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The Creative Cult

Creative class - that's what the corporate world is aspiring to build. The corporate world is undergoing a paradigm shift in terms of its business operations. The transition from a manufacturing dominant business model to a knowledge-based business model has been rather drastic. The shift in focus has effected all quarters of business making -marketing, finance, systems and nearly all human resources.

A sneak preview into HR's hiring checklist will help understand this change better. Earlier, educational qualifications and experience topped the list. However, today it's a prospective employee's creative potential that is most critical. The increased emphasis on creativity and innovative inquiry is making the entire corporate fraternity fret in search of ways to harness and make the creative potential available to them. Companies are also seeking newer sources of creative strategies to leverage them.

Creativity-the business concept

Picasso, David Copperfield, William Wordsworth and William Shakespeare-is this our only claim to creativity? No, these '*creative geniuses*' are only a part of the '*creative universe*' that bears within it various aspects of life. So when one talks of creativity in the organizational context, its implication goes beyond hiring talented actors or pianists, to include anyone who can actually make a difference to his field of work by thinking differently.

Therefore organizations that champion creativity in its true spirit direct innovative inquiry in the right direction yielding the desired results. For creativity to thrive, it's important that managers encourage creativity irrespective of its source. Experience, age and qualification are irrelevant when it comes to a good workable and profitable idea.

By limiting creativity to the corporate sector, we stunt its growth. Thus for its overall and complete development, we need to involve the society as a whole. Participative engagement in creativity is by far the surest way to make innovation and creativity a way of life.

So what should the corporate fraternity do to make creative thinking a habit? Various approaches help breed a creative culture. Companies have long employed reward and recognition strategies to encourage workforce creativity. These strategies have yielded results to the extent of harnessing what was presented to them. They however failed to tap the latent potential. The real creative zing lies in doing just that. How do companies unleash the latent creative potential of their youngest, oldest and other not-so-prominent members? The solution lies in making wise investments in creative infrastructure.

Creative infrastructure

What exactly does creative infrastructure imply? Creative infrastructure is quite like the physical infrastructure that nations thrive on. Transport systems like the railways and the airlines and services like the water and electricity supply have made life so much easier.

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An efficient and well-built creative infrastructure can ensure generation of new ideas. Organizations need to provide support systems to tap bright and workable ideas that have public appeal and the potential to provide high ROIs.

One of the best ways of tapping creative potential is by boosting corporate R&D spending on it. Organizations need to fuel their innovation drive through aggressive investments in training and education. Corporate funding in universities is another infrastructural support that companies can provide to boost the number of opportunities in creative fields of art and culture.

Another major area that has the potential to pump out creativity and innovation is workplace diversity. It may seem like a distant call, but in reality, workplace diversity contributes a large chunk to the corporate creative pool. The best way to encourage workplace diversity is to fund universities and colleges to include students from various ethnicities to join them. Restricted entry to universities can keep the brightest of a marginalized lot away, depriving both companies and students the chance to unleash their potential.

Apart from attracting the best and brightest talent, universities that have a diverse student population also preach tolerance. The crux however lies in recognizing these institutions of education, teachers of tolerance and laboratories of research.

Funding universities is a macro level approach to the objective of building a creative class. Managers who relate best to their corporate system might find it farfetched. However, the efforts to build the creative pool have been limited to the corporate system for a long time, and that is a great delimitation in itself. Hence, the need to look beyond the internal locus is indeed a compelling one.

Miles to go...

What goes against investing in collective creative infrastructure? The reasons are many. We know that companies operate on a profit-loss mode, hence for all invests they make their immediate concern is the return on investments. Therefore, logically business houses lobby only for options that promise faster, tangible and immediate returns. Universities and other educational institutions, on the other hand are long-term investment options where companies fail to see the profits horizon.

Research reveals that the “*global creativity index*” was the highest for Sweden, with USA figuring fourth in the list. An analysis of Sweden’s creativity infrastructure revealed that most universities in Sweden had relatively easier procedures that encouraged people across the globe to opt for its universities. In addition, the visa woes were none to negligible in the case of Sweden unlike the US, which had a rather lengthy process of application. Last, but not the least, Sweden-based companies were far more open to ideas, people and practices with its diversity-personified workforce testifying its creative spirit. Hence, corporate funding to universities was the highest in Sweden.

Universities and colleges may not make a good business case for building a creative class from a short-term perspective. However, on keenly studying the long-term effects of investments in creative infrastructure, its business case seems rather appealing. Hence,



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companies that are willing to show patience and play the big stake will ultimately carve a niche from their creative intellect, while others as they say will becomehistory!