When One Dimensional Models Fail:
Complexifying Models of Knowledge Construction

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Abstract: One dimensional models of reflective practice do not incorporate spirituality and social responsibility. Theological reflection, a form of reflective practice, is contextualized by a vision of social responsibility and the use of spirituality. An alternative model of reflective practice is proposed for spirituality and socially responsive learning at work.

Human resource developers are seeking ways to integrate spirituality and social responsibility through knowledge construction processes (Dirkx, 1997; Hatcher, 2000). Current models of reflective practice do not respond sufficiently to learners' need for spiritual integration (English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003) or connection to social issues (Hayes & Wilson, 2000). Theological reflection, a form of reflective practice in ministry, provides a model of reflective practice which embeds the problem solving process in spiritual information and a vision of social responsibility. The purpose of this paper is to illustrate an alternative model of reflective practice embedded in a framework of social responsibility and spirituality.

Human Resource Development's Quest to
Integrate Social Responsibility and Spirituality

The desire for spirituality and social responsibility in human resource development points toward the need to incorporate questions of social responsibility and holistic information into models of reflective practice. Socially responsible outcomes maybe evoked by asking "what type of world do we want?" Holistic sources of information are the types of data we use to make decisions. The data includes cognitive, affective, spiritual, political, and communal experiences. The desire to incorporate social responsibility and spirituality in human resource development theory and practice is evident in the plethora of literature addressing social responsibility and spirituality.

The Academy for Human Resource Development sought to integrate learning, performance, and spirituality perspectives in a statement of purpose (Bates, Hatcher, Holton III, & Chalofsky, 2001). The underlying assumption of the purpose statement was that the integration of the three perspectives was desirable and could enhance the field. Spirituality was defined in the purpose statement as "human potential" or "the latent capabilities in humans for growth and development" (Bates, et al, 2001, symposium 9-1). Spiritual information may include meaning, practices, or rituals that express individuals' "awareness of something greater than ourselves" (English & Gillen, 2000, p. 1). Primary components of meaningful work include giving to others and bringing your whole self (mind, body, emotion, and spirit) to work (Chalofsky, 1997). The search for spirituality is connected to the search for social responsibility through awareness of human interconnectedness (English et al., 2003).

Models for performance improvement are beginning to include socially responsive outcomes (Hatcher, 2000; Kaufman, 2000). "Performance therefore is defined as outcomes of a systematic approach to positive and desired changes in the individual, processes, organization, community, society, and the environment" (Hatcher, 2000, p. 19). The economic theory underlying human resource development is expanding from an exclusive focus on the financial

bottom line to include other indicators of success. These indicators include the impact on social communities and the environment. At the organizational level, models are available to support socially responsible performance (Kaufman, 2000). No models at the individual level are available to support socially responsible learning in the workplace. A model of reflective practice is needed that affirms the relationship between social responsibility and spirituality and integrates socially responsible learning and spirituality within the workplace.

Reflective Practice

Reflective practice grew out of the realization that technical rationality or the application of theory to practice was insufficient for the unique and surprising challenges faced by professionals (Schon, 1983, 1987). Professionals meet the challenges of new situations that go beyond the parameters of accepted theory by reflecting in action. Reflecting in action is the ability to think about what one is doing and to change one's actions simultaneously (Schon, 1983). The ability to reflect on and learn from professional activity to determine appropriate ways to behave in the future is the keystone idea of Schon's reflective practice model.

Reflective practice relies on the use of cognitive information to learn to deal with novel situations. Schon (1983) identifies four primary steps in reflective practice: reframing the problem, drawing on a repertoire or familiar exemplars, formulating a new hypothesis, and testing the hypothesis. The testing does not occur as a formal experiment but in the broad sense of confirming or refuting a hypothesis. Reflective practice is one dimensional in its exclusive use of cognitive information for the purpose of problem solving. The one dimensional model of reflective practice does not acknowledge a vision of social responsibility or spiritual information. Reflective practice needs further development to integrate spirituality and social responsibility. By examining theological reflection, a model of reflective practice used in ministry education, possibilities for further development emerge.

Theological Reflection

Theological reflection is a knowledge construction process that incorporates spirituality and social responsibility in Catholic graduate ministry education. Lee (1994) claimed that graduate education in ministry is the most progressive form of professional education. Theological reflection provides professional education with a model that incorporates questions about social responsibility and multiple sources of information. Theological reflection brings together theory, praxis, and technical or instrumental knowledge in response "to a major paradigm shift within Western culture" (Lee, 1994, p. 25). The shift in knowledge construction involves the move from seeking truth in right belief, *orthodoxy,* to finding truth in right action, *orthopraxy* (Lee, 1994). The focus in practical theology has moved from theory and metaphysics to *praxis* or informed action. Technical or instrumental knowledge serves praxis rather than merely being applied theory (Habermas, 1971/1973). Informed action is at the center of the learning endeavor rather than intellectual affirmations.

Theological reflection is a conversation between individual and communal experience and the wisdom of a religious tradition to seek a vision of social justice and meaning in life (Killen & de Beer, 1994). The tradition component provides inspiration for the vision of social responsibility; cultural information includes social analysis; personal experience incorporates cognitive, affective, and spiritual information (see Figure 1). In the Catholic tradition, using liberation theology, the Reign of God provides an image and metaphor for social justice. The search to resolve ministerial concerns is embedded in the conversation between tradition, cultural information, and personal experience.

For example, a minister is presented with the problem of the lack of participation of women in the church's pastoral board. Engaging the model of theological reflection, the minister attends to information from her own personal experience, cultural information, and information from the church tradition.
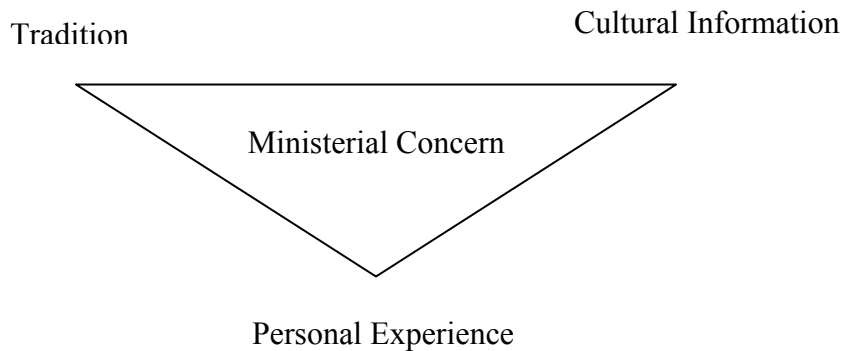
Tradition   Cultural Information

Ministerial Concern

Personal Experience

Figure 1.
Model of Theological Reflection (Whitehead & Whitehead, 1980, p. 14)

From her own experience, she may remember her own struggles with church hierarchy and feel anger and discouragement. She may also tell the story of her spiritual journey for strength and encouragement. A spiritual journey is evolution of the meaning, images, and feelings in the individual's relationship with the Ultimate over time. The cultural or social analysis reveals the historically submissive and private role women played in religion as well as successful strategies for empowerment and assertiveness. Analysis of the tradition may include reading scripture and feminist theologians that lift up positive models for women in church leadership. By attending to information in all three areas, personal, cultural, and tradition, the minister decides and implements an approach to affirm the leadership role of women in the church and secure their participation on the board.

The systematic construction of knowledge in theological reflection incorporates multiple sources of information (mental, emotional, social, and spiritual) (Killen & de Beer, 1994). In the example of the minister, spiritual information is elicited from the reflection on personal experience. Spiritual information may also include the influence of community worship and personal prayer and meditation on the minister's thinking. The analysis in the cultural and tradition areas reveals social injustice (i.e., history of women's oppression) and a vision of socially responsible outcomes (i.e., women in church leadership). Theological reflection brings together spirituality and social engagement in a transformative manner (Holland & Henriot, 2002). Theological reflection embodies the paradigm shift of knowledge construction and serves as model for reflective practice in human resource development by incorporating questions about social responsibility and multiple sources of information

Alternative Model of Reflective Practice

Imagine the effect of centralizing questions of social responsibility in the reflective practice of human resource developers. The questions of learning and performance will occur naturally within an explicit context of meaning, value, and vision. Answering the question of social responsibility requires diverse dimensions of knowledge. Cognitive, empirical

information is one source for constructing knowledge about our world. The yearning for spirituality tells us that it is not enough. We are feeling, imagining, symbolic, and communal beings who envision a world with all our senses and capacities. Constructing knowledge needs to include the full spectrum of cognitive, affective, biological, spiritual, political, and communal information to create socially responsible outcomes. By focusing only on the cognitive information and the problem, professionals can ignore the impact of the solution on society, the environment, relationships, feelings, and their spirit (Dirkx, 1997). Adding multiple sources of information in the service of socially responsible outcomes complexifies the models, processes, and experience of reflective practice. By embedding the problem within a vision of social responsibility and multiple sources of information, human resource developers may find satisfaction for spiritual and social justice yearnings (see Figure 2.).
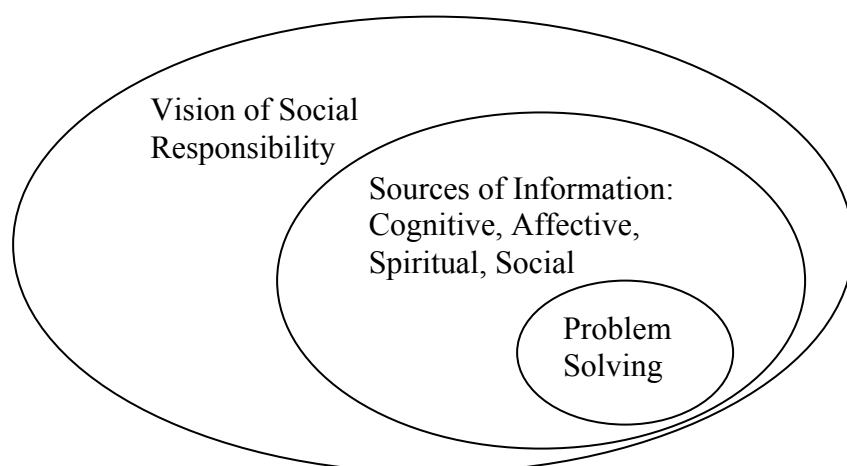

Figure 2.
Embedded Model of Reflective Practice

Figure 2 uses an embedded model rather than the triangulated model used in theological reflection to illustrate the relationships between the vision of social responsibility, sources of information, and problem solving. Embeddedness shows the enhanced context of problem solving activity – within a vision of social responsibility generated by responses to the questions of social justice and within data generated from multiple sources of information. The sources of information are embedded within the vision of social responsibility because the responses to the questions validate the sources used in solving the problem. If the vision is narrowly defined as profit, the social, affective, and spiritual experience of individuals is not valid or necessary. The cognitive and technical information will be sufficient to address the problem. For example, a manager in a computer store is faced with low customer satisfaction ratings and a decrease in sales. Using the traditional model of reflective practice, the manager will reframe the problem (e.g., employees are not trained properly), draw on repertoire of exemplars (e.g., identify successful training modules), formulate a new hypothesis (e.g., better trained employees will yield higher customer satisfaction ratings and increased sales), and test hypothesis (e.g., measure satisfaction ratings and profits after training). To solve this problem, the manager relied exclusively on cognitive information to increase the ratings and profit.

Using the embedded model of reflective practice, the manager begins to seek resolution to the problem of low customer satisfaction ratings and low profit by asking questions of social

responsibility in the outer circle. The questions of social responsibility may include: (a) What is a socially desirable outcome? (b) What is the desired quality of interaction for the customers and employees? and (c) What knowledge and skills are needed for life-affirming action? The answers to the questions may include the need to recycle computer parts, provide cultural sensitivity training for the multi-cultural customer base, and an expanded bottom line for the computer store. The answers paint a vision of social responsibility.

Within this vision, the manager seeks information from multiple sources. Using cognitive information (e.g., drawing on literature regarding customer satisfaction), affective information (e.g., asking how the employees feel about their relationships with customers), spiritual information (e.g., what meaning do his employees ascribe to their work and interactions and what does his own spiritual practice and tradition say about his work, relationships, and social responsibility), and social information (e.g. how is the overall work environment and mission contributing or inhibiting to the desired outcomes), the manager now has a very different context to address the problem of low customer satisfaction ratings and sales.

Using the vision generated by the questions of social responsibility and the data from cognitive, affective, and spiritual sources, the manager engages the problem. The manager may initiate a strategic planning process to redefine the mission and bottom line of the store. The manager may have discovered that the employees do not feel connected to the organizational mission and the spiritual meaning of their work. Using the information from the two outlying circles, Schon's (1983)four-steps of reflective practice may be engaged at this point or another problem solving technique. Resolving the problem in the embedded context results in a workshop for the employees to connect their personal and team experience with the transformed organizational mission. The embedded model of reflective practice generates multifaceted, spiritual, and socially responsive solutions to work problems.

Implications for Human Resource Development

The use of a complex model of reflective practice at work is important for human resource developers to create socially responsible work places and to engage multiple sources of information in knowledge construction processes. Encouraging professionals to define visions of socially responsible behavior and work is the first step in creating social justice. If professionals only seek to solve problems at the technical level, the social impact of their resolutions remains unexamined and potentially destructive to the social fabric. Professionals wield power and influence in Western society and if their power is not accountable to society, the potential for destroying the social and environment fabric is increased.

The proposed model of reflective practice challenges human resource developers to incorporate a holistic vision of the employee into the learning process. People at work are whole beings with cognitive, affective, spiritual, and physical needs and experiences. A complex model of reflective practice affirms a holistic view of employees and validates the use of multiple sources of information in the learning process. Embedding reflection in action in a vision of social responsibility and spiritual information addresses the yearning for spirituality and social responsibility expressed by human resource developers.

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