

An Indic Metalearning-cum-Superlearning Model for the 21st Century: Content Development for e-Learning



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Synergizing his diverse expertise, he has developed a highly regarded **e-Learning** model, which has also attracted favourable international attention. He is currently in the process of implementing it in the Hills Districts of Assam, as a **metalearning-cum-superlearning** project for improving the quality of governance.

Abstract

Since Information and Communication Technologies are no longer a bottleneck nowadays, some experts have even argued that the age of IT is already over! In other words, many feel that it is high time to focus more attention on the issue of **content development**, especially insofar as **e-learning** is concerned.

Again, since the India is one of the five or six major civilizations of our globalising world, it is opportune also to tap Indic knowledge systems for such **innovative** content development. The author therefore argues that the core Indic **cultural competencies** can be used to develop an effective and cross-culturally valid **e-learning** model, particularly since he shows that these are almost tailor-made for the new "**knowledge economy**".

Again, the training component of the model described here is a radically simplified version of a traditional Indian technique of visualization, which can be used to systematically tap the vast resources of the rightbrain. It then becomes possible to generate the kind of accelerated learning, called "**superlearning**", pioneered by the Bulgarian educationist Georgi Lozanov. Further, this technique also functions as a self-learning tool that promotes "**meta-learning**", or "learning how to learn". Finally, a video of this model has been uploaded onto the Government of India's main Media Streaming server, at www.assam.nic.in....

Introduction

In an interview given to "Business Today" in November 2000, the well known cognitive researcher Edward de Bono made the interesting statement that the age of IT is in a way already over! For contemporary advances in information and communication

technologies mean that these no longer constitute a bottleneck. So we are now "moving away from the information age to **the idea age**", as he put it. Or, as the management expert Tom Peters asserted, "The information age is just about behind us" [1]

Thus, to amend Marshal McLuhan's well known aphorism a bit, "the medium is **not** always the message", at least not beyond a point. So it is a waste of the powerful ICT technologies, if you can only use them to show ever more quickly that two and two add up to four....

In other words, as de Bono pointed out later in that same interview, it is high time to focus on ways of improving creativity, in order to generate *new ideas*. That is to say, insofar as e-Learning is concerned, it is opportune now to pay more attention to the issue of **content development**.

Again, in this globalizing world of which the Indian is one of five or six major civilizations, it is only appropriate that Indic knowledge systems are increasingly coming into their own, in fields ranging from Human Resource Development to Land Resource Management to Ethical Governance [2], [3]. In this paper therefore, I indicate how the core cultural traits, or "competencies" [4] of the Indian civilization are practically tailor-made for the new "**knowledge economy**", and so can form the basis of an effective and cross-culturally valid **e-learning model**.

Further, the *training* component of the model described here is a radically simplified version of a traditional Indian technique of visualization, which can be used to systematically tap the vast resources of the human rightbrain. Thereby it becomes possible to easily generate the kind of *accelerated* learning, called "**Superlearning**", that the Bulgarian educationist Georgi Lozanov had pioneered. Also, since it is a *self-learning* tool, this technique functions as an effective "**metalearning**" modality too, which enables one to "*learn how to learn*".

Indic Culture And its Learning Competencies

We may begin therefore by looking at certain *core* Indic themes or values. These four pan-Indian traits are also in effect "**core cultural competencies**", to extend the concept of "core competencies" theorized by the management gurus Gary Hamel and C. K. Prahalad [5]. As psycho-cultural themes, they are essentially *rightbrain* traits, and can thus be instrumental in facilitating access to that huge untapped mental reservoir of the *right* brain.

Moreover, these Indic anthropological traits are *learning* competencies, which happen serendipitously to be highly congruent with the new organizational philosophy that is mandated by the new technological paradigm of "informationalism". This radical philosophy of work is termed the "**hacker ethic**", reflecting as it does the original meaning of "hackers" as people who "program enthusiastically". It is gradually replacing the *Protestant ethic*, as it implies lifestyle wedded to the passionate pursuit of work that is "intrinsically interesting, exciting, and joyous" [6]

To take up the first trait now, South Asian / Indic personhood is "porous", unlike the atomistic personality structure that is modal in the modern West. For it is "holonic", to use Arthur Koestler's term: like everything in nature, it is a "holon", a whole that is in turn a part of other wholes [7]. Further, this *holistic* psycho-cultural understanding of selfhood is seen to be crossculturally much more valid than the Western, as anthropologists like Melford Spiro [8] and Malcolm Crick [9] have shown. That in fact is also why wellknown transpersonally-oriented psychologists like Robert Assagioli and Abraham Maslow have significantly enriched their work by the use of perspectives from Indic and related *meditative* traditions, which enable one to access one's own *deep-structure* learning resources. [10]

Secondly, as opposed to the Judeo-Christian worldview of the Western civilization, with its distinctive and almost pathological *Protestant* work-ethic, the Indic cultural ethos is more *playful*. This is

indicated by the salience of the Indic cosmogony of "*lila*", which views the creation of the cosmos as being due to the sport of the "divine". This cultural syndrome clearly has very positive and humanistic practical effects, because it makes for a more relaxed and healthier attitude towards life, which is redolent of the "hacker ethic" adumbrated above, and which "almost effortlessly conduces to *optimal learning* [11]

Thirdly, and this is intimately concerned with the previous theme, there is the Indic cultural salience of the *pleasure-principle*. This is quite patently evinced by the pan-South Asian persistence of *Shakta/Tantric* cults, which have in fact been the focus of much of my own research [12], [13]. These traditions foreground a *balanced* hedonism in order to attain the *altered* mental state of *samadhi*, which is the pan-Indic term for the mystical experience of union with the ground of being. This sophisticated appreciation of the role of Eros in human life also happens to resonate with Freud's ultimate realization that the libido is naught but the life-force. In other words, *pleasurable* visualization (say of a vacation by the sea) can put you into a "best state" for *learning* [14]

Finally, as against the *androcentric*, Judeo-Christian metaphysical biases of Western culture, Indic philosophy and culture are pervasively imbued with the ancient bipolar ideology of Samkhya, with its basic attitude of gender-mutuality/-complementarity. This can perhaps be related with Carl Jung's theories about the archetypal anima and animus, as well as the Chinese metaphysical principles of *yin* and *yang*, which allude to the psycho-spiritual complementarity between the sexes. At any rate, this equi-gendered view of reality is *visually* encapsulated in the striking icon of Shiva as *Ardhanariswara* (i.e. "the God who is half-woman"). And this image also neatly epitomises the *synergized* possibilities of balanced and symmetrical, *whole-brain learning* - through the cooption of the usually *sub-dominant* and latent *rightbrain*.

Indic Visualization As Accelerated Learning Technique

The above four cultural competencies are valuable *non-logical* valences, which can be said to characterize the Indic civilization as a "*rightbrain culture*". They also underpin the radically simplified version of the centuries-old Indic technique of bipolar *yogic visualization*, which is the basis of the *training* component of this *e-learning* model.

Thus, the hands-on, **empirical** component of the model consists of *four* stages. First, the body is relaxed by using a process of autogenic visualization. Then, the mind is put into an "altered state" by the visualization of an "inner body", within which is a fine tube running down its centre, from its anal region to the crown of the head, thereafter, by visually directing the attention up the tube, from its bottom end to its top, a deep hypnogogic state is achieved. Subsequently, in this state of deep relaxation, one methodically programs oneself to achieve one's desired learning goals. Finally, one reinforces the programming by using a simple cue, or "anchor", to use a term from Neuro Linguistic Programming, the contemporary school of Applied Psychology [15].

The effectiveness of any tool or technique depends on how simple it is, as Edward de Bono has pointed out. And we have seen above that this technique is both simple and extremely effective, as is brought home to me whenever I use it even in training courses for *hardboiled* professionals, such as senior civil servants in India. For *within minutes*, worldly-wise subjects such as these are enabled to enter a profound meditative state, within which they can very easily be taught how to "learn to learn". This is made possible through the synergic achievement of optimal *Stress Levels*, enhanced *Creativity*, and a systematic *Rightbrain Learning* style, as I now indicate.

(i) **Eustress:** There are about 2 dozen schools of yoga in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions. According to the eminent French Indologist Louis Renou, these Indic techniques of meditation/visualization are a veritable “discipline of the unconscious”. Or, to use contemporary terminology, such techniques are effective ways to get out of one’s normal leftbrain mode of consciousness, which constitutes merely the iceberg’s tip of one’s actual mental capacities. Thus, one can easily learn to systematically access the vast submerged and untapped potentials of the rightbrain. In other words, by regular practice of such rightbrain-manifesting states of meditative absorption, and thus of deep relaxation, one can effectively release the bulk of one’s accumulated stresses. One can thereby acquire a mindset of “learned optimism”, and thus operate increasingly at *optimal* levels of stress, or *eustress*, and therefore of *openness* to learning.

(ii) **Creativity:** According to many experts, individual creativity depends essentially on the ability to make novel conceptual associations, whereby one is then able to generate innovative ideas. This is a process that is eminently facilitated by such techniques of rightbrain-tapping, which enable one to bypass the routine style of functioning of the leftbrain, in order to enter the visual mode of the rightbrain. This latter holistic mode permits one to make the imaginative leaps that constitute what de Bono calls “*lateral* thinking”. The creative ideas that are thus generated can be critically evaluated later for their practicality and feasibility, by subsequent resort to the logical activity of the leftbrain. The net result is that one begins to learn in a *synergized*, whole-brain manner.

(iii) **Rightbrain Learning:** In the view of cognitive experts like Edward de Bono, even the best-known Universities worldwide are unable to produce the kind of citizens/learners that modern societies need. Moreover, in Harry Alder’s diagnosis, the main reason for this is that most thinking techniques are

largely leftbrain-oriented; for they focus mainly on the over-valued skills of critical analysis, sadly neglecting the much more *powerful* rightbrain modes. In fact, he found recently that most successful business leaders he studied had somehow learned to systematically access their full mental capacities, by using the holistic, *visual* mode of the *right-brain*. In other words, there is a definite global and cross-cultural trend towards the ‘*rightbrain learner*’.

Conclusion: Indic Visualization As e-Learning Modality

The above four *core competencies* of Indian culture form the basis of the highly effective and time-tested technique of Indic-visualization outlined above; its text is available at www.geocities.com/drsaranprem, under “Sixth Discipline”. By regular practice of this kind of “*imaginization*” [16], one is enabled to *systematically* tap the vast but *latent* resources of one’s own *rightbrain*.

Again, the subliminal dynamics so entrained make it a highly effective tool for *superlearning*, namely the kind of *accelerated learning* that is promoted by contemporary relaxation and visualization routines [17]. These result in a tremendous *learning synergy*, whereby one *learns to learn*, in a *positive* and *self-motivated* fashion [18].

For contemporary *neuroscientific* findings indicate that deep meditative, rightbrain states are *powerfully* conducive to learning [19]. In such optimal states of mind, one is able through systematic visualization to access one’s own resources of *accelerated learning* [20]. One is thus enabled to learn faster and more effectively, by using what one already knows so as to learn more and better [21].

Further, the process also taps into your inherent *joy of learning*, so that you increasingly *learn how to learn* “through the circuitries of pleasure” [22]. And these “strong mindbody circuits” [23] become easily accessible with practice, since pleasure is a sign of mindbody *congruence*

[24]. As a result, such learning techniques help you segue effortlessly into states of "flow" [25], within which you attain higher and higher levels of *peak performance*.

Conclusion: Indic Superlearning as Case Study

This metalearning model has already been *digitalised* for dissemination as a *Distance Learning* tool, having been videographed by a National Award-winning cinematographer. Also, it has recently been uploaded onto the main Media Streaming server of the Government of India in New Delhi, as a "*unique*" *e-HRD Model*: see "*New HRD Model*", at www.assam.nic.in. Further, the model has now been selected as one of "*India's Best IT Implementations*", in the June 2005 issue of "*PCQuest*" magazine. And a customized version of it is now being prepared, as a multi-media *e-learning* tool for the use of schoolchildren in Assam.

In addition, a cognate version of this time-tested Indic model has already been tested as an HRd-cum-*Learning* intervention, among senior civil servants working in various State Governments, as also senior executives and managers in major business organizations. It has also been appreciated by global business leaders like Bob Lutz (of General Motors) and Azim Premji (of WIPRO). Finally, at a recent international conference in Bangkok on the Learning Organization [26], it was even considered to be a possible **alternative** to the well-known model of organizational learning developed by MIT Professor Peter Senge [27].

In sum, this Indic **e-learning** model has a *global* outreach, for it can effectively address the universal human need for the lifelong, holistic development of the individual, namely the optimization of her physical, mental, emotional and spiritual potentials. Furthermore, as a instantiation of "*content development*" that leverages Pareto's Law of the optimization of one's inputs [28], it also effectively addresses the problem of *information overload* in today's "knowledge economy" [29]. For it is both a "**metalearning**" model that promotes *generative* learning (or *learning how to*

learn), as well as a "**superlearning**" tool which conduces to *optimal* learning....

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