

As the HR World Churns
Patricia A. McLagan
McLagan International, Inc.
www.mclaganint.com

There is no doubt about it. The World of Work is changing. We in HR are part of it: witnesses, agents, victims, scapegoats, surfers, divers, cynics, optimists, rein-pullers, bronco riders, nail-biters. Some of us hunker down, batten the hatches, and wait for the storm to beat itself out. Others dig in our heels, reach backward for old success patterns, and charge full steam ahead. At times we look straight into the crashing surf and ride the waves we can't see – try to tame them, show them who's boss. Or we try to race ahead of the turbulence, fly above it – or like the mythic Phaethon, get into a chariot driven by horses we can't control, fly too close to the sun, and are burned up in the heat.

No one is truly on top of what is happening. Perhaps no one ever was. But at least, we thought we knew. We had confidence in our models – of the stock market, of organizations, of change “management,” of leadership (“charismatic.”), of plan-organize-control, of learning and behavior change. We taught them with certainty. We asked students and proteges to recite the right answers back, to follow the procedures, to use yesterday's successful people as their models for tomorrow – better yet, to be like us.

What is happening? Where are we going? What do we prepare ourselves, others, our children for? How do we add value, succeed in, even cope with – not only the New World of Work – but the larger arenas (social, psychological, ecological, economic, geographic, political, intellectual) that the New World of Work is inextricably connected to? How do we both thrive add value in our work lives today, and leave a legacy for those who come after?

On a more mundane level, how do we think about HR in a time of such turbulence? Human Resource activities are enabling forces. But enabling of what? For what? For whom? And, who is the customer of the human resource professional? The answers are in a spaghetti bowl where thoughts and categories stick to each other. But I'll dig in anyway and make a few piles. There are some irreversible *trends* in and around work today. They are expressing themselves all over the world. The first section describes these.

These workplace trends are floating on and being carried by a larger stream of *forces*. I'll discuss these next. Because the forces are both powerful and driving us in very new directions, there is a lot of friction at the interfaces of old and new. It is like the crunching, resistance, and surprise activity and energy that occur when old and new geological plates rub on each other. As one is being born, the other is reshaped and destroyed – but not without creating rubble, spouting lava, and even causing chemical reactions that make startling new shapes and forms appear.

The third section describes what is happening on the *cusp* of change in and around the workplace today. The cusp consists of many psychological rifts – chasms we will all fall into as part of our journey to the other side.

Finally, I'll talk about what is happening in *HR* to accommodate and help facilitate the changes that are occurring. And, I'll summarize what I see as the implications for HR professionals and researchers.

The New Terrain

The workplace and how we think about work and organizations, are changing. So many things are happening, it seems hard to pick a few. But, there are some themes.

The Nature of Work is Changing. One hundred years ago, most of the world's work was manual labor. In post World-War II Industrialized world, the balance began to shift to brain work and service work – most of it mechanized and proceduralized. Since the computer began to exponentially spread (early 80's), we've been moving with accelerated speed into the knowledge-based economy.

Think of what this has meant for us as “workers.” For many of us today, what matters is our own energy and commitment, our competence, our ability to notice things and make judgments, our creativity. The value of the products we make and the services we provide is often largely knowledge value. The physical material accounts for fractions of the cost (think of a microchip). What used to be dangerous work (ranging from shoveling to working with test tubes of dangerous viruses) is done remotely, by computers and robots. The routine work is going the same way (preparing insurance policies, processing claims, preparing payroll checks, doing a literature search, ordering a new stove, even sending mail!!). A sign? In the US, union membership (unions represent primarily manual and more procedure-base workers) is down from a high of 35% in the 1950's to about 13% today.

Economic pressures and demands for higher quality are even turning what looks like routine work into something requiring thought. We expect everyone today to be looking for better ways of doing things, for ways to make products and services better. This turns even the most menial task into knowledge work. It means that everyone has to know about the larger competitive environment and what their organization is trying to do.

People in the more developed parts of the world have to be careful about generalizations here, though. As the standards of living rise for the “educated and advantaged haves”, the “have nots,” who don't have the competencies to do knowledge work, demand cost of living wages. The work is not “worth” that in the market, so it goes to technology or to scab labor, or to less developed countries where people are willing to work for less – actually, for anything!!

The Pace of Change is Accelerating. We live in a time when many product life cycles are shorter than their development cycles. The next version of Windows is on the drawing boards even as the 2000 version is introduced.

“But,” you say, “We’ve been talking about speed of change for years. What’s really new? What’s new is that we are just beginning to realize the impact of this on the workplace. Traditional hierarchical decision-making methods are too slow. Punitive and shaming controls too often lead to sabotage. Old style planning loses credibility because it assumes a certainty that no longer exists. The job descriptions and organization charts that once successfully pigeon-holed work gather dust while teams and individuals break out of them to get the real work done. Pay and other reward systems that were meant to control and direct behavior end up bent to meet personal needs. People even have to disregard them in order to do the right thing for customers and the future of the business. People gasp in frustration when the career ladders they’ve been climbing for years are replaced by conference circles, flattened organizations, outsourcing, and an awareness of their own zigzagging needs. They quake at the thought that entitlements of old are disappearing, and that few companies can or will guarantee a job for life. People with good skills in correcting things and following orders – who could keep things going in the good old days -- are left behind in the dust. Others take the learning’s, reframe the situation, and leap to new solutions.

What’s emerging in the workplace are more participative decision processes, more control through shared vision and values, and planning processes that are used to focus conversations as well as for continuous replanning. In the new workplace you’ll find flexible work design practices where one’s goals are one’s job. You’ll find share-the-wealth-with-the-whole-team pay systems, more organic and individualized career paths, and portable benefits packages.

Value Exchanges Are More Direct. In the past, it took lots of middle people to accomplish a transaction. Some of these transactions were primarily “pass throughs” for a product, service, or information from one place to another. Many middle management jobs were like that – transfer and control points for information from top to bottom. Many warehouses, distribution centers, and even retail operations are like that, too. They provide storage and access points. These were useful functions back then.

But, technology, new communication services, express delivery, and business models of the late 90’s make it possible to by-pass the middle people. We can order things directly through the internet and catalogues. With information and the proper accountability mindset, a direct worker can take a strategy and implement it with much less management translation and intervention. This has major implications for how we think about organization structure, work and careers, as well as the relationship between customers and suppliers.

As information technology enables us to bypass the former “translators,” many organizations are dramatically reducing the numbers of managers in the system. They are also reducing the numbers of staff jobs. Staff work and management work is supposed to

be shifting to the people themselves: self-managed work teams, self-managed careers, self-managed development, self-managed employee records updates – all are becoming more common. This shrinks ratios of supervising managers (at all levels) and workers to 1/20 and in some places to 1/500. It shrinks the ratios of human resource professionals and employees from an old 1/50 to 1/200 and more. It also changes the role of manager from boss to performance enabler – helping people achieve higher levels of contribution and responsibility.

The Web as Structural Model of Organization. The pyramid organization model – with its cascading fragmentation of work – was based on a model that separated thinking from doing. The intention was to simplify and routinize work for optimum efficiency. That was fine for monopolies. It was okay for what Peter Drucker calls, “making and moving things” And it reflected the more patriarchal authority structures found in most areas of human endeavor. The pyramid hierarchy and the siloing of work also reflected the scientific paradigm that got started in the 18th century and continued until very recently: if we just broke things into pieces and parts, we’d find all truth. The belief in atomic particles as the finite and the smallest bits of matter was part of this paradigm. (Now we know that matter and energy are interchangeable!)

What did the domination hierarchy achieve? In the early days it made it possible for large groups of relatively uneducated people to accomplish a lot more. But, faced with new conditions and its own dotage, the domination hierarchy alienates customers, entrenches co-dependency between people at the top and the bottom, sets up “we-they” internal factions, and creates cost structures that are bringing entire systems down (IBM barely avoided this demise!).

The domination hierarchy is breaking down. Most organizations are searching for its replacement. What’s emerging is a more web-like view of organization. Areas in the web perform specific functions, but will often shift roles as the larger system needs it. There is hierarchy and specialization, but even parts of the management function are shared – everyone being a manager when they take charge of projects or their own work. The body is a good analogy. The brain and nervous system carry the main load of thinking (the executive function). But cognitive process is everywhere – in our blood (white cells recognize disease and act when they detect it), in our skin (detects damaging sun rays and produces melanin) -- everywhere. Any of our cells could have become an eye, a lung, a toenail. They are all part of the hologram of our body.

The new structures of organizations are structures where people are on many teams, where everyone is expected to take some share of the leadership responsibility, where everyone must think in terms of the end customer and contribute to the effective functioning of the whole. This is a lot different than the “this isn’t my job” mentality of yore.

And, it goes many steps farther. The “organization” is no longer just the company – the legal corporate entity. It is the entire stream or web of people and groups who contribute to conceptualizing, designing, making, selling, distributing, serving, and even using the

products and services. Called “the Virtual Organization” it has a range of configurations – in one place consisting only of independent workers or in another, just of people on the Acme Corporation payroll. More likely, the Virtual Organization is made up of some core “corporation” people and some or many suppliers, contractors, independents. When the allegiance is to the paying customer or end user, synergies spark. When it’s a we-they mentality, the costs and breakdowns are huge. This is why some companies go out of their way to treat suppliers like full team members. It’s why some invite customers to become “part of the corporate family.”

The virtual organization simply respects the reality of what it takes to bring a product or service to life. And, it recognizes that businesses and people who work this way create economic tsunamis that quickly put less efficient structures out of business. This is how Wal-Mart works. So do many of the new Internet companies who take the model further by having customers set up and staff chat rooms.

The Bargaining Power of the Workforce is Rising. This is an inevitable consequence of the shift to knowledge work. When knowledge becomes a more important business resource, people become more valuable. The “tools of production” reside inside people. As some leaders acknowledge today, “our most important asset walks out of the door every night! And, we can never own them like we can materials and utilities.”

When we know we are an asset, our bargaining power increases. We have something important to exchange – exchange for meaningful work, for money, for a chance to grow, for power. More and more people realize this and are using their bargaining power to further break down the domination hierarchy and influence work content and conditions.

Also, as we bring our knowledge and creativity to work, we have to bring more of ourselves. Work becomes a more acknowledged and important part of our lives. We expect the workplace to be part of our life and its meaning. This is a far cry from seeing work as work, and life as life. And it is one of the reasons why emotional and interpersonal intelligence are key workplace assets. Knowledge workers expect the workplace to be fit for human habitation and to be a “great place to be.” If it isn’t, they will take their assets elsewhere.

The Shaping Forces

The changes above appear to be irreversible. They are on the leading edge of a new paradigm. The paradigm looks like it will be robust and long lasting, for it expresses vast and powerful forces that have a strong and growing foothold in the World’s psyche. We might consider them millenium forces that are ready to break loose in full array as we move into the next century.

Information Everywhere; You Everywhere. It’s not so long ago that even NASA experienced predictable blackouts in communicating with its spaceships. Information

was relayed from ground station to space and back to the next ground station. When the vehicle was not in the range of one station or other, there was a blackout.

Now there are relay stations in the sky. People everywhere – even in the underdeveloped world – use e-mail. Satellite dishes in the sky and fiber-optic cables in the ground, transmit 24 hours of information to virtually every part of the globe. Hundreds of thousands of airplanes carry millions of passengers to all parts of the globe – taking only 42 hours of airtime to go around the world.

Europe has a newspaper (transcending national boundaries), the US has a newspaper (transcending state boundaries), the world has news channels. There is virtually no way to keep secrets. Raw knowledge is itself becoming a commodity – available everywhere at once and virtually free to replicate (it's the applications that create advantage!).

The impact? Anything that relies on secrecy or knowledge domination loses its power. Anything that relies on localization of, or a particular delivery mode for, knowledge (e.g., universities and bricks and mortar schools) is in jeopardy. Furthermore, the only real limits to the absorption and use of knowledge are limitations of the learner -- who used to also be constrained by what their sources (teachers, newspapers, television) chose to convey.

Clearly “information everywhere” and “access everywhere” are behind all the significant shifts occurring in the workplace today. This ubiquity is also a reason why closed system governments (e.g., Russia, Cuba) have failed. It is one of the reasons Apartheid fell in South Africa. Restrictive regimes rely on propaganda – on information control. As the Internet is showing us, this kind of control is no longer possible.

Drive for Balance. We are beginning to recognize something that has been true for all time: when we emphasize one aspect of something and repress others, the other parts will eventually push to express themselves. A grand correction seems to be occurring, as voices that couldn't be heard in more mechanistic times, scream to express themselves. This is true for more conservative cultures, long repressed ethnic groups, the environment. Many religions and philosophies call this a search for wholeness and oneness. Without getting too philosophical, this does explain a lot of what is happening today.

Individuals and society also seem to seek bigger and bigger integrations. If we do something too long or do too much of something, other parts of our personality cry out for expression. The human being has more than economic aspirations. Think of how many stories there are today of rich but unhappy people. Even when there is a real synergy of work and personal fulfillment – when work is a true partner in one's own life journey, ignored parts of our selves will tap us on the shoulder when we've gone overboard. This “tap on the shoulder” extends to most workers in the developed world today.

Generation X-ers and 20-somethings are joining their mid-life crisis, baby-boomer parents to question how dominant a work-as-life ethic should be. Eastern philosophy sheds some light on this. Human beings strive for knowledge (the domain of science), beauty (the domain of art), social relevance (the domain of politics), and goodness (the domain of philosophy and religion), as well as for plenty (the domain of economics). When any one of these forces is out of proportion, a natural balancing will occur.

Time will tell what kind of balance these various aspirations will strike. They will undoubtedly oscillate – never standing still. Perhaps the ability to balance and counterbalance relates to the relative power of their excesses (science to excess is arrogance, art to excess is seduction, politics to excess is control, philosophy and religion to excess is fanaticism, economics to excess is greed). So far, greed has been powerful enough to make the economic motive dominate the others. This does not denigrate the drive for “plenty” that is behind this motive. But, out of control – the emerging ethic says -- greed threatens us all with both self and environmental destruction.

Rise of Democracy and Participative Governance. The only viable governance form today is democracy. Of course it has many faces – some more pluralistic than others. But, as the Economist has pointed out many times, countries that are more prosperous and stable are nations where citizens’ basic rights are protected, where citizens have a say in selecting leaders and in creating conditions around themselves, where citizens control some of the movement of money and can reap rewards from their own initiative and action.

This governance form is popping up in churches, schools, families, communities – as well as in businesses. Democracy and related forms of participation are in the air, infecting everything in sight. Doing anything else requires swimming against a strong tide. The open question is whether we can all grow into the responsibilities that democracy/participation bring.

The New Scientific Framework. Not coincidentally, participation is also a theme in the new scientific thinking. Until very recently, scientists operated from a mechanistic model. It was the model of the periodic table, the separation of matter and energy, the quest for the smallest bits of matter and for the formulas that would predict and, if possible determine and cause things to happen. The mechanistic model was based on the belief that we could find nature’s formulas and use them to determine the future.

In the new framework of complexity, indeterminacy, and chaos, scientists are finding new ways to explain and describe the universe. It is not a universe that is purposefully unfolding toward a predictable end (in other words, it is not determining what it will be). It’s not a universe where, once we understand the dynamics – we will harness the forces. Rather, there appear to be an infinite number of possible futures for the universe. Any little event could snowball into a shaping force. As we learn more about the universe’s operating principles, we will probably get better at recognizing the general patterns (scientists call these “attractors”). But anything can happen to jar the universe itself out

of any pattern. Just as, theoretically, any butterfly flapping its wings anywhere, could set up a chain of events that triggers a hurricane on the other side of the world.

Scientists now see that everything participates in creation. We don't really know or have control over the impact we or anything else has. We do know that existence is a relationship thing: nothing exists without being in relationship with something else. Relationships define us. We have weight, for example, in relationship to the earth. A shape has form only in relationship with the surroundings that it is not. I respond to you in relation to your conscious and unconscious response to me.

This all seems obvious, yet the old paradigm encouraged mainly dissection. It focused on the parts rather than their relationships. It's like saying that a person is the sum of his body parts. Or that the sweet taste of sugar exists in the atoms that make it up. (the truth is that the whole is something more than the sum of its parts!) Brought into the workplace, my performance appraisal focuses on me – not on us or the system – or it focuses on the system and not me. The New Science suggests it must focus on both.

Insights from Philosophy and Psychology. Clearly, we can't carry our old views of life and people into an age of ubiquitous information, democracy, raised human consciousness, and non-deterministic science. The old views had a decided "either-or" bent. Either you are good or bad, rational or irrational, an engineer or a manager. This either-or has played out in countries as extreme nationalism, in religions as saved-damned, in relationships as male-female forces or perpetrator and victim. It plays out in the workplace as "we-they," staff-line, management-union/workers, customer/supplier.

The new psychology teaches us several valuable lessons about dichotomies. It tells us that truth is in the paradox – that the very things we fear and disown are part of our own hidden selves, yearning to be understood and integrated. The new psychology also tells us that – like the universe – each person's own journey is one toward wholeness.

It is not a "goody-two-shoes" wholeness. It is one that recognizes the dark and the light side of human nature. It is one that respects how difficult it is to grow into the shoes of power – whether they are the red shoes of a Dorothy in Oz, the army boots of a UN peacekeeping commander, the slippers of today's fathers, the purple dresses of the family's matriarch, or the well-traveled but polished shoes of an executive dealing with ferocious business forces, or the deck boots of Odysseus.

Thanks to the groundwork of Freud and Jung; thanks to mythologists like Joseph Campbell and Clarissa Pinkola Estes; thanks to new psychologists like Arnold Mindell (the founder of a highly integrative school called "process work"), we have the psychological foundation to help us move into a more adult phase of human activity. It is adult because it is not naïve. It is tough and compassionate. It encompasses the dark and the light. And our increasing consciousness helps us deal with the forces that scared us – that we repressed in the past – including our own authoritarianism, victimhood, greed, and ability to destroy.

Philosophy deals with the systems of thought that affect our behavior. If we believe that the world is a great machine – can be dissected, reassembled, and controlled – then we act in a certain way (“this is your problem, not mine;” “this is your job, not mine.” “I’ll do this in my company...if it creates problems for you, that’s for you to deal with,” “let’s control behavior by manipulating the reward systems.”)

At the same time that psychology is delivering new paradigms, The new philosophy presents thinking frameworks for a more open systems (i.e., participative and co-creative) view. Henryk Skolomowski, Ken Wilbur, and Fritjof Capra, and Vaclav Havel are key voices here. Their emphasis is shifting to the following as dominant themes:

- “becoming” (change) as a key life principle (not excluding, but incorporating “being” or stability). I am a process that is unfolding, not a finished personality.
- Humans as co-creators of the future, not just intellects discovering and using nature’s force
- The universe as open and evolving, with many possible paths
- The need for deeper symbols and structures as the way to access the immense and unfolding mystery of life. Our rational mind – as a limited sensitivity – will never be able to comprehend and explain the universe or to motivate powerful action. All living creatures have other ways of knowing (e.g., intuition). It’s our responsibility to be as conscious of these as possible so we use them responsibly.
- “I participate, therefore I am” takes Descartes “I think therefore I am” to a new level of responsibility and being

The shifts may seem subtle, but they are profound. School systems, governments, families, businesses have all imbedded the old more mechanistic and rational philosophies into their ways of operating. Like the Y2K bug, the old philosophy served us well in the past. It created a particular view of power that helped us begin to appreciate how destructive and creative we can be (the 20th century is the bloodiest and most polluting century ever, but also the most creative).

But, defensible as our philosophy may have been in the past, forces as strong as the millenium shift are exposing it as a potentially fatal flaw for the future. It lurks as a time bomb in the cracks and crevices of our institutions and our psyche. We have learned that we possess fire. Like Prometheus in Greek mythology, we now have to take the responsibility that goes with this power or we will contribute to our own destruction.

It’s not insignificant that our interest in “emotional intelligence” has surfaced now. This is one sign that the co-creative philosophy is working its way into the public arena – into our consciousness – forcing us to act.

Higher Education but Lower Population of the “Haves.” It’s a very troubling force that faces us here. As average age and education levels increase in the wealthy parts of the world, the average age of people in the poorer areas is dropping. The economic, political, medical, and education systems in these areas are simply not able to handle the influx. There are many serious ethical questions here. Certainly many of the world’s

problems today appear to be clashes of cultures and belief systems. We can rightly ask whether Western “ways” which have produced the skills for economic prosperity in the past, should be the model. We can rightly observe that there are other systems of learning (e.g., Chinese) that have created a highly literate population.

What is troubling, however, is the widening gap of opportunity for children to learn. We are becoming more aware that the human brain develops very rapidly in early childhood. It is stimulated more than ever by learning of all kinds. Wealthy kids go to preschool, they play with computers, they have access to complex machines that teach spatial, manipulative and problem solving skills. They are exposed to a lot of information and stimulation. Poorer children do not have that access. Will they be doomed for life because of intellectual malnutrition in their early years? What will this do to the stability of the world? From an economic view, what will this do to the world’s potential to grow in overall prosperity and thus create the global customer base that will sustain a global economy?

Something will happen here to cause a new kind of balancing. As the world gets smaller due to communication and transportation, the boundaries that protect and isolate groups disintegrate. Eventually, we will all pay the price of imbalances we create. We’ll pay in war, famine, smaller markets, fear and stress, environmental destruction.

Social responsibility for business is no longer a nice thing we do to make us feel and look better. It is a critical survival strategy for the future of any institution – of all of us.

The New Economics. Until very recently, the most important measures for any business were the size of dividends, revenue and profit growth rates, and market share. Many companies myopically focused on these, creating fearful, short-term focused, and numbers-driven cultures. This worked when companies were more localized and management could control things personally. It worked when just a few big companies monopolized many industries (and therefore, employment opportunities). It worked when there wasn’t so much need for creativity and when the pace of change was slower.

And, it worked, because there were no alternatives. The paradigm of management reflected a mechanistic economic model. This model sought clear causes and effects, or at least assumed that such deterministic models existed – although veiled. If there were better ways, few companies used them, so we didn’t have to contend with competition that behaved differently or added dramatically more value for significantly less cost. In other words, our cost models incorporated the costs of any inefficiencies of the economic paradigm.

A new generation of economic models is emerging as we enter the new century. It is grounded in the uncertainty assumptions of the New Science. The model recognizes that “upstream variables” like work culture, customer satisfaction, loyalty and referrals, product and service quality, market and industry image, hold a key to success. Attend to them and have more reliable and sustained leverage. Of course, it is not an either-or

picture. As far as business dynamics go, revenue, profit, and productivity are “dependent” variables, after all. That is, other things we do dramatically influence them.

Peter Drucker warned institutions years ago, “profit is the reward for meeting market needs.” It can never be a goal you pursue directly. What happens is, in the direct pursuit of profit, we often kill the goose that lays the golden egg.

Research tells us over and over again that companies that create environments of power and accountability for their people are the highest producers. And, they are more likely to attract and keep the talent needed for the future. Since talent is the key resource in a knowledge economy, this is a very powerful source of competitive advantage. Research also tells us that companies that focus on adding value for customers and society are the ones that thrive. These companies have significantly higher profit, revenue and market share growth. They have higher productivity and less absenteeism. Also, high talent candidates are more likely to approach, join, and stay with the company.

This all makes intuitive sense, but old style economic thinking still creates such a panic around quarterly numbers that even the most intelligent and thoughtful executives favor short term fixes even when they know the long range impact will be disastrous.

This is not to say that short-term focus isn't important. It is!! But we've got to do the equivalent of both breathing (a short interval concern) and worrying about nutrition and wellness (a longer cycle issue). As more companies begin to focus on the more “independent” factors that generate great products and services and create and sustain high performance environments, the pressure on everyone to move into a more systemic economic mindset will increase.

Activity Under the Fault Line

Paradigms don't shift with rational precision. They rumble, send up lava leaks, break into periodic earthquakes at levels 2,3,4 on the psychic Richter scale. No one escapes the shaking or the turmoil.

Paradigms make their presence known long before they actually break through as new ground. We feel them subtly, imperceptibly. When they first shake us, we see the return to normal as a sign that nothing is happening – our current world has won. We continue to build our houses on the cracking ground.

In the workplace, the shift from a closed system to an open system way of operating has been flirting with us for a long time – for decades. For example, the first rumblings of the end of apartheid in South Africa occurred long before sanctions or other pressures shoved dynamite into the already spreading cracks. In the workplace, the equivalent early rumblings took the form of total quality programs, the human relation's movement, re-engineering and decentralization, team-based management, increased accountability of boards for ensuring needs of a variety of stakeholders are met, new partnerships among

customers/competitors and suppliers, privatization and divestiture. Some of these appeared “not to work.” In reality, they were the first energy outbursts of something new. The energy wasn’t yet strong enough to eclipse the old paradigm. But each failed experiment created new cracks at the fault line, built up a bit more pressure at the cusp – the crossover point.

And, we are on a cusp. In this crossover place, some rhetoric (“boss-subordinate”) and some practices (separation of quality control from the work itself) are still in the old world, and some in the new.

Some individuals and entire organizations appear to be stuck in this in-between point. It’s like being frozen at a fault line at the point where the pressure to move meets an equal pressure to hold firm. The forces at that point are extreme, if apparently in balance!

Return to the Good Old Days. There is a unique set of activities that happens in this space. They are occurring everywhere today. For example, as we face a major turning point, there’s a temptation to return to the times when the old ways were more of a solution and less of a problem. In today’s work world, this takes the form of “going back to the basics of good authoritarian planning, organizing and control. This was a viable solution as the economy ratcheted into its mass production phase. It doesn’t fit the current pace of change or economic reality.

Flip Side of the Coin. Another reaction is to make an illusory shift. Here we retain the old paradigm in a way that looks like there is fundamental change. We make the “customer” king (or queen). We say that we serve the people who get our work – not the boss upstairs. In the process we keep the authoritarian or closed system paradigm, but the seat of control shifts. The customer is now the aggressor, and the supplier the more subservient and passive one. Roles may have moved around, but as long as everyone continues to play passive-aggressive, the paradigm is still co-dependent. If we are smart, we begin to see that authoritarianism is not the fault of the people in power. It is a structure we all build and maintain. It doesn’t matter much who is on what end.

The forces are carrying us away from this paradigm all together. Mobocracy is as potentially dysfunctional as totalitarianism. It is cut from the same cloth – is the other side of the same coin. This is why the adversarial union-management models will never achieve anything except a cycling of who wins and who loses. Yet, like “returning to the good ole days,” “turning the coin over” seems to bide us time.

Naïve Idealism. Some of us use this rift as an opportunity to propagate a kind of naïve idealism. It’s based on a romantic view of people that says, “the good will come out” if there is freedom. It contends that all of us are ready to be entrusted with the thunderbolts of power. It pleads for a kind of equalization of influence and pure democratic process for everything.

We have only to look into our own experience, into myth, and into history to see how dangerous this kind of thinking is. Power and responsibility go together. Rights and

responsibilities go together. Not everyone has the will and discipline to become a leader, to have the social right to have disproportionate access to or power over resources. Part of becoming a leader is to grapple with one's own dark forces so they are not displaced on others in the form of prejudice of any kind. Myth tells us that the worthy leader – the hero – does just that!

What the changes in the world today call on all of us to do is to GROW up. The free lunches of both dependency and position are disappearing. As human beings, we have a right to live and express ourselves as long as we respect that right for others. As citizens of societies that have decided so, we have social rights to access education, private property, and other things as long as we meet requirements that don't discriminate unfairly. But we don't have the right to power over or with other people or resources unless we are willing to accept the responsibilities that go along with it. And, we don't really have the right to the benefits of our societies or corporations unless we are willing to be active citizen-members of those communities.

There is reciprocity. This is the adult way. To be able to take our place as adults in this complex world, we have to move out of childhood and adolescence, deal with our own strengths and weaknesses, our own good and evil parts, and look with clear eyes on a world that won't take less than that from us. We do not face a "goody-two-shoes" future. But we don't have to face a hostile and adversarial one, either.

Psychologists and history tell us that we must love and accept all of ourselves, just as the adolescent who rebels against his parents at 16 moves into a fast, but mutual friendship with them at 30. When we do this, we move into the adulthood that the new millennium beckons us to, and that the forces we've unleashed require of us.

So, the challenge at the fault line is to leave the good old days in the past. It's to break out of the passive aggressive cycle that's part of the decline of authoritarian systems. And, it includes a willingness to give up naïve idealism, come to grips with our own complex good-evil nature, and become a mature, responsible and integrating presence in the emerging world we are helping create.

And So, Where To?

Pressure is building at the fault line. Like a major geological shift, the long-term prognosis is clear: there will be dramatic change. Does that mean we are irrelevant? Some would say yes – that the forces are well beyond our control. Others would say "it doesn't matter....We'll be long dead and it will be someone else's problem." Some would try to stop the changes entirely, while others dynamite the fault to spare us the agony of a long ratcheting. Let's apply this to the future World of Work.

Forces are Beyond Our Control: The Benevolent Totalitarianism Scenario. One legacy of the decline of the rational era and its belief in "man's" ability to know, name and thus control things, is a new sense of our smallness. For many of us, life is just too

complex, too fast. We feel like victims. Felipe Fernandez Armesto, author of the tome world history, Millenium, believes that so many people fall into this category that totalitarianism – where a few think and the rest just follow – is likely.

The implication for the workplace could be that we educate some for benevolent, but authoritarian leadership, and provide clear and inviolate “rules for work.” Work could still be participative. Leaders and systems would have to be very enlightened, and authority levels very clear, however – or else there would be a slide to mass unrest, sabotage, and disastrous declines in productivity. Human consciousness has just opened up too far, communications and information are too ubiquitous to allow a return to old forms of autocracy. But benevolent totalitarianism is a possibility. It’s one way to quickly prepare for the emerging world of work.

It Doesn’t Matter: The Laissez-Faire Scenario. We can just ride the fault, shake with the quakes, build quake-proof buildings and bridges, and let our own personal and group agendas carry the day – with little thought to what is happening around us.

It’s business as usual, with adjustments when crises occur. And then, the adjustments are just that: adaptations to fix this quarter’s balance sheet and P&L – to patch problems and fix things as they break. “Is a major shift occurring? I’ll attend to it when it affects me!”

Back to the Basics: The Fundamentalist Scenario. It’s inevitable that the tremendous surge of economic, industrial and scientific development of the last century would trigger some balancing mechanism. One way to deal with it is to resurrect what (seemed to) worked in the past. All of us do it in one way or another – back to the 60’s, back to horse-and-buggy days, back to the farm, back to when the relationships between man and women were clear. Psychologists have long pointed out that we tend to remember the best and suppress the worst of the past.

At the end of a paradigm, many things seem messy and uncertain – complex. That is definitely true in and around organization’s today. Many things seem to be breaking down. One solution is to try to erect the same structures as in the past – only stronger. We see managers and workers alike retreat to old styles and practices when they are under stress. Even young people, who weren’t around when there was a simple division of work and life, education/learning and adulthood can be attracted to past rules and values that are now (after the fact) associated with less complicated times.

We are Co-Creators of the Future: The “Strategic Dynamite” Scenario. The New Science tells us that the future is potentially sensitive to everything that happens. Even a small force – at the right time and in the right place – can trigger a major direction shift. In this scenario, we both respect the complexity and magnitude of the forces that are driving and shaping the future, and we recognize that we are among those forces. We can strategically place dynamite in the fault line, jump up and down on it, and perhaps accelerate something or even prevent something from happening.

The die appears to be cast for the world as a whole: everything DOES co-create. Everything is interdependent. Putting our heads in the sand and battening down the hatches does not change that. It may change the outcome for us and the human race – for the Western economic system. But it won't stop Nature from evolving toward more complex forms.

Right now, it appears that strategic dynamite that will accelerate and perhaps help contain the earthquake, is an explosion of consciousness and responsibility. In the workplace, there is every evidence that more conscious and responsible involvement by everyone makes economic and personal sense. Economic sense because it increases responsible productivity and personal sense because it fosters the growth of a healthy, maturing person.

HR , and the New World of Work

In the midst of all this – and both resisting and co-creating it – is the Human Resource profession. A snapshot today shows us a profession on the cusp, fully feeling the tensions of the fault line as it tries to sort its way into the future. I'd like to focus on 5 of the main tensions that make up the field.

Segregation vs. Integration of People Practices. There are at least 17 major areas of human resource in business today:

- Organization structuring and design
- Selection/succession
- Orientation
- Communication
- Goal Setting: Individual
- Goal Setting: Team
- Performance Feedback
- Career management support
- Individual Learning support
- Organization development
- Job/work design
- Benefits
- Pay/rewards systems
- HR information systems
- Individual assessment
- Organization assessment
- Performance support

In the past, practices in these areas reflected different philosophies. They were planned in isolation. They used different language about work (tasks, results, outputs, outcomes, duties, key results areas, etc.) and about people (knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, commitments, competencies, capabilities, abilities). The models they used for similar

jobs were often different – such that the selection, development, succession, and performance specs for the same job might be different. The segmentation became so pronounced that even means to ends (e.g., competency studies) became ends in themselves (“I want a competency model for this job,” not “I want to improve the fit of people to this job.”)

The pressure today is increasing for a more systemic and ends-focused view. Technology – with its need for a common language and interoperability – increases the pressure and opens up more integration possibilities. Integration will inevitably win. But today’s organizations live with the job half-done – or struggling to get under way.

Closed vs. Open People Practices. Closed practices fit the authoritarian worldview. Executives and staff people did the thinking, created the procedures and controls. Employees worked within those boundaries. This often meant secretive selection and career processes. The boss and the human resource professional were in charge of and did the work of individual and team goal setting, pay, performance feedback, individual learning, and assessment, career management. Individuals played a more receptive role, accepting important decisions made behind closed doors – hearing little about the rationales.

Today, in a far more transparent world, these systems are opening up. This is largely a function of the nature of the work: knowledge work requires active individual participation. And, as the workforce becomes more aware of its negotiating power, people also demand to know the basis for decisions. They challenge arguments that these practices must be secret or controlled by the few.

Operational and Administrative vs. Strategic and Facilitative Role of HR Professional. David Ulrich has long pointed out that the HR profession must spend more time in strategic and cultural work, and less in administrative and operational. He points out that most HR people in the past managed records and administered services like pay and training programs. He notes that HR professionals also did a lot of the day to day management work, handling performance problems and discipline, doing various kinds of counseling, intervening on union-related issues, policing policy.

But, we are now in a knowledge era characterized by accelerated change, where people issues have become central to organization success. Shifts in business strategy, acquisitions and divestitures, new alliances, globalization, new technologies – these all require strategic thinking about human resources. Also, something has to happen to help change organization cultures – and change them dramatically!! Human Resource professionals are the logical choice for these roles. But they have to shift emphasis. This implies that HR professionals spend their time as strategists, HR system designers, culture change facilitators, coaches, consultants to management on performance, researchers.

Fortunately, technology and sources outside the business are able to take over the record-keeping and more procedural functions of HR. And, it is appropriate now to turn over the

day-to-day people management to managers, and to the people themselves. But, the competencies and mindsets of human resources professionals don't always fit the new work profile. In fact, the administrative skills of the past actually have a negative relationship with the emerging requirements.

From Dependency to Partnership. We are beginning to realize that Human Resource practices are not a staff function. Nor, are they something managers do to or for workers. Practically speaking, this has always been true. Many years ago, Canadian Alan Tough pointed out a startling fact that relates to most areas of work life: most learning activities are self-directed (he said 70%). 20% are directed or significantly supported by others who are NOT professional helpers (perhaps managers, colleagues, parents, friends, children). Professional helpers direct only about 5% of our learning. And this 5% includes counselors as well as teachers. Tough pointed out that the self- and other directed learning was often not very efficient. This, combined with the growing awareness of what it costs business to do a sloppy job of learning, helping, and knowledge transfer, creates the need for a radical shift. Formalizing the learning and coaching role appears to be a key to increased innovation, improvement, problem identification and solving, and to the rapid spread of knowledge throughout the firm.

This formalization does not mean that the old "boss" now becomes "coach." While there will undoubtedly be formal coordinating and coaching roles in the future, everyone in the knowledge-based organization is becoming both coach and learner. Neither role is restricted to a person or job. This is clearly true for other roles, like "manager," "strategist." In a knowledge-based organization, such roles become imbedded in the work itself. Hard role distinctions and domination patterns soften and blur, become interchangeable like the matter and energy of the Einsteinian universe. The work requires this flexibility. It's only our mindsets that prevent the shift here.

The leverage and interchangeability of the learner/coach and manager/worker roles – the ascendance of partnership styles of relationship --is increasingly clear. But, the challenge for the HR professional is how to make these roles more conscious and competent. Cusp dynamics make this difficult, though, since many individuals and managers don't have the skills or focused desire to play their new roles. Many HR professionals also struggle with the apparent loss of power. And they face the task of reengineering of all people practices so that they are more self-managing. It's a tall order.

Utilitarian vs. Generative View of Human Resources. The term "human resources" carries one bias of this apparent dichotomy. In the mechanistic, more authoritarian worldview, people are resources in the sense of being optimized and even exploited. Today, the more utilitarian view, often based on behaviorism vies with a more generative view based on humanistic philosophies and psychologies. Debates rage between factions supporting "Performance Consulting" in the sense of "Performance Engineering" and factions supporting more learning-centered view. "Will we do job-specific training, or more broadly based education?," we ask. Should the learning specialist become a performance engineer and systems consultant or focus on unleashing the capacity of people so that they can do that work themselves? Is

the human being in the workplace to be treated as an effect or a cause? And, is there a higher order of integration where we can act as through both are true?

The Challenge?

The shifts change things for everyone. But what about the HR professional? Perhaps the distinctions within HR (ie., between HR and HRD) are too fine. In a knowledge world, excellent people practices are driving forces for success.

There are clear and emerging challenges for HR people. Here are some:

Reorient Personal Competencies and Work. The emerging workplace scenario requires more strategic, systemic, business-savvy HR professionals. It demands competence in integrated people systems design, participative process, and change facilitation. And, we need to be able to function fully in the information/knowledge world – using its technologies. The HR professional also must have the emotional intelligence to be able to lead while standing on an explosive psychological fault line.

Redesign the People Practices. All the HR practices of the business must be brought into congruence with the emerging realities of work and life, among them: transparency, interoperability, generativity, virtual relationships and offices, self-management, strategic alignment, customer focus, flexibility, rapid knowledge transfer, global relevance, simplicity and clear added-value.

Prepare People for New Roles. The New World of Work shifts the relationship paradigm from domination, adversarialism, and dependency to self-management and partnership. This requires new roles and orientations by everyone. HR professionals must help prepare people to thrive and contribute in the new world of work. They must teach everyone how to be successful with the new people systems.

Provide Useful Research for an Expanded Audience. Now that everyone shares in the work of HR – as self-managers, as coaches, and as designers – everyone is a potential user of HR research. Research results can also help accelerate change at the cusp!! So, research results have to be accessible – even brought -- to everyone. Beyond that, we need research showing cause-effect connections between people practices and important dependent variables like productivity, revenues, profitability, customer satisfaction and retention, and worker attraction and retention.

Some sample lines of inquiry include: link of open system practices to economic performance; updated information about the extent of self-managed learning, third-party (non-professional) assisted learning, and professionally structured learning; nature and effect of roles played by HR professionals in high performance and low performance organizations; the factors associated with successful and unsuccessful deliberate culture change programs; the people practice differences between high and average/low performing organizations; factors associated with speed of adoption of new human

resource practices; critical success factors for HR professionals in a transitioning/transforming organization; the economic impact of authoritarian vs. participative styles of managing; the %-ages and key characteristics of those who successfully transition into the new world of work; ratios of managers to workers and the relationship with key measures of firm success.

Support, Even Drive, all Aspects of Culture Change. Institutional leaders today face tremendous pressures to perform in the face of shifting rules and performance environment. This is true in all sectors. It is true in all nations. Unfortunately, the natural and expedient reaction is to cope and go for short-term returns. There may be lip service to more fundamental change – change that may take energy today, but will lead to a productive future that is more aligned with the new rules of the game. But, most leaders are too absorbed in today’s issues to steer the large-scale changes that are needed to safely make it through the cusp.

The HR professional becomes the “de facto” steward of culture change – learning about its dynamics, finding out where to put the strategic dynamite, and even jumping up and down to create little movements along the fault line before the forces build to catastrophic levels and a destructive earthquake occurs.

To Jump or Not to Jump?

The world is changing dramatically. The workplace is changing radically. As people – the knowledge resources in a knowledge world -- move into the fore, human resource professionals assume new roles and a new centrality. But, the tectonic plate of the emerging world has only begun to show itself. Most of it is underground, pushing against a great fault line – the cusp of change. Great forces are at work, and those of us who dare to reach for them and help unleash them into the future need a lot of courage. Why? Because it is not always clear when and where to jump up and down, or, if we choose to use dynamite– what its effects might be.

It’s clearer all the time, though, that the fault line is but an indicator that major and inexorable forces of change are at work. So our actions will only help accelerate and shape the inevitable. As Obi Wan Kanobe said in the first Star Wars episode, “May the force be with you.” The force IS with HR for the future. AND, we are in a unique position to influence and use – if not control it.

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