Strategy Making and the Search for Authenticity

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ABSTRACT. Recent work in the business ethics field has called attention to the promise inherent in the concept of authenticity for enriching the ways we think about core issues at the intersection of management ethics and practice, like moral character, ethical choices, leadership, and corporate social responsibility [Driver, 2006; Jackson, 2005; Ladkin, 2006]. In this paper, I aim to extend these contributions by focusing on authenticity in relation to a set of organizational processes related to strategy making; most specifically an organization's strategic intent, arguing that these provide an ideal venue for particularising this exploration, as they represent the key processes through which an organization defines the self it aspires to be. In order to do this, I examine specifically what a shift from "business as usual" to the search for the creation of a more authentic corporate self might look like in practice, contending that such a shift offers the possibility for improving both the moral good and the business outcomes of an institution simultaneously. I conclude with assessment of the risks inherent in undertaking such a search for more authentic strategic intention in business organizations today.

KEY WORDS: strategy, authenticity, collaboration, Heidegger

Despite its deep and long-standing roots in many academic disciplines, the concept of authenticity has received scant attention in the business literature, yet has the potential to bring a new and powerful lens to management theorizing and practice – particularly at the intersection of discussions of ethics and management. In this paper, my aim is to explore this potential, building on important recent work in the ethics area that uses authenticity to argue for new framing of core issues like moral character, ethical choices, leadership, and corporate social responsibility (Driver, 2006; Jackson, 2005; Ladkin, 2006). I begin by reviewing evidence for authenticity as an idea of increasing interest and relevance in our current society and then move on to explore its use and contribution in the literature of multiple disciplines. I then focus on business strategy making, specifically on authenticity's application to the notion of strategic intent, a core concept in the strategy literature, with the purpose of investigating what creating an *authentic* strategic intent might mean and offer to business theory and practice. Finally, I conclude with the story of one organization's attempts to adopt a new set of strategy practices in line with the arguments made in this paper, and acknowledge a set of risks inherent in such a pursuit.

Introduction

The intensifying search for the authentic

Scholars across a wide variety of disciplines have called attention to what they see as an intensifying search for authenticity on the part of individuals in developed societies. The seemingly mystifying popularity of "reality TV" (Rose and Wood, 2005), rise of historical fiction (Hartmann, 2002), and increased interest in folk art (Fine, 2004) have all been cited as evidence of a search for experiences that feel "real." Hypotheses concerning the driving forces behind this interest abound. These include a desire to escape the avalanche of mass media "spin" and what Erickson (1995) has termed "pseudo-individualism;" the rise of a consumer culture that trades consumption for meaningful participation, in both work and civic life (Hardt, 1993); fears of loss of meaning and freedom, amidst the rise of instrumentalism and institutionalism (Taylor, 1991); and the lessened influence of the

family and fixed norms and traditions in an increasingly open society (Berman, 1971). Another view sees the search as a form of a backlash against the cynicism of post-modernism (Boyle, 2003). In the business sphere specifically, a perceived rise in corporate manipulation and/or guile has been conjectured to lead to increased interest in authenticity. Regardless of the specific catalysts they argue for, virtually all of these authors conclude that an increasing sense of alienation exists and that the pursuit of the authentic appeals as a palliative, if not a cure.

Developmental psychologists, on the other hand, have tended to see the search for an authentic self as driven by a natural human urge that seeks psychological health, rather than as a reaction to external factors. In this view, the search for one's authentic self is an important part of the transition from adolescence to adulthood and is linked to psychological benefits in the form of heightened self-esteem, positive affect, and hope for the future (Harter, 2002).

These differing views, one based on external threat and the other based on internal development and growth, resonate with both the business and moral challenges faced by business organizations today, comprised as they are of individuals seeking meaning and coherence in their personal and work lives and operating within the context of an increasing competitive marketplace and relentless pressure to continually improve financial performance. Given that authenticity's fundamental concern is with how individuals forge authentic selves in an on-going dialogue with the significant others around them (Taylor, 1991), its scant attention in the management discourse represents an enormous opportunity for scholars.

Defining authenticity

The concept of authenticity has deep roots in many disciplines – philosophy, developmental and social psychology, sociology, and the fine arts to name only those that I will discuss in this paper. All center on the notion of being ''true to oneself'' as the core, but each highlights different aspects of the construct, and the complexity surrounding the notion of the ''self'' to be true to. Yet, regardless of what literature we find it in, the concept of authenticity is grounded in a social constructionist perspective that questions the prevalence of objective, disembodied reasoning on the part of human beings in social settings. As Anton (2001) notes: ''the issues at stake are not knowledge, truth, and reality, but rather experience, meaning, and existence.''

It is in philosophy that discussions of authenticity are most extensive. Though the idea of being true to oneself can be traced back to the Greeks, it has attracted recent scholarly attention through the work on existentialism of Sartre (1956) and Heidegger (1962), among others. For both, the essential nature of authenticity is developmental – it is a process of continually becoming. For Heidegger, this becoming involves accessing the ''withheld'' – the future within that lies awaiting emergence in a process that requires a suspension of judgment that allows remaining open to the possibilities and which has been described as ''the lifting of a veil from the eyes through mindful participation in the world'' (Painter-Morland, 2006). Darey calls it a ''dwelling between past and future possibilities, authenticity involves a being open to the call of the withheld – not a prising open, but a remaining open.'' (1999, p. 89).

Taylor (1991) writes from a communitarian perspective and locates authenticity as part of a dialogical process between the individual and others of significance in which the goal is to ''discover and articulate our own identity.'' The process that he describes involves both creation and discovery, again within an environment of openness to others. For Taylor, as for developmental psychologists, the notion of differentiation – the discovery and articulation of an individual's unique identity – is key. Related to this is what Anton (2001) refers to as an individual's ''once occurredness'' – the notion that each is unique in and of him or herself and exists only at one point in time, and therefore is never substitutability by any other.

Also critical for Taylor is the moral dimension of authenticity. ''The self,'' Taylor notes, ''exists only in a moral space of questions about the good,'' and so authenticity is important as a moral ideal, with an attendant ethic that demands that each individual think responsibly for him or herself. For Sartre, authenticity is the ultimate ethical value, Jackson (2005) argues.

Against a backdrop of a social context that is given, defining the self entails determining what is

significant. Ultimately, finding the authentic self is about action more than reflection. Heidegger notes that, ''Each one of us is what he pursues and cares for. In everyday terms, we understand ourselves and our existence by way of the activities that we pursue and the things we take care of'' (1962, p. 159). Authenticity, or its lack, is thus determined by actual choices, often made in the face of uncertainty and purpose (Jackson, 2005).

Within Psychology, developmental psychologists, notably Fromm (1947) and Maslow (1968), have stressed similar normative dimensions of authenticity and the enhanced psychological benefits of acting in ways that are true to oneself. Voice – the ability to express oneself in ways consistent with inner thoughts and feelings – is seen as fundamental to the development of authenticity. Freedom of choice is also central as subordination and authenticity are seen as incompatible (Harter, 2002). A related theme is that of engagement. Active participation lies at the heart of authenticity, Hardt (1993) asserts, and involvement in decision-making processes is essential. MacCannell (1976), borrowing from Goffman (1959) argues that what is sought is an invitation to be part of the ''backstage'' – to be one of the performers, rather than cast as audience.

Social psychologists, on the other hand, have tended to emphasize the role emotion plays in their discussions of authenticity. Because of the primary role that self-knowledge plays in uncovering the authentic self, emotions are seen as delivering critical messages to the cognitive mind about the self's true state. For them, such ''undistorted perception of immediate psychological reality'' serves as the foundation of the authentic (Salmela, 2005). Helm (2001) notes that emotions not only reveal the true self, they drive the behaviors that construct the evolving self. He differentiates between the impact of cognitions (beliefs and judgments) and conations (desires), or what he terms *goal-directedness* versus *desire-directness*. Only desires, he argues, cause us to seek to change the world. Similarly, Pugmire argues that such emotions are the ''mainspring of action... it is via awakened desires that emotions create tendencies to act'' (1998, pp. 14–15).

Work in the Fine Arts has also recognized the role of authenticity in studies as diverse as Kemal and Gaskell's (1999) edited work on authenticity in the performing arts; Peterson's (2005) study of country music legend Hank Williams and Trilling's (1972) analysis of Hamlet. A dominant theme here has been the notion of the authentic as both highly original and simultaneously rooted in familiar traditions.

These different aspects of the authenticity discussion – its emphasis on developing a differentiated sense of self within a larger social context; of each individual's ''once occurredness;'' on the primacy of voice and participation and recognition of the powerful role of emotions; and, finally, recognition of the comfort of the familiar against the lure of the novel – although seemingly disparate are, in fact, related and unproblematically consonant with each other. They come together to provide useful yet untapped insights into creating an environment likely to result in more authentic selves in a business context – a subject to which we will now turn.

Authenticity's emergence in the organizational literature

The concept of authenticity has received scant attention in the business literature until very recently. Though sociologists have studied the phenomena of authenticity in business settings for decades, they have mostly been concerned with whether authenticity was even possible in organizations. Hochschild (1983) draws a differentiation between what she calls ''deep'' and ''surface'' acting in her studies of flight attendants and the organizational pressures they face to behave inauthentically when confronted with customer demands. MacCannell (1976, 1999) explores the experiences of tourists, developing a sense of what it means to be ''authentic'' through their eyes. These studies have found, for the most part, a negative institutional influence on the self.

''Faking it'' to aid in the creation of an ''authentic'' experience is a related and contested topic (Miller, 2003). Interestingly, MacCannell (1976, 1999) who found Williamsburg with its ''historical reproductions'' a benign phenomena in the original 1976 publication of his study is, by 1999 in the afterward in the 2nd edition, repulsed by what he sees as the more virulent behavior of Disney and its consequences for the ''victims of corporate servitude.'' Architectural

critics have tended to be equally negative on the subject, concerned for the effect of such "fakery" in the name of authenticity on society at large (Huxtable, 1997).

Yet, "fake it till you makes it," is a long accepted maxim and a small number of business scholars have been more optimistic about the positive effects of pursuing such a strategy. Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) note that individuals who strongly identify with their organizational roles feel most authentic when performing those roles in a process in which "role playing becomes role taking." Whereas "surface acting" produces emotional dissonance and alienation, genuine role taking produces psychological well being and satisfaction, they argue.

More recently, the areas of marketing (Boyle, 2003; Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Rose and Wood, 2005) and leadership (Goffee and Jones, 2005) have discovered authenticity. Particularly in the leadership arena, "authentic leadership" is seen as offering a new paradigm (Cooper et al., 2005) whose salient features include an emphasis on self-knowledge, perspective taking, and relational transparency (Avolio and Gardner, 2005). Rose and Wood (2005), exploring the puzzling success of reality TV, use the phrase "satisfying authenticity" (a phrase that we will later use in relation to business strategy) to describe what the viewers they study seek – the intersection of the "real" with the desirable. Most of the leadership works, however, invoke the term "authenticity" only in its common usage, paying virtually no attention to the literature discussed earlier in this paper. As a result, much of the potential power of the concept has not yet been tapped.

An exception to this has been recent work in the ethics field which grounds the authenticity discussion deeply in the work of Sartre and Heidegger, using it to explore the development of moral character and its interaction with the ethical choices made (Jackson, 2005); the quality of leadership and the nature of its engagement with others (Ladkin, 2006); and questions about the construction of the organizational self and its implications for views of corporate social responsibility (Driver, 2006). In the remainder of this paper, I hope to build on these important contributions by particularizing the discussion of how authenticity might meaningfully contribute to advancing theory and practice in

business. I do so by focusing in some depth on one specific set of corporate processes that lie at the core of the construction of the organizational self – those involved in the making of strategy. I examine the case for a shift from "business as usual" to the search for strategy-making processes that facilitate the creation of a more authentic corporate self, arguing that it is possible to improve both the moral good and the business outcomes of the corporation by doing so.

Authenticity and strategy process

Authenticity argues that, as individuals, we are each unique – an end in and of ourselves – partially born that way but also importantly constructed through our social context. We both discover and invent this emerging self through active engagement with that context in complex ways in which both emotions and cognitions play a role. The authentic self, either individual or organizational, is both rooted and evolving continuously. As a result, it is impossible to calibrate how "authentic" any self is in an objective way: authenticity is a subjective sense rather than a fact of our existence. Thus, we cannot hope to achieve – and would not have a reliable method of measuring even if we did – authenticity. We can only hope, instead, to move towards a greater sense of having it, in a process that remains inevitably subjective and somewhat mysterious. Of necessity, this shifts our attention from content to process – if we cannot say what an authentic strategy looks like, we can at least, specify the process conditions under which it is most likely to emerge.

A substantial body of research in the business field, though it has not invoked the language of authenticity, has examined the processes through which organizations formulate and enact their strategies, and in ways consonant with the same underlying notion of broad and active engagement of organizational members in the strategic decision-making processes that authenticity suggests. Most relevant to our discussion here is the work of Burgelman, Mintzberg, and Senge. Burgelman has highlighted the role of "autonomous strategic processes" (Burgelman, 1983) that occur throughout the organization, outside of the province of senior leadership control, that can play an important role in

facilitating an organization's ability to explore and adapt. Similarly, Mintzberg (1985, 1994) is known for his pioneering work on "emergent strategy" which recognizes a theoretical continuum of strategic approaches from the entirely deliberate to the wholly unintentional. In particular, he notes two alternatives of particular relevance here: the "ideological" in which organizational members strongly identify with a shared vision and "process" in which leaders focus attention on controlling the strategy process, rather than its content outcome (Mintzberg and Waters, 1985). Finally, Senge's seminal work on learning organizations (1990) draws attention to many of the same issues raised by the search for authenticity, particularly the central role of dialogue in the process of learning.

Why business needs authenticity

In the discussion thus far, I have argued that increased attention to authenticity and its themes – the differentiated sense of self located within a larger social context; each individual's "once occurred-ness,"; the importance of voice, active participation, and emotions; and the tension between the novel and the familiar – brings a different lens through which to view business strategy making, offering new ways to frame and explore key strategy concepts that challenge traditional approaches and practices prevalent today.

In beginning this analysis, I want to focus the ensuing discussion specifically around the creation of an organization's *strategic intent*, a core concept in the strategy literature. Hamel and Prahalad, who popularized the term in a well-known *Harvard Business Review* article in 1989, define strategic intent as specifying a future leadership position and providing a sense of "discovery, direction, and destiny" (1994). Strategic intent lays out a set of aspirations intended to focus organizational activities on a new future. Its goal is to marshal and leverage employees' commitment, to help them to focus and resist distraction, and to concentrate for as long as it takes to achieve success.

A similar theme is prevalent throughout the change management literature, which specifies a clear and desirable future state as a cornerstone of successful change processes (Fritz, 1989; Hendry,

1996). It is the tension between current reality and this desired intent that creates the energy for change. Senge et al. (2004) place such a "crystallizing intent" at the center of organizational ability to create new futures. Creating a powerful strategic intent and specifying how to get there is generally seen as the core purpose of strategy-making processes.

"Business as usual" strategy making

In order to make my case for greater scholarly and practitioner attention to authenticity in business and its potentially attractive outcomes, I first need to set up a notion of "business as usual" that lays out how strategy making actually happens in the majority of large business organizations today, in order to contrast this with a different, more authentic model.[1]

Despite much talk of empowerment over the past several decades, the making of strategy remains perhaps the last bastion of corporate prerogative (Liedtka and Rosenblum, 1996). The corporate stance remains one of a kind of "solicitude," to borrow from Heidegger (1962), which "leaps in and dominates." It is paternalistic with strategy-making processes closely controlled by senior executives. Espoused strategy is formulated almost exclusively at the top of the hierarchy and delivered to employees as pre-packaged communication – most frequently taking the form of mission and value statements, announcements of strategic goals and ambitions, and strategic plans.

In practice, the results produced by "business as usual" – either in moral or financial terms – have not lived up to expectations, despite decades of dedicated effort from scholars, consultants, and executives. On the one hand, Ethicists have raised questions as to whether such pronouncements might actually harm, rather than help, a firm's moral climate and facilitate bad faith by "packaging values" (Nash, 1995). On the business performance front, evidence also exists that they do little to facilitate producing superior financial outcomes. Despite their widespread use, such communications have not been shown to be seen as useful and relevant by the majority of employees (Bart et al., 2001; David and David, 2003; Mintzberg, 1994; Wright, 2002). Much attention in the strategy literature has been paid to how to make these communications from

corporate more effective (Eccles and Nohria, 1992; Pfeffer and Sutton, 1999) with little evidence of success.

One underlying contributor to this problem, so obvious as to be seen as self-evident, yet rarely discussed in the business literature, is that these espoused organizational strategies and goals are simply not seen as relevant or personally meaningful to employees. As a result, they are ignored or given lip service, without significant behavioral change resulting (Liedtka, 2006). And why should they be? The lack of active involvement in decision-making, the inhibition against using voice in hierarchies, the assignment to the role of audience member rather than actor, the banality and lack of sincere emotion in the statements themselves – all stand in opposition to the prescriptions for the creation of a sense of authenticity that we have reviewed here.

Exacerbating this, and almost always unstated but evident in corporate actions, is a sense that each individual employee is substitutable – that the relationship between the individual and the organization is a market based transaction in which one unit of labor is essentially similar to another, given similar qualifications. This, too, is in stark contrast to authenticity's requirement for the realization of "once occurredness" (Anton, 2001). Combined with paternalism, the reliance on pre-packaged communications and a perceived lack of personal relevance, this underlying sense of substitutability produces an attitude of entitlement and what Anton (2001) calls "neglectful indifference." What it generally does not produce is the committed implementation of new strategies. An understanding of authenticity suggests both why this is happening and what needs to change in order to correct it.

Facilitating authentic intention

Authenticity points us towards a different set of practices, attitudes, and by inference, resulting behaviors. Consider the contrast between "Business as usual" as described above and a hypothetical environment in which the notion of creating an authentic intention was taken seriously.

Such a shift would entail, first of all, a movement in the corporate stance to a different kind of solicitude that Heidegger calls "caring" – one that "leaps forth and *liberates*" (Anton, 2001, p. 157), rather than *dominates*. The definition of "care" here is, in fact, quite similar to that of feminist ethics (Benhabib, 1992; Gilligan, 1982; Held, 1993), focusing on the self as connected to others, taking as its distinctive elements an attention to particular others in actual contexts, and a commitment to dialogue as the primary means of moral deliberation. This stance focuses on enabling others to be free for their possibilities. This is consistent with Driver's argument for a more realistic and functional view of the organizational self as "interconnected, complex, and changing," constructed on an on-going basis through the various narratives of its stakeholders, rather than the illusory and dysfunctional, yet common, definition of corporate self as "uni-dimensional, integrated, stable, and unified" (2006, p. 346). Strategic intent, in this model, would be created in a participative, rather than top–down, process in which employees would be invited to take a meaningful role as participants – to look for the intersection of their "personal project" with that of the organization (Freeman, 1984).

The emphasis would be on each as a differentiated individual – "once occurring" – with the responsibility for his or her own development within the context of the development of the larger organization. Thus, corporate intent would grow out of "dwelling" in the kinds of strategic conversations that recognize the possibilities latent within each individual. The role of strategy-making processes would be to create a space in which those latent possibilities could emerge – in which Heidegger's veil could fall from their eyes to reveal the link between their possibilities and the organizations future – and in which the inevitable tensions across the differing individual visions could be acknowledged and reconciled on the path to forging a collective one. Such a use of Heidegger's concept of "the withheld" is supported by new work in the strategy field from some of its most influential thinkers, who argue that the most powerful futures are found by looking inside, rather than outside (Senge et al., 2004), and that the role of strategic planning processes ought to be "learning from the future" as well as from the past. The likely result of this would be change processes that engage – that are driven by *desire*, rather than goals, and commitment rather than compliance. The resulting

attitude, Anton (2001) argues, would be one of "passionate responsibility."

The role of senior leaders would be equally important, but dramatically different, in this world of authentic intention. Rather than formulate detailed strategies, they would articulate the boundaries and norms of the conversation. Much like a teacher in the Socratic Method, they would facilitate learning conversations that encouraged personal exploration within a community purpose, encouraging each individual to look for his or her own meaning, but guiding the discussion to coherence and eventually to the creation of some shared meanings. Acknowledgment and comfort with the role of emotion would be key; the illusion that "cool, detached deliberation" is the ideal model for organizational discourse at all times is problematic (Jackson, 2005). "Ideal" strategy making of the kind described here involves capturing and working with the tension between a distanced objective appraisal of current reality and passionate imagining about a better future.

Such leaders must be comfortable with dreaming as well as analyzing; with listening more often than speaking and they must manage the rules of engagement in the strategic conversation, rather than controlling the content of the strategies themselves. They must be willing to prioritize and to intervene, but only when needed.

Throughout, it would be the *process* rather than the *outcome* that mattered most. These strategic planning processes would be aimed at creating committed communities of shared purpose, not specific strategic plans. This focus on the process of becoming also resonates with the much-discussed concept of flow (Czikszentmihalyi, 1990) and its assertion that it is the process of creation itself (rather than the end result – the *finished* product) that is the root of satisfaction and high performance.

Creative ideas for growth would emerge from a community grounded and stabilized by a shared history and tradition, looking to each individual's unique possibilities as a way of invention. This idea that an individual – or an organization – ideally remains rooted in tradition and social context, yet continues to grow and develop in unique new ways addresses one of business' central issues: where healthy growth comes from.

The inevitably dialogic nature of these discussions, reflecting the realities of the way individuals make sense of their social environments, rather than assuming a single perspective in which all see the world the same way, shines light on factors traditionally given little attention in the strategy literature – subjective experience, the role of emotions, and the existence of tacit knowledge.

All of this takes time – a resource that organizations are notoriously reluctant to spend. As Ladkin (2006), Heidegger's quality of dwelling – a kind of engagement between leader and employee in which mutual influence occurs and each individual's latent possibilities are invited to emerge – must be "unhurried." This is not meant to imply that strategic decisions cannot be made quickly as needed under conditions of urgency; rather it suggests that strategic decision-making is likely to be most effective when strategy-making processes create "prepared minds." Such preparedness is developed during periods of "downtime" that allow for sustained dialogue and reflection that ready organizational members to act decisively in real-time periods of urgency, as needed. Creating fallow periods for such activities necessitates careful planning and commitment on the part of leadership, given the press of daily pressures that consume so much of managers' time in organizations today.

What these seemingly less efficient but more authentic processes may consume in terms of planning time, however, they may well make up for in effectiveness, creating a kind of "satisfying authenticity," an acknowledgement of today's reality that combines with a shared consensus around a desirable future, that is the gold standard in the currency of organizational change.

Authentic strategy making in action

The aforementioned discussion may sound too utopian to be actionable in a real institutional context. Yet, organizations are experimenting with new approaches that capture many of the ideas discussed above. Though few of these leaders of these efforts have likely read Heidegger, they see the possibilities inherent in creating more authentic strategic intents. I offer a case in point to demonstrate this and to make real the theoretical possibilities discussed thus far.

Strategy making at the New York Botanical Gardens: a case in point[2]

The New York Botanical Gardens, established in 1891 and modeled after London Kew Gardens, is one of the largest botanical gardens in the world, with both scientific and public use missions. For a period of several decades, it suffered a period of decline. Throughout this time, the organization under different leaders had embarked on a number of strategic planning efforts intended to improve the Garden's position – both physically and financially. All had failed to halt the erosion. The last and most visible of these, led by a prestigious New York based strategy-consulting firm, had, in particular, left employees resigned and cynical.

In the early 1990s, under the leadership of a new president, the Gardens embarked on yet another extensive planning process, aimed at recapturing the Garden pre-eminence. This approach, however, was very different than previous ones – focusing on a high level of participation in what was to be a lengthy, all-inclusive process. Input from all employees, at every level, was solicited during the two-year planning process. Central was the formation of the planning team, numbering about 85, which included all managers with program responsibility and included previously ignored areas like security and food service. Each manager, beginning with those at the front-line, was asked to give a three-part oral presentation to the entire planning group that focused on three areas: (1) how their role contributed to the Garden achieving its mission; (2) the dreams they had for the future – the possibilities each of them perceived, individually in their own roles, to move the Garden forward over the next 7 years; and (3) what resources they would need to accomplish this. Each presentation was followed by a question and answer period involving the group at large.

Not surprisingly, the total cost of the proposed plan when tallied exceeded even the most optimistic estimates of the fundraising capabilities of the institution. In the final step, the president, working with participating board members and senior leaders, synthesized and prioritized across all areas, and presented a proposed final plan for the larger group's discussion. Despite the need to cut back on the larger group's original dreams, there was nearly complete consensus among all members of the extended planning group in support of the final plan. Realizing the aspirations the plan contained necessitated a 165 million dollar fundraising effort, three times larger than anything the Gardens had previously attempted.

The Garden's approach reflected many of the themes around authenticity discussed in this paper:

– Each individual employee was invited to participate in the strategic conversation and asked to share the possibilities for the future that energized him or her at a personal level.
– The emotion evident in these presentations was treated as positive and appropriate; employees' passion as they spoke for their dreams engaged and inspired those who listened.
– The Q&A sessions introduced a vehicle for voice, creating a safe environment for all participants to publicly raise questions that challenged or supported what was being said.
– The content of the discussion, while grounded in the historic mission of the institution (a boundary set by the president before the discussion started), invited creative and novel thinking about new aspirations and approaches to achieving it. People found it meaningful and interesting.
– There was a ''dwelling'' in the conversation of the kind that Ladkin (2006) suggests is essential for mutual influence and latent possibilities to emerge. The group met every fortnight for 2 years.

A decade later, the results are impressive on many dimensions. One hundred and seventy-five million dollars has been raised and virtually every aspect of the plan has been successfully achieved. The Garden's remarkable renaissance has been profiled in publications from the *New York Times* to *Architectural Digest*.

Did the planning approach itself make a difference? Both employees and executives believe it did. Garden employees at every level demonstrate the ''passionate responsibility'' that Anton (2001) describes. One front-line manager explained:

> All of the good things that have happened here might have come out of a process where senior managers got together and made all of the decision, but I don't think so. Even if they did, and even if the Gardens looked the same, it would feel a lot different. The

ownership we feel – the investment that we all have in making the plan happen – that wouldn't be here. Neither would the patience that we developed in waiting for the things that my area has been promised in the plan.

Senior management talked about the energy that the inclusive process created that sustained the on-going implementation of the plan, the increased understanding of the business issues the Garden faced that participation in the process generated, and the decrease in turf protection that resulted. The president described the rationale for his belief in inclusive planning processes:

> We created the process based on the belief that the people in middle management know more about their work than we do. We respect their experiences and their opinions. We, as senior managers, had to filter it and integrate it and add our own ideas about priorities, but I believe that people have to be included...You need consensus – otherwise, a year or two later people are shooting down the pieces that they didn't like in the first place...

The example offered here is from a non-profit organization; we might question whether the principles apply to the business sector as well? Certainly, the use of approaches consistent with the pursuit of an authentic intention is more pervasive in the social sector – we hypothesize that this is because the illusion that senior leadership can impose a path to the future on unengaged organizational members rarely survives long in a world where many employees remain with an organization out of a deep commitment to its mission, and despite what the job pays. The luxury of the delusion that people and, in turn, the organizations they inhabit, successfully change their behaviors in the face of mandates from above belongs largely to business organizations today – and ignores much of what we know about the process of change itself. Leaders harbor this delusion at great cost to their organizations – and to their employees.

Moving authenticity forward

As the NYBG story demonstrates, introducing greater authenticity into strategy-making processes is not a hopelessly idealistic endeavor necessitating a Herculean overhaul of organizations, as we know them today. It can begin with a practice as simple as asking individuals at different levels of the organization "what if anything were possible?" and creating a safe environment in which their answers are listened to with respect, and taken seriously; giving employees what Max DePree, former CEO of the Herman Miller Company, has called "a voice, not a vote."

To begin, we need not even concern ourselves with the larger question of the composition of the organizational self – we can begin by merely conceiving of the organization as a *space* in which the possibilities inherent in the collection of unique individuals that comprise it have the opportunity to emerge, in much the same way as we see it as a space in which a set of business outcomes for customers emerge. Yet, out of these processes, which would undoubtedly be uncomfortably chaotic and incoherent at times – an organizational self would emerge. An organization is *both* an entity in and of itself over time and a collective of specific individuals who come together at a particular point in time. The good news is that the kind of systems and processes likely to produce a more authentic strategic intent at the organizational level would, as a matter of course, have to tap into the "withheld" of the organizations' members. There is simply no other way to get there.

In doing so, it would likely produce a more socially aware and responsible institution in the process. Driver asserts that much of the conversation in the area of corporate social responsibility has been focused on the wrong question. Instead of asking how *self-interested* the organization should be, we should be asking how the organizational self is *defined*. If we did this, she argues, being connected naturally leads to being good:

> Being connected, as part of an authentic, relational organizational self-definition, means or leads to being good. This is true because the good is defined here not egoically as an absolute standard that can be defined simplistically or rigidly as a permanent, once-and-for-all answer. Rather the good defined post-egoically refers to a good that is negotiated among multiple others or stakeholders and reflects a complex web of relationships... (2006: 349).

The case for leaving authenticity alone: implications for scholarly inquiry

Throughout this paper, I have championed the benefits of a greater attention to authenticity in business circles. There are, however, serious potential risks to invoking the mantle of authenticity in the name of improving business that need to be acknowledged and subjected to scholarly inquiry.

Foremost among these is the reality that *pursuing* the authentic is a contradiction in terms. The authentic emerges; it is not summoned at will. The idea of creating business processes to ferret it out doesn't work: similar to other concepts like "communities of practice," the most that organizations and their leaders can do to create authenticity is to create an environment hospitable to its emergence.

Secondly, *faking* the search for the authentic will make matters worse. If the authentic is found to have value, it is almost inevitable that many business' efforts directed towards achieving it will be sufficiently superficial as to discredit and misuse the concept, as the failed implementation of similarly positive but value-laden ideas like creating "learning organizations" and "total quality management" programs testify. Such misuse breeds cynicism and risks reducing authenticity to an "insidious form of indoctrination" (Jackson, 2005).

Furthermore, to even talk about a strategic intent as authentic raises serious issues. Strategic intent is undeniably not tangibly real in an objective sense – it is an image or idea of a future state that is future-focused – it is imaginary. What we aim to achieve is the *perception* of strategic intent as authentic. "Managing" perceptions invokes images of charlatans and faith healers – things we seem to already possess in sufficient quantities in the business world. Even more dangerous, Miller (2003) points out that is not the *knave* that we should fear but the *fool* where authenticity is concerned. Our powers of self-delusion, our willingness to be seduced into confusing the real with the desirable, may be far more troubling than our ability to be easily deceived by others.

Finally, some argue that the co-existence of authenticity and instrumentalism is problematic prima facie. Sociologists and architectural critics have weighed in already on this one (Hochschild, 1983; Huxtable, 1997; MacCannell, 1999) – Disney, Williamsburg, smiling at customers; it's all bad for the soul. Anything that seeks to create a sense of the genuine on the way to creating other outcomes must fail the authenticity test in the minds of many. Yet, other scholars disagree.

Despite these misgivings and potential landmines, as scholars with our own sense of "passionate responsibility" how can we abandon the pursuit of the authentic? Taylor (1991) points out that organizations need not be the *enemy* of authenticity – they can be its *host*. Boyle (2003) asks the most pressing question of all: what kind of world do we create when we accept that each of us – nearly all of whom spend the majority of our waking lives working within the confines of one kind of institution or the other – can be authentic only at our leisure?

Acknowledgement

Notes

[1] Like all straw men, this shorthand for "business as usual" suffers from over-simplification and generalization. I ask the readers forbearance in this – having spent 20 plus years as an advisor to such activities in corporations, I believe it to be sufficiently accurate to warrant use.

[2] A more detailed version of the Garden's story is contained in the two cases "Strategic Planning at the New York Botanical Garden (A) and (B)," UVA-BP-0383 and 0384 (Darden Publishing: Charlottesville, VA).

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