

Organizational Development and *Alignment*

The Tensegrity Mandala Framework



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Business Books

Organizational Development and Alignment

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www.sagepublications.com

Los Angeles • London • New Delhi • Singapore • Washington DC

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First published in 2013 by



SAGE Response

B1/I-1 Mohan Cooperative Industrial Area
Mathura Road, New Delhi 110 044, India

SAGE Publications Inc

2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320, USA

SAGE Publications Ltd

1 Oliver's Yard, 55 City Road
London EC1Y 1SP, United Kingdom

SAGE Publications Asia-Pacific Pte Ltd

33 Pekin Street
#02-01 Far East Square
Singapore 048763

Published by Vivek Mehra for SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd, typeset in 11/13 pt Baskerville by Diligent Typesetter, Delhi, and printed at Saurabh Printers Pvt Ltd.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Organizational development and alignment: the Tensegrity mandala framework/Gagandeep Singh, Raghu Ananthanarayanan.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Organizational behavior. 2. Industrial sociology. 3. Industrial organization. I. Singh, Gagandeep, 1970– II. Ananthanarayanan, Raghu.

HD58.7.O73664

302.3'5—dc23

2013

2013015496

ISBN: 978-81-321-1060-6 (HB)

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Advance Praise

I think the TAO team has cracked the code on organization design. Our frequent discussions with them using the Tensegrity Mandala has really helped me and my leadership team design the right role for each leader of the company which in turn has led to the right organization design across the company. This framework has really helped us align strategy and define key measures to drive the right growth drivers toward our vision.

—**Arjun Handa**

Managing Director and CEO,
Claris Lifesciences Ltd., Ahmedabad, India

A rich thought-provoking book that takes the reader on intellectual and practical tracks simultaneously. Singh and Ananthanarayanan have captured essence of their rich organizational design experience into this book and I recommend it highly!

Organizational design is a rich and complex topic that Singh and Ananthanarayanan have done a masterful job of disseminating to both academics and practitioners—simultaneously.

An excellent blend of Western and Indian thought and practice!

—**Prasad Kaipa**

Co-author of *From Smart to Wise:
Acting and Leading with Wisdom*,
and CEO, Advisor, and Coach,
Silicon Valley, USA

The Tensegrity model proposed by Raghu and his team is a very innovative and interesting way of understanding organizations. It provides deep insights into an organization's current processes and is a good lens through which to look at organizational redesign.

—**S. Ramadorai**

Vice Chairman, Tata Consultancy Services,
Mumbai, India

Organizational Development and Alignment

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Foreword

In my professional journey that began in the early 1970s, a large part of my research, teaching, dialogue, and consulting with organizations, and with leaders, both men and women, has been on the theme of managerial role-taking, performance, and organization effectiveness.

It has been a privilege to have witnessed many waves of transformation that have impacted the Indian and global workplace, and to have been gifted with stories and narratives of young managers, business leaders, entrepreneurs, and change agents who have invested considerable energies in changing perceptions of how the job, role, task, and performance are to be held.

From the very beginning, as I started teaching at IIM Ahmedabad, I have pursued an intellectual quest to search, identify, and define theory, management practice, organizational models, and an underlying philosophy that could integrate the richness of Indian culture, and yet internalize nuggets of Western management thought. In my work with family owned organizations as well as multinationals, I have seen leaders and managers struggle as they attempt to cohold legacies of Indian businesses, rituals, and perspectives that have their own richness, with Western management approaches and tools.

Much of this struggle could only be gleaned at what got manifested in individual role-taking within a more often than not prescribed Western organization structure. Hierarchies, authority, and job-positions looked harmless boxes on paper, but the conflicts and dilemmas that were raised in their deployment carried this paradox of Indian thought versus Western management tools and approaches. A number of factors such as caste and class identities made this transition from the agrarian mindset to the industrial paradigm difficult and challenging.

While I have pursued this quest with considerable success in the past, it has been my journey in institutions such as Indian Society for Individual and Social Development (ISISD) and in having cofounded the Sumedhas Academy for Human Context, where I have found many co-travelers who bring their own perspectives, knowledge, and experience. Sumedhas Academy for Human Context and its organizational development (OD) wing—Indian Academy for Organizational Development—has been an institutional space that has enlivened and replenished a collective search for an organizational dharma that is meaningful for the individual as well as the organization.

It is at ISISD where I first met Raghu Ananthanarayanan and experienced the sheer intensity of his zeal and energies to integrate yoga, engineering and systems thinking, Indian thought, and OD. Later as we cofounded Sumedhas Academy for Human Context along with other key practitioners of OD, including Sushanta Banerjee, Shyamol Gupta, and Ashok Malhotra, many others joined us in this quest including Gagandeep whom I had taught in IIM. Gagandeep, in recent years, has also been coanchoring teaching assignments with me at Foundation for Liberal and Management Education (FLAME).

It is with a certain pride and well-being that the enquiry in generating indigenous thought, indigenous models, and constructs that are relevant for global organizations, which Pulin Garg and many others had initiated and compelled me to look at in my life journey, has been picked up and venerated by the next generation of thinkers and practitioners in India. I have always believed that writing and publishing are the only ways in which we can dignify the legacies that we have been graced with over the centuries. I am happy to note that Raghu and Gagandeep have joined us in this endeavor.

Raghu and Gagandeep have chosen to bring in an original contribution to organization design and alignment based on consulting experiences across many organizations in the realm of transformation and managing change. They have integrated many other aspects of their learning from yoga, process work, *vaastu*, and systems thinking into their consulting practice in TAO and in designing the Tensegrity Mandala.

As I write this foreword for this Tensegrity Mandala book, one of the resonating themes has been the focus on looking at organizations as a system of tensions and dilemmas, and how

this inherent tension is experienced through the energy of the role or a set of roles. The Tensegrity Mandala offers a canvas for the members of the organization to define their own role-taking, to give meanings to one's own role interface, and own-up what is disowned in the modern organization through processes of dialogue and negotiations.

As opposed to looking at organization design through hierarchical structures, the authors offer newer alternatives that enable the modern Indian manager and leader to dignify and grace the social and primary systems he or she comes from, and to break away from the dysfunctional residues that belong to the agrarian and industrial paradigms.

The concept of Tensegrity has been innovatively deployed to create a systemic lens of looking at the organization, which does away with notions of hierarchy. Integrating this concept with "Mandala," the authors have created a structure as well as a language that capture most of the dilemmas of business and leaders, and provide a unique perspective toward maintaining an organizational equilibrium that sustains both growth and survival. The three invisible tensions of Valuing, Energizing, and Serving capture the source as well as the deployment of human energy, and complements the analysis of the other three—strategizing, investing, and improving.

In "Crossroads of Culture," Pulin and I had spoken of the emotive maps from the agrarian ethos, and how these challenged and conflicted with cognitive maps of the industrial (European) ethos, and explored newer alternatives beyond the two ethos and the consequent Indian anachronism. I feel that the authors have chosen to work with one such alternative—looking at the world of organizations and systems with a post-industrial frame, a frame that embellishes the nature of dilemmas and *dharmasankatas*¹ of the brave new world that engage the individual around her or his role-taking.

The 12 nodal roles and the five leadership roles that hold the six tensions of the Tensegrity Mandala in an equilibrium, have

¹ A threshold quite akin to a dilemma, where one experiences a double bind between two or more choices—each of these choices is founded on a critical value or dharma, and yet these choices faced by the actor become contrary to each other.

been very succinctly and lucidly presented by the authors—for me these 17 roles build a meta-script for the organization as it prepares for change and transformation. Absence or under-deployment of any of these roles within the organization space renders the organization stressed and adds to the systemic atrophy. I found the role-definitions as introduced by the authors very pragmatic and action centric. I am also aware that the authors have worked with many organizations on role-taking and role effectiveness.

I have been researching on and writing about the phenomena of human energy within the organization including having identified the nature of frozen energies that create resistance within—energies that lay unharnessed and disowned. What resonates in this book has been an explanation and deconstruction of invisible waste and the phenomena of anomie and alienation that permeates and impacts energy today. I agree with the authors' speculation that too much time and energy are devoted on the visible realities and visible waste, leading to a preoccupation with organizational efficiencies, rather than with institutional well-being.

The measurement of each tension in terms of its strength enables the construction and mapping of the Tensegrity Mandala. This allows for stakeholders within the organization to dialogue on the nature of the equilibrium desired as well as to take stock of where the energies and time of management are being applied. In many ways, convergence or lack of it across the six tensions becomes a useful trigger for real dialogue. I found the authors' perspectives on mapping the Mandala simple, deployable, and pragmatic. The fact that the Mandala can get created through collective dialogue alone is itself a significant step in owning the whole system by management and leadership.

In 1989, Pulin Garg, Vipin Garg, and I had edited a book on *Organization Identity, Change, and Adaptation*, where we had argued that the theme of Organization Identity was extremely critical in how the organization unfolds, grows, adapts, and survives the uncertainty and chaos of today. More than two decades later, the authors have chosen to carry on working with the concept of Organization Identity.

While engaging with the theme of identity, Gagandeep and Raghu have chosen to work on a very significant construct—that of the “Shadow” in this book—and offered a unique way of

explaining and deconstructing the “Shadow”. In this endeavor, the authors have offered a continuity of exploring the impact of identity on strategy and organizational growth of both Indian and multinational organizations.

The “Shadow” as a construct has been very critical for any transformation agenda undertaken—it invites the stakeholders within the organization, as well as OD practitioners to pause and reflect upon the fallacies of engaging with one or two facets of organizational existence, and the consequent entropy that impacts it in the name of the “Shadow.” Every living system needs to engage with the “Shadow,” and to build a dialogue with it, so as to morph into the next form. The Tensegrity Mandala offers insights into delving deeper and in explicating the “Shadow” by capturing multiple pluralistic realities, including ones that are edited in the legitimized narratives as depicted in its marketing literature or in its policy documents.

Gagandeep and Raghu have referred to the rich work done by Ashok Malhotra on existential universes’ framework, and have integrated organization culture as mapped by the framework across the six tensions. This allows for a deeper exploration of the six tensions—visible and tacit—and invites the stakeholders within to delve into the nature of role-taking, and the context of the dilemmas or *dharamsankatas* envisaged. I feel encouraged that the groundbreaking work of several peers such as Ashok and others in Sumedhas, in the form of indigenous frames and models, is being published and recognized by wider audiences.

Lastly, I would like to comment on the form of this work.

This Tensegrity Mandala book is quite unique, as it manages to retain an application or a practice orientation to OD and managing change. I believe that this book would be a very useful resource in the diagnosis of the organization and in intervention designs around the themes of alignment, role-effectiveness, coaching, and OD.

My experiences of working with both Gagandeep and Raghu have only highlighted their continual emphases on the action realities, implementation challenges, and deployment pragmatics, without sacrificing academic rigor and institutional values.

By designing this work as a book, the authors have chosen to offer their experiences and insights in the form of a manual for

the OD practitioner, the change agent and, most importantly, the leader of the organization when it comes to organization design and transformation.

Section B of the book comes across as a valuable teaching tool. I found this section comprehensive in its scope of applications, mirroring a similar degree of rigor and research as Section A.

Indira J. Parikh

Founder President,

FLAME, Pune

Gagandeep and Rashmi have referred to the rich work done by Ashok Mahanta on existential universes, framework, and have integrated organization culture as mapped by the framework across the six tensions. This allows for a deeper exploration of the six tensions—visible and tacit—and invites the stakeholders within to delve into the nature of role-taking and the context of the dilemmas or *dwandwas* envisaged. I feel encouraged that the groundbreaking work of several poets such as Ashok and others in *Sumudras*, in the form of indigenous frames and models, is being published and recognized by wider audiences.

Lastly, I would like to comment on the form of this work. This *Tensionary Mandala* book is quite unique, as it manages to retain an application or a practice orientation to OD and managing change. I believe that this book would be a very useful resource in the diagnosis of the organization and in intervention designs around the themes of alignment, role-effectiveness, coaching and OD.

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Preface

This book takes a close hard look at Organization Design and Alignment.

We asked ourselves why we should write about Organization Design and Alignment amidst times when managers all across the world are facing unnerving dilemmas and painful transitions, as they struggle to respond to the global downturn, under a looming threat of a possible collapse of western capitalism.

We believe that some of these dilemmas and challenges that we confront today, such as managing polarities including ethics versus expediency, invest versus harvest, protect versus eject, local versus global, community welfare versus financial stakeholders' wealth maximization, were seeded a long time ago in the way organizations were designed.

Some of the above-mentioned challenges have been an outcome, perhaps a necessary consequence of the unquestioned axioms and inherent assumptions of organization design and cultures laid down decades ago. These axioms and assumptions have only perpetuated inefficiencies and greed that lay hidden under the initial tide of positive cash flows and profitability as organizations scaled up in size and complexity.

If we refer to traditional organization design held in the mind of the practicing manager, we often come across a simplistic yet dynamic image of an interplay of pyramidal *structures* that lays down complex hierarchies and associated privileges, management control *systems*, and conformist *cultures* that sustain followership, dependencies, and mediocrity.

If we wish to revive and resurrect the organization for the 21st century, we would need to examine and explore the legacies of organization design, and to challenge the underlying philosophies, and emerge with a new way of looking at organizations. The

Tensegrity Mandala book presents such a perspective in visualizing, understanding, and designing the modern organization today.

The model seeks to improve individual and organizational responsiveness to a complex and dynamic environment in the short term as well as to create a human institution in the medium to long term.

The Tensegrity Mandala as a conceptual framework and as an organizational model has evolved with our consulting experience with organizations in India in the realm of alignment and transformation. In the past two decades, we have continually questioned, challenged, and struggled along with organizations in their valiant attempt to combat a potent but unique mind-set—an amalgam of agrarian and feudal orientations integrated with mechanistic and bureaucratic organizational theories and philosophy.

We discovered that our ideas, mental models, and constructs were getting restricted and impeded by our language. Our language was influenced by many Western organization theories and models that were not very useful to explore the organizational context in a new postmodern world—where the plurality, diversity, indeterminacy, and fragmentation only created multiple realities.

Not surprisingly, many of these models and theories in their application would also reinforce and enhance certain organizational perspectives that mirror the Indian socio cultural preoccupation with hierarchy, control, class, and ensuing power apparatus. This led to the proverbial chicken and egg debate, between the organization and the larger universe it was ensconced in, which generated a lot of heat, but found no resolution.

In our search for new language and models, we serendipitously discovered many insights and pioneering ideas of Buckminster Fuller (Synergetics), Stafford Beer, Anthony Judge, and Prasad Kaipa ("Application of Pyramid Building in Organizations: Aligning Strategy, Process and People in Organizations" by Prasad Kaipa, Chris Newham, and Russ Volckmann).

We also discovered that the Tripura Rahasyam speaks about the origin of all manifestation as depicted through the *tetrahedron*—a Tensegrity structure, comprising Chit Shakti (Consciousness), Iccha Shakti (the energy of intent), Kriya Shakti (the energy of action), and Gnyaana Shakti (the energy of knowledge). These perspectives energized us further in our attempt to discover organizations and their manifold realities through a comprehensive model.

The last three decades in India have witnessed organizations evolving from a production-centric existence toward becoming knowledge organizations. This transition has neither been painless, nor has it impacted organizations uniformly—for example, many visible systems such as lean management or Enterprise resource planning (ERP) have been implanted without preparing the organization in terms of culture and its tacit systems. The Tensegrity Mandala has been influenced by these shifts and transitions; the latter have been studied and challenged in our Organizational Maturity Model framework.

This book introduces an action-researched model that builds on the concept of Tensegrity. We have integrated Tensegrity with our understanding of organizational socio-psychology, and our underlying philosophy that has its roots in Indian thought. However, we would like to emphasize that its application is not restricted to Indian or Oriental geographies, but for any organization across the globe.

While its evolution began as an endeavor to enable the management in diagnosing and understanding the organization better, we discovered that the Tensegrity Mandala empowers the organization of today toward reflexivity and transformation. It serves as a blueprint for growth, organization development, dialogue, and institutionalizing leadership.

This book would also explore critical questions such as:

- 1) How is the “Role-based Tensegrity Mandala” model different from other organizational perspectives? How do we define a “Role” and link it with individual identity as well as with organization effectiveness?
- 2) What are the various applications of the Tensegrity Mandala model? What has been our experience? How can this consulting experience be productized in terms of application tools?

The Book Design

With the intent of creating a book that enables the reader to reflect, to question, and to put his or her insights as he or she traverses the book, we have brought in the following building blocks:

- 1) **Bedtime Stories:** A series of anecdotal narratives across chapters that trigger questions, provoke amusement and

intrigue, and point to key dilemmas encountered by our clients as well as by us as we look at organization design and alignment.

2) **Case Studies:** Longer narratives that are summarized on the basis of our consulting interventions, where we have used the Tensegrity Mandala frame.

3) **Wicked Problem Questions:** Each of the chapters in this book would culminate into key “wicked problem questions” that invite the reader to puzzle over and make notes for oneself. Many of these questions have no easy answers or at least no perfect and optimal solutions, but need to have a stance taken by the leader.

4) **Doodle Spaces:** Designed across this book are spaces for the reader to put his or her notes down, draw frames and figures, and break the monotony of sheer reading.

This book is structured around two key sections—A and B.

Section A prepares the reader to understand the construct, the theoretical underpinnings, and the nature of assumptions that have helped us evolve the Tensegrity Mandala. The first three of the four chapters in Section A enable the reader to map the history of organization design and evolution, setting the context for the Tensegrity Mandala.

1. Chapter 1 sets the context for looking at a new language and a new paradigm to work with organization design. It presents the unintended consequence of the inverted tree structure that is so characteristic of organization design for many managers, and builds a case to bring in a new lens to view organizations.

2. Chapter 2 introduces the six key tensions that are critical to the Tensegrity Mandala, and that embed organizational processes. The chapter delves deeper in to explaining the linkages between these tensions and how these impact organizational health. This chapter is critical toward building an understanding of the Tensegrity Mandala by differentiating between visible and invisible processes, tensions, and systems within the organization, and how these need to be co held. It postulates how an equilibrium

between the six tensions is critical for the well-being and balance between the visible and invisible realities of the organization.

3. Chapter 3 introduces the 12 nodal roles and the leadership role sets that uphold and maintain the Tensegrity Mandala. With the intent of enlivening and humanizing a model, this chapter seeks to introduce the concept of the role, the role outputs and, most importantly, the leadership roles that are crucial for the organization. It seeks to introduce building blocks that enable the individual and the system to plan for transformation and evolution.
4. Chapter 4 introduces the reader to the concept of Organizational Identity, and in identifying the nature of the “Shadow” that exists within the organization. Based on the Jungian concept of the “Shadow”, this chapter invites the reader to examine and explore energy sinks and sources within the organization and how patterns bring in certain pathologies to the organization.

Section B offers the reader a spectrum of applications and narratives that construe our consulting experience, spreading across organization diagnosis, designing change interventions, mentoring, and leadership development. This section stresses the pragmatics and deployment realities when it comes to applying the model.

This section moves away from the theoretical constructs of the model and invites the reader to examine the deployment potential and practices for the framework.

Section B has been largely written for the Organization Development Consultant (OD Consultant), internal or external to the organization, and continually invites the reader to make parallels with the organization he or she is working with. The design comprises case studies (built on our consulting experience), frameworks and tables, and exercises—to work with one’s learning and questions.

1. In Chapter 5, we present the process of mapping and enabling you to diagnose the organizational health of the organization at a systemic level, and even your department or your function at a sub-system level. In the chapter, we