Reflections

The SoL Journal
on Knowledge, Learning, and Change

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society for **SoL** organizational learning

PUBLISHER'S NOTE 13.1

Frank Schneider

For many leaders, the art of shifting mental models and reframing problems to come up with previously unforeseen solutions is not yet a matter of course. But while problem solving in this way may not be as widespread as we would hope, individuals and groups who are highly skilled in it are having a growing impact in the world. This issue of *Reflections* features examples of how choosing to let go of long-held beliefs and assumptions – and adopting new ways of thinking and acting – can lead to new possibilities.

We begin with the second part of a conversation among Peter Senge, Otto Scharmer, and Darcy Winslow (see *Reflections 12.4* for Part 1). In it, these thought leaders discuss possible scenarios for transforming capitalism by moving from an "ego-system" to an "eco-system." They explore models for linking individual and collective entrepreneurship, in the same way that artistic movements build on both personal and shared aesthetic impulses. Peter, Otto, and Darcy conclude by looking at what it might take to renew what we call "civilization" from its roots.

In "Choice As a Leadership Capability," SoL Consultant Member Rawlinson Agard describes his long journey toward realizing his life's mission. Through a process of reflective inquiry, Rawle came to realize that his actions were out of sync with his purpose. This realization led him to leave his executive position and rededicate his life to helping people reach their highest potential. His story is an inspiration for those of us who question how we can impact the larger systems in which we live.

In "Is Moving Too Fast Slowing You Down?" David Peter Stroh and Marilyn Paul uncover the root causes of work overload – something that is endemic in today's work environments. They describe how organizations unwittingly increase overload and suggest six strategies for both reducing it and achieving sustainable productivity.

Conscious implementation of these strategies, including individual commitment to take on only what one can *reliably* accomplish, is key.

In "From Automatic Defensive Routines to Automatic Learning," Michael Sales, Jay W. Vogt, Sara J. Singer, and Jeffrey B. Cooper describe how automatic defensive routines in hospital settings can put patients at risk. They demonstrate how a hospital's complex and stressful environment can make staff especially vulnerable to this kind of self-protective behavior. As an antidote, Sales and his colleagues describe a simulation-based program that helps healthcare teams adopt a *"seek learning"* rather than a *"seek perfection"* mindset.

We conclude with an excerpt from *Teaming: How Organizations Learn, Innovate, and Compete in the Knowledge Economy* by Amy Edmondson. In this provocative piece, Edmondson observes that in today's organizations, teams are not stable, fixed entities. Fast-moving work environments need people who know how to team, that is, who can be flexible, make decisions quickly, share knowledge openly – and then move on to the next project. In this excerpt, Edmondson describes the shifts in mindset that this new way of working involves.

In essence, the articles in this issue are all about choice. The choices we make determine how much we live in alignment with our purpose, the impact we have on the systems of which are a part, and the quality of leadership we provide in working with others. Our mental models – the way we each see the world – are also a matter of choice. To shift them – and improve our effectiveness in tackling the challenges we face – we need to make a choice to truly *pay attention* to the world within and outside of us. As Albert Einstein stated, "Problems cannot be solved with the same mindset that created them." Which choices are you making today that will make a difference? ■

Frank Schneider, *Publisher*

30 Years of Building Learning Communities
A Dialogue with Peter Senge, Otto Scharmer, and Darcy Winslow, Part 2

What story will children 75–100 years from now tell about how our current generation managed the tremendous large-scale challenges we face? And how can we – as individuals and communities – begin to change our trajectory so that the narrative our descendents weave is one of renewal rather than of destruction? In part two of their dialogue on the role of cross-organizational communities such as SoL and the Presencing Institute in a changing world, Peter Senge, Otto Scharmer, and Darcy Winslow look at the need to renew civilization from its roots rather than attempting to fix our broken institutions. They explore ways we might join together to "open a crack to a future that is different from the past" – and in the process create a genuinely "flourishing" society.

Choice As a Leadership Capability
Rawlinson Agard

Many people in organizations today live a dual life: they understand the power and importance of new ways of leading – such as those based on the principles of organizational learning – but they are hesitant to rock the boat by introducing these concepts in their organizations. For many years, Rawlinson Agard found himself in this same situation. Even as he worked to bring large-scale change to the complex systems he was a part of, he found that his actions and purpose were out of sync. A health crisis prompted Rawle to reflect on his choices – and set a new course of action that would bring together the two disparate threads in his career. In this article, he asks us to consider our own choices as we strive to make this world better for all.

Is Moving Too Fast Slowing You Down? How to Prevent Overload from Undermining Your Organization's Performance
David Peter Stroh and Marilyn Paul

Organizational overload is a problem confronting people across all industries and sectors. People have too much to do in too short a time with too few resources to accomplish their goals. The result is that managers find it difficult to sustain focus on and implement top organizational priorities. This article uncovers the root causes of organizational overload and targets the ways in which organizations unwittingly increase overload and crises in their continuous efforts to accomplish more with less. In particular, it exposes the ironies of a "can-do" culture that leads people to work harder at the expense of achieving consistently strong results. The authors conclude by recommending how to build a "results and renewal" culture to achieve higher, more sustainable performance.

From Automatic Defensive Routines to Automatic Learning Routines: The Journey to Patient Safety
Michael Sales, Jay W. Vogt, Sara J. Singer, and Jeffrey B. Cooper

Patient safety in hospital settings is a major public health problem. Several distinctive challenges combine to create a high-risk environment for patients that can result in grave – and costly – personal and organizational consequences. The authors hypothesize that defensive behaviors among hospital leaders, managers, and staff aggravate the dangers implicit in these settings. In this article, they describe a multidimensional training program, Healthcare Adventures™, in which the exploration of so-called "automatic defensive routines" figures as an important focus. This intervention combines a simulation of a traumatic patient safety event with structured reflection. Taken together, these kinds of learning opportunities support collaborative inquiry and appreciative engagement, which in this case can improve outcomes for patients.

Teaming Is a Verb

Amy C. Edmondson

Organizations thrive, or fail to thrive, based on how well the small groups within them function. In most organizations, the pace of change and the fluidity of work structures mean that success no longer comes from creating effective teams but instead from leading effective *teaming*. Teaming occurs when people come together to combine and apply their expertise to perform complex tasks or develop solutions to novel problems. Fast-moving work environments need people who have the skills and the flexibility to act in moments of potential collaboration when and where they appear; that is, people who know *how to team.* As summarized in this excerpt from *Teaming: How Organizations Learn, Innovate, and Compete in the Knowledge Economy,* four behaviors – speaking up, collaboration, experimentation, and reflection – are the pillars of effective teaming.

30 Years of Building Learning Communities

A Dialogue with Peter Senge, Otto Scharmer and Darcy Winslow, Part 2

What story will children 75–100 years from now tell about how our current generation managed the tremendous large-scale challenges we face? And how can we – as individuals and communities – begin to change our trajectory so that the narrative our descendents weave is one of renewal rather than of destruction? In part two of their dialogue on the role of cross-organizational communities such as SoL and the Presencing Institute in a changing world, Peter Senge, Otto Scharmer, and Darcy Winslow look at the need to renew civilization from its roots rather than attempting to fix our broken institutions. They explore ways we might join together to "open a crack to a future that is different from the past" – and in the process create a genuinely "flourishing" society.

Peter Senge

Otto Scharmer

Darcy Winslow

DARCY: In late December 2012, Peter and I spent several days in the Yucatan with a group exploring what the end of the 5,125-year Mayan "long count" on December 21 might mean to us. We came from diverse contexts: education, medicine, governance, science, conservation, spirituality, and business. We were connected by our commitment to contribute to the evolution of our own consciousness and the transformation of key institutions that shape our society.

We gathered knowing that December 21 and 22, 2012, represented not only the end of one cycle but the beginning of a new one – a chance for humans to start again. It was a profound experience, and it sparked a profound question. Let's go out 75 or 100 years and imagine that two children are telling the story of our evolutionary history and of our generation. What would that story sound like?

For our group in the Yucatan, the picture was pretty dire, when you actually put words to the fact that we are killing for oil. The list just went on and on. Then we posed the question, how do we start to change our story? How do we start to change our trajectory, our collective karma?

Peter and Otto, I would love to hear your thoughts on that question and what impact the SoL community and the Presencing community could have on that dynamic over the next five, 10, or 15 years.

Transformation of Capitalism

OTTO: The other day I was in Brazil, invited by a green institute for a talk and conversation about the new economy and the transformation of capitalism. At the end, one guy said, "I have been listening to this conversation here, and it strikes me that what you do in your work is very difficult, because you try to bring together three different discourses or groups of people that usually never meet. The first one is the world of awareness – learning from the future, spirituality, consciousness, and social entrepreneurship."

He went on, "The second one is the world of profound institutional change – the CEOs of the big companies, the governments, and so on. So another set of dynamics, another set of mindsets, another kind of complexity."

He ended with, "There is a third one, which is transformation of capitalism. It is not just institutional change. It is really how you transform the whole system, the economy."

His comment struck me as true, because I have seen it so often. You have these three groups that usually don't have that much to do with each other. We know that fault lines exist among these three groups. When you tell one story, half the group is excited. The other ones tune it out. When you come to the other part of the talk, then this part of the room lights up and the other ones just roll their eyes.

So, I believe that in the future, we will not be successful in taking our work to scale if we do not bring together these three discourses. In our forthcoming book, *Leading from the Emerging Future: From Ego-System to Eco-System Economies*, Katrin Kaufer and I attempt to contribute toward the integration of these three discourses.[1]

Where we can make real progress in the next 10 years or so is by developing the context but also holding the space for different types of conversations that allow these three groups to connect with, rather than rolling their eyes about, each other.

PETER: So are there places or instances that stand out for you where you see those three starting to come together?

OTTO: We have seen small beginnings, for example, in the Presencing Institute Global Forum. The Global Forum, which we held in 2011 in Boston and in 2012 in Berlin, and will hold again in Boston

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in 2014, is an experiment in creating an open space. It is not just addressing the smaller community we have been working with lately; it is really an invitation to anyone who is inspired by this transformation of capitalism, institutions, and self.

The response we have received is encouraging. So many people express being annoyed with the current politics and all of that. But underneath is a longing for a different kind of connection with the system, with each other, and with ourselves. So far, we as a global community have not responded at the level of scale and level of creativity that is called for today.

Change from the Periphery

PETER: Otto, there's a puzzle that I'd like to pursue with you a little. One of the things I've heard you say many times, and it always made so much sense to me, is that if you want to find change, look to the periphery. As we talk about reinventing capitalism, most people would say, "You have to go work in the Congress. You've got to go work in the center of power." I'm curious how your thinking about that process is evolving.

OTTO: Well, that question is on my mind almost every day. I would say we are not trying to reinvent capitalism; we are trying to *transform* capitalism. The problem with capitalism is that nature, labor, and money are considered commodities. Case in point: environmental destruction, poverty, inequity, and financial bubbles are all taking place at unprecedented levels of scale. But as Karl Polanyi pointed out in his book, *The Great Transformation*, nature, labor, and money are not commodities. He calls this the "commodity fiction" – we pretend they are commodities, but in fact they are not. We need to rethink the issue and realize that they are not commodities but rather *commons*. Commons that, if cultivated well, could help us to transform our economy from "me" to "we," from "ego" to "eco."

That's the narrative that Katrin and I spell out in our new book. Where do you find the seeds of the eco-system economy? It's exactly where you said,

Peter – in the periphery, in the local living economy. In the local economy, the commons are right in our faces, so it makes sense for us to take responsibility together. For our global commons, it's a much more complex story.

> **So far, we as a global community have not responded at the level of scale and level of creativity that is called for today.**

Part of answering the question of how much you focus on the center and how much you focus on the periphery, of course, is also individual. Where has life put me? What are the opportunities? What are the invitations I'm receiving to create meaningful change? For me, many of these invitations and opportunities have been on a grassroots level, which I have enormously enjoyed.

I also find that when you go inside mainstream institutions such as MIT, global companies, or the Chinese government, and you work with the younger, emerging generation of leaders, they are naturally in sync with a new way of operating and thinking. They look at leadership and transformation from a consciousness point of view in a way that I never would have expected. For example, over the past 10 years, I have never experienced a push back against mindfulness-based leadership practices. And for the past five years, you cannot find a single thinking person who would doubt that, as a global system, we are moving into an era of disruptive change. It's something that we almost take for granted today. But 10 years ago, it was very different.

Those are a few data points that tell us about the opening of a crack to a future that is different from the past. To connect to this opening and to allow a different future to emerge, we need to work from both inside and outside the old system. It's not either-or.

So far, we have not succeeded in creating a platform that gives the next generation of change makers a home base to tap into these communities, to connect with methods and tools, and to advance their own skills in a way that is not restricted by the old skeleton of institutions of higher education. That may be our biggest failure so far. And yet, it is something that is very much in reach and something where we could create a real breakthrough in the next five to 10 years.

How do you feel about that? How can we create a new platform for doing this kind of work – individual and yet also collective entrepreneurship – to shift the system from "ego" to "eco" in real, practical ways?

What if we imagined we were part of an artistic movement?

An Artistic Movement
PETER: When [Mexican arts educator and social entrepreneur] Claudia Madrazo and I were talking the other day, we came up with a really simple way to talk about this. What if we imagined we were part of an artistic movement?

If you look at history, there are few more generative phenomena that occur again and again in history than artistic movements. They are very distributed. They are organized by ideas and practices. They are living embodiments. They are spontaneous. They are full of many individuals who are iconoclastic and do not work together. It depends on the medium, of course. If it's theater, it is different than if it is writing or poetry or painting. Nonetheless, these movements have enormous coherence.

For Christmas, our son Nate's girlfriend got me a book containing all of Gustav Klimt's work. She found it in an old bookstore in Boulder that has all these wild books. She only saw one corner of the book sticking out. She went over and started pulling on the corner. And what comes out is this book that I think weighs 20 pounds. It's the heaviest book I've ever held.

I became a huge fan of Gustav Klimt when I lived in Austria as a student. I used to go to the Belvedere Museum and spend afternoons there. I thought he was an amazing person.

At the same time, my wife, Diane, got a book on Van Gogh. She loves Van Gogh. And all of a sudden we've got our books turned open to two paintings. In Diane's book was a painting that you would recognize right away. It was a typical Van Gogh painting of a field of flowers. The other was a painting of Klimt's of a bunch of flowers covering a wall of an Austrian country estate. And it was the same painting! They were done about 25 years apart. Van Gogh's was a little earlier, 1890 or so, and Klimt's was from 1912.

But you look at these and you go, this is an artistic movement. Here are two totally different artists, two totally different cultural contexts, who are not connected that much by art historians. You would never confuse Van Gogh's style with Klimt's style in general. And yet you look at these works and say, "Wow! Their ability to manifest light and the vibrancy of something alive with totally different styles is stunning!"

That to me became a powerful example of this field we are a part of. And that is a metaphor I could really work with, the metaphor of being an artistic movement. There is something that is animating each of us, that shows up in our own consciousness, in our own work in particular ways, particular models, particular practices. But it's not coming from there. It's coming from something bigger.

To me, this perspective has so much potential. First off, it totally transforms the individual-collective dilemma. It's very individual and it is very collective. Obviously, it couldn't be one or the other. Neither could be missing from this way of understanding.

Second, it reminds us of something that I think we don't talk about enough, which is the aesthetic aspect of our work. I was with Otto for a conversation in Berlin with people affected by the Holocaust. And Otto, for about 15 minutes at the opening, you exhibited an extraordinary aesthetic sensibility. You just stood there and just kept sensing and expressing what was real for you at that moment until the whole space started to open. And once it opened, amazing things started to come out.

I would call that the work of an artist. That's aesthetic sensibility, in the moment, where you have a lot of ideas but you have to set all of your ideas aside so that you can pay attention, directly and creatively.

Great artistic movements have a kind of epic quality, right? So whatever you would call that movement that linked Van Gogh and Klimt, it's epic. It is shifting culture in real time at a grand scale.

I think we need all of those. We need to harmonize the individual and collective. We need to pay attention to the aesthetic. We need to recognize that this field is kind of an epic thing; it is occurring on a scale that none of us could possibly manufacture because it is not coming from any of us.

Shared Intentions

OTTO: That so resonates with how I understand all of our work. I think I am in the tradition of somebody who tries to create. I have always been inspired by the Bauhaus story, probably the most influential architecture and design school ever. It happened in a similar situation to where we are now – a completely screwed-up environment, when all of the ideals kind of crashed and burned as a result of World War I.

A few people got together and created a school. They didn't agree with each other on everything. They were very individual, yet they had a common set of principles and beliefs and intentions. They teamed up with master practitioners of the various crafts. They changed the paradigm. Their intention

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was to bring design to the masses, to link advanced design with technology and to get beyond the old artistry, which was just for elites.

The first year was dedicated to the famous *Vorkurs* (pre-course), where you had both theoretical,

abstract classes with some of these masters and also hands-on workshops with all the crafts and materials. So the Bauhaus group created an education that brought together the very abstract and intellectual with the very hands-on and practical in a creative environment that connected these two poles. It happened in a real place and with a real community. People from this community then went out into the world. Even when the Nazis closed down the place, the movement went global and shaped the architecture in cities all around the world.

> **Science is the religion of the contemporary world in the sense that it is the voice we most often look toward to tell us our current version of "the truth."**

The way in which a small group created a school as a birthplace for a new paradigm that could be learned and applied in practical ways and then brought into the world – and how that movement then shaped and had a deep influence across the 20th century – always inspired me.

In our case, it is more complex. It is not just architecture that needs to be reinvented; it's the whole of society. But, in a way, it is also simpler, because all the pieces are already there – they just are not put together yet. That calls for another kind of creativity that no single person can do alone. But a few people can do it together when pulling around the same intentions.

PETER: For me, there is an imagery that has a lot of meaning: you start to feel you are in this river and this river is carrying you. You did not create the river, but your intentions and capabilities got you into it. It starts with awareness. This can't be faked. Right now, I think this awareness is getting more acute. When you just keep paying attention to that river, then at some point you can say, "We think we understand a little bit of what this field is all about."

I think you are right – this is not the work of just one person but of a group of people who can start building some boats to start to navigate in a different and more effective way. And they share what they are learning with one another.

OTTO: There is a line by Nietzsche that I have always loved: "To see science from the viewpoint of the artist and art from the viewpoint of life." That's exactly what we are talking about. It's a science from the viewpoint of the artist, the entrepreneur, the creative human being, and it's the creative act as seen from the viewpoint of the river, from the viewpoint of life.

I always thought that little line captured a seed of possibility in science that is dormant. Is that the reason why we hang out at MIT? Maybe we have to look at science and the evolution of science as something that is just beginning and that has yet to take this creative consciousness turn.

A System of Living
DARCY: Peter, if I can pick up on your boat analogy and the example Otto just shared from the architectural world, if we look at critical systems – the economy, education, marine ecosystems, the world of business – what ones do you think we need to focus on in the future, both in and of themselves, the interconnections among them, and the impact that they can make on the shifts we believe need to happen?

PETER: When I consider a question like this, there is an almost automatic frame – systems that matter like education, business, government, and so on. But you could back up and say, "Well, there is a system of science; there is a system of art." And if you use the word in the broadest sense, you might say there is a system of living. Those really are what sit behind institutional embodiments. So we operate our schools based on a whole bunch of assumptions embedded in our culture. People want to change the school without changing the culture. That is not going to happen.

It's how we live that shapes all those institutions. Obviously, science is the loudest voice today. It is the religion of the contemporary world in the sense that it is the voice we most often look toward to tell us our current version of "the truth."

Lost is art. It just gets lost because in contemporary culture, we've made it a specialty. We've made it something that just artists do. We've forgotten that for most of human history, our culture *was* our songs, our dances, our stories. That was the heart of everything. What defined a culture was its art. It was participative and it was inclusive. It didn't mean there weren't some people who had certain gifts. It just meant that it was for everybody. It's been so marginalized that we have lost that perspective.

But you might say that art is the system that sits behind the systems of how we live, how we create, how we understand.

OTTO: That's very close to Aristotle, who talked about three ways we can relate to reality: First, *theoria*, which is basically science. Then *poiesis*, or making things, creating. And third is *praxis*, which is another type of action that holds the goal in itself. It is not action in order to make something; it is creative activity, like if you play because of play itself, not in order to accomplish something. So it's that type of action.

PETER: Which is the key to life and it's the key to everything, right? If you want to say, what's one magic change you could wish for that could have the biggest impact on culture, it would be for us to learn how to invest meaning in what we do moment-by-moment. Then we would not have to keep chasing things. Our addiction to consumerism is a big, long, symbolic dance to get meaning and fun and enjoyment by acquiring things, because you no longer have the confidence that you can create meaning and fun and enjoyment by whatever you are doing right here, right now.

That spirit of life as a creative process is itself the root of the word "sacred." The verb "to sacralize" is to make what's happening right here, right now, whatever it is, that which matters. And in philosophy, this spirit lies in the difference between an instrumental versus an intrinsic or sacred orientation.

No other generation had this possibility before for making large-scale change.

Instrumental is when you say you do this in order to get that. Everything you do is an instrument to get something else, as opposed to being sacred in itself. Moving from one to another orientation would be a key cultural shift for us. The American philosopher Eric Hoffer said, "You can never get enough of what you don't really need to make you happy." We are always chasing after something new, which will never succeed in making us happy because we forgot that the chase itself is all that matters.

Anyhow. So systems sitting behind systems. That's interesting. Hmm! And a school dedicated to living. I like that!

A "Flourishing" Society

DARCY: I want to pick up on something that you touched on there around the sacred, to sacralize. I was thinking about change and how people deal with change. How do we start to articulate this change that's required, without it being perceived as having to sacrifice? When we talk about these systems that need to transform or the systems behind the systems, how can we do so in a way that engages people versus immediately putting them on their heels and becoming all about sacrifice?

OTTO: Well, we know how *not* to do it, and that is by scaring people and bombarding them with data about how bad things are. That method is not working. Science is clearly necessary but not sufficient. The answer to your question probably has to do with the *poiesis* and *praxis*, to tap into a different, more creative energy rather than avoiding something you don't want.

So that's, I think, a big challenge. Today we have these global institutions. We have capitalism in a form that has moved into the heart and the center of society and is embodied in and influencing just about everything. It wasn't like that before. So that's a particular frontier that we face. And it makes me excited, because no other generation had this possibility before for making large-scale change. We have many of the pieces that you need to really make some headway.

The challenge will probably be one of the most significant undertakings by many, many people over the next years. The question is whether or not we succeed in putting these pieces together and building examples and platforms and momentum to not only innovate at the margin but basically renew what we call civilization from within or from the roots.

PETER: Picking up on that last comment, when Ma Hongda, the man who has run Master Nan's Great Learning Center in China for many years, and I were talking in October, he said, "We really don't have civilization now." I appreciated that comment. There is no civilization now. The things that define civilization by and large have been pushed out of the mainstream of society.

So this is a simple and abstract answer to your question, Darcy. Things will not change until there is something more attractive. It's that simple. There has to be an emergent sense that it's not really about "giving up." Exactly the opposite. It's about going back to our collective and individual capacities regarding things that matter, the *praxis*, the *theoria*, the *poiesis*.

If you had the option of choosing civilization or no civilization, what would you choose? It has to get to that kind of clarity so that we could actually choose a path of civilization once again. Of course, first you have to build an awareness that that's an

option. Then, you have to have some ideas how to move along that path. And then you need some communities to support one another. It is what author John Ehrenfeld calls the pursuit of a genuinely "flourishing" society.

I can't help but think that a lot of what needs to happen is happening now. And part of the job is probably just continuing to get clearer in our expression and in our actions. One simple image for me is that we are at a point where we can no longer waste any effort. That doesn't mean we have the answer. It just means we can no longer waste any effort.

No matter what we are saying, no matter what we are doing, every single act, every single thought has to be in line with this. You've met Dadi Janki. Dadi Janki is the administrative head of the religious group Brahma Kumaris. She is now 95 years old. She says, "That thought. Is that the thought you want? Well, then don't have it. If it is not the thought you want, then get rid of it." She has this 100-percent belief that you shouldn't waste anything. It's obviously not about effort, that you've got to be uptight and tense and get the right answer and all of that. Quite the opposite. You just have to pay real attention.

Ever since I've started to understand this concept, I've been finding it more and more in different places in Master Nan's writing. In interpreting one sutra, he says, "If you are having good thoughts that are useful, you should cultivate them. If you are having bad thoughts, you should stop cultivating them. Stop them and go back to their roots and eliminate them at their roots." That is kind of a transcendent message.

OTTO: Yes it is. "That economy. Is that the economy you want? If not, then get rid of it." I love that. It's so true. All our economic problems start with the way we think. That's where the economic transformation will originate: from between our ears. *[Laughter]* ∎

ENDNOTE

1   Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer, *Leading from the Emerging Future: From Ego-System to Eco-System Economies* (Berrett-Koehler, 2013)

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Peter Senge is the founding chair of SoL, a senior lecturer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the author of *The Fifth Discipline*. He is also coauthor of *Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future, The Necessary Revolution: How Individuals and Organizations Are Working Together to Create a Sustainable World*, and the series of *Fifth Discipline* Fieldbooks, including the newly released *Schools That Learn*.

Otto Scharmer is a senior lecturer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the founding chair of the Presencing Institute. He is cofounder of the Global Wellbeing and Gross National Happiness Lab, author of *Theory U: Leading from the Future As It Emerges*, and coauthor of *Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future* and *Leading from the Emerging Future: From Ego-System to Eco-System Economies* (July 2013).

Darcy Winslow is managing partner of the Academy for Systemic Change and founder of Designs for a Sustainable World Collective, LLC. She worked at Nike, Inc., for more than 20 years and held several senior management positions within the business. Most recently, she served as general manager for Nike's Global Women's Fitness Business and as senior advisor to the Nike Foundation.

Choice As a Leadership Capability

RAWLINSON AGARD

Many people in organizations today live a dual life: they understand the power and importance of new ways of leading – such as those based on the principles of organizational learning – but they are hesitant to rock the boat by introducing these concepts in their organizations. For many years, Rawlinson Agard found himself in this same situation. Even as he worked to bring large-scale change to the complex systems he was a part of, he found that his actions and purpose were out of sync. A health crisis prompted Rawle to reflect on his choices – and set a new course of action that would bring together the two disparate threads in his career. In this article, he asks us to consider our own choices as we strive to make this world better for all.

SoL Consultant Member Rawlinson Agard wrote the following piece in response to our request for "Voices from the Field" contributions for the previous issue of Reflections. *Because of limited space in that issue, we share his moving and insightful story here in its entirety.*

Rawlinson Agard

For the first 10 years of my managerial career, my concepts of managing and leading did not match what I saw around me. Just out of graduate school, with four years in a senior advisory position to the cabinet of one of Canada's provincial governments, I returned to the Caribbean to work for the successor company to Shell Trinidad Limited. Somehow, the theories espoused in the halls of McMaster University and the leadership practices in this part of the oil industry did not fit together. I spent the next seven years at three major corporations searching for the synergistic relationship among people, operating systems, and personnel policies that I learned about in my graduate studies.

A Certain Kind of Magic

In 1991, I read Peter Senge's book, *The Fifth Discipline*. My colleague Ian Thomas and I were both management trainers, and we began experimenting with the ideas and thinking that Peter espoused in this book. Consistent with these approaches, we began modifying the training work we were doing with supervisors and managers. We were taken aback by the responsiveness of participants. It was as if the material had a certain kind of magic. People took inspiration from the notions of mental models and the creation of a future that was reflective of what they truly desired. The stories kept coming back to us, detailing how people were using the training with great success in their personal and professional lives.

> **People took inspiration from the notions of mental models and the creation of a future that was reflective of what they truly desired.**

The irony was that neither of us dared to use these ideas within our own work in the corporate environment. The dominant structures were so powerful that it often seemed like swimming against the tide. However, as an independent consultant, I began to practice based on the principles of the five disciples and the constraints of learning disabilities of organizations. We created the tag line "Standing in the Future, We Create the Present," and used the concepts around visioning and personal mastery with senior executive clients in designing strategic management processes and undertaking organizational change.

A Matter of Choice

I had always wanted to get to the source, to the people who were creating this work. It seemed to me that the first step was gaining a deeper understanding of what was behind the emerging thinking that was taking place at MIT. My reentry into the corporate oil and gas world provided this opportunity. As vice president of human resources and corporate services at Petrotrin, an integrated oil company that resulted from the merger of

> **I came to realize that the notion of choice as a leadership capability was fundamental to the ability to lead change.**

Texaco, British Petroleum, and Shell in Trinidad and Tobago, I attended a SoL program in Boston.

Peter Senge agreed to meet me for a dinner meeting. I later learned that, in doing so, Peter was stepping out of his normal practice of not engaging in parallel activities during the duration of a program. We met for hours. In our company were Frank Schneider and Robert Hanig. I spoke for most of the evening, pontificating and looking for some immediate quick-fix responses from Peter. At the end of it all, his advice was simple: "Rawle, your challenge is a matter of *choice.*"

It would take me some years to understand the profound meaning of that advice. Even at one of

the most successful points in my career, when I held two senior executive positions – one in petroleum and the other as deputy chair at a massive water utility – my actions and purpose were not in sync. My energies were directed to bringing change to both complex systems, yet the way I was relating to the world was based on fragmentation and traditional hero worship. I was constantly seeking to balance the wholeness of systems thinking with stakeholders' expectations of immediate maximization of assets. It was probably the most frustrating period in my career. It would be some time before I came to realize that *the notion of choice as a leadership capability* was fundamental to the ability to lead change.

> **I had found my purpose: supporting people in being their highest possibility individually and collectively.**

Learning from Adversity

The next five years would probably be the most rewarding in my work life. I continued to build a relationship with SoL, becoming a Corporate Member representing Petrotrin. I thought I had finally come to the source of the thinking about organizational learning, the place from which all this knowledge would flow. The experience of working with a team was insightful. We attempted to use the human resources function to transform an organization without having defined a shared vision; in a sense, we were seeking to bring about change from outside the system while being part of the process. Some of our people went to SoL programs in support of this transformation effort. In the final analysis, our aspirations were not realized. However, many of us learned lessons around organizational readiness, sponsorship for change efforts, and the challenges of creating shared vision.

But a great benefit was emerging for me personally. During this effort, I became gravely ill and ended up spending almost a year in treatment in North

America. Frank Schneider came to the hospital and spent three days with me in reflective inquiry. He was an excellent listener.

During those conversations, I recognized the true meaning of choice. One evening, it suddenly hit me. All the struggles with the varying systems in which I had worked and attempted to change, all the doubt, all the contradictions, all that I had encountered before were in fact in service of the next 15 years of my journey. I had found my purpose: *supporting people in being their highest possibility individually and collectively*. I now truly understood what Peter meant when he talked to me about choice at dinner that night.

Then and there, I knew that I was not going back to Petrotrin. What was I going to do? I was not certain, but I knew that I could not continue to live a dual life. The world's future needed the spirit of people learning to learn to be human beings, and I could help them create that possibility. Robert Hanig became my coach. I deepened my relationship with the SoL community, eventually becoming a Consultant Member.

Two Milestones

As I reflect on those years, I can think of a couple milestones for SoL that have significantly impacted us all: First, the reissuing of *The Fifth Discipline;* and second, the evolution of this community of learning into a global organization.

The creation of a revised and updated edition of *The Fifth Discipline* concretizes the significant contribution to management thinking that the book made when it was first published. While this edition expands on the previous thinking and material, the message has remained as pure and as powerful as it was 22 years ago. It shows the work still to be done within organizations. In addition, it highlights the universality of systems thinking and organization learning as core domains of knowledge, thinking, and action. The new edition signifies that we need to recommit ourselves to building a world that is sustainable and in harmony with its environment.

The second is the establishment of the Global Association of SoL Communities (Global SoL). As viewed from just 10° degrees north of the equator, SoL can look distant and remote. Nevertheless, the work of SoL is applicable across ethnic groupings, cultures, and geographic boundaries. When I reflect on SoL and its journey, I am moved to think that the establishment of Global SoL is significant. Looking up from the lower half of the globe, the north seems much richer, ordered, and technological. But there is so much potential in the emerging economies that Global SoL needs a presence, if only to hold the space for the development of a balanced world. The global network offers an opening to establish mutual learning across ethnic and political boundaries.

SoL's Emerging Work

The guiding ideas upon which Global SoL is founded appeal to the universality of the human experience. In a very practical sense, I hope that the organization provides access to the unknown and unrecorded work going on globally that gives validity to these fundamental principles. This is the emerging work of SoL.

The world today is complex and fragmented. Leadership requires new capabilities. We now possess the ability to destroy the environmental systems that sustain human life and even human life itself. Dialogue, as an instrument of change and sustainability, is a significant leverage point in the future evolution of sustainable human systems; it is a tool for creating choice, a generator of alternatives, and a way to build shared understanding in the face of conflict and diversity.

Inherent in dialogue is the potential for creating the highest human possibility. It provides a space to create a future grounded in the wisdom of the past and sensitive to the dangers of acting on preconceived assumptions of continuous growth. It is my deepest aspiration for Global SoL to nurture dialogue as a universal practice for producing sustainable outcomes that provide the world with a choice.

All civilizations go through a process of birth, growth, and decline. Knowledge has always been at a premium in each of these stages. Global warming is probably the greatest universal challenge that the leaders of this century will have to address, and it is a phenomenon that no single country can overcome purely by its own efforts. Only by collective leadership can humankind confront the direct and indirect consequences that are likely to emerge if we fail at mastering this conundrum. The growth and expansion of Global SoL can serve as a platform for maximizing open access to knowledge in its many dimensions: human, scientific, technological, and so on. This is a necessary condition of the globe's future success.

What Is Your Choice?

I have discovered that from an individual perspective, it is indeed a matter of choice. I now repeat Peter's advice to me with heightened clarity and profound realization of truth: "Life is a Matter of Choice." What is your choice? As we emerge in the next century and we contemplate the worldwide imperative of creating the post-industrial civilization, we must also give greater priority to choice. Ask, "What choices do I make as an individual?" and "How do my choices contribute to making this space better for all?" Our ability to see dialogue as an instrument of change and sustainability can provide us with significant leverage in the evolution of our world. And only you can see the limitless possibility. So I ask you, what is your choice? ∎

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Is Moving Too Fast Slowing You Down?

How to Prevent Overload from Undermining Your Organization's Performance

DAVID PETER STROH AND MARILYN PAUL

Organizational overload is a problem confronting people across all industries and sectors. People have too much to do in too short a time with too few resources to accomplish their goals. The result is that managers find it difficult to sustain focus on and implement top organizational priorities. This article uncovers the root causes of organizational overload and targets the ways in which organizations unwittingly increase overload and crises in their continuous efforts to accomplish more with less. In particular, it exposes the ironies of a "can-do" culture that leads people to work harder at the expense of achieving consistently strong results. The authors conclude by recommending how to build a "results and renewal" culture to achieve higher, more sustainable performance.

David Peter Stroh

Organizational overload is a troubling fact of today's business culture. Market pressures intensified by global competition and the economic crisis, as well as the advent of technology that makes people accessible 24/7, have exacerbated the drive to produce results faster and with fewer resources. Recent research reported in *Harvard Business Review* found that of 600 organizations surveyed, half suffered from overloading (insufficient resources to meet demands), multi-loading (shifting and competing expectations that undermine focus), and perpetual loading (constant pressure that allows people little opportunity to recharge their batteries)[1]

Marilyn Paul

Organizational overload takes a dramatic toll on employees, who experience a relentless sense of overwhelm and urgency. Our own research suggests that managers today spend at least half of their time fighting fires, doing work others should have done, trying to stay on top of email, and sitting in unproductive meetings. Failed communications, missed deadlines, poor quality work and resulting rework, and customer dissatisfaction are growing problems for businesses. Stress-related illness, burnout, and low morale are increasing signs of employee dissatisfaction. The more chaotic and unproductive the organization, the more difficult people find it to do their best and most important work.

Although many managers blame individual employees for not working as productively as possible, we suggest that organizations themselves can be the source of overload. Recognizing this possibility enables

managers to create an environment where people can *collectively* manage their time better and work more effectively, efficiently, and sustainably.

Root Causes of Organizational Overload

It is tempting to conclude that the primary causes of organizational overload are market pressures that require people to do more with less and technologies that enable them to work around the clock. However, this analysis misses a key point: while both of these factors affect all organizations, some organizations maintain high levels of energy and focus, while others devolve into vicious cycles of expanding workload, frequent crises, and diminishing productivity. Clearly, something about *how* organizations respond to these challenges affects their propensity to overload and, ultimately, their productivity over time.

While highly functional organizations respond to external pressures by focusing on their most important work, overloaded organizations respond *by unwittingly manufacturing more work* through a focus on problem symptoms, inadequate planning, disruptive resource allocations, and rework of poorly executed assignments. We call this phenomenon "phantom workload," because much of it would be unnecessary if people recognized at the outset the root causes of overload.[2]

Those root causes emerge out of underlying organizational norms. Organizations most vulnerable to overload exhibit a "can-do" culture that emphasizes increased *effort* under the assumption that greater effort always leads to better results. The executive recruiting firm Korn/Ferry once gave companies a hypothetical choice between a candidate who would do a great job in 80 hours per week and one who would perform equally well in only 40. Nine out of 10 companies indicated that they would select the former worker to set an example of hard work for others.[3]

> **Some organizations maintain high levels of energy and focus, while others devolve into vicious cycles of expanding workload, frequent crises, and diminishing productivity.**

Recent research challenges the core assumption of a "can-do" culture that greater effort always leads to better results. Findings from high-performing athletes note that success comes from alternating bursts of intense activity with periods of recovery, and this approach is now being used effectively to structure work and renewal in several organizations.[4] Other research indicates that multi-tasking reduces productivity and fails to increase output, even among younger people who have grown up in the digital age.[5]

By contrast, a "results and renewal" culture focuses on *outcomes* achieved through sustainable effort. Effort matters to the degree that it produces results,

TABLE 1   **A Tale of Two Cultures**

"Can-Do"	"Results and Renewal"
Being a good team player means always saying yes.	Being a good team player means making and keeping agreements.
Because performance is based on effort, everyone must always be "on call."	Contributions are measured by results on key strategic initiatives – not constant availability.
People do their best work under pressure.	People do their best work when they can sustain energy and focus over time.
We can always "pull the rabbit out of the hat."	Pulling the rabbit out of the hat means we have to plan more carefully going forward.
Failure is never acceptable.	Failure is an opportunity to learn.

supports individuals and groups to work strategically, and leads to learning from mistakes instead of repeating them. Table 1 (p. 15) lays out the difference between these two cultures.

Burnout reduces productivity and increases turnover, creating an ongoing sense of crisis and additional work for everyone.

In a "can-do" culture, three vicious cycles amplify organizational overload and slow an organization down.

1. Overload Creates More Overload

Though it may sound counterintuitive, overload directly increases overload, with resulting high costs for both individuals and organizations. When people are expected to do more than they can effectively accomplish over long periods of time, the resulting high stress erodes morale, motivation, and physical and mental health – all of which make it more difficult for employees to meet expectations. In the long run, increased stress and its consequences eventually lead to burnout. Burnout, in turn, reduces productivity and increases turnover, creating an ongoing sense of crisis and additional work for everyone.

In response to high demand, people tend to take on more work than they can handle. At one company, for example, computer programmers were

FIGURE 1 **Overload Creates More Overload Directly**

Overload and Resulting Crises

VICIOUS CYCLES (1)

- **Underestimation of Resources Required**
- **Stress Over Time**
- **Quality Erosion**
- **Burnout**
- **Lost Productivity**

expected to work seven productive hours per day, when everyone knew that the more realistic estimate was five hours. Despite research indicating that productivity usually declines after 50 hours per week and that engineers can only work effectively on two projects at a time,[6] organizations in thrall to the "can-do" culture hold that no demand is unreasonable and employees should do whatever it takes to make things happen. Add to this the fear of losing one's job in today's economy, which increases employee reluctance to challenge unrealistic expectations, and we find people underestimating resource requirements, deliberately or unconsciously, to prove they are responsible team players.

When people underestimate resource requirements, lower quality and productivity become the norm for two reasons. First, when everyone has more to do than they can accomplish, they collude around allowing things to fall through the cracks: not responding to emails, starting meetings late, breaking agreements, and missing deadlines. When dropping the ball is acceptable, people don't hesitate to take on even more work because they know they won't be held accountable for lapses, and the cycle continues. Second, managers tend to interpret the use of fewer resources as a sign that an organization is learning to be more efficient, rather than as a red flag showing that people are cutting corners and eroding quality. They feel justified in continuing to tighten resource requirements, with the unintended effect of further lowering quality and generating additional problems.
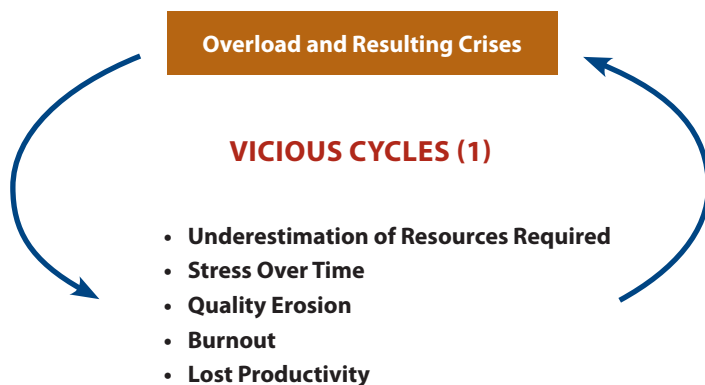
Figure 1 shows how the direct consequences of overload serve to increase overload, in a quintessential vicious cycle.

2. A Culture of Continual Crises

When people experience too much stress and continually try to compensate for insufficient resources, they think less clearly. The result is a crisis culture in which unanticipated problems show up at the last minute, tempers fray, quality suffers, deadlines are missed, and upset customers

must be appeased. Managers tend to deal with crises in three ways: firefighting, pressuring managers of failing projects, and/or asking everyone, including themselves, to work longer hours and forgo time for renewal. These quick fixes may mitigate crises in the short run, but they also make it more likely that new crises will emerge (see Figure 2).

In firefighting, managers allocate resources to fix immediate problems. Although firefighting can work in the short run by resolving problems and rewarding "firefighters" for their heroic efforts, it usually ends up starting new fires. Firefighting often entails rework, which adds to organizational overload and stress. Allocating resources to fight a fire on one project tends to disrupt resources assigned to other projects, which increases overload elsewhere in the organization. Moreover, people who learn that crises attract more resources often wait until the last minute to deal with problems, which inevitably leads to more crises. Finally, firefighting draws capacity away from the strategic planning that can prevent future crises.

Putting pressure on managers of failing projects can also work in the short run by emphasizing accountability, encouraging closer monitoring,

FIGURE 2 A Culture of Continual Crisis

VICIOUS CYCLES (2)

Firefighting
Individual Blame and Pressure
Length of Work Week

- **Resource Disruptions**
- **Rework**
- **Blame and Defensiveness**
- **Recurrent and Last-Minute Problems**
- **Distractibility**

Quick Fixes

Overload and Resulting Crises

and giving managers more attention, but it sends the message that overload problems are caused by poor performers instead of organization-wide norms, policies, and processes. This focus leads to a culture of blame and defensiveness. When

> **Although firefighting can work in the short run by resolving problems and rewarding "firefighters" for their heroic efforts, it usually ends up starting new fires.**

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people feel defensive, the quality of individual and collective thinking deteriorates. The resulting unproductive meetings, tendency to react to problem symptoms rather than deal with underlying causes, and recurrent problems further increase overload.

In a culture of crisis, employees usually work long hours and allow themselves little time for self-renewal. This pace can have short-term rewards, as people keep at it by convincing themselves that their intensive efforts are temporary. However, extended work hours can become addictive and eventually take a toll. The adrenaline and caffeine that keep many people going are unsustainable energy sources that can lead to serious health problems. Working nights and weekends combined with not taking vacations increase stress over time and undermine long-term productivity.

Technologies that enable 24/7 accessibility further erode time for self-renewal. When people are constantly available on email or by text message, stress and distractibility increase. People often turn to email when they are overwhelmed or fatigued, thinking that responding to messages will give them a hit of success, but the resulting short-term

release of dopamine in the brain provides erroneous reassurance that they are doing something constructive. A brief break to renew and refocus on important tasks would be more productive.
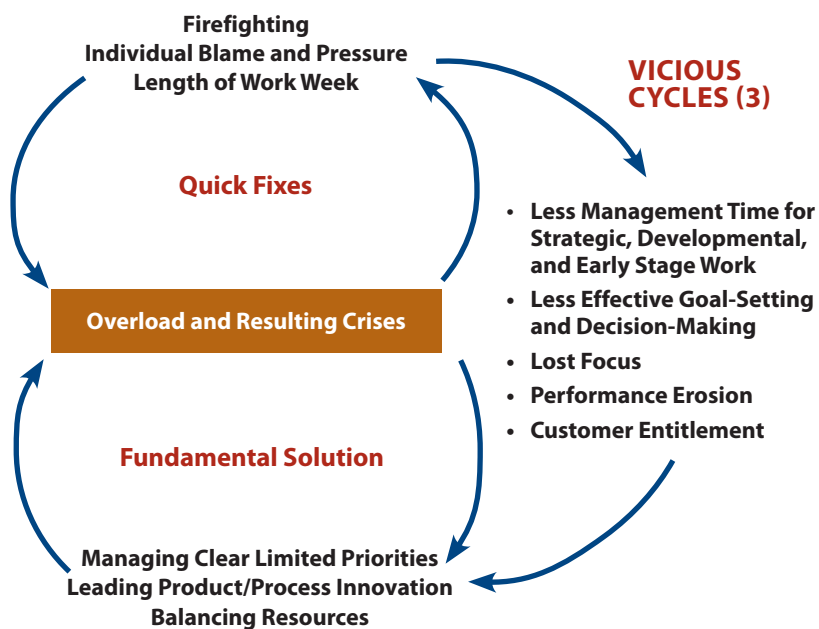
In short, when managers spend too much time firefighting, overseeing poorly performing projects and people, doing work others should have done right the first time, dealing with recurrent problems, sitting in unproductive meetings, and managing email, they reveal how organizations can inadvertently increase overload.

3. No Time for Management
The same managers who report spending too much time dealing with crises also say that they spend too *little* time reflecting and planning, developing people, building new business, and leading innovations in product or process improvement, that is, on the core management activities that offer fundamental, long-term solutions to the overload problem.[7]

Indeed, the quick fixes that unintentionally increase overload also directly undermine the ability of managers to think and act strategically (see Figure 3).

When managers spend their time creating quick fixes in a culture of crisis, they have little time and few personal or organizational resources left for strategic planning, developmental and early-stage work, and strategy execution. Instead, they tend to:
- Avoid hard decisions about priorities
- Set ambiguous or conflicting goals
- Add or shift priorities instead of staying the course or eliminating what is no longer working
- Let attention drift away from longer-term initiatives for innovating and increasing system efficiency
- Tolerate slowly eroding performance

In this context, problems tend to be addressed with "one-off" solutions that are difficult to integrate into a streamlined product portfolio or process. The result is complicated product lines, systems,

FIGURE 3 **No Time for Management**

Firefighting
Individual Blame and Pressure
Length of Work Week

VICIOUS CYCLES (3)

Quick Fixes

- **Less Management Time for Strategic, Developmental, and Early Stage Work**
- **Less Effective Goal-Setting and Decision-Making**
- **Lost Focus**
- **Performance Erosion**
- **Customer Entitlement**

Overload and Resulting Crises

Fundamental Solution

Managing Clear Limited Priorities
Leading Product/Process Innovation
Balancing Resources

processes, and lines of authority, which lead to still greater inefficiencies. Meanwhile, the expectations of the "can-do" culture make it difficult to push back on unrealistic or ambiguous expectations, increasing the likelihood of continued overload. This trade-off between short-term and long-term solutions to overload is the core irony of the "can-do" culture: the effort people put into fighting overload is exactly what makes it impossible to eradicate it (see "The Ironies of a 'Can-Do' Culture").

Changing Organizational Culture

The most profound and challenging task facing leaders in overloaded organizations is to change their underlying beliefs and expectations from those of a "can-do" culture to those of a "results and renewal" culture. One way of framing this shift is to think in terms of "achieving more by doing less."

Culture change begins when senior executives or key opinion leaders acknowledge that the organization cannot continue to operate the way it has been. They are concerned that people are too stressed, too many tasks are falling through the cracks, credibility and collaboration are strained, systems are broken, customers are upset, new client opportunities are being missed … and *there is no time* to resolve these issues and achieve strategic results. The champion may be a hard-driving CEO who is not getting the results he wants, a visionary leader who recognizes that the rest of her organization cannot keep up with her new ideas, or senior executives concerned about not having enough time to drive their organization's highest strategic priorities.

The champions sense that there must be an alternative way of working that will produce better and more lasting results. They want to understand why priorities are not being achieved and what they and others need to do differently. Most important, they want the organization to achieve results that will have the greatest positive impact on customers/clients, support staff effectiveness, and ensure financial viability.

The Ironies of a "Can-Do" Culture

1. People do more but do not necessarily accomplish more.

2. In their efforts to cut costs, organizations incur additional and often hidden costs.

3. Trying to make the most of existing resources, organizations drain or waste the resources they have.

4. By trying to move too quickly on too many initiatives, organizations slow down work on their most important projects.

5. By using time-saving devices to take advantage of 24/7 online accessibility, people have less time and are less available than ever before.

6. Rewarding firefighting leads to more fires.

7. Addiction is confused with commitment.

The most profound and challenging task facing overloaded organizations is to change their underlying beliefs and expectations from those of a "can-do" culture to those of a "results and renewal" culture.

To achieve these goals, we recommend that champions follow a four-stage change process:

1. Build a foundation for change
2. Understand why you and others are not getting the results you want
3. Make an explicit choice about a new way of working
4. Bridge the gap between what you want and the current situation

When people learn that continuing to work harder and harder will not produce a different or better result, they realize that they have a choice and that alternative ways of working might be more productive.

1. Build a Foundation for Change

The first steps in moving toward a more sustainable organizational culture are to make the business case for a new way of working and to engage a leadership coalition to catalyze change.

Begin by documenting the negative consequences of the status quo. Consider the unsustainable costs to your organization in terms of:

- *Ineffectiveness,* e.g., poor quality work, missed deadlines, angry customers, and failure to develop new business
- *Inefficiency,* e.g., people's lack of focus and follow-through, frequent unproductive meetings, recurrent unresolved problems, interpersonal conflicts, the inability to update outmoded systems and processes, health costs, low morale, and turnover

At the same time, articulate the significant benefits of change. These may include:

- Implementation of important projects more quickly and with higher quality
- Increased reliability and customer satisfaction
- People who are more available mentally and

- emotionally and thus more engaged
- More productive conversations and meetings resulting in more effective problem solving
- The elimination of work that doesn't add value

The initial leadership coalition might be the senior management team or a group of middle managers who recognize the need to work smarter, not harder, and can influence upward by demonstrating the benefits of a new way of working in their own divisions. Engaging senior managers early in the process is vital because they are the ones who are ultimately responsible for strategy development and embody the culture. Organizational overload prevents them from achieving the results they want, so they have both the most at stake and the greatest capacity to influence change.

2. Understand Why You Are Not Getting the Results You Want

The next step is to understand the organization's responsibility for the very problems it is trying to solve. It is tempting to think that change is not possible because market pressures and technology are not going away. However, managers can increase organizational effectiveness and efficiency by reducing the overload they themselves create.

The three types of vicious cycles explored in the first section represent composites of how organizations manufacture their own overload and crises, but every organization has its own particular dynamic. At one small investment bank, senior managers were concerned about the time they spent redoing their staff's poor quality work because it took valuable time away from new business development. They learned that the source of their problem was ironically their own strong commitment to customer responsiveness, which meant they frequently asked staff to drop what they were doing in favor of more urgent tasks. This behavior in turn led staff to produce poor quality work.

In addition to uncovering the dynamics that lock overload in place, organizations must surface the underlying assumptions that reinforce it. Members of the clinical informatics group of a major hospital

chain discovered that their diminishing credibility with internal customers resulted from an unquestioned commitment to the company's "can-do" culture. Because they believed that "being a team player means always saying yes," and "if I push back I might lose my job," they frequently overcommitted and under-delivered.

Identifying the dynamics and exposing the assumptions that contribute to them is both humbling and freeing. When people understand their own role in their work challenges and learn that continuing to work harder and harder will not produce a different or better result, they realize that they have a choice and that alternative ways of working might be more productive.

3. Make an Explicit Choice About a New Way of Working

Why don't people change? One reason is that the current system has payoffs, no matter how dysfunctional its behavior appears. A system organized around customer responsiveness pays off in customer enthusiasm in the short run, even though it tends to undermine the organization's ability to deliver on these commitments over the longer term. Similarly, the ways in which an organization responds to crises pays off in short-term crisis resolution at the expense of more serious problems over time.

In addition, the costs of change can be significant. Visionary leaders may need to think strategically about sequencing priorities over time instead of following each new possibility they see. A hard-driving executive might need to shift her focus from doing whatever it takes to achieve results to creating an environment where other people in the organization can succeed. The tough decisions required to limit priorities can create conflict and lead people to fiercely protect themselves against perceived losses of status and jobs.

When people recognize that there is a case for the status quo as well as a case for change, they are confronted with a choice. Choice is the place to get traction in shifting what people want, how

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they think, and how they act. They can choose to move toward a more sustainable way of working – and enliven it by creating a shared vision of what that would look like. Alternatively, they can decide to conduct business as usual, while acknowledging they have a hand in creating the way it is.

> **Choice is the place to get traction in shifting what people want, how they think, and how they act.**

Many of us find altering deeply ingrained beliefs and habits painful. Research into changing habits shows that people must make the same choices time and again over a prolonged period to sustain an initial commitment to working differently.[8] When the next business opportunity presents itself, people need to pause and consider how taking it on would affect their current priorities as well as those of others in the organization and at home. They may need to decide whether they can make a reliable new agreement in the face of the ones they have already made.

4. Bridge the Gap

When organizations make a conscious, firm commitment to achieving sustainable productivity in service of a few meaningful results, several strategies help move them forward:

- Approach individual overload problems systemically
- Concentrate resources on achieving a limited number of priorities at any one time
- Support people to make conscious agreements
- Cultivate sustainable organizational energy
- Increase email and meeting productivity
- Reinforce the "results and renewal" culture

Approach Individual Overload Problems Systemically

As we have said, overload problems are systemic: they are created more by complex organizational dynamics than by the failures of individuals. Therefore, when quality suffers, deadlines are missed, and customers complain, managers must look first for structural inadequacies. These might include unrealistic or ambiguous goals, unclear or conflicting roles, unwieldy processes or procedures, and inappropriate rewards. Because the root cause of many project shortfalls is organizational, common solutions such as time management training and individual coaching often miss the point and fail to solve the overload problem.

> **Overload problems are created more by complex organizational dynamics than by the failures of individuals.**

At the same time, it is important to recognize that organizational dynamics affect (and are exacerbated by) some people more than others. Some individuals tend to make unreasonable demands, while others find it hard to keep up because of disorganization or family commitments. People in both groups can benefit from coaching on how to set clear and realistic expectations, manage time effectively, remain focused, become more reliable, and stay on top of important details. Effective coaching is best structured around a proven behavior change process that helps people make necessary changes in patterns of thinking as well as action.[9]

Concentrate Resources on Limited Priorities

Focus is critical to achieving high performance.[10] People need a clear organizational strategy that focuses priorities and translates into a limited number of goals at any one time. For example, people are more productive when they work on two key projects over six months followed by another two key projects over the next six months than when they are responsible for four major projects over 12 months. It is also important to commit to developmental goals that (1) generate new sources of revenue in a dynamic and increasingly competitive environment, (2) increase the efficient use of existing resources through streamlining organizational systems and processes, and (3) help people continuously learn and grow.

The exact number of desirable annual goals varies depending on the organization. Following norms established by the U.S. Marines and Hewlett Packard, Hans Schulz, the CEO of the leading industrial coatings company Balzers, asks people to designate three "must-win battles" per year. The CEO of another large company recognized for both outstanding economic performance and commitment to its people expects to accomplish one key goal every four to five years.

In the course of identifying goals, people will often defend their own priorities out of fear of losing jobs or status. One way to address this tendency is to structure a *sequence* of priorities, with initiatives designed to build on each other. This means that a low-priority goal today might become a higher priority later on, and vice versa. People not involved in current high-priority initiatives can still provide valuable support for existing projects. However, some projects will probably be pruned in the prioritization process, and individuals need to accept that doing so is best for the organization's overall health.

Once managers establish limited goals, they must align them with resource capacity. Doing so means developing realistic estimates based on past experience, including all aspects of the work (e.g., preparation and completion time, time for managing interdependencies and allowing others to contribute, transitions, delays, and unforeseen circumstances) and using back-casting (i.e., plan from the desired end point backward rather than from the present forward).[11] Managers should in turn reconcile these projections with a top-down assessment of available resources to ensure that individual estimates do not exceed organizational capacity. Clear goals supported by appropriate resources are crucial to achieving the "results" in a "results and renewal" culture.

Support People to Make Conscious Agreements

An organization sometimes needs to shift its priorities to accommodate changes in the external environment. The challenge is to make this shift consciously, as part of a process of adaptation, rather than assuming that people can take on yet another initiative without deferring, adjusting the scope of, or eliminating current commitments.

In practice, this means that managers who delegate new initiatives and people who agree to implement them are supported in making conscious agreements. One senior management team developed guidelines for making reliable agreements that meet the following criteria:

- New requests are clear in terms of their scope, relevance, standards, roles, and timelines.
- These requests are compatible with current work. Resource requirements and potential impact on existing initiatives are understood and needs to rebalance resources across these initiatives are addressed explicitly.
- All parties have an opportunity to negotiate expectations, consider alternatives, and make deliberate trade-offs with respect to current commitments.

In other words, people who take on new projects are expected to interpret "being a good team player" as committing only to what they can reliably accomplish and pushing back responsibly and creatively when that is not the case. It is not a license to back down from challenging tasks, but rather a new challenge to confront tasks that risk taking people off purpose.

Taking on new priorities also challenges people to weed out projects that are no longer appropriate to their goals. Regular weeding requires the cultivation of a learning orientation and eradication

Clear goals supported by appropriate resources are crucial to achieving the "results" in a "results and renewal" culture.

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of the stigma of failure that hampers many organizations.[12] When managers want to disengage from unproductive projects, they have several options: they can ask themselves if they would take on the project if it did not already exist, they can clarify which priorities are being under-resourced to keep this project alive, and they can determine if the work is a candidate for outsourcing. Each of these steps supports the thoughtful governance of organizational resources.

The best way to generate organizational energy is to connect people with a meaningful purpose by keeping the organization's mission, vision, and values in the foreground.

Cultivate Sustainable Organizational Energy

Though the stimulation created by organizational overload may be exciting, it is not sustainable. The best way to generate organizational energy is to connect people with a meaningful purpose by keeping the organization's mission, vision, and values in the foreground. But it is also important to create and support programs targeted toward renewing people's energy on the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual levels. In-house wellness programs and work-life balance policies reduce health costs, increase productivity, improve morale, and attract talent. Such efforts have increased productivity at companies like Wachovia Bank, Sony Europe, and Ernst & Young.[13]

Formal "time-outs" to reflect and regenerate are essential elements of a "results and renewal" culture. Sonova Group, the world market leader in hearing aids, found that the practice of scheduling deliberate lulls after each of its two annual product launches increased the timeliness and quality of the releases. Microsoft has annual "Think Weeks" where 40 of the company's

thought leaders take time away from the office to absorb employee inputs on technology and business strategy. Engineers who reduced interruptions by establishing formal quiet times during working hours reported a 65% increase in productivity,[14] and consultants in a high-powered professional services firm who experimented with taking one full work day or evening off each week reported a 10% increase in a range of performance indicators.[15]

Increase Email and Meeting Productivity

Email is still the Wild West of organizational life, and most meetings waste enormous amounts of time and energy. Organizations increase the productivity of these resources when they manage them collectively instead of expecting people to master them on their own.

The most significant challenge to managing email is the organizational assumption that people should always be available by email or text message. Email is used indiscriminately as the dominant mode of communication when it is best suited for brief messages around familiar routines. Other simple techniques for managing email include checking it only 2-3 times daily (and after establishing your personal priorities for the day), using the Subject Line feature descriptively, and limiting the number of emails sent. People can

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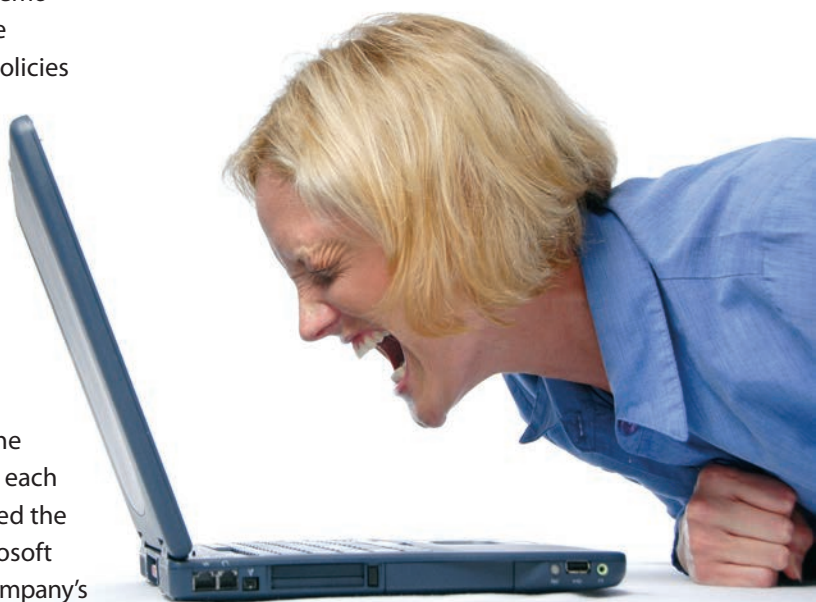
be encouraged to use face-to-face, phone, or videoconference conversations for challenging and nuanced communications, such as launching projects, dealing with conflict or emotionally sensitive information, managing recurring problems, and coaching junior staff. By contrast, approaching email as primarily a technical problem to be contained by limiting personal IT capacity and creating server space for managing shared documents tends to mask the cultural issues.

Similarly, meetings are often a microcosm of the problems associated with organizational overload. Nothing is as wasteful and frustrating as a poorly run meeting. When people try to rush through too many agenda items, they often agree to things they have no intention of doing, which means that problems recur and the same issues show up as additional agenda items again and again (a dynamic identified by our colleague Jennifer Kemeny). On the other hand, nothing is as productive as a well-managed meeting, particularly when it harnesses the collective intelligence of diverse stakeholders around a complex issue.

We recommend that organizations begin by auditing these two forms of communication and examining their purposes, including what is and isn't working about each, and listing ways to increase their productive use. This information can be used to develop new organizational norms and protocols that will transform emails and meetings from frustrating impediments to powerful tools.

Reinforce the "Results and Renewal" Culture

The best way to promote a "results and renewal" culture is to run limited experiments based on the five strategies above. At the same time, an organization must commit to achieving outstanding results by managing all of its resources, including its people, in sustainable ways. This commitment encompasses everyone, from the most senior managers, who must be supported in developing new values and attitudes – or shown the door – to employees, who are encouraged to share their own stories, aspirations, and proposals for new ways of thinking and acting. Strengthening or redesigning underlying processes for strategic management, problem solving, and human resource management

Doing Less and Achieving More: A Case Study

Managers of a leading global health care supplier recognized the need to reduce overload and increase throughput in the new product development process of its US consumer health care organization. Project hit rates on milestones were running at 43%, and the company recognized several problematic patterns:

- People were juggling too many projects, which resulted in extensive multi-tasking, high mental changeover costs, lack of focus on strategic work, slow ramp-up times, and relentlessly high workloads that led to burnout.
- Because expectations always exceeded capacity, managers were continually reprioritizing projects, something that led to chaos.
- People tended to skip over early tasks on a checklist under the assumption that they could easily address these at a later time if necessary.
- Likewise, to save time, developers were downplaying the likelihood and severity of risks at the beginning of the process, only to be surprised and unprepared later when full-fledged crises emerged.
- Knowing they were expected to do more with less, people often asked for fewer resources than they actually needed. They also overestimated what others could actually deliver. As a result, everyone was overloaded, and both higher-level managers and stakeholders in related functions were not aware of the pervasiveness and seriousness of the problem.
- Managers often jumped in to help junior people on tactical work and at the same time delegated strategic assignments, such as process improvement, to junior people who were not equipped to manage them. The reversal of roles frustrated both managers and those who worked for them.

The company is in the process of making several key changes in how it prioritizes work and allocates limited resources:

- Existing workloads have been carefully calculated, and senior management has determined that people have 60% more work than they can manage.

- People now question the norm that "we have six top priorities – but everything must launch on time." "Wishful thinking" is being replaced by rigorous project assessment. Saying "no" to projects is becoming acceptable because more people understand the problems caused by failing to balance workload with capacity.
- Capacity modeling based on realistic resource estimates enables management to accurately balance expectations with capacity. All stakeholders are asked to estimate their own resource requirements instead of making assumptions about what others can do.
- Projects are prioritized in such a way that *not all projects* are put on the development list in the first place. Projects placed in a "parking lot" expose the gap between what people want to get done and what they can do, thereby signaling the level of additional resources required to bridge the gap.
- Teams are designing high-priority projects to be achieved as quickly as possible using sufficient resources. Although fewer projects than before are in the pipeline, *the number of completed projects over time is greater*. This means that, instead of trying to achieve six top priority projects in 12 months, the company might now plan to achieve three top priority projects in six months before targeting three more top priority projects over the next six months.
- New projects are no longer introduced until old ones are cycled out.
- All stakeholders across functions, including senior managers, are involved in understanding, supporting, and acting on the capacity-modeling project.
- An initial result of this capacity-modeling project is that the company is achieving more of its most important work. Meetings have become more effective, because agendas now focus on what is being accomplished instead of what is not being done due to insufficient resources. In addition, teams are more effectively engaged in refining the product development process and optimizing capacity management. ∎

will help shape new ways of working and make overload a distant memory.

"Doing Less and Achieving More: A Case Study" tells how one global health care supplier adapted the four-stage change process to nearly double its project "hit rate" on milestones, improving from 43% to more than 80% of milestones completed on time.

Improving Strategic Effectiveness

Overload is a deeply embedded way of life in many organizations and a significant obstacle to strategic clarity and execution. It increases organizational costs, reduces speed, renders people less available, and hurts performance – all in the name of doing exactly the opposite of what is intended. However, organizations can improve their strategic effectiveness by looking systemically at the root causes and negative effects of overload, explicitly choosing to shift how they operate, and implementing strategies to move from a dysfunctional "can-do" culture to a powerful "results and renewal" culture. The outcome will be the elimination of overload and an organization that works effectively, efficiently, and sustainably. ■

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Commentary

RABBI MARC BAKER

Rabbi Marc Baker

Most of us are familiar with Aesop's fable, *The Tortoise and the Hare*, which, according to at least one interpretation, teaches us that the fastest runner does not always win the race. Likewise, in the Bible, God created the world in six days and the Sabbath on the seventh, for even the Divine Creator needed rest and renewal. The sages of the Jewish tradition taught: "If you take on too much, you have taken on nothing at all."

What is it about human nature that requires our wisdom traditions to continually bombard us with a similar message about the relationship between pace or workload and productivity?

Surely, we *know* somewhere in our heads and hearts that we cannot do it all and, that at some point, there is a diminishing return to what David Peter Stroh and Marilyn Paul call our "can-do," 24-7 culture. Yet, the fact that we know this is precisely what makes the phenomenon of "overload" and its deleterious effects on individual and organizational performance so ironic.

As a school leader – in an environment that can often feel akin to working in a hospital emergency room – I have found that interventions to reduce overload require people to change their beliefs and to act in ways that are counterintuitive for those of us in a society so focused on productivity. Making this shift is incredibly difficult.

Through their systems thinking perspective on the overload phenomenon, Stroh and Paul make the case for change by illuminating the unintended consequences and ripple effects of taking on too much with too few resources. They emphasize the need for us to slow down and acknowledge the costs of our learned behaviors, which include high stress, low morale, high turnover, avoidance of hard decisions, ambiguous or conflicting goals, and overall eroding performance.

Their "Ironies of a 'Can-Do' Culture" sidebar on page 19 succinctly captures the core problems with overload. One of Miriam Webster's definitions of irony is "incongruity between the actual result of a sequence of events and the normal or expected result." Day after day, those of us who struggle with overload live with these ironies, this incongruity, and *we know it*. So, why is it so hard for us to change?

Rethinking Deeply Held Beliefs

In their books *How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work* and *Immunity to Change*, Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey describe how people's "hidden immune system" fights their noble impulses to change for the better. Underlying values and beliefs that have helped many people survive (and made some quite successful) might actually impede growth and change. This, to me, lies at the very heart of why it is so difficult to overcome our "can-do" mentality.

The fear of letting people down by setting boundaries and saying no is scary. What if I set limits and people stop trusting me, needing me, praising me for accomplishing so much? A look-over-the-shoulder mentality pervades many workplaces where a subtle or not-so-subtle competition takes place over who works the hardest, the longest, the craziest hours – who lives the least balanced life.

Many professional cultures reinforce the unstated beliefs that saying no, acknowledging limits, and prioritizing rest and life outside of work are signs of weakness, or that renewal and sustainability are inherently conservative, passive, and growth-averse. In fact, prioritizing rest and renewal, as Stroh and Paul prescribe, takes extraordinary courage, which leaders and organizations need to expect and celebrate. Developing a culture that is sustainable, adaptive, generative, and self-renewing requires vision, creativity, and the capacity to inspire and motivate people.

> **Underlying values and beliefs that have helped many people survive (and made some quite successful) might actually impede growth and change.**

Many people learn their beliefs about what it means to be productive and successful as early as elementary school, where a "race to nowhere" culture pressures students to be what one *New York Times* editorial called "super people."[1] These ideas are deeply ingrained in our society and our professional culture and, for many of us, our sense of self.

With their results and renewal model, Stroh and Paul offer an important framework for unlearning and relearning a new set of beliefs about productivity. Just as Stephen Covey's concept of "sharpening the saw" serves the ultimate goal of "effective living," results and renewal principles lead to more than healthy, fulfilling, and sustainable living and working (because these would not be enough in our results-oriented culture!). Counterintuitively, these principles make people and organizations more productive. Less is actually more, and slower is ultimately faster.

Priorities and Focus

One of the fundamental misconceptions that Stroh and Paul address is the belief that people and organizations truly can do it all. They remind us that leaders and institutions need to make difficult, sometimes painful choices about what we can and cannot do. Saying yes to one thing necessarily means saying no to something or someone else, whether we want to acknowledge it or not.

I loved Stroh and Paul's description of Hans Schulz's approach of asking people to "designate three 'must-win battles' per year." This implies, of course, that Schulz gives implicit permission for his people to lose – or at least not to fight – many other battles. As I understand it, the work of prioritization and focus requires at least three steps: First, people need the *permission to prioritize* that Schulz gives his employees and that Stroh and Paul call for. Second, people need *clarity* about what their goals and priorities are and how they align with their organization's goals and priorities. Third, people need to develop the *discipline* to stay focused on these priorities, even at the expense of others.

In my experience, different people and different organizations will struggle with one or more of these steps at different times. Some will struggle mightily with winnowing a list of 20 goals down to three. Others will have no

trouble identifying which battles they must win but will wrestle with triaging stakeholder needs, competing demands, or even day-to-day tasks.

I have seen firsthand how tools such as the "conscious agreements" that Stroh and Paul describe can help individuals, teams, and organizations become more reflective, explicit, and communicative about their priorities. They also empower individuals to help themselves and to help others stay focused and follow through on their most important commitments.

Teams of Learners vs. Silos of "Gofers"

Ultimately, the only way our organizations will combat overload is by strengthening people's capacities to work together and support each other toward a shared vision. This includes not only *what* we aim to produce but also *how* we aim to work together.

One of the most insidious effects of overload that I have observed is its impact on teams and their capacity to collaborate effectively. So often, when work becomes stressful and demands pile up, people hunker down and teamwork erodes. Rather than being united by the centripetal force of shared vision, values, and good agreements, people are split into silos by the centrifugal force of overload.

The results of this go beyond individual burnout and lack of personal productivity. People get lost (hopefully not trampled) on what leadership expert Ron Heifetz refers to as the "dance floor" and can't even locate "the balcony," let alone climb up to it. That is, instead of seeing the big picture, people become gofers,[2] chasing after the task of the moment and putting out fires. As this happens, they get in each other's way, lose sight of commitments and priorities, and damage their own trustworthiness and the overall trust in their organization.

On the contrary, in a results and renewal culture, stress and workload can actually strengthen teamwork and leadership. They create opportunities for people to improve their relationships with one another by refocusing and doubling-down on core commitments and priorities, acknowledging fears and vulnerabilities, asking for help, and supporting one another in reaching collective goals. Organizations that prioritize learning and renewal even in the face of mounting pressures to produce will remain generative, creative, and forward-looking toward a productive, successful, and sustainable future. ∎

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From Automatic Defensive Routines to Automatic Learning Routines
The Journey to Patient Safety

MICHAEL SALES, JAY W. VOGT, SARA J. SINGER, AND JEFFREY B. COOPER

Patient safety in hospital settings is a major public health problem. Several distinctive challenges combine to create a high-risk environment for patients that can result in grave – and costly – personal and organizational consequences. The authors hypothesize that defensive behaviors among hospital leaders, managers, and staff aggravate the dangers implicit in these settings. In this article, they describe a multidimensional training program, Healthcare Adventures™, in which the exploration of so-called "automatic defensive routines" figures as an important focus. This intervention combines a simulation of a traumatic patient safety event with structured reflection. Taken together, these kinds of learning opportunities support collaborative inquiry and appreciative engagement, which in this case can improve outcomes for patients.

Michael Sales   **Jay W. Vogt**   **Sara J. Singer**   **Jeffrey B. Cooper**

Patient safety errors in hospitals are a significant public health issue in the United States and elsewhere. As this sampling of statistics demonstrates, the data is sobering:

- According to a 1999 study by the Institute of Medicine, 44,000 to 98,000 deaths occur annually due to preventable patient safety errors.[1]
- HealthGrades, which describes itself as "the leading independent health care ratings company," believes that these numbers dramatically understate the problem, estimating that "an average of 195,000 people died" annually in the early years of the century and that the data hasn't changed that much since.[2]
- Hospital-acquired staph infections in 2005 reached 478,000, representing an increase of 62% from 1999.[3]
- A 2012 Johns Hopkins study estimates that in the United States, surgeons leave foreign objects such as sponges and towels inside patients' bodies after operations a minimum of 39 times a week; perform the wrong procedure on patients 20 times a week; and operate on the wrong body site 20 times a week. The cost of these errors is more than $1.3 billion in medical malpractice payouts, and the reporting systems to capture these events are inadequate.[4]

Something is tragically wrong when hospitals, which are supposed to protect the vulnerable, all too often put them in jeopardy. Teams of professionals in other high-consequence industries, such as commercial aviation, deliver a more reliably safe experience to consumers than hospitals.[5] Why have hospitals generally been unable to overcome safety challenges? How should training programs be designed to help address this disturbing situation?

> **Something is tragically wrong when hospitals, which are supposed to protect the vulnerable, all too often put them in jeopardy.**

Challenges to Team Learning

Obviously, hospital executives and administrators want patients to be safe, and they want to avoid the pain, cost, and damaged reputation associated with preventable errors. However, while hospital managers are well placed to improve patient safety, they often lack the training necessary to provide leadership in this area. Those in non-clinical roles generally have little or no patient care experience and are not exposed to the safety issues confronting frontline workers. Clinicians who assume substantial administrative responsibilities spend little time in actual patient care. They may lack familiarity with clinical roles other than their own. In addition, clinician-managers may not have received management training. Further, patient care occurs within the context of complex business, economic, and political environments that present hospital leaders and managers with a wide range of competing and sometimes conflicting priorities.

Healthcare managers often work in teams. Relative to other industries, creating a team learning approach to safety is impeded in hospitals in several ways:
- Hospital managers' differentiated responsibilities can prevent them from managing hospitals as systems.
- Technically proficient healthcare professionals aren't trained to work together in groups or in

teams. They are trained primarily to rely on their individual expertise to prevent failures.

- Differences in training and focus across disciplines often yield different perspectives and interpretations of events, which can make it challenging for cross-functional groups to work together.
- Hospital environments are not standardized and are not designed as systems. New ways of working are often added on with little thought given to how they integrate with the rest of the system.
- The extensive clinical training of clinician-managers may cause them to focus more on promoting technical remedies than on cultivating a team learning orientation.
- Conversely, because managers who are not clinicians lack clinical experience, they may believe that interventions to promote patient safety are beyond their expertise or influence.
- Medicine is an inexact science, and every human body is unique.
- Patients are sick, and families are under stress, which adds another layer of difficulty to critical information exchanges.
- Many information hand-offs in hospitals take place between people with radically different roles and training. The lack of standardization in these transfers often leads to communication breakdowns.
- Personnel in hospitals are under huge pressure to produce more with fewer resources.

These factors can turn healthcare institutions into stressful environments that incline practitioners and work units away from personal connection and collective reflection. People are constantly on the move, dealing with challenging and frequently life-threatening problems. Interactions are often transactional, resources and staffing are constrained, and people are encased in disciplinary and administrative silos. These conditions are fertile ground for defensive, competitive, impersonal relationships. Unnoticed and untreated, such defensiveness creates a climate that inhibits hospitals from taking a learning stance toward the systemic causes of patient safety problems.

Organizational Culture and Automatic Defensive Routines

In the early 1970s, Chris Argyris and Donald Schön introduced the "theory of action" perspective, an analysis of the relationship between personal values, attitudes, and behaviors and the dynamics of organizational culture. By rigorously observing people in action, they demonstrated that many of us hold erroneous assumptions about the values and attitudes that shape our behavior. For example, I may firmly believe that I am open and inquisitive. However, close inspection of my behavior demonstrates that I am actually defensive, that is, closed to being influenced. We all have "espoused theories" regarding the principles we believe are guiding our actions, but the "theory-in-use" that can be inferred by analyzing what we actually do often looks quite different.

> **Unnoticed and untreated, defensiveness creates a climate that inhibits hospitals from taking a learning stance toward the systemic causes of patient safety problems.**

In organizational settings, the gap between what we think of ourselves and what our behavior says about us is "undiscussable" because, as far as we're concerned, it does not exist. Since we share with our coworkers an unspoken agreement not to analyze our behavior, we collude in creating an organizational resistance to awareness.

The mismatch between our espoused theory and our theory-in-use is heightened whenever we experience stress. Consequently, many people manage stressful interpersonal conditions – and protect themselves from uncomfortable self-reflection – by:

- Dominating conversations
- Asserting opinions as facts
- Acting on the belief that they know what others mean without testing their perceptions

- Allowing others to dominate an interaction
- Withholding feelings and perceptions
- Discounting the importance of what others have to say
- Persistently acting in ways that suppress negative feelings – their own and those of others

We are seldom aware of our use of these strategies. They happen at pre-conscious levels. For example, a nurse is guarded as she enters an interaction with a superior. The manager subconsciously senses that lack of trust and responds aggressively. The nurse in turn feels that her guardedness was justified, without realizing that her readiness to be suspicious influenced her manager's behavior.

Given that we fail to notice many of our thought processes, we tend to act according to "automatic defensive routines" – habitual defensive thoughts and actions that we don't consciously notice.

Given that we fail to notice many of our thought processes, we tend to act according to "automatic defensive routines" — habitual defensive thoughts and actions that we don't consciously notice. When people within an organization repeat these routines over and over again in many different situations, automatic defensive routines become layered into the cultural fabric. They are produced at every level of organizational action, from group to team to the organization as a whole. Because this behavior is so engrained in the organization's culture, over time, people stop trying to change it. Within this kind of culture of fear and self-deception, people learn how to get along rather than how to discover and solve problems together.

A Patient Safety Leadership Culture

As noted above, healthcare management teams are particularly vulnerable to the organizational pathology of automatic defensive routines. That defensiveness puts patient safety at risk. For

example, research indicates that healthcare leadership teams frequently react to the challenges of patient safety with a "seek perfection" rather than a "seek learning" response.[6] Healthcare practitioners tend to be self-reliant by training and impose very high standards on their own performance. This seemingly positive approach often has unintended negative consequences. Given a "seek perfection" orientation, practitioners try to avoid dependency on others, not wanting to be judged incompetent when others make mistakes, or fearing that others will recognize and criticize their own mistakes. When errors inevitably occur, perfectionists tend to hide them to avoid blame. The pursuit of perfection thus amplifies defensive routines. Practitioners learn to be more defensive rather than more oriented toward patient safety.

A "seek learning" orientation leads to a different set of behaviors: people ask for feedback and learn from it, reflect together, and search for systemic solutions. Such a learning stance reinforces behaviors that result in structured, consistent, and persistent organizational inquiry. Drawing on the literature on leading organizational learning, we suggest that to create such a culture in hospitals, leaders must:

- Continuously demonstrate that they "really care" about patient safety
- Manifest a welcoming and non-defensive attitude when engaging in conversations about patient safety
- Encourage everyone involved in patient care to speak up about their concerns
- Facilitate communication about patient safety in both formal and informal ways
- Take visible and tangible action to emphasize the importance of patient safety
- Mobilize and circulate the information that is needed to support patient safety
- Seek input from key stakeholders to get the best thinking and to win support for system changes that support patient well being

These leadership behaviors help to increase interpersonal and intergroup openness and inquiry and reduce the need for people to think and act

defensively. Figure 1 shows the relationship between these leadership behaviors, team learning, and group performance.

In the next section, we describe how certain kinds of intervention can loosen the grip of automatic defensive routines on hospital cultures.

### Simulations to Jump Start Hospital Safety

The Healthcare Adventures™ (HCA)[7] program was developed to introduce hospital management teams to patient safety concepts, develop their teamwork, and inspire them to bring these concepts and behaviors into their sphere of influence. The program evolved from earlier versions developed by the Center for Medical Simulation (CMS) and was further refined and evaluated by the authors under a research grant from The Patrick

> **Like the therapeutic jolt of a defibrillator, Healthcare Adventures is intended to jump start safety practices in hospital leadership teams.**

and Catherine Weldon Donaghue Medical Research Foundation.[8]

Like the therapeutic jolt of a defibrillator, Healthcare Adventures is intended to jump start safety practices in hospital leadership teams. It uses various modalities – intended to engage multiple learning styles – to shake up entrenched ways of acting and learning. An effort to soften the

FIGURE 1   **The Elements of a Patient Safety Leadership Culture**
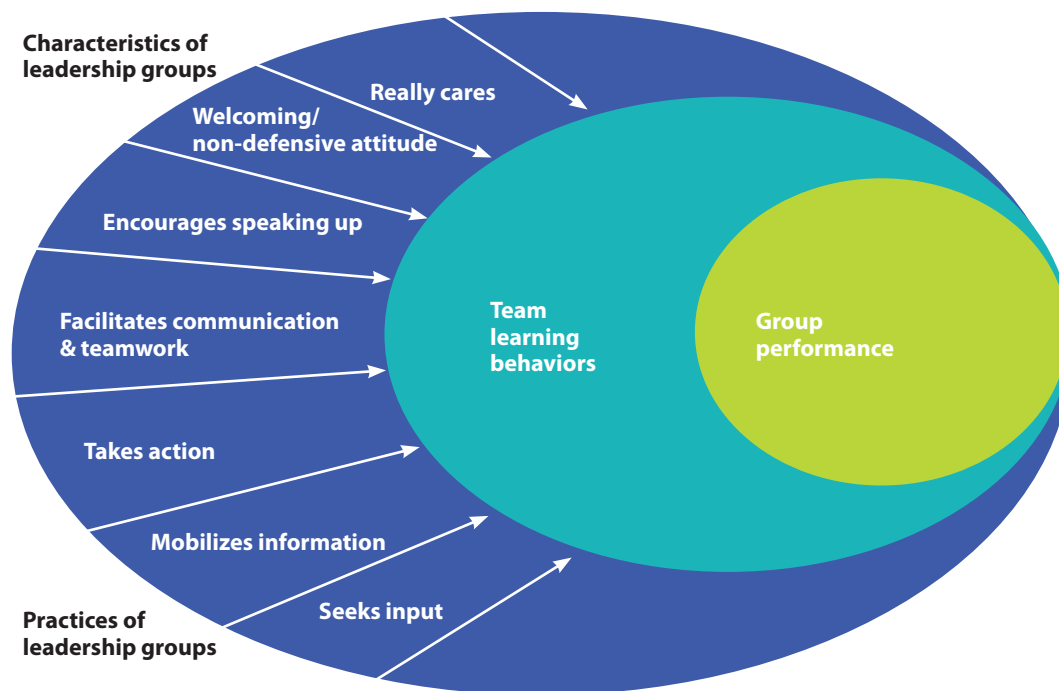
The *characteristics* refer to a set of leadership attitudes and values. Learning-oriented leaders are non-defensive and clearly make patient safety a top priority. One of the ways they demonstrate their openness is by encouraging others to speak up. They are inveterate team builders, always looking to create learning conversations. The *practices* refer to leader behaviors related to specific patient safety efforts, such as supporting a programmatic innovation, gathering and circulating information relevant to an initiative, and seeking input and support from key constituencies.

dynamics of automatic defensive routines is woven into each element of the intervention.

The Center for Medical Simulation has run this program with 16 teams of hospital administrators, leaders, and executives from several hospitals. The teams have been composed of clinicians, non-

clinicians, and mixtures of the two. Team members start off a full day of training by taking part in a moderately stressful simulation of a hospital event highlighting patient safety. The team then uses the "Gameplan," a project planning methodology, to reflect on its own behavior while improving patient safety. Prior to the training day, team

TABLE 1   **Training Elements and Their Impact on Automatic Defensive Routines**

Training Element	Description	Impact on Automatic Defensive Routines
Pre-meeting with team leaders and/or entire team	A 90-minute meeting to understand issues confronted by the team and to establish a project focus for the full-day training session	Heightens awareness of team dynamics, particularly regarding topics that might be both important and "undiscussable," e.g., conflicts over the priority paid to patient safety
Training Day Element 1: Appreciative Inquiry	A 30-minute reflection by the team on instances when it has been successful in identifying and addressing patient safety challenges	Establishes pride among team members in their accomplishments, thus strengthening their ability to engage controversial issues in a respectful fashion
Training Day Element 2: The Simulation	A 30- to 60-minute experience that provokes and reveals underlying team dynamics	Provides the facilitators with directly observable data of the team in action that they can then use for inquiry and discussion
Training Day Element 3: Debrief	A 60-minute discussion of what happened in the simulation	Explores the difficulties people have in speaking up and the challenge of mixing advocacy and inquiry. Provides "teachable moments," i.e., opportunities to observe and reflect on defensiveness and openness in real time.
Training Day Element 4: Theory	A 30-minute presentation and discussion of the Patient Safety Leadership Culture framework (See Figure 1)	Provides a theoretical framework for recognizing the interpersonal and leadership skills necessary to produce collective learning regarding patient safety
Training Day Element 5: Survey results (when a survey of leadership for patient safety has been conducted)	A 30-minute presentation and discussion of the results of a unit-wide survey that reports on the perceptions that the entire organization has of the leadership team's commitment to patient safety	Frequently provokes the complaint that the survey instrument was flawed, which is often followed by an acknowledgement that the leadership team has something to learn that might make it uncomfortable
Training Day Element 6: The Graphic Gameplan	A 2- to 3-hour planning process that results in a shared approach to an important patient safety initiative, focused on what leaders can do to support its implementation. Over the course of this session, the group fills in the elements of a Graphic Gameplan (see Figure 2) to create a visual roadmap to guide its initiative.	Provides an opportunity to apply the lessons learned during the activities of the day to a meaningful leadership team undertaking; specific responsibilities for taking action, mobilizing information, and seeking input related to the project are assigned to team members
Post-training day evaluations by facilitators	A brief assessment of the team's learning during the course of the day leading to follow-up planning	Identifies specific competencies that the facilitators think the team ought to concentrate on
The Booster Shot	A 2-hour discussion about the state of the team's project and its learning about leadership that occurs 1 to 6 months after the training day	Stimulates team members to remember what they learned and to hone the behaviors with which they've been experimenting

FIGURE 2   **The Healthcare Adventures Graphic Gameplan**
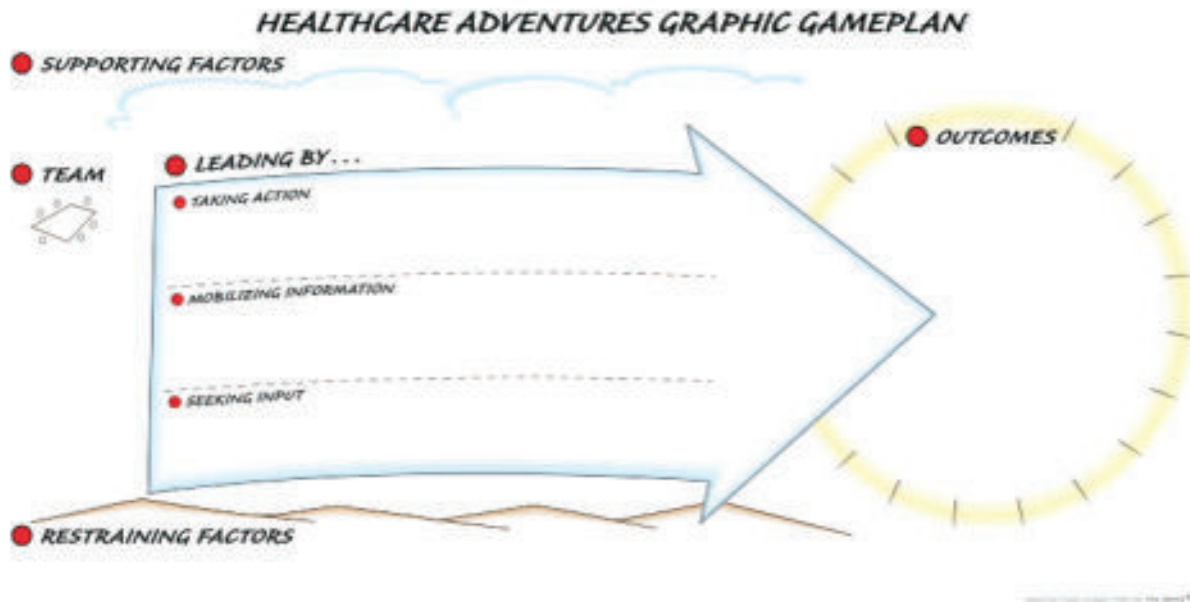
Using the Graphic Gameplan, a leadership team envisions the flow of a patient safety improvement initiative from start to finish in a way that points out the specific steps needed to achieve the desired outcomes.

leaders or the entire team meet to learn about the general nature of the training and discuss the team's needs and goals. The training day is followed by a "Booster Shot" at some later time to check in on the team's learning and its progress.

The simulation begins when a member of the CMS instructor team enters the room in a lab coat or scrubs. Employing some form of theatrical deception (e.g., "I'd like to take you on a tour of the hospital we just acquired"), the instructor invites participants to join him or her in a learning experience. The participants expect to engage in a simulation, but they don't know the details. They then leave the training room and enter a simulated hospital space.

CMS has used two simulations in the Healthcare program:
• Participants assume roles in which they assist a surgeon (a trained actor on the CMS staff) who discovers – unhappily – that he or she has operated on the wrong knee of an elderly patient. The members of the teams that engage in this simulation are typically non-clinicians who are given enough training to take on the roles they are asked to play.
• Participants assume roles in which they are the leadership team of a large, prestigious hospital that is visiting the emergency room of a smaller, less well-run facility it has just acquired. The emergency room has patients in two beds. The husband of one of the patients (both the husband and the patient work for CMS) inadvertently – and inappropriately – makes a video recording of a physician and a nurse (also actors) as they make a series of errors with another patient (a mannequin) in the neighboring bed. The participants in this simulation are typically clinicians asked to perform a managerial function.

Both simulations last about 30 minutes. In the first case, the surgeon is enraged that the mistake has been made and harangues others for causing the problem. As a result, the surgeon pushes for actions that may be ethically questionable. Do any members of the participant team speak up as advocates for the patient and her family? In the second case, after the emergency room scenario,

the team receives an urgent request from the president of the acquired hospital to help respond to the anticipated avalanche of negative publicity resulting from the threatened release of the video to the media. The team is given 30 minutes to develop a plan.

Both simulations provide an opportunity for the training group and the facilitators to observe the team's dynamics. These reflections typically include discussion of automatic defensive routines, their repercussions, and ways that people might act differently.

Learning activities are organized around the simulation, each of which reinforces the messaging on automatic defensive routines. Table 1 (p. 36) describes each component of the training program and its impact on automatic defensive routines.

> **The team dynamics made visible in the simulation provide observable data for conversation and reflection during the remainder of the training day.**

An Illustrative Vignette

The team dynamics made visible in the simulation provide observable data for conversation and reflection during the remainder of the training day. The group looks at the presence or absence of four critical leadership team characteristics regarding safety: "Really cares about patient safety," "Encourages speaking up," "Is welcoming and non-defensive," and "Facilitates communication and teamwork." Each of these behaviors is an antidote to automatic defensive routines. The facilitators heighten participants' awareness of the behaviors and mental models that contribute to defensiveness and poor communication around patient safety, and those that lead to collective learning and improved performance.

In the following example from a Debrief, we see a group that participated in the emergency room scenario discussing the observation that one or two team members did most of the talking during the event:

Facilitator [to a female participant who is a nurse]: "At the beginning of the ER simulation, you said something about the presence of the video camera. Your team leader [a renowned male physician] immediately said, 'Is his using the camera a problem? Maybe it is a bonus to have the recording going on.' What did you feel when he said that?"

Participant, with emotion: "My feeling was my statement wasn't valued. I recognized his point, but my thought was that there were major HIPAA things going on here [HIPAA is an acronym for the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, which protects personal health information]. It made me feel downtrodden."

Facilitator: "This was the first place where that opening to discuss possible HIPAA violations appeared, and we never found more about your concerns because of that exchange."

The physician who had interrupted her comments, clearly regretting his action: "What happens is you lose track of the problem. Somewhere you have to record it so you go back to it. It wasn't the camera, it was the HIPAA issue we have to address. But we didn't get to that because of the way I responded to her."

A nurse educator, who had also moved the group's attention away from the HIPPA comment: "I feel like I devalued what she said, and I did it consciously. I was like 'We have a huge issue here [with another aspect of what was going on in the simulation]!' So I wanted to change the subject. I felt I was totally clamping you down. I knew I was doing that. Should I have gone back later on and undid that?"

Another participant: "I felt like I didn't have a lot to say because the overarching issue was this guy in the other bed was going to die. I'm usually the one that brings up the underlying personal issues, but I thought that we had a more important issue: the condition of that patient. Those clinical things are easier to deal with because they are what we do. That's easier than working through the human affect stuff."

The nurse who had raised the HIPAA concern: "But we look to you for that! That is your area of expertise. There are times I really wish you would speak! There are times people are thinking it and not saying it *[a lot of emotion in her voice]*."

The unit's director of nursing: "Conflict avoidance is inherent in most of us. It is, 'what is your threshold? What is going to push you to the point to say something?'"

Here, an internationally respected surgeon at the top of his field, who is very assertive and proud of being "right," publicly acknowledges that his behavior prevented a subordinate from speaking up. A nurse confronts a colleague about her not speaking up. A director of nursing reflects on people's tendency to avoid conflict by not speaking up. During the Appreciative Inquiry exercise at the beginning of the training day, the members of this team expressed pride at their patient safety accomplishments. But at this moment in the training, they all opened up to a deeper level of reflection on the limits of their team dynamics, which did not conform to their more polished story of themselves. This openness later paid off in an energetic and comprehensive discussion by the team of an important patient safety project during the Gameplan module. At the close of the day, the nurse who raised the HIPAA issue described the impact of the training as "reminding us of the importance of being respectful to one another and using inquiry to solicit other people's opinions."

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Without a focus on overcoming automatic defensive routines, most hospital teams will act more defensively than they realize and than their patients would want.

Collective Learning

Healthcare Adventures™ aims for an ambitious result: to make automatic defensive routines visible, to reduce the inclination of participants to use them, and to point them toward automatic *learning* routines, like speaking up about patient safety. Chris Argyris and his collaborators have demonstrated that defensive routines cannot be easily "unlearned." Because they are habits of self-protection that individuals and groups automatically use when they feel threatened, they usually operate below conscious attention. Even when we are conscious of them, we find it challenging to pause and say things to ourselves like, "Hmm, I should listen more closely to what this other

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person is saying. I know I don't like him or his way of thinking, but maybe there's something there." Most of us require time and effort to learn to concentrate in this way. It is presumptuous to believe that a single training program, no matter how effective, can lead to the permanent transformation of defensive routines into ones that promote collective learning. But we can be sure that, without a focus on overcoming automatic defensive routines, most hospital teams will act more defensively than they realize and than their patients would want.

Programs like Healthcare Adventures create an environment where the members of a team can celebrate their achievements and learn about themselves individually and collectively in a way that promotes non-defensive values, attitudes, and behaviors. Sometimes this shift is dramatic:

- One group did not finish the task of preparing an action plan for the CEO after members visited the emergency department. When the facilitator pointed this out, they reacted defensively. Suddenly, one member of the group

spoke up (over multiple interruptions) and said, "What just happened in the simulation isn't that unusual. You know, I'm a trained facilitator who has the ability to help this group complete its tasks. But, I don't feel empowered in this group. I feel like I defer to people who are more influential and have higher rank, and as a result, I'm not well used by the group, and the group isn't taking advantage of my expertise." You could have heard a pin drop when this professional said something that had been on her mind for a long time.

In other instances, the impact is more subtle:

- The nursing director of a group acknowledged how defensiveness among the managers had caused his staff to stop offering suggestions. Describing the previous week, he said, "We had a new staff person who joined medical services. After offering new ideas, he said 'I'm not going to do this anymore because everyone gets defensive and shuts down.'" This remark led to extensive discussion about what it would take to be truly welcoming of input regarding patient safety.
- As a result of the training, culture shifts. Here's a report from a "Booster Shot" meeting: "We say 'Let me see what we can do to help.' We're doing more of this now than before. People are seeing us more for that and coming to us with questions. I see people going above and beyond to help people."
- A leader of one group described using a lesson from the training program to promote speaking up: "If it's the right thing to do, you need to speak up.... I've used that example [from the training program exercise] so many times to explain to people the organization chart doesn't matter. I have some responsibility for patient safety just by being physically present."

The Healthcare Adventures program is designed to soften automatic defensive routines by turning hospital leadership teams toward reflection and inquiry. Research by Singer and colleagues tracked qualitative data on 12 of the teams that have experienced this training, identifying the charac-

teristics of high performers, i.e., those teams that used the program to deep advantage. She has found that high-performing teams come primed to learn from their experiences and make time to confer with each other in a structured and persistent fashion. Low-performing groups tend not to engage in reflection and don't characterize their team as one where people appreciate and respect each other. Yet, this kind of training prompts leaders even in the low-performing teams to reflect together in real time. Therefore, all teams use their reflections to some extent to discuss how their particular constellation of beliefs and behaviors affects the quality of their leadership, and ultimately, patient safety.

In high-performing teams, the training process intensifies leaders' interest in listening to others in order to learn. In low-performing teams, it opens the door to the sort of conversations that the team has been avoiding. In mid-range teams, it shows what the results of greater awareness and openness culture could be. For all teams, however, training like that provided by Healthcare Adventures provides tools that participants can use to promote patient safety. While not every healthcare leadership team will want to have in-depth and non-defensive conversations about patient safety, most of us want to be treated in hospitals by teams that do. ■

> **While not every healthcare leadership team will want to have in-depth and non-defensive conversations about patient safety, most of us want to be treated in hospitals by teams that do.**

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6   Reason, J. (2000). "Human error: models and management," *BMJ*, *320*(7237), 768–770.

7   Healthcare Adventures is a trademark of the Center for Medical Simulation, a 501(c)3, non-profit research and training organization located in Charlestown, MA: www.harvardmedsim.org

8   The Donaghue Foundation is a charitable trust based in Connecticut that provides grants for medical research of practical benefit: www.Donaghue.org

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Teaming Is a Verb

AMY C. EDMONDSON

Organizations thrive, or fail to thrive, based on how well the small groups within them function. In most organizations, the pace of change and the fluidity of work structures mean that success no longer comes from creating effective teams but instead from leading effective *teaming*. Teaming occurs when people come together to combine and apply their expertise to perform complex tasks or develop solutions to novel problems. Fast-moving work environments need people who have the skills and the flexibility to act in moments of potential collaboration when and where they appear; that is, people who know how to team. As summarized in this excerpt from *Teaming: How Organizations Learn, Innovate, and Compete in the Knowledge Economy*, four behaviors – speaking up, collaboration, experimentation, and reflection – are the pillars of effective teaming.

Amy C. Edmondson

Sports teams and musical groups are both bounded, static collections of individuals. Like most work teams in the past, they are physically located in the same place while practicing or performing together. Members of these teams learn how to interact. They've developed trust and know each other's roles. Advocating stable boundaries, well-designed tasks, and thoughtfully composed membership, many seminal theories of organizational effectiveness explained how to design and manage just these types of static performance teams.[1]

Adapted from
Teaming: How Organizations Learn, Innovate, and Compete in the Knowledge Economy
Amy C. Edmondson
John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
2012

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Harvard psychologist Richard Hackman, a preeminent scholar of team effectiveness, established the power of team structures in enabling team performance. According to this influential perspective, well-designed teams are those with clear goals, well-thought-out tasks that are conducive to teamwork, team members with the right skills and experiences for the task, adequate resources, and access to coaching and support. Get the right design, the theory says, and the performance will take care of itself. This model focused on the team as an entity, looking largely within the well-defined bounds of a team to explain its performance. Other research, notably conducted by MIT professor Deborah Ancona, showed that how much a team's members interact with people outside the team boundaries was also an important factor in team performance.[2] Both perspectives worked well in guiding the design and management of effective teams, at least in contexts where managers

had the lead time and the run time to invest in composing stable, well-designed teams.

In these prior treatments, team is a noun. A team is an established, fixed group of people cooperating in pursuit of a common goal. But what if a team disbands almost as quickly as it was assembled? For example, what if you work in an emergency services facility where the staffing changes every shift, and the team changes completely for every case or client? What if you're a member of a temporary project team formed to solve a unique production problem? Or you're part of a group of managers with a mix of individual and shared responsibilities? How do you create synergy when you lack the advantages offered by the frequent drilling and practice sessions of static performance teams like those in sports and music?

The answer lies in **teaming.**

Teaming is a verb. It is a dynamic activity, not a bounded, static entity. It is largely determined by the mindset and practices of teamwork, not by the design and structures of effective teams. Teaming is teamwork on the fly. It involves coordinating and collaborating without the benefit of stable team structures, because many operations, such as hospitals, power plants, and military installations, require a level of staffing flexibility that makes stable team composition rare.[3] In a growing number of organizations, the constantly shifting nature

of work means that many teams disband almost as soon as they are formed. You could be working on one team right now, but in a few days, or even a few minutes, you may be on another team.

Fast-moving work environments need people who know *how to team,* people who have the skills and the flexibility to act in moments of potential collaboration when and where they appear. They must have the ability to move on, ready for the next such moments. Teaming still relies on old-fashioned teamwork skills such as recognizing and clarifying interdependence, establishing trust, and figuring out how to coordinate. But there usually isn't time to build a foundation of familiarity through the careful sharing of personal history and prior experience, nor is there time for developing shared experiences through practice working together. Instead, people need to develop and use new capabilities for sharing crucial knowledge quickly. They must learn to ask questions clearly and frequently. They must make the small adjustments through which different skills and knowledge are woven together into timely products and services.

Why should managers care about teaming? The answer is simple. Teaming is the engine of organizational learning.[4] By now, everyone knows that organizations need to learn – to thrive in a world of continuous change. But *how* organizations learn is not as well understood. . . . [O]rganizations are complex entities; many are globally distributed, most encompass multiple areas of expertise, and nearly all engage in a variety of activities. What does it mean for such a complex entity to "learn"? An organization cannot engage in a learning process in any meaningful sense – not in the way an individual can. Yet, when individuals learn, this does not always create change in the ways the organization delivers products and services to customers. This is a conundrum that has long fascinated academics. . . .

> **Fast-moving work environments need people who know *how to team*, people who have the skills and the flexibility to act in moments of potential collaboration when and where they appear.**

Four Pillars of Effective Teaming

Teaming occurs when people apply and combine their expertise to perform complex tasks or develop solutions to novel problems. Often a fluid process, teaming may involve performing with others, disbanding, and joining another group right away. An episode of teaming ends once some or all of the work is complete, but teaming as a mindset – and approach to work – can continue indefinitely. Teaming is normal in the "temporary organizations" that characterize creative endeavors such as making a film, or in the coordination of complex events, such as producing a professional conference. In such efforts, a mix of planned and spontaneous coordination often brings multiple players together to team.

Proficient teaming often requires integrating perspectives from a range of disciplines, communicating despite the different mental models that accompany different areas of expertise, *and* being able to manage the inevitable conflicts that arise when people work together. Fundamentally, this is a matter of developing interpersonal skills related to learning (inquiry, curiosity, listening) and teaching (communicating, connecting,

FIGURE 1   **Teaming**

clarifying). Teaming is thus both a mindset that accepts working together actively and a set of behaviors tailored to sharing and synthesizing knowledge (see Figure 1). Sometimes teaming requires coordinating across distant locations, which both increases the potential for miscommunication and gives rise to new opportunities for innovation. One chemical company I studied used

> **Teaming is both a mindset that accepts working together actively and a set of behaviors tailored to sharing and synthesizing knowledge.**

globally dispersed teams to innovate, overcoming various communication barriers to develop new products and processes that offered wider commercial value than those that could be developed in a single location. Whether face-to-face or mediated by communication technologies, successful teaming involves the four specific behaviors listed in "Behaviors Driving Teaming Success" on page 46.

Speaking Up

Candid communication allows teams to incorporate multiple perspectives and tap into individual knowledge. This includes asking questions; seeking feedback; talking about errors; asking for help; offering suggestions; and discussing problems, mistakes, and concerns. Speaking up is particularly crucial when confronting problems or failures of any kind. When people are willing to engage with each other directly and openly, they are better able to make sense of the larger shared work and more likely to generate ideas for improving work processes. Speaking up in this context refers to an interpersonal behavior that allows the development of shared insights from open conversation. It is essential for determining appropriate courses of action in

Behaviors Driving Teaming Success

Speaking Up: Teaming depends on honest, direct conversation between individuals, including asking questions, seeking feedback, and discussing errors.

Collaboration: Teaming requires a collaborative mindset and behaviors – both within and outside a given unit of teaming – to drive the process.

Experimentation: Teaming involves a tentative, iterative approach to action that recognizes the novelty and uncertainty inherent in every interaction between individuals.

Reflection: Teaming relies on the use of explicit observations, questions, and discussions of processes and outcomes. This must happen on a consistent basis that reflects the rhythm of the work, whether that calls for daily, weekly, or other project-specific timing.

any teaming encounter. Speaking up is also essential for helping people grasp new concepts and methods. Conversing about experiences, insights, and questions builds understanding of new practices and how to perform them. Although many people think of themselves as direct and straightforward, speaking up in the workplace is less common than you might think.

Collaboration

Collaboration is a way of working with colleagues that is characterized by cooperation, mutual respect, and shared goals. It involves sharing information, coordinating actions, discussing what's working and what's not, and perpetually seeking input and feedback. Teaming depends on collaborative behaviors within and

between departments or organizations. Clearly, without collaboration, teaming easily breaks down. Plans are less well informed, and the execution of plans suffers. . . . A collaborative attitude is also essential to shared reflection that may occur following coordinated action, because it allows full and thoughtful sharing of expertise and promotes the development of broader and deeper lessons from any experience. Imagine a product development team that doesn't collaborate with the marketing group and thereby fails to incorporate vital customer preferences or feedback!

Experimentation

Experimentation means expecting *not* to be right the first time. Borrowed from the literal experiments of scientists, experimentation behavior is a way of acting that centrally involves learning from the results of action. In teaming, experimentation behavior involves reaching out to others to assess the impact of one's actions on them, and also testing the implications of one's ideas with respect to what others are thinking. Experimentation is a vital aspect of teaming because of the uncertainty inherent in interdependent action. It's also a crucial part of learning . . . .

Reflection

Reflection is the habit of critically examining the results of actions to assess results and uncover new ideas. Some teams engage in reflection on a daily basis. Others reflect at a natural break in the project, such as at half-time for sports teams, or when documenting aspects of a patient's care in a chart after a medical visit. Project teams may explicitly engage in a reflection exercise only when a project is completed. The "after action reviews" conducted by the U.S. Army following military exercises are explicit reflection sessions that use a rigorous structured approach to assess what occurred against what was planned or expected. Reflection does not necessarily mean extensive sessions to thoroughly analyze team process or performance, but rather is often quick and pragmatic. Reflection-in-action, for ex-

ample, is the critical, real-time examination of a process so it can be adjusted based on new knowledge or, more often, in response to subtle feedback received from the work itself.[5] Reflection as a basis for effective teaming is more a behavioral tendency than a formal process. In one study of surgical teams, for example, I found no differences in outcomes for teams with formal reflection sessions, compared to those without such sessions; the teams that succeeded were those that were constantly reflecting aloud on what they were observing and thinking, as a way of figuring out how to work together more effectively.[6] For some types of teams, however, it may be more appropriate to wait for outcomes to be available before stopping to reflect on team process, in which case a more structured approach, such as a formal project review, is extremely valuable.

These four behaviors are the pillars of effective teaming. The challenges encountered on the factory floor, in the operating room, and around the glass-topped tables in corporate conference rooms differ significantly in look and feel, as well as in the nature of the work. Yet speaking up, collaboration, experimentation, and reflection are crucial behaviors across these disparate settings. In all of them, leaders who themselves embrace these behaviors make it easier for others to act in ways that support teaming. In addition to these behavioral tendencies, however, leaders must also understand the cyclical, recursive nature of the actual teaming process. ■

ENDNOTES

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society for **SoL** organizational learning