

Trainings woeful countenance by david m. kopp

[Business](#), [Human Resources](#)



The authors cite several of the axioms of this approach, which associate customer buying with the appearance of the face, or the shape of the skull: a Jew's nose is acquisitive; a pointed chin is a mark of cunning; a broad forehead denotes idealism; a receding forehead indicates idealism. By this method, Kopp and Desiderio create a consensus among readers that "the sales training manuals that relied on physiognomy for their training techniques were at best, by today's standards, politically incorrect and, at worst, blatantly bigoted, exploiting historical stereotypes" (2009, p. 136).

The authors differentiate between the use of physiognomy in America as a tool to increase sales, and its use in Europe as an instrument to advance the agenda of racial discrimination. Having firmly established their case as to the illegitimacy of physiognomic traits as the foundation of training, the authors go on to interpret the implications in terms of contemporary practices in training and development.

Kopp and Desiderio make the reader aware that the now discounted physiognomic influence which pervaded training in the early twentieth century was but the logical offshoot of the environment which prevailed at that time. Similarly, modern training techniques, largely based on applied psychological methods, are derived from the contemporary environment.

The prevalent trend is the use of biometrics as a means of authentication in the workplace. In this scenario, it is easy to establish a common denominator with the physiognomic emphasis of the past - both include the use of physiological traits for identification. The authors make a compelling argument for the absolute necessity for "responsible critical reflection" (Kopp and Desiderio, 2009, p. 140) in the implementation of training in HRD.

Utmost vigilance is needed to ensure that the “dubious training practice of physiognomy in the early 20th century” (Kopp and Desiderio, 2009, p. 136), does not repeat itself, under a new guise, in the present-day workplace. The only way to prevent this is to ensure that training is not viewed through the single lens of improving a business’s profitability, but is seen in a broader context which includes ethics, social justice and “political, cultural and economic aspects” (Kopp and Desiderio, 2009, p. 140).

Training’s Woeful Countenance is unarguably a thought-provoking article. By exposing the fallacy of the physiognomy-based training techniques of yesterday, Kopp and Desiderio successfully draw attention to “the hidden power imbalances within the training manuals and the training systems of today” (2009, p. 136). Just as the flawed physiognomic sales training manuals of the past were accepted in their times, current HRD practices may stem from dubious reasoning and biases which subtly rule the environment. The article is a very effective wake-up call and a warning that training practices require continuous evaluation, in order to remain free from bias.