

# Social Healing and Management Reform

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## Abstract

How the case for social healing can be made on the basis of the concepts of common good, social capital, and moral agency in order to overcome macro and micro managerial failure due to deep polarisation in societies and organisations therein, is presented in this paper. However, there are limitations on its achievement which are noted. These limitations can be overcome by means of establishing a pragmatic political economy of social-liberal values in the macro as also micro management of the economy and society.

**Keywords:** Social healing, Common good, Social capital, Private and public management reform

## Introduction

Real-world societies and the productive and administrative organisations therein, especially in multicultural societies such as America and India, are polarised. Such societies with manifold divisions by class, caste, race, gender, region, tribe, creed and culture have evolved to be afflicted with highly prejudiced, divisive, conflict-ridden, brutalized and dysfunctional zero-sum and even negative sum games [27, 15]. In this milieu, there are conflicting interests and clashing ideas in relation to the

questions raised for discussion thus: “What is the future that is possible, though uncertain, and desirable because we want it? To what extent is our fate in our hands?”[26].

For example, take the Indian context. India has been portrayed as a broken nation [31]. Successive Indian leaders and officials have pushed India into an unchanging abyss. Today, more than seventy-five years after Independence, Indian democracy and economy are in a shambles” — “India will stay in its trap. Indian democracy will fail to deliver the public goods necessary for economic growth that

benefits all. Good jobs will remain scarce. The lack of jobs will generate more social anger, which will further increase the political incentive for the quick-fire provision of visible goods and undermine democracy's ability to work for a long-term jobs-rich future." The lived reality of a vast number of Indians is a never-ending struggle under constant threat of humiliation and violence for two main reasons. First, "to employ all working-age Indians, the economy needs to create 200 million jobs over the next decade, an impossible order after the past decade of declining employment numbers." And second, there is lack of public goods for shared progress—education, health delivery, functioning cities, clean air and water, and a responsive and fair judiciary. In conjunction with good jobs crisis and public goods crisis, is the lives and livelihoods crisis. "Dying rivers could choke not just the economy but an entire way of life. And India's climate crisis is here, threatening to compound the ravages of reckless environmental degradation." Killer heatwaves, arid agricultural seasons, episodes of extreme rainfall, rising sea levels, cyclones and melting glaciers are all expected to increase in frequency and intensity [6].

Similarly, at the microcosmic level of productive organisations, there are endless capital-labour conflicts revealing "unbelievable brutalization of managements along with precarity, overwork and deathly dangers of employment, arbitrary dismissals, false framing of criminal cases and life imprisonment without a fair trial meted out to the workers and their leaders" on the one hand, and how workers

engage in a "crescendo of individual and collective struggles to define their rights and defend their dignity in the face of combined corporate and state power", on the other [7]. Organisational conflicts and workplace dignity violations are common contrary to what can be expected out of the conflict-free-idyllic human resource management theorisation.

This note is carved out of this background with a view to especially spook the long-faced management students to reimagine the ways out of the dysfunctional managerial hubris and morass, at both macro and micro levels of social organisation. The reimagination required, for example, concerns the challenge of integrating equity concerns with efficiency concerns through collectively chosen moral principles. It needs to be underlined that "Moral principles do not emanate from the reason or experience of isolated individuals. Instead, the development of ethical principles is driven by the endeavour of groups to create tolerable and righteous conditions of social existence. In this endeavour they come together to discuss and establish shared normative rules. The moral project is a social and experimental endeavour" [22].

### Social Healing

Given the above macrocosmic and microcosmic harsh realities, it is well said in the American context that "safe, mindfully structured dialogues are imperative if we are to salvage our republic and the democratic principles on which it is built" [39]. And in the Indian context, many public intellectuals have called for the restoration of democratic values as expressed

in the Preamble to the Constitution of India, in micro as also macro management of economy and society [21, 8, 36].

In other words, in such a milieu, what is enduringly invoked is the spirit of social healing, which is “an emerging field that seeks to deal with wounds created by conflict, collective trauma, and large-scale oppression. It seeks to identify areas of collective experience that remain unresolved, neglected, and repressed within the psyche of groups and even nations. Its domain is centrally within consciousness rather than politics per se; it is psychospiritual in nature yet activist in its consequences. Its primary modalities are truth, reconciliation, forgiveness, and restorative justice. It requires individuals to assume the responsibility to become healing agents themselves and as such, it is experiential rather than ideological” [39].

Social healing requires the pursuit of common good. “In philosophy, economics, and political science, the common good (also commonwealth, general welfare, or public interest and benefit) is either what is shared and beneficial for all or most members of a given community, or alternatively, what is achieved by citizenship, collective action, and active participation in the realm of politics and public service.” There are numerous contributions to the concept of common good [e.g. 24], and about common good history, common good philosophy, common good economics, common good business, common good development, common good poetry and so on and so forth. All the same, what is

common good acceptable to all, and how it can be achieved by the cooperation of politicians, industry, working people and the public in general, nobody seems to really know or even bother. Historical and contemporary documentation on experiential learning in this regard needs to be critically evaluated [10].

Be that as it may, common good, in turn, requires building up social capital of a country, about which there is copious scholarly writing, also in the name of social cohesion and social integration [18, 20, 28]. The central point is that “Social capital allows a group of people to work together effectively to achieve a common purpose or goal. It allows a society or organization, such as a corporation or a nonprofit, to function together as a whole through trust and shared identity, norms, values, and mutual relationships.” This holds good at the macrocosmic level of political governance in a country and the microcosmic level of governance of businesses and other organisations like non-profits. Social capital refers to “the networks and links within and between social groups — can benefit us by increasing wellbeing and creating economic opportunities. For people and organisations, the problem comes when social bonds and bridges work to exclude others rather than include.”

Social capital, in turn, is dependent on social morality. The portrayal of India as a broken nation is, for instance, entirely attributed to moral trap militating against social capital accumulation [31]. There is “cascading deterioration in social norms and

accountability". Unaccountable "politicians, with power and personal enrichment as their main goals, have sought easy short-run policy fixes for economic and social problems that require complex, long-term solutions." Citizens and businesses indulge in scamming and marauding behaviour. In such a milieu, democracy is easily trampled by autocracy. As such, the way out of this moral trap is to overcome the decline and fall of Civic India, like the way the political scientist Robert Putnam had called for overcoming the decline and fall of Civic America: "We must move to an equilibrium in which everyone expects others to be honest, in which case most people will act honestly. That "honest equilibrium" will promote trust and cooperation to work together in the long-haul tasks of creating public goods and advancing sustainable development." In other words, we need to go through a definitive transition from a "me-me-me" to a "we-we-we" society by building civic consciousness, tying "public-spirited nongovernmental work with the authority and institutional resources of governments, and decentralization of governance. Social capital, as already defined above, and civic engagement refer to features of social life-networks, norms, and trust that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives. Negative consequences of polity, economy and society are attributed to the degradation of social capital and civic engagement--unprecedented collapse in civic, social, associational, and political life. As such, restoration of social capital will play a vital role in the functioning of societies with significant implications for

various outcomes, including economic development, political participation, and overall social well-being." It follows from this analysis that social capital formation, in turn, requires us to have ethical foundations of politics, economics and business, which are conspicuous by their absence in the real-world.

In other words, what we need to establish, if we want a "world of peace and of a reasonably harmonious development", is a threefold short-term as also long-term "sustainable social and economic development" [26]: "1. Economically sustainable development, that is one relating to the market of goods and capital, investment and finance as well as that of labour; 2. Socially sustainable development, that is one relating to a fair, socially accepted income distribution and appropriate participation of basic population groups in public services; 3. Environmentally sustainable development, that is one relating to maintaining proper relations between human economic activity and nature." These goals are based on values or ethical foundations of realizing "life with sense" for all people.

### Earth-Shaking Criticisms

How social capital will optimally come about from its non-existence, from ground zero, is a strange mystery, though. Moreover, apart from the definitional, measurement and what-causes-what ambiguities, the fashionable Putnam's advocacy of social capital has come under heavy fire from radical economists on the ground that it overlooks internecine "power dynamics and structural inequalities within society. Social capital can be unequally

distributed with marginalised groups facing barriers to access and participation. The emphasis on community-level social capital neglects the disparities and power imbalances that exist within and between communities. Further, the role of conflict and dissent in social capital formation” is downplayed [17, 14].

In light of all this discussion, students of micro private management—production management, human resource management and public relations in private organisations driven by profit motive— as also public (macro) management students of public affairs, public policy and public administration might wonder as to how social capital building can be done and dynamically maintained in order to depolarise societies and organisations therein to achieve mass prosperity and general welfare.

### **What Can be Done**

Management students have many options to explore for seeking solutions, which are not usually discussed in the classrooms of mainstream academia.

First, they can explore the Social Norms Theory. Social norms are “behavioural expectations or rules within a group of people”, and whether undesirable social norms can be changed through public policy is an avant-garde enquiry [16]. This opens up further inquiry in particular into moral economy as “perceptions about fairness, the limits of exploitation, and the reciprocities that should govern social relations, as well as about appropriate economic behaviour that does not solely seek

personal profit”, and in general into “a moral history of capitalism, understood not simply as an economic system but as an order that encompasses all areas of modern life”. By explorations on these lines, “insights into contemporary debates on economic policies and social responsibilities” can be obtained [35, 3].

Second, they can draw on the human dignity and social justice ideas from moral and political philosophers such as Immanuel Kant and Karl Marx; and also examine the practical sense of diverse solutions (like regulation, property rights, community self-organisation) for collective action problems [32, 29].

Third, they can draw on the activism of the Progressive International, Structural Inequalities Alliance, Wellbeing Economy Alliance and the like progressive organisations fighting against income, wealth and ascriptive-identity inequalities as also destruction of nature; and also examine the oligarchy versus democracy discourse [12, 38].

Fourth, inspired by Andaleeb Qureshi, students can imbibe experiential sensitivity towards diversity and inclusion by following the Human Library movement. The human library “is a global social project that promotes humanity and social acceptance of people regardless of their backgrounds, profiles and the tags our society places on them. It follows a concept of any library we have ever been to. We just replace paper books with human books, who share their real-life experience – no scripts just real words and emotions. Readers walk into the venue and borrow a book that attracts

their attention...Once the reader borrows a human book with the help of a librarian, the reading session lasts for up to 40 minutes. In the conversation, there is a narration by book about their life around prejudices they have lived through. After the session, there is an open dialogue between the book and the reader. This exercise is to allow a free exchange of thoughts so as to help the readers know a greater deal about the prejudices. The prime objective of the project is tolerance and respect and the basic principle of learning in the process is not to judge a book by its cover. What is most encouraging about the human library is that it allows the readers the space to directly confront their prejudices by choosing a subject they don't understand. Through listening to the experiences of the books, the reader is able to connect to its subjects in a deeply personal way because these books say a lot more inside than their cover outside" [4].

Fifth, students can also heed useful gospels from character development science fostering the value of "inner capacities" by common-good-ethical orientation and Harvard Business Review Working Knowledge calling for leadership promoting dignity of people [45, 46, 34].

Sixth, they can tap on religious and spiritual leaders offering valuable knowledge of social healing. For example, liberation theology as propounded by Pope Francis is very much meaningful and helpful [9]; and also, the discourse on the humane principles of mindful management drawn from ancient wisdom by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar of the Art of Living

Foundation [43]. The Action for Happiness as a secular movement to institute ethical culture for human happiness too wants the philosophy of management in firms to be rethought in terms of "giving workers more influence on how their work is organised; paying team workers on the basis of team performance; measuring worker wellbeing; appointing managers who can inspire and lead; running courses on wellbeing at work for all the workers; and taking mental illness seriously, with managers who can spot it and get the necessary help" [29].

Seventh, students can think of developing economic empowerment models that benefit all sections of people in multicultural societies [37]; they must examine cooperatives and employee-owned organisations as viable alternatives to the "criminal" corporate form of capitalism and more importantly, see through the unending meaningless language of management fashions produced by the business schools and management 'babas' [2, 41].

Eighth, it is high time students critically examined rampant extractivist model of development everywhere in the world as a very short-term socio-ecologically destructive mode of organising life through "subjugation, depletion and non-reciprocity" [13]. Given that "around the world, in thousands of locations, people are organising and fighting against corporate power, against land grabs, against extreme extraction, against the incessant commodification of our lives", students and their teachers too must have courage to



examine whether “we have no choice but to try to cashier capitalism and replace it with an entirely different economy and mode of life based on minimizing not maximizing resource consumption; public ownership of most, though not necessarily all, of the economy; large-scale economic planning and international coordination; and a global contraction and convergence between the North and the South around a lower but hopefully satisfactory level of material consumption for all the world’s peoples” [40].

Lastly, students can draw on Organizational Sociology as an interdisciplinary subject. It is upbeat in making itself clear to private management students to marry profits with social purpose. This leads to the possibility of “stewardly capitalism” [30].

### Summing Up and Conclusion

One thing is clear from the above exemplary initiatives and pieces of knowledge at valuing and realizing social healing for socio-economic progress for general welfare. If they are not there, and even if we do not understand why they are not there or cannot be there, we will only be perpetually haunted by the spectre of the entropic dangers of the rise of divisive, arbitrary, confusing, mendacious and megalomaniac demagogues, populists and practitioners in micro and macro management. This would be like a dreadful ‘sword of the Damocles’, never freeing us from the fear of the impending peril of the continuation of political abuse of economies and societies militating against shared destinies and general

welfare [44].

Social healing as a function of common good, which is a function of social capital which, in turn, is a function of ethics, as pointed out above, is indeed an inspirational train of thought, albeit not yet crystal clear. For public (macro) management students, it enables them to think about realising better national and global governance for inclusive development of societies in the world. They need to understand in particular how state’s capacity to achieve social goals can be enhanced by reducing corruption [23]. They will have to stand for a new social liberal and republican state which can undertake public management reform! This reform is “to increase state capacity, to create a strong state: able to produce representative and accountable government; able to protect civil rights and assure markets, and so liberal; able to promote social justice, and so social; able to resist corruption and rent-seeking, and thus republican.” It may be noted that democratic, liberal, social and republican objectives are not “intrinsically contradictory, although the political history of mankind is in many ways the history of the conflicts between such ideologies. They may have been conflicting historically and they may still present major differences, but, provided that they are understood reasonably they end up being complementary: successful political achievements” [11].

At the private or public micro-management level, management students will have to reckon with organisational conflict as unavoidable, and find out how an organisation

handles conflict in determining its health and durability. Conflict is not inherently bad; rather, when handled constructively, it may catalyse development and creativity [33]. Managers must perceive disagreements as an opportunity for learning, cooperation and progress rather than a problem to be suppressed. Conflict frequently indicates underlying issues, such as mismatched goals or communication failures, which managers may resolve by fostering open dialogue and encouraging diverse perspectives. This way, conflict resolution transforms into a healing process, rebuilding trust, reinforcing shared values and uniting teams around a renewed purpose. For management students today living in a world of constant uncertainty and change in terms of global crises, digital transformations and shifts in social norms constantly reshaping the workplace, adaptability is a prized skill to develop. Social healing framework provides them a timeless framework to navigate these challenges, prioritising resilience, empathy and inclusion over rigorous adherence to traditional blood-letting by cost-cutting business norms. Students should be aware that the most effective leaders are frequently those who, rather than fearing upheaval, see it as an opportunity to foster growth, connection and renewal within their organisations.

It is rightly emphasized that in an era of rapid change, turbulence and increasing complexity—especially in organisational life—the notion of social healing has arisen as an “effective remedy for the social fractures we experience” [25, 1]. For management students who are frequently entrusted with leadership

in difficult times, social healing may be a surprisingly practical and long-lasting tool for creating resilience, engagement and unity among teams and communities. Recognising the importance of trust, social cohesion and shared values in developing healthy interpersonal and organisational connections is the first step towards social healing. Economic success alone does not sustain societies or organisations; a sense of belonging, shared purpose and mutual respect is equally vital. When implemented within organisations, these principles urge managers to prioritise relationship depth above short-term profits, resulting in a culture that makes workers feel safe and respected. This sense of belonging can help to reduce workplace disputes and enhance general morale—a crucial consideration for management students anticipating careers in dynamic and often high-pressure environments. Social cohesion or capital has “three dimensions—structural, relational and cognitive—each of which contributes distinctively to an organisation's ability to build productive and sustainable settings. Managers may improve their organisations' social fabric by actively nurturing these dimensions, making social capital not just a valuable asset but also a fundamental component of societal healing. Understanding these social capital components provides management students with a road map to becoming leaders who can skilfully handle crises by leveraging connections and trust.”

So much on the macro-micro appeal of social healing for a better tomorrow in the midst of widespread cynicism and hopelessness among



the many youth crying in wilderness today [5].

This note is an open-minded, thinking-aloud-exercise in “radical conservatism” as reasonableness to save capitalism from inhumane Fascism or Communism [42], with a view to learning the lesson that “things can happen better because we understand, better and better, what really depends on what” [26] with regard to bringing about genuine social and economic progress under the pragmatism of “social market economy” or social democratic capitalism by rejecting both neoliberal capitalism and state capitalism.

It is safe to conclude that life-enhancing civilizational efforts at social healing on the one hand and instituting a political economy of social-liberal values governing public and private management on the other, are mutually reinforcing with positive feedback loops. Extensive and worthwhile social healing cannot be there without political economy of social-liberalist ethics as found, at least, in the Nordic countries. This thesis is well-argued out in the profound writing of the renowned management professor Geoffrey Hodgson [22]. He has correctly put forward the viewpoint that the ubiquitous utilitarian pursuit of self-interest unrestrained by moral qualms is “the worm that is gnawing away at the moral core of civilized society”.

If we do not accept the desirable possibility of having a peaceful and regenerative economy and society by balancing profit-motive based efficiency drive with justice-based equity aspiration through the ethical foundation of not harming one another (including Nature),

then what will worsen is what we already know—social and natural entropy with the majority living a “poor, nasty, brutish, short” and alienated life. This state of affairs can off and on lead to the insanity-evolution of extreme right-wing or left-wing revolts that history testifies to without there being any amicable and worthwhile learning by doing about how to survive and thrive in cataclysmic times.

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