

# *Imago Dei* and Human Resource Management: How Our Understanding of the Breath of God's Spirit Shapes the Way We Manage People

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**ABSTRACT:** Of all that God created, humans alone were given life by God's own breath. Therefore, the foundation of *imago Dei*, creation in the image of God by the breath of God's Spirit, should shape our general approach toward managing people and our specific human resource management practices. A holistic approach to human resource management that adopts a balance of theological perspectives of *imago Dei* effectively supports an organization.

**KEYWORDS:** *Imago Dei*; image of God; management; human resource management

## INTRODUCTION

The creation stories are wondrous to read as they describe God's glory and majesty and the results of his handiwork. However, of all that was created, humans alone were made in God's own image, given life by God's own breath (Gen 2:7). Therefore, if we believe that humans are created in the image of God, by the breath of God's Spirit, how should that shape workplace interactions? More specifically, how should the belief that managers reflect God's likeness and characteristics shape the way we manage people in organizations? How does the belief that employees are created in his image drive job design, planning for staffing needs, recruitment, selection, training, development, compensation, health and safety, and performance evaluation of those whom God places in the care of our management as we seek to achieve organizational goals and objectives?

This paper will survey definitions and applications of the concept of *imago Dei* as presented by theologians and scholars by evaluating three perspectives: a structural approach, which interprets *imago Dei* as reflecting attributes of God that are intrinsic to humans; a relational perspective indicates that humans repeat the relational aspects of God's relational being; and a functional approach, including stewardship and dominion

over the rest of creation. It will then evaluate the application of *imago Dei* toward the management of people and specific human resource management (HRM) activities by proposing that an integration of these three key theological models will develop the necessary holistic approach required for effective management of people in organizations.

## IMAGO DEI: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE?

The word "image" is understood as a representation of something or someone. Likenesses can be visible impressions or mental representations. Artists create images as they craft portraits and sculptures or take photographs. Authors help readers imagine words written on a page. Images are crafted in a manner that enables others to see and understand the object being represented. Such is the foundational understanding of *imago Dei*: humans have been created to represent the Creator. Yet how are we created in God's likeness?

Sands (2010) states, "Christian theologians agree that human beings are defined by their creation 'in the image of God.' This agreement unravels when theologians try to specify the precise nature of the image" (p. 28). He

argues that while there have been attempts to articulate the nature of how we are “imaged,” theologians have at times wandered from historical-critical exegesis and have adopted an abstract, speculative direction, perhaps because of the limited number of passages, especially in the Old Testament, that describe *imago Dei*. The creation story as told in Genesis provides the foundation: “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them” (Gen 1:27 NRSV). This is further developed in the next chapter, where we are told “the Lord formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (Gen 2:7). Other passages provide additional glimpses of *imago Dei* (Gen 5:1-3 and 9:6; Ps 8:5-6), yet there is a transition from humans as the perfect image bearer of God to the image bearer marred by sin. There is a further transition from *imago Dei* as a pneumatological process in the Old Testament, to a Christocentric confession in the New Testament that we bear the image of the Son (1 Cor 15:47-49; Col 3:10-11; Rom 8:29), who is himself the image of God (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15), and that we live in the hope that “when he is revealed, we will be like him” (1 John 3:2). In attempts to interpret these passages (particularly Gen 1 and 2 where *imago Dei* was unmarred by man’s fall into sin) and to develop a theology of *imago Dei*, three main schools of thought appear among scholars: structural, relational, and functional (or ambassadorial). A structural perspective focuses on **who** we are created to be based on attributes and characteristics that reflect *imago Dei*. A relational approach focuses on **how** we are created to live—communally—as the Godhead itself communes with one another. A functional perspective emphasizes **what** we are created to do: co-create and steward the earth’s resources using our diverse gifts. These three perspectives provide differing viewpoints about the complexity with which God created humans in his image.

### Structural Perspective

Just as one might describe how a child resembles his or her parent (e.g., thoughtful, playful), a structural perspective defines an image bearer as one who possesses attributes and characteristics of God. For instance, Sands (2010) identifies reason, self-consciousness, freedom, moral sense, and spirituality as characteristics that have been stamped on humans (p. 32). Scripture emphasizes three characteristics when describing what it means to be made in God’s image: “holiness, righteousness, and true knowledge” (Chewning, 1989, p. 134). Ephesians 4:23-24 urges us to “be renewed in the spirit of your minds and to clothe your-

selves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” Colossians 3:10 speaks about clothing “yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator.” Additional attributes of God, as identified in Scripture, that we display include truth, justice, love, mercy, faithfulness, goodness, and grace.

Besides resembling God, our father, a structural approach to *Imago Dei* can have a Christocentric focus. The Bible speaks of Christ as the image of God (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15) and being “in the form of God” (Phil 2:6). Robinson (2011) compares the doctrinal perspectives of Barth, Moltmann, and von Balthasar, three twentieth-century theologians, specifically because of their different traditions. He concludes that all three theologians approach *imago Dei* from a Christocentric position, having developed perspectives based on the shift in thinking that occurred during the Reformation, beginning with Luther and Calvin, who focussed on “the sovereignty of God in whose image humanity is made and, in particular on Christ, who has restored us to this image” (Robinson, 2011, p. 21). Barth’s Protestant view of *imago Dei* stemmed from the understanding that our relationship with God has placed us in partnership with Christ (Robinson, 2011, p. 47). Von Balthasar, a Roman Catholic, built on Barth’s relational view of *imago Dei*, yet in ways that affirm the dignity of humanity as being a component of God’s reflection. Norsworthy and Belcher (2015) also take a Christocentric view, concluding that it is the insight into the “unique deity of Jesus as Lord and the call to imitate him, in God’s image” that defines the way in which we have been made (p. 4).

Being made in the image of a triune God means that our understanding of *imago Dei* would be incomplete with considering a pneumatological view. Kärkkäinen (2002) states that the Holy Spirit was sent into the world to bring about new creation, giving birth to new humanity fashioned after the image of [perhaps created to resemble] God (p. 157). Moltmann “expresses the presence of the Holy Spirit as the presence of God at the very heart of creation,” emphasizing the ongoing relationship we have with God (as cited in Robinson, 2011). However, Robinson (2011) is critical of Moltmann’s model as overlooking that “human dignity is found not in our quest for God but God’s descent to us in Christ” (p. 158).

### Relational Perspective

The relational approach proposes that we reflect the image and experience of God as we relate to others.

Relational comparisons are made when children follow in the footsteps of their parent and exhibit concern for others as they seek to maintain healthy relationships and to build communities that reflect love and respect dignity. This perspective focuses on how we are created to live in relationship to God and to his children. 1 Peter 4:10 urges us, “As good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.” The use of “varied grace” in the ESV and “faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms” in the NIV emphasize even more strongly how people were created with diverse gifts and strengths with which to serve others. “Human beings reflect the divine image not as solitary individuals but in social relatedness” (Sands, 2010, p. 35). Barth indicates that humans repeat the relational aspect of God’s relational being (Sands, 2010, p. 35). Bonhoeffer’s theology relating to *imago Dei* is developed in a social context, both individually and corporately (Green, 1999), thus defining a theology of sociality built on a relational interpretation of humans created in God’s image.

### Functional (Ambassadorial) Perspective

A functional approach to *imago Dei* relates to God’s command to his image bearers to have dominion over the rest of creation. That we are co-creators with God is part of this approach. Functional similarities reflect the care of a child for the possessions, work, and reputation of the parent, in a stewardly manner and as if they were the child’s own. We display God’s image when we serve as the hands and feet of God, caring for this world. The functional perspective is well described by Moltmann (1997) as he suggests that “when we come awake in God’s Spirit, we also participate in God’s sufferings in this world and with this world, and wait for the future of his redemption” (p. 133). He describes the relationship between the Word and the Spirit: they complement each other, in that “the Word specifies and differentiates; the Spirit binds and forms harmony.” He depicts creation as the “community of creation . . . sustained by the breath of God’s Spirit” (Moltmann, 1997, p. 116).

In exercising dominion, Middleton claims that we are called to function as royal ambassadors to share in the administration of resources and creatures (as cited in Sands 2010, p. 37). In 2 Corinthians 5:20a, Paul writes, “We are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us.” Relying on this verse, Pregitzer (2008) encourages believers to “approach the world from the perspective of an ambassador: someone who goes out

into the world representing not himself but the King, Jesus Christ” (p. 49).

### An Integrated Perspective

While Christians agree that humans are created in God’s image and are given life by the very breath of the Holy Spirit, the discussion above makes it apparent that there are multiple interpretations about how that image is actualized. While some authors have maintained distinctions among the three perspectives described above, others have recognized overlap or have combined the perspectives into one more overarching description.

For instance, Pregitzer (2008) goes on to say that, “We are called to minister to the world as agents of reconciliation between God and Man” (p. 49), which reflects how closely the functional (ambassadorial) approach is to the relational. Norsworthy and Belcher (2015), when evaluating a survey of educators, fold functional into relational, considering that when we represent God in our actions, we act like and mirror God. An “ambassadorial” approach means we are to represent God to others as an ambassador would represent a king or sovereign nation.

Hardy compares the insights of several Reformers, all of whom combine two or more of the above perspectives. Luther’s view is that “by working we affirm our uniquely human position as God’s representatives on this earth, as cultivators and stewards of the good gifts of his creation, which are destined for the benefit of all” combines functional and relational perspectives (as cited in Hardy, 1990, p. 48). Calvin also espoused both a functional and a relational view of *imago Dei*. “He is the creator and sustainer of the universe. He is the redeemer of the human race. Thus when we shape and administer his creation in service to others and pursue his righteousness in the context of human society we express something of his nature in our lives” (as cited in Hardy, 1990, p. 57). Calvin contends that, “all the gifts we possess have been bestowed by God and entrusted to us on condition that they be distributed for our neighbors’ benefit” (as cited in McKim, 2001, p. 83). Zwingli combines a structural and relational perspective, suggesting it is “those who exercise themselves in righteousness that they may ‘serve the Christian community, the common good, the state, and individuals’ that are ‘most like to God’” (as cited in Hardy, 1990, p. 57).

Hardy also compares the Reformed tradition with that of the Catholic tradition, where there is a recognition of all three perspectives. He discusses the views of two recent Popes (Paul VI and John Paul II) who both display

a functional perspective on *imago Dei*. Commenting on Gen 1:28, Pope Paul VI in *Populorum Progression*, sec. 22, emphasizes the responsibility of humans to develop the whole creation “by intelligent effort and by means of his labour to perfect it, so to speak, for his use” (as cited in Hardy, 1990, p. 71). John Paul II in *Laborem Exercens*, sec. 4, states that “man is the image of God partly through the mandate received from his creator to subdue, to dominate, the earth” (as cited in Hardy, 1990, p. 72). However, there is also a relational perspective suggested in the Catholic emphasis on unique gifts all being used in service to human society, similar to the body analogy used to describe the Church in the New Testament, which parallels that suggested by the Reformers. Both Pope Leo XIII and Pope Pius XI emphasized the importance of specific gifts being used to the benefit of society (Hardy, 1990, pp. 73-74).

Going back to our original “definitions” of the three perspectives of *imago Dei*, it seems that the most fruitful application of this concept as we seek to apply it to the area of strategic HRM is a blending of the three. To be created in God’s image means that we possess certain attributes (who we are created to be), which affect how we relate to God and one another (how we are created to live), as we fulfill our roles as co-creators and stewards (what we are created to do).

When applying the concept of *imago Dei* to the workplace, it is important to consider, first, what it means that managers are created in the image of God and, second, what it means that employees, too, bear his image. The first consideration will be the focus of the next section. The second consideration will be covered in a subsequent section.

### **IMAGO DEI: WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR PEOPLE MANAGERS?**

If we believe that we are created in the image of God, by the breath of the Holy Spirit, how does this affect the way we manage people in organizations? If we are created in God’s image, then it follows that we are thinking, productive people, desirous of entering into healthy relationships with employees and capable of making responsible decisions about the resources God has entrusted to us. While we watch the bottom line of profit, we should see the people in our organizations as ends, as well as the means to the end, of a profitable business. This presents a tension to be balanced: financial objectives must be met

through the people employed by the organization, yet people as individuals must be cared for and treated with dignity as they contribute toward achieving organizational goals and goals of their own. Successfully negotiating such a tension requires that we recognize the image of God in each employee, regardless of which approach to *imago Dei* we embrace.

The three theological perspectives of *imago Dei* identified above are also found in the writings of a number of authors in the context of the workplace and effective people management.

Chewning (2001) indicates that God created us to bear his image to reveal his goodness and love, suggesting a faceted structural approach to managing people. He points to several aspects of God, invisible attributes such as his eternal power and divine nature, revealed in the way we manage people. It is these aspects of God that are also revealed in our own lives by the re-creative work of the Holy Spirit (Chewning, 2001, pp. 80-93).

Fischer and Friedman (2014) suggest that Psalms 72, 82, and 101 provide leadership lessons that set the tone at the top of an organization. Adopting a structural approach, they focus on the attribute of justice, “the biblical equivalent of organizational trust” (p. 29). They show how Psalms 72, 82, and 101, emphasize three elements of organizational trust: integrity, ability (seeking and accepting instruction), and benevolence (truthful communication). They illustrate that those who lead with truth and justice should, like David’s prayer for his son, ask God to help them be “honest and fair just like you, our God” (Ps 72:1-2). God’s attributes of truth and justice are critical for leaders since “they are agents of God in dispensing justice to humanity” (p. 31). Our fallen nature is also addressed, for example, in Psalm 101. After he promises to silence gossip, David “pledges to seek out the most competent and trustworthy people to serve as his officials and advisors” (Ps 101:5-6).

In a response to Fischer and Friedman’s article, Dose (2012) focuses on the need to extend trust and justice beyond the leader to other organizational relationships and to followers. She specifically notes that “contributions to an environment of trust and justice honor both God and fellow human beings created in His image, as well as contribute to organizational effectiveness.”

In a strongly structural argument, economist Kevin Brown (2014) indicates that we are “inspired, directed, and driven” to produce “by a spiritual DNA that compels us to create, to innovate, to produce, and to relate and concern ourselves with the affairs of others. It is who we



are because we are image-bearers of who He is” (p. 75). He outlines two implications of this image-bearing; first, our production is a valuable labour activity that reflects God’s attributes; second, this has implications for how we manage organizations in a structured, orderly and efficient manner.

Franz (2014) is particularly persuasive in arguing from a functional/ambassadorial position. He states, “If God is redemptive, communal, personal, and relational, and man is a reflection of God, then the organizations we create and the managerial systems we enact are poorer for our neglect of these realities—i.e., our organizations are lonelier, meaner, more fragmented, and dysfunctional ... Existing management models are not wrong, but they are incomplete” (p. 54). He builds to this conclusion by arguing that as *imago Dei* reveals the relational nature of God, this should carry over to our management models. This is evidence of a complementary, communal nature that reflects God, albeit in a limited way.

Cafferky (2015) is unequivocal when he states that we are not “human” and “spiritual,” but whole entities made in God’s whole, three-in-one image. We are to be coworkers with God, and as responsible servants, we are created to sustain flourishing (pp. 36-37), suggesting a functional view of *imago Dei*. He illustrates that as persons created in the image of God, we cannot take a dualistic approach to managing organizations. Cafferky uses the example of the Sabbath: by giving Sundays off, we are in effect giving up over fourteen percent of a week’s productive time, thereby voluntarily limiting the potential for profit. His statements concur with Chewning (2001): integrating our faith with our work requires the help of the Holy Spirit (p. 136). When viewed as image bearers, employees are seen in the fullness of their labor, not merely as a cost to be efficiently managed (Jackson, 2006, p. 157). Employees are not profit to be maximized or foregone.

Van Duzer (2010) suggests that humans reflect characteristics of God described in Genesis 1, namely that God is “inherently relational” and that God is “a worker,” i.e., “God makes things” (p. 31). He states, “They were created for relationship, with one another and with God. They were created as diverse creatures with differences that complemented each other and delighted God. They were called to work, as co-creators with God, to steward the creation” (pp. 37-38).

Building on Van Duzer, Cawley and Snyder (2015) contend, “God accomplishes his purposes in the world by equipping us with unique talents, skills, and abilities that he expects us to use in service to others” (p. 166).

This aligns with Hardy’s (1990) definition of work as “a social place where our gifts are to be employed in the service of our neighbor” (p. 124). In applying *imago Dei*, Cawley and Snyder (2015) employ all three perspectives, emphasizing that work provides opportunities “to create and cultivate trusting and interdependent relationships” (relational), “to discern and refine God-given virtues... that reflect his nature and character” (structural), and “to offer our unique identities and callings to God and for the world for the sustainable maintenance of the ecological and social order” (functional), (p. 168).

In an evaluation of Proverbs, Dose (2012) scans passages and categorizes them into topics that apply directly to the management of contemporary organizations. Her analysis can be further categorized into proverbs that underscore structural, relational, and functional frameworks. For example, following a structural model, character traits of God such as wisdom (13:10; 13:20; 15:7), truth (20:28; 16:13), and honesty (16:13) enable what she describes as work group interaction and effective leadership. A relational understanding affects how we communicate (16:23), how we gather information (15:22), how we give feedback (15:4), and how we lead (20:8; 14:28; 16:15; 29:14; 16:10; 29:19; 29:12; and 28:16), recognizing the dignity of others as we see them reflect God’s divine image. A functional interpretation sees us use our abilities as God’s image-bearers to search for and organize information that will solve problems and make decisions that range from obtaining resources to allocating and evaluating their use, thus enabling us to develop and sustain that which God has created.

The three approaches to interpreting *imago Dei* can be seen in Dose’s (2012) understanding of successful management. The attributes of vision, values, and integrity are critical as we manage people (Prov 29:18). We are to work in community to develop and sustain organizations, using well the gifts God has given each of us (1 Tim 4:14-15), and since the body consists of a variety of gifts, we are to include all parts of the body in combination (1 Cor 12:12-29). A relational model is apparent in the description of how the Christian community should interact with and complement one another. Functionally, we are equipped to undertake such tasks as healing, assisting, leading, teaching, and performing miracles. Structurally we exhibit God’s attributes through a variety of spiritual gifts.

Cafferky (2013) in a discussion about efficiency describes the closely related concept of *imitatio Dei*, or of imitating God. The example he uses is producing shoes: in doing so, we imitate God’s “attributes of wisdom,

knowledge, skill, strength, creativity, appreciation of beauty, sovereignty, planning for the future, and the use of language to communicate” (p. 54-55). The structural approach is complemented by the relational implications of finding meaning in work as community (p. 44), and the functional connotation of being efficient and wise stewards of the resources with which God has entrusted to us as we “participate with him to bring forth the potentiality that the good earth offered” (p. 45). These are challenges for managers to balance, as we seek to manage people in ways that are structured, orderly, efficient, and effective for organizations and for employees.

The implications for each interpretation of *imago Dei* are varied, but the approaches should be interwoven in order to adopt holistic and effective people management practices. A structural interpretation recognizes that managers reflect facets of God’s attributes such as reason, moral sense, competence, trustworthiness, and creativity. As we shall see in the next section, managers should also work to identify and develop those characteristics in employees who also reflect the image of God. A relational approach suggests that managers should treat each individual with justice, love, and honesty in order to build healthy social interactions and to maintain employee engagement. Finally, a functional interpretation encourages managers to actively build trust by enabling learning and by providing timely feedback as we hold each other mutually accountable for stewardship of organizational resources.

### **IMAGO DEI: WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR HR PRACTICE?**

A biblical view of people management through the lens of *imago Dei* means we emphasize the worth of each person, recognizing that people come to work with differing and individual goals (salary, job security, fulfillment, etc.). We must consider these individual goals as we motivate employees to work for their benefit and for the benefit of the organization. This perspective drives us to treat people with the respect and concern due them by virtue of the fact that each individual is made in God’s image. By adopting a long-term, strategic approach to HRM, we can build relationships and partnerships especially as we recognize God’s image resident in each individual. Cawley and Snyder (2015) suggest that two keys to organizational survival (or domination) in today’s changing markets are “(1) dynamic capabilities that adapt firm resource configurations more quickly and effectively than

the competition and (2) the forging of close stakeholder relationships through outstanding responsiveness both of which are facilitated by an effective talent management system” (p. 169).

Important HRM activities include designing jobs, identifying gaps within current staffing networks, working with business partners and line managers to recruit for vacancies and select the most appropriate candidate with the skills and flexibility needed, training and developing employees for their long-term contribution to the organization and its strategic goals, designing and implementing compensation programs, developing health and safety programs, and managing and evaluating performance. In each of these activities, learning to find God’s image in each individual is an investment that will reap significant rewards for employees and employers alike.

There are several ways in which we can integrate our belief that God’s image is breathed into every person with the way we shape our practice of HRM. Yet in order to develop a balanced and effective HRM practice, it becomes critical to understand not only the different perceptions of *imago Dei*, but to interweave those perceptions into an holistic practice that supports individual employees and the organization as a whole. A model of HRM built on a structural interpretation would identify and recognize characteristic attributes, gifts and abilities in individual employees. This would focus on the systematic development of employees, preparing them to best use their gifts and abilities as they take on new responsibilities within the organization, moving the organization toward its long-term goals and objectives. An HRM practice founded on a relational interpretation would focus on empowering and motivating employees through social relatedness, building employee engagement and commitment to the goals of the organization, and enabling employees to become advocates for each other and ambassadors for the organization. A functional view that recognizes our fallen state awaiting redemption would lead to an HRM model that develops policies and procedures for people and knowledge in such a way as to control for employees’ behavior and actions, model leniency and grace, and safeguard and manage the resources entrusted to us. Framing HRM strategies in such a manner develops an efficient community of stewards equipped to meet goals through an innovative and creative stance.

Each model in its own right is necessary, but the adoption of one model to the exclusion of the others would be to the detriment of the employee and the organization alike. Although individual activities of HRM

might draw more heavily on one interpretation of *imago Dei*, in an approach similar to Hill's (1997) three-legged stool of Christian ethics, our management of co-laborers will be most effective when held in balance by all three legs. Using another analogy, the three perspectives, intertwined with each other, create a rope that is stronger than any of the individual strands that comprise it. When considering the importance of strategic HRM and the rich variety of people involved, a synthesis of approaches becomes critical to enabling people to work successfully towards the multitude of goals, personal and corporate, that exist within organizations.

### Job Design

In designing jobs, we recognize the close tie between the call "to nurture and develop the creation, and to delight in his good gifts within it," (Redeemer University College, 2002, p. 5) and our understanding of work as stewardship of that which God created (functional). Honoring the image-creating work of the Holy Spirit means that we should design jobs that allow for personal growth and the development of talents (structural); provide opportunity for people to bear responsibility through shared decision-making (relational); provide opportunity for a certain measure of creativity, thus expressing a sense of accomplishment (functional); generate a sense of fellowship, recognizing that we were created as social beings (relational); and provide a fair and just wage (Antonides, 1994, pp. 7-9). In a similar vein, Hardy (1990) suggests that jobs should be designed so as to "engage us as whole persons, as creatures with high-level capacities for thought, imagination, and responsible choice as well as motor abilities" (p. 174). It could even lead to "job crafting," where employees make "proactive changes to their own jobs" (Cawley & Snyder, 2015, p. 176). As we align human resource needs with the strategy of the organization, we must design jobs that utilize the individual capabilities of employees, recognize their psychological and physiological needs (structural), and create meaning in their work by enabling them to serve others (relational) and to function effectively as stewards (functional).

Decisions about the administration of natural, financial, and human resources are often more creative and innovative because of the respect we show as we consider individuals' contributions. Jobs that are designed to allow employees to have greater input and control fulfill Antonides' requirements for creative work. Moreover, as several studies cited by Hardy (1990) show, work that is redesigned to be more satisfying and to treat employees

with more human decency and respect actually serves the long-run best interests of the company, leading to increased productivity, higher profits, and larger increases in stock prices (pp. 176-178).

### Human Resource Planning

Once jobs have been designed, the starting point for an effective strategic HRM practice is a thoroughly researched, carefully constructed plan. HR planning involves determining how to have the right people in the right job at the right time to achieve the organization's objectives. In essence, it maps the current deployment of human resources to identify gaps in both immediate and future needs. Gaps are successfully filled when three components are met: there is alignment between the needs of the job and the fit of employees (relational), the capabilities and talents of employees are the key criterion for placing them into jobs (structural), and there is a high level of employee engagement and bi-directional commitment as an outcome of connecting the right employee with a job vacancy (functional). As royal ambassadors (functional), our human resource planning should position us to be efficient, wise stewards of God's resources.

HR planning integrates all three theological approaches to *imago Dei*: structuralists recognize the individual characteristics and attributes required for different jobs, relationalists recognize the dignity of others when decisions that impact the lives of employees are made, and functionalists emphasize that employees working together effectively and efficiently utilize the organization's resources to attain the organization's goals and objectives. However, in the planning stage, the balance may shift somewhat to a relational perspective. Black and Smith (2003) suggest we are defined by our relationship with God and with others; thus our personhood develops in a spiritual system or community. They note, "As people of God, we are nodes in a network that was initiated by God at creation (Genesis 1) ..." (Black & Smith, 2003, p. 16). Networks such as those in the workplace reflect a long-term view, not separating secular from sacred; workplaces are networks that are foundational in society. Our intentionality in HRM planning should always have an ultimate long-term focus on building a healthy and sustainable community. Naughton (2006) indicates that trustees or inheritors of wealth are called not only to preserve that wealth but to increase it in order to make organizations stronger for the future (p. 55). Naughton (2006) also states that "people have priority over things, labor over capital, persons over technology, and that lead-

ers of organizations must seek the *development* of people associated with the organization” (p. 63). Perhaps Van Duzer’s (2010) statement about product decisions could be paraphrased to include human resource management: “Given the core competencies of my organization and the assets [employees] under its control, how can I best direct the organization to serve?” (p. 45).

### Recruitment and Selection

The next key activity of HRM includes the recruitment and selection of people to fill the gaps identified in the plan. It becomes critical to establish a large enough pool of qualified candidates to yield the right person for the job, through internal and external partners, using reliable and valid processes to make effective hiring decisions.

The impact of how we see God’s image in applicants leads us to identify the facets of God’s attributes in individuals, and match the best candidates to specific jobs (a structural perspective), as well as fit with the community (a relational perspective). During the recruiting and selecting process, we are obligated to be honest with applicants (a relational perspective). By providing realistic job previews (allowing potential employees to see both the positive and negative aspects of the work and of the organization) and by being transparent about compensation plans before an employment contract is signed, we are representing and mirroring God in our actions towards potential employees. Open communication should occur about organizational events such as potential staff reductions, organizational changes, or mergers and acquisitions.

A structural perspective might bear more consideration in this stage of human resource practice. Bakke (2006) discusses the first person in Scripture who was described as being “filled with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge” (Ex 31:2–3) and who was chosen (by God) to perform specific tasks in the building of the Tabernacle.

Cawley and Snyder (2015) also emphasize how identification of strengths is crucial to increasing employee engagement (again, a structural approach), but they also point out that “matching a person to the right job, or a job to the right person” is one of the most complex tasks of a manager (p. 177).

Likewise, Dyck and Starke (2005) take a structural perspective, stating that we manifest the image of God through our entrepreneurial, creative, and innovative decisions. The authors are specific in identifying a creative spirit as a “reflection of the creative nature of God’s image,” yet they also indicate that we must act in ways that

honor God, “with the same love and respect for creation that God modeled during creation” (p. 139). Especially in a changing economy, being innovative requires that we remember our employees are created in the image of God as we make decisions that affect their work and their lives.

A structural perspective is also underscored when we apply the attribute of justice to the hiring process, as we give special attention to the weak members of our community by providing jobs for those with disabilities or by breaking down barriers that discriminate against people. Justice requires that we not define people solely by their disabilities, but as agents who are able to define their own needs and wants (Yong, 2011, p. 13), as people who are capable of being creative, innovative employees who can contribute to an organization. Yong is insistent that disabilities “are not necessarily evil or blemishes to be eliminated” in individuals—they do not need to be fixed—since those “with disabilities are created in the image of God that is measured according to the person of Christ, not by any Mr. Universe or Miss America” (Yong, 2011, p. 13).

Yet the need for holistic hiring practices is observed: Bakke (2006) indicates that “as part of seeking holiness, we are to steward resources as we serve people’s needs and spread the story of redemption” p. 17), suggesting the combination of structural and functional approaches.

### Training and Development

Training and development involve equipping employees to meet the objectives of the organization, but with slightly different foci: training helps employees develop skills to do the jobs in which they are currently working; development helps to prepare employees for future careers within an ever changing environment. A holistic HR practice recognizes that attributes of God are to be used to serve God and others; therefore, as we manage people we should help them develop their gifts and abilities in order to better display God’s attributes to a waiting world.

Outcomes of a structural approach would include allowing for personal growth and the development of employees’ abilities, while also providing functional opportunities for creativity and innovation. The integration of high-performance, high-commitment, and high-involvement HR systems with the recognition of individual employees’ gifts better positions organizations to not only develop those individuals but to also develop organizational ambidexterity (the ability to take advantage of existing market opportunities while adopting innovative preparations for future markets) (Cawley and Snyder, 2015; Jackson, et. al, 2014; Patel, et. al, 2013). Intersecting



this with a relational view of *imago Dei* requires that we treat each individual with justice, love, and honesty as we build employee engagement, thus representing and mirroring God in our actions toward others. A relational interpretation of seeing employees as being made in God's image drives our training and development initiatives to help employees find meaning in their work, to provide means to bear responsibility, to generate a sense of fellowship, and to establish shared decision-making opportunities. From a functional perspective, we are called to share in the administration of God's resources and creatures, and our training and development of employees equips them to become effective ambassadors as they share in developing and sustaining God's creation.

Development of employees with disabilities requires special attention. Wilkerson and Gerdes (2015) indicate that accommodation of those with disabilities may not happen based on a request by these employees because employees with disabilities are less likely to make such a request. Yet they are definitive in stating that "Man is made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27; Psalm 8:5), and Christian leaders must recognize the humanity in the people they lead" (Wilkerson & Gerdes, 2015, p. 13). Managers cannot take a *laissez-faire* attitude toward supporting employees with disabilities, especially as we consider the call to recognize that all individuals reflect facets of God's attributes and bring value to the work they do.

### Compensation Management

Dessler and Chhiner (2017) describe employee compensation as, "All forms of pay or rewards going to employees and arising from their employment" (p. 251). Compensation can take the form of direct payments (wages, salaries, incentives, commissions or bonuses) and indirect payments (group health and dental insurance, and group life insurance). Because compensation is one of the largest expenses organizations face, it is often the first to face reduction when cost cutting measures are implemented.

Traditional approaches to HRM provide numerous methods for determining appropriate compensation policies and practices. Recognizing that compensation is a motivating factor for people, steps are outlined to determine fair and appropriate rates. Equity theory indicates that people are aware of internal, external, individual, and procedural equity as they evaluate the fairness of their earnings. Naughton (2005), however, is adamant that wages must be just, laying a solid case for providing a living wage, giving three reasons: first, a living wage is

"the minimum amount due to every independent wage earner by the mere fact that he is a human being with a life to maintain and a personality to develop;" second, this equitable wage is "the contribution of an employee's productivity and effort" to the organization's profits; and third, this living wage reflects an amount that "is sustainable for the economic health of the organization as a whole" (Naughton, 2005, p. 11). Translating Naughton's language to the models of *imago Dei*, his first argument exhibits a relational approach in that compensation is determined based on relationships to be maintained and supported. His second argument is structural in that the attributes of God reflected in humans earning a wage, namely talents and effort, deserve a just remuneration. Finally, as ambassadors of God and as stewards of his work, the organization's ability to pay is weighed against the sustainability and economic health of the organization, a responsibility laid upon the managers of the business. Naughton indicates that, like the three-legged stool, these principles are in tension, but that employees deserve to be paid a fair wage because of their worth as individuals made in God's image. Van Duzer (2010) concurs, indicating that an employee's personhood as designed by God is violated if a living wage is not earned.

### Performance Management

Managing and evaluating the performance of people enables employees to perform according to established standards in ways that are productive, efficient, and effective. Performance management is key to aligning individuals, their abilities and skills, with the strategic goals of both the organization and employees themselves. It is a vehicle for culture change, clarifying areas for development and determining appropriate compensation. In some sectors and organizational cultures, evaluation systems have been seen as adversarial; managers review a laundry list of failures and infractions, and impose a set of goals for the coming year. In other organizations, performance management adopts a collaborative, developmental approach.

By recognizing that we are fashioned, mind and body, in the image of God, the way in which individuals display reason, self-consciousness, freedom, moral sense, artistry, and creativity should undergird all evaluative processes. The structural objective of performance management should be to identify and help expand the abilities of each employee. Relationally, performance management discussions should lead to sharing of information and should be a time of problem-solving, help, support and

trust that creates strong relationships and networks. The functional objective of performance management should be to build trust by empowering learning and providing feedback as we hold each other mutually accountable, develop the gifts of employees to replicate the body of Christ, and together operate as efficient, wise stewards of God's resources.

In managing performance, it is important to recognize the need to bring together what may be seen as the conflicting goals of business, employees, and society as a whole. This may take the form of cultivating people's skills and abilities to enable them to take on more responsibility through job enlargement, job enrichment, or promotions. It may also mean that we move employees into different roles (or out of the organization entirely) because they are in positions for which they are not equipped or in which they will not flourish. Treating employees with love may involve making difficult and hurtful decisions in the short-term (such as releasing them from a position) for the long-term growth of the individual and the long-term sustainability and health of the organization and other individuals within its employ.

We are responsible to give an account for how we have managed the people God has entrusted to our care as employees. As the stewards were held accountable in the Parable of the Talents (Matt 25:14–30), so also are we responsible for developing the existing talents in our employees and for discovering latent talents as well. Chewning, Eby, and Roels (1990) state, "God is keenly interested in our talents and ideas and does not want them to lie dormant and be wasted" (p. 87).

A holistic HR practice that sees employees through a balance of lenses makes it possible for an organization to manage people in ways that better enable individual employees to discern their gifts and abilities and to identify and achieve their career objectives while at the same time preparing the organization to achieve its strategic goals. Such a practice has implications for managers in small companies as well as for organizations with designated HR leaders.

### **Health and Safety**

If we are responsible for developing the skills, abilities, and talents of employees, the obligation to care for their physical well-being is of perhaps even greater importance. Prioritizing health and safety begins at the top and should be an accepted practice throughout organizations. As we care for the health and safety of others, we reflect God's care for his unique creation of humans (structural). We

also shape norms of care within the community (relational). And we model the care of God to others, serving as administrators and managers of his creation (functional).

Birch (1985) indicates that not only did God create, He also provided for the care of creation, the provision of all needs, and the means to sustain that creation (p. 21). Building a culture of health and safety because we view people as being created in the image of God provides a foundation for safeguarding the dignity of each worker. It also models a community that honors workers and considers them a long-term strategic end, not just a means to the end, of organizational success.

### **AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

As we evaluate different understandings of *imago Dei* and how they apply to the management of people in organizations, further research must be done. A study similar to that of Norsworthy and Belcher (2015) among educators could be undertaken to assess the theological perspectives of individual people managers and how their beliefs about being created in the image of God shape their HR practices. This could lead to additional perspectives to integrate into a holistic approach. It could also help to flesh out how our understanding of *imago Dei* is applied in the workplace.

Along with articulating a theological belief, questions could probe for understanding about how sin has marred each of the approaches and how HRM should be then be adapted to take into account the flawed actions of both managers and those whom they manage. Such research could be used to develop balanced, realistic models of HR practice that would benefit employees and organizations.

### **CONCLUSION**

To be created in God's image means that we possess attributes and characteristics of God (such as holiness, righteousness, and true knowledge), which affect how we relate to God and one another, as we fulfill our roles as co-creators and stewards. This multi-faceted understanding of *imago Dei* answers questions about who we are created to be (structural), how we are created to live in relationship to God and others (relational), and what we are created to do (functional) that have implications for our lives in general and the workplace. Considering the importance of strategic human resource management

and the rich diversity of people as God's image bearers, a synthesis of approaches is critical to serving effectively as managers who enable people to work successfully towards the strategic goals of the organization.

Nevertheless, applying our understanding of *imago Dei* to the workplace is a difficult task and one that we would be unwise to try to do on our own. Belcher (2016), co-author of a study of educators and their application of *imago Dei*, issues a challenge: If faith is the way you lean into life, then we as Christians are obligated to rely on the Holy Spirit for discernment that comes from what we know, and that embodies our intellectual information in ways that are relational, thus reflecting the image of God to those around us.

We are called to be aware of the breath of the Spirit of God, *imago Dei*, in our own lives as managers and to manifest this awareness in our HR activities. As we display the attributes of God in social contexts as co-creators with God, we are equipped to effectively manage the employees God has entrusted to our organizations.

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