

## "Musings on the HR World Congress 2010" by Monica Redden

I recently attended the 13<sup>th</sup> World Human Resources Congress in Montreal, Canada. Below I have gathered the key themes and ideas I observed during the conference to share with you.

**Role of HR:** considerable encouragement for HR people to *be more strategic* in their role of working with the Exec/CEO to support the work of the organization. This was particularly referred to as *"thinking beyond the regulatory and transactional work and into the strategic"*.

**Human Beings not Human Resources:** The emphasis on **human beings/people/human** resourcefulness over human resources was consistently referred to by key note speakers and other presenters.

**Creativity and innovation:** these themes were consistently linked to creating sustainable and vibrant organizations.

I was particularly impressed with Antony Thomas from Dubai. He explored beyond the HR transactional to transformational and had many great models for thinking about such. Shifting from HR as strategic partner; change agent; administrative expert and employee advocate and moving toward strategic innovation; change innovator; Web 2.0 Expert and customer expert. He also explored some challenges faced in society and suggested that HR think beyond the organization to take into consideration the wider community, in particular the link between the organization and the people within that are unemployed; employed; underemployed and unemployable (made redundant and face barriers geographically, age, skill, etc). He then challenged organizations and HR to be creative, imagine ideas, and be innovative to execute the ideas, particularly in relation to people processes.

Nancy Adler, author of CoachingOurselves topic "[Ordinary People, Extraordinary Leadership](#)", received the Georges Petitpas Memorial Award in acknowledgment for her contribution to human resources and later gave a session on re-hydrating leadership. She presented a compelling argument for rethinking how organisations and leaders need to position thinking & behaviour in the next decade. She emphasized the importance of being creative and linking the visions & imagination to new ways of being while providing some great examples of where companies, directors, and managers have tackled different ways of doing things. She worked her way through the five stages of Kubler Ross's grief (denial, anger, depression, bargaining, acceptance) and paralleled each stage with an analysis of the current state of society/leadership and management. In particular, she presented 3 challenges for the future:

- 1) To have the ability to see reality (eg. if we had seen reality with the banks and businesses, would we have ended in such a mess?)
- 2) To have the ability and courage to see a better world (move beyond can't do)
- 3) To have the courage to move from reality to possibility

CoachingOurselves, from my perspective, is trying to create a realistic environment where managers have the opportunity to discuss real issues and to generate actions, which connects each individual to the reality of their organization. It also brings attention to the importance of linking creative thinking to innovative thinking.

**Workforce engagement:** The other theme that ran consistently through the conference was the emphasis on managers and moving beyond the focus on leaders as stand-alone individuals. It was evident that the financial crisis over the past 1-2 years has forced some serious rethinking about how organizations run; sustainability in times of crisis; capacity, and resilience requires engagement & ownership for change to be integrated within organizations.

Interestingly airlines featured heavily as role models for rethinking and remodeling. It appears that the financial crisis and impact on declining customers has forced the industry to seriously review its connection to customers/satisfaction with service and consequently engage employees in identifying how that might be improved.

**Technology and communications:** Technology and the new wave for connecting and sharing knowledge was also a theme. David Tapscott was keynote speaker and presented another compelling argument for why the current generation of native clicks (those born in the computer era) are connected, imaginative, think in snaps as opposed to linear thinking, and require a different mode of engagement. I heard many arguments for and against his thesis; particularly from people in developing regions that argued the face to face is critical for generating drive and change, and once the relationships are established then technology can support ongoing development. Tod Maffin's session "Taking Crazy Back: working and living in the hyper-speed economy without losing your mind" argued that the busyness of the workplace with the increase in technology and expectations of on-demand communications is actually leading to major mental health and physical health issues. A responsible organization will address the need for balance, example: slowdown and talk, create a culture where asking for help is encouraged, etc.

**Creating Community:** Henry Mintzberg, [co-founder of CoachingOurselves](#), held a Q&A session that underlined the work of most of the presenters. He emphasized the importance of humanizing companies and organizations by creating possibilities for people to connect and strengthen the fabric within organizations. His session received a standing ovation from some and constant reference to his work in workshops, presentations, and general discussion for the remainder of the conference. The humanizing of leadership and engagement with managers, as mentioned above, was a constant theme during the conference.

**People:** Of course the other positive thing about the conference was meeting lots of great people, many of whom are dedicated HR people trying to make a difference in the way their organization operates and engages their employees. 3500 people gathered from all over the world, including a woman that I had a BBQ with at my dear friend's birthday party last year!!!

*The above is a reflection of my interpretation and of the sessions that I attended. I hope it provides some information of interest. I think the relevance of these themes in relation to CoachingOurselves relates to creating reality, creating opportunities for people to connect, being creative and innovative, engagement of the workforce as the key to success, leadership is about making space for emergence of leaders throughout organizations and not about elite individuals and heaps more.....*

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experienced in working with people at all levels, including executives, boards, senior managers, local residents, middle management, staff, and project management. Monica and her team work with clients to review and restructure organizations, manage consultation on complex issues, and develop useful strategic and operational plans. The team specializes in organizational planning, facilitation, industrial relations, coaching, communications, and writing.