TALES FROM & INSIGHTS

DID WE

EVOLVE

FROM

APES

TO BECOME

RATS?



(Changing Outlook of CSR: "Pashu jeeta hai ann ke liye, manushya arth ke liye")

DID WE EVOLVE FROM APES ONLY TO BECOME RATS?

(Why waste a good crisis; isn't this a good opportunity to change the outlook of CSR from being 'Compulsion Driven' to 'Contribution Driven'? Can the new age CSR move from Corporate Social Responsibility to Conscious for Self-Redemption)

Why Waste a Good Crisis, is a philosophy which is based on the dual thought process that in a crisis, on one hand we get the time to pause and reflect and on other, an opportunity to explore radical makeover considering the surroundings are hyper sensitive and eager to lap up any change, the mood for acceptance being generally high with least resistance.

CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) has always been on the agenda of Businesses but the degree of sincerity of intent has varied vastly, based on the Founder / Founding Family / Shareholders outlook. In the last decade, the degree of variance has reduced because of the introduction of Laws and general awareness among the stakeholders, especially shareholders that giving back to society is not an option but a hygiene factor for any business.

So, what ails CSR today? Well, there are multiple factors which stop it from operating in its purest form, intent and to its fullest potential. For the purpose of this paper, we will restrict the focus to people / culture dimension only. Based on people / culture dimension , following are the top 3 challenges that ail CSR today:

• Compulsion Driven:

• Just Fulfil Legal Formality

In many organisations CSR is still seen as a compulsion of legislation, rather than as an opportunity to serve one of the critical stakeholders i.e. society. This compulsion attitude often translates into an outlook that manifests into a belief that someone is 'stealing' from me what is rightful mine and to fight that, we often resort to tactics like recycling the funds by opening dummy NGOs or sharing CSR funds only with a NGO operated by Family or Loved ones, where in the intent is malicious, as they are simply FRONTs for recycling funds.

• Decided by Business / Senior Management.

Another Challenge is that often it is a set of Senior Management Committees that decide what will be the areas of CSR focus. They often tend to see it from the prism of aligning CSR to the current business priorities, since in their view CSR is simply yet another business item checklist in their agenda. They often restrict the potential of CSR to Brand Building or Networking with Govt, Campuses and other stakeholders, rather than exploiting these funds to their fullest potential and integrating it to organisations core values and culture.

Selfie / Self Absorption:

<u>Limited to Photo Opportunity</u>

Another disturbing trend which is witnessed among the employees today is the tendency to restrict their involvement in the CSR activity to a 'Photo Op', when the 'Selfie' becomes the most critical action item on the agenda. This trend is often witnessed among some employees who emotionally don't believe in 'Giving back' to society, or have been forced by their organisations to volunteer or who are just there just to overcome a weekend guilt trip which eventually fades away in few hours.

• No responsibility for IMPACT - 'just brute force'

Current engagement strategies of the involvement of employees in CSR is purely volunteer based which is completely unaccountable and this results in an atmosphere where the employees' attitude is at times arrogant or charitable or moody or even erratic. These employees believe that their contribution is in simply showing up for an occasion and provide the physical energy / brute force and there is no need of any psychological or spiritual connect with the cause. Often, they restrict their responsibility to that event and are not interested in any follow up or taking any accountability around IMPACT metrics which may be spread across a longer time range.

• Rarity in Priority:

Tick in the Box

Many still perceive CSR as a forced KRA / KPI which they would like to avoid or handover to someone else, rather than an opportunity to make a difference. In many organisations CSR is still an additional responsibility and very rarely we have qualified and dedicated professionals running the same on full time basis. This often leads to a situation where in CSR becomes the last item on their agenda and it will be discussed as and when they have time to spare or else just have a superficial scan over critical data points and reach some quick decisions.

Not a Priority for Best of Resources / Time (Punishment Posting)

If CSR is not a priority which the CxO will personally review from time to time, or the CxO will proudly flaunt in the Annual Meet along with the best sales / delivery champion, than often the best and smartest of resources shy away from picking up this responsibility. At times, it is the non-performing ones or resources who have burned out and want to take it slow, are either pushed into this roles or volunteer for these roles. The same attitude also continues in terms of budget allocation. Only what is mandated by law is allocated and nothing more

than that. We cannot create a perception that CRS role being a Punishment Posting, can we?

The challenges are unique for sure and many of them stem from our mindset / outlook rather than legal systems or organisation structures or shareholders priorities. So, when we summarise these challenges into a common thread / theme, we realise how myopic we are in our approach and have restricted our imagination.

The general feeling one gets is that either we are running another RAT Race to prove a point (we are committing to CSR because everyone else is doing it, without truly believing in it) or we are having a Rat Outlook which is very self-centric and myopic (I, Me, Myself). In either of the cases we need to pause and reflect on the moot question:

Did we Evolve from Apes, just to become Rats?

No, Definitely Not! We did not evolve from Apes to become Rats but to become Humans. What defines 'Human' and their outlook is best defined and articulated in Bhagwad Geeta aptly-

"Pashu jeeta hai ann ke liye, manushya arth ke liye" (Animals live to Feed themselves, whereas as Human we live to Find Meaning & Purpose).

So, if we are capable of such TRANSFORMATIVE journey, why are we restricting ourselves to such Transactional outlook when it comes to giving back and sharing through CSR? How can we embark on this new 'Outside to Inside' Journey, a few thoughts and insights:

Conscience Driven (Employees):

Moving from Company Compulsion Driven to Conscience Driven (Employees)

• Beyond the realms of Business Domain: Employees conscience takes precedence

CSR as an effective idea can only be sustained if it becomes a people movement (employees) and is not driven by a bunch of self-appointed guardians. To become a people movement the ideas, focus, initiatives must come from the Employees Conscious.

In a liberal, decentralised ecosystem, it is quite possible that employees may choose topics / focus areas which are not in line with business focus and organisations should be open to it. Organisations should also be open to exposing themselves to sensitive issues which may not be openly discussed in Board Rooms like Gay Rights, Glass ceilings, Environmental Impacts etc. The only filter that organisations can add is that the proposed activity cannot be against its Core beliefs or negate its business model or violate the law of land. For example - if the employees of a publication house ask to ePublish books and distribute for free or a liquor company wants to run drinking is a health hazard campaign under its CSR.

A choice that is conscience driven by employees will add the required zeal and energy to bring in soul and a purpose which is transformational as human and not just a rat race checklist.

• <u>Tap the Employees Passion as Entrepreneurs</u>

Another way to bring about a change in outlook towards CSR is by encouraging a self-sustained entrepreneurial outlook, where in the employees are asked to make a pitch for a budget and a cause they believe in or a NGO which they want to support. In the proposal they are expected to propose IMPACT metrics they will strive to achieve by cultivating / nurturing the cause.

Post evaluations by the CSR Committee, the Employees' are allocated the budgets and their projects are monitored on the IMPACT Metrics on Quarterly basis. Any feedback to streamline or any support to strengthen the efforts is promptly approved by the committee, including support in form of expert advice to run the Program as a Self-Sustained Program (SBU)

To ensure a degree of institutionalisation and appreciate the need for affiliation, the success / progress of initiative can be recorded in the appraisals and career graphs based on the demonstrated leadership competencies as part of the running of the program.

Based on the progress, achievement of milestone and impact created, the next year extensions, funding, structures can be approved, just like any venture funding.

Selfless (New Age Maslow)

Moving from Selfie / Self Absorption to Selfless mindset of 'Serving / Seva'

• Serving / Seva is a Core Ingredient in Me

The idea of Seva stems from being Selfless, where the intent of giving / sharing is a self-belief of doing greater good for others, without expecting anything in return.

New Age Maslow is a concept which believes that all the dimensions of Maslow are constantly required to all of us, but their propositions vary, based on the stage of life an individual is in. So, if in an employee, the self-actualisation need is greater than 33% than their need to 'Serve' / 'Give" i.e. being selfless is high and to a great extent that feeling is genuine and self-sustained.

Employees need to go through this assessment and reflect on their individual needs and build their priorities accordingly, especially the idea of Volunteering for CSR. Organisations should also encourage looking into these scores before enrolling the employees for any long-term CSR plans.

Employees demonstrating less scores can be channelized for other complimentary activities like mobilising funds etc. which are a short term, spread over a weekend, rather than being entrusted with major milestones which require long term ensuring self-driven efforts.

Credit based on Impact, not efforts/ physical energy/ physical presence

Employees should be clearly communicated that their CSR contribution will be encouraged / evaluated / appreciated for the Impact they have created and not for their mere physical presence or physical energy they bring to the program.

At the time of the self-nomination / nomination of an employee to a CSR program, the employee should be handed over a Charter of Understanding which should clearly articulate what is expected from them and how at the end of the said program or term, their contribution will be measured in terms of IMPACT Metrics. For example, in a sanitation campaign the metrics could be "xxx number of bathrooms checked / cleaned in 4 hours' or for education drive, 'xxx books read to children in 2 hours of library period' and so on instead of 'spending xxx days at school for CSR'.

Employees should also be discouraged to use CSR platforms for self-propagation / publicity. Guidelines should be drawn on publishing photographs on Social Media etc. to encourage Seva, not Selfie.

• Rewired to Organisation Culture & Systems :

Moving from Rarity in Priority to Rewiring CSR as part of Organisational Culture / Ethos and its Systems

Leadership Priority / Agenda

Leaders and leadership actions are often the benchmark and baseline for employees to emulate. History is a witness that leaders set the tone for a revolution to succeed and are visible on the front line.

Leaders must exhibit their presence, both physically and emotionally to the causes and 'walk the talk' by providing their unconditional support. Leaders must believe that society is a critical and equal stakeholder in their success, just like the shareholders and employees and cannot be neglected any more. It is imperative for leaders to understand that if they do not sustain the society, then the society will neither provide future raw material and neither consume the products / services in future.

CSR has to come to the forefront of CEO's Agenda, they not only have to institutionalise frameworks like TRIPLE BOTTOMLINE which priorities the working with ecosystem (economic, social, environmental) as popularised by ITC; but also need to ensure that it is ingrained as a Cultural Ethos across all employees and stakeholders and not restricted as just another initiative for a building a better brand.

Superheroes come in all Shapes & Sizes (beyond Sales & Delivery)

We need to acknowledge that super heroes come in all shapes and sizes, which in short means they need not confirm to our standard stereotype of sales and delivery teams. Often they steal so much limelight that we unknowingly pass a message to the employees that anyone contributing only on those lines would avail these recognitions and privileges.

The big change we need to propose to break this stereotype and make Super-Heroes of those souls who believed and worked for the betterment of society / beyond self. We all know that 'Behaviours that get rewarded, get repeated'. So, we need to probe how many behaviours we are rewarding which are promoting the idea of selflessness and acting according to one's conscience.

This New Journey from **Self absorption to Self Awareness** is not going to be an easy one; since it would require breaking away from our comfort zones and leading the organisations self-awareness towards bringing in a degree of spirituality at workplace.

We have often shied away from dilemmas of dharma, spirituality, consciousness believing these words are alien in our world of Board rooms. It is time to realise that they are not, rather they are imbedded deep within us and our conscience. On a parting note - Did we evolve from Apes to become rats, I guess no way . . .



www.thestrategistand.in

K Srinivas Rao

Founder & Chief Strategist The Strategist &

You can reach the author at ksrini@thestrategist.in