

**What constitutes a healthy workplace? Ever since the first stone-age hunter risking life and limb mused ‘There must be a better way’, workers and scholars have pondered the workplace with its potential for fulfillment and disaster. In this foray into utopianism, Dr Cynthia Davis draws on notions of Emotional Intelligence, Intuitive Intelligence and Spiritual Leadership to challenge the skeptics and present a program for workplace reform that is rooted in successful utopian experiments and soars with hopeful aspirations.**

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## ***The Utopian Workplace***

by Dr Cynthia R. Davis

### **The Overview**

That we are in the *Knowledge Age*, and moving deeper into it, is a moot point for some. We hear the almost evangelical preachings of globalisation, economic rationalism, down-sizing, out-sourcing and their counterparts, as paving the preferred road to increasing profits and as the panacea for hungry shareholders. Even the Productivity Commission annual report of last year was primarily an in-depth apology for globalisation. But do we ponder the ramifications of the emerging 'borderless' world and its implications for the workplace of the future? How do we make good use of the benefits of economic intercourse and technological progress and share the gains of globalisation? From these considerations how do we then envision *The Utopian Workplace*? Is it to be seen as the bastion of an organization that wants to compete successfully in the new world of global competition and will change its face as global needs dictate? Or is it the bastion of community and co-operation that allows the organization to win markets through the enthusiasm and innovation of its people? The answer is most likely to be found somewhere in between. Paradox relieves, somewhat, the tension of this dual recognition. Consider the following:

### **The Paradox Of Our Age**

**We have taller buildings, but shorter tempers; Wider freeways, but narrower viewpoints;  
We spend more, but have less; We buy more, but enjoy less.**

**We have bigger houses and smaller families; More conveniences, but less time;  
We have more degrees, but less sense; More knowledge, but less judgment;  
More experts, but more problems; More medicine, but less wellness.**

**We drink too much, Smoke too much, Spend too recklessly,  
Laugh too little, Drive too fast, Get too angry too quickly, Stay up too late,  
Get up too tired, Read too seldom, Watch too much TV,  
And pray too seldom.**

**We have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values,  
We talk too much, love too seldom and lie too often,  
We've learned how to make a living but not a life;  
We've added years to life, but not life to years.**

**We've been all the way to the moon and back but have trouble  
Crossing the street to meet the new neighbour.**

**We've conquered outer space, but not inner space;  
We've done larger things, but not better things;  
We've cleaned up the air, but polluted the soul;  
We've split the atom, but not our prejudice;  
We write more, but learn less; Plan more, but accomplish less;  
We've learned to rush but not to wait; We have higher incomes but lower morals;  
More food, but less appeasement; More acquaintances, but fewer friends;  
More effort but less success.**

**We build more computers to hold more information  
To produce more copies than ever, but have less communication;  
We've become long on quantity, but short on quality.  
These are the times of fast food and slow digestion:  
Tall men and short characters; Steep profits and shallow relationships.**

There are times of world peace, but domestic warfare;  
 More leisure and less fun; More kinds of food, but less nutrition.  
 These are the days of two incomes, but more divorce;  
 Of fancier houses, but broken homes.

These are the days of quick trips, Disposable diapers, Throw-away morality,  
 One-night stands, Over-weight bodies, And pills that do everything from cheer,  
 To quiet, to kill.

It's a time when there is much in the shop window and nothing in the stock room.

Indeed it's all true.

The chief cause of failure and unhappiness  
 Is trading what we want most  
 For what we want at the moment.

**Author unknown**

Where do we lay the blame for this trade-off? We may try to blame globalisation and its henchmen for the fast-paced, highly competitive work force of today. But surely it is only partially responsible and we have not even looked at its merits. Too often I meet individuals who have sacrificed themselves to the bastion of the corporate structure. They are depersonalized, have failing families, have little identity apart from their work, and experience the spiritual void at the heart of modern living, a sad product of a work-obsessed culture. Where do we lay the blame? With individuals for not taking responsibility for changing their circumstances, or do we blame the organization for its seeming implacable hold on the lives and souls of its workers?

From the necessary temporary stillness the above poem affords us, we may find the way forward in our search for what *Utopia* really means in the workplace. Again, the holding of seeming opposites is paramount until meaning and vision emerge.

In short, the *Utopian Workplace* is a paragon of both technical excellence and human virtue. It is both a data and product processing system and a human system; it is both a company and a community. It is a place where state-of-the-art business strategy, e-commerce and technical excellence is second to nothing except the unleashing of the potential of individual workers as they seek community and pursue their quest to find meaning in life through their work. The latter is a deceptively simple premise: the notion that individual workers, put as the centre of an organization, will become all that they can become in their place of work and grow the organization exponentially.

The umbrella over the above-mentioned duality of the *Utopian Workplace* is *Spiritual Leadership*. "Our spirit is the vital, energizing force or principal in us, the fertile invisible realm that is the wellspring for our creativity, the core of our values, and the source of our morality" (Fairholm, p7 1997). Because individuals are in many ways a microcosm of the organization, work must involve spirit. "Rather than being a necessary distraction from life, business is business precisely because people bring their whole self, their spiritual self with them to work...we need to reconnect with the fact that our hearts and minds, not just our bodies, are central to our business relationships" (Fairholm, p7, 1997; Gratton, 2000). People respond primarily to the way their leaders feels about them. Leadership, as distinct from management, is a matter of touching the inner life of the worker, not controlling his/her actions. The challenge for leaders here is to guide a movement without institutionalizing his/her power.

So what of profits, lest we forget the fallacy that business exists to make them! They have their place. Arie deGeus provides an apt perspective with his metaphor that profits to an organization are like oxygen to people - they are essential to survival but they are not the purpose (*The Living Company*, 1997). This is indeed the wisdom of organizational *Utopia*.

What, then, is the purpose of business? Business exists to serve. It exists to grow people. The degree to which it does this is the degree to which it will swell with goodwill, dynamic relationships and soaring profits. The sustainable competitive advantage of any organization comes from its people, not its products. Of course, the leap from rhetoric to action is far from easy.

*Flight Centre* (a travel company) is one organization, in a series of others in recent times, that has taken such a leap. *Flight Centre* is Australian. It is a compelling story of success which grew at a rate of one new outlet every 72 hours. That returns an increase in profits each year at an average rate of 45% after tax! That creates a growth in share prices faster than Microsoft over the corresponding period, and that turns both owners and employees into millionaires (Blake, 2001). *Flight Centre* has gone from start-up to Australia's fourth largest retailer in just a few years. Why?

*“Flight Centre has become more than simply an outstanding financial success. Flight Centre has created a community instead of just a company. It has recognized that the business is a living system, and that the key is in liberating the best in people - letting them discover themselves through their vocation. People seek meaning in their work, yet many organizations snuff out human potential instead of unleashing it”* (Blake, 2001).

Thus *The Utopian Workplace* forges its identity from the transcendent individual. Lest we be hoodwinked into thinking that this is about self-glorification it is not. For the 'self' can only be fully potentiated when it serves.

*The only gift is a portion of thyself*

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)

### **The Example**

Job once said that there is nothing new under the sun. The Mondragon Cooperative System (Whyte & Whyte, 1991), which began in 1943 in northern Spain, provides some of the elements of *The Utopian Workplace* described in this article. It is more than worthy of discussion given its remarkable economic performance (Bradley, 1986) despite the vicissitudes of the world economic climate throughout the last 60 years.

Mondragon is the centre of a network of more than 100 employee-owned cooperatives in northern Spain. This includes Spain's largest appliance manufacturer, and its sole producer of microchips. The network spreads throughout the towns and villages across the three provinces of the Basque country .

Mondragon's basic principles include the following: open admission, sovereignty of labour, participatory management, intercooperation, universality, democratic organisation, payment solidarity, social transformation, education

([www.sfworlds.com/linkworld/mondragon](http://www.sfworlds.com/linkworld/mondragon)). These clearly reveal the cooperative's commitment to more than just the bottom line. Its vision is founded equally on altruism and social transformation. This is realized in the elaborate system of secondary cooperatives attached to Mondragon which includes a health and pension system, a research institute that investigates new technological applications, an educational system covering all grades through to a technical university that is itself a producing cooperative, and an impresarial division that focuses in the start-up of new cooperatives. All are governed by boards held accountable to the member coops, as well as their own working share-holders (Hoover, 1992).

All of the economic benefits of the Mondragon Cooperative System are in addition to the advantages for workers of participating in a system where information is accessible, where there is genuine commitment to providing security for workers and their families, and where there is the real prospect of increasing community educational standards, health, cultural participation and wealth itself.

While Mondragon never offered a recipe for human happiness, it continues to offer a workplace where individual workers can self-actualize through their work. Maslow's hierarchy of human needs remains remarkably relevant. Mondragon is an outstanding example of what can occur in an environment where the humanization of the labour process is attempted and achieved. It delivers real benefits for the economy, for the family, for the personal life as well as for the life of the community.

Let's put *The Utopian Workplace* under the microscope and see its detailed elements.

### **The first feature**

The first identifying feature of *The Utopian Workplace* is staff, at all levels, who have *Emotional Intelligence* (Goleman, 1998). This means they have a high level of self-awareness (the primary emotional competency) and know how to move easily from their inner world to their outer world (this is Intuitive Intelligence which is the hidden consciousness of an organization). It means, also, that they are passionate, have strong achievement drive, are skilled in negotiating all kinds of relationships and thrive in the community of the workplace. This describes the transcendent individual. The Emotional Competence Framework, based on the theory of Daniel Goleman (1997) is summarized as follows:

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE
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PERSONAL COMPETENCE  
(how we manage ourselves)

SOCIAL COMPETENCE  
(how we manage others)



Relates to inner states of  
Being, self-awareness, self-  
Motivation, meta-cognition,  
Dreams, spiritual realities

operates via person to  
person relationship and  
covers the whole gamut  
of social competencies



SELF  
AWARENESS

MANAGING  
FEELINGS

SELF  
MOTIVATION

EMPATHY

SOCIAL  
SKILLS



self-awareness, self-reflection, self-actualization, spirituality, commitment, assertiveness, independence, achievement drive, leadership, stress tolerance, reality testing, frustration tolerance, zeal, passion, adaptability, conscientiousness, flexibility, impulse control, persistence, self-motivation, conflict management, problem solving, collaboration, persuasiveness, optimism, initiative, innovation, empathy, change catalyst, social responsibility

These are the qualities that mark people who excel: whose intimate relationships flourish, who create Utopia in the workplace. The development of the above-mentioned competencies creates self-mastery, creativity and innovation, and social competence at work. As the individual changes himself/herself the work milieu will change because the perceptions, thoughts, reactions and behaviours of the individual are different. The new effect will inevitably filter to other people and situations in the organization, like the process of osmosis.

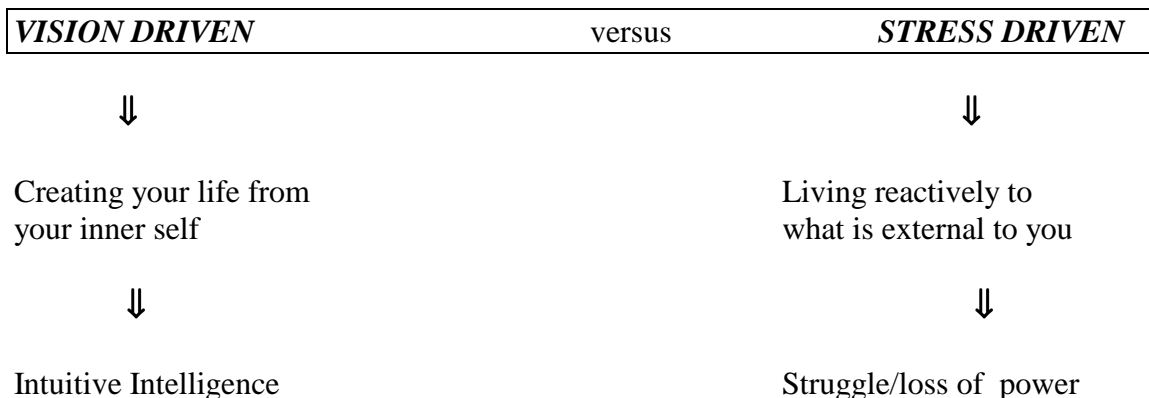
The skills are generalized to all others areas of life. It is the responsibility of the individual to view work colleagues and work situations as mirrors that reflect to the person what he/she is like. Self-awareness enables changes in thinking and behaviour to be made efficiently, without defensiveness or apathy. Many organizations are realizing the importance of Emotional Intelligence competencies in the workplace and are offering training for management and staff in these skills.

Leaders and staff who have Emotional Intelligence have competence specifically in the following areas:

- awareness of how family-of-origin issues and ‘bonding patterns’ can create difficulties in relationships and can sabotage problem-solving e.g the ‘control freak’
- objectivity in relationships as opposed to enmeshment
- awareness of one’s own feelings and how thoughts trigger feelings and actions

- awareness of what others might be feeling and caring about that (empathy)
- hearing their own ‘inner critic’ and knowing how to handle it
- capacity to self-soothe when angry, sad or frustrated
- capacity to relate to others who are angry, sad or frustrated
- capacity to control impulse, motivate oneself and tolerate frustration
- reduce the need to use defensive behaviours (denial, projection, rationalization etc.)
- capacity to separate people from the problem
- capacity to manage conflict
- capacity to manage stress
- knowledge of what motivates other people
- effective use of pro-social communication skills such as levelling, listening, validating, and assertive communication
- intelligent use of emotion to achieve goals and to be creative
- creation of a dynamic workplace environment where people feel good about themselves and can find meaning in life through their work
- nurturing of one’s spiritual nature and finding the joy in life that goes beyond material possessions.

As the individual develops Emotional Intelligence competencies he/she moves from living the reactive, stress-driven life to living the creative, vision-driven one. This is depicted as follows:



This model conceptualizes the emergence of Intuitive Intelligence. The growth of self-awareness and the development of EQ competencies in the workplace leads the individual into the mode of living that is via Intuitive Intelligence, which is the next progression in the transcendent journey of the individual. ‘Intuition’ is intelligence mysteriously ushered into consciousness from the inner realm. When the inner realm is traversed regularly, intuition emerges as the only dependable guide to life, even more dependable than our senses.

Our ‘Intuitive Intelligence’ is the place where Emotional Intelligence and Spiritual Intelligence, the intelligence of values, ethics, and larger meaning in life (Zohar & Marshall, 2000), meet. Intuitive Intelligence illuminates ‘self-awareness’, the primary emotional competency and the one upon which all others grow. It is the hidden consciousness of an organization. It is essential for creating Utopia in the workplace because it moves the individual from the methodical plod of performing work tasks to the heightened experience of inspiration, innovation and creativity at work.

*The Utopian Workplace* starts with the individual by the development of his/her Emotional Intelligence, self-mastery in the inner life and social competence in relationships. In turn it grows the individual to live intuitively. If the workplace does not support individual workers and create an environment for them to develop in this way then they owe it to themselves to leave it, find one that does or create their own!

### **The Second Feature**

The second identifying feature of the *Utopian Workplace* is state-of-the-art information technologies and communications applications. There is no room here for technophobics of any description!

Customer relationship management (CRM) is the emerging buzzword in organisations committed to staying at the top of the technology ladder. “CRM is about automating and enhancing customer-centric business processes supported by a set of applications integrating the front and back office processes. These coordinated applications ensure a more satisfactory customer experience, which has a direct link to a more profitable organisation” (Ding, 2001). The mandate to actively pursue, enhance and manage the relationship with customers is seen as the mechanism for achieving the competitive edge for greater profitability. This is Emotional Intelligence at its best: building bridges of intimacy and goodwill within the workplace and with customers. The human and the technical in sync with each other!

The following section was written by Melissa Ding, an expert in e commerce applications. Melissa highlights how technology, specifically information technologies and communications applications have facilitated the achievement of improved job satisfaction, flexibility in working conditions and more balance in life. She describes the components of information technology and their effects on the modern worker and workplace. Again, the following is IT Utopia in the workplace!

#### **Job Satisfaction**

“Job satisfaction is about how individual employees feel that their work makes a positive difference and how their daily activities contribute to the larger mission.

Customer relationship management (CRM) is the current buzzword. The CRM application suite, together with the customer knowledge database and computer telephony integration (CTI) enabled systems, is going to transform the meaning of call centres. With CRM, the focus is now on customer relationship management and providing value in the customer service and an enhanced customer experience at every customer touchpoint.

The role of the Customer Interaction Centre (CIC) officers is no longer to handle as many calls as quickly as they can, but to customise the service delivery and foster loyalty in their client base to increase sales and maximise the bottom line. This enables them to become a much more integral part of the management team and change their focus to achieve the organisation CRM goals and increase in staff morale. The intelligent handling of routine calls by the CTI reduces the workload placed on the CIC officers, freeing them up to spend more time with

the customers and build up a relationship with the clients. Therefore customer experienced is enhanced and results in greater customer satisfaction.

#### Flexible Working Conditions and Balance in Life

In the early 1990's, telecommuting was made possible with the emergence of a multitude of tools for remote access and has presented workers with a wider option of a "workplace". One of the changes observed is that increasingly, employees who might work full-time in a central office also routinely do "work" at home. Office automation has transformed many paper-based procedures into electronic ones, and face-to-face communication has been reduced by the advent of technologies such as voicemail, teleconferencing and email. These changes, in addition to the availability of high-speed connections, allow people to check email and voicemail from home, and to access the Internet for work-related research.

The value that 21st century workers place on time versus money will continue to shift in favour of time to spend with the family or to pursue an interest or hobby. Many companies are supporting flexible work arrangements to show a company's commitment to work/ life issues, and therefore increase employee loyalty.

Thanks to the Internet and high-speed, instant access to messaging and information, the "home office" or "virtual workplace" is a reality in 2001. More and more employees are working from home, as companies downsize the work area and cut down on overhead costs. Workers benefit by being able to avoid the daily commute to work and the time and trouble it takes to prepare for work too. Giving employees flexibility to work at home is a perk that could attract more people to business. Additionally, these technologies are providing more work opportunities to mothers at home, disabled and the senior population. In this sense, new communication and information technologies can level the playing field for employees.

As the World Wide Web and Internet usage became widespread both in and out of the office, access to information became nearly instantaneous, and the amount of work one person was able to do expanded exponentially yet again - but this time not just at the office. As home computer ownership increased, and as laptop computers became lighter and less expensive, workers found the line between work and home life increasingly blurry. Businesses became more reliant on the Web, and some even began to operate in virtual space, even more new jobs opened up in e-commerce, e-content - almost e-everything.

That "seamless" web of voice, fax, and phone is only now making teamwork and mobility a reality. And it took business time to grow comfortable with tools such as voice mail and E-mail, the World Wide Web and private "intranets" that link far-flung workers. Having everyone fly to one location isn't always the best, or most cost-effective, solution. Phone conversations are good for day-to-day communication, but when all parties need to come together to discuss strategies and problems, using the phone is often not good enough.

Web-based conferencing technology allows all parties, large or small, to effectively "meet" one another without leaving their own offices. No flight delays, outlandish phone bills, or high-tech equipment required, and the options

are plentiful. The technology has been around for a little while but is only now spreading to the masses. Web conferencing is an efficient and effective way to communicate with groups of people in different locations. The technology permits workers to save the time and money associated with travelling and not have to pass up the opportunity for interaction with partners, customers, and potential clients at the same time. Employee needs are changing and the increased flexibility of 'at home' offices will attract more qualified employees.

Information technology, telecommunications, and related technologies are profoundly changing the dimensions of a workplace. A perfect workplace is to be had by all: it brings job satisfaction, empowerment, flexibility, mobility and most importantly, balance in life. “

### **The Third Feature**

The third feature of *The Utopian Workplace* is Spiritual Leadership which is spirit- and values-based transformation leadership. It is a dynamic, interactive process which favours human-centered to capital-centered work systems. It is more than just an ideal, it is a paradigm shift from a top-down rigid, directive culture to a culture based on values and ethics which resonate with the leader's perception of spiritual self. Spirit can be defined as each person's vital energizing force or principal. “Our spirit is the vital, energizing force or principal in us, the fertile invisible realm that is the wellspring for our creativity, the core of our values, and the source of our morality” (Fairholm, p7 1997). Spiritually attuned leaders accept as a prime goal the need to help workers become their best self as the corporation strives to maximize profit. Leadership theory for a century has ignored the core self in developing its models and defining the leader's tasks and roles.

The key issues and approaches that are part of the shift to Spiritual Leadership include:

- redefining profit to include providing society with services and goods, providing people with employment and creating a surplus of wealth (profit)
- an attitude of cooperation, honoring diversity while establishing community
- creating work characterized by a deeper sense of life purpose, work that lets people feel they are making a difference, being fully alive, living with integrity, developing sacredness in their relationships, and turning the organization into a community where everyone can learn and grow
- competition, cooperation and co-creation
- seeking inclusive communities that are open, frank, and accepting of mistakes
- developing an inner wisdom that facilitates transformation

(adapted from Fairholm, 1997, p43)

Integrating the many elements of one's work and personal life into a comprehensive system for managing the workplace defines the holistic or spiritual approach. It provides the basis for leadership that acknowledges the spirit dimension in people and in all of their behaviour.

## **The Conclusion**

Along the path toward envisioning *The Utopian Workplace* we have journeyed through notions such as globalisation, the transcendent individual, emotional intelligence competencies, vision-driven versus stress-driven living, e commerce and spiritual leadership, to arrive at the almost mysterious proposition that the key defining element of *The Utopian Workplace* is *Intuitive Intelligence*.

People with *Intuitive Intelligence* are truly transcendent: they thrive on becoming the best that they can be. They create vision and pursue it passionately. They ground their personal power within them and refuse to give it away to any external such as a recalcitrant boss or a sycophant work colleague, or a presentation to the board. They are highly self-aware and their poise and equanimity, even in trying circumstances, gives others tacit permission to be the same. They live creatively from their inner world to the outer one, not reactively to what is external. They have humility and their purpose is to serve. They are altruistic. They love deeply. They reach for the sky. They are CEO's, leaders, managers and staff. They are what makes the difference. They are both the building blocks of *The Utopian Workplace* and its product.

To attempt to create *The Utopian Workplace* from the larger business infrastructure is folly. The process must start with the individual, at all levels within the organisation, who commit to taking responsibility for changing themselves.

My thesis is that the world of work must move into the *Intuitive Age*, in which organisations will experience an increase in productivity in all domains including personal, relational and financial. This will extend into the community and is achieved via inner success working its way out and spreading. It results in a personal feeling of being grounded, still; the energy surge of quality relationships; the confidence that comes from skilled problem-solving and increased profits. These affirmative outcomes that extend from the individual changing himself/herself will be generalized from the workplace to home, parenting, community and society.

Is this Utopia or is it, to use a metaphor, tantamount to footprints in a stream. Critics will come from the right and the left and this is necessary to keep our thinking honest. But skepticism must be based on knowledge, not ignorance. The example of Mondragon should challenge the skeptics.

The allure of the *Utopian* vision lies in dissatisfaction with the status quo and might well rouse us from complacency. As Frederic White observes "it is the inspired disgust with things as they are that creates the literature of Utopia" (1981). Transcendence is the challenge for each of us.

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