

Stream. *The spirit of capitalism: critical approaches to religion and spirituality in organisation*

Having Faith in Management: Deluded, Dangerous or Doable?

Tim Harle

ABSTRACT

Should we (re)connect management schools and monasteries? Religions of difference imply separateness, whereas detraditionalization often accompanies a turning inward (Woodhead & Heelas, 2000). Nevertheless, connectedness features in spirituality at work (Howard & Welbourn, 2004). Some see dangers: Roberts (2002) is scathing of managerialism and 'commodification of the soul', Tourish (2005) highlights the perils of coercive persuasion, and Hicks (2003) calls for 'respectful pluralism' to replace vague spirituality.

Against this background, this paper explores practical connections. From a standpoint of reflective praxis, it offers critical observations in three areas.

First, attitudes to change. Binney et al (2005) highlight the challenge of 'living with permanent transition', while complexity science reminds us that 'equilibrium is death' (Pascale et al, 2000). A number of religious attitudes to change are examined, including the Benedictine vow of *conversatio morum*: 'a vow to change, to never remain still either in self-satisfied fulfilment or self-denying despair' (Dollard et al, 2002).

Second, the leadership agenda. Business school authors write of leading quietly and crucibles of leadership (Turnbull, 2006), while a research programme highlighted executives who '[build] enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will' (Collins, 2001). Examples from business, political and faith communities illustrate constructive dissent and inverse learning (Grint 2005), and leading at the edge. Implications for leadership competencies are examined (Cowan, 2005; Harle, 2005).

Third, sustainability. Contemporary discourse around physical resources can neglect the sustainability of communities and individuals. Eastern and Western traditions are mined for concepts of renewal: the *Bhagavad Gita* speaks of nourishing soil, society and self. Business applications are found in Hamel & Prahalad's (1996) call to create 'a capacity for continuous renewal deep within the company', and in business ecology (Robertson, 1995).

In conclusion, the threads are connected in a paradox - that stability promotes change.

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