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‘Self, Soul and Management Learning: Constructing the Genre of the Spiritualized Manager’.

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Abstract

What form of management is suggested by the increased interest in organizational spirituality and what genre of manager does spiritual learning attempt to construct? This article explores the growth of interest in organizational spirituality and its implications for management learning and development.

A definition of organizational spirituality and of spiritual management learning are provided which are based on a thorough review of the growing literature in these fields.

Burgoyne's (2002) outline of the different styles of learning approaches and the types of 'Self' they seek to construct are discussed in an attempt to clarify how spiritual management learning approaches are understood with the aim of clarifying a new, spiritualized form (or genre) of managerial self, which the discourse of organizational spirituality appears to seek.

Keywords: Spiritual Management Development, Organizational Spirituality, Workplace Spirituality, The Self at Work, Management Learning, Management Development, Spiritualization of Management, Managerial Self

The central question asked in this paper is: what form of managerial self is proposed by spiritual management development or learning programmes? Interest in spiritual management development has grown recently, partly as a result of the burgeoning management and practitioner literature on the subject, and partly as a response to criticisms of management development and executive education in the aftermath of the series of high-profile corporate scandals in the early years of this millennium.

This article involves a journey through the literature from different, but related disciplines (management development, organizational spirituality, management learning, theories of the self) to identify both the commonalities and points of departure between them. Providing a robust picture of these fields, which are very much undergoing a process of formation, involves taking on board critical perspectives of them, whilst also exploring and acknowledging their positive potential. If the goal of introducing, or increasing, a spiritual dimension to the role of the manager is the aim of spiritual management learning and development, an awareness of the suggested form of this new self or soul is necessary.

Bearing in mind the central theme of the paper, the strategy for investigating this area is to first examine the growth in writing on spirituality from managerial and organizational perspectives. Having established this context, specific emphasis is then placed on spiritual management learning: what it is and what it says about the form of self or soul which it attempts to form. The

spiritualization of management learning in general is discussed, and this is followed by an analysis of the literature on spiritual management development and its components. In an attempt to ground the article in various approaches which exist to understanding self and soul, a model is presented which analyses the various ways in which the self has been understood from different social scientific perspectives.

The genre of the spiritualized manager is then discussed in the context of Burgoyne's (2002) model of the types of self which differing approaches to training and development suggests. Based on the material referred to in this review, a genre of manager which is produced by the spiritual learning view is proposed.

Definition of Organizational Spirituality

An overview of the literature on workplace spirituality was undertaken and this suggested that spirituality in the context of organizations attempts to

- (1) clarify and integrate** selves, social communities and the transcendent, and
- (2) interconnect** these in ways which serve and enrich them, and
- (3) make meaningful:** the individual; the communities in which they work and serve; the broader global community, and; the Divine.

On the basis of this definition, the article then turned to examine the implications which the emergence of

organizational spirituality has for managers and their development.

Organizational Spirituality and Management Development

The burgeoning literature on organizational spirituality was then reviewed in order to determine its implications for management development. The most noticeable ways in which management development meets the requirements of the organizational spirituality discourse are:

- Providing *meaning to working lives; providing identity cohesion, and;*
- **Enabling** individual workers and managers to *defend* their Selves against disruptive organizational or social adjustments.

In the first case, the integral role of work in the search for meaning is emphasized (Mitroff, 2003). Work and our organizational roles are key in helping us understand ourselves and the role we can play in the world. This is directly linked to the function of spirituality in providing *identity cohesion* or the de-saturation of the self. Howard (2002) stresses that

'management development thus represents a pathway to understanding and making sense of the world in which we live. In the process of gaining understanding we are forced to become acquainted with concerns over how we are to define ourselves' (p.235).

It can also address existential crises and self-alienation caused by boring or repetitive work (Krishnakumar and Neck, 2002). Bell & Taylor (2003) suggest that **spirituality at work is perceived as a reaction to negative influences on** organizational life, such as work-life imbalance, downsizing and workaholism. Boyle and Healy (2003) state that individual spirituality is one of the few remaining ways in which controlled work environments, where intense rationalization has deepened the crisis of modernity (Casey, 2004) can be resisted by employees. Howard (2002) suggests that the 'unifying oneness' (p. 231) offered by spirituality can address increasingly fragmented societies. In these respects the promise of workplace and organizational spirituality are manifold and express ambitious aims.

The Spiritualization of Management Learning

The learning organization and organizational spirituality are sometimes seen as being mutually co-dependent (Hawkins, 1991; Howard, 2002) and core beliefs of the commercial advantages of learning and spirituality are often identically expressed in the literature. Mitroff, for example, states the core finding of his research that "spirituality was perceived as the only true and lasting competitive advantage" (2003, p.377). Ackers and Preston (1997) noted that a spiritual tone had been introduced into management development programmes since the early 1980s, partly a result of the "revival of the charismatic form of authority" (p.677) in the work of writers such as Tom Peters. This genre of writing attempted to convert individual executives and corporate

culture and to transcend rationalist understandings of what management development is for and what it does. The 'sacralization' of the management development experience, coupled with the emergence of the *learning discourse* and its associated emphasis on self-development, has contributed to the emergence of Spiritual Management D. Contu *et al.* (2003) point out that, "Learning carries connotations with humanistic concerns of self-actualization, self-development, perhaps even emancipation" (p.934). Self-development has played a central role in the emergence of organizational learning and the Learning Organization movement, and this has been particularly noticeable in the case of managers (Antonacopoulou, 2000). Bell and Taylor (2004) illustrate how SMD differs from other forms of management development by virtue of its focal emphasis on the unearthing of the manager's authentic self or essence, with the aim of producing a differing state of being, rather than specific managerial competencies and skills.

Critical appraisals of management learning point out that management or organizational learning are problematic primarily because learning is **understood in terms of organizational needs and practices, and learning** which does not reflect these preoccupations is not considered to be relevant or useful. Managers thus act as *agents* for organizational learning (Friedman, 2001 cited in Antanocopoulou, 2006) and utilize and develop learning that will help consolidate existing configurations of power.

Learning has thus been mobilized to be supportive of certain political ideologies, to cement and bolster the organizational status quo, and is productive of conservatism, rather than creativity. This creates questions as to what is expected of

managers and executives in terms of personal or self development. If **management learning is concerned with encouraging managers to perform as** learning agents for the organization, what is the rationale for investing in learning initiatives that encourage managers to develop their Selves or souls?

Heelas (1996) outlines how the 'New Age' movement has emerged from an 'established order of modernity' and is a product of the trajectories of sociocultural development. New Age movements "maintain that inner spirituality - embedded within the self and the natural order as a whole - serves as *the* key to moving from all that is wrong with life to all that is right" (p.16).

Heelas outlines the chief concerns of New Age self-spiritualities:

- the disruption of true authentic self-hood by the established order;
- perfection can be attained only by transcending the established self;
- the emergence of 'truth' from the self, rather than the external world;
- the individual should be their own (and only) guide and is entirely responsible for ones own life;
- the self can only become free when liberated from the past;
- no one religion is entirely 'correct', but when all religions are considered together, there are opportunities for truth to be obtained.

Although self-development began to be emphasized with increasing regularity during the 1990s, spirituality as a term might not have been as admissible into 'management speak' until relatively recently because of its long association with the counter-culture movement's anti-corporate message. Gradually, through the influence of humanistic expressivism, 'seminar spirituality' and 'prosperity practices' mobilized the key components of self-spirituality in order to transform work and personal development practices. The stress on finding, developing and presenting an 'authentic self' is increasingly noticeable in the leadership development literature. Leaders are exhorted to 'find their way', 'know themselves' and discover their own inherent strengths and weaknesses with a view to being competent, trusted leaders of their followers (Sessa, 2002; Gardner *et al.*, 2005). Once again, although these programmes and concepts are often not marketed as spiritual, they share the characteristics of self-spirituality typical of the New Age movement.

Although SMD aims to improve the lives of managers several writers question the ethics of this approach as another of a set of 'disciplinary mechanisms and techniques of surveillance as premised on the "active consent and subjection of subjects"' (Ledema *et al.*, 2006 p.1111). SMD could be viewed as a technique where organizational power and discipline construct conformist managerial selves by forcing participants to exert self-discipline. Antonacopoulou (2006) notes that self-development has been seen as "an appropriate [HRD] strategy for developing staff in light of the present uncertainties, because it allows the necessary flexibility and self-direction in the development process and facilitates a more immediate response to the changing needs of individuals and the

organization" (p.459). Organizations are faced with the problem of continuous re-orientation in the light of continuous adjustments and changes because markets change at a pace that always outstrips an organizations capacity to change (Foster & Kaplan, 2001). This has a debilitating effect on managers, executives and employees who are forced through round-after-round of transformation initiative, leading to change fatigue and burn-out (Abrahamson, 2004). Self development can place the emphasis on the individual employee to change their Selves in line with market needs. The potential of an SMD initiative to get managers to internalize the organization's need for a flexible, sometimes rapidly disposable workforce (including managers) is difficult to refute. It aims to create a certain type of self-knowledge, or discipline in which the individual manager understands their utility to an organization, and to a particular socio-economic order. As a particular type of management learning approach, SMD is perhaps one of the most 'slippery' (Antonacopoulou, 2006), and this leads to larger questions of spirituality and it's 'learnability' by managers.

The Genre of the Spiritualized Managerial Self

Several advocates of spirituality in the workplace and organizations in the literature reviewed make clear from the outset that they write from inherited religious perspectives, irregardless of how much they actually practice, or argue from their perspectives. These antecedents inhibit the ability to engage in a collective organizational spiritual learning (Steingard, 2005b; Johansen & McClean, 2006). These paradigms, or "worldviews" affect how adults learn in the workplace in different ways" (Johansen & McClean, 2006,

p.416).

With a view to recognizing how workplace learning is impacted by the **diverse spiritual values of each tradition**, *Advances in Developing Human*

Resources recently devoted a special issue to uncovering how a range of spiritual traditions understood workplace learning in terms of metaphysical, epistemological and axiological foundations of a range of different spiritual traditions which emphasized the importance of recognizing the antecedent spiritual tradition of learners in assisting how the programme is viewed and received in the workplace, particularly if it emerges from a different spiritual tradition. These worldviews are important in that they provide the individual with a significant sense of Self which is often imparted from a very early stage of childhood development. If an individual undergoes significant change in relation to how they 'configure' their Selves as the result of an SMD programme, the learning they have undergone can be **considered somewhat similar to a conversion experience (Ackers and Preston, 1997)**.

Burgoyne (2002) outlines fourteen theoretical approaches to learning and the concepts of self which each approach understands and attempts to construct. The modes of learning delivery carry with them embedded assumptions of how the learner's self will change, as any "attempt to facilitate learning asserts a form of self for the target of learning" (p.4).

Space does not allow for a detailed summary of Burgoyne's exploration, so, briefly, the learning theories and the associated selves which they aim to produce are:

1. Conditioning and connectionist approaches, which aims to construct a *mechanical* view of the self;
2. trait modification aims to construct a specification view of the self; information transfer implies a *recorder* view of the self;
3. the Cognitive School seeks a *knowing* view of the self;
4. Systems theory seeks a *discovery* view of the self;
- 5-6 Humanistic and Existential Approaches try to produce a view of the self that is *essential*;
7. Social Learning Theories attempt to construct an *identity* view of the self;
8. Psychodynamics and related approaches are interested in developing a *mystical* view of the self;
9. Post modern approaches develop knowledge of a *decentered* and *fragmented* self;
10. Situated Learning Theory produces awareness of the *communal* self;
11. Post-structuralism aims to construct the 'vacant' self;
12. Activity theory seeks a *contextualized* self, and;
- 13 Actor Network Theory is interested in a *co-evolving* self.
14. Critical realism seeks a *hermeneutic* self.

If we examine Burgoyne's model in relation to the terms discussed here (the proprium view of the self, the autogenic formation of the Self, the view that the real Self is hidden and can be uncovered), we can see that at least one of these elements are relevant to most of the learning styles (with the exceptions of postmodernism, post-structuralism, actor-network theory, activity theory and possibly critical realism. In the first two cases, it might be postulated that spiritual learning aims to counteract these approaches).

The closest alignments are with humanistic, existential, and psychodynamic approaches which aim to produce essential or mystical views of the selves. Although similar to these, there are different views as to what the 'spiritual' self is and what its learning style aims to construct. With this in mind, and with the aim of creating and clearly summarizing what has been written in this paper, a fifteenth learning theory is suggested for addition to Burgoyne's overview.

School Fifteen: The Spiritual Learning View

• *Summary:* Unlike the other learning approaches, the spiritual view of learning is explicitly concerned with 'selfhood'. Spiritual management development is a collection of approaches which emerged in the early 1990s with a specific focus on helping managers and workers focusing on their selves. Although not expressly *religious*, it relies heavily on a variety of religious **traditions to assist managers in understanding their inner hidden** resources with a view to developing self understanding and self awareness and finding *meaning* in their work. The key assumption of this approach is that individuals, organizations and societies suffer from alienation and anomie and this negatively impacts human capital within the organization. These issues can be addressed by becoming self-aware, embarking on an inner journey of personal change with a view to finding one's authentic self or soul

- *Essence of orientation for facilitating learning:* learners are often presented with a variety of tools and techniques which focus on past and current experiences, both inside and outside work, but also on clarifying what it is they would really like to achieve in the future.

- Moral issues and self-clarification, unearthing and discovery are emphasized throughout.
- *View of Self and the Learning Entity*: An expressive individualist view of the self.

Conclusion

A number of questions and avenues of investigation are suggested by this work. Expressive individualism, as a desired sense of self-hood aligns with different cultures and faith traditions variously. Should more attention be given to the forms of spiritualized managerial learning managers receive, and how will SMD impact on a manager's own inherent spirituality, or even the corporate culture in which they work?

Is it possible to deliver other forms of SMD which aim to produce spiritual learning that results in forms of managerial selfhood that are not based on the principles of expressive individualism, and if so, what form of self will these be?

Throughout this article the term 'Self' has been more referred to than the term 'Soul'. The reason for this is that the theories on both the self, and on spiritual management development, do the same, and often the terms Self and Soul are used interchangeably. SMD aims to effect a transformation of the managers sense of self-hood, but what are the implications for managers and **organizations if it was aimed at influencing managers' conceptualization of their Soul?**

Undoubtedly, numerous variations on this type of self exist depending on the training being offered and the organizational context. If Heelas & Woodhead's (2005)

statement that there has been a massive 'subjective turn in developed economies is correct, it is likely that spiritual learning will **become more important in the field of management learning. Moreover, if it** is also the case that 'the subjective turn has become the defining cultural development of modern western culture.... both self-understanding and **socio-cultural arrangements have been developing in a "person-centered" or "subjectivity-centered direction"** (Ibid., p.5), the spiritual will become a much

more potent force in organizational life, and managers and executives will find themselves increasingly employing and working with expressive individualists. If the trajectory of organizational and management spirituality continues, managers and their employees will increasingly work in a sphere where work will emphasize connections between the individual, their communities and the transcendent. The spiritualization of the workplace, at this point in late modernity, requires spiritualized managers who both **recognize the immanent and transcendent needs in their workers and** organizations, but who are also aware of the dangers of organizational and workplace spirituality being 'hi-jacked' as a tool of ideological control.

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