



Tribute to J. Richard Hackman – A giant of our profession

Pauline Willis & Ruth Wageman

DURING the Annual DOP conference in Brighton, we were joined by key professional colleagues, including the current President of the British Psychological Society, for a tribute session for the late, great J. Richard Hackman, Edgar Pierce Professor of Social and Organizational Psychology at Harvard University, who died of lung cancer last year.

Since the first publication of the Job Characteristics Model over 30 years ago, which Richard developed with colleagues Ed Lawler and Greg Oldham, he has had a profound and lasting influence on the professions of occupational and organisational psychology globally.

Richard's contribution to the profession was rooted in his deeply held belief that work can and should make us better, happier, more capable people, and this individual impact should contribute to the good of the work team, the organisation, and society. Richard was a key contributor to systems design thinking about teams and workplaces -- a concern for creating and using the right intervention at the right time and place. In the words of a colleague, he thought it important for teams and teamwork to be treated seriously in work contexts, not thoughtlessly tossed in as another ingredient in the management salad. He lamented the misuse of work teams to solve work problems for which they were not suited, and the general lack of attention that managers as a group paid to the purposes, structure, and social integrity of work teams. He thought of teams as powerful tools, but ones that required significant support to enable them to accomplish great things. Among Richard's

notable contributions was to examine instances of great teamwork to distil the commonalities at all levels of analysis that increased the odds of success.

Passionate about ‘useful research’ – that is, work that contributes both to social science theory and to informed action – Richard’s contribution to the well-being of individuals and teams in organisations is widely recognised within our profession. In recent years, he was concentrating on developing an implementation model of his theory, one designed for leaders of teams, that could guide the application of his conditions for team effectiveness to the launch or redesign of teams in organisations (Wageman et al., 2008; see Figure 1). Moreover, he had developed and validated a survey instrument designed to assess the standing of any team on those conditions for effectiveness, for use in scholarly research and education about teams, but also to support the diagnosis and redesign of teams in organisations. (Wageman et al., 2005). A revised version of that instrument is due to be launched this year.



Figure 1: Essential and enabling conditions for team effectiveness

The ‘usefulness’ of Richard’s work has been felt beyond our profession in countless ways. Coaches and mentors who work with teams and who come from professional backgrounds outside of psychology, as well as the human resources communities of practice, also recognise the value of his work and have embraced the theoretical contribution and eminently useful tools he has created with his colleagues to support organisational success.

Richard leaves behind an immeasurable contribution to the profession through his scholarly work and his teaching. His theories and substantial body of evidence – and that of his countless students – encompassed individual, team and organisational influences on the effectiveness of social systems. Perhaps most importantly, Richard wrote and taught always with humility and with a mindfulness toward ensuring that his work was not just for our profession, but for greater good of all.

Extract from the Division of Occupational Psychology’s *OP Matters* journal. Reproduced © 2014 with permission from the British Psychological Society.

If you would like to make a personal contribution to the DOP tribute, please send your comments to **pauline.willis@lauriate.com**. Alternately, if you have a contribution that you would prefer to submit directly for the www.jrichardhackman.com memorial pages email these to **rwageman@wjh.harvard.edu**. We welcome any comments or thoughts you would like to share.



The authors

Pauline Willis (left) is director at Lauriate Ltd Business Psychology Coaching and Consulting, Regional Distributor for Team Sociomapping UK/Aus.

Ruth Wageman (right) is the Director of ReThink Health Stewardship, an initiative of the Rippel Foundation.

