

## **Chapter 12. Organization Culture and Quality of Service:**

### **A Strategy for Releasing Love in the Workplace**

#### **Introduction**

The publication of the foregoing paper, "Leadership and Strategy for a New Age" marked a major shift in the focus of my public work, as distinct from my consulting work with clients. The latter continued to be a blend of the mundane and the ideal, depending on clients' needs and readiness. I had seen the dangers of "missionary work" during the sixties, when I and my colleagues thought to transform organizations through the application of T groups in organizations. It had cost us dearly in credibility, and it had caused some unfortunate clients much pain. Although I was always alert for opportunities to bring more heart into the working lives of clients, and I endeavored to open my own heart in interactions with them, I confined my proselytizing to my lecturing and writing.

I spent quite a bit of time looking for ways to talk about love in organizations that could bring hard headed leaders and managers into dialogue on the subject, rather than turning them off. Although I immediately began speaking about my ideas to any group that would listen, it was not until 1985 that I found what I was looking for in a return to my earlier interest in organization culture. In that year I was invited to speak about my "New Age" ideas at the Annual Meeting of The Academy of Management. I arrived a little early at the room where the meeting was to be held, just as Tom Janz of the University of Calgary was finishing a presentation on a new measure of organization culture he had developed, using as a framework the ideas in *In Search of Excellence* (Peters and Waterman, 1982). Someone who had read my earlier work on organization culture saw me in the audience, and suggested to Tom and me that we might have some interests in common. On looking over Janz's work, I saw that his carefully

constructed and validated measure of organization culture was built on dimensions very similar to the model Charles Handy and I had come up with intuitively so many years before. I had not thought of that work for years, except to regret that it had been published so far ahead of its time, but now I saw it as an answer to my need for a way to discuss the place of love in organizations that would evoke interest and debate, rather than defensiveness, in audiences of business managers. Culture was a hot topic in the early eighties, and I thought I had something to say on the subject that could capture the interest of business leaders. My idea was that if I presented them with a model of organization culture in which a caring, relationship oriented culture was only one of the alternatives, it should not be hard to establish the need for balance among cultural extremes. I would revamp my old culture questionnaire to include a scale that assessed where an organization was on the qualities of caring, support and cooperation (love in action). Then it should be easy to show people by their own data what desirable qualities were missing in their organization's culture, and get some discussion going about what should be changed, and why.

I got to work on the reconstruction of my culture questionnaire, taking guidance from Janz's statistical studies. Soon I had the help of Herb Stokes, who began using my new questionnaire in his consulting practice on work redesign, and in his workshops on High Performing Systems. Herb revised the items so they could be understood by everyone in organizations, from top to bottom of the hierarchy. I began using the questionnaire and the culture model in my talks, and soon achieved my goal of being able to talk with managers about love in a balanced and thoughtful way.

In the mid eighties, US companies began to take a belated interest in improving the quality of their service to customers, and I once again saw an opportunity to connect love with a current concern of managers. The result was "Organization Culture and Quality of Service." In

it I show how differing organization cultures tend to produce differing styles of service, and I make a case for developing strong Support cultures as a way of bringing caring and concern (love) into the service activities of an organization. The model of organization culture presented here is the same as that used in Herb Stokes' and my culture questionnaire, which has since been published commercially (Harrison and Stokes, 1992). Many of my speaking engagements at the time were in Europe and the UK, and the paper was published in the UK in 1987. Thus, it has not yet been widely read in the US. I have revised both it and the following paper, "Culture and Levels of Consciousness in Organizations" in order to minimize redundancy between the two pieces.

## **Organization Culture and Quality of Service: A Strategy for Releasing Love in the Workplace**

### **The Hazards of Short Term Problem Solving**

Like many of my consultant colleagues, and a good few of my clients, I have done a fair amount of "work" on myself. About ten years ago, the gap between what I fondly thought of as my own level of consciousness and what I was able to talk about and work with in business organizations began to bother me a lot. I felt that I could see a need for business managers to do less and to feel and imagine more. As their jobs became tougher under foreign competition, the cost squeezes brought on by the oil crisis, and the turbulence of financial markets, managers became more aggressive in changing their organizations. Believing that "when the going gets tough, the tough get going," they worked longer hours, reorganized their businesses, reduced the work force, cut back on budgets, endeavored to shift from a production to a marketing orientation, and so on.

To me, much of what was done seemed to fall somewhere between marginally useful and counterproductive, especially when looked at from the perspective of the larger society or the planet. In reorganizing and in performing organization surgery, it seemed to me that people were intervening in very gross ways into complex living systems they didn't understand very well. They would often get the short term benefits they were looking for, but they got a lot of long term unintended consequences as well. Observe, for example, the performance decrements which almost always follow the acquisition of one organization by another.

***We Are Polluting the World with Wasted Humans***

From a societal perspective, we seem to have entered into a new cycle of environmental pollution. At the same time as we are cleaning up our rivers and our atmosphere, our businesses are discharging large amounts of garbage into the streets—human garbage! Every productive person who loses his or her job through forced early retirement or redundancy, every teenager or young adult who wants to work but can't, becomes part of this stream of living effluent. The organizations which discharge the human "waste products" become tighter, leaner, more competitive and profitable; the larger society becomes poorer, more disorganized, more full of pain.

***The Fault is Not in the People, But in How they Think***

No one is really at fault. The sensitive and caring managers I talk to about these problems are as distressed as I am by the waste and the pain, but they see no viable alternatives to competing as hard as they can, by any legal means at hand. When they choose short term solutions, it's not because they don't care: it's usually because the situations they deal with are too complex for them to understand the dynamics and predict the eventual consequences of their actions.

Part of the problem lies in how we see the world. In business, we learn to be competitive, action oriented and autonomous, and to think in "left brained" ways: analytically, concretely and rationally. These are all qualities of behavior and thought which lend themselves to dealing with the physical world—and that includes organizations, when we think of them as like machines.

### **New Ways to Think about Organization**

#### ***Systems Thinking—A “Soft” Discipline***

Dealing effectively with complex living systems such as human beings, groups, organizations, markets, and the planet Earth requires habits of thought which are not widely distributed in business and not widely taught in schools and universities. I am talking about such "unbusinesslike" patterns and preoccupations as cooperation, nurturing relationships and appreciating interdependency. Associated modes of thought and feeling are "right brained:" intuitive, open to emotions as well as facts, holistic.

Having begun life with every intention of becoming an engineer, I know the transition from the harder, more active pole to the softer, more receptive one is difficult and can be long. For me, that new understanding was forged in sensitivity training groups, in the experience of living and working in a foreign country, in psychotherapy, in meditation and spiritual seeking.

I don't fancy proposing such a regimen for my clients, but I am convinced that exploring what the world looks like from the softer side, from the "yin" as opposed to the "yang" point of view, offers my clients perspectives which can bring both power and healing into their organizations.

I have spent the last four or five years in efforts to bridge the gap between the softer disciplines and my tough minded clients. In that time I have encountered many others on the same path: managers and consultants, men and women, who share a vision of work as a healing

and growthful experience, and organizations as healthy places for humans to become the best they can be. Through dialogue and experiment I have evolved a theoretical framework and a strategy which I shall share in this paper. I believe my experiences can be useful to those others engaged in this work (sometimes called "organization transformation") as well as to those who simply want to understand organizations and help them to be more effective (organization development).

***Talking about Love—Alignment and Attunement***

My vision, as I conceived it at the outset, was that I wanted to balance the powers of intellect and of human will in organizations with the powers of intuition and of love. For some time I remained stuck in my vision, unable to imagine how to talk with managers about love, and doing a lot of compulsive dithering about risks to my professional reputation and future income! Then, screwing up my courage, in 1981 I began to write on organization alignment and attunement (Harrison, 1981), (Harrison, 1984\*). My earliest effort received very limited circulation. I sent it to some friends and colleagues in the U.S. and in Europe, and it was distributed to a small number of clients of SRI International. Then the feedback began to come in.

People who were "tuned in" to "new age" ideas liked the paper all right and gave me some nice compliments. Outside of that inner circle, I got two kinds of strong feedback, both of which strengthened my belief that business organizations are not currently easy places in which to pursue the developments I had in mind. One kind came from professional friends and colleagues, people who have liked and respected my work and who wish me well. The following is a good example:

"...You spoke of love at some length. After the initial shock of it my uneasiness did not go away. 'You keep talkin' about love, boy, and you gonna' get screwed royally,' remained my basic sentiment. I mean, 'love' in a high performance organization? That's tossing a hot potato into a cold/cool medium. Even if you do warm things up with attunement, can you ever warm it up to 'love' level and still keep an eye on business? ...It seems to me, Roger, that using the term love for organization description stirs up people's deepest hurts and longings, and how you can meet their expectations and run a railroad at the same time is beyond me."

The second kind of feedback was from managers, people I didn't know who had received the paper through the workings of the rather mysterious process that keeps putting like minded people in touch with one another. The following quotation from a manager who had read the paper, and then shared it with colleagues, gives the flavor:

"...By the time I finished reading it, tears were streaming from my eyes. It is happening again, now as I write this note to you. For years, I have felt alone in thinking it was possible to work with people in such a caring atmosphere that the bottom line becomes a by product of that atmosphere. Now, thanks to your report, there are many people around me who share that seemingly impossible dream."

Both correspondents were focused on a basic truth: business organizations are tough places to nurture tender feelings. People who do harbor dreams of a more compassionate and responsive business world feel alone and unsupported, except when something occurs which brings their feelings out in the open. Then they find that others have also harbored these same, seemingly subversive thoughts and feelings.

***The Need for an Alternative to the Competitive Paradigm***

Seen through the lens of my vision, much of the business world is unbalanced and stuck., The strong and increasingly dominant values of action, competition and strength mean that much of the energy and time expended in organizations goes into countering the actions and intentions of other people or organizations. It's push against push, with lots of energy going out and not that much movement. There is too much "moving against," and not enough "moving towards" or "moving with."

The issue is not just one of educating individuals to be more caring and cooperative. People are already more caring and cooperative than their organizations allow them to be. Organizations block development of caring and compassion on the part of organization members, creating daily win lose situations that channel people's energies into unproductive competition.

The behavior of organizations in society is also frozen into a competitive/exploitative orientation. Viable alternatives to competitive behavior cannot even be perceived from that vantage point. We shall continue stripping the world of natural resources, polluting our air and water, replacing people who need work with machines which don't, manipulating one another into spending money we don't have for goods we don't need, so long as the development of the softer, responsive, compassionate side of people in business remains blocked. When we can't allow ourselves to take care of one another in business, we certainly won't allow ourselves to take care of the larger society, let alone the planet.

**Developing a Strategy for Bringing Love and Compassion into the Workplace**

Sometimes I wonder whether in shaping my practice around bringing love into the workplace, I am not simply projecting my own needs onto a part of that world where they are



inappropriate. I will never be sure until I have put the question to the test in the real world. I have decided that the best test of my thinking lies in committing myself to develop a strategy for helping organizations to open paths for their members to develop their compassionate, caring side in the conduct of business. If I am in fact sunk in some solipsistic dream, then I shall find few allies, and the strategy will fail for lack of an energetic response. In my profession, we live on our ability to attract the energy and commitment of our clients to projects which mean something to them personally, and the feedback is pretty swift if we are off in our assumptions about what they care about.

At present, that strategy has two parts: a model of organization culture, and a focus on service. The idea is, first, to create a way of talking and thinking about organizations which provides a mental model of balance between hard and soft, competitive and caring. Then managers and leaders can see for themselves the extent to which their own organizations may be diminished because the powers of attunement, compassion and love are missing.

Second, I have identified giving service as an organization process or activity which most organizations are involved in and which is attracting increased management attention presently (see, for example, (Albrecht and Zemke, 1985). Consider the following definition, and see if it does not imply that service is love in action!

Service. iv. 1. The action of serving, helping or benefiting; conduct tending to the welfare or advantage of another. — The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 1968.

### ***Service as a Vehicle for Caring in Organizations***

In fact, as we experience service internally between different parts of our organizations, and externally as customers, service is a lot of things which are neither supportive, nor compassionate, nor caring. Organizations and their customers most experience the lack of

caring, in service relationships, and it is in that area where performance improvement most depends on opening the heart of the organization and its members. In attempting to understand the dynamic forces which influence the process of giving service, I have found it useful to focus on organization culture as a key variable. The model presented below identifies the varieties of service which we experience in practice, points up cultural barriers to giving service from the heart, and suggests directions which may be taken to remove those barriers.

### **Four Organization Cultures**

Some years ago I wrote a paper on organization culture (Harrison, 1972\*-b) putting forward ideas originally developed by Charles Handy and myself and prompted by my experiences living and working as a consultant in Britain and Northern Europe. Later, I published an instrument (Harrison, 1975) which people could use to assess their organization's culture, and Charles Handy wrote a delightful book on the subject in the mid seventies which has since been republished (Handy, 1985).

Recent work by others on organization culture prompted me to take a fresh look at the concepts we developed. Tom Janz, in particular, has done interesting work on the factorial structure of organization members' perceptions of culture, the results of which are consistent with Handy's and my intuitive model (Janz, 1986, Personal Communication). On the basis of Janz's work and my own current thinking about organizations, I have revised my model and developed a new questionnaire (Harrison and Stokes, 1992). Both the model and the questionnaire have found acceptance among managers and consultants engaged in new plant design and redesign, in which the quality of working relationships, and intergroup cooperation and service are prime considerations.

### ***The Power Culture***

The Power oriented organization is based on inequality of access to resources. A “resource” can be anything one person controls that another person wants. In business, some “currencies” of power are money, privileges, job security, working conditions, and the ability to control others’ access to these. The people in power use resources to satisfy or frustrate others’ needs, and thus to control others’ behavior. Leadership resides in the person of the leader(s), and rests on their ability and willingness to administer rewards and punishments. People in power oriented organizations are primarily motivated by external rewards and punishments, and secondarily by the wish to be associated with a strong leader.

In the Power organization at its best, leadership is based on strength, justice and paternalistic benevolence on the part of the leader. The leaders are firm, fair, and generous with loyal subordinates. They have a sense of obligation to their followers, and they exercise power according to their understanding of what is good for the organization and all its people. This orientation towards the use of responsible power seems to be typical of some of the best Japanese organizations. It rests on the acceptance of hierarchy and inequality as legitimate by all members of the organization. In more egalitarian societies, such as the United States, there is much less acceptance of hierarchy as being legitimate than in Japan, and there is not a strong tradition of benevolent, power oriented leadership.

At its worst, the Power oriented organization tends towards a rule by fear, with abuse of power for personal advantage on the part of the leaders, their friends and protegés. When the organization becomes large, or when the leaders struggle for dominance, it may degenerate into a hotbed of political intrigue.

The Power orientation is well suited to entrepreneurial and startup situations where the leaders have the vision, intelligence and will to manage the business and assume personal

direction or the activities of its people. The other people in the organization extend the leaders' reach, leverage and impact. There is a personal relationship between leaders and followers. The latter depend on their leaders for direction and security, and the leaders depend on followers for loyal service.

As the size and complexity of the business increases, the demands on the leadership of a Power oriented organization multiply exponentially. Large Power oriented organizations are frequently inefficient and full of fear and confusion, unless the Power orientation is supplemented by good structures and systems for getting work done (Role culture). As the distance between leaders and followers increases, effective control becomes more difficult. Because followers have been conditioned to be dependent, when Power oriented organizations expand, they often run short on leadership talent.

### ***The Role Orientation***

The Role culture substitutes a system of structures and procedures for the naked power of the leaders. This gives protection to subordinates and stability to the organization. The struggle for power is moderated by the rule of law. The duties and the rewards of the members' roles are carefully defined, usually in writing, and are the subject of an explicit or implicit contract between the organization and the individual. Both the individual and the organization are expected to adhere to their part of the bargain.

The values of the role orientation are order, dependability, rationality, and consistency. Performance is organized by structure and procedures, rather than personally controlled by the leader. A well-designed system of roles (a bureaucracy) permits work to be reliably directed at a distance, so that large, complex organizations can be created and managed. Rather than the coalition at the top having all the power, authority and responsibility are delegated downward,

each level in the organization has a defined area of authority, and work can be controlled without direct supervision from the top.

At its best the Role oriented organization provides stability, justice, and efficient performance. Rules and "due process" give people protection from the arbitrary exercise of authority which is typical of the Power orientation. They are able to spend less time "looking out for No. 1," and thus they can devote more energy to the work.

A bureaucracy operating a stable technology in a slowly changing environment can be very efficient, because much of the routine work can be made subject to impersonal rules and a system of checks and balances. Well designed systems, methods and procedures maximize productivity and minimize error. Once an operating problem is solved, the solution gets built into the system. People know what is expected of them and are trained to do their jobs efficiently.

Role oriented organizations require less direct supervision, compared to the "hands on" management typical of the Power culture. Performance can be monitored by information systems, without much face to face contact with people who do the work. Routine work can be standardized and broken into small pieces which are learned quickly by relatively unskilled workers.

Traditional role oriented organizations are best adapted to the more stable combinations of technology, supplies and markets which characterized the century between 1850 and 1950. In rapidly changing situations, they have difficulty keeping up with circumstances. Nevertheless, most large organizations today have strong elements of the Role culture. The advent of computer aided data processing has possibly saved bureaucracy from an a demise caused by information overload, as the processes of change have speeded up dramatically. Our society is

very “system dependent” and needs a strong role orientation to operate those complex systems reliably.

The weakness of Role organizations is in the very impersonality which is their strength. They operate on the assumption that people are not much to be trusted, so they don't give individual autonomy or discretion to the members at lower levels. The system is designed to control people and prevent them from committing selfish and stupid acts. It also keeps people from being innovative, and from doing the right thing when the right thing is outside the rules. In the interests of rationality and order it is made difficult to change or bend the rules, and it usually takes a long time to make needed changes.

In most of the Western business world, the development of systems and procedures has been strongly influenced by the ideas of “scientific management.” The assumption has been that there is “one best way,” and that the best system is one which makes the fewest demands on the intelligence, initiative and problem solving ability of the worker. In order to prevent workers from “messing up” the system, the practice has been to leave them little discretion in how they do their work. Creative management thinkers are beginning to realize that these assumptions and practices are very limiting in a technologically changing world. In service industries, too, rigid systems make it difficult for workers to respond to the individual needs of customers.

In fact, good systems and procedures do not have to be inflexible or hard to change. They can be responsive as well as controlling, as the Japanese have demonstrated. The Role culture as we experience it in most organizations is not only defined by an emphasis on rationality and well designed systems. It's distinctive quality is its *unilateral control* of people's behavior by systems, rules and regulations. The system controls the people, rather than responding to their needs as workers.

New approaches to management such as Employee Involvement and Total Quality Management attempt to blend the Role orientation's emphasis on well designed and closely managed systems with the empowerment of employees typical of the Achievement orientation. These approaches endeavor to make the system serve the workers, and thus to combine the economic effectiveness of the Role orientation with the high energy of the Achievement culture. However, their success depends on the extent to which genuine changes are made in the ways authority is distributed and work is organized. Without a significant degree of power sharing, the gains they bring are very limited.

### ***The Achievement Orientation***

Both the Power oriented and the Role oriented organization cultures depend on the use of external rewards and punishments to motivate people. Organization members are expected to contribute their personal energy in return for rewards. This means that the organization has available to it only that fraction of each person's personal energy that he or she is willing to commit in return for the extrinsic rewards the organization offers.

It is true, of course, that many people actually like their work, want to make a worthwhile contribution to society, and enjoy interacting with colleagues or customers. These are intrinsic rewards which are qualitative rather than quantitative and which arise from the nature of the work and/or the context in which it takes place. Traditional Power and Role oriented organizations are not designed to provide these intrinsic satisfactions, nor are they designed to harness the energy that people have for doing work they like to do in the way they like to do it.

In some work situations intrinsic satisfactions arise naturally. People who have worked in such diverse situations as new business and new plant startups, nuclear test shots, intensive care units, and political and community organizing campaigns, report that these work cultures

can provide deep personal satisfactions and evoke personal commitment of a high order. These “high energy” work situations are described by participants as having most of the following qualities:

- The work situation engages the total person.
- The values that people experience in the work transcend personal advantage. The situation evokes altruism, which is satisfying to everyone involved. People feel they are working for something bigger than themselves.
- People give their all, working long hours without complaint. They may willingly sacrifice their family and social lives to the demands of the work.
- People supervise themselves, seeking out what needs to be done without direction from above.
- There is high morale, teamwork, and a sense of camaraderie. The group frequently feels itself to be elite or special.
- There is a sense of urgency; people live “on the edge,” putting out high energy for long periods of time. They may become addicted to stress.
- There is a clearly understood mission that is articulated and supported at the highest level of the organization.
- The mission is emphasized and reinforced by everything upper managers do: the financial decisions they make; the questions they ask and the topics they pursue in meetings; the sorts of people they hire, fire and promote; and the aspects of the operation they look at during field visits.



- The mission is stated in unambiguous terms. There are one or two dominant values that are more important than any others in the organization. People know that they can't go far wrong as long as they pursue those values with sincerity and integrity.
- People do not argue much about the mission. People who do not share the organization's basic values and commitments are made to feel uncomfortable and usually leave.
- People do argue a lot about how best to achieve the mission. Positional authority does not shut off discussion, or curb the expression of employees' ideas.
- The values embedded in the mission are larger than mere profit or growth. In pursuing the mission, organization members believe they are making a contribution to society, as well as gaining something for the company.
- The organization is more egalitarian than most. Employees are treated like willing contributors. Those at lower levels are empowered to make decisions that other organizations reserve for supervisors and middle managers.
- Communication channels are open, both laterally and vertically. It is easy to be heard if you have an idea or suggestion.
- Failure is viewed as something to learn from, rather than as a sign of personal inadequacy.
- People are given effective authority in accordance with their ability to contribute to the mission. Neither the red tape of a bureaucracy, nor the privileges and status of a power elite count as much as ability and contribution in deciding who does what.

The Achievement oriented organization is an "aligned" organization. It "lines people up" behind a common vision or purpose. It uses the mission to attract and release the personal

energy of its members in the pursuit of common goals. This is in marked contrast to the Power and Role oriented organizations that rely on the application of rewards and punishment, and on impersonal systems and structures to control and constrain their members. The mission serves to focus the personal energy of individuals. Because members make their contributions freely in response to their commitment to a shared purpose, they willingly give more to the organization, and the whole prospers accordingly.

Of course, structures and systems are still necessary in the Achievement oriented organization, and the allocation and distribution of resources is still a problem. In the best such organizations the systems and structures serve the mission and are changed when the mission requires it, rather than becoming laws unto themselves.

Power, too, has a place in such an organization. These organizations are not Power oriented, but they use power. The people in power first establish the mission and then serve it. On a day to day basis, decisions are made by reference to the mission, not by reference to people in power. The actions of those in power are judged and criticized by the same standard as is applied to everyone else in the organization: do they advance the mission?

Enthusiasm for the “hands on, value driven” approach said to be typical of “excellent companies” has been so great that a negative side to the Achievement orientation may come as a surprise to some. The Achievement culture has the deficiencies and distortions brought on by its strengths. The high energy and involvement which the Achievement orientation generates are difficult to sustain, and organization members are subject to burnout and disillusionment. Such organizations may rely on the common vision to organize the work, rather than subjecting themselves to the discipline of systems and procedures. When the task is complex, and the vision takes on different forms for different parts of the organization, people lose focus and unity of

effort. When different groups each “do their own thing,” coordination suffers and resources are wasted.

Here are some actual quotes from interviews of veterans of Achievement oriented organizations where hard work and long hours substitute for planning, where the thrust for achievement has submerged concern for people’s needs, and where elitism and competition have eroded cooperation.

- We’re too busy doing to plan objectively.
- There are bound to be organizational problems with tight resources and tight delivery schedules; things are bound to get tense. People who are attracted to our company like this climate others would go looney here. Pressure is keen, and you have to compromise on quality sometimes.
- People are beginning to burn out; you can’t keep putting the pressure on people. We must turn down our expectations of the magic we can perform and do more realistic scheduling.
- One of the craziest things about the company is the founders’ 90 hour weeks. My best people look like garbage only putting in 60 hour weeks.
- I’m worried about the health of some of the people; bad things are happening to the founders and old timers.
- Everyone needs positive feedback; even those who show outside self confidence still like to hear the words. It’s hard for many to say those words; ...it’s easier to criticize than to stroke.

- We were team players inside, and terribly competitive outside. People in other groups saw us as self centered and uncooperative, and they were right. We really didn't care about anything but meeting our own objectives.
- Our arrogance and elitism isolated us from the rest of the organization. When we did make some mistakes, they were glad to see us fail.
- We became intolerant. We couldn't accept criticism either from outside the group, or from our own members.

The Achievement oriented organization is frequently under organized; it relies on high motivation to overcome its deficiencies in structures, systems and planning. Although it evokes enthusiasm and commitment, it may not have a heart. People's needs are subordinate to the organization's mission and its needs. After a time, people realize this and may begin to mistrust the organization—or they may remain committed but suffer high levels of emotional and physical stress. Under stress, organization members may withdraw into an idealistic fantasy world, losing touch with the realities of competition, customer needs, and the business environment (a fairly common phenomenon in R&D and high tech organizations).

### ***The Support Orientation***

The Support culture may be defined as an organizational climate based on mutual trust between the individual and the organization. In such an organization people believe that they are valued as human beings, not just as cogs in a machine or contributors to a task. A Support culture fosters warmth and even love, not just driving enthusiasm. People like to come to work in the morning, not only because they like their work, but because they care for the people they work with. Because they feel cared for, they are more human in their interactions with others: customers, suppliers, the public, and their fellow workers.

Support organizations show most of the following qualities:

- People help each other beyond the formal demands of their jobs. Help is extended not only within one's own work group, but to other groups as well.
- People communicate a lot, not only about work, but also about personal concerns. They can always find someone to listen to their ideas and problems.
- People like spending time together. They often see each other off the job, as well as at work
- In hiring people, the organization gives special weight to whether the person is caring and cooperative and will fit in.
- People are viewed as basically good. When things go wrong, they get a second chance.
- People know that the organization will go beyond the requirements of the policy or the employment contract to look after them when they need it. In return, they go out of their way to take care of the organization, caring for the facilities and equipment, giving special attention to quality, conserving resources and/or protecting the company's reputation in the community.
- People celebrate together. They not only take pride in their work achievements, but they recognize such personal milestones as promotions, retirements, birthdays and anniversaries.
- People value harmony and avoid confrontation, sometimes to the point of leaving important issues unresolved.
- People "keep the faith"; they don't let each other down. This doesn't merely mean keeping one's word; it also means doing one's share of the work, including coming in to work when one isn't feeling quite up to par, in order not to overload others.

In western societies, the support culture is the least typical of the four assessed by the questionnaire, *Diagnosing Organization Culture* (Harrison and Stokes, 1992). It is not valued by the leaders in Power or Role oriented organizations, and so it goes underground. It can be

seen in relatively small groups, where people know one another personally and interact face to face. It tends to develop in organizations where people work together for long enough periods of time to build personal relationships, work out their differences, and arrive at a degree of trust.

When not balanced by a thrust for success, the pure Support culture is seldom found in business; it is not results oriented enough to enable a business to be competitive. It makes its best contribution when it is in dynamic tension with the Achievement orientation. The latter releases and focuses the personal energy which is evoked for each of us by a love of doing, and by a sense of high purpose and worthy mission. The Support orientation taps into the personal energy present in the ties of love and trust which bind us to people, groups and organizations for which we care.

There are two current issues in business where we can clearly see the benefits of a warm and caring organization climate: quality and service. It is no accident that successful approaches to quality improvement are often based on small work teams. There is a close connection between loving one's work and wanting to do it well, and a sense of caring and trust with the people with whom one works. In teams dedicated to quality, people develop both a love of quality work, and close ties with the others they work with. When assembly operators who had left their jobs at one Fortune 500 company and later reapplied for employment were asked why they decided to return, the most frequent reason given was, "I missed my quality circle!"

Like the Achievement culture, Support oriented organizations assume that people want to contribute. Rather than evoking their contribution through a common purpose or ideal (a *doing* culture), the Support oriented organization offers its members satisfactions which come from relationships: mutuality, belonging and connection (a *being* culture). The assumption is that

people will contribute out a sense of commitment to a group or organization where they feel a real sense of belonging, and in which they believe they have a personal stake.

The emphasis on human needs of the Support culture balances and moderates the single pointed task focus of the Achievement orientation. Where the one may use people up and burn them out, the other binds up their wounds, restores their energy and vitality, and heals their relationships. The Achievement culture unleashes and fuses the human will of organization members in the service of the organization's task. The Support culture evokes human love for the nurturing of the organization's members, and the maintenance of the organization's essential fabric of relationships.

The Support culture can evoke extremely strong motivation in the service of the group. We see this motivation in the sacrifices which members of groups make for one another. The willingness of people to give their lives for those of their comrades is not only known in war, but also in close knit teams doing dangerous work such as polar exploration, police work, and fire fighting. In more mundane work situations, the effects of team loyalty on productivity, quality and absenteeism are well publicized in recent writing on high performing organizations.

The weaknesses of the Support culture are the negative side of its strengths. Organizations in which the Support culture is both strong and unbalanced tend to avoid conflict: in the interests of harmony, difficult issues are swept under the rug. Consensus may be overvalued, hampering the organization's ability to move decisively. Sometimes, favoritism affects decisions about people, and injustice results. Differences in skill and ability may be ignored in the interests of "equal treatment." Tough decisions about people's performance may be postponed out of "kindness," negatively impacting the organization's effectiveness. In

Power and Role oriented organizations, cohesive work teams may support their members in anti management behaviors such as rate restriction and rule breaking.

The Support culture is more common in Scandinavia than it is in the US or the UK. When I talk about culture to managers there, they report that cohesive groups often punish members who assert their own deviant opinions or take individual initiatives. They refer to it as "hammering down the nail whose head is sticking out."

Like everyone else, I have my own cultural biases. It would be easy to read a bias toward the Achievement and Support cultures into the way the cultures are described above, and to see it also in the phrasing of the items in our questionnaire, *Diagnosing Organization Culture* (Harrison and Stokes, 1992). In fact, in constructing the questionnaire I tried to write items which expressed the positive side of the Power and Role cultures, and which would also be seen by people as descriptive of their organizational experiences. This task proved extraordinarily difficult. On reflection, that difficulty seems to me a reflection of the society in which we live, rather than some inherent negativity in the concepts of Power and Role.

Power has the capacity to enliven life in organizations, and to release the human spirit. There have been times in history when there has been a tradition of nobility and responsibility on the part of those who exercised power. In our own recent past, the concept of benevolent paternalism was much more prevalent than it is today. Although I have never worked in Japan, conversations with those who have suggest that responsible, caring power is much more common there than in the West. In fact, I suspect that one of the secrets of Japanese success is the acceptance of inequality on the part of Japanese employees, and the reciprocal acceptance of responsibility on the part of their leaders. The stability and mutual acceptance of one another's



positions and prerogatives permits employees and leaders to work together without the power struggles which are such a frequent aspect of life in Western Power oriented organizations.

In the West, and particularly in America, we tend to have little love or respect for power or the people who wield it. Mirroring our negative attitudes, they often tend not to deserve our love or loyalty. Those who do are seen as individual exceptions to the rule, rather than as examples of a socially valued tradition. We do not know how to make organizations work without power; at the same time, we do not know how to trust power or make it trustworthy.

The situation of the Role oriented organization is somewhat different. Traditionally, the systematic organization of work has been characterized by application of “scientific management” principles, top down control and faceless bureaucracy. Those sorts of Role oriented organizations tend to squeeze the spirit out of working life, and the items in our questionnaire have some of this flavor.

Working rationally and systematically is not *inherently* soul deadening; it only becomes so when we elevate the system and the machine to the status of master, and subordinate to it our creativity, vision and human values. That working to improve systems and procedures can be enlivening is demonstrated by some of the work in Sociotechnical systems design (STS), Total Quality Management (TQM), and Employee Involvement (EI), where the emphasis is on making systems more responsive to the needs of the task (Achievement), and the people who work in the organization (Support).

If I have a bias, it is towards the release of the human spirit in work. With Kahlil Gibran, I believe that “work is love made manifest,” and that our organizations will be richer materially and spiritually to the extent that we can realize that dream. In reaching towards that ideal, organizations will do well to avoid dominance by any one of the four cultures, preferring instead

a dynamic balance in which each culture is expressed in its highest form, and the positive side of each balances the darker tendencies of the others. The ideal is not a compromise or average. It is a synthesis achieved by struggle and debate within the organization between differing views of what is good for the organization and good for its “stakeholders”: employees, stockholders, customers, community, and the planet.

### ***Frequent Patterns of Culture in Organizations***

Although every organization is different, I have observed some patterns which come up frequently in the organizations with which I work.

Questionnaire scores on Power are negatively correlated with those on Achievement and Support. This means that if a group has a high score on Power, it tends to have low scores on both Achievement and Support. The Role scores tend to fluctuate fairly independently of the other scores.

The Power culture has a potential for fear and manipulation. People in Power oriented cultures tend to be rather careful what they say and who they say it to. The Support and Achievement cultures require a fairly high degree of openness and trust to flourish. Therefore, we should expect an organization high on Power to be low on Achievement and Support, and vice versa.

When people in an organization disagree about the culture they actually have, it is often because the culture looks and feels different from the perspective of different parts of the organization. It feels different when you are at the top than it does when you are at the bottom. Upper managers see more of the Achievement culture than do those lower down. The latter are more likely to see the organization as Power oriented.

Often the kind of work people do and the way it is organized influences the culture of their group or department. Left to nature, research and development groups tend to be Achievement oriented. Groups which keep track of and control money tend to be Role oriented. Marketing groups tend to be Achievement oriented, while Sales organizations are more likely to lean towards the Power culture. Production organizations tend towards a mix of Power and Role.

It is possible, however, to design organizations which have radically different cultures than those we have listed above as the norm. For example, I have seen Sales organizations with an Achievement/Support culture that are as effective or more effective than Power oriented ones (and far more enjoyable for their members).

My experience is that in most organizations, differences between functions are less striking than is the overall organization culture. The departments within an organizations are less differentiated in their cultures than we would expect, given the very different kinds of work the functions perform. Thus, in a strongly Role oriented organization (e.g., a traditional insurance company) the Marketing department would tend to be more Role and less Achievement oriented than it would in an organization with a dominant Achievement culture (e.g., some high technology organizations).

### ***Common Patterns in Peoples' Preferred Cultures***

Another observation I have made is that while people in different parts of the organization may disagree about what the culture actually is, they usually pretty much agree on how they would like it to be. Most people surveyed agree they prefer to work in a climate which is low on Power, high on Achievement, and middling on Role. There is more disagreement about the degree to which people prefer the Support culture, possibly because fewer people have fully experienced it than the other three.

### **Organization Culture and Styles of Service**

My current strategy is based on the belief that as we move further into a service economy, organizations are coming under competitive pressures which will force consideration of the possibility that some version of the Golden Rule may actually be good business. As organizations respond to the demand of customers for more personal, individualized service, opportunities to operate from an open heart may increase. These developments are so far seen only in a rudimentary form which I hope heralds a growing trend. My strategy is rooted in the expectation of that change, and to help it along, I have determined to act as though it is already a reality.

Culture is the key to understanding service. An organization's cultural orientation has implications for every aspect of its operations and its internal and external relationships. Hence, each orientation tends to produce a typical attitude and style of customer service.

The effect of culture is quite aside from whether the service is "good" or "bad." Each produces a kind of service which is qualitatively different from the others, different in "taste" and "feel." Each may give "good" or "bad" service, and the definition of good service will differ from one culture to the other. I think this distinction is important, but I find that in much discussion and writing about service, the "goodness" of service is confused with its style. For example, warm, friendly and relaxed service is not necessarily "better" than fast, efficient and impersonal service, but it certainly feels different. The *style* of service which an organization offers, both internally and to its customers, is a reflection of that combination of values, preoccupations, social structure, norms and mores which we call organization culture.

#### ***Power Oriented Service***

The Power orientation is associated with a style of service which emphasizes status and prestige. When it is well done, it makes the customer "feel like a king." The hierarchical emphasis of the Power orientation leads naturally to status differentiation in service. Different grades and classes of service are offered to customers based on their status, prestige, wealth, or the price of the goods or services consumed. On a recent flight to Europe I experienced very strongly the typical "feel" of Power oriented service. I was waited on hand and foot in the first class cabin with obsequious courtesy. The service was choreographed so as to make one feel like one of the elite, but it also managed to convey the impression that imposters would be found out. In the jeans and tennis shoes I usually wear for long distance travel, I felt a bit like a tramp who had wandered into the Ritz. Nothing was said, of course, but I knew, and I knew that "they" knew that I knew!

Power oriented service is typical of restaurants, hotels, resorts, casinos and gentlemen's clothing establishments catering to the prestigious and affluent, particularly in Britain and Europe. It can be found in sales oriented organizations which seek to influence purchases through lavish entertainment and gifts. A more aggressive and competitive variety of the Power orientation can be found in the salesrooms of automobile dealerships, but there the energy is often devoted to making the customer feel inferior, rather than royal!

If a strong leader becomes the champion of service, the Power oriented organization can be extremely service conscious. A classic example is the late J. W. Marriott, who was said to read every customer complaint personally, and who was fond of getting his subordinates up at 4:00 a.m. to make a surprise inspection tour of the kitchens. Such leaders make a strong impact on their organizations. If they are both strong and benevolent, then the quality of service they engender can be both willing and friendly. Often, however, there is more than a little motivation

by fear in such leaders' style of management. The fear results in a degree of servility on the part of employees.

The Power orientation at its best, and at its highest level of integrity, is often found today in relatively small, owner managed businesses such as restaurants, hotels, summer camps and resorts. Sometimes family operated, often with a family atmosphere, these organizations manage to combine the unity of direction which comes from a strong leader, with the warmth and responsiveness to individuals' needs typical of the Support culture. They are small enough for one person to exercise control over the details, and the employees are bonded to the owner by ties of affection, not just fear. Such organizations seem to be the last bastion of the benevolent autocracy which was such a prominent feature of the best business leadership in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

### ***Role Oriented Service***

Quality of service in the Role oriented organization tends to revolve around the *transaction*, and around systems designed to make transactions faster, more efficient and more profitable to the organization. The Role orientation lends itself to the provision of goods and services on a large scale, and to a focus on cost, price, and margins. Good service, for such organizations, means devising efficient service systems which meet the needs of the typical customer, and then managing the system so that the human components play their parts as designed.

In the United States, our ideas of service are often synonymous with fast, efficient systems, designed to produce uniform and predictable outcomes. Such "excellent companies" as Federal Express and McDonald's have built reputations on the reliability of their systems in meeting customers' expectations. Their service is valued for cost/benefit and uniformity, rather

than for making people feel warm and comfortable. Similarly, when we complain about service systems such as the U.S. Post Office, or our local bank, we concern ourselves primarily with convenience (long lines, long waits on the phone, not having the information you want); with reliability (losing or delaying the mail, inappropriately bouncing checks); and with whether we are getting value for our money (continual rises in charges with diminished levels of service).

In accordance with their cultural priorities (order, system, predictability, costs, prices and profits) Role oriented organizations tend to try to control variability in their environment. Their priorities are best met by having simple, hence reliable and cheap systems, which provide uniform goods and services to customers with uniform needs. During the last few decades, as our needs and wants have become more differentiated and unpredictable, systems have had to become more complex in the attempt to respond to customer wants, and they have predictably become less reliable as a result. When I compare the management in large bureaucratic organizations today with what it was thirty years ago when I began my own career, it is clear that both quality and effort are up, but customer satisfaction is down. I believe that a major reason is the proliferating complexity of systems designed to offer variety and choice to customers. As Perrow has pointed out, complex, closely coupled systems are inherently unstable and unreliable, no matter how much human effort goes into trying to make them work (Perrow, 1984a).

The public contact employees of large bureaucracies are often seen by the public to be excessively rigid, uncaring and unresponsive to customers' needs. In my experience, these same employees feel themselves to be controlled and frustrated by the systems and structures under which they work. Most people, particularly those who choose work involving high contact with the public, enjoy being able to give service and satisfy people's needs. Often, their hands are tied.

Recently, the Customer Service people in an electric utility I work with got together the field supervisors in a series of meetings and asked, "What could we do in the short term to remove "service inhibitors?" Service inhibitors were defined as "anything which prevents our field crews and telephone contact people from giving customers the service they want, and which our people would like to give them." It had been expected that most of the ideas would involve additional manpower, money, and equipment. These commodities are in short supply in any cost sensitive operation. In fact, people enthusiastically contributed over fifty suggestions for short term service improvements, only one of which required additional resources. The rest were matters of changing current practices and policies, or giving field people additional discretion to decide which requests from customers were reasonable.

Role oriented organizations also tend to be inward turning in their preoccupations and their priorities. They are often large and centralized, and what this means in systems terms is that contact with the environment is limited to the thin, often stretched and overworked "skin" of the organization. The vast preponderance of organization members are busy responding to one another, and to the requirements of the systems which control their daily activities.

Thus today, large, bureaucratic organizations are in trouble as customers demand more variety, and particularly as they demand more responsiveness to their individual needs. The dilemma which exists for such organizations when they want to improve customer service is that they are in trouble because of their size, their systems, their structures and their associated culture. The difficulty is not, I think, because of any inherent incapacity, personality traits, or unwillingness to respond on the part of their managers or the people who do the work.

Of course, with our penchant for finding the closest and most obvious culprit for anything that goes wrong, it is the employees who usually are fingered as responsible for service failures.



Then the need for improved service is addressed by providing training and closer supervision, and perhaps by introducing incentives and awards (e.g., "employee of the month"). It is typical of the Role (and the Power) orientations to assume that it is the employees who need to be fixed, and not the conditions under which they work.

### *Achievement Oriented Service*

The Achievement oriented organization marches to its own drum, and its concept of service derives from its own sense of purpose and mission. The mission may or may not include a focus on service, but in any event, the definition of good service is based on internal values and standards. The standards sometimes bear scant resemblance to customers' ideas of what they want.

The world of high technology abounds with examples of unilateral definition of customers' needs. Apple Computer under Steve Jobs was a classic example of the Achievement culture. Asked what was Apple's mission, Jobs is reported to have said, "To change the world!" He decided that the Macintosh computer was what computer users needed to change the world, and he focused the energies of the organization on that product. Meanwhile, fanatically loyal users of earlier Apple products languished, fretted and eventually became disaffected as their requests for product information and service were ignored.

Scientists, engineers, professionals and staff specialists of all kinds who love their work and believe they are making a contribution tend to share the Achievement culture's implicit assumption that what the customer (or the organization, or the world) needs is what they offer. In consulting with these professionals on how they can be more effective in dealing with their clients, difficulties in giving service are nearly always framed as problems in influencing others. "How can we get the line managers to see that our new performance appraisal program is a real

improvement over what they're doing?" "How can we get the refineries to adopt our new catalyst?" "How can I get my patients to take their medicine as prescribed?" "How can we get the Program Managers to cooperate with our improved budgeting process?"

Thus, service is seen as *doing* something *to* someone . The customer becomes the target or object of the service activity. Individuals and organizations which are highly oriented to Achievement tend to define the service relationship unilaterally, and "good customers" are those who respect the service provider's expertise and cooperate in their own treatment. In other words, good customers are "good patients."

The strength of the Achievement orientation to service is in its dedication to excellence, to innovation, and to professional integrity. Achievement oriented organizations will often spare no time, money or expense to get it right, make it work, solve the problem. Because their people are dedicated to their work and believe in what they are doing, they tend to be self motivated, and to drive themselves and others to high levels of personal performance.

Achievement oriented people like challenges. If an Achievement oriented organization has a concept of service as central to its mission, it will put the same energy into achieving high standards of service as it would put into any other activity. Although I am not familiar at first hand with Jan Carlzon of SAS, I have read reports of his drive to improve customer service in that organization. They read like a classic example of the passionate striving for excellence which is typical of the Achievement orientation. A few quotes from Service America give the flavor:

"With the help of his key executives, Carlzon began to preach and teach this gospel of customer orientation energetically and persistently throughout the organization....

"According to Olle Stiwenius, director of the internal SAS management consultants, 'Jan Carlzon really masterminded the turnabout maneuver. He... himself supplied the vision to get it going and the energy to see it through.'"

"Carlzon's approach was characterized by an almost obsessive commitment to managing the customer's experience at all points in the cycle of service." (Albrecht and Zemke, 1985).

This is visionary leadership at its best: thrusting for excellence, preaching the message, inspiring the troops, energizing the organization from the top. Doubtless, the strategy called for sampling customer opinion, responding swiftly to complaints, and the like. But the accounts one reads do not convey that the customer was in the driver's seat. Carlzon was in the driver's seat, and the organization was responding to his vision. The idea of service in the Achievement culture is active: shaping, building, creative, rather than receptive or responsive. For the latter, we must look to the Support orientation.

### ***Support Oriented Service***

The Support orientation is in important ways the other side of the coin from the Achievement culture. Both are internally motivated. In the Power and Role cultures, people are controlled by the application of external rewards and punishments, e.g., fear of losing one's job, or hope of monetary rewards, and promotions. In contrast, it is intrinsically fulfilling for most people to perform and participate in the Support and Achievement cultures.

The Support culture emphasizes "being" values of cooperation, belonging, caring, responsiveness and receptivity. These are opposite from the "doing" values of Achievement: action, autonomy, performance, innovation, building and shaping the environment.

Thus, the idea of service in the Support culture is much more oriented to listening to customers or clients, empathizing with their needs, and responding to their concerns. Rather than actively shaping the environment, the Support culture endeavors to flow with external forces, and work with them.

### **Comparing Service Styles**

For example, the Achievement response to a problem is to attack and overcome it. The Support response is like the martial art of aikido. One joins with the forces of the others, working with them in a kind of dance, the outcome of which is not a victory, but is more likely to be learning for all parties, and mutual appreciation.

Where the strategy of the Achievement orientation is to offer or sell something new or better to the customer, the Support strategy is to ask, "What can we do for you?"

Staff/line relationships within an organization are often an interesting study in the contrast between active and responsive orientations on the part of staff when they are serving the line. Some staff groups have high standards of professionalism and are oriented to excellence in the practice of their professions. They spend a great deal of time in their own offices, thinking up ways to help the line: new technology, better systems, innovative ways to solve problems. They have well articulated visions of how the application of their expertise can make their organizations better. When they invent or discover something particularly exciting, they venture out with great enthusiasm to "sell" line managers on adopting it. When they don't make a sale, they interpret it as a failure on the part of the line to comprehend the benefits which are being offered. They characterize the line as "resistant to change," or "conservative." These staff groups are behaving in a typically Achievement oriented way.

Other groups conceive of themselves more as identifying and responding to the needs of line managers. They spend a lot of time in line managers' offices, talking with them about their operations and their problems. They look for ways to be useful to their "clients." They get to know them personally, often building close relationships which are over and above what's required to do the work. They are often so busy putting out fires and performing other services for the line that they don't have time to think and be creative. Their way of giving service is typically Support oriented.

*An Example of the Difference between Support and Achievement Service*

I have spent quite a lot of time with training and management development people in organizations, and there the contrast between Support and Achievement orientations is marked. I remember particularly one extremely competent and creative training manager who devoted his time primarily to finding and bringing into the organization the best and latest in "experience based" training. He spent a lot of company money on outside consultants, and he put on some of the best designed and conducted training it has been my pleasure to see within a company.

Most of the executives in the company were engineers. They didn't understand or share my friend's passion for interpersonal process. It was a very "bottom line" oriented company, and these managers couldn't see a relationship between the training and the profits. They tolerated the training activities without great conviction, up to the time when the company laid off a lot of people during a recession. Then they closed their expensive training center and my friend lost his job. When the decision was made, there just wasn't any understanding or support for his activities among the top executive group.

There is a brighter sequel to the story. My friend did a lot of soul searching during the period between jobs, and when he finally got another, also in a scientifically oriented

organization, he completely reformed his strategy. Initially he didn't make a move without making the rounds of his client managers to discover whether they had a need for it. He saved his creativity for solving their problems and meeting their needs. He asked lots of questions before he developed anything. When he finally had a training product to offer, he needed to do very little selling, since he was producing to the order of his customers. From running one of the most isolated and Achievement oriented training operations I've seen, he came to run one of the most connected and responsive Support oriented ones I've worked with. His training probably wasn't as creative and ground breaking as it had been before, but it was many times more appreciated.

The Support orientation to service comes ultimately from the heart, in contrast to the Achievement orientation, which flows from the mind and from the will. It springs from our empathy and sympathy with the needs, problems and dilemmas of other human beings, and from the wish to respond and to help. Where the Achievement orientation is clever creative, and determined, the Support orientation is compassionate and caring.

### **Examples of Role Oriented Service: The American Way**

We Americans are not greatly inclined towards the Support orientation to service. We tend instead towards the Role orientation. I am particularly struck with the contrast on those occasions when I fly an American airline to Europe and then go on a European airline to a further destination, particularly if my onward travel is on Aer Lingus, the Irish airline. American cabin attendants at their best are efficient, attractive and friendly. Irish cabin attendants radiate warmth. In my experience, transactions with them have a personal quality which is indefinable but unmistakable. It is a blend of being present for the weary traveller, and being genuinely interested in him or her as a person.

I don't believe it is a matter of training with these airlines, so much as it is the style of a national culture. That isn't to say that organization cultures can't be led or shaped or changed, but if they are left to themselves they will take the shape and the style which their employees bring with them when they come to work in the morning. If you want to change the style, you have to start there and work with what you have.

Another example of the difference was brought home to my partner and me when we emigrated to the US from England some years ago. I had been away for eight years; my wife was born in Britain. We were both struck by the difference in service which we encountered around getting various household services: rug cleaning, appliance repair, plumbing, department store deliveries, opening bank accounts, and the like.

The American organizations we dealt with tended to be large and well organized, compared to their British counterparts. They had precision systems for delivering service and, by and large, the systems worked. However, if your need was not provided for by the system, you were up against a blank, uncomprehending wall. There was often, literally, no one you could talk with about your problem.

### **An Example of Support Oriented Service**

The contrast is illustrated by an incident I remember in a London restaurant after a late dinner. The hostess called a taxi to take us to a midnight sleeper for the North. The minutes went by, and no taxi came. It began to look as though we would miss our train, and my client meeting the next day. Seeing our distress, the hostess volunteered that her boy friend was picking her up after work. Although it was well out of their way, they happily took us round to the station. We caught our train, and we carried the glow of their generous act with us on our onward journey.

The incident proves nothing by itself, but it has been repeated in less dramatic ways many times. In Britain, systems for service delivery are not so highly evolved, and they often don't work very well. When they don't, there is usually a human being on the other end of the telephone with whom you can talk about your problem. Often you can evoke the sympathy of that person for your plight, and when that happens, acts of individual kindness occur. The rule is bent, or you are put a bit ahead of your rightful place in the queue, or someone goes out of their way to help.

### **The Role Orientation Constricts the Heart**

In the U.S. we emphasize the system, and often the system does not permit the individual to respond from the heart. The rule isn't flexible, or, as is the case with service representatives who work over the telephone, transactions are monitored by supervisors for brevity. Taking the time to listen and help is discouraged.

Tight, efficient systems don't permit people to respond from the heart. People who work in them become frustrated and irritated by their lack of freedom to respond, and they close down emotionally. They check their compassion and their empathy at the door, because to experience their warm feelings for people they are prevented from helping would create painful internal conflict.

### **What Customers Want**

I believe customers are coming increasingly to place a higher value on the warmth of the Support orientation in their search for service. They are looking for service transactions where they are treated as worthwhile individuals; where their opinions about what they want and need are respected; where they are assisted by people they can relate to on a level of equality; and where caring and kindness characterize the human interactions.



This is the trend I see over the recent past, and I am not sure why. Perhaps it is the growing realization that we are all going to have to do with the same or a lower standard of material living as time goes on. If we don't look forward with the same confidence to moving ahead, we may want to enjoy where we are a bit more. Perhaps it is the feeling that too many of our transactions are with systems, too few with people. We want those fewer interactions we have with people to be of a higher quality. Perhaps it is the "high tech, high touch" trend John Naisbitt (Naisbitt, 1982) talks about. Perhaps, living in a competitive, abrasive and insecure world where relationships are often transitory and easily fractured, we are developing a "hidden hunger" to be loved a little bit more.

Whatever the reason, customers and the organizations which serve them are growing more sensitive to service quality. When organizations become concerned about improving service, they tend to see it in terms of their own cultural biases. It is that tendency which this discussion is intended to counterbalance. Increasingly, when customers talk about wanting better service, they mean the style of service which is typical of the Support culture. That doesn't mean customers don't want efficient systems or excellent, innovative approaches to meeting their needs. They want these, and more. Organizations which don't learn how to listen to customers from the perspective of the Support framework will not understand what they are hearing. They may put effort into improving service in ways which customers are happy enough to have, but which don't meet their deeper priorities, their "hidden hungers."

### **Love and Service**

A lot of people want to give warmer service than they are permitted to. In my experience, people who give service are more often frustrated by the circumstances, systems and procedures under which they must operate than they are by the people they serve. And when I

talk to leaders and managers about balancing Achievement with Support in their organizations, there are far more wistful looks in the audience than there are antagonistic ones. Many people are urged by their hearts to be kinder, more responsive, more supportive in their business interactions. In the Support orientation to service, people's needs to be cared for and to be treated as individuals come together with the unmet need most of us have to be more nurturing and responsive in our business lives.

### **The Difficulty in Changing to a Support Orientation to Service**

We are often blocked by the driving, competitive climates of our organizations, and by the rigidity of systems set up to assure that customers have uniform service at a price. Most organizations are too far out of balance to be able to integrate caring service with efficient systems and the drive for bottom line results. They recognize the need for change, but they cling to what they know best, unable to let go of its security in order to reach for something which seems riskier at the same time as it offers improvement.

It is a genuine risk. The relaxation of controls can permit sloppy, uncaring performance, as well as service from the heart. Responsible managers will not let go of control, unless they can have some trust and confidence in the improvements in service to be expected.

In this respect, service is like quality. So long as mistrust is behind the inspection of people's work, they will not assume personal responsibility for it, and quality will be a persistent, nagging, unsolved problem, beset with adversarial relationships. When people are given and accept responsibility for their own quality, that situation improves, sometimes dramatically. I believe that service will prove amenable to the same approaches which have worked with quality: top management commitment, combined with systems designed to give the management of service over to the people who deliver it.

### **Support Oriented Service Cannot be Faked**

It will only work if the process is managed from the heart, not just because it is good business, but because it feels right. It is not enough for business leaders to believe in service as a Support oriented activity; they have to "walk the talk" as well, serving the service providers from their hearts, whether the latter are internal staff or work with customers.

That is very simple, and also very hard. It is hard because most organization cultures don't support development of the heart. It is simple, because there are certain behaviors which, practiced faithfully, will open the heart of the one who practices, and will warm the hearts of those impacted. When the leaders I work with ask me what I mean by practicing love in business, here is how I suggest they treat other people and the organization.

- Give credit for their ideas and build on their contributions.
- Listen to their concerns, hopes, fears, pain: be there for them when they need an empathetic ear.
- Treat their feelings as important.
- Be generous with your trust. Give them the benefit of the doubt.
- See them as valuable and unique in themselves, and not simply for their contribution to the task.
- Respond actively to others' needs and concerns; give help and assistance when it is not your job.
- Look for the good and the positive in others, and acknowledge it when you find it.
- Nurture their growth: teach, support, encourage, smooth the path.
- Take care of the organization. Be responsive and responsible to its needs as a living system.

These are the signs and signals of love in business, and they are the behaviors of a Support orientation to service. For many of us, they also define a discipline which can lead us in the direction of greater personal satisfaction and continued growth—across the frontier of our own hearts.

