

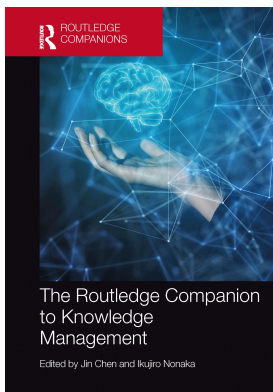
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7

JAPANESE PHILOSOPHY AND KNOWLEDGE

Insights into Ikigai and Wabi-Sabi

Sanjay Kumar

Part I

Introduction

Of late, there is a growing interest in the concepts associated with Japanese philosophy, cutting across multiple realms—both individual and organizational. On a more personal level, Japanese philosophy is being utilized to help change perspectives and attitudes toward life, and at the organizational level, a tendency to move toward minimalism is emerging more and more across a variety of sectors. While such philosophies may not completely revolutionize everyday life, they can certainly help equip people with the required insights that can help provide a sense of stability, and help find the light, even in seemingly endless darkness. Like most philosophical tools, however, the impact depends greatly on interpretation, and how we utilize our own power of thought.

Japanese philosophy, rather than being limited to itself, has assimilated learning and influences from a number of other cultures, Asian and otherwise. As such, the perspectives emanating from such philosophy are incredibly nuanced, and cognizant of the complications associated with cultural relations, similarities, and contrasts. Historically, due to the absence of overtly foreign influences on their sovereignty of thought, Japanese thinkers had the luxury of alternatives outside the binary of simple wholehearted acceptance or utter rejection (Kasulis, 2019). New theories from abroad could be tried and, if need be, experimentally modified before making a final decision about endorsement. As such, as the philosophies have evolved with time, their application across a variety of contexts has evolved alongside, owing to the same being more relatable than a number of other, more localized strands of philosophy.

The purpose of this chapter is not to state that specific elements of Japanese philosophy can be deemed as the necessary solution to problems and challenges plaguing most of us on a personal, professional, or organizational level. Instead, the purpose here is to help provide some context, some alternative perspectives to help recalibrate priorities that may help us contextualize the said challenges in a way which makes them more palatable, and presents them as opportunities to grow instead of a *prima facie* source of suffering. This is a tricky pursuit, however, as it is difficult to remedy the source of stress and suffering without the ability to clearly identify the same. Stress can often emanate from seemingly desirable

propositions and attributes, which may not strike us as being inherently harmful and thus, may continue to lurk undetected, for instance, our pursuit of perfection.

Perfectionism is lauded as a desirable personal trait by organizations and individuals alike. The desire to produce the perfect output at all times, while seemingly positive, has slowly but surely evolved into a disdain for making mistakes, and consequently, an inability to deal with the consequences. The paradox here is that as we pursue perfection in the quest for a peaceful existence—whether as an individual or an organization—we pay massive, intangible costs in the form of physical, economic, and psycho-social well-being. Perfectionism can therefore be incredibly counterproductive, by inculcating a blinkered focus on the failures, and therefore not allowing for achievements to be celebrated.

This mindset also has a potentially damaging effect on our mental health and well-being—with available evidence and literature suggesting that it can lead to depression and anxiety starting from a fairly young age, tiredness, low mood, increased tendency to self-harm, and a variety of linked and proximate disorders, including eating disorders, PTSD, and OCD (Accordino et al., 2000). Data also suggest a strong correlation between mental health disorders emanating from increased exposure to stress, and an increase in the rates of self-harm including suicides. Grimly enough, this correlation cuts across age groups and includes young people (Flett and Hewitt, 2014).

With mental health issues touted as the next worldwide pandemic (Heale, 2020), there are extremely capable forces, institutions, and individuals working to identify a variety of remedies to help deal with the issue. However, a problem with such deep-rooted causal factors cutting across multiple realms of personal, professional, and organizational structures in society is sure to require a multi-faceted approach in order to deal with it adequately, and this is where key learnings from philosophy can play a crucial role. Japanese philosophy is beautifully balanced in this regard—having developed a nation and more importantly, a culture associated with perfection, it not only encourages, but celebrates imperfections by viewing them as beauty in visible signs of repair (Buetow and Wallis, 2017), which is the basis behind the art of *kintsugi*—the art of repairing broken pottery with lacquer, dusted or mixed with powdered precious metals.

In this way, Japan celebrates imperfections by looking at it as an art form, and by forcing the onlooker to look at imperfections for what they truly are—the opportunity to learn and to elevate the final product into something absolutely unique, while acknowledging the realities of a journey not devoid of hardships, and highlighting perseverance, adaptability, and a healthy respect for factors outside of our control. The beauty of Japanese philosophy therefore lies in its tendency to poke at the obvious to seek out the meaningful, and in this way, it seeks to make even the most abstract of concepts relatable and applicable to daily scenarios. *Kintsugi* could be applied to lives and organizations struggling to deal with the pressure which accompanies the pursuit of excellence, and to help inculcate a culture where mistakes—while still avoidable if possible—are not viewed as sin, and are in fact treated as opportunities for improvement.

To develop such a perspective on life requires a level of consciousness and mindfulness which is not easy to hone, but once achieved, is likely to be sustainable owing to its simplicity of thought. Here, it is fitting to focus on the concept of *Wabi-Sabi*, a very existential, primal philosophy emanating from Japan. It refers to a refreshing attitude toward aesthetics, which focuses on the natural, the impermanent, and the imperfect, originating from philosophies in China, and then settling as a useful way of life in Japan, where it is still difficult to identify one concrete definition for the concept, most framing it instead as a mere state of mind (Juniper, 2003).

For people who incorporate the concept of Wabi-Sabi within their lives, you'll find that they agree on one thing, which is appreciating the cycle of every life—birth and death. All things on earth will eventually move on to a state of decay and humans are not exempt from it. In between birth and death, Wabi-Sabi compels us to age gracefully and enjoy life's journeys and to embrace the idea of coming to terms with the process of getting older while realizing that life is inherently transitory and imperfect.

There is only one thing in this world that's perpetual and that is change. This is something that several people are fearful and anxious about. Humans fear change because we lose control over a situation, we feel powerless, and eventually this deters our self-determination. The principles of Wabi-Sabi make us more accepting of change, especially in dealing with things that are beyond our control, and in this way, we learn to embrace this perpetual phenomenon, allowing us to anticipate the same on a personal and organizational level in a more productive manner.

While Wabi-Sabi could therefore be seen as a state of elevated mindfulness, *Ikigai* helps provide the very reason for our being. This principle simply means a deep and personal pursuit of finding one's purpose for being, i.e. having something or someone to motivate you to carry on and continue living. Your *Ikigai* is the very reason why you get up in the morning, get dressed, and get out to the world. *Ikigai* compels us on a journey to find our one true purpose—our calling. Consequently, this brings us happiness and satisfaction.

Most people believe that a purpose-driven life equates to a long life and there are multiple studies that associate longevity to *Ikigai*. In particular, the Okinawa islands in Japan are among the few places that have an above-average longevity rate, especially for females. The secret? A combination of the Okinawa diet, their regional genome, social support, and of course, *Ikigai* (Yildirim, 2020).

In the following portions, we will explore these concepts in more depth.

Part II

Ikigai

Time is perhaps the most expensive currency in the world. *Ikigai* teaches us to spend it wisely by avoiding three common mistakes. First, as humans, we have the tendency to dwell on one thing, wasting our valuable time that can be spent elsewhere. Second, we waste our time on several other things that are unnecessary and superficial. Lastly, we don't spend our time well enough, doing too little (Yildirim, 2020).

What does this imply then? We have the freedom to choose the things in life we want to focus on. It doesn't need to be just a single thing and we definitely don't need to spread ourselves too thin either. With *Ikigai*, it urges us to engage in activities that interest us and make us truly happy, creative, and fulfilled (Yildirim, 2020).

Ikigai encourages us to leverage our strengths to find our purpose in life. While talent is inherent, skills can be learned. So we can all start from learning to build our strengths. Once we have established our strengths, we'll have more options on how to live our lives and discover our purpose, our *Ikigai* (Yildirim, 2020).

Devoting our time investing in the skills that we are good at will ultimately lead us to something we enjoy doing, providing us with financial security and letting us contribute to society. These are all fundamental aspects of *Ikigai*.

Ikigai is finding the convergence or the center of the things you are passionate about, your chosen mission in life, your vocation, and your profession. In other words, it is finding the

overlaps between the things you love doing, things you are good at, what you can be paid for doing, and what the world needs from you.

The truth is not all of us can work our way toward the center; nonetheless, there is fulfillment in making headway toward our *Ikigai*. This is where we should be optimists. It is all about finding healthy approaches in achieving our purpose and in the process of doing so, stay grounded to reality.

Life presents us with plenty of opportunities and it is up to us how we choose to live it. There will always be obstacles but there are also several ways around it. *Wabi-Sabi* and *Ikigai* are only examples of life philosophies that provide guidance and balance.

We are not perfect and we can get easily overwhelmed with life but that's perfectly fine. A life coach is always there to provide you with the necessary tools to develop yourself, help you unlock your potential, and live a life that's fulfilling. In all the beauty, madness, and complexities of life, the question now remains—How do you choose to live?

Ikigai therefore revolves around the art of defining your own meaning in life. Usually, this inward journey requires a lot of patience and time before you find this sense of 'purpose' within yourself. It is about establishing a balance between the things you are passionate about, something the world needs (no matter how small or big), the things you are good at, as well as the feasibility of financial scenarios. Of course, there are innumerable ways to interpret *ikigai*; although countless thinkers have come forward with their ideas on how to find the most fulfillment in life, the word remained largely open to interpretation.

Héctor García and Francesc Miralles published a book titled *Ikigai: The Japanese Secret to a Long and Happy Life*. The book explores how the lifestyles of people in Okinawa are directly correlated to their longevity—and this in turn elevated *ikigai* from a concept to a lifestyle. The book attributes the long life of Okinawans to the following (García and Miralles, 2018):

- 1 Eating only until you're 80 percent full
- 2 Stay active and don't retire
- 3 Surround yourself with good friends
- 4 Get in shape
- 5 Reconnect with nature
- 6 Live in the moment
- 7 Give thanks
- 8 Take it slow
- 9 Smile and acknowledge the people around you
- 10 Follow your *ikigai*

You've probably heard most of these tips before, but García and Miralles ignited further interest on the Japanese philosophy of *ikigai*, which inspired several TED talks on the topic of 'finding your *ikigai*.' For Japanese workers in big cities, a typical work day begins with a state called *sushi-zume*, a term which likens commuters squeezed into a crowded train car to tightly packed grains of rice in sushi.

However, the stress doesn't stop there. The country's obsession with a relentless work culture ensures most people put in long hours at the office, governed by strict hierarchical rules. Overwork is not uncommon and the last trains home on weekdays around midnight are filled with people in suits. However, it has become a deep-seated aspect of the culture which begs the question why the people choose to do it, day after day, regardless of the stress that ensues? And this is where *Ikigai* helps explain this process, by being the very reason why we get up in the morning.

To those in the West who are more familiar with the concept of *ikigai*, it's often associated with four overlapping qualities: what you love, what you are good at, what the world needs, and what you can be paid for (Mitsuhashi, 2017).

For the Japanese however, the idea is slightly different. One's *ikigai* may have nothing to do with income. In fact, in a survey of 2,000 Japanese men and women conducted by Central Research Services in 2010, just 31% of recipients considered work as their *ikigai* (Central Research Services, 2010). Someone's value in life can be work—but it is certainly not limited to that.

There are many books in Japan devoted to *ikigai*, but one in particular is considered definitive: *Ikigai-ni-tsuite* (About *Ikigai*), published in 1966. The book's author, psychiatrist Mieko Kamiya, explains that as a word, *ikigai* is similar to “happiness” but has a subtle difference in its nuance. *Ikigai* is what allows you to look forward to the future even if you are miserable right now (Kamiya, 1966).

In a 2001 research paper on *ikigai*, co-author Akihiro Hasegawa, a clinical psychologist and associate professor at Toyo Eiwa University, placed the word *ikigai* as part of everyday Japanese language. It is composed of two words: *iki*, which means life and *gai*, which describes value or worth. According to Hasegawa, the origin of the word *ikigai* goes back to the Heian period (794–1185). *Gai* comes from the word *kai* (“shell” in Japanese) which was deemed highly valuable, and from there *ikigai* derived as a word that means value in living (Mitsuhashi, 2017).

Hasegawa points out that in English, the word *life* means both lifetime and everyday life. So, *ikigai* translated as *life's purpose* sounds very grand. “But in Japan we have *jinsei*, which means lifetime and *seikatsu*, which means everyday life,” he says. The concept of *ikigai* aligns more to *seikatsu* and, through his research, Hasegawa discovered that Japanese people believe that the sum of small joys in everyday life results in more fulfilling life as a whole (Mitsuhashi, 2017).

Japan has some of the longest-living citizens in the world—87 years for women and 81 for men, according to the country's Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (2019). Could this concept of *ikigai* contribute to longevity? Author Dan Buettner believes it does. He is the author of *Blue Zones: Lessons on Living Longer from the People Who've Lived the Longest* (Buettner, 2010), and has travelled the globe exploring long-lived communities around the world.

One such zone is Okinawa, a remote island with a remarkably high number of centenarians. While a unique diet likely has a lot to do with residents' longevity, Buettner says *ikigai* also plays a part. “Older people are celebrated, they feel obligated to pass on their wisdom to younger generations,” he says. This gives them a purpose in life outside of themselves, in service to their communities (Buettner, 2010). According to Buettner, the concept of *ikigai* is not exclusive to Okinawans: “there might not be a word for it but in all four blue zones such as Sardinia and Nicoya Peninsula, the same concept exists among people living long lives.” Buettner suggests making three lists: your values, things you like to do, and things you are good at (Buettner, 2010). The cross section of the three lists is your *ikigai* (Mitsuhashi, 2017). But, knowing your *ikigai* alone is not enough. Simply put, you need an outlet. *Ikigai* is “purpose in action,” he says.

In a culture where the value of the team supersedes the individual, Japanese workers are driven by being useful to others, being thanked, and being esteemed by their colleagues, says Toshimitsu Sowa, CEO of HR consulting firm Jinzai Kenkyusho (Mitsuhashi, 2017). CEO of executive recruiting firm Probitry Global Search Yuko Takato spends her days with highly qualified people who consider work as their *ikigai* and, according to Takato, they all have one thing in common: they are motivated and quick to take action (Mitsuhashi, 2017).

However, this is not to say that working harder and longer are key tenets of the *ikigai* philosophy—nearly a quarter of Japanese employees work more than 80 hours of overtime a month, and with tragic outcomes—the phenomenon of *karoshi* (death from overwork) claims more than 2,000 lives a year.

Rather, *ikigai* is about feeling your work makes a difference in people's lives. How people find meaning in their work is a topic of much interest to management experts. One research paper by Wharton management professor Adam Grant explained that what motivates employees is “doing work that affects the well-being of others” and to “see or meet the people affected by their work” (Grant, 2013). In one experiment, cold callers at the University of Michigan who spent time with a recipient of the scholarship they were trying to raise money for brought in 171% more money when compared with those who were merely working using a phone. The simple act of meeting a student beneficiary provided meaning to the fundraisers and boosted their performance. This applies to life in general. Instead of trying to tackle world hunger, you can start small by helping someone around you, like a local volunteering group (Mitsuhashi, 2017).

Part III

Wabi-Sabi

Two preliminary observations about the Japanese cultural tradition are relevant to the arts. First, classical Japanese philosophy understands reality as constant change, or (to use a Buddhist expression) impermanence.

The idea of *mujō* (impermanence) is perhaps most forcefully expressed in the writings and sayings of the 13th-century Zen master Dōgen, who is arguably Japan's profoundest philosopher, but there is a fine expression of it by a later Buddhist priest, Yoshida Kenkō, whose work *Essays in Idleness* (Tsurezuregusa, 1332) sparkles with aesthetic insights (Parkes and Loughnane, 2018).

It does not matter how young or strong you may be, the hour of death comes sooner than you expect. It is an extraordinary miracle that you should have escaped to this day; do you suppose you have even the briefest respite in which to relax (Brownlee and Keene, 1968)? In the Japanese Buddhist tradition, awareness of the fundamental condition of existence is no cause for nihilistic despair, but rather a call to vital activity in the present moment and to gratitude for another moment's being granted to us (Parkes and Loughnane, 2018).

The second observation is that the arts in Japan have tended to be closely connected with Confucian practices of self-cultivation, as evidenced in the fact that they are often referred to as “ways [of living]”: *chadō*, the way of tea (tea ceremony), *shōdō*, the way of writing (calligraphy), and so forth. And since the scholar official in China was expected to be skilled in the “Six Arts”—ceremonial ritual, music, calligraphy, mathematics, archery, and charioteering—culture and the arts tend to be more closely connected with intellect and the life of the mind than in the western traditions. To this day, it is not unusual in Japan for the scholar to be a fine calligrapher and an accomplished poet in addition to possessing the pertinent intellectual abilities (Parkes and Loughnane, 2018).

In the aforementioned *Essays in Idleness* Kenkō asks, “Are we to look at cherry blossoms only in full bloom, at the moon only when it is cloudless?” (Brownlee and Keene, 1968) If for the Buddhists the basic condition is impermanence, to privilege as consummate only certain moments in the eternal flux may signify a refusal to accept that basic condition. Kenkō continues: “To long for the moon while looking on the rain, to lower the blinds and be

unaware of the passing of the spring—these are even more deeply moving. Branches about to blossom or gardens strewn with faded flowers are worthier of our admiration.” This is an example of the idea of wabi, understated beauty, which was first distinguished and praised when expressed in poetry. But it is in the art of tea, and the context of Zen, that the notion of wabi is most fully developed (Parkes and Loughnane, 2018).

The term sabi occurs often in the Manyōshū, where it has a connotation of desolateness (*sabireru* means “to become desolate”), and later on it seems to acquire the meaning of something that has aged well, grown rusty (another word pronounced *sabi* means “rust”), or has acquired a patina that makes it beautiful (Parkes and Loughnane, 2018).

The importance of sabi for the way of tea was affirmed by the great 15th-century tea master Shukō, founder of one of the first schools of tea ceremony. As a distinguished commentator puts it: “The concept sabi carries not only the meaning ‘aged’—in the sense of ‘ripe with experience and insight’ as well as ‘infused with the patina that lends old things their beauty’—but also that of tranquility, aloneness, deep solitude” (Hammitzsch, 1993).

The feeling of sabi is also evoked in the haiku of the famous 17th-century poet Matsuo Bashō, where its connection with the word *sabishi* (solitary, lonely) is emphasized. The following haiku typifies *sabi*(*shi*) in conveying an atmosphere of solitude or loneliness that undercuts, as Japanese poetry usually does, the distinction between subjective and objective (Parkes and Loughnane, 2018):

“*Solitary now—
Standing amidst the blossoms
Is a cypress tree.*”

Contrasting with the colorful beauty of the blossoms, the more subdued gracefulness of the cypress—no doubt older than the person seeing it but no less solitary—typifies the poetic mood of *sabi* (Parkes and Loughnane, 2018).

As an extremely complex aesthetic value, it is difficult to find a corresponding word for Wabi-Sabi in a foreign language. Therefore, when the Japanese introduce Wabi-Sabi to the world outside of Japan, a series of short sentences and phrases are often used to make a broad, multiple, and flexible description. Leonard Koren described it as a hybrid for introducing Wabi-Sabi “a beauty of things imperfect impermanent, and incomplete. It is a beauty of things modest and humble it is a beauty of things unconventional.” In short, Wabi-Sabi expresses the beauty of incompleteness, imperfections, nature, simplicity, silence, humility, etc.

Wabi-Sabi refers to an aesthetic philosophy and vision applied to objects, which alludes to beauty in imperfections and the value of the passage of time, and openly accepts the deterioration and transience of existence, both human and material. For example, a lovely porcelain teacup that has been used for many years—it is chipped and scratched from use, but has acquired value and beauty from its rich history. But, beyond the aesthetic perspective, Wabi-Sabi also has lessons for our daily actions and the way we conceive of the world and life itself.

Richard Powell, author of the book *Wabi Sabi Simple*, notes that, “Nothing lasts, nothing is finished, nothing is perfect” (Powell, 2005)—and to this I would add, that is fine. It is necessary to learn that we can find beauty in imperfection, that we must honor the fleeting nature of experiences and existence itself by savoring and living in the present moment, that life is not and will not be perfect but that it is beautiful, and that nothing is permanent, which is why every moment is sacred.

We may be frustrated with a situation, we may feel that things are not as we would like, we may wish that some things lasted longer and others were over sooner. We suffer when our plans don’t go as we expected, or when an experience is not as perfect as we had hoped.

Wabi-Sabi can help us adapt in a healthy way to the changes and endless cycles of life. As Charles Darwin wrote, it is not the strongest or most intelligent species that survive, but rather the most flexible and adaptable. During this time, we are faced with a call for attention and a reminder to return to the essential—the simple and magical aspects of life. We can learn to recognize beauty and appreciate imperfection and impermanence as an opportunity to grow and to live to the fullest.

How can we start to practice Wabi-Sabi? Here are four ways to take this philosophy into everyday life.

Savor the present moment

Much is being said and written now about the practice of mindfulness—the art of living in the present—and how we can train our minds to be in the here and now, so we can enjoy the positive moments of each day. We can start by taking a few minutes daily to focus on breathing, body sensations, or emotions. Mindfulness practice invites us to be present throughout the day: to enjoy that first cup of coffee in the morning, to contemplate the clouds and their movement with amazement, to listen more deeply, and (when we can do so safely) to hug each other heart to heart.

Embrace Your Personal Story

Reflect on the path you've travelled, on all the ups and downs, and bring attention to the moments of joy, learning, and transformation (both external and internal) that you have experienced over time. Each person has a unique story with its own authentic and particular beauty. Reflecting and writing about these moments allow us to cultivate perspective and feel a sense of accomplishment and empowerment. It is equally important to give love to the scars that have marked our lives; we must not forget that each one of them adds value to our personal history.

Extract Learning

When things do not go as we expect or we are surprised by events that alter the order of our lives, what can we learn from the situation? Learning shifts us from victims to creators, allowing us to adapt and cultivate a resilient attitude toward change, loss, and transition.

Find Beauty in Simplicity

We can learn to redefine beauty, to expand our gaze, and to bring into focus elements that elicit joy and appreciation. We can do this with the objects we've gathered around us, with our everyday interactions with those we meet or live with, and also with nature. You might try taking pictures of the beauty you observe each day, and creating a Wabi-Sabi album.

The time has come to embrace change, fleetingness, and imperfection as a source of beauty, wisdom, and growth. We often speak of the “ravages of time”; we are conditioned to resist aging and seek eternal beauty and youth. Time does not wreak havoc—time shapes works of art and gives value to both objects and people. How wonderful to be able to tell stories and to have wrinkles and scars (internal and external) that have marked the path of a lifetime!

There are times when life unfolds in a very different way than we would have liked or imagined, when we have no control and are forced to face the imperfection of a situation. We are experiencing one of those times right now with COVID-19: a situation that no one

expected and that has turned our lives upside down. It is in moments like these that we can return to the simple but profound philosophy of Wabi-Sabi, one of the Japanese secrets for a happy life.

Part IV

Japanese Philosophy, Life, and Knowledge

Ikigai, as an idea is becoming popular outside of Japan as a way to live longer and better. It not only facilitates people to find their purpose in life (PIL) but also provides them with an ability to integrate stressful events during the course of their lives without any ambiguity. As a natural corollary, it leads to reduced anxiety and lower sympathetic nervous system activity during psychologically and physically stressful situations.

Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance constitutes an important aspect of people's life in modern times. Notwithstanding its importance, the concept or phrase 'work-life balance' has been overused without people really understanding as to what it actually means. Theoretically, balance could suggest a 50/50 split but more often than not it does not happen that way. The focus and priority keeps shifting between family and work depending on the exigencies. However, considering the time people spend on work, it is worthwhile finding ikigai in one's work so as to sustain long-term work-related self-motivation.

Organizations relying on robust strategy of pursuing an ikigai approach can successfully instill a sense of purpose and joy in their teams which inter-alia leads to positive organizational outcomes. In a survey conducted in 2016, 82% of the Japanese men and women who responded felt they needed to feel joy at work in order to feel fulfilled.

Organizational purpose

Increasingly, the present society is acquiring a secular hue, which, in turn, is leading people to search for purpose and meaning in their work life (Taylor, 2019). Progressively, employees care less about monetary fulfillments and more about how their work seeks to fulfill a greater purpose. To illustrate, a recent study by LinkedIn found that 74 percent of job candidates want a job where they feel like their work matters (LinkedIn, 2019).

Workplace culture thrives when an organization and its employees identify and nurture their collective purpose. In the workplace, collective purpose symbolizes the shared goals and values of an organization and its people. A shared purpose serves as the driving force behind staff, encouraging them forward with a clear sense of direction and a mutually acknowledged destination (Taylor, 2019).

Job Crafting

Job crafting is the process of shaping any job to achieve better alignment to an individual's motives, strengths, and passion. It is the act of crafting and designing one's own job instead of passively accepting the job that is allocated (Berg, Dutton and Wrzesniewski, 2007). The term 'job crafting' was coined in 2001 by Jane Dutton and Amy Wrzesniewski (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001). Prof Dutton says that the idea of job crafting had been going

on for many years. She found that nearly 75% of the workers had already made spontaneous changes or adjustments to their jobs to satisfy their personal needs and make their jobs more fulfilling. Finding *ikigai* at work often requires us to do some form of job crafting to make the jobs more engaging and rewarding.

The Power of Flow

Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi asserts in his book *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* that Flow is “the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience is so enjoyable that people will continue to do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it.” When we flow, we are focused on a concrete task without distractions. Our mind is “in order” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). The ability to reach this state of ‘Flow’ is the key ingredient for finding happiness and living according to one’s *ikigai*. In other words, it is the motivation, passion, and involvement people bring to their work which fuels their will to contribute positively to the company’s goals.

Engaged employees

One day, on John F. Kennedy’s first visit to NASA, he met a janitor who was mopping the floor and asked him what he did at NASA. The janitor replied, “I’m helping put the man on the moon!” He had a clear understanding of the purpose and expressed in NASA’s vision that guided his actions and showed him how his work mattered. That’s engagement. Multiplied across an organization, this has a ripple effect: Highly engaged teams have better customer engagement, higher productivity, fewer accidents, and 21% greater profitability. Engaged employees also have lower absenteeism and higher morale (Harter, 2018).

Companies that provide meaningful and purposeful work don’t only have higher profit margins, but their employees *feel* like they make a difference. They are emotionally invested in the business—it isn’t just a paycheck to them; it’s an opportunity to do work that matters. Engaged employees are naturally inclined to learning and seeking new challenges, continuously investing in their work, making a clear connection between their skills and their role, and committing to improvement and alignment with the company’s purpose.

It is clear therefore, that it is necessary to keep a work-life balance, which means that an equilibrium needs to be maintained between our professional and personal lives. We spend a lot of time and energy in professional organizations where we invest crucial hours in carrying out mandated tasks and discharging responsibilities; it is imperative for organizations to be sensitized to the need for ‘work-life balance,’ for example, a balance between the work we are doing and deriving pleasure out of and a balance between the chores we are performing and maintaining meaningful connections with our co-workers. All of this can be achieved if we inculcate this approach in corporations.

The needs of both organization and employee go hand in hand. We have studied that the organizational goals and individual goals coincide with each other and it is very important to satisfy both of them. Consider an employee who is not enjoying his work and remains dissatisfied and unhappy because of his job: He or she will not work at his full potential and his productivity will remain low. This will lead to the downfall of the firm because the efficiency of the employee is directly related to the growth of the company. On the other hand, consider an employee who appreciates his work and is satisfied with it: he’ll remain self-motivated and nobody needs to waste his time in encouraging him and he’ll work at his optimum level. This will lead to the advancement of the institution.

Building a strong workplace community

We all know that an organization is nothing but a collection of people working together. If the workforce of the institution is pleased with their work and are excited about it, then they will keep good and positive relations with their colleagues and this is bound to increase the sense of belongingness and teamwork among the people of the company, and this will help the management develop.

The employer can conduct various interactive sessions, several games, and fun activities as this can increase the team bonding of the workers. They can also provide numerous incentives and rewards whether monetary or non-monetary as this can give recognition to their work. For example, there is a software company named 'Engagedly' which provides Guru badges to those employees who perform well in their training and development sessions; 'Google' provides employee stock option plan to their people as it creates a sense of ownership among them; recently 'Zomato' came up with the "period leave" policy for their female workers. These are just some of the examples that can ensure that the employees not only remain engaged on a more personal level, but try and align their purpose: their "why" with that of the organization.

Also at the time of recruitment or the hiring process, the recruiter can ask the person who is applying for the job some questions such as 'What are our strengths? What are we good at? Do we know what the company needs from us?' By answering all these questions, the interviewer will understand the psychology of the person as he will be able to read his mind and this can help in making good decisions. For example, if the company wants a person who has good technical skills but the person who is applying for the job is not good at it. He is just applying for the sake of it and the employer also agrees to this. The idea is that first the person needs to understand the basics of that skill and then he'll need to master it or get proficiency in it. If he realizes that he is not suitable for this job, he might get irritated with his work and ultimately regretting his decision. In order to avoid such situations both the administration as well as the individual should apply this approach; otherwise, we will end up at the wrong place.

Sustainability, Mindfulness, and the Art of Imperfection

The effect of perfectionist aesthetics reaches the supermarket shelves as well. Another consequence of perfectionist aesthetics is the accelerated pace of the perceived obsolescence of manufactured goods, ranging from clothing to hi-tech gadgets that encourages fast fashion (Saito, 1997). This consumer action fuelled by perfectionist aesthetics is responsible for resource depletion, environmental degradation, mounting garbage, not to mention human rights violation in those developing nations where many goods are manufactured and where developed nations' garbage gets dumped. Imperfectionist aesthetics is helpful in responding to these environmental consequences of perfectionism (Haeg, 2010).

In the matter of consumer goods, there has been a growing interest in repair. Under perfectionism, repair has a negative connotation because it is associated with damage. However, in the apparel industry, which is notorious for promoting fast fashion, some designers are starting to incorporate signs and potentials for repair in their designs.

Wabi-Sabi encourages us to be content with what we have and resist the urge to constantly update or refresh our homes and wardrobes to keep up. Saving and investing in quality items, those that are likely to be passed down through generations, can help minimize environmental impact and help you find gratitude for what you own. Upcycling or adopting a 'make do and mend' attitude is also another way to embrace Wabi-Sabi and extend the lifespan of our possessions.

Wabi-Sabi is acknowledging that new isn't always more beautiful than old, and, in turn, questioning the societal pressure to constantly consume and upgrade. This is perhaps accelerated by ever-evolving technology and the idea that we need the next phone, tablet, or computer as ours is soon outdated. Challenging this compliments the principles of slow design and slow interiors, which instead champions local craftsmanship over the mass-produced and encourages being conscious of the environmental impact of our purchases. This is also particularly pertinent for fast fashion and the speed at which low quality trend-led garments are produced.

Wabi-Sabi also encourages letting go of the past. Wabi-Sabi and particularly Kintsugi place emphasis on where you are on your journey. A beautiful new bowl which becomes cracked and repaired with gold isn't damaged; instead it becomes so much more than what it was before. That being said, it can never go back to what it originally was. It's about being at peace with change and decay and seeing these as progression, learning from the cycle of nature and the seasons. As a result, Wabi-Sabi encourages mindfulness and an engaged relationship with the present.

This concept of Wabi-Sabi offers potent wisdom to help us deal with a rollercoaster year like 2020. It is an acceptance and appreciation of the impermanent, imperfect, and incomplete nature of everything, including ourselves. And when you really think about that, it's relief. We are not supposed to be perfect. We are all works-in-progress, as are our careers, and relationships, and lives. When things don't work out, we can pause, reflect, and grieve, then shapeshift, innovate, transform, or evolve, or simply choose to try again.

The principles that underlie Wabi-Sabi can teach us life lessons about letting go of perfection and accepting ourselves just as we are. They give us tools for escaping the chaos and material pressures of modern life, so we can be content with less. And they remind us to look for beauty in the everyday, allowing ourselves to be moved by it and, in doing so, feeling gratitude for life itself. The secret of Wabi-Sabi lies in seeing the world not with the logical mind but through the feeling heart. Perhaps that is the way to navigate this pandemic and come out the other side with a sense of hope.

Conclusion

Modern times are VUCA times (**V**olatile, **U**ncertain, **C**omplex, and **A**mbiguous) that describe the state of constant flux which individuals, societies, and businesses find themselves in. The manifestation can be also termed as an 'era of acceleration' wherein all types of goods can be ordered online and delivered within hours. People rely on apps for accessing and downloading instructional videos for seemingly normal activities like exercise and meditation. Then, there are apps for online ordering of meals from various restaurants and food-vending outlets. Consequence of this ever-increasing rate of technological advancement and social change is speeding up the pace of business and life itself, thereby making most of us time-starved where a 24-hour day is not enough. Exacerbating the situation is the fact that people today are under intense pressure to be "ideal workers"—totally committed to their jobs and always on call. As a natural corollary, the world is suffering the consequences emanating from a global lifestyle which calls upon them to constantly adjust their work schedules to suit different time zones across continents, which throws their biological clock out of sync. Quite logically, people are suffering from sleep disorders and encounter related health problems. With the problem assuming gargantuan dimensions, it has dawned on people that social systems should be allowed to auto-heal by slowing down or reducing the pace of life so as to enable each of us to pay attention to an easy-paced life, wellness, and time-tested food habits.

The early years of the 21st century have witnessed a worldwide epidemic of poor mental health and related illnesses. By 2030, the cost to the global economy of all mental health problems could amount to \$16 trillion. How the world confronts mental health challenges, which are a blight on a growing number of people's lives as well as an economic encumbrance, was on the agenda at the World Economic Forum's Annual Meeting 2019 in Davos (Fleming, 2019).

Simplicity and finding contentment in what we have is at the heart of the slow living mindset. But, as with many ethics, slow living takes inspiration from age-old philosophies which have stood the test of time across centuries and generations of wise men and learned philosophers. Out of people all over the world, the Japanese have perfected the art of integrating ancient philosophies into their daily practices. There seems to be a piece of Japanese philosophy to suit every stress or struggle in life. Shintoism, Buddhism, and Qi, which advocate the unity of mind and body, have contributed to the Japanese philosophy of life. The practice of psychosomatic medicine emphasizes the connection between mind and body and combines the psychotherapies (directed at the mind) and relaxation techniques (directed at the body) to achieve stress management. Participation in religious activities such as preaching, praying, and meditating helps in achieving mind as well as body relaxation.

Japanese philosophies teach us how to be gentler, kinder, and more mindful, both toward ourselves and to others. For a culture that values treating others with respect so highly, these philosophies are so important. Japan has a long and rich history of wellness helped by the introduction of Buddhism and also by evolution of traditions through the centuries. The philosophy and practices behind wellness and health are woven deep into the fabric of Japanese culture. The events that shaped modern-day Japan have brought about these ideas of wellness and ultimately created a healthy society. Just like in traditional Indian healing systems, philosophy lies at the heart of *J-Wellness*.

The world has woken up to the power of Japan inspired wellness called J-Wellness, which is motored by *ikigai*—the Japanese word for 'a reason to live.' *Ikigai* is a mystical inner space of equilibrium where needs, desires, ambitions, and satisfaction come together. Then there is *Kintsugi*—the art of repairing 'broken pottery' and *Wabi-Sabi* that embraces the flawed or the imperfect—an object's use marks its value since its broken parts, cracks, and repairs reflect events in its existence akin to a human being's passage through life.

As the Global Wellness Summit 2020 Report observes, "Japan is not standing still, but rather executing exciting innovations on top of its cultural traditions of trust, exacting quality in all matters, and a deep reverence for nature." Japan's ancient esoteric healing and wellness culture is catching the imagination of the world that's constantly in search of new miracle cures. J-Wellness is a balanced state of the mind, body and soul to achieve perfect serenity and quality of life. Brilliantly marrying revered traditions with innovative technologies, Japan asserts a comprehensive culture of wellness—and encourages the world to follow suit.

To sum up, we only live once. We have one life, and therefore only one chance to live it fully, with meaning and purpose.

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