

Getting by in the Age of Unreason

'Professionalise if you want to capitalise', is the mantra for managers

"All progress depends on the unreasonable man," George Bernard Shaw had observed, referring to those who continually strive to change the world to make it fit some inner vision or ambition. The reasonable men, on the other hand, are reconciled to the change and over time, adapt themselves to it. In other words, they alter themselves to fit into the world.

This broad paradigm holds true even today. At a macro level, one can be excused for viewing the unreasonable man as the entrepreneur and the reasonable one as the employee. The entrepreneur being the engine of growth, without whom the organisation would have struggled to exist, has traditionally been viewed as 'the hero', while the employees are at best relegated to 'supporting acts' in the credit rolls. Is that viewpoint changing now? Or is it only getting more effectively entrenched in our psyche?

I came across an interesting book by Charles Handy on this topic and it had very interesting insights on this phenomenon. The view proffered was that "in Shaw's time, change occurred continuously and relatively slowly (by today's standards). It was, perhaps, a 'reasonable' age. However, today we were entering an Age of Unreason — an era of rapid and highly discontinuous change - the author wrote.

In such a world, of unreasonable, discontinuous change, all the established rules are vulnerable. We need to respond with discontinuous, upside-down thinking. We need new kinds of organisations, new approaches to work, new types of schools, and new ideas about being in the world.

Without delving into the essence of this wonderful book (after all, this is not



a book review), a reasonable takeaway would be that we need to alter traditional mindsets to keep pace with change. This could easily be a word of advice to senior management professionals.

The question to ask is, are we equipped to handle management challenges in this unreasonable age? Do we have the requisite tools and know-how at our disposal to manage our workplaces competently?

Take a look around you today. Every domain/ sphere/ institution/ organisation is a hotbed of activity right now. The new economy has ushered in unimaginable wealth, opportunity and quite unexpectedly, this surge has rubbed off on the old as well. The global marketplace has shrunk, so much so that it takes a few seconds over the internet to finalise a trans-continental deal, something that would

have taken a few months just 20 years ago. The internet has energised commerce and synergised human effort. No longer does one have to wait for anything - information bottlenecks have been eliminated (though newer ones have emerged). Technology and innovation are the buzzwords today, replacing pure industrial dominance as the business strategies for organisations to aspire for.

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comment

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man resources today are valued the most along with intellectual capital. The entrepreneur is just as indispensable, but it is not about money alone. The ideation is what is important today - the gestation period is shifting from years to months to now a matter of days. The internet is spawning millionaires by the dozens. Technology is evolving so rapidly that it is getting more and more difficult to keep pace with it. What does a modern day manager do in such a scenario?

The mantra may be, 'Professionalise if you want to capitalise'. Management is still about long-term decision making and crisis management. However, making on-the-spot ad-hoc decisions is as vital in a dynamic ever-evolving environment. Any modern day manager who is not adaptable and capable of providing dynamic leadership will be left behind in the 'race of the CTCs. Organisations today have no option but to look for people who can function in this 'hotbed of opportunity' with the required energy, dynamism and leadership required to do so.

All hope is not lost though. The prizes are quite substantial even for those who cannot keep up with the leaders in this race. My advice to the modern day manager would be to view change as a stepping stone towards further success and not as an impediment. Then, there would be no stopping one's career juggernaut from rolling on relentlessly.