HOW "WHOLE" IS WHOLE PERSON LEARNING? AN EXAMINATION OF SPIRITUALITY IN EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

The question of spirituality in the design and implementation of experiential learning experiences is examined. A model, based upon astute design and efficacious delivery of whole person learning, says it can be done. The Spiritualization Actualization model developed includes a definition of experiential learning and multiple-input learning systems. The concept of Spiritual Actualization learning is discussed from the perspective of: 1) spiritual actualization goals and objectives, 2) addressing possible design flaws in existing business educational settings, 3) facilitating whole person learning student involvement, and, 4) evaluation and grading challenges. A conceptual and diagnostic model for integrating Spiritual Actualization learning systems concludes the presentation.

INTRODUCTION

The genesis of this paper comes from three sources. The first is an "it's about time" perspective on whole person learning that includes the dimension of spirituality. The question is….just how "whole" is whole person learning? Another perspective comes from a continuing call for the inclusion of spiritual values in our modern organizations. The final source comes from some of the recent criticisms of MBA programs and current business education trends, the programs that provide the managers for our organizations.

Gull and Doh (2004) state that modern organizations remain devoid of a spiritual foundation, and further, deny the employees of those organizations the opportunity for spiritual expression in the workplace setting. Gull and Doh lament the damage created by the absence of spiritual elements in the modern workplace. Ashar and Lane-Maher (2004) take the concept of spiritual values in organizations into an even more positive realm. They report a positive association between spirituality and success. The thrust of these authors' writing is that spiritual values not only enhance the quality of work life of employees, but have the potential to enhance the organization as a whole. Thompson and Bunderson (2003) echo this sentiment, going so far as to call for "ideology infused psychological contracts" in modern organizations (2003: 571).

But if "spirituality infusions" in modern organizations are to be successful, they must be introduced effectively and they must be well managed. This raises the question of the effectiveness of business education in general and MBA programs in particular in the regard of being able to infuse students (as future managers) with humanistic values such as spirituality. Business education relevance and program effectiveness issues have been raised by Pfeffer and Fong (2002). Bennis and O'Toole (2005) feel that business schools have made research and research methodology such a central part of business schools that not only do they do a poor job of teaching and reinforcing humanistic variables such as spirituality, but that business schools have, in essence, become irrelevant. Similar criticisms of MBA programs have been raised by Mintzberg (2004), including a special issue of the *Academy of Management Learning and Education Journal* with a significant portion of an issue dedicated to reactions to Mintzberg's assertions (Nord, 2005).

This paper is being written to address many of these concerns. It is my position that current experiential models and applications can do a better job of including spiritual dimensions of whole person learning. Furthermore, it is also my position that business education programs, including MBA degree programs: 1) have not been designed to teach and infuse spiritual values, 2) do not have sufficient capacity to identify program components that effectively address spiritual values, 3) do not have sufficient capacity to reinforce these values as they do exist, and 4) do not have the capacity to integrate the teaching of spiritual values into curriculum or course design. These shortcomings, however, can be addressed by designing spiritual actualizing experiential learning experiences in business education settings. This paper will, therefore, address the following:

1) *What is Spiritual Actualization, and how is it defined relative to experiential learning and Whole Person Learning?*

2) *What is Whole Person Experiential learning; how does it function in general; and, how can it be used most effectively to impart a degree of Spiritual Actualization?*

3) *What is the skill set needed to be an effective Spiritual Actualization learning facilitator?*

4) *What are the design and implementation considerations that need to be effectively addressed in order to have a successful Spiritual Actualization learning experiences in business educational settings?*

SPIRITUALITY IN THE WORKPLACE DEFINED

In their study Mitroff and Denton (1999) conclude that there is a "hunger" for the practice of spirituality in the workplace. But to address spirituality in the workplace, we first need to establish a definition of spirituality that is derived from the management literature and thus can be construed to apply to both workplace and education settings. A good starting point for this is the work of Schmidt-Wilk, Heaton and Steingard (2000), who define spirituality from three differing and interrelated perspectives: 1) in personal and individualized terms, 2) with spirituality as it is applied and/or interpreted, and 3) as the characteristics of a spiritual organization. This paper will use these three categories as a collective to refer to spirituality as a target of a learning experience producing Spiritual Actualization (defined later in this paper). To make this collective interpretation have depth, however, we must first briefly visit some of the components of the three elements of spirituality.

Spirituality in personal terms is both highly individualized and significantly internalized. Remen (1993: 41) describes "the spiritual as inclusive. It is the deepest sense of belonging and participation." As such, the sense of community found in many participative organizations can be viewed as an example of spirituality in the work place. In fact, if the reader wishes to re-conceptualize the definition of spirituality as addressed in this paper, the concept of "community" in an organizational setting would be an appropriate substitution. While there are many aspects of spiritually related concepts such as ethics, business values as humanistic, environmentalism, etc. that could be topics in a spiritually oriented business curriculum, this paper will stick to addressing the global aspects of spirituality in a business education setting as opposed to critiquing or analyzing curriculum particulars or the topical areas of individual courses.

Aligning with this rather broad framework, Delbecq's (1999) conceptualization of spirituality is as a lived experience of the transcendent. A personalized perspective of spirituality would not be complete without adding Thompson's (2000) concept of the transcendent, i.e., that which we encompass which has meaning beyond just ourselves. Thompson includes in this category not only concepts such as principles beyond simple self-interest, but also even expression in work itself.

Schmidt-Wilk et al (2000) describe the applied aspect of spirituality as manifesting in three possible ways---through morality and ethics, through acts of care and respect for others, and through acts of love and humility. Ashmos and Duchon (2000) describe the three dimensions of inner life, meaningful work, and support of community. These applied aspects of spirituality add the dimension of a behavioral orientation to the mix. The concept of community is particularly applicable to the management education issues addressed in this paper because it produces a perspective on spirituality that is collectivistic and capable of manifesting in an organizational environment. Schmidt-Wilk, et al, also discuss the concept of organizational orientation and spirituality. In this perspective, organizations that are characterized by orientations and behaviors classified as ethical, value-based, or humanistic/emotion-based are described as spiritual organizations.

Since this paper addresses business education and Spiritual Actualization in global terms, it is best to use a definition of spirituality that is also broad and encompassing. Thus, as a perspective appropriate to this paper, I conclude with the definition adopted by Ashar and Lane-Maher (2004: 253): "Spirituality involves an innate and universal search for transcendent meaning in one's life…It involves a yearning for connectiveness and wholeness that can only be manifested when one is allowed to integrate his or her inner life with one's professional role in the service of a greater good." This definition not only includes spirituality on an individual and experiential level as "connectiveness and wholeness", but also addresses the organizational component of integrating spirituality with organizational role. And, it is my position that if experiential learning is to function as whole person learning, than that "wholeness" should include the spiritual dimension.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING DIMENSIONS AND WHOLE PERSON LEARNING

Experiential learning is conceptualized here as a methodology of education which has a learning impact on the whole person, including spirituality, emotion (affect) and behavior in addition to cognitive stimulation. In order to develop a conceptualization of experiential learning that is useful pedagogically, experiential learning practitioners need effective delineation and definition of the spiritual, intellectual/cognitive, emotional/affective and behavioral domains of learning as separate components. Experiential learning is whole person learning. That is, it functions integratively, combining the spiritual, emotional/affective and behavioral domains with the cognitive domain always found in educational processes. Whole person learning can be a basic design component in MBA curriculum decisions, as is evidenced by the work done by Boyatzis, Cowen and Kolb in their program design work at Case Western University (Boyatzis, et al, 1995).

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING: A SPIRITUALLY INCLUSIVE DEFINITION

Experiential learning approaches essentially attempt to combine the processes of learning with the content of learning. To the extent that any educational process is participative, it accomplishes this outcome. However, the designers and users of experiential learning methodologies attempt more conscious use and deliberate adoption of the learning dynamics inherent in the process dimension. This focus on process is an attempt to achieve learning and

insight from the "how" as well as the "what" of the instruction or training. Astute design and selection of experiential learning methodologies is thus a question of how to efficaciously use these learning dimensions.

Experiential learning has been commonly defined as "learning by doing". I feel that this perspective results from an oversimplification of the learning theories put forth by David Kolb (1984). The following definition is more specific and describes experiential learning as a process:

Experiential learning exists when a personally responsible participant (s) spiritually, cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally processes knowledge, skills and/or attitudes in a learning situation characterized by a high level of active involvement.

This positive definition ties together the previously introduced concepts, and introduces the prescriptive role of the learning individual – one of autonomy and self-direction (Brookfield, 1986). This concept of individual autonomy and self direction is critical if spiritual values are to be introduced into business education settings. Processes of issue identification and value clarification do not come from the prescriptions of the instructor, but must be sourced in the learning individual. Thus, experiential learning, properly applied, can be utilized to access the full human potential to learn and internalize spiritual values.

As an educational approach, that is, as an application of pedagogy, experiential learning may be viewed as follows:

Experiential learning may be viewed as a methodology of education whereby structure and individual or group experiences are contrived to form and frame spiritual values and perspectives, to develop learning and perceptual capacities, to develop and reinforce cognitions, to impact on emotions and attitudes, and, importantly, to function in developing capacities to behave consistently with the insights of these processes and experiences.

Management educators have traditionally focused primarily on the cognitive aspects of learning even when addressing executive level skill components, and have tended to use traditional methodologies grounded in the lecture format. But only whole person learning can equip our educational organization product, students, in all of their spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and behavioral capacities, to function in the complex and challenging business world of today. The analytical framework I use to catalog these experiences is *actualization.* Actualization is the basic premise supporting the whole person actualization model and Spiritual Actualization. Actualization occurs when the target person or learning party has "got it," and Spiritual Actualization occurs when, the target person or learning party knows that they have "got it", can report it as a transcendent experience, and can put it in a whole person perspective. It should be noted that the "got it" part of actualization may occur as a "Eureka!" effect. Thus, it is not uncommon for sudden breakthroughs to produce punctuated change resulting in significant levels of insight and/or mastery**.**

It is important to note that the concept of "mastery", as used in the context of Spiritual Actualization, is a relative and not absolute measure. If an actualization continuum were to be drawn, it would have something like "Novice with Introductory Knowledge Only" (Spiritual Actualization = 0) at one end and something like "Expert with Total Integrated and Internalized Insight" (Spiritual Actualization significantly > 0) on the other end. Useful actualization is thus defined as existing after a threshold has been attained such that the learning party can identify that they have "got it", and are able to manifest at will the newly acquired capacity. The chart below lists the four elements of whole person actualization. With this framework established, the remainder of the paper will describe aspects of the design and effective implementation of learning systems conducive to the manifestation of Spiritual Actualization in business educational settings.

WHOLE PERSON LEARNING AND PERCEPTUAL ACTUALIZATION: THE IEBS FRAMEWORK

Note: the whole person model encompasses dimensions 1), 2), 3), and 4).

1) Intellectual Actualization has to occur to the extent that a cognitive framework is established, allowing for the "what", "where", "when" and "how" of successful endeavor.
2) Emotional Actualization has to occur to the extent that emotional involvement is established to the point that the groundwork is laid for commitment and internalization.
3) Behavioral Actualization has to occur to the extent that necessary skills are understood, believed in and behaviorally learned to the point that successful, goal-focused performance can be manifested at will.
4) The global and encompassing aspect of whole person actualization is Spiritual Actualization. Spiritual Actualization occurs when basic life perspectives/values and meta-philosophies are altered. Such an occurrence is often described as transcendent learning or change. Spiritual Actualization learning experiences have traditionally been rare in the context of an organizational change management program or in educational settings.

GOALS OF THE SPIRITUAL ACTUALIZATION LEARNING SYSTEM

Educators in Spiritual Actualization component settings should determine whether or not they are preparing their students to take responsible and consistent spiritual positions in the challenging world in which they (the students) must operate. For example, questions should be asked relative to:

1. *Whether or not students are educated to confront problems which no longer exist or that they will not face---questions of relevance*
2. *Whether or not students are being armed with tools and techniques they are not equipped to apply---questions of adequate application capacities, and*
3. *If the total mix of learning objectives and learning program inputs are, in fact, tailored to student backgrounds and needs---questions of delivering individualized learning and personalized spiritual development vs. generic programs.*

Spiritual Actualization learning systems should go far beyond simply processing and presenting traditional or simplistic content. It is vital to include:

1. Cognizance of the significant and unique spiritual challenges facing a particular student or group of students, and,
2. Analysis of the controllable variables (multiple inputs in the language of this paper) that allow for the effective design and implementation of individualized and strongly impactful learning system goals and objectives. While it is important for students to develop and maintain a flexible and adaptive map of the world they live and work in, they must also shape and often create from scratch significant elements of that world. Thus, the Spiritual Actualization program must include assistance in delineating the cognitive map of the learning person (Huff and Jenkins, 2002).
3. Despite an important consensus on cognitive matters, the learning system must also encompass variables more aligned with whole person learning. For example, in addition to an enhanced Spiritual Actualization perspective, the learning person must also have: a) emotional maturity, and attitudes directed toward interpersonal understanding and interpersonal competence, b) abilities in situational diagnosis and skill selection, c) the propensity to be proactive in order to cope with environmental conditions of uncertainty, ambiguity and rapid change, and, d) a willingness to experiment and to change the organizations and unique systems within which they work.

SUGGESTIONS FOR ATTAINING LEARNER INVOLVEMENT IN SPIRITUAL ACTUALIZATION SETTINGS

The following suggestions are by no means comprehensive, but they do serve to illustrate how the design philosophy of the multiple experiential input/output approaches can identify, and therefore hopefully avoid many of the pitfalls to effective learning outcomes in Spiritual Actualization settings:

- Don't allow initial freezing up or begin learning programs with rigid and/or unchanging participants. Start participation and active learning involvement based on personal development as early as possible. Create a felt need in the learning individual on his/her own terms. Spiritual development comes best in an environment of safety.
- Provide early positive success experiences. Frustration and then hopelessness can build fast in people not practiced in meeting the challenges of personal development and individual change. Learning individuals in Spiritual Actualization settings must be made to feel initially comfortable with and understanding of their current perspectives and points of view and then subsequently stretched and challenged to integrate that set of perspectives with their new orientation(s). Pointing out their shortcomings at an early stage could be detrimental to the entire unfreezing process and cause the target learning person to shut down. Thus, initial personal integration (and subsequent learning successes) is important to prevent psychological or even physical withdrawal from the learning system.
- The instructor/trainer should state his/her assumptions about the students and his/her goals for the learning programs. Share "where we are going" and create positive and identifiable parameters of the mutual task to be undertaken. In addition, the instructor should demonstrate empathy while modeling the Spiritual Actualization learning target behaviors. Spiritual Actualization is definitely one of those areas where "do what I say, not what I do" does not work.
- In addition to stating the course goals for the instructor and the university, an early set of positive expectations for students should be set by the instructor as well. By stating a belief in the student's capacity to succeed, the instructor can set a positive self-fulfilling prophecy as a course foundational element. Research indicates that students will meet the instructor's positive expectations (Davidson and Eden, 2000).
- Have rules for giving and receiving negative feedback and/or criticism. Do not ignore strong emotional or spiritual content if it emerges in the learning environment. Process and include it as part of the total person learning experience. If insufficient motivation or negative attitudes become process drivers, then the learning interventions should focus on these factors until they are resolved. An individual absorbed with negative perceptions cannot function at a high intensity whole person learning level, and it is folly to ignore such signals in a spiritually driven experiential learning environment.
- Realize that the role of "teacher" in an experiential Spiritual Actualization setting involves the role of learning facilitator and that this is a significantly

different set of behaviors and instructional skills than those found in traditional classroom instructor controlled oriented systems.

- Focus on specific, definable, and measurable learning outcomes. Keep the feedback positive and growth-oriented where possible, avoiding undue emphasis upon individual quirks, mistakes, etc. Especially avoid presenting a personality trait or any culturally derived factor as either a definitive answer or as something to be dismissed outright. The ultimate integration of conflicting perspectives must occur within the learning person. Let the learning person reach his/her own conclusions about what should be internalized as correct, and what should be discarded as inappropriate.

- For long run and lasting involvement, leave room in the learning environment for the feeling of a spirit of inquiry and a sense of adventure. This incompleteness will give students potential avenues for continued growth and development. When such avenues can be identified, confront students with as specific a set of challenges as can be described.

EVALUATION AND GRADING PROCESSES IN A SPIRITUAL ACTUALIZATION LEARNING SYSTEM

It is important to include both positive and negative feedback experiences in a Spiritual Actualization program for the sake of reality, especially in earlier stages. However, the negative feedback occurrences should come at a lower frequency and/or have less negative consequences. This concept is supported by organizations such as the Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations. One of their "best practice" guidelines, for example is "Deliver assessments with care" (Goleman and Chermis, 2004). This same guideline also points out that assessment should also avoid making excuses or downplaying the seriousness of deficiencies.

It is interesting to note that the traditional cognitive educational system's concept of grading rears its head as a potential problem area and stumbling block in a Spiritual Actualization program. Over emphasizing grading or course points accumulation can be dysfunctional for the following reasons: 1) at the best it takes the learning person's focus off of their own spiritual developmental processes and puts the focus on the test or the testing/measurement mechanism, 2) it causes a shift (especially with cognitive exams) from whole person learning to cognitive one-dimensional measures, and, 3) it allows the learning system to fall into the lazy pattern of spending time and learning system energy on that which is more easily measured as opposed to that which is most vital to whole person acquisition of Spiritual Actualization perspectives.

It is interesting to note that students are not necessarily adverse to these one-dimensional reductions. They are practiced at taking cognitive exams, already know how to play the "guess what the professor will ask" game, and perhaps are even looking for an easy way to sidestep their own spiritual development challenges. This is due to the fact that personal spiritual growth is not always comfortable. Whole person learning is more intense than one-dimensional learning and a transcendent experience is not an easy thing to accomplish. The entire process is not always reassuring (at least initially) because spiritual development may involve unlearning values that come to be identified as dysfunctional or in re-learning perspectives previously thought to be adequate. In any case, Spiritual Actualization learning processes should be designed to help identify and internalize new desirable perspectives and capacities, and then to test them in safe experiential learning environments.

INTEGRATION OF SPIRITUAL ACTUALIZATION LEARNINGS

When we are debriefing experiential learning, we are dealing with an analysis of the actual mix of multiple-input exercises processed by the student, (i.e., the learning environment as it existed for them). Debriefing key components include: 1) issues of insuring personal integration, 2) "refreezing" (or "re-slushing as a term I prefer), and 3) the student's readiness to process and consistently apply their internalized Spiritual Actualization. Debriefing, at the conclusion of a spiritually enhanced learning experience, is the time where content and process, and experiences, come together.

Specific debriefing includes wrapping up the Spiritual Actualization individualized learning model. Personalized learning and meaningful goal setting is emphasized at this point in time. Learning exercise debriefing also serves as the mechanism to affirm personal responsibility choices made during Spiritual Actualization experiential learning exercises. Generalized debriefing should focus on integration of the transfer of acquired spiritualization from the classroom to their post graduate endeavors (Dweck and Leggett, 1988). Generalized debriefing can thus be seen as the point wherein the student transitions from student to Personal Career Manager. This is vital in Spiritual Actualization learning environments, as it is even more important that the student perceive the benefit of his/her learning, and then be able to integrate those learnings in a real world environment characterized by an enhanced level of Spiritual Actualization.

Thus, whole person learning outcomes relative to Spiritual Actualization should include:
1) *intellectual perspective and enhanced cognitive mapping of acquired spiritual perspectives*
2) *emotional commitment to self and one's acquired spiritual perspectives*
3) *the capacity to exercise enhanced spirituality; and, importantly*
4) *the perspective, confidence and willingness to manifest enhanced spirituality at will.*

Some guidelines for debriefing are listed below. It should be noted that these guidelines follow the teaching philosophies for effective experiential learning facilitation.

- Debriefing should be dominated by questions from students, not pat answers from instructors or trainers.
- The facilitator should be as objective and fact oriented as possible, while being particularly sensitive to the fact that Spiritual Actualization outcomes are highly personal, and one person's facts are another person's opinions. This includes the instructor's facts/opinions as well.
- Timing in individualized learning: Debriefing should begin when the facilitator artfully determines that the group or individual needs closure and/or feedback. This is also delineated as being at the point where ending would provide enough closure to allow each individual to finalize/further his/her own learning and personal spiritual development (i.e. his/her own answers, and the answers that fit his/her own situation).
- Timing and experiential exercise effectiveness: If the debriefing begins too early, there will not have been whole person learning sufficient to produce spiritual insights, intellectual frameworks, allow for emotional absorption or behavioral skill practice. If the debriefing begins too late, the crux of the learning moment may have passed, the intensity of the experience may have waned or repetition may have led to loss of interest or boredom. This, the facilitation of spiritually driven experiential learning exercises involves the facilitator doing the right thing at the right moment for the right reason. The characteristics of different students, group and class dynamics, and differing environmental complications function, at least for me, to keep spiritually driven experiential learning facilitation a fresh and always engaging challenge.
- Debriefing should not attempt some type of permanent spiritual closure. Rather, it is best to think of it as learning how to enhance spiritual perspectives from scratch, and then to re-learn and unlearn in a Spiritual Actualization learning environment.

SUMMARY

To aid in the astute design and implementation of Spiritual Actualization learning systems, I have presented several conceptual frameworks and models as guidelines. Through integration of:

- Learner readiness
- Prebriefing and debriefing issues,
- Whole person/multiple input learning systems, and
- Individualized Feedback,

It is possible to design and implement Spiritual Actualization learning systems in modern business educational settings. Furthermore, these programs can be effective and have lasting significant student impact. Whole person experiential learning, with a special emphasis upon Spiritual Actualization issues, provides a set of tools that can be used in either undergraduate or MBA programs. The result can be a Spiritual Actualization component to business education that prepares the managers of tomorrow with the tools and the will to design and sustain spiritual dimensions of future organizations. The result will be an enhanced spirituality in the workplace and organizations that are better equipped to fulfill a fuller societal role.

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