



## The Shape of the Next Game

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During my 38 year career as a consultant to organizations I have had the privilege of working with a few extraordinary leaders. The question that invariably comes to mind is “What presence, of consequence, can I bring to this party?” The world, the times, demand a new level of thinking and leading. The bright lights in organizations around the world will step up to this call. The question is whether or not we as practitioners are positioned to partner, significantly, in this next game.

### CONTEXT

Some of what I know about organizational life and leadership I learned in classrooms, workshops and from my library of books and journal articles. Most of what stands out as touch points comes from the unique experience of being in the trenches where I engaged people in the context of their work. I have worked in corporate board rooms, exclusive retreat centers, nuclear plants, refineries, schools, charitable organizations and institutions of faith. I boarded a navy aircraft carrier, rode sidesaddle with police and firefighters, and went underground in coal mines to work with supervisors. Naturally, I have stories of success, failure, naiveté and courage all of which have shaped my personal and professional transformation, teaching me to honor the wisdom and worth of my unique ways of knowing as I join other thinkers in theirs. The field of organization consulting has changed both by design and out of necessity which is the impetus for this article. What are the most compelling questions that we as practitioners must consider about our approaches as business and society adapt to radical changes? As individuals, groups, organizations and



Communities of Practice, what must we mine from the outer world and what must we nurture and trust from our own interiority?

I have had the privilege of working with bright and dedicated people; learning hard and enduring lessons from sometimes rewarding and sometimes complex situations. Along the way I have been a perpetual student of personal development, management theory, models and concepts that anchor my experience and support the framing of practical and relevant approaches.

This is an article about leadership and consulting; patterns that I have observed and the constantly emerging body of theoretical work that has expanded, refreshed and revitalized my views. It is also, hopefully, a conversation starter for how we as *behavioral science practitioners must be intentional players in a broader professional community “discerning the shape of the next game” in business and society...and be ready to partner as architects of processes that evoke timely and meaningful ideas and results.* We need inter-generational conversations with experienced practitioners, newer and potential members and readers, talking not



only among ourselves but bringing in the views of peers across other professional groups, and most importantly our clients, current and past.

The new NTL Practising Social Change Journal presents an opportunity for generative conversation, wise stories from our breadth of knowledge and experience, the creation of our own brand of new intelligence and applications. This is the time for the NTL membership to exploit the roots of our rich legacy and reinvent our craft as consultants. As a consequence of my engagement with several professional communities over the past decade, I am convinced that those of us practiced in supporting self knowledge, group methods, facilitation and design skills have the agency for a holistic application and adaptation of emerging knowledge and leadership concepts. At a time when the organization demands greater output and the people are longing for meaning and means, we might, in the spirit of longtime colleague, Roger Harrison, open up our thinking about what to preserve from our past and new ways of being, if we are to have a presence of some consequence in the NEXT GAME.

*"We should not just abandon our tools for new methods; but rather we must do something much harder; change our minds expanding and altering the mindsets and perceptual frames that produced the tools."*

Roger Harrison, *Strategies For A New Age* 1983

## THE SHAPE OF THE NEXT GAME

The Next Game, in the world of business, seems to be more of the same but at an accelerated pace of uncertainty: global interdependence; complex economies, organizational forms and collaborative models that transcend traditional boundaries; and the dynamic interplay between business, culture, politics, governance and the concerns for a sustainable environment. The challenges are great and the natural leaders will seek out reliable ways of thinking; anticipating the future; optimizing the capacity to connect people, resources, technology and systems, around clearer purpose and intent.

In a 2001 issue of *The Journal of Knowledge Management* Otto Scharmer writes:

*"Leaders need a new type of knowledge that allows them to sense, tune into and actualize emerging business opportunities - that is, to tap into the sources of not-yet-embodied knowledge. Bill Gates is not so much a wizard of technology", says Brian Arthur, "but a wizard of precognition, of discerning the shape of the next game."*

A February 2010 entry on the Oxford Leadership Academy Face Book Blog reads:

*"In today's fast speed environment, motion makes observation difficult. Leaders must get above the dance floor and get on the balcony. Great leaders never react. They observe,*

*consider the options and then act decisively with full determination."*

Chris Matthews the television news journalist has a byline that says: "Tell me something that I don't already know." That just about sums up the challenge that I feel as a consultant in today's environment. But fortunately I have learned that my job is not to tell them. Neither my clients, nor I, am content to problem-solve complex issues based in past experience; rather we must learn generative ways of addressing issues. Maybe up on the balcony we discover and engage the organization's most important questions and opportunities in ways that lead to fresh ideas and lasting intelligence. My job is to help them to build the capacity to craft their own inquiry within their teams and employee populations.

## REAL FACES

My views on leadership and management are influenced by specific clients who made lasting impressions on me over my 38 years in this field. I refer to them as the "bright lights." They are a very diverse group in a range of roles and titles such as Chief of Naval Operations of the U.S. Navy, superintendent of schools in a large district, vice president for refining in a major oil company, internationally renowned pastor and religious teacher, regional vice president in a chemical company, a research scientist, and a middle manager who didn't want to grow up to be president. I met the first member of this pool in 1973 and the most recent in 2009; some during periods of significant social change or prolonged down cycles in institutions with strong and historically stable cultures. There have also been pivotal situations that were great lessons, in retrospect, like rich and complex case studies that just keep on giving.

The meaning that I make from these situations gets reenacted over and over again by new people and situations. I believe that this is the "stuff" of wisdom, as defined by Russell Ackoff (systems theorist and professor of organizational change, quoted by Bellinger, Castro and Mills, *The Way of Systems*, 2004) as evaluated understanding. He identified five categories of the mind: data, information, knowledge, understanding and wisdom.

"Ackoff indicates that the first four categories relate to the past; they deal with what has been or what is known. Only the fifth category, wisdom, deals with the future because it incorporates vision and design. Wisdom, he states is an extrapolative process. It beckons to give us understanding about which there has previously been no understanding, and in doing so, goes far beyond understanding itself. It is the essence of philosophical probing."

My experience over the past 10 years has provided comprehension and language for phenomena that I previously only intuited.



## COHERING QUALITIES AND BEHAVIORS OF LEADERS WHOM I HAVE ADMIRIED

First and foremost the bright lights were all **good managers and stewards** of the entity and resources entrusted to them. They got things done and created an environment for the development of people, product and business results. They gained the *respect and loyalty* of peers and direct reports through their competence, generosity, inclusiveness and genuineness. These were approachable people, dedicated workers but not workaholics. Their fullness came from the way they organized and managed themselves as well as their work including the pursuit of knowledge in their respective professions, in the industry of their membership, and in their interests and networks beyond work.

Much of what has been catalogued in the literature as traits and habits of strong leaders applies to different members of this group. I will describe what I believe to be some of the more intricate and interior drivers that also influence their leadership.

## BOUNDARY LEADERS

Gary Gunderson, one of my favorite scholars identifies Boundary Leaders as “persons willing to live, learn and work “at the boundaries” of the complex and contested space where chaos, conflict and opportunity for a better future coexist.” (Boundary Leaders: Leadership Skills for People of Faith, Fortress Press, 2004) The school superintendent moved through the middle of chaos and conflict during school desegregation determined not to allow interest groups in the community to determine the rules for such change. The CNO of the Navy saw unparalleled mutinous activities aboard ships as a symptom that something was fundamentally wrong: He didn't simply quell the conflict; he looked for the source of the anger, the root cause, and systematically set in motion a major social change initiative. From the chaos, the CNO created an opportunity. Another example of one who worked in the boundary zone would be the vice president of refining at the Fortune 500 Oil Company where I worked for 13 years, a traditional organization by many measures. When the president of the company spoke to the fast track stars in my management course he spoke, invariably and almost jokingly of Ted (our pseudo for the VP) as living evidence that reasonable risk taking was encouraged in the corporation. Ted was described as a top performer who walked the edge between conformity and risk taking; exhibiting out-of-the-box behavior that was tolerated because of his record of success. Fast trackers understand that type of message. This is an example of working in Gunderson's boundary zone and contested spaces. I admired Ted's willingness to work within a creative tension, navigating the conflict to realize ultimately better outcomes for the company and the industry. He was a truth-telling mentor and sponsor of young managers, and my first choice to represent

accurately the realities of corporate life and the choices to be faced on the fast track.

## A FEEL FOR THE ORGANISM

This idea is a combination of seeing systems, sensing and sensitivity. It also means thinking of one's organization as a living entity with characteristics, rather than as a faceless myth (actually not faceless because many think of the policy makers as “the organization”). Ted was among a group of senior people whom I depended upon to provide the historical, big picture that put current realities (and my work on change) in perspective. They all described the recurring business and economic cycles that affected downsizing, rightsizing and reorganizations. They all demystified the engineer-oriented leadership patterns, reward system and human resource stance for me when I was at the opposite pole from the mind of an engineer. Barbara McClintock, the maverick visionary scientist and Nobel Laureate, says about knowing your target/subject: “It takes time and patience to hear what is being said to you, the openness to let it come to you...above all you must have a *feel for the organism*”. McClintock's explanation of how she studied corn to create groundbreaking scientific discoveries has always resonated with my sense of organizations as organisms, acting in some observable pattern: its wholeness, its parts, its relationship to the environment. People like Ted helped me to understand the locus of change within the corporation and what is actually honored as leadership.

“Organization as organism” also suggests caring enough to make relating to the organization important. The Academy of Management 2010 conference theme, *Dare to Care: Passion and Compassion in Management Practice and Research*, “dares all of us to care more deeply about our role in our family, in our workplace, and in our society. The theme wants all of us to have passion about what we do and compassion for the people for whom we do our work.” The AOM focus acknowledges the inextricable link between performance, passion for our work, and alignment with organizational purpose.

As a senior consultant I was once asked by a senior manager to speak with a colleague, another internal consultant who was having difficulty in his role, and see if I could be helpful, maybe as a mentor. My colleague agreed to explore this. After a few enjoyable dinners during which he spoke about the company, his career, relationships with key people, I said to him: “Gene (not his name), I noticed that you have not had one positive thing to say about the company, the people, your hopes or accomplishments here. It is as if you don't like the company; in fact I think that you actually dislike this company. How can you help an organization's purpose when you dislike it?”



He later told me that it was an enlightening conversation. He retired from the company within six months, moved to California and opened a restaurant. He later confided that he was happy, felt a great sense of freedom and purpose. Before leaving New Jersey for sunny California he shipped a large box of OD books to my office, with no note. I never quite knew how to take that.

Most of the bright lights demonstrated a deeper understanding of the big picture, patterns and dynamics, and could speak candidly about the weaknesses in the culture of their companies. They exhibited passion for their work, an investment in the success of the company, and for some, pride in the brand and logo.

### GENERATIVE THINKING

Generative thinking is grounded in a systems view, bigger pictures and the dynamics that influence or control directions. Such thinking leads to the questioning of underlying assumptions. Peter Senge describes generative thought as the creative tension between the current reality and what may be possible. Generative thinkers live in the type of curiosity that opens things up, creating new ways of looking at the world.

Case Western Reserve Professor and NTL member, Tojo Thatchenkery, and colleague Carol Metzker, call this quality Appreciative Intelligence (Appreciative Intelligence: Seeing The Mighty Oak in The Acorn, Berrett Koehler, 2006), the ability to reframe a situation to appreciate its positive aspects and to see how the future unfolds from the generative aspects of the current situation. I have noticed that some people don't get mired in what is wrong, who is to blame and emotional quagmire. They pull out pen and paper and begin sketching out the 'what ifs?'. The CNO of the Navy in the 70's, a highly decorated officer and the youngest man to serve as Navy CNO, believed in the possibility that military readiness and the integrity of the chain of command, rules that he had successfully honored all of his career, would not be jeopardized and would, in fact, be enhanced by opening up the preferred ranks and schools to enlisted men and the increasing number of minorities in the Navy. This was a bold endeavor that required sweeping actions that drew sparks from the mess halls of ships to the halls of the United States Congress. Once the CNO solidified two of John P. Kotter's requisites for transformational change ("Leading Change...Why Transformation Efforts Fail" Harvard Business Review, Jan 2007) "a sense of urgency" and "a powerful (high ranking) guiding coalition", he generated deliberate actions leading to Kotter's final requirement "institutionalization of new approaches", which in the Navy meant the crafting and enforcement of policy and regulations.

As a civilian consultant on one of the projects associated with this initiative, I had the privilege of

visiting the CNO's home and was granted a private interview with him for my doctoral thesis. After researching his leadership philosophy and methods, I recognized behind his ease and clarity the embodiment of beliefs and convictions. A generative and appreciative thinker, realistic, action-oriented, he devised a course of action to take advantage of his vision of a different Navy. His leadership was not separate from who he was as a person with both strengths and peculiarities, a husband and father.

When I think of others who employed the same level of conviction, in context, I know that I was witnessing the translation of theory into practice or, in my case more accurately, the translation of practice into theory.

### A WILL FOR BETTERMENT

Robert Mager, an authority in adult learning and curriculum design, said that in order to change and learn adults must have both the will and the skill. This made a lasting impression on me as an educator and later as a consultant because somewhere along the line skill training became the catch-all for growth and change in behavior and performance. The coaching training models used by Keilty Goldsmith Company, and supervision training models used by Ken Blanchard Company, incorporate the skill/will differentiation, recognizing that addressing the needs of someone who is unwilling is different from addressing the needs of someone who is unable. How many times have we been asked to teach a course in communication skills when the problem was rooted in something deeper and more fundamental such as power or organizational structures? Will for this discussion is defined as resolve or determination.

A will for betterment is an expression put forth by Schein, Kahne and Scharmer (Humility and Ignorance: What It Takes to Be an Effective Process Consultant, Reflections, the Journal of SoL, Vol. 3 No. 2, 2001). A will for societal betterment is a type of disequilibrium, people unhappy with the state of their world and having energy to try to make it better. They observed that groups that work explicitly or implicitly to make their world better off seem to have a greater and deeper energy and creativity than groups working only to make themselves better off, and that a will for societal betterment may be a vital driver of change.

The energy and spirit that these authors identified in collaborative groups is very similar to the strength of character that I have observed in leaders. They seem to have an inner flame that doesn't burn out. Their leadership appears to be a natural way of being, linked to something bigger than themselves that serves others and organizational purpose. The regional president at the international chemical company; the district superintendent of schools and the Navy CNO each exhibited "will." They were



unhappy with the state of things and had energy and commitment that propelled their bidding.

The superintendent and CNO both went against the grain for change for minorities. Resistance was fierce, the work was hard and the cost was high as both their careers were affected.

A will for betterment is similar to what Jim Collins calls professional will (Good to Great; Harper Business Books, 2001 and How the Mighty Fall, Random House, 2009). "Professional will is a fierce and unwavering resolve to do whatever is needed to make the company great" balanced by the other side of the coin which Collins calls humility: "reliably successful leaders combine extreme personal humility with intense professional will". Level 5 leaders (the criteria needed to take a company from good to great) are ambitious for the company and what it stands for; they have a sense of purpose beyond their success. Humility and modesty are central to both views. The essential point of this discussion is that a sustainable level of good leadership is fueled by some type of inner compass, a strength of will that we as coaches and consultants must consider as we help people create conditions and targets for development and career decisions.

## REFLECTIONS

People who choose leadership are acting beyond the pursuit of career or the authority of roles. They live their lives as vocation, a concept described by Brian Mahan (Forgetting Ourselves on Purpose, Jossey-Bass, 2002): as "the discovery of a type of interior consonance between our deepest desires and hopes and our unique gifts, as they are summoned forth by the needs of others and realized in response to that summons." Vocation is a broader way of thinking about leaders. It paints a bigger picture than the career. Framing such as *boundary leader*, *generative thinking*, *a feel for the organism*, and *a will for societal betterment*, help me to grasp some of the finer distinctions of character, competence, performance and creativity.

Topics and experiences that have been stimulating and revitalizing for me over the past ten years include:

- Otto Scharmer's **Theory U** and **The Blind Spot of Leadership**. Theory U is a versatile and practical model that is grounded in a broad body of behavioral knowledge, and fits my background in the Gestalt approach to consulting particularly the use of presence and awareness. W. Otto Scharmer, *Theory U: Leading From The Future as it Emerges; The Social Technology of Presencing*, The Society for Organization Learning.
- **Conversational Leadership**. The principles and practices of **The World Café** have become central to my work. I find that the ability to

craft meaningful, penetrating and provocative questions is a powerful skill that expands my thinking and takes clients to a deeper understanding and exploration of what matters to them. Questioning and the skillful use of conversation as a core business practice, are now widely acclaimed leadership approaches across many sectors and societal change initiatives around the world. (Conversational Leadership: *Thinking Together For a Change*, Pegasus Newsletter The Systems Thinker, November 2009. Vol. 20 No. 9. Juanita Brown and David Isaacs, *The World Café*, Berrett Koehler.)

Alan Webber (*What's So New About The New Economy?*), Harvard Business Review, January 1992) states that in the knowledge economy, the most important work is conversation.

- **The reframing of facilitation and consulting as hosting**. (The Art of Hosting, Berkana Institute and Solving Tough Problems, Adam Kahane). The creation of hospitable space physically and philosophically to bring out the best in others is a more effective role for facilitators and consultants. It brings an enabling perspective to designing learning experiences and interventions.
- **ALIA Institute**, formerly the Shambhala Summer Institute, convenes a community of renowned presenters and learners from around the world. Presenters are typically people whose work in the field span academia, the corporate world, The Third World, some of the most volatile and entrenched conflict situations, and stories of renewal and community building in the face of obstacles that can barely be named. For about ten days against a backdrop of Buddhist tradition, an international group of learners participate in multiple forums applying concepts to real life, and often face-to-face with witnesses to those stories from across the world. The Summer Institute has allowed me to engage in hours of deep learning and intimate conversation with stimulating thinkers and courageous people working for change, as well as the opportunity to create and teach my own programs in partnership with my peers. Presenters at the Shambhala Summer Institute have included Peter Senge, Otto Scharmer, Adam Kahane, Juanita Brown, Meg Wheatley, Brian Bacon and Art Kleiner.

My ability to integrate and incorporate these experiences is supported by a strong background accrued over the years particularly through NTL and The Gestalt Institute OSD Program. As Roger Harrison suggests in an earlier quote, I didn't abandon established knowledge and practice, I affirmed and expanded. Sometimes it was necessary to suspend or rethink some of my assumptions about helping, the nature of my role, and honoring the ability of people to solve their own problems.



## MESSAGE

In our numerous professional communities we could learn from the business world the wisdom of consortia and mergers. For instance, there are scholars who research and create management and behavioral science theory and models; there are business schools that prepare scholars and consultants, and then there are practitioner schools such as NTL and Gestalt OSD that integrate knowledge and theory into distinct competencies and models of consulting and coaching. The overlap is tremendous: many of the theorists and scholars are field workers; consultants are also theorists and model builders, etc., and none of us belongs to any one group exclusively.

The opportunity for complementary cross-learning however goes unnoticed. When I watch some of our thought leaders host a conversation or facilitate a learning event my facilitator hat goes on. Facilitating and hosting are like teaching in a purely adult model. Some thought leaders are naturals or trained facilitators, and others miss the potential for more effect by sharing the essentials of their concepts, because they don't incorporate well the logic and value that process design and facilitation contributes to learning and change. And many practitioners are too content to stick to what we know, when the world around us is changing at lightning speed.

Those of us who have aligned ourselves with Organization Development for many years value what we know and do so well. We have grown in our field and now it is time to ask what organization development might also become? My story is not unique; we need to grow together through our stories if we are to be players in the next game.

Two months ago, at the end of a particularly grueling workday a client said to me; "You really enjoy what you do don't you?" It was one of those days when I had entered the zone. This was an excellent client: the strategy of the design was working, the people were showing up with their minds and spirits. I moved through the day like a dancer, at one with the music (well, with much less elegance these days). These reflections remind me of how much I have enjoyed my career, my community and make me hopeful that the next generation is catching the spark and creating even bigger stories.

## BIOGRAPHY

NTL Emeritus Member, Frances Baldwin has been a successful, international consultant to a range of corporations, and public and civic organizations for 38 years. She uses her broad experience to coach and support leaders who are concerned with corporate responsibility, more democratic business models, elevating others to be their best, and leaving legacies that matter to future generations. Over the past 10 years Conversational Leadership has become a dominant model in her work for extraordinary results, in context, for individuals and organizations.

A Senior Steward at The World Café Community Foundation, she has presented keynote messages and forums on the topic at the National OD Network and Pegasus Systems Thinking Conferences in the United States. Frances was a manager and senior organization consultant at Exxon Corporation (now ExxonMobil) for 13 years where she consulted extensively on executive education and was a key contributor to several major change and capital improvement projects in the United States and at Esso Chemical International headquartered in Brussels, Belgium. Her current interests include working with women to ensure that, as we move into higher levels of authority and responsibility, we also bring our unique perspectives and feminine wisdom to bear on the need for authentic and shared leadership.

Frances' program, When Women Lead From Within, has been sponsored in Halifax, Nova Scotia, 2004-2006 and Edinburgh, Scotland September 2008. She is the Principal Consultant at Designed Wisdom, Inc., Warner Robins, Georgia, USA and on the consulting team of The Chaos Game in Aberdeen, Scotland.

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