

SHIFTING PARADIGMS

How ready are we for the demands of the 21st Century? Creative transformation can help effect a breakthrough to a new order.

Creative thinking is needed at all levels of society and in all areas of life – at home, in school and at work. Specifically, creative thinking helps us become more efficient and to come up with more effective ways of doing the things we often do.

Edward de Bono, guru of lateral thinking and general advocate of creativity, made the following observation in an interview with *Management Times* (10 September 1996). “I think the way we use knowledge is going to be just as important as collecting more knowledge. Just having the information itself does not create value. It is how we use that information that creates value; and that needs creativity”.

How do employees at work create value with the knowledge and information that they have access to? During an economic recession, for instance, companies often resort to retrenching their employees. Are there other options that could be explored as companies proceed with streamlining and downsizing in order to stay in business? Perhaps, the employees themselves could work out ingenious schemes that will enable them to stay on the payroll while contributing to the survival and growth of the company. This will result in a win-win situation for both parties.

Creative individuals do not only have knowledge and information. They also tend to possess certain qualities that enable them to bring a fresh perspective to old problems. Creativity flourishes in freedom. The imagination is then free to move unfettered in the course of learning, working and living. What then are some of the forces that can stifle the creative spirit? What happens to a child in the process of growing up? What happens to his spontaneity as he is pressured to conform to the norms of society?

As a child grows older, his spontaneity is curbed by the golden rules of “good behaviour”. A child who speaks his mind is often considered rude. And who creates a play environment of a magical wonderland visible only to him, is viewed as having created a mess in the living room. The emphasis is on keeping up appearances and a sense of outward order.

Society and its norms take priority over all other matters. Social conditioning and culture prepare individuals to fit in, to be accepted by one and all as “normal”. Can we allow our children to tread an unknown path and carve a niche for themselves? Are we ready to encourage innovation in our own homes before we start pointing fingers at the system and the teachers who may have little choice but to uphold it?

Arus Saujana has come up with a collaborative learning concept for child care centres. Project Manager, Habib Imbichi, was quoted as saying, “The creative thinking aroused through stimulating play will lay the foundation for a lifetime of inventive problem-solving. Playing is a natural need in a child.... it enables a child to use all his senses to study things around him – to explore, create, develop and demolish”. Understanding the potential of children and giving them the respect that they deserve as individuals will allow them the freedom to develop creative ability and to apply it to their lives.