

"In a business, quarterly reports and an average lifespan of 40 years for big companies tend to put immortality on the back burner...The Mitsui Corporation and my old Oxford college are both over 600 years old, both still going strong and thinking far...You can only look ahead as far as you can look back."

Charles Handy¹

Change is the eternal reality individuals and organizations have always faced, confront today, and will continue to encounter through time. However, it is our understanding and adherence to never-changing principles that help us thrive in change.

We all know and agree how important it is for organizations to continually learn, improve, and grow. These are eternal requirements and imply the need for us to adapt to change continuously. Such contradictions in life are everlasting and come in all shapes and sizes. They are built into the very fabric of nature - within and around us.

If it weren't for our curious minds, would we ever learn anything new? Could we ever improve the way we think and behave? What triggers curiosity in us? Contradictions! For this reason I have associated the term 'gift' with this phenomenon.

Consider this: We are forever caught between the need to control and at the same time, to empower; Leaders need to exhibit courage, while also having capacity for compassion; Managers need to focus on goals and at the same time need to show the flexibility of mind to create and innovate. There are numerous instances where I have seen managers 'hang' when faced with competing ideas. They need to 'reboot' themselves in order to use contradictions as a springboard for success.

Everything we take for granted today was once viewed as impossible by many. Take flying for example. The governing paradigm almost a century ago was that only lighter than air can fly. Thank God there were a vital few who had the audacity to challenge status quo and today we have over six hundred tons of immaculate engineering transporting a vast number of humanity across continents at the speed of a bullet!

The world-wide web is yet another example which glaringly illustrates the power of contradictions to inspire innovation. The "www" marvel is the most centralized system on earth, and has liberated individuals to access knowledge and communicate globally, instantly. The internet has transformed human possibilities beyond belief!

A colleague once asked me, "Who has been your best teacher?" I thought for a while. Names flashed through my memory. I went to the white board in my office and made a circle. In it, I placed the symbol of a question mark "?". I am eternally grateful to my colleague for asking such an innocent question. I spent that entire day pondering on what gives rise to questions in my mind. Voila!! I found the answer: Contradictions! My life changed forever. It's in small moments like these that big things happen, but only if we make time to reflect deeply.

I have since discovered many truths. That mortal beings can create immortality if they so wish. Social philosopher, Charles Handy is widely regarded. He is seen as the guru of the modern workplace. Many of his predictions have already come true, including the demise of the traditional organization and job and the emergence of talented individuals and entrepreneurs being outsourced for their expertise in specialized fields.

Handy concedes disparagingly that, "In a business, quarterly reports and an average lifespan of 40 years for big companies tend to put immortality on the back burner." He finds this short-sightedness ill-founded; institutions, he declares, can be immortal. "The Mitsui Corporation and my old Oxford College are both over 600 years old, both still going strong and thinking far." He continues to amplify his point, "You can only look ahead as far as you can look back."

Building trust with others and between people in organizations is the only real way to achieve greater efficiency, reduce costs and create sustainability. However, to enjoy the fruits of trust, you will have to make yourself vulnerable!

There are no perfect solutions to anything, and no one can predict exactly what the future may hold. The ambient paradoxes are too complicated for that, but continue to be a blessing.

Our continuing success depends on making sense of contradictions.
