

***Diverse Thinking ~ Harmonious Action:
Leading in a Global Age***

“Once a photograph of the Earth, taken from outside, is available . . . a new idea as powerful as any other in history will be let loose. “

British Astronomer, Sir Fred Hoyle, 1948



When the first photos of the earth from space were transmitted from the U.S. Apollo space program in 1969, humanity was profoundly moved. The photo symbolizes a graduation for humans on the planet. No longer are we able to think of ourselves only as citizens of a particular country, state, region or tribe; all of us are global citizens. We can literally see the interconnection – the water that surrounds and connects all the landmasses, the atmosphere that surrounds the entire planet. The photo symbolizes other interdependencies as well – economic, political, environmental, social, spiritual. These forces interact to create a dynamic global system, creating contact among people of different cultures, different political ideologies and different worldviews. Our cultures and our communities throughout the world are exposed to one another and interact in ways never before experienced.

This interdependent, dynamic global system requires a fundamental shift in our understanding of leading. We need a new vision of leaders and of leadership. What kind of leadership can help us manage the potential conflict these differences may create? What kind of leadership can enable us to leverage the opportunities inherent in the interdependencies of our current reality?

The purpose of this paper is to engage readers in exploring this fundamental shift - in thinking and acting - that is required for effectively leading others in a global age. It examines the ***paradox of diversity and harmony*** as it relates to leading, and specifically argues that our effectiveness as leaders rests on our ability to develop competence in both:

- evoking, drawing out, diverse perspectives, and
- enabling shared vision, group intention and motivation for collective, harmonious action to emerge.

Global Interdependence

The reality we face is that we are interdependent whether or not that is what we would choose. Examples abound.

- In the US, an average pound of food travels 2000 miles to the consumer. Current methods of shipping and distributing food and other products over great distances consume massive amounts of increasingly valuable fuel and create greenhouse gases. These impacts do not respect national boundaries. (Senge, Smith, Kruschwitz, Laur & Schley, 2008)
- Educational Policy is impacted. Immigration patterns and movement of refugees have created increasingly diverse student populations. Greece, a country that until recently had a strict anti-immigration policy, now accepts a wide array of foreigners and immigrants. Some kindergarten classes in Athens now have over 75% minority children. Educational approaches are being developed to enable children both to adjust to the mainstream society in which they now live, and to develop their own self-confidence and autonomy in their birth culture. (Vidali & Adams, 2006)
- Even civil war affects other countries as refugees seek safety. The United Nations estimates nearly 12,000,000 Refugees at the end of 2007. (United Nations High Commission for Refugees [UNHCR], 2007)
- Trade agreements eliminate jobs in some areas and create jobs in other areas.
- Consumer goods are often designed in one country, manufactured in another country, and sold in many countries around the globe.
- Terrorism continues to increase.

Students in a master's level course on Global Pluralism researched the life cycle of various products commonly purchase by U.S. consumers seeking to understand the processes through which these items passed, from extraction or planting to final consumption. They were especially interested in learning how various groups of people were involved in and affected by these processes. To their amazement, their findings revealed multiple layers of interdependence represented by products we use every day.

One group explored the life cycle of cashmere. The cashmere scarf you may own began life as the down of a goat. The cold climate in the mountains of China's Alashan Plateau is an excellent environment for the goats "Due to the large demand for cashmere, the breeding of goats has grown faster than other livestock in the past 10 years," comments Jia Youling, director-general of Veterinary Bureau of the Ministry of Agriculture. (Jiang Jingjing, 2005) As the number of goats increased, so too, did desertification, degradation of the natural grasslands, dried up lakes, dust storms and increased pollution. The impacts are far reaching. Pollution contributes to reduced visibility, respiratory problems in children and the elderly, and early snowmelt. Desertification means less food for the goats; fewer goats are born each year; the quality of cashmere decreases.

Herders and their families struggle to make ends meet. Speaking to an international conference, Liu Jiawen, Deputy Director of the Grassland Monitoring and Administration Center under the Ministry of Agriculture, describes some of the initiatives the Chinese government has launched to address the problem, projects involving “the restoration of grassland vegetation, the establishment of forage seed bases and grassland fencing.” (“Grasslands face severe desertification despite protection,” 2008) And yet, there are other players in this process. Few individuals in Italy, the UK or the US who purchase cashmere scarves recognize the interdependencies behind that product. Few are aware, or choose to be aware, of their role in dust storms in Beijing or the desertification of the Alashan Plateau in China.

While global interdependence can bring frightening challenges, it also provides amazing benefits. The wisdom of various cultural and philosophical traditions brings new models and methods for living together. Commenting on how to resolve intense differences, a friend from South Africa responded matter-of-factly, “Well, at the end of the day we know that if you’re happy, I’m happy, and if you are not happy, I am not happy.” This expression of Ubuntu provides a quite different way of looking at conflict from the win/lose perspective in which conflict is often perceived.

In the United States, Chinese medicine has been increasingly available and embraced. Now individuals have a vastly expanded approach to health and healing.

Mr. Zhang Yue, co-founder of BROAD Air Conditioning (www.broad.com) provides a powerful example of environmental consciousness and the creativity needed for addressing global energy needs. At the same time, the manufacturing base, near Changsha, demonstrates practices in harmony with nature - solar panels are used extensively, vegetables, fish and pigs raised within the manufacturing complex provide food for the meals provided free to the workers, the energy produced by the manufacturing process is recycled to provide heat for a near-by school. Non-electric refrigeration, BROAD’s primary product, uses natural gas, solar power, recycled waste energy, actually any source of heat to boil a special liquid, a lithium bromide solution, and when the vapors from that solution condense, they cool whatever is near them. These products do not use Freon or other toxic chemicals. (Company brochure and personal visit)

The Pioneers of Change is “a global learning network supporting practitioners in their mid-20s to mid-30.” (<http://pioneersofchange.net/>) Founded in 1999 by a group of people from 16 countries, it now includes participants from around the world, all of whom commit to these principles: be yourself, do what matters, start now, engage with others, never stop asking questions. Members share stories, resources, experiences and lessons learned. The site supports “communities of practice” on topics such as: social entrepreneurship, immigration and integration, facilitation and peacebuilding.

iLEAP, a non-profit organization in the US, whose mission is to cultivate and inspire a new generation of global leaders, selected four mid-career individuals who are making a difference in their local countries for three months of study in the United States. (www.ileap.org/) These men and women from Zambia, Nepal, Liberia and India meet with organizations engaged in work similar to theirs, share ideas, build relationships with other leaders. They exchange information about sustainable farming, about resolving problems of refugees, about improving the health of women and girls. All gain new perspectives, not just the four individuals, but all who are engaged in those conversations.

Leading in a Global, Interdependent World

Our interdependence, both benefits and challenges, necessitates that we deal with difference, difference that is significant. Peter Senge and his colleagues, in an extensive research project examining how individuals and organizations are addressing issues of sustainability, concluded that one of the most crucial skills of leadership is the ability to lead across boundaries. (Senge, et al. 2008) Whether those boundaries are geographical, political, cultural or ideological, leading across boundaries requires that leaders are able to create an environment where differences can be expressed and heard. It requires skills in helping groups discover commonalities and resolve differences in order to collectively move to action in productive ways.

Fundamental question surface as we consider leading in this context.

- How are we to lead people from different cultures, backgrounds, languages, religions, political ideologies to some sort of sustainable life together?
- How do we manage the potential conflict inherent in differences?
- How do we solve complex problems?
- How do we evoke people's innate creativity?
- How are we to lead in such a way that our differences can be helpful rather than inhibiting?
- How are we to orchestrate harmonious action in such a sea of differences?

And, perhaps the bigger question is: Are we willing?

In a global world of pluralism and paradox, there are rarely "right" answers to the challenges we face. In contrast to traditional expectations that leaders will have the "right" answers and the power to control others, leaders today must be able to respond effectively in absence of clear precedents and past experience. We must depend on others when we are more comfortable depending on ourselves. We cannot rely on road maps, or formulas for success and considerable risk is involved.

Ronald Heifetz, Director of the Leadership Education Project at Harvard University's School of Government, provides powerful and practical insight into the kinds of problems leaders face today. (1994) Distinguishing between what he calls "technical fixes" and "adaptive challenges," Heifetz points out that when problems can be clearly defined and known responses exist, leaders with authority may indeed be able to guide groups to "right answers." However, problems faced by those who are leading across boundaries are complex, what Heifetz would call "adaptive challenges." Such problems have no simple, clear definition and specific technical fixes are not available. Such problems require that leaders are able to gather the right people and create an environment where they can creatively and collaboratively learn and act in order to make progress in resolving the problem.

The story of an ***unlikely partnership*** illustrates such an adaptive challenge.

Facing water shortages, for several years, Coca-Cola had focused on achieving water efficiency within its own plants. These efforts represent what Heifetz would call "technical fixes." Gradually, however, senior management realized that it was the health of the entire watershed within which the plant operated that needed to be the focus of their attention. In 2007 Coke entered into a five-year partnership with the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) to build the expertise to achieve a new aim of "giving back to nature" the water it extracts, and to set up an independent verification of progress. (Senge, et al., p. 46)

Clearly, the health of the entire watershed, was beyond the scope of Coke's competencies. The World Wildlife Fund (www.wwf.org/) a Non-Governmental Organization, whose goal is to build a future where people live in harmony with nature, and who have over 50 years of experience in this work, has a great deal to contribute. Yet there is no clear-cut definition of this problem or how it can best be addressed, and these two organizations have very different purposes, histories and cultures.

As strange as it may seem that this large corporation and one of the world's most respected NGOs would create such a partnership, it clearly is in the best interest of both. Coca-Cola depends on water for its product. And one of primary concerns of the World Wildlife Fund is to work for clean water for inhabitants in all parts of the world. Nevertheless, these two entities have very different cultures, expectations, and ways of viewing the world. To make it (corporate/NGO partnerships) work, "Your bias should be toward engagement and understanding one another, not to trying to make all our objectives align too quickly. This takes patience," counsels Dan Vermeer, a member of Coke's corporate water and environment staff. (Senge et al., p.89)

See these web sites for more information:

http://www.panda.org/what_we_do/how_we_work/businesses/businesses

http://www.thecoca-colacompany.com/citizensip/conservation_partnership.html

All of the serious problems we face as global citizens are “adaptive challenges,” requiring collaboration among national governments and agencies, corporations, educational institutions, people of many disciplines, speaking many languages, and coming from very different cultures and histories.

Most of us will not be leaders of nations meeting, formally or informally, to determine international agreements. However, most of us will find ourselves leading across boundaries, leading difference. Perhaps you will be involved in an unlikely partnership between a corporation and an NGO, such as Coca-Cola and WWF, or

- Perhaps you will be leading a virtual team, dealing with different time zones and different languages as well as a variety of cultural perspectives and expectations as you attempt to resolve a problem in the manufacturing of an airplane part.
- Perhaps you will lead a cross-cultural research team.
- Perhaps you will be participating in a negotiating team seeking agreement on various aspects of a climate change policy.
- Perhaps you will be responsible for coordinating the efforts of geologists, engineers, geographers and production managers in seeking new energy resources.

Regardless of our position, title, or role we will find ourselves engaged in leading differences. Leading across boundaries brings us face-to-face with the paradox of diversity and harmony. Diversity includes cross-cultural reality. And it is more. Diversity includes differences among professional disciplines. It includes the different perspectives of NGOs and for-profit organizations. It includes gender differences, racial and ethnic differences, age differences, economic differences, educational differences. We are faced with persons who both share our humanity, and perceive reality in a way very different from our own. We are confronted with persons from cultures with different practices of communication, different ways of making decisions, different approaches to planning and problem-solving.

The traditional approach in many of our cultures has been to defend, to convince, to persuade or insist on one’s own viewpoint. Within our own cultures we may have had the means of control to back us up. This approach is greatly limited today. Not only do we not have control over many of those with whom we work, there are rarely right answers to the challenges we face. Problems are complex and multilayered.

The question then, is how are we to lead people from different cultures, backgrounds, languages, religions, political ideologies to some sort of sustainable life together? How are we to manage the paradox of diversity and harmony?

Confronting the paradox of diversity and harmony

Globalizing leaders, facing the paradox of diversity and harmony, cannot be “prepared” in the sense we have always understood that word. Because we can’t predict the situations in which we will find ourselves. Thus, “being

prepared” comes to mean something entirely different. Discomfort and disequilibrium are normal. How do we “prepare” to lead in this context?

This brings us again to the thesis of this paper, that the key to leading effectively in this global, interdependent world is competence in:

- evoking diverse perspectives, and
- enabling shared vision, group intention and motivation for collective, harmonious action to emerge.

Developing these competencies requires both “unlearning” and learning.

- It requires that we develop our inner resources, so that we can be comfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity.
- It requires that we reframe our expectations.
 - Nick Barker, Leadership Education Coordinator, at the East/West Center in Hawaii suggests that we reframe our understanding of difference. Speaking at a Global Leadership Conference in 2008, Barker emphasized that rather than thinking that we are “different from” one another, we need to recognize that we are “different for” one another. That is, we need to shift from tolerating difference to learning to appreciate difference, to mobilize and activate difference.
 - For leaders this suggests that harmonious action is not about controlling others to support our perspective, but instead, inquiring, seeking to understand others’ perspectives, encouraging communication among those we lead, so that creative possibilities can emerge.
- It requires learning, or learning to depend on, skills such as listening, observing, developing trust, nurturing relationships, continuing the conversations.
 - For those of us who think of leaders as “directing the show,” a great deal of “unlearning” may be necessary. Evoking the creativity and spirit of a group, helping team members deal with conflict productively, enabling a group of diverse individuals discover their common humanness and leverage their differences in useful ways - these require proficiency in such skills.
- It requires learning to use Social Technologies for facilitating collective decisions and action. Some of these are described below.

Leading in a global, interdependent world requires courage! Building the capacity for collaboration is hard work and needs to be seen as such. The following discussion of Valuing Diversity and Social Technologies, addresses, in depth, understanding and developing strategies for

- evoking diverse perspectives, and
- enabling shared vision, group intention and motivation for collective, harmonious action to emerge.

Valuing Diversity

On the surface, it may seem counter-productive to draw out differences when what we want is harmonious action. The question is, what is the alternative? We live in a world of diversity. Whether we are speaking of cultural norms in China and Africa, or different perspectives within a team of scientists considering the best approach to climate change, or perhaps the idea of what constitutes a romantic evening from the point of view of a man and a woman - we will find diversity. To ignore such differences is to make decisions that will not be implemented, to create plans that will be undermined.

For centuries our focus has been, not on an interdependent global world, but on our own "part" of that world - our country, our organization, our priorities. Diversity, from this perspective is not a desirable quality. In fact it complicates matters. Differences mean less certainty, less ability to standardize expectations, and less ability to predict outcomes.

A particularly troublesome result of this perspective is that it fosters monocultures, that is, systems with very low diversity. And monocultures, whether in agriculture or human groups, are unsustainable. One-dimensional individuals, groups or organizations are vulnerable.

In agriculture, monoculture, or cultivation of low diversity of crops, can lead to large-scale crop failure as a single genetic variety becomes susceptible to a disease. The Irish potato famine was caused by susceptibility to a particular kind of mold. The wine industry in Europe was devastated by susceptibility to a particular tiny insect. In the case of the wine industry, each crop had to be replaced by a new variety imported from another country that had used a different genetic variable that was not susceptible to the pathogen.

In human systems, a monoculture is any sort of system wherein everyone has similar perceptions, ways of thinking and frameworks for making meaning of their experience. There is an appeal to it. It seems easier to manage, allows for economies of scale, and minimizes surprises. But just as eating only one type of food, no matter how nutritious it might be, would eventually lead to poor health, in an interdependent world, organizations characterized by internal monoculture do not have internal fortitude, or the flexibility to respond to their changing environment. No matter how beautifully the violins might be played, without all the other instruments, there is no orchestra; there is no harmony.

Nations and organizations may seek to create strong cultures to promote cohesiveness within, to develop consistency in decision-making, to encourage employee pride and commitment. Yet, this creates its own problems. Strong cultures tend to become homogeneous cultures. And homogeneous cultures do

not have diversity of interest, perspective, or relationships within and without to enable the innovation and adaptability necessary for creating a sustainable future.

Acknowledging differences does not require agreement. What it does do is provide a basis for conversation, an opportunity to discover common ground. Inviting diverse perspectives does not lead directly to harmonious action, but it is a pre-condition. As diverse ideas, expectations, interpretations are surfaced, we have the raw material for rich music. Diversity provides the transformative potential for a truly harmonious world.

A brief example may illustrate this transformative potential of a group learning to listen to one another's perspectives in light of their common goal.

A small team of graduate students developing a paper to describe the kind of organizations they wanted to help create, suddenly realized that the way they were approaching this assignment was the antithesis of the kind of organization they were hoping to create. They suspended the tasks they had allocated to one another and spent several hours talking together, both in person and on-line. As they explored their ideas together, the conversations became rich, and "we hated for our meetings to end." When the time came to actually write the paper, "It practically wrote itself," they reported. Their reflections are insightful: it seemed weird to give up our lists and our individual tasks; not everyone was present every time, and yet it didn't matter, the continuity continued; questions seemed key, we used questions to help us think together.

Their initial interaction was focused on individual tasks, with the hope that these individual efforts could be put together into a cohesive and meaningful whole. Their discovery was that through frequent communication they were continually building on the new information various members contributed. It enabled the group as a whole to learn together. It allowed for questioning and challenging ideas as their knowledge and understanding increased. Differences were acknowledged and commonalities were identified as part of the on-going conversation. In writing the final paper, much of the work was already done.

A larger, long term corporate example provides a similar illustration. This multi-state telecommunications company in the United States, facing dramatic changes following national deregulation of the industry, developed a company-wide initiative to engage all employees in articulating a set of values that would support their work together. The company operated in six states and the workforce was quite diverse.

As work groups across the company had conversations about the values that were important to them, and as company directors synthesized the reports from these groups, an important statement of values emerged. The most significant aspect of this activity, however, was not only the statement of values, but also

the conversations that were held. People were personally engaged. Diverse voices were heard. While the values that were articulated were similar to what leaders might have identified, the meaning of these values and the commitment to these values were significantly different. Employees did not accept these values because leaders requested or required them to do so. These were **their** values. They identified “trust” as a value, for example, because they experienced every day its importance in doing quality work. They identified “accountability” as a value, because they experienced the importance of being able to depend on one another.

For the five years following deregulation, when almost every telecommunications company in the industry experienced lower revenue and profits, this organization realized a 13% increase in revenue and a 7% increase in profits.

In each case, the focus shifted from achieving specific tasks, to the relationships that comprised and created the whole. This shift released creativity, wove together disparate voices and led to harmonious achievement of desired and significant results.

Social Technologies for Harmonious Action

For the last three centuries product innovations - technologies that produced products ranging from the printing press to lap top computers, from tractors to dishwashers - have had a huge impact on our daily lives. Social technologies, on the other hand, have, until the last century, been noticeable by their absence. Today they represent a strongly researched set of methods, models and strategies that facilitate people working together to create desired results.

Social Technologies have grown out of the field of Organization Development. They focus, not on products, but on people. They address what motivates people? What allows and invites people to do their best? What stimulates their creativity? What evokes full engagement and persistence? What evokes and supports collaboration?

Like scientists in any field, working with social technologies requires commitment, reflection and learning from experience. Darcy Winslow, references the patience and persistence required in such work. Winslow, head of a small R & D group in Nike, describes the iterative process of engaging a meaningful cross section of key players in the Nike product system talking with one another to generate the interest and energy necessary to rethink products at Nike. Once an initial strategic microcosm is identified and engaged, she comments, the real work has just begun. The work “came down to months and eventually years of one-on-one personal conversations.” (Senge, et al., p. 237)

These are technologies that can help leaders harmonize diversity. Several of these specific technologies are illustrated below in the examples of collaborative work.

Action Research - The Bridge Group

Five students in the second year of their graduate program in Antioch University's Center for Creative Change in Seattle, WA, were drawn to work with communities in South Seattle at the Duwamish River Superfund cleanup site. They called themselves the "Bridge Group," as they conceived of their work as supporting the bridging of differences for collective action. As they engaged with the community and various agencies involved, and explored their own interests in the project, they discovered that working as a team both strengthened their impact and deepened their learning. The students were pursuing masters degrees in different programs with the Center for Creative Change - Environment and Community, Whole Systems Design and Organizational Psychology.

The students initiated and were involved in a variety of collaborative activities with the people who lived in the communities, with city, state and federal government agencies, Indian tribes and other local organizations with a stake in the clean-up. One student provided technical understanding and support. Two developed and implemented an evening workshop for community residents. Through the workshop residents improved their ability to represent themselves and their neighborhood with informed and reasoned public comment at U.S. Environmental Protection Agency public meetings. This workshop empowered the members of the community and enabled a valuable experience of public participation in environmental decision-making. Another student in this team helped organize a community visioning workshop to prepare for Superfund cleanup and shoreline restoration projects. Interested community members, governmental agencies, businesses and other stakeholders then began to work together to create a multi-phase and multi-use future for the two contaminated sites.

Such projects reveal the complexities of many of our global, social problems, problems that cannot be solved by any one organization, company or country.

Through their partnership with these various stakeholders, and with one another, students engaged in on-going reflection, deepening understanding of what was happening, collaborative planning for new action, etc. The action, and the learning, were equally important; they are interdependent components of the same process.

An article by M. Riel, "Understanding Action Research," provides a full description of Action Research, as well as examples and resources. (Riel, M. 2007).

Appreciative Inquiry - Southern Sudan

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a systematic way for a group or organization to discover its strengths and its real energy for realizing its potential. (<http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/>) Developed by David Cooperrider of Case Western Reserve University, the basic idea of AI is to focus on what works, rather than trying to fix what's wrong. The approach acknowledges the contribution of individuals in order to increase trust and organizational alignment. The method aims to create meaning by drawing from stories of concrete successes. It teaches a particular way of asking questions and envisioning the future that reveals areas of shared positive energy in a group or organization.

A message on the AI List serve, May 24, 2009, from Malcolm J. Odell, Jr., MS, PhD, Sudan BRIDGE Consultant, describes this process in action in a village in Sudan. Appreciative Planning and Action (APA) is an adaptation of Appreciative Inquiry (AI). Excerpts from his message follow.

“Greetings from Aweil, Northern Bhar al-Ghazal - Southern Sudan.

I woke up about 5:30 am the other morning in a UN Peace Keepers camp and suddenly things seemed remarkably clear. What I've been seeing as I watch my Sudanese Winrock colleagues conducting Appreciative Planning and Action (APA) community mobilization meetings in local villages is really quite a miracle..

Within just a few hours the community - including about 100 villagers (majority women I might note) went through our streamlined APA process built almost exclusively on pictures they drew in groups that started with sharing their success stories about things they have done together in the village on their own that they are particularly proud of. They went on to draw their vision for what they'd like to see their village to be for their children and grandchildren. Following this, they outlined their priority projects they would like to undertake themselves, choosing one for which they made a detailed action plan accompanied by personal commitments.

Then I watched, admittedly with my jaw dropping, as each group took about 10 to 15 minutes to actually start to implement the first step of their plans. Women climbed up on the roof of the local mud-brick school they have started building and began thatching the roof; youth cleared an area for a vegetable garden; old men - including the Chief himself - began dragging thorn branches to fence the garden area.

This process, complete with some lengthy speeches by a local councilman, the chief and others, plus active presentations by each of the groups -- three women's groups, the youth, and the elders -- where they shared their APA

inspired success maps, dream pictures, action plans, personal commitments, and what they had done to begin -- took less than 3 hours, beginning to end. Several other groups have done the same in 2 hrs, or even less.

Example: one of the women's group showed their three action plans for vegetable, fish, and milk collection projects and how they would divide responsibilities, collect the revenues, and put them in a special box which would be watched over by 3 women; a fourth woman said she would take responsibility for settling any disputes that might arise to ensure everything went smoothly. No where did the women ask for anything from Winrock or any other donor. These, they proudly reminded everyone, were projects they would do entirely on their own. One women's group even reported that their commitment was to support the government of the new Southern Sudan by paying taxes! (Have you ever heard that before, anywhere?)”

Odell's very detailed description of an application of this Social Technology not only provides the practical, results-oriented nature of these technologies, it also demonstrates their value cross-culturally.

World Café - Wells Fargo Bank

A third Social Technology, The World Café, is a structured conversational process for hosting conversations about questions that matter. These conversations link and build on each other as people move between groups, cross-pollinate ideas, and discover new insights into the questions or issues that are most important. Developed by Juanita Brown, it is well researched, and decades of practice have followed its emergence. It can surface the collective intelligence within any group, thus enabling collaborative action in pursuit of shared goals.

Ann McClosky shares her experience hosting a world café to create a new technology plan for the whole bank. McCloskey is Senior Vice President Strategic Development for Wells Fargo Foothill, a subsidiary of Wells Fargo Company, U.S. Excerpts from her story illustrate this methodology. (McCloskey, n.d.)

The World Café Meets Project Planning by Ann McCloskey

The purpose of this intervention was to translate the World Café methodology into a work place tool without losing the essence of the process. A recent technology project planning meeting set to the tune of the World Café was the vehicle used to test this concept translation.

A few basic principles of the World Café noted at www.theworldcafe.com should

be maintained throughout the process in order to maintain the underlying essence of the method.

*Clarify the Context *Create Hospitable Space *Explore Questions That Matter *Connect Diverse Perspectives *Encourage Each Person's Contribution *Listen Together for Patterns, Insights and Deeper Questions *Share Collective Discoveries

The meeting included 50 people from across the country. The group members were selected to represent a wide range of regions, positions, and divisions throughout the organization. Participants ranged from high-level managers to entry level staff.

The space used for the exercise consisted of 10 tables of 5 places each. Each table was equipped with crayons, scented markers, children's modeling clay and various small toys. The intent of the modeling clay and toys was to stimulate the tactile sensations and help tap into the creative part of the brain. Each table top was covered with butcher paper. Two flip charts were placed at the front of the room.

Each participant was asked prior to the meeting to scan the business environment and bring ideas of how technology could improve the business process or create new approaches to old business challenges. The facilitator explained the process in detail at the beginning of the meeting. The members at each table were to discuss their project ideas. Participants were encouraged to use the markers, toys, and clay to help communicate the essence of their project. The group would come to a consensus after approximately 30 minutes as to which idea would "hold the table".

Holding the table meant that the idea had the greatest level of support amongst the members of the table. The person whose idea it was would stay at the table and the remaining members would move to new tables. The process would repeat in a similar fashion. It was important for the facilitator to "walk the room" during the second and third rounds to ensure that discussions continued around all ideas and didn't automatically default to the idea that had previously won the table. Once an idea had held a table for three rounds, the presenter or owner of the idea would open the project to the floor. Members of the meeting were then free to share ideas and ask questions related to the project. The originator of the idea would put an outline of the project on the flip chart and post it on the wall if a general consensus was reached at this point

The use of the World Café technology created a higher overall energy level throughout the meeting. Several new break-through ideas were identified and fleshed out. Several projects were consolidated or new and more innovative projects were put in place by creating a forum for many ideas to be shared. Very

few people became entrenched in owning a particular idea because of the pace of the meeting and an environment of true information sharing was created.

McCloskey's description of using The World Café methodology in a bank, reveals the adaptability of these Social Technologies. They are useful in work teams or communities, for product development in corporations or determining the best location for digging a well in remote villages. Their value is that they provide ways to:

- evoke diverse perspectives, and
- enable harmonious action.

Women's Global Leadership

The final topic that will be considered in this section is not a methodology per se. Rather it calls attention to the role of women in global leadership.

Traditionally in many cultures, in both so-called developing nations and developed nations, leadership has been considered the province of men. Men sit at the head of the table and women sit at the foot of the table. Women may do much or most of the work, but men make the decisions. To limit our selves to this perspective is akin to hopping on one leg when we actually have two legs. The challenges and opportunities facing us today call for us to support the full potential of every person.

Commenting on women and leadership, Ronald Heifetz calls attention to the fact that women have headed social reform movements for over 150 years in the United States, but only recently, as women's history has become an established academic field, have their accomplishments been acknowledged. "Leadership without authority has been the domain to which women have been restricted for ages," he notes. (Heifetz, p.184) He goes on to describe that because of this history, women are more likely to have the skills of drawing out others and creating harmony out of diversity. Men have been trained and expected to lead through authority and control.

Today, women are leading, with authority, and without it. To nurture their contributions and their leadership, along with that of men, is a ready and reliable way to increase one's own effectiveness.

On the one hand we see women elected to positions of authority, such as Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, who in 2005, became Africa's first elected woman head of state ("Profile: Liberia's 'Iron Lady'"), Michelle Bachelet Jeria, who was elected President of Chile in 2006, the first woman to hold this position in the country's history, Michele Duvivier Pierre-Louise becoming Prime Minister of Haiti in September 2008, and Gertrude Ibengwe Mongella, becoming President of the Pan-African Parliament in 2004. (Globewomen Special Edition, April 3, 2009)

On the other hand we learn of the leadership of countless women, who without designated authority, lead others to accomplish seemingly impossible results. Hasina's story illustrates the challenges and achievements of such leaders. Hasina, from Mipur Village in Bangladesh, at age 35, survived with her family on a diet of bread and rice; some days they had nothing at all. Hasina's life began to improve when she received her first microcredit loan and business counseling from the International humanitarian organization, CARE. With forty-five dollars she started a small poultry farm that grew into a highly successful business. Soon her family had saved enough money to build their own home as well as additional ten homes that they rent to other families.

"Despite her illiteracy, Hasina was able to build upon her business success and become a respected community leader. As the head of her village's governing council, she helped establish a health clinic and created a door-to-door counseling service to combat domestic violence. She also led fundraising efforts to install a community well. Her dream is for everyone in the village to have a good home, an honorable job, and a good education." (Borges, p. 62)

Sometimes referred to as the "world's most underutilized resource," women represent a rich source of leadership. Time magazine, in its May 25, 2009 issue, examined "The Future of Work." In an article entitled, "Women will Rule Business," authors, Shipman and Kay observed that the female management style is "not soft; it's lucrative," referring to a study of 353 Fortune 500 companies which revealed that those with the most women in senior management had a higher return on equities - by more than a third. Referencing research from Cambridge University, the University of Pittsburgh, Catalyst (a workplace-research group in the U.S.) and Chartered Management Institute in the U.K., these authors note that women manage more cautiously, focus on the long term and are less competitive than men. Women are "consensus builders, conciliators and collaborators, and they employ what is called a transformational leadership style - heavily engaged, motivational, extremely well suited for the emerging, less hierarchical workplace." (p. 47)

As noted above, while women's global leadership is not a Social Technology, women often find Social Technologies are processes that feel quite natural to them. And women often lead in ways that naturally draws out and builds on the strengths of others.

These stories describing the use of Social Technologies take away the mystique of the paradox of diverse perspectives and harmonious action. The examples illustrate the skills of listening, observing, seeking to understand others' perspectives, developing trust, nurturing relationships, sharing information, respecting the opinions of others, creating an environment where differences can be expressed, encouraging communication. These skills enable us both to seek our differences, and to encourage harmonious action.

Theoretical Foundation for Social Technologies

The preceding descriptions reveal the practical and powerful nature of Social Technologies. The following section introduces some of the theoretical foundations out of which these methodologies grew. Research in Systems Thinking, in the field of Complex Adaptive Systems, in Chaos and Complexity Theory and in Quantum Physics enable us to better understanding our dynamic, interdependent world.

Principles of Systems Thinking

Basic principles of systemic, holistic thinking bring a useful perspective to understanding the work of leading:

Interdependence – The leader's world is not just interconnected, it is interdependent, comprised of overlapping systems that profoundly influence one another. Whether one leads a team or a city, a corporate division, a university department, or a nation, these all include multiple systems and every system includes multiple elements and relationships. Leaders work within a dynamic field of relationships in which the effect of any single action is not entirely controllable because in a systemic, interdependent reality, every action affects the whole.

Dynamic – The essence of a system - a work group, a global task force, or a nation – is created through the interaction of the components. Focus on the parts causes us to overlook the relationship among the parts and our relationship to the whole. We forgot that for every change, ripples flow out to impact other parts of the system. It is the dance that is important. Joanna Macy (1991) expresses it eloquently.

A system is less a thing than a pattern. It is a pattern of events, its existence and character deriving less from the nature of its components than from their organization.

Emergence – Because of the dynamic nature of systems, nothing is static. Reality emerges through our interaction, our communication. Meaning is created moment by moment through conversation and through relationships. Even strategic planning is becoming a more emergent process. (Smith, 1997) Rather than predicting the future, establishing goals based on those predictions, and mobilizing resources to achieve those goals, the development of strategy is being reversed today. Facing high uncertainty and complexity, leaders seek greater flexibility and agility. Now they often start with identifying key core competencies, examining internal and external relationships that can leverage those competencies and establishing feedback systems that allow for adapting plans.

Diversity - In his theory of living systems, Fritjof Capra (1996) provides a conceptual framework for the link between ecological communities and human communities. A diverse ecosystem will be resilient, because it contains many species with overlapping ecological functions that can partially replace one another. The more complex the network is, the more complex its pattern of interconnection, the more resilient it will be. In human communities ethnic and cultural diversity may play the same role. Diversity means many different relationships, many different approaches to the same situation. A diverse community is a resilient community, capable of adapting to changing situations.

Complex Adaptive Systems

As scientists grappled with the realization that not everything could be predicted or controlled, the theory of complexity emerged. This theory, based on relationships, emergence, patterns and iterations, maintains that the universe is full of systems, weather systems, immune systems, social systems, etc. These systems are complex and constantly adapting to their environment and thus are referred to as complex adaptive systems (Stacy, 1992).

As we struggle with the enormous difficulty of shifting to a new way of leading, the theory of complex adaptive systems provides a key strategic framework for understanding both why and how we can make this shift.

A few of the features of complex adaptive systems include the fact that:

- they are open systems, taking in information and energy from their environment and releasing information and energy into their environment; monocultures do not do this
- relationships are non-linear, that is a small disturbance may cause a large effect, or no effect; cause and effect relationships are not proportional
- negative and positive feedback loops are often found; the effects of an element's behavior are fed back to it in such a way that the element itself is altered
- they have a history; they are dynamic and prior states may influence present states
- they may be nested; for example, an economy is made up of organizations, which are made up of people, which are made up of cells, all of which are complex systems
- boundaries are difficult to determine; the decision is ultimately made by the observer.

Complex adaptive systems behave and evolve according to three principles: order is emergent as opposed to predetermined, the system's history is irreversible, and the system's future is unpredictable.

Patricia Shaw (2002), co-founder of the Complexity and Management Centre at the University of Hertfordshire in England, translates these features of complex adaptive systems into the ongoing work of organizational life. She understands the “organization,” not as something that has an existence separate from our own activity, but rather as a continual organizing process. She describes this organizing as essentially a conversational, self-organizing process of participating in the spontaneous emergence of reality. It is the process of collectively making sense of our experience.

Shaw describes leading, in this understanding of reality, as “going on together.” She considers it a craft and believes that “. . . just as we can learn to conceptualize, to design, to communicate and persuade, we can also learn to participate with imaginative concreteness.” (Shaw, 2002, p. 173)

Chaos Theory - Fractals

Change at the international level depends on change at the national level, the community level, the personal level. Fractals, a central concept of chaos theory, are said to display a pattern that repeats itself at every level of magnification from the microscopic to the macroscopic. This physical concept, like many others, can be regarded as having a social analog. Myron J. Frankman, a Canadian economist and professor at McGill University, considers social fractals as a basis for extending economic international cooperation. In a paper for the Canadian Association for the Study of International Development, he argues that open participatory structures of governance which are appropriate locally and nationally, are no less appropriate at the supranational and even global levels.

Drawing on the research of Riane Eisler (1987), he highlights what he calls the fractal quality of the old paradigm and the fractal quality of the new paradigm.

In her Cultural Transformation Theory, (1995) Eisler distinguishes between what she calls the dominator model of society, either patriarchy or matriarchy, in which one half of humanity is ranked over the other, and the partnership model, in which social relations are based on the principle of linking, rather than ranking. “Diversity is not equated with either inferiority or superiority.” (1995, xvii)

We do have notions of self-organizing and self-governing societies – in native and indigenous cultures. In particular, Eisler describes the Neolithic cultures in area of modern Turkey. Interestingly, a book published by the China Social Sciences Publishing House, *The Chalice and the Blade in Chinese Society: Gender Relations and Social Models*, describes a culture of the same time period, with similar characteristics, Ban Po, located near Xian (1995). Nevertheless, for hundreds of years, most of our cultures around the world have been based on what Eisler would call the dominator model of society.

Frankman calls attention to the fact that in the last two decades or so, we have seen the blossoming of a new vocabulary. We hear about empowerment, participation, non-governmental organizations, grassroots initiatives, human rights, and freedom. While the old paradigms are still around, animated discussion and action have been set in motion by this succession of phrases which reflects a new viewpoint. He sees the characteristics of the dominator model, with emphasis on obedience, deference to authority and a rigid hierarchical ordering of society – as the fractal quality of the old paradigm – found in the family the workplace, the school, the community, the congregation and governance. Likewise, he suggests that the new partnership model can be fractal. He argues that the partnership image or vision as a new way of being together can also find expression in individuals, families, schools, organizations, communities and the world.

Quantum Physics and Dialogue

David Bohm was a quantum physicist and also passionately interested in the dynamics of society. He was particularly concerned with how people of diverse opinion and diverse culture could get beyond conflict and confrontation to unleash the creative potential latent in their differences. “A free form of dialogue,” he said, . . . “may well be one of the most effective ways of investigating the crisis which faces society, and indeed the whole of human nature and consciousness today” (Bohm & Peat, 1987, p. 240). For Bohm, a common meaning is created and is constantly transforming in the process of dialogue. He explains that people engaged in dialogue are not primarily in opposition to one another and yet, neither are they actually interacting. Rather, they are participating in this pool of common meaning that is continually emerging (Bohm, 1985).

Writing about Bohm’s understanding of dialogue, Danah Zohar (1994) describes it as similar to the process the brain goes through every time it takes in new information, first deconstructing and then resynthesizes new data to arrive at a new meaningful whole. In dialogue, the deconstructive stage is described as a “suspension” of one’s own point of view as the only point of view. There must be a willingness to put one’s own alongside others’ points of view as one of many to be compared, contrasted, and considered.

During this stage of the dialogue, one’s own point of view becomes available for analysis along with those of others. The meanings and underlying assumptions of all the points of view can be surfaced, their cultural presuppositions and assumptions thus exposed, and their grip on the consciousness loosened.

Rather than trying to understand a situation by analyzing it and examining the parts, in dialogue the focus is on the whole. As each person shares his or her unique perspective or understanding, it is not with the intent to persuade others to a particular point of view, but rather to explore together, to weave together many perspectives to deepen understanding of the whole. The insight that

emerges is always dependent upon “reciprocal connectivity that can never be predicted and controlled.

Bohm believed that as people go through this process, much of the emotional charge surrounding a rigidly held point of view would be diffused, making it easier for participants genuinely to listen to one another. In the brain a sense of frustration is released – the mind stops trying to make sense of the data in the old terms. It frees itself to begin the process of reconstructing the data through the creation of new concepts and categories.

Once the participants in a dialogue have let go of clinging to their own points of view and the process of deconstruction is complete, the second stage begins the resynthesis. People discover they can listen to each other in a new way, that there is some common ground to be discovered. This new order is a whole new, emergent level of consciousness in which the participants get beyond the fragmented state of individual consciousness to a shared pool of meaning and value, to a common purpose or understanding. They see that their original points of view in their original form clash, but if looked at in a new way “give rise to a unity in plurality.” (Zohar, 1994, p. 242)

But as Bohm and those who have developed the art of practicing dialogue within groups can tell us, it is more than simply ensuring that every person has an opportunity to speak. There is a different quality of listening. There is a process of “hanging up our assumptions” for a bit that opens us to really hearing the meaning of what others express, AND to tuning in to a deeper level internally, to becoming more aware of our own thinking and feeling. It involves a willingness to be touched by the words and ideas of another.

Dialogue is definitely NOT a social technology. That is, it is not a methodology that can be applied, with rather predictable results. It requires deeper intention and commitment than most groups achieve. It can be used in situations that involve deeply held beliefs and the willingness to allow those to be challenged, possibly changed. Skilled facilitators led groups in South Africa who held intense and opposing views regarding Apartheid, to engage in Dialogue. Dramatic reconciliation often resulted.

Adam Kahne, who was one of those facilitators in South Africa, describes similar Dialogue sessions he helped to facilitate in various world trouble spots. Some of them resulted in resolution and groups moving on together. Others did not. His book however, *Solving Tough Problems: An Open Way of Talking, Listening, and Creating New Realities*, is a priceless resource for he illustrates that intense global issues, and small group or local issues, can all best be approached in the same way. That is, developing skills of talking, listening and learning in an open way will serve you no matter where you lead.

Two individuals stand out for their leadership in the practical application of the theory underlying dialogue: William Isaacs and Juanita Brown.

William Isaacs, as Director of The Dialogue Project at the Organizational Learning Center at MIT, describes dialogue as “the discipline of collective learning and inquiry . . . for transforming the quality of conversation and the thinking that lies beneath it” (Isaacs, 1993). Isaacs has facilitated dialogue processes in situations of extremely strong differences in perspective such as hostile labor/management representatives from a steel mill and with opposing factions during the reconciliation following apartheid. He is emphatic that dialogue is not a problem-solving technique, but a means to surface the subtle influences on our thinking that keep us locked in to automatic habits of perception and thought.

As mentioned above, Juanita Brown and colleagues developed The World Café as a widely practiced and useful way for groups of people to tap into the wisdom within the group. In an article authored with Sherrin Bennett (Brown, Bennett, 1995), she reminds us of the vulnerability of these new ways of being and working together. Listening deeply and taking in the other’s meaning, we choose the risk of being changed by what we hear. In this sense, listening is a radical act. It is the willingness to allow this process to unfold that gives dialogue its transformative power, concludes Brown. The World Café is indeed a process that enables groups to learn to hear one another and to move on to harmonious action. While issues are significant, and the results are important, the stakes are not as high as they typically are in true Dialogue

Leading in an Interdependent, Global World

Leading across boundaries, leading differences, depends on tapping into the unique characteristics, passion and talent of individuals, inviting full expression of those talents in an environment of cooperative creativity.

Appreciating that diversity is the source of creative and effective collective action, a leader can be encouraging and receptive to unique ideas. She or he can nurture multiple perspectives and approaches. Knowing that the essence of the team or the community is continually emerging she or he can create opportunities for multiple relationships and a variety of kinds of conversations where shared meaning can emerge.

The effective leader in a dynamic interdependent world is willing to step out of the traditional expectations of command and control, but also to step out of the expectation for being the “vision setter.” She or he sees self as co-creator, willing to trust the knowledge and wisdom of others, specifically charged with calling out the diverse talent of others and creating an environment of safety and expectation in which diversity creates harmonious action.

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