

## SPIRITUALITY IN THE WORKPLACE: THE NEW FRONTIER OF HRD

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### Abstract

*In this critical essay we argue that recent human resource development (HRD) initiatives in building learning communities and appropriating employees' holistic development are exploiting spiritual needs and offering promises traditionally fulfilled through spiritual search and worship. We trace HRD's expanding curriculum into areas of spirituality and critically analyse examples of spirituality-based HRD programs, showing how such programs embed contradictions, are pervaded by a fundamentalist zeal, invade individuals' privacy, demand surrender while resisting critical discernment, appropriate selected promises of spirituality, and meld whole persons to the global marketplace. Finally, we explore how spirituality might be integrated with work and learning through alternative approaches that are more ethical, ecumenical, ecological, and inclusive.*

### Résumé

*Certaines initiatives récentes en développement des ressources humaines (DRH), notamment l'établissement de «communautés d'apprentissage» et l'appropriation du développement holistique des individus, exploitent en réalité les aspirations spirituelles des employés en leur offrant des assurances qui relèvent traditionnellement du domaine de l'introspection et du recueillement. Ainsi, on retracera les incursions du DRH dans le domaine spirituel en faisant l'analyse critique de certains programmes. On montrera comment ces programmes se nourrissent de contradictions, se complaisent dans la ferveur intégriste, méprisent l'intimité, exigent le renoncement à la pensée critique, exploitent l'expectative spirituelle, et s'efforcent d'assujettir l'identité personnelle à la globalité du marché. Enfin, on explorera des moyens d'intégration spirituelle fondés sur les valeurs de l'éthique, de l'œcuménisme, de l'écologie et de l'inclusion.*

From new-age prophecies to encounters with angels, guides offering spiritual self-help have recently pervaded the best-seller market. In October 1994, *Maclean's* magazine published a cover story on "The New Spirituality: Mainstream North America Searches for Meaning in Life" (McDonald, 1994). The story claims people are asking, with compelling rigor in late modernity, traditional questions of philosophy, theology, and everyday life as they seek to understand their place in the world: Is this all there is? What is my purpose on earth, in the community of humanity? How best can I fulfill my purpose? What should I do to live well the life intended for me? These questions are part of a search to make sense out of the seeming disorder in everyday life. They emanate from a firm belief that a coherent pattern can be discerned to reconcile life's ambiguity and difficulty, and to give meaning to one's life and self. They also represent a universal impulse to seek the "meaning of life," which Merriam and Heuer (1996) claim is a central drive in adult learning and development. The spiritual search throughout human time has expressed a yearning to connect with a community, a higher power, or a transcendent energy—and to liberate this energy within one's self.

This spiritual search seems to have become more urgent in the late 20th century, when pervasive dissatisfaction and even despair have been produced by an age centered on appetite and material consumption. Critics of late modernity disparage the general cultural malaise, alienation, numbness (Saul, 1995), sullenness (Borgmann, 1992), and anxiety (Giddens, 1991) of this era. Borgmann contends that modernity's economic universalism, aggressive realism, and rugged individualism have created an *age of narcissism*, wherein lonely people pursue empty hyperactivity. Slattery (1995) writes that people are fed up with materialistic self-gratification, shallow individualism, militaristic competitiveness, rampant over-consumption, and pandering paternalism fed them by the media and marketplace in an orgy of technological splendor. It is no wonder that people are searching for meaning, as well as personal healing, wholeness, peace, joy, and connectedness. These mass yearnings for "the spiritual" are currently expressed in an eclectic flowering of religions, psychoanalysis, magic and mysticism, natural healing therapies, revival of ancient religious traditions, and integration of theological concerns with science and social science. Taylor (1996) holds that the "wild" range of spiritualities today is different than at any other time in history as a consequence of human

rebellion against a flat world, where all is subordinate to utility and instrumentality. People are pushing for something fuller, deeper, and higher.

Emerging from among the varied spiritual expressions currently pervading North America is a subtle and potentially dangerous new force that subverts this spiritual mania for its own purposes. This force is manifested within the human resource development (HRD) movement, the educational handmaid of corporate power. The HRD movement in recent years has extended its reach beyond skills training to envelop holistic human learning and personal growth. However, within this humanist mask, the general goal of much HRD activity is to construct worker subjects who will ensure the continued flourishing and global expansion of corporations. In the name of building "continuous lifelong learning" communities, HRD programs increasingly presume to transform people's belief systems by encouraging confession, producing personal visions, and (most recently) developing workers' spirituality and higher consciousness.

Throughout history, powerful bonds among the economy, education, and religion have successfully exploited and shaped large populations. The expanding HRD curriculum apparently regards workers' spirits as an untapped resource with remarkable potential for improving productivity. The new corporate interest in spirituality is easily presented to employees as a natural outgrowth of HRD's humanistic caring for its organization's workers. HRD programs in many corporations appear to offer what everyone appears to be seeking: authentic community, holistic living, the meaning of life, personal healing, and purposeful action in a needy world.

We argue here that the current positioning of HRD as it enters spiritual realms represents not a caring concern for a broken and searching humanity, but a bid for market share of vulnerable souls. And once the domain of the spiritual is admissible in the corporate training mission, it becomes subject to the ideological control of corporate high priests. When North Americans are frantically searching not only for spiritual expression and fulfillment (McDonald, 1994; Taylor, 1996) but also for employment, they are less likely to challenge the cosy knitting-together of their life's purpose and deepest questions with the fundamental principles driving a highly competitive globalized market economy.

Spirituality—like sex—can be blissful, transcendent, and move humanity towards more intimate and connective relationships, or it can be used cruelly, perversely, and exploitatively. In this article we question the present coupling of HRD and spirituality. We believe that certain HRD

initiatives manipulate human spirituality, and offer a shallow hurry-up-and-feel-good response to the difficult spiritual journey. We begin with definitions, describing certain dimensions of both HRD and spirituality from our perspective. Next we outline ways in which things spiritual are currently appearing in HRD activity, then we explore implications for workers from a critical perspective. Finally, we turn to the question of how spirituality can be integrated in work and learning in an ethical, ecumenical, and integrated way that gives hope, fosters responsible freedom and relatedness, and ensures care for the most vulnerable in human and natural worlds.

### **Dimensions of HRD in a Global Economy**

Human resource development has been a predominant model of corporate-sponsored workplace education since World War II. The current area of HRD practice is difficult to define satisfactorily, given its varying interpretations and permutations. However, general consensus prevails about the basic purpose and functions of HRD despite wide-ranging philosophies and practice in its manifestations. In a Canadian textbook used to train human resource developers, Srivinas (1984) explains the purpose of HRD as providing a comprehensive, continuous program for staff training and development to prepare for anticipated changes in the organization: a program whose outcomes ultimately must be justifiable in terms of value-added human performance which will advance the organization's goals. More recently, writers addressing HRD do not indicate that this fundamental concept has altered in essence. If anything, the conceptualization of human resource development has become more tightly controlled, shifting to more standardized production of knowledge "interwoven within the various quality management movements and closely tied to so-called 'post-industrial' forms of production" (Schied, Carter, Preston, & Howell, 1998, p. 15). There is considerable ideological concern among critical adult educators about the HRD concept of integrating learning with production, and the ongoing struggle over control of workers' knowledge (Cunningham, 1993; Finger & Woolis, 1994; Hart, 1993; Noble, 1990; Schied, 1995).

Drawing upon the premises of human capital theory, advocates of this HRD model essentially treat workers as resources carrying market-determined value for organizational growth. Strategic investment and development are believed necessary for converting latent human talent into productive skills (Marchak, 1991; Todaro, 1985). Worker knowledge and

subjectivity have been appropriated, fragmented, and represented as part of a scientific–technological process (Hart, 1992, p. 132). Skill-training has continued the splintering of human capability characteristic of Fordist factory-line production processes. In the 1950s and 1960s, influenced by Mayo's (1933) findings that people's productivity increased when their social needs were met at work, personnel trainer became human resource developers who deployed behavioral psychology to motivate workers. Human resource development combines "soft" human relations management with a Theory Y philosophy: happy people make productive workers, and happiness should be induced by arranging organizational conditions and manipulating relationships to help people feel respected, useful, important, and connected (McGregor, 1967).

With organizational conversion to total quality management, focus shifted to humanist strategies of building team synergy and individual empowerment. Critical reflection became the 1980s instrument to ensure excellence and increased accountability to the organization. Three prevailing assumptions continue to govern the HRD movement: (a) that people are capable of exercising far more initiative, responsibility, and creativity than their jobs require or allow; (b) that people have untapped resources useful to the organization that are wasted unless their personal needs are met; and (c) that management has responsibility to stimulate people's motivation and to "mine" their personal resources developed through HRD (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1993). In exchange for their compliance with an increasing focus on education, workers receive long-term economic gain, prestige, more challenging work, less surveillance, and a generally improved quality of life (according to market measures of life quality). Workers' ties to family, communities, and spiritual pursuits outside the workplace, all aspects of civil society, have become impediments to personal and national wealth production (Marchak, 1991).

Now new learning demands have been created by exploding information, accelerated competition, and the technological imperative—which are shortening time and shrinking space. Workers in this globalized economy are expected to be flexible, quick-learning, innovative, supportive members of self-governing teams formed and dissolved quickly to meet fast-changing organizational needs. Of course, these worker requirements are only for the newly emerging knowledge elite—a small, highly mobile, high-tech, top-level cadre of professional, managerial, entrepreneurial, scientific, technical, and educational workers. The remaining

population—those who cannot or will not “keep up” with the new demands—are relegated to part-time, low-skilled, low-status, low-paying, and often exploitative work in the free trade zones. No wonder workers turn to new age spirituality and alternate cosmologies to seek meaning in their lives.

### **Dimensions of Spirituality in the Late 20th Century**

What is spirituality? What common threads, if any, can be discerned among the widely varied human understandings of spirituality in a postmodern pluralistic world? Scholarly religious writers indicate that spirituality is a search or journey. This journey is explained by Diana Butler Bass (1998), associate professor of religious studies at Rhodes College, as having two interwoven parts: an inner journey of healing, questioning, and exploring the self in relation to mysteries greater than the self, and an outward journey reaching towards others in interconnectedness and faith expressed in action. Similarly, Wilber (1997) defines spirituality as an evolving path of consciousness and spirit. Principe (1997) also explains spirituality as movement towards “life in the Spirit” (p. 112)—clarifying Spirit as a divine holiness moving through and connecting the world, time, and individual souls.

The journey both inward and outward is simultaneous. Oliver (1992), working with the varied philosophies of Buber, Eckhart, Nishida Kitaro, and Christianity, concludes that spirituality is a movement towards understanding and dwelling in the true self, which is a “no-self,” a self that dissolves in the act of experiencing the world. To be is to be in communion, open to the indwelling of the spirit which connects the cosmos. Mack (1992) emphasizes that through the spiritual journey humans come to engage the world deeply, integrating spiritual perspectives in gritty everyday material reality. Thus spirituality is closely linked with a working-out of morals, relationships, and those personal values which guide one’s everyday choices and actions.

Examining a broad range of spiritual traditions, Slattery (1995) suggests that “the spiritual” is the “self in dialogue with eternal communal wisdom” (p. 81), searching for both personal and universal peace. The human spirit senses there is a holy center of life in which all things are interconnected, and seeks to recover and nurture it. This search may be assisted by meditational practice, ecclesial and daily ritual, divine revelation, theological discipline, service to others, participation in community, human relationships, work, and

learning. Through such activities, infused with a deliberate reaching inwards and outwards, the individual human spirit approaches union with the cosmos as a complex, integrated entity and with the mystery of eternity.

This contoured human journey towards this mysterious union is what we mean by "spirituality" in this article. Based on the preceding discussion, we conceive the spiritual domain to include, among many other things, a person's struggles to understand self, soul, and purpose; to develop the "spirit" or "higher consciousness"; to conceptualize the problem of evil and the definition of good; to specify values and choose actions for "right" living; and to seek communion with that mysterious realm described variously as interconnectedness, Spirit, the divine, holiness, or the cosmos.

### **HRD's Expansion onto "Higher Ground"**

Examples of the human resource development movement encroaching on spiritual domains abound. In the past few years, hardcover releases appearing in the business section of North American bookstores have included titles such as *Jesus CEO: Using Ancient Wisdom for Visionary Leadership*; *The Stirring of Soul in the Workplace*; *The Soul of a Business: Managing for Profit and the Common Good*; and *How Would Confucius Ask For a Raise? Compassionate Capitalism*. In *The Age of Heretics, Heroes, Outlaws and the Forerunners of Corporate Change* Art Kleiner (1996), an HRD consultant, traces the history of the market economy in broad bands of human spiritual evolution. Explicitly, the book links medieval monastic orders with corporate change in the modern world, dividing the book into large sections entitled "Mystics," "Monastics," and "Reformists." Secretan (1996), an HRD consultant to major corporations, shows in *Reclaiming Higher Ground: Creating Organizations that Inspire the Soul* that the way out of survival mode and into "true productivity" is through creating a spiritual "sanctuary" within the workplace. Business is reinvented as a "community of souls" through shared values, love, trust, and respect. Apparently enough people think so, as the *Third International Conference on Spirituality and Business: A Global Perspective* was held in November 1997 in Mexico.

Books such as Secretan's mark the emergence of a new genre of HRD: merchant-missionaries who are busy marketing spirituality-based worker development programs to corporations. Of course, texts can always be left on the shelves by critical consumers. However, these new spiritual gurus

apparently are being sought actively by corporations to spread their gospels. *Training Magazine's* 1996 Industry Report<sup>1</sup> shows that 37% of U.S. companies provide training in ethics and 68% in personal growth. Increasingly, personal growth programs in business HRD are presenting explicitly spiritual material. Leigh (1997) cites many U.S. programs with mandates such as "fostering social and spiritual transformation in the workplace," and "dedicated to the further development of human consciousness through spiritual understanding" (p. 33). MentorMedia, as one example, boasts high demand for its "Character-Building" program, a curriculum that fosters "personal integrity" and the development of "good" character (including "good" values, self-control, and the ability to do the "right" thing).

Why the upsurge in spiritual interest among business trainers? Leigh (1997) suggests three reasons: (a) despirited workers, reeling from decreased organizational support and increased demands, need more purpose and meaning in their work; (b) trainers believe the workplace is a key source of connection and contribution for many people; and (c) workers are expressing a deep desire to be of service. From the organization's point of view, McMillen (1993) explains that putting resources into spirituality can produce more fully evolved and developed human beings, creating workers highly attuned to their identity, their strengths and weaknesses, and their special place and contribution. Spiritual employees bring more energy, effort, and clarity to their jobs. Thus, issues of initiative, responsibility, motivation, commitment, and productivity resolve themselves. And of course, McMillen points out, health insurance costs, absenteeism, and enthusiasm are all affected positively. Besides, as Lee and Zemke (1993) note, spirituality is the buzzword of the nineties, and it's smart business to associate with hot trends.

What is notable here is the seamless conflation of corporate purpose with the discourse and promises of spirituality. These "spiritual" educators are themselves competitive businesses seeking a novel market niche, and they are apparently finding it as hawkers of the holy to corporate interest. One rather uncomfortable example is illustrated by Pacific Institute's "Purpose of Life" curriculum, offered to its Fortune 500 company clients by Catholic priest Father Bob Spitzer (Finlayson, 1997). This curriculum focuses on developing spiritual ethics and "happiness" among workers, "the

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<sup>1</sup>All U.S. organizations with 100 or more employees are surveyed annually about their training program costs, goals, participants, and content. In 1996, 2,833 usable responses were received.



happiness we feel from making a difference to someone or something beyond [ourselves]" (p. H4). Father Bob demonstrates how such happiness increases productivity, markets, return on investment, and long-term viability. If it is clear whose happiness is truly being developed here, why then are workers not protesting vociferously?

Some evidently are. Pacific Bell was legally challenged for spending millions on a training program based in part on the teachings of an Armenian mystic; a Washington car salesman refused to attend a quality-based training program in the 1980s (and was subsequently fired); a Firestone Tire manager in Georgia refused to conduct a training program which conflicted with his own spiritual convictions (Lee & Zemke, 1993). Naturally worker resistance to training need not be confrontational or even visible to be effective. However, the increasing proliferation of HRD programs, books, and consultants specializing in domains of personal growth, ethics, and the spiritual (Leigh, 1997) suggests either that there is no ground-swelling of resistance, or that it is checked by other imperatives (such as, I want to keep my job).

A widely popular and influential member of the new breed of HRD merchant-missionaries is Stephen Covey (1989), whose *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* has become a popular program in which thousands of workers are being inducted in corporations like Proctor and Gamble, Conoco, GM, and Shell Oil (Hurd, 1994). Covey promises all the gifts of a spiritual journey: freedom from anxiety, transcendence of the ordinary, wholeness, peace, joy, and even communion with the divine. By combining various self-improvement prescriptions with frequent Biblical citations, Covey represents a secular evangelist who preaches unfettered freedom to choose, being response-able rather than reactive, becoming principle-centered, seeking mutual benefit and synergy, and renewing the four dimensions of one's nature: physical, social/emotional, mental, spiritual.

Covey (1989) demands surrender: early in the book he encourages the reader to remain open, vulnerable, and willingly to suspend disbelief. He urges "a business/mission statement that everyone buys into" (p. 142); he advocates, if employees will not "volunteer their hearts and minds" (p. 58), they should be fired. Discernment is encouraged only to the extent that individuals thoughtfully apply the Covey "teaching" and, by extension, the corporate appropriation of this teaching to their own lives. Covey's is a unitary vision, a society of people all empowered by developing "correct" habits of living. Critical debate by the converted is impossible when they

accept that these "correct principles are natural laws, and that God, the Creator and Father of us all, is the source of them. . . . To the degree that people live by this [divinely] inspired conscience, they will grow to fulfill themselves" (p. 319). Covey's popularity may, in fact, stem from the fact that Covey really is echoing the Truth, the Way, the Life and that his readers naturally find resonance inside the deepest part of their own consciences and souls with what he says. Covey himself claims that the principles he espouses are part of deep rhythms and patterns that have driven all of life since the beginning of time; that they are part of all successful world religions and philosophies.

When deployed as an employee development program, Covey's system presents an extreme example of the potential for exploitation of spiritual longings. For example, after 10,000 Conoco employees were trained in Covey principles of effective living, the director of personnel development boasted that the program had saved the company \$12 million dollars because "better" decisions were being made (Hurd, 1994). When people are encouraged to abandon rationality and open themselves to spiritual ways of knowing, their human vulnerability is open to manipulation. Other more subtle examples of the HRD expansion into spiritual domains are visible in the currently popular HRD emphases on building supposedly democratic dialogical work/learning communities. Corporations promote team-bonding, personal reflection, open dialogue, mission, vision, worker empowerment, and continuous improvement, all emphasizing personal growth. Within the total quality management (TQM) movement, a new corporate focus on engineering "learning organizations" has developed the TQM principles to focus especially on the continuous learning of the worker (Watkins & Marsick, 1993) as harnessed to corporate productivity. What counts as learning is controlled, classified, and monitored by HRD professionals, and embraces all facets of individual development. Of particular interest to learning organization facilitators is developing the workers' capability for "creativity, proactivity, and critical reflection . . . the promise of continuous learning is innovation [and] innovation is at the core of productivity" (Watkins & Marsick, 1993, p. 25).

Peter Senge (1991), who is credited with popularizing the notion of a learning organization, defines it as "a place where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to act together" (p. 3). Senge writes from a management perspective, examining human learning from the

site of the organization and the motive of enhancing or transforming workplace organizations as necessary to improve productivity and effectiveness. For Senge, Ross, Smith, Roberts, and Kleiner (1994), there are five interwoven forces (disciplines) that HRD and management need to cultivate in workers when building a learning organization: (a) personal mastery, coming to understand personal capacities and dreams; (b) mental models, examining and overturning deep personal beliefs; (c) team learning, collaborating to work and develop knowledge effectively in small groups; (d) shared vision, building a collective dream to guide future action; and (e) systems thinking, coming to view the organization from a management perspective that subordinates individual intention and action to the purposes and outcomes of the total system.

Central to these disciplines is the assumption that employees need to engage in critical reflection—exposing their own belief systems and critically challenging others' belief systems—to break free of thinking patterns which perpetuate dysfunction and prevent innovation. Open, supposedly democratic dialogue that balances inquiry with advocacy is emphasized in order to render a worker's thinking transparent to self and others. People are supposedly to bond and learn in caring collaborative groups in a learning organization. A flexible, self-reflexive, but vividly clear personal vision is melded with the group vision. Everyone and everything within and without an organization are to be "helped" to learn how they are interconnected, and to understand and work with each other. The spiritual promises of connectedness, personal meaning and transcendence, as well as the demands that workers surrender their most fundamental beliefs are unmistakable.

Recently, HRD writing has extended its purview of workplace learning into the deepest spiritual needs of people's fragile private worlds. Kofman and Senge (1995) write about "deep learning," community, and generative language to show how corporations can offer wholeness, identity, love, and meaning to workers feeling fragmented and alienated. A section devoted to "prayer" (written by a CEO) appears in Watkins and Marsick's (1993) book about how to "sculpt" a learning organization. This HRD discourse offers transcendent personal fulfillment in exchange for confession, conversion, and participation in organizationally mandated ritual. Like many religions, the learning organization ideals require individuals' surrender to the greater will and authority (systems thinking), their ritualized confession of innermost beliefs and sins (mistakes and dysfunctional assumptions) in reflective group dialogue, and their allegiance to the organizational mission. Yet this religion

is based not in relationship with the divine or eternal, but in the profit margins of a hyperactive market economy. The goal of learning organization discourse is presented as liberation of individuals, but liberation with a catch: people are promised emancipation through their cooperative participation in a learning organization to maximize their full potential as innovative, intelligent workers—but in learning only what ultimately serves the prosperity of the organization. Beliefs subversive to the organization's health and essential structures cannot be tolerated. Thus transformation of the deepest beliefs and personal meaning structures of workers (their "mental models") becomes a crucial part of learning organization ideology.

### **A Critical Analysis of the HRD Appropriation of Spirituality**

From one perspective, HRD programs are simply trying to meet the apparent mass need for spiritual fulfillment, by transforming the workplace into a community with activities and rituals that facilitates workers' spiritual journey, and by helping workers to satisfy their spiritual longing for meaning. What is wrong with this?

*The first problem is the fundamental contradiction between the purposes, pursuits, knowledge, and authorities of spirituality and those of HRD.* These conflict in ways that will always enable the HRD priorities to maintain privilege. HRD appeals to employees as a process that can help to build a collaborative work community with values of caring and sharing, reflecting, and being honest and trusting; but the process does not acknowledge the conflicts between such values and the market economy structures of competition for wealth and power through performativity. Material gain, which drives the pursuit of individualistic success in this world, is irreconcilable with spiritual gain, which represents a loss of goods and ultimately of the ego-self. The corporate demand for subordinating creativity, insight, energy, and relationships to the profit bottom line conflicts with the spiritual demand to release creativity, insight, energy, and relationships in service to humanity and the divine. The creative process, which is at the heart of spiritual transformation, within the HRD nirvana of a learning organization, is distorted into innovation—ideas harnessed to the organization's advantage—and subjected to organizational norms of accountability and results-based measurement. Learning innovations that may threaten corporate existence, such as liberated workers finding ecological and communicatively nurturing ways to achieve their purposes

that begin with dismantling the organization or shifting the bottom-line value structure, are unthinkable. Meanwhile the warm rhetoric of caring, connectedness, open sharing, trust, and opportunity to find the meaning of life in this work all unfold in a climate undergirded by an ethos of anxiety: workers are in danger of being ejected at any time. The exhortation to individuals to keep up with the “powerful engines” of the New Economy (Beck, 1995) by continuously learning is made urgent: learn or lose your job.

*The second problem is the religious fundamentalism which pervades the new HRD spirituality.* A trait of many fundamentalist religious sects is their vulnerability to move towards intolerance, zealotry, fanaticism, and even paranoia and victimization of followers. The HRD appropriation of spirituality is fundamentalist in that it does not allow diversity, but presents a unitary doctrine in absolutes. This doctrine of beliefs is not explicated but sublimated into prescriptive actions: teams, community, critical reflection, shared vision, and continuous innovation. The spiritual assumptions underpinning these ideals are not put forward in a way that can be challenged: to resist one must argue from irrational polarities, and be anti-peace, anti-honesty, anti-growth. Alternative perspectives are invisible in the new ritual norms of continuous learning, confessional dialogue, and belief transformation. The HRD writings and teachings are not coming from theologians struggling as fellow spiritual sojourners to discern and understand a divine authority. Rather, the new prophets are all healed, self-contained facilitators—organizational doctors—who help *us* meet *our* needs, having already divined the truth for themselves.

Those who would resist workplace restructuring, downsizing, and shifts in power are configured as non-normative, as traditional (intellectually limited), unable to learn, and in danger of being “left behind.” “Trust” and “openness” are most valued; the shadows are suspicion and closed minds, which are categorized deviant in the new learning organization discourse. As “continuous learners” employees are continuously in deficit, perpetually positioned in deference to the HRD missionaries heralding the new epistemology. The worker’s belief system is continually inadequate, continually malleable, continually open to challenge and rehabilitation, and continually excluded from the possibility of challenging this ideology.

*Third is the invasion of individual privacy by HRD uses of spirituality.* HRD now legitimates, as normative practice, activities which invade the private space of workers—such as revealing personal meanings in “open, honest” public dialogue. As Usher and Edwards (1995) argue, this is a form

of ritualized confession, which has proven powerful in spiritual experience as part of the process of repentance, redemption, and rebirth. Confession grants dominance to the listener. The HRD demand that employees disclose their opinions, deepest belief systems, and values to critical scrutiny is a demand to surrender the last private space of personal meaning, their "hearts and minds" as Covey explains it, to the public space of workplace control. Thus the open, honest, trusting dialogue fostered by the HRD project is an exercise of surveillance and disciplinary regulation constituting the gross violation of an individual's rights.

*Fourth is the related problem of demanding surrender without the balance of discernment.* Workers have always been forced to surrender to organizational authority, knowledge, and values. The new HRD craving for spiritual surrender is evident in the supervision of employees' critical reflection on their belief systems. The urgent focus on workers' personal transformation or conversion, coupled with proselytizing spiritual promises of joy through systems thinking and continuous personal change, is creating a new religion. Indeed, Senge's (1990) manifesto is called the fifth discipline. Senge et al.'s (1994) manual of field activities provides ways for HRD facilitators to lead employees through meditational exercises which explore their personal life journey, in order to figure out their innermost dreams and to form action plans to materialize these dreams in their work. Such activities render people completely vulnerable, without the balancing discipline of personal discernment. As Taylor (1996) points out, spiritual reflection without discernment neglects the interplay of light and darkness, and the complex ambiguity of human subjectivity. Discernment is required to distinguish what is deep from what is shallow, what is free from what is compulsive, and what is narcissistic self-gratification from what is profound spiritual stirring.

*Fifth, without discernment the potential for manipulation of people's spiritual impulses by the HRD project is great.* The appeals to deep human yearnings with powerful promises raise the same ethical questions that confront commercial advertisers who manipulate deep human needs for affection and security and fears of humiliation and inadequacy to sell products. The new HRD plays upon the profound and pervasive human need to reach perfection, salvation, and eschatological bliss by eliding these promises with corporate objectives. The human search for meaning and transcendence, challenge and passion is linked to innovative projects that will enhance organizational productivity. Learning organization discourse amalgamates workers' spiritual desire for peace, wholeness, and healing with

professed organizational goals emphasizing community, meaning, and caring. Workers themselves elide nirvana-type longings with material satisfaction and consumptive wealth—desires which are linked to gainful paid employment. Organizations can promise well-being in return for surrender to organizational goals.

*Sixth, the HRD project is simplistic in its appropriations of selected promises of spirituality.* Spiritual bliss, ecstasy, and transcendent visions of wholeness, joy, and peace must be reconciled with the messiness of the human world of pain, suffering, and disorder. The prophet eventually must come down from the mountain and struggle with contradiction and paradox. Within the HRD literature, such as Covey's book and the learning organization discourse, the desired vision remains controlled and romanticized. But as Taylor (1996) argues, the spiritual journey is hard work, and has a dark side. Desolation and despair are common parts of the spiritual experience. Death is the critical dimension against which foundational beliefs interpreting the meaning of life are constructed. Such dimensions do not figure in the enthusiastic HRD rhetoric of emancipation, transformation, and relatedness.

*Seventh, HRD is naive in its treatment of spiritual community.* Learning organization literature is pervaded with appeals to employees to help build a collaborative, caring, essentially spiritually centered community. These appeals are based on romantic notions of pre-modern community: unity, stability, reciprocal caring, and interdependence. Never acknowledged are the problems attending pre-modern community: patriarchy and oppression, stark class division, ceaseless labor, passive acceptance of illness, and other problems. The reliance on shared vision in building workplace community lacks a moral foundation. A vision that depends only on consensus of the *majority for its authority* is relativistic. If the shared consensus is altruistic, perhaps the more utopian promises of Senge's organizations built on shared vision are possible. But as many belief systems recognize, the presumption of human altruism is naive. Sin and evil are not ominous possibilities but real forces in some religions. Even believers in the essential goodness of human beings acknowledge that human predilections can include deception, laziness, corruption, opportunism, and overweening ambition for personal gain. Similarly, romantic ideals of community based on ideals espoused by HRD missionaries can, without a more solid foundation than shared vision, be easily distorted. North America continues to be shocked by examples whereby community ideals (surrender to spiritual participation, mutual

caring, transcending the self to serve the whole, shared vision, and the like) have been distorted into diabolical manifestations ending in mass suicide and murder.

This critique is not meant to imply that authentic, life-giving community is hopeless, or that the spiritual journey is grim or ends in cynicism. Hope and redemption are important dimensions of many communities bound by shared spiritual understandings. However, as Pugh (1997) explains, the context of the community of faith must be scrutinized carefully. Discipline and theology (which Pugh defines as contemplation of one's own being and the divine) are key in examining this context: "When the temptations to power, self, and corporate illusions are strong we need the resources of those who are engaged in the necessary disciplines of spiritual formation [prayer, meditation, and worship] to keep us honest" (p. 45). Justice as well as discipline are important themes in scholarly discussions of authentic spiritual community. Willhauck (1996) argues that hope in what she calls "an age of disbelief" lies in the transformation of power in the world to God's power of love and social justice. This transformation can be advanced through communities wherein authentic liturgy and education for spiritual growth are rooted in ideals of love and justice. Alexander (1996) adds that an authentic spiritual community of learning and action is motivated and held together by love, and strives to live according to a higher conception of good. Not all visions of good, cautions Alexander, are equally acceptable. Standards of value must be derived from a vision of good lying beyond the self or the self-interest of the community. In business, however, the central standards of value are founded not on love, but on profit margins. Disciplines of sales and accounting, not prayer and worship, are most important in sustaining and regulating a business community.

*Finally, the growing acceptance of HRD encroachment on the personal is melding whole persons to the global marketplace.* The mirage of self-control perpetuated by HRD programs in spirituality and other highly personal aspects of growth effectively masks power relations implicit in neo-liberal globalization processes and market relations. The HRD focus places workers' needs for further training and development front and centre in both economic and educational debates. The sole function of education is rapidly becoming a preparation for the job market, and a readjustment of workers to economic shifts occurring through globalization. Questions about increasing control of investment and national policy wielded by transnational corporations and about subversion of life to galloping global competition, market exploitation, global inequalities of access, and marginalization of



growing sectors of the population in both the North and South are certainly permitted in democratic society but are often dismissed by the prevailing market logic. Max Weber (cited in Duchorow, 1995) calls this masterless slavery, whereby the masters are invisible behind the mechanisms of the market that are compared to natural law, beyond criticism and hence ethically inaccessible. Meanwhile, economic anxiety prevails and is encouraged by market prophets of doom who exhort workers to survive by learning more and working harder: "Hit the ground running or you won't keep up!" (Beck, 1995).

With the current expansion of HRD, not only workers' creativity but also their critical thinking, community impulses and spiritual longings are in danger of being harnessed by business and industry as resources and as competencies for restructured global production. HRD's concern with holistic education engages workers in self-surveillance, which effectively melds their intellect, emotions and values into the corporate common interest. As the power of the state declines, corporate thinkers promote the algorithm of empowerment as equivalent to freedom within the New Economy. Workers' identity, fashioned by instrumental corporate needs, eventually will become indistinguishable from personal growth, community solidarity, and social contributions to society. As Hart (1992) summarizes:

Such psychological co-optation is necessary because of high job insecurity, and because deteriorating social relations at the workplace have created a psychological vacuum. (p. 153) . . . What is called for is a psychological, mental, and behavioral preparation for living with instability, and for being able to think of oneself in terms of renewable, exchangeable and updatable resource rather than in terms of a human being with unique experiences, hopes, wishes, and dreams. (p. 87)

Hence the line between public and private is blurred through the commodification of people's hearts, minds, and souls. The new HRD becomes the not-so-invisible hand of management domesticating not only the psychology of workers, but increasingly their spirituality in the movement for increased control and seamless meld of whole persons to the global marketplace.

### **Rethinking Work, Learning, and Spirituality**

Yet what seems to be a mass spiritual famine persists. Theologian Hans Kung (1988) claims "the intellectual crisis of our time is co-determined by a

religious crisis" (p. 6). People are running feverishly to keep up to a technology-dictated rhythm of life, seeking the paradise of technological miracles and a near-utopia of productivity and abundance mediated by scientific expertise and the gospel of the market. The faster the images and promises are projected and the more the conditions of anxiety are created, the more fervently people seek spiritual solace. They search for a quiet space to balance the frenetic pace, to refocus priorities in order to withstand the image onslaught, and to re-connect with principles and wisdom traditions that can simplify and endow living with more meaning. But this fervent seeking often takes the form of consumptive spirituality, continuously grasping for more because the starting point has been guilt or some other deficit state. Beneath these forms of brokenness is the desire to overcome disconnectedness from one's self, from human community, and from the earth (Palmer, 1993).

Spiritual journeys within the process of community-building can provide hope for a more compassionate, just, sustainable living. But is the corporation with its particular interests a legitimate site for such integration of learning processes with spirituality? The problem of finding a defensible line between the worker and the legitimate prerogative of the company becomes very slippery in areas of developing "right" hearts and spirits. A company that is dedicated to creating a more compassionate life-giving workspace, and is concerned with enabling people to find fulfillment and personal meaning in their work, one which nurtures connectedness and caring, should be encouraged, not chided for taking interest in workers beyond their technical-bureaucratic functions. The compelling questions are, as always when critiquing an educational program, what is the real intent of workplace initiatives which focus on spirituality? Whose interests are served? What conception of need drives the program, according to whose perception, and by whose authority? Is the company designing programs to develop its spiritually "needy" employees by targeting the worker's spirit as a final frontier to be colonized and developed for the company's benefit? Or is the company genuinely motivated to support the whole person of a worker? Such motivation should be evident in the company's fundamental commitment to the work-life balance of its people. Emphasis might be less on programs for workers' spiritual training, and more on flexible hours and job-sharing opportunities, support for employees' volunteer work outside the company, child- and elder-care support, compassionate response to worker stress, gender and ethnic inclusivity practices, exercise of social responsibility in the wider community, and clear evidence that the company questions and practices a consistent and thoughtful system of ethics in all

areas of its corporate activity, including acceptable boundaries of HRD practice. This kind of response to the spiritual impulse stirs the entire organization in humility and authentic search for justice, towards a vision that Griffin (1988) articulates as public life grounded in a postmodern theology, “a re-enchantment of the cosmos and a better intuition of its ‘Holy Centre’” (p. 52).

In a conception broader than corporate policy, the reintegration of work, learning, and spirituality holds much promise for freedom and dignity. Teaching and learning, Palmer (1993) suggest, are ancient communal acts that can be renewed through traditions of spiritual wisdom that welcome inquiry and do not fear searching. Purpel (1989) promotes infusion of the sacred into education, calling teachers to be prophets in a learning process that seeks ultimate meaning. Liberation theology and emancipatory pedagogy share a long tradition of uniting the spiritual search with critical thinking and social action. In the past decade, curriculum theorists such as Slattery (1995) and theologians such as Griffin (1988) have been articulating a common vision that links spirituality with education and action as a process of personal and civic transformation. Slattery contends that religion and education are inseparable, and he outlines what he calls a constructive postmodern vision which threads “ethical and ecumenical integration of spirituality and theology into the very fabric of education” (p. 68). This vision presents three ways in which learning communities can integrate educational processes with spirituality: (a) an emphasis on community cooperation rather than corporate competition, that promotes “a search for wisdom through theological experiences, that creates cooperative and ecologically sustainable learning environments, and that commits to reverent, democratic, and just community models of schooling” (p. 94); (b) a holistic process perspective (rather than reductionism) which connects the past and present to the eternal; and (c) a multi-layered interdisciplinary curriculum that integrates spirituality and theology into all aspects of the educational process. These three emphases on community cooperation, holistic learning, and the integration of education with the spiritual can be consolidated into a new vision of the workplace in which learning and work are merged.

In many political and religious traditions, work has long been acknowledged as reflecting human creativity, constituting human dignity, and sustaining human community. From the perspective of Gutierrez (1968), a liberation theologian, “work as a humanizing element normally tends through this transformation of nature to construct a society that is more just and worthy of human beings. Every offense, every humiliation, every

alienation of human labor is an obstacle to the work of salvation [namely, social salvation]" (p. 72). Work and learning bring humans into engagement, into a connectedness with each other and the world that is inherently spiritual.

This connectedness is transcendence, not a breaking-out or removal from the world, but a breaking-in, the in-spiration of the Divine into material reality (Palmer, 1993). This understanding of transcendence rejects the futuristic eschatology of some religions and economic systems, such as the heaven of paternalistically empowered, materially driven individuals constructed by the new HRD for a globalized marketplace. An alternative immanent eschatology can be welcomed that infuses reverence into daily human action. In a complete surrender to and communion with the present, boundaries dissolve between the sacred and secular, between spiritual growth and education, between work and prayer, and between self and other.

Discernment is identifying the inner will to possess and control, the artificial construction of a self driven by fear and need for self-affirmation (Del Prete, 1991, p. 36). Through examination of the interplay of light and darkness in both the public society and the private corners of one's heart, one can discern the purpose for life and the integrity of various spiritualities, including the new HRD. This is the aspect most neglected by processes of shallow meaning-making and community building. The process of discernment moves beyond the reductionism of political ideologies in their supply of answers, certainties, and utopias toward two other aspects—lament and surrender.

Merton (cited in Del Prete, 1991) laments that "the world we live in has become an awful void, a desecrated sanctuary, reflecting outwardly the emptiness and blindness of the hearts of [people] who have gone crazy with their love for money and power and with pride in their technology" (p. 36). Brueggeman (1978) contends that this lament and grieving is the beginning of moral outrage that things are not as they should be (p. 21); Fox (1983) similarly contends that the original blessing of balanced and mutual relationships has been broken. This grief is an entry into darkness, into emptiness. Surrender, as Fox describes it in a spiritual context, is releasing oneself from surroundings—the images, projections, and names. The spiritual journey is the detachment from endless striving and worldly desire. To surrender is to enter silence; to be still; to be open to pain, suffering, anguish, and fear, then nothingness; to exist with nothingness. The *journey*

*into the desert*, the discernment of and surrender to the essential nothingness, is an emptying out and also, paradoxically, a spiritual rebirth.

Through discernment, lament, and surrender, humans approach the pain of the universe, the tragedy of human brokenness, the cry of the Earth as she gives up her fertility. To touch pain is to wake up to injustice. Pain links humans to each other; for pain is schooling in compassion (Fox, 1983, pp. 143, 145). Compassion (passion-with) all life forms relinquishes boundaries of identity, and consequently abandons systems of power and cravings for possession predicated on difference. From the deep recesses of private pain, compassion embraces the powerless and exploited as well as the powerful and prosperous, who together share weariness and drained hope. It untombs the notion of economy as "care of our household" and re-images a diversity of economies, particularly upholding grassroots economies, a social economy, and a gift economy (Glover, 1995; Rifkin, 1995; Waring, 1989).

Justice then is not a rational, abstract idea but a passionate caring that, as Gandhi suggested, loves people into transformation. Erikson (1969) explains that in Gandhi's vision of *Satyagraha* (truth-force or truth-in-action) clear-sighted analysis is combined with discernment whereby the inner voice merges with the voices of humankind, particularly the voices of the most vulnerable. This form of mysticism does not despise the world and is not aiming for the beyond, but affirms the world, daily ordinary human life, and historical processes, while seeing some supreme good beyond. Through this spiritual orientation and *ahimsa* (the insight into the latent truth of the other) can be seen what is most genuine in the other (Erikson, 1969, pp. 397, 413). Thus, a spirit is created that provides the powerful and powerless courage to change, that condemns the power relations and not the actors themselves. The insight of *ahimsa* erupts into the stewardship of justice-making.

This stewardship is not what Block (1993) considers to be the integration of the human spirit with the demands for survival and profits in the marketplace. It is not about reconciling one's personal fragmentation to the workplace by being given more power to define purpose and reap rewards. It is not about reconciling what is good for the soul with what is good for the health of the larger institution (p. xxii). While control and participation are in a conflicting alliance in workplace cultures, this definition of stewardship is still a commodity form premised on self-absorption and elitism. Rather, the stewardship of justice-making is premised on the loss of self and desire whereby people are led constantly outside

themselves in service to the community, particularly to those suffering any form of human impoverishment. In this way, spirituality and justice are mutually constitutive and fully connected to one's social, cultural, economic, and natural worlds.

Then what is the role of the educator? If, as Purpel (1989) argues, educators are prophets enabling the spiritual movement of transformation, what are they to prophesy? Brueggeman (1978) explains that the role of a prophetic imagination is to entertain the thought that an end of the present order might come and to offer symbols from the deepest memories of a community that give expression to the hopes and yearnings that have been suppressed for so long (pp. 63–67). As compassionate participants in just caring, educators move into the streets, into corporate boardrooms, into local communities, to facilitate the hermeneutic of gratitude, in-breaking, discernment, lament, emptying, compassion, imagination, and celebration in a wide variety of forms. Discernment undomesticates the Spirit to create havoc with humanity's ingrained images. Compassion reintegrates work, learning, and spirituality with reverent relationships rooted in sustainable, convivial, just communities. And stewardship participates with the global community as an emptying of the will into a force of love. A prophetic imagination celebrates the hope for and the promise of a new order—a sensual, connected, life-giving order.

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