Marina, M. (2004). From science to citizenship: An analysis of 20th-century trends in corporate rhetoric on employee education. Studies in the Education of Adults, 36(2), 206–221.© NIACE, 2004. All rights reserved.

# *From science to citizenship: An analysis of twentieth-century trends in corporate rhetoric on employee education*

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## Abstract

This paper presents a study of the rhetoric of employee training in two US management trade journals, *Personnel* and *Management Review*, from 1920 to 2000. A discussion of forces that have influenced US employee development theory and practice throughout the twentieth century is followed by findings of a thematic analysis of the trade journal articles. Four themes emerged from the analysis: the importance of science, perceived inequalities in ability to learn, concern over cost, and corporate training as citizenship training. The analysis reveals consistency of these themes, with organisational control becoming less overtly expressed and increasingly couched in language that emphasises the worth and needs of the individual.

## Keywords

employee development, employee education, training, citizenship, management journals.

## Introduction

Throughout the twentieth century, social, cultural and economic changes in much of the industrialised world greatly affected work and the individual's relationship to work. Some of these changes – for instance, automation, increased use of technology, and business globalisation – have created an economic climate and industrial structure that calls for flexibility and rapid change. For these purposes, the organisation must be able to maintain control over the efficiency of its workforce. Other forces – such as increased application of social sciences to employee relations and the influence of marketing on the culture at large – have offered management new tools for communicating its workforce needs in a manner in which employees see some personal benefit beyond economic reward, in adapting to the corporate programme.

Because it is shaped by beliefs about the employee's role in the organisation, one of the areas in which these forces have had the greatest impact has undoubtedly been employee education. By *employee education*, I mean here the systematic effort by an organisation to teach its employees new skills, to introduce them to new approaches to work, or to shape their attitudes. For instance, a programme of employee education might teach a group of employees to use a new computer system, it might provoke them to think more in terms of teamwork, or it might encourage them to value more highly their relationships with customers. This definition thus includes both what is commonly known as 'training' as well as much of what some organisations refer to as 'human resource development' (HRD) and 'organisation development' (OD), or efforts to increase productivity and efficiency of the organisation by addressing human skills, knowledge, behaviour, attitudes, and interactions.

The ultimate goal of employee education has always been to better control the effectiveness of the workforce in order to improve business results, but over time it has come to be packaged as a more human-oriented enterprise, with the modern-day discourse of employee education offering a far greater emphasis on the development of the person than in years past. But the focus on the individual has emerged only in tandem with an increasingly subtle – and perhaps as a result, more powerful – emphasis on organisational efficiency and control. Today's corporate education promises personal fulfilment even as it limits the boundaries of that fulfilment. Over the twentieth century, the corporation's interest in shaping its employees remains constant. What changes is its approach: it begins with an application of scientific principles and ends with an appropriation of wide-ranging realms of the employee's world, from personal health to interpersonal relationships to community and worldwide citizenship.

In this paper I make two assumptions. First, I assume that there has in fact been a trend toward a more person-oriented packaging of employee education in the US, as suggested by the work of scholars such as Hancock (1999) and Prilleltensky (1990), as well as industry authors (e.g., Kinni, 2000; Leigh, 1996). Second, I assume that because this trend is significant and fundamental, it will have been reflected in twentieth-century US industry rhetoric about employee education. I make this assumption based on the tendency of professional journals, for which a central goal is to provide news about contemporary trends, to reflect current thought within the professions. Founded on these assumptions, the paper will offer support for the argument established above through an analysis of articles published in two US management trade journals, *Personnel* (*HR Focus* beginning in 1991) and *Management Review* (formerly *The Management Review*), between 1920 and 2000. The analysis will focus on changes in the way employee education has been framed over time in the US, as well as the changing assumptions such framing suggests as related to the trends of management (and of the greater culture) over the twentieth century.

In essence, then, this effort is an attempt to bring a historical and critical perspective to the understanding of US employee education through an examination of a sample of corporate employee education rhetoric. Ideally, this analysis will contribute to the broader discussion of organisational practices and communication strategies surrounding the employer–employee relationship.

Before embarking on a discussion of this effort, it will be useful to review some of the historical trends that have played a part in shaping the approach to US employer–employee relations in general over the past century. The section that follows introduces these forces, offers some analysis of each and, in so doing, provides a backdrop for the later discussion of the manifestation of these forces in the trade journal articles.

## Forces affecting the US corporate approach to employee education over the twentieth century

Each of the forces to be considered here has had an important impact on the employee's role as learner and the organisation's role as teacher over the twentieth century in the US. These forces fall into three general categories: the fragmentation of work and rise of scientific management in the early 1900s, the mid-century influence of psychology and the rise of human relations-style management, and the globalisation and rapid change that characterise industry in more recent years.

### *Scientific management*

As industrialisation tightened its grip on work and society in the early 1900s, theorisations of the industrial process emerged to guide its direction, and notions of the worker and his or her formation would be forever altered. Frederick Taylor's scientific management and Henry Ford's assembly line model for production revolutionised work and the employee–work relationship in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Taylor's ideas, first disseminated in 1911 with the publishing of his immediately influential book *The Principles of Scientific Management* (Wirth, 1980), were undoubtedly among the most fundamental in shaping twentieth-century industrial thought. Although Taylor himself envisioned a workplace in which employees could enjoy satisfaction from their work, his ideas led to a worker alienation and objectification in industrial life bemoaned for decades. Ford's system of mass production, first applied in 1914, further rationalised the process of work and, by extension, the role of the worker within the organisation. Although Fordism's totalising influence on the larger society did not take hold until mid-century, the scientific rationalism on which it was based had already begun to shape beliefs and policies of worker education when it was first introduced (Kincheloe, 1999).

### *The influence of psychology and other social sciences*

It was not until 1945 that the Society for Industrial and Organizational (I/O) Psychology was established, but the origins of that field date back to the early 1900s (Smither, 1988) and the influence of its tenets has so thoroughly penetrated management philosophy over the century that it is impossible to talk about management without invoking the psychological–scientific approach to knowledge. Most notably, the motivational psychology of the early to mid-1900s – theories such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Herzberg's hygiene-motivator theory – left a deep impression on corporate–employee relations and the later appearing fields of personnel, training and development, and human resources management. Human relations theory, which is often viewed (erroneously, it has often been argued) as fundamentally opposite to scientific management, and which dominated much of the twentieth-century approach to employee relations and training, draws heavily from this motivational psychology body of knowledge and the philosophical tenets on which it is based (Smither, 1988).

The powerful influence of the social sciences on management and employer–employee relations in the middle 1900s created in the arena of employer–employee relations what Max Weber termed *rationalisation*: in part, the technical takeover of that which was not inherently technical, wherein relationships, human interaction, emotions and the like come to be treated as rational phenomena to be systematically quantified and controlled (Brubaker, 1984). In a comparison between the scientific management and human relations approaches to employee relations, Hancock (1999) posits that the epistemological and ontological 'truths' held in these two traditions are fundamentally the same: both are based on the notion of separation of subject from object. 'That is,' writes the author, 'they were [both] grounded in the metaphysical belief that the domain of the human subject and the material environment were both separate and hierarchically ordered' and that '[t]his…hierarchy…privileges the human subject as potential and indeed rightful master [sic] of the material environment…' (pp. 157–8; sic notation in original). This belief is clearly manifest in the motivational psychology that, again, provides much of the foundation for I/O psychology: the fulfilled and satisfied worker – a prerequisite for organisational efficiency – has 'mastered' her or his relationship to the environment.

### *Employee relations professionalised*

As I/O psychology was taking hold in the corporate sector in mid-century, the structure of the corporation began to change to accommodate it. One of the most obvious examples of this change was the emergence of the personnel specialisation in the 1940s. The personnel department enabled corporations for the first time to claim purposeful attention to the human side of management. Still, at its beginnings and ever since, personnel (now generally called *human resources*, part of the effort to humanise the image of the corporation–employee relationship) concerned itself with the role of the worker as it related to the productivity of the organisation (Hancock, 1999). The personnel system replaced the more informal handling of employment issues by individual factory or office supervisors, and as a *system*, further rationalised the way the human and the corporation interacted (Hill, 1981).

### *The 'new' management*

Even the seemingly radical management approaches that have become popular over the last two decades – those drawing from anthropology, physics, and even Eastern philosophies – sound the familiar ring of the earlier modes of thinking they seek to replace. Management approaches that embrace the language of culture, of organisation development (OD) and of chaos and flux suggest what is human, organic, and liberating, but as Hancock (1999) notes, the new, gentler approach to management could not exist if its adherents – and the culture that surrounds and supports it – were not firmly entrenched in the soft–hard dualism from which it emerged. Prilleltensky (1990) demonstrates this point in writing of the OD enterprise, 'the single most important feature…is its impartial and humanistic façade… Owners and workers dialogue "as if" they were equal, thus gaining the latter's cooperation and subtly dissuading them from organizing politically to fulfill their aspirations' (p. 85).

### *Mandated growth*

In the sense that increased emphasis on humanistic concerns has focused corporate energy on the growth and satisfaction of the worker, it has influenced employee education in profound ways. The new expectations for worker participation in managerial efforts, for continual and rapid learning of new skills, for development of not just the worker but also of the *person* – as with expectations present in career development, values management, personal coaching, and the like – all reflect the dual interests of human relations management, concerned with the individual, and classical scientific management, concerned with cost, productivity, and efficiency. The worker is encouraged to participate and develop, but growth is mandated, normalised and measured. Corporations exert control by seeming *not* to exert control: as Schacht (1985) argues, '[s]oftened power circumscribes [workers'] consciousness, allowing illusions of free choice to persist while available choices are curtailed through a subtle foreshortening of their imagination' (p. 513).

## 'Managing' culture

The current popularity of the organisation-as-culture metaphor – a phenomenon of the last 15 years or so (Frost *et al.*, 1991) – deserves special attention in this discussion of contemporary management. Before organisations began to borrow from anthropology and other social sciences to think of themselves as *cultures*, the means they could purposefully employ for employee education were limited to the traditional: classrooms, newsletters, public addresses, and so on. But if an organisation *is* a culture, there is nothing about it that is *not* a means for education-as-socialisation: culture, after all, is most often defined as a force which serves to perpetuate the values, norms and assumptions of the group (see, for example, Langness, 1987; Lustig and Koester, 1993). Within the organisational culture paradigm, executives could begin to see socialisation opportunities everywhere, at every moment of organisational life. In other words, as soon as organisations had the words to name the processes and structures through which they were already teaching and socialising, they became able to manipulate these processes and structures in purposeful, planned ways. Suddenly, such aspects of culture as rites of passage, systems of 'lineage' and mythologies of good and evil became opportunities for carefully managed control over employee activity. To quote Hancock (1999), the corporate-culture approach seeks to effect a 'reformulation of 'reality'…through the purposeful application of a constellation of related discursive formations and material practices' (p. 162). 'Managing culture' is an oxymoron that aptly describes the softer approach to management of the late twentieth century: it tries to apply scientific rationalism ('managing') to that which is organic ('culture').

### *Globalization and rapid change*

The current era – roughly the 1980s to the present – has been characterised as one of globalisation, flux, and uncertainty. Best-selling management books of the last decade or so offer unending advice on dealing effectively with change, sporting such titles as *Leading Change*, *Race for the World*, *Managing Across Borders*, *The Dance of Change*, *Managing at the Speed of Change*, and *Deep Change*. Both globalisation – the dissolution of trade barriers between nations and resulting surge of international competitiveness – and the decline of Fordism – an economic shift that rewards industries which are able to make rapid changes in response to market forces – have been named as primary forces in the fundamental shift toward the 'flexible' economy and workforce that is called for today (Brown, 1997a). In response to this call, organisations have sought to remake the employee into one capable of changing focus, changing location, and changing expertise at short notice. In the post-Fordist workplace, writes Casey (1995), '[w]orkers must be willing and able to learn and perform new tasks, take on different roles and be easily redeployed…' (p. 37). This demand for flexibility can be credited for the new popularity of slogans such as 'lifelong learning' and 'career resiliency,' which suggest that the benefit lies with the individual, who becomes wiser and more shatter-resistant in the new corporate development system. But there is another side to the high demand for flexibility left invisible in such rhetoric. As Brown (1997b) writes of the British economy, 'all these developments may make for a more flexible and competitive labour market, . . . but they also make for one in which employees have less security and less ability to control their own working lives and to plan for the future' (pp. 74–5).

The changing conditions of current industrial life are not, however, limited to the economic and technological. Just as influential have been changes in social values, and corporations have rushed not just to keep up, but to appropriate these changes as their own. The 1990s might be characterised as an era of increased interest in spirituality within work, in finding personal meaning in one's vocation, and in 'downshifting' from a high-power, high-stress lifestyle, as evidenced, again, by best-sellers with such titles as *Doing Best by Doing Good*, *Reawakening the Spirit in Work*, and *Soul: Profits with Principles* (Whitmyer, 1994). These trends, along with such wider social trends as multiculturalism, have been adopted by the corporation as benefits to offer in exchange for worker commitment. For instance, corporations might offer workers a sense of spirituality through corporate values, character sensitivity through diversity training and even personal enlightenment through meditation and self-hypnosis (Lindsay, 1987). Even as the employee development industry ventures into this new spiritualised realm, though, it maintains its fundamental pragmatism: as Prilleltensky (1990) writes, 'Despite the pseudo-neutral language of "Organizational Development" . . . the fact remains that these innovations were merely instrumental in improving business and as such had a clear pro-management bias' (p. 74).

Perhaps the best example of this blending of moral and financial interests is to be found in the practice of diversity management: organisations have responded to the dual pressures of a public interested in respecting cultural differences and a workforce and customer base that continues to become more and more heterogenous in ethnic background, English-language proficiency, and lifestyle. To be seen as a good corporate citizen, the organisation must at least appear to care about respecting human differences, and to remain profitable, it must be able effectively to employ and sell to a wide variety of people. This conflating of moral and financial is summed up no better than in the now clichéd quote commonly offered by corporate executives speaking on the topic of managing diversity: 'It's not just the right thing to do; it makes good business sense.' As one industry professional phrased it,

> *Diversity recruitment and training may once have been a nicety in corporate America, but those days are long gone. Diversity development is now a necessary ingredient to create opportunity and to keep America globally competitive.* (Peak, 1995, p. 1)

Even the term 'managing diversity' presents something of an oxymoron, suggesting that the realm of human difference can, or should, be manipulated toward financially profitable ends.

## Themes emerging from management trade journals, 1920–2000

The previous discussion provides historical and social context for the analysis of text to be presented in the sections that follow. This research revealed a surprising endurance of fundamental beliefs and practices – including those that would seem to be thoroughly contemporary – throughout the time period in question. What seems to have changed are not the essential assumptions about the nature of the employee and the corporation's role in training the employee, but the degree to which these assumptions are coupled with the values of humanism, in the sense of emphasising the interests, inherent worth, and dignity of the person, or of focusing on humans' 'unique capacities and abilities, to be cultivated and celebrated for their own sake' (Audi, 1995, p. 340). Although there appears to be a back-and-forth dynamic in the introduction of this sort of humanism into employee education – with certain periods embracing it fully and others seemingly rejecting – the overall trend is that of an increasing rhetoric of person-oriented values. Ultimately, the language in the more contemporary articles reveals a neat coupling of person-oriented and business-oriented concerns. The sections that follow offer a discussion of such changes in the most salient themes that emerged from the texts, as well as some perspective on their origins and implications.

## *Method*

The articles examined come from two management trade journals, *Personnel* and *Management Review*. These two were chosen because they are both trade, not academic, journals, meaning that they should reflect the prevailing management ideas of the day, and because they are among the few journals addressing employee education published continuously from the 1920s through 2000. Moreover, while they both approach employee relations and education from a business perspective, each represents a particular point of view within that approach. *Management Review* is a journal for executives; it features articles that focus clearly, and with no apologies, on profit-making and the efficient use of material and human resources. *Personnel,* on the other hand, focuses almost exclusively on the employer–employee relationship, seems to target itself toward human resources and similar professionals, and features a somewhat less bottom line-oriented tone. Because the two journals present similar information with different agendas, an examination of both should yield richer data than would two more similar journals.

The research begins with articles from 1920 because, as noted earlier, it was at this time that issues of employee training became increasingly important in the corporate world. In gathering text for the analysis, I chose one article dealing with employee education from each journal for every fifth year from 1920 through 2000, making a total of 34 articles. Articles were chosen on the basis of their relevance to the subject of study; those with mere reference to employee education were passed over, when possible, for others that dealt with the topic more substantially. In a few cases, either no appropriate article was available for the desired year or the desired volume was missing, and instead articles were chosen from the closest available volume.

As this study seeks to illuminate the discourse about employee education as it is expressed in these two bodies of text, the texts were analysed thematically, with language examined at both syntactic and semantic levels (van Dijk, 1991). The thematic analysis entailed searching for key notions in each article by attending to parts of the text that seem to shape its essential character, what van Manen (1990) calls the 'selective' approach to thematic analysis. The first step thus involved reading the 34 articles searching for salient themes related to ideas about training and education and the role of the corporation and the individual in those activities. Each article was then reread, and passages were coded according to the themes identified, resulting in an identification of dominant themes and subthemes.

The final step was to identify rhetorical elements – including tone, word choice, and syntax – that both reveal and help produce ideological positions about the organisation, the employee, and employee development. As Kress (1985) writes, '[t]he connection between language and ideology exists at many levels: at the lexical level and at the grammatical–syntactic level' (p. 30). The task here was thus to select from the articles key phrases – those which seem to sum up a position or philosophy, and often those used repeatedly or as catch-phrases – and analyse both the choice and the combination of words used and the meanings they produce.

### *Themes emerging*

The four themes to be discussed here – science in employee education, perceived inequalities in workers' abilities to learn, concern over cost of training, and corporate training as citizenship training – each appear in some form in the earliest articles as well as in the latest. The next sections address each of the themes in turn.

### *Science as supreme*

Above all others, the theme that emerged most clearly and most consistently through the eight decades was that of the supremacy of the scientific method as a framework for educating employees. What did vary, however, was the manner in which science was invoked.

Text from the earlier part of the sample – the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s – revealed what today seems an unquestioning, ingenuous belief in the truth value of the scientific approach. Most notably, this sense emerges through the (often hyperbolic) use of some form of the word science in describing science's beneficial qualities, as well as through an emphasis on the need for scientifically designed methods. Authors urged readers to follow the 'proved technique' of 'genuinely scientific methods' in training and supervision (Carver, 1926, p. 126); to 'deal with the problem [of training] scientifically' and defer to the 'laws of learning' (Cushman, 1940, pp. 25–7); to follow a 'systematic method of training' with progress 'carefully charted' in an 'organized, systematic manner' (McGarvey, 1935, pp. 178–80); and to use 'scientific measurement' in training (Planty, 1945, p. 240). The authors make generalisations about the 'laws' of human nature, often in phrases beginning with 'man is…' or 'the natural reaction within the man will be…' (Rogers, 1919, pp. 2–3) or 'when a person is confronted with a job…' (Cushman, 1940, p. 27), or 'the natural tendency to…' (Berry, 1928, p. 229). One author boasts that trainees in a particular programme are '95 per cent as efficient as skilled workers' (Single-purpose training, 1940, p. 287); another bemoans the condition of certain aspects of training as 'in a very unscientific state, probably not more than 25 per cent efficient' (Berry, 1928, p. 228). As late as 1950, the language exposes an unabashed bias toward clinical methods: one article calls for 'a factual and statistic picture of training needs' with the need to systematically 'trace' education needs to particular types of employees (Houseknecht, 1950, pp. 283, 287).

*Humanism emerges within the scientific approach*. Beginning in the 1950s and 60s, the tone of the texts changes. Still apparent is a trust in the scientific approach, but it is a scientific approach softened, infused with a new person-oriented essence. The influence of motivational psychology – and its emphasis on worker satisfaction, self-actualisation, and concern for the individual – becomes apparent here. Articles offer advice on 'helping supervisors train themselves in human relations' by learning to listen to different points of view (Fredriksen and Martinson, 1955, p. 323); on teaching creativity by 'providing the…conditions that will remove…blocks and nurture whatever inherent talent [the employee] possesses' (Clark, 1965, p. 52); on helping trainers 'create a safe environment in which to experiment with…new behaviors' (Weathersby, 2000, p. 6); and on understanding that a 'company's strength [has] always been in the individuality of the people who [compose] it' (Wright, 1960, p. 10).

The scientific approach has not disappeared here, but it is no longer referred to in the calculating terms of a laboratory. Instead, it begins to couple itself with a person-oriented language: employees are living, feeling beings, but it is precisely this living and feeling that can be approached scientifically. One author refers to the 'body of hard knowledge' (seemingly, as opposed to soft knowledge) of which employee educators must avail themselves to 'perform the critical work of helping people develop' (Wright, 1960, p. 9); another invokes the unquestioned belief in progress in a definition of learning: 'the acquisition of new knowledge, skills, and abilities…which enable a person to do something he could not do before or do it better than before' (Whitesell and Pietrus, 1965, p. 45). This fusion of the scientific and the humanistic creates a strange logic in which the realm of the personal is instrumental for the organisation. An author writing about the 'Gestalt approach' to employee development, for instance, writes that 'people can live richer, fuller lives by becoming more self-aware' and that such personal growth 'is especially relevant to organizational goal-setting' (Karp, 1980, p. 58). Similarly, an article on career development advocates '*worker* enrichment through career development' (author's italics) and calls such career development 'management's best hope' for avoiding the problem of turnover (Griffith, 1980, p. 69). Perhaps most revealing of the rationalised and profit-oriented motives underlying humanism is the suggestion that the corporation utilise the new knowledge from motivational psychology to make the worker believe she or he is choosing to choose – as one author described it, on providing 'the supervisor with the proper understanding and tools so that he can motivate… employees to do their best for the company, *willingly*' (Imberman, 1970, p. 15; italics mine).

## Natural inequalities among workers

Related to the emphasis on scientific approach is the clear belief in 'natural' differences among workers' abilities to learn and succeed. Again, however, in the articles from earlier years this belief comes through in ways much more overt than it does today, and its development can be divided into three distinct periods.

In the earliest period – roughly the 1920s through the 1940s – the lower-level line employee is described as thoroughly malleable, as a 'blank slate' on which the company could (and should) inscribe the bits of its own knowledge it wants the worker to absorb. The intellectual limitations of the working masses are thus established in opposition to the capabilities of the managerial class. The goal of an employee education program is 'the creation of a state of mind' (Rogers, 1919, p. 2) in which 'the employer expects the employee to act according to logical processes,' but 'the employee usually does the reverse' (Rogers, 1919, p. 3). The worker is portrayed as having a 'natural tendency to slack off' (Berry, p. 229), requiring constant supervision; in fact, it must be explained to the worker 'why it is in his interest to be a good salesman [or employee]' (Hegarty, 1945, p. 265). 'Natural' intellectual differences among people are here expressed unabashedly: as one author plainly puts it, 'Some groups will need much more training than others' (Berry, 1928, p. 226). In deciding whom to train, 'the greatest care is used' (Single-purpose training, 1940, p. 286), so that employers can be sure they are training the trainable.

In the middle period – roughly the 1950s through the 1970s – 'natural' differences are acknowledged, but with a paradoxical effort to deny any bias that might result. Although as late as 1960 there is reference to 'men who just don't have the basic capacity to make good' (Shaw, 1960, p. 23), for the most part this period's articles reveal such a belief in a more covert manner. For instance, training is "tailored" to the individual,' for 'each possesses different aptitudes, interests and learning ability which govern his growth and development' (Houseknecht, 1950, p. 283). The organisation portrayed here is not discriminating; it is rather helping each person reach the goals delimited by his or her own intellectual capacities. Natural differences now become the organisation's key to discovering how to treat employees more humanely: each employee is 'a solitary and peculiar being,' and '[w]e grow either in obedience to the particular demands of our individual natures, or not at all' (Wright, 1960, p. 8). Trainers 'must be fully aware of the vast differences among the backgrounds of the trainees' (Gray and Borecki, 1970, p. 23) in order to help each develop to his or her full capacity.

In the relatively recent articles – those from the 1980s and later – an interesting twist on the approach to the question of unequal capability appears. Differences in ability or training need are acknowledged, but the acknowledgment is framed as appreciation for personal differences and made an image-building opportunity for the corporate enterprise. The most salient example of this sort of reframing might be diversity training itself, which seeks to both encourage employees to respect one another's differences and to broadcast a message that organisational leaders want to welcome workers and customers of all kinds. At the same time, diversity management is presented to industry insiders as a profitable endeavour. For instance, the running head of one article (Milburn, 1997) tells readers that '[i]f organizations are going to be successful in the next century, they are going to have to understand the cultural assumptions that come into play when members of an increasingly diverse workforce communicate' (p. 26). Another (Hemphill and Haines, 1995) warns readers that '[m]anaging offenses and avoiding discrimination and harassment issues are high-stake business issues. Workers who are unable or unwilling to function cooperatively hurt productivity, quality and profitability' (p. S5). Addressing diversity creates good public relations, but this is merely a by-product of its real value: it allows organisations to make use of new labour pools, to avoid discrimination lawsuits, and to capture new markets. In short, it represents the rational course of action for profit-minded executives.

In more general terms, in the past 20 or so years employees are seen to benefit from the corporation's keen discrimination of difference, so that '[t]he best management training programs select people who have great potential and give them . . . the opportunity to show in which jobs they're most comfortable and competent' (Salzman, 1985, p. 44). The company is likewise encouraged to 'address the career development of [its] nonexempt clerical, secretarial, and technical support staff' to send 'the important message that they [are] valued' (Leibowitz, Feldman and Mosley, 1990, p. 38). Another article touts a training programme that teaches workers 'why it's important to get to work on time' (New-hire training success strategies, 2000, p. 11). The lesser capacity of some groups of employees is just as taken for granted here as in the earlier articles, but now it emerges only as incidental to the corporation's worthy goal: to 'allow the entire workforce to realize its full potential' (Leibowitz, Feldman and Mosley, 1990, p. 38). Rather than 'giving them what they need,' companies are now 'responding to the needs' of the subsections of their workforces. The action is essentially the same; it is stated motivation of the corporation that is different. In the first construction, the corporation is the agent, acting on its own behalf to change the worker. In the second, it is in a sense itself the object, first acted upon by worker needs and then reacting, only in response. In this sense, the worker might be said to resemble a consumer, with the corporation positioned – in the same way it is positioned to produce and sell goods for the buyer's own satisfaction – to run its educational programmes for the benefit of the worker and his or her personal welfare.

## Cost effectiveness, practicality, and defence of training

An emphasis on the cost effectiveness of training is one of the most salient and consistent themes through the 34 articles. Again, however, the manner in which this theme is framed changes over time. In articles from the earlier part of the century, matters of cost are discussed in very pragmatic ways, with the assumption that cost would, without question, be of concern in employee education programming. Companies wanted 'dollars-and-cents results' (Coffin, 1930, p. 12); they were reminded that 'it pays to train employees' (Berry, 1928, p. 226) and that 'the [short-term] expenses of conducting an educational campaign' will result in 'ultimate gain' (Rogers, 1919, p. 5).

As 'personnel' emerges as a professional field around 1940, however, the tone of such discussion of cost begins to serve a new purpose: defending employee education and training within the organisation. The articles warn that 'no one really knows how much it costs society to permit inexperienced . . . people to flounder around on new jobs' (Cushman, 1940, p. 24) and offer assurances that proper training can 'be of considerable value' (Single-purpose training, 1940, p. 286) and that 'investing time and money' in training can 'bring about improvement in . . . performance' (Houseknecht, 1950, p. 283).

By about 1960, the defence of training is expressed not just through (increasingly fervent) claims of long-term cost savings, but also through a new defensive strategy against the seeming 'soft', and therefore business-irrelevant, quality of employee education. Around the middle of the century, a number of highly affect-oriented training approaches came into fashion. These included methods such as laboratory training and T-groups (retreats of a sort in which employees participate in experiential exercises designed to promote interpersonal communication) (Spector, 1996). Further, workplace training was beginning to include aspects of what formerly had been considered strictly the personal domain: training in communication skills, creativity, self-esteem, and the like. Although workplace training had for some time addressed character, particularly among employees serving customers directly, it had formerly not focused on connections between the teaching of those 'personality skills' and the job at hand. Just as the humanistic orientation to employee relations had emerged in the 1950s as a backlash against scientific management, the articles reveal a 1960s neo-scientific management coming back the other way, ready to throw the person-oriented approach aside for its lack of relevance to the bottom line. This meant that the personnel and training specialists who had adopted the new approaches, and whose livelihood relied on them, needed to rally to their own defence.

It is at this time that articles begin fervently to stress the need for practicality in training, for work-based curricula, and for the scientific and quantifiable measurements of the results of training. One article thus complains that 'so many people concerned with training seem to have scant knowledge of the learning process and its application to training' and cautions that 'investments [in training] ... must be as soundly conceived and well planned as other capital outlays' (Whitesell and Pietrus, 1965, p. 45), suggesting that training has lost its bottom-line business orientation and needs to reclaim it. Another laments that 'in relation to the time and money industry has expended on developing managers, the results have been mediocre indeed' and asserts that 'the focus of…educational activities must be upon the *work rather than the personality*' (italics mine) because 'work can be seen – identified, analyzed, measured' (Wright, 1960, pp. 9–11). The importance of practicality and relevance of training curricula also becomes clear in this period: in examining the differences between person-oriented 'education' and task-oriented 'training,' one author writes that while educating employees to become well-rounded people is a laudable goal, 'the training approach brings faster results', and that 'regardless of the scope or depth of the material covered, relevance becomes the watchword' (Gray and Borecki, 1970, p. 28).

Along with the renewed emphasis on practicality and task orientation in training, a new call for employee responsibility in training appears in the articles around 1970, and this call similarly defends the training budget: if those who control corporate budgets doubt that training costs are a reasonable expenditure, demonstrating that the employee bears just as great a burden for her or his learning as does the company seems an effective defence for the training department. It is then not surprising that 'self-directed' learning – in which the employee learns independently, sometimes with materials but without the aid of an instructor or formal structure – comes into vogue about this time, with this approach touted for its capacity to create productive initiative takers. One article, for instance, describes an employee who had been a 'docile, obedient mouse' but, after a self-directed learning experience, 'initiates, takes risks, advocates things – all that autonomy training is meant to encourage' (Chambers, 1975, p. 32); another advocates employees 'taking full responsibility for their actions' in setting and reaching development goals (Karp, 1980, p. 58). The need for the organisation to spare unneeded expense is thus couched in terms of individual initiative, which – in the US in particular – is a highly desirable personal quality.

At about the same time, the presence of organisation development (OD) emerged in the articles, and it offered a solution to the problem of bottom line versus personal growth tension. At its beginnings, OD seems to have been taken as a remedy for an overly person-oriented approach to training. One author advocates 'moving from the idea of providing continuing education for our people…to determining what will make the organization effective' (Quick, 1975, p. 45) and positions OD in contrast to the 'soft' human relations approach as having 'shed its…ideology that…preaches human relations, democratic climates, and sensitivity training' and to 'deal more responsibly with the questions of improving the *effectiveness* of individuals in the organization' (italics mine) as well as to 'see that employees are increasingly effective in achieving organizational goals' (Quick, 1975, pp. 47–8). As time goes on, however, OD seems to present training as both good for the employee *and* for the organisation, suggesting that there is no conflict between what is good for the individual and what is good for the organisation. The language of OD reflects an effort to embrace a contradictory agenda, and in this way returns to the 'hard-soft' dualism that shaped previous employee education movements. The term *organisation development* itself embodies both the notion of structure and instrumentality ('organisation') and that of organicism and movement toward personal satisfaction ('development'). Similarly, the training function is described as a 'learning laboratory' (Quick, 1975, p. 50) – a term combining the precision and control of the second word with the openness and humanism of the first – in the same way that *human resources* combines one word connoting organicism ('human') with another connoting materialism ('resources'). This kind of paradox continues to the present, with a 1990 article reporting on use of a 'total quality mission statement' to guide employee development efforts (Leibowitz, Feldman and Mosley, 1990, p. 39), another congratulating companies that are 'benchmarking employee development' (McCune, 1994, p. 10), and another calling on trainers to 'optimize our collective investment' to 'rediscover the joy of [learning]' (Weathersby, 2000, p. 6). *Mission* suggests passion and drive while *statement* carries a legalistic ring; *development* connotes that which is organic while *benchmarking* is done by counting and calculating; *optimize* and *investment* bring to mind the speed and efficiency of an assembly line, while 'rediscover the joy' evokes the thrill of re-encountering a lost love. Again here, the rationalisation of human experience is not just captured in language but effectively normalised and perpetuated through language.

## Corporation as family citizen

Although the term corporate citizenship became current only in the last decade or two, the idea it represents has a much longer history. The role of the corporation in not just acting as citizen, but in fulfilling its moral obligation to help train good citizens, is a theme reflected throughout the articles. Just as with the other themes discussed, however, what does change is the framing of the issues.

Articles from the 1920s and 1930s made clear the corporation's responsibility for continuing the task of the schools in shaping good citizens; the worker him- or herself was a submissive and malleable figure in this relationship. The corporation was in this way responsible for 'continued training of the school *product* after he has become an employee' (Kenagy, 1927, p. 105; italics mine) because 'without the influence of outside contact, [the worker] is like a man eternally in a room without windows,' with a mind that 'just revolves from lack of a counter attraction' (Rogers, 1919, p. 2). It was also the duty of the corporation to remedy social problems related to worker skill or education deficits, such as the problem of 'the great reduction in the number of skilled workers coming into this country' (Berry, 1928, p. 226). The corporation's ultimate goal in training was then doing 'what is best for the American people and institutions as well as for the future well-being and profit of industry' (Dodd, 1936, p. 79). This goal extended to the protection of the capitalist enterprise itself, with the urgent call in a 1919 article for an 'effective educational campaign [that] will counteract [the] educational campaign of confiscation' of industrial property being waged by unions and other 'socialistic and revolutionary' forces (Rogers, 1919, pp. 12–13). By the Cold War era, the defence against a more socialist approach comes through again in a discussion of the US attitude toward worker training. In the 'American system of private initiative,' writes one author, 'there is no trace of paternalism'; it is 'based solidly on mutual benefit… [W]hat is so frequently forgotten by advocates of the Welfare State [is that] for anything to be of value to a person he must put forth some effort' (Education and the employee, 1950, p. 206).

The corporation-as-citizen is not invoked again in these articles until the 1980s and later, when the corporation takes on the shape of family, of school, and of citizen as well as employer and producer of goods. If the corporation of the early 1900s was the parent, that of more recent years is the community member, concerned with social ills of the day. A sense of idealism emerges here, with the corporation capable of solving personal and social problems. The career development that emerges as a training concern in the 1980s, for instance, is infused with the power to drastically improve people's lives. One article plugs a programme called 'Life 101' (New-hire training, 2000); another maintains that corporate training can ‘help [employees] succeed in the future’ (Shute Reifsnyder, 1995, p. 22). Modern-day training is compared to the old-fashioned approach, in which ‘the alcoholic was fired; the immobile worker was thrust, unprepared, into the job market; and the minority-group manager was left to flounder,’ and it is set up as the answer to unchecked job stress that can result in ‘hypertension, ulcers, and alcohol or drug addiction’ (Griffith, 1980, p. 64). Beyond personal satisfaction, though, corporate training of the 1980s and beyond would appear to address wide social problems, as with a corporate AIDS education programme described in one article, which sought to ‘change attitudes and alter behavior,’ ‘promote good health,’ and even ‘eliminate discrimination and motivate compassion’ and ‘help participants come to terms with their role as world citizens’ (Jordheim, 1990, pp. 20–24). This sort of idealism – the assumption that the corporation can benefit society, nation, and world – is precisely the device used in many of the advertising campaigns of multinational technology, communications, and financial services companies today, with images of people worldwide overcoming illiteracy, illness, and poverty through the intervention of a corporation’s product line.

This widening of corporate training’s field of influence seems to serve corporate interests in two ways. First, it may build the corporation’s image as a caring entity, and one that is indispensable to the personal and professional growth of our adult population. The corporation’s activity is thus normalised; the employee should participate in its agenda because it is the sensible thing to do given the needs of the society. Second, this widening of interests may allow the corporation to tap into a dissatisfaction many workers have felt, and expressed, over the past decade about the lack of spiritual connection and alienation they feel at work. In much the same way that advertisers co-opt youth alienation to lure potential customers with images of downtrodden, disaffected, and seemingly independent-minded teenagers using their products, employers seem to have identified the alienated worker as a marketing segment and made his and her cause their own.

## Conclusion

As trends in US management have evolved over the past century, so have employee education philosophies and the practices they generate. What endures is an emphasis on control by the organisation of its workforce. In particular in this sample of articles from US industry journals, it is the use of scientific principles to better control training, the adaptation of training to individual differences to render all levels of the workforce more efficient, the essential connection between training and the bottom line, and the use of training to broadly shape workers’ lives that appear to have held the attention of management over the years. These emphases, however, become less overt – and perhaps thus more powerful – as time passes.

In each of these four themes, there is an evolution toward presenting the organisation as embodying the best of both the technical and the person-oriented approaches. The organisation is now concerned neither strictly with cost and efficiency nor strictly with employees’ personal development, but rather is positioned to achieve both by offering employees training that can help them advance their careers and help them help the organisation advance its material goals.

Thus the control the corporation exerts now is neither the overt scientific management of the earlier part of the century nor the outright fuzzy human relations approach of the 1960s; it is rather both, and as such it can, in Nord and Doherty’s (1996) words, 'make disempowerment increasingly unobtrusive and therefore more difficult to challenge' (p. 201). Workers themselves may have little choice but to assent; on the other hand, they may find powerful defence in searching for a fuller meaning behind the messages they encounter about work and individual development, and the ways in which the two intersect.

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