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# A Response to the Generative Paradigm

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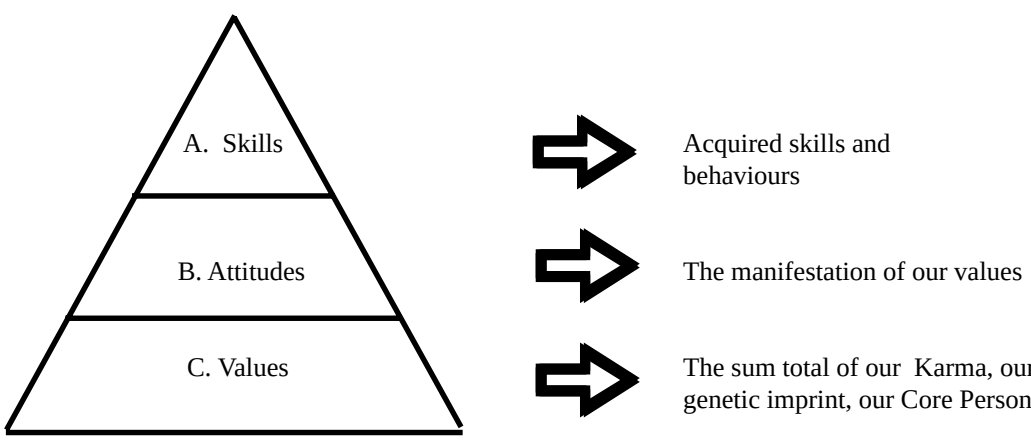
As a relatively recent entrant to the Development Training field (five years, 2500 odd participants), I have travelled a short but interesting and thought provoking road as far as the philosophy and style of Development Training is concerned. Thought provoking because though one started with the classical "Western / algorithmic" model (Development Training as a concept is an import into India), one's roots lay elsewhere — in ancient Indian thought and in a certain, peculiar, Indian way of being. This coming–from–elsewhere background has allowed us to naturally question the linear, "scientific", production process approach. The result is agreement on lots of small things and disagreement on several of the bigger ones.

Before going into specific issues, let's address some basic questions. Do people really change, especially in a four day course? Does "Do–Review–Apply–Do Better" work as "pat" as that? Does learning transfer through the cognitive pipeline? My contention is that if the algorithmic model is followed, whatever change happens, it is mostly in the very superficial "skills" region. This intellectually driven approach can possibly teach you a new set of tools and acquired behaviours to handle life–situations but the veneer is so thin, most people can see through it for what it really is — a method to further your own interests. These acquired behaviours also have a way of vanishing in moments of crisis when we revert back to our basic, true selves.

Is there no hope then? Should we all be honest to ourselves and simply close the shop? Luckily there's a solution, albeit a difficult and harder one. For this a diagrammatic representation of the problem helps (Western methods have their uses!).

**Figure I Training Levels**



In figure I, Level A represents skills and learned behaviours. By definition these are superficial, acquired skill–sets. Examples could be Communication skills, Presentation skills, Team working etc. In training, it is relatively easy to impart these skills. But unless these skills have their roots at a deeper, attitudinal level, they would appear affected and fake. For example we all know good communication requires focused listening. This is not possible unless there is a deeper, natural willingness to respect others. If the respect is there, the skill comes naturally. If it isn't, the "skill" is fake and shallow. It is my belief that most algorithmic approaches seldom escape this level.

Levels B and C are closely related. Attitudes are a manifestation of Values. Values in action, as it were. So what makes for a person's values? Psychologists would say they are the genetic imprint, the basic qualities we were born with plus what we absorbed through osmosis in our very early childhood. Values also comprise what can be called our Core Persona. The Indian tradition calls this the sum total of our Karma — of this as well as of our past lives. (Karma needs to be seen as an active accumulation of deeds done rather than as a fatalistic, pre–ordained destiny. Vedanta recognises that 'destiny' is nothing but a consequence of our past actions — taking responsibility for one's actions & suffering the consequences). Thus, Values are directly related to our actions. And here's the window of opportunity for the Trainer — we call it Experiential Learning. As Trainers, we know that experience is a powerful way of touching our values.

I believe that for any genuine impact, training programmes must work at levels B and C. Unfortunately values and attitudes do not lend themselves to the Kolb cycle. In a sense they are impervious to algorithmic methods of stimulation. So, if Level A is superficial and a waste of time, and Levels B and C are unresponsive to training, what can a trainer hope to achieve? A realistic answer perhaps lies in, first of all, a lowering of expectations (a humbling experience for our pedestalled trainer!). Conventional tools simply don't work too well at Levels B and C. Secondly it needs to be recognised that, if one's values need to be touched, can anything short of the spiritual be good enough? In the spiritual sense, trainers would thus need to be accomplished Masters — Gurus — before they are to be able to even attempt this deeper "enlightenment" of their participants.

But our situation, in Corporate Training especially, is different from this classical, spiritual construct. Our "seekers" do not come to us out of a burning desire for enlightenment. They are simply nominated by their employers. In fact, sometimes they may have come even against their wishes! The other key difference lies in the capability of the trainer. We are simply not competent, we are not Zen masters! So what do we do?

I believe that if a training programme can create moments of insight when participants get a chance to really "look" at themselves, it has served its purpose. These insight moments act as the spark, which, if nurtured, can then possibly result in lasting change. The other important way in which a programme can act is by making a participant comfortable with who they are, with their own B and C Levels. This comfort, this ability to look peaceably at oneself, is the golden moment that a Development Training course should be proud of being able to achieve.

How is this "outcome" to be achieved? Since Values cannot be '"taught", the trainer simply has to be rather than to say. We have to be true to ourselves, freed from our egos, and truly compassionate. Easier said than done; but whoever said that we're in an easy business? The courses we conduct must allow for aided and unaided reflection — using Pranayama and meditation techniques if

necessary. Perhaps we need to look at the other methods as well — the parable, the well–told story, the reflective question, the creation of an atmosphere of quietude (Martin Ringer calls this the safe container) where people can simply be. These, interspersed with our trusty, battle–proven activities — whether it is adrenaline buzzing rock climbing or a high ropes element, or a team intensive spiders web — each trainer has several up his/her sleeve — can create the right action–reflection balance wherein insight moments are often born.

Since this approach is participant–centric and open–ended (most of our courses are conceived in a fairly detailed minute to minute schedule but end up quite different!) outcomes are often not predictable and certainly not uniform across all participants. Each person takes away according to his readiness and ability to absorb. Some find the breathing and meditation sessions absorbing while for some the most rewarding and moving moment of the course could simply be the night astronomy session.

Indian thought recognises that though the ultimate spiritual goal is one, there are many ways to reach it depending on one's proclivities. For the simple rural folk there's Bhakti Marg or the path of devotion, for the intellectually inclined there's Gyan Marg or the path of knowledge, for those who have the will there's Dhyan Marg or the path of meditation and so on. In a broad sense the training that we conduct is a path of its own but within the design itself different people will always have different takeouts.

The earliest Development Training model that Indians know of was codified by the sage Patanjali in 600 BC This postulates that there are eight stages to a person's development — Forbearance, Self–discipline, Yoga asanas, Pranayama or the expansion of vital energy through breath control and Restraint or the withdrawal of the senses. This is followed by Dharana or the ability to contemplate inner space, Dhyana — which is a continuous state of dharana. Finally there's Samadhi where personal identity is merged with the Godhead (the translations do not do justice to the concepts, each of which probably merits an article for itself).

Patanjali actually lays out the road map for the full personal development process. Contrast this with algorithmic approaches that work merely towards "measurable, bottom–line" outcomes and you know how unfulfilling and unambitious conventional training models can be.

Even without Patanjali's wisdom, we are fortunate to have in our hands a tool as powerful as this. It is our responsibility to keep a sensitive hand on the helm, to be conscious that this is no ordinary factory that we're running. Ours is an important milestone in the spiritual quest, a place for insight, inspiration and joy, a spark that could be the most significant moment of people's lives. Let's remember that.

**Atul Mathur** founded and directs Outbound foundation, an outdoor development training organisation in Panchgani, India. Outbound provides outdoor training programmes to corporate and school clients. Prior to this Atul worked in the corporate sector in Mumbai. Atul is an outdoor enthusiast and an amateur naturalist with an interest in the local knowledge held by the villagers in his area. E–Mail: outbound@vsnl.net