



Challenges and Opportunities*

Janani Harish

Associate Fellow, World Academy of Art & Science;
Research Associate, The Mother's Service Society, India

Abstract

Out of the depths of the problems that challenged humanity in the past have surfaced great opportunities. Famine, war, depression and subjugation have all left one or more positive impacts on the world. Crises have made men and women rise to the occasion, and with the right response not only overcome the problem but convert them into expansive elevating opportunities. The pressure of the challenges motivates people to perform extraordinary tasks, releasing inherent energy, changing attitudes, and breaking resistances along the way. Just as the momentum of the opponent's attack can be turned around and used to one's own benefit in martial arts, the pressure of the crises can be converted into energy and directed towards finding a solution. Our response to the challenges determines whether the challenges defeat us or are converted into opportunities. What the mind views as irreconcilable and mutually exclusive contradictions can turn out to be complements. Is it possible that every challenge has a concealed opportunity behind it? If so, how can we convert one into the other?

1. Introduction

It was 1922. The Great War had ended 4 years earlier, but Europe was still reeling under aftershocks. All countries suffered to different extents due to the global depression following the war. Czechoslovakia's economy was in ruins. Its exports were drastically cut and there was widespread unemployment in the country. The newly formed Czech government adopted tight monetary controls to fight inflation, and the currency was devalued by 75% in a year. People's purchasing power declined precipitously, most businesses had high levels of debt and falling incomes. Production declined, layoffs multiplied, and the situation in Bata Shoes, a mid-sized footwear manufacturing company was symbolic of what every business in the country was going through. It was suffering badly. Founder Tomas Bata saw his company's exports drop by 75%. Stocks were accumulating in his warehouses, the warehouses were overflowing. There was enormous pressure to lay off workers and cut down production.

The national manufacturers' association of Czechoslovakia called an urgent meeting of its members to discuss the government's policies and see what needed to be done to avert economic disaster. Those who attended felt they were helpless victims of external forces and government actions. They were nearly unanimous in condemning the government and demanding relief, but none could propose a viable solution to the problems facing the nation.

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It was Tomas Bata's turn to speak. Bata saw the futility of the government's policy and industry's response to it. He believed that some radically new strategy was needed to break the vicious cycle of economic decline. He was a man who firmly believed in boldly facing the problem and solving it. He was also motivated by a deep sense of commitment to the thousands of people who depended on him for their livelihood and very survival. When Bata addressed the conference, he did not strike the familiar refrain demanding government action. Rather, he called on the business community to act courageously for its own preservation. He ended his speech with a dramatic announcement that startled the entire gathering. Bata refused to lay off a single worker. Instead, he was going to cut the prices of his shoes in half. Bata's announcement brought a hushed silence, no one was quite sure they had heard correctly. Then, there was derisive laughter. He was dismissed as a lunatic or a fool. How could a company cut its prices by 50% and survive? How could it ever repay its creditors by lowering prices?

Bata returned to his factory and explained his radical decision to his employees. It was the only possible way to save the company and preserve their jobs. All costs had to be reduced to the absolute minimum. Waste of all description had to be completely eradicated. Efficiency and productivity had to be raised to much greater levels than existed. He imposed across-the-board 40% wage cuts for all employees, despite the opposition of a powerful union, but he promised to supply all workers and their families with food, clothing, and other necessities at half the present price to ensure their maintenance. He divided his factory into profit centers and promised incentives for higher productivity. Having put his internal operations on a war footing, Bata launched a national poster advertising campaign depicting a huge fist crushing the Czech word which represented the high cost of living.

The public response was overwhelming. Shoe stores that had been empty for months were suddenly invaded by mobs of people seeking an affordable pair of shoes. Police had to be called in to restore order and regulate traffic. Orders poured into the warehouses until they were almost empty of stock. The workshops were geared up to full production capacity. Within a week, the sense of uncertainty and despair was replaced by one of urgency, excitement, and purpose. In the following months Bata not only maintained full employment but actually started to expand. He continuously introduced improved production techniques, administrative systems, and employee incentives to increase productivity. Over the next five years, employment in Bata's factories more than doubled, and production multiplied 15-fold. Between 1922 and 1932 the average retail price of Bata shoes fell by 82%, while wages in Bata factories rose by 200%. Bata succeeded in producing so efficiently that a former luxury became accessible to the masses for the first time. By 1928 Bata operated the largest tanneries, shoe-making factories, and shoe machinery industry in the world. Czechoslovakia led the world in footwear exports, and the Czech people were the best shod in Europe. What had begun as a crisis due to the bleak economic situation had gone on to propel the company, and the entire country forward.

In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity, said Albert Einstein. Time and again, this has been seen to be true. Out of the depths of the innumerable problems that challenged humanity in the past have surfaced great opportunities. Famine, war, depression and subjugation have all left one or more positive impacts on the world.

The Irish Potato Famine of the 1840s that resulted in the death of over a million people, became a major watershed in Irish economic, agricultural, demographic, political, religious and linguistic history of the country. It resulted, among other things, in a large scale reorganization of the agricultural sector. Farmers and laborers became politically better organized. Funding from those who had emigrated to America and elsewhere came to their support. Emigration forged enduring links between Ireland and the world.

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The devastating Second World War destroyed the European economy and left millions and millions dead, homeless, or badly affected. But, looking back, it is apparent that the war necessitated and developed many industries. After it ended, most nations rebounded quickly, and witnessed rapid economic growth and modernization. What had been the culmination of five centuries of incessant warfare in Europe led to the founding of the United Nations and the European Community, and the total elimination of warfare in Western Europe. The end of the war was quickly followed by the end of colonial empires around the world and the spread of democracy. Technology developed during the war found commercial use afterwards, raising living standards. Employment of women soared during the war and resulted in greater social freedom and economic opportunities after it ended. Widespread enlistment of African Americans in the armed forces helped bring racial discrimination to an end.

Such a phenomenon can be observed throughout history, in the Black Plague, the American Civil War, the Great Depression, Apartheid, Cold War, oil crises, climate change...

2. Great Leaders

Another phenomenon that can be seen during times of great crises is the appearance of great men and women at the right time and place. Throughout history, the solution of every problem has associated with it one or more leaders, people of vision who solved the problem or guided others through it. The American independence movement saw the rise of George Washington, Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson. Giants of men, Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin allied during World War II. Martin Luther King Jr. was there to lead the Civil Rights movement. The Indian freedom movement gave expression to the remarkable abilities of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, the Apartheid to Nelson Mandela.

How can we explain the fact that great men have appeared only in the face of major disasters? Is it mere coincidence? Such a constellation of leaders at one point in time as at the time of its Founding Fathers has not been seen again in the USA since its independence. England has not had a leader of the stature of Churchill since World War II ended. India has not seen another Gandhi since the English left.

People of extraordinary talent and capacity live everywhere in all generations. But often the times and circumstances are not conducive for the expression of their potential. The native capacities are activated by crises. Great challenges bring out the greatness in people. They stir them awake. They release the energy of necessity, motivate and pressurize, break down resistances, change old attitudes, necessitate creative thinking, supply courage and strength. In other words, challenges can create leaders, just as they convert severely threatening circumstances into positive expansive elevating opportunities that extend benefits far beyond the elimination of the original threat.

3. Challenges Release Energy

What is it about challenges that open up opportunities, shape leaders out of men? No pressure, no diamonds, said the Scottish philosopher Thomas Carlyle. Carbon is not the only thing that undergoes a transformation under pressure and heat, people do too. The pressure of a challenge releases energy. It raises aspiration in people and awakens them to their inherent strength. People become motivated, resourceful, and capable of taking effort they would never have taken during normal times. When all is well, we don't set tough goals. When we set high challenging goals, we see opportunities that were not visible before.

When Hitler attacked England in WWII, he expected England to surrender within six weeks. But after three months, Germany gave up the attack, though they heavily outnumbered Britain in both aircraft and experienced pilots. At the start of the war, Germany had 4,000 aircrafts compared to Britain's front-line strength of 1,660. Germany trained 800 pilots per month, and Britain, 200. The material advantage was with Hitler, but he had not taken into account the enormous psychological determination of Britain and its leader. In one of his most famous addresses to the nation, Churchill rallied the English to make unheard of sacrifices and unrelenting effort to defend their freedom. He did not ask his countrymen, what do you all think we should do? He did not compare the numerical strength of his army or air force with Hitler's. He did not have in mind the troops the US would send – America had not yet even entered the war. He simply proclaimed that Britain shall not surrender, speaking out of the deepest conviction and courage of his heart. He appealed to the depths of character of the English people. During air raids, he would stand outside on the roof top, shaking his fists at the bombers. His courage, patriotism, sense of honor and self-sacrifice resonated with all the English people. They backed him totally. In one of his other war speeches, he said 'I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat'. What more can a leader offer, and every one of his countrymen was willing to follow him and offer the same. These statements of Churchill had all his emotions, sentiments and beliefs behind them, and struck a chord with all his people. Against all odds the under-equipped and under-manned British air force was victorious in the skies. Britain lost 1012 aircraft, and Germany, 1918. 537 British airmen were lost, Germany lost 5 times as many, 2662. In the face of such resistance, Hitler had no choice but to give up.

Something similar was seen in the battle of Agincourt, France during the hundred years' war between England and France, when, King Henry V led England to a near miraculous victory. The English troops had very little food, had marched 260 miles in two and a half weeks, were suffering from sickness, and faced much larger numbers of well-equipped French men. The French had over 12,000 men, and outnumbered the English 5 to 1. It is said

that some French leaders were so eager to defeat the English that they insisted on being in the front line. But in spite of the great odds, the French casualties were somewhere between 5000 and 10,000 men. Incredibly, the English lost less than 100. Henry V fought a superior French army, crippled France, and started a new period in the war. The courage and determination of the king and his army were immortalized by Shakespeare in his drama *Henry V*.

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Students pulling off an all-nighter the day before the exam is an instance of crises releasing energy seen on a much smaller scale! Challenges also make us more resourceful, we’ve seen in books like *Robinson Crusoe* and movies like *Castaway* that necessity makes people come up with ideas that they would not have done during normal times. Gasoline shortage in Japan in 1946 made Soichiro Honda attach a small motor, powered by kerosene, to his bicycle. After dozens of his friends asked him to build similar motorbikes for them, he formed the Honda Motor Company. American Southwest airlines had a slow turnaround time for its aircraft. Under pressure of a severe shortage of funds, it adopted aggressive measures to improve the value of speed and punctuality. Now the airline has the fastest turn time in the industry and unmatched profitability.

It is the pressure of the situation that releases energy in people and makes them rise to the occasion. It is what made Bata turn his company around, and Churchill rally his countrymen. It is what made the employees of Bata Shoes work hard, and every soldier and civilian in England give everything in the Battle of Britain.

4. Challenges Change Attitudes

A bad attitude is said to be like a flat tire, you cannot get very far until you change it. A crisis does just that, it changes attitudes. Faced with a crisis, many people see a dead end with no way out. They do not realize that their sense of helplessness arises from their own attitudes, like that of the Czech industrialists who blamed the government and external forces and sought help, while Bata decided to act on his own. He changed his outlook, and infused optimism in everyone around him as well. Changing deep seated attitudes is never easy. But challenges generate pressure for a change of attitudes. Invariably, new opportunities appear as a consequence.

The story of Michael Blumenthal is a great study of an individual taking a challenge and turning it around to strengthen himself. Blumenthal was a Jew, born in Germany, where the family had resided for centuries. But in 1938, his father was arrested and the family’s shop burnt. Blumenthal, who was a 7 year old boy, was beaten up. His father escaped from a concentration camp and took the family to Shanghai, as it was a country that did not require entry visas. They hoped to go on from there to some place else. But World War II broke out in 1939, and the Blumenthals became trapped in China for eight years. Frequently, they did not have enough to eat and underwent great physical and mental hardship. Blumenthal worked

in a chemical factory for \$1 a week to help feed his family. His education was interrupted; the trauma took a toll on the family, his parents divorced. After the American troops entered Shanghai in 1945, 21-year old Blumenthal and his sister arrived in San Francisco with just \$60 with them.

*“Challenges can strengthen people, and change their attitudes.
They teach lessons that no classroom can impart.”*

Blumenthal enrolled at college and worked at a host of odd jobs-truck driver, night elevator operator, busboy, movie theater ticket-taker. He finished at the University of California at Berkeley. Then, on a scholarship, he earned two master’s degrees and a Ph.D. in economics at Princeton, and later taught there. Then he entered politics and public service. He moved from height to height. He masterminded the merger of Sperry Corporation into Burroughs to form UNISYS Corporation, the second largest computer manufacturer in the world at the time and the largest merger in the history of the computer industry until then. He went on to serve as US Secretary of the Treasury under President Jimmy Carter.

A man who fled persecution in Germany, spent nearly a decade of privation in China, and had no easy time on arriving in the US, Blumenthal says he owes his success to the hardships he faced in his early life. The principle that challenges are opportunities is well-known in martial arts. One can use the momentum of the attack and turn it against the attacker. Blumenthal used this Jujitsu principle. He applied the lessons learnt in Nazi Germany and wartime Shanghai to become stronger, more determined and more resourceful. Instead of allowing troubles to crush him, he let them teach him how to cope with adversity. The lessons equipped him for the future. In his autobiography, *From Exile to Washington* he wrote “The tough refugee years were precious lessons for the future; I lived them intensely, and they taught me much that was valuable and that I might never have learned in normal circumstances. Today I am grateful for that.”

Challenges can strengthen people, and change their attitudes. They teach lessons that no classroom can impart. The improved attitudes often improve situations, and bring solutions.

5. New Situations Break Old Resistances

Sometimes, the society, organization, or individual’s entrenched pattern of thought, attitude and action cause the problem. A crisis enables the revamping of this structure. The pressure of a crisis can be used to break down the resistances that are the source of the problem.

Resistance crumbling under pressure of a crisis was witnessed in the turnaround of America’s third largest automobile manufacturer, Chrysler. Founded in 1925, the company expanded into Europe, and acquired French, British and Spanish companies. In the 1970s, a number of factors including the 1973 oil crisis impacted Chrysler’s sales. This was aggravated by massive imports of high quality, fuel-efficient small cars from Japan. As a result, Chrysler came to the verge of bankruptcy, forcing its retreat from Europe. In 1979 the financial experts

were unanimous in their diagnosis that Chrysler was all but dead. Lee Iacocca, the man credited with turning around the company, was brought in as CEO. The situation was so desperate that Iacocca had to beg the US government for financial support in order to prevent the loss of tens of thousands of jobs. It was the largest instance of a financial bailout in American history. A study of the actions Iacocca took to save the company is a great course in itself.

When he took over, Iacocca discovered to his dismay that inside Chrysler plants there was just about every kind of problem one could imagine—theft, gambling, protection rackets, prostitution, and even a murder. There was no discipline. Executives used the president's office as a passageway from one office to another. Executives with coffee cups in their hands kept opening the door and walking right through the president's office. Factory workers did not bother to use the trash barrels for their garbage. Absenteeism, low morale, racial tensions, disputes between workers and managers, and wildcat strikes were common. Workers at one plant failed to punch in and out for lunch hour and then broke the clocks when management insisted. These recurring problems seriously affected the efficiency of operations and the quality of the cars.

Chrysler had 100,000 unsold cars valued at \$600 million that were poorly made and deteriorating outdoors; enormous overheads and declining sales that were generating millions in losses every day; a dissatisfied and alienated customer base. Chrysler ran out of cash—it came down to its last \$1 million at a time when daily expenses were \$50 million—and in 1980 and 1981 its total losses were \$2.2 billion.

Iacocca discovered that each of the company's 35 vice presidents was running a mini-empire. Each ruled his own turf. There was no communication or coordination between departments. There was absence of a strong central authority making it difficult to control people and impossible to harness their full capacities for productive work. Talented individuals were assigned to jobs that they had not been trained for. Potential talents were ignored or suppressed rather than being actively encouraged.

Iacocca called it a state of anarchy. He said he never would have accepted the job if he had known how bad things really were. He said it left him seeing double. Iacocca's first task was to eradicate the negative habits and install simple discipline. He had to peel away the encrusting layers of dead habits, vested interests, outmoded strategies, and inertia. He fired 33 of the company's 35 vice-presidents and allowed long-suppressed ideas, energies, and talents to rise to the surface. The pressure made Iacocca remove the entrenched negative habits that had generated the crisis in the first place. It also made the powerful union go along with him, otherwise the company would have to file for bankruptcy and everyone would be left without jobs.

Between 1978 and 1981, Chrysler lost \$3.3 billion – the largest loss ever by an American corporation until that time. Between 1982 and 1984, Chrysler earned a net profit of \$3.3 billion – more money than it had earned in the previous 59 years it was in business. The net gain in profitability was \$6.6 billion. The company repaid the government's financial guarantees seven years ahead of schedule.

Iacocca had earlier served as president at Ford, but he could not do there what he did at Chrysler. Because the obstacles were so large, the pressure was all the more, and great resistances could be removed. Nothing short of imminent collapse could have made such

sweeping changes possible, changes that swept away many outdated, entrenched patterns that were in the way of efficiency and profitability.

6. The Right Response

What differentiates those who tide over a crisis from those who succumb to it? Is there a process that explains how individuals, companies and countries are able to convert challenges into opportunities? Do we really explain anything when we say that Henry V was a great king, Churchill a great war-time Prime Minister, Bata and Iacocca entrepreneurs with acumen? Accomplishment is a human process. There ought to be some general principles we can derive from these extraordinary instances.

Game changers are always on the lookout for opportunity. And they recognize it when they see it. Thomas Alva Edison said that opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work. Sometimes, a slight change in outlook can make the difference. Lee Iacocca drove a Ford car while he was in college. Whenever his car stalled while driving uphill, instead of cursing the car or its maker, he used to say ‘They need me in Ford. Someone who makes this kind of car can do with some help’.

Just as the principle in martial arts, instead of resisting the attack, the momentum of the attack of the opponent is redirected and used against the very opponent, great men and women redirect their energy in the right direction. It was said of Washington that he never appeared to so much advantage as in the hour of distress. Adversity brought his best traits to the surface and ennobled him. When Lee Iacocca was fired from Ford, the anger and humiliation pushed him to take on the presidency of Chrysler. He said, ‘There are times in everyone’s life when something constructive is born out of adversity. There are times when things seem so bad that you’ve got to grab your fate by the shoulders and shake it. I was full of anger and I had a simple choice: I could turn that anger against myself, with disastrous results. Or I could take some of that energy and try to do something productive. In times of great stress and adversity, it is always best to keep busy, to plow your anger and your energy into something positive.’

Letting go of the past, anticipating change and adapting oneself to change are essential components of the right response. Those passenger shipping lines that did not see the aviation industry taking off fell further and further behind, whereas those that saw it and moved to cargo or cruise industries, or to an entirely different business survived.

Great leaders learn from mistakes, their own as well as others’. Edison immortalized the idea when he said, ‘I have not failed, I have just found 10,000 ways that won’t work’. They think creatively and adapt. Life giving lemons is used to indicate life giving problems, lemons in this case signify sourness and bitterness. Julius Rosenwald is credited to have said, when life gives you lemons, make lemonade. That is, the problem can be converted into something good. There is a yet another modern twist to this, when life gives you lemons use the seeds to plant an orchard, make lemonade and start a franchise.

7. From Famine to Plenty

Challenges have done what nothing else could have made possible. A concluding story of

India's Green Revolution that transformed India from a starving nation to a net food exporter shows the capacity of crises to bring about incredible change.

The population explosion of the 1950s brought about by introduction of vaccinations and life saving drugs resulted in perennial food shortages in India that had to be met by massive imports of food at concessional prices from the USA. The problem was aggravated in the mid-1960s, when India faced two successive years of severe drought, and acute food shortage. The country led what was described as a 'ship to mouth' existence. At one point, India reached a stage where she had stocks for only two weeks, and nothing else in the pipeline. Prime Minister Shastri called upon all Indians to miss one meal each week. The FAO estimated that severe famine could take up to 10 million lives in the country.

C Subramaniam (CS), the Food and Agriculture minister proposed importing hybrid seeds that had been developed and experimented in Mexico with success by Dr. Norman Borlaug. He insisted that the government set up a separate corporation that would purchase the extra food produced in food surplus regions at a price that guaranteed the farmers would earn a profit and then sell the surplus in food deficit areas. That way, farmers would always have an incentive for producing more. Seed farms, warehouses and fertilizer plants were set up to support the effort. Then he announced in the parliament that his program would make India self-sufficient within five years. Members of parliament laughed at his absurd boast, but CS was determined.

CS faced formidable opposition from within the Cabinet, from agricultural scientists, the opposition parties, his own party members and the general public. Scientists and economists opposed the proposed strategy. The opponents organized as many as thousand protest demonstrations around the country. But CS worked diligently to persuade various constituencies to his view. He converted five acres of lawn into a demonstration farm at his home in New Delhi. That experiment proved highly successful, leading his Cabinet colleagues to withdraw their opposition and support him. The farmers said it would not work in India, the people wouldn't eat it because the wheat was the wrong color and shape. CS dismissed all these objections. The government brought the seeds by air as they could not wait for the ships.

In the meantime, since food was urgently required, CS went to Washington for assistance. US President Lyndon Johnson agreed to export food, but CS explained that India couldn't wait till the ships reached the ports, it was such an emergency. So he asked the president to redirect the food in ships that were already in the high seas.

Planning for the long term, CS revamped agricultural education in the country, shifted the focus to high priority areas, set up a fertilizer corporation. Meanwhile, the imported seeds were a success, famine was staved off. The Green Revolution had been launched. Food grain production went up by 50% in 5 years. India had a token surplus and began to export. In 10 years, food production doubled. The success was emulated by other Asian and African countries.

As a by-product of the Green Revolution, many other lateral industries flourished. Crop areas under high-yield varieties needed more water, more fertilizer and more pesticides. This spurred the growth of the local manufacturing sector. Industrial growth created new jobs and contributed to the country's GDP. The increase in irrigation created need for new

dams to harness monsoon water. The water stored was used to create hydro-electric power. This in turn boosted industrial growth, created jobs and improved the quality of life of people in villages. India paid back all loans it had taken from the World Bank for the purpose of the Green Revolution. This improved India's creditworthiness. Some developed countries like Canada, which were facing a shortage in agricultural labor, were so impressed by the results of India's Green Revolution that they asked the Indian government to supply them with farmers experienced in the methods of the Green Revolution. Many farmers from the northern states in India were thus sent to these countries. Not only were their lives transformed, but this had an impact on their hometowns as well. Everything had a positive ripple effect.

"The willingness to learn, adapt and grow determines the result."

8. Conclusion

All of the above read very well as inspiring stories from the past, like the many motivational quotes and proverbs about seeing the silver lining. But they are not just meant to be idealistic anecdotes with happy endings. They are in truth lessons for the present and the future. We can compare the enormity of the challenges we face today, with the ones we have overcome in the past, and look for parallels, guidelines, even warnings. Eradicating poverty around the world seems as huge as overcoming the economic crisis after World War I, but Bata tells us it can be done, and how to do it. If one nation could use an impending famine as a stepping stone to food surplus, together we can achieve food security for all humanity. If Iacocca could revive a company on the verge of bankruptcy, inclusive economic growth must be possible. We see the energy crisis leading to the exploration of renewable energy sources, much as the hardships equipped Blumenthal to rise high. Global warming analysts predict exactly when and how high the sea level will rise. But if Churchill could prove all war experts wrong and make the Battle of Britain end in another way, it should be possible for us to alter the direction regarding global climate change. When implementing the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, success in overcoming earlier challenges are practical examples that can inspire us to greater achievements. It is much difficult to see anything positive coming out of spreading epidemics, religious fundamentalism that seems to getting out of hand with each passing day, or the threat of nuclear war, but one quick glance backward is enough to tell us that these challenges can be converted into opportunities. It is our response that is the determinant. Can we give the right response?

What is the difference between challenges and opportunities? As Shakespeare wrote, 'There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so'. Challenges and opportunities are not irreconcilable opposites or contradictions. By challenges, we typically refer to situations that threaten to deprive us of current achievements – situations which seem to demand more energy, knowledge and capacity than we presently possess and are therefore daunting, perplexing or frightening. We view situations as opportunities that have the potential to raise our level of accomplishment to a higher level – we find that opportunities also demand more energy, knowledge and capacity than we presently possess, compelling us to raise our level of performance beyond present levels or what we even believed possible. In practice, the distinction is less clear. Both require similar responses including:

- enormous investment of energy
- changes in our knowledge, attitudes
- restructuring of organization
- acquiring new knowledge, learning new skills
- risking what we presently have

Our response to the challenge determines whether the challenge defeats us or is converted into an opportunity. The right response to the challenge releases energy and redirects it towards finding a solution. The willingness to learn, adapt and grow determines the result. Contradictions can be complements. What the mind views as irreconcilable and mutually exclusive opposites can turn out to be aspects of a greater whole. Is it possible that all challenges have concealed opportunities behind them? Can we do as the oysters do, convert an irritant into a pearl?

Author Contact Information

Email: harish.janani@gmail.com