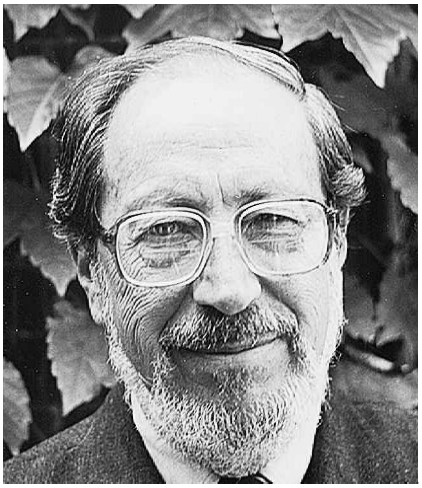
From the Founding Editor



It is time to move on. After four very exciting and productive years creating a new journal, I find that I need to go on to other things, and *Reflections* needs to reflect on its own future. The *Reflections* team of Karen Ayas, Stephen Buckley, Jane Gebhart, and Judy Rodgers, with the able photographic assistance of Emily Sper, has been the source of inspiration and fun. We typically met, weather permitting, on my deck and enjoyed being creative under the oak and birch trees.

And creativity is what it was all about. It is hard to convey how exciting it can be to have the license to launch a journal around new concepts and different goals. The goal that was particularly salient was to bring academics/researchers, consultants, and practitioners/managers into better communication with each other. This goal reflected SoL's mission and fitted well the personal goals of each team member. We received positive feedback from the very beginning, so we knew that our new journal, with its different format and greater emphasis on variety of content and visual form, was a success. But we also sensed that, in this glutted information age, not enough people would see *Reflections* to sustain it economically through subscriptions. We learned that, without extensive and intensive marketing, it was difficult to reach a wider audience, even though the people who did see the journal loved it. Let it be noted that we considered running advertisements or finding corporate sponsors for given issues or topics, but decided in the end that total editorial freedom was more important in creating something new than economic stability.

Organizations do not have an inherent right to exist no matter what. They must contribute, and when their contribution is no longer needed, they must evolve. *Reflections* made a great contribution in showing that knowledge and wisdom come in many forms and that a journal unafraid to violate the so-called ''peer review'' standards can be illuminating, responsible, and relevant. What we had observed and fought against was the tyranny that ''peer reviewing'' imposes on writers, because the peer review process is essentially conservative. Instead, we imposed strong editorial standards. Every member of the team had to agree that a given contribution was worthwhile in terms of our basic goals. But our standards were to be innovative, to communicate clearly, to have a message for occupational communities other than our own, and to push the envelope. As we look over the tables of contents for our 16 issues, the wealth of knowledge in those many classics and current contributions is impressive. In fact, one way we plan to continue the legacy of *Reflections* is to pull together some of the best material into one or two books.

As we move on, it is also time to give some thanks. We created an Editorial Board that reflected the three constituencies we were trying to reach. I want to thank this board for the tremendous stimulus it provided in terms of ideas and feedback. Two members in particular provided help ''above and beyond the call of duty''—Russ Ackoff and Karl Weick—and I will be forever grateful for their stimulating input.

The production side of *Reflections* required dedication and skill. This was provided by Karen Ayas, until Jane Gebhart, an able Managing Editor, joined the team, smoothed the whole process, and allowed the rest of the team more time for planning. Many of the contributions came to us in very rough form, and we must acknowledge our great debt to Jane's editorial skills in converting these rough gems into elegant cut stones. The financial support provided by MIT and SoL was, of course, essential, and we thank both organizations for their willingness to bet on a new kind of journal.

And now it is time to move on, to evolve, and to this end, Karen Ayas, Peter Senge, and other members of the SoL team are managing this evolution (see page 80). As

Reflections in its present form goes into a cocoon stage, stay tuned to see what kind of butterfly will emerge.

Some personal reflections: What have I learned from these four years?

- Occupational communities, whether consultants, researchers, or managers, do develop strong subcultures, with their own values, beliefs, and languages. Creating communication across these subcultural boundaries is a more formidable task than I had imagined.
- One of the most dysfunctional ideas I have encountered is that ''knowledge'' is derived through research and then passed on to practitioners. Knowledge exists in each of these occupational communities, and it is just as dysfunctional for the researcher to ignore what the practitioner knows as vice versa. One of the great unsolved problems of generating useful knowledge is how to access and reveal in usable form what consultants and practitioners know.
- Certain sciences come to dominate the knowledge domain, which distorts both theory and practice. In particular, too much of our social and organizational knowledge is based on psychology and not enough is based on anthropology. We keep trying to explain organizational and even interorganizational phenomena in terms of psychological constructs. We do not really understand cultural dynamics and, hence, do not take them seriously enough.
- The world of knowledge and the world of the arts do not sufficiently interpenetrate. Even the best and hardest scientific inquiry has huge artistic components, and great artists know much about science. Furthermore, we underestimate the role of the arts as a necessary component of daily life. We recently attended a performance of ''The Children of Herakles'' by Euripides and learned that the Greek theater had an explicit goal to bring pressing social issues, such as the plight of refugees, to the citizenry for reflection and action. One of the most gratifying aspects of editing *Reflections* was that I could explore and write about the role of the arts and what artists bring to the party of daily life.
- We do not yet understand the enormous role that interpersonal dynamics plays in the learning process. Here again, we have adopted the psychological model of teacher-student or expert-novice. We continue to ignore at our peril what sociologists and anthropologists have shown over and over again—that every relationship is reciprocal and is governed by a complex interpersonal economics. And we do not yet appreciate how much learning is a contextual process in which the presence of other learners is crucial.
- I have learned that the written word is limited, yet important as both science and art. Writing forces clear thinking, something that my PhD advisor, Gordon Allport, taught me in 1950. Clear thinking and logical exposition are essential in science. But as a writer, I have also come to appreciate how much my choice of what to write about and how to structure my writing is as much an artistic impulse as anything else. So I have chosen to write as best I can about my actual experiences with organizations and, by putting those experiences into analytic frameworks, to enhance our understanding of the complexity of organizational cultures and their impacts.

I hope we can continue to honor the artistic in each other, even as we strive to be better researchers and scientists.

Ed Schein

EDITORIAL

In This Issue

Karen Ayas and Edgar H. Schein

Associate Editor, *Reflections*
Research Fellow, Erasmus University
Partner, The Ripples Group
karen@ripplesgroup.com

If we are to survive as a global community, we have yet to cultivate our capacity for healing and reconciliation. If there is any hope of ''a world in balance,'' it begins with a different worldview, honoring all. And that requires learning to deal with communication failures and cultural misunderstandings, and a leadership approach that honors feminine and masculine qualities alike.

In this issue, we first turn to the wisdom of other cultures that can inform us of ways into a sustainable future. You will find inspiring examples from Bali to Bhutan to Africa and testimonials to our common humanity. **Bernard Lietaer** discusses how monetary systems deeply affect values and relationships in a community by encouraging specific behavior patterns. See what one can learn from the Balinese, who for centuries have lived with a dual currency system that sustains the yin-yang coherence. Arguably, this is just one exception, but read **Charles Handy's** comments to find other seeds of hope—other forms of work that would bring us closer to the world Lietaer describes.

Mieko Nishimizu, the vice president of the World Bank, in a keynote address, solicits the people of Japan to begin to think globally and to follow the path of nations like Bhutan, where inner spiritual development is as prominent as material progress. **Barbara Nussbaum** articulates the inspiring dimensions of African values, the beauty and power of *ubuntu* in building community and strong interdependence.

Are these all exceptions or is there a way to get there? How can we improve our thought processes, in the world as well as in our organizations? **Edgar Schein** next elaborates on the theory and practice of dialogue—a necessary vehicle for understanding cultures—and provides a perspective based on his own direct experience. **Philip Mirvis** and **Karen Ayas** then follow with an illustration of dialogue at work. Enter the circle of the young leaders from diverse corners of Asia and listen to their chairman's leadership journey. Pay close attention to what Niall FitzGerald, cochair of Unilever, has to say about leadership and his call to the participants to nurture missing feminine qualities.

The next set of articles elaborates on leadership approaches that can restore the desired balance between head and heart in our organizations and the role of the feminine qualities in specific. Rest assured that the word *feminine* does not relate to a particular gender. If you are serious about welcoming feminine energies in masculine cultures, see what guidance **Judy Sorum Brown** has to offer for a balanced perspective in leadership work.

That women tend to have a simple way of organizing and natural nurturing qualities comes to light in **Stella Eugene Humphries's** interview with **Sr. Mohini Panjabi**, a leader in the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual Organization. As stressed by **Jeff Clanon's** comments, for those who want to live a balanced life of reason and intuition or for those who seek a quality life for self while serving others, Sr. Mohini is an inspiration. **Neville Hodgkinson** briefly describes the influence of the sister on his life. Based on her work with members of SoL's Sustainability Consortium, **Hilary Bradbury** reports on how a group of women would go about redesigning organizations for future generations. Next is a brief interview by **Alexander Schieffer** with **Margaret Wheatley,** who speaks of the essence of leadership as understanding and believing in other people and the power of relationships as a sustainable form of organizing.

We close with a research report on SoL's Greenhouse III that informs us of a meeting designed to include diverse perspectives and face the challenges of rigor and relevance. **Carol Gorelick** conveys the spirit of collaboration, and **Barry Sugarman** describes the collaborative research themes. **David Schwandt,** a professor, and **Tova Olson**, a student volunteer, reflect on their experiences at the Greenhouse.

Contributors

Karen Ayas is associate editor, *Reflections*; research fellow, Erasmus University; and partner, The Ripples Group, a management consultancy specializing in growth strategy and large-scale change.

Hilary Bradbury is assistant professor of organizational behavior at the Weatherhead School of Management, Case Western Reserve University.

Judy Sorum Brown is a speaker, writer, and educator in private practice whose work revolves around the issues of leadership and the nature of change and its impact on individuals and organizations.

Raphael Bustin is a photographer in Gloucester, Massachusetts, who specializes in scenic photography produced via digital means. ⟨www.terrapinphoto.com⟩

Jeff Clanon is a founding consultant member and the director of partnership development for the Society for Organizational Learning.

Linda Cooper is a photographer based in Evanston, Illinois. ⟨linda@wineantique.com⟩

Carol Gorelick is a visiting assistant professor at Pace University.

Charles Handy is a writer and broadcaster living in London. His most recent book, *The Elephant and the Flea* (Harvard Business School Press), describes the rise of the independent worker and the consequences.

Neville Hodgkinson is an author and journalist in the UK.

Stella Eugene Humphries is a researcher, Society for Organizational Learning.

Rachel Lillian Kohn is a photographer located in Somerville, Massachusetts. ⟨rachel@rachelkohn.com⟩

Bernard Lietaer is the chairman of Terra Global Foundation.

Jonathan Liffgens is a freelance photographer and architect in Chicago. ⟨jliffgens@ixpres.com⟩

Philip H. Mirvis is an organizational psychologist, consultant, and senior fellow at the Center for Corporate Citizenship, Boston College.

Mieko Nishimizu is a vice president at the World Bank.

Barbara Nussbaum is with the Liaison for Africa, World Business Academy.

Tova Olson is a doctoral student in George Washington University's Human and Organizational Studies Doctoral Program. She served as volunteer coordinator at Greenhouse III for 15 fellow students who contributed to the event.

Sister Mohini Panjabi is a senior spiritual leader, Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University.

Barry Pell is a photojournalist and world traveler based in Boston, Massachusetts. ⟨barrypell@mac.com⟩

Edgar H. Schein is the Sloan Fellows Professor of Management Emeritus at the MIT Sloan School of Management.

Alexander Schieffer is a managing partner of the Center of Excellence and Learning.

Megan Buchanan Schopf is a graphic recorder.

David R. Schwandt is director of George Washington University's Human and Organizational Studies Doctoral Program and director of the Center for the Study of Learning.

Emily Sper is a photographer, graphic designer, and author-illustrator in Boston, Massachusetts. Her photographs have been exhibited in the US and abroad. ⟨www.emilysper.com⟩

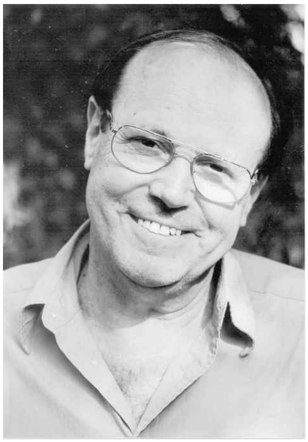
Barry Sugarman is a research coordinator at the Society for Organizational Learning.

Margaret Wheatley is president of the Berkana Institute.

FEATURE

A World in Balance?

Bernard Lietaer



Bernard Lietaer
Chairman
Terra Global Foundation
blietaer@earthlink.net

What would be different in a society in which the feminine approach to leadership is honored? Honoring the feminine not only encompasses equal rights for women but translates into an entirely different worldview in which a balance is achieved between the masculine and the feminine. Imagine a world safe from pollution in which the long-term interests of mankind and the planet temper the short-term interests of business and industry, in which conscious cooperation exists symbiotically with healthy competition, and in which the proper raising and teaching of children and the caring for elders is valued as highly as investment banking. Imagine a world in which there is meaningful work for every person, together with adequate time for families, communities, and personal pursuits, a world that encourages individual growth and economic growth, community and productivity, and conservation and consumption. Imagine a world that nurtures our spirits and our souls as it does our material needs and that fully honors the diversity of all life and the life-affirming aspects of humanity. In essence, imagine a world in *balance*.

Such a world is possible. But it will take money! It is not a matter of how much money, but rather the kind of money that is important. We must bring balance to money, because our monetary system fuels and exerts the most profound influence on all other human systems. Such balanced money systems have existed during specific periods and exist today in some unexpected pockets of the world, with dramatic, encouraging effects.

Rather than argue from theory, I will use two tragic events as examples. Shocks sometime starkly expose the underlying value system of an individual or a society, as a tectonic plate shift can suddenly lay bare the underlying geological strata. I examine how two different societies dealt with unexpected crises.

Another Way?

Was a different reaction possible after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks? Let us look at how another society dealt with its own terrorist attack, exactly one year, one month, and one day after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

A terrorist bomb in Kuta, Bali, killed more than 190 people on the night of October 12, 2002. However, the global media have not covered the Balinese reaction to this horror. Two authoritative reports from Bali demonstrate an alternative way to deal with terrorism. From a police report a week after the bombing:

> Lt Col I Made Murda of the Bali police declared that, although hundreds of shops and restaurants had their windows blown out in the blast, not one single looting has been reported. Down in Legian, there are all these shops without windows and doors, all their wares there for the taking, but nobody has.
>
> There were also fears that there could be an instant reaction against the Muslim population in Bali, but no such thing has happened. What *has* happened is that there have been peace vigils and prayer meetings all over the island, and Christians, Muslims, locals, and foreigners working hand in hand in the relief effort (personal e-mail, 2002).

In contrast, in the US after September 11, the FBI reported:

> Hate crimes against Muslims soared . . . by more than 1,600%: a jump from 28 in 2000 to 481 in 2001. . . . The overall number of hate crimes against all minorities in the US increased over the last year by 21% to a total of 1,828 (Schevitz, 2002).

The second Bali report is a speech by Asana Viebeke, the representative of the main local civic authorities in the area where the blast occurred. He delivered this speech in English on October 25, 2002.

> We Balinese have an essential concept of balance. It's the *Tri Hita Karana:* the concept of triple harmonious balance. The balance between god and humanity, humanity with itself, and humanity with the environment. . . .
>
> Who did this? This is not such an important question for us to discuss. Why this happened—maybe this is more worthy of thought. What can we do to create beauty from this tragedy and come to an understanding where nobody feels the need to make such a statement again? That is important. That is the basis from which we can embrace everyone as a brother, everyone as a sister. . . .
>
> Why seek retribution from people who are acting as they see fit? These people are misguided from our point of view. Obviously, from theirs, they feel justified and angry enough to make such a brutal statement.
>
> We would like to send a message to the world: Embrace this misunderstanding between our brothers, and let's seek a peaceful answer to the problems that bring us to such tragedy. Words of hate will not rebuild our shops and houses. They will not heal damaged skin. They will not bring back our dead. Help us to create beauty out of this tragedy. . . .
>
> The overwhelming scenes of love and compassion at Sanglah Hospital show us the way forward into the future. If we hate our brothers and sisters, we are lost in *Kali Yuga* [the "Iron" or "Dark Age"]. If we can love all of our brothers and sisters, we have already begun to move into *Kertha Yuga*. We have already won "The War Against Terrorism."

Compare this statement with US official policy of violent military retaliation. The contrast between such reactions raises these questions:

- What explains how a similar horror spontaneously elicits exactly opposite emotional reactions in a society?
- What explains the Balinese exception?
- How can we learn from it?

I happened to be in Bali on that fateful night. I had just completed four months of primary field research focusing on these last two questions. My key findings were that Balinese society maintains a balance between what the Taoists call the yin-yang worldviews, or between the masculine and the feminine perspectives, while the so-called "developed countries"—including the US—are strongly dominated by the yang coherence. Furthermore, the collective power of money systems is an engine that continually maintains and encourages each worldview. Specifically, in Bali, a dual yin-yang currency system operates, while in Western societies, there is a monopoly of a yang currency.

Next, I synthesize some evidence for these claims that are documented more completely elsewhere (Lietaer and DeMeulenaere, 2003).

Values and Emotional Coherences

The analytical framework used to describe collective emotions and behavior patterns goes back to Taoism and its central concept of yin-yang. It enables me to speak about

> The Balinese do not need a costly government to compel them to be thoughtful and considerate. They like to be thoughtful and considerate. They like to share themselves and what they have with others. The world about them may rage with selfishness, greed, animosity, and conflict, but the Balinese live on under the impression that man is a social being, in a social community, a social world, and a social universe. Perhaps in their primitive, unclouded way they comprehend better than the rest of us that, back of the seeming, all reality of necessity is social. Wouldn't it be an interesting twist in the scheme of things if the self-satisfied befuddled Occident, not knowing where it is going or why, was compelled to come to these "poor benighted heathens" to learn how to be neighborly, productive, and happy at one and the same time! The Balinese know how to do this, and they do it as naturally and as easily as children at play.
>
> —J.A. Boone, *Letters to Strongheart* (London: Sloane Art Store, 1939).

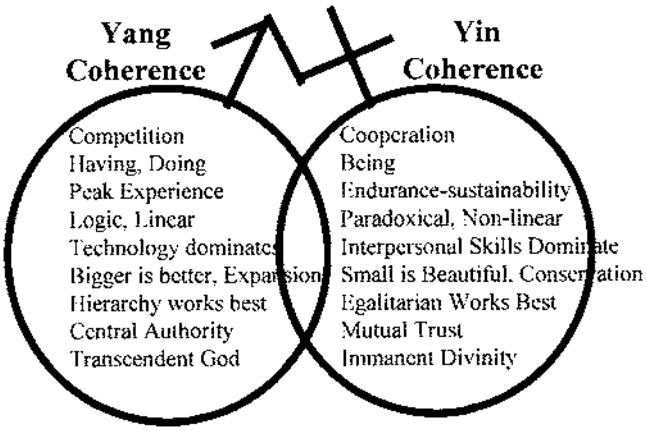


Figure 1 Some characteristics of the yin-yang coherences

gender-related issues in a broad sense. C.G. Jung expressed regret that our culture is not more familiar with this concept: ''Unfortunately, our Western mind, lacking all refinement in this respect, has never yet devised a concept, nor even a name, for the 'union of opposites through the middle path,' that most fundamental item of inward experience, which could respectably be set against the Chinese concept of Tao'' (Jung, 1960: 203). Therefore, I use the words yin-yang here at the risk of appearing exotic, simply because Western languages don't have the precise, equivalent words.

Taoism conceived all forces in complementary pairs, such as earth-heaven, water-fire, inhaling-exhaling, pulling-pushing, feminine-masculine, and so on. Taoists see these forces as matching components of a single ultimate unity, although they are obviously distinct. A balance between them is therefore at the core of such a worldview, because they are necessary to each other. A bit like a magnet or an electric battery of necessity must have both a positive and a negative pole, neither can exist separately. Figure 1 summarizes some of these complementary aspects. It includes some metaphysical aspects, because an effective way to understand a particular society is to examine its image of the divine. For instance, to a Balinese, the divine is not necessarily male and transcendent, but also androgynous and immanent, present everywhere in everything and everybody, not just in the temple compound or invisible in the heavens.

You can read figure 1 from the bottom up to focus on the internal coherence of each worldview, or horizontally to appreciate the polarity between them. The figure also highlights the differences with our modern Western culture from its predominant focus on the yang coherence. From a Balinese perspective, *both* views are equally valid. In addition, the Balinese have spontaneously developed a dual currency system that actively supports each worldview, as explained next.

Money Systems as Hidden Persuaders

A widespread, tacit assumption is that only one kind of money is possible in the modern world, a monopoly of familiar national currencies in the form of bills and coins. Furthermore, conventional economic theory assumes that all currencies are implicitly value neutral: they are supposed not to affect the transactions or the relationships among the people using them.

In reality, different kinds of money have coexisted in many societies in the past and still do in some places. Furthermore, the type of money a society uses and the way a society creates and administers money deeply mold values and relationships within that society by encouraging or discouraging specific collective emotions and behavior patterns. All money systems facilitate exchanges among people. But, given the remarkable motivating power of money, some currencies tend to foster either yin or yang values and attitudes. Conventional money is definitely an extreme yang construct. A global hierarchy creates it, so developing countries don't have a chance at influencing the rules. A central bank enforces it at the national level. Its interest feature encourages the accumulation and concentration of money. Its necessary scarcity promotes competition among its users. Each characteristic links such a currency to the yang coherence (see figure 1).

The type of money a society uses and the way a society creates and administers money deeply mold values and relationships within that society.

Money is not a *thing.* While economic textbooks invariably define money in terms of what it *does,*[1] they never define it in terms of what it *is*. I define money as an *agreement within a community to use something as a medium of exchange* (Lietaer, 2000a). Our money and monetary systems are therefore not God-given realities, such as air or water, but rather choices, such as social contracts, marriages, or business arrangements, and are subject to review and amendment.

Bali's Dual Currency System

For many centuries, Bali has used two types of currency in parallel. The first is the rupiah, the Indonesian national currency. It is a yang currency, managed by a central bank. The Balinese have no more influence over it than the residents of Iowa have over Alan Greenspan.

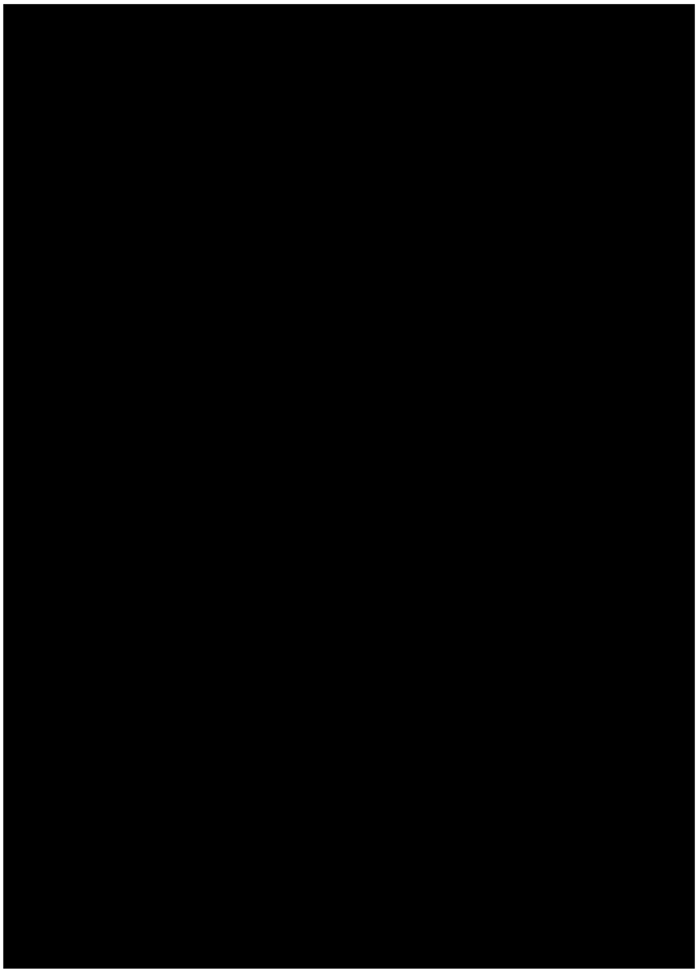
The second currency is *nayahan banjar,* roughly translated as ''work for the common good of the community.'' A time-for-services currency, the typical unit of account is approximately three hours of work in the morning, afternoon, or evening. The *kulkul* (a special wooden gong) summons people to gather for collective work.

Each *banjar* manages its own second currency. The banjar is a decentralized, democratic, cooperative institution at the local level. The first written reference to this ancient organization structure was in 914 AD (Purwita, 1983: 18). It has proven to be a very adaptable organization structure: ''Even today, among families who have spent several generations in an urban setting away from the rice fields, the banjar still plays an important role'' (Eiseman, 1990: 74). The banjar structure has been described elsewhere (Geertz, 1959; Geertz and Geertz, 1975; Guermonprez, 1990; Warren, 1993).

More than 3,000 banjars operate in Bali today, each with between 50 and 500 families. They are ''hyperdemocratic'' organization structures in the sense that their leaders, the *klian banjar,* are elected by a majority vote, but can also be dismissed at a members' meeting by majority vote. Each member is equal and has one vote: there is no special status granted to wealthier or higher class members of the banjar. Once a month on average, community decisions are made at the *bale banjar,* the community's open meeting pavilion. Special meetings can also be convened whenever necessary.

At the meetings, people propose both new activities and report ongoing projects. At the same time, they decide on contributions of time and money for each project. However, if a majority of members oppose any particular project at any time, they can reconsider it at the next monthly meeting to decide whether to continue it.

On average, each banjar starts between seven and ten different projects every month, large and small. For each project, each family unit's expected contributions—in rupiah and in time—are taken into account. In the poorer banjars, the rupiah constraint is typically the more binding, while in the richer ones, the opposite may happen. In short, the banjar functions as a community-based planning and implementation unit that budgets its activities using both currencies: time and rupiah.



People who cannot contribute their share of time are supposed to send a substitute. If neither is possible, they must pay a fine in rupiah. However, such substitutions are only partial and conditional, similar to the phenomenon between money and love in Western culture. One can, to some extent, ''buy love'' with a nice gift, jewelry, dinner, or other expensive gesture. But when the relationship is based entirely on money, it becomes prostitution and ceases to be love (Foa, 1971; Foa and Foa, 1974).

According to the local Balinese leaders, it is not the Balinese or Hindu religion but the strong system of mutual cooperation within the banjar that has maintained the balance in values characteristic to Balinese society:

> Banjar is stronger than religion in keeping our communities and values strong.
>
> Banjar is what holds the community, each other, together.
>
> Banjar is the most fundamental organization that keeps the Balinese character intact.

What holds the banjar together? The leaders are clear that ''time is a form of money.'' The majority even make the point that "time is more important than rupiah for keeping the community cooperation strong in the banjar." The time exchanges within a banjar can sometimes take a negative form: the main punishment meted out is not a rupiah fine, but ostracism, the exclusion of someone who refuses three times in a row to respect the community decisions. Such ostracism becomes most serious when there is a family ceremony, like a cremation, marriage, or coming of age ritual. No one will give time to help in the preparations. In short, depriving someone of time is considered the ultimate retribution.[2]

Why is a dual currency system so important for keeping community spirit and traditional values strong?

Dual Currency Supports Yin-Yang Balance

A philosophically inclined banjar leader described the dual currency system as being in "yin-yang relationship." He saw the normal Indonesian national currency as of yang nature because it cannot be created within the community but has to be earned by competing in the outside world. The other, time—which everybody has as a birthright—is yin because it is generated within the community on an egalitarian basis and generates cooperation. You can't accumulate and store it like conventional money; you use it or lose it. In short, the national currency fits in and supports the yang coherence, while the time currency—the *nayahan banjar*—explicitly nurtures the yin coherence.

I observed a very flexible yin attitude toward the yin currency. If, for example, someone has a sick child and cannot provide time, nobody will object. What matters is the goodwill underlying one's actions. Such a dual currency system within a democratic structure such as the banjar provides more flexibility than a one-currency system. People with a lot of conventional money tend to have little time, and people with little money tend to have more time. So the dual currency mechanism enables some automatic leveling among the social classes.

The dual currency mechanism enables some automatic leveling among the social classes.

Furthermore, the dual currency system allows flexibility in the choice of projects the council approves. The banjar in poorer communities automatically favors projects that require a lot of time; in rich ones, the more expensive rupiah projects get approved. In both cases, a lot of local resources can be mobilized for whatever the community chooses to focus on. And in all cases, a mixture of rupiah money and time money is always involved, but the proportional mix varies. This explains why, in Bali, religious or cultural events actively involve almost everyone and are not limited to a small social group.

This system goes beyond religious or cultural events. Banjars support their primary schools and even build their own roads when the central government isn't responsive to their demands.

Is the Balinese model relevant for application in another environment? To answer that question, a systems framework proves helpful to illustrate how dual currency systems support a more balanced worldview.

Systems Approach to Money and Values

There are four well-known forms of capital:

- Physical capital such as plant, equipment, and real estate.
- Financial capital such as cash, stocks, and bonds, or intellectual property such as patents and trademarks.
- Social capital such as family or group solidarity, peace, community, quality of life, and so on.
- Natural capital such as clean water or air, biodiversity, and other gifts of nature.

These four forms of capital fall into a straightforward pattern within the yin-yang framework as show in table 1. The next step is to link the dual currency system and these four forms of capital. As noted earlier, conventional national currencies have yang characteristics: they are centralizing in nature as they are created through a highly centralized and hierarchical process, they foster competition, and they bear interest (a mechanism that encourages accumulation of money and its concentration). Yin currencies, such as the

Table 1 Four forms of capital

	Yang	*Yin*
Nonmaterial level	Financial capital	Social capital
Material level	Physical capital	Natural capital

Balinese time currency, exhibit exactly the polar characteristics: they are created through a decentralized and democratic process, they foster cooperation, and they are interest free and aren't accumulated. Figure 2 illustrates the dynamics of the two complementary currencies in their respective economies.

The conventional national currency operates within the competitive economy where it facilitates quite efficiently the various types of commercial transactions, and it creates financial capital in the process. I describe this as the ''yang economic cycle.'' The yin currency, in contrast, activates the yin economic cycle in a cooperative economy, facilitating community exchanges that help generate social capital. Both economies require as underpinning a foundation of physical and natural capital.

Conventional economic theory focuses only on the yang cycle and formally acknowledges the existence of the two yang forms of capital: physical capital and financial capital. These forms of capital are measured and exchanged in the national currency, that is, the yang currency. Conventional theory therefore tends to ignore the role of the two forms of yin capital—natural capital and social capital—and considers them ''externalities.''

Nevertheless, all economies need to have both a yin and a yang cycle. Otherwise, vitally important yin functions such as raising and educating children, caring for the elderly, or community and volunteer activities would not exist. A society completely lacking a yin cycle would therefore soon collapse. But whenever a monopoly of yang currency prevails, the yin functions tend to be less acknowledged and honored and systematically starved of resources. Such functions used to be relegated to women, so the public invisibility of women, the disregard of the functions of the yin cycle, and the gradual deterioration of the yin forms of capital are explicitly linked.

One result of a monopoly of yang currency is community decay, less solidarity, and fewer creative group activities than in societies with a dual yin-yang currency system. In Bali, it is often said that ''everybody is an artist of some kind,'' as almost everyone contributes to cultural events as musician, dancer, mask maker, decorator of musical instruments or temple ornaments, or arranger of the elaborate daily offerings. In contrast, in the developed societies where exchanges are monetized exclusively via a yang currency, the arts become a highly specialized, comparatively rarefied function, and their output becomes a commodity consumed by an elite.

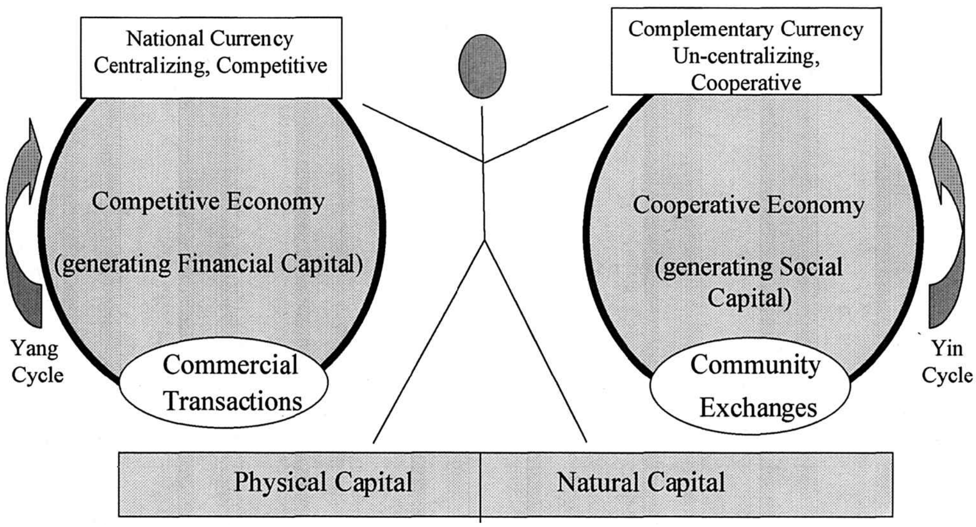


Figure 2 The integral economy as a yin-yang complementary system

The integral economy framework formally recognizes both a yin and a yang cycle in which each cycle mutually supports and complements the other (see figure 2). Within such a framework, the Balinese exception and many of its unusual characteristics become more easily understandable, even predictable. The characteristics may also contribute to explaining the polar differences of the reaction to a terrorist attack in Bali and in the US.

The model of an integral economy and the unusual socioeconomic dynamics of dual yin-yang currencies have been verified in other contemporary cases (DeMeulenaere, Week, and Stevenson, 2002). In addition, I have documented historical precedents of the use and effects of dual currency systems by matrifocal societies in dynastic Egypt and during the central Middle Ages in Western Europe (Lietaer, 2000b).

Some Implications?

What would a society that honors the feminine values—the yin coherence—look like? On the basis of various case studies, it would not be a society in which masculine values are repressed. Instead, it would be a society moving toward the ''world in balance'' I described earlier.

If a dual yin-yang currency approach combined with hyperdemocratic grassroots organizations can significantly shape a society's value system, interesting new initiatives become available for introducing change. Such initiatives can best be started at the grassroots level, without central governmental involvement. By using a yin complementary currency, yin-type activities are more continually nurtured whether they are of social, cultural, or artistic nature, even while the people pursue market-oriented activities in parallel. In a large-scale survey of the American public, 83% considered that the top priority in the US should be to ''rebuild community'' (Ray and Anderson, 1999). This suggests that it may be useful to question the assumption that the dollar is the only monetary tool relevant to solve all problems, especially those of a community nature, even in the US.

What would a society that honors the feminine values—the yin coherence—look like?

There are many places where either of these concepts is currently operational, either decentralized democratic organizations or complementary currencies. Only their combination remains comparatively rare. Many community exchange systems function throughout the Third World. In the past two decades, similar unconventional currencies have developed exponentially throughout the First World. There was only one such modern system in 1984, fewer than 100 in 1990, and more than 4,000 today. For instance, local exchange trading systems, time dollars,[3] and time banks all use different forms of yin complementary currencies.

Those 4,000 local currency experiments currently under way can be considered research prototypes of what will emerge during the next decade. They are a bit like the Wright Brothers' planes—it is a miracle that they fly in the first place. But they have unquestionably proven that it is possible to fly. They have already shown that they can contribute to solving a wide range of social problems without involving government bureaucrats or taxpayers' money. Pragmatic results amply justify more systematic experimentation, as is being done in Japan. Regional and local governments have started supporting pilot projects throughout Japan to facilitate the rebuilding of community and social capital more effectively than the conventional approaches, and at a fraction of the yen cost. Several new exchange systems even use smart cards to process the yin-type complementary currencies.[4]

Complementary currencies may indeed be an old idea whose time is coming, even for developed countries. UK Prime Minister Tony Blair has commented: ''As a nation, we're rich in many things, but perhaps our greatest wealth lies in the talent, the character and the idealism of the millions of people who make their communities work. Everyone—however rich or poor—has time to give. . . . Let us give generously, in the two currencies of time and money'' (Seyfang, 2002). Similarly, President George W. Bush has appealed to Americans to volunteer more frequently.

Could we not learn something from the people who have accumulated centuries of experience using tools that support such activities? Requests for volunteering and

© Barry Pell

exhortations for a ''gentler society'' deny the collective programming generated by a monopoly of a scarce, centralizing, yang currency. The importance of truly democratic decision making on how people want to use their resources (both time and money) is similarly overlooked, even in most nonprofit organizations. The resilience of the Balinese approach derives clearly from genuine grassroots support for every activity on which the community has decided and the possibility to stop any project whenever a majority questions it. When this approach is abused through a top-down imposition of projects, the mechanism quickly deteriorates and breaks down.

So What?

''If you want to feed someone, give him a fish. But if you want to truly help him, teach him how to fish.'' Well-designed complementary currencies play the role of such proverbial fishing lessons. Once in operation, they facilitate a continuous flow of transactions that otherwise wouldn't happen, thereby enabling more work and creating additional wealth and social capital.

It is naive to expect central governments to address local issues. Millions of people are involved in initiatives to attend to an impressive range of social, educational, or environmental problems. But only a few such local activists have become aware of the potential of local complementary currencies to increase their actions' effectiveness. It may indeed be appropriate to look seriously into the social multiplier effects that complementary currencies make possible. If you are in an area where a local complementary currency is already operational, you may want to consider joining the experiment yourself. If there is no local system available, but you belong to a community of dedicated activists, you may want to consider starting a system. This may become even more relevant in the immediate future. For the first time since the 1930s, the three major world economies have entered into a simultaneous recession. It is predictable that the social support system will be under more pressure.

From an academic perspective, theory is way behind practice in this domain. Most economic theory assumes only one currency per geographical area. Practically none of it deals with the effects of complementary yin-yang currencies that respectively stimulate different behavior patterns. Therefore, the field of integral economics is wide open for both theoretical and practical field research.

Conclusion

We should question the implicit theoretical assumption that money is value neutral. As the English put it: ‘‘A fact is a fact, and is more respectable than the Lord Mayor of London.’’ It is a fact that, in Bali, many exchanges and transactions occur that otherwise would not happen because of the availability of the locally created yin currency. Furthermore, it is a fact that the users themselves claim that their vibrant community spirit and more gentle worldview can be sustained only because of the existence and widespread use of this yin currency. Finally, it is a fact that Bali *is* different and has proven so most recently under the extreme pressures of a brutal terrorist attack.

I am not claiming that the yin-type community currencies are by themselves magic wands that will automatically solve Third World poverty and cultural degradation or violence-prone policies and behavior in the First World. Neither is Bali the Pollyanna paradise proclaimed by the travel brochures. Fights occur in Bali, crimes are committed, and pollution is increasing (Ramseyer and Tisna, 2000; Vickers, 1989). But their frequency and scale is definitely more manageable than in most other places on this planet.

Human societies are an extraordinarily complex web of interrelated but independent factors, and it would be naive to assume that change in any one variable would be sufficient to shift the whole. I hope that this article will draw the attention to one important variable that seems generally overlooked: the role of money systems in shaping collective emotions and values.

This study may explain why—to be successful in business—many women feel a systematic pressure to repress their feminine side. This becomes quite understandable if one realizes that business is ultimately about controlling the flow of money and that money—instead of being value neutral—is one of the most powerful enforcers of the yang coherence in our society. Any yin priority is therefore by definition going to have to swim upstream against the yang undertow built into our conventional money system.

Although there are many women presidents of major countries, universities, or corporations, women governors of central banks are about as frequent as women popes. More generally, as yang money shapes behavior patterns and emotions independently of the gender of the participant, it doesn’t leave much leeway for the expression of the feminine side, particularly in our business or financial worlds, whether by men or by women.

The fundamental purpose of Taoism, as most spiritual practices, is the transcendence of duality. Therefore the yin-yang model is only a mental tool helpful to map one way to such a goal of transcendence. Even the dual currency model of the integral economy should be considered only as an evolutionary tool particularly relevant for the socioeconomic transition period in which our global society is engaged. Ecological pressures, community breakdowns, or the spread of violence can all be successfully dealt with only from a broad perspective that fully reintegrates the legitimacy of the feminine perspective into our worldview.

Acknowledgment

I want to acknowledge the key contributions of my coauthor in the Bali case study (Lietaer and DeMeulenaere, 2003). DeMeulenaere is an expert in complementary currencies in developing countries and a permanent resident in Ubud, Bali.

Notes

1. Money is almost invariably defined by its functions, such as standard of value, medium of exchange, or store of value.

2. We were told the story about the richest man in Bali who systematically used to replace his time participation in his banjar with rupiah payments. But, for his cremation ceremony, the most important religious event in a Balinese life, nobody came.
3. See www.timedollar.org
4. For a complete conceptual framework and an investigative report on the advantages and disadvantages of each type of complementary currency, see *The Future of Money* (Lietaer, 2000a).

References

DeMeulenaere, S., D. Week, and I. Stevenson. *The Standardisation and Mobilisation of the Tabu Traditional Shell Currency* (Papua, New Guinea: East New Britain Provincial Government, 2002).

Eiseman, F.B. *Bali Sekala & Niskala: Essays on Society, Tradition and Craft,* Vol. II (Berkeley, CA: Periplus Editions Inc., 1990).

Foa, U. ''Interpersonal and Economic Resources.'' *Science* 171, no. 1 (January 1971): 345–351.

Foa, U. and E. Foa. *Societal Structures of the Mind* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1974).

Geertz, C. ''Form and Variation in Balinese Village Structure.'' *American Anthropologist* 61 (1959): 991–1012.

Geertz, H. and C. Geertz. *Kinship in Bali* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975).

Guermonprez, J.F. ''On the Elusive Balinese Village: Hierarchy and Values Versus Political Models.'' *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 24 (1990): 55–89.

Jung, C.G. *Collected Works,* Vol. 3, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960).

Lietaer, B. *The Future of Money* (London: Random House, 2000a).

Lietaer, B. *Mysterium Geld* (Munich: Riemann Verlag, 2000b).

Lietaer, B. and S. DeMeulenaere. ''Sustaining Cultural Vitality in a Globalizing World: The Balinese Example.'' *International Journal for Social Economics* 30 (Summer 2003).

Purwita, A. *Pemantapan Adat Dalam Menunjang Usaha-Usaha Pembangunan* (Majelis Pembina Lembaga Ada, Denpasar, 1983).

Ramseyer, U. and I Gusti Raka Panji Tisna. *Bali Living in Two Worlds: A Critical Self-Portrait* (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2000).

Ray, P. and S. Anderson. *The Cultural Creatives* (New York: Harmony Books, 1999).

Schevitz, T. ''FBI Sees Leap in Anti-Muslim Hate Crimes.'' *San Francisco Chronicle* (November 26, 2002): 1. [The original data come from the official FBI report on hate crimes released on November 25, 2002.]

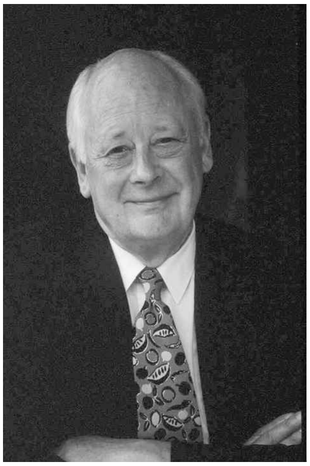
Seyfang, G. ''Tackling Social Exclusion through Community Currencies: Learning from LETS to Timebanks.'' *International Journal of Community Currency Research* 6 (August 2002): http://www.geog.le.ac.uk/ijccr/vol4–6/6no3.htm.

Vickers, A. *Bali: A Paradise Created* (Berkeley, CA: Periplus Editions, 1989).

Warren, C. *Adat and Dinas: Balinese Communities in the Indonesian State* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1993).

Commentary

by Charles Handy



Charles Handy
Writer, broadcaster
Author, *The Elephant and the Flea*
(Harvard Business School Press)

The ''Balinese exception'' is truly exceptional. It will remain an ideal that many communities may aspire to but few achieve. Similarly, the 4,000 or so alternative currencies, however admirable, are unlikely ever to be more than small puddles of yin in the great acres of yang that define the developed world. A world in better balance can seem a long way off if this is the way it is to be achieved.

Perhaps there is another way, one that lies in the emphasis given to different forms of work rather than to different mediums of exchange, although there is a clear connection between the two. If work is defined as ''meaningful activity,'' it is possible to identify at least six varieties of work:

- Wage work
- Fee work
- Gift work
- Home work
- Study work
- Recreational work

All these forms of work can be done for money, or for free, or for exchanges in kind. Economies appear to grow, by conventional measures, when activities that used to be done for free or for exchanges in kind are converted into paid activities. Home work, which includes the care and nurturing of young and old dependants as well as cleaning and cooking, is often contracted out by the affluent, who then hope to earn enough after tax to pay for it. The money they earn and the money they spend both boost the economy, although the actual amount of home work done remains the same. Recreation includes taking a walk in the woods (free) or walking on a treadmill in a gym (money). Study may be listening to a radio talk or downloading a lecture from the Internet (almost free) or enrollment in a formal program (paid for). Even gift work or volunteering is increasingly being offered money in the form of expenses or allowances.

Bernard Lietaer would like to see more of the top two forms of work (wage and fee work) converted into work done for exchanges of time spent. My concern is to protect the other forms of work from a creeping monetarization, turning them all into forms of paid work and thereby magnifying the yang element in society. I don't have as much hope as he does for the transformation of paid work, but I do believe that we can halt the commercialization of the other forms.

Small seeds of hope are there. One-third of baby care in Britain is now done by men—for free, because they are the fathers. Similarly, the affluent 30-something first-time mothers are increasingly giving up paid work for a few years to be with their children, for free. As the demographic balance in the developed world shifts toward the over-60s, more people discover that they want time rather than things, and time, once you have ceased paid work, is cost-free. Moreover, if you give that time to others for free, be they your family or others, you earn yourself a feeling of worth, and sometimes gratitude or even love. Such things, more people are discovering, are beyond price.

Ideas change society—if they can catch the imagination. The Balinese example is an inspiration. The Tao has long been the guide of choice for many. Nonmonetary exchanges are a practical example of the yin we need to balance the yang, even if they are destined to remain small puddles of hope. But if the idea caught on that work was more—much more—than going to the office or the plant or the store, and that the work that was done for love, or just for its own sake, was the work that was most worthwhile, then, while governments might complain of faltering economies, more lives could be in better balance and that might, in turn, make communities less selfish.

VIEW

Looking Back, Leaping Forward

Mieko Nishimizu

This keynote address was given at a symposium on the Fiftieth Anniversary of Japan's Bretton Woods Membership, in Tokyo, on September 10, 2002.

Mieko Nishimizu
Vice President, South Asia Region
The World Bank

The mission of the World Bank Group is to fight poverty with passion and professionalism. Our dream is a world free of poverty.

It is easy to be misled into thinking that we understand poverty. But, it takes more than our *head* to understand the reality of poverty. It takes an open *heart*. And mine was torn open some years ago by simple words of an old woman. She had walked hours under the scorching sun of premonsoon India, just to fetch a bucket of water. ''This, is not life,'' she said. ''This, is only keeping a body alive.''

Deep in your hearts, I know many of you here can connect with her words. You, and millions like you throughout Japan, must have felt exactly the same at the end of World War II.

•

So, today, we *look back*. Former Prime Minister Miyazawa has just been our gentle guide, reminding us of those harsh years and the scale of the journey traveled. A journey, from *survival* to *life*, by the sovereign people of Japan.

Fifty years ago, Japan joined the Bretton Woods institutions. Today, we mark that milestone with a sense of privilege to find Japan our strong partner in that dream we share, of a world free of poverty.

It was in 1953—one year after the end of the US occupation—when the World Bank commenced its financial assistance for postwar reconstruction, with a loan to the Kansai Electricity Power Project. For the next 13 years, a grand total of $863 million (USD equivalent) financed 31 reconstruction projects including the famous bullet train system. Japan's rapid recovery and growth enabled her to graduate from World Bank borrowing in 1966 and finish repayments of all loans by 1990 with, I should add, an impeccable debt-servicing record sustained over three decades. Japan is now the second-largest shareholder-donor of the World Bank Group, and the largest provider of trust fund grants.

Along the way, countless Japanese citizens invested their savings in various World Bank Group bonds. The Tokyo market has been our single largest funding source for quite some time. Like any other sound financial institutions, we aspire to lend other people's money wisely, manage our finances prudently, meet all debt obligations to investors as promised, earn their trust, and guard that trust jealously. We are proud of our fine AAA credit ratings, built up slowly from a far inferior rating when we first opened our doors for business. The ratings signal the investors' confidence and enable us in turn to provide low-cost financing for developing countries. As such, the World Bank Group owes a great deal more than just money to the sovereign people of Japan—their market's prudent discipline on us, and their trust and confidence.

•

An impressive membership history, indeed. Yet sadly, we still live in a world of conflicts within and among nation states. Whether Afghanistan, Angola, Bosnia, Congo, Guatemala, or Sri Lanka, to name but a few, the World Bank continues its reconstruction work with the people of war-torn nations. In their struggles as the dark of war recedes, it is Japan that offers a beacon of hope. It is Japan's collective memory of what it took to finish reconstruction that remains the guide for today's distressed nations:

- A sound macroeconomic management, guarding against inflationary tendencies of postconflict economies.
- Far-reaching structural reforms, with unfailing focus on people's health and education, to unleash growth in investment, employment, output, and productivity.
- A balance between public investments and private-sector leadership in reconstruction, especially smaller enterprises.

Most important of all, Japan's reconstruction demonstrated the power of a people's self-determination. In our 50-year partnership, this was perhaps Japan's most valuable lesson to the World Bank. Under President Wolfensohn's leadership, we now call our way of working the Comprehensive Development Framework. This framework is rooted in the principle demonstrated by Japan: that nation building is a learning process, a process of transformation of a society that is *of* the people, *by* the people, and *for* the people; and that external agencies, like the World Bank, serve as a *team* of facilitators for that process, invited by the people as catalysts for positive change of their own conviction. The framework is now spreading throughout the world, as it guides developing nations to articulate their Poverty Reduction Strategies and donor nations and agencies to set their assistance strategies.

•

The World Bank also feels gratified to learn from Japan's distinguished citizens— those who, as young visionary leaders of change, had worked with us as ''counterparts''— about what they valued most in our partnership:

- The global best-practice knowledge shared freely by the World Bank staff, with a singular focus on the well-being of the Japanese people.
- The staff's appreciation of Japan's local context, and their curiosity and interest in learning what Japan had to offer to the rest of the world.
- The World Bank's long-term financing, not for the money's sake but for providing that precious social, economic, and political ''enabling space'' for these leaders to transform their dreams into reality.

The World Bank's mandate and priorities have evolved since its founding, along with changing needs of its members. Yet, these three things said to have been valued most have remained the bedrock of our corporate vision, values, and business strategy. Indeed, the World Bank today (as a group of financial cooperatives belonging to the sovereign people of the now 184 member nations) is a global learning organization, a ''knowledge bank.'' Lending money comes second to this core—simply an instrument that opens an enabling space, in which a society can travel through a transformation of its own. We learn constantly from global experience and share the best practice as honest brokers with all members. And we strive to remain tuned to the future shape of the world in which development must take place.

Globalization can indeed mean the greater good and not the good of the great.

•

That *future* appears alien to us. It differs from the past most notably in that the Earth itself is the relevant unit with which to frame and measure that future.

Discriminating issues that shape the future are all fundamentally global. We belong to one inescapable network of mutuality: mutuality of ecosystems; mutuality of freer movement of information, ideas, people, capital, goods and services; and mutuality of peace and security. We are tied, indeed, in a single fabric of destiny on Planet Earth.

Policies and actions that attempt to tear a nation from this cloth will inevitably fail, by impoverishing the very wealth or income of those they set out to protect. Of this, the interwar history of the world is one notable testimony. Not to repeat that history, of the

© Barry Pell

Great Depression and the world wars, was what motivated and drove the founding fathers of the Bretton Woods institutions, Lord John Maynard Keynes among them.

What, then, does it take for the world community of nation states to think beyond national borders and myopic self-interests? Is such a different ‘‘state of the world’’ possible?

Enlightened policies that raise the sights of a people above the lowest common denominator of ‘‘democratic consensus,’’ beyond their immediate losses to a greater gain for all, are instigated only with leadership of vision and courage. With such leadership, the world community can begin to think globally and act to raise the sights of respective national interests, so that globalization can indeed mean the greater good and not the good of the great. For the first time in human history, we possess the technology and resources to rid our world of poverty by doing so.

It is in this context that, while looking back over the 50 years, I suggest that Japan *leap forward*.

I sense that the people of Japan see their country at a crossroads of her destiny. Too many nations have grown rich while losing sight of their culture, spirituality, and harmony with nature and with other peoples. As a citizen of Japan, it saddens me deeply to hear my countrymen ask whether they have left behind something valuable somewhere along the way. . . .

There is a small nation in a remote corner of Asia, which has chosen an entirely different path: Bhutan. More than 20 years ago, Bhutan set ‘‘Gross National Happiness’’ as the nation’s development goal, explicitly.

In the cultural context of Bhutan, as is also the case with Japan and other societies of Asia, the word ‘‘development’’ is traditionally understood to mean ‘‘enlightenment.’’ Enlightenment, not solely an object of religious activity, but the blossoming of happiness. In Bhutan’s vision, happiness is a complete view of human and national development that transcends the material. Inner spiritual development is as prominent a focus as external material development in the nation’s policies and actions. In Bhutan’s conviction, happiness is made more probable by consciously creating a harmonious psychological, social, economic, and natural environment within which to live—to be able to say: ‘‘*This, is life—not just keeping a body alive.*’’

Happiness is made more probable by consciously creating a harmonious psychological, social, economic, and natural environment within which to live.

This choice is no less extraordinary in its foresight than in its nonconventional wisdom and nonconformist perseverance. It carries a striking relevance today in thinking about that different state of our world, where nations expand their policy horizon beyond their borders. In the words of H.E. Jigmi Thinley, the Foreign Minister of Bhutan:

> The knowledge of the self is important to attain individual liberty and freedom, to gain happiness. . . . In varying degrees, the contemporary world may be too acutely preoccupied with the self. . . . But the paradox is that excessive self-concern does not lead to real knowledge of ourselves. Happiness depends, instead, on gaining freedom from this. . . . In our opinion, minimization of self-concern is also an important step in the process of constructing a happier web of human relationships, and of transforming man into a less intrusive and destructive force in our natural and human environments.

With my hard World Bank economist's hat on, I view this conscious pursuit of happiness as a truly holistic view of development. It has quite naturally led this small Himalayan nation, for instance, to execute environmentally sustainable development at the cutting edge of world practice, long before the world woke up to its deteriorating ecosystems. In a world suffering from climate change with insufficient action, Bhutan takes pride in protecting and expanding its pristine forest as a contribution to the global sink service.

•

If there is a way to turn the inescapable global mutuality into a positive energy, one may indeed find it in the Asian way demonstrated by Bhutan. The connection Bhutan makes, between the hard stuff of the material and the soft stuff of the intangible ''development,'' is not at all foreign to Japanese thinking. Was this not part of Japan's cultural foundation, the thread that wove her society together throughout trying times?

Japan is the only G7 nation whose heritage—a heritage not yet lost—would make her a natural and ideal champion, globally. The people of Japan do understand what it takes to go after the win-wins between national interests and those of the world. With all her postwar achievements that were once thought impossible, it is surely reasonable to expect Japan to inspire all with an ''Asian enlightenment.''

I repeat. Enlightened policies that raise the sights of a people, beyond their immediate losses to a greater gain for all, are instigated only with leadership of vision and courage. With such leadership, the world community can begin to think globally, and act to raise the sights of national interests, for globalization to mean the greater good, not the good of the great.

•

The greatest challenge of this third millennium, for every nation on Earth, will be to secure the happiness of the people. It is my hope that this century will see the world's collective energies devoted to a higher development endeavor, aiming not to pacify the insatiable self but to bring happiness and peace to all. And it is my personal dream to see Japan *leap forward*, side by side with the like-minded such as Bhutan, and lead a positive change in how nation states think and act.

On behalf of James D. Wolfensohn, the president of the World Bank Group, and the entire staff in 107 offices worldwide, including the Tokyo Office now led by Vice President Yoshimura, I wish the sovereign people of Japan well—all the change leaders of today, and of tomorrow, among them. A very happy fiftieth birthday, and many happy returns, from the bottom of my heart!

Ubuntu: Reflections of a South African on Our Common Humanity

Barbara Nussbaum

African values could contribute much to world consciousness, but people in the West misunderstand Africa for many reasons. First, Africa's traditional culture is inaccessible because most of it is oral rather than written and lived rather than formally communicated in books or journals; it is difficult to learn about from a distance. Second, many African political leaders betrayed the philosophical and humanitarian principles on which African culture is based, and political failures in African countries tend to tarnish the views of many Westerners. Third, people in the West, for whatever reason, receive negative, limited information through the media; images of ethnic wars, dictatorships, famine, and AIDS predominate, so the potential contribution of African values is often lost.

I have chosen to write about the inspiring dimensions of African values that rarely make their way into mainstream US news media. I write because of a strengthening conviction that Africa has something important to contribute to a change of heart needed in the world. This need for change has become clearer in my own mind since September 11; there is no doubt that our world must embrace a sense of interconnectedness as a global community if we are to survive.

I share here some personal reflections about Africa.[1] I seek to articulate some of the beauty and power of *ubuntu,* an underlying social philosophy of African culture. Ubuntu is the capacity in African culture to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony, and humanity in the interests of building and maintaining community. Ubuntu calls on us to believe and feel that:

Your pain is My pain,
My wealth is Your wealth,
Your salvation is My salvation.

In essence, ubuntu, an Nguni word from South Africa, addresses our interconnectedness, our common humanity, and the responsibility to each other that flows from our connection. The eclipse of ubuntu has darkened the spirit of modern-day African political systems. However, imagine the potential of ubuntu's sunlight, were it to be embraced as a vital part of the African renaissance or even as Africa's contribution to help a divided, fragmented world.

Nhlanhla Mkhize, a South African psychologist, explains that *self* is rooted in community in several traditional African cultures in South Africa:

> The African view of personhood denies that a person can be described solely in terms of the physical and psychological properties. It is with reference to the community that a person is defined. The importance of the community in self-definition is summed up by Mbiti, ''I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am.''. . . It is this rootedness of the self-in-community that gives rise to sayings such as *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (Nguni*)/Motho ke motho ka batho babang* (Sotho). These roughly translate to, ''It is through others that one attains selfhood.'' The Venda saying, *Muthu u bebelwa munwe* (a person is born for the other), also captures the interdependence between self and community (Mkhize, 1998: 1).

Barbara Nussbaum
Liaison for Africa
World Business Academy
BarbaraNu@aol.com

Leopold Senghor, a West African social philosopher, describes another dimension of ubuntu, ''I feel the other, I dance the other, and therefore I am.''

According to Duke University professor Michael Battle, ubuntu reflects the strong interdependence of human beings:

> We say a person is a person through other persons. We don't come fully formed into the world. . . . We need other human beings in order to be human. We are made for togetherness, we are made for family, for fellowship, (for community) to exist in a tender network of interdependence (Battle, 1997).

Interconnectedness of Self and Community

Ubuntu sees community rather than self-determination as the essential aspect of personhood. People are distinctive beings, able to recognize and acknowledge each other through mutual encounter and cultural integration.

Ronnie Lessem, a senior lecturer at the University of Buckingham, and I were among the first researchers to write about the potential of ubuntu and other African values as a positive force in the South African workplace. In our book, we describe various ways in which the arts, storytelling, and community-building rituals strengthen and enliven group relationships (Lessem and Nussbaum, 1996). Values and processes geared toward seeking consensus and mutual understanding, and maintaining harmony are very much a part of African culture. These include leadership and healing skills and simple interpersonal processes, such as how to greet someone in the morning, how a person leads a group to improvise together in dance, how a chief makes decisions, or how war healers reduce vengeance among people who have been at war. For example, Shona greetings (from Zimbabwe) in the morning would be:

Ubuntu sees community rather than self-determination as the essential aspect of personhood.

Mangwani, marara sei? (Good morning, did you sleep well?)
Ndarara, kana mararawo (I slept well, if you slept well.)

And at lunchtime:

Marara sei? (How has your day been?)
Ndarara, kana mararawo? (My day has been good, if your day has been good.)

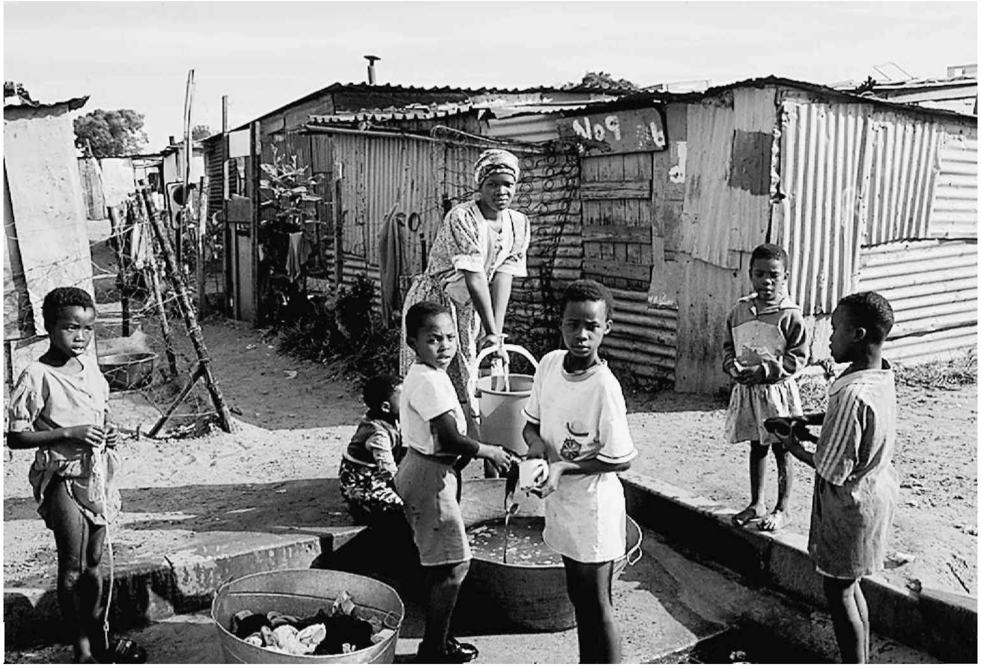
In other words, we are so connected that if you did not sleep well, or if you are not having a good day, how can I sleep well or have a good day? This kind of greeting would apply to close family and to strangers.

A good chief listens to the group and finds the point of consensus. He (most are men) would play a low-key role, listen to all viewpoints, facilitate debate, and finally summarize and make a decision that is just, preserves dignity, and reflects the group consensus. The phrase, ''a chief is a chief by the people,'' underlies the traditional way in which leaders, by listening to people, understood the place of the common good.

Traditionally, following a war between two tribes in South Africa, war healers from each side would together arrange for a cleansing ceremony involving those who fought on both sides. They believed that because people had died, ancestors on both sides would be aggrieved, and the hands, hearts, and spirits of killers on each side needed to be cleansed. This mature, profound skill demonstrates an in-built capacity for reconciliation and healing after war. Where else in the world does this happen? Imagine if the Israelis and Arabs had been able to do this at various points during their long, antagonistic history? Such ceremonies remind people of their common humanity and reduce the buildup of vengeful feelings.

Reconciliation and Soul Force

When I was working in a nongovernmental organization in Zimbabwe in the late 1980s, a colleague, Matanga, and I disagreed about an issue. After discussing it for an hour or two, I said, ''Matanga, can't we agree to disagree?'' He said, ''No, *sisi* (sister) Barbs. We have to sit and talk until we agree.'' This conversation illustrates a value base that stresses



© Barry Pell

cooperation, the desire for reconciliation, and communication in the interests of not only harmony but shared understanding.

I believe that some of the cultural dynamics behind South Africa's political miracle must be attributed to the patience, maturity, and reconciliatory skill that African leaders embody. Nelson Mandela and others found a way to talk issues through, until a dignified consensus was found. Credit is also due to the humility and commitment of white leaders who chose to listen. But, in the final analysis, the reconciliatory wisdom in the service of discovering and building our connection with each other is an inherent gift of African cultural heritage, a gift the world is just beginning to recognize and one that merits greater attention.

Ali Mazrui, a Kenyan political scientist, has referred to an African tendency toward a ''short memory of hate'': ''In reality, black people have been at least as violent as anything ever perpetrated by Indians. What is distinctive about Africans is their short memory of hate'' (Mazrui, 2001: 14–17). Africans teach their children to communicate, reconcile, and find ways to cleanse and let go of hatred and give them the skills to do so. The wars in the Congo and Rwanda are a sober counterpoint, compromising the powerful legacy of this continent, which gave birth to a deeply human heritage.

Mazrui also described Gandhi's views on African soul force, of great interest because Gandhi profoundly influenced Martin Luther King, Jr. According to Mazrui:

> In the first half of the twentieth century, India produced Mohandas Gandhi, who led one of the most remarkable nonviolent anticolonial movements ever witnessed. Westerners themselves saw Gandhi's message as the nearest approximation of the Christian ethic of the first half of the twentieth century. Mahatma Gandhi's India gave birth to new principles of passive resistance and *satygraha*. Yet Gandhi himself said that it may be through the black people that the unadulterated message of soul force and passive resistance might be realized (Mazrui, 1986).

There is something powerful and inspiring about African soul force. When I lived in South Africa from 1992 to 2000, I watched Mandela become president, a new constitution brought to life through careful midwifery, and the weekly special reports on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as South Africans discussed mutual healing. Soul force infused the pre-election negotiations in South Africa. It made its mark on the South African constitution and on the debate about civic engagement in that country. Perhaps soul force is a beautiful quality deeply inherent in all human beings, but through the forces of time, urbanization, industrialization, and concomitant processes of alienation, it tends to be denied, suppressed, and temporarily forgotten.

Ubuntu in Mandela and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Mandela is an icon who embodies a profound capacity for reconciliation and forgiveness. He has given the world the gift of seeing, fighting for, and then living out our common humanity. My dream is that the leaders and citizens of the world not only receive his gift but translate what they learn from his heartfelt sense of connectedness in community into their own lives.

Mandela's autobiography shows the power of this gift:

> I have always known that deep down in every human heart, there is mercy and generosity. No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite. Even at the grimmest times in prison, when my comrades and I were pushed to our limits, I would see a glimmer of humanity in one of the guards, perhaps just for a second, but it was enough to reassure me and keep me going. Man's goodness is a flame that can be hidden but never extinguished (Mandela, 1994: 542).

Mandela's expression of ubuntu, as he conceived of its logical and ultimate extension, embraces freedom and respect for all humanity:

> It was during those long and lonely years that my hunger for the freedom of my own people became a hunger for the freedom of all people, white and black. I knew as well as I knew anything that the oppressor must be liberated just as surely as the oppressed. A man who takes away another man's freedom is a prisoner of hatred; he is locked behind the bars of prejudice and narrow-mindedness. I am not truly free if I am taking away someone else's freedom, just as surely as I am not truly free when my freedom is taken from me. The oppressed and the oppressor alike are robbed of their humanity. . . . When I walked out of prison, that was my mission to liberate the oppressed and the oppressor both. . . . For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others (Mandela, 1994: 544).

At this time, I wonder what the world would look like if other leaders followed Mandela's example. What would capitalism look like if infused with ubuntu? What would the world's economic order be? What would the legal system be in America? How much more heartfelt economic and political generosity might there be?

In his own version of ubuntu, law professor Peter Gabel has commented about Martin Luther King, Jr.:

> The most profound definition of justice is Martin Luther King, Jr.'s: "*Love correcting that which revolts against love.*" Its power comes from its affirmation that we are first of all *connected,* that as individuals we are but unique incarnations of a spiritual force that unites us, and that justice is the making manifest of that love by correcting, through the inherent ethical call that love makes upon every one of us, the spiritual distortions that revolt against love and seek to deny it. It was to this inherent ethical understanding emanating from the very essence of our social existence, pulling upon the conscience of the oppressor as much as giving courage to the oppressed, that King always addressed himself (Gabel, 2000: 11).

King lived at a different time in history, but he, Mandela, and Gabel share an understanding of the link between the oppressor and the oppressed. They all allude to our connectedness and interdependence and recognize the power of love and common humanity as the soul force or the spiritual energy that carries within it the fire to transform and to correct.

What would capitalism look like if infused with ubuntu? What would the world's economic order be?

In Gabel's writings, I see the echo and flavor of African humanity. In my small, personal microcosm in America, I notice among my friends, underneath the apparent alienation and masks, a deep desire for compassion, connectedness, and community. Could African values shed additional light and give meaning to defining and fulfilling that desire?

In South Africa, I met "mini-Mandelas," or people whose capacity to transform feelings of hate into love are awe inspiring. I interviewed a business leader, Eric Molobi, director of Kagiso Trust Investments in Joburg, South Africa, who, after years of suffering the apartheid system, became a political activist and was jailed. He began to hate all white people. In prison, in a single moment, his hardened attitudes began to melt. One evening, Eric was feeling sad and comforted himself by whistling, ''Silent Night, Holy Night.'' A white prison warden heard him and said with gentleness and kindness, ''My son, this is not the end. Have faith.'' Eric was deeply touched by this warden's humanity. ''This man doesn't know it, but he changed me. Previously, I had clubbed all whites altogether. He called me, 'my son'! He understood what I was feeling and he comforted me.'' The compassion of his prison warden began a profound transformation in Molobi's attitude toward white people. In this brief vignette, we can see how the spiral of compassion can become a transformative one, moving toward justice and healing, the spiral described by King, Gabel, and played out in this South African prison.

Individualism of the East and the West

Ronnie Lessem suggests that East and West have been able to meet because both are somewhat individualistic. In Lessem's view, the South (Africa, Latin America) is a primary source of inspiration for the communal spirit that shapes ways of being and living in community:

> The key aspect which differentiates the east from the south is the eastern notion, 'I am the universe.' In other words, the universe lives in me and me in the universe, but not as much in other people or the community. In the great African souls, community and selfhood through collective belonging is a powerful force, which feeds the imagination (Lessem, personal interview, September 2002).

But there are writers in the West who have come to their understanding of interconnectedness through unexpected pathways, such as physics. Joe Jaworski describes his evolution from a driven, hardworking Texas lawyer to someone who understands the need to foster connectedness in a country fragmented by too many social and economic divides (Jaworski, 1996). In his own journey, he began to understand his emerging leadership role as transforming society by building bridges between leaders from different institutional, class, and professional sectors.

One person who influenced Jaworski's thinking was the late David Bohm, who described scientific dimensions of an implicate order that shapes and underlies our interconnectedness. Jaworski saw the human and spiritual correlates of the new physics and responded to this knowledge by trying to heal the fragmentation he saw in American society and starting ALF (American Leadership Forum). Through ALF trainings, leaders from different professions, social classes, political ideologies, and institutional sectors discuss and discover their interconnectedness and capacity for collaborative work.

African culture has celebrated mutuality and connectedness for centuries.

Those of us in South Africa recognized that Bohm's new physics is about ubuntu—our African unscientific but similar manifestation of interconnectedness. African culture has celebrated mutuality and connectedness for centuries. Africans understand the connections of past and present, human beings and nature, our common humanity, and a shared spirituality. Africans have mastered the art of communication between ancestors and people in the present as well as dialogue among us all (plants, birds, and animals included). The new physics are, for South Africans, the golden threads of ubuntu woven from the old traditional African fabric of interconnectedness.

Ubuntu in the US and the World

Voices in the US media give me hope that, while there are deeply isolationist tendencies in the US, some people have ubuntu and care deeply about helping not only their own country but others as well. For example, Harvard professor Jeffrey Sachs writes:

> Africa, with tens of millions of lives at stake, needs around $5 billion to $10 billion a year from the rich countries in the next decade to battle AIDS. . . . A realistic policy would go beyond fighting AIDS, committing to another $5 billion to $10 billion a year to a full-fledged fight on malaria, tuberculosis, and other killer diseases that help keep Africa trapped in

> poverty. The rich countries could finance both this and the AIDS program—at between $10 billion and $20 billion a year—without breaking a sweat. . . . A likely American government share—say, $3 billion or so annually in the next few years—would represent about $10 a year for each of us—the cost of a movie ticket with popcorn. Saving millions of African lives in the coming decade would have practical returns for the United States, sparing huge later costs. But the real returns would be to our own moral worth (Sachs, 2001).

Such thinkers espouse what, through my own South African lens, sounds like ubuntu values in America. More people who articulate the clarion call for connectedness and interdependence deserve to be heard throughout the world.

One is Rinaldo Brutoco, founder and president of the World Business Academy, who said recently:

> While nations may not be ready to turn swords into ploughshares or to redesign the world economic order, the only way to ensure long-term sustainability and global security is to inspire investment in a world where the vision of peace, mutual benefit, and rising economic wealth for all, supercedes the reality of a world crippled by fear, runaway military budgets, starvation, and saber-rattling (Brutoco, personal interview, October 19, 2002).

In the aftermath of September 11, which has clearly underlined our increasing social and economic global interdependence, it seems clear that African ubuntu could contribute to the world, if people would allow themselves to internalize it. If we acknowledge the common good and our interconnectedness, we can look to the wisdom of ubuntu to inform our lives.

I conclude by repeating the old South African saying: ''Your pain is my pain, my wealth is your wealth, your salvation is my salvation.'' As we begin to entertain the possibility that the roots of poverty are similar to the roots of terrorism, the challenge of radically altering the way financial markets operate and reenvisioning how wealth could be shared becomes more real. Indeed, if it were possible to sprinkle ubuntu on the consciousness of humankind, we could look forward to a more just, equitable, and sustainable future. By bringing about salvation for everybody, whether African or European, Muslim or American, we could create our own safety and our own salvation.

Acknowledgment

This article is adapted from a research paper published by the World Business Academy. For the original article, see www.Worldbusiness.org, Perspectives, Vol. 17, Issue 1 (February 12, 2003) or write directly to BarbaraNu@aol.com.

Note

1. Because most of my experiences in Africa have occurred as a result of living in South Africa and Zimbabwe, when I use the word *African*, I intend it to apply only to those countries. In this article, ubuntu is a philosophy and a frame of mind prevalent among African people living below the Sahara.

References

Battle, M. *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Bishop Desmond Tutu* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim's Press, 1997).

Gabel, P. ''Imagining Law.'' *Tikkun* 15 (November-December 2000).

Jaworski, J. *Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 1996).

Lessem, R. and B. Nussbaum. *Sawubona Africa: Embracing Four Worlds in South African Management* (Johannesburg, South Africa: Zebra Press, Struik Publishers, 1996).

Mandela, N. *A Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1994).

Mazrui, A. ''The Africans: A Triple Heritage'' (BBC lecture series, 1986).

Mazrui, A. ''Afro-Arab Crossfire: Between the Flames of Terrorism and the Force of Pax Americana.'' Paper presented at a special seminar sponsored by the Ethiopian International Institute for Peace and Development, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, December 5, 2001.

Mkhize, N. ''Culture, Morality and Self, In Search of an Africentric Voice,'' unpublished manuscript, University of Natal—Pietermaritzberg, Department of Psychology, South Africa Initiative, 1998.

Sachs, J. ''The Best Possible Investment in Africa.'' *New York Times* (February 10, 2001).

FEATURE

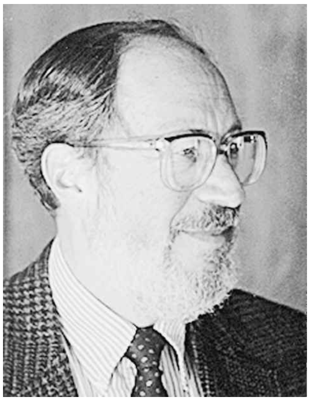
On Dialogue, Culture, and Organizational Learning

Edgar H. Schein

Consider any complex, potentially volatile issue—Arab relations; the problems between Serbs, Croats, and Bosnians; corporate decision making; getting control of the US deficit or health care costs; labor-management relations; and so on. At the root of the issue, we are likely to find communication failures and cultural misunderstandings that prevent the parties from framing the problem in a common way, and thus make it impossible to deal with the problem constructively.

Clearly, we need ways of improving our thought processes, especially in groups where the solution depends on people reaching at least a common formulation of the problem. It is for this reason that governments, communities, and organizations are focusing increasing attention on the theory and practice of dialogue. Proponents of dialogue claim that it holds promise as a way of helping groups reach higher levels of consciousness and thus be more creative and more effective. At the same time, the uninitiated may view dialogue as just one more oversold communication technology—or nothing more than a new variant of sensitivity training.

My goal in this article is to provide one perspective on dialogue, based upon my own direct experience with it. I hope to show that dialogue is indeed not only different from many of the techniques that have been proposed before, but also that it has considerable promise as a problem-formulation and problem-solving philosophy and technology. I will also argue that dialogue is necessary as a vehicle for understanding cultures and subcultures, and that organizational learning will ultimately depend upon such cultural understanding. *Dialogue thus becomes a central element of any model of organizational transformation.*



Edgar H. Schein
Sloan Fellows Professor Emeritus
MIT Sloan School of Management
Scheine@mit.edu

What Is the Problem and Why Is Dialogue Essential?

To answer this question, we must put dialogue, culture, and organizational learning in the context of changes that are occurring in the organizational world. These changes can be stated as a set of propositions, as follows.

- Because of the increasing rate of change in the environment, organizations face an increasing need for rapid learning.
- Because of the growth of technological complexity in all functions, organizational structures and designs are moving toward knowledge-based, distributed information forms.
- Consequently, organizations of all sizes will show a greater tendency to break down into subunits of various sorts, based on technology, products, markets, geographies, occupational communities, and other factors not yet known.
- The subunits of organizations are more and more likely to develop their own subcultures (implying different languages and different assumptions about reality, i.e., different mental models) because of their shared core technologies and their different learning experiences.
- Organizational effectiveness is therefore increasingly dependent on valid communication across subcultural boundaries. Integration across subcultures (the essential

Reprinted from *Organizational Dynamics*, Edgar H. Schein, vol. 22, Summer 1993, with permission from Elsevier Science.

coordination problem) will increasingly hinge on the ability to develop an overarching common language and mental model.

- Any form of *organizational* learning, therefore, will require the evolution of shared mental models that cut across the subcultures of the organization.
- The evolution of new shared mental models is inhibited by current cultural rules about interaction and communication, making dialogue a necessary first step in learning.

The ultimate reason for learning about the theory and practice of dialogue, then, is that it facilitates and creates new possibilities for valid communication. If we did not need to communicate in groups, then we would not need to work on dialogue. But if problem solving and conflict resolution in groups is increasingly important in our complex world, then the skill of dialogue becomes one of the most fundamental of human skills.

Why do we have so many problems understanding each other? Basically, the answer is that we are all culturally overtrained not only to think in terms of certain consensually validated categories but also to withhold information that would in any way threaten the current ''social order.'' From early on in life, we are taught that social relations hinge upon the mutual maintenance of ''face.'' ''Face'' can be thought of as the social value that persons attribute to themselves as they enter any interpersonal situation. As the sociologist Erving Goffman has shown so eloquently, we always present ourselves as *something*—by name, by title, by our demeanor, by the tone of our voice. And, in so doing, we always claim a certain amount of value or status for ourselves relative to the others in the situation.

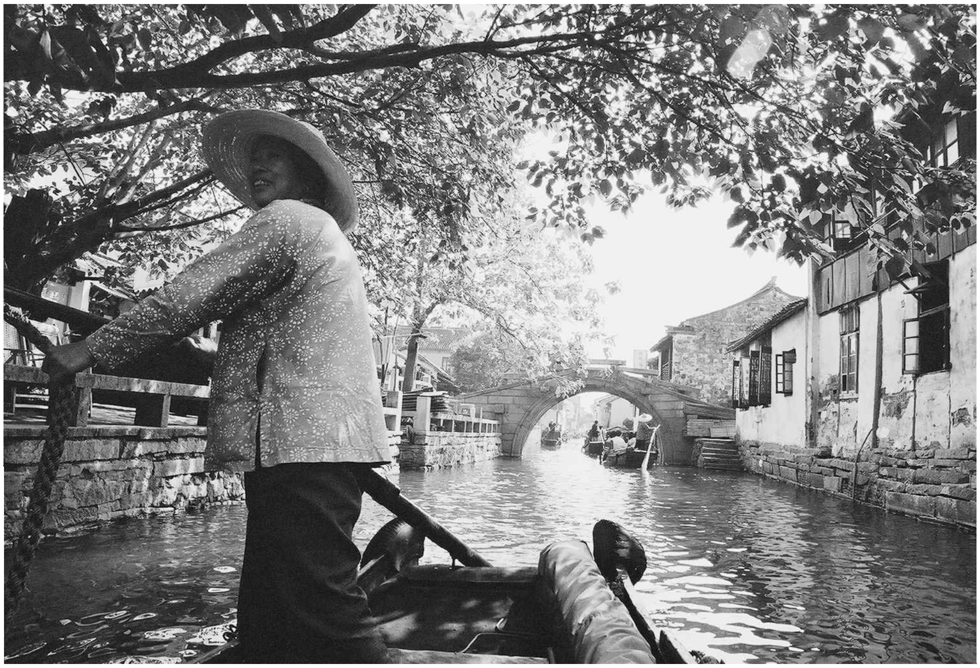
Why do we have so many problems understanding each other?

Others then must make an immediate choice: to grant us what we have claimed, or to either withhold confirmation or actually challenge us. Consider a simple example of such disconfirmation. To get someone's attention, I say ''Excuse me . . . ,'' and the other person responds with ''Can't you see I'm busy?'' At this point, I am likely to feel put down or unacknowledged, and if the situation is not repaired, we will both lose face. I will not have been granted the status of a valid question asker, and the other person will have displayed him or herself as ''rude.''

In fact, lack of acknowledgment is devastating to most human beings. We are taught early in life not only to pay attention to and acknowledge people, but to go further—to grant them what they claim unless it makes us too uncomfortable. Thus, when someone tells us a joke, we laugh even when we don't think it is funny. If someone says, ''Don't I look nice in this outfit?'' we tend to be complimentary even if we don't like what we see. And so on. What we call *tact, good manners, savoir faire,* and *poise* usually refers to a person's ability to respond in such a way as to enhance everyone's self-worth, rather than tear it down.

Mutual face saving thus makes normal social relations possible. But in that very process, we operate by cultural rules that undermine valid communication and create what Chris Argyris calls ''defensive routines.'' To be polite, to protect everyone's face, especially our own, we tend to say what we feel is most appropriate and least hurtful. It becomes a cultural rule to ''say something nice if you say anything at all, and if you can't say something nice, don't say anything.'' All cultures teach such rules, but Asian cultures probably adhere to them even more than Western cultures. Whereas a confrontational remark in US culture may be seen only as rude and offensive, other cultures may view the same remark as a serious affront and insult, leading to an immediate breakdown of the relationship.

Time pressures create a real dilemma for problem-solving groups: voicing the truth might lead to a quicker solution, but undermine the relationship-building process. In a discussion or debate, various parties may see a factual disagreement as a personal attack or affront. This causes a defensive response that further interferes with communication and task accomplishment. To avoid such possibilities, we often formalize debate around common rules such as Robert's Rules of Order, sacrificing communication and understanding to the preservation of face. This scenario is so typical in decision-making groups that one can state the following proposition:



© Linda Cooper

All problem-solving groups should begin in a dialogue format to facilitate the building of sufficient common ground and mutual trust, and to make it possible to tell what is really on one's mind.

Seen from this point of view, dialogue is a necessary condition for effective group action, because only with a period of dialogue is it possible to determine whether or not the communication that is going on is valid. If it is not valid, in the sense that different members are using words differently or have different mental models without realizing it, the possibilities of solving problems or making effective decisions are markedly reduced. Dialogue, then, is at the root of *all* effective group action.

If cross-cultural issues are involved as well, the development of shared mental models will require more lengthy and elaborate periods of dialogue. As organizations differentiate themselves in terms of programs, projects, functional groups, geographical units, hierarchical strata, or competency-based units (what John Seely Brown and others have called ''communities of practice''), we will find that each of these units inevitably creates common frames of reference, common languages, and, ultimately, common assumptions, thus forming genuine subcultures that will have to be integrated if the organization is to work effectively. Once we recognize that the problem of coordination and integration in an organization is ultimately a problem of meshing subcultures, we will also realize that our normal coordination mechanisms are not up to the task. We will need technologies and mechanisms that make it possible for people to discover that they use language differently, that they operate from different mental models, and that the categories we employ are ultimately learned social constructions of reality and thus arbitrary. Dialogue is one such technology.

Dialogue, then, is at the root of all *effective group action.*

Dialogue versus Sensitivity Training

To elucidate this argument, let me provide a very personal account of how I analyzed my own experiences with dialogue. My purpose in giving a detailed account is to demystify dialogue. Some proponents have made it sound like a most esoteric experience. If dialogue is to become helpful to organizational processes, it must be seen as accessible to all of us. Unfortunately, an abstract description does not help accessibility. As we all know, ''the devil is in the details.''

I became specifically preoccupied with the question of how dialogue was different from good face-to-face communication of the sort we learn about in group dynamics and human relations workshops. The difference does not become clear until one actually experiences the dialogue setting. Then, however, the difference is obvious and can be described unambiguously.

Most communication and human relations workshops emphasize active listening, by which is meant that one should pay attention to all the communication channels—the spoken words, the body language, tone of voice, and emotional content. One should learn to focus initially on what the other person is saying rather than on one's own intended response. In contrast, dialogue focuses on getting in touch with underlying assumptions (especially our own assumptions) that automatically determine when we choose to speak and what we choose to say. Dialogue is focused more on the thinking process and how our perceptions and cognitions are preformed by our past experiences. The assumption here is that if we become more conscious of how our *thought process* works, we will think better collectively and communicate better. An important goal of dialogue is to enable *the group* to reach a higher level of consciousness and creativity through the gradual creation of a shared set of meanings and a ''common'' thinking process.

Active listening plays a role in this process, but is not the central focus or purpose. In fact, I discovered that I spent a lot more time in *self-analysis,* attempting to understand what *my own assumptions* were, and was relatively less focused on actively listening to others. Feelings and all of the other dimensions of communication are important. Eventually, dialogue participants do ''listen actively'' to each other, but the path for getting there is quite different.

In the typical sensitivity training workshop, we explore relationships through ''opening up'' and sharing, through giving and receiving feedback, and through examining all of the *emotional* problems of communication. In dialogue, however, we explore all the complexities of *thinking and language.* We discover how arbitrary our basic categories of thought and perception are and thereby become conscious of imperfections or biases in our basic *cognitive* processes.

An MIT colleague, Fred Kofman, provides an example of such bias by telling about the platypus. When this animal was first discovered, scientists found themselves in a major controversy. Was it really a mammal, a bird, or a reptile? The automatic assumption was that mammals, birds, and reptiles are the reality into which vertebrates had to be fitted, rather than categories for representing reality. Fred reminded us that the platypus was a platypus.

It is not necessary to force the platypus into any category, except as a matter of convenience. And when we do force the fit, we reduce opportunities for learning about the reality that is actually there.

Whereas, in sensitivity training, the goal is to use the group process to develop our individual interpersonal skills, dialogue aims to build a group that can think generatively, creatively, and, most important *together*. When dialogue works, the group can surmount the creative abilities of its individual members and can achieve levels of creative thought that no one would have initially imagined. Dialogue is thus a vehicle for creative problem identification and problem solving.

In sensitivity training, the learning emphasis falls heavily on learning how to give and receive feedback, a process that is countercultural because of our need to maintain face. Therefore, it elicits high levels of emotionality and anxiety. The process promises to give us new insights, to reveal our blind sides to us, and to provide opportunity to see ourselves as others see us. For many, this is not only novel, but potentially devastating—even though it may be ultimately necessary for self-improvement. To receive feedback is to put our illusions about ourselves on the line; to give feedback is to risk offending and unleashing hostility in the receiver.

In contrast, dialogue emphasizes the natural flow of conversation. It actually (though somewhat implicitly in my experience) discourages feedback and direct interpersonal encounters. In dialogue, the whole group is the object of learning, and the members share the potential excitement of discovering, collectively, ideas that individually none of them might have ever thought of. Feedback may occur, especially in relation to individual behavior that undermines the natural flow of conversation, but it is not encouraged as a goal of the group process.

One of the most important differences between dialogue and other communication enhancers is that the group size is not arbitrarily limited. Whereas sensitivity training works best with groups of 10 to 15, I have been in dialogue groups as large as 60. I have been told that dialogue has been tried successfully with as many as 100 or more. The notion that such large groups can accomplish anything is counterintuitive. We must understand, however, that larger groups are often composed of individuals who have had prior small-group experience with dialogue. In the larger groups, these people have lower initial expectations and assumptions about the need for everyone to have significant "air time."

In sensitivity training, everyone is expected to learn and to participate in the learning process. In dialogue, the role of individual contribution is blunted somewhat by the goal of reaching a higher level of communication as a group. Much of the individual work is internal, examining one's own assumptions, which somewhat reduces the need to be competitive in terms of "getting one's share of the air time." In terms of length and frequency of meetings, dialogue appears to be more flexible, variable, and less intense.

How Does Dialogue Get Started?

In all of the groups that I have observed, initiated by William Isaacs, Peter Senge, or myself, the facilitator started by arranging the setting and then describing the concept. In each case, the group could understand the essence sufficiently to begin the conversation. The key to this understanding is to link dialogue to other experiences we have had that felt like real communication.

The initial role of the facilitator can be characterized in terms of the following kinds of activities:

- Organize the physical space to be as nearly a circle as possible. Whether or not people are seated at a table or tables is not as important as the sense of equality that comes from sitting in a circle.
- Introduce the general concept, then ask everyone to think about an experience of dialogue in the sense of "good communication" in their past.
- Ask people to share with their neighbor what the experience was and to think about the characteristics of that experience (this works because people are relating very concrete experiences, not abstract concepts).
- Ask group members to share what it was in such past experiences that made for good communication and write these characteristics on a flip chart.
- Ask the group to reflect on these characteristics by having each person in turn talk about his or her reactions.
- Let the conversation flow naturally once everyone has commented (this requires one and half to two hours or more).
- Intervene as necessary to clarify or elucidate, using concepts and data that illustrate the problems of communication (some of these concepts are spelled out below).
- Close the session by asking everyone to comment in whatever way he or she may choose.

The theory that lies behind such a startup is entirely consistent with what we know about group dynamics and involves several important assumptions about new groups:

1. Members should feel as equal as possible. (Even if there are actual rank or status differences in the group, everyone should sit in a circle.)
2. Everyone should feel a sense of guaranteed "air time" to establish their identity in the group. (Therefore, asking everyone to comment guarantees that everyone will have their turn and their space. In the larger groups, not everyone might speak, but the norm is that everyone has an opportunity to speak if they want to, and that the group will take whatever time is necessary for that to happen.)
3. The task of the group should be to explore the dialogue process, and to gain some understanding of it, rather than make a decision or solve some external problem.

4. Early in the group's life, members will be concerned primarily about themselves and their own feelings; hence, legitimizing personal experiences and drawing on these experiences is a good way to begin.

The length and frequency of meetings depend upon the size of the group, the reasons for getting together, and the constraints operating on members. The meetings held at MIT were generally one and a half to two hours long and occurred at roughly two- to three-week intervals. After watching various groups go through a first meeting, I found myself wondering how the second meeting of the group would get going. I found that the best method was to start by asking *everyone* to comment on ''where they were at'' at that moment and going around the circle with the expectation that everyone would make some comment. Again, what seems to be important is to legitimize air time for everyone and to tacitly imply that everyone should make a contribution to starting the meeting, even though the content of that contribution can be virtually anything. Obviously, this process would vary according to the size of the group, but the principle that ''we are all in this together on an equal basis'' is important to communicate.

The facilitator has a choice of how much theoretical input to provide, either at the beginning or as the process gets going. Concepts should be provided if the group really needs them. If the presentation is incorrectly timed, it can disrupt the group process.

Helpful Concepts to Facilitate Dialogue

To determine what concepts to introduce when, I have found it helpful to draw a roadmap based on Isaacs's basic model (figure 1). By mapping forms of conversation in terms of two basic paths, the model highlights what I think is the essential concept underlying dialogue—the discovery of one's own internal choice process regarding when to speak and what to say.

Suspension. As a conversation develops, there inevitably comes a point where we sense some form of disconfirmation. We perceive that our point was not understood, or we elicit disagreement, challenge, or attack. At that moment, we usually respond with anxiety or anger, though we may be barely aware of it. The first issue of choice, then, is whether or not to allow the feeling to surface and whether or not to trust the feeling. We

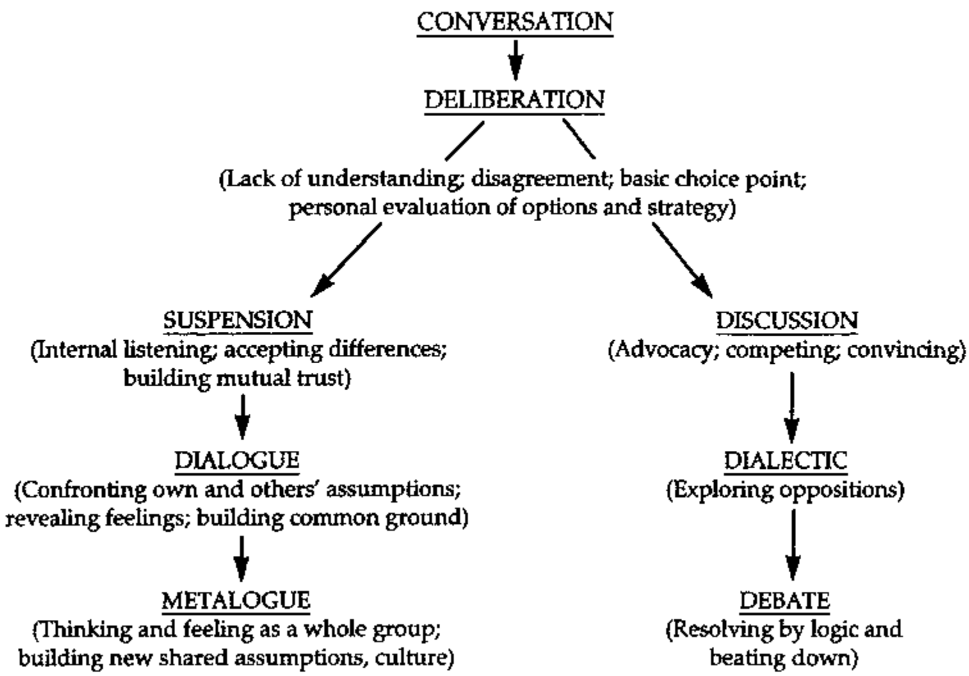


Figure 1

typically do not experience these as choices until we have become more reflective and conscious of our own emotions. But we clearly have a choice of whether or not to express the feeling overtly in some form or another.

As we become more aware of these choices, we also become aware of the possibility that the feeling was triggered by our *perception* of what the others in the group did, and *that these perceptions themselves could be incorrect.* Before we give in to anxiety and/or anger, we must determine whether or not the data were accurately interpreted. Were we, in point of fact, being challenged or attacked or whatever?

This moment is critical. As we become more reflective, we begin to realize how much our initial perceptions can be colored by expectations based on our cultural learning and our past experiences. We do not always perceive what is ''accurately'' out there. What we perceive is often based on our needs, our expectations, our projections, and, most of all, our culturally learned assumptions and categories of thought. It is this process of becoming reflective that makes us realize that the first problem of listening to others is to identify the distortions and biases that filter our own cognitive processes. *We have to learn to listen to ourselves before we can really understand others,* and such internal listening is, of course, especially difficult if one is in the midst of an active task-oriented discussion. Furthermore, there may be nothing in our cultural learning to support such introspection.

Once we have identified the basic issue that our perception itself may not be accurate, we face a second, more fundamental choice—whether or not to actively check the perception by taking up the point, asking what the person really meant, explaining ourselves further, or in some other way focusing specifically on the person who produced the disconfirming event. As we know from observing group processes, choosing to confront the situation immediately (for example, asking someone to explain what he or she meant with a specific remark) can quickly polarize the conversation around a few people and a few issues.

We have to learn to listen to ourselves before we can really understand others.

An alternative choice is to ''suspend.'' What Isaacs means by suspension is to let the issue—our perceptions, our feelings, our judgments, and our impulses—rest for a while in a state of suspension to see what more will come up from ourselves and from others. What this means operationally in the group (and what I have experienced over and over) is that when I am upset by what someone else says, I have a genuine choice between (1) voicing my reaction and (2) letting the matter go (thereby suspending my own reaction). Suspending is particularly difficult if I perceive that my prior point has been misunderstood or misinterpreted. Nevertheless, I have found repeatedly that if I suspend, I find that further conversation clarifies the issue and that my own interpretation of what may have been going on is validated or changed without my having to actively intervene.

It is when a number of members of the group discover some value in suspending their own reactions that the group begins to go down the path shown in figure 1. In contrast, when a number of members choose to react by immediately disagreeing, elaborating, questioning, and in other ways focusing on a particular trigger that set them off, the group goes down the path of discussion and ultimately mires in unproductive debate. Suspension allows reflection, which is very similar to the emphasis, in group dynamics training, on observing the ''here and now.'' Isaacs correctly notes, however, that reflective attention is looking at the past. Instead, he suggests that what we need is ''proprioception''—attention to and living in the moment. Ultimately, dialogue tries to achieve a state of knowing one's thought as one is having it. Whether proprioception in this sense is psychologically possible is debatable, but the basic idea is to shorten the internal feedback loop as much as possible. As a result, we can get in touch with what is going on in the here and now, and become conscious of how much our thought and perception are both a function of our past learning and the immediate events that trigger it. This learning is difficult at best, yet lies at the heart of the ability to enter dialogue.

Dialogue versus Discussion. How do we know whether discussion and/or debate is more or less desirable than dialogue? Should we always go down the dialogue path? I would argue that discussion or debate is a valid problem-solving and decision-making

© Linda Cooper

process *only if one can assume that the group members understand each other well enough to be ''talking the same language.''* Paradoxically, such a state of sharing categories probably cannot be achieved unless somewhere in the group's history some form of dialogue has taken place. Alternatively, the danger in premature discussion is that the group reaches a ''false consensus''—members assume that they mean the same thing by certain terms. Only later do they discover that subtle differences in meaning have major consequences for implied action and implementation.

Dialogue, on the other hand, is a basic process for building common understanding, in that it allows one to see the hidden meanings of words, first by seeing such hidden meanings in our own communication. By letting disagreement go, meanings become clearer, and the group gradually builds a shared set of meanings that make much higher levels of mutual understanding and creative thinking possible. As we listen to ourselves and others in what may appear often to be a disjointed, rather random conversation, we begin to see the bias and subtleties of how each member thinks and expresses meanings. In this process, we do not convince each other, but build a common experience base that allows us to learn collectively. The more the group has achieved such collective understanding, the easier it becomes to reach decisions, and the more likely it will be that the decision will be implemented in the way that the group meant it.

Group Dynamics. The dynamics of ''building the group'' occur in parallel with the process of conducting the dialogue. Issues of identity, role, influence, group goals, norms of openness and intimacy, and questions of authority all have to be worked on, though much of this occurs implicitly rather than explicitly, as would be the case in a human relations or group dynamics workshop. The group will display all of the classical issues that occur around authority vis-à-vis the facilitator: Will the facilitator tell us what to do? Will we do it, even if we are told? Does the facilitator have the answers and is withholding them, or is he or she exploring along with the rest of us? At what point can we function without the facilitator? And so on.

As issues of group growth and development arise, they have to be dealt with if they interfere with or confuse the dialogue process. The facilitator should, therefore, be skilled in group facilitation as well, so that the issues that arise in the group can be properly sorted into two categories: issues that have to do with the development of the dialogue, and those that have to do with the development of the group as a group. In my own experience, the dialogue process speeds up the development of the group and should therefore be the primary driving process in each meeting. A major reason for this ''speed up'' is that dialogue creates psychological safety and thus allows individual and group change to occur, assuming that there is some motivation to change present already. Dialogue cannot create the need to change, but it certainly facilitates the process of change.

Some initial motivation to engage in a dialogue must be present. Because the process appears initially to be very ''inefficient,'' a group will not readily volunteer to engage in dialogue unless it is unfrozen in some other respects, i.e., unless group members feel disconfirmed (are hurting), are feeling some guilt or anxiety, and need to overcome such feelings in order to get on with a task. The core task or ultimate problem, then, is likely to be the longer run reason why the group will meet in the first place.

The group may initially experience dialogue as a detour or a slowing down of problem solving. But real change does not happen until people feel psychologically safe, and the implicit or explicit norms that are articulated in a dialogue session provide that safety by giving people both a sense of direction and a sense that the dangerous aspects of interaction will be contained. If the group can work on the task or problem using the dialogue format, it should be able to reach a valid level of communication much faster.

Containment. Isaacs speaks articulately of the need to build a *container* for dialogue, to create a climate and a set of explicit or implicit norms that permits people to handle ''hot issues'' without getting burned. For example, the steelworkers participating in a recent labor/management dialogue likened dialogue to the mill in which molten metal was poured from a container into various molds safely, while human operators were close by. The container is jointly created and then permits high levels of emotionality and tension without anyone getting burned or burning up.

The facilitator contributes to all of this by modeling the behavior, by being nonjudgmental, and by displaying the ability to suspend his or her own categories and judgments. This skill becomes especially relevant in group situations where conflict heats up to the point that it threatens to spill over or out of the container. At that point, the facilitator can simply legitimize the situation, acknowledging the conflict as real and as something to be viewed by all the members in the here and now without judgment or recrimination, or even without the felt need to do anything about it.

Task versus Process. Once a group experiences dialogue, the process tends to feed on itself. In several cases, I have been in groups that chose to stay in a circle and continue in a dialogue mode even as they tackled other work—concrete tasks with time limits. I would hypothesize, however, that unless a group is formed specifically for the purpose of learning about itself, it eventually needs some other larger purpose to sustain itself. Continuing to meet in a dialogue format probably does not work once members have mastered the basic skills.

The best way to think about dialogue is as a group process that arises initially out of the individual participants' personal skills or attitudes. Dialogue is, by definition, a process that has meaning only in a group. Several people have to collaborate with each other for dialogue to occur. But this collaboration rests on an individual choice, based on a certain attitude toward how to get the most out of a conversation and on certain skills of reflection and suspension. Once the group has those attitudes and skills collectively, it is possible to have even highly time-sensitive problem-solving meetings in a dialogue format.

I have also observed that most people have a general sense of what dialogue is about and have experienced versions of it in their past relationships. Thus, even in a problem-solving meeting, a facilitator may suggest that the group experiment with dialogue. In my own experience, I have found it best to introduce the idea, early on, that, behind our comments and perceptions, there are always assumptions, and that our problem-solving process will be improved if we get in touch with our own and each other's assumptions. Consequently, if the conversation turns into too much of a discussion or debate, I can legitimately raise the question of whether or not the disagreement is based on different assumptions, and explore those assumptions explicitly. Continually focusing the group on the cognitive categories and assumptions that underlie conversation is, from this point of view, the central role of the facilitator.

One of the ultimate tests of the importance of dialogue will be to find out whether or not difficult, conflict-ridden problems can be handled better in groups that have learned to function in a dialogue mode, and that have agreed to seek a ''win-win'' outcome. However, learning to hold a dialogue requires initial motivation to work together. There is nothing in the dialogue process itself that would overcome the desire of group members to win out over other group members, if that is their initial motivation.

On Culture and Subcultures

The role of dialogue in relation to culture is of especial significance. When we operate as culture carriers and are conscious of our cultural membership, we are emotionally attached to our culturally learned categories of thought; we value them and protect them as an aspect of our group identity. One of the ways that groups, communities, organizations, or other units that develop subcultures define themselves and set their psychological boundaries is by developing a language. In occupational communities, we call this language ''jargon.'' Using that language expresses membership and belonging, and that, in turn, provides status and identity.

In other words, powerful motivational forces are at work, and these forces make us cling to our language and our thought processes even if we recognize that they are biased and block communication. We often feel that our biases are the correct ones and thus make ourselves impervious to other views. And if we value our group, we feel that others should learn our language, as is sometimes the case with information technology professionals who insist that users learn their terminology.

Groups made up of members from different cultures or subcultures have difficulty communicating with each other, even if they speak the same native language.

In addition, the familiar categories of thought provide meaning, comfort, and predictability—things we all seek. Given these forces, we should not be surprised if groups made up of members from different cultures or subcultures have difficulty communicating with each other, even if they speak the same native language, and even if they are motivated to try to understand each other. In fact, using the same language, such as English, creates a greater risk that people will overlook the actual differences in categories of thought that reflect functional subcultures such as sales, production, or finance. Only when decisions fail to be implemented correctly, do we begin to realize that what people heard as the decision differed according to their membership in different subcultures.

The subculture problem can be stated in terms of the following propositions:

- Subcultures tend to form around any stable social unit, where stability is a function of:
  - Relative stability of membership
  - How long the founders of the group have been in leadership roles
  - The vividness and potency of leadership
  - The number and intensity of common coping experiences
  - The absolute length of time the group has existed
  - The ''smallness'' of the group, in the sense of permitting high levels of mutual acquaintance and trust
- Functional and geographical subcultures are highly visible and, therefore, easily noticed; hierarchical subcultures are harder to detect but very active because many of the conditions for subculture formation mentioned above apply to hierarchical strata: the board subculture, the executive subculture (CEO, office of the president, key board committees, executive committee, president's council, senior political appointees in the government, etc.) and so on down the hierarchy.
- Organizational integration, coordination, and learning is hindered most by variations in the *hierarchical* subcultures because of the myth that ''all management speaks the same language.''

It is this last point that requires most elaboration because hierarchy-based subcultures not only are harder to detect but their effect is more devastating. For example, when one invites CEOs to a seminar, they invariably want to know who else is attending. If the other attendees are not equivalent-level executives, they are reluctant to attend. This response is partly a matter of protecting status. But at a deeper level, it reflects the executives' assumption that they live in a special world and that only others who live in that world can really understand it and, therefore, be useful sources of learning. When multiple ranks are represented in a seminar, it is often very evident that managers at different levels speak different languages. Words such as *empowerment* or *delegation,* for example, have subtly different meanings depending on whether one is a CEO (with ''absolute'' power) or a vice president who is constrained by various policies. In other words, how much power and autonomy one has in one's organizational ''space'' colors very much what things mean.

Further clinical evidence that different strata have different subcultures comes from the frequent complaint one hears from CEOs that, even though they have a lot of power and authority, they have great difficulty getting their programs implemented. They complain that things are not understood, that goals seem to change as they get communicated down the hierarchy, or that their subordinates ''screw up'' because they don't really understand what is wanted. This often leads CEOs to mass communication, such as videotaped messages sent to everyone or mass meetings where visions are shared with everyone simultaneously. In spite of these efforts, people still hear very different things "down the line."

Taking these various points about subcultures together leads to the following conclusions: We must take the impact of subcultures on language and mental models seriously, and we must take the subcultural differences between hierarchical strata seriously, especially between the executive stratum and the rest of the organization.

The need for dialogue across subcultural boundaries, especially across hierarchical boundaries, is, therefore, one of the most pressing needs. Much of what we call *bureaucracy*, in the bad sense of that word, stems from misunderstanding across these kinds of boundaries.

Organizational Learning

What are the implications of dialogue and culture dynamics for organizational learning? Organizational learning is not possible unless some learning first takes place in the executive subculture. I do not see how learning at that or any other level of the organization can take place unless the executive subculture first recognizes itself as a subculture in need of analysis. Such self-analysis will inevitably involve periods of dialogue, first to help members of this group become conscious of their own cognitive bias, and later to become sympathetic to the problems of communicating to the rest of the organization whatever new insights they have gained. Yet, it is executive leaders who may be most reluctant to engage in this kind of self-reflective analysis. For leaders to reveal to others (and even to themselves) that they are not sure of themselves, that they do not understand all of the assumptions on which they base action, and that they make mistakes in their thinking can be profoundly threatening.

The process of communicating across the hierarchical levels . . . will require further dialogue because . . . different strata operate with different assumptions.

Dialogue at the executive level is not enough for organizational learning to occur. The process of communicating across the hierarchical levels of an organization will require further dialogue because of the likelihood that different strata operate with different assumptions. If the initial learning has occurred in groups below the executive level, as is often the case, the problem of creating a dialogue across hierarchical strata is even more essential because it is so easy for the higher level to undermine the learning of the lower levels.

In conclusion, learning across cultural boundaries cannot be created or sustained without initial and periodic dialogue. Dialogue in some form is therefore necessary and integral to any organizational learning that involves going beyond the cultural status quo. Organizations do learn within the set of assumptions that characterizes their present culture and subcultures. But if any new organizational responses are needed that involve changes in cultural assumptions or learning across subcultural boundaries, dialogue must be viewed as an essential component of such learning.

Further Reading

Some basic material on dialogue can be found in William Isaacs, "Dialogue: The Power of Collective Thinking," *The Systems Thinker* 4 (1993): 1–4; in Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline* (New York: Doubleday, 1990); and in David Bohm, *On Dialogue* (London: Routledge, 1990).

Basic material on organizational culture and group dynamics is drawn from my own work. See, especially, *Process Consultation, Vol. 2* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1987); *Process Consultation, Vol. 1*, 2nd ed. (Reading, MA.: Addison-Wesley, 1988); *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992); and "How Can Organizations Learn Faster?" *Sloan Management Review* 34 (1993): 85–92.

The crucial analysis of cultural face work is drawn from the seminal work of Erving Goffman, best summarized in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1959). Chris Argyris's development of the concept of defensive routines can be found in his book, *Strategy, Change, and Defensive Routines* (Marshfield, MA: Pitman, 1985).

Communities of practice were described in J.S. Brown and P. Duguid, ''Organizational Learning and Communities of Practice.'' *Organization Science* 2 (1991): 40–57.

The basic dilemmas of organizational learning are well captured in D.N. Michael, ''Governing by Learning in an Information Society'' in *Governing in an Information Society,* ed. S.A. Rosell (Montreal, Quebec: Institute for Research on Public Policy, 1992).

More current references include my own work, *The Corporate Culture Survival Guide* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), and *Process Consultation Revisited* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley/Prentice Hall, 1999). See, also, William Isaacs, *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together* (New York: Doubleday, 1999).

Acknowledgments

I am indebted to the late Don Michael for invaluable comments and criticisms of this paper and to Bill Isaacs for providing me the opportunity to learn about dialogue through active participation in some of his groups as a participant and apprentice cofacilitator.

Reflective Dialogue, Life Stories, and Leadership Development

Philip H. Mirvis and Karen Ayas

Our group of some 25 young leaders from Unilever, representing countries across the Asian Pacific, met in Danang, Vietnam, in November 2002 to continue the leadership journey they began two years earlier (see Ayas and Mirvis, 2002). Tex Gunning, the president of the Unilever Asia Pacific region, established the Young Leaders' Forum to bring together the young managers and help them develop into top leaders in the company. The forum was intended as a learning community and a network of support. Young leaders would stay with the forum until they became management board members. Several new members joined with the reorganization of the business, and a few moved on, but the group has continued its biannual meetings.

One practice of the group is reflective dialogue at several points during meetings. The group members, sitting in a circle, share their thoughts and feelings on a subject and reflect on themselves and their reactions to what is shared. This process has many features in common with the dialogue methodology developed and refined by William Isaacs and Peter Senge. It emphasizes self-scanning, suspending judgment, and creating a container for ''hot issues,'' as Edgar Schein points out in his article in this issue (please see page 27). But it also draws on the principles and practices of community building, as articulated by psychiatrist and spiritualist M. Scott Peck (1987, 1993):

- ''I'' statements—Use the first-person pronoun to claim knowledge, feelings, and observations rather than ascribe them to ''we'' or to ''everyone.''
- Moved to speak—Follow the Quaker injunction to wait until you are personally moved to say something and, when so moved, to speak.
- Difficult issues—Face difficult issues that arise rather than deny, disregard, or downplay them.
- Emptiness—Share personal thoughts and feelings, especially those that prevent you from being fully present in the dialogue.
- Witnessing—Welcome and affirm others' stories and points of view and, in the spirit of community, bridge differences with love and respect.

The young leaders had used reflective dialogue in previous meetings to talk about their life histories and careers. To this point, however, group dialogues had been conducted in the relatively safe container of peers, after the participants had developed trustworthy relations with one another, the business group president, and external facilitators. The task ahead was uncharted and risky: to prepare—without the help and involvement of the president and facilitators—to meet with Niall FitzGerald, the chairman of the British side of Unilever.

To begin preparations, one young leader reminded the group of ''lessons learned'' about teamwork from a challenge they had faced in a previous meeting in India—presenting a business case to the board of Hindustan Lever. Putting these lessons to use, the group appointed a facilitator and developed plans for engaging the chairman. They decided to invite FitzGerald into the *experience* of the forum rather than preparing a presentation

Philip H. Mirvis
Organizational Psychologist
Consultant
Senior Fellow
Center for Corporate Citizenship
Boston College
pmirv@aol.com

Associate Editor, *Reflections*
Research Fellow, Erasmus University
Partner, The Ripples Group
karen@ripplesgroup.com

about it. It had to be a dialogue session, they decided, but that raised further questions: What would they talk about? Would that be defined beforehand? Should they assign someone to facilitate the dialogue? Would there be time boundaries? They debated these and other questions in the prep session where they exchanged ideas about not only content but also process. They decided, for instance, to talk about people's ''leadership journey.'' ''But we cannot script this,'' said one young leader, ''you speak when you are moved to speak. Is that not the whole point of dialogue?'' Added another, ''Yes, but we should assign someone to start things off and bring the session to closure when the time is right.''

Dialogue with the Chairman

Niall FitzGerald sat on the floor in a circle with the young Asian leaders. The dialogue, starting at nine PM, lasted until midnight. One participant from Indonesia opened the session and welcomed FitzGerald:

> Our journey began about two years ago, when we started assembling as a group. Ever since, it's been a journey of self-discovery and personal development for each one of us. The group may change in size, but the form stays the same—it's always a circle. Each time we meet, we create a new spirit in the group through the circle. You are now part of this circle; the group will share with you, and we would also welcome you to share with us.

After a moment of sitting in silence in community, a young leader from the Philippines was moved to speak:

> We sometimes don't have the courage to act like leaders when we need to. These sessions remind us who we want to be and allow us to share our difficulties. We are supposed to be a group of top young leaders in the region, but here we share a lot of our disappointments. This ultimately helps us become stronger. It's basically what this circle is all about.

As the conversation went along, FitzGerald asked: ''What have you learned about yourself through this process that you didn't know before?''

''I learned something very special,'' said a Taiwanese. ''You can only understand the issues in business if you face yourself. In my job, I look at numbers, I look at strategy, I look at process. But I didn't look at the real factor behind that—people. And if you want to be able to deal with people, you really need to face humanity.''

A Pakistani stated, ''Before I joined, I just did things as requested. My drive was to deliver to perfection. I'd never done any reflection before. Suddenly I had a mirror in front of me: 'Why are you doing this? Why do you want that? If you want leadership, do you really want to take the consequences?' Self-awareness is the thing that I learned from the circle.''

Fitzgerald also questioned the importance of deep, personal sharing in becoming part of the group. One young leader from Australia said: ''In listening to other people's stories, you hear your own story. Other people's stories often clarify things in your own mind—what your past is and what drives you. I'm a 33-year-old guy, and I'm still trying to get recognition from my parents. That's not necessarily a bad thing, but having that self-awareness at least allows you to acknowledge and deal with that issue.'' A young woman from Indonesia added: ''As I listened to others sharing their stories and learned about their journeys, I gained more confidence. At the same time, I grew strong. I realized what I want to do with my life. That realization gave me a very clear direction of how to move forward.''

A Leadership Journey

After sharing these reflections, the young leaders asked FitzGerald about his leadership journey. They wanted to know how he became chairman and what it took to get there. FitzGerald began: ''I have been perpetually amazed that people take me seriously. There is a little boy in me, even at this advanced age, who often says, 'What are you doing here? How did you get here? How could you possibly be doing what you do?'''

In the spirit of the forum, FitzGerald shared personal stories of early childhood and experiences that shaped him as a person and as a leader:

© Karen Ayas

> I got married, and then, within a year, we had our first baby. She was born on Good Friday. She had to be put in an incubator. The doctor said, ''It's fine. She just needs to be kept under observation for a while.'' But I was still a bit worried. I left the hospital to go home, and I stopped off in a church. I'm a Roman Catholic by upbringing, but I'm not particularly religious. But I went into the church and sat on a bench at the end and spoke to God. I didn't pray; I spoke. I said, ''God, I haven't spoken to you too often in the last few years, but I really need you to do something for me now. And I'd really appreciate it if you would. Just look over this little baby. It's the first and she's really important.'' And then I left the church. That was on Friday. On Monday, this little baby died.
>
> I went back to the church on my way home, because my wife was staying in the hospital. I sat on the same bench and spoke to God again. And I said, ''You let me down. You shouldn't really have done this. This was not necessary. This was the only time I've ever asked you for something and you wouldn't give it to me. So I feel betrayed, and you and I can never be friends.'' Then I left the church. That was in 1971. I didn't walk back into a church for 26 years, until the death of a friend.

The death of a child was a scarring experience. Next came a bittersweet memory of becoming the chairman while facing the end of his first marriage:

> I became chairman, which was wonderful. But at the same time, something quite traumatic was happening in my life. My marriage was breaking up. The problem was, I wasn't recognizing it and I wasn't admitting it. I found myself in the first two or three years as chairman doing two really catastrophic things. I started to act as if everything was sweetness and light in my personal life. So I began to act a role in my personal life, which is very debilitating and takes a lot of energy. And it's not you. But at the same time, without realizing it, I began to act another role as chairman. That was really sad. I'd gotten to be a chairman by being me, and suddenly, I stopped being me. Then some things happened that changed me fundamentally and forever.

The trigger was the death of Peter, his very close friend, who left him with these words: ''What I'm angry about is that it's taken the imminence of death to get a real understanding of life and to understand the fact that life is not a rehearsal. It had better be the performance you want to give and had better be in the place you want to give it. It better be the best bloody performance you're capable of giving. I want you to take that away, Niall, and act on it.''

FitzGerald emphasized the true gift his friend had offered him and explained to the group:

> What that gave me was an absolute determination that I would do things only my way. By that, I mean that if it seems the best and true way for me, it is likely to be good for others too. Out of that came a freedom in how I live my life and a complete commitment to truth, because I think it's only truth that matters. Be truthful to yourself, to begin with, and then be truthful to everyone. It saves a lot of time, by the way, to be truthful.
>
> What I've learned is that you can align what you want to do in your career with what you want to do as a person. If you don't align them, you'll do neither very well. So if you find yourself in the wrong place, either in your personal life or in your business life, you better get out of there. That's easy to say, but it's tough to do—getting yourself into the right place.

Leadership Is a Choice

The memorable evening of reflective dialogue closed with FitzGerald's remarks:

> I now am at a stage in my life where I feel very relaxed. I love what's happening with the business. I love the people in the business. I think we're finally beginning to understand how we really should be as a group of people. And I love what's happening in my life.
>
> But it still leaves me with a dilemma. When you become a father again at an older age, you're much more conscious that time is limited. And you're much more conscious that each day is a day that's never going to be repeated. Therefore you had better make the best use of that day you possibly can. You're also very conscious that when you're blessed with a child—you're handed this spirit that you've called into the world—you're also handed a blank canvas and a set of paints. You're responsible for what you put on the canvas. You'd better think about the brush strokes, not just let them happen. You'd better understand that, when the picture eventually emerges, it's the picture you painted. It's both genetically what you've put in and environmentally what you created around your children, so it's your creation.
>
> Why do I tell you that? Because I want you to understand the dilemma. My struggle at this moment is that I'm very conscious of trying to balance my life—to be with Ingrid and little Gabriella as much as I can. So why did I spend last weekend away from home, the weekend before, and two weekends before that? This business and particularly this group of people, which has taken 35 years of my life, is at a moment of potential transformation that I feel needs just another shove. It'll get to a place where it's always intended to be, but it might miss.
>
> Although I'm in a place I want to be and love it, and I've never felt happier, here I am, still sitting with this dilemma. My point is to tell you that you're always going to have this. I still have to choose between doing what I think I can do with others and with you to bring this wonderful business that I love to a special place. But it requires me to make other sacrifices that I'm much more conscious of making than I was before. However far you go, remember that you're never going to be free of having to make those choices.

FitzGerald's closing notes resonated strongly with the young leaders. He had spoken about an important theme raised in all forum meetings: ''Leadership is a choice.'' Though the evening ended with FitzGerald's story, the dialogue continued the next morning. First, the young leaders shared what had struck them. A Dutchman based in Singapore said,

© Karen Ayas

Stories of Parents

Marketer from Taiwan: "When I went back to my home country, I called my mom. She was touched. It's been a very tough year for her because she's getting weaker. But she remembers every one of the six kids in the family and who has how much in the bank. She knows investments and watches stock announcers. She says, 'I would like to buy this stock. Would you like to buy it? I can buy it for you.' So that's her role. My father would decide big things, and my mother would make decisions on small things. But big things never happened in the family, so it's always my mom. Now I know why I'm so organized and detailed-oriented; I just am just like her.

"Starting about a year and a half ago, she told us she felt like she would fall when she walks. One night, she fell down in the bathroom. The doctor found a tumor in her brain. Now she has to walk with someone's assistance. She's also acting like a kid now, because of her weakness. Still, she remembers everything, all the bank records, everything."

Marketer from Australia: "I chose to go back to Australia to work in the family business. It was not something we often talked about, but because my father had to work for his father and his father passed away, my father never put any pressure on me to work in the business. But I thought that's what I wanted.

"When my father turned 58—his father had died at 58—something changed in him. He didn't want to work anymore, but wanted to get out of the business. I had gone back to Australia thinking I was going to work with him for five years, learn how to run the business, and then take the role of the leader. But it didn't work out that way.

"I felt extremely disappointed in my father because I'd given up a good career at Unilever and moved my family, my young daughter, back to Australia, to do what I thought was my dream—to live with my family near the beach and work with my parents.

"I realize I was quite dependent on my parents and in a transitional phase. I have my own children now. I have to become the man. First I was disappointed in myself. But, I think from every bad thing comes a good thing. Now my parents are retired, and they're very happy together. Through my children, I'm reestablishing my relationship with my father. I can forgive him now for the things he did to me and my family. And I feel fortunate that Unilever was willing to accept me back into the family."

Marketer from Thailand: "My family is a traditional Asian one. As we were discussing in our group, in our culture, we don't express our love as much as we should, especially physically, like hugging or saying things to our parents. I now realize it is very important to say things out loud. You can't take it for granted that they know how much you love them, how much you care. It was very hard for me to start doing that. I have to internalize it again and again to open myself up more.

"I've been in China for about five or six months now without my family. It's a bit frightening. That really made me think: How can you share with them that you really care about them, even if you're far away? I discovered that just a phone call to them, just to hear how excited they were, was a first step. They just started crying when they heard my voice. When I went back home this October for the first time, my whole family picked me up at the airport. And we all hugged each other, something that was never done before in my family. Everyone just came out of their shell and started hugging and crying. There was so much to express in loving that I had never experienced before."

''The most important message I heard from Niall is that life is not a rehearsal; you get one shot at it. When you are young, you don't really think that way. Being reminded of that fact so you can live accordingly and act on it is very important.'' A woman from Japan said, ''You made me realize that it is not about balancing work and life. It's about being me, balancing me.'' A woman from Thailand commented, ''From your story, I learned that you need to be truthful to yourself. We shouldn't just do things to make other people happy. You end up suffering if you are not true to yourself. You don't live life to the fullest today, and you make everybody suffer.''

The session concluded with a further summation of the lessons the young leaders learned and FitzGerald's reflections about his lessons on leading a business (see the sidebar ''Niall FitzGerald on Leadership'').

Reflective Dialogue and Leadership Development

What was the rationale for this dialogue between the young leaders and their company chairman? What was the basis for reflections and lessons learned? It is important to note that different forms of dialogue are practiced in therapy, human relations training, team building, conflict resolution, and community-building programs. The universal principles apply to private prayer and public policy-making (Buber, 1965; Yankelovich, 1999). The

Niall FitzGerald on Leadership

There ain't no leadership style. Each of us needs to be led in a different way, so you can't adopt a style and apply it to everybody. You can have common characteristics on how you deal with each individual and how you deal with teams and subteams. But you have to take the time to understand those you're seeking to lead. You can't be a leader without followers, and people must want to follow you. The characteristics are a combination of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects.

Physical aspects. A leader needs to take care of his own mind and body. You can't do it if you're not fit. Your mind won't rule or react with the speed it needs or be able to probe deeply if you haven't exercised. Of the physical aspects, courage is top on my list. There are times when you physically need the courage to do something, to face the reality. Often, it's very unpopular to define the reality, to say, "This is where we are; look in the mirror." That's the first duty of a leader.

Passion, with both physical and emotional sides, is also hugely important. Without passion, nothing moves. We can be sitting here with the most wonderfully engineered Ferrari and racing driver Michael Schumacher in it. But unless we put fuel in it, it doesn't go anywhere. Passion is the fuel that drives us on.

Mental aspects. Sometimes, people think that leadership is standing back and being rather lofty, saying, "I don't have to attend to the detail." Like hell, I don't. As a leader, I need to have the knowledge to be able to judge what the detail is that I don't need to attend to. I have to be concerned by the details that matter, without getting in people's way. How can I judge them, how can I coach them, how can I inspire them, if I don't understand the basic thing they're trying to do or say?

You need simplicity and curiosity. The really bright, sharp minds don't complicate; they quickly get to the essence of the issue. Only the finest minds simplify. I've always noticed that great leaders have a kind of restless curiosity about the world, about themselves, and about people around them.

Emotions. The leader casts a shadow and needs to understand the influence of that shadow. If you're not self-aware, how do you know what impact you're having on people? A mean-spirited leader grinds you down, even if you try hard and you do everything. The leader has to show optimism, but not unrealistic optimism. Willpower is an emotional force. Sometimes you see insurmountable problems overcome by naked willpower: "We will not be defeated at this. We will prevail." People are going to look at you and your shadow. Always be sensitive to what that's doing.

Openness, generous listening, and being prepared to show your vulnerabilities are essential. You can't be inspired by an icon of perfection, because you know it isn't real. Nobody is perfect. So anyone who seeks to consciously or subconsciously hold themselves up as king is by definition being false. Yet how many people try to create that illusion?

There is also a necessity to connect with people. If you want to lead, you must like people. You must be inspired by what other people do and what you help them to do. If you do not like being with people, you're not going to be authentic; you're going through a mechanical motion. People will see through that. You have to connect with people and have them feel that you want to give them something and you don't expect anything in return. You appreciate what they do and thank them.

Spiritual aspects. The spiritual side starts with truth. Every time I have departed from the truth, I have failed, without exception. There has never been a moment in my life when I chose to be

(*continued*)

key elements of reflective dialogue in the forum show its relevance for leadership development.

The Power of Life Stories

The young leaders have shared stories about their lives and careers among themselves and now with their chairman. The aim was to increase their self-awareness. Of course, the same can be said of personality surveys, projective tests, and other self-assessment methodologies. Is there something special about a life story for ''knowing thyself''?

Is there something special about a life story for "knowing thyself"?

Psychotherapy contends that people ''reexperience'' their lives when they delve into their past. This reexperiencing helps to surface long-ago and sometimes forgotten feelings about one's life course and, when given thoughtful consideration, to understand the self. There is also the notion from cultural anthropology that people live their lives through and in stories. Self-narration, in this line of thought, yields a dynamic rather than static picture, like the difference between a film of your life and snapshots. It locates the self in a familial and sociocultural context. Stories have communicative value; people seldom remember a bullet point. Furthermore, in conversations about lives lived, other people's experiences bring to mind stories of oneself.

dishonest that I succeeded. I may have had some short-term success, but ultimately, I fail. If you're not being truthful, you have to have a very good memory. You have to keep flying back to keep consistency in what you're doing.

Truth is the foundation stone for me in building trust. If I know that you're dealing with me always truthfully and you know that I'm dealing with you always truthfully, we begin to know where we can place our trust. There will be events and circumstances that force us away from that. But, when that happens, we will know it and force ourselves back again. Trust, of course, is also required to build a team. Teams cannot function without unconditional trust, given without reservation. Give it too widely and it's useless. You have to give it selectively but unconditionally.

Authenticity is also something that is important. What essence do you allow to come out? People who are spiritually secure have a generosity of spirit and know there's something very valuable in every person. They seek to find the best in everyone, however difficult it may seem, however unpleasant the person seems. If you feel spiritually strong, you are prepared to show your vulnerability. By spiritual, I don't mean religious; I mean the soul, something deep inside you.

Balance. You are not going to lead people because you've been appointed the leader. People are not going to be led solely by your physical and intellectual strength. They're going to need to engage with your emotional and spiritual side. The balance of all dimensions and more attention to the emotional and spiritual aspects of leadership will be increasingly important.

On balance, women are stronger than men, emotionally and spiritually. They are better listeners, are more sensitive to advice, and work more with intuition. They are more sensitive to relationship building and maintaining relationships.

When I look around at the future leaders, I see many more women. But I am also deeply concerned that some women have succeeded under what I call the old leadership model. They succeeded by becoming more like men. As far as I'm concerned, that is a disaster. We're going in the wrong direction. You should play to the strengths that women naturally have. The message for men is to find some of those strengths yourselves and be mentored by women, rather than telling women how men do it.

The choice. Leadership can be very lonely. The leader is ultimately left with decisions to take. He's left with the consequence of those decisions. He's left to cope with the criticism.

That's not something that takes away the enjoyment. Nothing for me is more deeply satisfying than seeing a group of people or even a single person respond to what you've seen in them and then understand that they have a potential far beyond anything they thought of themselves. You've helped them both to see it and to reach it. That is most satisfying, whether it's your child, friend, or team. But it doesn't take away from the fact that there are lonely times.

With my own children, for instance, I've known that what I've had to say to them has not always been what they wanted to hear. It created a distance for a moment. But I knew that it was the right thing to do or to say, and they in due course would know it. But at that moment, it makes you very lonely.

How would you know when the leader has succeeded? The ultimate sign is when the leader is redundant, no longer necessary. It means that everybody has filled the space. Then the leader should move on because he will have done what he set out to do. He would have drawn people in, inspired them, and made them believe in themselves, and made himself unnecessary. So I wish you well on your journey.

In *Leading Minds*, Howard Gardner emphasizes the importance of leaders' storytelling: ''The story is a basic human cognitive form; the artful creation and articulation of stories constitutes a fundamental part of the leader's vocation. Stories speak to both parts of the human mind—its reason and emotion'' (1995: 43). The introspective value of a self-story was much in evidence as the young leaders discussed their parents. A marketer from Taiwan—a modern woman raised by a traditional mother—began to appreciate what the two have in common. A young man—deeply disappointed by his experiences in the family business—spoke of becoming a parent and reconciling with his father (see the sidebar ''Stories of Parents'').

Reflecting on life stories also seems a valuable management practice (''Personal Histories,'' 2000). Whatever the value of such self-reflection, sharing these stories—between the self and others—transforms personal reflection into reflective dialogue.

The Experience of Reflective Dialogue

Some practitioners characterize reflective dialogue as a stage in the process, when, for example, there is a shift from ''third person'' to ''first person'' and people ''slow down and think'' (see Isaacs, 1999). The use of ''I'' statements and the experience of the young leaders working in community have facilitated the movement toward self-reflection. At the same time, reflections called forth in the forum are not *cognitive;* the intent of reflection

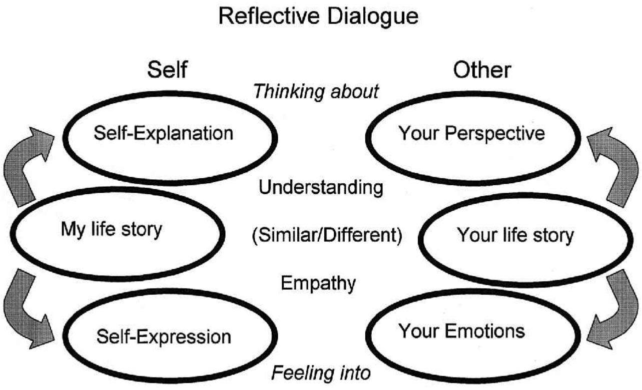


Figure 1

is not solely to help the group *think together* better. On the contrary, the expression of *emotions* and inclination to *feel together* are very much part of communal dialogue with the young leaders (see Mirvis, 2002).

Consider the reflective experience of the "self and other" in a dialogue about life stories (figure 1). On the cognitive side of self-reflection, there is, to use Gardner's imagery, the creation and articulation of a life story. This act of organizing thoughts and explaining oneself is itself a boon to self-understanding. Then there is the interaction with another's life story and perspective, then another's story, and so on. While witnessing another's story, some of the attendant self-scanning concerns perceptions and assumptions: "How am I reacting to this story? To this person? What are my reactions telling me about my own assumptions about life and people?" Schein calls this "listening to ourselves" (see the article on page 27 in this issue). At the same time, attention also turns to imagining: "What has this person's life been like? Why do they see things the way they do?" This is a different sort of self-listening in which the self makes inferences about what makes others tick and how they relate to their world.

Such inferences contribute to what sociologist George Herbert Mead described as "role taking" or, more colloquially, putting your self in the place of others (1934). In taking on another person's perspective, people not only enrich their understanding of others but also see how their *own* lives and perspectives are both similar *and* different. In short, in understanding another person, we come to better understand ourselves. This braid of reciprocal role taking, over the life course, is central to both socialization and the forming of character, hence, the relevance for sharing life stories as a means of developing young leaders.

What about the emotional aspects? Certainly reexperiencing your life history stimulates emotions, which are sometimes painful, sometimes pleasurable, and cathartic. In truly experiencing affect in dialogue, moreover, you may not only imagine how others feel, but also empathize with or literally "feel into" them. In so doing, of course, people also feel into themselves. Not surprising, tears and laughter often reverberate through reflective dialogues among the young leaders. How else can you react when you feel like another who expresses pain or joy or both?

In understanding another person, we come to better understand ourselves.

Empathizing is central to what Erich Fromm calls the "art of loving" (2000). It too is integral to socialization and growth. Indeed, psychologists posit that just as seeing the world through another's perspective helps people to grow beyond egocentrism, so empathizing with another is the antidote to human selfishness. Alfie Kohn, among others, suggests that empathy, more so than sympathy, is the basis for the "helping relationship" (1990). Certainly we have seen this among the young leaders who, beyond reflecting on one another's pain, also reach out and offer support and comfort to each other (see the sidebar "From Feeling to Helping").

"Eldering" and Lessons Learned

Reflective dialogues about life and its lessons are a form of socialization. Among the young leaders, it is peer mentoring and, with the chairman, formal role modeling. The young leaders' dialogue with their chief is called, in traditional cultures, "eldering."

Sandy Johnson, who has studied the customs of Native Americans, quotes Sylvia Walulatuma, from the Warm Springs reservation, on the custom: "Around December, the people would all come and move into the loghouse. It had a dirt floor and there were three fires burning in there during wintertime, it was so cold. The old people told us stories and Indian legends during the winter months" (1994: 157). Johnson amplified on the elders' roles:

From Feeling to Helping: A Conversation among Young Leaders

"My daughter was only 1.8 kilograms at birth. She was in intensive care for three weeks. I was going through quite a lot of emotional ups and downs. The nightmare just wouldn't stop. Because she was a preemie, she tended to catch a lot of viruses; she was in and out of hospital. At that time, I had also gone back to work. I needed to pick up everything and make sure that I was up to speed.

"I really appreciate this forum. I've learned a lot here, but at the back of my mind, I'm worried. All of you are so great and I feel really small. When Niall said he knew that some people would drop out, I was worried. I'm very scared that after five to eight years, I'll be such a letdown to you. I'm feeling so torn between my own emotions and what I should do for the company and for Asia. I have the sense that you guys know what to do and what's going to happen to Asia."

"Join the club. We have no clue either. You're very harsh on yourself. I've seen that from day one. I think you should start to realize that this is your strength, this is your source of growth. You have the courage to confront yourself. Like you, we have no clue what's going to happen in Asia. That's why we're here together."

"Sometimes, I ask myself why I want to join this forum. Is it for my personal development? Or is it for the company? It is not fair for me to do it just for myself. I'm so scared that I'll never be able to make it."

"You will. What you have said strikes me. I don't know how many of us have the courage to say it."

"It's not just you. It's also luck. Sometimes things just happen. I think we are too harsh with ourselves. You are superb. If you were in Thailand, you probably would have made a huge difference because of the opportunity."

"How you hold yourself accountable has been such a wonderful source of inspiration for all of us."

"You have the values of a good leader. You confront yourself and you feel that you are responsible for your business and for your country. Yet you feel ashamed that you couldn't do it all. To be honest, I haven't done anything for the company yet. And sometimes I struggle with it. I feel ashamed that I'm here. But then I think, it takes time to turn around the business. As long as you have the passion and stay with it, one day you get there."

"May I also share one of my tough moments? When we were at the end of the program in India, everybody was very happy and celebrating because we'd finished the case. That was the worst night for me. I felt that I come from a different world. I cannot deliver anything. I also have a big question about myself.

"I decided not to go out that night and locked myself in my room. I was crying; I lost all my confidence. I skipped dinner, even though I was hungry. But I just couldn't face people. I didn't know what to say. I was very disappointed with myself. Then I used reflection. That is the most valuable thing I learned from this journey. I thought, 'Okay, I love myself. What do I need to do? Cry? No, stop crying.' I thought how I came to be in such a situation. I made myself describe the situation and ask myself what I needed to do. I reflected on that and where I wanted to go.

"So I made a choice to want to be someplace, even though I had no clue where it should be. But I made a choice and started a journey. I think that once you commit yourself to the journey, then, of course, something good will happen."

> On most of these reservations, there lives an elder. Not defined by age or gender, an elder is one who carries the knowledge of the tradition and wisdom of the heart, one who walks in truth and dignity. . . . Some elders heal with a knowledge of nature medicine not yet known or recognized by the dominant culture. Some heal with a spirituality that is worlds beyond many of those who don black robes and preach on Sundays. Some heal with a song (1994: 47).

In sharing his life story and speaking of his life lessons, FitzGerald was fulfilling an elder's role in Unilever. In the language of indigenous people, he was using his ''medicine'' and his spiritual wisdom to teach his people. Using modern-day concepts, Gardner stresses the value of conveying *identity stories*. Through such stories, the leader reveals his or her character and, in turn, helps followers to discover and develop their own identities. ''It is the particular burden of the leader to help other individuals to determine their personal, social, and moral identities,'' he writes. ''More often than not, leaders inspire in part because of how they have resolved their own identity issues'' (1995: 25).

In addition to its importance for mentoring, this sharing of stories—across hierarchical layers, age groupings, and national identities, in the case of the Young Leaders'

Forum—is also a way to bridge differences between subcultures in organizations. Dialogue has served as the primary vehicle in building common understanding and facilitating the development of a shared group culture. There are 15 nationalities represented in this group and attendant differences in thinking, language, communication styles, norms, and values dictated by their cultures. Nearly all the young leaders are Asian, for whom ''maintaining face'' is of prime concern (Goffman, 2003). More than any other cultural group, Asians tend to eschew self-disclosure, confronting others, and saying what's really on their minds.

The group has now evolved to a stage where young leaders can talk about ''face'' and the influence of cultural norms and values on the ways they think and feel. In the forum, they feel comfortable and safe enough to be ''themselves.'' They have also adopted ways of being together—in dialogue and community—that may be counter to the native cultures. Furthermore, many have been courageous enough to bring new ways of behaving back to their home cultures. For instance, a Thai woman hugged all her family members for the first time in her life when they came to greet her at the airport. An Indonesian man wrote a letter to his father to tell him how much he loves him.

These examples show how the young leaders have learned to become more self-reflective, to challenge culturally learned assumptions, and to try out new behaviors. Indeed, many lessons that emerge seem to speak to universal truths about living and leadership—what thinking and feeling together can produce.

At the same time, sharing life stories is a specific experience. The young leaders felt very privileged to meet with their tribe's elder. The dialogue enabled intimacy and authenticity. A Thai woman's comments exemplify the benefit of this session:

> Getting to know you as a person was very valuable. I never thought I would have the opportunity to meet you, let alone hear your real story. In Thailand, we don't get to see our chairman. If he's around, we are too scared to meet him. But, with you now, I feel different. Whenever you come to Thailand, I hope you will visit us. Now it feels like we know each other, not that you are ''Mr. Chairman.'' It feels good to know that, even in a big position, you are a real person.

References

Ayas, K. and P.H. Mirvis. ''Young Leaders' Forum in Asia: Learning About Leadership, Abundance, and Growth.'' *Reflections* 4 (Fall 2002): 33–42.

Buber, M. *Between Man and Man.* Translated by R.G. Smith (New York: MacMillan, 1965). Originally published, 1947.

Fromm, E. *The Art of Loving* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000).

Gardner, H. *Leading Minds* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995).

Goffman, E. ''On Face-Work: An Analysis of Ritual Elements in Social Interaction.'' *Reflections* 3 (Spring 2003): 7–13.

Isaacs, W. *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together: A Pioneering Approach to Communicating in Business and Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1999).

Johnson, S. *The Book of Elders, The Life Stories & Wisdom of Great American Indians* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1994).

Kohn, A. *The Brighter Side of Human Nature: Altruism and Empathy in Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).

Mead, G.H. *Mind, Self, and Society from the Standpoint of Social Behavior.* Vol. 1 of *Works of George Herbert Mead,* ed. C.W. Morris (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934).

Mirvis, P.H. ''Community Building in Business.'' *Reflections 3* (Spring 2002): 45–51.

Peck, M.S. *The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987).

Peck, M.S. *A World Waiting to Be Born: Civility Rediscovered* (New York: Doubleday, 1993).

''Personal Histories: Leaders Remember the Moments and People That Shaped Them.'' *Harvard Business Review* 79 (December 2001): 3–11.

Yankelovich, D. *The Magic of Dialogue: Transforming Conflict into Cooperation* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999).

Welcoming the Feminine Dimensions of Leadership

FEATURE

Judy Sorum Brown

Judy Sorum Brown
Educator, writer, and consultant
JudyBrown@aol.com

> Over these writings I bent my head.
> Now you are considering them. If you
> Turn away I will look up: a bridge
> That was there will be gone.
> For the rest of your life I will stand here,
> Reaching across.
> —William Stafford (1994: 16)

As a leader and a woman, I am aware of the difficulty of capturing the leadership dimensions embedded in the notion of the feminine. I use the word *feminine* not as relating to a particular gender, but as a quality within us all. I use the term *leadership* not as conferred by a particular role or high position, but as a human capacity and action widely available although not always evident. And were that not challenge enough, I urge that we integrate the feminine dimensions in healthy partnership with the masculine dimensions.

Men and women who struggle to lead in healthy ways tell me that they recognize in themselves and others the hunger for a balance of the two orientations in their own lives, relationships, and organizations. To honor their efforts, and with their encouragement, I have set out to place some trail markers on a path we each travel. How might we more fully invite and welcome the feminine dimension of leadership in organizations, relationships, and ourselves?

I no longer think there are definitive, perceivable differences between the leadership of men and that of women. We can look at one or another woman leader and notice how she leads differently from one or another male leader. But we also notice women leaders who lead in ways that we would consider more masculine. And we observe that men show a similar, broad range of leadership approaches.

Our observation is complicated by the fact that our minds slip from the word *feminine* (which embraces a collection of qualities our society associates with the feminine, yet which we all possess to some extent), to the word *female* (the gender). Like a car that keeps slipping out of gear, we slide from the qualities to the gender. The two are not the same.

Carol Frenier defines the feminine dimension in terms of four primary attributes: (1) diffuse awareness, (2) a feel for the quick of the moment, (3) acceptance of the cycles of life, and (4) a feel for deep community (Frenier, 1996). Still, some organizations seem inadvertently to dampen and discourage the feminine dimension in men and women. As a result, those organizations end up dismissing the feminine energies. Sometimes they swing from one extreme to another, first convinced they need the ''soft stuff'' and then convinced the ''bottom line'' is all that matters. The lack of integration, respect, steadiness, and balance saps the energy of both men and women. The women are often singularly saddled with the hard, emotional work of the organization and with other feminine dimensions of community building, if those dimensions are attended to at all. And, of course, as people realize that only part of them is welcome in organizational life, men and women cease to welcome that other dimension within themselves. Thus, increasingly, the organization is in danger of being blindsided by realities related to the feminine, including cultural and emotional dynamics, creative potential, and aesthetics. Most of us have had painful firsthand experience in this world.

In work cultures that are historically feminine, it may be necessary to invite explicitly the masculine dimension into the leadership, so a few men don't have to carry it alone. The necessity of rebalancing has become clearer to me in my work in large urban libraries, where the culture is traditionally more feminine.

A Commitment to Integration

As a fairly driven executive for many years and a poet, I continue to seek ways to hold onto my own commitment to integration, balance, and the presence of both the masculine and feminine in my life and in the organizations with which I work. As I facilitate dialogues and design learning experiences, I learn much about that integration. I am able to collect, practice, and share some notions that seem to entice and help root the feminine energies into our organizational lives, particularly in institutions that have evolved in a more masculine field—for example, manufacturing, universities, science- and engineering-based firms, and even symphonies. Such processes include storytelling; community building; inquiry and listening; creative practices such as music, poetry, drama, or art; and forms of dialogue. Such processes value participation and inclusion, and elicit more presence than presenting, more listening than lobbying, more creating than constructing, and more discovery than direction (see the sidebar).

While the challenge of welcoming feminine energies in masculine cultures has been at the heart of my work, I do not frame what I do in that way. It is more natural for me to speak of the challenge of welcoming all perspectives, gifts, knowledge and experience, and voices often silenced. I remain aware that often those silenced voices (be they male or female) are speaking from the feminine orientation.

Some Guiding Processes

Using these processes, in which the feminine dimension is deeply imbedded, increases its presence in the organization.

- **Check-in and check-out**. These simple processes for beginning and ending work create space for all voices and invites contribution. By example, they set important norms of inclusion and openness (see Peter Senge et al., 1994).
- **Dialogue.** Dialogue creates a communication space for listening deeply and for becoming increasingly aware of one's own thinking and the perspectives of others (see the works of Glenna Gerard and Linda Ellinor [1998]; William Isaacs [1999]; and Judy Sorum Brown [1995, 2000]).
- **Open space processes.** There are many variants on these deeply democratic processes for shaping common purpose, work, and strategy collectively (see the work of Harrison Owen [1997]).
- **Creative processes**. Nonverbal processes involving various art forms help people shift from words into other forms of knowing. Many processes provide simple introductions into the world of the arts (see the works of Julia Cameron [1992]; Frederik Franck [1973]; Michael Gelb [1998]; and Michael Jones [1995]).
- **Appreciative inquiry.** This process helps balance our trained tendency to solve problems with the ability to determine what is going well and amplify it. The process also brings out the deepest positive motivation in people (see David Cooperrider and Diana Whitney [1999]).
- **World café.** This process allows people to have intimate, focused conversations on an important topic and to create quickly visible threads of shared understanding (see Juanita Brown [in press]).
- **Clearness committee.** This process for exploring a dilemma creates an exceptionally safe space in which a person can gain insight by responding to completely open questions posed by a small group during a three-hour period (see Parker Palmer [1998]).
- **Storytelling.** The source of this process is the age-old human tradition of asking genuinely curious questions and letting a story unfold (see Parker Palmer [2000]).
- **Scenario work.** This is a process of creating alternative stories of the future (or the past) and watching unfolding events (see Peter Schwartz [1991]; and Paula Underwood [1994]).

© Rachel Lillian Kohn

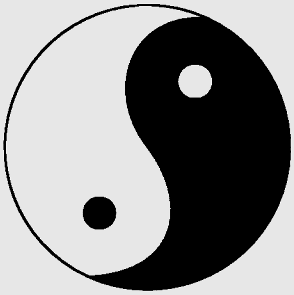
Whether introduced by men or women, feminine approaches often run into the cultural norms of the ''traditional'' leadership model and masculine energies. That doesn't mean they are at odds with individual male leaders. For example:

- The School of Engineering at the University of Michigan at Dearborn invited Michael Jones and me to facilitate an engineering-focused conference on systems learning, using music and poetry to link workshops and keynotes designed to stimulate different ways of thinking. At the end of three days, engineers with whom I'd worked for years in the auto plants began to hand me folded slips of paper. ''Here,'' one or another would say, ''It's a poem I wrote.''
- The director of quality for 52 Visteon auto parts plants, Al Tervalon, was frustrated because people did not understand his idea of the ''cadence'' of manufacturing. He tapped on the conference room table to suggest the importance of manufacturing cadence. ''Jazz band,'' I said. ''Hire one,'' he replied. The jazz band became part of our global meeting to help people think about how they might better work together. In the dialogue after the live music, the participation came mostly from manufacturing leaders who were young, female, people of color, and not born in the US—all those who were usually silent in headquarters meetings.
- An executive described how he helped people move beyond their grief when having to close the founding unit of their Fortune 500 firm. ''No jobs were lost,'' he said. ''Nobody disagreed with the action, and yet nobody could move on. We were stuck. So I did the only thing a thinking engineer could do: I ordered a casket, with flowers, and had it placed in the lobby of the corporate headquarters. We had a funeral for the old business. Folks who'd been part of that business unit came. We sang songs, people cried, and we buried that sucker. Then we could get on with our work.''

In each experience, we can see the intuitive introduction or unexpected emergence of a feminine dimension of leadership. How do we sketch a full range of such qualities? How do we more intentionally invite them into our leadership work?

The most straightforward way for me is to list word pairs, the first pointing toward the feminine, the second to the masculine (see the sidebar). They are words that direct us toward the territory, like trail signs. They are not definitive or exhaustive; they suggest the differences. We can see them as dimensions not at odds with each other, but necessary to one another and resident within us.

These word pairs dance with each other as if each word is in a dynamic relationship that is changing and in which the two are always connected. The symbol of yin and yang



Feminine ↔ Masculine

Welcome and boundaries
Partnership and competition
Inquiry and advocacy
Ritual and rigor
Curiosity and certainty
Wondering and knowing
Appreciating and judging
Accepting and asserting
Listening and talking
Nurturing and challenging
Stories and analysis
Humanities and sciences
Appreciating and challenging
Inviting and limiting
Empathy and objectivity
Poetry and analysis
Music and words
Art and science
Creating and building
Space and materials
Spirit and object
Sketching and stating
Exploring and judging
Opening and choosing
Accepting and insisting
Emergence and intention
Attention and intention

approximates that relationship, suggesting a curved delineation in which each holds space for the other.

Yet it is not easy to have a balanced, respectful dance between masculine and feminine in organizational life, at least in Western culture. Work cultures schooled in one (the masculine, for instance) but unconsciously yearning for the other (the feminine) may swing between them rather than center to hold both.

Balanced Perspective

Not long ago, I caught myself celebrating the feminine as a trumping of the masculine, and then seeing immediately my error. I was talking with my longtime friend Marlo with whom I attended school from kindergarten through high school. We were discussing the death of Marlo's mother, who was the last of our four parents to die. As he reflected on her passing, he showed me a photograph he'd found among her things. It was a picture my dad had taken of Marlo's parents on their farm. My dad had taught agricultural practices and had translated university research into usable guidance. In his spare time, he was also a good photographer, with a sense of framing, light, and composition. The black-and-white photo was stark, powerful, and simple: a man and a woman in the early 1950s, facing into the camera, standing at the edge of a field, with the rows of potato plants stretching behind them into the distance.

''I don't know how your dad captured this,'' Marlo said. ''He must have stood on top of the car to get this particular angle. This photo was really important to us. It was the first time we realized the remarkable thing we had accomplished with the farm and with our lives.'' The poet in me was taken by the power of the photo and by my sudden realization that my father's artistry as a photographer (the framing, the angle, the light, the detail) had given Marlo's family an important window through which to understand the significance of what they had done.

All those years, I had thought it was science that had been my father's contribution. Now I could see it was art, the story captured in the photograph. In a moment, my understanding shifted like a kaleidoscope, substituting my prior understanding of my father as scientist to a new understanding of my father as artist. It was a satisfying, pleasing shift. As a poet and an artist, I felt great comfort, recognition, and affirmation in that understanding. ''See,'' I said to myself, ''Art wins. Science loses.'' In terms of the masculine-feminine dimension of my father's leadership, ''Feminine wins, masculine loses.''

Then I turned the photo over; written carefully on the back were a series of scientific notations: ''1952, acreage: . . . planting date: . . . soil type: . . . rainfall: . . . weather conditions: . . . seed potato variety: . . . planting conditions: . . . prior year yield . . . ''—all the detailed, precise notes of the scientist, indivisible from the picture. At that moment, I realized there was no way to separate the two sides of the story. I had to acknowledge that the scientist and the artist together created a new picture of what had been accomplished in the life of one family.

Leadership work is just that—holding both sides and valuing both. It is the precise, disciplined, and curious scientist and the aware and gifted storyteller. It honors the masculine and feminine. The feminine is needed not because it trumps the masculine, but because it has been missing from the necessary partnership of the two leadership dimensions.

How do we create conditions in which both the feminine and the masculine perspectives are invited, valued, celebrated, and heard?

As we each look at the list of word pairs or create our own lists, other stories may float to our minds. How do we create conditions in which both the feminine and the masculine perspectives are invited, valued, celebrated, and heard? In organizations where the feminine dimension has been historically less visible, less openly articulated, and less appreciated than the masculine, how do we create conditions for it to be more fully present? What guidance can we offer ourselves?

First, we should pay attention to our own experiences and learn from those communities of practice that inform our work. Increasing our own awareness of the practices

Some Guiding Principles

Some principles help me create more balanced spaces in which the feminine is invited, cherished, and celebrated along with the masculine.

- Pay close attention to the implicit messages of space and design. Use circles, natural light, color, living plants, and beauty of all kinds. Once the leader attends to these dimensions, others follow suit. Before a planning retreat, a local police chief rearranged the tables in a circle because, as he told me, "It's too squared off and we can't see each other." We laughingly reminded each other that all good work begins with rearranging furniture.
- Balance advocacy with inquiry. Marcial Losada's research reminds us that successful leadership teams balance their communication equally between advocacy and inquiry (Losada, forthcoming). The losing teams tend to favor advocacy.
- Notice what upsets you about others' leadership approaches and explore how you accept or deny that voice or approach. Pay attention to the balance of the feminine and masculine within you.
- Focus on balance in framing every dilemma. Ensure that both male and female energies are honored and balanced. As a leader, watch carefully and ask others to look for dynamics that subtly drive out the feminine perspective. Invite both the masculine and feminine and seek a third way whenever possible.
- Intentionally set organizational norms that invite both male and female leadership dimensions. Threesomes of norms hold masculine, feminine, and the third way simultaneously. For example:

  From the work of the Courage to Teach community, the threesome of creating space that is bounded, charged, and welcoming.
  From Buddhist practice, the three energies of fierceness, tenderness, and playfulness.

and principles that shift the balance in a healthy way is an important step (see the sidebar). Sharing what we are learning is key.

Conclusion

Leaders create conditions that are either enlivening or deadening. In a sense, leaders—like architects or designers—create emotional space, thinking space, and working space. Our ability to serve as leaders has much to do with how we work with the materials before us. Among the resources are the energies of the feminine and masculine dimensions within us and around us. In a sense, we are trying to create a fire, the release of human energies. I wrote the accompanying poem about that process one day as I sat before a fire. I am still learning from it, so I trust my intuition that it should close this exploration for now.

Acknowledgments

The author thanks those whose reflections and feedback were particularly helpful in crafting this essay—Scott Fosler, Anne L'Ecuyer, Roger Saillant, Richard Smith, and Al Tervalon—and gives appreciation to those whose conversations over a lifetime have contributed to this dialogue.

References

Brown, J. *World Café* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, in press).
Brown, J.S. "Dialogue: Capacities and Stories." *Learning Organizations: Developing Cultures for Tomorrow's Workplace* (Portland, OR: Productivity Press, 1995).
Brown, J.S. *The Sea Accepts All Rivers and Other Poems* (Alexandria, VA: Miles River Press, 2000).
Cameron, J. *The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Perigee, 1992).
Cooperrider, D.L. and D. Whitney. *Appreciative Inquiry* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 1999).
Franck, F. *The Zen of Seeing: Seeing/Drawing as Meditation* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973).
Frenier, C.R. *Business and the Feminine Principle: The Untapped Resource* (Woburn, MA: Butterworth-Heinemann Publishers, 1996).
Gelb, M.J. *How to Think Like Leonardo da Vinci* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1998).
Gerard, G. and L. Ellinor. *Dialogue: Rediscover the Transforming Power of Conversation* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1998).

Fire

What makes a fire burn
is space between the logs,
a breathing space.
Too much of a good thing,
too many logs
packed in too tight
can squelch a fire,
can douse the flames
almost as surely
as a pail of water can.

So building fires
requires tending in a
special way,
attention to the wood
as well as to the spaces in
between,
so fire can catch, can grow,
can breathe,
can build its energy and
warmth
which we so need in order
to survive the cold.

We need to practice
building open spaces
just as clearly as we learn
to pile on the logs.
It's fuel, and absence of the
fuel
together, that make fire
possible,
let it develop in the way
that's
possible when we lay logs
in just the
way the fire wants to go.

Then we can watch it as it
leaps and plays,
burns down and then
flames up
in unexpected ways.
Then we need only lay a
log on it
from time to time.
Then it has life all of its
own,
a beauty that emerges
not where logs are
but where spaces can invite
the flames
to burn, to form exquisite
patterns of their own,
their beauty possible
simply because the space is
there,
an opening in which the
flame
that knows just how it
wants
to burn can find its way.
—Judy Sorum Brown

Isaacs, W. *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together: A Pioneering Approach to Communicating in Business and in Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1999).
Jones, M. *Creating an Imaginative Life* (Berkeley, CA: Conari Press, 1995).
Losada, M. ''The Role of Positivity and Connectivity in the Performance of Business Teams: A Nonlinear Dynamical Model'' (forthcoming).
Owen, H. *Expanding Our Now: The Story of Open Space Technology* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1997).
Palmer, P.J. *The Courage to Teach* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998).
Palmer, P.J. *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000).
Schwartz, P. *The Art of the Long View* (New York: Doubleday, 1991).
Senge, P.M., C. Roberts, R.B. Ross, B.J. Smith, and A. Kleiner. *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organization* (New York: Currency/Doubleday, 1994).
Stafford, W. *Learning to Live in the World* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1994).
Underwood, P. *Three Strands in the Braid* (Austin, TX: Tribe of Two Press, 1994).

On Being a Leader: A Conversation with Sister Mohini Panjabi

Stella Eugene Humphries

Sister Mohini Panjabi is a senior spiritual leader and regional coordinator (for North and South America and the Caribbean) of the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University (BKWSU). She is also the BKWSU representative to the UN. To place her leadership role in context, I will describe some features of the BKWSU that make it an organization of interest to the study of governance, structure, coordination, and leadership.

The BKWSU is dedicated to providing knowledge and an environment for individual transformation in practical, everyday life. It is founded on the belief that through the attainment, in action, of personal qualities such as peace, compassion, inner power, and wisdom, we can bring about fundamental social transformation.

The organization was founded in 1937 in India by wealthy jeweler Prajapita Brahma. When he died in 1969, the administration was handed over to women. Today, two women are the co-administrators: Dadi Prakashmani, based in the international headquarters in Mount Abu, Rajasthan, India, and Dadi Janki, based in London. These two octogenarians continue to be fully active in their administrative and teaching roles, including regular world travel. The BKWSU has spread to 80 countries with some 600,000 daily students. Although the senior administrators are women, both men and women participate in equal numbers.

The BKWSU consists of self-organizing centers (known in most countries as Raja Yoga Meditation Centers), which are run by volunteers. Each Raja Yoga center provides the same daily classes to its students. There is no "membership"; each individual is free to find his or her relationship to the organization on a continuum from daily study to occasional participation in special programs. Regular coordination of activities among local, national, and international centers and the headquarters in Mount Abu occurs via the Internet and telephone. In addition to the daily schedule of teaching and meditation, the organization holds special programs for the public and professional groups in the arts, sciences, medicine, government, the legal profession, education, and business. The BKWSU organizes conferences, training workshops, concerts, retreats, and lectures, often in partnership with other groups.

Regular students and guests convene annually at the international headquarters in Mount Abu for retreats, programs, and planning. Almost 20,000 Indians are accommodated and fed at a time, with a turnover of participants every few days for about six months of the year. Foreigners attend in smaller numbers of 2,000 to 3,000 and tend to stay a week or longer. Despite the large numbers, each person is individually met and their needs are attended to, including special requests for transport, diet, accommodation, and medical care.

The organization has large retreat properties in India, North and South America, Australia, and Europe. It also founded and administers a hospital in Mount Abu and has been invited by the government to administer another in Bombay. The BKWSU undertakes global projects of social service, many of which are formally affiliated with the UN, such as the Million Minutes of Peace Appeal, Global Cooperation for a Better World, Living Values,

Sister Mohini Panjabi
Senior spiritual leader
Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University
mohini@bkswu.com

Stella Eugene Humphries
Researcher
Society for Organizational Learning
seh@whidbey.com

and activities related to various UN summits. The organization has general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council and has won seven Peace Messenger Awards.

There is no charge for the activities; all financial support is donated.

Stella Eugene Humphries (SEH): Can you tell us a little of your own story, how you came to be a leader?

Mohini Panjabi (MP): I was a very private person and wanted to live a simple family life, but I had a need to know more; I felt also that service was important. I wanted to provide for myself, but I also cared a lot for other people. At first, service for me was simple—to reach out to people and to give them whatever they needed, small things. In the early sixties, there was an epidemic of influenza. In almost every home in the large block where we lived, people were sick because we did not have immunity or injections. I did not get sick. I made tea and went door to door to serve food. When India had two or three small wars with Pakistan and China, I reached out to wounded people by going to hospitals to see what I could do.

I think understanding what you want to achieve for yourself and also what you want to do to serve others are needed in combination. It seems people either want to do something for others or do something for themselves, but they do not often combine the two. When I think of where I began and where the story of leadership began, I discover that I sought to combine the two very specifically. I wanted both a quality life for myself, and I wanted to offer myself to service.

SEH: You feel that awareness of one's inner needs, then, is important for playing a public leadership role?

MP: The story of successful leaders begins with how they lead their own lives. Many people look to others for direction and insight. But others feel that there is some purpose they wish to fulfill. There is an inner calling that pulls and to which they have to respond. That is when learning begins.

Learning is connected to helping your self. You should ask: In which direction would I like to go and what is the aim of my life? What do I want to do? People tend not to think about their lives in this way. They accept external information and norms without questioning what these mean. Most people today focus on what the market wants. They think that if they study to fill the current market need, they can immediately earn money. But rather they should feel the guidance within. They should look for something very special that gives fulfillment. Once they commit to following their intuition and finding their own inner direction, fulfillment begins to grow. Of course, education needs to be connected with livelihood, but job and money are secondary. Education first needs to focus on developing the quality of one's ''being,'' not only on developing the capacity for ''doing.'' Whatever I do, I want first to know: Why am I doing it? What is it bringing to me? What is it bringing to others?

The story of successful leaders begins with how they lead their own lives.

SEH: What formal training helps you in your role today?

MP: I studied history and political science, not a common combination for girls in India. The political leaders were mostly men. But I wanted to know about the world.

I saw a gap between what people say about values and what they do. It is common to say that we should be honest, that we should care for each other, but in practice, the words did not mean anything. So my question was: How can I understand truly what values are? Where do I get the power to practice them? In my parents' home, all the children were required to embrace values and good character. Not that all had that tendency, but I did. At age 13 or 14, I started reading scholars and listening to spiritual leaders, not only those who were seeking salvation, but also spiritual leaders who made a difference in the world.

Swami Vivikananda attracted me because he was action oriented. He would say, ''What is in your heart, put into action. What is in your heart is for yourself and what you put into action is for the world.'' I read about 22 of his volumes. So my education became combined; for inner fulfillment, I read the spiritual leaders, and I also continued my regular studies.

© Emily Sper

I went to different spiritual centers, including a Brahma Kumaris center. There I felt a simple, honest, and truthful way of living. At that time, I did not know how to explain the experience—what they had was not packaged. Although I was touched, I did not become a student at the Brahma Kumaris center. I continued going to university for another seven to eight years. Again, from the desire to serve people and to serve the world, I decided to study journalism and law. I felt these were two areas through which I could help. The injustices I saw used to hurt me; I felt that people were not able to be fair. At a very young age, even before I finished journalism, I wrote letters to the editor; some would get published. For three years, I did parliamentary reporting in Delhi.

SEH: From where do you get your guidance and support as a leader?

MP: Basically, my strength comes from my principles, from learning, and from my insights. I like being governed from my insights, and I like to have information. I read a lot in every area—economics, politics, medicine. When I have to decide something and form an opinion or make comments, I give them from inside. I like to hear the news and be informed, but I do not necessarily like to be influenced to the extent that my own initiative, my own pure reasoning, and my own insights get lost. I keep a distance that helps me to discern.

Before I become a guide for others, am I a good guide for myself? If I am a guide for myself, then I know where I am leading people. I feel everyone has to have his or her own map and inner direction in life. Every human life becomes a guidance or misguidance for others. I am careful because I know when I do something, others will want to do it. The individual—even in a large organization such as the one of which I am part—always has to be connected with the guidance of the self. Wherever I feel that I am unclear, I am uncomfortable; I will go inside and try to find the right direction. To be guided by one's inner self and to act with the awareness that others will follow are very important.

Before I become a guide for others, am I a good guide for myself?

The strength of leaders should come from inside, from values. Their lives should be governed by principles because following principles protects strength. When you speak the truth, you only have to say it once. But once you speak a lie, you have to tell another 20 and still not be able to convince. It is more simple to be truthful, to be honest.

SEH: You spoke about the importance of insight. How does one develop that power?

MP: We take in information through reading or listening. But to make a decision, we need to connect external information to a deeper knowing that is connected to our values. Insight comes when we step aside from external influence, connect internally, and feel what is true.

If someone asks for my input, I step aside mentally for a few moments and separate myself first from the situation. By doing that, I am not absorbing it; rather, I am allowing information to come from my own intuitive feelings. Everyone feels something, but subtly. So unless we are aware, we don't pick up and use that feeling to direct action. The intellect is so dominant today that reasoning takes over everything. But there is something deeper than reasoning. When we feel, we know where the truth is.

When we feel, we know where the truth is.

Staying in touch with the inner self is not common these days. Insight comes when we are in touch with our true selves. It is a very soft, gentle voice that speaks truth within each of us, but we do not listen and do not hear it. Today, people listen to so much noise and, if they do not have noise, create noise internally through too much thinking. Getting in touch with the true self in those quiet moments allows insight to grow.

Once we use that insight and find it right, we listen more; consequently, our trust in ourselves grows. We come to know that insight is definitely true, that what it is saying is going to work. But trust in our own insight doesn't come until we listen, test it, and find that it works. You are the insight—that is, the site of your inner self—not the outside world. The truth comes from there.

SEH: What is your vision of a well-functioning system? Toward what ideal way of organizing do you lead?

MP: A teacher asked the students to fix a world map that was torn into little pieces. The students wondered how could they restore it. But one student fixed it in 15 minutes. He had turned the map over and found on the back a figure of the human body, so he put the pieces together. He knew where the eyes should be, the nose, and so on. When he turned it over, he had also put the world together. This is a metaphor for the interdependency of all human beings in the world; beneath the surface, things have a connection and the whole has a pattern. We should be neither dependent nor independent. Instead, we need to understand and accept the right relationship among the parts of the whole. Each part is important and has a role. Understanding this leads to the right relationship. If we truly understood that the whole world is one family, then abuse through power, status, and greed would end.

When we think of family, we don't think only of tasks. There is much more to a family than getting tasks done. Task-oriented leaders sooner or later lose effectiveness because they lose the people. Those close to leaders remember them for the small things. The ex-Prime Minister of India Indira Gandhi was publicly known as the Iron Woman, as a very strong politician. Few knew her soft side, which was her true strength. An ambassador to a Caribbean island described a time when he was in her cabinet; they had worked late on a project at her residence. Every two or three hours, she would send someone for tea. Such little gestures of her care made them work day and night.

True leaders are remembered for such small, humanitarian acts. But, more often, status and greed become big challenges for a leader. Even praise and success are difficult for many. A leader has to remember: "I am a server; I am on service."

The BKWSU, at its core, is a family first, then it is an organization. Because it is a large family, we need to run it as an organization, but we do not have presidents, secretaries, and so on. This structure is very beautiful—family *and* organization. It means each member's personal care and security are really the well-being of the organization.

SEH: How is leadership in the BKWSU established and sustained?

MP: People sometimes ask which person decides who will be in a certain position, but actually no one decides. It happens naturally on the basis of who has the qualities and lives the values that are needed. These are the only factors. No decisions are made on the basis of our liking and favoring someone. I think the top leaders have service and family in their hearts. Those who don't have these qualities find it very difficult to lead within this organization.

Leadership qualities are mostly learned through modeling. Through the example of the senior leaders, a lot gets done. Younger leaders look at the more senior leaders, say, Dadi Prakashmani, who is the head of the organization. They see her humility, availability, personal interest, and love toward everyone, and they see her success.

Also, there is no misuse of money or relationships at any level. Our founder was wealthy and had a position in society, but he lived simply and humbly. The next generation of leaders was able to follow from their hearts. So these traits and behaviors were naturally passed on.

© Jonathan Liffgens

SEH: What should be our attitude toward leaders today who have betrayed trust?

MP: There needs to be a realization that everyone is responsible. Whatever is happening in a collective is not because of one, two, or ten individuals, but because of each of us. We are in a system. We elect our leaders; we allow all that happens to happen. If, at the grass-roots level, people do not empower themselves, they will always look to the leaders and blame them. Both the formal leaders and those at the grass roots need to take responsibility for whatever is happening in the world. Each of us has to ask, ''How am I contributing by my actions, my thoughts, my attitudes, and my choices?'' If I want peace, I have to ask myself, ''Am I being peaceful?'' If I want tolerance or nonviolence, I need to see where in my life I am contributing to violence or the lack of peace and start to change those thoughts, attitudes, and actions.

Each person needs to take responsibility, not just expect rights. Each needs to contribute whatever he or she can toward a better world. Everyone needs to feel, ''I am a leader.'' People working with leaders and leaders working with people are equally necessary.

SEH: What would help organizations cultivate good leaders?

MP: In education and in corporations and organizations, there should be some value-based courses. People need help balancing their inner and outer beings. There is no such balance today. Success is difficult for many to deal with. Success is always seen as a final result, as profit, as something external. We need to encourage people to see other kinds of success. Success needs to be understood as a holistic process. There needs to be more recognition and valuing of success in terms of inner growth and inner achievement. Success based on merit and qualification is too narrow. Institutions need to discover that there are other kinds of merit—inner merit.

If I want peace, I have to ask myself, "Am I being peaceful?"

Organizations and corporations also need to create contexts in which people's inner personalities can find expression. With balance between outer competencies and inner qualities, people will have a deeper capacity for dealing with both favorable and adverse situations. But because people have a narrow view of competency, when something doesn't work, they do not apply the inner skills and relationship skills we have been talking about. As a result, the next thing doesn't work, which establishes a cycle of more and more loss. The flexibility and adaptability that come from being a well-rounded person are not there. There is no effort to allow the whole being to be present and the whole being is not enhanced, so individuals and organizations lose.

SEH: It seems that leadership within the Brahma Kumaris arises from empowering individuals and developing their inner qualities. But leadership must also address the practical matter of volunteers running a large, globally dispersed, multicultural organization. Can you speak about this nexus of spiritual and practical leadership?

MP: One important thing about this organization is that the spiritual principles that are taught have to be applied in administration. The spiritual head and administrative head are combined because we believe that spirituality is also the foundation for worldly leadership. In other words, we consider that religion and politics need to be integrated. I use the word *religion* in the sense of universal spiritual wisdom, not in a sectarian meaning.

If I believe in certain things, but I am not able to implement them in my work or administration, then they are just beliefs. Then changes won't occur; there won't be social change or empowerment. But if I use the values and principles I am taught, then my own power grows and empowers others. For example, I believe in peace. So, for peace, I need to work in peace and with peace. When a difficult situation arises with people or circumstances, I always remind myself that if I am for peace, I have to be in peace. Then others see that it is possible to deal with a disturbing situation peacefully. When we model what we are taught, it empowers others. When leaders behave inconsistently in their values, it is easy for others to fall into the same trap. Then leaders cannot help anyone because their power is lost too.

Our leadership is based on spiritual principles, which is a great achievement but also a great challenge. You always have to remember the source of your success, which is not from being an administrator but from the principles you uphold. A true leader's quality is selflessness, although self-interest is inherently there because as you give, you also receive. When there is selflessness, whatever you think and do will help many others. But if you are self-centered and focus on your own success, empowerment doesn't happen. Selflessness helps you to be open to others, win trust, and get cooperation. With cooperation, many tasks get done easily. Without it, there is always some difficulty.

Connect within and think of a positive quality such as tolerance, patience, or compassion to replace anger.

SEH: The Brahma Kumaris clearly place relationships before results and see relationships as central to achieving sustainable, quality results. Could you elaborate on this perspective?

MP: Some people think that you compromise quality if you maintain relationships. In the early 1970s, I discussed this with a senior teacher: Which is more important, the task or relationship? At that time, the task was more important to me because I thought that my image, my way of doing things, my methods, and my efficiency were important. She said that in whatever you are able to do, you will always need people to help you. When there are good relationships, you will have help, more work can get done, and expansion can take place. Now, I know that if you have good relationships, you need say only a few words. When you just pay attention to the task, you can say a lot, but people are not willing to listen. So relationships help, especially when you work with volunteers.

In our large retreat center in upstate New York—Peace Village—I have very high standards for the quality of tasks, the way a place is cleaned, or the way food is prepared. I like spotless cleanliness. I check and say, "This should be like this. This should be like that." Yet when I leave, the people who operate the center ask me when I plan to return. I once asked why they wanted me to come frequently, when I require so much discipline from them. They responded that they get much energy by doing things well, that they get satisfaction from having a team that does good work together.

I trust the coordinators of the different departments. I do not change anything directly, but I will ask them. They know that although I am very task oriented, I have a lot of love and respect for them. One thing I have learned is that if I say something in the right way and at the right time, it is accepted. I have to care for people's feelings and realize they are also dedicated and committed to excellence. I have to create the conditions for them to be able to work well.

The success of Peace Village depends on our relationships with each other. There is love among us. If I want to upgrade things, first I do some internal work with them and then I make some proposals. That works out well because their energy, their enthusiasm, and their confidence in themselves have grown. When I ask them to take on a task, it gets done very nicely.

Caring about relationships is an alignment between relationship and task. If you are task oriented, people are glad as soon as you leave. But if you have good relationships and are also task oriented, everyone will want to run things efficiently and properly.

SEH: What advice do you have for facing challenges?

MP: If I were to absorb the influence of the outside world, I would see situations as bigger than I am. Fear, worry, and anger would emerge. The situation is real, but my tendency to fear it makes it big. So I look at the situation, and, in parallel, I look at my fear of it, separate the two, and address both.

If I am detached—not disconnecting, but being unattached—I keep the self and the situation separate. I then can see my fears or anxiety more clearly and work on those as well as on the situation. So whether with people or situations, it is important not to think that I cannot manage.

Fear arises from past experiences and world occurrences, which raise fear of the future. But inside us, there is the potential for courage and for fear. We can separate the true self from the influences of the past and the future and thus allow courage to come instead of fear. Courage is a natural state.

Each of us has the potential for expressing negative and positive qualities. To deal with a difficult situation, we have to say, ''Let me show positive qualities. Let me show my strength and have courage.'' As soon as we think this way, we will get help, faith, and trust ourselves. So at a time of difficulty, ask, ''Which quality do I need?''

Instead of being angry or forceful, try a gentler way. Connect within and think of a positive quality such as tolerance, patience, or compassion to replace anger. When the situation is adverse and you are also negative, it only gets worse. If you are willing to act constructively, you will get power to deal with it. The situation will not seem as difficult and will eventually resolve.

Whenever I am in any situation, I always remind myself to think in the most empowering way I can about myself and others. I do not think about the situation first, but about the quality of my thoughts. If I need to speak to someone, I first check in my heart whether my thoughts for the person are positive. By clearing my mind and heart of negativity, I can be very honest because I am also being loving toward that person. Then, when I say something, the person usually accepts it. If I think about that person's defect or have negative feelings, there is always a reaction.

SEH: Can you explain how the BKWSU funds itself?

MP: In the Brahma Kumaris, everything belongs to everyone and everyone is a part of everything. Leaders do not get more than others. So everyone wants to share whatever they can afford. With that feeling, people are willing to give and work toward growth and success.

Leaders who misuse their power and use profits for themselves create a lot of mistrust. Something very expensive was once given to the head of the organization. We said to her, ''Dadi, you must use this.'' She said, ''No, until I can give this to each of the 15,000 teachers, I do not want to use it. If they look at me using something that they are not able to have, I am creating desire and greed.'' I like the example of always thinking of everyone, not only of the self. So there is love and also trust. Everything is used for the task, the purpose, and the well-being of everyone as family. That is the basis of our prosperity.

SEH: Why are women especially prominent in leadership roles within the organization?

MP: Organizations today need leadership that is nurturing. Women tend to have natural nurturing qualities and a balance between the head and the heart. The head will miss a lot of things that the heart will not. Being a mother is basically serving and thinking of others. Intellectual capacities can easily be developed in today's institutional cultures, but the feminine qualities of listening to the heart and of kindness are not recognized as important and are not developed. Because women tend to have those qualities naturally, we can use their capacities to organize in a simple way based on values.

Organizations today need leadership that is nurturing.

When people come to the BKWSU, especially to the headquarters in Mount Abu, they see dedication, commitment, and patience. Being devoted in a sustained way is a very feminine quality. Some people can be task oriented but not dedicated in the long term. When male business leaders come to our headquarters, they realize that the influence of women's leadership is missing in their organizations. Many have said, ''If we had that, we would also grow like you are growing.'' They can feel the balance of the head and the heart.

SEH: What kind of people seek out the BKWSU?

MP: Our teachings attract people in all walks of life and at all levels of education. All professions—judges, lawyers, doctors, educators, administrators, politicians—are well represented. Many Indian state governments have asked the Brahma Kumaris to teach in the assembly. In the West as well, our teachings are applied to organizations. For example, the ''Living Values'' curriculum is being introduced to schools, and ''Self-Managing Leadership'' is used in business. The fundamental teachings can be practically applied in all professions, religions, races, and age groups and in organizations and the community, collectively and individually. Anyone who is interested gets connected.

Anyone can grow professionally through his or her career, but there is no connection to inner development. The area of inner development is neglected and marginalized today. But most individuals—in their thirties and forties—start to feel that they are stuck somewhere. They are not fulfilled or contented with what they are doing. They then begin to seek—to go inside—to take care of their inner lives. Most people who are task oriented or externally oriented do not take time for themselves. They place everything else before their own well-being.

There are some basic practices they could commit to, such as starting their day with themselves and in the evening spending time with their families. Instead, they just go the whole day. At one of our programs, a woman mentioned that when her husband, a politician, comes home, the first thing he does is check his answering machine and turn on his computer and other machines. Four family members are sitting there, and he doesn't even say hello. People get so absorbed in their tasks, they get trapped. When they come here, we teach them what to do for the self, how to be in a family, and how to connect with others and with the world. Self-development is based on making time for one's self, recognizing what brings happiness to the self, and understanding real success. In our environment, we balance meditation and solitude with activity and interaction. We help people discover, redefine, and practice what has true meaning and lasting value for themselves. They can then use this foundation for how they live their everyday lives.

SEH: Can you suggest some practices people could experiment with?

MP: One of our practices is to pause a few times a day, maybe every two or three hours. We call this ''traffic control'' or controlling the traffic of thoughts in the mind. We take a few moments to calm down, get connected within, and clear the mind of noise. Once we feel reconnected with the peaceful inner self, we go back to the task. Doing this on a regular basis is the key; the results are enormously beneficial. Another regular practice is to start the day with time alone, to think or read something of inspiration, and to meditate. Filling the mind with something nourishing is important at the start of the day. Thinking about a virtue or a value that we can apply that day is a good morning practice. Then, during the day, we will have an enhanced awareness of that virtue and be able to draw on its power when difficulties arise. We experience strength through this, and day by day, with regular practice, that strength grows. We often say, ''Drops make the ocean.''

One of the most important things in life is to pay attention to our thoughts. With our thoughts, we create our future, consciously or unconsciously. We need to slow down to get to know our thoughts and choose which ones to engage and which ones to let go.

We should not need to go back and forth over the same situation in our thoughts. Our thinking should be clean and direct, so when it is over, we are finished with the situation. Seeing the value of mental energy—making the effort to have clear, stable mental energy—will make it easy to take on responsibility and to stay fresh. If we lose our mental energy, we are drained and ineffective. Time, thoughts, and energy are interrelated personal properties for which we should care a great deal. These are the foundation on which we individually and collectively create the quality of our lives and our society.

Commentary

by Jeff Clanon

Jeff Clanon
Founding consultant member
Director of Partnership Development
Society for Organizational Learning
jclanon@solonline.org

In the spring of 2002, I had the privilege of working with Sister Mohini on a retreat entitled "Love in Leadership." While reading the interview, I was once again struck by her clear, abundant, thought-provoking insights on being a leader. In contrast to most of the contemporary "competency-based" work in the area of leadership development that focuses exclusively on behavior and results in the external world, Sister Mohini emphasizes the importance of developing one's inner qualities. Recognizing and nurturing these qualities means being clear on who you are and what you want for yourself as well as what the world wants of you. She observes that most of us look to the outside for what we want. Yet her experience (and mine) is that it is when you listen to and follow your inner direction, fulfillment begins to grow. She stresses the importance of integrating what you learn from the external world with what you learn from your internal insights.

I vividly remember Sister Mohini sharing an insight at the retreat about making decisions and being an effective leader, which struck me as both powerful and pragmatic. She said that she has learned from experience never to allow anyone to rush her into a decision. When she is uncertain or unsettled about an impending decision, she always allows at least a day to reflect and get in touch with what her inner self is telling her. For her, making a decision involves connecting external information to a deeper knowing consistent with her values. Insight, she says, comes when we step aside from external conflict, connect internally, and "feel what is true."

Sister Mohini also has some deep insight about what is needed to develop strong leaders. Her holistic view that everyone is responsible, that everyone needs to feel "I am a leader," deviates sharply from the current, predominant emphasis on the charismatic individual or hero leader. She feels that our view of leadership competency is much too narrow, that we need to create contexts in which people's inner personalities can find expression, and that our institutions need to recognize and value "inner" merit.

When you read this interview, you might be intrigued but wonder about the results Sister Mohini gets with her approach. Having lived a few days at the Retreat Center she leads, I can share some observations about my experience there. The facilities are exceptionally well cared for; the place has a pervasive feeling of peace and serenity. A genuine sense of caring and joy emanates from virtually every staff member. There is a cooperative, relaxed efficiency around getting things done. She is indeed getting great results!

What strikes me most deeply about Sister Mohini, which is reflected in the interview and unmistakable when you are with her in person, is the consistency between what she says and what she embodies as a human being. Perhaps this is her most profound message to us on being a leader.

Commentary

by Neville Hodgkinson

Neville Hodgkinson
Author and journalist
Oxford, UK
Neville@bksugrc.demon.co.uk

I realized Sister Mohini's importance to me when I visited her a few days after a major kidney operation. She had lost a lot of weight, but her face was full and her eyes sparkling. I was surprised at how relieved and moved I felt to find her so well. Why should this woman—with whom I have had only passing contact, albeit over many years—be particularly important to me?

The insights she has shared in this interview help me to understand. Sister Mohini lives by the valuable principles she articulates. She emphasizes finding your own inner direction as a necessary concomitant of relating successfully to others and bringing something valuable into the world. I have never felt her "lay anything on me," in the sense of burdening me or others with criticism or unrealistic expectations. She combines diligence in learning—acquiring external information—with taking time to feel where the truth lies. This too is a precious combination and an inspiration to me in my efforts to live a life that balances reason and intuition.

I live with the understanding that the inner being is essentially positive, and I am most myself when I enjoy this state of being. When I lose it, I know that it is because I have moved into the narrow self-concerns of the ego. An understanding of the need to displace ego with true self-respect underlies the Brahma Kumaris's entire approach to serving the world. But you undertake this deep surgery of the soul at your own pace, helped along by a kind of motherly concern from the teachers. The process is nonconfrontational and largely nonanalytical, although a great deal of knowledge is shared, which restores self-respect.

After I left a full-time newspaper job and gave much more time to contributing directly to the work of the Brahma Kumaris, I lived at a retreat center and adopted disciplines associated with a dedicated spiritual journey and role. Although freed from the constraints of a high-profile job, I had also lost the supports such as money, position, and influence that came with it. I had feelings of rebellion linked to being a man working in an organization run largely by women. It has, however, brought me to a newfound stability, perhaps even serenity, at some very deep level. At least in this latest round of the battle, the ego has put up a white flag. Paradoxically (to my old way of thinking), this surrender has brought me closer to a state of true self-empowerment.

VIEW

Webs, not Kevlar: Designing Sustainable Organizations

Hilary Bradbury

Kevlar, a material used in bullet-proof vests, is manufactured by pouring petroleum-derived molecules into a pressurized vat of concentrated sulfuric acid and boiling it at several hundred degrees Fahrenheit. It is then subjected to high pressures to extrude the fibers. The energy input is extreme, and the toxicity odious. Although it saves the lives of those under gunfire, Kevlar lasts forever in our overflowing landfills. In contrast, spider silk is able to absorb five times the impact force that Kevlar absorbs, without breaking (Benyus, 1997). It is so strong that, on a human scale, a web resembling a fishing net could catch a passenger jet in flight. The spider's process is far less odious than that for Kevlar. The spider spins with input of only sunlight and water. Her web is woven in ambient temperatures. Moreover, there is no long-term toxicity in her wake.

Efforts to design a material with the properties of spider silk for human use are, however, proving to be difficult, given our lack of familiarity with the design logic of nature. For too long, we have designed products and organizations that are increasingly out of place in the natural landscape and therefore unsustainable. A focus on clarifying the design principles of nature opens new ways to design organizations, their products, and processes in a way to allow for the needs of the post-industrial twenty-first century. Ecological scientists (Robèrt et al., 1997), evolutionary psychologists (Cosmides and Tooby, 1992), environmental designers (McDonough, 1997; cf. Sosnowchik, 2000), management thinkers (Bradbury and Clair, 1999; Gladwin, Kenneally, and Krause, 1995; Roome, 1998), and environmental visionaries (Hawken, Lovins, and Lovins, 1999) have come up with many overlapping principles drawn from the study of nature.

Increasingly, activist stakeholders have forced business organizations to be concerned about the impact on the social and natural systems in which they are embedded. The momentum toward sustainable business practices, along with common sense, suggests that we may no longer have to afford the long-lived, damaging side-effects of Kevlar-like systems, that is, those based on industrial premises. Situating human activity in a broader context of the natural environment stresses the importance of nature's ability to profoundly shape human activity despite our hubris-filled efforts to the contrary. What might design for interdependence mean for organizational life?

A group of women leaders, which we call "Women Leading Sustainability," convened for a conversation on how we might redesign organizations. We knew each other from the Society for Organizational Learning's Sustainability Consortium, which is focused on learning about efforts with sustainable development in the corporate world. The women represented an organizational spectrum with executives from large multinationals, from smaller start-up efforts such as fuel-cell projects, and from educational non-profits. We met monthly via teleconferences in which some seven to eight women participated on a rotating basis. Each woman considered herself a leader in bringing notions of sustainability to influence practices in her organization.

We posed a simple question to begin: *Is it possible that those who were excluded from the original design of organizational structures could offer input for the redesign of more*

Hilary Bradbury
Assistant Professor
Weatherhead School of Management
Case Western Reserve University
Hilary@po.cwru.edu

Project Participants

Sue Simington
Sara Metcalf
Anita Burke
Catherine Grey
Darcy Winslow
Sarah Severn
Chris Page
Denise Kalule
Catherine Bragdon
Sara Schley
Catherine Greener
Sheena Boughan
Joyce LaValle

sustainable organizational forms for future generations? We wondered specifically about the role of gender because, while a vast majority of executives in the Fortune 1,000 are men, a significant proportion of executives in positions to manage organizational sustainability are women.[1] We wondered what this unusual gender ratio might mean for business and for management educators. We wondered what design criteria these leaders might uniquely offer to the necessary task of organizational redesign for a postindustrial era. The point of inquiry for the dialogue with the executive women became: *How might women redesign our organizations for future generations*?

How might women redesign our organizations for future generations?

We wanted productive conversations about organizational redesign. The payoff for being in these conversations would be the insights shared, corroborated, and adopted. The conversations were structured around three questions so that each participant would have a grasp of others' approaches:

- What image or vision compels you in managing sustainable business practices?
- What points of leverage have you found for encouraging sustainable business practices?
- What is the leverage for you in this effort?

The conversation generated seven statements that articulated recurring themes. In a follow-up conversation, each participant was invited to agree or disagree with the statements. Listening to each other engendered more conversation and clarity about which issues are most salient to women executives in their efforts to design organizations for our children's children:

1. My work to promote sustainable development is *service,* a *calling* (not ordinary work).
2. *My children, my own childhood, and family* in general are the most potent points of connection in motivating me to engage with this work.
3. Generating *a community of cocontributors* is crucial to making sustainability a reality (in organizations or institutions).
4. It is crucial that I bring, and *allow* others to bring, *mind* and *heart* to work on these issues.
5. I seek to consciously *integrate* the ''techno-knowledge,'' ''business knowledge,'' and ''people knowledge'' in this work.
6. I am particularly open to and informed by *nontraditional*, *interdisciplinary,* more intuitive ''ways of knowing'' when I approach this work, especially in efforts to understand interdependence. Whole systems thinking, shamanism, and tribal patterns are examples of useful approaches.
7. I place a great deal of importance on generating productive encounters to enhance this work, for example, listening deeply or asking transformational questions.

One woman shared a compelling image from a story ''The Man Who Planted Trees.'' She emphasized a concern for dense interconnectedness and weblike ways of organizing:

> A man plants 100 trees every day. He creates forests and transforms the place. From the acorns, there are trees; from the trees, the towns can grow back. With more green, comes more good life. We're naturally drawn to the good, to the green. But this a male story! Individual heroics are not for me. I'd like to be part of a community doing this. So I ask, what acorns we should be planting if we are to redesign organizations?

We then discussed the ''so what?'' We chose to focus on the strategies for implementation and influence that the women use to bring about new organizational arrangements. A core theme in their strategies was to coordinate learning and input from all salient stakeholders in their organizations by creating multifunctional teams to report regularly on key performance indicators, including metrics and illustrative stories. All the suggestions related to the importance of uncovering the often fragmented or unheard voices of various stakeholders. One participant suggested bringing children into organizational design work. She commented:

> Who better to be the stakeholders in our efforts to design organizations for our children's children? Wouldn't it be terrific to let leaders meet with the children of all their stakeholders—the older kids or teens, children of customers, suppliers, and neighbors. They could talk with the business leaders about the company so they could develop an understanding. The leaders would get some input to their strategy and visioning processes. There would be tremendous learning all around.

In these examples, as with many others not used here, we see concern for the whole system and for the nonlinear effects of organizing extended to include a population not normally considered important stakeholders. We see also a productive concern for diversity of input that can counteract what Shiva (1999) refers to as "monocultures of the mind" that increasingly prevail as the language of economics overtakes us.


© Emily Sper

Next Steps

Participants mentioned diversity, feedback, and a systems approach as core considerations for designing systems informed by nature that, in turn, allow our organizations to live within nature. Further work will move the dialogue from the original group of women executives to allow for more cycles of action and reflection. Ongoing interest has meant that the group continues to meet. We are guided by a focus on what sustainable business practices each participant is seeking to accomplish in her company. We ask where the energy and obstacles for this initiative are. We acknowledge that, in nature, all change occurs while it is being inhibited (Maturana, 2000). Our dialogue therefore allows us to grapple with how to involve stakeholders in a way that allows for personal connection to the issues. It forces participants to think about how sustainable business practices may appear welcome or unwelcome when viewed by different stakeholders. The dialogue moves forward on a premise that nature grows something new in the presence of something that already exists (Senge and Carstadt, 2001). This means that we understand that we do not make change, but rather help to foster change in a context presumed to have obstacles.

That there is a specific "gendered" way of approaching issues of sustainability is, of course, an oversimplification. Encouraged by many productive encounters with our male colleagues (some of whom have joined our conversation groups), we believe the issue is not so much about men's or women's approach to organizational life as much as it is about different aspirations for using executive power. There is power over others or relationships of interdependence. Women have traditionally chosen the latter.

Does having so many women in leadership roles in the sustainability arena mean that more women should be hired? Does hiring more women marginalize women executives and sustainability issues even further? At the very least, we believe our dialogues are a small contribution to redesigning our way of living and working in organizations as we create the postindustrial world. Because organizations are human rather than machinelike artifacts, we cannot drive change. We can, however, grow something new in the presence of the old. In so doing, we can aspire to a world that works for everyone, including our children's children.

Acknowledgments

The author's project participation and writing have been supported, in part, with funding from a National Science Foundation grant #SES NSF 0080643.

Note

1. It is propitious to note the very large percentage of women participants in the nationwide Net Impact association. Net Impact is a network of MBA students and alumni ''committed to using the power of business to create a better world'' (see www.weatherhead.cwru.edu/netimpact for more information). In management schools as well, women are taking leadership in arenas in which business acts as an agent of world benefit.

References

Benyus, J. *Biomimicry: Innovation Inspired by Nature* (New York: Morrow, 1997).

Bradbury, H. and J. Clair. ''Promoting Sustainable Organizations with Sweden's Natural Step.'' *Academy of Management Executive* 13 (1999): 63–74.

Cosmides, L. and J. Tooby. ''Cognitive Adaptations for Social Exchange,'' in *The Adapted Mind,* eds. J. Barkow, L. Cosmides, and J. Tooby (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992): 163–228.

Gladwin, T., J. Kenneally, and T.-S. Krause. ''Shifting Paradigms for Sustainable Development: Implications for Management Theory and Research.'' *Academy of Management Review* 20 (1995): 874–907.

Hawken, P, A. Lovins, and L.H. Lovins. *Natural Capital: Creating the Next Industrial Revolution* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1999).

McDonough, W.A. ''A Boat for Thoreau, Environmental Challenges to Business.'' Paper delivered at the Environmental Challenges to Business Conference, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, 1997.

Maturana, H. Commentary. *Reflections: The SoL Journal* 1 (2000): 72.

Robèrt, K.-H., H. Daly, P. Hawken, and J. Holmberg. ''A Compass for Sustainable Development.'' *International Journal of Sustainable Development* 4 (1997): 79–92.

Roome, N., ed. *Sustainable Strategies for Industries* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1998).

Senge, P. and G. Carstadt. ''Designing the Next Industrial Revolution.'' *Sloan Management Review* 42 (2001): 24–38.

Shiva, S. *Monocultures of the Mind* (London: Zed Books, 1999).

Sosnowchik, K. ''The Hopeful Inventors: William McDonough and Michael Braungar.'' Green@Work (May/June 2000): 12–21.

The Essence of Leadership and the Power of Networks: An Interview with Margaret Wheatley

Alexander Schieffer

The interview took place in November 2002 during the Systems Thinking in Action Conference in San Diego, California.

Alexander Schieffer (AS): Hundreds of experts in human resource management were recently asked what they would describe as the *essence of leadership*. Nearly everybody came up with a different answer. What is the essence of leadership for you?

Margaret Wheatley (MW): I would refer to the word *essence*, which in French also means fuel. The question could be asked as, ''What is the fuel in leadership?'' The real fuel in leadership is understanding and believing in other people. I define a good leader as someone who has great faith in people's ability and who uses every opportunity to create the means for them to offer their creativity to the organization. The essence of leadership is to inspire people about their own competence and to create an atmosphere of ''we can do that.'' A good leader is foremost a good teacher—someone who believes in his or her students and helps them to realize their own potential. I do not believe that leaders can be heroes; it is an impossible task for anyone to figure out these days.

AS: However, in all problematic and complex situations, you still find most people searching for the *great leader*, someone who comes and fixes the problem.

MW: Yes, many still look for the hero. But we don't need the hero type of leader anymore. What we do need are leaders who are able to bring out the best in all of us. The US is currently suffering from a president who embodies images of *hero*, *cowboy,* and *savior of the world,* but who certainly cannot deliver on that. He can probably drive us to destruction, but he surely can't create security or a safe world.

AS: What is a key lesson for today's leaders?

MW: As a leader, you really have to work on how not to be a big ego and how to inspire people without controlling them. I have encouraged leaders to notice what they really believe about other people's capacity. Most leaders will tell you that they believe in people and that they rely on people, but when you look at their action, it is all about command and control—forcing people to do things and thinking that one has to motivate people. But noticing one's own personal beliefs requires a huge amount of self-awareness and self-knowledge. A leader must understand that you really have to be who you say you are and that you really do have to walk your talk. To be a good leader these days, one must be a person of extraordinary integrity and clarity. That includes knowing what you stand for, knowing what you believe in, and coming to the realization that you can't do it alone.

AS: The reaction of most leaders who hear about new leadership, systems thinking, chaos theory, interconnectedness, or the relationship between leadership and the new science

Margaret Wheatley
President, Berkana Institute
www.berkana.org

Alexander Schieffer
Managing Partner
Center of Excellence and Learning
Lecturer, University of St. Gallen
a.schieffer@c-cell.cc

find these concepts highly impractical and do not understand the relevance to their own business and leadership style. How can a broad audience of leaders embrace this new thinking?

MW: I do not understand why everyone can't see the world as a big system. The evidence is so overwhelming: if you plan short term, you are going to fail; if you do not understand systemic consequences, you are going to be surprised terribly by the effects of your actions. However, people are getting more receptive and have started to understand that the world is highly complex and that a lot of it is out of anyone's immediate control. Organizations increasingly understand that you can't just work the numbers. More and more people are getting this message. But I am not sure whether they are willing to slow down and think long term. We are currently going through a tremendous sifting of the chaff from the wheat. Clearly, the only organizations that will survive this process in the long term will have switched to a new understanding of leadership.

AS: In chaotic and difficult situations, most people return to the kind of behavior that they know best, even if this behavior has proved to be unsuccessful. What do you advise organizations and leaders to do? How can they develop and apply the new mental and action model?

Networks rely on whole new levels of openness, trust, honesty, integrity, and communication.

MW: There have been practical applications in the field of leadership and systems thinking for more than 20 years. We have case after case demonstrating how applied systems thinking can improve an organization in terms of saving money, better adaptation to the future, and so on. And still it is not the norm. But we are talking about a profound shift of mind that has to occur. Although the world is hammering us, saying that humankind has to learn this lesson, we still haven't done it.

AS: In *Leadership and the New Science* [Wheatley, 1992], you write that, in order to develop this new mental and action model, in order to be more creative and more adaptive, people need to let go of fear.

MW: We've got a lot of fear in the world right now. As you said, during times of fear, we go back to what we know, and all we know is hierarchy and command and control. Unfortunately, that just creates more chaos. We have taken an enormous leap backward because of fear.

© Emily Sper

AS: What could be the most promising field for development in order to support the fundamental shift of mind that leaders and organizations need?

MW: I think that the *network form of organizing* is a very powerful lever. In recent years, enormously good work has been done on networks and network organizations, which is a whole new form of interacting and cooperating. This shift to become a network organization has been very difficult for any hierarchic organization that went through this process, because, in networks, you have to depend on relationships rather than on direct command. Relationships have been ignored for years. Networks rely on whole new levels of openness, trust, honesty, integrity, and communication. This is exactly that kind of behavior that leaders have not been practicing. International terrorist networks (in a very efficient, although evil and destructive, way) have demonstrated the power of network organizations. We are now learning that it is impossible to fight a network with a hierarchy.

AS: You mentioned an enormous leap backward by most organizations. What gives you the courage to continue your pledge for a fundamental shift of mind?

MW: I became more courageous when I fell in love with life and people and I realized how wondrous the universe is, how truly awesome. It creates a feeling that life is really worth fighting for. Life is not something to take for granted or hope that someone else figures out how to do it. Connecting with the living world and the human spirit are the key sources for my courage to fight.

Reference

Wheatley, M.J. *Leadership and the New Science*. (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 1992).

RESEARCH

Building a Cross-Organizational Learning Community: Reflections on SoL's Greenhouse III

Carol Gorelick and Barry Sugarman

Carol Gorelick
Visiting Assistant Professor
Pace University—New York
cgorelick@notes.interliant.com

G3 Design Committee

Carol Gorelick (chair)
Karen Ayas
John Carroll
Jim Ritchie-Dunham
Lilly Evans
Ben Bruce
Michael Pergola
Margaret Delaney Gorman
Sue Simmons
Frank Schneider
Jeff Clanon
Jackie Tabb
Barry Sugarman

Introduction and Context

Carol Gorelick

As the chairperson of the Society for Organizational Learning's (SoL) Greenhouse III design committee, I hope to communicate the spirit of collaboration and learning that was palpable during the event. As a SoL Council member *and* a proud alumna of George Washington University's Executive Leadership Program, I was gratified to participate in bringing these two organizations together and quite thrilled to see all concerned so clearly enjoy and benefit from the experience.

The Greenhouse design committee (see the sidebar) wanted to continue nurturing the traditions that were seeded and cultivated at the two previous Greenhouses. Three overarching principles guided our efforts. First, we strove to increase participation by all three SoL constituencies: researchers, practitioners, and consultants. Second, we wanted to provide an environment that encouraged collaboration and interaction. The design challenge was to balance structure and flexibility. Third, we hoped to include diverse perspectives into our conversations: for-profit and not-for-profit; organizations, teams, and individuals; and local, multinational, and global organizations.

Dangerous external circumstances have set the tone for the gathering both this year and last. Greenhouse II was poignant, taking place 10 days after September 11, and brought us closer together as a community. This year, snipers besieged the Washington area for several weeks but, fortunately, were found, barely two days before our event. Once again, we were called to reflect on what really matters, and we began with a sense of heightened awareness of what we individually and collectively value.

On Sunday night, more than 40 attendees met for an informal dinner. Our guest of honor, Egbe Osifo, manager for human development programs at the World Bank Institute, in her brief address on "Cultivating Leaders for Change," raised our consciousness about the enormous global health-care problems and opportunities to improve the lives of many. She eloquently described a serious societal threat supported by concrete data. Osifo embodies many of SoL's design principles with her practice and represents multiple constituencies as a medical doctor and MBA, practitioner and educator. She is involved in strategy, policy, implementation, and education in the UK, the US, and developing countries in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. She is a role model for inspirational leadership and left us individually and collectively with a mandate to act.

On Monday morning, Karen Ayas, cofounder (with John Carroll) of the first Greenhouse and our link to all three Greenhouses, skillfully introduced the history and led us in a SoL tradition—check-in, a process to welcome all and bring the whole person into the room. Next, I provided the context for the work of the SoL community. I chose to emphasize the evident paradoxes with a picture in which each of the three SoL constituencies—researchers, practitioners, and consultants—are represented by a box, but as distinct membership categories, SoL members struggle with the notion of belonging to a single constituency. Ultimately, SoL aspires to become a web of inclusion or a spiral that integrates all three constituencies and encourages flow among individuals, groups, organizations, and functions. This applies at multiple levels—individual, group or team, organization, and society—as well as within SoL's structure—founding SoL, local SoL fractals, and fractals across the growing Global SoL Network. As reflected in the Greenhouse design principles and this year's theme, the overarching objective and research challenge is to do meaningful work that is simultaneously rigorous and relevant.

Three constituencies © Megan Buchanan Schopf

Representatives came from all constituencies and several countries, including Austria, Canada, Japan, South Africa, and the UK. We built on past Greenhouse successes and enhanced the process. There was some new learning on which to build for the next Greenhouse, including:

1. Have the Greenhouse at an academic site. The participation of George Washington University staff and doctoral students added tremendous value. It seemed to legitimize the research agenda by setting the tone for discovery, capacity building, and collaboration.
2. Allow space for unplanned sessions so germination can occur. The planned germination and plenary sessions may spark ideas that belong in a completely different category from scheduled sessions. Although someone may not be interested in the specific research topic emerging in a particular session, it may initiate another idea that could lead to collaborative research.
3. Provide a venue to answer an overarching question related to sustainability, which concerns us all and is important for a global learning community to focus on. *How can we collectively become intelligent about the most basic systems shaping global well-being?*

We once again closed with the poem from Greenhouse II (see the sidebar). Each participant left the Greenhouse with a rose, both to accentuate the theme of growth and to remind us of the collective spirit.

Several weeks later, a member of the research committee received a message from a new SoL consultant member and first-time Greenhouse participant: ''SoL Greenhouse III has definitely gotten under my skin. I can't work on any project now without thinking of a potential research component.'' This small win presents an exciting challenge—to make research an integral part of every project and share knowledge across organizations.

Research Themes and Cross-Currents

Barry Sugarman

The goals for Greenhouse III, as set by the design committee, were:

1. To learn from collaborative research on organizational learning and transformation.
2. To explore the challenges of combining relevance and rigor in research.
3. To foster partnerships for further collaborations among researchers, managers, and consultants.

Barry Sugarman
SoL Research Coordinator
Barry@solonline.org

Some 30 sessions took place, of which I can mention only a few here. I focus on the dominant themes: action research and systems thinking (the subject of plenary sessions)

It Felt Love

How
Did the rose
Ever open its heart

And give to this world
All its
Beauty?

It felt the encouragement of light
Against its
Being,

Otherwise,
We all remain

Too
Frightened.

—Hafiz

and leadership development and integrated infrastructures (emerging foci of collaborative research) (see the sidebar for the complete list of topics covered in the germination sessions).

Action Research

Bill Torbert and Alain Gauthier skillfully presented the opening session on action research. They demonstrated why action research is essential to real transformation—both personal and organizational—and why it is central to effective leadership. Three members of the SoL Sustainability Consortium (researchers Hilary Bradbury and John Carroll, and Rob Fredricks from Ford) presented the implications of collaborative action research in a later session. The consortium supports ''green'' product development and other change projects, using the tools of organizational learning, and it conducts case studies of these efforts, some retrospectively and some concurrently. The case studies focus on a triple bottom line, defined as people, planet, and profits. In a germination session, Dan and Rita Kowalski, Joel Harmon, and Dan Twomey presented another good example of academic-practitioner action-learning research on a national scale from the US Department of Veterans Affairs.

Systems Thinking

John Sterman, in his keynote session entitled ''Cloudy Skies,''[1] demonstrated that the ''fifth discipline'' itself remains at the heart of important research and thinking. Rather than presenting one of his studies on how quality improvement studies fail to be sustained, Sterman chose global warming as his topic. With shocking clarity, he analyzed key statements from the Bush administration's position on this issue, contrasting its argument based on ''common sense'' with that of the scientific community, using systems thinking. He demonstrated once again that even the ''smartest'' humans usually perform very poorly when facing problems that involve system dynamics. Sterman's interpretation is that the human brain appears to have evolved over thousands of generations to be good at pattern matching but not at simulating stocks and flows. So pattern matching is what we use, leading sometimes to seriously erroneous conclusions, for example, the amount of time remaining to undo the effects of global warming and the magnitude of change needed.

Two other teachers of systems thinking, Marilyn Herasymowych and Henry Senko, who also noticed that their students used pattern matching to understand systems, decided to find a way to use this as an asset rather than treat it as a problem. They created and demonstrated training that applies pattern-matching principles using 10 pairs of archetypes, each with both positive and negative versions. They are seeking research partners to carry their work further.

Peter Senge offered his own reflections on ''Cloudy Skies'' and led the lively discussion that followed.

Leadership and Leadership Development

For SoL members and our cosponsors at George Washington University, leadership and leadership development remain dominant themes. Among the research featured was a panel with multiple presenters from GWU, surveying the work of the George Washington Center for the Study of Learning. Because SoL audiences usually appreciate senior practitioners who speak candidly about their leadership practices, we also heard from Arjan Overwater, senior vice president at Unilever Bestfoods. In his session entitled ''Unilever's Path to Growth,'' Overwater showcased its innovative and boundary-stretching work with emphasis on personal growth and community building. ''Leadership Growth Journeys''

Greenhouse Germination (break-out) Sessions

Presenters	Presentation or germination topic
Clyde Croswell, James Leslie, Chris Wagoner, GWU	Leadership and moving from "I" to "we": Transformational learning experiences, building collective trust, and dialogic leadership in AA, formal teams, and professional education associations
Marilyn Herasymowych and Henry Senko	Making systems thinking accessible using systems archetypal mapping
Katherine Holt	Exploring the people practices behind innovation
Arjan Overwater, Unilever	Human drivers of organizational success, research proposal from Unilever
Chris Kayes, Clyde Croswell (USMC, Ret.), Patricia R. Brown, GWU	Learning in multidisciplinary teams: Lessons from Marine Band combos
David Koehn and Rima Shaffer	Beyond rigor: A search for new practices for thriving in chaos and complexity
Christoph E. Mandl, Vienna University	Organizational learning in early phases, before and in the first three years after the founding of an organization
Mebs A. Loghdey, University of Cape Town; Paul Alexander, Julie LeRoux, Old Mutual Insurance	Model of organizational learning integrating scenario thinking, ROI, capacity building, and knowledge management
Susan C. Hull, Carol Gorelick, Barry Sugarman, and several SoL organizational liaisons	Project LEAD research: Insights into design possibilities for phase II of collaborative research on leadership development
Ellen Pruyne and Michael Pergola	From consultancy to practice to research in building a learning organization: Wachovia Corporation
Hilary Bradbury, John Carroll, Rob Fredricks	Research collaborations in the SoL Sustainability Consortium
Fred Simon, Prasad Kaipur, Jim Ritchie-Dunham	Systems thinking—a conversation
Rita Kowalski, Dan Kowalski, Ellen Kollar, US Department of Veterans Affairs; Joel Harmon, Dan Twomey, Fairleigh Dickinson University	New challenges and learning from large-scale, collaborative research project. A national study of workplace stress and aggression in the US Department of Veterans Affairs
Paulette Seymour, Christine Klucznik, University of Massachusetts Memorial Medical Center; Vince Pelote	Nursing leadership at UMMMC's comprehensive leadership development strategy utilizing action research and reflective learning.
Arjan Overwater, Unilever	Lessons on intercultural leadership development. Framework and recommendations on how to develop leadership in different cultures
Arjan Overwater	Unilever's new way of learning and growing
Jim Hazy, Brian Tivnan, David Schwandt, GWU	Boundary spanning activities in organizational learning
Karen Ayas	Young leaders' forum in Asia: Learning about leadership, abundance, and growth
Brad Rassler	"A sustainable way": transformative leadership development in environmentally sustainable, socially responsible business practice
Betty Ann Rafuse, Doug Lawson, Sanofi-Synthelabo, Canada Inc.	"What competencies are needed to support and create hypergrowth forecasted for the next three to five years?," related questions
Marty Finkle, AT&T	Global implementation of e-CRM system—impact on organization
David Schwandt, Marshall Sashkin, Andrea Casey, Margaret Gorman, GWU	Bringing OL into change interventions; examples of research from the GWU Center
Sharon Drew Morgen	Human drivers of growth: beyond dialogue

© Emily Sper

brought the top 100 managers to Costa Rica one year, and next-generation top leaders in this huge multinational to Iceland and Croatia in other years. These ''growth journeys'' prompted participants to get out of their ''executive shells'' in a back-to-basics human encounter, often in a natural setting. The experiences were intended to evoke deep introspection about what is important to them as people. Although naturally challenging and sometimes scary, the experiences promoted leadership capabilities by bringing a different perspective and purpose back into the business world. Overwater personally witnessed a marked difference in the dialogues among the top leaders following the Costa Rica trip, beyond anything he has experienced before.

Boldly pushing the envelope in leadership development practice, such as the Young Leaders' Forum in Asia (presented by Karen Ayas), Unilever has begun research on ''the human drivers of organizational success'' (presented by Tim Munden). In a different vein, a group at the University of Massachusetts Memorial Medical Center (Paulette Seymour, Christine Klucznik, and Vince Pelote) presented a leadership development project guided by a solid, competency-based research component.

Another leadership session — Project LEAD — focused on mental models of leadership as both an individual and collective capability. LEAD involved collaborative research that was seeded at a germination session in the previous Greenhouse. Six SoL member organizations participated in this joint research. The focus is on the broader systemic view of leadership in each organization, and preliminary findings show the importance of examining the mental models of leadership and leadership development. Project LEAD has also generated important learning for its participants about the process of collaboration at each stage of the research: design, collecting data, analyzing, reporting, and interpreting. While this process takes longer, the knowledge created gets really infused into the organization, increasing the capability to act on it.

Integrated Infrastructures

This research topic owes much to a proposal submitted to the Greenhouse by a practitioner involved in a large, corporate, electronic customer relationship management (e-CRM) implementation, alert to the high probability that this major change will have unintended consequences for many parts of his system. Typical of a germination session, that exploratory conversation identified other participants and other organizations with similar concerns and interests.

One SoL member company is deeply invested in lean operating systems and is eager for research that would help support that work, while another is working on lean manufacturing and trying to overcome the fragmentation of related systems. Several are concerned about honoring the interdependencies among subsystems; others are interested in making their support systems more flexible and sustainable.

Further conversations at the liaison officers' meeting of member companies following the Greenhouse nurtured the seeds that were planted at the Greenhouse; some of those seeds came from earlier liaison discussions. While a concrete plan is not yet defined, this group has identified an important area of shared interest and members have a commitment to some collaborative form of inquiry.

The emergence of ''Integrated Infrastructures'' as a research topic provides an excellent example of the germination sessions and the role of the Greenhouse for seeding and nurturing research projects across constituencies and organizations. Martin Finkle from AT&T proposed a session entitled ''Global Implementation of e-CRM: Its Impact on the Whole System.'' Finkle took the opportunity to bring his practical workplace concern into a larger community space where it could be collectively reframed as a research opportunity involving other practitioners and researchers.[2] ''Integrated Infrastructures'' is likely to become the focus of a collaborative research effort, involving a substantial group of SoL member organizations.

Rigor and Relevance

The overarching theme chosen for Greenhouse III was ''Rigor *and* Relevance,'' a core concern of SoL research. Relevance focuses on the practicality of new knowledge and rigor focuses on its accuracy and generalizability. SoL seeks to be a cross-organizational community of practice whose members generate and share knowledge of relevance to other members through rigorous research. The theme may be perceived as calling for trade-offs, but our challenge is to maximize both values.

The Greenhouse provided some opportunities to probe more deeply into these issues with diverse examples. For example, systems thinking provides a rigorous method for analyzing public policies on global warming, a topic of the highest relevance. But how can this rigorous analysis be made to seem relevant to policy makers and voters who do not have access to such rigorous ways of thinking? Similarly, rigorous research methods are giving us better competency systems for leadership development programs, but these often do not satisfy the wish for transformational leadership. Different mental models come into play, and rigorous methods that work within one mental model must be re-evaluated before they are used for different purposes, for clients who use a different mental model. What kind of research can assess, with appropriate rigor and validity, a program such as Unilever's ''growth journeys''?

One of our greatest assets at SoL is an ability to focus collective attention on serious, deep, difficult issues in ways that lead people to feel more energized to take relevant action. A continuing commitment to rigor in our thinking and research need not drag us down into defeatism or irrelevance. We must continue to insist on both relevance and rigor.

This Greenhouse created the context that enabled many great conversations about important topics in organizational learning, and it brought more SoL members fully ''into the game'' of collaborative action research. It helped to advance the germination of some ideas and proposals for research, including the second phase of Project LEAD and the new Integrated Infrastructures project. These two topics form a major part of SoL's emerging research agenda. A third candidate, unveiled at G3 and now awaiting further discussion, is the ''human drivers of growth'' proposal, rooted in the two Unilever presentations from Munden and Overwater.

As articulated by the SoL Research Committee, the vision for research at SoL is that every organizational member should be engaged in projects to improve its organizational learning *and* engaged in research and assessment to strengthen its improvement and learning process. The Greenhouse once again served as a good venue and vehicle for creating and sharing new knowledge (know-how, methods and tools, and theory) about organizational learning and transformation, helping SoL to be an effective community of practice and learning.

Acknowledgments

George Washington University, specifically, the faculty and students of the Executive Leadership Doctoral Program and the Center for the Study of Learning, hosted and co-sponsored Greenhouse III at its northern Virginia campus, October 27–29, 2002. Many thanks to David Schwandt, program and center director, and to Margaret Delaney Gorman, executive director, for their contributions to the venture's success. We are grateful for the bright energy of the doctoral student participants who took thoughtful notes during all sessions and helped to staff the conference.

Greenhouse program information can be found on the SoLonline.org website, including a list of presenters and topics, their material, and some discussion notes in the form of handouts, slides, and video (for some plenary sessions only). Search by title, name of presenter, or ''G3.'' The SoL web-based archive also includes substantial material from the two earlier Greenhouses.

Notes

1. Paper coauthored by John Sterman and Linda Booth Sweeney and available on the SoL website.
2. The challenge in wording one of these proposals is simultaneously to identify a practical concern that will be shared by other practitioners and to show the possibility for an interesting role where researchers can contribute. What is needed is not to fully define the problem but just to show how it has potential for those who might help proposal writers find something rewarding for themselves at the same time. Helping define the problem better may be where the collaboration starts.

Commentary

by David R. Schwandt

David R. Schwandt
Director
Human and Organizational Studies
Doctoral Program
Director, Center for the
Study of Learning
George Washington University

Reflecting on the Greenhouse is a difficult and rewarding task. The difficulty stems from the diversity of the presentations and the depth that each manifested. My initial expectations were that this would be a conference of "beginning" ideas. However, as is true with a botanical greenhouse, this greenhouse displayed ideas at all stages of development, yet commonly characterized by a sincere request for input by the presenters. This variety of topics and passion for inquiry form the basis of my difficulty and rewards. However, three ideas remain with me.

First, the interest that was voiced concerning the development of leaders and managers seems to have evolved from the traditional "let's identify competencies" to an emphasis on context of leadership and management. The conference voices reflected a leadership continuum that ranged from individual development, shown by Loghdey, Alexander, and LeRoux, to collective, intercultural leadership, depicted by Overwater. The themes reflected in these presentations represented (1) the acknowledgment of a highly complex, socially created leadership context; (2) incorporation of action learning experiences that make cross-cultural differences obvious and important; and (3) a concern for the ethical foundations of organizations, both for-profit and not-for-profit. The papers and ideas reflect a philosophy that supports leadership development as more than mastery of a set of individual competencies, but rather leadership as a social phenomenon required for social structure, meaningful work, and individual dignity in a community. Leadership is not seen as "something you do to someone else."

Second, the range of applicability of concepts put forward at the conference ranged from the very micro to the macro social levels. The use of systems thinking and systems dynamics was evident in the analysis of learning in the multidisciplined teams, as presented by Crosswell, Kayes, and Brown. In this example, improvisation by the system (team) is seen as a function of the interactions around language and social norms. This same dependence in social interactions and language was evident in the macro issue of global warming. Sterman's systems dynamics analysis of the "science" of global warming was well positioned in the context of the social dynamics of learning. This macro issue of information management was also the focus of systems thinking as demonstrated by Finkle in the discussion of the global implementation of e-CRM.

Last, an issue that was not the explicit focus of any one presentation but was implicit in the work that is being accomplished is the relative orientation of the world. When organizations study leadership, communications, or systems analysis, do we approach them from a "research" framework or from an "advocate" frame? Is there a line between these two orientations that can be crossed over? These can be difficult questions because of many factors such as a client's pragmatic need to solve problems, our need to promote a specified philosophy or worldview, and, of course, the field's need to experiment and create knowledge. The action learning process seems to be one of the better orientations to this dilemma. The expectations for solutions are integrated with the methods of inquiry and represented by the many papers that were presented at the conference and also reflect SoL's underlying theory of knowledge.

These three ideas—leadership development, cross-level analysis, and action learning—appear to be strands of thought that permeated the proceedings. They were present not only in the substance but also in the spirit of the participants' interactions. In this way, the conference lived in the ideas of learning and knowledge creation.

Commentary

by Tova Olson

Tova Olson
Doctoral student
George Washington University
Human and Organizational Studies
tova@gwu.edu

Knowledge creation as a continuous and evolving process seems to be at the heart of SoL. Collaboration among researchers, managers, and consultants is central to this process, and as student volunteers for the SoL Greenhouse III, we learned, firsthand, the advantages of enlisting multiple, varied perspectives and creating a context that allows for knowledge creation.

As doctoral students who assisted in facilitating the conference, our volunteer responsibilities evolved into a meaningful, contributing role. We served as facilitators, conveners, and summarizers. However, our most important role was as collaborative learners in the SoL community.

Our assigned primary role was to assist in the germination sessions, the smaller and more interactive discussions. A presenter who was genuinely interested in creating a context in which participants could explore and develop ideas facilitated each session. We were actively engaged in this exploration, and through this experience, we learned about topics ranging from leadership to action learning.

Following each germination session, we could further reflect on our ideas and share collaborative learning with other conference participants. With a student partner, we developed conceptual maps depicting the themes that emerged from each session. These visual maps, which we shared with other participants, later became the basis for the concluding plenary sessions. Through this process, we learned how intentional efforts to share knowledge can result in more fruitful conversations. We witnessed how participants identified important areas of shared interest both within the sessions and in the ensuing conversations. Our visual maps sparked conversations that allowed collaboration to continue during breaks and meals, and we recognized how our small efforts could greatly benefit an entire organization.

In addition to learning through reflection and conversation, we also learned by observing the already established partnerships among SoL members. The conference participants included a wide range of scholars, managers, and consultants. Most impressive was the genuine interest all participants showed in each topic. Participants seemed to challenge themselves to attend sessions outside their specific area of interest or research, and wonderful opportunities for collaboration emerged. As students or future organizational learning practitioners, we were included in the SoL community and began to develop relationships that will help us to continue to explore our areas of interest.

Finally, we learned from the conference designers the importance of flexibility in any learning context. The design committee established a culture in which flexibility was not only encouraged, but expected. It was not uncommon to see session facilitators diverge from the topic at hand to follow the group's interests. In addition, as topics emerged, groups with shared interests held informal sessions. Finally, the agenda for the conference continued to evolve throughout the process to meet the needs of presenters, facilitators, and the group as a whole. Although challenging at times, what resulted was a context in which ideas could be followed and developed as they emerged.

SoL created the context for knowledge creation and learning. As student participants, we came away with increased enthusiasm, an appreciation of the impact of collaboration, and, most important, the beginning of relationships with other scholars, managers, and consultants.

Reflections: Looking Ahead

We are pleased to announce that, in the coming months, *Reflections: The SoL Journal* will move to a new format more in line with what we understand to be of greatest value to our current and prospective readers. Through this change, we hope to focus in depth on particular strategic topics, while preserving the high editorial and production standards that have characterized the journal's first four years.

Beginning in October 2003, we will replace the quarterly publication of a hard-copy journal with monthly articles sent to *Reflections* subscribers electronically and published on the SoL website (http://www.solonline.org). We will then publish these articles in hard-copy form as a *Reflections* annual volume, to be sent to all subscribers.

Concentrating on one or two major articles per month will allow us to focus on developing core themes and to engage readers in more interactive exploration of those themes. Some topics we have in mind include large-scale change, sustainability, leadership development, cross-sectoral and distributed leadership, innovation in practice, and the future of education. Each reflects a crucial dimension of the institutional changes that are reshaping global economies and societies. Most importantly for *Reflections,* each represents an area in which organizational learning principles and methods and collaboration across institutional boundaries are essential to sustaining change.

With each monthly article, we will initiate a web-based dialogue related to the article and to the larger theme at its core, which will enable SoL members and *Reflections* readers worldwide to engage directly with authors, practitioners, and one another. Over time, we expect these dialogues themselves to yield interesting articles for subsequent monthly publications.

Additionally, in the interest of providing a broad forum for knowledge exchange, we will continue to accept contributed articles and post them on the SoL website, subject to our editorial criteria. We anticipate that this will provide a window to newly emergent strategic themes and create an important content stream for future *Reflections* publications.

The Summer 2003 issue brings the quarterly publications to a close and marks the beginning of the new monthly series. The 16 existing issues of *Reflections* will continue to be available on the SoL website. And we plan to compile a book of the core themes explored in many of the timeless classics and timely features published in these first four volumes. Please visit the SoL website (http://www.solonline.org) for the latest information about continuing or initiating a *Reflections* subscription.

The coming transition will be challenging and exciting. We have an array of provocative articles in planning that blend important new ideas with insights into the practical challenges of change. We hope to build on the wonderful foundation that Ed Schein and the editorial team have provided during the past four years. Ed will continue to be a guide and inspiration as our founding editor, and we will do our very best to disturb his retirement on a regular basis.

We will also need your help in the coming months. Please let us know your thoughts and suggestions.

Karen Ayas, Associate Editor, *Reflections*
Sherry Immediato, Managing Director, SoL
Peter Senge, Founding Chair, SoL