

The illustration is a stylized, woodblock-style drawing. It depicts a fisherman in a boat, seen from behind, using a long pole to spear a large, pinkish-orange fish. The fish is shown in two positions: one being speared in the water and another lying on a blue plate in the foreground. The boat has a white canopy and a blue interior with a patterned border. The background is a mix of blue and orange tones, suggesting a sky and water. The overall style is graphic and expressive.

Go and  
wash your plate,  
or: HOW TO TEACH AIKIDO  
TO “HUMAN RESOURCES”

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The theme of this conference gave me pause to really think things over. This is a very well-known German trait. More questions than answers popped up. Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to pose several provocative questions, and by so doing to perhaps start a lively debate.

My thanks go to Peter Schettgen, who made this forum possible.

### **What does Aikido have to do with Human Resources?**

I think the term “human resource” as such is dubious. It places a person on the same level as an object: financial, mineral, natural, human resources. What exactly is a resource? The word comes from the Latin word “resurgere” and means “resurrection.” It is easily exploited, because it grows back by itself. Here persons are not only not individuals; they are degraded to being self-reproducing biological material.

True Budo is the Way of great harmony and great love for all beings.

(K. Ueshiba, *The Spirit of Aikido*, p. 98)

It is no coincidence that the term “human resource” has become the norm in the field of business in particular. This reveals a way of viewing people that does not want to see humans behind the function anymore, because this doesn't fit into the matrix of order.

Subjects in organizations are not interesting ... as “in – dividuals,” but rather ...

in view of the chosen functions ... (of their) ability to work. ... The division of work also does not serve primarily ... to optimize efficient production, but rather ... to direct the employees. It has to do with "the functionalization, control and exploitation of resources."

(Schettgen, *The Daily Struggle in Organizations*, p. 15)

What does Aikido become when it moves to the level of "managing human resources?" Does Aikido help to exploit human resources better? Does Aikido help to keep the exploited resources remain productive for a longer period?

Am I helping to improve the administration of human resources and to improve its sustainability?

Isn't it an illusion to assume that I have an individual in front of me in this institutionalized context who chose to practice Aikido on his or her own free will? Do I have an individual in front of me at all? Individuality actually means the indivisibility of a person. Here the subject is divided into functions.

And what does it look like when I teach Aikido to a "non-individual?"

Am I teaching a type of Aikido that is divided into functions to subjects who are divided into functions – capable of being controlled two-fold?

Can Aikido become functionalized and functionalizing?

This is exactly where the double aspect of our modern social order be-

gins: Not only are the ever-increasing number of organizations exerting external pressure to reach their goals, but those who are organized must gain the ability

to obtain internal synchronization with the ruling order, to obtain the machination and instrumentation of themselves, to obtain the identification with the respective function

(Breuer, On Max Weber's Sociology of Rulership, p. 213)

Isn't it an illusion to believe that this won't happen to us as "providers" of Aikido?

Is the purpose of Aikido to perfect this type of ability, to perfect one's own ability to functionalize?

You are here for no other purpose than to realize your inner divinity and manifest your innate enlightenment.

(M. Ueshiba, The Art of Peace, p. 13)

Won't we just become another "human resource" with the interesting additional function of Aikido, which is meant to be exploited as long as it produces benefits – in other words, as long as it produces additional benefits you can measure?

How can I believe that I can keep Aikido out of this mechanism? Or that I can start a process of re-individualization through Aikido, when I myself am part of the mechanism?

I remember the priority of the functional differentiation according to Luhmann, who wrote that

a function, which is to be fulfilled in the entire system, receives an orientation priority in a partial system that was differentiated especially for that system  
(Luhmann, *The Function of Religion*, p. 15.)

### **Is Aikido a designer suit? Does it increase my value?**

If Aikido serves a purpose, then is Aikido as good or as bad as the purpose I use it for? Is Aikido a wall hook? And it doesn't matter what I hang on it, whether it's a painting or a crocodile, the main thing is the hook doesn't come out of the wall?

### **What does Aikido have to do with organizations?**

What are organizations anyway? We use the word so easily and so frequently. Organizations are not a collection of individuals who work together independently, but rather they are

controlled entities; they not only set up controlled situations on the inside but also on the outside. They are ... modi for dominating, processing, forming, managing, regulating, controlling, or at the very least, for influencing 'third parties'  
(Schettgen, *The Daily Struggle in Organizations*, p. 22 – italics by Schettgen)

But am I not such a "third party" as soon as I offer to teach Aikido to

an organization? And to what extent will Aikido itself be subjugated, regulated, controlled and manipulated in the process?

As a provider, I offer a commodity that an organization purchases because it is supposed to provide benefits to the organization. So what are the benefits the commodity Aikido will provide for an organization? Or to put it another way: What does an organization want?

With every form of control, the fact that an administrative staff exists and its continuous actions directed at the execution and enforcement of the regulations are vital to maintain submissiveness. The existence of these actions is what one means with the word "organization" ... the exercise of those orders or powers that serve to maintain rule.

(Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, pp. 154, 549 – italics by Weber)

Do the benefits of Aikido for an organization perhaps have to do with acquiring a new, more efficient and more effective means to "maintain rule" and "submission," to maintain "subjugation" and "control?" A controllable medium that supports the ruling system?

Who (or what) will be the larger determining factor? The organization or the provider?

Will Aikido become a function with benefits measured in monetary value with a measurable success? Is that what Aikido is about? Regardless of how noble my approach may be?

Master Ueshiba demonstrated by his own example that the prosperity of Aikido is not measured by the number of followers, but by the depth and intensity of the personal quest for truth through training and practice. As Aikido practitioners we must always “reflect on our footsteps,” even as we move forward together with high idealism and a passion for truth.

(K. Ueshiba, *The Spirit of Aikido*, p. 104)

Measurability, functionalization, instrumentalization: this means nothing but divisibility. In one corner we have Aikido principles as a theory on a more intelligent growth of companies, in another corner Aikido as a strategy for a conflict-free and more efficient leadership, and in yet another corner Aikido as a modern, therapeutic approach. Be that as it may, Aikido is divided up and therefore lost. “Divide et impera!” What can be divided can be controlled.

There is nothing more desirable than growth and expansion, but if your eyes are attracted only to surface events and we lose sight of the essence of the Way of Aikido, then – just as a spinning top loses its momentum, its balance, and sooner or later falls – our Way will lose its vitality, become divided and eventually disintegrate.

(K. Ueshiba, *The Spirit of Aikido*, p. 104)

Is Aikido a cake?

Everyone takes what they need: one person licks off the icing, another

one just eats the chocolate filling. Then what's left? A flat cake? Leftovers?

### **What does Aikido have to do with managing?**

What does Aikido teach us about managing a company?

Does my high dan degree make me capable of leading a company?

Do I need Aikido to produce a special, better type of management? Does this distinguish Aikido from other methods?

I have been teaching Aikido for twenty years now, and in all those years I rarely had the impression that people obviously developed undiscovered talents and abilities as a regular practitioner of Aikido, or that they cured a neurosis they had had when they started practicing Aikido, or increased their social competence to a great extent, or even accelerated their business career with their inherent knowledge. At least not to the extent that it could have been justified just as well by playing tennis, climbing mountains or practicing Ikebana on a regular basis.

How much is Aikido like Captain Picard?

Probably a great deal. But did he ever practice Aikido?

Managing means working in a company to achieve the goals of that organization, and working for one's own economic advantage. What does that have to do with Aikido?

The founder showed complete indifference to the normal objects of human desire – social position, honor and acclaim, wealth and material comfort.

(K. Ueshiba, *The Spirit of Aikido*, p. 101)

### **Is Aikido similar to instructions for needlepoint?**

Two right, two left, drop one, and my company is run in a harmonious and efficient manner according to the “Corporate Aikido” principle.

### **Is Aikido capable of being a metaphor? What I mean is, is Aikido conveyable at all?**

Is there actually a theory of Aikido? Something I can explain in words and by using several case examples? What is an Aikido principle explained in words?

Words and letters can never adequately describe Aikido - its meaning is revealed only to those who are enlightened through hard training. (M. Ueshiba as quoted in Stevens, *Aikido. The Way of Harmony*, p. 21)

Can a medium that can only be experienced by means of hard physical work and by working with partners serve as a metaphor at all?

Besides the fact that at this moment in time I am dividing Aikido into a theoretical section and a practical section, and thus I make it not only controllable but I even reduce it - when it is taught it is only half of

the knowledge. Aikido thus becomes interchangeable. Here is one example from literature on this subject:

To develop trust and harmony, to remain flexible and capable of reacting, to learn the process of releasing and letting go. Go beyond the victory. Be open to surprises and to the future. When opposition appears, investigate it and use it instead of testing your strength against it. The secret is to use the enemy's strength against him. There is no victory and no defeat. One must perceive the truth with an open mind and thus anticipate unexpected events.

More than half of the quote above is from the book "Strategy of the Dolphin" by Lynch and Kordis, the other half is from the book "The Aikido Principle" by Pino. Do you know which half is from which book? Let me tell you right now, you're wrong. That's what I mean with interchangeability. The list could go on and on: Buddhism for managers, work-life balancing, new ethics, dolphins, mice.

So what makes Aikido different from fashionable trends and New Age blah-blah? Or in the words of one manager:

Aikido in management contributes to your psychical health, to your mental fitness. It strengthens your harmoniousness and balance. ... You're mentally fit if you're determined and strong-willed, self-confident without being overbearing, relaxed and calm, wide-awake and concentrated, motivated and interested, intuitive and creative, patient and serene. ... Accept your own emotions, be less

forceful, less hectic, reduce your demands.

(Pachali, *Dancing Instead of Fighting. Aikido in Everyday Management*, p. 114)

Brave new manager. But wouldn't the process be faster and quicker with a good anti-aging program, or by spending more time with your family?

Or to name another example: Aikido and conflict management.

The authors [Dobson and Miller 1993] compare the physical movements of Aikido to physical conflicts and use them as metaphors for the way other forms of social and psychological attacks could also be dealt with as a matter of principle. ... The general psychological principles of Aikido that have proven to be successful in warding off physical attacks should thus ... be applied to other forms of everyday conflicts, such as, for example, verbal tirades.

(Schettgen, *The Daily Struggle in Organizations*, p. 178)

**Once again, Aikido is used as a metaphor – in this case as a metaphor for managing conflicts. But what are the “general psychological principles of Aikido?” After all, Aikido is non-verbal and physical.**

Do I really need Aikido for psychological conflict management?

Doesn't it make just as much sense, for example, to use Bill Watterson's "Calvin and Hobbes" for advice? A few examples are presented here.

But can knowledge gained in a safe place like a dojo, or knowledge

from an art, really be transferred to a professional and personal level? When I worked in theaters I experienced fantastic actors on the “sacred stage.” People at the top of their form, inspired and apparently the quintessence of every cosmic law. Not even those who have experienced it themselves and were role models for others could formulate something of their experiences as a principle, or transfer it to their everyday lives as a matter of principle. And they certainly wouldn’t be better managers or therapists.

As an illustration, here is a little story from Kisshomaru Ueshiba, which some of you may already know:

Before World War II, a famous scientist involved in military research came to Japan. When he returned to Germany, he took with him several Japanese swords and entrusted them for scientific analysis to an institute specializing in research and development of high technology steel. The scientist was an admirer of Japanese swords and knew of their high superiority when compared with European swords. But something bothered him: the air of mysticism that enshrouded the traditional method of forging steel blade, for the swordsmith, dressed all in white to symbolize purification, does his work before a Shinto altar. He wanted to penetrate the mystery and unravel secrets, but no matter how earnestly he requested it, he was never permitted to watch a swordsmith at work.

**Thus it was that he decided to have a scientific analysis made of the materials**

and the methods of production. With the scientific data at hand, he thought he would reconstruct the sword using the most recent technology available at the time. The outcome was utter failure. The result was just one commonplace sword after another.

(K. Ueshiba, *The Spirit of Aikido*, pp. 72ff.)

If we reduce Aikido to principles and translate them, does it then perhaps become merely mediocre?

And if Aikido principles actually could be translated, why should I still practice?

### **What does Aikido have to do with business?**

We are in an area here that directly affects the existence of humankind – which demands a high degree of responsibility:

... to be included in the economic system and to remain in it is a question of existence in modern society, as only this situation of being included creates the necessary conditions to be able to lead a secure material life.

(Hillebrandt, *The Exclusion of Individuality. Modern Social Structure and the Social Construction of People*, p. 268)

If I introduce Aikido into the economic process, it is one product among a multitude of products, possibly with a touch of exotic “USP” (Unique Selling Proposition). Aikido becomes buyable. Thus Aikido

subjects itself to the competition in the marketplace of other providers of similar methods.

Testing, competing with, and criticizing others weaken and defeat you.

(M. Ueshiba, *The Art of Peace*, p. 33)

Wasn't the elimination of competition one of the main attributes of Aikido? In order to establish a place of freedom? In order to not be subject to comparisons of performance in a performance-oriented society? And from there to the commercial competition for a position in the marketplace?

Business ... differentiates between the code "pay/not pay" by means of the medium money. This code enables abstract operations by a person, operations that are downright typical for business.

(Hillebrandt, *The Exclusion of Individuality. Modern Social Structure and the Social Construction of People*, p. 103)

Doesn't Aikido automatically become subject to this abstract process in the business cycle? What is "abstract Aikido?"

Aikido is primarily a spiritual path which decries any form of competition or tournament where victors or vanquished are decided, and everything hinges on winning. ... When strength determines all – Japanese martial ways lose their true essence.

(K. Ueshiba, *The Spirit of Aikido*, p. 117)

### **What is Aikido without “Do?”**

Do is what makes Aikido nonfunctional and individual. Do protects Aikido from being leveled out, from banalization and from selling out. This do makes Aikido an art. It isn't a means to an end. It has to do with a lifelong search and perfection, with free choice. It has no end. I always start at the beginning every single time. There are no final answers, there are no valid answers. It is an art.

### **If I haven't thought something through to the end and experienced it, if I always start at the beginning, then what can I convey?**

In answer to the question as to why he practices Aikido, my teacher Nobuyuki Watanabe replied, “If I knew that, I would have stopped a long time ago.”

What is the essence of art? Rodin gave the shortest answer I know of: “Toujours travailler” – “always work.”

In your training do not be in a hurry, for it takes a minimum of ten years to master the basics and advance to the first rung.

(M. Ueshiba, *The Art of Peace*, p. 105)

It is just that moment of the daily, hard training and the unbelievably long time that prevents a rapid conveyance or salability. There are no quick effects or impressions or strategies or results or measurable per-

formances. The decision for a lifelong process of scrutinizing is detrimental to every quick success.

How can I learn “ai” and “ki” without “do?”

Aikido is revealed only to those who are enlightened through hard training.

(M. Ueshiba as quoted in Stevens, *Aikido. The Way of Harmony*, p. 21)

How can I learn Aikido without a dojo?

Isn't what distinguishes a dojo is that it is possible to have vast and intense experiences there, experiences that we cannot possibly have in our personal or professional lives? And for the exact reason because a dojo is a separate, secure space where I can move within a safe, ritualized form. Is it perhaps precisely this “non-translatibility,” the separation of the dojo from everything that is part of our personal and professional life through the ritual of entering and exiting, which is the biggest part of the effect?

I taught Aikido at an institution for eighteen years. I taught a lot of actors and actresses and knew them for years and followed their careers. At one point I asked myself whether it really was the ingenious fundamental concept of Aikido that made them keep coming back and attending classes, or whether it was simply just the secure space that I gave them. The possibility to be taken seriously as an individual, with your own pace and growth, without having to practice and learn any

skills that can be thrown into a machine. At any rate, acrobatics would be better suited for that. Their Aikido was never studied by a commission and evaluated. I always kept it out of institutional processes. This protection of being in a “safe space” gave them a playroom. Perhaps it was, above all else, this ritualized playroom that had so much effect. Not the instruction. Not I as their teacher.

Naturally it makes sense to use certain techniques from Aikido as long as I remain in this medium; for example, the way Paul Linden uses these techniques for his work with victims of violent crimes. But he teaches Aikido in his dojo. It certainly makes sense to teach Aikido everywhere where there are the appropriate conditions, as long as Aikido remains in its shape and entirety. In other words, be aware and think clearly about whether there is enough open space for Aikido.

The fascinating concept of Aiki Extensions is still in the beginning stages. We should give ourselves plenty of room and time to explore the entire potential of Aikido. If we don't “always reflect on our footsteps” in a clear and consequent manner, we will destroy our own foundation in the long run.

I wish to express my gratitude that this conference provided me with the impulse and the freedom to think about this topic more precisely. I have been dealing with the questions posed here for a long time, but I never took the time to put them into words.

The student comes to the master and asks, "What is the sense of life?" The master answers, "Have you already had a meal?" "Yes," said the student, "just before I came." The master says, "Go and wash your plate."

But what if the student just wanted to be polite, or was impatient and wanted a quick answer from his master? What if the student hadn't had a meal at all?

Then which plate does he wash?

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