

Keeping our Culture Faithful to the Vision – Resources for Responding to the People Challenge

Sandie Cornish, Panel Input, Catholic Health Australia, Governance Conference, 30 March 2015

This paper situates responding to people challenges within the responsibility of Boards of Catholic organizations to identify and manage risks to mission. It draws on three resources from the Catholic tradition to propose principles for responding to people challenges: the concept of the dignity of the human person; the option for the poor; and our understanding of the nature of work.

Mission Risk & People Challenges: A Board Responsibility

Catholic organizations, like the Church, exist to “make the kingdom of God present in our world”.¹ Hence the most important risk they face is being off mission, and their Boards must grapple with the mission risk involved in responses to people challenges.

The Kingdom, or Reign of God touches every aspect of our lives, personally and collectively.² We want God to rule over or govern all of our relationships, including workplace relations. This is challenging because we are human beings and we live in a world marked by sin and selfishness as well as grace and love.

The Board has responsibility for the culture of a Catholic organization. There will never be perfect alignment between our Gospel driven vision, mission and values and our actual behavior because we are sinners. Sinfulness can become embedded in our organizational structures and processes, and make it harder to do what is right and good.³ As Pope Francis likes to remind us, we are sinners who are loved and forgiven, and therefore able to reflect the mercy of God to others.⁴ It possible to promote organizational structures and processes that encourage and facilitate justice, love and human flourishing – and it is the Board’s responsibility to do so.

There are no simple, certain and comprehensive answers to the people challenges that arise in our organizations, but we do have resources from our tradition that can guide us. I’ll focus on three: the dignity of the human person; the option for the poor and marginalized; and our vision of the nature of work.

¹ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013, n 176.

² EG, n 181.

³ Saint John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 1984, n 19.

⁴ For example “It is good to feel Jesus' compassionate gaze upon us, just as it was felt by the sinful woman in the house of the Pharisee (cf. Lk 7:36-50)... With how much love Jesus looks at us! With how much love He heals our sinful heart! Our sins never scare Him...I have often thought of how the Church may render more clear her mission to be a witness to mercy; and we have to make this journey. It is a journey which begins with spiritual conversion.” Pope Francis, Homily, 13 March 2015.

The Dignity of the Human Person

The most fundamental touchstone is the dignity of the human person. God takes a person-centred approach - nothing could affirm the dignity and worth of the human person more than the fact that in Jesus, God became human for and with us.

The person has always been at the centre of modern Catholic Social Teaching. *Rerum Novarum* focused on the person as a subject who works,⁵ and the 'worker question' was seen as the key to justice in society up until the immediate post Vatican II period. Blessed Paul VI focused on the person as the subject of development as the centre of Catholic Social Teaching, introducing the concept of integral human development.⁶ Development that is integral and person-centred calls for development of the whole person, for all persons and for all peoples. Saint John Paul II and Benedict XVI both understood the importance of this shift and commemorated it with anniversary encyclicals.⁷ In *Caritas in Veritate*, Benedict XVI called *Populorum Progressio* "the *Rerum Novarum* of the present age".⁸

Catholic Social Teaching is centred on the person - the person who works, the person who is called to become all that God created them to be - hence Catholic organizations will be person-centred and this shapes our relationships with both our clients and with the people of our organizations.

In addressing people challenges, we will put people first and will never treat any person as an instrument or tool because persons are subjects not objects.⁹ Our staff and volunteers are persons who participate in our organization's mission not mere tools to be used for mission activity. Our clients are not just objects on which we act in order to express our mission. We can't pursue our mission of making God's Reign present in the world through actions that are contrary to the right relationships that are characteristic of that Reign.

Persons are free and responsible. We hold each other accountable for the justice of our actions. Our organizations can't promote God's Reign of justice and peace by sheltering or rewarding unjust behavior. Pastoral care for all persons involved in a dispute does not trump justice, it needs to accompany and support just responses because justice is love's barest minimum.¹⁰ We encourage and support people to change their inappropriate behavior, because we believe in the possibility of conversion and change, but we also have a duty to defend the dignity and rights of all of the people of our organizations.

⁵ Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, 1891.

⁶ Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, 1967, n 42.

⁷ Saint John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei Socialis*, 1987; Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 2009.

⁸ "At a distance of over forty years from the Encyclical's publication, I intend to pay tribute and to honour the memory of the great Pope Paul VI, revisiting his teachings on integral human development and taking my place within the path that they marked out, so as to apply them to the present moment. This continual application to contemporary circumstances began with the Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, with which the Servant of God Pope John Paul II chose to mark the twentieth anniversary of the publication of *Populorum Progressio*. Until that time, only *Rerum Novarum* had been commemorated in this way. Now that a further twenty years have passed, I express my conviction that *Populorum Progressio* deserves to be considered "the *Rerum Novarum* of the present age", shedding light upon humanity's journey towards unity." Pope Benedict XVI, CV, n 8.

⁹ "What is truly shameful and inhuman is to misuse men [sic] as instruments for gain and to value them only as so much mere energy and strength." RN, n 16.

¹⁰ "If we love others with charity then we are first of all just towards them", CV, n 6.

Option for the Poor & Marginalized

Saint John Paul II affirmed in *Sollicitudo rei Socialis* that a preferential love for the poor and marginalized is an ancient and continuous part of Catholic tradition.¹¹ We see it at work in *Rerum Novarum* where Leo XIII called on the state to intervene in employment agreements between employers and employees because the imbalance of power rendered workers unable to effectively defend themselves.¹² While things have changed since 1891, the reality of power and of power differentials remains something that we need to take into account in our defense of human dignity. It is often an important factor in addressing people challenges within our organizations.

Our option for the poor and marginalized leads us to pay special attention to those who have the least power and resources in a given situation. We ask ourselves if our policies and processes serve to defend their rights as effectively as due process protects those with greater power and access to resources. We aspire to policies and processes that are realistic and effective as well as fair, and transparent. We cannot, in the name of being pastoral, fail to defend the rights of the most vulnerable within our own organizations or among our clients.

It is a big challenge. The option for the poor and marginalized needs to be more than just language, it needs to be a living part of the Catholic culture of our organizations.

The Nature of Work

The Catholic Church has rich teachings on work, and the more they animate our organizational cultures, the fewer people challenges we are likely to face. I will highlight five teachings on work drawing particularly on Saint John Paul II's spirituality of work.

Firstly, work is a vocation, a calling from God. In the second Genesis account, the call to stewardship of creation comes before the fall, not as a punishment.¹³ With sin, toil and pain enter the picture, but work remains a way in which we participate in God's on-going work of creation. In our work we reflect the image of God as Creator.¹⁴ Through work can we express ourselves and grow as persons, becoming more human, becoming more the people that we were created to be.¹⁵ In dealing with people challenges then we are touching the spiritual dimension of people's lives. Our people often have a strong sense of vocation about the work that they do. Sometimes this sense of vocation prevents people from risking making complaints.

Secondly, the dignity of work comes primarily from the fact that it is the free act of a human person. The value of work is not primarily determined by what is produced or the market value of the work done.¹⁶ In facing people challenges, no one is more important than anyone else on the basis of the social status or market value of their work.

¹¹ SRS, n 42.

¹² "Where the protection of private rights is concerned, special regard must be had for the poor and weak. Rich people can use their wealth to protect themselves and have less need of the state's protection; but the mass of the poor have nothing of their own with which to defend themselves and have to depend above all upon the protection of the state." RN n 29.

¹³ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 2004, n 255; Saint John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, 1981, n 4.

¹⁴ *Compendium*, n 265, LE n 4 & 25.

¹⁵ LE n 9 – 10.

¹⁶ LE n 6.

Thirdly, work is both a right and a responsibility.¹⁷ John Paul II points to mutuality and reciprocity in rights and responsibilities between employees and their direct and indirect employers.¹⁸ Employees ought not to make vexatious claims, but employers might also avoid claims by providing a safe and healthy environment free from harassment and discrimination which enables workers to meet their responsibilities.

Fourthly, work is a way of contributing to the wellbeing of the community, supporting those in need, and building up the common good.¹⁹ People often choose to work in healthcare and in Catholic organizations to contribute to the common good. Clashes of motivations and priorities can be part of the mix in people challenges and sometimes organizational performance and mission can seem to be in tension.

Finally, work is not and should not be the whole of our lives. We need time to rest, to nurture our family and community relationships, to participate in cultural life, political life, to enjoy recreation, and to nurture our spiritual life individually and communally.²⁰ Sometimes in mission driven organizations we can fall into a kind of totalism in which we forget that our organization's participation in the mission of God is not the whole of the mission and that our people are also called to participate in God's mission in other ways too.

Principles for response

So, to conclude, I propose four principles for responding to people challenges:

1. We respect the human dignity of each person
 - Our people are entitled to safe, healthy work environments free from harassment, discrimination and bullying
 - We value all people equally regardless of their organizational role or social status
2. Persons are not tools or instruments
 - People are never a means to an end
 - Our people are participants in mission not tools for mission activities
3. We have a special responsibility to ensure justice for those who are the most vulnerable or least able to defend themselves
 - Our policies and procedures should be realistic, fair and transparent
 - We evaluate our policies from the perspective of those with the least power and resources
4. Action in favour of justice is accompanied and supported by pastoral care
 - Pastoral care for victims accompanies and does not replace action for justice
 - Justice for victims is given priority, pastoral care for wrongdoers must support this aim and promote healing
 - Our responses attend to the whole person, body, mind and spirit

¹⁷ LE n 16.

¹⁸ For instance, at LE n 18 Pope John Paul II addresses mutual obligation saying that a society can insist that people fulfill their responsibility to work only if it ensures opportunities for everyone to contribute.

¹⁹ LE n 10.

²⁰ LE n 19.