

on academic inquiry but on skills training. Students themselves often say they learned more about leadership from being in a crisis of some sort than from any academic course.

Picking up that cue, business schools simulate situations that demand leadership and invite students to rise to the occasion. Just like in the real world.

## *Government's Invisible Hand*

“The Strength of a Weak State: The Rights Revolution and the Rise of Human Resources Management Divisions” by Frank Dobbin and John R. Sutton, in *American Journal of Sociology* (Sept. 1998), 5835 S. Kimbark, Chicago, Ill. 60637.

In the early 1970s Washington launched an “employment rights” revolution, with landmark legislation and regulation in the realms of equal employment opportunity, occupational health and safety, and fringe benefits. Many large employers established specialized offices to cope with their new obligations. Then, a curious shift in rationale for these offices took place. Sociologists Dobbin and Sutton, of Princeton University and the University of California, Santa Barbara, respectively, explain.

Employers were not legally forced to establish new personnel offices or other specialized units. But the new laws did create abstract rights and proscribe various abuses without specifying how employers were to comply. Precisely because of that uncertainty, Dobbin and Sutton argue, employers hired “expert” staffs and created new offices as the best protection against costly lawsuits.

In the mid-1960s, about 35 percent of the 279 organizations the authors examined (including publicly traded businesses, nonprofit groups, and government agencies in three states) had personnel or human resources management offices. By the mid-1980s, 70 percent did. (By then, 35 percent also had benefits offices, more than 30 percent had health and safety offices, and 40 percent had equal employment units.)

By the early 1980s, however, personnel managers were singing a new tune about their function. In keeping with an emerging human resources management movement, they were justifying their offices not as defenses against lawsuits but as vehicles for enhancing organizational productivity.

“The new human resources management movement,” the authors point out, “was championing diversity as the key to expanding markets and improving innovation, safety and health programs as the key to winning employee commitment and renovating antiquated technologies, and benefits programs as a means to reducing alienation and improving worker attitudes.” So compelling was this rationale, say Dobbin and Sutton, that even when the Reagan administration cut back enforcement of employment rights, employers kept creating more such specialized offices anyway (while, in some cases, circumventing the law on the rights themselves).

Changing the rationale was a typically American response, the authors say. In a culture so hostile to government regulation, employers soon come to pretend that they really are only responding to the demands of the market. The authors think the government would do a better job if Americans overcame their “collective amnesia.”

## SOCIETY

### *Railing against the Car*

“Transitory Dreams: How New Rail Lines Often Hurt Transit Systems” by Jonathan E. D. Richmond, in *The Taubman Center Report* (1998), Taubman Center for State and Local Government, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard Univ., 79 John F. Kennedy St., Cambridge, Mass. 02138; “Dense Thinkers” by Randal O’Toole, in *Reason* (Jan. 1999), 3415 S. Sepulveda Blvd., Ste. 400, Los Angeles, Calif. 90034-6064.

More than a decade ago, Portland, Oregon, often cited as a model of city planning, built a light-rail system connecting downtown and the

suburbs, hoping to cut automobile congestion and air pollution. In Portland, as in other cities that followed its example, it hasn’t worked out

that way, argues Richmond, a research fellow at Harvard University's Taubman Center.

Portland officials originally forecast that the rail line, which opened in 1986, would serve 42,900 daily weekday riders in its seventh year; instead, it drew only 23,700. Not only that, most of the riders (two-thirds in 1996) had merely shifted over from buses. In the dozen cities Richmond studied, suburb-to-downtown bus service—potentially a cheaper, more effective alternative, he says—generally was discontinued with the advent of the new rail line. In no city did the new rail service “noticeably improve highway congestion or air quality,” he says. In fact, only San Diego's South Line light rail, with “high ridership, low costs, and effective system integration,” appears to have been a worthwhile investment.

O'Toole, an economist currently teaching conservation policy at Yale University, says that “reverence” for light rail may well be “*the* defining characteristic of the New Urbanism,” which he portrays as no longer the plaything of architects and planners but an amalgam of interest groups that “is quietly sweeping the nation.” Advocates want to curb low-density suburban development (“sprawl”) and create high-density urban neighborhoods in which people can work, shop, play, and live without having to rely on the automobile.

“Far from delivering urban zones from the curse of ‘auto-dependent’ lifestyles,” O'Toole contends, “New Urbanist policies” in Portland and other cities have led to increased highway congestion and worse air pollution, as well as other ills. Doubling population density, he says, cuts per capita driving by no more than 10 percent. In Portland, planners' most optimistic scenario is that by 2040, car use will have fallen from 92 percent of all area trips to 88 percent. O'Toole's conclusion: “since planners assume a 75 percent increase in population, this translates to a massive expansion in traffic and congestion—they figure three to four times the current number of congested road miles.”

Richmond, in his study, found that three cities—Pittsburgh, Houston, and Ottawa—had achieved “dramatic successes” by building transitways open only to buses (in Houston's case, to carpools and vanpools, as well). The Pittsburgh East Busway, for instance, has the same ridership as that city's three-times-larger light-rail system.

For all of New Urbanism's high profile today, O'Toole doubts that the effort to prop up central cities will succeed. “The ‘decline’ of cities that officials worry so much about,” he says, “is due to the fact that cars, telephones, and electricity make it possible for people to live in lower densities—and most choose to do so.”

## ‘Orientalism’ Reconsidered

“Edward Said's ‘Orientalism’ Revisited” by Keith Windschuttle, in *The New Criterion* (Jan. 1999), 850 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10019.

It is hard to exaggerate the cultural influence of Edward Said and his celebrated 1978 work, *Orientalism*, observes Windschuttle, author of *The Killing of History* (1997). Whether the subject is European art, literature, cinema, music, or history, critics now routinely pay obeisance to the ideas of the Palestinian American professor of literature at Columbia University. In the “postcolonial” theory he helped inspire, Eurocentric derogations of “the Other” extend not only to Islam and Arabs but to other Others, such as Native Americans and Africans. Windschuttle, however, believes that the postcolonial guru's main claims about Orientalism are “seriously flawed.”

*Orientalism* is a critique of the centuries-old academic field of Oriental studies, the study of cultures in the Arab world. Said claims that Western scholarship prepared the way for the extension of colonial rule over the Middle East and North Africa. But aside from invoking Michel Foucault's notion that knowledge always generates power, Windschuttle says, Said fails to provide any historical evidence about “the actual causal sequence” that led to English or French imperialism in the 19th century. (Historians usually point to desires for trade, investment, and military advantage as causes.) And what about the Germans, who produced prominent Orientalists but “never went on to become an imperial power”?