The Whole Greater than the Sum of its Parts: Being Whole in the Workplace

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THE DISINTEGRATION OF SELF

Adults devote a substantial amount of time doing work, with a great majority doing so in organizations. Ideally, adults bring their whole selves into the workplace such that their body, soul, and spirit - participates in it. This ideal state of wholeness is challenged by increasing pressures from more demanding roles and expectations in highly competitive environments brought about in part by a rapidly changing and globalized work environment.

Indeed globalization has brought countries together but has also brought them apart. It has expanded the world economy but may have reduced organization’s sense of accountability and responsibility. Rosenau points how globalization has resulted in a state of fragmegration where there may be a need to govern two opposing forces of fragmentation and integration. Organizations are caught in the middle in what Rosenau refers to as organizational explosion. New forms of organization emerge as well as new ways of communicating. A network of entities across the globe, with each entity governed by a different set of authorities, replaces the traditional structure and hierarchy of organizations.

Globalization saw the rise of transnational corporations in the 1950’s that eventually led to a wave of mergers and acquisitions by the 1980s. As trade liberalization opened new markets, cross-border investments became more dominant. The shareholder price was the measure of corporate success. Thus, corporate leaders were incentivized to ensure that shareholder value was maximized. It was not long after that corporate scandals erupted.

Within the globalized environment, organizations struggle to remain competitive. Competitive behavior has anthropological roots. It has led people to embrace economic profitability as independent of other aspects of human advancement. The consequence of this is “short-termism” and self-centeredness. In placing greater emphasis on financial viability, organizational leaders adopt short-term strategies and practices that may have unwitting long-term trade-offs.

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4 Sol Picciotto, Regulating Global Corporate Capitalism, (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 68, 118.
5 Picciotto, Regulating Global Corporate Capitalism, 125.
For instance, outsourcing is commonplace since it is a way to manage payroll and overhead expenses. Lower overhead expenses could be a response to keeping an organization afloat. It has however resulted in lay-offs and it sends a strong signal that jobs are not secure. With a Damocles Sword hanging over their heads, workers may then engage in work behavior that threatens their wholeness in order to preserve their jobs.

As a result, fragmentation and compartmentalization at varying degrees and across different arenas have become possible traps for every worker. Fragmentation arises from a divided life or a split personality. This occurs when workers embrace a distinct set of values at work and another in their private lives. It is likely that workers will subjugate their personal values to that of the organization since the organization pays them to do work. For instance, an organization requires sales personnel to entertain some foreign clients in establishments that promote sexism. The sales personnel may feel compelled to comply even if it is against personal values for fear of losing a job. There may be an internal struggle and eventually they play along. This contributes to moral disengagement. The more morally disengaged workers are, the greater is the likely they will engage in unethical behavior.8

When the organization values integrity, the workplace can serve as the vehicle to encourage the alignment of disjointed selves. However, when the organizational values are contrary to personally upheld virtues, this may force workers to switch off one’s moral conscience in the workplace.9 This disconnection from one’s inner self may cause workers to have indistinct work and private values. As more and more workers are unable to distinguish what is right and wrong in their work and private lives, they begin to become disintegrated.

To avoid the influence of negative work values, there are workers who separate their work from their private lives by living in distinct spheres.10 This compartmentalization allows workers to assume a “professional” persona apart from their own.11 Workers who create such persona believe they can distance themselves from actions that otherwise they will have to accept blame. Workers can claim that they are only performing roles, that it is “part of the job”. Since a

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“role” is merely a social construct and roles are constantly changing, then moral responsibility cannot be attributed to those who assume the roles. The danger is when workers forget they are playing roles and allow the immoral side to flourish. If the changing of masks occurs with constant frequency, or worse, if workers bring home undesirable work values, these workers may feel disjointed from themselves.

“People do not want to compartmentalize.” They do not want to live fragmented lives where surface acting becomes the norm. They would like to be themselves at home and in the workplace. This makes them authentic. Authentic people bring in their lives in the workplace. This makes them whole, more engaged, and thus more productive. The Latin word “integritas,” from which the word integer - a whole number is derived, pertains to the condition of wholeness or being one.

Compartmentalization is a coping mechanism. The coping strategy is meant to be a temporary solution to escape from the negative versions of oneself in certain spheres of life. However, when compartmentalization becomes the norm, the constancy leads to a disintegrated self. Compartmentalization puts moral judgement in a state of flux. It has the effect of wiping the hands over something one has responsibility over. The more one shuns or denies responsibility for an unethical act, the greater is the likelihood that unethical and deceptive behavior will persist.

The phenomena of fragmentation and compartmentalization may account for the wide-range of corporate scandals and tragedies in the last decade. This

13 The concept of fragmentation was introduced by Helen J. Alford, O.P. and Michael J. Naughton, Managing as if Faith Mattered (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, (2001), 7.
17 Ibid, 323.
has led to the “crisis of trust, inequality, and sustainability.” Fragmentation and compartmentalization are consequences of a work environment that favors company owners with little concern for the welfare of workers. Typically, company owners employ workers for the primary purpose of contributing to the maximization of profits. By itself, profit maximization is not bad following the lessons from the Parable of Talents. Achieving economic ends is good for the organization as it provides for the financial well-being of its workers. Workers crisis’ that lead to disintegrated selves occur when organizational leaders make decisions and adopt workplace practices on purely financial considerations without regard for worker consequences. These decisions and workplace practices leaves little chance for a community of work to survive and for common good to prevail. If not for the common good, what is the essence of work?

THE ESSENCE OF WORK

Ideally, one finds meaning in work. Naughton (as cited in Kendall) classified work into three levels: a job, career, or vocation. The first level is to look at work as a job. The financial return for doing any job may be sufficient for some workers as it provides them the resources to seek fulfillment elsewhere. For others, work is more than a job. It may be a career. A career can provide an identity, a feeling of belongingness, of being needed. Still for others, work is an extension of one’s self, a calling marked with the virtue of constancy or a true

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25 While common good is a term often associated with Catholic social teaching, Stabile notes that other religions also support the concept of communitarian values. Susan J. Stabile, “A Catholic Vision of the Corporation”, Legal Studies Research Paper Series #07-0018 (Queens, NY: St. John’s University School of Law, 2005).
vocation. Work, which is a calling, is not regarded as “work” since it encapsulates who the person is.

Laborem Exercens, written by Pope John Paul II, expounded on the value of human work, more especially in bringing back the human person as the Creator would have it. Through one’s work, humans are able to share in the activity of their Creator and thereby perfect themselves. Work is a medium to complete a person. However, it is when one sees work as a vocation when a person could perfect himself and take part in the mission entrusted to him by the Creator.

“People work with not only their hands, but with their hearts (spirit).” Soraueren concludes that workers need to find meaning in their work and financial incentives may not necessarily lead to improved productivity should there be a temporal absence of motivation. He emphasizes the need for workers to trust their organizations. This is not an easy feat. Child and Rodrigues report that based on their survey in six continents, there is a declining level of trust particularly for large corporations. Edelman, that has been monitoring trust levels for more than ten years, highlights the need to rebuild trust. One way to regain trust is to establish connections with their workforce.

Workers need to feel a connection with their organization to find meaning in their work. When workers find meaning in the workplace, they become engaged and committed. This means they are able to bring their whole selves into the workplace. Studies show that the more engaged workers are the higher are their productivity levels. Since it is to the best interest of organizations to ensure that workers fulfill the corporate mission, business leaders need to engage the whole person. To help workers establish a connection with the organization, organizational leaders need to take a holistic approach that considers the workers’ spiritual, physical, and emotional well-being.

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A holistic approach recognizes that workers have other needs. “People do not work for money alone.” Money is merely a means to an end. People desire to build families and communities. Building families and communities foster meaningfulness at work by blurring the boundaries between work and home. Thus, organizations that provide for genuine development of persons contribute to building communities of persons where the common good takes precedence. As such, work should serve to integrate rather than disintegrate the worker. The ideal work is that which brings out the full potential of the person, citing as reason the words of John Paul II that “all work is ultimately for the person; the person is not for work.”

**THE NOTION OF WHOLE BEINGS IN THE WORK PLACE**

Hawtrey and Johnson are of the view that the global financial crisis is more than the technical failing of the market. Rather, it was a result of the breakdown in society’s morality. Thus to avert another crisis, the core belief system of society must change in favor of living for a higher purpose.

Meanwhile, the pressure to act has built and has led to the emergence of corporate codes that paid attention to non-financial goals. Despite the initial debates whether it is the corporations’ responsibility to concern itself with social development and environmental protection, corporations began to take a different view of its role. Corporate social responsibility became a new mantra as did stakeholder theory. Central to these management thoughts is the need to treat human beings, whether that be an employee, supplier, client, customer, or

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member of society, with dignity. This regard for human dignity allows the building of authentic communities that is the foundation of just societies. As more organizations work towards building authentic communities, and the longer they are able to work towards it, the stronger is the community.

Workers are important stakeholders in an organization and it is through them that long lasting companies are built. Long-term sustainability is achieved through a cohesive value system. McGregor recognized this as early as 1960. He concluded that sustainability hinges on the degree to which human values are preserved and protected in the organization. The more aligned personal values match those of the organization, the higher is the level of commitment leading to greater motivation, less job stress and anxiety, and more personal success.

When organizations focus on work output alone, there is an implicit message that workers should leave personal matters, including their spiritual life, at home. In an economic exchange, organizations buy the time and talent of workers and thus must derive a commensurate return for that investment. Thus, there is a tendency to treat workers as factors of production. Yet people are not without emotions. Drucker presents that whole persons report to work and not simply pairs of hands.

The attention to whole persons in the workplace rather than “hired hands” is common in the literature on Catholic social teaching and workplace spirituality. Proponents of workplace spirituality contend that of all dimensions of the person, spirituality is the dimension that weaves the person as an integrated self. When spirituality at work is present, workers feel connected, are compassionate and mindful, find meaning in work, and are able to transcend. There is some evidence that organizations, that encouraged spirituality in the workplace, experienced positive organizational outcomes. These refer not

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48 Michael J. Naughton, “The Corporation as a Community of Work”, 75.
54 Petchsawang and Duchon, “Measuring workplace spirituality in an Asian context,” 461.
merely to attitudes but to improvements in work performance as measured by organizations.  

SUPPORTING WHOLENESS IN THE WORKPLACE

Organizations play an essential role in helping its workers find greater meaning in their work so that it becomes more like a calling. Organizational leaders need to harness this within the person and between the person and organization.

While organizations recognize the robustness of human capital in the pursuit of sustainable wealth expansion, authentic human development requires a clear distinction between ends and means. This suggests that organizational leaders defend the progression of people and their right to live worthwhile lives as the goal. Work, even in its biblical sense has to be a venue for each employee to gain self-worth and dignity. It is a place, where one is able to achieve fulfillment as a human being. It is therefore important for organizations to give prime regard to personal growth.

The necessity to provide an atmosphere for human development in the workplace follows from the nature-nurture interaction pointed out by most psychologists as the requisite for development. The nurture concept reaches its peak when organizations view people as the center of organizational growth. As Sandelands puts it, the “business of business is the human person”. Persons are not merely factors of production nor are they instruments for the pursuit of wealth.

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61 Rozuel defines this as the “working towards a state of a whole self,” which provides a “safe anchor” for the unfolding of “individuality” and the development of moral strength and consistency (p. 688).
accumulation. The workforce is probably the most important stakeholder closely identified with the organization.\textsuperscript{65} thus, they should be valued and protected.

Although not all organizations assume total responsibility for the growth of their employees,\textsuperscript{66} organizations no longer have the autonomy or isolation from moral concerns in a period when the role of classical economic principles as basis for corporate sustainability has reached a point of doubt.\textsuperscript{67} Having seen the high costs of ethical fiascos, organizations have recognized more the role of right values and consistent ethical behavior, which both reside in the individual.

Miller and Ewest\textsuperscript{68} developed the model of the “Integration Box,” that takes into account the increasing desire of people to live whole lives that fully integrate their body, mind, and soul in all that they do. The achievement of integral human development demands that organizations are able to address the full range of needs of its people – material, intellectual, emotional, social, moral, and spiritual – in a systematic, organized character.\textsuperscript{69}

The process through which wholeness could be pursued is through human resource interventions. This comes from the view that it is important to look for purpose within the process itself.\textsuperscript{70} Human development interventions that lead to whole personhood consist of a holistic and integral approach to people development. This approach could incorporate coaching, reflection, processing, spiritual, moral and values formation, on top of the typical intellectual, social, and skills development programs. Catholic social teaching taken from such documents as \textit{Laborem Exercens, Gaudium et Spes, Caritas in Veritate as well as the Compendium of the Social Doctrines of the Church}, among others, offer two strong pillars for human development. These are “the inviolable dignity of the human person” and the “transcendent value of moral norms.”\textsuperscript{71} These documents provide the norm by which enterprise should function in society and have as its end goal - “the good of all people and of the whole person.”\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{65} Alejo José G. Sison and Joan Fontrodona, “Participating in the Common Good of the Firm”, \textit{Journal of Business Ethics} 113, no. 4 (2013): 611-25.
\textsuperscript{66} W. Richard Scott, \textit{Organizations - Rational, Natural, and Open Systems}, 4\textsuperscript{th} Ed. (New Jersey: East End Publishing Services, 2003), 23.
\textsuperscript{69} Lerner, \textit{Concepts and Theories of Human Development}, 16.
\textsuperscript{72} Sandelands, “The Business of Business”, 96.
The encyclical entitled *Caritas in Veritate* written by Pope Benedict XVI on occasion of the fortieth anniversary of *Populorum Progressio*, emphasized the role of charity in truth, love. It has been “received and given” and it is incumbent about the recipients to share and communicate this, in the attainment of an integral human development. Stormes explained how love illumined by truth, can serve to direct economics, business, and ethics to come together for the pursuit of the authentic development of every person and of all humanity.

*Laborem Exercens* brings to the attention of the individual the ultimate reason for one’s work. It therefore, provides a clear guide on the direction that human resource interventions ought to take, to promote the perfection of the person – that is, towards union with his Creator, upon whom his total integrality depends. In practical terms, this could come mean taking the time to remain in solitude, to allow for better discernment and the provision of opportunities for leisure, reflection, and values formation as a way to rediscover the Creator. The introduction of spiritual practices of meditation and prayer help build spiritual power as a cornerstone of social power that organizations may use to influence positive change.

**THE MODERATING ROLE OF ORGANIZATION LEADERS**

Organizational leaders have a direct responsibility for shaping their organizations. Unfortunately, not all leaders are trusted. Thus, the need to rebuild trust. Leaders have to recognize the need to have the right anchor for its organizational goals. Ultimately, values serve as the vital input for sound cognition and effective decision-making. It provides people with the integrity needed to thrive in a competitive environment and directs the organization to achieve its reason for being. Providing the essence of an organization, its leaders can clearly identify

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78 Elisabeth Sundrum, “Moving Beyond Compliance and Control: Building a Values-Based Corporate Governance Culture Supportive of a Culture of Mutual Accountability,” *International Journal of Corporate Governance and Ethics* 1, nos. 2-3 (2004): 192-209.
organizational priorities such that the growth and well-being of people are always
given priority.\textsuperscript{79}

If leaders are to be trusted again, they should try to live, develop, and
promote values or principles that are of greater worth than self-interest. This will
provide the wisdom for leaders to consider the bigger picture of business as not
solely for profits.\textsuperscript{80} This type of leadership enables and influences others to gain
strong and integrated individual character, primarily through the incarnation of
values rooted in deep internalization,\textsuperscript{81} empowering them to make choices that
serve their very own integration.

Acting as the “guardian of organizational purpose”, the leader generates,
refines, as well as acts on the vision, and provides the main links between
strategic planning and operational decision-making.\textsuperscript{82} This also means that it is
the function of the leader to keep the integral parts of a business in the right
balance and growth trajectory while pushing the organization in delivering its
products and services, thus creating a whole, which is greater than the sum of its
parts.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, the authors forward that wholeness requires that the full range of
needs of the human person have to be satisfied. Consequently, the task of
becoming a whole person demands a clear understanding of the different levels of
individual needs. Depending on how higher level needs are provided for,
wholeness or fragmentation takes effect.

While there are many challenges that a worker encounters inside and
outside the workplace, it is possible to remain whole and not to become
fragmented amidst so much pressures. Workers however need the support of the
organizations they work in. They need to trust and believe that organizations
prioritize their total human development.

Indeed, organizational leaders play a critical role in rebuilding trust in a
fragmented world. By being true to oneself and being stewards for responsible
and ethical management, leaders are able to reshape organizational practices. As
they do so, authentic human development involving interventions that nourish the

\textsuperscript{79} Jeffery Ferguson and John Milliman, “Creating Effective Core Organizational Values”,

\textsuperscript{80} Michael J. Naughton and David Specht, “Lessons Learned - The Business of Practical
Wisdom,” in \textit{Leading wisely in difficult times: Three cases on faith and business}, ed. Michael J.

\textsuperscript{81} Kandy Dayaram, “Leadership and Vision: Evolving Strategies”, \textit{Journal of Indian Management},

\textsuperscript{82} Cynthia A. Montgomery, “Putting Leadership Back into Strategy”, \textit{Harvard Business Review},
body, mind, and spirit, takes place. Ultimately, leaders build an environment where whole persons are present and not just hands and minds.