

# Happiness, harmony and healthy knowledge networks: Joyful journey towards inclusive, innovative and imaginative society<sup>1</sup>

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Many years ago, I had an occasion to join a debate with a dear friend, Dr. Srinath Reddy on the subject of health, happiness and harmony. I asked him how much do doctors know about health. Don't they only meet sick people. Is absence of sickness, health? Of course, being eminent as he is, his response was that medical scientists do study population characteristics through community medicine. That brought the dimension of community in the discussion of an individual's health. This perhaps is the crux. When creative aspirations of a society get connected to the concerns towards community and its wellbeing, the innovation eco system can be said to work towards a happy and healthy society. I will discuss here the indicators of a happy eco system for promoting innovations and harnessing creativity of individuals and communities. These are based on the 25 years journey of the Honey Bee Network which essentially leverages the principle of cross-pollination, acknowledgement of every contribution and creating community or social good while meeting individual needs.

## Motivations and trigger for innovations:

There are several reasons why people innovate, only one of which is self-gratification. A few creative people believe that the most exalted form of expression of their inner feelings of sadness or happiness happen when they just be what they are. A Sanskrit phrase, "*Swantahsukhay*," i.e., for one's own happiness captures this type of motivation better. It is not a consumptive joy but a desire to fulfill one's own inner potential. In some cases, it could be the opposite. It could be a desire to get rich and hopefully therefore happy. It is a different matter that most people after becoming rich have to renounce wealth to gain happiness. Otherwise, the world's largest charities would not have come about. But, isn't it a pursuit which defers happiness too long? And settles for a currency, which devalues dignity if not handled properly.

The motivations can be captured through the following matrix.

### Outcome of innovation

Tangible	Intangible	Ethereal		
1	4	7	Self	
2	5	8	Known Unknown	Others
3	6	9	Nature	

Purpose of innovation

Table 1

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There can be joyful outcomes in all the cases, but these are likely to arise much more when the purpose is for others and that too strangers or unknown, and it could be about nature. A Large number of grassroots innovators innovate not to solve their own problems but that of others. The tangible outcomes for self can be IP protected or in open source. More than 10000 innovations and traditional knowledge practices are available on [www.sristi.org](http://www.sristi.org) under different databases viz., Honey Bee published practices, GILD [Grassroots Indian Language Database], common property institutions, medicinal plants, etc. This is perhaps the largest open source global knowledge base available for people to improve their life, make their farm and non-farm activities sustainable and conserve nature. Despite so much talk of participatory development and billions of dollars spent on social and economic aid, why should there be such a high dearth of databases of open source content for improving sustainable resource management and wellbeing of disadvantaged communities. Apparently, the pursuit of happiness is not the primary goal of most of such developmental aid and interventions.

The outcomes can be tangible or intangible. When Mushtaq Ahmed and Mehtar Hussain in Assam developed a bamboo windmill in `5000 for irrigating small paddy field, little did they realize that it would find applications with some modifications in the western part of the country. It was improved for pumping brine water to make salt and thus influence the lives of some of the poorest people in the region. They get royalty for every windmill installed. A tangible outcome is made available at practically no cost through third party support for social transformation of one of the most disadvantaged communities.

When certain communities shared the practice of growing lady’s finger crop around cotton field to trap the pests of cotton crop and minimize the use of chemical pesticide, they provided an intangible knowledge in open source, which can be shared widely for tangible outcomes. Similarly, a farmer summarized our appeal for non-chemical pest control in a very evocative way during a shodhyatra in Kutchch, Gujarat. After listening to the discussion about sustainable pest management for half an hour, the farmer said, “what you are telling us is that any plant which is not eaten by cattle or other animals is a potential source of herbal pesticide”. His statement reflected wisdom while mine were based on knowledge. He wouldn’t mind an idea like this be shared with anyone. Such heuristics have global application and can spread happiness through extremely affordable and sustainable outcomes through intangible as well as ethereal message. The spirit of global good is not just a process but also reflects a larger than life purpose.

When concern is expressed for others, the known others and the unknown others bring out different dimensions of our consciousness. The most exalted gift one can give is to the perfect strangers. The unknown and the unknowable cannot reciprocate. You have six kinds of incentives for others.

**Nature of others**

		Known others	Unknown others	Unknowable others
	Material			
Nature of incentive	Non-material			

*Table 2*

The incentives for innovation can be for individual and groups. Both can be known, unknown and unknowable. If an innovator solves problem of a client, S/he can have material or non-material incentives to serve him. If he develops a product or service for unknown individual clients, then uncertainty is higher and affordability is an important issue. When he develops a solution for unknowable, it is essentially a contribution for future. The unknowable implies perfect stranger, i.e., the unborn and other non-human sentient beings whose feelings we often cannot understand or anticipate. The material incentives are awards or prizes or physical infrastructure and the non-material incentives are recognition, naming of buildings or streets or other kinds of appreciation. These can flow to individuals or groups/communities. Communities of known people are generally proximal communities. Communities of unknown people could include distant members of the group. The nature of policies required to incentivize will therefore have to include a portfolio of measures. And this portfolio will require challenging conventional assumptions while addressing the needs of future generation and nature. Happiness cannot be harnessed by excluding the interests of various kinds of others, particularly the unknowable or perfect strangers. Most cultures around the developing world and also in some of economically developed countries provide space for 'others' in everyday life. In Asia, many communities keep the first bread cooked at home for the birds or other animals. In Denmark, a folk song suggests that when one rakes the field, after the harvest, one should do it lightly so that fallen grains can be used by the 'others'. Also recall, "Do not gather the fallen grains ... you shall leave them for the stranger and the poor"(Leviticus 19:9 -10). Recently, in a study of bird feeding platforms in about 200 villages, SRISTI observed varied practices of community efforts to collect and feed the birds even in the regions prone to frequent droughts. Happiness is easy.

The non-material incentives to care for the perfect strangers will require pedagogic and curricular changes. Today, there is very little discussion in the classrooms about various institutions invented by different societies for creating space in our life for 'others'. The need for inclusive development would not have arisen had we not institutionalized instruments of evaluation of rights and wrongs that rested on fundamental exclusion of the disadvantaged human and non-human sentient beings. Happiness is another name of inclusion.

### **Barriers to inclusiveness:**

To expect that pursuit of happiness would invariably lead to inclusive society will not be tenable. So much of injustice in the world would not have persisted otherwise. How can then inclusiveness as an instrument of seeking happiness be incentivized? My contention is that encouragement to grassroots innovators who develop such innovations for larger social good will be a very precise and result oriented approach to achieve desirable outcome. Such innovations in the field of technology, institutions, culture or governance would help expand the space for people who already see the connection between inclusiveness and happiness. Instead of trying to motivate those who are not on this road yet, shouldn't we create better facilities for those who on their own have chosen this road?

## **Policy and institutional alternatives:**

Twenty-five years ago, when Honey Bee Network was started, it was hoped that a new human consciousness would emerge out of the principles of the Network. Let me explain how has the Network succeeded in no small measure in mobilizing large scale contribution from private and public institutions, experts and other individuals for the larger social good at no cost or minimal cost. Society for Research and Initiatives for Technologies and Institutions [sristi.org] was set up in 1993 to scout and collate innovations and traditional knowledge practices in education, institutions and technologies. It also has perhaps only the lab, which is completely dedicated to add value to people's knowledge and share benefits in case of commercialization and /or make technologies open source for larger social good. It has developed numerous products by pooling the distributed traditional knowledge in the field of agriculture, livestock and human health and wellbeing. Every time we are able to validate and value add in people's knowledge, we are able to advance the frontiers of frugality and transcend the limits of love that flows by sharing knowledge.

Grassroots Innovation Augmentation Network [GIAN] was set up in 1997 to incubate innovations and link them with investment and enterprise. Provision of micro venture capital for bearing risks underlying such technologies was an important reason for setting up GIAN. In 2000, National Innovation Foundation [NIF] was set up by Department of Science and Technology to scale up the experience of Honey Bee Network all over the country. The fact that tens of thousands of people have shared 170,000 ideas, innovations and traditional knowledge practices from 500 districts of the country demonstrates a very vibrant spirit of sharing. Recently, a Grassroots Technological Innovation Acquisition Fund [GTIAF] has been set up to acquire the IP rights from the innovators to make these technologies available at not cost or low cost. The expansion of public domain undoubtedly expands opportunities for happiness for those who cannot afford to seek it otherwise.

SRISTI has been pursuing study of life experiences of centenarian people. Who could teach us better about the sustainability of life than those who have lived it for a century? It is a paradox that while we always bless to live long, we seldom learn from those who do it. Every country should record the lessons of life of centenarians so that future generation get access to authenticated knowledge, feelings and actions of people who live long.

## **Summing up:**

I have shared in brief several instruments and indicators through which we can track the connection between creativity, innovation and pursuit of joyful journey towards creation of public goods. Various motivations for developing innovative solutions triggered by a range of personal, social or environmental conditions lead to different outcomes. By tapping the happiness score of different combinations of motivations, triggers and outcomes, we can develop appropriate incentives. The accountability towards strangers and that too perfect strangers is another major motivation which generates innovations for larger social good. Material or non-material incentives for promoting creativity by individuals and groups for known, unknown and unknowable members of our responsibility structures provide operational guidelines for implementing a metric for measuring happiness.

Honey Bee Network strongly believes that happiness is possible, and is attainable by harnessing the power of creating public knowledge goods through innovations and knowledge networks. Every time we constrain the potential of an innovation, we persist with inefficiency, we stranglehold human potential and restrict the decision making horizon. Obviously, I am referring to empathetic and inclusive and sustainable innovations here. There are occasions when communities and individuals develop non-sustainable solutions. For instance, use of dynamite for catching fish is one such innovation. We will not recommend such innovations because these are non-sustainable. Given the vast experience of grassroots innovations harnessed from various countries of the world, the time of economic slowdown provides a golden opportunity for revisiting the excessive consumption oriented model of economic growth which cannot generate happiness for maximum time and maximum people. Frugality, communitarian spirit and sustainable solutions blending formal and informal science and technology provide a viable basis for compassionate world.