



Meeting Transformational Challenges: Continuing Education and Leadership

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Meeting Transformational Challenges: Continuing Education and Leadership

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Organizations and leadership face great crises today different in character and dimension from any of those of the 20th century. Every era provides some challenges but current conditions threaten the existence of thousands of organizations and the continuity of leadership (Arrighi, 1994; Arrighi and Silver, 1999; Drucker, 1993; Friedman, 1999; Schumpeter, 1978; Wallerstein, 1984;). These crises come from a changing of the fundamental relationships between organizations and their environments, and these changes are most pronounced in countries like the United States (Bobbitt, 2003).

These crises are already having tidal wave impacts on businesses, jobs in basic and high technology industries and on stock markets. Significantly, the year 2000 appears to have heralded the end of the economic boom that began in 1982 and ushered in what may prove to be years of declining growth and outright shrinkage in many areas of the economy. With a lessening of economic expansion severe restrictions have begun to be applied to federal, state, local and nonprofit spending.

Other than dismissing employees and curtailing or discontinuing programs, do preferable alternatives exist? Yes! But, they require creating new structures that can transform existing organizations to ones that can cope with these new circumstances. Professional continuing education can help develop the organizational leadership that will meet the challenges.

Transformational Challenges

There are several powerful factors that make this era so foreboding. First, we examine the most visible factors and then we look at efforts that can be taken to create structures that can help transform many troubled organizations.

Information Technology (IT)

Every organization and every leader must have the means to secure and exchange information with their environment and to communicate throughout the organi-

zation. The technology of communication has improved in the last four decades at a geometric rate. The telephone has merged with the radio to become a cell phone leading to constant communication. No longer is the individual tethered to landlines but remains in a continuous contact with the world. Satellite technology ended the dependence on land lines and permits immediate voice contact along with pinpointing the location of each individual. Increased bandwidth, faster processors and powerful compression technology now couple video with voice completing the convergence of telephone, radio and television into a web linking every individual and organization. The internet is a further step in this convergence, providing powerful storage and processing nodes controlled by individuals and organizations. A powerful, intelligent network is emerging with voice, video and data that can move with the individual rather than requiring the individual be tethered at a fixed point.

This is an astounding development for the design of organizations. Most organizations were built around communication limits—originally the number of people visible to one another. The military, schools and factories have all been bound by this information principle. It means that people have to be relatively at the same place and at the same time for the organization to function. Rules require starting times, job locations, work sites and communication procedures. Written orders and then the telephone extended these limits. Leaders can now link up to 200 people.

Now when these limits of simultaneous place and time are lessened or removed, organizational reality and leadership, together, change in many and often unanticipated ways. Work can be spread out among members with fewer concerns about close proximity for communication and control. The military has begun to seize upon this change by creating small fighting units that quickly disperse across a battlefield with IT providing location, contact, coordination and control.

The entire manufacturing, distribution and sales

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activities of businesses are starting to be reformed by this new reality. Manufacturing, rather than having all components of an activity under the same roof, use IT to disperse it to sites where advantages of low-cost labor and raw materials exist. A design center in Boston or London can transmit fabric requirements to a textile mill in Egypt, patterns to sewing and assembly operation in El Salvador, shipping orders to Federal Express and deploy inventory directly to retailers in Los Angeles, Tokyo, Rome or Paris. Communication replaces large manufacturing and storage facilities. Management tracks sales, identifies popular items, quickly refreshes retail inventories, and avoids having profits locked into slow-moving distribution chains.

Knowledge producing and disseminating entities, including both government and education, are also changing rapidly. Both create and direct the flow of information to promote the interest of the society. Advances in IT have great meanings for such organizations. Large universities are slowly being transformed into occasional assembly points as more and more traditional functions yield to the new communication reality. As libraries and museums digitize, students and faculty no longer visit the library in person to out check materials. Students register, pay bills, acquire syllabi and notes, post homework and papers, and communicate with the instructor electronically. Scholars and researchers post their findings at their own web sites and electronic journals present new findings months ahead of the formal journal printing and distribution process.

Many traditional government services are yielding to digital technologies. Municipalities permit services as well as tax assessments to be paid via the internet. Some localities are using these tools for jury pools, auto license registrations, securing copies of official documents and many other duties formerly transacted at city hall or the county seat. Some digital technologies will replace traditional governmental functions, such as e-mail has over posted letters.

Businesses also must change and adapt to these new communication realities. Information technology has given business large databases to track inventory and support "just in time manufacturing" and the internet to connect all parts of the enterprise and as an appealing means to reach customers, but it carries a threat as

well. The increased availability of information means that no organization holds an advantage for long. It also means that the world can quickly learn the strengths and weaknesses of every organization, every leader and its services and products.

While technology provides a gateway to customers, it also accelerates comparison shopping reducing every business' pricing power. For manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers, while it provides around the clock and around the world contacts with more customers, it erodes traditional franchises and increases competition.

For knowledge organizations IT changes erode the traditional geographical-based monopoly. Education obtained electronically is more convenient and cheaper. Similarly, government workers must conduct more of their affairs without relying upon a fixed office. What is occurring with the U. S. Post Office, with their functions being taken by leaner organizations such as UPS and FedEx and the internet replacing correspondence and bill paying, is a caution for many other areas of government.

Globalization

Globalization is a second threatening factor. Globalization brings the entire world as an environment to every organization, every leader. It has many implications. Once protected markets are now vulnerable with the low cost producer determining the cost of the product and thus wage levels. Daily wages in China are \$3-\$5. Daily wages in the United States, Western Europe and Japan are on the order of \$50-\$75. Low-cost manufacturing from China displaces manufacturing in high-wage countries, and jobs move rapidly to low-cost areas. Workers in India are accustomed to working 70-hour work weeks without vacation or benefits, and they are intelligent, hard working and increasingly well educated.

Low-wage countries compete not only for labor intensive manufacturing but also for high-wage, knowledge-intensive service jobs. The current estimated 400,000 exported service jobs will climb to 3.3 million in 2015—about 2% of all American jobs. Additionally, nearly half a million computer-industry jobs could be transferred abroad in the next 12 years—about 8% of the nation's computer jobs. Stephanie Moore, vice president for outsourcing at Forrester Research, notes, "You

can get crackerjack Java programmers in India right out of college for \$5,000 a year versus \$60,000 here.” “The technology is such, why be in New York City when you can be 9,000 miles away with far less expense? (Greenhouse, 2003)”

Dell Computers, like many other high tech industries, provides an example of exporting manufacturing and then service jobs to lower-wage countries. Dell continues to move its manufacturing to Asia, with US plants doing simple assembly and packaging. A year ago, one author called Dell's 800 number for support on a failing disk drive and was connected to an English speaking support engineer in India. As Dell seeks lower wages, it leaves behind communities in Texas, resulting in higher unemployment and a diminished taxation base. The consequence is that high-wage states must either drop wages to the global market rate or create products or services that are not made by the low-wage states.

Government and public services are directly affected by this reality as tax revenues and charitable donations are driven by profits from organizations and wages that provide margins for taxes and giving. Additionally, this situation directly affects jobs that could go to welfare-to-work clients. While many US states have outsourced government assistance call centers, legislators in Missouri were angered that the state used overseas service employees to the detriment of local unemployed individuals. This theme is powerfully explored by in the PBS program “Foreign Service” (available on line <http://www.pbs.org/now/politics/jobflight.html>).

The Curse of Centralization and Mass Scale

The centralization and mass scale of large organizations have become a major burden. Originally an advantage, large organizations had better control with everyone in the same place and benefited from volume purchasing discounts (March and Simon, 1958). Changes in communication and transportation have lessened the advantages and amplified the inherent problems of centralized organizations. Centralizing tendencies are barriers to creativity. They lessen employees' ability to pass information from the environment to decision makers, and often create feelings of facelessness, alienation and lack of purpose among employees. Scott Adams has made Dilbert an organization signpost

of the times by recognizing the adverse human impact of centralizing tendencies. Centralized organizations can only succeed by changing so that they can quickly and effectively acquire dependable information.

Disappearance of the Relative Wealth Advantage

A number of factors are rapidly eroding western societies' relative wealth advantages. One is aging of the workforces, resulting in a lower ratio of workers to retired workers. Second, the ready availability of natural resources, such as in the US, generated great wealth in the 19th and 20th centuries. Resources now are almost exhausted. Third, machines and innovations in agriculture, transportation, mining, manufacturing and government increased productivity, leading to greater individual worker's wealth and decreased the number of workers needed. Other innovations, including the automobile, air travel, improved health and sanitation, chemical and biological advances and information technology have increased productivity and well being. All of these innovations have now spread to much of the globe. They are no longer exclusive to western societies, and the advantage they represent is now gone. Until new innovations occur, the engines of wealth generation for western societies will remain silent.

During much of the 20th century wealth increased across the world, but we have entered in a period of slowed wealth creation and, in some cases, growing poverty. Increased poverty leads to greater conflicts. Western societies grow ever more deeply involved in war with other regions, particularly the Middle East. These wars will prove to be costly and threaten the existence of some organizations. This enduring war will lessen the availability of resources for many organizations, expose some to threats of terrorism and can serve to sap the morale of people.

Responding To New Dilemmas

Only if existing organizations in the more prosperous areas of the globe quickly begin to change can some semblance of the existing standards of living be maintained. There are two minimum essentials to creating transformational organizations that provide innovation. One is a highly educated workforce committed to life-long learning. A generation ago workers could hold a

job for a work career without today's high pressure to learn new skills. In past years, education and training were viewed as rewards for good performance. Both must now focus upon maintaining competency for the individual and for the organization. Many present structures are providers of continuing education, but a lot of work must be done to adapt these providers to the needs of workforce, leadership, and organizational learning.

The second essential is creating organizational cultures that will foster innovation and service development. Unlike the continuing education of individuals, this is a difficult task with a low success rate in both the private and the public sector. It is a task where we have fewer models of how to do it. Yet, it is an area of greatest relative promise for success in this new environment.

Most organizational theory in the last century has focused upon and seen the greatest success in job simplification and control systems for large numbers of workers (Senge, 1991, (Morgan, 1997, 2000)). Books extol techniques to manage and motivate every type of person (Spencer and Blanchard, 1983), and other books assure that standard rules apply (Covey, 1990). These efforts lead to systems that are created to detail and track efforts of employees and procedures to keep work moving and meeting standards.

Mass scale tools and techniques will not foster innovation. Indeed, educating, socializing and managing persons to work in mass scale organizations threatens and/or removes the properties of curiosity, self directed inquiry and independence. Mass scale emphasizes control and restriction, effectively removing the responsibility and the authority of employees to think about why their jobs are structured as they are, what product or service alternatives may exist and who the users, clients or customers are. Part of the challenge of creating organizations where innovation and quality improvement are the internalized "orders of the day" is to undo patterns learned in elementary and secondary education, as well as much of popular culture.

Much of formal schooling consists of learning to perform to standards set by the teacher, the school, the state achievement testing authority, etc. While standards have an important role, critical thinking and social engagement are neglected. Critical thinking means examining a thing, a situation from a number of viewpoints and being

able to assign meaning rather than simply memorizing. Writing a paper, solving a new math problem, organizing a pickup basketball game all have elements of critical thinking. Individuals have to apply knowledge, interpret rules and sometimes create new rules.

Promote Creativity, Innovation and Quality in Government

In sharp contrast to the traditional, organizations with high success with innovation mobilize the entire organization in the innovation process. They develop rich flows of information up, down and horizontally throughout the organization. They develop reward systems not around compliance but around performance and innovation. These organizations scrutinize, continuously and thoughtfully, their environment. They know very well who purchases their products and services and why. They know who their competitors are and who might be a new competitor. Often they develop close relationships with suppliers to refine and improve raw materials. In a like fashion, they routinely collaborate with customers to see how their products are used and how they might be improved (Kelly and Lauderdale, 1999a; 1999b).

Organizations that are creative, and that quickly take advantage of new conditions are organizations where all employees see themselves as members in a common enterprise. High levels of trust and reciprocity exist among all members, and members view the organization as part of their family. The old employment concept of "a fair day's work for a fair day's wage" is replaced by reciprocal feelings among the members of the organization of a shared and common enterprise. When one visits such an organization, one is struck by the enthusiasm and the focused effort of everyone in the organization. Employer and employee are replaced by leaders and members. Indeed, one of the more visible trends in analysis of organizations is the increased attention being paid to leadership (Argyris, 1993; Kouzes and Posner, 2003).

Leadership in the organization creates these conditions by taking several steps. These steps include:

- Asking employees on a regular basis if strong conditions exist to promote quality innovation and dedication.

- Leading through example, including spending significant time close to people engaged in the various tasks of the organization.
- Seeing that employees are actively engaged in examining the products and services of the organization and are active in efforts to better understand and improve those products and services.
- Ensuring that there is a restless quality to work within the organization to ensure that no one is "resting on his laurels."
- Building processes that "open" the organization to the users of the organization and those that provide the resources that enable the organization's existence.

Leadership uses tools such as regular employee surveys, quality circles, supervisors that are skilled in securing involvement and other activities that promote deeper understanding of what the organization is doing with every employee. Efforts to build a more informed and committed workforce are continuous (Lauderdale 1999).

The second thing essential to producing innovation and quality services is to develop a number of means to gather information about how the various publics that an agency serves evaluates the services. This is often called "customer satisfaction." Using the state police, as an example, the agency must determine how the various people that depend on the agency feel about its service quality. How do people view the way they are treated when they apply for or renew a driver's license? Do they feel they are treated with respect and handled in a timely and friendly manner? Every aspect of the agency must be examined against the criteria of the intent of the agency and how well the various publics' feel about agency performance. When a state police officer issues a ticket, is it done in a fashion that conveys respect to the citizen even though it may result in a fine? Does the work of the state police lessen crime along the highway system, and does the state police work in effective partnerships with local and federal law enforcement.

"Customer satisfaction" for a public agency is far more complex than one might find in a restaurant or hotel. Strong agencies will identify several "publics," and develop relevant measures to see how they are viewed and if improvements are noticed.

Yet, public agencies face many of the challenges encountered by the private sector. In the next few years, increased revenues to expand existing services or create new ones have a low likelihood. For several years leadership will be called to do more with less. Yet innovative, creative and effective public services are just as important in the national mix of building a strong, competitive economy as is the case for manufacturing, agriculture, technology and health care.

The Survey of Organizational Excellence Tools

We began to address some early aspects of these issues and try to build higher quality organizations 30 years ago when the University of Texas, Social Work Continuing Education program collaborated with the State of Texas to improve employee performance and satisfaction (Lauderdale, 1999). Our first experiences were with the state human services agency; those led to requests to address similar issues throughout state government. As our experience grew, we focused on the characteristics of the organizations, not just the attitudes of the employees. We began to see the norms and the culture of the organization as more important than employee attitudes in determining how well an employee worked, how satisfied the employee was and how clients, customers or citizens experienced the services.

Our work became directed to improving aspects of the organization; from our experience, we have derived some 'transformational principles.' These seem to be what is necessary to create organizations that can appropriately transform themselves to meet new challenges, and transform members so that they are prepared for ever higher challenges.

Transformational Principles

Organizations must have high levels of support and involvement of all employees. Employees must be able to see themselves as members of a common enterprise, not simply as hired persons.

- Organizations must place a high priority on having strong teams with members capable of continuously examining services or products with an emphasis on quality and improvement. Careful and continuous critique of all efforts is encouraged as a central property.

- Leadership is dispersed throughout the organization and developed so that members respect them for greater knowledge and decision making ability. Leaders' authority comes from capability—not formal assignment of position.
- Social distance among all levels and divisions of the organization is minimized, with an emphasis on shared responsibility, success and failure, and destiny.
- Tools and training increase members' understanding of the organization, how it is funded, and the quality of its efforts toward goals. The aim is every person knowledgeable—even expert—in the business of the organization. We call this property, holographic.
- Leaders share with members as much as possible about the organization and its activities and, in turn, expect high levels of responsibility, understanding and commitment. Transparency and candor are critical properties.
- Staff training and development is focused upon requisite skills and abilities critical for the organization, not on employee desires. Employees are supported toward educational and professional development, but the resources of the organization focus upon organizational needs and priorities.
- Investments in training and technology are made to facilitate ready communication and access to information throughout the organization. The general assumption is that the more information is available with ready access, individual actions are more highly informed.
- Information technology investments would move toward becoming a 'learning organization.' Information is seen not as a scarce and controlled resource but an open imperative need available to all members of the organization.
- With high levels of effective teamwork, members skilled in thoughtful critique, and with decision-making spread through out the organization, quick access to information would lead to improved organizational response time in dealing with challenges and a greater likelihood of innovation.

These were, and remain, our working hypotheses to build stronger, more creative and more successful

organizations. Our approach has always been one of developing partnerships with organizations that choose to use the tools and commit to these transformational principles. We have always felt that building stronger organizations is a work much like gardening – a process that requires years and patience.

Our efforts have led to the Survey of Organizational Excellence (SOE) that includes additional tools to assess customer satisfaction and to conduct 360 leadership assessments. The reader may see these tools at <http://www.utexas.edu/research/cswr/survey/>. The customer satisfaction instruments are designed to provide regular and structured environmental information. The 360 leadership assessments are to support candor, transparency and the responsibility of all members to build better leadership. All these tools are intended to encourage the processes of innovation so critical to the existence of organizations today.

Unlike many efforts at organizational improvement, these tools are designed for use by core leadership, not the training, personnel or human resources. Too often these offices provide training promoting "successful habits" or "one-minute quick fixes." There is nothing wrong with these efforts, but they do not achieve the sort of organizational change that is needed to build a transformational organization. That requires the continual emphasis of top leadership of the organization and the follow-through at all levels of supervision.

So, how have we done?

An important question is how well have governmental agencies taken to building transformational organizations? Several different types of data support the success of the effort. One is the rate of adoption and continuation of the use of the tools. The effort, began with 10 Texas state agencies in 1979, continues in 2003 with 115 participating agencies and more than 200,000 participating members. Tool use has grown in recent years and includes state agencies in Missouri and Ohio, housing authorities in Texas and Rhode Island, private for profit and not-for profits, municipal public safety organizations, childcare and rehabilitation hospitals and colleges and universities.

The indicator of improvement is an increase in the percentages organizational members completing the

Survey. We regularly find that participation on subsequent surveys is very influenced by how fully the data from the survey are returned to the organization, the steps that leadership takes to involve members in recognizing achievements, and efforts to address problems.

Another way to study the success is to let the words for some of the users express what these tools provide. One successful user of the SOE is the Natural Resource Conservation Commission, which is responsible for ensuring the air and water quality in Texas. With over 7,000 employees—about a third trained in engineering and the physical sciences—it monitors emissions, issues permits and provides expert testimony on air and water resources. The Executive Director, Jeff Saitas noted that, "Participation in the SOE is an important endeavor for the TNRCC. The SOE offers all employees the opportunity to participate in how our agency operates by allowing input and ideas on how we function and ways in which we can improve the way we do business. Participation in the SOE offers an opportunity for openness and 'buy-in' into the agency, enhancing each employee's responsibility and ownership, thus enriching our organizational and human capital." The board chairman, Robert J. Huston, offered this assessment. "As we strive toward excellence in the agency's operations, the survey provides a reality check from those who know best—our people. The Survey results provide invaluable information on our strengths and weaknesses, and serve as a guide for continued improvement."

Commissioner Eduardo Sanchez, head of the Texas Health Department, sees the survey as a means to get an assessment of the organization. He, says, "Our goal is 100% employee response so we can really evaluate TDH's strengths and areas that need improvement."

Organizations need data from both within and from those outside who use the organization. Several agencies provide services to many different constituencies. One of the most complex is the Department of Licensing and Regulation (TDLR). This agency licenses electricians, water-well drillers, talent agencies, and career counselors. After applying transformational principles, including the SOE, Nancy Jones, Executive Director of the Association of Plumbing and Heating Contractors, a prime customer, noted "Team work,

team spirit, enthusiasm, organization, excitement, I can use a lot of words, how many do you want? Success! And I think this agency is exemplary now. I think, if not already, it will be one of the top agencies in the state."

Bill Koontz and Brian Francis have applied the tools and transformational principles in two different state organizations. Reviewing their repeat success, they noted that they saw some additional changes in staff. They said, "We found that employees became more competent and were eager to extend this feeling of competency to other arenas. One of the more amazing things was the vast increase in the number of people participating in the annual United Way Drive and the increase in total dollars generated! We had not anticipated this aspect of return from organizational improvement." A member of the Texas Legislature, Representative Jim Pitts, observed, "They are a model agency, and I would hope that other agencies in the State of Texas would look at TDLR and see how things turn around from probably a dead-on-arrival agency to an agency that is flourishing."

Ms. Judy Briscoe, quoting Gary Johnson, Executive Director of Texas Department of Criminal Justice on uses of the SOE, says, "TDCJ has taken the responses to the Survey of Organizational Excellence very seriously, and has worked judiciously to improve those areas of concern. Improvements in the 2002 survey can be attributed to the administration's willingness to implement necessary changes suggested by the Human Resources Division and other key staff, and the administration's commitment to make training a priority."

Conclusion

This article suggests that unprecedented change now confronts formal organizations. Along with private concerns, the public's business – carried out by organizations at the local, state, and federal level – must adopt new structural forms and new types of leaderships, engagement, and involvement. Continuing professional education can serve an important role in helping human service organizations adapt by focusing on the organization's relationship to its environment. Continuing education must be focused beyond the individual and rather on the individual within the organizational con-

text. Continuing education must embrace the organization as the client helping the professional leadership transform their service organizations to the new realities of communication, innovation, globalization, and employee involvement.

Our experience with the survey of organizational excellence (SOE) may provide an example of how professional continuing education can assist these vital transformations. It suggests that leadership can pave the way for more openness and participation. Cultures like organizations may be closed and unchanging or open

and dynamic. The route to security in these times must be the route of openness and adaptability. The opportunity to participate in organizational life in both public and private spheres creates many advantages (Putnam, 1996, 2000)). One is the simple increase of trust that develops among all parties. When people work together, these interactions create reciprocities that enhance the effectiveness of the organization and often yield benefits that extend to other organizations. The trust and reciprocity builds wealth in the community and lessens costs associated with isolated sectors of the community.

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