

Radical surgery: what will tomorrow's organizations look like?

Ian I. Mitroff, Richard O. Mason, Christine M. Pearson

Executive Overview

The problems America's organizations are facing are not due to temporary downturns in the economy. They are a vivid testimony to the fact that organizations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are obsolete. We need radically new kinds of organizations to meet the extreme challenges of today's world and tomorrow's.

In the past, organizations have been structured around largely autonomous, self-contained, traditional functions such as accounting, finance, human resources, law, marketing, strategic planning, and so on. While important, they are no longer the building blocks of today's organizations. Today's environment has produced new challenges—crisis management, issues management, global competitiveness, total quality management, environmentalism, ethics programs—for which the traditional functions are largely inadequate.

To meet tomorrow's challenges, we propose that organizations be structured around five new organizational entities: (1) a Knowledge/Learning Center, (2) a Recovery/Development Center, (3) a World Service/Spiritual Center, (4) a World Class Operations Center, and (5) a Leadership Institute.

In effect, we propose a new philosophy of organization design. Because this new design is controversial, we harbor no illusions that it will be accepted easily. Indeed, one fundamental purpose of this article is to provoke others to generate alternate designs of their own. We are not, therefore, asking readers to accept our framework, but to engage in the production of alternate designs. In the end, the important issue is the concerns raised by each center, not the design itself.

The world is going through a transition—many would say a fundamental revolution—that is as profound as that from the Agrarian to the Industrial Age. Indeed, we have already moved from the Industrial to the Information/Knowledge/Systems Age. One sure sign of revolution is the inability of old institutions, old functions, and core competencies to adapt and cope with new problems.

The environment of business is more volatile than ever, and grows more so every day. To meet this challenge, the dominant response of American business has unfortunately been the adoption of one quick-fix and band-aid approach after another: thus, budgets have been slashed, departments cut, the workforce reduced, early retirements forced, divisions moved offshore, whole departments and functions eliminated or outsourced, and on and on. While many of these

actions are necessary, and even help for a while, they do not respond to the real source of the problem.¹

The fundamental problem is that the basic structure of American business is outmoded and has outlived its usefulness. While quick fixes and bandaids stop the hemorrhaging for a while, they do not constitute a viable strategy for responding to the true forces prompting change.² Nothing less than a radical redesign is required.

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Point of Departure: Some Emerging Functions

Before elaborating on our preliminary design, we address the emerging functions or at least key competencies that today's organizations must have. Exhibit 1 identifies six major emerging functions and elaborates on the core activities of each. The core activities of each function include continuous assessment and design.

Crisis Management (CM). The core activities of CM are a series of ongoing, interrelated assessments or audits of the kinds of crises and forces that pose major threats to the main products, services, manufacturing processes,

Emerging Functions	Core Activities
Crisis Management (CM)	<p>Assess the major crises, systems, stakeholders, and manufacturing processes that pose a threat to products, services, manufacturing processes, company reputation, employees, the environment, and communities</p> <p>Design and implement plans, organization and manufacturing processes, procedures, products for the detection, prevention, containment, recovery and learning from major crises</p>
Issues Management (IM)	<p>Assess broad societal and industry trends and the power of associated stakeholders in shaping issues</p> <p>Design and implement strategies to minimize organizational impact</p>
Total Quality Management (TQM)	<p>Assess product defects and poor quality due to poor initial designs, raw materials, management, manufacturing processes, operators, shipping and distribution systems</p> <p>Design and implement products, manufacturing processes, manufacturing systems, operator training that lead to continuous improvement in all phases of company operations</p>
Environmentalism (ENV)	<p>Assess threats of products, services, manufacturing processes to environment and communities</p> <p>Design products, services, manufacturing processes to benefit the environment/communities</p>
GLOBALISM	<p>Assess products or services to compete in worldwide markets</p> <p>Design products or services to compete in worldwide markets</p>
ETHICS	<p>Assess ethical and moral attributes of the organization's behavior, policies, decisions, and procedures</p> <p>Design and implement communications, controls, codes, credos and culture</p>
Exhibit 1. Emerging Functions and Core Activities	

employees, and the surrounding environment or communities of a company. CM also consists of activities for the design, redesign, and implementation of key plans, procedures, and mechanisms for the detection, possible prevention, preparation, containment, recovery, and learning from key crises.³

Issues Management (IM). The core activities of IM include:

- (1) tracking broad societal and industry trends;
- (2) assessing and determining issues that pose a specific threat or opportunity for a particular organization, and the stakeholders associated with those issues;
- (3) assessing the power of the opposition versus the company in shaping issues;
- (4) discovering the impact of opposing stakeholders and the issues with which they are associated on the products, services, manufacturing processes, and reputation of the company.⁴

Total Quality Management (TQM). TQM is concerned with a systemic assessment of manufacturing processes that affect the quality of finished products and services. One key objective of TQM is identifying the sources of defects in the general manufacturing, distribution, and management systems of an organization. Most TQM advocates stress that the major source of product defects is not typically the carelessness of individual operators.⁵ Rather, the root causes of most defects are to be found in the tools that operators have been given, the failure of management to design and carry out effective production processes, the presence of faulty cultural beliefs signaling that management may be more interested in getting products out the door than in insuring their quality.

Environmentalism (ENV). ENV consists of risk assessments of threats to the environment posed by inherent defects in products and their manufacturing processes. ENV is also concerned with designing or redesigning products and manufacturing processes that will be beneficial to the environment. The most effective corporate environmentalist programs include a company-wide inventory of all the separate projects that are being conducted concerning the environment, thereby insuring that no one is proceeding at cross purposes. In addition, the most effective programs have a dedicated budget and a senior officer who not only exercises oversight for environmentalism, but serves as its champion and representative at the highest levels of the organization.⁶

Globalism. This function requires that an organization's production, marketing, and administrative processes are tuned to the global political economy. On the marketing side, it involves the identification and development of new products and markets, country by country, to serve different cultural needs and preferences. It also involves adapting products and procedures to meet local requirements. On the production side, globalism requires a broad look at locations throughout the world in which supplies may be procured and one's business activities conducted. A serious globalism program also requires a systems-wide company effort. Thinking globally has to be a part of every employee's job, much as quality and service are also a part.

Ethics. This function examines the key business principles of an organization and how they affect the health and safety of employees, consumers, and the general environment. It assesses the organization's contributions toward the realization of a good and just community. To support this effort, organizations

must design and implement codes of conduct that enhance ethical business practice. Ethical behavior is everyone's business, and is thus embedded in the entire culture of an organization.

Every one of the six emerging functions in Exhibit 1 is part of every employee's job and, while not identical, each function strongly overlaps one or more others. Every one of them is system-wide, thereby distinguishing them from the old or more traditional functions, and, while each is not strictly necessary for the existence and performance of the others, each can aid the other functions in accomplishing key objectives.

A Preliminary Design

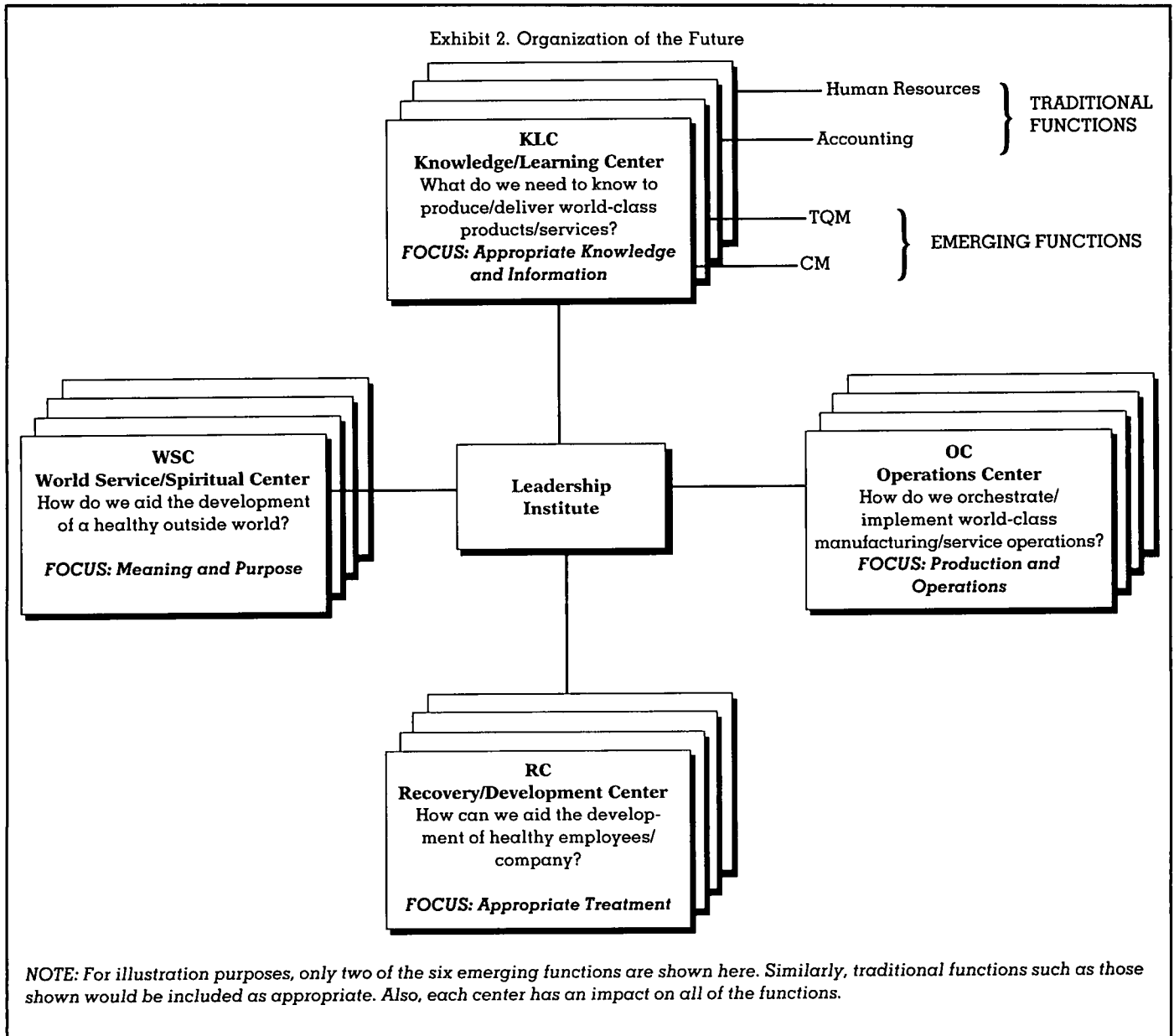
What follows is an idealized design⁷ for the organization of the future. It is idealized in that no single organization currently embodies all of its features. However, it is not utopian. Major corporations and government agencies are currently experimenting with every one of the features described on a limited basis.

Exhibit 2 shows the four main centers that comprise the heart of the organization of the future as we envision it. It also shows the central issues and the primary focus of each center. Doing business in the global economy requires a new conception of information and knowledge. It further requires a new mechanism for securing, organizing, and disseminating the right information/knowledge to the right people at the right time so that the right products and services can be produced and delivered. Thus, a new organization for knowledge is needed within virtually every business, large or small. We call this new structure the Knowledge/Learning Center. The key issue of the Knowledge/Learning Center (KLC) is: What kinds of knowledge and information are needed to perform the key management functions (crisis management, marketing, etc.) of an organization in an *integrated* and *systemic* manner? The KLC is thus concerned with producing and distributing the kinds of knowledge and information that will enable an organization to perform all of its functions in an integrated manner, and hence, take advantage of natural synergies among them. In this regard, it is vital to stress that the KLC is not intended to add another layer of bureaucratic dysfunction. It is also not intended to take away any of the entrepreneurial freedom of individual operating units. Its main purpose is to identify and examine the key assumptions of an organization and how they interact.

Organizations have a greater responsibility than ever before to contribute to the solution of world problems such as hunger, homelessness, child abuse, and the environment itself.

One cannot make quality products and deliver quality service with employees who are emotionally unhealthy. Organizations affect the emotional well-being of employees far more deeply and more extensively than we have recognized. The mechanism we propose for treating this is the Recovery/Development Center. The key issue of the Recovery/Development Center (RC) is: How can we help our employees recover from whatever personal, emotional dysfunctions or problems they bring with them to our organization (for example, being abused as a child, growing up in an alcoholic family), and develop new positive ways of existing? Also, how can we help our organization as a whole recover from systemic dysfunctions and develop into a healthy system?

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World Service/Spiritual Center (WSC). The key issue of this Center is: How can our organization use all of its resources to develop a healthier society and world?

Being a major competitor requires constant innovation, research, and development. It necessitates constant self-criticism of one's products, services, processes, and distribution strategies. It also involves the continuous redesign and recreation of an organization. All of these are central to the ability to manufacture quality products and deliver services. The entity that helps organize and orchestrate these concerns is an Operations Center. The key issue of the Operations Center (OC) is: How can we actually implement and operate a world class manufacturing and service organization?

Exhibit 2 also shows the traditional and emerging functions that all major

organizations must perform. These functions need to be integrated. They can no longer be conceived of or performed as separate, stand-alone activities. In addition, the traditional functions of business are no longer more important or more fundamental than the emerging functions. Every function must be conceived of as a fundamental part of all of the others in the sense of providing critical knowledge with regard to key concerns.

Finally, the CEO, the directors of each of the four centers, and the CEO's staff comprise the Leadership Institute. The chief function of the Leadership Institute is to supervise all the activities of the functions and the centers (and manage the creative tensions among them) to ensure that the organization as a whole is performing well on all fronts.

The Knowledge/Learning or Inquiry Center

It is beyond the scope of an article to describe each of the four centers in detail. We can only provide examples and describe some of their more pertinent features. It is thus important to note that the KLC is more than merely a "concept." For instance, General Motors is conducting a significant experiment with what they call the GM Inquiry Center.

In *Hearing the Voice of the Market*, Gerald Zaltman of the Harvard Business School and Vincent Barabba, director of Market Intelligence for General Motors, describe their conception of a KLC:

We use the term "inquiry center" to describe the "ideal state of mind within a company for effectively and efficiently reconciling the voice of the market with the voice of the firm."

The Inquiry Center describes a particular way of learning about the marketplace and using the resultant knowledge. While the term "center" describes an organizational unit, it is as much an attitude, ethic, or creed as it is a formal entity.⁸

One of the fundamental purposes of the inquiry center is: to improve on and then institutionalize an ongoing process for drawing upon various sources of information, knowledge, data, and wisdom for consideration when making important decisions about the business (more than just vehicles).

The three-fold purpose of the inquiry center is: 1) to build expertise and provide assistance to facilitate improved thinking, decisions, and actions; 2) to break down barriers between functions and foster and accelerate systemic thinking required to produce top-quality innovative products needed to successfully compete in international markets; and, 3) to increase the problem-framing and problem-solving capacity of managers by acquiring, synthesizing, developing, evaluating, and disseminating information. In sum, this center makes managers aware of:

- What they think they know
- What they think they need to know
- What they expect to happen given certain decisions
- What assumptions they hold about the if-thens regarding decisions.⁹

The Recovery/Development Center

If people and organizations were merely all brains and no feelings, then a discussion of the ideal organizations of the twenty-first century would end with the Knowledge/Learning Center. However, people and organizations are not

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thinking machines devoid of all emotions. Instead they are complex mixtures of thoughts and feelings. In fact, many organizations have characteristics of dysfunctional families.¹⁰

The knowledge needs of organizations and their corresponding emotional needs are generally treated in separate scientific and professional literature. From a general systems standpoint, this is untenable.¹¹ The tendency to compartmentalize thinking and feeling, to relegate them to separate spheres, is itself evidence of the general inability of most humans, and human systems, to deal with complex thoughts and emotions.

In *Modern Madness, the Emotional Fallout of Success*,¹² psychotherapist Douglas LaBier, whose practice is devoted almost exclusively to the treatment of individuals who work in large organizations, found that many employees who were considered "sick" by their institutions were, from a psychotherapeutic standpoint, "normal." Those who were considered "normal," and hence were pointed to as role models, had serious psychological problems including the lust for power, conquest of others, feelings of grandiosity, destructiveness, or intense cravings for self-humiliation and domination of others. In saying that those who appear to be "sick" are "normal" while those who appear to be "normal" are thereby "sick," more than a clever play on words is operating. Many organizations have deeply institutionalized "sickness." "Sickness" is not only a fundamental part of the culture, but it also exercises tremendous pressures on "normal" individuals to become "sick" in order to "fit in."

The general functions of the Recovery Center can be summarized as follows:

- (1) To study the similarities and the dissimilarities, particularly in the backgrounds and personalities, of top management; to identify the mechanisms at work in recruiting and promoting particular kinds of individuals within an organization;
- (2) To study the influence of the similarities and dissimilarities in the backgrounds of top management and what impact they have on the key functions and programs of the organization; e.g., CM, TQM, etc.;
- (3) To study and track over time the dysfunctions of top management, and of an organization as a whole, what impact they have on and how they interfere with the critical functions and programs of the organization;
- (4) To recommend and implement effective interventions in breaking down the dysfunctions of an organization;
- (5) To formulate programs that are uniquely suited to the specific circumstances of the particular organization, such as team building, organizational development, and empowerment. It should be noted that these "surface techniques" of organizational development can only be effective in those situations where dysfunctions are minimal. Otherwise, they will merely aid and empower the dysfunctions of the organization.¹³

The World Service/Spiritual Center

The line between spirituality and morality has always been thin at best. By discussing the spiritual sides of organizations, we are not promoting an official "company religion" or an unqualified endorsement of one of the world's traditional religions or sects. Rather, we are talking about the greater moral purpose and obligation of every organization to contribute to the solution of world problems. Fundamentally, spirituality is a special act of recognition

that there is a connection between one's everyday affairs or business and humanity's problems.

While rare, this notion of spirituality is reflected periodically in the behavior of business organizations. For instance, it is reflected in the fundamental question that CIBA-GEIGY, the giant multinational corporation, asked of itself: "How can we get our pharmaceutical drugs to those who are in desperate need of them and not merely to those who can afford to pay for them?" Having asked this, CIBA-GEIGY ultimately decided to sell drugs in Africa even though it would make a profit of only one to two percent, an amount substantially below its usual rates. To justify this low rate of return, it reasoned as follows: "If we sell our drugs in Africa, we will build our reputation in the eyes of the world as a company that really cares and wants to help. We can thus factor this in as a positive amount on our bottom line. If we do, and, further, if we estimate what this amount would be, then our operations in Africa will be in line with our other business units and their rates of return. Therefore, we ought to do so!"

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Notice that in promoting a nontraditional business goal, CIBA-GEIGY was pioneering a new concept of accounting that some have come to call "environmental accounting." We would prefer, however, to call this *world service accounting*. It is concerned fundamentally with developing new measures of economic performance that will allow firms to engage in humanitarian acts that traditional accounting practices would discourage, if not forbid.

The essential functions of the World Service/Spiritual Center are:

- (1) To broaden the vision of every organization and its members.
- (2) To draw connections between (a) the critical skills and knowledge that every organization possesses and uses to conduct its "normal" operations and businesses, and (b) world problems such as child abuse, homelessness, hunger, poverty, and war to which the organization's special skills and knowledge can be applied.
- (3) To infuse every organization and its members with the vitality, enthusiasm, and spirit needed to acquire true excellence.
- (4) To give every organization and its members a true sense of meaning and purpose.
- (5) To allow all members to work, on company time, on a world problem of importance to them.
- (6) To keep a companywide record of the individual projects that its members are working on so that synergies can be achieved wherever possible.
- (7) To acknowledge the wrongdoings that one's organization has committed in the past, and perhaps is still committing in the present, and to make it a central focus of one's mission to eliminate them.
- (8) To seriously monitor and be actively aware of whatever new wrongdoings one's organization is about to commit or has committed without full conscious awareness.

The Operations Center

The primary purpose of a world-class Operations Center is to serve as a laboratory for constant innovation and change. As Xerox's Corporate Vice President, John Seely Brown, puts it, "The most important invention that will come out of the corporate research lab in the future will be the corporation

itself. As companies try to keep pace with rapid changes in technology and cope with increasingly unstable business environments, the research department has to do more than simply innovate new products. It must design the new technological and organizational 'architectures' that make possible a continuously innovating company. Put another way, corporate research must reinvent innovation."¹⁴

A world-class Operations Center has four major functions:

- (1) The primary purpose is to serve as the arena of an organization's innovation. Innovation is construed in the broadest possible sense of the term. The OC is not only responsible for technological innovations with regard to products and services, but the manufacturing processes of an organization, and the organization's structure as well. Thus, for instance, it is charged with conducting and evaluating experiments with regard to the performance of an organization's work. For example, would the workers function better in teams, and, if so, which kinds?
- (2) The OC is also responsible for prototype development and testing key innovations;
- (3) Its third major responsibility is that of oversight for all of the operations of the organization to make sure that they are in harmony with one another;
- (4) Finally, it is responsible for the establishment and the evaluation of links to the Knowledge/Learning Center and strategic thinking or planning in general. While there are critical differences between the centers, the overlaps between them are just as important. Thus, while the Operations Center deals with the detailed knowledge necessary to develop and market new products, the Knowledge/Learning Center is concerned with the highest level assumptions with respect to the organization in general, and especially with regard to its strategic future.

The Enterprise as a Whole

The mechanism that integrates the whole organization is the Leadership Institute. It is an institute because it is above the centers. The Institute is composed of the top officers of an organization plus the heads of the four centers. Their collective job is to oversee all of the centers and, most important, manage the creative tensions among them.

The "group or collective" nature of leadership must be emphasized because it is top management as a team that exercises guidance over an organization. Of course, everyone in an organization needs to embrace and promote systemic, integrated thinking. In the final analysis, however, it is the Leadership Institute that is ultimately responsible for the wisdom of the whole. This wisdom is informed by the activities of the four centers, each of which pursues different ideals. As a result, each places competing demands on the Leadership Institute.

The Operations Center's ideal is "appropriate" economic growth, not the endless accumulation of wealth per se. The Knowledge Center's ideal is truth. The World Service/Spiritual Center's ideal is the pursuit of the aesthetic, interpreted as "harmony with nature and humanity." The Recovery Center's ideal is the pursuit of the "good," interpreted broadly as "health" and "well-being."

Each of the four centers, then, plays a unique role in contributing to the wisdom of the Leadership Institute, and by implication, the organization as a whole. Operations furnishes the latest innovative and creative means of production.

Knowledge provides true information. Spiritual seeks change, new goals, and appropriate relationships. Recovery demands that each human being within the organization be made whole. These claims become the raw material from which the Leadership Institute crafts its judgment and sets the direction of the organization.

Postscript

Ultimately, it is the activities and concerns of the centers that are vital, not their physical location or structure. There may indeed be a virtually infinite number of different designs that fit each of the centers, depending upon the particular organization and its business. In some ways, the various centers may be thought of as parts of a hologram. As is well-known, a hologram is not an ordinary way of taking pictures of an object. A hologram has the interesting and important property that each of the "parts" contains a picture of the "whole." Thus, the "parts" are in the "whole" and vice versa. In this sense, the centers will have a definite physical location and structure. However, ideally, their functions will be integrated, and much like a hologram, will give us a "better" image of a complex object.

Finally, the design of organizations needs to change radically to meet the problems of a more complex, turbulent world. This article has attempted to offer a broad design for organizations as we approach the twenty-first century. It is just one possible design. Further, it is not intended to serve as a detailed blueprint. Its primary purpose is to serve as a guiding vision for a new philosophy and spirit of organizational design.

Endnotes

This article is excerpted from *Framebreak*, by Mitroff, Mason, and Pearson (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994).

¹ Wayne F. Cascio, "Downsizing: What Do We Know? What Have We Learned?" *The Academy of Management Executive*, 7(1), February 1993, 95-104.

² *Ibid.*

³ See Christine M. Pearson and Ian I. Mitroff, "From Crisis Prone to Crisis Prepared: A Framework for Crisis Management," *The Academy of Management Executive*, 7(1), February 1993, 48-59.

⁴ Walter P. von Wartburg, "Political Issue Management with Common Sense," *Industrial Crisis Quarterly*, 3 (4), 1989, 303-318.

⁵ W. Edwards Deming, *Out of the Crisis* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Center for Advanced Engineering Study, 1982); J.M. Juran, *Juran on Planning for Quality* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1988).

⁶ Based on a pilot project conducted by the USC Center for Crisis Management.

⁷ See Russell Ackoff, *Creating the Corporate Future* (New York, NY: John Wiley, 1981), for an in-depth discussion of idealized planning or IP for short. IP asks participants to produce creative solutions to their current problems by "mentally jumping out" of the confines of their current problems and organizations. The participants are asked to envision the design of a new organization that would remove, ideally,

their initial problems by challenging the current constraints that keep the problems locked in place. The assumption of IP is that it is easier to work from the "outside in" (i.e., envision a new organization) than it is to work within the constraints of the current organization.

⁸ Gerald Zaltman and Vincent P. Barabba, *Hearing the Voice of the Market* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1991), 38.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁰ Anne Wilson Schaeff and Diane Fassel, *The Addictive Organization: Why We Overwork, Cover Up, Pick Up the Pieces, Please the Boss, and Perpetuate Sick Organizations* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1988); Mary Riley, *Corporate Healing, Solutions of the Impact of the Addictive Personality in the Workplace* (Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, 1990).

¹¹ Thierry C. Pauchant and Ian I. Mitroff, *Transforming the Crisis Prone Organization* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1992).

¹² Douglas LaBier, *Modern Madness: The Emotional Fallout of Success* (Menlo Park, CA: Addison-Wesley, 1986).

¹³ See our book, *Framebreak* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994), for a detailed discussion of deep intervention strategies based on the Twelve-Step Program of Alcoholics Anonymous.

¹⁴ "Research that Reinvents the Corporation," *Harvard Business Review*, January-February 1991, 102.

About the Authors

Ian I. Mitroff is the Harold Quinton Distinguished Professor of Business Policy and the director of the USC Center for Crisis Management. His Ph.D. is in engineering science (human-machine systems) and the philosophy of science from the University of California at Berkeley. He has published more than 250 articles and 14 books. He has consulted widely with major private and public organizations on strategic planning, organization redesign, crisis management, and total systems management. He is a frequent contributor to the *Los Angeles Times* and other major newspapers, and a frequent guest on national radio and television programs.

Richard O. Mason is Carr P. Collins Professor of Management Information Sciences at the Edwin L. Cox School of Business at Southwestern Methodist University. He currently serves as vice president for The Institute of Management Sciences and is an officer of The International Conference on Information Systems. He formerly served as president of the Western Academy of Management. He recently completed a three-year term on the prestigious GMAC Commission to examine "The Future Role of Graduate Management Education" and was selected in 1989 to be a delegate to the U.S.S.R. to review Soviet plans for the "Informatization of Soviet Society." He is a member of the editorial boards of five journals in management and information systems and is co-editor of the Jossey-Bass series on organization and management. He received his B.S. from Oregon State University and his Ph.D. in business administration from the University of California at Berkeley.

Christine Pearson is an assistant professor at the Kenan-Flagler Business School, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Prior to joining the faculty at UNC, she was the associate director of the Center for Crisis Management, University of Southern California. Her research focuses on the impact of organizational culture on crisis management, and the human contribution to the cause and escalation of organizational crises. She has published articles on these topics in such journals as *Organization Science*, *Industrial and Environmental Crisis Quarterly*, and the *Academy of Management Executive*. She has assisted a variety of public and private organizations in the implementation of long-term, system-wide change.

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