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IN THIS LAST ISSUE OF THE YEAR, WE PRESENT A SELECTION OF articles that offer practical applications and report on work that is pushing the edge of what we recognize as personal and collective learning disciplines.

Our feature story is most apropos to the time of year – I write this while hoping to check many things off my year-end to do list. You may be reading it at about the same time, or perhaps as you are sitting back and reflecting on what the coming year holds in store. In either case, reviewing "Managing Your Time as a Leader," by Marilyn Paul and David Peter Stroh is certainly a good use of your time. Marilyn, author of *It's Hard to Make a Difference When You Can't Find Your Keys: The Seven-Step Path to Becoming Truly Organized*, joins her husband, business partner, and SoL member David in capturing the basic implications of their work for effective leadership. You may have seen a recent *Harvard Business Review* article addressing the symptom of overworked executives, which reported that working long hours and traveling between multiple time zones result in the equivalent of decisions made under the effect of too many martinis. Paul and Stroh are clear that this is a symptom of faulty assumptions that cause us to work more, achieve less, and create a ripple of ineffectiveness in the organizations we manage. They urge us to stop addressing the symptoms and start addressing the causes of working more and achieving less. Two of their key points are recognizing how to increase sustainable productivity, and reducing phantom workload. Their artful use of creative tension to frame their lessons and practical techniques is a great application of organizational learning fundamentals.

This issue also includes three Emerging Knowledge Forum articles from contributors around the world.

By its very label, "systems thinking" can imply that an appreciation of systems is a mental activity. Raimo P. Hämäläinen and Esa Saarinen, of Helsinki University of Technology in Finland propose that our ability to comprehend systems is a complex intelligence involving multiple senses, and sense making that is in itself quite complex. In "Systems Intelligence: A Key Competence in Human Action and Organizational Life" they usefully ask us to consider how it is we are able to function effectively in complex systems, particularly if we understand this competence as intelligent behavior that can be further developed. Some would say that this is the premise of Senge's contribution to the field of organizational learning. Regardless, we would benefit from clear research questions to help develop this intelligence. We look forward to reader comments on this work.

"Context Tension: Cultural Influences on Leadership and Management Practice" points out that the realities of globalization tend to result in Western-based businesses imposing their values and management practices on those in the developing world. The authors – Nadine Mendelek Theimann, University of Oxford; Kurt April, University of Cape Town and Ashridge; and Eddie Blass, University of Hertfordshire and Ashridge – focus on the African context and note that the strength of African culture makes such homogenization both ineffective and impractical. At the same time, the necessity of cross-regional business relationships, as well as a history of colonialism, mean a rejection of Western practices is equally unworkable. The authors propose the possibility of hybrid management systems honoring both traditions rather than trying to co-opt or improve either. They offer a well-researched comparison of regional management

values and practices that the casual reader is likely to find a useful window on the challenges and opportunities of globalization. We hope researchers continue to offer questions and evidence around culture context and its relevance to organizational learning.

For the past ten years, Phil Ramsey, of Massey University in New Zealand, has had the intention of teaching organizational learning by engaging his students in creating their own learning organization. In "Teaching Organizational Learning: Permission to Exhale" he notes that a more traditional mode of transferring knowledge (inhaling) should be complemented with providing the opportunity for "learners to experience the exhilaration of organizational learning" in the educational process (exhaling). We hope that Ramsey's article will create an important new thread of contributions to *Reflections* about organizational learning in the university classroom – including exchanges of syllabi and course materials, teaching techniques, and advice about how to experiment within a traditional university setting.

Finally, this issue's book excerpt from *Conscious Business: How to Build Value Through Values* takes a comprehensive view about how we can bring more of ourselves to work. The book's author, Fred Kofman, was an early member of the staff of SoL's predecessor, the MIT Center for Organizational Learning. Because Ken Wilber has aspired to a rather thorough definition of what consciousness means to the individual in a collective context, we have chosen to reprint his foreword. It provides a brief and accessible summary of his own work, while offering a good introduction to the whole idea of conscious business – something that we can correctly conclude is currently the exception rather than rule.

As Paul and Stroh began, is it any wonder in all our rushing around that consciousness is the casualty? Fortunately, we can choose otherwise. We hope that this issue provides an opportunity for some quiet moments of awareness of your own gifts – those that you offer and those you receive. We appreciate the opportunity your commitment to collective intelligence and wisdom creates for all of us to engage in inquiry and conversations that matter.

With best wishes for deep contentment in the New Year,

C. Sherry Immediato
Managing Director, SoL

A STRUGGLE FOR SUSTAINABILITY IN RUSSIA

THE STORY OF THE INSTITUTE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (ISD) IN VLADIVOSTOK and its founding by its students and their teachers is a story of entrepreneurial spirit and hope (*Reflections* 7.3). Reading Jeffrey Lindstrom's article makes you want to get up and change educational institutions. It is the story of connecting an idea with an intention. And it immediately raises a comparison with the life of students in most educational institutions today. What better learning experience could there be than creating your own curriculum and learning environment, one that allows students to succeed and contribute to their own community?

One challenge, as they identified, will be how this new way of learning and teaching will survive in a larger system that is stuck in the past. The example of unprepared professors showing up late for the exams at ISD is a reflection of that challenge. Another possible future challenge for ISD might be harder to address: When the ISD moves from its initial entrepreneurial phase to conducting its everyday business, will it continue to provide such an exciting learning environment for its students? Will the next generation of students have a chance to create or co-create their curriculum as well?

I saw three outstanding lessons from Lindstrom's story of ISD's founding:

1) Students thrive when they take responsibility for creating their own curriculum and learning environment.
2) The sustainability award created by the students points to the importance of connecting the curriculum and the students' work with their community, and with the larger reality beyond the educational institution.
3) The underlying purpose of the Institute, sustainability, unites students and the supporter of ISD because it connects to an objective beyond individual interests.

These are lessons that could be applied in many other contexts.

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Managing Your Time as a Leader

Marilyn Paul and David Peter Stroh

Marilyn Paul

David Peter Stroh

Many leaders feel starved for time. Working under the assumption that longer hours lead to improved productivity, they drive themselves and others to increase effectiveness – then try to "squeeze in" good, quality time with loved ones. Working people are expected to run at a fast pace and be highly productive; yet at the same time, there is a chronic sense of individual and collective slippage, less than optimal work performance and impending burnout.

The ability of leaders to manage the increase in both workload and burnout more effectively is essential because their behavior has significant impact on others. Recent studies confirm that under stress, people act more defensively, make poorer decisions, and literally lose the "executive" function of their minds.[1] This is especially costly for leaders because they set the tone for their organizations. Their moods affect how others think and behave, so that people around them also tend to react in confused, defensive, and otherwise unproductive ways.[2]

When we ask our clients what they know about how to manage time, they list many familiar approaches: set goals, plan ahead, delegate, track commitments to ensure work is completed, and create manageable "to do" lists.[3] When we ask if they *use* these tools, we get one of two answers:

1. We do all these things, and they are not sufficient for us to stay on top of the demands we face, or
2. We know we should do these things, but we don't have time to do them

Conventional approaches to time management are useful in organizing to get work done. However, increasing personal efficiency alone is inadequate for helping leaders resolve this key strategic issue: *how to achieve high levels of sustainable, long-term performance while meeting the challenge of doing more with less*. Powerful workplace dynamics lead people, individually and collectively, to spend large amounts of their work time pursuing non-productive activities. Leaders must understand the nature of these dynamics and what they can do to change individual and collective habits of action.

The purpose of this article is to help leaders at all levels update their approach to time management to better address the challenges of today's work world. The key elements of this new approach are:

1. A focus on sustainable productivity
2. Identification and reduction of "phantom workload" – the work people unwittingly create for themselves by taking short cuts around or trying to avoid essential, difficult tasks
3. Tools for managing time more effectively in four leadership domains

4. A behavioral change model that enables people to reliably put good time management ideas – both traditional and innovative – into sustainable practice.

Increasing Sustainable Productivity

Perhaps the most important assumption for leaders to question is that working harder – longer hours and more days in a year – increases productivity. It's a seductive proposition, because working harder works up to a point – and beyond that point the personal consequences include reduced brain functioning, increased stress and health problems, decreased effectiveness, and strained or failed relationships. The impact on teams and units is also great: overwork tends to lead to mistakes that result in poor quality and re-work; misunderstandings and unnecessary conflict; lack of innovation; and extensive, unproductive meetings. The impact of overwork is sometimes clear and sometimes subtle – but it is insidious, leading to a long-term decline in quality of life.

Experience shows that time is not something that can be saved; it can only be "spent" more or less wisely.

Bill, a senior manager at a major pharmaceutical company, worked long hours to keep up with his assignments, which included leading several global teams developing market research projects. He enjoyed being the expert who was needed by people across the globe and tried to make himself available to his colleagues. He prided himself on putting in long hours at work and being available at home. But when Marilyn met him, he was in the middle of a brutal divorce and under scrutiny by his boss. He felt pulled in many directions and had trouble focusing on the essence of his responsibilities. He also had difficulty showing the leadership his department needed and was known as an uneven and unreliable manager. Some days he would be remote and unavailable; on others he would be chatty and even long-winded. Because he was so stretched, he let his subordinates run for a long time without supervision. Then, when he caught up on his sleep or reduced his backlog, he would take a look at what had happened without him. Surprised or even shocked by what he saw, he would plunge in with a fine-tooth comb – aggravating his subordinates and creating resentment that he hadn't been more present earlier. Sensing the resentment, he would back off and the uneven management cycle would repeat.

The costs of his uneven behavior were high, but he had difficulty saying no to requests for his expert advice. If he was going to survive at the company, he would have to deeply restore his energy, learn to set clear priorities, and even out his managerial behavior.

Leaders need to think in terms of increasing not simply levels of work and productivity, but primarily the level of *sustainable* productivity. By sustainable productivity we mean:

- Getting the right things done, well, in a timely way, *and*
- Preserving and restoring resources including oneself, one's good standings with colleagues and customers, and one's relationships with family, community, and the natural environment

Experience shows that time is not something that can be saved; it can only be *spent* more or less wisely. One way to approach this is to clarify what really matters to us, live life in accordance with our deepest values, and serve others' best interests as well as our own. From a leader's point of view, time management needs to be about helping oneself and others make wise and often courageous choices rather than doing more with less.

Reducing Phantom Workload

One of the best ways to increase sustainable productivity is to reduce what we call "phantom workload." Phantom workload is the unintentional work created when people either take expedient, but ineffective short cuts or avoid taking on such essential, difficult tasks as:[4]

- Clarifying mission, vision, and values
- Asking questions that challenge what is ambiguous or unrealistic
- Identifying and resolving conflicts
- Clarifying and streamlining decision-making processes
- Providing candid, constructive feedback
- Differentiating people with sanctions and rewards
- Launching innovative projects
- Making decisions that require disinvestment in programs or projects

The consequences of phantom workload include re-work, upset customers, chronic organizational conflict, lengthy unproductive meetings, time wasted solving the same problem over and over again, and extensive signoffs. Phantom workload looks and feels real and unavoidable, yet it can add hours to daily workload without significant benefit. Leaders unwittingly create a vicious cycle where the workload produced by solving these additional problems leads to increased pressure, which in turn leads to greater stress and a further reluctance or inability to engage in difficult tasks (see Figure 1).

In one case, the sponsor of a new project in a major oil company decided not to attend the project's two-hour kickoff meeting. He had other tasks to attend to, and he wanted to empower his project manager to take charge from the very beginning. However, the meeting did not go well because the project team members from different parts of the company could not agree on the project's goals, decision-making processes, and accountabilities. The sponsor subsequently spent 120 hours working with different departments and individuals to resolve the ambiguities and conflicts – 60 times longer than the original meeting!

As we face the tasks we typically avoid, we strengthen ourselves to make hard decisions, face difficult people and situations with more grace, and stop ducking what needs to be addressed.

In another example, the clinical informatics group of a major health care company found itself caught in a dynamic of over-promising and under-delivering to its internal customers. The group's management recognized that it had two ways of dealing with this performance pressure: set realistic expectations with customers or make commitments it was not sure the group could deliver on. Setting realistic expectations was difficult because customers themselves experienced intense pressure to improve short-term business results, the company was highly decentralized, and the innovative work the group did was difficult to scope. By contrast, promising a lot was easier, created customer excitement, and gave group members inspiring goals. Moreover, every once in a while, with a huge push, the group did in fact "pull a rabbit out of the hat."

Avoiding the difficult task of setting realistic expectations, which required ruthless portfolio as well as project planning, resulted in unintended consequences that increased performance pressure even further. First, the group was under continuous stress to meet generally unrealistic expectations. Since they often hurried to complete projects, they created numerous bugs in their product releases that had to be fixed. This led to even less time for planning and making accurate time estimates. They also had to negotiate customer pressures as delays

Figure 1. Phantom Workload

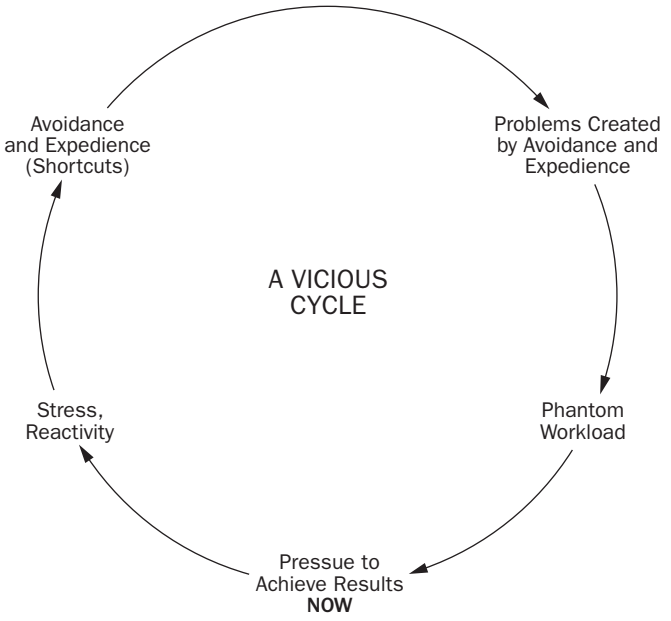
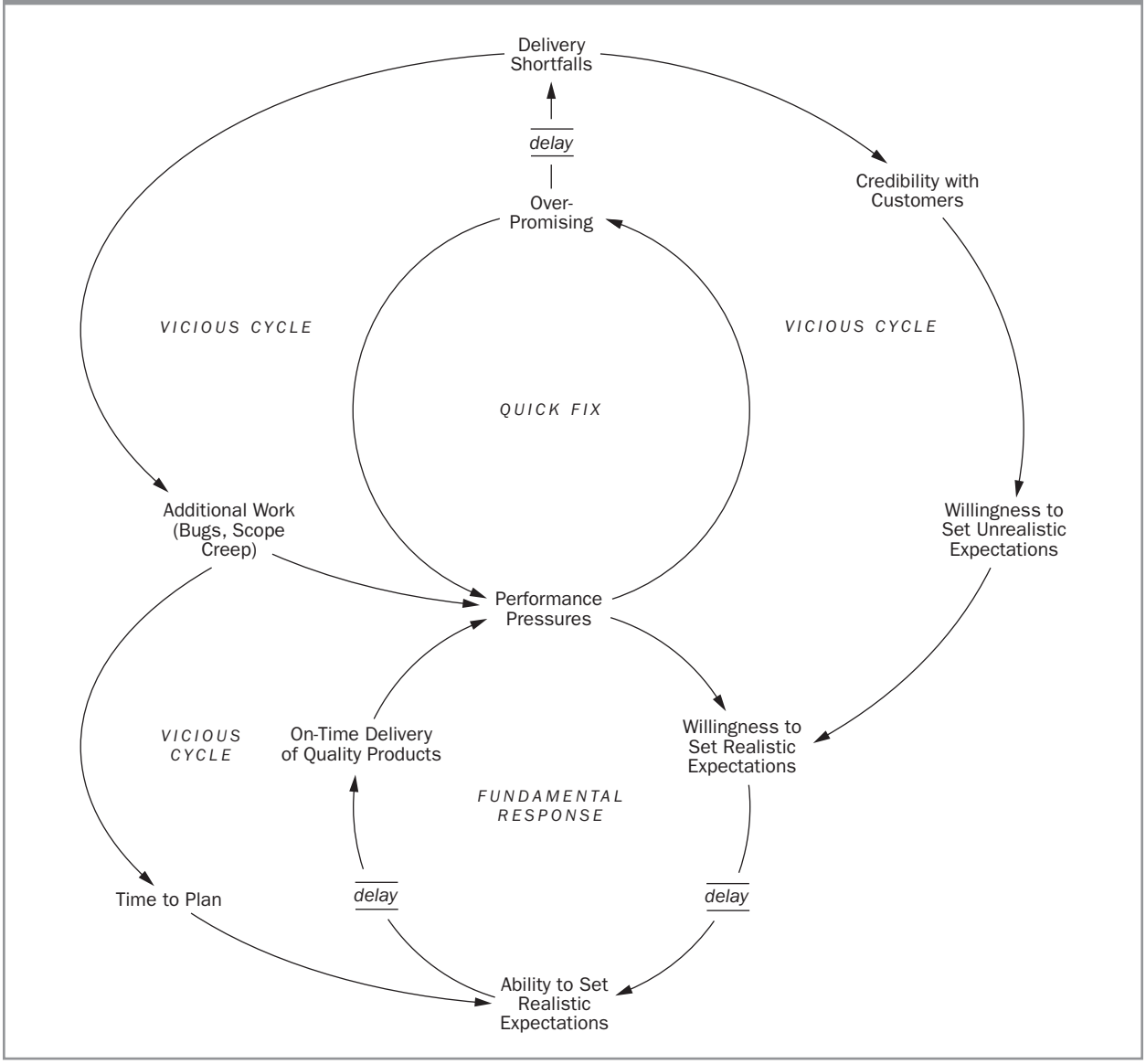


Figure 2. Over-promising and Under-delivering



mounted. When customer frustration increased, the group's credibility decreased, further undermining its ability to recalibrate its customers' unrealistic expectations. Moreover fatigue and discouragement increased along with stress, decreasing the group's creativity and overall work effectiveness even further (see Figure 2).

The important tasks that leaders avoid tend to be difficult, unpleasant, or anxiety-provoking. Therefore, addressing phantom workload as a way to manage time calls upon people to confront what is difficult. It requires leaders to go beyond doing current tasks differently to address what they are *not* doing. Whether they call the tendency "avoidance," "procrastination," or simply "not getting around to it," leaders need to take a hard look at the tasks they leave unattended before deciding that the benefits of not doing them exceed the costs. Thus, "time management" becomes leadership development. As we face the tasks we typically avoid, we strengthen ourselves to make hard decisions, face difficult people and situations with more grace, and stop ducking what needs to be addressed.

Managing Time in Four Domains

	Strategizing	Guiding	Doing	Relating
Domain	Mental	Spiritual	Material	Emotional
Function	Think strategically	Mobilize commitment through aspiration	Organize for action	Build relationships and community
Primary Tasks	• Defining limited goals • Managing tradeoffs • Making accurate time estimates	• Knowing what you really care about • Establishing a meaningful purpose • Clarifying your unique contributions	• Sorting and filing information • Tracking commitments • Managing email	• Making commitments and requests • Managing productive meetings • Managing your energy

Managing Time in Four Domains

It is helpful to think of time management in four domains. These domains represent the spiritual, mental, emotional and physical realms, which correspond to four key functions of leadership: mobilizing commitment, thinking strategically, building relationships and community, and organizing for action. The sidebar (above) describes these functions and their related time management tasks.

Effective leaders must deliver in all four areas, personally or indirectly through people they support. We often generate phantom workload in the areas in which we are weakest, since these are where we tend to avoid the tasks that need to be done. Developing or even getting support for weaknesses does not always come naturally to people who achieve on the basis of one or two strengths. For example, Jack Welch was promoted to CEO at GE because of his extraordinary ability to get things done. Even during his early tenure his reputation to clear out unproductive work and entire businesses earned him the nickname "Neutron Jack." However, over time Welch came to realize that leading GE required him to focus as much on values as results. He cited that a turning point in transforming the company occurred when he made the controversial decision to fire managers who were getting results but failing to practice the organization's new values.

Mobilizing Commitment

According to researchers Heike Bruch and Sumantra Ghoshal, high performing managers demonstrate high degrees of both focus and energy. Their resulting strong sense of purpose enables them to apply their limited time to greatest advantage.[5] They draw on their purposefulness to sort through the multiple demands on their time and target a few key contributions they want to make.

By contrast, people who don't have enough time to get things done often find themselves in a reactive mode. Disconnected from their sense of purpose and values, they are more easily driven by what others want from them than by their own innate sense of direction. In a world where there is always too much to do, their lack of clear personal purpose leaves them vulnerable to trying to do it all. As a result, they are often unfocused and confused.

Bruch and Ghoshal's research provides support for managers who long to live life directed by an inner compass rather than holding their finger to the wind. Knowing what one deeply cares about is different from knowing what one likes to do; indeed, being true to one's purpose often provides the motivation to take essential but difficult actions. Engaging our sense of purpose is a practice, not a one time event. We may have to keep asking the questions, "What do I really care about? What do I stand for? What matters most to me?"

Having done the hard and rewarding work of tapping into their own sense of purpose, effective leaders both intuit and shape a shared purpose that unites their organizations. As leaders guide people in their organizations to articulate shared values, mission, and vision, they "save" time later by clarifying the guiding ideas that underpin decision-making throughout the organization.[6]

Knowing your purpose and the goals of your organization enables you to identify the unique contributions you can make. These contributions leverage your passion and talents in the few places where you can have the greatest impact given the needs and direction of the organization. It becomes your navigational system, helping you respond to the excessive demands, tantalizing opportunities, inevitable crises, and frequent interruptions that can so easily distract you from your path.

Thinking Strategically

Clarifying the unique contribution you want to make enables you to set a limited number of goals. Purposeful managers tend to work towards 1–3 goals at a time, and discipline their direct reports to do the same.[7] Limiting goals can seem risky for leaders concerned about missing opportunities or pursuing the wrong direction. However, proliferating goals often substitute for sound strategic thinking, conflict resolution, and tough decision-making. The resulting ambiguity, confusion, and chronic conflicts are costly. Overwork, resentment, mistrust, and burnout are among the highest costs.

People who don't have enough time to get things done often find themselves in a reactive mode and are more easily driven by what others want from them than by their own innate sense of direction.

Leaders who know the few goals they want to pursue are better prepared to manage tough tradeoffs, for example between:

- Short-term vs. long-term
- Urgent vs. important
- Easy vs. difficult
- Comfortable vs. unpleasant

These tradeoffs are tough because we often prefer the left hand column. Ironically, many managers report that they never have time to do what they believe they should focus on – whether that be planning, supporting others, or evaluating performance. From this vantage point, sticking with priorities often becomes an act of courage and pattern breaking, even character building. Stephen Covey's time management book *First Things First*, makes much of addressing the long-term important, versus the short-term urgent. To develop the skills to address the right hand column, we ask slightly different questions as we decide where to focus:

- What am I avoiding?
- What feels most urgent and compelling, yet might not actually be so very important?

- What essential tasks have I "not gotten around to" for the past several days, or weeks, or months?
- Who am I blaming for their part in not getting something important done? What is my role in that?

Raising awareness of the right-hand column can lead to additional questions that help people focus on what they have been avoiding that is truly important:

1. What specifically are you avoiding? Why?
2. What are the consequences of avoiding this? How important is it really?
3. What is your goal for addressing it?
4. What is the first step you intend to take? By when?
5. What is the second step you intend to take? By when?
6. Who will you ask for support?

One manager said, "In our company we never have time to do it right, but we always have time to do it over."

Since accurate time estimates can be pivotal in not only the success of a project but also the satisfaction of those involved, making them is an essential part of setting priorities and planning. To do so, we build on prior experience; learn how to include such hidden factors as collaboration time, transition time, and dealing with unforeseen obstacles; and create a buffer for "surprises." These guidelines can help:

- Surface and challenge internal and external pressures to under-estimate how long things will take
- Include time for preparation, collaboration, transition and completion in your estimates
- Allow for unforeseen circumstances – set personal deadlines well in advance of actual ones to ensure sufficient buffer time
- Use backcasting as a planning tool

Often people say that it is not culturally acceptable to tell the truth about how long a project takes. However, identifying the costs of under-estimating time can bolster the courage to develop better estimates up front. One manager said, "In our company we never have time to do it right, but we always have time to do it over." That is the essence of phantom workload, and good time estimates can reduce it substantially.

Building Relationships

Trust and respect are the coin of the realm in today's increasingly networked organizations.[8] Establishing clear priorities, managing difficult trade-offs, and effectively predicting how long things take all help build trust. The ability to make reliable commitments reduces the domino effect produced by missed deadlines, where one person's failure to deliver on time undermines others' abilities to do the same. It also eliminates the need for people to take time away from their own commitments to help complete someone else's work, which is a time-waster and relationship-killer all in one.

No matter how important reliability is, in some organizations it is hard for people to keep their word. Requests to do additional work come frequently and in many forms: as demands, interruptions, crises, and opportunities.

Being true to yourself and your word requires the willingness and courage to resist saying "Yes" when a request takes you away from your chosen goals, or you are not sure you can

deliver. Saying "No" is not perceived as an option in many organizations. Moreover, to please others, people often accept ambiguous or unrealistic requests. Clarifying the nature of the request can be construed as not being cooperative or a team player. For example, several members of the clinical informatics group believed:

- "I am not allowed to push back. We know programmers don't code 6 hours per day, but that's what we budget for."
- "Client expectations are totally out of our control."

Furthermore, in organizations that value busyness over effectiveness, challenging others to keep their word can be equally unpopular. How do we hold people accountable for being late on a project or to a meeting when we know how stretched we all are?

Despite the temptations to say "Yes" to requests, it helps to buy time first to consider the following:

1. Is meeting the request congruent with your personal intentions, skills, and resources?
2. If the requested work does not directly support your goals, does it build sufficient social capital that enables you to be successful in the ways you choose?
3. Is this a SMART request?[9]
   - **S** Specific: the details are clear
   - **M** Measurable: one understands the requester's standards
   - **A** Attainable: the request is achievable
   - **R** Realistic: one can meet the request
   - **T** Time-limited: there are clear dates for completion and mid-course correction

The following questions further support the hard work of making effective agreements:

- When and with whom do you feel that you cannot take the time to clarify the nature of the request?
- When and with whom do you over-commit (Clients, colleagues, bosses)?
- What beliefs and thinking patterns lead you to take on ambiguous work that you are not sure you can deliver on?

Finally, it is important to note that there are options between responding to a request with an unqualified "Yes" or "No." Sometimes, the most responsible answer – one that best honors the other person's needs as well as your capacity – might be to:

- Ask for clarification; ensure you receive a SMART request
- Offer to check your resources and get back to the requester in a specified amount of time
- Make a counter-offer that you believe can still meet the requester's needs
- Clarify the tradeoffs you see and jointly problem-solve an alternative

The flip side of making reliable commitments is ensuring that others keep their agreements with you. Managers often avoid delegating because they feel that they can do the work better or faster themselves. This might be true, but it means that the manager is not creating conditions for others to be successful. Moreover, if the job being delegated is repetitive, the benefits gained over time by not doing it oneself should outweigh the up-front work involved in coaching someone else to do it.

The following guidelines can help you make others' word good:

1. Remember that getting others' support requires clear and regular two-way communication – both at the outset and over the course of the commitment.
2. Ensure that your own requests are SMART ones.
3. Give people the opportunity to question or modify the request.
4. Take time to monitor progress, provide support when asked, and encourage learning from failures as well as successes along the way.

Meetings also consume an enormous amount of time. As organizations become flatter and more networked, many meetings across units seem to be required in addition to the more traditional internal ones. Between endless meetings and emails, many are concerned that they have precious little time for *productive* work.

There is so much flux in organizations that in some cases meetings have become a substitute for organizational structure and organizational norms.

Improving the productivity of meetings, including evaluating the need to have them at all, is an important part of time management.[10] At the same time we think the proliferation of meetings in today's organizations requires a second and more comprehensive response as well. There is so much flux in organizations that in some cases meetings have become a substitute for organizational structure and organizational norms. An organization-wide task force can be charged with assessing the way the organization uses meetings overall, gauging their effectiveness, training line and network leaders to better use this essential resource, and simultaneously determining what meetings can be eliminated entirely or replaced with alternative forms of communication. One partial solution, used by some companies to reduce meeting gridlock in today's networked structures, is to segment types of meetings and schedule all meetings of a similar type on the same days or weeks.

Finally, as we look at how relationships affect people's ability to manage time, we want to call attention to that most essential relationship – the one we each have with ourself. Our experience of vitality is our key "time management" resource. When we feel awake and alive we can meet our work with strength and energy. When we are dragging ourselves around, our best hope is to get through the day. One colleague says, "When I am well rested and in good shape, I can do in four hours what otherwise takes me eight."

It is easy to neglect self-care in the name of productivity, but working harder and longer is not more productive beyond a certain point.[11] Taking care of ourselves is essential for sustaining joy and commitment to work. Claiming the value of self-care challenges our mental models. For example, one leader who participates in the daytime yoga class offered at his

bank tells his colleague, "I'm off to increase my productivity." Other companies force their employees to take vacation by limiting email access during certain periods of the year.

Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz, who have worked extensively with both senior managers and professional athletes, conclude that *energy* not time is an individual's most precious resource.[12] They recommend ways to mobilize energy in four areas – spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical – which correspond to the four leadership domains described here. Developing periods of self-renewal during the day, like five-minute stretch breaks, can extend and increase energy. For many, the most important source of renewal is their family. Unfortunately, the demands of work often show up at home, where people feel more comfortable expressing the negative energy that builds up during the day. Approaching family and friendship as an afterthought or even a dumping ground threatens the very support that many people need to maintain sustainable productivity at work.[13]

Refreshing ourselves at all levels is key to sustaining interest in work and life. Self-care breaks throughout the day, week, and year are essential to making the most of the time we have.

Organizing for Action

Taking action inevitably leads to natural disorder: papers and books are placed on surfaces, e-folders and files are opened, notes are written down, etc. The critical point in keeping track of information and "stuff" is what we do *after* we create the disorder. Do we put things away in places where we can easily retrieve them, or do we allow the temporary chaos to expand indefinitely? Do we clean up our creative messes or create toxic ones? Honestly answering these questions can be especially difficult for leaders who see the big picture and don't want be bothered with details.

It can be helpful to remember that effective leadership involves implementation as well as ideas, and that implementation *is* in the details. People can accomplish great things without taking care of some of the basics, but there may come a time when addressing fundamental organizing skills is necessary.

Organizing for action means creating useful, workable systems and habits for accessing information quickly, tracking commitments, and managing email effectively. The objective of a good filing system is retrieval, not storage. After you set up meaningful categories and

locate items where you can quickly find them again, it is important to develop a practice of sorting through files regularly. Though this can seem like a waste of time, looking for lost items wastes more. According to one study of offices, 15% of papers are irretrievably lost regularly, and each lost paper costs the business an average of $120.[14]

The initial backlog is daunting. Beginning to sort through piles of accumulated paper can create anxiety because they are often the build-up of unmade decisions, projects to let go of, or confusion about tasks. The piles are there because we don't want to deal with them. Remember your purpose and vision for managing time. Enlist the support of an executive assistant or professional organizing coach. Repeated short efforts (e.g. 10-30 minutes per day), can eliminate unwieldy piles. Building in the habit of regular filing – once per day, week or month – prevents the piles from coming back.

A second organizing challenge is tracking the commitments you make to others and others make to you. Leaders establish commitments in many places throughout the day. We recommend putting them in writing immediately and then, at least once a day, compiling them in one location. However the list is developed, it is important to select a manageable number of items for each day before the rush descends – ideally the night before or before opening one's email in the morning. Finally, we recommend that leaders conduct a weekly review to update their commitments and ensure that others are keeping their commitments to them.

Email has become the boon and bane of many people's organizational lives. It is a time-saving device, which, along with cell phones and Blackberries, has ironically left us with less discretionary time than ever before. One recent client labeled it "a faceless way of delegating thoughtlessly." We have found that some people can make best use of email when they follow certain guidelines such as those in Figure 4. Leaders also have a responsibility to help their teams and organizations create effective email protocols.

Changing Behavior

Time management practices are habits of thought and action, and thus require time and effort to change. The challenge is to alter some very personal ways of being in the world. While personal change is by definition individual, we suggest that the following seven steps may help the process.[15]

Know Your Purpose for Change

Establishing a powerful purpose for change is key to sustaining energy and motivation for engaging new practices. Ask, "What are the costs of continuing this way, and what are the benefits of changing?" The costs of mismanaging time can be very high: sustaining damage to one's work reputation, losing health and well being, and destabilizing love relationships. It's hard to face these costs; yet one's pain can lead to commitment to a more sustainable way of living. Identifying the benefits of change can also be motivating: a more stable family life, better health, a sense of well being, and greater work success might be among them.

Create Your Vision

Visioning helps people establish a new direction that lifts them out of today's problems. It is often used to describe a long-term, big-picture aspiration. Athletes use visioning to picture their desired high performance in a particular event. Visioning is a useful tool for re-crafting actual days and weeks. Without a picture of a desired daily life, it is easy to get lost in daily

Managing E-mail

1. Focus on your strategic priorities for the day before answering e-mail
2. Limit items during the day to check e-mail
3. Immediately discard all impersonal irrelevant messages
4. Briefly answer messages that require an immediate response
5. Use subject line protocols to speed up communication
6. Put all information-related e-mails into folders that you have created for that purpose
7. Keep only alive messages in your inbox
8. Allocate time daily or weekly to deal with complex responses
9. Empty your inbox every week
10. Ask people to remove you from their distribution lists that are no longer appropriate
11. Do not write a message when you are upset nor use e-mail for sensitive communications

pressures. Some good questions for visioning are: "How would I like my days to be? How can I imagine feeling on top of my work and energized? What details of the workday would I like to handle differently?"

Take Stock of Current Reality

Many people puzzle over how hard it is to get their time under control. They try to manage their time well, but outside pressures always seem to overwhelm them. Often this dilemma arises because they have never accurately assessed the sources of their time problems. They say, "It's my boss. It's the culture here. It's all those meetings. It's my Blackberry." Since these answers seem true, they don't feel the need to inquire more deeply.

Taking stock of current reality involves recognizing the cultural, organizational, and personal pressures that influence your workload; accurately describing your current work day; and identifying underlying beliefs and assumptions that determine how you spend your time. It requires taking personal responsibility for the way things are – recognizing both one's conscious choices and unconscious reactions to external pressures.

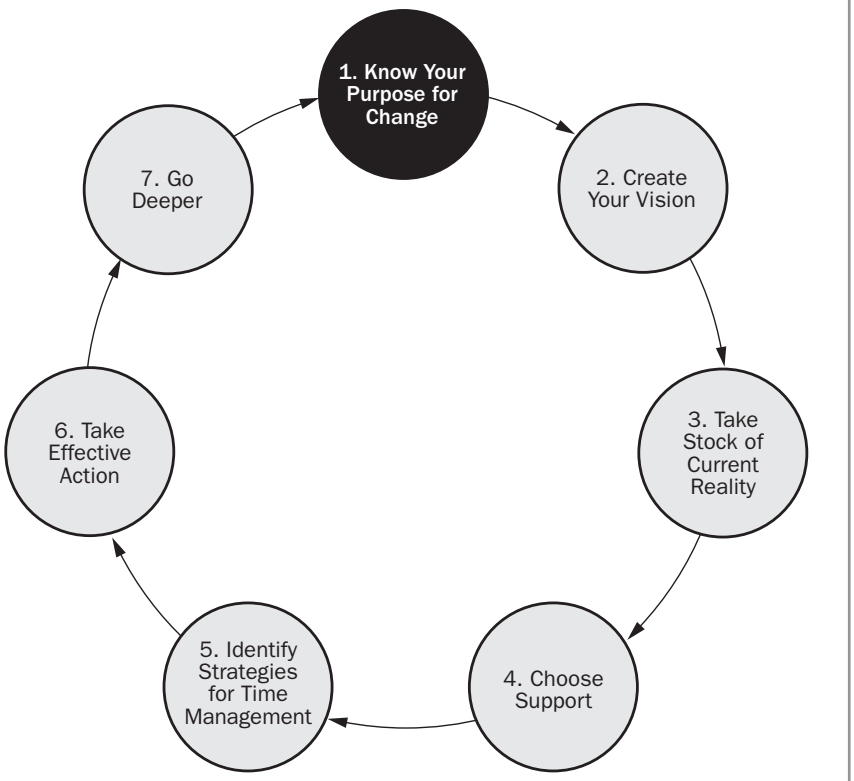
People often avoid exploring their time management challenges because they feel they don't have time to look at how they behave. Surprisingly, though, self-observation doesn't take extra time. It takes a willingness to activate an inner witnessing part of the self. When you lift the veil of labels, judgments and illusions, connecting with reality in an accepting way can be remarkably satisfying. For many people, it is powerful to start simply observing and getting to know oneself without empowering the haranguing inner voices, without defending or shaming oneself.

Taking stock at an organizational level involves developing a systems diagnosis of the root causes underlying the organization's problems with time. For example, Figure 2 illuminated the reasons why the clinical informatics group felt so stressed and under-resourced. It helped them have honest conversations about their responsibility for creating the dynamics they experienced and to consider alternative responses to company-wide pressures.

Get Support

Support helps us make the often deep changes associated with reallocating our time. It can decrease the sense of isolation – the feeling of being the only one struggling with these issues.

Figure 3. Changing Behavior



It can provide accountability or encouragement when the going gets rough. One powerful form of support is appreciative confrontation: "You are very creative, visionary and wonderful to work with in many ways, but I don't trust that you will meet our deadlines. It is important that we work together differently."

Talking about disorganization or poor time management habits is intensely personal. Thus, getting support should be done with care. Support for change helps counter the type of encouragement that reinforces our current behavior. "You're not leaving early are you? We have so much to get done." Or, "I can't believe you got that done ahead of schedule. Are you sure you covered everything?" Or, "You were working until ten last night. I wish everyone had your dedication."

Identify Strategies for Time Management

We have covered many strategies for time management. But, of course, there are many more. Time management strategies range from clarifying mission, vision and goals to managing to-do lists, phone calls, and software such as Microsoft Outlook with skill. The key is to implement a few strategies that yield high leverage for change.

Take Effective Action

In *Man's Search for Meaning* Vicktor Frankl noted, "It is not enough that we observe ourselves; we truly learn about ourselves as we take action towards a meaningful goal."

Taking action in this framework involves testing and experimenting. There is no 'one size fits all' time management strategy. The key question is, "What works for you? How will you try on a strategy and customize it for yourself?" The main thing is to look for leverage and the most impactful change. For example, one of our clients determined that getting more sleep would dramatically help his performance at work. He had been trying to save time by sleeping less, but that was backfiring because his afternoons were so unproductive. Another client decided to stop working at home after dinner. The work she did late at night was uniformly poor quality and always had to be redone. A third client decided to try out the Friday afternoon weekly review.

As we take action to change ourselves, we must remember that change can be slow. It often takes repetition and recommitment, like learning any new behavior. Here it is important to not give up on change, but to try again – and again if necessary. The stakes are too high to give up.

Go Deeper

Resolutions to change are inherently suspect. We move forward only to encounter all the reasons we were better off in the first place. The Biblical story of the Hebrews' exodus from Egypt dramatically points out how people conditioned to servitude would rather remain enslaved than risk becoming free. In their book, *How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work*, Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey coin the term "competing commitments" to capture the payoffs we experience in the way things are and the costs we might have to incur to achieve the results we want.

Resolutions to change are inherently suspect. We move forward only to encounter all the reasons we were better off in the first place.

Making new behavior stick requires clarifying the *benefits of not changing and the costs of change* – and then testing to see if those factors are indeed as powerful as the benefits of change and the costs of not changing. For example, Beth, a member of the clinical informatics group, agreed with her supervisor about the risks of saying "No" to clients' requests. However, she decided to test her assumptions by asking clients for a specific amount of time to get back to them with a carefully thought-out answer about what she could – and could not – deliver. She discovered that, while some clients viewed her as uncooperative, others respected her professionalism. She decided to continue her new behavior having determined that the costs were well worth the rewards.

Summary

In today's 24/7 world, leaders need to focus on ensuring the sustainable productivity of themselves and the people in their organizations. They need to think of time management as a discipline of making wise and sometimes difficult choices – not an exercise in doing more with less. They can do this by identifying and reducing phantom workload, drawing on numerous strategies to manage time more effectively, tapping resources other than time to increase productivity and effectiveness, and engaging themselves and others in a process of changing behavior. Their lives and the lives of others depend on their ability to manage this precious resource.

Endnotes

1 "Overloaded Circuits: Why Smart People Underperform," Edward Hallowell, *Harvard Business Review*, January 2005

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6 See, for example, *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook* by Peter Senge et al, and *Built to Last* by James Collins and Jerry Porras

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8 "Karen Stephenson's Quantum Theory of Trust", Art Kleiner, *Strategy + Business,* Issue 29

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13 *The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work,* Arlie Hochschild, Henry Holt, 2000

14 "So many reasons to neaten up, but it's too imposing", *Boston Globe*, March 12, 2006

15 *It's Hard to Make a Difference When You Can't Find Your Keys,* Marilyn Paul, Penguin Compass, 2004

Recommended Reading

"Beware the Busy Manager," Heike Bruch and Sumantra Ghoshal, *Harvard Business Review*, February 2002. This article describes the research that demonstrates the importance of a proactive or creative orientation to effective time management and high performance.

The Power of Full Engagement, Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz, Free Press, 2003. Managing one's energy and learning how to renew oneself are essential to sustainable productivity. This book provides a comprehensive approach and sound research to support it.

It's Hard to Make a Difference When You Can't Find Your Keys, Marilyn Paul, Penguin Compass, 2004. This book enables disorganized people to meet the challenge of organizing for action. Numerous tips are presented within the context of the personal behavior change approach described in this article.

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Systems Intelligence:
A Key Competence for Organizational Life

Raimo P. Hämäläinen and Esa Saarinen

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Esa Saarinen

We all have to act without knowing for certain what our choices will bring. We cannot seize a situation or stop the flow of time in order to analyze the various underlying patterns of the system in which we are embedded. And yet we all wish to act intelligently – indeed, we must.

By *systems intelligence*,[1] we mean intelligent behavior in the context of complex systems involving interaction and feedback. A person acting with systems intelligence engages successfully and productively with the holistic feedback mechanisms of her environment. She experiences herself as part of an interdependent environment, aware of the influence of the whole upon herself as well as her own influence upon the whole. With this heightened awareness, she is able to act intelligently.

We believe that systems intelligence is a higher-level cognitive capacity, similar to the many forms of intelligence Howard Gardner identifies in his theory of multiple intelligences,[2] and that it can provide a significant fresh approach for organizational learning practitioners. The systems intelligence approach acknowledges the systemic nature of the external world, but its main emphasis is on the concept of a system as part of the *human* experience and orientation. A "system" is a generative frame within which a subject experiences her life as taking place. The system moves, pushes, restricts, conditions, encourages, suggests, seduces, and commands: It seems to have a will and voice of its own. There is no way to fully know what it is.

The human race clearly must have had some form of practical intelligence to have survived as long as it has. That intelligence must have demonstrated itself in *action*, as humans reacted to, adjusted to, and made use of sometimes rapidly changing circumstances. Insight, knowledge acquisition, judgment, and analysis must have had prominent roles in the success story of the human race, of course, but before them came action – action that must have been intelligent before being acknowledged by a rational subject *as* intelligent.

From Systems Thinking to Systems Intelligence

When we launched the systems intelligence project, our starting point was Peter Senge's *The Fifth Discipline*.[3] But we felt that a link between Senge's discipline of "personal mastery" and his discipline of "systems thinking" was missing.

The systems intelligence approach basically takes Senge's discipline of personal mastery and the systems *perspective* as fundamental, and considers the discipline of systems *thinking* as secondary. We feel there is an objectifying bias in systems thinking, a bias for cognitive rationality and external viewpoint. Systems thinking highlights a domain of objects it believes is neglected – systems. But systems remain objects nonetheless, entities to be identified

and reflected from the outside. The systems intelligence approach avoids this externalist trap. Another aspect of the descriptions of systems thinking we felt uncomfortable with was the negative impacts that systems are often portrayed as producing. In the beer game described in *The Fifth Discipline*, for example, the individual can never fully succeed. He cannot flourish. He can improve his game performance somewhat, but ultimately the system structure forces him to acknowledge failure.

Insight, knowledge acquisition, judgment, and analysis must have had prominent roles in the success story of the human race.

Similarly, the "system archetypes" of systems thinking focus on describing how things can go wrong when systems structures are not acknowledged. "Limits to growth," "shifting the burden," "eroding goals," "tragedy of the commons," and "fixes that backfire" all highlight the negative traps people can fall into as a result of not appreciating the relevant systems structures.

The systems intelligence approach, in contrast, focuses on *what people do right and could improve upon in systemic settings*. It assumes that people possess a kind of inherent pre-rational and pre-reflective systems thinking capability. The key idea is what we call *flourishment*, a capacity for flourishing, as opposed to simply avoiding pitfalls. Systems intelligence thus calls for a positive systems scholarship, and sides with "positive organizational scholarship"[4] and "positive psychology"[5] movements in its focus on human flourishing, in contrast to human malfunctions. Systems intelligence also reflects the approach of "action research."[6]

Since we proposed the idea of systems intelligence in 2002, it has been applied to avoiding conflicts in environmental management, merger and acquisition issues, classroom pedagogy, themes of rewards and compensation, the theory of constraints, Sun Tzu's writings, and management and leadership coaching, to name a few applications.[7] During the past few years, the systems intelligence approach has become something of a movement in organizational life in Finland, discussed even on the chief editorial page of our major national newspaper.[8]

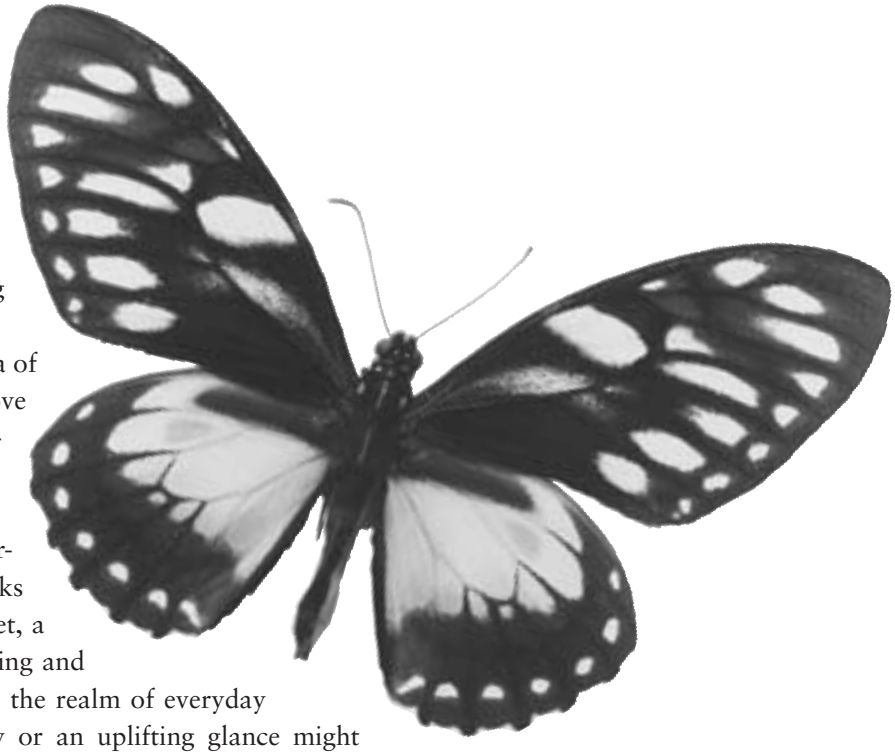
It Works in Practice, but Does It Work in Theory?

We began with the idea that it is essential to combine several perspectives that have traditionally remained isolated in academics and intellectual life:

1. *Philosophy of life* as an everyday activity reaching out to people irrespective of their background
2. *Systems perspective* with its emphasis on the whole and the complexity of the essential phenomena of human life
3. Human-centered *leadership for change* that builds on the hidden dimensions of human subjectivity, existential situation, and interaction
4. Appreciation for *humanly rich activities* such as sports, music, performing arts, and successful conduct of the everyday

We were interested in human activities that worked, even when there was no theory to explain why they worked, or even a recognized need for a theory.

The starting point was pragmatic and emerged from an engineering mind-set. Raimo Hämäläinen's background is in engineering sciences and operations research (often referred to as the science of making things better[9]); Esa Saarinen is a philosopher whose interest has



been in bringing philosophy to everyday contexts and to organizational life. Like Hämäläinen in the decades of his tenure at Helsinki University of Technology, Saarinen has worked extensively with engineering organizations such as Nokia.

Engineering thinking is based on the idea of change. Make X work, it says, and improve upon what doesn't work. One uses rationality and creativity in order to bring workable solutions to a concrete reality. One celebrates success even when not understanding exactly why something that works does work. Thus, for an engineer's mind-set, a system that works comes first; understanding and explaining why it works comes second. In the realm of everyday life, a kiss or warm laughter, an apology or an uplifting glance might resolve a tricky situation in a relationship. For the mind-set of a "master of the everyday," what works comes first; understanding why it works comes second.

Such was our starting point. We were saying: Let's allow *the system's working* to guide us; let's focus primarily on the actual emergence of a human system instead of focusing on our cognitive maps of that emergence. And we assumed that human beings do just that, as part of their inherent orientation toward living intelligently.

Pitfalls of Systems Intelligence

The systems intelligence perspective is radical because:

- It wishes to account for an individual's fundamental ability (intelligence) in a way that does not conceptually presuppose the subject–object distinction, but seeks to connect her with a situation, a context, and other people's realities – a system – considered as primary as the subject herself
- It wishes to account for an individual's nonrational, nonpropositional and noncognitive capabilities, such as instinctual awareness, touch, "feel," and sensibilities at large, as capabilities that relate the subject intelligently to a system (the situation, context, other people)
- It explicitly seeks out the positive dimension of life, assuming humans will flourish; assuming magnificent success, uplift, and growth to be fundamental human realities rather than mere positive exceptions

A key contrast between systems thinking and systems intelligence lies in our *refusal to take the outsider's view* of the systems being addressed. Causal loop diagrams, for instance, are not as useful in systems intelligence as they are in systems thinking. The systems intelligence approach says the primary situation is one in which the individual already identifies himself as being in the loop and does not step outside the loop to reflect on it in isolation. He does not necessarily know and perhaps will never know exactly what the loop is, and yet that is the context of his actions and of potential flourishment. How can he behave intelligently?

How can a human act intelligently (indeed, act magnificently) in contexts, in environments, and among other people – in systems – when *a veil of uncertainty is always present*? What can intelligent choice mean when one cannot step aside and sort out the options and their systemic impact? These are the key questions of the systems intelligence approach.

Our conviction is that human beings *do* possess such systemic intelligence. We believe people do own an almost miraculous means of access to the realm of flourishment. People are intelligent creatures, more so than is sometimes appreciated. Positive reciprocity works: It can bring about wonders, and its dynamics are intuitively appreciated by all of us. Let's focus on that! The point is not so much to teach people something new but to awaken a competence they already have. The systems intelligence movement helps people excel in something they have exercised already, often with considerable success.

Optimism for Change

Change starts somewhere. It might emerge from something trivial. And yet it might amount to a huge restructuring of the fundamental aspects of the entire system – because of the leverage created by:

- Change in the way people experience other agents of the system as a result of a small but significant change in others' behavior
- Change in the way people experience their own possibilities of acting within the system as a result of a small but significant change somewhere in the system
- Change in the way people experience the likely structure of the system in the long run

When Rosa Parks refused to give her seat to a white man in a Montgomery city bus in 1955, most people had not heard of Rosa Parks, considered the bus system a technical matter, did not perceive the city of Montgomery as being particularly significant, and would have considered irrelevant the question of a particular bus seat on a particular bus leg. But as Rosa Parks was arrested, the marginal incident snowballed, creating an avalanche that eventually reached epic proportions. Change was going to reshape the entire system of race distinction in the most powerful country in the world.

Our philosophy of change is optimistic because of our view of people's beliefs and the functioning of their internal system. Our conviction is that many of the core beliefs of the

A Systems-Intelligent Organization

- Empowers people to share their mental models of the organization and to consider the effects of their own actions on the whole
- Fosters and sustains inquiry mode and reduces advocacy
- Keeps down fear factors
- Helps people be responsive to flourishing initiatives
- Builds trust in the goodwill of others
- Sees that its production capacity is not restricted to the measurable variables but is extended to the world of emotions and well-being
- Elevates innovation within an environment where emotional variables do not limit performance

people around us do not show up in their actions. The actions reflect the assumed nature of the current system. People have adjusted to *what they believe is the system* – e.g., to the way whites regard blacks. But when the system is shaken, the latent beliefs might trigger a revolution. Given a small but critical change in the system, deeply held aspirations might suddenly surface, adding exponentially to the momentum.

Beliefs are distinctive in having a fundamentally ephemeral essence: They can be changed dramatically, massively, and instantaneously. People might get excited, might start believing in the future, might start to trust and respect one another as a result of something relatively small and mundane. For systems intelligence, this is the key: small changes that transform something major; a kind of "butterfly effect" in the context of our life systems.

Systems intelligence focuses on changes as leveraged by the dual force fields of the systemic and movable nature of the human mental world and the systemic nature of the context, situation, and behaviors around us. It takes the idea of people's internal and malleable world utterly seriously. We do not fear the subjective or the emotional, the experiential or the phenomenological – indeed, we embrace those things. Therein lies the source of emergence.

One might be terribly misguided regarding what others truly believe and what might move them toward flourishment. Our patterns of interaction, our tactics, might be utterly misplaced. There might be a systematic flaw in the way a group experiences the subjective worlds of others. The "reality" we form together might be a castle built on quicksand, destroying the higher possibilities of life.

Systems intelligence is based on humility and optimism. It acknowledges that one's perspective of others might be drastically mistaken, particularly regarding what others' true aspirations might be. An incremental and seemingly trivial change in my behavior might be a significant change for the better in the eyes of another, might intervene with her beliefs regarding me, might lead her to appreciate suddenly what life is all about, and might thus trigger a chain of changes in the actual behaviors of each of us and in the system we form together.

To the extent that we are ignorant regarding the aspirations of others in the system, there is also a hidden possibility of cumulative enrichment and improvement through reciprocity. Fresh possibilities of flourishment are always there, simply because most forms of interaction have *not been tried*. Our patterns of interaction are highly standardized, are often low in emotional energy,[10] and typically hide the positive options. Systems intelligence is an approach of realistic hands-on optimism, based on acknowledging the possibility of upward-spiraling change through human reciprocity.

People thrive on meaning. As a result, the most forceful forms of systems intelligence intervention are likely to be those that touch basic human aspirations.

This sort of thinking is often dismissed as wishful idealism. Yet it amounts to an appreciation of some of the most powerful moments of most people's lives – those moments when their actions flow with the situation, when people are in synch, when positivity rules, when the system flies and we fly with the system.

Adapting terminology from "systems archetypes," one could reconstruct many of one's best moments in life – or, for example, the history of the civil rights movement in the United States – in terms of systems intelligence archetypes: "fixes that fire," "sharing the burden," and "miracle of the commons."

Marshall Mannerheim Enters the Stage

As Finland was fighting for its (eventually successful) independence against Stalin's Red Army during World War II, the Finnish commander-in-chief Marshall Mannerheim sometimes visited the front. A tall, cultivated man in his 80s in excellent physical shape, Mannerheim was a towering figure, respected by all Finns.

Mannerheim's junior adjutant at the time was Colonel Rafael Bäckman. According to Bäckman, Mannerheim would sometimes stop while walking in a trench and take out a cigarette. This, Bäckman explained, offered a possibility for a soldier standing nearby to approach and offer a light for the commander-in-chief. After the cigarette was lit, Mannerheim would talk informally with the soldier, typically about his home and loved ones.

Consider this an example of systems intelligence. Suppose you are a soldier out there in a trench and observe your charismatic commander-in-chief approaching with his entourage. How are you to strike a sufficiently impressive pose? You are trapped in a system that hardly allows you to breathe. And yet a small intervention – a cigarette lighting – can change it all. Being attuned to opportunities to make similar interventions is key to systems intelligence.

Systemic Leverage

Our assumption is that people experience and interpret situations from a systemic point of view. Then they adapt to the system and operate within the system. But as we have said, the system could be different from what people believe it to be. There is tremendous leverage built into any human context, if only people would interpret the system as having changed. Even if it hasn't yet changed, it will change, when enough people believe it has changed. Here lies the opportunity of systemic intervention. In human contexts, almost anything has the potential to signal a *change for hope*. A clean subway car, completely free of graffiti, can become a powerful symbol of an entirely new era.

The interpretation of a given incident as a symbol of change in the human context is

highly variable. Interpretation is everything; it defines the realm of possibility. And sometimes people grasp that possibility, personally and powerfully. The catch for a rationalist lies in the lack of clear-cut predictability. In the context of human change, the logic typically is not "if *x*, then *y*." Instead, one needs to be sensitive, situation-conscious, emotionally alert, sufficiently distanced, and sufficiently connected; one needs to be fine-tuned to the nonrational undercurrents in the context in order to make things work and in order to flourish. It is such sensitivity that systems intelligence wants to elicit.

People thrive on meaning. As a result, the most forceful forms of systems intelligence intervention are likely to be those that touch basic human aspirations, especially:

1. A person's sense of worth and desire to be respected
2. A person's desire to feel connected in the company of others
3. A person's desire to feel connected with something meaningful

An intervention that touches upon a person's basic needs is likely to inspire change through the internal system of that person.

Rose-Buying Finns

Most Finnish husbands do not buy roses for their wives spontaneously on normal weekdays. A *non-rose-buying system* is in place, creating behaviors that generate the lack of rose buying. The system is invisible, as part of the accepted reality. A man who buys a rose is experienced as having made a choice, but a man who doesn't is not experienced as having chosen not to buy a rose. It is almost as if some higher authority governs the rose-buying behaviors of all these non-rose-buying men.

The system, no doubt, is in place partly because of the experiences each particular man in his seasoned marriage has undergone over the course of years. His wife has changed, he feels, and is becoming increasingly negative. She is unenthusiastic about life. She never puts on lipstick at home just for him. His wife seems overly pragmatic. Not much of a spark left. He reacts to this, suppressing his more romantic ideas and gestures, a dimension in which he was never strong to begin with. But the same is true of the wife: The two are caught in *a system of mutually holding back*. The two have created a system, and now the system rules.

Consider the rose buying as a metaphor for small behavioral actions that could touch the

other positively. A husband who buys his wife roses will strengthen her faith in life, optimism, hope, and sense of worth.

Now consider the workplace. One would expect the workplace to be unconditionally alert to such systems of "rose buying," i.e., to systems of generating faith, optimism, and strength in people, particularly as that will result in greater productivity for the business and because such systems can be created free of cost.

This turns out not to be the case. Instead, systems of holding back, in return and in advance, rule everywhere:

- Most managers want to support their team members more than they currently do. Most team members would like to get more support from their managers. Yet more support does not result. There seems to be *a lack-of-support system* in place.
- Most speakers would like to give their best in a presentation. People attending the presentation would benefit most if the speaker were at her best. But the speaker does not give her best, and the audience does not receive the best. There seems to be *a poor-presentation-generating system* in place.
- Most people would benefit from coworkers' generosity in everyday situations (showing interest, being polite or considerate, expressing appreciation, giving credit to others, etc.) Most people would themselves like to provide such gestures more than they do. But generosity is scarce. There seems to be *a non-generosity-generating system* in place.

The sensitive, the instinctual, the contextual, the situational, the emotional, and the subjective elements and capabilities reside right there at the center of human individual and collective action, organizational behavior, and systemic change.

Holding back is a key form of human interaction. Systems of holding back trap us from everywhere – from within and from without. Such systems trivialize reciprocity, decrease vitality, and depress human life. It requires intelligence just to adjust to them. Higher intelligence is needed if you want to overcome the system – a possibility that the systems intelligence approach offers.

Five Levels of Systems Intelligence

1. Seeing oneself in the system: Ability to see oneself and one's roles and behavior in the system, and also through the eyes of other people and with different framings of the system. Systems thinking awareness.
2. Thinking about systems intelligence: Ability to envision and identify productive ways of behavior for oneself in the system and cognitively understanding systemic possibilities emerging from one's choices.
3. Managing systems intelligence: Ability to personally exercise productive ways of behaving within the system.
4. Sustaining systems intelligence: Ability to continue and foster systems-intelligent behavior in the long run.
5. Leadership with systems intelligence: Ability to initiate and create systems-intelligent organizations.

Window of Opportunity

Systems intelligence is based on the insight that *systems of holding back prevail everywhere, and yet do not tell the whole story*. Fear rules over courageousness, ingratitude over gratitude, taking over giving. And yet there is more to humans than meets the eye – more that is good.

An entirely different story is hiding beneath the surface, and it could be triggered to emerge by a marginal change. This is because people are not likely to reveal their discontent with what they believe is unchangeable. But suppose hope returns, excitement comes back, and someone realizes that a seemingly unchangeable system actually is a construction, an artifact from top to bottom, based entirely on human choice.

Saarinen's initial interest in systems of holding back grew out of his desire to find examples of choice that people could not deny. He was led to studying small behaviors that would benefit others, would not require any material resources, and yet failed to materialize. These included the failure of a longtime couple to hold hands in a shopping mall, or the failure of a professional to lean forward and pay attention to a colleague giving a presentation, or the failure of a manager to start a meeting with a few informal, credit-giving words.

Why is there a universally accepted people's movement to, say, not give credit? Why a people's movement to not pay attention at meetings? The lack of positive small behaviors reveals a complement: the domain of small actions that could have been.

That domain is huge – and it is a source of tremendous leverage if perceived in systemic terms.

When people are shown examples drawn from marriage, it is remarkably easy regardless of their socioeconomic levels, age or education backgrounds, to gain insight into their own holding-back behaviors and to the unintended consequences created thereby. Systems of holding back are at the core of our everyday living, and of all organized life, in a way that is easy for people to comprehend intuitively and personally.

Systems of holding back are a route to appreciating the constructed nature of our everyday modes of being. As soon as that element is appreciated, the fundamental possibility of human choice enters the picture – choice conceived of as a personal possibility on the level of small everyday behaviors.

Personally perceived choice resulting in taking an action is a key idea in systems intelligence. The point is to highlight choice in order to pave the way to an empowered practice of change. It is essential to discuss behaviors in which the agent indisputably does have a choice, even when judged by his own perhaps distorted and biased internal belief system.

A Systems-Intelligent Leader

Strives to learn and reach Level 5 (See "Five Levels of Systems Intelligence," page 24).

- Sees herself in the system with a mission to develop a systems-intelligent organization
- Is aware of the human perspective and of the possibilities of human reciprocity
- Operates within the visible system and manages the emotional system simultaneously
- Is not held captive by a mechanistic perspective
- Identifies and eliminates structural systems dictatorships that alienate people from their own choices
- Recognizes systems intelligence as a personal growth challenge and an asset to success

The intellectual complexity of the choice is rarely the issue. As a result, causal loop diagrams are not likely to be of much use. What is the bottleneck if not lack of knowledge? Our answer is: *human self-centeredness, lack of sensitivity, and lack of belief in the human potential in us and around us*.

An egoistical, cynical person views a system coldly from the outside, intending to find an objective reality. He might be effective in the short run in his efforts to manipulate the system from outside. But the alternative is to step inside, open up the system, and open up himself; working openly, sensitively, attentively, with systems intelligence. In short, the alternative is to make the system flourish. The sensitive, the instinctual, the contextual, the situational, the emotional, and the subjective elements and capabilities reside right there at the center of human individual and collective action, organizational behavior, and systemic change.

Why Systems Intelligence Projects Fail

Senge, in the revised edition of *The Fifth Discipline* (2006), openly acknowledges that building learning organizations has turned out to be significantly more difficult than what he envisioned in 1990. Likewise Jeremy Seligman,[11] describing his experiences building a systems thinking (ST) culture at Ford, writes bluntly, "sometimes it seems doubtful that ST will ever gain the critical mass required to make it an integral part of how major corporations practice strategic thinking." This is where we believe the systems intelligence approach points the way forward.

First, observe why systems intelligence projects can easily fail. ST projects aim to increase people's knowledge of an organization's systemic structures by teaching people the use of systemic tools such as loop diagrams and stock-and-flow computer models. But none of that knowledge necessarily touches their everyday holding-back behaviors, or the holding-back systems generated by such behaviors.

It is clear that a learning organization can never flourish if it remains a system of holding back. But systems of holding back lurk at the human level, in the dimension of the mundane; they are in many cases intellectually trivial, often seemingly invisible, hiding as they do behind the curtain of custom and conformity, and generally not approachable from the outside.

ST projects fail because people need not change their *small, behaviorally relevant* modes of thinking, mental models, and dialogical patterns as a result of increased knowledge of various aspects of systems intelligence or of the systems structures involved. But small behav-

iors generate systems of holding back, creating a hidden, crushingly powerful counterforce to the systems thinker's well-intended and rationally sound effort to launch ST initiatives in order for the organization to "grasp the big picture" and to "understand the long-term effects."

Becoming More Systems Intelligent

The learning organization movement has struggled with the fact that as systems thinking programs are driven into organizations, surprisingly little changes. "Problems may get solved, but the organization will be no smarter," as Peter Senge puts it in the revised *Fifth Discipline*.[12]

We believe what is called for is a movement toward the individual, the subjective, and the emotional. This is what the systems intelligence perspective attempts to accomplish. We believe the systems intelligence approach offers a way forward from some of the traps the learning organization movement seems to have fallen into. At the same time, the systems intelligence approach builds upon Senge's original insight regarding the significance of the systems perspective.

We believe what is called for is a movement toward the individual, the subjectivity and the ecmotional. This is what the systems intelligence perspective attempts to accomplish.

The systems intelligence perspective has already proven its ability to stimulate learning. In the context of lectures and seminars, we have observed that people feel strongly encouraged to further develop a capability they already possess, more so than they might embrace cognitive learning of material they might feel is too abstract.

The concept itself points the way. It is heuristically energetic. In most cases only a few sentences of explanation are needed in order for people to feel ready to move ahead with the concept and apply it to their own situations. The word *system* encourages a hands-on attitude: It suggests something that is constructed, something that is working – and thus something that could work better. Learning together is important, but acting together for flourishment is even more so. That is the possibility the systems intelligence approach wishes to highlight.

Endnotes

1 The introduction of the systems intelligence concept and the seminal essays on it were first presented in Finnish in 2002, and they appeared in the report series of the Systems Analysis Laboratory. In 2004, the first essays in English were published in Raimo P. Hämäläinen and Esa Saarinen, editors, *Systems Intelligence: Discovering a Hidden Competence in Human Action and Organisational Life* (Helsinki University of Technology: Systems Analysis Laboratory Research Reports A 88, 2004). The key texts therein are the introduction and chapter 1: "Systems Intelligence: Connecting Engineering Thinking with Human Sensitivity," by Esa Saarinen and Raimo P. Hämäläinen.

2 For the MI theory, see Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York: Basic Books, 1983; 1993), and *Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

3 Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline* (New York: Doubleday, 1990; 2006).

4 See, e.g., Kim S. Cameron, Jane E. Dutton, and Robert E. Quinn, editors, *Positive Organizational Scholarship* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2003).

5 See, e.g., C.R. Snyder and Shane J. Lopez, editors, *Handbook of Positive Psychology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

6 See P. Reason and H. Bradbury, editors, *Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry & Practice* (London: Sage Publications, 2001).

7 The related essays are in the publication in note 1. The home pages of our research group provide free access to all the materials, essays, and slides. www.systemsintelligence.hut.fi

8 The article by the editor-in-chief, Reetta Meriläinen, titled "There would be a standing order for systems intelligence" ("Systemiälylle olisi kestotilaus"), was published in the daily newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* on July 16, 2006.)

9 See "Operations Research: The Science of Better" Web site, www.scienceofbetter.org

10 On emotional energy, see Randall Collins's important *Interaction Ritual Chains* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

11 Jeremy Seligman, "Building a Systems Intelligence Culture at Ford Motor Company," *Reflections,* Vol. 6, No. 4/5.

12 Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline* (New York: Doubleday, 2006). Page 332.

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Teaching Organizational Learning:
Permission to Exhale

Phil Ramsey

Phil Ramsey

When I first encountered organizational learning as a discipline I felt a deep sense of relief that, at last, I was able to teach issues that I knew were missing from "Management" curriculum, but which I had been unable to name or to justify from an academic perspective. I felt that the world – including the world of business – was complex, and I had not been doing justice to that complexity. We were simplifying management by dropping some issues, and the issues we were dropping were the ones that appealed to me the most. These were the issues that organizational learning addressed.

As I learned about organizational learning it became apparent why this work addresses what I felt was missing. Organizational learning is the study of the gap between how we *think* our organizations work and how they actually *do* work.[1] In other words, whatever is missing from our understanding of organizational life and functioning can be legitimately investigated by those interested in organizational learning.

Organizational learning also seemed to me to be closely connected with another of my interests, the study of organizational culture. The connection I saw was that communities – including organizational communities – form cultures as they establish some values as legitimate while repressing other values. Organizational learning, therefore, deals with a cultural challenge: how to address a full range of human values, including those that are currently being repressed within organizations.[2] When people are allowed to express previously repressed values, the effect is similar to being allowed to exhale after you have been holding your breath for a length of time. It feels fantastic, invigorating.

The challenge I felt as a teacher, was how to help students understand this invigorating aspect of organizational learning. I wanted to do more than teach students *about* organizational learning. I wanted them to experience what it is to be involved in organizational learning as a participant. In essence, I wanted to turn my classroom into a learning organization.

This is what I have been experimenting with over the last ten years. My primary opportunity for experimentation takes place during a week-long course on organizational learning, held midyear. The week-long course is one component of a year-long course: students work collaboratively during the week, and individually throughout the rest of the year. This article is the product of my reflections on some of the lessons learned from my experiences attempting to create a learning organization in the classroom.

Oddly, while it might appear at first glance that learning in a university would restrict one's ability to create a "learning organization" environment, the prevailing university culture of "inhaling only" sets students up to experience the invigoration of exhalation.

University Culture

What do universities generally have in common that makes them different from other organizations? A defining feature of their business is that high value is placed on people acting as experts.

Those who have established their expertise are in a position to teach others. Teaching generally involves what we might call "cognitive transfer" of knowledge:

the expert teacher finds some way to express what they know so that the knowledge is transferred to the mind of the learner. Learners undergo processes of assessment in order to establish the extent to which the transfer has been successful. The assessment determines where learners sit in the journey toward becoming experts themselves.

This process is well established in universities, so much so that little thought is given to the assumptions and values upon which it operates. A central assumption is that learning is a cognitive process: it is about concepts and facts, and not about relationships and emotions. A student needs only to know the answers in the examination: there is no extra benefit in caring about the subject or wanting to be part of a community that uses the knowledge. You might observe that students tend to get similar grades across subjects: one might be an "A" student and one a "C" student irrespective of whether they care about the subject or whether they want to use the knowledge they have gained. Such issues are peripheral and treated by many as a distraction from the real business of assessing cognitive transfer.

Acting in this way encourages one set of values while repressing others. People are encouraged to act as individuals, taking care of what they personally need to do to qualify. Collaboration is not valued: students often feel deeply uncomfortable, even aggrieved, when they are assessed on work they have done as part of a group. "Good" students feel obliged to carry the group on their individual shoulders, rather than learn skills of collaboration.

Teachers are encouraged to act in a disconnected, emotionally-neutral way when it comes to assessment. They make a clear distinction between themselves and the student body so that they do not give an unfair advantage to any student. While the power difference between the qualified, expert teacher and the not-yet qualified students may be somewhat hidden at other times, it becomes magnified during assessment. A teacher's emotional engagement with students as part of a closely connected learning community is not valued. Rather, it is treated with suspicion because it is likely to affect what is more highly valued: objectivity in assessment.

How does this culture provide a context for experiencing organizational learning as an invigorating process? The assumptions and values discussed here – teaching as cognitive transfer, expertise, individualism, and objectivity – are taken for granted by most within the culture. They repress values associated with collaboration, community, and emotional engagement without intending to do so. Teachers of some courses in universities will teach people *about* the need for the repressed values in learning, and still revert to methods of assessment prescribed by the

culture.[3] The university culture has set students up to experience a sense of relief if they should ever encounter learning that allows them to experience the repressed values in action: they are, in fact, waiting to exhale.

Teaching organizational learning is an ideal opportunity to enable students to experience this exhilaration. The subject matter of organizational learning is directly aligned with the values that are traditionally repressed in universities. As an organizational learning teacher, I am in an envious position where, if I practice what I preach, students will experience exhilaration! The challenge has been to find ways to do this in a university context.

Lessons Learned

Practicing what I preach has been an on-going journey of discovery. Over the past ten years I have experimented with strategies aimed at closing the gap between my teaching practice and organizational learning concepts. At times the lessons I learned were the result of thoughtful application of a technique I had learned. Often lessons were serendipitous, as my students and I stumbled upon ways of handling challenges that presented themselves. While the latter involved actions that were not the result of carefully applied concepts, we have been able to make good use of hindsight, linking actions to organizational learning concepts after the event. Following are some of the key lessons I have learned. Notice that many of them are inter-linked: the classroom needs to be treated as a system.

Learning to collaborate requires interdependence

People in universities are used to working in loosely formed groups. Academics often operate in units where they may interact with one another regularly, but do not actually depend on one another in meaningful ways. Similarly, students may interact with one another in classes, but when it really matters – when they are being assessed – they operate independent of one another. In many institutions, relying on the work of others is considered "cheating."[4]

A class on organizational learning needs to contain some aspects of assessment that students complete in teams. These teams can act as a vehicle for teaching a variety of organizational learning concepts while allowing students to experience how the concepts apply to a situation that is meaningful to them: the healthy functioning of a team to which they belong.

Expand the Core Group[5]

The "core group" in a community consists of those who really matter. People look to the core group to determine what is important to the community.

Often structural elements in universities make it clear that the core group consists solely of the teacher. For instance, the chairs and desks in many classrooms are laid out in rows so that everyone is looking at the "expert" teacher at the front. Communication happens between individual students and the teacher. The physical layout discourages students from talking to one another: the arrangement encourages students to attend to the teacher, not to one anther.

For several years whenever I ran the course, I would spend some time rearranging furniture, moving desks out of rows to create enlarged café tables at which teams of five or six could work. This arrangement prompted students to interact directly with one another. Teams formed their own core groups, with each team acting as a "fractal" of the class as a whole. The amount of interaction was radically enhanced. When I interacted with one team – for instance, when giving feedback – members of the team responded as if it were personal interaction with them as individuals.

Then one year a variety of events prevented me from rearranging the furniture in advance. When I arrived to teach, students were already seated in rows. It was clear from their faces that they were already bored: the layout of the room generated the expectation that they were going to be sitting and listening for the duration of a five-day course.

I decided to begin with a short discussion about

the mental models of whoever chose to set the furniture out in rows: what assumptions could the class see embedded in the arrangement? Then I asked students how we might arrange the room to represent more of what they had learned about organizational learning from their pre-course readings. I shared my experience of working with teams in small groups. Then the students moved the furniture to where they wanted it.

The result of having students move the furniture themselves was remarkable. There was a burst of energy as they took control of their own space and began interacting with one another with freedom and vigour. Physically organizing their own space dramatically altered student's expectations and was a powerful example of being allowed, finally, to exhale. Further, students were left with a deep understanding that the room belonged to them and that they could alter it in ways that enhanced their interactions and learning.

Having the class shift the furniture also allows me to establish myself as a host rather than the class expert. As people organize the furniture and themselves into teams I have them move into the first "café conversation" of the course: discussing how we will work together if we are to ensure that we create a learning organization experience. As the conversation begins in the various groups, I move through the classroom placing a vase of flowers on each team's table. While only minimally decorative, students recognise my effort as an indication that we are creating an environment in which conversation and interaction is welcomed.

As the teacher, I recognise that, even though I have expanded the core group, I am still in the central position in that core. In taking this action I am helping to ensure that my actions are in line with my espoused theories regarding organizational learning.

Create a vibrant "Community of Practice"

There is a growing recognition that learning is a social process and that teachers need to give much greater attention to issues of community. People are motivated to learn out of a desire to move into a community that is meaningful to them. Often they want to learn things that will enable them to move to a more central position in a community of which they are already a member. Alternatively, they may be motivated to learn so that they can move into a new community.[6]

Academic programs traditionally concentrate on subject matter, with teachers focusing their efforts on a body of knowledge. Social issues are peripheral. If people within a class form social bonds that is a bonus (or, occasionally, a threat) for the teacher whose job is to cover a predetermined amount of material. Our teaching more closely reflects the actual motivation of learners if we make social factors a central concern and make "covering the material" more peripheral.

Ask educators about the most common mistake they make and you are likely to be told "I tried to cover too much material." This is symptomatic of focusing attention on subject matter. When I began teaching the week-long course I made the mistake of thinking that, to give value to learners, I needed to introduce them to as many concepts and techniques as possible. The result was a course that felt fragmented and rushed, and which was exhausting for everyone.

Now the course is structured around the two pieces of work that people complete in teams. My role is to ensure that there is an appropriate mix of the "familiar" and the "exciting"; that teams engage in routine work that is punctuated by the injection of challenging concepts that illuminate the work they are doing and the challenges they encounter. Challenging concepts need to be presented in a way that takes people out of their routine: either with an innovative approach to presentation or a guest speaker with high credibility.

Assessment is a point of leverage

Students are familiar with situations where they establish a healthy productive relationship with a teacher, only to have everything change when it comes time for assessment. At assessment time the teacher ceases to be the person interested in facilitat-

ing your learning and development, and shifts back to a command and control learning style of operating. Students are reminded of the power held by the teacher. They inhale and hold their collective breath.

Typically, student's primary concerns are that (1) they pass, and (2) the assessment is equitable. As a consequence they feel torn by the changes described above. They welcome the opportunity to work collaboratively within a learning environment that is free from the excesses of command and control learning management. At the same time, they have qualms about what this will mean in terms of assessment. As a consequence, issues of assessment always arise during the initial café conversation on how we can create a learning organization experience.

What lies behind the qualms students feel? By the time they have reached post-graduate level they have usually experienced assessment based on group work. Often, their experience has been a difficult one leaving many feeling they were exploited by less able or less motivated students in the same group. Because assessment is a high stakes activity they tend to avoid too much diversity in the group for fear that problems with communication or other differences will be an obstacle to success.

Further, one of the safeguards against exploitation is the power of the teacher. The value of command and control learning is that it operates to ensure equity. The changes outlined above leave many students feeling vulnerable.

The first time I ran the course these issues surfaced in the opening conversation and the concerns of students became apparent to everyone present. Fortunately, a student suggested – somewhat jokingly – a strategy that dissolves the problem.

The traditional approach to grading student work is, of course, to have students present their work to an expert teacher who arrives at a grade by judging the work against "expert" standards and the work of other students. The proposed strategy was that we take grades out of play by negotiating the grades before the students undertake the work. Groups of students who are willing to commit to extending themselves during the course, working hard and being open to feedback are able to negotiate an "A" grade. Groups can also opt to put in a less committed effort and be awarded a "C" grade, though in the ten years the course has run no group has taken this option.

The impact on students is remarkable. The interference[7] associated with assessment evaporates, and students engage fully with the process of learning. This occurs even when the group work is in an area they find difficult, such as Systems Thinking. Students are also far more open to feedback, seeking an in-depth critique of their work safe in the knowledge that they will learn from, rather than be punished for, any errors found.

Usually at assessment time it is the student who bears all the risk. They are at risk of being penalised by factors outside their control, including the ignorance or capriciousness of teachers. With this approach I, as the teacher, also bear some of the risk

that the course will not produce the results we are hoping for. And the risk is minimized for me in that, if it is evident that a group has not lived up to its side of the negotiated agreement I do not have to award the grade.

These issues are all discussed openly by the class as a whole. And in ten years over 60 groups have responded with remarkable levels of enthusiasm and goodwill which is sustained throughout the five days of the course and in the weeks following. Every year I am confident that the grades awarded represent outstanding work on the part of students. Students report that they have not previously experienced such satisfying collaboration in a university course.

Of course, not everything runs smoothly in terms of assessment. On one occasion a group became somewhat dysfunctional: key members decided that to truly deserve the A grade they needed to ensure the presentation was perfect and consequently made choices where they sacrificed understanding and learning for a veneer of competence. In subsequent years I have been much more explicit in describing the environment we are going to create and the need for all members of groups to be fully engaged with the work being undertaken.

During this period there have also been times when I have felt that the grades are higher than would have been awarded by an objective assessor. I view this as an "academic trade-off." I am prepared to trade-off a little objectivity in order to create an outstanding learning experience for students. I view this as no worse than trading off student's learning experiences and the validity of assessment processes in order to attain a degree of objectivity. Indeed, because my university's charter explicitly encourages innovation, teaching quality and life-long learning and makes no mention of objective assessment (an unspoken value) I believe I have good reason to make such a trade-off from time to time.

There is no need to go too far

It is an exhilarating relief to exhale after you have held your breath for some time. It would be wrong to think, though, that this relief is proof that exhaling is superior to inhaling. The feelings highlight the need for both, and the dangers of suppressing either.

I am aware that the student reaction I have enjoyed happens as a consequence of the context. The values represented in my course are enjoyed by students, not because they are better than traditional university values, but rather because they have been missing. I also need to ensure that the traditional values of expertise, individual accomplishment and objectivity are also present in my work.

Students studying organizational learning do not feel that every aspect of the course must reflect the values present during the week-long course. The negotiated assessment represents 40% of the final grade they receive on the course. The remaining 60% is completed individually and a full range of grades are awarded, depending on student performance. Interestingly, the relationship established during the week of the course influences student reactions to subsequent assessment: students continue to welcome feedback and it is rare to have a student challenge a grade. I believe this reaction reflects the desire of students to both work collaboratively and be recognized for their personal achievements.

Understanding this need for balance prevents me from crusading to have other courses in my College adopt the same processes. I believe that students learn more about organizational learning by experiencing the difference between my course and those run on more traditional lines. It is the same difference people experience when they move from a highly prescriptive, bureaucratic role into an innovative and collaborative team environment.

Lessons Yet to Be Learned

In undertaking the work described earlier I have deliberately acted in ways that run counter to the prevailing culture of my university. Even though this has enabled me to create the experience I want for my students, there is a price to pay. I am still looking for ways to "have my cake and eat it too": to run a course that is culturally different, and also accepted within the culture of the university.

When I began working on the course I recognized the danger of having my strategies and the course itself rejected by the college. I chose to operate as a "skunkworks": staying quiet about any experimentation and letting people judge the course on its reputation among students.

In recent years the college I work in has become deeply concerned with issues of academic accreditation and, therefore, with teaching quality. Predictably, rather than viewing student reaction to the course as evidence of a quality learning experience, the college Examination Committee[8] has viewed the better-than-usual grades achieved by students as an indication that quality is being compromised.

The college has held to the traditional view that the way to ensure quality is to have only a small proportion of students in any class, achieve grades of distinction. One consequence of this is that assessment processes are designed to generate the right distribution of grades rather than to enhance learning or the experience students have while studying. Further, the traditional view encourages a view that teaching quality is the result of externally derived standards, rather than emanating from the identity and integrity of the teacher.[9]

When taken-for-granted assumptions are challenged people express their concerns in a variety of ways. With the organizational learning course, this happens when people learn that all students are awarded the same grade for a piece of assessed work.

Some academics express the view that the only justification for a non-standard grade distribution is that there has been an "exceptional year": one in which a higher proportion of able students take the particular course. This view perpetuates a belief that, of all the variables influencing student achievement, the only one that truly matters is the innate potential of individual students; "A Students" will get As and "C Students" will get Cs. Those expressing the view do not accept that exceptional teaching or the creation of an exceptional learning environment could influence student achievement. Nor do they see that a policy that requires distinctions to be made between students becomes self-fulfilling: teachers are forced to design "valid" assessment practices, with validity determined by whether they produce the same distinctions as those being made in more traditional courses.

Concern has been expressed that giving all students the same mark creates problems of equity between those in the class: that more capable stu-

dents are likely to feel aggrieved that they are awarded the same grade as their less capable classmates. This concern ignores the evidence generated by the organizational learning course: assessment practices have been the subject of open conversation in every class, using a café conversation technique that ensures all students are involved, and despite this transparency there has never been a student complaint regarding inequity in the assessment.

A related concern is that problems of equity are caused between courses: students may be punished for enrolling in some courses rather than others. To my mind, this concern expresses a desire to concentrate on one outcome of university education to the exclusion of other outcomes. University qualifications are used by some to make judgements between graduates; employers, for instance, may select people on the basis of the grades they achieve. Another outcome of university education is for students to have high quality learning experiences. Where possible we can aim to achieve both these outcomes, otherwise some balance between the two is needed. It would be ultimately damaging to pursue one to the exclusion of the other, particularly if the one excluded (quality of teaching) is the direct work of the university.

Finally, some argue that, if all students are awarded the same grade on a piece of work, there is little point in having that work count toward the final grade. This view is based on a belief that the primary purpose of grading is to distinguish between students rather than to recognize accomplishment. Further, if I were to adopt it in my organizational learning course, I would be signalling to students that although collaboration is at the heart of organizational learning, collaborative work on my course is not as highly valued as individual work.

Culture Change

When people raise these concerns and arguments they do so because they are genuinely concerned about issues of quality. They are not aware that their arguments are based on taken-for-granted assumptions or that those are a product of the academic culture. Rather, they are expressing what they believe to be self-evident: that experimenting with grades as I have done is likely to be harmful to the integrity of the university. The challenge for me is to find a way for the university to accept that other values can be incorporated into its activities.

How might this be done? It requires finding ways to reframe the work I am doing so that it comes into alignment with existing values and assumptions.

As discussed earlier, a particularly powerful value in university culture is that of giving status to people with expertise. Interestingly, many people within the university community support moves away from rigid application of grade distributions because it conflicts with their expert knowledge. People with expertise in areas such as Quality Management, Human Resource Development, and Performance Management Systems can see flaws in the traditional approach to assessment and grading.

Conclusion

The nature of organizational learning creates challenges in many cultures. Organizational learning recognises that the structural issues in the design of organizations prevent them from achieving the results they really want. Organizational learning encourages people to be experimental; to examine assumptions and values that have previously been taken for granted. Work in the organizational learning area naturally brings us into conflict with existing cultures.

My efforts to teach organizational learning – and to put organizational learning concepts to work in my teaching – has generated both opportunities for learning and conflict with university processes. The university context provides an opportunity for learners to experience the exhilaration of organizational learning. The challenge is to ensure that experiments are not rejected as having no place in the university culture.

It seems to me that the challenge is worth the effort. For organizational learning to thrive, it needs to be taught in the university context. And, when

taught, we can do more than teaching students *about* organizational learning while sticking to traditional methods. We can engage learners in organizational learning processes and communities. We can go beyond cognitive transfer of information and create environments that influence people's aspirations and values.

Endnotes

1 This insight is courtesy of a talk in which Peter Senge quoted Gregory Bateson as saying that "the cause of all our problems is the gap between how we think and how nature works."

2 I discuss the connection between culture and organizational learning in the article "Learning to be Complete," *Reflections,* 3, 1, 49-56.

3 Culturally speaking, the assessment processes are an artefact of the culture, reflecting its values in a way that may go unrecognized by those in the academic community.

4 Jerry Harvey has written about this paradoxical aspect of academic life in his essay "Encouraging Future Managers to Cheat." It is published in his book *The Abilene Paradox and Other Meditations on Management* (San Diego CA: University Associates, 1988).

5 For an explanation of Core Group Theory see Art Kleiner's book *Who Really Matters* (New York: Currency Doubleday, 2003).

6 Etienne Wenger, Richard McDermott and William Snyder write about these challenges in their book *Cultivating Communities of Practice* (Harvard Business School Press, 2002).

7 Timothy Gallwey discusses interference in his book *The Inner Game of Work* (New York: Random House, 2000).

8 In keeping with the cultural values we have discussed, even though the University Charter espouses a desire to be characterised by teaching quality, innovation and lifelong learning, the College of Business does not have any Committee charged with ensuring those values are addressed. The Examinations Committee is the only formally constituted body designed to address matters of quality, which it does by reviewing grade distributions.

9 Parker J. Palmer discusses how the "inner landscape" of the teacher acts as the source of teaching quality in his book *The Courage to Teach* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998).

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Context Tension:
Cultural Influences on Leadership and Management Practice

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The canon of knowledge in the fields of management and leadership has been developed from Western capitalist principles, with leading thinkers in the field being mainly of American or European descent. These ideas have then been "exported" beyond Western boundaries as trade has expanded globally, and practices such as international outsourcing have become more widespread. Although some areas of Asia, particularly India, may be willing to adapt to some of these Western practices, other areas of Asia, and Africa as a whole, are not so willing. We offer a contextual understanding and comparison of leadership and management practices in Western and African contexts to provide some explanation as to why such practice needs to be modified if it is to be successful outside the Western context in which it was conceived.

Understanding the African Context

The West has supplied leadership and management ideas, political systems, and economic infrastructures to Africa from colonial times to the present. Most Western theories used in organizations in Africa have not achieved their desired outcomes, however, because many Africans find they have to sacrifice their authenticity in order to fully embrace such Western ideals. This highlights the need to understand the African context and, in particular, the perspective of the African worker.

African theories are seldom captured in literature, and specifically not in organizational literature – rather, the "African Way" has been to pass down the wisdom of the ages through the oral tradition. This no longer appears sufficient, as many Africans, particularly educated and skilled Africans, have been drawn to urban lifestyles, separating them from the traditional forms of oral transfer and placing them in direct contact with the Western organizational norms and cultures that dominate many of their employing organizations.

From Convergence and Divergence to "Crossvergence" Perspectives

Increased international business activity and emphasis on globalization have rekindled interest in the convergence/divergence debate among organizations. The *convergence* thesis maintains that economic ideology drives cultural values, such that exposure to Western ways of engaging in business will result in the adoption of Western values (Ralston et al., 1993). This suggests that a society's value systems respond to technological advances, rather than to indigenous cultural forces. As a result, industrialized nations will develop common values in the realm of economic activity and work-related behavior. Culture,

therefore, is treated merely as something accidental that could have been different.

The *divergence* perspective, on the other hand, recognizes national and cultural differences. Its proponents maintain that culture is deeply rooted and drives the values of any society beyond economic ideology. The divergence perspective is consistent with the dominant view of some cross-cultural theorists (e.g., Hofstede, 1980, 1991; Adler, 2002) who emphasize that all management practices are in large part culturally determined, although there is little consensus on the significance of particular cultural variables.

Hence a third perspective has developed: *crossvergence,* based on acculturation theory within the field of anthropology. Ward et al. (1999) and Ralston et al. (1993) proposed that when two cultures meet, a blending of values may result. The crossvergence perspective therefore recognizes the importance of economic ideology and national culture, as well as the importance of the synergetic interaction between the two. Moreover, it is consistent with a more balanced perspective of global integration and local responsiveness. Country-specific characteristics, such as culture, socioeconomics, political-legal climate, and technological factors, however, influence the meaning, interpretation, and implementation of the foreign practices in these organizations. Understanding these characteristics is necessary before crossvergence can be achieved. The influences of other cultures tend to lead to the development of a new hybrid value system, rather than a convergence of value systems.

A common sense of identity within the emerging hybrid culture may be manifested as agreement on what the current situation in the organization is, in terms of organizational and management attributes; what the ideal situation is, in terms of management style and such organizational factors as hierarchy, decision-making process, and control; and how the ideal contrasts with the way these aspects are likely to change. Logically, organizations are likely to evolve in a positive way if the various stakeholders concur on these fundamental matters.

Creating a Hybrid from Different Roots

The root difference between Western and African cultural perspectives stems from the principles on which they learn and develop throughout their lives. The Western world adopts a primarily scholastic approach based on facts, logic, and the nature of reality, whereas the African approach is based in humanism.

In Western Europe, humanism originated in the study of classical culture and was part of the Renaissance that took place in the 14th and 15th centuries. It got its name from one of the era's most important goals: the promotion of a new educational curriculum. This curriculum consisted of *studia humanitatis,* or the humanities, a group of academic subjects concerning the human condition. Humanities subjects included grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry, and ethics. These disciplines were all studied, whenever possible, in the original classical texts and with a qualitative approach. The humanities curriculum conflicted with more traditional education that was based on scholasticism. Scholastic education concentrated on more "factual" subjects, such as logic, natural philosophy (science), and metaphysics, or the nature of reality. Scholars often clashed sharply over these two systems of education. A lot was at stake in these academic controversies, which were, and still are, related to the question "What is education for?"

African humanism is embodied in ritual, story, cultural practices, symbolism, and myth, and takes the human being as the starting point, emphasizing the dignity and worth of the individual. A basic premise of humanism is that human beings possess within themselves the capacity for *truth* and *goodness*.

We are currently in a perverse situation in which the West is traversing a path toward a more humanistic approach, particularly in business and government, while Africa is being criticized for not being scholastic enough, be it in business, government, or society. Modern Africa still stresses the importance of human needs, both on an individual basis and, more importantly, on a collective basis. African

During the colonial period in Africa, people and employees were treated in a transactional or instrumental manner. They were seen as cogs in the machinery of business, a means to an end, to be exploited solely for the betterment of business (exemplified in the term: "human resources"). A new "post-instrumental" form of communal humanism (different from the individualism and transactional approaches so dominant during colonial times) has the potential to build an inclusive competitive advantage.

humanism requires interconnected individuals to contribute to the welfare of the society in which they reside. This is Africa's gift to the world: social leadership within a context of humanistic citizenship. This approach may not be the most expedient or efficient, but it promises a more sustainable society.

This is unlikely to be a purely African phenomenon. There is evidence, from India (Jackson, 2002), for example, that hybrid human resource development systems are being designed to manage Western (instrumental) and Indian (humanistic) orientations in organizations. Their applicability in other regions, such as sub-Saharan Africa, needs to be investigated. The Japanese (holistic) management approach has also provided systems of management in East Asia that appear to be successful in collectivist societies, and they, too, may have some parallels with African societies. The influence of Asian management collectivist philosophy has to be taken into consideration, since Asian businsess have made significant investments (particularly in South Africa) in recent years. Ahiauzu (1986, p. 54) points out that "though he may work in industry, the African lives in a wider society; and it is from this society outside the workplace that the elements that constitute the framework within which the African indigenous thought-system operates derive." This "thought system" includes features like a high degree of harmony between humans and the world around them, the use of symbolism to make sense of the world, a spiritual connection to something larger than the individual, the use of an oral tradition for passing on collective wisdom, and a strong emphasis on family and the immediate community. The importance of family is visible in the network of interrelationships, extended family and mutual obligations, similar to the paternalism found in Thai organizations (Kamoche, 2000). This results in a sense of communalism and traditionalism (Nzelibe, 1986; Onyemelukwe, 1973), which is not unlike the Confucian influence on Asian cultures (Horwitz, Kamoche & Chew, 2002).

What do such hybrid models look like in practice? How do they differ from the Western management models? Jackson (2004) identified three dominant types of management organizations in Africa: (1) post-colonial, (2) post-instrumental, and (3) African renaissance. By analyzing each of these three systems, we will illustrate how they can lead to potential and actual conflicts in the workplace. The analysis will address issues of cross-cultural management in African countries, while demonstrating how a combination of features from the three models could give rise to hybrid management models.

Post-Colonial Leadership and Management Systems

Leadership/management in Africa is typically represented in the literature as fatalistic, resistant to change, reactive, short-term-oriented, authoritarian, risk-reducing, and context-dependent, with decision making based on external criteria. Kiggundu (1989), for example, describes organizations as typically having these characteristics: understaffing of competent people; poor motivation; risk aversion; workers unwilling to take independent action; close supervision of subordinates with little delegation; inefficient operations; overstaffing of nonqualified personnel; underutilization of capacity; poor pay; and low morale, indicated by high turnover and absen-

teeism. Top leaders and managers are likely to be overworked, while reluctant to delegate work, and are generally learned, articulate, and well traveled. However, at the middle-management level is inadequate managerial expertise and skills, combined with a lack of industrial knowledge. Blunt & Jones (1992, 1997) also represent such a system.

Jackson (2004) argues that this representation of African management in the literature is mostly representative of a post-colonial heritage, reflecting a Theory X style of management, in McGregor's (1960) terminology, which generally mistrusts human nature and asserts a need to impose controls on workers, allowing little worker initiative and individually rewarding a narrow set of skills simply by financial means. This system was imposed on African society originally by the colonial powers, and has been perpetuated since Africa gained political independence (but often not economic independence), perhaps as a result of vested political and economic interests, or perhaps purely because this was the way managers in the colonial era were trained. This kind of system typically lacks clear, community/stakeholder-endorsed mission statements or any sense of shared direction. Poor business results follow, and leadership is viewed as detached, highly centralized, hierarchical, and authoritarian. Table 1 illustrates how this Western ideal of leadership is viewed by the authors as operating in its "ideal" state, in East Asia, and in Africa.

In the African context, "leadership" and "management" are socially constructed concepts that contrast with the individual Western construct of "the leader/manager," as explained by Hogg's (2001) "social identity theory of leadership." According to Hogg (p. 184), "group identification, as self-categorization, constructs an intra-group prototypicality gradient that invests the most prototypical member with the appearance of having influence; the appearance arises because members cognitively and behaviorally conform to the prototype" (i.e., the person who behaves the most to "type" is deemed to be the leader of that type). Because most multinational managers and highly skilled Africans take their intra-group norms from the previously colonial West, it is they who are ascribed the apparent influence as leaders. African employees then seek to emulate them in culture and behavior, often suppressing or denying their authentic selves (at a cost). Hence the belief in modern, urban Africa that the "work person" is separate from the "home person" – a belief that undermines the roots of African humanistic society.

Hogg further argues that the group becomes divided by status into leader/managers and followers. In time, a charismatic leadership/managerial personality

Table 1. Comparison of Elements of the Western "Ideal" Leadership with East Asian and African Paradigms

Element	Current Western Leadership "Ideal"	Leadership in East Asia	Leadership in Africa
Influences on leadership practices	• Paramount concern for organizational performance • Drive for efficiency and competitiveness • Urgency induced by short-term economic model • Dependent on followers for operational effectiveness • Individualistic • Emphasis on capital markets	• Maintenance of harmony fundamental • Attention to social networks and particularly familial networks • Consensus valued • Respect for seniority, age, experience • Expectation that managerial authority will be exercised with concern for country and community	• Highly centralized power structures • High degrees of tension as management seeks clarity and control against employee comfort in uncertainty and ambiguity • Emphasis on control mechanisms rather than organizational performance • Bureaucratic resistance to change • Acute resource scarcity • Individual concern for basic security • Stakeholder focus • Importance of extended family and kin networks
Managing authority	• Relative equality of authority and status between manager and subordinates • Delegation/ decentralization • Teamwork • "Empowerment"	• Leadership from the top • Respect for seniority • Goals set by top management • Acceptance of wide power and status differentials between managers and subordinates	• Authoritarian/ paternalistic leadership patterns • Centralization • Bureaucratic controls • Preoccupation with rules and procedures • Reluctance to judge individual performance
Managing uncertainty	• High degree of conservatism and stability-seeking behavior • Uncertainty accepted as normal • Continuous change viewed as natural • Sense of urgency	• Deep-rooted, shared theologies and philosophies provide relative certainty and security • Long-term view of evolving change • Hierarchy and conformity stressed • Collectivist mutual duties	• High degree of tolerance of ambiguity • Change-resistant organizational hierarchies, reinforced by preoccupation with rules • Social networks crucial to provide individual security
Managing relationships	• Trust superficial and offered up-front. Deep trust seldom offered. • Tolerance of others • Openness valued • Open confrontation of differences • Open debate and conflict valued Deep private conversation and dialogue avoided • Support of followers essential • Drive to secure commitment and high morale	• Emphasis on maintenance of harmony and personal dignity • Deep trust earned over time. No offering of superficial trust • Persons valued over issues • Avoidance of confrontation and conflict • Open debate and conflict avoided. Deep private conversation and dialogue valued • Maintenance of social networks important	• Openness to others • Deep trust earned over time. No offering of superficial trust • Emphasis on harmony with others, nature, and the spirit world • Confrontation and differences privately dealt with • Open debate and conflict avoided. Deep private conversation and dialogue valued • Extended social networks importance for sustainability

is attributed to the leader/manager group, which further empowers them and sharpens the status differential. Hence the leader/manager develops a view of the "followers" (employees) as a dependent group hanging on their commands and knowledge. This results in leaders' seeking to limit organizational risk, which in practice means the implementation of controls. Hence, in Africa, the emphasis is on control mechanisms, rules, and procedures, rather than performance. Indeed, there is a high reluctance to judge individual performance.

Table 2 illustrates how this post-colonial perspective on African management differs from the post-instrumental, African renaissance, and East Asian perspectives. A spiral of copying Western behavior in a culture that values leadership differently leads to a strong control element, as can be seen in the table.

The character of such overly controlled organizations is also reflected in the local public sector, or recently privatized local organizations that are not foreign-owned. This stems from the fact that much of the public sector is led by the ex–war heroes/political prisoners/exiles, etc., who led the political revolutions for democracies in their home states. Unfortunately, most of these people did not receive any formal education in managing organizations. When they have acquired such education, they have rarely had sufficient time to practice their skills and competencies. As a result, many are "learning-by-doing" (Gorelick et al., 2004). In addition, the public sector often finds it difficult to lure the most talented local employees away from the multinationals and the private sector.

Managers who fit in well in a post-colonial system are expected to be motivated by power and economic security. Decisions are typically focused on the past and present, rather than the future. Management practices follow an authoritarian leadership style with reliance on hierarchy and a lack of openness in communication and information giving. Within post-colonial systems, management is oriented toward internal processes and power relations.

Individuals' perception about the control they have over what happens to them is vital to their understanding of how they live and what their meaning in the world is (Shapiro, Schwartz, & Astin, 1996), and can affect how new experiences change the individual's behavior. This perception is referred to as "*locus* of *control*" and stems from their expectations about what will happen following a particular behavior (Rotter, Seeman, & Liverant, 1962). Western culture promotes an internal locus-of-control orientation; people are expected to perceive themselves as the active determiners of their fates and accept full responsibility for their outcomes. Over the years in Western society, the locus of control has become "good guys/bad guys," with internality being substituted for "desirable, intelligent, and bright" and externality for "failure, dull, and inadequate" (Lefcourt, 1982, p. 182). The research and practice in the area has been biased by the popular assumption that internal locus of control is a positive asset and externality is a deficit (Evans, Shapiro, & Lewis, 1993). An internal locus of control became the "moral vision" of Western cultural ideology (Christopher, 1996), whereas African culture generally features an external locus of control.

A useful alternative conceptualization of *locus* of *control, in our attempt to find a crossvergence way forward,* is provided by Wong & Sproule (1984). In their study, they noted the importance of distinguishing "realism" from "idealism," suggesting that people's reality tended to account for their external scores, and their ideals tended to account for their internal scores. Building on this, it is possible to view *locus* of *control* as involving a two-dimensional view, such that dual control (or shared responsibility) can be described in terms of both internal and external *control*. Individuals who understand *control* to be from both internal and external sources could be considered to be "bilocals," individuals who strike a healthy balance between beliefs in internal and external *control*. Wong & Sproule (1984) hypothesized that bilocals cope more effectively because they observe an optimal mix between personal responsibility (internal *control*) and reliance on appropriate outside resources (external *control)*.

Indeed, Gurin et al. (1978, p. 292) argued that

Table 2. Comparison of Different Organizational Management Systems in Africa

	Post-Colonial	Post-Instrumental	African Renaissance	East Asian/Japanese
Main principles	• Theory X • Western/post-independence African • Instrumental	• Theory Y • Western/"modern" • Functionalist	• Humanistic • Ubuntu • Community collectivism	• Humanistic • Corporate collectivism
Importance	• Continuing legacy through political and economic interests	• Looked to as alternative • Influence from multinationals, management education, and consultants	• Some elements may prevail in indigenous organizations • Of growing interest internationally	• Developing importance through East Asian investment • May be seen as alternative
Strategy	• Input- and process-oriented • Lack of results and objectives • Risk aversion	• Results- and market-oriented • Clear objectives • Calculated risk taking	• Stakeholder oriented	• Market- and results-oriented • Clear objectives • Low risk-taking
Structure	• Hierarchy • Centralized	• Flatter hierarchy • Often decentralized	• Flatter hierarchy • Decentralized and closer to stakeholders	• Hierarchy and conformity
Governance and decision making	• Authoritarian • Non-consultative	• Often consultative • Increasing emphasis on empowerment	• Participative, consensus seeking (*indaba*)	• Consultative but authority from top
Control	• Rule-bound • Lack of flexibility • Outside influence or control (family, government) often seen as negative	• Clear rules of action • Flexible • Outside government influence decreasing	• Benign rules of action • Outside influence (family, government) may be seen as more benign	• Consensus and harmony above formal rules • May lack flexibility
Character	• May not act ethically toward stakeholders • Not very efficient • Static • Probably not foreign owned	• More ethically responsible • Aims to be successful • Change is a feature • Probably foreign-owned	• Stakeholder interest may be more important than "ethics" • Success related to development and well-being of people • Indigenous	• Harmony and "face" may be more important than ethics • Efficiency • May be slow to change
Internal policies	• Discriminatory • Employee policies aimed at duties rather than rights	• Nondiscriminatory • Access to equal opportunities and clear employee policies on responsibilities and rights	• Stakeholder interests • Access to equal opportunities	• Can be discriminatory (toward women) • Employee relations may be more implicit
Internal climate	• Employee alienation common • Weak trade unions • Inter-ethnic friction • Discourages diversity of opinions • Promotion by ascription	• Emphasis on employee motivation • Weak or cooperative unions • Move toward inter-ethnic harmony • Diverse opinions often encouraged • Promotion based on achievement	• Motivation through participation important • Unions protect rights • Inter-ethnic harmony taken into consideration • Everyone should be able to state opinions • Promotion based on legitimization of status	• Aims at employee commitment (job satisfaction may be low) • Company trade unions • Inter-ethnic relations may not be an issue • Consensus rather than diversity of opinions stressed • Promotion by seniority
External policies	• Lack of customer/client policies • Lack of result orientation	• Clear policies on customers/clients • Result orientation	• A clear awareness of and articulation of stakeholder interests	• A focus on business and customer networks rather than explicit policies
Management expertise	• Educated management elite with low managerial expertise	• High, result-oriented managerial expertise sought	• Management expertise based on people orientation	• Management effectiveness based on collective skills
People orientation	• Control orientation	• People and result orientation	• People and stakeholder orientation	• People (in-group) orientation

scores of greater externality on measures of locus of control among minority (oppressed) groups were incorrectly interpreted in several reports as demonstrating that "cultural values and beliefs in external forces needed to be altered, when in fact [subjects'] sense of low personal control reflected a correct perception of a harsh environment over which they had little control." Hence the importance of emphasizing both internal and external aspects of control, instead of only the benefits of internal (ascribed to Western leaders/managers) or the distresses associated with external (ascribed mainly to African employees). This is a sensible alternative to prevailing discussions of locus of control, and fits within a crossvergence perspective. In multicultural environments, bilocals are expected to be better adjusted than controllers (those with internal control beliefs) and controllees (those with external control beliefs) in many ways (Wong & Sproule, 1984).

Others (e.g., Hannerz, 1969; Valentine, 1971; LaFromboise et al., 1993) have referred to the impact of cultural acquisition and the creative tension between maintaining a balance between internal and external control as "biculturalism." The concepts of bilocals and biculturalism are key to making sense of the collective behavior and social life, as well as the individual and work life, of the African community. Members of the community draw upon both a distinctive repertoire of standardized African group behavior and, simultaneously, patterns derived from the mainstream cultural system of Western derivation. For most Africans, socialization in both of the systems begins at an early age, at home and in school and through the mass media, and continues throughout life – and therefore the two are of equal importance.

Post-Instrumental Management Systems

When Western human resource practices are implemented in cultures that have a different regard for people in organizations, these incompatibilities can result in a lack of motivation in the workplace, leading to low productivity and labor strife. Followers may prefer a leader who is kindly, considerate, and understanding to one who is overly dynamic and productive, and possibly too demanding. There is no assumption here (as there is with the post-colonial management systems) that the followers are lazy, need controlling, and have an external focus. Here the assumption is that the objective of development is to make the "developing" world more like the "developed" one through industrialization, and that this goal should be reflected in the direction of organizational change and the way people are managed. "Most organizations have been primarily shaped by the narrow range of perspectives and experiences of Western European, white, heterosexual, physically able-bodied males" (Weber, 1993, p. 93). This is reflected in a trend wherein Western approaches to management are imported into African countries either through multinational companies; Western-governed institutions like the WTO, IMF, and World Bank; or African managers who are increasingly being educated with Western-style leadership and management curricula (in Africa and abroad). This view is quite different from that of African culture, and the contrast between the two views of training and development are illustrated in Table 3.

An opportunity exists within the post-instrumental management system for a crossvergence hybrid model to emerge. Africans can extract useful Western knowledge while discarding dysfunctional practices, and combine the result with context-appropriate native insights and knowledge, thereby creating a unique hybrid. This also affords the West, and its institutions, the opportunity to enrich its own perspectives and reconstitute its organizations along the hybrid model, providing they are prepared "… to be shaped by more diverse cultures and perspectives, [then] there is every reason to expect that organizations will change" (Weber, 1993, p. 93).

Valuing diversity in African workplaces seems to be compatible with stressing common goals and standards, provided the attention to diversity is not allowed to undermine the emphasis on community and what the community stands for. Since African

employees are engaged in common effort rather than individual effort, organizational processes and human resource practices and policies should seek to guide behavior standards that address the collective effort (shared goals, shared rewards, shared performance standards, shared operating norms, and so forth). Yet Africa is far from one large, harmonious community. There are frictions and tensions between sub-communities as exist between different ethnic groups all around the world. The challenge becomes finding the right balance between the humanistic collective orientation of the community and the different ethnicities and communities within the nation-state or even within the African Union. "If we do not recover and identify with the particularities of our community, then we shall lose what it is we have to contribute to the common culture. We shall have nothing to bring, nothing to give. But if each of us dwells too much, or even exclusively, upon his or her ethnic particularity, then we are in danger of fragmenting and even destroying the common life" (Alasdair MacIntyre, quoted in Quay, 1991).

There is also a need in Africa for skills development that will allow individuals to contribute their best to the collective cause, rather than skills development for individual gain. In the West, the focus is

Table 3. Contrast between Western and African View of Training

Western	African
• Individual responsibility for self-actualization	• Group-determined self-actualization
• Learning viewed as an individual problem-solving process toward positivistic reality, involving puzzlement, perturbation, even discomfort for the learner. Knowledge is to be hoarded as a source of power, and the tension of "not knowing" is skillfully managed at an individual level	• Learning is viewed as a group-responsibility process toward constructivist reality, involving risk avoidance for the group but acquisition of additional information on an individual level. Collectivist nature of social relationships, which enables compromised group goals
• Individual agency in social relationships, which enables maximized organizational goals	• Self-confidence in individual's relationship with his/her stakeholder group, thereby ensuring positive individual affirmation
• Self-confidence in individual's relationship with his/her employing organization, thereby ensuring positive individual affirmation	• Heightened awareness of hierarchical levels within and outside organizations, and deference to tribal/familial authority
• Heightened awareness of hierarchical levels within organizations mainly, as well as deference to organizational authority	• Education is seen as a way to enhance individual status, rather than for personal growth
• Education is seen as a way to enhance both individual status and personal growth	• A view of the professional as better able to make interdependent judgments
• A view of the professional as an individual of independent judgment	• The value of prescribed knowledge from an early age, with self-discovered knowledge emerging with maturity – and knowledge is to be used for the group's advancement
• The value of self-discovered knowledge as opposed to prescribed knowledge from an early age – and knowledge is to be used for one's own advancement	• The power of the teacher is ascribed to him/her by virtue of his/her position. View of the teacher-learner relationship as one in which the learner stays dependent and cannot easily achieve equality with the teacher
• The power of the teacher rests in his/her expert knowledge, information, and skills. An emerging view of the teacher-learner relationship as involving interdependence and growing equality as learner approximates teacher's knowledge	• Development as involving group risk and individual change for learners, but reward is potential group prosperity
• Development as involving individual risk and change for learners, but reward is potential individual prosperity	• Training viewed as a threat rather than an opportunity if it involves an admission of group ignorance and group shortcomings
• Training viewed as an opportunity even if it involves, within a trusting training context, the admission of individual ignorance and shortcomings	• Increasing degree of openness, as trust is developed over a long period of time (among everyone, and as an explicit goal)
• Increasing degree of openness, as trust is assumed up-front in relationships (mainly among peers)	

Source: Authors, and adapted from Jones (1989), Jackson (2002)

on getting teamwork/communal behavior even though individuals are individually competent. Africans need to be empowered with individual skills and competencies, in order to work for the benefit of all. However, the paradoxical nature of Africa's dilemma is that although there is a humanistic, communal focus, no wide-scale agreement exists as to what the common good or venture should be. So separate groups muddle along, each working toward its own goals and values, without either harming or contributing to the success of neighbor communities. This runs counter to the Western market philosophies of survival of the fittest, mean and lean organizational paradigms, or pulling together for the common good of the organization. It is expected, almost taken for granted, that African organizations will not pull together because of ethnic or family-based rifts. Hence what may appear to a Western observer of African organizations to be "irrational" merely reflects a set of values that differ from those of the West.

The African Renaissance System

Taking a divergent stance and rejecting Western ideals more or less completely, some African authors have called for a return to African values and indigenous knowledge systems (Stremlau, 1999; Ajulu, 2001; Mbeki et al., 2004). This movement for an African renaissance follows the precepts of *Ubuntu*. Literally translated, *Ubuntu* means "I am who I am through others." Mbigi (1997) has more specifically set about defining and elaborating the management philosophy of *Ubuntu*, which is based on the sense of community.

Key values can be summarized as follows:

- **Sharing:** A need for security in the face of hardship has prompted a commitment to helping one another. This value is not based on simple exchange, but is a result of a network of social obligations, based predominantly on kinship.
- **Deference to rank:** Although traditional rulers gained their titles by senior lineage, they had to

Table 4: Comparison of Different Management Attributes in Africa				
	Post-Colonial	**Post-Instrumental**	**African Renaissance**	**East Asian/Japanese**
Management motivators	· Economic security · Control	· Managing uncertainty · Self-enhancement · Autonomy · Independence · Achievement	· Belonging · Development of personal and group	· Belonging · Development in corporate context · Elements of economic security
Management commitment	· To business objectives · To relatives · To organization	· To self · To results · To ethical principles · To work	· To group · To people	· To business objectives · To results · To work · To relatives
Management principle	· External locus of control · Deontology · Theory X · Mistrust of human nature · Status orientation	· Internal locus of control · Teleology · Theory Y · Conditional trust of human nature · Achievement orientation	· Internal and external locus of control · Trust of human nature · Status and achievement orientation	· External locus of control · Theory Y (in-group), Theory X (out-group) · Trust of in-group members · Relational aspects of decision making · Status through seniority
Management practices	· Reliance on hierarchy · Low egalitarianism · Lack of open communication · Lack of open information	· Some participation · Mostly communicating openly · Providing open information when necessary · Confrontational	· Participation · Egalitarianism · Communicating openly · Providing open communication	· Consultative · Communicating and information sharing to gain consensus · Maintaining harmony
Main orientations	· Managing process · Managing power relations	· Managing results (external focus) · Managing people	· Managing people (internal stakeholder focus) · Managing results (defined by stakeholder interests)	· Managing people (in-group/out-group relations) · Managing results (defined by stakeholder interests)

Source: Jackson (2002)

earn the respect of their followers and rule by consensus. People were free to express opinions and dissension. At the same time, taking one's proper place in the social scale is an important aspect of the virtue of humility and legitimization of status.

- **Sanctity of commitment:** Commitment and mutual obligations stem from group pressures to meet one's promises and to conform to social expectations (this appears as obligations to stakeholders noted in Table 2).
- **Regard for compromise and consensus:** The main characteristic of traditional African leadership is that of a chief who personifies the unity of the tribe and who must live the values of his community in an exemplary way without being an autocrat. The chief must rely on representatives of the people to assist him, in order to be guided by consensus. Failure to do so would result in his people ignoring his decisions and law. The people are strongly represented, with a duty to attend court hearings, and all have a responsibility to one another to ensure the laws are upheld. As a result of this collective responsibility, everyone has the right to question in open court.
- **The concept of openness:** An important value that implies that nobody should receive retribution for anything said correctly in an open forum. In Table 2, this is reflected in structures

that have flatter hierarchies, consensus-seeking decision making, an internal climate of participation and openness, and protection of rights. Management practice also reflects a participative, egalitarian, and open approach.

- **Good social and personal relations:** Commitment to social solidarity. The tensions of management/labor relations that have been a feature in African organizations can be attributed largely to a lack of human dimension and the adversarial attitudes of colonial employment relations.

A comparison of the management attributes associated with each of the three African management systems and the East Asian system are presented in Table 4.

Whereas the post-colonial system seeks to impose Western ideals on African culture, the African renaissance model seeks to reject such ideas and return to a cultural context untouched by industrialization and the expansion of capitalism. This may be appealing to many in Africa, but it is an unrealistic ambition, as the colonial history and influence cannot be erased.

Where Do We Go from Here?

For a management system to operate successfully in the African context, it must take account of the cultural roots and history within which the organization is seeking to operate. We have outlined three approaches that can be taken: a post-colonial approach that seeks to impose Western ideas on Africa; the post-instrumental approach, which seeks to "improve" Africa with Western developments; and the African renaissance approach, which seeks to reject Western ideas. Such normative aims will never succeed if the community that is being "improved" does not welcome the intervention as improvement. Equally, the African renaissance approach that seeks to remove the Western influence and return to African cultural roots will not succeed, because history cannot be erased, and the influence of the multinationals and globalization are not going to recede. This leaves us seeking a middle ground that considers both the different and the overlapping systems stemming from the influence of diverse post-colonial systems and their different operating versions (Portuguese, Belgian, French, Dutch, English, German, Arabic, etc.) on the one hand, and the interaction with post-instrumental systems represented by various multinationals present on the African continent (North American, European, and Asian companies) on the other hand – while first focusing on the African values and thought system in order to understand their impact on the working behavior of African leaders and managers. Such a hybrid, cross-vergence management system not only could be the way forward for management in Africa, but also may be the way forward for the developed world as it struggles to embrace the complexities of diversity that are arising from globalization. Perhaps it is time for the canon of knowledge in management and leadership to shift to Africa.

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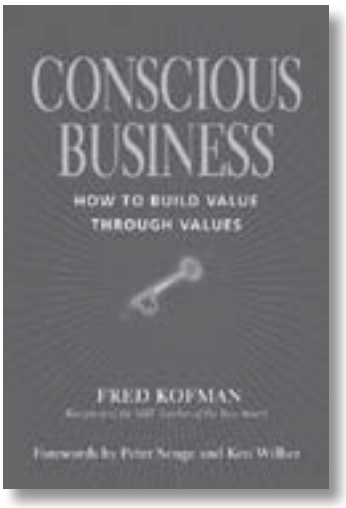
Conscious Business: How to Build Value Through Values

Fred Kofman
Sounds True, 2006

Conscious Business:
How to Build Value Through Values

Fred Kofman

In *Conscious Business*, author Fred Kofman, one of the original members of the Center for Organizational Learning at MIT, argues that creating cultures of mutual learning is the foundation of organizational excellence. The techniques he introduces show readers how to create such cultures through achieving unconditional responsibility, unflinching integrity, authentic communication, impeccable commitments, and "right leadership." Together, these help create a conscious business that produces sustainable, exceptional performance through the solidarity of its community and the dignity of each member.



Foreword by Ken Wilber

The dictionary definition of business, dry and prosaic, is "occupation, work, trade, commerce; serious, rightful, proper endeavor." Conscious means "having an awareness of one's inner and outer worlds; mentally perceptive, awake, mindful." So "conscious business" might mean, engaging in an occupation, work, or trade in a mindful, awake fashion. This implies, of course, that many people do not do so. In my experience, this is often the case. So I would definitely be in favor of conscious business – or conscious anything, for that matter.

That starts to sound interesting. Still, I wonder exactly what "conscious" or "mindful" might mean, especially since under "conscious" we find the provocative phrase, "aware of inner and outer worlds." Just how many worlds are there, and do I have to be conscious of all of them in order to be really conscious?

Here, I think, is where the entire idea of conscious business starts to become truly intriguing. Worlds, terrains, landscapes, environments: It's a big world, and the better we understand that world – both inner and outer – the better our navigation of it will be.

A map of the outer world would help; so would a map of the inner world. Together they would provide a tool that would dramatically improve my navigation through any environment, any world, including the world of business. A comprehensive map that combined the latest knowledge of both inner and outer worlds would provide an extraordinary means for fulfilling any goals that I might have. It would also provide the key to being conscious of both inner and outer worlds. Conscious business – in fact, conscious living – would start to become a very real possibility.

Big World, Big Map

A map, of course, is not the territory, and we definitely do not want to confuse any map, no matter how comprehensive, with the territory itself. At the same time, we don't want to have an inadequate, partial, broken map either. The fact is, most human endeavors, including most business practices, operate with incomplete and often misleading maps of human potentials. These partial and fractured maps of inner and outer realities consistently lead to failures in both personal and professional endeavors.

In the past few decades there has been, for the first time in history, a concerted effort to take all of the known maps of human potentials, both inner and outer, and combine them into a more comprehensive, inclusive, and

accurate map of reality. This "big map" – sometimes called an Integral Map – represents the most comprehensive and balanced overview to date, and as such offers an unparalleled navigational aid in defining and fulfilling virtually any goals, personal or professional.

How comprehensive is this Big Map? It started with an exhaustive cross-cultural comparison of all the known interior maps offered by the world's major cultures, including psychological maps from Freud to Jung to Piaget; Eastern maps, including those offered by yoga, Buddhism, and Taoism; the extensive results of cognitive science, neurobiology, and evolutionary psychology; typologies from the Enneagram to Myers-Briggs; transformation tools from ancient shamans to postmodern sages. The idea was simple: What psychological map or model could account for, and include, all of those possibilities? Because human beings have in fact proposed all of those various schools and systems, there must be a model comprehensive enough to account for all of them, and the Integral Model, as far as we can tell, does exactly that.

The result in the interior domains is that there appears to be a spectrum of consciousness available to men and women. This spectrum ranges from body to mind to spirit; from prerational to rational to transrational; from subconscious to self-conscious to superconscious; from emotional to ethical to spiritual. The point is that all of those potentials – body to mind to spirit – are important for a comprehensive approach to any situation, personal or professional, because those realities are in fact operating in all humans in any event, and you either take them into conscious account or they will subconsciously sabotage your efforts at every turn. This is true in any human endeavor, from marriage to business to education to recreation.

In addition to these interior or psychological realities, the Integral Model also includes the most recent maps of the outer world, maps offered by widely respected empirical sciences from dynamic systems theory to complexity and chaos theories. Combined with interior maps, the result is indeed an Integral Map of inner and outer worlds – a map that therefore is the measure of what it means to be really conscious.

Complex as this Integral Map sounds (and is), it actually shakes down into a handful of fairly simple factors that can be quickly mastered. The easiest way to summarize the Integral Map is that it covers a spectrum of consciousness operating in both inner and outer worlds: the Integral Approach includes body, mind, and spirit in self, culture, and nature.

We have already briefly examined the first part of that equation – namely, "body, mind, and spirit" – which we saw as the spectrum of consciousness that constitutes the interior realities or worlds. The second half of the integral equation –"in self, culture, and nature" – represents the three most important worlds themselves; that is, the three most fundamental environments, realities, or landscapes through which the spectrum of consciousness operates.

"Self" simply refers to my own interior world or subjective realities, which can be accessed by introspection, meditation, and self-reflection. "Culture" refers to the world of shared values, mutual understanding, and common meanings that you and I might exchange, such as a common language, an interest in business, a love of classical music, or any shared meaning or value. This is not subjective but intersubjective, a world accessed by interpretation and mutual understanding. And "nature" refers to the exterior world of objective facts, environments, and events, including exterior human nature with its products and artifacts. Because the human organism is a part of nature, then the products of human organisms, such as automobiles, are products of nature and can be approached with natural sciences such as systems theory and complexity theory.

These three major landscapes – self, culture, and world – are often called the Beautiful, the Good, and the True. Or Art, Morals, and Science. Or simply I, We, and It. They are also sometimes called "the Big Three," so fundamental and important are these three worlds in which human beings are always operating. Conscious living – and certainly conscious business – would therefore necessarily take these three worlds into account when planning any activity, because, again,

these worlds exist in any event, and you will either take them into conscious account or they will subconsciously sabotage your every move.

Integral Business

Conscious business – business that is conscious of inner and outer worlds – would therefore be business that takes into account body, mind, and spirit in self, culture, and nature. Put differently, conscious business would be mindful of the way that the spectrum of consciousness operates in the Big Three worlds of self, culture, and nature. This means very specifically that integral business leadership would use the tools that have been developed to best navigate and master self, culture, and world.

It's not surprising, then, that business management theories break down into three large categories covering the Big Three landscapes: approaches that focus on individual motivation; those that emphasize corporate culture and values; and those that focus on exterior objective systems, flow patterns, and quality control. The whole point is that integral business leadership would use the tools of all of them in a coordinated and integrated fashion for maximum results, or else settle for less than optimal results.

For example, integral business leadership would use systems theory to understand the dynamic patterns of the exterior world. The systems approach to business has been made popular by writers such as Peter Senge, Meg Wheatley, and Michael C. Jackson, among literally hundreds of others. The systems approach is also widely used to track business cycles, as in the groundbreaking work of Clayton Christensen on disruptive technologies.

But integral business leadership would also use the tools of the interior spectrum of consciousness in individuals – tools such as emotional intelligence, made popular by Daniel Goleman; Myers-Briggs, already widely used as a management aid; and personal motivational tools, from Tony Robbins to Franklin Covey.

But integral business leadership would not stop with self and world. It would also draw on our extensive knowledge of corporate culture, shared values, and company motivation. Every company has a culture, and specific business cycles seem to be most effectively navigated by different types of corporate cultures, as suggested by the important research of Geoffrey Moore, or the empirical research of Jim Collins. Both point to the overriding importance of corporate values and intersubjective factors in long-term success, which any integral leadership would take into account if it wanted to be mindful and awake in the world of corporate values and maximum effectiveness.

In other words, all of those major theories of business management and leadership – from systems theory to emotional intelligence to corporate-culture management, covering the Big Three landscapes faced by all humans – have an important place in a true Integral Model of conscious business. Although this might at first seem too complicated, the undeniable fact is that any less than integral approach is doomed to failure. In today's world, nobody can afford to be less than integral, because the guaranteed costs are otherwise much too high. Body, mind, and spirit – and self, culture, nature – are all there, all exerting an influence, all actively shaping events, and you either consciously take them into account in any human endeavor or stand back and watch the roadkill.

Big Map, Big Mind

I have attempted to give a simple summary of this overall approach to business in *A Theory of Everything: An Integral Vision for Business, Politics, Science, and Spirituality.* But perhaps the best place to begin with an integral approach to business is with oneself. In the Big Three of self, culture, and world, integral mastery starts with self. How do body, mind, and spirit operate in me? How does that necessarily impact my role in the world of business? And how can I become more conscious of these already operating realities in myself and in others?

This is the great value of Fred Kofman's *Conscious Business: How to Build Value Through Values*. Integral mastery begins with mastery of self, at an emotional level, a mental-ethical level, and a spiritual level. Anything more than that is not needed; anything less than that, disastrous.

Fred Kofman is a living example of what he preaches, a man of sensitivity, impeccability, and keen consciousness. It's not just that this makes him a better, more effective, more successful businessperson, but that it makes him a more admirable human being, whom I am proud to call friend. I highly recommend that you take the following journey with Fred, learning to transform body, mind, and spirit as a prelude to transforming self, culture, and world. And in that integral embrace, neither you nor the world will ever be the same.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Fred Kofman is co-founder and president of Axialent, a consulting company devoted to helping organizations succeed through effectiveness, solidarity, and integrity. Fred holds a doctorate in economics from the University of California at Berkeley. From 1990 to 1996 he was a senior researcher at MIT, and was named Teacher of the Year at the Sloan School of Management, where he taught management accounting and control systems. Since 1999, he has collaborated with Ken Wilber at the Integral Institute's business and spiritual centers.

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