

Endpiece

Towards a new management practice: holistic inquiry

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This issue of *Interconnections* has quite purposefully included articles from many different walks of life. We have drawn from spiritual practitioners, from educationalists, from global organisations, from groups of specialist experts in management, from environmental entrepreneurs, and from groups of academics. Throughout the issue we have seen writers and practitioners, people throughout the globe, meeting this unprecedented challenge, struggling with how to establish alternatives – how to build community. Some may ask: what has this to do with management practice?

One of the commonalities in these articles, and indeed in past *Interconnections* issues, has been the call for holistic and systemic change. Quite clearly, management practice can no longer exist in a cocoon of its own making. It is admirable that global bodies and specialists are breaking through the bonds of passivity and silence that have kept the industrialised West in their place. This is still revolutionary language. However, it is still important to use the past as a guide for the next steps forward, not only as a reminder, but also as an important part of taking responsibility, and indeed seeing the consequences of particular actions. Until we see deeply and acknowledge how we have created the conditions, recognise patterns and cycles of interaction, then we do not have the resources and wisdom to take our next steps forward, even if they are in the dark.

As the philosopher Santayana wrote:

'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.'

So many management initiatives over the past 30 years or so have simply obliterated the old, and rolled in the 'new'. The rhetoric of management change has proliferated and dominated, yet actually, in terms of the values that have driven business nothing has changed, despite the sterling efforts of those who have tried to introduce values that are different from those of growth and profit – such as the Body Shop as a prime example, or those endeavouring to introduce more humanitarian and 'emotion-based' management into the system. These have been regrettably small, and outside of the mainstream of managerial action and discourse. And what is being called for now is of a different order – and demands that the change happens throughout the entire system.

This can only happen when the people in managerial positions realise the need to lead change, and then engage in actions that can bring this about. John Nirenberg talks about his experience of 'waking up from the trance' when he heard about the Stanford prison experiments and this is perhaps where we all are. What is clear from this article, is the power of the collective to shape minds and actions, and how quickly this moves beyond what we would all agree is ethical action. One of the mechanisms by which we have been held in this trance is through the perpetuation of the myth of the 'hero'.

The hero is not concerned with issues of sustainability, community, sexuality, reproduction, emotionality. He is concerned with reaching to the sky. We compete with our rivals, struggle for 'world class' systems, and beat off the dragons of our competitors. The heroic (usually male) executive straddles world systems, promoting the virtues of market forces, and their apparently 'neutral' values. Organisations are drawn up to reflect and reinforce the behaviours of the hero. This is the predominant means of success, and this is incarcerated more and more in the current obsession with the notion of 'leading'.

The language of exhortation and metaphor are used to develop this picture. For example:

The stepladder is gone, and there's not even the implied structure of an industry's rope ladder. Its more like vines, and you bring your own machete. You don't know what you'll be doing next.

(Drucker, quoted by Harris 1993, p. 117)

... No amount of knowledge of marketing, finance, operations, Human Resources (HR) and Strategic Management techniques will suffice in the tough, changing world of Contemporary Management, unless it is built on a firmly based self-concept.

(Smith, 1993 p. 46)

Here the masculine world of strife and struggle, underpinned by a strong, heroic ego 'the firmly based self-concept' is evoked through a language with which Homer would have been pleased. We need to bring our own 'machete'. We cannot expect the support of our colleagues. The sense of community spirit has disappeared. This is all congruent with individualised pay and reward systems, and how we need to negotiate salaries for ourselves, based upon the way in which we present our own heroic stories.

Our survival depends on this. Wrapped up, of course, in the elegant language of management systems. It is remarkably seductive. However, it can also be destructive. Remember Icarus who flew up to the sun, and burnt his wings? This is the hubris of the modern hero – and some writers have argued that this is the hubris of western civilisation (Tarnas 1991).

So, can management mature?

Can we find a different language and archetype to take us forward?

Management in a sustainable age: embracing diversity?

This means an alignment of the technological and human: to be sustainable means to be not just efficient, but to be caring and meaningful. The current crisis has shown us that efficiency, the holy grail of management, has reached the end of the road in its current form. Many of the articles in this issue have pointed to the radical shifts needed in education and management, and in particular, the extract from 'Moonshots for Management' by Gary Hamel observes that we need to 're-train managerial minds'. It will take time to move away from the competitive model that has dominated organisations for at least 20 years. It is time for the notion of the 'hero' to move onto its wiser, more mature, archetype: the senex, or its female counterpart, the old crone. With the senex, comes different qualities of stability, patience, limits, time restraints – of the passing on of wisdom, not the endless struggling to kill the dragon. The senex/old crone is embodied in experience, in time and space. No room here for the endless short-termism that has also dominated our structures.

How can we make this move from hero to senex? Can we evolve change that is both radical and evolutionary? One of the answers was provided by the article by Mae Chee Sansanee, who showed how women could make a different

contribution to organisations, by bringing in spiritual depth and caring – what would be needed for this to happen is for us to find the means of creating these conditions. Colleen McLaughlin gave us some pointers here with her analysis of the current educational system in the UK. She pointed out how the fit between development and the environment created by leaders was the key process to help in the human process of thriving or withering. She shows how we seem to have forgotten this wisdom and have fallen into the trap of objectifying and commodifying young people and the process of their development, as we have done in other elements of modern life.

The same issues for spirituality, or humanness were echoed by Jon Smith's article, on spirituality in the FBI, and by Andy and Alan's articles on the importance of story-telling in organisations. The difficulties, and yet potential excitement in this time of chaos were further enhanced by David Saunders, who gave us some pointers to sustainability, from his practical experience. He took the analysis deeply into the structures of nature – and it is clear that we will have to do some deep digging into our past, to build a sustainable foundation for the future.

One such means of doing this is through holistic inquiry.

Holistic inquiry: strategic practice

Holistic inquiry is a form of individual and collective management practice that is strategic not just in the sense of its own profits, but is strategic in a time and space sense – that is enabled to inquire deeply into the conditions of its own making, into the social, environmental conditions and even spiritual conditions in which it is operating. It needs

to be able to look backwards in time (how it has created current conditions) to inquire into the present (its own conditions, actions and consequences) and into the future (to envision a sustainable future for itself and others).

Further, it needs to be able to undergo this inquiry into its own actions collaboratively with colleagues, customers, suppliers. Holistic inquiry involves a process of questioning about the way in which we perceive the world, and the values underlying it, and the means for collectively articulated strategic movement – that has both a sense of direction, and an openness to flexibility within that. Holistic inquiry involves processes of listening as much to the language, as to the energy, passion and commitment behind the dialogue – how one forms the other. It is about acknowledging and learning from what has happened in the past (individually and collectively) and moving into the future. It is a multi-valenced practice – and one that could become critical in this time of unprecedented change.

Research on holistic inquiry has been developed at Ashcroft International Business School at the Centre for Communication and Ethics in International Business. Breakfast seminars on the method and *Interconnections* will be running in both Chelmsford and Cambridge. Please inquire to the editor.

References

- Tarnas, R. (1991), *The Passion of the Western Mind*, New York, Ballantine
- Smith, J. (1993), Building managers from the inside out, *Journal of Management Development*, Vol. 12. Issue 1
- Harris, T. George (1993), The post-capitalist executive: an interview with Peter F. Drucker, *Harvard Business Review*. May–June, pp. 115–122

Any comments on these articles are most welcome, as are offers of contributions to our next edition.

If you wish to become part of the *Interconnections* community, and informed of any forthcoming seminars and opportunities for dialogue, please contact the editor, Bronwen Rees: dr.bronwenrees@ntlworld.com