

Spearheading Developmental Culture- A Case Study

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Vinod is in a pensive mood as he looked at the sky through the glass window of his office at twelfth floor of Rajani Chambers located in the heart of the city. He was so worried about his organization which he nurtured from idea to inception. In this perturbed state of mind, memories of the struggle and success of the past crept in. Vinod happened to be the CMD of Green Field Group of Companies- an agro based enterprise whose meteoric rise created sensation in industry. Green Field was Vinod's dream, which he realized by sheer perseverance and tenacity. Vinod, a student of chemistry, started his career as a trainee pharmacist in an all India pharmaceutical company, always wanted to become an entrepreneur with difference. In his late thirties, inspired by one of his college professors about the business prospect of utilizing waste land, he chalked out the blue print of Green Field and at the age of forty two, he left his job and devoted himself wholeheartedly to achieve his goal. Coincidentally, at that point of time, the Government of Dakshinanchal*- the state to which Vinod belonged showed concern about waste land management. The wastelands of Dakshinanchal, mostly confined to 6 backward districts shared about 70% of the reported total wastelands of the state. The major constraints identified with these wastelands include-

(i) Undulating Topography.

(ii) Shallow Depth Of Surface Soil.

(iii) Acid lateritic infertile/fragile soil with very low organic matter, low Cation Exchange Capacity (CEO), specially available fraction of P, Ca, Mg, Zn etc. and abnormally high concentration of Fe, Mn and Al in soil, low water holding capacity of soil etc.

(iv) Socio-economically marginal status of the land owners and

(v) cost intensive unaffordable investment of the reclamation process involved in crop production.

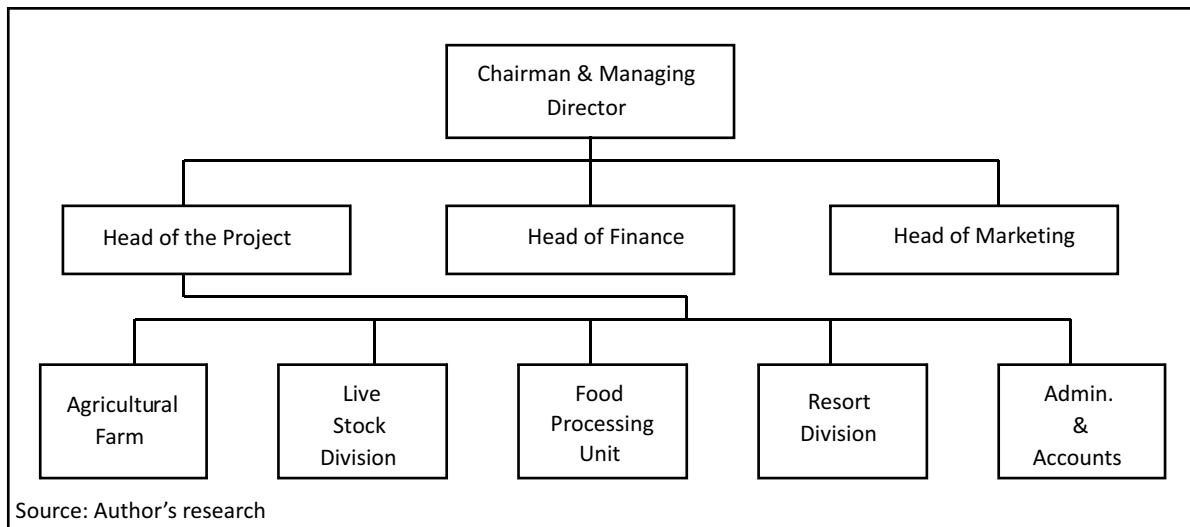
Vinod, under the guidance of one of the most reputed technical institutions in India made a plan for scientific reclamation and thereafter, selected an appropriate agro-forestry cropping schedule to use such land effectively for an integrated farming system involving an intensive agro-horticultural inter/sequence cropping with an elaborate provision of post harvest processing, dairy, poultry, nursery raising etc. on a commercial scale. Eco-tourism was also planned by provisioning of cottages in the aforesaid project premises. One of the leading Agricultural Universities of the state also lent support to Vinod's project. Later, both the organizations formally entered into collaboration with Vinod's project. Vinod received reasonable support from the State Government in terms of procurement of land and other assistance. 300 acres of waste land was identified for his project located at the tribal area of Jhumgarh, a remote place in Chhatterpur, one of the most backward districts of the state of Dakshinanchal. The technical experts from the aforesaid institutions inspected and approved the land for the project. In this process, Green Field Nature Makers Public Limited was formed under the leadership of Vinod at the capital city of the State of Dakshinanchal in the year 1998 with the prospective massive agro forestry project at Jhumgarh, making an endeavor for efficient use of waste land through appropriate Agro-forestry and alternate innovative cropping technology. Vinod arranged the required capital for the initiation of the project through bank loan and other sources. The land in question was purchased by installments. Vinod left the city and stayed on the project field for months. He used to personally supervise the agricultural labours, monitor the cultivation and other allied activities. He directly interacted with local tribal workers who were quite sincere and laborious with their usual limitations. Within a year of commencement, Vinod's project was a great success - it yielded crops and vegetables of high quality, prompting Vinod to diversify into various kinds of fruit cultivation including seasonal and permanent. Gradually, Horticulture, Nursery, Fishery, Poultry, and other divisions were established, all of which became an integral part of the Green Field Group. Inspired by the superior

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quality of fruits and vegetables that his farm produced, Vinod commissioned Green Field Food Products Ltd., which in due course of time produced export quality of processed food products comprising of about 50 items which very soon attracted customer delight and performed very well in domestic & overseas market. Subsequently came up Green Field Pure Pvt. Ltd., which engaged in producing quality dairy & dairy products, pisciculture, livestock feed, catering to the growing needs of the market. Another important company of the Group which was formed shortly after was named Green Field Hospitality Ltd. that engaged in eco-tourism industry comprising of a cluster of beautiful holiday resorts located amidst pollution free lush greenery of Green Field project catering the guests with farm fresh organic palatable dishes and gradually became a centre of tourist attraction. With the increase in volume of business and its diversification, Green Field evolved out the following organizational structure:

Figure 1: Organization Structure Of Green Field



For some specialized functional areas like specific functions of Human Resource Management i.e. Recruitment, Training etc., Legal Affairs, Research and Development, the group did not have full-fledged departments. In such areas, advisors or consultants were engaged to do the needful. They used to work under the general supervision of the MD in coordination with concerned functionaries. So far as Human Resource Management was concerned, two consultants were engaged who used to take care of about 100 employees of the corporate office and about 500 odd employees of the project under the direct monitoring of the MD. Vinod was very meticulous about the recruitment of his staff and technical personnel. The activities of his project required a good number of technical personnel especially in the area of food technology, soil science, veterinary science, bio-technology, instrumentation, accounts, quality control etc. whom he himself recruited and placed successfully at project with reasonable facilities which could be made available in the remote area of the project including free lodging, subsidized food etc.,. Although at this point of time, his basic thrust was on expansion of business with high end technology, Vinod played a very important role in man management of his company. One of the HR consultants used to take care of statutory compliance and disciplinary matters. The other one drafted rules in the area of Working hours/weekly off, Leaves, Compensation etc. as per the statutory provisions and implemented them on an ad hoc basis as the final policy was yet to be formulated. Vinod planned to have a HR department very soon.

In the mean time, Vinod was recognized as a pioneer in the agro based industry of the state and was chosen as a state delegate to an international conference at Malaysia, where he visited projects similar to Green Field. Subsequent to his Malaysian experience, he used to illustrate the business model of his company in the following manner (As given in Figure 2).

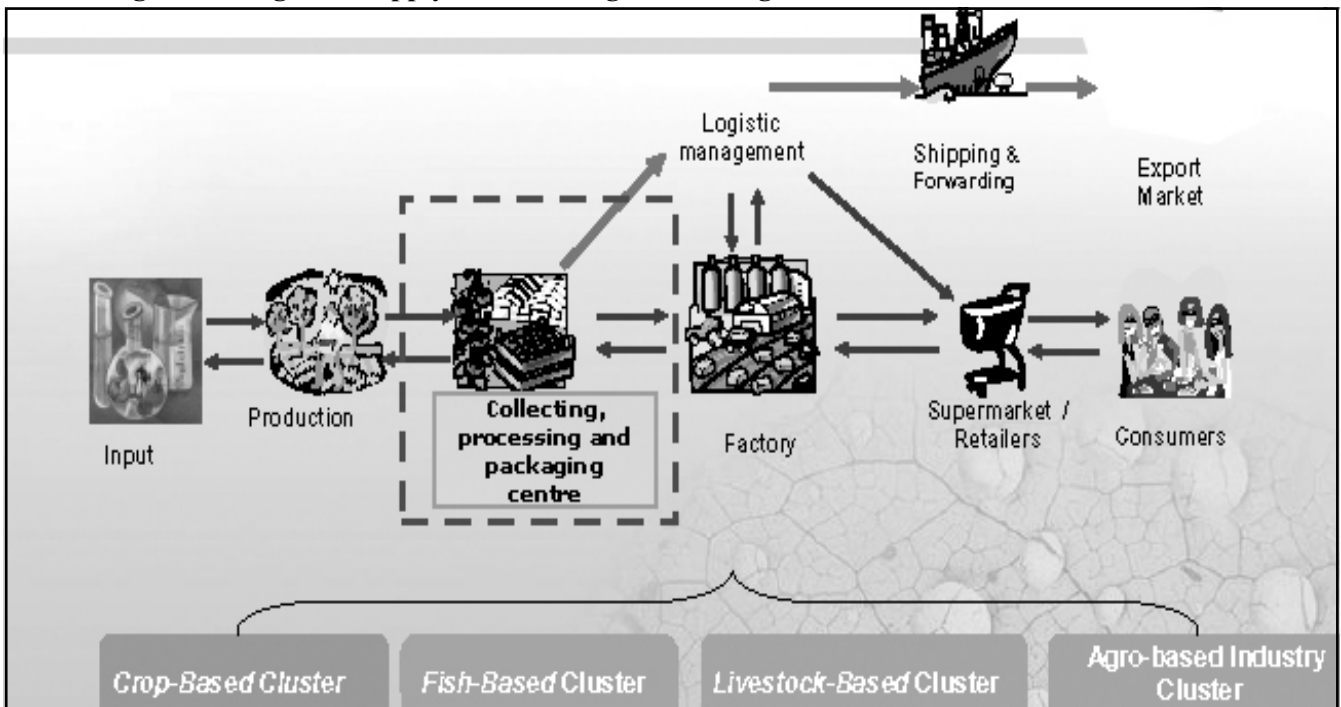
Every thing was moving in the right direction but suddenly, two months back, Vinod was intimated about a demonstration by local workers at a project site in connection with enhancement of wages. Vinod did not pay much attention. The matter was sorted out locally by the incharge of the project and administrative officials. But future had a different story in store for Vinod. In the following week, Vinod came to know that a good number of local tribal workers had refused to join work unless they were given the amenities urged upon by the management. Vinod became

thoughtful because this incident seriously hampered the production and logistic process. As he was busy in business meetings in the city, he directed one of the senior officers of the corporate office to visit the project and sort out the issue which yielded no significant result. One Sunday morning when he was enjoying TV at his city residence, he got a telephone call from the factory manager of the project.

The factory manager informed him in a shaken voice, “*Sir, things are beyond control, they have locked us in the factory. They want to talk to you personally.*”

Vinod immediately called up the in charge of administration and came to know he was also gharawed. He spent the entire day restlessly making attempts to contact the project officials, even the leaders of agitating workers, but all his efforts went in vain. Next day early in the morning, Vinod started for the project site by car, reaching there by afternoon. Till that time, all the technical and administrative personnel were forcefully confined by the tribal workers without food and water. Immediately, Vinod sat in a meeting with the leaders of agitating workers and patiently listened to their demands and assured them that he would try to fulfill them as far as practicable. Thereupon, they released the project officials who were under confinement. But what surprised Vinod was the change in attitude and behaviour of the local people - they were treating him and the project officials like a cruel oppressors--- the warmth of relationship he had developed with the local people at the initial stage of the project was missing. He had never experienced such stiff opposition and arrogance. During the next four months, there were seven occurrences of similar nature leading to serious disturbances in work processes and in most of the cases, the management had to accommodate workers' demand to a certain extent.

Figure 2: Integrated Supply Chain Management Of Agro Based Business Of Green Field



Source: MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE & AGRO BASED INDUSTRY MALAYSIA; Ninth Malaysia Plan (9MP)

Vinod took a serious view of the working of the project. Although a substantive post for Head of the Project was visualized, till then, the factory manager was the defacto holder of the position. Now, Vinod badly felt the need of a suitable Head of the Project with adequate experience in industrial relations and man management who could spearhead the development of his growing organization by retaining the quality human resource required for transfer of technology to the project and maintenance thereof at the same time and also a person who could integrate the local work force in the activities of the project.

So the search began on all India basis. The person who was found suitable was a gentleman in his early fifties who took voluntary retirement from a reputed Indian multinational as an executive of middle management cadre. Moreover, this gentleman named Sanatan had the experience of initiating and successfully developing the HR system of a food

processing unit in a backward state of India while serving the reputed organization. It seemed he would perfectly fit in to the bill.

Vinod was quite happy with the selection of Sanatan. He offered Sanatan quite a handsome salary, provided him with all possible amenities in the project. At the time of Sanatan's joining the project, Vinod personally introduced him to the staff members and assured Sanatan of all possible cooperation from him and the staff.

Sanatan started off well---systematization of processes, developing coordination, streamlining communication network. It seemed things were gradually coming to shape. For the time being, the pace of production was restored, resistance of the local people lessened. In the mean time, four workers who were the members of the local tribal community were reported against by one of the factory supervisors for dereliction of duty for not complying with the hygiene and quality control norms of the factory. The matter was brought before Sanatan who dealt with the issue procedurally and as per rules which lead to the punishment of the concerned four workers who were temporarily placed under suspension. The next morning, the environment at the project site appeared rather tensed. The workers of the project including factory workers, most of whom belonged to the local tribal community were against the decision of the management and in an agitated mood. Somehow, the work process started. By evening, their grievance took a concrete shape and their representatives wanted to meet Sanatan for immediate reinstatement of the suspended workers. Sanatan gave them a patient hearing and treated them with full dignity but so far the reinstatement of the suspended workers was concerned, he remained rigid in his decision and emphasized on compliance of procedures. Sanatan's continuous emphasis on procedure and formalities made the representatives of tribal workers infuriated and in a frantic manner, they left the meeting threatening him with dire consequences. Sanatan being veteran in the field of IR, faced the situation calmly, and late in the evening intimidated Vinod at the corporate office in the city over phone about the incident and assured Vinod that he need not worry. Vinod, having heard Sanatan, became aware of the situation which was no more new to him, but he did not worry much as Sanatan reassured him strongly.

But unfortunately, the situation turned worse. By night, a large number of the local tribal population of the surrounding villages assembled in front of the project site armed with various weapons, and some of them were in a highly intoxicated state. They asked the security to open the gate which the security personnel refused. After a heated exchange of words, the tribal people broke open the entry gate and rushed to Sanatan's quarter. Sanatan was trying to inform the police but by then, the telephone line was disconnected by the miscreants. The irate mob barged into the quarters of senior officials including Sanatan, ransacked the quarters, physically assaulted them causing severe bodily injury. They also set fire in the factory godown causing huge financial loss. It seemed the incident was the expression of cumulative anger and hatred of the tribal population against the project and its urbanite staff. After the rampage was over and the troublemakers were away, some of the senior officials including Sanatan had to be taken to the nearest sub-divisional hospital for treatment. Sanatan's injuries in skull and hand were very serious; he had to be shifted to the ICU of a city nursing home for further treatment.

After this shocking incident, legal action was taken, police camp was setup at the project site; some arrests were made which rather aggravated the situation. In the mean time, having undergone treatment at the nursing home for about a month, when Sanatan was released from the nursing home, considering his age and other factors, he decided not to resume his service in the project. Very soon, there was mass exodus of urbanite managerial and technical personnel from the company. As this incident was reported by media, Green Field earned stigma for itself in industry and public. Urbanite professionals were scared to join the organization.

For Vinod, it was almost a "Paradise lost" situation. On an urgent basis, Vinod got into damage control. It was not possible for him to see his brain child dying slowly in front of him. He started spending more time at the project site rather than at the corporate office in the city, motivating and inspiring his staff and making every possible effort to create a harmonious work environment. At the same time, he left no stone unturned to find out a person who could take charge of the project because in his absence, the functions at the corporate office were getting adversely affected. He was truly in a horns dilemma.

At this very juncture, while attending a conference in the city, Vinod met Agni -a young officer of Chamber of Commerce ,coincidentally a HR man by training who showed considerable interest in the project. It so happened in quick succession that Vinod met Agni on various occasions thereafter. Vinod was quite impressed with the dynamism, interpersonal skills and understanding of human behaviour of this young man in thirties. Finally, one day, Vinod made an offer to Agni to take charge of the project. Agni was getting a hunch about the offer from the meetings he had with

Vinod, but he did not accept the offer readily, although the offer seemed to be quite challenging to him as a HR professional. He wanted to visit the project site before taking any decision. Vinod readily agreed and took him to the project site at the earliest possible opportunity. At the project site, Agni minutely observed the work environment, took note of important facts, spoke to cross section of people. Having returned to the city, on the basis of his observation, Agni chalked out his strategies for execution and discussed them with Vinod and finally put forward a few conditions to Vinod for his joining the project. Among them the most important were:

1. Autonomy to implement his ideas.
2. Enlisting moral and financial support of Vinod and management in this connection.
3. Agni's reporting authority should be Vinod only; none else would interfere in his work.

Having thought over the conditions for a few days and having had series of discussions with Agni about his plan and strategies for the project, Vinod agreed. After all, for him, undertaking any kind of experimentation for the betterment of his company was acceptable.

One sunny morning, Agni finally reached the project site. For the first three days, he met every single employee of the project and took note of their profile and personal details. At the same time, for about a week, he keenly observed the work process at the project site. He held several meetings with technical staff, managerial staff and consultants, most of whom were from urban background, regarding the issues concerning lack of coordination and cooperation between local work force and them. He also met the leaders and representatives of local work force, listened to them very carefully. Having heard both the parties, he diagnosed the problems which were:

1. For the local work force, the project was a "Technological imposition"; they did not identify their interest with the development of the project. For them, project activities were a kind of technological invasion on their land.
2. The communication gap between the local people and the urbanite staff of the project was arising out of cultural difference. The local tribal workers perceived urbanite managers and technical staff as "privileged outsiders" who were bossing them due to their technical superiority.
3. Lack of trust and cooperation among the workforce resulted in groupism and clique.

Now came the turn to address the aforesaid issues. Agni formed a core committee comprising of enthusiastic and committed persons from all section of employees having adequate representation of local workforce. He convinced them about his strategies and plans for the development of the project. This committee was to function as a nodal point for disseminating symbiotic values among the workforce. Very quickly, few measures were introduced for initiating the process of harmony and cooperation among the personnel of the project. It was made obligatory that every week, there should be at least two meetings where all the personnel of the project, including the local tribal workers- permanent and non permanent should be present and they would freely exchange their views regarding official issues. Uniform with the logo of Green Field was introduced for the personnel of the project. From the sub-staff to head of the project- all the project personnel shall be in uniform during working hours. Agni contacted the local office of Tribal Welfare Department and having used his connection of Chamber of Commerce, he arranged for a training programme on local tribal language for managerial and technical personnel so that they could develop working knowledge to communicate with the local work force. It was also made mandatory for every superior staff including Agni himself to successfully qualify in the aforesaid training programme.

He made it compulsory that twice a week, the lunch which the company provided would be served in a common dining place where all personnel, including Agni himself would participate and the menu would be same for all. A common dining space was constructed on a temporary basis which was made permanent later. A part of the ground of the project (which was used for loading and unloading goods from vehicle) was made ready for project personnel, irrespective of their rank and position, to play various sports in the evening by forming teams comprising of localites and urbanites both.

With initial reluctance and opposition, the aforesaid measures were gradually getting accepted by the project personnel, especially the younger generation cutting across the community line and organizational hierarchy. Slowly, a sense of team spirit started prevailing. People of the project were becoming more interactive, communicative and the sense of alienation among individuals and groups were eroding. Even if superiors' incorrect tribal language, that too in wrong accent made the local tribal workers laugh, but it did developed a sense intimacy and frankness. The workers were smilingly rectifying the errors in pronunciation of their managers and a sense of mutuality ushered in. In the football match or in the dining space, having found the factory manager beside him, the packer initially was perplexed

but a sense fellow feeling did develop.

Within three to four months, there was a marked change in the organizational culture of the project. Agni felt the time was appropriate to consolidate this change. He immediately embarked on the implementation of the long term strategies that he had planned.

Non-availability of medical facilities was one of the biggest problems at the project site and its neighboring areas. The nearest hospital was about 35 kilometers at the sub divisional town. It was quite difficult to avail medical facility during general sickness, what to speak of emergency. A general physician used to visit the project site twice in a week for 2-3 hours, which in fact was of little or no use so far catering the medical need of about 500 employees of the project were concerned. At the same time, setting up a hospital or medical unit at the project was not feasible. Agni contacted a few city based charitable organizations who provided medical care and invited them to the project site. Having visited the project site, the officials of the aforesaid organizations were quite impressed, and very soon they entered into a formal agreement with the company to the effect that every week, a few specialist doctors would visit the project to provide specialized medical care to the project personnel and people of neighboring areas. Incidental expenses in connection with their visit were agreed to be borne by Green Field. With the initiation of this process, for the first time, not only the employees of the project, but also the local tribal people of surrounding villages received specialized medical care within their easy reach, for which earlier they had to rush to the district town or state capital.

At the same time, Agni and members of his core committee invited some NGOs who worked in the field of community development to start working in the tribal villages adjacent to the project. By this time, the core committee members along with the representatives of the local work force visited the villages and prepared a report on the backwardness of the villages. Officials of the NGOs visited the project site very soon. Members of the core committee and local leaders accompanied them to the nearby villages. Officials of the NGO surveyed the villages. Thereafter, a series of meetings took place at the project office where project officials, representatives of local people, and members of civil administration participated to chalk out a strategy for the development of nearby villages. On behalf of the company and the project, with the concurrence of the higher management, Agni assured all possible help and cooperation to the NGOs. Finally, within 3 months of their first visit to the project, two of the NGOs started working in the nearby villages. Later, other organizations also participated in this developmental process. The NGOs worked mainly in the area of Public Health & Sanitation, Family Planning and Literacy.

The tribal culture has its own charm and the tribal people have their own festivals to celebrate. Members of the core committee, having interacted with the people of tribal community, identified the tribal festivals and arranged for patronage of the festivals from the project. When this process was on, one of the active members of the core committee who belonged to the tribal community, met Agni and requested, *“Sir, in the neighboring district, there is a very popular dance and drama group who conducts programmes in our local language. We want to invite the group to the project site to conduct such functions. We also request the company to bear the necessary expenses.”* Agni enquired about the group and ascertained the financial obligations associated with its performance. After he got the relevant information, he gave his consent. He had something else at the back of his mind. The group came to the project site and their performance elated the local audience. Agni, along with core committee members, held a meeting with the director of this cultural group and wanted him to perform a few shows about the mission and vision of the Green Field project and how the project was beneficial for developing the life of the local people. After a few rounds of discussion, the director agreed. For the next few days, the director and his assistants were imparted a thorough understanding of the goals and objectives of the project. In a month or so, the first show of the group was arranged in a local village in the form of a drama, which made a significant impact on the audience. With the success of the show, these kinds of programmes sponsored by the company were held in other adjoining localities. This experimentation helped Green Field a lot in building its image among the local tribal population.

Marketing of household and stationery goods was a big problem. The nearest market was about 20 kilometers from the project site. Therefore, purchase of such commodities for local people as well as the project personnel cost minimum two and half hours time and energy. For mitigating this problem, a cooperative store was founded in the premises of the project site, which was open for the use of the public as well.

Agni, along with the managerial and supervisory staff, reviewed the performance of tribal workforce at ground level and accordingly, a skill inventory was prepared. Those who were found to have requisite skills for the activities of the project were being given initial training at the project site itself and later, were officially sponsored for attending

various training programmes organized by specialized technical bodies for their further development. Implementation of these measures cumulatively had deep rooted effect on organisational life of Green Field. For the tribal workforce, Green Field was no more “outside's” organization; rather, it became very much their “own” organization. This “we” feeling became evident when Green Field football team, comprising of all sections of employees, irrespective of hierarchy and background won runners up trophy at the sub divisional football competition. This culture of cooperation brought in organizational stability and accelerated organizational growth. There was record production in the Green Field agricultural firm. Accordingly, Green Field had to set up its own cold storage for preserving its fruits and vegetables for future use. Green Field food processing unit could successfully fulfill the entire production target. Despite that, the demand for Green Field food products in domestic and overseas market was on rise. Green Field had to take the decision of establishing a second production unit with latest technology. Green Field Resorts received the award of Best Eco Tourism Spot of the Year from Government of the Dakshinanchal. Vinod, having very well realized the importance of Agni's strategy, took all possible measures to transform them into company policy and practice. A permanent body called Project Development Board was constituted comprising of cross section of people to look after the well being and development of local tribal work force of the project. In addition, appropriate policies were adopted. Any urbanite recruited for the project at the time of induction was given adequate exposure of necessary interpersonal and communications skills, local tribal population, their culture and language. HRD departments were set up both in corporate and project offices which worked under the supervision of Agni. Agni was formally promoted as Chief Operating Officer of Green Field Group of Companies with requisite perquisites and benefits attached to the promotion. Finally, the HR man received the due strategic importance.

ANALYSIS OF THE CASE

In a very small span of time, rather in its nascent stage, Green Field secured too big volume of business to manage. In fact, Green Field's human resource system was not organized and adaptive enough to cope with the expansion and complexity of a business process of such a magnitude. Moreover, the founder and the promoters of the organization ab initio emphasized on technology, research and development, rather than giving adequate attention to human aspect of the organization. They should have foreseen that only transfer of technology and its successful implementation would not ensure sustenance of the organization; it requires a conducive human environment as well which was complementary to the technology, especially in case of agro based business of Green Field, which is a labour intensive industry. They failed to realize the impact of the surrounding society and culture of the place (where their production unit was located) on the work process. It was a remote place, far away from urban or metropolitan influence dominated by tribal population whose culture and value system were markedly different. A socio- economic survey of that area and a kind of reconnaissance of the local surrounding must have been undertaken before initiating and expanding business over there. Mere judging the location from the point of view of technology transfer, logistic, availability of land, other natural and physical resources undervaluing the local sentiment was an act of strategic business myopia. The promoters of Green Field were not able to appreciate the reality that culture of a work organization is greatly influenced by the societal culture of that work place. A fundamental notion escaped their mind- that so long a culture, which is congenial for the attainment of organizational goals cannot be built within the existing framework of local societal culture; the organization cannot function effectively. A business organization can not afford to be a closed organization, striving only to achieve its business goals.

After all, organizational culture depends on employee perception. For the employees, organizational culture is the summation of attributes that the organization prefers. In case of Green Field, taking into consideration the location of the unit, the local tribal workers (who were the majority of the work force), and their socio- economic condition, the management should have adopted a people oriented organizational culture from the very day of the inception of the project. Instead, with the grand success of the project, the management adopted an outcome oriented -rather amoral work centric culture which signified selfish orientation of maximizing gain. Naturally, this environment was quite difficult for the local people to accept. In this connection, it is to be kept in mind that the local people were not even clear about the goal and the purpose of the project, nor did they develop any emotional attachment towards the organization.

Even a professionally trained and experienced manager like Sanatan also committed the similar kind of mistake--

instead of taking local people into confidence and bridging the gap between the management and local workers by exercising human relation techniques, he emphasized on formalization and bureaucratization of procedures. Had he tried to understand a bit of psychology of tribal people, he would have realized these people are children of nature, embodiment of freedom and liberty; they could not be formalized forcefully.

Agni, however, could read the situation well and thereby developed appropriate strategies to address the issues. His approach to solve the issue was quite radical. The implementation of the ideas of the core committee headed by him brought in drastic change in the functioning of the organization. With the gradual acceptance of these new ideas, the divide, rather fragmentation, between urbanite and local workers, various employee groups started diminishing. Tribal workers could understand the mission and the purpose of Green Field and in the due course of time, aligned themselves with the goal of the organization successfully. They successfully cooperated with other sections of the workforce to achieve the organizational objective. In this process, under the leadership of Agni Green Field, in true sense of the term, transformed itself into a learning organization which welcomed proactiveness rather than reactiveness. In the case of Green Field, it was very important to link the gap between the local public life and the organization for the interest of the organization itself. Very consciously, as a strategy, Agni utilized the organizational apparatus of Green Field to be instrumental for the development of the local public life of Jhumgarh, which in turn helped Green Field to grow in long term perspective. At the same time, the company set a new standard for corporate social responsibility. On the other hand, this effort ushered in such a developmental climate where HRD was no more confined to a set of micro level mechanism or techniques like performance appraisal and training; rather, it became a process or a general practice.

This manifested a rare kind of enabling culture where employees take initiative on their own, go in for experimentation, innovation and ultimately make things happens-a metamorphosis from Green Field's original secluded closed mechanical culture to a dynamic vibrant organizational culture strong enough to succeed in changing environment.

NOTES

* This case study is based on the author's practical, real life experiences. Names have been changed to protect identity.