



The Indian **EXPRESS**

JOURNALISM OF COURAGE



THE FINANCIAL EXPRESS

www.financialexpress.com

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Is quality cultural?

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Feb 05, 2012

“Religion is the opium of the masses,” said Karl Marx. Had he experienced the political scenario after imperialism and feudalism, he may have said politics is more than opium, it’s anesthesia to make the population sleep. However, nobody can deny that a country’s cultural base is always religion.

I’ve been introspecting about why, collectively, India is not quite quality-centric. In business workshops, I try to project that as a deliverable’s hidden part is its real quality, companies should stretch to score here. But this non-visible quality area gets scant attention from participants. Being at a loss to understand this, let me hazard an analysis with religious roots as QCW (quality customers want) has been this column’s subject these past four weeks. Please take my analysis without prejudice; I respect every individual’s faith.

France, my adopted country, is Catholic dominated. Here God is one and good and bad values well-established. It’s the only credibly anchored religion existing in exactly the same administrative way for 2000 years in the Vatican. Christianity’s doctrines have underlying rational factors that bind Christians in a strong belief system. Catholic rules were so strong that in 1559, refusing to go to church attracted

a 12-pence fine. Religion doesn’t allow killing, yet politics found a way to eliminate enemies. They’d legitimised political death sentence by pulling in a Catholic priest to certify that society is sacrificing its evil side. Before the Church gave freedom of expression in art, literature and science in end-15th century, people weren’t allowed to think, create or write anything beyond God. Using this liberalisation, Western society mesmerised the world with invention after invention. But their value system called “valeur rationelle” is always recognisable. All consciously follow cultural attachment to one God, one principal rational belief system to avoid God’s wrath. If you extrapolate Christianity’s single God and belief factor, you will find it exists in Islam, Buddhism, Judaism. These believers in any country have the same understanding because their known, indoctrinated practices glue them culturally.

In developed countries, not everyone regularly practices religion. But their single minded collective focus in one non-visible God is so strong that everyone can easily strive for one goal. Sex is taboo in Catholicism, allowed only for procreation. A section of Christians revolted against this denial of sex and abortion. But in spite of disruptions and perversions, a religious principle binds believers to their non-visible God, his representative sits in the Vatican. This collective “valeur rationelle” has made Western business practices very strong in the objective of providing QCW.

Coming now to Hindu-dominated India, we find hundreds of Gods and Goddesses. Hinduism is a way of life. There's no compulsion from religious dogma. Every individual's inclination towards God can differ by choice. This miscellany along with all other religions secular India accepts, makes ours a vast multiplicity of people requiring no sanction from anyone. So by religion itself we are democratic. Appreciation of this liberty is the birth of Hare Krishna movement and hippies in the 1960s when Western Christians sought sanctuary from religious domination.

Only in this open-minded milieu of India can you nurture flexibility to drive a \$70 billion global business. That's the strength of India's IT industry which unleashes thousands of engineers to service MNC companies in every corner of the globe. Free-thinking and tolerance have unparalleled value, however, collective discipline becomes a challenge in this egalitarian culture. Industrial business systems require quality delivery without deviation and quality customers want requires collective focus. This is where different people having different interpretations snowballs into a huge concern. India has no QCW standard. Is Hinduism's diversity making it more of a challenge to achieve QCW than anywhere else? My research reveals that Hinduism's go-as-you-like system is subliminally ingrained in majority of India's population. So collectively, one standard quality has not been easy to gain.

It's normal for every company in India to have employees of different religions and beliefs. But as company culture, how do you align them to a single-minded quality drive? In the globalised world where the scale of product and service duplication is the big business game, there's now a clash of understanding "valeur rationelle"

or non-visible quality customers want. The only way to address QCW in India is for every industry to define its quality parameters by filtering the QCW in that industry. An internal process has to then stringently drive these filtered points as a single company culture. After all, what's QCW but the straight route to customer repeat purchase? Living in the West has disciplined me to ferret out non-visible factors that strengthen quality. My urge is to always fortify the working process root of every product or service by incorporating QCW. Businesses in India, both domestic and foreign, require huge QCW discipline. Cultural flexibility was thumbs up for the IT industry; QCW is the sure-fire win for each and every company's growth. Indian companies will succeed in competitive global markets only when employees mandatorily drive each company's identified QCW parameters.

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