

## Workers, Subjectivity and Decent Work

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This chapter explores ways in which renewed attention to the worker's subjectivity in the course of education, training and learning interventions can widen the personal and collective possibilities for workplace development and for enactment of decent work. The chapter critiques the prevailing focus on techno-economic imperatives and of obscured managerial elite interests in organizations that currently circumscribe and delimit worker subjectivities and their learning at work. The chapter also critiques the managerial notion of the human resource and proposes an alternative conceptualization of the worker as agentic subject. It proposes that active worker subjects may re-imagine and re-orientate organizational and worker learning to improve work practices and generate expanded horizons for decent work and civilized organizations.

### 14.1 Introduction

The education of workers has been variously theorized and practiced throughout the 20th century. Within these debates notions of the worker as the subject of education, training and learning programmes, as well as the agent of work and production activities, have been erratically addressed and under-theorised. The vague, implicit assumptions that have underpinned many theories and practices of worker education and training, even those of a humanistic and worker-oriented persuasion, have unintentionally enabled the wide uptake of an economically instrumental conception of the worker as a "human resource". Now, not only in areas of management and organization studies, but widely in education and training fields, the worker as human resource is a near-taken for granted conception. This

development, however, is neither a neutral one nor unproblematic for workers and their accompanying educators.

Current debates in worker education, in lifelong learning, and in organizational development are marked by a very often prevailing economic perspective that places emphasis on constructing “learning organizations” and on “human resource” learning. These learning imperatives are principally in the service of organizational strategies for innovation and competitive advantage in economic activities in the currently extolled knowledge-based economies. However, economic and managerial models scarcely attend to the human subjectivity of the learner-worker and the worker’s diverse learning interests. Broader socio-cultural ends of worker learning that were prominently articulated throughout the 20th century (Dewey 1916; Friere 1973; Delors 1996) – such as lifelong human development, improved work-life and participatory citizenship in democratic society – are now very often overlooked. Critical educators including notably Coffield (1999), Fenwick (2001) and Scheid et al. (2001), express concerns that the new knowledge-based economies and the organizational and employment relations reforms they stimulate may be used by employers to undermine workers’ rights and foreclose opportunities for advancing worker development.

Moreover, in very recent years, there is much effort to elaborate and expand notions of human and citizen rights and to operationalize these notions across wider spheres of life. Prominent among these efforts, and on a hoped-for global scale, is the International Labour Organization’s promotion of ‘decent work’. This notion, with its many implications, is now the central focus of the ILO’s current agenda. Decent work means more than the basic decencies of freedom from child labour and gender and racial discrimination, rights to adequate pay, tolerable conditions and health and safety – even as these basic rights remain scarce for much of the world’s working people. Decent work means attaining and sustaining provisions for developing opportunities for human development, for personal and collective participation in the regulation of work, for greater dignity at work, and for more convivial relations of production (ILO 1999, 2001; ICFTU 2003; Zarka-Martres and Guichard-Kelly 2005).

Are there possibilities for creative, generative, alliances between worker education, current imperatives for learning organizations, and making real ‘decent work’ in today’s workplaces? A key linkage, I propose, is the conceptualization of the subject of these activities – the worker. I wish in this chapter to add to the critical discussions of concerns arising from recent economic and technological developments. I wish to discuss two matters that have direct bearing on conceptualisations of worker education and decent work. The first is an exposition of some crucial flaws in current demands for learning organizations that are set in economic and managerial

discourses and the conceptions of worker-learners these models espouse. The second poses an alternative construct to the managerial framework that restores the working person to the centre of concerns, and which may stimulate practical possibilities for enacting socio-political agendas for decent work and convivial workplaces. Many critical adult educators and management critics have long shared these concerns (Baptiste 2001; Fenwick 2001; Grey and Willmott 2005). My effort in this chapter is to offer a further elaboration of these criticisms. To begin, the chapter offers a critical discussion of current conceptions of learning organizations and learning workers.

## **14.2 Knowledge-Based Economies, Organizations and Learning**

Current drives in OECD countries toward achieving knowledge-based economies, characterized by increased production of knowledge and information-rich products through ever-expanding electronic and computer technologies of production, communication, and financial exchange (Beck 2000; Castells 1996; Harvey 1989; Heckscher 1988; Kochan et al. 1995) are effecting considerable changes to the world of work and organizations. These economic developments are generating changes to labour markets, organizational practices, to workplace life, and to workers' experiences of work. At the everyday level, they manifest, for example, in demands for organizational restructuring, for down-sizing, for flexible employment relations, such as temporary jobs, longer or shorter working hours, and for intensified worker productivity. Many of these developments occur in conflict with other social and cultural aspirations, such as for secure employment, social inclusion, community development, and quality of working life.

Economic and business leaders now promote an intensified drive toward product and process innovation and for knowledge-rich production of goods and services. At the political level, these developments are expressed in demands for developed countries to become "learning economies / learning societies". At the organizational level of this discourse new theories of organization and management place emphatic attention on generating "learning organizations" for the achievement of innovation and advantage (Boisot 1998; Senge 1999; Stewart 1997). The complex impact of these economic, technological, and organizational developments includes alterations to modern conceptions of organization and workers, and of workers' education and learning.

The concept of the “learning organization” is premised on an idea that human knowledge as human capital is now the principal productive force in contemporary capitalism (Boisot 1998; Harvey 1989; Senge 1990, 1999; Stewart 1997; Reich 1991). The learning organization is now extolled as the pivotal agent in technological innovation and competitive success. A heightened re-privileging of managerial agency in organizational design and behaviour represses recognition and legitimacy of the role of political action on the part of workers’ unions and their demands – that were more visible in the latter 20th century – for participatory forms of industrial organization and for worker learning.

The humanistic, participatory forms of organizations which industrial democracy and adult education movements have long advocated, in which worker education enhanced both practical skills and personal development, have more recently given way to *strategic organizational learning* models serving singular organizational business imperatives. These find expression, for instance, in management decisions, including on the retention or discarding of labour, being oriented solely according to the organization’s “core business” of profit making and shareholder satisfaction.

Strategic management’s emphasis on learning in organizations privileges the organization as the learner – it is abstracted, collective learning in order for the organization to respond and innovate that is regarded as the singular imperative of learning organizations. The learning needs of the organization, as defined by management, override or occlude attention to the needs of individual learning workers. Individual learning is legitimated solely according to criteria for its contribution to organizational learning. As the influential European economists Lundvall and Borras (1997) put it, worker and organizational learning and knowledge, are for “the shaping of institutions and structures of production so that the innovation system becomes better suited to future market developments” (p. 64).

Moreover, in this model, even attention to interactive learning, which one might assume to be learning occurring among interacting human actors, has largely concentrated on the institutional level – on the effects of inter-organizational interactions on the functioning of economic institutions, particularly industrial organizations (e.g. Lundvall 1988; Lundvall and Borras 1997).

These current conceptions of organizational learning, which entail an acute abstraction of the individual person as learner, eschew competing approaches to work and organization, especially those that envision work, and workers, as more than instrumental economic activity. The definition and legitimation by economic and managerial elites of key concepts in contemporary debates on learning workers and learning organizations has immense implications for worker education, and for the prospects of revitalising socio-political aspirations for decent work and democratic participation

in the workplace. Most pressingly, are the implications ensuing from a further pivotal element in the hyper-rational managerial model, that of the “human resource”.

### 14.3 The Human Resource

The trend toward hyper-rationalised models of production, organization and management, and for lean, tightly controlled operations, requires a correspondingly altered conception of the worker, and of worker learning. A principal concept of the learning organization, which underpins the successful shift of worker-focused lifelong learning to a managerial one, is the notion of the “human resource”. The concept emerged in the 1980s (see discussions in, for example, Guest 1987; Kochan et al. 1995; Whittington 1993; Wright and McMahan 1992) and gained rapid popularity in economic, management, and organizational theory and practice. Although the concept clearly manifests a privileging of organizational system rationalities and managerial priorities, its use is now widespread and virtually taken for granted. It is even sometimes employed in traditionally more humanistic adult education literature (e.g. Knowles et al. 1998), but importantly remains refused by some critical educationists (Coffield 1999; Fenwick 2001; Howell et al. 2002; Schied et al. 2001). For many, though, the term has displaced former concepts such as personnel and staff, and encouraged a view of management as the legitimately dominant party in industrial management. With respect to current policies and programmes toward the development of learning organizations and learning workers, the widespread utilisation of the concept of the human resource affects conceptions of knowledge and learning and narrows the options for worker education.

The managerially-framed model of learning organizations conceives the worker, (which is a term evoking older connotations of an integrated relation between the person, her knowledge and skill, and the doing of work) as being more readily strategically utilised by rendering as a “human resource”. As an abstracted component in the organizational production process, like other production resources of material and plant, the worker is rationalised into correspondence with rational management. As a human resource, the worker is an object of utility for the organization, and accordingly of its overtly privileged stratum of agentic management. The worker’s human needs, interests, aspirations and irrationalities are eclipsed and rationalised by the technical resource imperative of the organization. The needs of the organization are, in this model, determined and normalised by a managerial cadre, which practices a strategic utilisation and management of resources toward their attainment (Porter 1991; Whittington 1993; Storey 1989).

The managerial organizational concept of human resource has direct implications for contemporary understandings of organizational learning and worker learning in a politically-promoted learning economy. Within the apparently widely accepted logic of instrumentally rational organization, the concept of human resource is put forward as a sensible, pragmatic organizational concept. An implicit convergence of managerial interests with organizational ones – a common ideology in contemporary managerialist organization studies – presents the concept as legitimate, descriptive and neutral. Indeed, while it may well serve to deligitimise or marginalise the demands of workers and trade unions for humanistic conceptions of the worker, the term is regularly employed by trade unions and worker educators.

The model of the ideal learning organization proposes a rational alignment of workers with the organization's rational techno-economic imperatives. The organizational level of learning in the managerial perspective requires institutional reform toward facilitating the strategic selection of innovative ideas, knowledge pursuits, technological developments and ways of doing things. Consequently, organizational learning is framed by a focus on learning directed to the tasks of selection, coordination and retention of practical and theoretical productive knowledge. It includes the extraction and codification of workers' personal capacities, tacit knowledge and affective creativity. It also includes strategic containment of worker knowledge. The strategic championing of selected knowledge forms is directed toward instrumentally-defined organizational goals pursued in organizational environments conceived as highly competitive and increasingly global. Illustrations of this approach are readily found in training programmes for organizational and workplace learning (e.g. Garvin 2000; Marquardt 1996; Senge 1990, 1999.).

However, the idealised managerial model of the learning human resource rationally aligned with the learning organization in a learning economy contains a fundamental oversight. Notwithstanding strong demands for technological innovations and economic efficiencies at the organizational level in the forced correspondence of the rationalised worker, organizations are also sites of myriad human activities and learning agenda. As numerous studies have shown workers, who rarely behave as ideal human resources, try to exercise various forms and degrees of control over their learning processes and those of the collective organization (Burawoy 1985; Casey 2002; Jermier et al 1994; Kunda 1992). As long as workers with the demonstrated propensity for diverse learning at work and in other arenas of adult life are reduced to the status of human resource for distant others' ends, and denied recognition of their multiple needs and motivations, underlying tensions will frustrate and delimit their learning potential – for themselves and the organization. Irrespective of remunerative

incentives, soft motivation campaigns, or more overt disciplinary and coercive means, workers performing a resource-defined role will find ways to contain and withhold not only their expertise but their commitment.

A widening and reframing of the currently dominant management approach, as some critical analysts are endeavouring to do (Fenwick 2001; Howell et al. 2002; Schied et al. 2001), allows for a reimagination of organizations as sites for the development and practice of innovative human relations in the organization of production, work, and self-creation. Such a reconception of the managerially-framed notion proposes more convivial concrete organizations and personnel, and importantly enables a substantive realignment of the notion of the learning economy, currently extolled by the advanced industrialised countries, with socio-cultural development and democratic citizenship in which learning and education are more broadly conceived.

Recognising the limits of abstract instrumental rationalities embedded in the managerially-focused agenda for enhanced organizational learning allows for a response to diverse expressions of workers' interests and demands in their workplace experiences. Such recognition motivates a turn away from human resource concepts. It allows for a reconceptualisation of knowledge beyond monological instrumental terms. It elevates a more complex notion of the worker learning as a subject of her or his life and work. The worker subject in all her and his complex humanity works in and co-constitutes a learning organization. A conceptual shift of this magnitude may enable a theoretical and practical expansion of what it means to do decent work and sustain convivial workplaces.

#### 14.4 Workers: Subjectivity and Learning

The technical reduction of humans to organizational utility abstracts *instrumental* rationality from a *substantive* rationality of socio-cultural ends. It elides an ethic of human subjectivity as an end in itself into an undifferentiated instrumental rationality. This ethically devoid utility not only debases the human experience of organizational work – even if production efficiencies and market advantage are expanded – it ultimately truncates the potential for human initiative and creative imagination. It is the latter that comprise rich resources not only for innovation and organizational success in strict economic terms, but for organizational transformation in more comprehensive ways. The facilitation of greater development of persons working for more than a singular rational and economic imperative recognises work as potentially self-fulfilling and socially participatory.

The everyday life of organizations readily exhibits to any close observer myriad competing rationalities among individuals and groups of

workers. These competing rationalities and currents of interest manifestly challenge and interrupt the officially, solely privileged instrumental rationalities of economy. As adult educators have long known, the learning gained and pursued by workers is diverse and oftentimes contradictory to that desired by organizational managers and trainers (Casey 2002; Istance et al. 2002; Jarvis 2000; Lewin and Regine 2000). The challenge in the arena of education for workers within a learning-seeking organization is to recognise, address and accommodate multiple motivations and agenda in learning needs and aspirations.

This suggestion does not require that the realist recognition that an organization comes together by and large for the pursuit of a primary set of rational purposes be set aside. But it does require recognition that the pursuit of a primary set of purposes – especially when those purposes are determined by controlling elites – is always in relation to intersecting and competing unofficial purposes with varying attachments and investments. A managerial view of this form of organizational diversity regards it as a problem for organizational managers faced daily with the task of achieving more or less a rational order of things and outcomes. But recognition of these diverse interests is a necessary step for a creative repositioning of the dominant and impoverished managerial view. Surrendering the singular privileging of instrumental rationality, and its concomitant conceptions of organizational design and process, which drives contemporary learning economy and learning organization imperatives opens up rich possibilities for organizational life. A concept of the learning organization that goes beyond an instrumental logic entails a restoration of person-centredness to learning. It recognises that workers have multiple life interests in which their performance of organizational labour is just one.

As a first step in moving organizational learning and worker education away from conventional managerial models, and in opening up possibilities for richer educational opportunities in the workplace and beyond it, I propose an alternative concept of the learner as a worker and as a subject. This concept imagines the learner, not as a rationalised, abstracted human resource and object of organizational utility, but as a subject who works, desires, and learns. I turn now to elaborate this concept and explain its vital role in organizational innovation and in the restoration of democratic citizenship in the so-called learning economies. The questions orienting this discussion are: Who is the learning-worker? What is her/his relationship with the learning organization?

The conventional answer to those questions can be readily discerned in prevailing organizational approaches to education and training of



workers. In privileging the organization's needs for particular developmental trajectories, for skills and competencies generating product innovation and production efficiency (Archibugi and Lundvall 2001; Garvin 2000; Marquardt 1996; Senge 1990, 1999) the learning worker is rendered simply as a smart component. Moreover, in serving economic organization needs, much of vocational education, worker training, and human resource development has focused on socialisation and training of individuals for participation in industrial institutional roles specifically for employing organizations and generally in a work-based society. As critics have pointed out, these approaches have practised a schooling-type socialisation function of the under-socialised adult worker into either occupational roles or, more specifically, predetermined organization roles as employees (Casey 1995; Istance et al. 2002; Jarvis 2000; Leymann and Kornbluh 1989). While this social reproductive model has been much criticised in recent decades in the education of children (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990; Popkewitz 1987; Wexler 1987), critical voices in organizational learning and worker education and training have scarcely been heard. Instead, a heightened emphasis is placed on organizational systemic needs for specific learning and knowledge utilisation directed toward optimisation of production (Lundvall and Borras 1997).

The contemporary dominant, hyper-rational, model of organization that reduces human actors in organizational activity to objects of utility, runs contrary to humanistic theories and practices of education, especially the principles of lifelong education. For lifelong education to include learning and development in the workplace – where the vast majority of adults spend much of their lives – these impoverished and one-sided conceptions must be redressed and surpassed. But the challenge, as other critics have recognized (e.g. Coffield 2000; Fenwick 2001), to surpass hyper-rationalised conceptions is considerable. I offer below a contribution to that effort. I endeavour to outline a reconceptualisation of the person at work, and of the learning worker. In particular, I draw on the thought of French sociologist Alain Touraine (1995, 1996) in ways that bear direct application to the tasks of organizational reconceptualisation beyond the neo-rational model, to the education of workers in full recognition of their subjectivity.

Central to Touraine's extensive sociological oeuvre has been the development of the notion of the subject – of the human actor in history that modernity has engendered. Arising from a tradition in French philosophy that Touraine complexly traces to include significantly Marx and Rousseau, St. Paul and Augustine (Touraine 1995), Touraine's thesis comprehensively critiques modernity and simultaneously rejects postmodern subjecti-

fication<sup>1</sup>. This complex philosophical path has led to his theorisation of a concept of the Subject. The Subject, for Touraine, is an idea of the human person that refuses reduction to rationalisation. The subject is neither a product of power as conceived by contemporary structuralist and Foucauldian theorisations, nor is it reduced to a rationally-choosing economic agent as neo-liberal theorists purport. Touraine's subject refuses both traditional identifications and subjectifications and the rationalisation and instrumentalisation of personal and collective life (1996:297). Rather, the human subject is, for Touraine, one who seeks freedom and creation, autonomy and relatedness, reason and affect and spirit. It is this subject – the resistor of the demands of instrumentality – who is able to act and to create.

*Subjectivation* – the process by which one becomes an acting, self-creating, subject – is achieved through “an individual's will to act and to be recognised as an actor” (Touraine 1995:207). Subject-actors, striving beyond the received conditions of tradition and instrumental rationality, construct personal self-projects through the events of their lives. They strive to create spaces for autonomy and freedom. For Touraine, in the process of subjectivation the individual constructs its individuation against the world of economic rationalities and commodities and the world of community, and it succeeds in its individuation as it is able to unite instrumental rationality and relational identity. The subject strives for its subjectivation in all dimensions of life, not least in its working life.

This notion of a complex, acting Subject who resists and appropriates rationality and affectivity is an important one for the theory and practice of lifelong education. The recognition of contemporary workers seeking subjectivation – against long class histories of *subjectification* at work – demands a substantive shift in the conception of workers and in organizational arrangements accommodating them. Notwithstanding, or in spite of, the demands of hyper-rationalised organizational workplaces, a number of researchers of contemporary work practices (Casey 2002; Handy 1997; Lewin and Regine 2000; Rifkin 2000) observe much evidence that many people are demanding, often in idiosyncratic ways, self-expressive, self-creating space. In addition to the demands for economic remuneration and collective conditions, the efforts of many contemporary workers include improvements in bodily and affective well-being (as in various mind-body therapies, Yoga, alternative health practices and so forth), spiritual quests,

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<sup>1</sup> A full explanatory discussion of this notion must be deferred here. Suffice to say, perhaps, is that in rejecting Foucault's notion in particular of ineluctable subjection to diverse power schema and structural forces in which persons and their subjectivities are always already subjugated, Touraine proposes struggle, individual and collective movement, and socio-cultural change.

and identity constructions around sexualities, ethnicities, and ecological sensibilities, and community building. These efforts indicate self-creation struggles and alternative value setting to that privileged in an overly rationalised technocratic workplace. Their practitioners are seeking agentic subjectivation in creating their lives and acting in the world. In addition to these self-expressivist aspirations, there is evidence of growing collective demands for work-life balance, for family-friendly workplaces, and for more relationally satisfying work environments.

If we take this notion of the subject into organizational life, we are faced with a very different notion of the worker, as an agentic, learning, relational person whose actions and choices are more than instrumentally rational. The managerially defined human resource, a notion that epitomises the reduction of the person to a commodified object of instrumental utility is disrupted. The conventional strategic management conception of the human resource and its concomitant conceptions of organizational learning and human resource development must be rescinded. A reconceptualisation of the learning worker as a subject at work – as a Subject-worker – makes possible the stimulation of new concepts and forms of knowledge. It demands theoretical and institutional changes toward a more complex grasp of learning and development in a social economy. This turn of the subject-actor, for which there appears growing evidence in the rise, for instance, of identity movements, religio-cultural value demands, and political-economic pluralisms (Casey 2002; Castells 1997; Lewin and Regine 2000; Melucci 1996; Rifkin 2000), makes possible the stimulation of participatory processes in organizational life which are vital to the reinvention of organizations and work practices, and of democracy in post-industrial societies.

## 14.5 Subjects, Learning and Decent Work

Having sketched out a moral ideal for organizational worker-learners to be reconceptualised as subjects, possessing complex desires and imperatives for agency and creation, let us turn to consider how production organizations – and educators working at the organizational level – may accommodate and utilise a new concept of learning workers, and of learning organizations. Managerial approaches to learning and knowledge creation focus on rational and strategic learning. A richer conception confronts the challenge of facilitating and shaping multiple learning agenda. A vision of life-long education encompassing workplace learning recognizes the validity of both rationally useful and intrinsically developmental learning. As such it demands a congruence of organizational and production activity with substantive socio-cultural values. That is, rational production imperatives must be met alongside the subject-worker's demands for personal value

and active participation in organizational life. In organizations which continue to practise a narrow agenda of management-defined instrumental learning among workers, and retain the transmission of education and training of workers in traditional ways, e.g. via expert professional to deficient worker, the learning accomplished will reflect that model. It will typically produce specific and delimited knowledge for problem-solving within conventional frameworks. Conformity and compliance to alienating production systems generate expected outcomes which include a measure of productivity gain, but exacerbate rebelliousness, dissent, and strategic withholding of worker commitment and intelligence.

A conventional managerial approach to worker learning which fails to recognise the more complex needs and interests of worker learners and obstructs efforts toward worker participation and organizational democracy produces only conventional learning outcomes. As a consequence, neither the organization nor the worker learns in ways more appropriate to contemporary post-industrial conditions. In other words, despite growing complexity in production and trading systems in globalising markets, the expansion of post-Fordist, flexible, contingent organizations, and growing socio-cultural diversity, a narrowly conceived instrumental, resource-based model of organizational learning fails to deal with contemporary complexities and diverse currents of demands – in effect denying or suppressing the realities of both.

For Touraine, the idea of the subject and its relation to social institutions requires in the first instance a refusal. The worker as Subject refuses the monological instrumental rationality privileged in the organization's reduction of labour to an apparatus of production. This refusal entails a rejection of concomitant notions of worker learning. Notions of worker learning and organizational learning which are conceived solely in terms of their strategic functionality or dysfunctionality for the organizational system are rendered grossly inadequate and redundant. A more appropriate conception for the development of education and training in organizations recognises that the worker is neither an anonymous object of utility, nor a disengaged, a-social individualist. Rather, the worker conceived as Subject is a relational person with individual and collective desires and goals, selectively employing instrumental rationalities, affective sensibilities and substantive socio-cultural values toward her/his self-creation projects.

The recognition and facilitation of a complex learning agenda, rather than its suppression and denial as in managerial models of organization and human resource learning, enables a conception of production organizations which are constructed according to the dynamics of participation, negotiation and collective goal setting. The rejection of human resource models opens admission to organizational complexity beyond

both functionalist utility or elite ideological control. It conceives the ability of individuals to combine their diverse skills and imaginations for the attainment of common, collectively negotiated, goals. Their collective productive intelligence depends on coordination, mutual adjustments and personal initiatives in common work. This alternative ideal of learning workers and their production organizations – as an accomplishment of revitalised models of lifelong education in conjunction with organizations – engenders an expansion and revitalisation of democratic process within organizational life and potentially in social life more broadly.

Relinquishing concepts of knowledge as solely an instrumental resource that must be abstracted from commodified workers enables a vital organizational innovation. Concomitantly, the admission of an ideal in which the person at work is conceived as a subject with life interests and personal projects beyond those of the world of work and employing organizations allows for a legitimate but morally delimited role of instrumental rationalities and their institutionalisation in contemporary organizations. It delimits the demands for education and training for innovation and organizational competitiveness. And it repositions the elevated, ideological position of managerial control over worker knowledge.

The organization that integrates these cognisances and institutionalises these values produces and allows dynamic action capable of transforming the organization beyond the industrial vision. It breaks with the instrumentally congealed modernist conceptions of organizations and takes up the collective task of creating learning organizations appropriate to a post-industrial society. It makes possible not only new forms of socially constructed organizational action for productive and economic goals, but action admitting new dynamics of creativity. These dynamics are the key to practical innovations in technology and labour process, as they are key to socio-cultural innovations resulting from the value demands of subject-workers, and subject-citizens. A generative interface between political notions of a learning economy and socio-political aspirations for expanded notions of decent work, beyond the enduringly necessary fair pay and safe conditions demands, and beyond juridically defined notions is consequently opened up.

Of course, these demands for organizational reconceptualisation and relinquishment of managerial holds over the terms of debate are scarcely palatable to managerial interests and to organizational learning models conceived in that framework. Nonetheless, it is to organizational developers and educators, as well as academic commentators, that I direct these theoretical propositions. A dynamic conception of organizations recognises that setting the terms and agenda of organizational learning is a political process and not necessarily a forgone conclusion of managerial privilege and workers' acceptance. When participatory avenues are closed,

consequences manifest in the passive demands of disaffected employees in the withholding of competence and the pursuit of alternative self-satisfying expression<sup>2</sup>. Such outcomes are typically seen as obstructions to organizational learning and innovation. But a reconceptualisation of organizational knowledge and worker learning in accordance with the recognition of the subject status of the working person can mitigate those obstructions and contribute to the construction of new organizational institutions, including those for participatory structures of governance and management. Recognition, rather than suppression, of the political contest over the stakes of organizational life is a key condition of these changes.

A learning organization conceived as comprising learning worker-subjects is capable of institutional transformation of a nature rarely admissible by instrumentally driven conventional organizations. In this model, managerial power, notwithstanding its currently reasserted privileging, is recognized as one important force among others in organizational and workplace activity. Workers, trade unions and worker educators gain more socio-political space for a renewed assertion of their agenda for the education of workers for agentic participation toward plural goals in organizational life. This plurality of goals, which include economic goals and non-economic, cultural goals; emancipation and self-determination, rests on a full recognition of the needs of workers in plural, democratic societies. Furthermore, a rejection of the conception “human resources” and a reconceptualisation of learning in organizations to reflect the moral ideal of the worker-subject make possible a renewed and effective link of organizational practice with broader cultural notions of persons and citizenship. Conceptions of decent work are expanded to a demand for a correspondence between citizens of civil society and citizenship in organizational workplaces. Development of capacities for self-directedness, cooperative endeavour, trusted utilisation of expertise, and for participatory management relations in the workplace reflects and encourages the revitalisation of models of civil, democratic society.

## 14.6 Conclusion

The subjugation of notions of personhood at work, and of substantive socio-cultural ends of rational economic activity, is commonplace in today’s workplaces. Their prevalence makes critique and reconstruction even more imperative. Reconceptualising the worker, who is the subject of

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<sup>2</sup> Numerous examples of these include deliberate mediocre performance, elaborate practical joking and playing fantasy games on the Internet. See, for example, Casey (2002); Jermier et al. (1994); Kunda (1992) for further discussion.

work and of learning in contemporary knowledge-based economies, is vital for both the articulation of a moral ideal, and for the imagination of learning organizations beyond their currently truncated conceptions. The idea of the worker as subject is a principal key in the conceptualisation of both new forms of knowledge and the substantive socio-cultural ends of knowledge. This subject, as I have outlined above, is increasingly demanding new and reimagined social arrangements. Cultural currents of self-expressivism, identity movements, ecology and ethical debates represent some iterations of the newly demanding subject. Articulation of these demands in workplaces contributes to a widening of the agenda of decent work and practically advancing it in concrete situations.

Within a movement toward a globalising learning economy a sophisticated organizational strategy arises in the recognition of the demands of the aspirant- subject and a strategic alignment with the moral ideal struggling for articulation in these demands. Proponents of organizational learning and worker education may find much that is useful in a conception of the worker as agentic subject who brings her rich capacities for life – as a desiring, creating, relational person – into her working life and organizational participations. Such a recognition may contribute to the development of innovative and sophisticated organizations. In turn, innovative organizations practicing decent work may stimulate renewed potential for a revitalisation of democracy and the reduction of social fragmentation on a global scale.

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