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CONNECTING RATIONALITY AND SPIRITUALITY IN BUSINESS EDUCATION

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CONNECTING RATIONALITY AND SPIRITUALITY IN BUSINESS EDUCATION

Abstract

The paper argues that there is an imbalance in business, management and leadership education between providing abstract concepts and opportunities for personal growth. Connecting rationality and spirituality in higher education is necessary if we want to prepare students for the complexities and challenges of organisations.

Kopatsy's model of Intellectual Capital illustrates how crucial it is to cultivate right morality in society. Business education has a responsibility to provide safe environments and opportunities for students to connect their rational thoughts with their conscience and embody their "true self".

The paper gives an example of how introducing techniques from voice therapy and drama enable students to look beyond the rational. By engaging with the true self students discover dormant qualities in themselves and start moving towards their purpose, meaning, universal connectedness and spirituality.

INTRODUCTION

Many of the complexities and challenges of the 21st century are beyond the capabilities of individuals, nation states or multi-national corporations; they require a collective, collaborative response from all of us.

The pressure to produce more, create and meet new demands is constantly growing. At the same time we have fewer resources, and more pressing environmental, and social challenges. We have seen an unprecedented change and development in military, transport and communication technologies over the last century. Unfortunately our assumptions about our human relationships, the role and responsibilities of leaders and followers have not caught up with these changes and we can feel the tension that this discontinuity causes in the world (Obolensky, 2010). Our collective assumptions are still based on binary logic resulting in a polarised view of the world. Life is seen as either good or bad; we collaborate or compete; exploit or protect the environment and have a love or hate relationship with each other. The technological changes of the past hundred years equipped us with the tools to be more connected. We can travel to each other faster and we can reach each other with our mobile phones and internet connections almost instantaneously. Yet societies are more fragmented than ever before. Increasing number of people are lonely and live without a sense of purpose and belonging. We are faced with rising levels of extreme and fundamentalist behaviour in the world. The more we know the less certain we seem to become. Many problems of our era are so complex and “wicked” (Grint, 2010) that we can only attempt to make improvements by taking a fresh look at our guiding principles and purpose.

How can we change our assumptions? How can we prepare and equip ourselves and the next generation for the current and future difficulties? What are the qualities that we need to develop in ourselves and in others to relate to each other and our environment in a more meaningful and responsible way?

At a practical level we need to acknowledge the pressures and constraints around us. In the work context these include cost reductions; resource limitations; emission regulations; raising level of unemployment and growing pressures to systematise, standardise, optimise and innovate and come up with more efficient and advanced ways of delivering our products and services.

At a deeper, more philosophical level we need to reflect individually and in our immediate work environment and take a critical look at our current paradigm, values and purpose and what “work” really means to us. We need to ask ourselves what we offer as service to the world, who we want to serve, how we want to work and what we want to receive for our service. I believe that by finding our passion and using our individual talent for the benefit of others we all have the opportunity to “serve” others and our own purpose at the same time.

Plato said that “work is effort applied to difficulty; it always has external and internal results.” In manufacturing and agriculture the external result of work is visible and tangible. The physical presence of the result is objectively measureable and will translate to the internal result of job satisfaction, sense of achievement or pride. In the service industry, however, the external result is not necessarily tangible or visible and the internal result is influenced by the feedback we receive from others. Using the measures suitable for counting products and goods are not appropriate for evaluating intangible, service related work based on human interaction.

The basic transaction of service is “giving” (service provider) and “receiving” (recipient of the service). This transaction always happens on four levels. How the service is given will trigger external and internal responses both in the receiver and the provider. When we are in a job for the wrong reason it is difficult to be motivated, enthusiastic, tolerant, understanding, patient and compassionate. When we are in the right job for the right reason we are passionate about our work; and we focus on the “giving” rather than the “receiving” part of the transaction. Our motivation and the internal result will come primarily from our calling and will not be dependent only on the payment or feedback we receive.

Educators and societies have a crucial responsibility to provide young people a variety of opportunities for self-discovery. Those who manage to find their passion for a specific profession are motivated to develop all the skills and competencies that they need to be successful and experience fulfilment in their field.

BUSINESS, MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP EDUCATION

It is a widely held view and there is a growing demand both from students and employers for redressing the balance between theory and practice in business, management and leadership education. Mintzberg (2004) criticized the business curricula (MBAs) and argued that people who take these courses with little or no management experience will only be equipped with scientific tools for analysis and decision making. Consequently they will be without the art and craft of leadership and can cause more harm than good in responsible positions.

Some authors (for example Zaleznik, A. 1992, Bennis, W. 1989, Pascale, R. 1990) make a clear distinction between leadership and management and argue that leaders create and communicate the vision and managers implement and work out the details. Although there is a meaningful distinction between leaders and managers Obolensky (2010) suggests that a holistic view of leadership brings together the leading and the managing functions and unites these two subcategories. The issues that are raised in this paper are relevant to all who enter into higher education although the examples come primarily from business, management and leadership education.

The rhetoric is changing in business education but that does not necessarily mean change of mind-sets and behaviour. Business education has yet to embrace the responsibility of preparing students for life by giving them opportunities for self-discovery, developing personal mastery and integrity.

Business education in its current form provides plenty of opportunities for the acquisition of tangible knowledge. There is no shortage of support for those who buy into the ideology that promotes financial and material success as a measurement of human worth and value.. Character formation, the development of virtues seems to fall outside the remit of management and business education (Walls, Platts, Illes, 2007). It can be argued of course that character is formed in the family and throughout primary and secondary education and by the time one enters tertiary education profession specific technical knowledge is all that is needed.

Various authors have called for a fundamental review of management education (Mintzberg, 1994; Senge, 1990; Hock, 1999). Some have argued that our traditional educational approaches are deeply rooted in a mechanistic view of management [and leadership] evoking the illusion of control and predictability (Berends, Glunk, 2006), whereas daily experience in the workplace shows that events are not necessarily predictable or controllable. Even the

deployment of increasingly sophisticated information and decision support systems cannot take away the need for human judgement in a social context. Practice suggests that success in managerial and leadership roles depends to a great extent on the level of maturity, growth, self-awareness and personal mastery (Covey, 1992; Platts, 2003) of the individual.

Developing one's character, morality and guiding principles requires free space (Kessels, J., Boers, E., Mostert, P. 2004) and free air (Barnett, 2007). It requires willingness and courage to embark on an individual inner journey of self-discovery. It cannot be pre-determined and prescribed by neatly boxed learning objectives. It is a personal quest that is easier to follow when we see that others around us are also focusing on their own challenges. The Greek word 'scholé' means free space. Originally a school was a retreat where people could reflect together with others on how the world weaves into a whole, what we and others ought to do, how the good life may be defined, attained and lived. School is a place where, for a while, we are relieved of the task of making a living, or taking care of others, or serving specific interests. Schooling is: making use of this free space to inquire into ideas that guide our doings, to remind us of our initial intentions, to explore the meaning of words and concepts that inform our activities. As inquiry, schooling intends to update our practice. It is a joint effort, since our words and ideas need to be 'honed' by those of others. In the progression of inquiry a team is forged in which participants can develop their own understanding, their personal view of excellence in action. And this in turn opens the way towards a vision shared by all. (Kessels, et.al. 2004)

Schools in their original sense have played an important role in the formation of character over the centuries. It would be timely to re-introduce the concept of "free space" in business schools and encourage students to formulate their own ideas through dialogue and personal reflection before they set their foot on the corporate ladder (Illes, 2004).

"What is clearly needed is a change in the mind-set, values and principles of our leaders, as well as of those who finance our enterprises, and of those who teach and mentor our future leaders. At the very minimum, what is needed is an expansion of the concept of 'success' so that it transcends the prevailing myopic focus on short-term financial gains." (Pruzan, 2007.p.6.)

Encouraging students to formulate their own definitions of success would be one of the first steps that educators could do. Allowing time and creating regular opportunities to explore questions about meaning, beauty and the idea of a "good life" would give students an opportunity to formulate their ideas and enter into an internal discussion with their conscience. When we continuously "Educate and obey our conscience" (Stephen Covey quoted in Pruzan 2007 p.53) we develop our character and act according to spiritual principles even if we decide not to label them that way.

"Spiritual-based leaders respect others and are guided by the fundamental ethic: service to others comes before serving oneself. From an existential perspective, the raison d'être of organisations is to serve human needs. Really, there is no other reason for their existence. Individuals and organisations grow when they give themselves to others. Relationships improve when there is a focus on serving the other, be it at the level of the individual, the family, the organisation, the community, the society or all of humanity". (Pruzan, 2007. p.52)

By including philosophy, ethics, values and wisdom into the curriculum of business education and allowing time and free space for honest dialogue we could enable students to

make the shift from competition to collaboration, from knowledge hoarding to knowledge sharing, from exploiting opportunities to contributing to the overall well-being of humanity.

KOPATSY'S MODEL OF INTELLECTUAL CAPITAL

Sandor Kopatsy the Hungarian economist presented a thought provoking model at a conference in 1999. In his paper he argues that 'Intellectual Capital' cannot be treated and measured in the same way as tangible properties (Kopatsy, 1999).

In Kopatsy's view social development, particularly the growth of Western societies over the past 500 years is the result of the harmony between society's needs and its Intellectual Capital. Although no one denies that the Intellectual Capital is an important factor of political and economic life, society treats intellectual wealth as any other resource. However by their nature the four components of Intellectual Capital: knowledge, morality, talent and effort are not resources in a traditional sense. They cannot be purchased or acquired by someone else. They can only be employed or rented and used effectively when there is a common interest for the owner of the Intellectual Capital and the individual or organisation that employs it.

Intellectual Capital = Knowledge X Morality X Talent X Effort

Kopatsy claims that each of these components is equally important and when all four are present with a positive sign they can magnify and multiply each other. If any of these components is missing the total intellectual capital will be zero. He claims that only the multiplication and not the sum of the components will show us the size of the Intellectual Capital. In accordance with the law of multiplication when one factor is zero the product will also be zero. In our case it means that when there is zero knowledge, zero talent or zero effort the Intellectual Capital is also zero. But it is also zero when there is zero moral intent.

It is even more important to point out that three of the four factors can only be positive as their starting point is zero. On the other hand morality can be negative as well as positive. Consequently Intellectual Capital can only be positive and add value to society when it is accompanied by good moral intent. The more educated the more talented and more diligent the individual is but the more negative his or her moral intent, the bigger the damage to society (Laáb & Illes 2007).

Kopatsy explains the four components in the following way:

- a. *Knowledge* is only valuable for society when it appears with right morality. With wrong morality knowledge causes only harm to society. When there is no talent, knowledge on its own is meaningless. Without effort one cannot achieve a lot even though there is knowledge, right morality and talent. So knowledge in itself is not a value. It is made valuable by the other three components of the equation.
- b. *Morality (Moral intent)*. Morality is considered to be valuable for society only when it comes with knowledge, talent and effort. Wrong intent causes damage to society. The higher the talent, the knowledge and the effort the bigger the damage when it is combined with bad moral intent.
- c. *Talent* is only valuable when the owner of the talent is able to guide it by knowledge and combines it with good moral intent and effort. A society loses most when its talents are not developed properly and are not equipped with right morality and effort.
- d. *Effort* has become the main virtue in modern society Effort also includes ambition, initiative and enterprise. It is easy to accept that without effort for example it is not possible for the talent to show outstanding results.

The impact of positive or negative morality on intellectual capital

Morality is the idea that some forms of behaviours are right, proper, and acceptable and that other forms of behaviours are bad or wrong, either in your own opinion or in the opinion of society (Collins, 2004).

An ethic of a particular kind is an idea or moral belief that influences the behaviour, attitudes, and philosophy of life in a group of people (Collins, 2004). The word ethic comes from the Greek 'ethos'. The verb 'etheo' means first of all to filter through, to examine something. The Greeks believed that one's destiny and journey in life can be discovered from human nature. The second meaning of the verb is to stretch toward something, to strive for something. The Greeks believed that humans were naturally moving towards the manifestation of the 'divine sketch' that the 'Gods dreamt of them' and that they willingly or unwillingly had to fulfil. In this respect one behaves with morality when he gradually fulfils the 'divine dream' that was personally meant for him. Repeated activities lead to reasonably stable behaviours. This is why in certain Greek dictionaries 'ethos' means habit, manner, etiquette and so on. These meanings approach ethics through external characteristics. Although this is one sided it can be argued that the external signals the internal qualities.

The Hungarian poet Sandor Weöres explains perhaps even more clearly what it means to fulfil one's human nature and morality:

“Virtue is all that is equal to the eternal measure and lifts you towards completeness; sin is all that opposes the eternal measure and distances you from completeness. One who has reached completeness becomes one with the eternal measure and has no virtue or sin any more. He becomes similar to the fire. The light is not the virtue of the fire but it is its nature. Similarly one who has achieved completeness has the eternal measure not as a virtue but as part of his nature. In completeness there is no good and bad, no merit and mistake, no reward and punishment.” (Weöres, 2000, III: 28 translated by the author).

In this respect one can argue that the reluctance to do good is immoral and has a negative sign. Intellectual capital can only be positive, that is generate value to society when it is accompanied by a moral disposition and a tendency to do good. Reluctance to do good is immoral because the individual is tempted to use his talent, effort and knowledge to harm, damage or destroy himself or the people and nature around him. Someone with a bad morality is particularly dangerous to society when he is talented, knowledgeable and puts effort into his negative behaviour.

DISCOVER YOUR LEADING QUALITIES WORKSHOPS

There is a disconnect between learning about leadership and improving one's leadership qualities. My personal belief is that we all have the potential to lead and the ability to follow. When we are connected with our purpose we tap into an energy that fuels our desire to grow and we develop all skills and competencies we need to fulfil our purpose.

It is through the embodiment of “true self” that leaders and followers are perceived authentic or not (Ladkin, D. and Taylor, S.S. 2010). Connecting to the “true self” is not primarily an intellectual process and through the somatic sense of self we can experience a felt sense that confirms our level of authenticity to ourselves and to others around us. Working with techniques used in voice training and drama we understand and experience the connection between the physical, emotional and intellectual aspects of ourselves. This felt sense enables us to release our trapped energies and discover new qualities within.

I worked with a voice and drama therapist and developed and led some highly interactive workshops between 2009 and 2011. Our aim was to give an opportunity for self-discovery and direct participants from the rational towards the spiritual through opportunities of experiencing themselves through the felt sense. We wanted to explore if it was possible to trigger the desire for self-discovery in university students through voice, drama and the felt sense.

We conducted 10 single workshops each lasting for about 2 hours for undergraduate and post-graduate university students at a post 1992 UK university. The workshops were funded by the University's Arts Council and were advertised for students of all faculties. The flyers of the events deliberately did not give away a lot. To attend this extra curriculum event required a certain level of curiosity, searching and readiness from the students. Participants came from arts, languages, and science, nursing, education and business backgrounds. They represented a variety of nationalities and were between the age of 21 and 45. During the sessions we used vocal exercises, role play, improvisation, creative writing and personal reflection. We created a safe, trusting and light hearted atmosphere. The workshops enabled individuals to establish a connection between their abstract, intellectual views on leadership and their personal, bodily embedded experiences of leading and following. Participants had opportunities to take on both leading and supporting roles during the workshops.

By changing the question from "What is Leadership?" to "What are my leading qualities that I can use to serve with passion?" leadership became a personal experience and developing one's talent a personal responsibility.

Challenges

The voice and drama therapist colleague and I never knew who would turn up for the workshops. We could not be sure about the number of participants or their interests and background. It meant that we depended a great deal on our own felt sense and intuition and improvised as it was appropriate in a given situations.

Each workshop was very different both in content and in interaction. Each workshop was self-contained and timed to be accessible to students in the target group. More than 100 students attended a workshop. The workshops required a high level of intuition, improvisation and trust in each other and the process. The methods we used in the various workshops varied from rational, through the felt sense, to reflective and meditative practices. We deliberately made the title intriguing and open to personal interpretation. "Discover your leading qualities" can refer to qualities that help you as a leader or it could also mean: discover your top qualities (whatever they might be!). We expected to attract participants who were at a cross road in their lives, who were prepared to take some risks and open themselves up to self-exploration and experience something different to intellectual lecture inputs.

Findings

Our expectations about the participants were correct. Apart from one person who was disappointed that we did not give a standard lecture on leadership, all participants were seekers who were ready to give up some free time in search to experience something different to standard academic interaction. After the initial "I don't know what to expect" hesitation participants responded very well to the unusual offerings of the sessions.

All workshops were well received and at the end of every workshop students left the room energized and positive. As facilitators we also felt encouraged and enthused by the outcome. The workshops gave us very tangible confirmations that our efforts were worthwhile and we are responding to a deep rooted need of a growing number of people.

We received appreciative comments and thanks after the events. We asked for some voluntary written feedback from participants after the workshop. Below are the questions we asked and a selection of the replies we received.

What were your expectations from the workshop?

Came with an open mind; a lecture on leadership; presentation; listening for 3 hours and not doing anything

What did you like in the workshop?

Creativity, interaction; by breaking the barrier we were all together; singing, playing; nothing it was not for me, sorry

Have you discovered anything new about yourself?

I CAN speak in public! My future depends on me; not to limit myself; I like to perform; I need to change my outlook on life

What else would you like to experience in such a workshop?

More singing; more opportunities to talk in public; work on body language; not sure; some more presentation skills

Would you recommend this workshop to a friend?

More than 90 per cent of participants said 'yes' to this question

Would you like to hear about future workshops?

More than 90 per cent of participants said 'yes' to this question

After the workshops we also received emails from some participants asking us about personal discovery and development, meditation and reflection techniques. These students were keen to take on extra curriculum activities to continue their self-discovery. The workshops indicated that by discovering our own leading qualities we open up the possibility for establishing a closer, more interconnected relationship between leading and following.

The debriefing sessions and the participants' written feedback confirmed that students who attended the workshops would like to focus more on developing their leading qualities while studying at university.

These ten workshops were also very valuable for the facilitators. It made us realise that we needed to make further efforts to transform all our interaction with our students creating further opportunities for personal discovery, reflection and applying the concepts in our various classes to real life, personal experiences. We also realised that by sharing our experiments and positive experiences with colleagues we could encourage more and more academics to promote a holistic approach to business education. By focusing on the original meaning of education ("to bring forth, to bring out") we can help to bring out the hidden talent in people and prepare them not only for exam but for life.

CONCLUSION

Business and management education have a growing responsibility to equip students not only with up-to-date explicit knowledge but also to provide learning opportunities for developing a sense of responsibility for self, for fellow human beings and for the environment.

I believe that self-discovery and spending time getting to know our true self is a crucial part of this process. By directing students towards their inner selves we enable them to expand their consciousness and see their lives as part of a universal human experience. Those who manage to find the passion for a specific profession are motivated to develop all the skills and competencies that they need in their field. By connecting with others and with our unique purpose we can experience a sense of flow, an ultimate human experience of oneness (Csikszentmihalyi, 1982).

Creating learning opportunities where university students can move from the tangible and rational towards the intangible and spiritual is an important challenge for educators. If we want to lead our students not only in subject related matters but also in personal development we need to be able to connect rationality and spirituality in our own life. Talking about spirituality might be intellectually stimulating but on its own it is not enough. We teach primarily not by what we say but by how we live. Integrating solitude and spiritual practices into our busy lives reinforce our connectedness.

*“Ordinary men hate solitude.
But the Master makes use of it,
Embracing his aloneness, realizing
he is one with the whole universe.” (Tao Te Ching, 42:3)*

By developing our own leading qualities we can help to create a culture of sharing and collaboration around us, shifting the focus from receiving to giving at all levels. This will play a key role in finding collaborative solutions to complex global challenges, while maintaining personal responsibility for our actions.

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