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Scientific Management Is a Sunday School Picnic Compared to Reengineering

Many critics love to chide Taylorism—Frederick Taylor's early-twentieth-century scientific management methods (Taylor, 1947). I am not one of those critics. If you have qualms about scientific management, hold onto your hat—here comes reengineering the corporation as put forth by Hammer and Champy (1993). The titles of recent publications begin to tell the story: *Reengineering Work: Don't Automate, Obliterate* (Hammer, 1990) and "Reengineering Gives Firms New Efficiency, Workers the Pink Slip" (Ehrbar, 1993).

Hammer is well trained, with a doctorate in computer science—a systems person, the cream of the crop. These are good credentials, although personally I think overreaction to the present economic situation has given him an advantage in the new corporate "guru" competition. In contrast, Stephen Covey's psychological generalities (1989)—in the obtuse form of seven habits of highly effective people, the leadership side of organizations—does not have a chance against Hammer's message about reengineering. Precisely because of its obtuseness, however, Covey's book may be around for years and likely will be required self-help reading for the victims of reengineering. Although Covey's book might not help anybody, it most likely won't hurt anybody either. In contrast, Hammer's reengineering—the shortest distance from point A to point B—can be understood and implemented by top management with lightning speed. Hammer may or may not get credit 100 years from now, but reengineering will surely take hold, and its effects on people will be great.

In my view, sound organizational decisions are based on sound theory in three domains: economic, systems, and psychological theories (Swanson, 1992). This "three-legged stool" is a metaphor for both stability and flexibility. HRD needs to strengthen its primary leg of the stool, the psychological leg. HRD also needs to articulate the psychological theory and practice required to create short-term and long-term viability of human organizations.

Directly or indirectly, HRD has been getting a free ride from the total quality management (TQM) movement and the leadership of Juran (1992) and others. The rhetoric of the TQM movement, characterized by Deming's

general template of theoretical knowledge, has given HRD a stage but no script (Deming, n.d.). Deming is a master of variation (reduction of the variation in processes). Reducing variation is simply a proxy for practicing economics, as is reengineering. However, the quality gurus know less about systems and even less about psychology than they know about the control of variation. That's okay, because HRD is supposed to supply the psychology script, and the systems scripts should be supplied by people like Hammer.

The present quality-improvement models are most suitable to organizations that are reasonably healthy and reasonably stable. These relatively safe conditions are comfortably supported by the theoretical three-legged stool, with economic, systems, and psychological legs. In contrast, a company that has faced disaster—or is fast approaching disaster—cannot find a tool in either TQM or HRD that addresses its survival problem. To think that an organization can avoid such crises is an organizational fantasy. Reengineering advocates have ridden to the rescue, pushing aside HRD and TQM.

HRD needs to get back into the crisis management process, along with reengineering. Human resources and HRD need to help make the messy decisions about (speaking metaphorically) amputation, nourishment, organ transplant, and death. The reality is that these sorts of decisions will be made with or without us, and they should not be made by computer scientists or statisticians. A three-legged stool depicts stability. In a two-legged organization, managed without a sound psychological leg, the theory and practice of attracting, developing, retaining, and unleashing human expertise are not understood. Reengineering advocates would never have come up with a three-legged stool as a metaphor for their efforts. Instead I imagine them picturing a speeding bullet driven by economic gun powder, with systems theory doing the dirty work. *No psychological theory supports reengineering.*

It is not Hammer's job to build and maintain the psychological leg of the organization. He best explains why not as he criticizes others: "You become a prisoner of your own thinking" (1993). We cannot expect a computer science person like Hammer to make a flowchart of the human spirit or its impact on the organization. That is the job of HRD. The quality improvement movement has given HRD the platform to strengthen its psychological leg, and now the reengineering folks are unintentionally about to take it away. HRD needs to react by articulating and advocating its best case through the likes of the Rummler and Brache (1990) model of organization-process-job performance levels and the Nadler, Gerstein, and Shaw (1992) organizational architecture approach. These and other models clearly go beyond reengineering.

Pirsig (1991) defines quality as static quality in search of dynamic quality (change). In his earlier writings he argued for the dynamic only

(Pirsig, 1974). He has since learned that to be in a totally dynamic state is chaos. Given the new global economy and worldwide competitiveness, I believe reengineering will be a continuous state. Thus a part of almost every organization will be in chaos. The short-term economic agenda will almost always favor reengineering, even back-to-back reengineering. To Pirsig, back-to-back reengineering without a stable psychological base to work from is chaos, not quality. It holds the possibility of fear and exploitation.

Reengineering needs the psychological leg. It would provide employees with the stable envelope of trust and courage needed to reengineer successfully in the midst of inevitable chaos. Human resource leaders in organizations need to ensure the existence of systemic elements that help people develop, help them fully use their expertise, and help them remain with or leave the organization in fairness and with dignity. Without HRD in the reengineering formula, reengineering will be only a tool for short-term corporate survival or greed.

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