Birds of the same feather ought not flock together. For, in doing so they cordon themselves from effects of change. One cannot limit one's decision-making, strategy planning or functioning in just one line of thought or work. There is no telling which extraneous (rather temporal) factor might have a bearing on one's business.

Present day strategy making is about relegating to target position with fugue of the past. The point of reference for future planning (which in turn is the point of reference of present day planning!) is the key requirement for the initiation of strategy making in the business. Operational efficiency is not just the means to achieving the end strategic vision, but also the strategic vision in itself if attainment of that vision were the end all.

'Price-The pleasure toy' of businesses is fast mutating to be an inconsequential measure, for pricing is a strategy which is fast replicated even before it provides an edge. Mass hysteria on price releases is fading into reality. One needs to individualize customers (which of course is a business cliché'), but the opportunity is in 'fingerprint pricing'; one that differentiates each customer on the basis of what service he is demanding and provided for. And this brings us to the demise of the 'exclusivity model'. Trumps no longer triumph. The faster you let go of your card, the higher the chances of a short but sure yield. There's no strategy for a rainy day (a rainy day is everyday!).

Corporates need to escape 'tunnel vision'. Opportunities don't follow a set pattern so why should strategies that envision them? While perspectives should be garnered from undefined (broadened) sources, the initiatives should be highly channelized to necessitate effectiveness.

Insubordination of technology to the consumer (and not vice versa) shall be the prime mover, and shall be the vision go-getter. Origination of technological advances (which reflects in the product delivered) should stem from the consumers need in the present and more importantly in the future. Companies with 'subservience of customers' as a blueprint to business operation shall be humiliated.

"I think, therefore I' am"(pardon the warped version of Descartes' quote) holds great truth in the present. The days of one entity thinking or acting on behalf of a horde are gone. The thought in fact should germinate from the unison of ideas of the horde and should vouch for it. And when the horde is what generates the ideas for future thought, the question of blocking them off on the grounds of dipping profits does not even need to feature on the organizations agenda.

The need to go for marginal profits is utmost in today's business. The fixed costs should not baulk one. The operating profits shall even up in course of time if one plays the number game well (Reliance wouldn't be a shoddy example at that!). Which brings us to the pertinent question of ethics in work behavior of current day organizations. Ethics? Well, whatever yields money (and one can't possibly make money today by duping many or any one) is ethical (Reliance, would be a shoddy example of that!!)

Yet another idea worth stealing?? Guess not. A stolen idea today shows and shows like a zit! Structuring of today's success is in the hands of those who take their cues from the future. One can succeed only if one communicates prospects in an understandable language. Moreover prospects hold hope of something better than is offered today.

India Marketing (A job never well done enough!)

The toughest customer? An Indian, moreso a knowledgeable Indian. And while there are millions of bytes of information desperately seeking you through your notebooks, mobile phones, television, kiosks, its tough to remain ignorant. An Indian customer is no longer ignorant. He has his choices, he knows what he wants, and he doesn't want you to talk best about yourself. He shall find out for himself. An Indian customer is the same guy! (Am I kidding?) The psyche is the same, and shall continue to remain so in all probabilities. He still likes to discuss the new television set in the market with his friends, the latest IPO with his colleagues at office, the shirt with his wife. And he wants a rebate, he wants something free, he wants something he can return back (maybe even after using it, and not finding a defect, perhaps just not liking it), he wants something he can use now and pay later. (That's perhaps the reason why super and hyper malls haven't been able to make a super dent like they intended and your round the corner 'on credit kirana' store is still doing brilliant business.

Therefore the Indian is the same, thought wise. Only worse (corporations point of view) because now he wants better and better for lesser and lesser and he knows he shall have it, because if one does not give it, someone else shall. An Indian customer is critical by nature, suspicious by mind. How do you appeal to his senses? Toy with just that! Tinker with his perception.

Implied SLA's work like magic. (This is a good product (mind you, not best!) The moment you say best you take away the right from him to decide. You make him offensive.) "If our product fails vis-à-vis what we promised and you expected, your will shall prevail". Don't just say or believe he is king. Make him feel like one, even before he decides upon your product. That will perhaps make him decide.

Free Lunches- Of course they exist!

"The product you would hate to be addicted to", is the claim to fame. Tickle his criticality to your favor. He believes there is a thing like free lunch. Make him realise that maybe there is. (And all those economists were foolishly wrong when they said that there isn't. But then they weren't Indians.) But then free lunches aren't exactly great. For tastes to be satiated he needs to pay. He shall understand and then he shall pay.

An avenue where the public can chime in, not just to complain, but to help the company find the free ideas and amazing insights that will make the product more successful in its next version.

Piracy- Boon to the Society

No, I don't think downloading songs or movies is right or legal or even convenient at times. I do believe, however, that it's going to happen more and more, and people in the industry ought to tell the truth--to each other and to us. The only thing that will save the existing infrastructure is an out-of-house experience that really and truly IS worth paying for. That, and an in-house experience that is super-easy and very cheap. The music industry could have killed Napster with a $10 a month all you can eat plan (which would have easily tripled their profits) and Hollywood could do the same. But they won't.

No matter how bad it is for companies; for the end customer its great to have duplicates of triplicates of the original products. Either you waste time fighting it or devicing methods to counter it.

Case Study

"Yes, Sir?" said the van-chow guy (who I'll refer to as "Chelliah") from his seat. Such van-chows are the cheap, yummy and 'available till late' food providers on Trivandrum weeknights. I stepped up to the van window, placed my order, only I can't call it an order because one eats first, pays later and mentions what he ate all by himself, without any cross verification! The cook is busy serving at the other end, having no tab on how much he's giving and to whom. Every person accounts for himself and tells Chelliah, who then collects the money accordingly.

And this situation is typical of several such 'appam-curry' businesses across Kerela. It's always a crowd, 'cause people from all sections come to eat; from laborers to executives returning late, and even college students. But that doesn't speak anything of the food, because it's truly delectable. And so Chelliah has too many customers to cater to and doesn't bother to cross check. Or worry about money matters. Everybody is served within few minutes. Yes, I did see him occasionally shout out to the chef and serving-boys in case he noticed a customer wait a minute too long. That was indeed his concern.

If you were the CFO of a big business -- say, a big restaurant, shopping mall, or multinational bank, you'd have yelled your heart out at this scene. He lets his customers make their own bill! How does he know they're making the correct bill? Or not even paying at all? (Mind you, there's plenty scope for that amid the commotion) Where's the technology that prevents the guys from escaping while he's not looking? Surely there's a device that could be invented to keep track of exact bill amounts. Perhaps letting each customer speak out his bill through lie detectors? Ahem! This is just so un-business like…

Excuse me, Mr. CFO; don't go all 6 Sigma on us. Chelliah probably does lose a little bit of money each day to non-payment & wrong bill, but more than makes up for it in other ways. The efficiency of that van-chow is amazing. For comparison's sake, even a small restaurant serves nearly half the customers in the same time. And makes them wait, double the time (or more). So, Chelliah is doing roughly twice the business with the lesser resources. Let's see Pizza Hut do that!

It's also apparent that Chelliah trusts his customers, and that they both appreciate and return that sense of trust (I know I do). Trust is one of the most difficult "assets" for companies to acquire, but also one of the most valuable. Many companies take shortcuts in getting their customers to trust them, paying lip service to Trust™ in press releases and marketing brochures and advertisements. Which works, temporarily and superficially, but when you get down to it, you can't market trust...it needs to be earned. People trust you when you trust them.

When an environment of trust is created, good things start happening. Chelliah can serve twice as many customers. People get their food late in the night in half the time and pay much lesser. Due to this time and cost saving, people become regulars. Regulars provide Chelliah's business with stability, a good reputation, and with customers. Lots of customers who make correct change increase his profit margin.

And what did Chelliah have to pay for all this? A bit of lost money here and there.

Final Say

The difference between a product company and a project-based company is that in a product company everyone in the company is talking about the same thing; the product. There is a clear identity. All minds in synergy create a product and simultaneously make it available to the user. The product thereafter speaks of all those flawless minds that went behind the making. And you make this product known not by thrusting its goodness on customers, but by letting them feel so by trying it for themselves. You don't evaluate your product on their behalf. You entrust them with it, and if required make changes. Your motive shouldn't be to make a 'Great Sale'. The intention rather should be, 'A Great Buy' for the customer. This approach shall make the product amazing as a means to achieving it.

And the rest shall follow.