
Lessons from Oz: balance and wholeness in organizations

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Jerry Biberman

University of Scranton, Scranton, Pennsylvania, USA

Michael Whitty

University of Detroit-Mercy, Birmingham, Michigan, USA, and

Lee Robbins

Golden Gate University, San Francisco, California, USA

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Abstract *The 1899 book and the 1939 MGM film The Wizard of Oz hold a permanent influence on US culture. In this article we describe how the Wizard of Oz's story can serve as a metaphor for balancing energies and organizational transformation at all levels. Just as the spiritual transformation of a person must be initiated from within, so organizations must discover the inner power to balance energies and transform themselves into more humane systems.*

Introduction

Organizations worldwide have begun to show an increased interest in spirituality and spiritual values (e.g. Brandt, 1996; Galen, 1995; Laabbs, 1995; Vicek, 1992). Consultants and business writers are urging organizations to pay more attention to spiritual values (e.g. Bolman and Deal, 1995; Gunn, 1992; Russell, 1989; Schechter, 1995; Scherer and Shook, 1993; Walker, 1989). Perhaps the most mainstream business title bringing the good news is Novak (1996). Novak, a leading conservative Catholic, suggests spirituality is vital to a fulfilling life in business. One scenario which we believe can be achieved shows a harmonic convergence between old values reaffirmed – work as a calling or duty – and an evolving consciousness which has stirred the soul in the modern workplace.

By contrast, authors such as Schaef (1987), Schaef and Fassel (1988), Kets de Vries and Miller (1984), and Harvey (1977) described business organizations in the USA as “addictive”, “neurotic” and “phrog farms”. Peters shifted from discussing “excellent” organizations (Peters and Waterman, 1982; Peters and Austin, 1985) to contending there are no excellent organizations after the leading corporations he previously had cited as being excellent rapidly deteriorated (Peters and Austin, 1985; Peters, 1987). Leading companies aggressively market their wares while concealing evidence of severely damaged products (from silicone breast implants to asbestos to defective condoms). Global *tsunamis* in the financial markets leave devastated economies and the starving and unemployed in their wake. The USA subsidizes third world exports of the same tobacco products which bear government health warnings at home. Leaving “things as they are” risks an early end to healthy human enterprise.

While popular organizational consultants such as Stephen Covey (1989) urge inner/outer victory for individual managers in large systems, other leading business writers and leaders recommend a paradigm shift in basic organizational values. Both individual and systemic changes are needed for the future evolution of work on a spiritual plane. Stephen Covey makes great use of story telling in his trainings. In this essay we will take our inspirational lessons from *The Wizard of Oz* (Baum, 1899). On our journey through our work lives we must find ourselves and our true work. We believe there is a sacred dimension to our daily work.

Holistic thinking is a leading metaphor for an integral work culture

We believe that for organizations and individuals the key to spiritual change lies in transformation which must come from within. Using *The Wizard of Oz* as a metaphor, we explain how an organization can balance its intellect, emotionality and sense of purpose; and we recommend steps organizations can take in each area to achieve this balance.

We then suggest the beginnings of a different organizational paradigm. Preconditions for transformational or paradigmatic shift have been described (Robbins, 1992; Robbins and Stevenson, 1988) as repeated experiences of frustration, hope and the emergence of a new model. Continuing social, economic and ecological disasters can be the repeated experiences of frustration which lead to reexamination of basic assumptions. Unlike the single sharp crisis which leads to stronger attempts to implement the same paradigm – “more of the same, harder” – such repetitious experiences provide the foundation for the fundamental reexaminations and massive shifts described in Kuhn’s (1970) seminal study and in Gersick’s (1991) examination of punctuated equilibrium. Hope is found in the human spirit and activated through such cultural stories as that of Oz. An alternative model, which we describe later, involves questioning the single-pointed pursuit of profit maximization – which requires reexamining organizational processes and values of higher education as well as those of corporations.

A question of balance

Every spiritual tradition emphasizes the importance of being in balance or balancing one’s energies as a means for spiritual transformation. These energies are often described in terms of “masculine” (or assertive) and “feminine” (or receptive) energies. Examples include the familiar yin and yang symbols, and the (perhaps less familiar) description in Kaballah or Jewish symbolism of the three pillars or columns of masculine, feminine, and center or balanced pillar. This emphasis on balance has found its way into the popular culture through such media as the *Karate Kid* films (with Mr Myagi’s teaching of, and emphasis on, learning balance, not just in karate but in all of life) and the *Star Wars* trilogy (with the Jedi philosophy of the force), the various *Star Trek* television and film series (illustrating balancing emotion and intellect – as illustrated by the interplay of Mr Spock and Dr McCoy, and in Data’s wanting

to express human emotions), and in the music of the Moody Blues (including their *Question of Balance* album). In each case, the balance is of energies, and the balance occurs within each person, so each person has both masculine and feminine qualities within her/himself; the task is to balance these qualities within one's self. The balance and subsequent transformation must be initiated by and performed from within the person though, paradoxically, this occurs in response to contact with external forces, ideas or teachings. Organizations too must discover the inner power to balance their energies and to transform themselves into more humane systems.

On this "yellow brick road" to organizational transformation, we have all encountered many cultural, political and even technological obstacles. Toxic stress, selfish competitiveness and inequity in the name of profit have created an economic and organizational world out of balance (Shaef and Fassel, 1988). Large systems and organizational processes have been undermined through cultural pathologies, addiction and shadow. Sadly, the currently dominant paradigm contains much of addiction and shadow.

Chappell (1993) has developed a practitioner's model for integrating values, beliefs, and business. This type of integration is what we mean by organizational balance. Biberman and Whitty (1997) catalog some of the ever expanding literature on spirituality and organizations. It is also helpful to apply the principles of transpersonal psychology to organizational transformation and the possible future. Readers may wish to refer to Shaef (1988) and LaBier (1989). In addition to the trend in business philosophy a similar trend is occurring in economics and public policy. This drive for integration, wholeness and balance applies not only to organizations and systems undergoing constant change but also to global society seeking new paradigms for balanced change. The foremost thinker along these lines has been Korten (1996).

Sharing visions and experiences by means of the metaphor of the *Wizard of Oz*

Telling and retelling the story of *The Wizard of Oz* has allowed our western/world culture to understand what it is to be a balanced and integrated person. Folk tales often feature insights or some form of moral story for individuals and national cultures. *The Wizard of Oz*, in the book by L. Frank Baum, the MGM movie, and later incarnations, has served this purpose for readers and viewers over the past hundred years. A search by the authors for articles and books using *The Wizard of Oz* theme and story has found books that use the story as a metaphor for personal spiritual growth (Stewart, 1997), for survival as a spiritual orphan (Kolbenschlag, 1988), and to convey the principles of managerial and organizational accountability (Connors *et al.*, 1994). Schlesinger (1997) used the Oz fable as a metaphor for helping subordinates to work and learn under different types of bosses. In this article, we intend to expand the metaphor to describe spiritual transformation of organizations at the macro level. Our goal in utilizing the story of *The Wizard of Oz* is to encourage the

reader to go beyond securing personal balance at work to explore the steps needed to contribute to organizational balance from the individual in the basic work unit to the macro organization and all its stakeholder environments.

The characters of the Oz story illustrate the strengths and challenges we all face, individually and collectively. We intend to show the necessary choices required to humanize organizations by commenting on the story and major characters of the Oz story.

The story

In this article, we refer mainly to the story and characters depicted in the MGM movie. The story begins in Kansas, where Dorothy yearns to leave her farm home and all of her perceived problems to go far, far away, “somewhere over the rainbow”. A tornado sends Dorothy and her dog Toto to the land of Oz, where her house kills a wicked witch and she inherits the witch’s ruby slippers. Dorothy meets the Munchkins, the wicked witch’s more wicked sister, and Glinda, the good witch of the story. No sooner does Dorothy get to Oz than she wants to return to her home in Kansas. She is told the Wizard of Oz can help her: the way to get to the Wizard is to follow the Yellow Brick Road. Along the road, Dorothy and Toto encounter the Scarecrow, Tin Woodsman, and Cowardly Lion. The characters then overcome a series of crises culminating in the killing of the Wicked Witch, the realization the Wizard is a fraud (“humbug”), and a further realization that each character has indeed demonstrated the quality each believed her/himself to be lacking. Finally, Dorothy learns she has always had the power to return home, but had to realize it for herself. We will examine Dorothy and each of the other characters, and their organizational counterparts, in more detail in the next section. In this section, we explore possible interpretations of the story.

On the simplest level, the story can be viewed as an exciting and humorous children’s adventure tale, with the moralistic conclusion that “there’s no place like home”. On the psychological level, the story could be interpreted as a coming of age story for Dorothy and her companions or a series of initiation trials to be completed before Dorothy could return home. The story could be further seen as the importance of using all of your abilities (represented by each of the characters Dorothy encounters). Stewart (1997) described how the story serves as a metaphor for balancing energies and reclaiming personal power, resulting in personal spiritual growth and transformation.

The unbalanced value system of the modern world

The Oz story offers an allegory of the interconnectedness of all things – humankind and the natural world. The human condition stands as a witness and mirror to the natural world. Humankind and its inventions, including human organizations, are part of the natural world. Organizations and human society are part of the transformational process in much the same manner as individuals. When the Oz characters are out of balance, nature reflects this crisis. Without the tornado, Dorothy would not have learned her lessons. Chaos

and crisis are part of all life. Everyone and everything is our teacher. For example, the cowardly lion seems to represent aspects of our self-doubt or low self-esteem. Yet, each of us and our human creations such as complex organizations, have the potential for empowerment, confidence and high self-esteem. Organizations – and the researchers who study them and the academics who teach about them — can create a work culture supporting these potentials. Even the animal kingdom has an important role to play in saving the corporate planet through the cultural myth containing animal helpers, guides and archetypes. Witness the supportive role of Toto and the messages from nature and the spirit kingdoms in the Oz story.

The story could also be looked at as a metaphor for the struggles of modern life and work. On that level, the good witch/bad witch could be seen to represent the two faces of twentieth century organizational life – on the one hand bringing the grace of wealth/growth/technology etc., but often at the expense of humanity, soul and nature. Work and work structures have brought both light and darkness to humanity.

With the creed of greed threatening both ecology and human justice, it seems humankind has resigned itself to worship the false god of conflict and destruction. Spirituality seems so unscientific. The bad witch seems to have the upper hand. As Shaef and Fassel (1988) demonstrate, organizational pathology dominates office politics. The Wizard is in charge. He (and we mean He) rules via mass media. All the initial coping methods produced rigid rules, paternalism, bureaucracy and crisis management. These methods, initially useful in creating the economic development of the earlier industrial revolution and checking the earlier liabilities of feudalism and mercantilism, achieved much of their ends. These same methods in a wired world allow heightened control of the munchkins and the other inhabitants of Oz both at work and in politics. Their excesses can lead to a world out of balance.

As crisis mounted, Dorothy and her allies from all walks of life discovered that personal transformation led surprisingly to the transformation of organizations and whole systems such as the land of Oz. Perhaps the metaphor of Oz can apply to any system or imposed structure? All reactive management is like the politics of The Wizard. Change steps were needed. Let's examine each of the characters of the story in more detail, and explore counterparts and implications for the organization.

The characters in “Oz” and what they symbolize

Scarecrow

The Scarecrow represents intellect. The Scarecrow, who has no brains, is the problem solver of the story. On the organizational level, an organization that is not using its head does not plan. It usually operates using crisis management. An organization that makes full use of its brainpower uses a balance of rational (left hemisphere) and intuitive (right hemisphere) thinking and problem solving, uses strategic planning, and often finds creative solutions to problems. Change steps to develop this capacity include providing challenges,

brainstorming and other creativity techniques, encouraging decision-making opportunities, and group problem-solving sessions including training in statistical process control tools, strategic planning and team skills. A smart organization thinks with heart and head.

Tin Woodsman

The Tin Woodsman represents emotions. The Tin Woodsman, who has no heart, is the most emotional character in the story. On the organizational level, an organization that is not using its heart runs on bureaucracy, paternalism, and rigid rules operating as if its mission were purely defined by objectively measured profit maximization. An organization that uses its heart encourages emotionality with celebrations and reward ceremonies. It encourages change by providing challenges, rewards and recognition, and uses storytelling, envisioning, revisiting its mission and service projects, while providing positive reinforcement and training in communication and conflict management. The organization must discover its soul. It seeks to discover broader values externally by serving the larger economic and community systems with which it is interdependent, and internally by responding to the needs of its own employees. Soulful leadership is needed for this breakthrough in corporate culture.

Cowardly Lion

The Cowardly Lion represents the will to act. The Cowardly Lion, who has no courage, overcomes his fears to demonstrate great courage in the story. On the organizational level, an organization that has no courage is afraid to take risks, is compliant, and manages by reacting. Argyris (1993), Argyris and Schön (1976; 1978; 1993) and Senge (1990; 1994) demonstrated that organizational learning requires accepting error as an opportunity to learn, challenging assumptions of the existing paradigm and acting with a belief in organizational robustness. All of these require courage. An organization that demonstrates courage takes risks, is proactive, and is socially conscious. It encourages change by providing challenging assignments and projects while providing training in survival training, ethics and social justice.

The Wizard, the two wicked witches, and Glinda each represent an outside agent or external force to which the characters in the story initially attribute the ability to create change, i.e., the ability to exert power over them. The power which is attributed to each of them produces a sense of fear and results in compliance by the inhabitants of Oz. As Connors *et al.* (1994) point out, this combination of blame and attribution of power to the Wizard and the witches serves to disempower the other characters in the story, and allows the inhabitants to act as victims who elude accountability. Each of these characters have counterparts in business firms. The balance of rights and responsibility requires vigilance and heightened self-awareness. Trust, integrity, courage and compassion bring much needed balance to organizational power and politics.

The Wizard

The Wizard represents power in the organization. At the beginning of the story, this power is attributed to a specific magical person but, by its end, the Wizard is revealed to be a “humbug” or fraud, and the power and accountability are reclaimed by Dorothy and her companions. Similarly, on the organizational level, an organization that attributes power to a single charismatic leader disempowers itself in the long run. An organization that reclaims its power and accountability empowers all its internal resources, trusts its processes and uses empowering techniques such as envisioning and process consultation. It encourages change by providing experiences and opportunities for spiritual growth, while providing training in self-awareness, community building, creativity, meditation, even the cultivation of basic virtues such as discernment. This will help bring life to work in its full human potential.

The witches

The witches represent the opposing forces or energies of power that operate in the story, in each of us, and in organizations. At the beginning of the story, these forces or energies are, again, externalized and split, and are attributed to a “good” witch (Glinda) and to two “bad” or “wicked” witches. By the end of the story, Dorothy and her companions, through their shared experiences in overcoming the challenges they encounter, have reclaimed and balanced these energies within themselves. It is by reclaiming these energies that Dorothy realizes how to use her power and return home. On an individual psychological level, killing the wicked witch represents the psychological work of reclaiming one’s “shadow” as Carl Jung called it, or accepting and integrating one’s “dark side” or, as Pierrakos (1987) refers to it, reconnecting one’s lower human emotions (like anger and rage) with one’s higher or spiritual self. A recurring theme of science fiction and myth is that we need both our so-called good and evil natures in order to be complete persons, and how, indeed, our darker, angrier side, often contributes decisively to leadership and action. On the organizational level, such an energy split is manifested in the kinds of organizational defenses and pathology described by Schaefer and Fassel (1988) or by Kets de Vries and Miller (1984). An organization can encourage the balancing of its energies by exorcising its pathologies, while providing training in conflict management and incorporating the self-help philosophy of the various 12-step programs (Robbins, 1992; Robbins and Stevenson, 1998).

Dorothy

Dorothy symbolizes all the various energies and forces of the story. She reclaims her personal balance and power resulting in her spiritual transformation. The Oz characters, Dorothy and her friends, achieved inner victory over their darker sides as well as outer victory in attaining their goals. While the changes come from within, it is their integration of their experiences along the path that allows these changes to occur. Organizations need to

balance recognition of their inner strengths with responsiveness both to ideas and to shifts in their environments. An organization that undergoes a spiritual transformation will exhibit the characteristics described at the beginning of this article. It will empower all of its members and celebrate their diversity. Its members will feel that they are in balance with their natures and are “home”.

Conclusion

We hope our use of the Oz metaphor puts a human face on organizational theory. Institutions need to practice self-analysis (“inventory”) just as people do. Evolving organizations need to develop closer relationships with their feelings, culture, intentions and mission. Learning organizations must take the initiative to evolve towards their highest and most creative possibilities. The recovering organizations at the turn of the century are overcoming much of this pathology in work, inch by inch, day by day. Hopefully, our storytelling with the Oz metaphor gives encouragement to courageous leaders from all walks of life to face their witches and confront their wizards and contribute to the spiritual future of work.

L. Frank Baum, the author of *The Wizard of Oz*, was a forerunner of transpersonal psychology in his storytelling of trusting the basic goodness of our earthly destinies. He saw humankind weaving back and forth between the wizard and the witch. Our human organizations, which reflect our consciousness in evolution, must contain a balance between masculine and feminine, the light and dark, levity and gravity – all with the final aim of partnership in creation. For the organizational psychologist or cultural anthropologist, the non-integrated soul of the modern organization is represented by the Scarecrow, The Tin Man and the Lion. The combination of these outside “higher powers” and the higher self resulted in positive evolution to solutions on the yellow brick road. The oncoming organizational myth makers, heroes and heroines will be the those who balance the dualities of work life with the organic destiny of the human enterprise. We believe the unfolding of a servant heart within future business leaders will produce the organizational consciousness necessary for a breakthrough to a new business paradigm. How might they apply these perceptions to the modern business firm? Moving along the path from organizational addiction to organizational transformation and developing work processes where people matter is a spiritual journey. In this journey the firm comes to recognize not just its particular mission but a broader mission of serving humanity, ourselves. Thus, this new work paradigm is one of balance, which likely will require deviations from the “lower” objective of profit maximization.

Without spirituality the normative goal of business is profit, an objective which has shown demonstrable effectiveness in increasing industrial output. In this paradigm income distribution is only a side-effect, wagged by the output maximization goal. While the lack of attention to distribution is recognized (e.g., regulations to deal with the internal and external diseconomies and moral hazard), such adjustments fail to correct fully specific effects and deal weakly

with the perception of profit as the proper legitimate goal. The impact of such a one-pointed goal, which readily comes to be seen as the goal rather than just a means to an end, expands. Concepts and behaviors based on the goal of profit maximization become embedded in organizational cultures and in the measures used in academic research to evaluate management techniques.

From the multiple goals advanced for spirituality, an increase in variety seems requisite, just as Dorothy found multiple characteristics necessary in her journey home. Multiple criteria rather than the single criterion of profit or profit's cousins, growth and market share, are required. Spiritual alternatives mean widening the focus of business objectives including recognizing different and potentially conflicting criteria for, on the one hand, production and, on the other, distribution. A set of more extensive normative criteria helpful for widening our concepts of the purpose of business can be found in the schema of Ackoff (1981). Maintaining that we are a species in search of ideals, he contends we have developed five recognizable foci (with each corresponding body of theory and academic disciplines in parentheses) as follows: Truth (Science), Beauty (Aesthetics), The Good (Ethics, Philosophy), Plenty (Economics), and Justice (Law). The ideals are the governing variables, the indicators of success, of the associated disciplines. Management is not included in Ackoff's list of disciplines; the prevailing paradigm we have discussed seems to imply that the purpose of business, its ideal, is simply Plenty, the domain of economics. Profit becomes a constraint, a necessary condition to achieve multiple objectives, rather than a single varied objective to be maximized. Even with multiple criteria the problem of balance remains. Focusing on any of these ideals without attending to the others produces a bad result. Only Good and Justice (distribution) produces the problems of socialism with a potential for equity but, as recently seen, too little to distribute and the sterility of "socialist realist art". Only Truth produces science but not necessarily sufficiency or ethics or fairness. Only Beauty produces neither food nor social concerns nor a search for truth – including medical progress. And only Plenty (abundance) produces an ugly, unjust society with little attention to truth or compassion.

Robbins (1992) suggests how a balanced firm might look with semi-autonomous units of limited size, minimal coercive pressures, recognition of error as a source of learning and other characteristics. The Brazilian firm, Semco, which fits many of these characteristics, went from near financial disaster in 1980 to a position as Brazil's largest food-process machinery manufacturer and one of Brazil's fastest growing companies in 1988 and, despite recent difficulties in Brazil, continues to thrive (Semler, 1989, 1995). Spirituality seems based more on questions than on proscriptive answers – the search for meaning in the ordinary business of life. Without spirituality the normative purpose of business is profit. If we choose to develop more spiritual organizations, we must use multiple criteria such as those suggested in Ackoff's model and develop organizational designs which support such criteria. This new paradigm contains many of the features of the Oz story in which all the characters have an awakening.

Both individuals and organizations work best with awakening, joy, meaning and commitment in the work process. Richards (1995) calls this a centered organization – one which will produce environments where commitment is the norm, where people strive to be perceptive, receptive and expressive and where people are involved in work that is congruent with the requirements of their own spirits and souls. Dorothy and her friends learned we are born with this potential if we only can wake up to its reality in our lives.

As the post-modern organization struggles to turn chaos into creativity it is coming to grips with the necessity of integrating its soul and spirit. Dorothy and the dynamics of spirit may herald the coming of a new work community. A basic workplace spirituality can be the common ground for the new work community. Working people and human evolution itself are constantly seeking meaning, purpose, and a sense of contribution to work life. Reframing the meaning of work has support of the servant leaders worldwide who see that a life of service best fits the basic human need for relevance, recognition, meaning and self-transcendence. Stewart (1997) is convinced that our human culture has the map for the modern spiritual journey. This journey runs through all of life at every level. In an age of economics where corporations rule the world this journey has a most important passage through the world of work. From this universal folk tale and modern morality play, maybe we may some day reinvent work and transform human organizations in a way that will make the world more humane. We believe the experiences of the Scarecrow, Tin Woodsman and the Cowardly Lion along with Dorothy and Toto represent the challenge to everyone on this planet. We have the ability not only to heal ourselves but also the organizations within which we work.

We all have the opportunity to be servant leaders of the next breakthrough of human organizational evolution. There is a certain urgency for humanity to develop the consciousness needed to meet the new and diverse challenges arising on the planet. As they neared the Emerald City, Dorothy and her “fellow travelers” said to each other, “Welcome on then. What are you waiting for?”, “Hurry! Hurry!”, “You can’t rest now– we’re nearly there” (Stewart, 1997, p. 174).

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