

EXCERPT FROM: The Human Solution: Big Business's Unseen Opportunity

Once upon a time - as all good stories begin - our world went through a radical change as the Industrial Revolution took us from cottage industry to industrial production.

This transformation altered our work, our mindset, our expectations, our possibilities, our lifestyles, our visions of the future, and most importantly our relationship to ourselves, to others and to our planet; it changed absolutely everything about how we would perceive and live our lives moving forward.

Machines were seen as “better than” the human. Where the human could create one item in a given amount of time, in that same amount of time the machine could create untold multiples of that item.

Dollar signs danced in our wee little heads. We saw ourselves as inferior to the machine. We are “only human” we told ourselves, and we believed our humanness to be inferior to the predictability and power of the machine that we ourselves had built.

We moved into a worldwide experience of exponentially increasing supply and demand. From an intertwined give-and-take relationship with the earth, its rhythms and its gifts, we moved into a give-and-give relationship with the machine.

Little did we know the personal and planetary impacts of our change.

Little did we know the nature of the tiger we had by the tail.

While we perceived ourselves as having abilities inferior to the machine, we also felt a kind of teenage potency, a new experience of being able to take control over our world through the machine and make it do our bidding. We saw that financially the sky was the limit, and we fell in love with the speed and the power of the machine, this thing that could so satisfyingly magnify our strength and our desire; the machine could now mind-blowingly multiply our strength while satisfying our desire...over and over and over again.

The relationship was unhealthy and one-sided. We knelt before our new partner in devotion. There were only two places to stand in relation to our new “god”: we could either serve it from below - working in the sweat shops and steaming factories - or serve it from above, directing our new god's output.

We adapted to this new arrangement, finding the money and control a sufficient reward for what we sacrificed: personal agency, human mastery, day-to-day creativity, personal and

professional fulfillment. The human being grew even less unimportant to industry over time. We took our seat in the back of the production car while money took the driver's seat, and until the advent of the Union no chorus of voices arose to object that the human was being drained while money took pride- of-place, even though money lacks the insight, vision or innovation to create anew. We built our new face of commerce on speed and money. The problem was and is one of inhumanity. The Industrial Revolution gave birth to the new machine-as-god culture, and man became conqueror of this new god.

The structure of management over the machine arose as a “necessary” structure in the 1800's as the result both of the rapid rise of the machine, and a now-prosaic event: a train wreck.

The Train Wreck That Gave Birth to the Org Chart

Two trains met outside of Worcester, Massachusetts in 1841. Train lines had multiplied but the organization needed to control those lines had not yet come into existence.

One conductor and one passenger died. Seventeen others were injured. The wreck highlighted a concerning lack of command and control for the owners.

This was new territory for post-Industrial Revolution business. Suddenly aware that they could not account for nor predict problems, the owners naturally wanted to: (1) do everything possible to avoid such a situation in the future, (2) find the fault in the “machinery” of the system - hold someone accountable for any problems and replace them, and (3) find those who could be responsible for issuing punishments and finding solutions that aligned with the desired outlook of those in charge.

“ ‘... That [train] disaster marked the beginning of a new management era.’] These words open Peter Scholtes' classic book on leadership. He goes on to explain how the term “management” was unknown in the days of cottage industries. As business grew and became geographically disperse in the 1800's, a way to run these businesses had to be found. But there were no models outside the church and the military, so investigators into the train-wreck disaster looked to the Prussian army for a model. And there they found the classic organization chart — the one we know so well today. Scholtes calls it the “train-wreck” chart. It was revolutionary at the time.

‘The purpose of what became today's organization chart was clear: The assignment of responsibility would enable “prompt detection of derelictions of duty... and point

out the delinquent.” Scholtes says: “A fundamental premise of the ‘train-wreck’ approach to management is that the primary cause of problems is ‘dereliction of duty’. The purpose of the organizational chart is to sufficiently specify those duties so that management can quickly assign blame, should another accident occur.”[3]

After that initial wake-up call the U.S. industry took more than 20 years to birth the kind of management system we take as a given today. It took that long to find the right system; initially they looked to only two - the church and the army.