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2006 Martin Buber's I and Thou: Implications for Reclaiming the Soul in Organizations

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Finally, I would like to acknowledge that this is the first lecture since Dr. Winifred Weter passed away earlier this year. She was and continues to be a model for women professors here at SPU, and her stories of care and commitment to the members of this university serve as examples of *I-Thou* relationships within organizations.

PREFACE

Fifteen years ago, as a young instructor at Columbia University, I had the honor of being in the same department as Morton Deutch. Professor Deutch was a student of the father of social psychology, Kurt Levin, and went on to become internationally known for his work on mediation, conflict resolution and social justice. During my second year at Columbia, I had the privilege of hearing Mort deliver an annual lecture much like we are about to hear this evening. I sat in the front row of the hall right in front of him and eagerly awaited spending the next hour learning about the application of his research on conflict resolution to his international consultations.

Five minutes into the lecture I found myself in a terrible predicament. How was I going to stay awake for the next fifty-five minutes? Mort had chosen to read his lecture, which was densely structured, and worse still, to read it with no inflection or emotion, barely looking over his paper at his audience. His goal that evening did not so much appear to be to encounter his audience, to create, what Martin Buber refers to in *I-Thou* as "a world of relation," but rather to use the audience in terms of Buber's *I-It* relationships as "a thing among things." But more on that distinction later.

This is the dilemma for anyone delivering a lecture that also will be published for some posterity. How do I intelligently deliver a talk that can be absorbed aurally in real time in which the audience is treated as participants in a dynamic event *and* prepare a static document that has some gravitas of ideas that can perhaps be read with some savoring long after the lecture is given?

I have intentionally chosen to try to create an hour in which we can attempt to meet Buber's goals of encounter, dialogue and relatedness by writing in a style that can be orally communicated and save the denser academic version for some little-read academic journal. However, since I can't help myself, there are abstruse footnotes scattered throughout the text.

I don't remember a thing Mort said that evening. I did manage to keep my eyes open and gaze focused, but I was painfully exhausted by the end of the lecture. Except for that hour, my recollections of Mort are all overwhelmingly positive and are all based on memories of a giant in my field who was incredibly humble and willing to take time to have conversations with a very junior colleague. I believe that we are more likely to remember words spoken within an *I-Thou* relationship, and so I hope that my words and delivery honor the humanity of those who attend this lecture.

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Martin Buber's *I and Thou*:

Implications for reclaiming the soul in organizations

For most of the twentieth century, scholarship associated with the psychology of work has assumed that work is fragmented and supersedes the rest of life's endeavors. As noted organizational psychologist Chuck Hulin recently wrote,

Contemporary man has replaced God and King with himself at the center of his life. For most people, the self is now defined by work more than any other element of their lives including God and country. No other choice we make with the possible exception of our spouse influences each of us, our families, our children, our values, or our status as much as our choice of a job or occupation.¹

Spirituality at work

Only more recently have organizational psychologists attempted to develop a more holistic and self-oriented approach to understanding the motivation to work² and the underlying social structures in organizations that facilitate the development this sense of self. Since its inception, the study of management has more simply asked how to best fit people to their jobs in organizations.³ In the past decade, however, there has been

¹ Charles Hulin (2002). Lessons from industrial and organizational psychology. In Jean M. Brett & Fritz Drasgow (Eds.), *The psychology of work. Theoretically based empirical research*, pp 3-22.

² This body of research is often referred to as Person-Organizational Fit. See Amy L. Kristof-Brown, Ryan D. Zimmerman & Erin C. Johnson (2005). Consequences of individual's fit at work: A meta-analysis of person-job, person-organization, person-group, and person-supervisor fit. *Personnel Psychology*, 58, pp. 281-342.

³ One notable exception was Dr. Lillian Moller Gilbreth, who was a pioneering Industrial Engineer and the first woman industrial / organizational psychologist. In her thesis and later published work, *The psychology of management* (1921, New York: Macmillan), she argued that jobs should be designed around the skills and motivations of employees. She is best known, however, as the long-suffering mother of twelve in her children's book, *Cheaper by the dozen*.

a growing interest in asking how organizations can design work to meet the skills, interests and personal motivations of its employees. Within this movement, a new subspecialty has arisen which is known as Management, Spirituality and Religion, or, MSR.⁴ MSR provides opportunities for scholarship regarding the role of spirituality in the workplace.⁵

With approximately ten years of scholarship, spirituality in the workplace is beginning to find its way into Introduction to Management textbooks. For example, a recent text noted that characteristics of a spiritual organization include 1) a strong sense of meaningful purpose; 2) focus on individual development; 3) trust, respect and an environment that is free from fear; 4) the development of work environments that honor the humanity of workers by offering a modicum of job security, emphasizing employee empowerment and narrowing pay and status differentials; and 5) recognition that higher order organization goals can be met through a multiplicity of approaches that can honor individual

⁴ The Academy of Management, which is the international guild for management professors, established the interest group of Management, Spirituality and Religion in 2000.

⁵ While some writers in the field of spirituality in management have argued that spirituality is independent of religion, others have argued that religion is both an individual and institutional construct and that the practice of spiritual disciplines, personal reflection on religious writings and gathering in community can foster spiritual experiences. As such, religion can serve as a pathway in the process to claim the sacred. Subsequently, religion and spirituality represent related rather than independent constructs for seeking and understanding the sacred. For more on this debate see

Donde Ashmos & Dennis Duchon (2000). Spirituality at work: A conceptualization and measure. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 9, 134-145.

Margaret Diddams, J. Lee Whittington, & Teresa Davigo (2006). Creating in the name of God who creates. A whole life model of vocation & work. *Journal of Management, Spirituality and Religion*, 2, 310-331.

Peter C. Hill & Kenneth I. Pargament (2003). Advances in the conceptualization and measurement of religion and spirituality. *American Psychologist*, 58, 65-74.

Peter C. Hill, Kenneth Pargament, Ralph W. Hood, Micheal E. McCullough, James P. Sawyers, David B. Larson, & Brian J. Zinnbauer (2000). Conceptualizing religion and spirituality: Points of commonality, points of departure. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 30, 51-77.

Kenneth Pargament (1999). The psychology of religion and spirituality? Yes and no. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 9, 3-16.

employees' own goals and interests.⁶

This common summary of spirituality in the workplace is fairly devoid of, well . . . , spirituality. It has basically repackaged the writings of the mid-twentieth-century Human Relations School of Management,⁷ who tended to view humanity as full of potential, active, capable of developing personal goals, self-directed, efficacious, and both capable and willing to enter into team work. Management only needed to develop the skills to create the appropriate work environment for both the self to flourish and productivity to increase.

Nature of the Soul

MSR's interest in promoting the self in the work place harkens back to the age old question of "what makes a human genuinely human?" Dating back to the Greek philosophers, the answer was the soul. In fact soul is often mentioned within the writings that associate both religion and spirituality with modern work-life. But the use of soul is often metaphorical, simply representing a non-behaviorist approach to understanding self-identity. In the popular press, books associated with the soul at work define it as 1) one's inner self;⁸ 2) the interactions and struggles to maintain the multiplicities of selves within each of us;⁹ 3) "the way that emotional or relational depth is honored and the way that yearnings for development or evolution are given space";¹⁰ or 4) one's

⁶ Stephen Robbins (2005). *Organizational behavior. (11th ed.)*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.

⁷ The proponents of what would become known as the Human Relations School of Management include Elton Mayo, Abraham Maslow, Douglas McGregor, Fredrick Hertzberg, Rensis Likert, David McClelland & Chris Argyris.

⁸ Cheryl Peppers & Alan Briskin (2000). *Bringing your soul to work*. San Francisco: Berrett – Koehler.

⁹ Alan Briskin (1998). *The stirring of soul in the workplace*. San Francisco: Berrett – Koehler.

¹⁰ Margaret Benefiel (2005). *Soul at work*. New York: Seabury Books, p. 10.

authentic self.¹¹

Perhaps the lack of emphasis on the transcendent is related to an unease with definitions that border on the religious. Writers on spirituality in the workplace often deride religion as merely a set of rules. However, psychologist Kenneth Pargament, in his distinction between the characteristics of spirituality and religion, notes that a benefit of religion is that it provides theological frameworks with which to organize and synthesize ideas that relate to the transcendent.¹² To move the field of management spirituality and religion forward as a whole there needs to be a willingness to examine and critique these theological frameworks rather than simply dismiss them as a form of proselytism. I believe that the examination of the meaning of soul within such a framework could move our understanding of its implications beyond mere self-identity.

Within Christian theology the soul is not metaphorical. However, checking in with my more theologically oriented colleagues suggests that the Bible is less than specific in the terms and definition of the nature of the soul and that there is no Hebrew word or idea even closely related to the concept communicated by the modern understanding of a spiritually transcendent "soul." The English word *soul* is translated from the Hebrew word *nephesh*, which Dr. Rick Steele informs me, means life force, or whatever it is that living bodies have and corpses don't. *Nephesh* has also been translated as breath, exhalation and throat.¹³

If we accept what Fuller professor of psychology Warren Brown

¹¹ Lee G. Bolman & Terrence E. Deal (2001). *Leading with soul: An uncommon journey of spirit*. San Francisco: Jossey – Bass.

¹² *The psychology of religion and spirituality? Yes and no*, p. 9.

¹³ Colin Brown (1978). Soul. In *The new international dictionary of the New Testament* (vol. 3, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Press, p. 679.

refers to as our “souliness,” what is its nature? This question has growing importance given the gains in our understanding of DNA and the inner workings of the brain. According to Brown, there are three ways that the soul is currently viewed in academe. The first approach has been labeled “Reductive Materialism” and serves more as a straw man than a true argument for the soul. Reductive materialism views humanity as determined by DNA and believes that all behavior is best understood as sequenced firings of neurotransmitters. Francis Crick, the co-discoverer of DNA, explains that a modern neurobiologist sees no need for the religious concept of a soul to explain the behavior of humans. His opening paragraph of *The astonishing hypothesis* reads,

The astonishing hypothesis is that “you,” your joys and your sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of personal identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behavior of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules.¹⁴

If we reject the notion that we are no more than a complex DNA sequence, then what is the alternative to understanding the nature of the soul? Historically, thanks to the Augustine’s careful reading of the Greek philosophers, especially Plato, Christianity has embraced a dualism that sees the soul as residing within the body and promotes the idea that we have a soul that is non-material and will rise up out of our bodies and ascend into heaven when we die. This dualism turned into more of a tripartism with Descartes’ famous dictum “I think, therefore I am,” giving us body, mind and soul.

¹⁴ Francis Crick (1995). *The astonishing hypothesis: The scientific search for the soul*. New York: Scribner, p. 1.

However, at the Spring 2005 meeting of the Society for the Study of Psychology and Wesleyan Theology, which was held here at SPU, a panel of theologians, philosophers and psychologists roundly dismissed the notion of dualism and instead emphasized a type of monism that Warren Brown (who was part of the panel) has labeled "Nonreductive Physicalism." Nonreductive physicalism views an integrated mind, heart, soul, body and brain such that these personhood characteristics are all part of the human physical body. We are not reduced to biology but supported by it. In his writings, Brown argues that *nephesh* as understood by the Old Testament writers referred to the whole person. To say it more simply, we do not have a soul but rather are a soul. This embodied soul is "the net sum of encounters in which embodied humans relate to and commune with God (who is spirit) or with one another in a manner that reaches deeply into the essences of ourselves."¹⁵ For Brown, the experience of the soul emerges from personal relatedness: "it is the experiences related to others, to the self and most particularly to God that endow a person with the attributes that have been attached to the concept of soul."¹⁶

Personal relatedness is an emergent property of human cognition. Before going into the cognitive properties that allow for personal relatedness, let me first discuss the meaning of an emergent property. An emergent property is a unique mode of functioning that becomes possible on the basis of a significant increase in the capacity and interaction among lower level abilities. These emergent properties are dependent on

¹⁵ Warren Brown (1998). Cognitive contributions to the soul. In Warren Brown, Nancey Murphy & H. Newton Maloney (Eds.), *Whatever happened to the soul? Scientific and theological portraits of human nature*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, p.101.

¹⁶ *Cognitive contributions*, p. 102.

lower-level functioning but can not be understood through the lower abilities alone. Brown writes that the properties of soul emerge from personal relatedness, which in turn emerges from mental capacities. While the human experiences of soul are conditioned by the following mental processes they can not be reduced to them. Brown suggests five interdependent mental processes that are critical for personal relatedness. The first is the ability to communicate complex and abstract ideas in past, present and future tense. The second is the ability to develop a theory of the mind to contemplate one's own and others' thoughts and feelings and to demonstrate and or receive empathy. The third ability is episodic memory or the ability to recall historical memory of events and persons, times and memories. The fourth is conscious, top-down agency or the ability to modulate ongoing behavior in light of one's own decisions. The last is the ability to think through the future implications of current behaviors.¹⁷ These cognitive abilities allow us to recognize and define ourselves in time and place. They also allow us to recognize and define others not only in time and place but also in relation to ourselves and the communities in which we function. These sets of cognitive abilities allow us to form and hold relationships.

How then does one use these cognitive abilities to extend and receive relatedness and as a result nurture "souliness"? Martin Buber's *I and Thou* provides a glimpse of how these cognitive abilities allow us to receive and engage in personal relatedness.

¹⁷ Brown stresses the point that the development of soul does not rest entirely on one's own cognitive abilities. He writes that people with diminished cognitive abilities have soul because "although cognition contributes to the soul in the final analysis, it is God's act of relating that engenders soul in each human being" (p.125). He did add, however, that the soul could be diminished to the extent that one chooses not to participate in community regardless of one's cognitive make-up. See pp. 124-125.

Martin Buber's I and Thou

Martin Buber (1878 – 1965) was a Jewish writer, philosopher and social activist for the cause of Zionism. He spent most of his early life in Germany, immigrating to Palestine in 1938 with the outbreak of World War II. He is best known for his 1923 essay *Ich und Du* which we know as *I and Thou*.¹⁸ Like many European philosophers at the end of World War I, Buber struggled with the meaning of human existence in the aftermath of such carnage. *I and Thou* is in the form of a philosophical manifesto in which Buber wrote that human reality exists as encounter. Or as Desmond Tutu has written, “We are, therefore I am.”¹⁹ In *I and Thou*, Buber describes two forms for relationships that he emphasizes are not mutually exclusive. In the first relationship, *I and It*, the *I* stands apart from others. In the second type, *I and Thou*, the *I* and the other affirm each other, which in turn offers a glimpse into the face of God. Let me explain each more thoroughly.

Buber writes that human relationships are often viewed as instrumental to other life goals, which he labels *I-It relationships*. In *I-It* relationships, the *I* is detached and removed from the humanity of others, treating things, people, etc., as objects to be examined and used. The common “business speak” of “leveraging others” is a form of *I-It* relationships.

I-Thou relationships recognize the mutual holistic and reciprocal existence of both parties within an encounter.²⁰ These relationships exist

¹⁸ The first English translation by Ronald Gregor Smith appeared in 1937. Buber published a revised version of his original essay in 1958. I am citing Martin Buber (1958 / 2000). *I and Thou*. Translated by R. G. Smith. New York: Scribner.

¹⁹ Desmond M. Tutu (1999). *No future without forgiveness*. New York: Doubleday.

²⁰ Buber's *I and Thou* and the Philosophy of Dialogue were not without severe critics noting the lack of depth in the development of his ideas and the Utopian nature of his writings that appeared to appeal to anti-

for their own benefit and not to meet other instrumental goals. Buber argues that relationships have intrinsic value. Human beings can place themselves completely into a relationship, to truly understand and "be there" with another person. Buber writes that it is possible to engage in *I-Thou* relationships with inanimate objects and animals, other human beings and with God, whom he labels as the "eternal *Thou*," although he emphasizes that the main *I-Thou* relationship is between humans.²¹

Buber writes that man becomes more fully himself²² through the *Thou*, that through others we experience our own *I*. Though *I-It* and *I-Thou* have the same cadence, they differ in subject and object. In *I-It* relationships the *I* is the subject acting on others, but in *I-Thou* relationships, the *I* is the object allowing others to act on him. Thus there is a reciprocal relationship. By recognizing the humanity of others in my relationships, I open myself up to be allowed to be their object as they allow themselves to be my object. We both become simultaneously

intellectualism. For a critical review of Buber's work see Willard Moonan (1981). *Martin Buber and his critics. An annotated bibliography of writings in English through 1978*. New York: Garland. Another important criticism is Buber's lack of operationalization regarding an *I-Thou* relationship. Buber was hesitant to define more fully and distinguish between *I-Thou* and *I-It* relationships. He wrote that operationalizing an *I-Thou* relationship would be tantamount to objectifying it and thus moving it to the realm of an *I-It* relationship. This lack of operationalization, however, is not unheard of in the social sciences that take a more postmodern narrative rather than logical positivist approach to knowledge generation. For example, Murray Bowen in his design of Family Systems Theory, which explains differentiation of the self within a social system, never meant to have his theory, which is well articulated, operationalized. See Micheal E. Kerr & Murray Bowen (1988). *Family evaluation: An approach based on Bowen theory*. New York: Norton.

²¹ Buber argued that both types of relationships are necessary in life and that relationships are not static in one category or the other. He also cautioned against trying to force an *I-Thou* relationship for fear of objectifying the relationship. While *I-Thou* relationships are bound to become instrumental at some point and turn to *I-It*, Buber viewed God as the "eternal *Thou*," the one relationship that would never become objectified. Buber believed that religion was best understood within the framework of relation. Consequently as we engage others in *I-Thou* relationships we come face to face with God. According to Buber, the essence of religious life is not the affirmation of religious beliefs but rather the way one meets the challenges of existence.

²² Buber used the male pronoun throughout his writings. For the sake of simplicity, I have chosen to use the male pronoun to reflect Buber's thoughts, recognizing that his writings are not intended to be gender specific.

subject and object and begin to develop a richer sense of self through these reciprocal “*Thou*” interactions, recognizing in the other an affirmation of self.²³ As Buber writes, “My *Thou* affects me as *I* affect it.”²⁴

I-Thou relationships occur through three interrelated types of mutual and reciprocal interactions: 1) encounter, 2) dialogue, and 3) relation. Let’s turn now to look at these more closely.²⁵

Encounter. The first attribute of an *I-Thou* relationship is encounter, which occurs when two *I*s enter relation at the same time. Given the reciprocal nature of the *I-Thou* relation, encounter occurs as individuals engage with each other fully – meeting with a willingness to be in relation. It is not merely two individuals sharing time and space but instead a real interaction in which *I-Thou* relationships can occur. This initial encounter, the start of the reciprocal relationship, takes what Buber calls “trustful knowing.”

Dialogue. Buber’s ideas are often referred to as the Philosophy of Dialogue. Buber began his essay by writing about words and speaking into *I-It* and *I-Thou* relationships.²⁶ In his 1947 essay *Between man and man*, Buber commented on three types of dialogue.²⁷ The first is technical dialogue, which is prompted solely by the need of objective

²³ This mutuality of being is the main theme in Buber’s later essay titled *Between man and man* which was written in part to further his explication of *I-Thou* relationships. See Martin Buber (1947 / 1965). *Between man and man*. New York: MacMillan.

²⁴ *I and Thou* p. 29.

²⁵ Because Buber wrote in German, *dialogue*, *encounter*, and *relation* are not his original words. For *Dialogue* he used *Zwiesprache*, which can also be interpreted as “conversation.” For *Encounter* he used the word *Begegnung* which can also be interpreted as “meeting.” For *Relation* he used *Beziehung* which has also been interpreted as “community.” Perhaps most importantly Buber used the German phrase *Ich-Du Beziehung* which uses the informal *You* and for which there is no English equivalent. See Roland G. Smith (1975). *Martin Buber*. Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press.

²⁶ *I and Thou*, p. 19.

²⁷ See Mark K. Smith, (2000). Martin Buber on education. *The encyclopedia of informal education*. Retrieved April 11, 2006 from <http://www.infed.org/thinkers/et-buber.htm>

understanding such as an e-mail providing instruction on completion of a homework assignment. Then there is monologue. Rather than try to explain this, let's listen to Buber's own words:

And there is monologue disguised as dialogue, in which two or more men, meeting in space, speak each with himself in strangely tortuous and circuitous ways and yet imagine they have escaped the torment of being thrown back on their own resources.²⁸

These first two types of communication represent *I-It* relationships, but genuine dialogue within *I-Thou* relationships occurs when each participant is mindful of others' attempts to communicate and listen in the present rather than stray into the past or future. In an *I-Thou* relationship, there is the intention of establishing a living mutual relationship between the dyad. The etiology of *dialogue* comes from the Greek: *Dia* meaning "through" and *Logos*, which translates into "meaning." Communication is used to find shared meaning.

In the early 1980's, the physicist David Bohm first began to be interested in the extent to which communication patterns mimicked the collective properties of particles. Since 1983 he has been exploring the nature of dialogue, with his most famous work being his 1996 book titled *On dialogue*.²⁹ In his description of dialogue he writes,

When one person says something, the other person does not in general respond with exactly the same meaning as that seen by the first person. Rather, the meanings are only similar and not identical. Thus, when the second person replies, the first person sees a difference between what he meant to say and what the other

²⁸ *Between man and man*, p. 19.

²⁹ David Bohm (1996). *On dialogue*. New York: Routledge.

person understood. On considering this difference, he may then be able to see something new, which is relevant both to his own views and to those of the other person. Thus, in a dialogue, each person does not attempt to make common certain ideas or items of information that are already known to him. Rather, it may be said that two people are making something in common.³⁰

Bohm goes on that dialogue can only occur when participants are able to acknowledge that their own understanding may be limited and thus willing to accept that others will contribute to a more successful understanding and solution to an issue. Management consultant Peter Senge notes that in dialogue people must become observers of their own thinking.³¹ This resonates with Buber's writings that in *I-Thou* relationships, the *I* becomes both subject and object in relation.

Following Bohm's conditions for dialogue, Linda Ellinor and Glenna Gerard,³² the cofounders of *the Dialogue Group*, define qualities of dialogue which include 1) suspension of judgment, 2) release of the need for specific outcomes, 3) an inquiry into and an examination of underlying assumptions, 4) the opportunity to risk being authentic without negative consequences, 5) a slower pace that honors silence, and 6) listening without your mind wandering into your own alleyways in order to understand common meaning. In dialogue, a person is not trying to sell a solution, but rather to listen deeply to another. The listener will not form a reply until the speaker is finished. The dialogue

³⁰ *On dialogue*, p. 3.

³¹ Peter Senge (1990). *The fifth discipline*. New York: Doubleday, p. 242.

³² Linda Ellinor & Glenna Gerrard (1998). *Dialogue: Rediscover the transforming power of conversation*. New York: Wiley.

may include silence, but Buber wrote that this waiting is a part of dialogue.³³

Relation. The third attribute of an *I-Thou* relationship is relation which has also been translated as “community.”³⁴ Early in his adult life, Buber had deep concerns about what he saw as a false dichotomy between the individualism in capitalism and the collectivism in Marxism. He rejected both and influenced by his Hasidism, instead wrote that relation or community occurs as men “take their stand in living mutual relation with a living center.”³⁵ According to philosopher and Buber biographer Robert Wood, Buber viewed authentic community as built upon 1) the acceptance of others, 2) a living relation with fellow men, and 3) a common reference to a living center. Buber viewed this living center as akin to the *zaddik* or spiritual leader found in Hassidic communities.³⁶ In community one does not stand apart from others. Community is a recognition in present time that one’s self is intertwined with that of others through interpersonal relationships where common discourse through dialogue can occur.

Tying these three attributes together, *encounter* is an event or situation in which *relation* occurs and the fundamental means for relation is through *dialogue*.

³³ In his later writings, Buber emphasized that silence or stillness was the basis of dialogue. See Martin Buber (1947). *Tales of the Hasidim: Vol. 1; early masters*. Translated by O. Marx. New York: Schocken.

³⁴ While Buber wrote about relation in *I and Thou* (pp. 53-58), the ideas associated with it are more fully developed in his essay *Between man and man*.

³⁵ *I and Thou*, p. 53.

³⁶ Robert Wood (1969). *Martin Buber's ontology*. Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, p. 76. See *I and Thou*, pp. 53 & 54.

Personal Relatedness and I – Thou

The cognitive abilities that support the emergent property of personal relatedness are also necessary for encounter, dialogue and relation. Encounter occurs as people are able to communicate with each other, differentiate among the past, present and future, and experience empathy. Neuroscientist Donald MacKay suggests that dialogue occurs when we are able to form mental maps of each other in conversation.³⁷ Relation is dependent on the ability to control behavior and develop trust, which requires the ability to think through future implications of behaviors and events. Both Brown and Buber point toward the notion that the essence of soul, that which makes us uniquely human, is developed through relationships. While Brown writes that there are three types of relationships (self, inter-personal and God) without specifying a hierarchy, Buber writes that we know God or the eternal “Thou” through relationships with others. Buber’s writings on relation, or community, speak to the notion that the personal relatedness that leads to the nourishment of the soul does not occur only in dyadic relationships but can develop within a larger system of community with multiple encounters. A community, on the other hand, does not exist in a social void but develops rules and roles for its members. This sense of community is congruent with the modern definition of an organization.

Nature of an Organization

In the twenty-first century we tend to think that organizations are synonymous with corporations. But think again. Churches, Boy Scouts, and families are also forms of organizations. In management science,

³⁷ Donald M. MacKay (1991). *Behind the eye*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

organizations are typically defined as:

A collectivity with a relatively identifiable boundary, a normative order, ranks of authority, communication systems, and membership – coordinating systems; this collectivity exists on a relatively continuous basis in an environment and engages in activities that are usually related to a set of goals; the activities have outcomes for organizational members, the organization itself, and for society.³⁸

There are several attributes of organizations that should be highlighted in this definition. First is the lack of physical structure. A church congregation is not a building, but it functions more effectively (perhaps) when housed in a physical structure. Likewise, while organizations are not buildings, they function more effectively when there is physical support (even if that physical support is a server or set of routers that allow for worldwide communication). Instead, this definition speaks to the fact that organizations are best understood as identifiable social structures with differing continuums of informal to formal rules, processes, member expectations that are tied to specific goals and outcomes that serve its members, other individuals and/ or social structures that lie outside of its own boundaries. Churches, families, for-profit corporations and universities are all forms of organizations, albeit with different goals, process and metrics for success.

This common definition of an organization contains the simple phrase “a normative order,” which most of us in this field would just quickly agree is a fancy definition for corporate culture and move on. But

³⁸ Richard Hall (2005). *Organizations: Structures, processes and outcomes (9th ed.)*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

for the purposes of this discussion is important to unpack this term. Normative order reflects the group norms or expectations of behaviors that form in an organization. These stem from a smaller number of higher-order shared values which may or may not be well articulated. However behavior that exemplifies these values is formally shaped through positive performance reviews, raises and promotions. Such behavior can also be recognized through informal rewards such as collegiality or isolation.³⁹ Let me give you two examples of an organizational value and its related normative order. In the early eighties I had the good fortune to work at AT&T's World Headquarters in New York City. As a worldwide provider of telephone services, AT&T held the value of consistency. This higher order value led to multiple behaviors that had been shaped and rewarded over its history. Start time was precisely at nine. We quit precisely at five; lunch was precisely one hour, and you were expected to leave your desk. When Philip Johnson designed the postmodern, grandfather clock AT&T building in midtown Manhattan, he talked the company into purchasing blinds for the six-foot office windows that only opened all the way to the top or all the way down. He did not like the idea of looking at a skyscraper with uneven blinds throughout. Given AT&T's value of consistency, we sat in dark offices or blinding afternoon light. But this strong value of consistency also led to conservative behavior that tended to be risk averse. Managers at AT&T were known for their "Bell-shaped heads" that reflected an

³⁹Organizational values and subsequent normative behaviors have their genesis with the founder of an organization. As more people are hired on, they tend to hold the same behavioral norms, adjust to them or not last very long. Psychologist Ben Schneider has labeled this the Attraction – Selection – Attrition model of employee motivation. See Benjamin Schneider, D. Brent Smith, & Harold W. Goldstein (2000). *Attraction-Selection-Attrition: Toward a person-environment psychology of organizations*. In B. Walsh (Ed.), *New directions in person-environment psychology*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

inability to make timely decisions or actions without a drawn-out process through which no single individual became responsible for change.⁴⁰

Given this normative order, there was a deep concern in the mid eighties among upper management that AT&T would be unable to capitalize on the benefits of the divestiture which was to have freed them to do more than provide phones and long-distance service. Their lackluster twenty-year performance and recent purchase by one of their own baby-bells attests to the double edged sword that strong corporate values can wield.

Eleven years later I found myself working for Microsoft. In the 1990's Microsoft valued passion—a passion for technology and a passion for working at Microsoft. How do I know this? One of the main ways that culture, values and normative order are communicated in the workplace are through stories that are publicly and repeatedly told.⁴¹ When Microsoft had only one building, employees would park in order of arrival to note who got there first and who stayed the latest. Developers had sleeping bags hanging from the back of their doors, and even when I was there most folks kept a box of cereal in their office and could go down the hall to get free milk or other caffeinated beverages. And everyone was referred to as a guy. By hearing these stories over and over, employees were socialized to start early, stay late, and if you must go, log in soon with your company issued lap-top. This passion also spilled over into meetings; the product review sessions that I attended had a take-no-prisoners approach to decision making.

⁴⁰ The one bright spot of innovation at AT&T was and remains Bell Labs, later known as Lucent Technologies, which was managed independently from Corporate and which had its own values and normative behaviors.

⁴¹ See Linda Smircich (1983). Concepts of culture and organizational analysis, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 28, 339-358.

And while we don't think of relatedness when we think of corporations, how people interact with each other, how management interacts with employees, and how communication is rewarded or tolerated formally or informally are key components of normative order that stem from shared values. Whether or not these concepts are articulated, the opportunities for encounter, dialogue and relatedness are unfortunately not part of the normative order in most organizations. Consequently, when we go to work, we are not generally faced with the opportunity to nurture the soul. This does not have to be the norm; these attributes can be present at work.

Personal Relatedness in Organizations

In the last twenty years there have been a growing number of companies that have indeed attempted to develop and reward these aspects of relatedness in their normative order.⁴² But here is the rub, each company that I reviewed for inclusion in this lecture recognized that developing relatedness for the instrumental goal of financial gain would be an oxymoron. They made money to stay in business, and through business they were able to meet goals to serve their community and practice behaviors that reflected their articulated relatedness goals. In many cases they did it because their CEOs were on the verge of burnout, and they did not believe they could maintain their role unless there was a growing appreciation for interpersonal processes. I would like to tell you some stories from these companies and from my own life, which have deeply influenced my perceptions of personal relatedness.

⁴² This relatedness includes not only relationships among employees but also with other stakeholders such as customers, suppliers, owners, government and the environment. See *The soul of a business*, p. 34.

Encounter

For many years Max De Pree was the CEO of Herman Miller. Prior to retirement he wrote several books regarding his management philosophy. In his 1989 book, *Management is an art*,⁴³ he begins with a story about his father, the founder of Herman Miller. As a young manager in the 1920's his father was faced with the death of the company's millwright who was responsible for the everyday operations of the plant machinery. His father visited with the widow who asked him if she could read him some of her husband's poetry. The lesson learned through this corporate story is that leaders must encounter their employees first as persons. As an employee at Tom's of Maine put it, "I am a human being not a human doing!"⁴⁴

Here is my story. Our administrative assistant in the Department of Social and Organizational Psychology at Columbia was a holocaust survivor of Treblinka. Tonia probably should have retired years earlier, but she had health problems that dated back to her time in the camp and needed the insurance. One day after I had gotten to know her fairly well, she told me a little bit about how she had survived in the camp by lying about her age and telling the Germans that she was a nurse. But after about twenty minutes she started to tear up and had to stop. Over the two years that I worked with her, I gained only small snatches of conversation with her about her time in Treblinka.

Tonia was the worst administrative assistant that I have ever worked with, and I loved her deeply. You could not count on Tonia to do things quickly, and she was forgetful. One day one of my very senior and

⁴³ Max De Pree (1989). *Leadership is an art*. New York: Doubleday, pp. 5-6.

⁴⁴ *The soul of a business*, p. 42.

well known colleagues was furious that she had not made copies of a handout for a presentation, and he just flat out yelled at her for what was about five minutes. I remember thinking that given everything that Tonia had been through, no one should be allowed to treat her like that. And then as an echo I thought to myself that no one, period, had any business being treated in such a degrading way when they are made in the image of God.

So whether our experience is with a poet or a holocaust survivor, we may be lucky enough to have a life changing encounter, whether full of joy or sorrow, in which we realize that our interactions with others gives us glimpses into our relationship with God. But the more important implication for nurturing the soul in organizations is that all human interactions provide an opportunity for relation in encounter. As Buber writes, "every relational event is a stage that affords [man] a glimpse into the consummating event of [meeting the endless thou]."⁴⁵

Dialogue

Some of us here this evening might count Cherry Garcia and Chunky Monkey among our best friends. While Ben & Jerry's is known for their super-premium ice cream, they are also known for their strong corporate values that drive their normative order with employees, suppliers, and customers. Part of that normative order includes using dialogue to listen to customers. Founder Ben Cohen, in his new book titled *Values-driven business*,⁴⁶ writes that it is important to listen to customer feedback while suspending one's own judgments to make sure

⁴⁵ Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 81.

⁴⁶ Ben Cohen & Mal Warwick (2006). *Values-driven business: How to change the world, make money and have fun*. San Francisco: Berrett – Koehler.

that you can come to a shared understanding of the feedback that you are receiving. Such dialogue helps to build trust and provides a method for storytelling that can communicate not only decisions but how values drive decision making in a company.

Dialogue in corporations is difficult because of the existing power differentiations among team members. Peter Senge has encouraged the use of a facilitator, who “holds the context” of the dialogue and who can ask questions to help obviate hidden assumptions⁴⁷.

About ten years ago I was hired by the Information Technology Group at Microsoft to facilitate an off-site meeting of approximately thirty engineers who were about to form a self-managing work team with only a single director. This group was a subset of a larger reorganization of several hundred employees. The newly appointed director was the driver behind the design, but he wanted input and buy-in from the engineers. Our agenda for the day was to come up with key customer contact processes that would then drive work processes that were internal to the group. Since the design was radical, we decided that dialogue would be an appropriate process. To begin, I went over the agenda, noted the goals and deliverables, and then explained the process. All ideas were welcome; no ideas could be criticized until all ideas were expressed, and with such a large group there could not be “side conversations.” To facilitate listening, I brought a Nerf vortex football, which looks like a football on top of a rocket. You could only talk if you had the football, and once you were done you could throw it to whomever you liked. We also used break-out groups for specific problems, using sticky notes to

⁴⁷ Peter Senge (1990). *The fifth discipline*. New York: Doubleday.

generate and cluster ideas which were then brought to forum – the term we used for the whole group.

Late in the afternoon, one of the engineers identified an underlying assumption. The director was assuming that silence or lack of participation on the part of the engineers meant that they agreed with the decisions that were being made. But several engineers grew angry and said that they did not agree with the decisions that had been made that day and felt shut out. At that point we agreed to change the process. I became the one to throw the football and make sure that everyone who wanted to say something was included. We also agreed that silence in the future would mean consent and that this large self-managing team could only function if everyone felt that they could contribute.

The dialogue processes that we used that day continued to be used by the group for several years. A year after its inception, an employee satisfaction survey of the entire division showed that employees in this self-managing team had greater employee satisfaction on every dimension. They had higher trust in their management, believed that they received fair treatment in decision processes, experienced timely and open communication and had input into their department's decision processes. Frankly, I was surprised at the huge differences in employee satisfaction between this group of engineers and other employees. I mean the football cost all of five bucks! But looking back over the time I spent with them, I can see that through the use of dialogue, these employees not only designed their own work, but also had a stake in designing how they would work together. Most importantly, they had a say in how they expected to be treated.

Relation

Tom Chappell, the founder of Tom's of Maine, was one of those CEO's who was close to burnout. As their brands moved beyond toothpaste and their market expanded, Chappell became personally wealthy but increasingly unhappy with the direction of his own life and his management of the company. He talked his board of directors into allowing him to take a part time sabbatical so that he could study theology at Harvard Divinity School. As part of his MDiv, he read Buber's *I and Thou*, which deeply influenced everything at Tom's of Maine, including their corporate strategy, employee policies, methods of communicating with customers and their product ingredients.

Tom Chappell also describes attributes of encounter and dialogue in his book *The soul of a business*. But the section that resonated with my own work life was the development of community through the intentional telling of stories. Chappell writes that it is difficult to develop community in companies since there are existing hierarchies that carry power and authority, which in turn limit the extent to which people can be known at work. Instead Chappell wanted an organizational culture in which people felt free to be known by more than their job responsibilities, so he has encouraged employees to tell stories about their lives to enrich the relationships among them. Chappell tells about dropping his grouchy five-year-old off at day care, and as he was trying to get his son's boots off, noticing another employee, a woman in charge of customer communication, also trying to get her son settled. With a bit of unease on both sides, they said hello and that was about it. However, that one time of sharing a different type of role gave them additional common ground in which to operate. In meetings this woman felt more comfortable

talking about parents' point of view on the products, not only because she saw their mail, but because she knew that she had a point of relatedness with the CEO. Chappell continues that the common ground fostered through storytelling gives employees multiple points of connectedness and helps people bring their whole sense of self into the workplace.

SPU, Crista, and First Free Methodist Church have provided me and my family with multiple points of connection that have softened the roles and boundaries associated with faculty, staff, administration and student identities. Gail Steele, who served as an administrative assistant in the School of Theology, was our children's day care director at Crista when we first moved here in 1993, and she was my most tangible lifeline as I negotiated a new job, house and baby. Peggy Swanstrom, who then was the office assistant for the School of Business and Economics (SBE), was our daughter Mollie's Sunday school teacher years ago. Mary Hill, the wife of the former dean of SBE, Alec Hill, served as a Sunday School teacher for our older son. As members of the same Sunday School class, I have shared hours of prayer with my Economics colleague Lisa Surdyk and our School of Psychology, Family and Community office manager Kelley Unger. Students whom I taught on Friday have disciplined my teenagers on Sunday, and I have been on nursery duty with some of my students' children. Just last week, I watched Bud McDole, the former chair of the SPU Board of Trustees, try to teach my eight-year-old how to fold a table cloth.

These out-of-role experiences that happen frequently between church and work have only served to strengthen my sense of community at SPU by providing a different venue and opportunities to develop richer

relations with others outside of our job descriptions. It has also taught me to embrace a self-identity that goes beyond being a professor at SPU. To this day, I can not walk by Peggy Swanstrom's desk without being reminded that I am a mom who has had the privilege to rely on wonderful others to help raise my children. And changing the diaper of a student's child pretty much erases any power differentiation that may have been present in the classroom.

To go back to the title of this lecture, "Reclaiming the soul in organizations," "the soul" in the title, does not refer to an organization's soul, which is merely a social structure. However, it is possible to reclaim the opportunity to nurture one's soul through personal relatedness when normative order is driven by values that include attention to encounter, dialogue and relation. While dialogue and relation may be directly rewarded through a corporation's performance appraisal system, they are more likely to be rewarded through collegiality in day-to-day actions to the extent that the leadership in an organization embraces and models them as the normative order. Let me add that these are not just nice-to-have attributes for an organization. Real change and innovation is difficult in any maturing organization. Without some form of dialogue, sabotage though inaction is easy tactic for resistance, and a take-no-prisoners approach to problem solving, where positions are entrenched before communication begins, is a poor method for innovation. The opportunity for employees to nurture their souls is central for both spiritual formation and organizational functioning. For the last part of my lecture, I would like to discuss universities as a special form of organization.

Universities as Institutions

Universities have the opportunity to be known as institutions within their larger community. An institution is a special form of organization, having all of the characteristics of an organization with at least one important difference. As noted earlier the normative order within an organization serves to inform its members of acceptable processes and forms of relationships as they work to meet its organizational goals. An institution, on the other hand, is an organization that holds such a respected normative order that it serves as a model for other individuals and organizations. According to Stanford economics professor Avner Greif, institutions have a social purpose and permanence which transcend the individual human lives and intentions of its members.⁴⁸ Greif writes that an organization cannot will itself to become an institution but instead develops a normative order that is valued outside of its boundaries as more than just a means to its own business end. According to Greif, an organization *emerges* as an institution to those outside of its current membership as others adopt its normative order within their own organization. An institution serves as a model to other social systems through its normative order, not its products.

Perhaps most importantly for our discussion tonight, universities have historically been referred to as institutions when students graduate and move into other organizations, taking the normative order of their schools with them. However, in the past century, universities have lost their elevation as institutions and instead have taken industrial corporations as their own model institutions, adopting the

⁴⁸ Avner Greif (2006). *Institutions and the path to the modern economy: Lessons from medieval trade*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

compartmentalization associated with the factory floor. Students, rather than cars, move along the assembly line from one classroom to the other, where they are inputted with information by professors. Once students are pumped full of required credits, they are pushed off the assembly line with a robe, tassel and parchment into the arms of their own family, who may represent the only organizational structure in which students have experienced an *I-thou* relationship during their college sojourn.⁴⁹

How then can the university reclaim the status of an institution? How do we develop a normative order that is so valued that other individuals and organizations wish to emulate it? Several years ago our colleague Rob Wall posed a question on Facnet, our faculty e-mail distribution list, that has stuck with me over the years. It went something like this – Does education at a Christian school look different than education elsewhere? I had an unarticulated belief that it should look different, but before I started working on this lecture, I could not come up with much more besides a kinder, gentler set of professors who were willing to talk about faith where appropriate – but unlikely in a multivariate statistics class.

However, I would like to suggest to you that the very nature of education at a Christian school can look different than our secular counterparts and elevate us back to the status of an institution if we accept the privilege, obligation and opportunity to nurture the souls of our students and in turn nurture our own.

Nurturing the souls of our students through personal relatedness should be seen as part of our mission to develop the character of our

⁴⁹ David F. Warlick (2004). *Redefining literacy for the 21st century*. Worthington, OH: Linworth Publishing.

students. Character is often associated with being a person of integrity. The development of character occurs within individuals through the formation of traits that include such things as values, morals, interpersonal traits, attitudes, intra-psychic process and interests and preferences.⁵⁰ However, Stanley Hauerwas, who currently serves as a professor of theological ethics at Duke University Divinity School, has argued that character is best understood within the context of the stories we tell or what he calls “the narrative of our community.” He says that “our capacity to be virtuous depends on the existence of communities which have been formed by narratives to the character of reality.”⁵¹ Or as moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre writes more succinctly, character is formed through identifying with some Christian community and making its stories and values one’s own.⁵²

Subsequently, I would like to suggest that the development of character not only includes intra-personal traits such as judgment and integrity but also encompasses the development of “souliness” found in the personal relatedness of encounter, dialogue and relation.

Development of character / soul in universities

But can the soul be trained? Over 2,000 years ago Socrates grappled with the same question. He came to the conclusion that since

⁵⁰ Robert Hogan & R. Robert Sinclair. (1997). For love or money? Character dynamics in consultation. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 49, 256-267.

⁵¹ Stanley Hauerwas (1981). The virtues and our communities: Human nature as history. In S. Hauerwas (Ed.), *A community of character: Toward a constructive Christian social ethic* (pp. 111- 128). Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, p. 116. See also the essay titled Character, narrative and growth (pp. 129 – 152) for more on the importance of character development in relation to others.

Hauerwas has also viewed the development of community in terms of the character of its members: “the development of a person of virtue mandates living faithful to a community’s history. . .an ethic of virtue is profoundly committed to the existence of communities convinced that their future depends on the development of, and trust in, persons of virtue. See The virtues and our communities, pp. 116 – 117.

⁵² Alasdair MacIntyre (1990). *Three rival versions of moral enquiry: Encyclopaedia, genealogy and tradition*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

the soul is a spirit capable of thought and reason, it could be cared for.⁵³ As the historian George Marsden notes in his book *The soul of the American university*,⁵⁴ religion and more specifically Christianity served as the foundation for American higher education up until the 1920's, but with the break between "liberal" and "fundamentalist" factions within Christianity, the dialogue about the proper role of religion in higher education became more circuitous. By the late 1920's it was acceptable to talk about character formation; however, the standard formula for how to influence college students was the phrase "character is caught, rather than taught,"⁵⁵ meaning that students would be able to develop character through the observation of acts of integrity by faculty and administration. This idea of passive character development is not necessarily passé. Professor of educational psychology Larry Nucci recently wrote that "character emerges from the more general individual environment interactions from which students construct their sense of themselves."⁵⁶

I would like to suggest that skills associated with personal relatedness can be developed as course objectives, taught and assessed. There is content associated with each attribute, and the classroom itself can serve as a laboratory for their development. Here is my very modest proposal for both content and process.

Encounter

Issues surrounding diversity, multiculturalism and globalization

⁵³ See Soul. *The new international dictionary of New Testament theology*, p. 679.

⁵⁴ George M. Marsden (1994). *The soul of the American university: From protestant establishment to established nonbelief*. New York: Oxford University Press.

⁵⁵ *The soul of the American university*, p. 348.

⁵⁶ Larry Nucci (1997). Moral development and character formation. In Herbert J. Walberg & Geneva D. Haertzel (Eds.), *Psychology and educational practice* (pp. 127 – 157). Berkely, CA: MacCarchan, p. 151.

can be examined within the framework of encounter, helping students to understand that they function simultaneously as both object and subject and do not stand outside of a multicultural encounter. The classroom itself with both instructor and students could be used as a laboratory for encounter with mutual respect among its members encouraged. I would like to see the practice of encounter included in syllabi and discussed during the first day. For example, student "non-participation" through chatting, on-line shopping, text messaging, or sleeping could be discussed as a form of negative engagement and used as a teaching opportunity.

Dialogue

Skills associated with dialogue can be taught or reviewed in classes and practiced through role playing during class with the instructor serving as facilitator. Groups can be instructed on how to use dialogue skills when working on projects and assessed not just on project outcomes but for the development of dialogue skills. If credit for class contributions is given, it could be assessed for both content and process. Instructors can model dialogue as a request for frequent and fast feedback. In their research associated with communication, psychologists Boaz Keysar and Anne Henley have shown that speakers can overestimate their effectiveness in communicating meaning to others.⁵⁷ Taking time to suspend assumptions regarding student understanding of a concept can be a useful pedagogical tool as well as a way to model dialogue.

⁵⁷ Boaz Keysar & Anne S. Henly (2002). Speakers' overestimation of their effectiveness. *Psychological Science*, 13, 207 - 212.

Relation

Storytelling is a powerful pedagogical tool. In a review of the psychological principles associated with storytelling, psychologist Melanie Green notes that storytelling about the development of ideas can spark student interest, give abstract principles concrete form and lead to mental imagery making material more memorable. More important perhaps is that providing background stories can help engage students' interest by helping them to humanize and put a face on the people whose work they are studying. Stories are especially helpful when they can be told from different points of view, encouraging empathy.⁵⁸

As brothers and sisters in Christ, faculty and students can work toward points of relatedness in the classroom that go beyond instructor and student. Instructors and students alike could be encouraged to tell their own stories in light of the course content. Buber, who also wrote extensively on the nature of education, emphasizes that a teacher is also called upon to actively promote a pastoral / healing concern for the personal well-being of the student.⁵⁹ As an example, psychologist David Myers teaches large sections of approximately seventy students in Introduction to Psychology at Hope College. He schedules what he calls "flash visits" with all students during the first week of class. He takes about ten minutes for each student and generally asks them simple questions such as where they are from, why they chose Hope College and what are their interests? After trying to make these points of connection,

⁵⁸ Melanie C. Green (2004, April). Storytelling in teaching. *Association for Psychological Science Observer*. Retrieved April 15, 2006 from <http://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/getArticle.cfm?id=1562>

⁵⁹ Daniel Murphy (1988). *Martin Buber's philosophy of education*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, pp. 90 – 118.

he notes that “when next meeting the class, I have found myself noticeably more comfortable, as if surrounded by friends.”⁶⁰

All of these activities mean that there is less class time to cover course content. But in light of technological gains that allow students to download podcasts of lectures at highly respected universities such as Stanford, Duke and our own University of Washington,⁶¹ it is very relevant to ask what we as professors provide beyond content, and as Christian professors, what we provide beyond content that is unique to the historical mission of our school and our own sense of vocation. My paltry list above is not exhaustive, but it is perhaps a starting point where we can begin our own dialogue among ourselves and with our students.

I would like to suggest that universities are no longer commonly thought of as institutions. To reclaim their role as institutions, they must also reclaim their mission to nurture the soul of their students. We can not sit down with others at the table of change without the willingness, skill set and experience to encounter, dialogue and be in relation with others.

The Boundaries of Soul Development within Organizations

There are, however, boundaries to the development of soul in organizational life. Buber, in one of his more coherent sections in *I and Thou*, is quite adamant that corporations by the very nature of holding economic goals, could not foster *I-Thou* relationships. *I-It* relationships

⁶⁰ David Meyers (2005, March). Teaching tips from experienced teachers. *Association for Psychological Science Observer*. Retrieved April 15, 2006 from <http://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/getArticle.cfm?id=1745>

⁶¹ Peg Tyre (2005, November 28). Professor in your pocket. *Newsweek*. Retrieved April 15, 2006 from <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/10117475/site/newsweek/>

are typically the modal process in the workplace. This is reflected in the fact that the most commonly articulated goal of for-profit organizations is in itself instrumental: to enhance shareholder value.⁶² In turn, corporations view their resources, including human resources, as instrumental to this primary goal, which often leads managers to also assume that employee motivation is extrinsically oriented and instrumental.⁶³ In other words, within the framework of *I-It* relationships, when corporations view themselves as instrumental, employees easily become instrumental to the organization and are assumed to work for their own instrumental goals. Buber was not keen on the likelihood that *I-Thou* relationships could occur in what his translator called institutions. He too saw that their economic goals precluded the development of relatedness among employees and wrote that the separated *It* of institutions is an animated clod without soul.⁶⁴

But given my previous examples, I would like to argue that *I-Thou* relationships can occur in corporations even if they are bounded by the future orientation of profit motive and the hierarchies that are part of the social structure of organizations. Buber wrote that certain relationships can never approach a perfect *I-Thou* encounter. He gave the example of doctor and patient and interestingly scholar and student. Yet he argued that some semblance of *I-Thou* is, nevertheless, possible. Given the financial goals of an organization, there will be times of layoff, salary freeze and benefit cuts. These actions are not *I-It* in and of themselves,

⁶² Tom Chappell (1993). *The soul of a business: managing for profit and the common good*. New York: Bantam Books.

⁶³ Harvey A. Hornstein (2003). *The haves and the have nots: The abuse of power and privilege in the workplace. . . and how to control it*. New York: Prentice-Hall.

⁶⁴ *I and Thou*, p.53.

however as my colleague Denise Daniels and I have argued in a prior publication with the unsexy title, *How to do lay-offs right*,⁶⁵ that because management science tends to over emphasize the positive aspects of work, young MBA's are not taught how to function in *I-Thou* relationships when bad things happen at work. So when faced with implementing difficult HR decisions such as communicating a lay-off to employees, managers are more likely to try to deal with minimizing their own anxiety by suppressing their image of the humanity of employees to whom they must give bad news instead of encounter with dialogue and relation. It is bad enough to be objectified at the point at which an employee's humanity needs to be most affirmed. But because the workplace is a social system, other employees, who are not directly impacted nevertheless observe the action of their managers. As Columbia management professor Joel Brockner has demonstrated, over the twenty years of his research program, employees who survive some sort of tumultuous shakeup in the workplace are not happy just to have a job, they are waiting for the other shoe to drop -- on them, because if management is willing to treat valued co-workers as an object among objects have they not modeled their willingness to objectify anyone in times of trouble?⁶⁶

In Summary

As noted at the outset, much of the writing on spirituality at work lacks a spiritual or transcendent dimension. It also lacks an overarching framework and instead focuses on a utilitarian "what works for folks"

⁶⁵ Margaret Diddams & Denise Daniels (2002, August). Doing layoffs right. *Washington CEO*, p. 12.

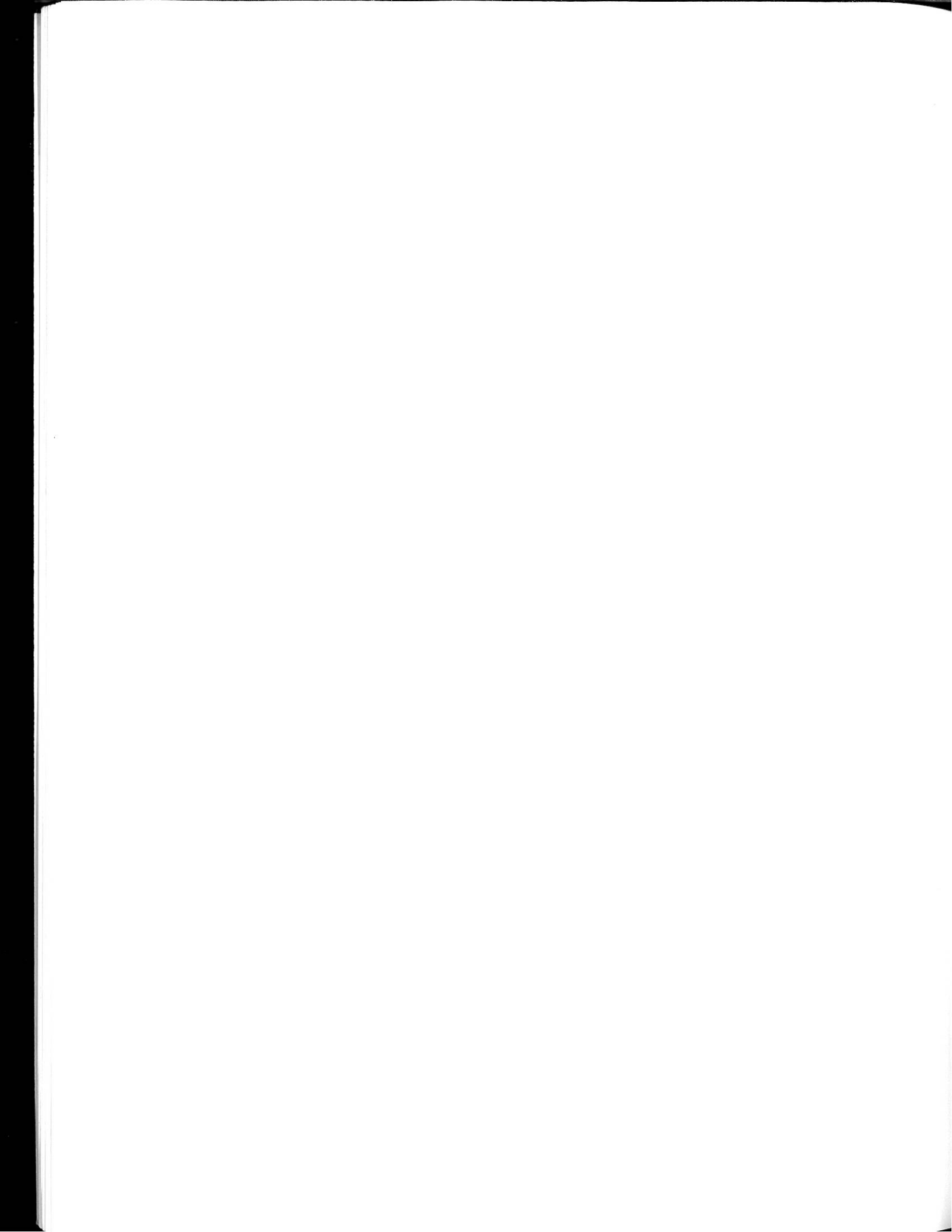
⁶⁶ Joel Brockner (2002). Making sense of procedural fairness: How high procedural fairness can reduce or heighten the influence of outcome favorability. *Academy of Management Review*, 27, 58-76.

approach. Self-oriented definitions, such as the authentic self, speak nothing about spirituality at work as relatedness. As Kenneth Pargament writes, "spirituality is defined as a sense of connectedness rather than a connectedness that is lived out."⁶⁷

The work of Brown and Buber can provide a framework for providing a deeper understanding of soul than currently exists in MSR. Their work provides a glimpse into how soul can be nurtured in organizations and suggests how an organization might evolve into an institution. I have argued that universities, especially Christian schools, can regain their status as institutions to the extent that they intentionally seek to nurture students' souls through coursework as well as intentional active learning and modeling in the classroom of encounter, dialogue and relation.

However, we must be careful to recognize that the economic boundaries and power differentiations that exist within many organizations create boundaries that at times make *I-Thou* relationships difficult to practice. Nevertheless, Buber's writings provide an aspiration to reflect on the development of one's soul across one's multiple life roles.

⁶⁷*The psychology of religion and spirituality? Yes and no*, p. 9.



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Dr. Diddams is an Associate Professor and Director of Research for the Department of Graduate Psychology in the School of Psychology, Family and Community at Seattle Pacific University. She also serves as the Chair of the University Institutional Review Board, which oversees research with Human Participants. Dr. Diddams is an Industrial / Organizational Psychologist who has taught at SPU for ten years in the School of Business and Economics, Clinical Graduate Psychology. Beginning in the summer of 2006, she will be Associate Professor in the new Organizational Psychology Department. She has worked as a management consultant for over twenty years and has spent time as an internal employee for AT&T and Microsoft. Currently Dr. Diddams works with local managers as part of the executive development program at Seattle University. Her areas of research focus on the modern meaning of work, Sabbath keeping, respite and person-environment fit, which examines the congruence between self and organizational goals.

Margaret and her husband Stan have been married for 23 years and have four children ranging in age from 17 to 8. They are members of the First Free Methodist Church where they are members of the Homebuilders' Sunday school class. Margaret is a runner and swimmer and coaches boys soccer in the fall.

Martin Buber's *I and Thou*:

Implications for reclaiming the soul in organizations

The 2006 Winifred E. Weter Faculty Award Lecture
Seattle Pacific University
April 20, 2006

Margaret Diddams, Ph.D.
Director of Research
Associate Professor of Graduate Psychology



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