercilessly sacked, chairmen chopped off in one fell swoop, all because they failed to sense shifting needs and to respond swiftly enough in time. It is here that success breeds arrogance; arrogance breeds complacency; and complacency always leads to failure. It is once again the story of 'Humpty Dumpty who had a great fall and all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty Dumpty back again'.

2. Usually we wait for a crisis to initiate change. We have witnessed instances where corruption turns epidemic, investors flee, the bottom line caves in, deadwood is all around, bright youngsters are missing and technology wobbles. These are common situations that compel the leadership team to wake up and take swift action. 'Something is wrong in here' is a sudden state of eureka enlightenment. The inability to sense rapidly changing user needs coupled with leadership incompetence to reinvent and take daring strategic decisions, leads to crisis. The oft used term that a bottleneck in any bottle is always at the top is a no brainer. It's the top 3% that define the character of any organisation. Whether the neck be as big as a wide-mouthed jar or narrow as a nozzle determines the outflow. Lots to learn from HCL, Wipro, TCS, Edelweiss, Strides, Mahindra and more recently Infosys who have constantly redesigned their leadership and their strategies.

3. False sense of security and over sized self importance, leading to believe that the more loyal we are, the less likely we will fail. ' Nothing can happen to us ' syndrome! We have been here from time immemorial and we are the self proclaimed pillars of organisational strength of character.

Change seldom shrieks out loud. It is not always an announcement in the media which screams through a blow-horn 'shape up or ship out'. It often creeps in stealthily while organisations and it's leaders remain in a blissful state of deep slumber. It's like the secure oversized toad in a huge pot of water which when gently and gradually heated fails to recognise danger until the toad ultimately gets cooked in slow fire. Whereas, a new toad, when dropped into the same heated pot, leaps out in a flash of a second the moment it hits the boiling water.

Security that comes from great sustainable performance is the only guarantee that works in the long run. All other forms of security have been both a corporate and social disaster. It's a curse on ingenuity, kills innovation and dampens the spirit of enterprise that humans are naturally endowed with. The usual signs of dysfunctional security are sloth and a gradual slow decline in enthusiasm that creates a community of laggards dragging one another down. Much to the surprise of any inclusive thinker, the emergence of Brexit or Trumpland is no freak accident. Someone heard the voice of the silent Anglo-Saxon voter. While on the other hand the secure warm feeling that Democrats would win hands down anyway got snuffed out in the ashes of its own defeat.

Helen Keller could not see, could not hear and could not speak. She said:

***Security is mostly a superstition.
It does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it.***

***Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure.
Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing.***

For if we do not learn from history, we are condemned to repeat it.