Papers on Education and Learning

Introduction

My energy and attention during my career have been about equally divided between education and consulting. As a consultant, my focus has always been on enabling learning for my clients. I have never been enormously enamored of the role of teacher, especially when the role is focused on the transfer of information from teacher to student, or on the evaluation of student performance by the teacher. I have found these as distasteful when I have been a teacher as I did when I was a student. I have always loved learning things for myself, and finding ways to encourage others to do the same. Thus, this set of papers is largely concerned with creating the conditions under which people will be stimulated to engage in learning, as well as minimizing the blocks and barriers to learning. The first paper "Defenses and the Need to Know" (Harrison, 1963*) dates from my T group days. It puts forward a model for balancing confrontation and stress in experiential learning situations. Quite recently, the model has resurfaced in my work, as I concern myself with ways of moderating the trauma and stress which are produced during the massive organizational changes of the present moment.

While I was at Yale University during the sixties, I devoted a great deal of time and energy to research on the processes and outcomes of learning in T groups. "Cognitive Change and Participation in a Sensitivity Training Laboratory" (Harrison, 1966) is an example of that work. Although the content may seem dated, I believe an understanding of the processes of cognitive change which I studied then is highly

relevant now to helping organization members to learn during periods of organization change (that is to say, almost all the time!).

While at Yale, I struggled long, and ultimately successfully, with the question of how to create an enclave of empowered and active learners in my classroom, finding ways to buffer the influence of the traditional authoritarian milieu in a prestigious mainstream university. In this work, I was led into exploring and inventing theory and practice of "social architecture." While at Yale, I applied my what I was learning about the design of experiential education to the training of Peace Corps Volunteers for service in Latin America. My paper with Richard Hopkins, "The Design of Cross Cultural Training: An Alternative to the University Model" (Harrison and Hopkins, 1967*) was intended both to provide guidance in designing training relevant to overseas performance, and also as a general critique of traditional university educational methods. To my delight, it was received as such by radical students and faculty engaged in university reform during the sixties. When I left Yale in 1966, I abandoned my academic ambitions in favor of a full time consulting career. As a kind of legacy to others, I wrote everything I then knew about motivating and empowering students in "Classroom Innovation: A Design Primer"(Harrison, 1969*).

I spent the late sixties and early seventies establishing myself as a freelance consultant and then I returned to my educational interests, prompted by the success of my efforts to design a form of experiential education for European managers that did not depend on small group processes for its energy. "Developing Autonomy, Initiative and Risk Taking Through a Laboratory Design" (Harrison, 1972*-a) describes

my early work in this area, and it was followed by "How to Design and Conduct Self Directed Learning Experiences" (Harrison, 1978*). The latter paper, like "Classroom Education: A Design Primer" was intended to set forth a coherent theory and practice which could be followed by others so inclined.

"Towards a Strategy for Helping Redundant and Retiring Managers" (Harrison, 1973*) was published at a time when the first of many waves of layoffs and redundancies was beginning to be felt in Britain. The paper outlines what I knew at the time about the conditions needed for individuals to heal from the stress and trauma of losing their work. It then puts forward a proposal for educating those who have lost jobs, using methods of self directed learning taken from the "Autonomy Labs" first described in "Developing Autonomy, Initiative and Risk Taking Through a Laboratory Design."

Finally, "Steps Towards the Learning Organization" is a brief summary of my longer monograph on organization learning (Harrison, 1992). The latter will eventually find its way into a book, but for the present, I want to share my thoughts on how to be a learning oriented organization development consultant, thus neatly bringing together at the end of this volume the twin strands of consulting and education that have made up my career. I also wanted to introduce my recent thinking on the blocks and barriers to organization learning, and on the close relationship between healing and learning in organizations.