

## **The Rules have Changed But there is more to come**

**W**ould you like to take a sneak peak at the kind of organization that you will be working in? Well, it would not be the conventional structure which most people are conversant with. Like, it would neither be an Indian company nor a foreign company. Does that surprise you? It should not.

In tomorrow's world there is every likelihood that you would work in a company which is headquartered in India, whose raw-material is sourced from Australia, finished product is marketed in North America, money is raised in Europe, the design and development is undertaken in South America and the finished goods are manufactured in China, Asia. So you are likely to have the sourcing function in Australia-New Zealand, marketing in America, finance in Europe, R&D in South America, manufacturing in China and strategizing in India. Now what do you call such a company? An Indian company or an American company or a plain and simple transnational organization?

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I am not shooting in the dark. Nor am I talking of anything original. Such organizations are already in existence with business process outsourcing being a trailer for the shape of things to come. In such a world your colleagues, peers, mentors and leaders are not going to have the same socio-economic, educational and cultural backgrounds. They would come from differing backgrounds with different work place ethics that would lead to culture shocks. To succeed in such a place you need to understand the changing rules of the career market.

### **Rule 1: Uni vs. Multi Functional**

#### ***Knowledge is power***

If you are a specialist, that's great. Suppose you are the big boy of corporate finance or of the fussy world of management accounting. Or, suppose that you are hopelessly in love with the debits and credits of financial accounting or with the loopholes of tax and of law. Well, in that case you could go on to become the CFO of the organization. But you will stop there. You may never graduate to become the CEO. If you want to run an organization, say a manufacturing outfit, while you could be a specialist in finance and accounting, you will also have to have a significant appreciation of manufacturing, marketing, research, design, development and strategizing not to speak of HR and technology.

Now comes the ringer. All of this was true once upon a time! Today, if you want to be a CFO you will have to know all those things that a CEO of yore needed to know. Yes, you need to have a multi-functional appreciation of the happenings in your organization even to become a CFO, leave alone becoming a CEO. This is a world where knowledge like never before is power.

## **Rule 2: 9 to 5 vs. 24 x 7**

### ***Career first***

If you ask your grandparents, they would tell you how simple the world once was. They went to office at 9 in the morning and returned home at 5 in the evening so much so that there was a branded dress called 9 to 5 which sold like hot cakes among office goers. Working on weekends and holidays was a strict no-no. It was called the British culture, at its very best. At office time you did office work, at other times you did other work. If things got done during a day's work; great. Otherwise you could come the next day to finish it. Today, you cannot be a clock watcher. Today, it is not just enough to show up; you have to deliver. There is nothing like 9 to 5 office timing. It's flexi timing. You work at hours that suit your convenience. And you work 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. That's like a doctor on call.

You are given a task to be performed in say 5 days. You could sleep for 4 days and crack it on the 5th. Or you could work all 5 days. Boy, it's your choice. I am not suggesting that this is the wisest way to work, but that's the reality. The arrival of the mobile and the Internet has meant the death of privacy. Today, career comes first. Everything else, the family included, is second. The pressure to succeed is immense. Little wonder that there are early burn outs, strained relationships and greater career crisis. But if you want to succeed you need to play the game by the new rules of the game.

## **Rule 3: Grey Hairs vs. Grey Cells**

### ***Age no bar***

Ask your grandparents and they will tell you that you needed to be 50 plus to be a CEO. Look at any of the public sector organizations and you will see that. Also many a private sector player follows that

rule. There was a time when ambitious youngsters colored their hair a shade white (yes white, not black) to look more mature when they were seeking higher jobs. Today things are changing. At 30 something you can head a function, at 40 something you can become a CEO; at 50 plus you should definitely be the head of a global organization. The days when promotions were based on seniority, yes-sir syndrome and age zones are gone. Today, they are merit-based, there is greater objectivity in appraisal; what companies look for is a transferable skill set. You can ask why you are being rated lower and there is healthy competition.

#### **Rule 4: Hard Skills vs. Soft Skills**

##### ***Beyond knowledge***

Ten or so years ago, you could get to climb the corporate ladder if you were strong in your subject, smart and current in your area of work. Hard skill (a.k.a. knowledge) was important. Like, if you knew the income tax law inside out, including judgments and dissents; if you knew how to deal with the officers in the department; and if you generally had a way with people, you could become the big boss of taxation in office. Like, if you knew corporate and other laws cover to cover and if you were on first name terms with the officers in the departments you could become the big boss of secretarial practice.

Even today knowledge is important; but knowledge alone won't do. Today, it is not enough to have an educational qualification. You must be skilled to do what the job calls for you to do. Remember, everything does not get taught in colleges, B-Schools and chartered accountancy. Most things are learnt at workplace. Also, today you need to have the ability to carry people along with you. And that calls for people skills. Your ability to communicate, get along, be a team player, contribute as a team member, lead

small groups, generate and take through ideas, motivate others are all crucial. These are what are referred to as soft skills. The irony is that you will have to work with, lead or report to folks who might not measure up to you, IQ-wise. But you have to get along with the available talent for the world is made up of all kinds of people. Remember, great effort was never achieved by outstanding individuals but by ordinary mortals who went on to do extraordinary things. Today, like never before, soft skills are far more important than hard skills.

### **Rule 5: Loyalty vs. Job Hopping**

#### ***Who is the boss?***

Old timers will tell you that they thought many a time before taking up their first jobs. They swore by the Japanese philosophy, “One employer for life”. Ask your grand dad and he is likely to say that he didn’t work in more than 3 companies all his life. Why even your dad is likely to say much the same thing. Those days, if you switched jobs you were thought to be disloyal. And they said, “Hey he is a rolling stone”. The insinuation: “a rolling stone gathers no mass.”

Today, the scene is different. Today, job hopping is quite common. No one thinks twice before switching jobs. The loyalty is no longer to the company; the loyalty is to the self and to one’s career. Even promoters, successful ones at that, have walked out of their creations. Now, this is not to suggest that you should do a hop, step and jump every other year. It is only to indicate that hopping 3 jobs in 10 years isn’t all that bad. Every hop should give you a better and wider appreciation of organizational working, widen your horizon, improve your skill set and take you closer to your big goal. Hop jobs by all means but hop with a purpose.

**Rule 6: One Time vs. Life Long*****Run boy, run***

If you think that your education ends the moment you qualify from the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) think again. It may have been the norm earlier, but not now.

Once upon a time, the availability of knowledge in the world doubled every 50 years. Later, it started doubling every 15 years. Today, it doubles every 3 years. This means that if for three years on the trot you don't update yourself, you can become hopelessly outdated; like a museum piece. At least a museum piece has an archeological value; but if you are rooted to time, you will not have that luxury. Today, learning is life long. The moment you stop learning your career is over. And often what you have to learn you might not have studied a jot in your classrooms. The name of the game therefore is to learn the art of "learning to learn". You will have to constantly upgrade both your knowledge and your skill sets. You will have to be constantly on the move in the journey of life in order to stay relevant. That will put an enormous pressure on you in your job. But this is a welcome pressure.

**Rule 7: Adam vs. Eve*****It's a woman's world also***

Years ago man ruled the world. No, I am not being chauvinistic. Not many women ventured to be engineers or CAs. They chose the more exciting profession of medicine. Today, a very good number of women are cracking into what were for many years regarded as male bastions – Factory, Police, Civil Service, Banking, Finance, Treasury, Capital Markets and Taxation. They are also populating the corporate world. There is no such thing as a glass ceiling. If you have the knowledge, skill and expertise you can go places.

This creates a stiffer world to work in. You will have woman as your peers, as your boss, as your coach or you may have to mentor them. Whether it will be easy or difficult one cannot say, but they for sure come with a completely different mind set. Consider this sentence. "Woman without her man is nothing". Once upon a time, people, woman included, would have punctuated it as "Woman, without her man, is nothing". Today, people, men included, could punctuate it as "Woman, without her, man is nothing". That's the mindset change.

### **Rule 8: Winner vs. Runner**

#### ***Winner takes all***

At the career market, as in life, success is eulogized; no tears are shed for failures. The world recognizes you, appreciates you, admires you, adores you and fawns on you only as long as you are a success. The moment you slip up, as any human being can, it forgets you. Take this quiz. You know Australia won the 2007 World Cup. Remember who was the runner up? No? Well, that's how the world is. It remembers only winners. "Don't talk of your labor pains; show us the child" is the credo. If you whine you are dismissed as a whiner, not a winner.

I hope to tell you how you could not just stay afloat but swim ahead.