

Words Do Matter: Archimedes vs. Atlas?



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THRIVE IN THE AGE OF KNOWLEDGE

Jeffery Marshall

President, Morgan Works

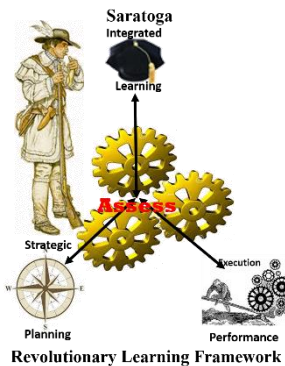
Morgan Works helps organizations transform into Revolutionary Learning Organizations to thrive in the rapidly changing and chaotic environment.

The Age of Knowledge is a dynamic and disruptive environment in which organizations must continually adapt themselves to meet challenges and opportunities or face irrelevance or even extinction. It is marked by the rapid emergence of disruptive technologies, the ease of use of these technologies and users that can rapidly and effectively apply information to achieve their own ends and purposes.

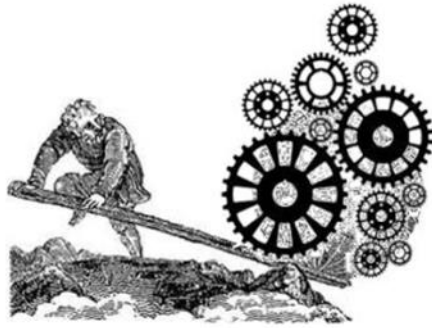
***Key Points:** Language and how we use it shapes our thoughts. The less precise our language, the less precise our thoughts and will be. Words matter greatly, and leaders need to develop a clear language process and consider their words to effectively communicate vision, concepts, and set the tone and culture for an organization. Clear thinking produces clear vision, mission, and strategy. Let words be a tool rather than a burden.*

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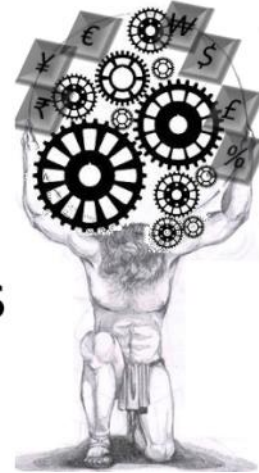
Morgan Works provides a suite of integrated planning and execution tools through the Saratoga Revolutionary Learning Organization Framework™.



Saratoga's modules may be implanted separately or as part of a cohesive framework to integrate key aspects of planning and execution in a Revolutionary Learning Environment. It is based on knowledge enablement to help people and organizations to understand their environment and to thrive in a chaotic and rapidly changing world. **Thrive in the Age of Knowledge**



VS



As you go through life certain events or teachings make an indelible impression on you and shape your world outlook. Two teachings that have stayed with me over the years have often

made me question terms like “human resources” and “behavioral health”.

The first teaching is from my college philosophy course. Now as a young sophomore looking to be an engineer, the last thing I wanted to take was philosophy. Yet I have found that the course has stayed with me and guided me much more than thermodynamics or structural engineering. The important teaching that I took away from the course was Kant's Categorical Imperative: “People are ends in themselves and not means to an end.” In other words, people are not resources to be used to accomplish something.

The second teaching came from a small group instructor at the Infantry Officers Advanced Course. He continually admonished us to “use precise terms precisely”. While on one level it simply meant know what you are talking about and use terms correctly to convey meaning, on another level it was about clear and precise thinking. The words we use to frame our thoughts actually shape our thoughts and govern our perceptions.

“The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.” Wittgenstein,

Over the years since those days, through many different experiences in many different settings, those two teachings have been a beacon to guide my thoughts and actions. They have helped to cut through the clutter and distractions of the daily grind and shaped my approach to life.

They have also caused me to question much of what I see in organization's approach to personnel issues and how the organization treats people.

The term “human resources” completely flies in the face of Kant's Categorical Imperative. The term itself clearly states the organization considers people to be resources to be expended in pursuit of organizational objectives. To an organization that practices HR, people are simply means to an end.

Now you might say, “get over it; it’s just a term”, but that takes us to the second teaching. Precise terms shape and influence our thought, often in subtle ways that do not necessarily come into our conscious mind. If we call people resources, we start to think of them as resources and simply means to be used and expended. Yes, people are instrumental in achieving organizational goals and objectives. But to think of people as resources is to belittle them and to see them as objects that do not have their own needs, dreams, and desires.

Language helps us to remember information and transforms the way in which we view situations. [Tversky and Kahneman](#)

If we look at management today, I suspect the root of many problems is this outlook that people are resources to be consumed. Think unions are a problem and we need to get rid of them? The whole reason we have unions is because managers treated people as resources and exploited them. Unions started as a way to counter act this terrible approach to human resources. Think workers are not motivated and do not perform well? How motivated is that socket wrench?

Look at the littered landscape of abandoned factories and towns withering away when a company leaves and the human misery it creates. If the managers of the company saw people as ends in and of themselves rather than resources that cost so much and so much less over there, would they make the same decision to move the company?

This terrible approach to management has and will continue to have significant costs that are not calculated into a manager’s decision. The organization simply leaves with no cost to them and leaves the cost of shattered towns and lives to “society” to manage.

This has two significant impacts. First, people get alienated and behave so, which creates stress in society and potentially sets the conditions for instability that leads to chaos. Society after all is social and about people. If the people are unstable and anxious, then society will be as well. Second, when people lose their jobs, they lose the ability to purchase the goods and services that drive the economy and allow them to take care of themselves and their family. This further leads to instability, anxiety and chaos.

All because precise terms are used in a way that completely violates Kant’s Categorical Imperative? Did you ever hear a true leader talk about “human resources”? I sincerely doubt it. You will hear a real leader talk about the value of people. Leaders talk about helping people to achieve their potential. They are smart and not necessarily altruistic. They know that empowered and motivated people will find ways to achieve organizational goals and objectives, especially when they see and realize the benefits.

The second term, “behavioral health” has the same set of connotative and denotative problems. On the surface it seems somewhat benign. But think about what it really says. The manager is more interested in the workers’ behavior on the job than their emotional, mental, and spiritual health. This hearkens straight back to the concept of human resources and treating people as a means to an end. In essence, the work environment becomes a giant [Skinner Box](#) to a manager and the people are rats running through the maze of conditioned behavior. If you treat people like rats, do not be surprised if they act like the rats in a Skinner Box solely seeking the box’s rewards.

Look at the title image for this piece. On the left is Archimedes and his lever. The person is using tools to effectively execute processes to intelligently accomplish objectives. On the right is Atlas. The person is a means to an end. Archimedes makes things happen. Atlas bears burdens and contributes little else. Which would you prefer: Archimedes or Atlas? The words you use and the way you treat people will determine which you get. And if you choose Atlas and he shrugs...

Leaders choose Archimedes and seek to help people to achieve their potential so they can effectively employ tools and processes to accomplish objectives. Managers choose Atlas and see people as resources to be used and expended. While both leaders and managers want to achieve organizational goals and objectives, there is a fundamentally different way in which they approach it. Leaders talk about human potential and resiliency. Managers talk about human resources and behavioral health.