

# Reflections on a few HR/OB Topics

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**Topic: MBTI (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator)** : In today's fast paced world, everybody is in a hurry. No wonder, we hardly have time to understand the people around us. For us, "I" becomes too much important, how I feel, what I love... We are always at a loss to gauge other people's behaviour and more often than not, it leads to conflict and stress in our personal lives as well as in our work environment. We fail to value differences because we fail to understand it. If all would have been alike, it would have been such a dull and boring world!

No two persons are exactly a replica of each other and there is no reason as to why, they should think alike, deal with situations in the same way... the list is endless. It is not a big deal as to whether somebody is an Extrovert or Introvert in their attitude, Sensing or Intuitive in their perception, decides on the basis of *hard* Logic or *soft* Feelings or oriented towards a Judging or a Perceiving nature. Because, there is nothing right in being an Extrovert or nothing wrong in being an Introvert – it is just a matter of preferences! It is also not necessary that we be in either of the extremes, we can be anywhere – halfway, more of an Extrovert than an Introvert or anything else. I personally believe that there will be very few people on the extremes.

A proper understanding of preferences will help us in adjusting better to situations and to people. Simply stated, we will be better prepared to deal with situations or people.

**Topic: Perceptions** : Why perception is so important for any individual? Leaving aside many things, we can say that one important reason being its intricate relationship with our behaviour. An important dimension of perception is that it is not always a reality – need not be! But invalid or wrong perceptions too often may lead to unpleasant situations and we need to be very guarded in what we perceive / how we perceive.

Now perceptions can be both on self and on others – both equally damaging. An individual might have a perception on himself that he is not very smart. Assuming that he / she is having a wrong perception on himself / herself, this will lead to the manifestation of a complex within that individual which in the long run may play havoc with his / her life. What if the perception is correct? Good enough; take corrective actions. How do we know whether we have perceived correctly or incorrectly? A difficult question to answer. Take time, explore and try to understand what made us perceive what we perceived, well may be we have the answer after all.

So, should *first impression* be the *last impression* - difficult to answer again, because in many cases we don't have any other option. An interviewer for example – but we should not forget that they are suitably trained in their trade or in other cases, very experienced. As a general rule, it is perhaps better that our first impression should not be the last impression.

Perceiving reasonably well will need a lot of patience, openness and awareness. It is one area where we ought not to rush through but take sufficient time (of course depending on the situations). Making comments and giving judgments, simply on our perceptions does not seem to be the greatest of ideas. So, *look before you leap!*

**Topic: Transaction Analysis** : Humans are the most complex of all living beings – the most intelligent species living on this planet. In spite of our intelligence and knowledge, we are yet to understand ourselves reasonably well. We are often perplexed by the things we do, the way we behave, the way we feel... But great minds are at work to unravel these mysteries.

Today, we have a much better understanding of our psychology. And because of this understanding, we are in a better position to figure out that many of the things we do are normal reactions, developed over the years (specially our childhood) and reinforced over time. We also acknowledge that psychological problems and unaccepted behaviour can be overcome and it is possible to change, albeit slowly. We can change our negative attitudes to more positive attitudes, forego unacceptable behaviours and ultimately be a better human being.

Because of the intricate nature of the environment and human behaviour, it is very important that we know how we deal with others because for others, we are part of his / her environment. We must strive to achieve a fine balance between the different dimensions of our behaviour and achieve what may be termed as a *balanced personality*. With a balanced personality, we will be fitter for the society in general and personal relationships in particular.

**Topic: Pygmalion Effect** : People have always been amazed by what will – power can do. They have also been mystified by faith and belief – faith in others and belief in oneself and what these have been able to achieve. There is also the relationship (sometimes positive and sometimes negative) between expectation and performance - why some perform beyond expectations and some below expectations. What role does our sub-conscious behaviour play in expectations and performance? Can we train our sub-conscious behaviour?

To have positive expectations in oneself or others may be equated with an acknowledgement of talent or ability; and proper communication of this expectation with necessary support can bring out the best in an individual. Here the absence of either proper communication or support will be counter-productive. Performance also needs to be acknowledged, appreciated to be sustained, and these have to be genuine, not lip-service.

**Topic: Negotiations** : In a world full of strife and conflict, we often hear the terms “negotiators”, “negotiating”, and the like. In the corporate world, in these days of Merger and Acquisitions, there are hard negotiations all the way. These in no way disregard the importance of negotiations in our day to day life, whether it is talking to our Boss asking for a sabbatical, talking to a Client for advance payment, and so on.

Negotiation requires tremendous skills in terms of focus, seeing beyond the obvious, understanding and above all a thorough preparation. It is a hard job. Negotiation is not about getting the best deal for oneself, but the best deal for both the parties. There has to be openness to ideas, a spirit of cooperation and the belief that there might be a win/win situation for both to get to a mutually agreeable agreement, where both parties come out of the negotiating table contented. If a negotiation fails, it is a tremendous waste of effort, time and energy for both parties and both as such must own responsibility.

**Topic: Interpersonal Sensitivity** : Humans are by nature sensitive to a varied extent and this is reflected even if we do not express it verbally. This is expressed in the form of our body language in terms of our behaviour, hand gestures, eye contact, body movements, etc. Taking aside the fact that we need not be unnatural, we can always work upon our body language so that others who are in touch do not get negative signals. Being natural is important for the simple reason that otherwise we will just pretend what we are not. And pretensions just give away sooner or latter. The essence is that the changed behaviour in terms of our body language also needs to be natural and not artificial.

**Topic: Group Dynamics** : Groups are the elements of a society and a precursor to human civilization. We have groups because of various reasons – a common goal or task, similar interests and so on. It would be wonderful if every member of a group had all the things in common – right from interests to temperament, but it is hardly the case – it is near impossible to have such a homogeneous group. The result is conflict among the group members on what needs to be done – sometimes it is logical, sometimes not. Many a times, individuals in a group give vent their disagreements, there will also be individuals who won't. Both ways, the group loses as those who vent their opposition would not budge and those who don't, they are happy to toe the group line just for the sake of it. This is where we need to sensitize ourselves about having *positive* vibes as far as group dynamics is concerned. Each group member needs to be accommodating, give others the chance, make the quieter ones present their views; keep their egoistic self behind so that the whole group benefits out of *collective* wisdom. It is just not about presenting a united face, but about taking group decisions intelligently on a collective basis, on merit and without any bias whatsoever.

**Topic: Power Dynamics** : Who doesn't like power or for that matter who would mind flaunting it their own way. It is also a fact that nobody likes to be powered down. People derive power due to a variety of reasons – authority, position or pure charisma. Exercising power is not easy and people more often than not crosses the thin line dividing what power authorizes us to do and what it does not. This is where, we find discontentment and strife as those on the other side has no option but to hit back.

As the hit *Spiderman* movie preaches, "With great power comes great responsibilities", we must be worthy of the power bestowed on us and see to it that it is never misused. It also means that we should never bulk in exercising it if the situation so demands.

**Topic: Managing Stress** : Of late, we have made an important addition to our life – stress! With the kind of lifestyle we follow, there is bound to be stress. But our understanding of stress seems to be very superficial – we somehow always associate it with our fast-paced

life and to the shortage of time in our hands. We fail to bring in the psychological factor. Because a major part of what we conjure up as stress is in our mind – the way we perceive at things - the mental image we have of ourselves, the world around us.

We can relieve a lot of our stress by building up a positive frame of mind; accept ourselves / others along with our / their limitations and learning to relax. We can hope to relax only when we are at peace with ourselves and be contented with what life has offered to us.

**Topic: Competition v/s Cooperation** : When the norm is “survival of the fittest”, what do you expect? Of course, it is competition. There is no harm as such to competition; in fact a hallmark of strong personality is being competitive in life. The problem arises when competition becomes a tool of one-upmanship – where competition loses its positivism to one of negativism. It becomes a vicious cycle of outgunning one another where no body really wins in the long term. The ill effect of competition is most prevalent in groups and teams, where because of intra rivalry and competition among the members, the whole team / group loses.

Cooperation on the other hand is a panacea for bringing about the best in each of us through a process of *give and take*, complementing and learning from each other. Borrowing from Anand Kumarasamy<sup>1</sup>, it will be at our peril to overestimate the strengths of competition and underestimate the power of cooperation.

So, is then competition such a bad word? The answer is no. We need to compete against ourselves; so that we continue to better ourselves and keep on raising the bar! Competition and cooperation is a juggle which if we can master will lead to what is termed as *bliss*.

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<sup>1</sup> From his book “Gandhi on Personal Leadership” (Jaico Books, 2006)