



## SYSTEM EFFICIENCY THROUGH HEEDFUL INTERRELATION - ILLUSTRATION FROM ADMINISTRATIVE SITUATIONS.

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### **Abstract**

*Literature is replete with team building necessary for the efficiency of the system within the dominant paradigm of individualism and competition. Positive organizational behaviour literature hints more at interrelatedness than competition suggested by individualism. The present attempt is to illustrate an administrative system that provides greater system efficiency that can be generated within a networked behavioural environment drawing from a simple system such as exam administration and extrapolation to more complex systems such as traffic administration. Further extension may be possible to more complex systems with necessary information dissemination and minimal hierarchy to facilitate the transition from the simple to the complex. Positive behaviour when nurtured, can be the way by which organisational culture is preferentially built over hierarchical directiveness as a control and direction mechanism.*

**Key Words:***Heedful Interrelating, Respectful Interaction, Mindful Organizing, Appreciative Inquiry, System Efficiency, Non-Directiveness, Positive OB, Collective Mind, Sense Making.*

### **Introduction**

Any system would have system efficiency as its objective. Can behaviour of actors in a system be contributive of system efficiency or inefficiency? If so, what would constitute appropriate behaviour? That would require an examination of the system. It would also require that the dominant paradigm be modified and represented appropriately that the individual actors know their role towards greater system efficiency. Positive organizational behaviour offers some insights to develop such an efficient system based on actors' collective behaviour. An example is drawn from a relatively less complex system such as exam administration to illustrate the concept in positive organisational behaviour terms.

### **The Literature on heedful interrelating, mindful organizing and respectful interaction**

The concept of *heedful interrelating* forms a trio with *respectful interaction* and *mindful organizing* in appreciative inquiry strain of organizational behaviour. It can be summed up as generally mapped out sequences, of highly trained people capable of improvisation and adaptation. The key here is joint capability to function as a single mind. Further, a major property of heedful interrelating is that the people see their work as a contribution to a system, not as a standalone activity. People act as if they are under the direction of a single organizing centre even though no such center exists.

When people act as if there is something towards which they contribute, 'that something' starts to materialize, a key component of a self organizing system.

Another property is the *representation* which is a shared visualization of the meshed contributions. Each participant has a representation that includes the action/s of others and their relations. And finally, people treat their system as their referent and act in ways that meet the needs of the system.



The concept of mindful organizing in positive organizing would mean an organising that enriches experience and pragmatically improves perception, alertness and adaptation through efforts to refine and differentiate existing categories, create new categories and detect subtle ways in which contexts vary and call for contingent responding. And respectful interaction would entail trusting, being trustworthy and maintaining self respect.

### **Sense making resources**

Interaction and conversation (social), clear frames of reference (identity), relevant past experience (retrospect), neglected details in the current environment (cues), updating the impressions that have changed (ongoing), plausible stories of what could be happening (plausibility), and actions that clarify thinking (enactment) together form the sense making resources (Weick,1993).

### **The simple system of exam administration and the constraints**

The exam administration in the traditional system has two broad functions; one of supervising the students and the other of providing the requisite stationery for the students. The provision of stationery i.e. answer booklets for writing is in the normal course simplistic however, with stipulations on restricting the supply only upon requests, poses a constraint. Invigilators therefore are required to be alert to the requests and be acting in such ways as to minimize loss of time. Time therefore is also a constraint while considering efficiency of the operation.

The number of administrators is also restricted due to the constraint on number of people available. The job is essentially of a non-productive nature or productive only in a deterrent sense. Because of the requirement of silence and decorum in the exam hall, information of a request is generated, understood and passed on through gestures or minimal voice at best.

The paradigm of competition would in this case mean more number of stationery distributed by a single administrator. However, system efficiency would mean less movement of administrators or less time from request to supply.

The actors in the system are the invigilators and the students undergoing the exam. Interaction could be between the invigilators or between invigilators and students, but not between students.

### **Heedfulness, mindfulness and respectfulness in the exam administration system.**

Let us apply the heedfulness, mindfulness and respectfulness discussed in the first part to the exam administration system. For illustrative purposes, a typical examination hall would be a hall with students in 9 columns with 20 rows. An approximate number of examinees would be 120 to 180. The number of exam administrators is 3.

Heedfulness of the administrator would mean alertness to the requests and an approximate gauging of distance of the administrator/s from the request spot and delivery either himself or alerting other administrator/s. A competition paradigm would require an administrator to be eager to deliver the stationery himself whereas the system efficiency paradigm would require one to gauge that another administrator may be near the request and alert him in turn to deliver. It is the system efficiency paradigm that is sought to be examined and mapped here in this article.

Efficiency can be added if there can be a mental map or representation of the exam hall being divided into as many sectors as there are number of administrators. Further it is expected that the administrators

keep moving both for the purpose of watchfulness and for the simple fact that mere standing in one place is ergonomically undesirable. The requests for stationery can then easily be responded to, depending on the position of the nearest administrator.

Further the mental map can be used in such a way that the administrator moves as if the area is divided roughly into the number of administrators and adjust self movement to fill the vacant area created by a moving administrator so that at any moment no request is too far away from the requesting student examinee.

Therefore the appropriate self movement would then be such that the longest distance would be the longest distance within the divided area allocated to one examiner. At some moment a rest pause is a possibility for one of the administrators in which case the total area is mentally mapped by the rest of the administrators to be divided into  $A / (n-r)$  where A is the total area, n is the number of administrators, r is the number of administrators taking rest pause.

Efficiency would then mean least distance of the administrator and the avoidance of wasteful movement of a particular administrator as to move any distance more than the longest distance within the  $A/n$  area or  $A / (n-r)$  as the case may be. The heedfulness, mindfulness and respectfulness in this case would mean that the system efficiency paradigm would require a distant administrator to gauge that another administrator may be near the request and alert him in turn to deliver.

### **Adding heedfulness of requestors**

Since the administrators are on the move it would be possible to have further system efficiency if we add heedfulness of the requestors as well. An individual student requestor can very well anticipate his /her stationery need and request as the administrator approaches, eliminating the need for a distant request. This would further reduce the request → approach → delivery time delay.

The new improved sequence that gets enacted would then be

Approach → Request → Delivery  
replacing the former  
Request → Approach → Delivery

with least time lag in the sequence.

The system in a small area would need more of a networked interaction between the administrators with non-verbal interactions than a hierarchical one unlike for instance, the music conductor and the musicians.

A hierarchy would be needed only if all administrators can't perceive each other and their relative positions. The hierarchy is then less useful. The networked interaction (in contrast to the hierarchical one) would nevertheless leave room for directiveness when a particular administrator may be alerted by another one as to a request near to the one alerted in an event he has not noticed the request.

In a way, the absence of hierarchy and the emergence of the need for alerting would generate directiveness alternatively from each of the administrators (mindful organizing) and one could say for the moment the apex of the hierarchy shifts to that particular alerting administrator after which the network goes back to its original non- hierarchical state.

### **Higher levels of complexity and heedfulness**

We can now move on to heedfulness on situations involving multiple actors and greater complexity as in a traffic system.

Since at any given moment, the individual driver's information about the terrain is only limited to his visual field, a hierarchy becomes necessary at the traffic junction manned by police personnel with authority. If information was perfectly available to all the drivers and they were all capable of heedfully interacting, the need for hierarchy (directiveness from the police personnel) is reduced so much. Even with such a hierarchy, the actors' heedfulness would reduce the load on the police, provided all the actors transmit their intentions (using proper signals) unambiguously and cooperate accordingly.

We can add levels of complexity further such as a railway signaling system and an air traffic control system etc. and in all such situations it is found that behavioural adjustments in terms of heedful interrelating, mindful organizing and respectful interactions between the actors facilitated by the hierarchy forms the basis of system efficiency. However, the key point is that hierarchy in this sense is a necessary addition only to compensate for the information non-availability to the actors arising out of the progressive complexity in each of these situations.

It can therefore be postulated that systems such as the economy at large would also benefit from the heedfulness, mindfulness and respectfulness of all the citizens. Given these, mediation and directiveness from authorities such as the government need be minimal as to compensate for the information non-availability to individual citizens as the system moves towards greater complexity.

And given the positive behavioural changes among the actors, the role of the government or any authority would diminish as to intervene only by exception further raising the efficiency of the system as a whole. This would eliminate disruptive tendencies such as power for the sake of power and in a networked environment, the presence of directiveness shifts in such a way that the alerting becomes of more significance than mere power holding and actors would not hesitate to be alternately alerted and directed and also alerting and directing depending on the circumstances, adding to system efficiency overall.

### **Conclusion**

The foregoing discussion tried to bring in examples from simple administrative situations and extrapolated to more complex systems. Positive organisational behaviour is expected to give less resistance from actors in a social system compared to the deficiency – gap filling perspective of traditional organizational behaviour.

Much of the necessity of hierarchy is redundant in the networked world which fact is however less evident due to the dominant prevailing wisdom of authority and directiveness. The discussion posited authority and directiveness as a necessary feature only of systems that have inadequate information dissemination and presence of complexity. Given the networked system, it may be necessary to redraw the lines so as to allow for the emergence of centres of authority and directiveness alternately diffused in the nodes of the network determined by the need for alerting other nodes. Heedful interrelation among the actors is paramount in such a model and the same is less appreciative of competitive interactions than cooperative interactions and one could say that as such, the model is focused on system efficiency and redefines competitiveness as the ability to heedfully interact.

### **Reference**

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