Volume 13, Number 2

Reflections

The SoL Journal
on Knowledge, Learning, and Change

Photo courtesy of Michael Goodman

Published by The Society for Organizational Learning
www.solonline.org

ISSN 1524-1734

society for organizational learning

PUBLISHER'S NOTE 13.2

Frank Schneider

In our efforts to solve chronic problems or effect sustainable change, we frequently rely on the hero model of leadership, in which success or failure depends on a single person or a select group of people. We know this model rarely works. This issue of *Reflections* focuses on those who have rejected this approach and who instead understand that supporting and being supported by others is what achieves desired results.

How often has poor communication interfered with or undermined your intentions and actions? In this excerpt from his book *Humble Inquiry,* founding publisher of *Reflections* Ed Schein describes a key element of building positive relationships: what he calls "humble inquiry," a mode of communication that focuses on *asking* rather than *telling.* By inquiring instead of offering opinion or advice, we demonstrate curiosity and interest in the other person. In turn, these conditions create a psychologically safe place to build mutual trust and improve communication – and, ultimately, action.

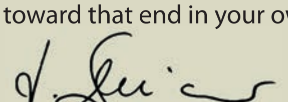
In a companion piece, "On Communication: Process Consultation, Helping, and Humble Inquiry," Schein reflects on his own evolution as a consultant. He describes how he discovered that there are many different ways to intervene and that one of the least effective is to tell. He learned that what his clients really wanted from him was to help their organizations be more effective in what they were trying to do. Over time, Schein came to understand that open communication was the cornerstone to helping his clients improve essential organizational processes.

In their book *Leading from the Emerging Future: From Ego-System to Eco-System Economies,* Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer explain that if we are to meet the demands of today's challenges, we need to shift from an obsolete "ego-system" that focuses on individual well-being to an "eco-system" that emphasizes the well-being of the whole. In this excerpt, they share three inspirational stories that illustrate the main leverage points for shifting a system as a whole to a more effective way of operating.

Bob Stilger knows first-hand what happens when a catastrophe brings a country to its knees. In "Disaster as a Springboard for Thriving, Resilient Communities," he describes his experiences in Japan in the aftermath of March 11, 2011, when the triple disasters of earthquake, tsunami, and radiation leak devastated the northeastern part of the country. Despite the unimaginable conditions they endured, many people sought each other out to reflect on how they can create a new future together. Since then, a number of initiatives for encouraging creativity and collective action have been launched. At a time when the world is vulnerable to collapsing systems, the people of Japan are showing us how to build resilient communities.

"Healthcare at Its Best: Southcentral Foundation's Core Concepts Training" is the story of one community's transformative journey from dependence and control to self-determination and authenticity. In this article, Katherine Gottlieb and Michelle Tierney, two leaders of this effort, describe what can be achieved when tradition and culture guide the design of a training program. By integrating foundational concepts and processes learned at SoL's Core Competencies Course, Southcentral Foundation, an Alaska Native-owned, nonprofit healthcare organization, developed its own Core Concepts Training. Today, SCF's healthcare system stands as an exemplary model of change and a testament to what can be accomplished when people work collectively to control their own destiny.

The articles in this issue highlight the importance of working to resolve stubborn challenges collectively, as one. In reading this issue, we hope that you will be encouraged and inspired as you continue to strive toward that end in your own work. ■



Frank Schneider, *Publisher*

EXECUTIVE DIGEST 13.2

Humble Inquiry

Edgar H. Schein

Communication is essential to healthy relationships, but too often when we interact with people, we end up *telling* them what we think they need to know. In the process, we miss the opportunity to build relationships based on curiosity and interest in the other person. In today's increasingly complex, interdependent, and culturally diverse world, this inability to practice what Professor Edgar Schein refers to as "Humble Inquiry" can interfere with our ability to generate bold new ideas, avoid disastrous mistakes, and develop agility and flexibility as a team. In this excerpt from *Humble Inquiry: The Gentle Art of Asking Instead of Telling*, Schein contrasts Humble Inquiry with other kinds of inquiry and shows the benefits of Humble Inquiry in an organizational setting.

On Communication: Process Consultation, Helping, and Humble Inquiry

Edgar H. Schein

Throughout his career, *Reflection*'s Founding Editor Edgar Schein has sought to find the most effective ways to intervene in organizational challenges. He learned early on that clients don't want advice – they want help in improving their interpersonal, group, and organizational processes. Schein came to understand the importance of asking the client what kind of help might be useful before rushing in with advice or action. This emphasis on asking instead of telling has implications for communication within an organization as well. As the world becomes more complex and tasks become more interdependent, coordination is crucial. Through "Humble Inquiry," team members build the trust necessary for engaging in mutual learning.

Leading the Relational Inversion: From Ego to Eco

C. Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer

In their recent book *Leading from the Emerging Future: From Ego-System to Eco-System Economies,* Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer contend that meeting the challenges of this century requires updating our economic logic and operating system. We need to shift from an obsolete "ego-system" that focuses entirely on individual well-being to an "eco-system" that emphasizes the well-being of the whole. In this excerpt, the authors focus on a key element of this change: learning how to see ourselves through the eyes of others and of the whole. Three stories offer inspiration for creating the rich new forms of communication needed to build a more resilient, intentional, inclusive, and aware economy.

Disaster as a Springboard for Thriving, Resilient Communities

Bob Stilger

What happens when catastrophe fundamentally shifts the world we know? In March 11, 2011, the triple disasters of earthquake, tsunami, and radiation leak devastated northeastern Japan. In the aftermath of the tragedy, people from throughout the country began to gather not just to share their grief but to consider how they might create a new future together. Numerous initiatives have been launched to experiment with the structures, processes, and practices that create conditions for creativity and collective action. As we enter a time when the world as a whole may experience even more collapsing systems and disasters, the people of Japan – and especially of the Tohoku region – are showing us the way to build healthy and resilient communities.

EXECUTIVE DIGEST 13.2

Healthcare at Its Best: Southcentral Foundation's Core Concepts Training

Katherine Gottlieb and Michelle Tierney

True transformation, particularly in an organization, is a rare occurrence. It requires unswerving commitment to vision, leadership that is willing to learn, and an organization determined to change in a way that is beneficial to all, not to just a select few. To guide it toward achieving its vision of creating a community that enjoys physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual wellness, Southcentral Foundation (SCF), an Alaska Native-owned, nonprofit healthcare organization, worked with SoL to design and implement a foundational program, the Core Concepts Training. SCF's story not only presents an exemplary model of change but perhaps more importantly illustrates what can be accomplished when people choose to control their own destiny.

TRIBUTE 13.2

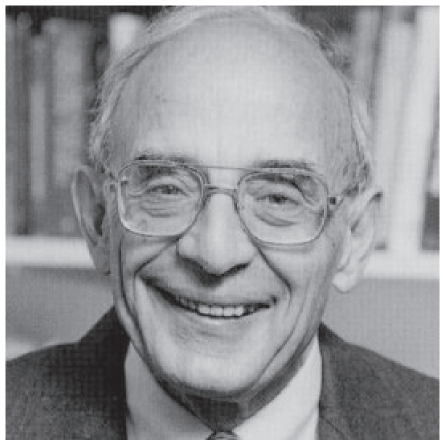
Chris Argyris

1923–2013

On November 16, Chris Argyris died peacefully, surrounded by his family after living a full and meaningful life. During his 90 years, Chris served in World War II, produced over 30 books and 150 articles, taught at Yale's School of Management and at Harvard's Business School and Graduate School of Education, served on the boards of the Monitor Group and Greenwich Research Associates, and earned 14 honorary doctorates. He leaves behind a body of work and a community of inquiry that will forever shape how we think about leaders, organizations, theory-building, research, and practice.

As the father of organizational learning, Chris exemplified what he taught: the curiosity and courage it takes to sustain learning, even in the face of threat; the hope and humility it takes to create a better world; and the unbounded generativity and generosity it takes not just to create new ideas, but to forge collaborations across disciplines and to mentor a wide range of scholars and practitioners.

But it was Chris's unique ability to empathize with people's experiences and circumstances – while still holding them accountable for changing them – that affected me most. This was his ticket into the hearts and minds of thousands of people around the world – government and corporate



leaders, students, professors, and colleagues alike.

It certainly was for me. Thirty-five years ago, while looking at a catalogue for the Harvard Graduate School of Education, where Chris was teaching at the time, my father noticed Chris's name.

"Chris Argyris? Chris Argyris?" he asked excitedly. "He teaches there?"

"It looks that way," I said, unaware of the name and surprised by the reaction.

"Well, you *have* to take *his* course. He was one of only three consultants who came through IBM that I had the greatest respect for. He's absolutely brilliant."

That coming from my father was exceptionally high praise. As a member of IBM's Management Committee in the 1960s, he had the highest standards when it came to rigor, thought, and excellence.

Curious, I asked, "So who are the other two?"

"Jay Forrester and Herb Simon."

Over the next three decades, I came to fully appreciate why my Dad reacted the way he did, and in what fine company he had placed Chris.

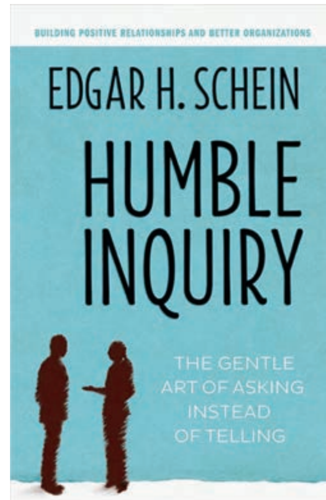
I like to think of Chris now in that kind of company, along with his most generative collaborator, Don Schön, with whom he wrote the seminal books *Theory in Practice* (1974) and *Organizational Learning* (1978). I can just see him – a broad smile lighting his face, eyes full of curiosity – asking the unexpected question, listening for a toehold to advance learning, and not stopping until something new comes of it.

Chris leaves behind his beloved wife of 63 years, Renee, and his talented and devoted children, Dianne and Phil, two apples who did not fall far from the tree.

— *Diana McLain Smith*

BOOK EXCERPT 13.2

Humble Inquiry



Excerpted from *Humble Inquiry: The Gentle Art of Asking Instead of Telling*
Edgar H. Schein
Berrett-Koehler, 2013

Communication is essential to healthy relationships, but too often when we interact with people, we end up *telling* them what we think they need to know. In the process, we miss the opportunity to build relationships based on curiosity and interest in the other person. In today's increasingly complex, interdependent, and culturally diverse world, this inability to practice what Professor Edgar Schein refers to as "Humble Inquiry" can interfere with our ability to generate bold new ideas, avoid disastrous mistakes, and develop agility and flexibility as a team. In this excerpt from *Humble Inquiry: The Gentle Art of Asking Instead of Telling,* Schein contrasts Humble Inquiry with other kinds of inquiry and shows the benefits of Humble Inquiry in an organizational setting.

Edgar H. Schein

When conversations go wrong, when our best advice is ignored, when we get upset with the advice that others give us, when our subordinates fail to tell us things that would improve matters or avoid pitfalls, when discussions turn into arguments that end in stalemates and hurt feelings – what went wrong and what could have been done to get better outcomes?

A vivid example came from one of my executive students in the MIT Sloan Program who was studying for his important finance exam in his basement study. He had explicitly instructed his six-year-old daughter not to interrupt him. He was deep into his work when a knock on the door announced the arrival of his daughter. He said sharply, "I thought I told you not to interrupt me." The little girl burst into tears and ran off. The next morning his wife berated him for upsetting the daughter. He defended himself vigorously until his wife interrupted and said, "I sent her down to you to say goodnight and ask you if you wanted a cup of coffee to help with your studying. Why did you yell at her instead of asking her why she was there?"

How can we do better? The answer is simple, but its implementation is not. We would have to do three things: (1) do less telling; (2) learn to do more asking in the particular form of Humble Inquiry; and (3) do a better job of listening and acknowledging. Talking and listening have received enormous attention via hundreds of books on communication. But the social art of asking a question has been strangely neglected.

Yet what we ask and the particular form in which we ask it – what I describe as Humble Inquiry – is ultimately the basis for building trusting relationships, which facilitates better communication and, thereby, ensures collaboration where it is needed to get the job done.

© Photodisc

Some tasks can be accomplished by each person doing his or her own thing. If that is the case, building relationships and improving communication may not matter. In the team sports of basketball, soccer, and hockey, teamwork is

If part of the goal of the conversation is to *improve* communication and build a relationship, then telling is more risky than asking.

desirable but not essential. But when *all the parties* have to do the right thing – when there is complete, simultaneous interdependence, as in a seesaw or a relay race – then good relationships and open communication become *essential.*

How Does *Asking* Build Relationships?

We all live in a culture of Tell and find it difficult to ask, especially to ask in a humble way. What is so wrong with telling? The short answer is a sociological one. *Telling* puts the other person down. It implies that the other person does not already know what I am telling and that the other person ought to know it. Often when I am told something that I did not ask about, I find that I already know that and wonder why the person assumes that I don't. When I am told things that I already know or have thought of, at the minimum I get impatient, and at the maximum I get offended. The fact that the other person says, "But I was only trying to help – you might not have thought of it," does not end up being helpful or reassuring.

On the other hand, *asking* temporarily empowers the other person in the conversation and temporarily makes me vulnerable. It implies that the other person knows something that I need to or want to know. It draws the other person into the situation and into the driver's seat; it enables the other person to help or hurt me and, thereby, opens the door to building a relationship. If I don't care about communicating or building a relationship with the other person, then telling is fine. But if part of the goal of the conversation is to *improve* communication and build a relationship, then telling is more risky than asking.

A conversation that leads to a relationship has to be sociologically equitable and balanced. If I want to build a relationship, I have to begin by investing something in it. Humble Inquiry is investing by spending some of my *attention* up front. My question is conveying to the other person, "I am prepared to listen to you and am making myself vulnerable to you." I will get a return on my investment if what the other person tells me is something that I did not know before and needed to know. I will then appreciate being told something new, and a relationship can begin to develop through successive cycles of being told something *in response to asking.*

Trust builds on my end because I have made myself vulnerable, and the other person has not taken advantage of me nor ignored me. Trust builds on the other person's end because I have shown an interest in and paid attention to what I have been told. A conversation that builds a trusting relationship is, therefore, an interactive process in which each party invests and gets something of value in return.

All of this occurs within the cultural boundaries of what is considered appropriate good manners and civility. The participants exchange information and attention in successive cycles guided by each of their perceptions of the cultural boundaries of what is appropriate to ask and tell about in the given situation.

Why does this not occur routinely? Don't we all know how to ask questions? Of course we think we know how to ask, but we fail to notice how often even our questions are just another form of telling – rhetorical or just testing whether what we think is right. We are biased toward telling instead of asking because we live in a pragmatic, problem-solving culture in which knowing things and telling others what we know is valued. We also live in a structured society in which building relationships is not as important as task accomplishment, in which it is appropriate and expected that the subordinate does more asking than telling, while the boss does more telling that asking. Having to ask is a sign of weakness or ignorance, so we avoid it as much as possible.

Yet there is growing evidence that many tasks get accomplished better and more safely if team members and especially bosses learn to build relationships through the art of Humble Inquiry. This form of asking shows interest in the other person, signals a willingness to listen, and, thereby, temporarily empowers the other person. It implies a temporary state of dependence on another and, therefore, implies a kind of *Here-and-now Humility*, which must be distinguished from two other forms of humility.

Three Kinds of Humility

Humility, in the most general sense, refers to granting someone else a higher *status* than one claims for oneself. To be *humiliated* means to be publicly deprived of one's claimed status, to lose face. It is unacceptable in all cultures to humiliate another person, but the rules for what constitutes humiliation vary among cultures due to differences in how status is granted. Therefore, to understand Humble Inquiry, we need to distinguish three kinds of humility based on three kinds of status:

1. Basic humility

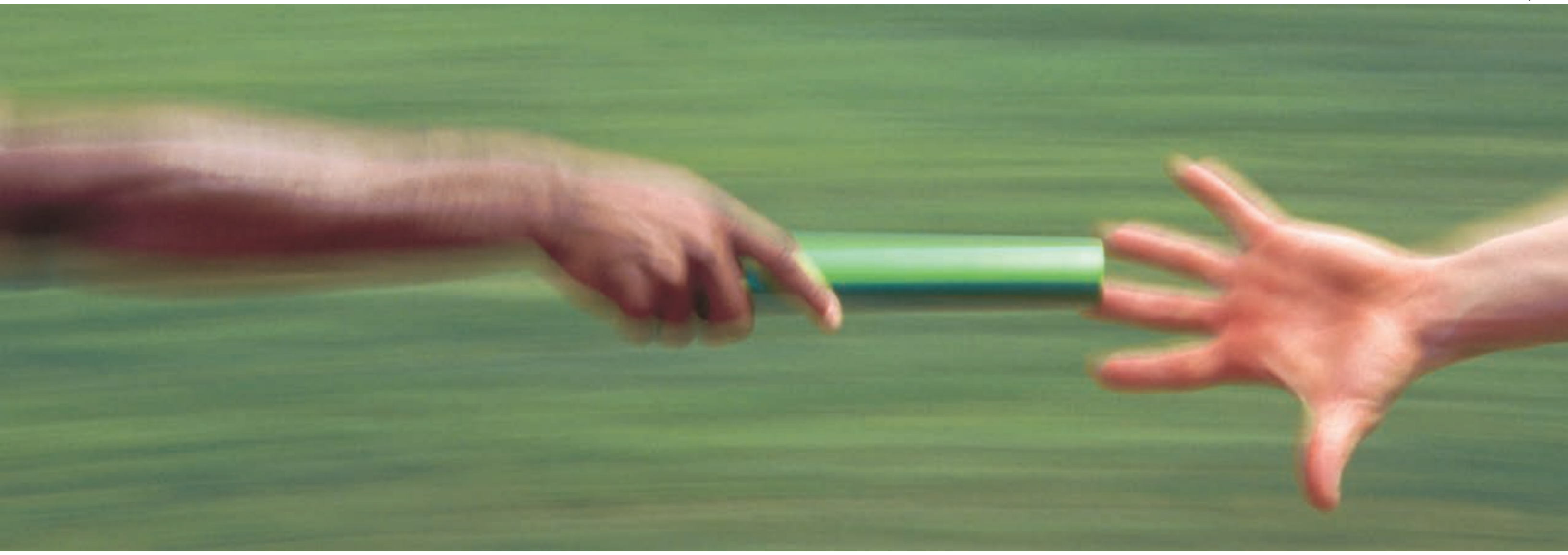
In traditional societies where status is ascribed by birth or social position, humility is not a choice but a condition. One can accept it or resent it, but one cannot arbitrarily change it. In most cultures the

> **We are biased toward telling instead of asking because we live in a pragmatic, problem-solving culture in which knowing things and telling others what we know is valued.**

"upper class" is granted an intrinsic respect based on the status one is born into. In Western democracies such as the United States, we are in conflict about how humble to be in front of someone who has been born into it rather than having achieved it. But all cultures dictate the minimum amount of respect required, or the expected politeness and acknowledgment that adults owe each other. We all acknowledge that as human beings we owe each other some basic respect and should act with some measure of civility.

2. Optional humility

In societies where status is *achieved* through one's accomplishments, we tend to feel humble in the presence of people who have clearly achieved more than we have, and we either admire or envy them. This is *optional* because we have the choice whether or not to put ourselves in the presence of others who would humble us with their achievements. We can avoid such feelings of humility by the company we choose and who we choose to compare ourselves to, our reference groups. When in the presence of someone whose achievements we respect, we generally know what the expected rules of deference and demeanor are, but these can vary by occupational culture. How to properly



show respect for the Nobel Prize–winning physicist or the Olympic Gold Medal–winner may require some coaching by occupational insiders.

3. Here-and-now Humility

There is a third kind of humility that is crucial for the understanding of Humble Inquiry. Here-and-now Humility is how I feel when I am dependent on you. My status is inferior to yours at this moment because you know something or can do something that I need in order to accomplish some task or goal that I have chosen. You have the power to help or hinder me in the achievement of goals that I have chosen and have committed to. I have to be humble because I am temporarily dependent on you. Here I also have a choice. I can either not commit to tasks that make me dependent on others, or I can deny the dependency, avoid feeling humble, fail to get what I need, and, thereby, fail to accomplish the task or unwittingly sabotage it. Unfortunately people often would rather fail than to admit their dependency on someone else.

This kind of humility is easy to see and feel when you are the subordinate, the student, or the patient/client because the situation you are in defines relative status. It is less visible in a team among peers, and it is often totally invisible to the boss who may assume that the formal power granted by the position itself will guarantee the performance of the subordinate. The boss may not perceive his or her dependency on the subordinate, either because of incorrect assumptions about the nature of the task that is being performed or because of incorrect assumptions about a subordinate's level of commitment to the particular job. The boss may assume that if something is in the subordinate's job description, it will be done, and not notice the many ways in which subordinates will withhold information or drift off what they have been trained for. But, if I am a boss on a seesaw or in a relay race in which everyone's performance matters to getting the job done at all, I am de facto dependent on the subordinate whether I recognize it or not. Getting the seesaw to move and passing the baton will work only if all the participants, regardless of formal status, recognize their dependence on each other. It is in that situation where Humble Inquiry by all the parties becomes most relevant, where the humility is not based on a priori status gaps or differences in prior achievement, but on recognized here-and-now interdependence.

When you are dependent on someone to get a task accomplished, it is essential that you build a relationship with that person that will lead to open task-related communication. Consider two possibilities. You are the boss in the relay race. *Telling* the person to put out her or his left hand so that you, who are right-handed, can easily pass the baton, may or may not lead to effective passing. However, if you decide to engage in Humble Inquiry prior to the race, you might ask your teammate's preference for which hand to use. You might then discover that the person has an injured left hand that does not work as well, and it would be better for you to pass with *your* left.

Shouldn't the subordinate have mentioned that before the race anyway? Not if in that culture for one person to speak up directly to a person of higher status is taboo. If the baton pass is an instrument a nurse passes to the surgeon, isn't it enough for the surgeon to *tell* the nurse what she needs and expect a correct response? Ordinarily yes, but what if the nurse is temporarily distracted by a beep from monitoring equipment or confused because of a possible language problem or thinks it is the wrong instrument? Should he not speak up and admit that he does not understand, or are the cultural forces in the situation such that he will guess and maybe make a costly mistake? If, in the culture of that operating room, the doctors are gods and one simply does not question or confront them, that nurse will not speak up, even if there is potential harm to the patient. My point is that in both of those examples, the boss and the doctor are de facto dependent on their subordinates and must, therefore, recognize their Here-and-now Humility. Failure to do so and failure to engage in Humble Inquiry to build a relationship *prior to the race or the operation itself* then leads to poor performance, potential harm, and feelings of frustration all around.

When such situations occur within a given culture where the rules of deference and demeanor are clear, there is a chance that the parties will understand each other. But when the team members in an interdependent task are more multicultural, both the language and the set of behavioral rules about how to deal with authority and trust may vary. To make this clear, let's look at a hypothetical multicultural example from medicine, keeping in mind that the same cultural forces would operate in a comparable example of a task force in a business or in a curriculum committee in a school.

Three Kinds of Humility: A Surgical Team Example

Consider these three types of humility in the context of a hypothetical British hospital operating room where a complex operation is being performed. The surgeon is Dr. Roderick Brown, the son of Lord Brown, who is a respected senior surgeon and works with the Royal Family; the anesthesiologist is Dr. Yoshi Tanaka, recently arrived from Japan on a residency fellowship; the surgical nurse is Amy Grant, an American working in the United Kingdom because her husband has a job there; and the surgical tech is Jack Swift, who is from a lower-class section of London and has gone as high as he is likely to go at the hospital.[1]

When you are dependent on someone to get a task accomplished, it is essential that you build a relationship with that person that will lead to open task-related communication.

All the members of the team would feel some *basic humility* with respect to the surgeon, Dr. Brown, except possibly Amy, who does not particularly respect the British class structure. Both Amy and Dr. Tanaka would feel *optional humility* with respect to Dr. Brown because they can see how talented Brown is with surgical tools. Jack is likely to feel such *optional humility* with respect to all the others in the room. What none of them may be sufficiently aware of is that they are *interdependent* and will, therefore, have to experience *Here-and-now Humility* from time to time with respect to each other.

Dr. Brown, the senior surgeon, may know implicitly, but would not necessarily acknowledge openly, that he is also dependent on the other three. A situation might well arise where he needs information or something to be done by the others in the room who have lower status than he. In the context of the task to be done, situations will arise where an occupationally higher-status person temporarily has lower status by virtue of being dependent and, therefore, should display Here-and-now humility to ensure a better performance and a safer outcome for the patient.

The higher-status person often denies or glosses over this kind of dependency by rationalizing that "I am, after all, working with professionals." That implies that they are all competent, are committed to the superordinate goals of healing the patient, and accept their roles and relative status in the room. It implies that they don't feel humiliated by having orders barked at them or having help demanded of them. Their "professionalism" also typically assumes that they will not humiliate the person with higher status by offering criticism or help unless asked. The burden then falls on the higher-status person to ask for help and *to create the climate that gives permission for the help to be given.*

Situational Trouble or Surprise

If things work smoothly, there may be no issues around status and open communication. But what if something goes wrong or something unexpected occurs? For example, if Dr. Tanaka is about to make a major mistake on the anesthetics, and the nurse, Amy, notices it, what should she do? Should she speak up? And what are the consequences of her speaking up about it? Being American, she might just blurt it out and risk that Dr. Tanaka would, in fact, be humiliated by being corrected by a lower-status nurse, a woman, and an American.

If the corrective comment was made by Dr. Brown, it might be embarrassing, but would have been accepted because the senior person can legitimately correct the junior person. Dr. Tanaka might actually appreciate it. Jack might have seen the potential error but would not be licensed to speak up at all. If Amy or the tech made the mistake, they might get yelled at and thrown off the team

because from the point of view of the senior doctor, they could easily be replaced by someone more competent.

What if Dr. Brown was about to make a mistake? Would anyone tell him? Dr. Tanaka has learned in his culture that one *never* corrects a superior. This might go so far as to cover up for a surgeon's mistake in order to protect the face of the superior and the profession. Amy would experience conflict and might or might not speak up depending on how psychologically safe she felt in the situation. That might be based on what kind of history of communication and relationship she had with Dr. Brown and other male surgeons in her past career. She might not know whether Dr. Brown would be humiliated by having a nurse offer a corrective comment or question. And humiliation must be avoided in most cultures, so it would be difficult for her to speak up unless she and Dr. Brown had built a relationship in which she felt safe to do so.

Jack would certainly not speak up but might later tell terrible stories about Dr. Brown to his tech colleagues if the operation went badly and the patient was harmed or died unnecessarily. If this incident later led to an official inquiry, Jack and Dr. Tanaka might be called as witnesses. They might be asked what they had observed and would either have to lie or, if they admitted that they saw the mistake, might be criticized for not having done anything at the time.

All this would result from Dr. Brown (the leader) being insensitive to the cultural rules around speaking up across status boundaries and not doing anything to change those rules within his surgical team. What is missing in this scenario, and it is often missing in all kinds of complex interdependent tasks, is a social mechanism that overrides the barriers to communication across status lines where humiliation is a cultural possibility. To build this social mechanism – a relationship that facilitates relevant, task-oriented, open communication across status boundaries – requires that leaders learn the art of Humble Inquiry. The most difficult part of this learning is for persons in the higher-status position to become Here-and-now Humble, to realize that in many situations *they are de facto dependent on subordinates and other lower-status team members.*

In achievement-oriented cultures where knowledge and the display of it are admired, being Here-and-now Humble implies loss of status.

This kind of humility is difficult to learn because in achievement-oriented cultures where knowledge and the display of it are admired, being Here-and-now Humble implies loss of status. Yet this is precisely the kind of humility that will increasingly be needed by leaders, managers, and professionals of all sorts because they will find themselves more and more in tasks where mutual interdependency is the basic condition. That might at times require leaders to ask their team, "Am I doing this correctly? Tell me if I am doing something wrong." This is even harder to learn when some of the members of the team come from traditional cultures in which arbitrary status lines must not be overridden and where task failure is preferable to humiliation and loss of face.

What would it take to get Dr. Tanaka, Amy, and even Jack to confront Dr. Brown when he is about to make a mistake? Efforts to define common goals, require procedures such as checklists, and standardize training are necessary but not sufficient because, in a new and ambiguous situation, team members will fall back on their own cultural rules and do unpredictable things. A leader of any multicultural team who really wanted to ensure open task-related communication would use Humble Inquiry to first build a relationship with the others that would make them feel psychologically safe and able to overcome the conflict they may experience between their duties and their

Questions for the Reader

- Think about various people whom you admire and respect. What is the type of humility that you feel in each case?
- Think about tasks that require collaboration. In what way are you dependent on another person? Try to reflect on and recognize the temporary Here-and-now Humility that is required of each of you as you help each other. Do you think you can talk about this kind of humility with each other when you next discuss your joint task? If not, why not?
- Now think about yourself in your daily life with friends and family. Reflect on the kinds of questions you tend to ask in ordinary conversation and in task situations. Are they different? Why?
- What is the one most important thing you have learned about how to ask questions?
- Now take a few minutes just to reflect quietly on what you have learned in general so far.

culturally and professionally defined sense of deference.

What Is Inquiry?

Having defined what *humility* means in this analysis of Humble Inquiry, we need next to ask what *inquiry* means. Inquiry is also a complex concept.

Most of us have not considered how questions should be asked in the context of daily life, ordinary conversations, and, most importantly, task performance.

Questioning is both a science and an art. Professional question askers such as pollsters have done decades of research on how to ask a question to get the kind of information they want. Effective therapists, counselors, and consultants have refined the art of questioning to a high degree.

But most of us have not considered how questions should be asked in the context of daily life, ordinary conversations, and, most importantly, task performance. When we add the issue of asking questions across cultural and status boundaries, things become very muddy indeed.

What we ask, how we ask it, where we ask it, and when we ask it all matter. But the essence of Humble Inquiry goes beyond just overt questioning. The kind of inquiry I am talking about derives from an *attitude of interest and curiosity.* It implies a desire to build a relationship that will lead to more open communication. It also implies that one makes oneself vulnerable and, thereby, arouses positive helping behavior in the other person. Such an attitude is reflected in a variety of behaviors other than just the specific questions we ask. Sometimes we display through body language and silence a curiosity and level of interest that gets the other person talking even when we have said nothing.

Feelings of Here-and-now Humility are, for the most part, the basis of curiosity and interest. If I feel I have something to learn from you or want to hear from you some of your experiences or feelings because I care for you, or need something from you to accomplish a task, this makes me temporarily dependent and vulnerable. It is precisely my temporary subordination that creates psychological safety for you and, therefore, increases the chances that you will tell me what I need to know and help me get the job done. If you exploit the situation and lie to me or take advantage of me by selling me something I don't need or giving me bad advice, I will learn to avoid you in the future or punish you if I am your boss. If you tell me what I need to know and help me, we have begun to build a positive relationship.

Inquiry, in this context, does imply that you ask questions. But not any old question. The dilemma in U.S. culture is that we don't really distinguish what I am defining as Humble Inquiry carefully enough from *leading* questions, *rhetorical* questions, *embarrassing* questions, or statements in

© iStock/Marcin Balcerzak

the form of questions – such as journalists seem to love – which are deliberately provocative and intended to put you down. If leaders, managers, and all kinds of professionals are to learn Humble Inquiry, they will have to learn to differentiate carefully among the possible questions to ask and make choices that build the relationship. How this is done will vary with the setting, the task, and the local circumstances. ■

If I feel I have something to learn from you or want to hear from you some of your experiences or feelings because I care for you, or need something from you to accomplish a task, this makes me temporarily dependent and vulnerable.

ENDNOTE

1 For this example, the gender of the characters reflects the current situation in medicine and is thus intended to reflect current reality rather than what might be desirable.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Edgar H. Schein is the *Society of Sloan Fellows Professor of Management Emeritus* and a Professor Emeritus at the MIT Sloan School of Management. He is the author of numerous books and articles in the fields of organizational culture, process consultation, research process, career dynamics, and organization learning and change. Professor Schein is the founding editor of *Reflections.*

FEATURE 13.2

On Communication

Process Consultation, Helping, and Humble Inquiry

EDGAR H. SCHEIN

Throughout his career, *Reflection*'s Founding Editor Edgar Schein has sought to find the most effective ways to intervene in organizational challenges. He learned early on that clients don't want advice – they want help in improving their interpersonal, group, and organizational processes. Schein came to understand the importance of asking the client what kind of help might be useful before rushing in with advice or action. This emphasis on asking instead of telling has implications for communication within an organization as well. As the world becomes more complex and tasks become more interdependent, coordination is crucial. Through "Humble Inquiry," team members build the trust necessary for engaging in mutual learning.

Edgar H. Schein

As one ages, one begins to see what my friend Jay Keyser so accurately called the "arc of one's work." My complex title is intended to represent that arc, which I now see more clearly than ever. The issue is: In any given situation, do we ask or tell? And if we are wise enough to ask before telling, in what way do we ask? Does asking serve a special function in the communication process? The answer to these questions is, I realize, the key to my last 60 years of work.

The Work of the Scholar/Practitioner

The ideas that constitute the answers to these questions were not invented by me. They were empirically forced onto me by the various kinds of good and bad experiences I had as a teacher, consultant, human relations trainer, coach, and helper. Observing experience closely, analyzing it, categorizing it, clarifying it, and eventually developing concepts to explain it has been my forte and preferred method of studying interpersonal, group, and organizational dynamics. Though I started as an experimental social psychologist, I realized early that the traditional scientific methods inherited from the physical sciences did not lend themselves to studying human behavior. At the same time, I was always intrigued by Kurt Lewin's assertion that you do not really understand an organization until you try to change it. Becoming a T-group trainer and designer of workshops showed me how applicable that observation is at the personal and group level. In turn, I comfortably took on a new identity, that of scholar/practitioner.

I came to call the scholarship side of this identity *clinical inquiry,* and I published a small book and several articles on that method of research.[1] The practitioner side of it involved continuing to do various kinds of consulting and to introduce experiential methods into the classroom. I found that becoming an interventionist was consistent with being on the faculty at a school of management, in the sense that if management is anything, it is the craft of "intervention."

My arc of learning was created by the discovery that there are many different ways to intervene and that one of the least effective is to *tell* – to give advice, to make recommendations, even to step in as surrogate leader or manager. My clients taught me early on that they did not want my advice, they wanted help, and that advice was generally not helpful for two important reasons: (1) they had already thought of it, and (2) they had rejected it because it would not fit into their culture, i.e., it could not be implemented. It was my good fortune that these clients, such as Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC), taught me what is really helpful, which is to aid the organization in doing more effectively what it is trying to do – to improve its interpersonal, group and organizational processes.[2]

Clinical Inquiry

The essence of the idea was not so complicated – help the client with what he or she or they are trying to do. But figuring out what they were trying to do required *inquiry* of various sorts, because clients often were not themselves aware of just what they were trying to do, or they focused the consultant on the wrong issues. Whether I liked it or not, my clinical inquiry had to deal with the cultures and subcultures of the client systems, something that I noticed the advocacy consultants consistently failing to do. This did not generally mean long hours of interrogation or therapeutic interviewing, but rather the right question based on genuine curiosity about what the client system was trying to do and especially asking about things that were puzzling. For me, that was the essence of how you clinically discover an organization's cultural assumptions. This method is, of course, one of the mainstays of ethnographic research.

It was important to distinguish the psychological contract that ethnographers have with their subjects from the one that process consultants have with their clients. Ethnographers come in with their own research agendas and need the cooperation of the members of the culture. They are, therefore, somewhat limited in what they can ask. If I was invited in to help an organization and it was costing the client some fees, this legitimated my asking all kinds of personal questions about what was going on. If ethnographers asked similar questions, they might be viewed as offensive. From that point of view, a clinical type of inquiry provides potentially deeper insight into the culture, which helps the client and provides data for the scholar/practitioner. I also observed that the two models converge in many situations. As ethnographers become helpful to their subjects, their subjects grant them greater access. Likewise, process consultants often discover that they can legitimately broaden their base of investigation beyond what the client initially wanted.

If management is anything, it is the craft of "intervention."

When I later wrote books about organizational and occupational culture, I drew heavily on my own observed experience rather than on what "the literature" had to say. To be fair to the literature, much of the research that I knew about could only become useful as I could connect it to events I experienced. For example, Douglas McGregor pretty convincingly articulated the power of Theory Y – the assumption that people want to work and can monitor themselves. I was able to observe Ken Olsen, the founder and CEO of DEC, give someone a job and tell them to do the budget, get it approved, and then not to come back unless something needed to be changed. This observation provided good raw data on the positive impact that such a management philosophy has on empowering employees and getting maximum creativity and commitment from them. I also observed the unanticipated consequences that can occur when this style is used for several successful decades. The employees become powerful, set in their ways, protective of their people and turf, and, in the end, detrimental to the economic health of the organization as they start to fight with each other and waste resources. Ken's style produced the successful DEC – and that same style caused DEC's failure in the end.[3]

Mutual Help

In my various consulting projects, I became quite aware of how much the management process is one of mutual help. A good manager creates conditions that enable the subordinate to succeed; a good team is in a constant state of mutual helping; a good subordinate helps his or her boss as the need arises. Watching these dynamics in the real world revealed that this kind of mutual helping has more to do with social and cultural forces than with personality characteristics. I became less interested in competency research and much more interested in the work of Erving Goffman.[4] Goffman showed how delicate relationships really are, and how difficult it is to be in the position of needing help. So I decided to do a sociological analysis of the helping process and, in that regard, also began to focus more on the culture we live in and have to adhere to.

We know a lot about team building among peers but relatively little about how to improve coordination across hierarchical boundaries.

This work resulted in the book *Helping: How to Offer, Give and Receive Help* (Berrett-Koehler, 2009), which pointed out the importance of asking the client what kind of help might be helpful before rushing in with advice, recommendations, or even action. My most vivid lesson came one day when I wanted to help a blind person cross the street. I grabbed his arm, only to be sternly rebuffed with the statement that he had to be the one to grab my arm. Who was I to treat him as a dependent, needy person? *Helping* opened up the whole issue of *asking* and drew attention to the delicate status dance that goes on between people all the time. We spend a lot of time analyzing other cultures and ignore the powerful forces that control our lives in the culture in which we are embedded. In particular, we often fail to notice that the patterns of deference and demeanor that govern relations within a hierarchy function coercively, to the point that, if we violate them, we are chided and subjected to coaching. Most of what I have observed as going on under the label of "coaching" is really training the client how to get along in the organizational culture that he or she belongs to and wants to get ahead in.

As the world becomes more complex and tasks become more interdependent, it becomes apparent that coordination is more crucial. We know a lot about team building among peers but relatively little about how to improve coordination across hierarchical boundaries. For example, how do surgeons doing complex operations build effective coordination with nurses and technicians when everyone understands that the surgeon is the god in the operating room.[5] The myth that it is enough for everyone to be "professional" does not enable a nurse who has been yelled at by surgeons to speak up in the operating room. It is significant that Jody Gittell's work on "relational coordination" is receiving a lot of attention, particularly in medicine. She proposes that good coordination requires (1) shared goals, (2) knowledge of each others' work, and (3) mutual respect. Her model draws attention to the problem of how the higher-status person can learn and communicate respect to the lower-status person.[6] I reached the conclusion that the key to solving this problem is for the higher-status person to learn different behavior, particularly learning to ask.

Humble Inquiry

To my amazement, books on communication spend a lot of time on listening and on communicating clearly, but contain hardly a word on asking. Yet if you don't ask good questions, there is nothing to listen to. I devoted a chapter in *Helping* to different forms of asking and decided that this chapter really required expansion into a book. I came to this conclusion based on the frequency of being told things gratuitously and my discovery that I did not really like being told things. Yet we live in a culture in which telling things is valued, while asking is a sign of weakness. I also discovered in my work on safety that many accidents result from a failure of upward communication. Not only is it inappropriate in our culture to tell the boss he or she has a problem, but bosses typically create a climate in which it is not safe or prudent for subordinates to speak up. Many messengers get shot, more messengers get ignored, and often the boss says, "Don't bring me a problem unless you have a solution."

My book *Humble Inquiry*: *The Gentle Art of Asking Instead of Telling* (Berrett/Koehler, 2013) takes these issues into the medical arena and focuses on whether, as operations become more complex, surgeons are actually becoming more dependent on their teams. This raises the question of what the boss, the senior person, the surgeon must do to create a psychologically safe climate so that a nurse or technician might feel respected and actually point out an error that is about to be made. Such behavior on the part of higher-status people goes against the cultural grain, yet may become more and more necessary. As we look ahead, it will not be good enough to just encourage people to "speak up." The people in power will have to change their own behavior first toward some approximation of humble inquiry and then engage in mutual learning with their team.[7]

The logic is simple: If the goal is the communication upward of task-relevant information, then a relationship of trust must exist between superior and subordinate. The way to build that relationship is through humble inquiry that reflects people's genuine interest in each other as total persons, not just as professional roles. Humble inquiry is, therefore, the basic building block for helping, coaching, and consulting. ■

ENDNOTE

1 See Schein, E.H. (1987). *The Clinical Perspective in Field Work*. *Sage;* Schein, E.H. (1993). "Legitimating Clinical Research in the Study of Organizational Culture." *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 71, 703-708; and Schein, E. H. (2008) "Clinical Inquiry/Research, Revised" in P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.) *Handbook of Action Research*, Second Edition. Sage.

2 See Schein, E. H. (1969). *Process Consultation.* Addison-Wesley; and Schein, E. H. (1999). *Process Consultation Revisited.* Addison-Wesley.

3 See Schein, E. H. (2003). *DEC is Dead; Long Live DEC: The Lasting Legacy of Digital Equipment Corporation*. Berrett-Koehler.

4 See Goffman, E. (1967). *Interaction Ritual.* Pantheon.

5 See Edmondson, A. C. (2012). *Teaming.* Jossey-Bass; Kellogg, K. C. (2011). *Challenging Operations*. University of Chicago Press.

6 See Gittell, J. H. (2009). *High Performance Health Care.* McGraw-Hill.

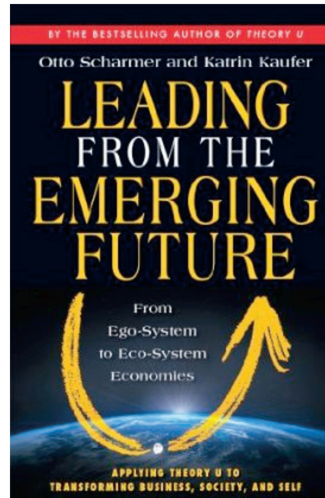
7 See Edmondson, A. C. (2012). *Teaming*. Jossey-Bass.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Edgar H. Schein is the *Society of Sloan Fellows Professor of Management Emeritus* and a Professor Emeritus at the MIT Sloan School of Management. He is the author of numerous books and articles in the fields of organizational culture, process consultation, research process, career dynamics, and organization learning and change. Professor Schein is the founding editor of *Reflections.*

BOOK EXCERPT 13.2

Leading the Relational Inversion: From Ego to Eco



Adapted from *Leading from the Emerging Future: From Ego-System to Eco-System Economies*
C. Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer
Berrett-Koehler, 2013

In their recent book *Leading from the Emerging Future: From Ego-System to Eco-System Economies,* Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer contend that meeting the challenges of this century requires updating our economic logic and operating system. We need to shift from an obsolete "ego-system" that focuses entirely on individual well-being to an "eco-system" that emphasizes the well-being of the whole. In this excerpt, the authors focus on a key element of this change: learning how to see ourselves through the eyes of others and of the whole. Three stories offer inspiration for creating the rich new forms of communication needed to build a more resilient, intentional, inclusive, and aware economy.


C. Otto Scharmer


Katrin Kaufer

One of the biggest challenges we face in moving toward an eco-system economy is to act collectively in ways that are intentional, effective, and co-creative. Over the past several years, I (Otto) have watched executives participate in a climate change simulation game at MIT, designed and led by MIT Professor John Sterman. He splits the group into small teams, with each team representing a key country group in the ongoing United Nations–sponsored negotiations over carbon emissions. The negotiators' agreements are fed into a simulation model using actual climate data. After the model calculates the likely climate change outcomes, the negotiators go back to the table for a second round. After three or four rounds, they are presented with what is inevitably the devastating and destabilizing impact of their collective decisions on the climate worldwide.[1] Then the group reflects on what they have learned.

Three Obstacles: Denial, Cynicism, and Depression

During their postnegotiation reflection session, I noted that the participants had three habitual reactions of avoidance that prevented the consequences of their actions from sinking in deeply: (1) denial, (2) cynicism, and (3) depression. The most common strategy for reality avoidance is denial. We keep ourselves so busy with "urgent" issues that we don't have time to focus on the one that may in fact be the most pressing. We are simply too busy rearranging the deck chairs on the *Titanic*. … The second response is cynicism. Once the outcomes of an agreement become obvious, cynicism is an easy way out. A cynical person creates distance between himself and the consequences of his actions by saying, "Hey, the world is going to hell anyway; it doesn't really matter what *I* do."

But even if these first two strategies of reality avoidance are dealt with, there still is a third one waiting: depression. Depression denies us the power to collectively shift reality to a different way of operating. Depression creates a disconnect between self and Self on the level of the will – just as cynicism creates a disconnect on the level of the heart and denial creates a disconnect on the level of the mind. And into that void slips doubt, anger, and fear. Fear inhibits us from letting go of what is familiar, even when we know it doesn't work and is holding us back.

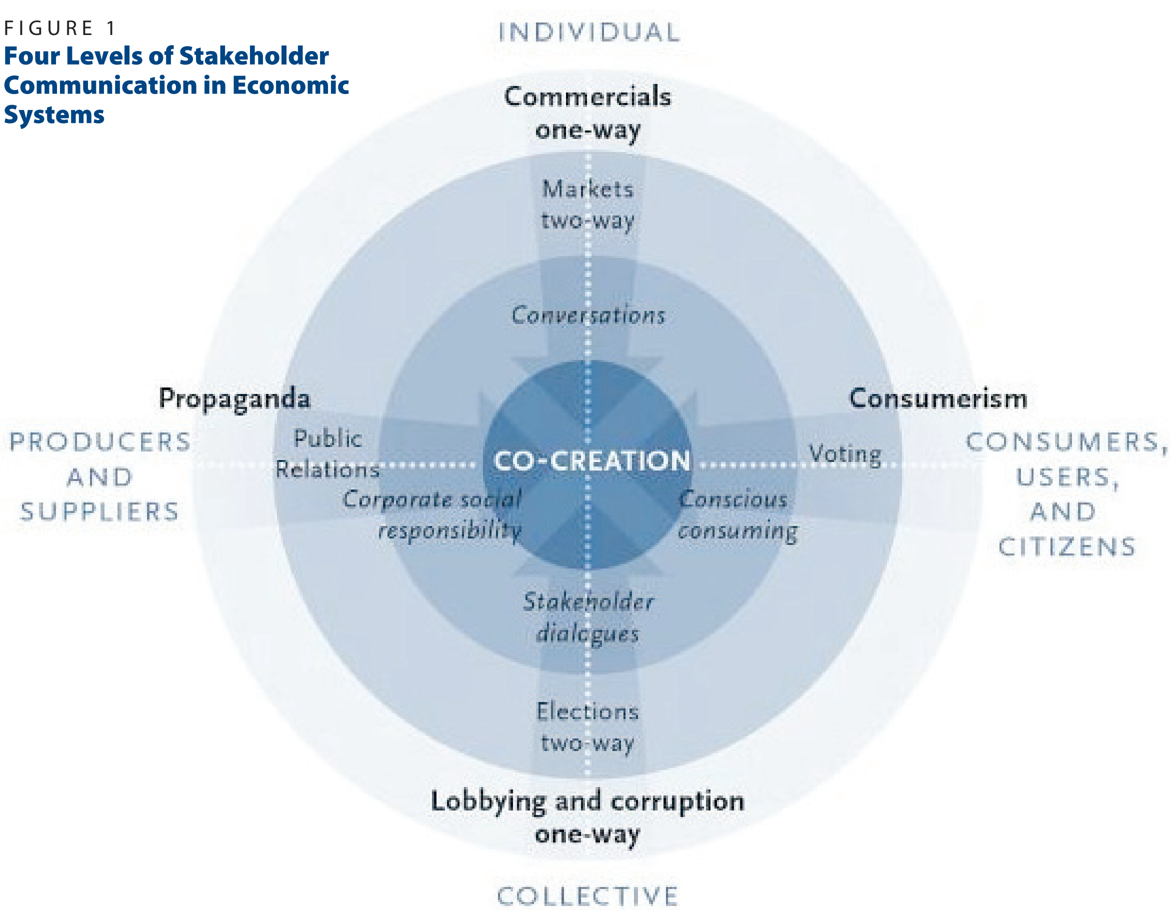
Conversations Create the World

Learning how to deal with these three types of reality avoidance requires self-reflection and a conversation that bends the beam of attention back onto ourselves. We call this Conversation 4.0 – a conversation that allows for embracing the collective shadow . . . and for unleashing our untapped reserves of creativity, as we will discuss later in this chapter.

The main problem today is that we try to solve complex problems like climate change with traditional types of conversation, which results in predictable outcomes. The collapse of the climate talks in Copenhagen in 2011 and of the MIT climate simulation game are just two of many, many examples.

All complex modern systems – health, education, energy, sustainability – deal with both individual and collective entities, the latter often through government. Accordingly, the figure "Four levels of stakeholder communication in economic systems," which shows how stakeholders communicate within our society's systems, differentiates between individual and collective entities on the one hand, and suppliers and consumers on the other hand. The four levels of conversation are represented by four rings.

FIGURE 1
Four Levels of Stakeholder Communication in Economic Systems



The most common types of conversation, represented by the outermost ring, are:

1. unilateral and linear;
2. low on inclusion and transparency; and
3. organized by an intention to serve the well-being of the few.

At the center are the rarest and most precious types of conversation, which offer a major acupuncture point for future change. They are:

1. multilateral and cyclical;
2. high on inclusion and transparency; and
3. organized by an intention to serve the well-being of all.

One-way communication focuses on "selling," on making the target buy something or vote in a particular way. But the target has no opportunity to talk back.

Level 1: Unilateral, One-Way Downloading, and Manipulating

Level 1 stakeholder communication is unilateral, one-way downloading with the intent to manipulate, rather than to serve the well-being of, the other side. Most of what we call corporate or professional communication strategy in business and election campaigns is organized this way. Market research segments citizen and consumer communities into specific target groups that are bombarded with customized messaging and communication strategies. The flood of commercials that hits consumers and citizens every day is mind-boggling. According to a survey in 1993, the average child in the United States sees 20,000 commercials per year. The average 65-year-old in the United States has seen two million commercials.

One-way communication focuses on "selling," on making the target buy something or vote in a particular way. But the target has no opportunity to talk back. Lobbyists and special-interest groups operate the same way. Their influence often is based on privileged access and excluding other relevant parties from the conversation.

Level 2: Bilateral, Two-Way Discussions, and Exchange of Viewpoints

Level 2 stakeholder communication is a bilateral, two-way discussion with the intent to provide and receive information, and includes a response or feedback mechanism. In markets, the buyer talks back with her money. In democratic elections, the voter talks back by casting her vote. Both are excellent examples of two-way communication.

Level 3: Multilateral Stakeholder Dialogue: Seeing Oneself Through the Eyes of Another

Level 3 stakeholder communication is a multilateral conversation characterized by reflection, learning, and dialogue.[2] Dialogue is a conversation in which you see yourself through the eyes of another – and in the context of the whole. The examples are manifold, from roundtables and "world cafés" to interactive social media. The conversations need a form, a process, and a holding space to operate well. Some companies, like Natura, Nike, and Unilever, have internalized level 3 communication to their benefit.

For example, Eosta, an international distributor of organic fresh fruit and vegetables in the Netherlands, and also one of the first companies to be climate-neutral and use compostable packaging, wants its customers to see the "invisible" processes behind its products. A three-digit code on each of its products leads the consumer through the Eosta website to the producer. For example, the code 565 on a mango leads to Mr. Zongo in Burkina Faso, who then responds to the consumer comments online on his wall. This mechanism is an excellent example of level 3 communication because it allows consumers to see themselves in the context of the whole value chain.

Examples of multilateral stakeholder communication also include town hall meetings in New England, where citizens discuss local issues, and UN efforts such as the Framework Conventions

The sustainability flower was developed in 2009 by an international group of prominent pioneers and innovators of the organic movement. They were looking to unite ecological and social values in a single elegant model. This protocol was developed as a fast, quantitative, and practical tool to evaluate sustainable achievements along nine separate ecological and social dimensions.

Images: © EOSTA

All Nature & More products are labeled with a stamp that shows the face of the grower and a simple three-digit code. By entering the code on the Nature & More website, you can "meet" the grower and learn all about his sustainable efforts. Code 183, for example, corresponds to grower Rob van Paassen.

on Climate Change. To work well, these stakeholder communications require enabling technologies and facilitation.

In the end, all of these approaches deliver the same result: They help stakeholders in a system to see themselves in the context of the other stakeholders and the larger whole. They bend the beam of attention in ways that help these distributed communities to *see themselves* as part of a bigger picture.

Level 4: Co-Creative Eco-System Innovation: Blurring the Boundary of Ego and Eco

Level 4 stakeholder communication is a multi-lateral, collectively creative eco-system conversation that helps diverse groups of players to co-sense and co-create the future by transforming awareness from ego to eco. Examples include transformative multistakeholder processes like the World Commission on Dams and the Sustainable Food Lab.[3] The outcomes of these processes deliver not only astonishing breakthrough results, but also a shift in mindset and consciousness from ego-system awareness to eco-system awareness – from a mindset that values one's own well-being

> **Dialogue is a conversation in which you see yourself through the eyes of another – and in the context of the whole.**

to a mindset that also values the well-being of one's partners and of the whole.

Leverage Points

Although there are some inspiring examples of level 4 innovations, it is quite clear where the main leverage points are today for shifting the system to a better way of operating:

1. We need to get rid of the toxic layer of level 1 communication (bribery, soft money, commercials, and other forms of propaganda and manipulation that keep intoxicating the communication channels of our society today).
2. And we need to develop new spheres of level 4 co-creative stakeholder relationships, in which partners in an eco-system can come together to co-sense, prototype, and co-create the future of their eco-system.

The question is how to do it. How can we build the deep capacities that will allow us to build and scale these level 4 arenas of co-creation? Here are three stories that offer some inspiration.

Girl Scouts – Arizona Cactus Pine Council (ACPC)

The CEO of the ACPC, Tamara Woodbury, sees the Girl Scouts as a part of the larger global movement that recognizes the importance of women leaders in the transformation of intractable societal issues. Since 2005, she and Presencing Institute facilitator Beth Jandernoa and her colleague Glennifer Gillespie have been experimenting with a process called Circle of Wholeness, designed to dive deeply into the qualitative practice of wholeness and well-being in the council and in the larger Arizona community. The circle, a group of eighteen, is composed of Girl Scout staff and volunteers, as well as business, nonprofit, and civic leaders, men and women, young and old (late teens to early eighties), from a range of social and ethnic backgrounds.

The quality of the conversation that followed this silence was alive and fresh with ideas that the group had previously never considered.

In October 2012, after a day spent immersing themselves in experience and research around well-being and wholeness, the group began a round of check-in, touching base with where people were in their own learning process. Beth and Glennifer felt a tension between the group's urge to take action and the need to slow down and listen internally to what was wanting to emerge. A breakthrough moment came when John, the former CEO of an international heavy construction equipment company, shifted the action-driven momentum. He spoke slowly of his difficulties in the early phase of becoming a philanthropist. John's quality of speech opened the group's listening and evoked a sense of curiosity and palpable spaciousness.

Moments later, ACPC executive Carol Ackerson began to speak. Carol is known for her capacity to conceptualize and articulate complex issues so that others can easily understand them. This time, instead of taking a rational approach, she paused and said: "I know I usually speak from my head, but this time, even though it's not comfortable, I feel it is important for me and for all of us to slow down and listen and speak from our hearts. I feel a new sensation in my body, and the meaning I make of it is, if we can be patient and keep from jumping into action, there's a new possibility present."

A deep silence descended on the group. As people sat quietly together, someone said, "This is amazing. What is going on?" Glennifer answered calmly: "At the beginning of a group's gathering, silence is often awkward. As we drop into a deeper space together, we can have that rare experience as a collective that 'silence is golden.' Let's keep sitting with this and let it do its work." Beth describes her experience, in those moments, as one in which "both I and the collective were being *rearranged* internally – somehow transformed." Later Carol said, "I felt as though the presence of Juliette Gordon Low, the founder of the Girl Scouts, was in the room."

The quality of the conversation that followed this silence was alive and fresh with ideas that the group had previously never considered. They began to explore how they might define the ACPC's "signature" conversation (the atmosphere and process) and "signature" narrative (the content of its unique principles and practices). During that meeting they identified "creating conversations that generate the experience of love" as one of the unique future competencies of ACPC.

Shifting the Conversation on Climate Change

Martin Kalungu-Banda, co-founder of Presencing Institute Africa, shares the following story:

After the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference in December 2009, there seemed to be a feeling and perception that the world had let itself down *by failing to reach the kind of international agreement and commitment that would significantly and urgently begin to tackle issues of climate change. For many people and organizations, Copenhagen also exposed a disconnect between climate change discourse and development thinking and practice.*

In mid-2010, the Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN) began to think about how to strengthen the nexus between climate change and development. A consortium of organizations was convened to create an event that could bring new life into the climate-development nexus. This thinking culminated in the CDKN Action Lab Event, which took place in Oxford in April 2011.

Preparation for the event was led by a cross-sector group of process designers and facilitators. The intention was to create an event wherein 200 participants from over 70 countries, covering public, private, and civil society sectors, could think and interact together in ways that could generate actionable ideas at the nexus of climate change and development. Participants' experience and expertise were gathered using online tools. Guest speakers were identified to illuminate key aspects of the challenge. Weekly meetings were held between facilitators online over a period of four months to design and test the process for hosting and conducting the event.

The hosting environment, Oxford University, was carefully chosen for its capacity to provide the space and atmosphere required for breakthrough thinking. The best practices in human interaction and systems thinking were tapped into and brought into the design. The entire process was a mix of plenary conversations, small-group discussions, and individual moments of reflection. To maximize the creativity of the participants, various tools and techniques in creative processes, such as sculpting, drawing, painting, systems games, and journaling, among others, were used.

© Leila Mead/IISD

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Chairman Rejenra Pahauri speaks to negotiators at the 15th Conference of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2009 in Copenhagen.

The conference began with three days of "sensing the field," seeking to understand and share as much as they could about the brutal facts of climate change. Next, participants went for an hour of deep reflection in the Oxford Botanic Gardens. The two questions that guided the reflection were "If I suspended all that is not essential, who would be my best future Self?" and "What is life asking me/us to do to create a different future for the world?" At the end of the reflection period, the two hundred participants returned to the plenary room. The group of two hundred somehow felt like a small group that had been seeking solutions to a common challenge together for a long time.

"What is life asking me/us to do to create a different future for the world?"

With unusual ease, they listened to each other's insights arising from the hour of silence. Much of the sharing sounded like people singing from the same page of a hymnal. We had become one in seeing what was at stake, and, even if we did not say so to one another, we seemed to have glimpsed a common future through the one-hour reflection period. The experience brought a new feeling of hope after the disappointments of Copenhagen. One participant from Ghana, Winfred, said, "Copenhagen had dampened my spirit. Now I know I do not need to be a politician to make a difference. It is our turn to provide leadership to the politicians."

Working in small groups created on the basis of interest and work/organizational focus, participants collaborated to come up with twenty-six prototypes as a way of creating the landing strips for the common future we envisioned together. Equally profound were the different collaborative relationships and networks that emerged during the four-day event.[4]

What is so interesting about Martin's story is that the voices of denial, cynicism, and depression seem to have been somewhat transformed. These networks have gone on to implement some initiatives that are proving to be cutting-edge in responding to issues of climate change, as may be seen on the CDKN website, *http://cdkn.org*.

One promising development that emerged from the Oxford meeting was a similar engagement in 2012 with top national leaders in Ghana, including the vice-president, cabinet ministers, members of parliament, and many others. These leaders were invited to reflect on what climate change meant to them personally. They watched a theater performance put on by local students that demonstrated the impacts of climate change, along with a documentary that showed Ghanaian citizens asking their leaders to take action. The secretary to the cabinet reflected, "All along, we have looked at climate change as an issue far from our day-to-day work. We must use the instruments of government to create a different future for our children. How could we have let this go on for so long?" To date, over 400 additional government officials were invited to participate in a similar process, and have committed to change in their regions.[5]

ELIAS: Emerging Leaders Innovate across Sectors

A third story brings us to Cambridge, Massachusetts. Around 2004 we started to get frustrated. Reflecting on the bigger picture, we realized that in spite of our modest progress on this project or that one, we were not having any real impact on the three big divides. We also realized that most of our work had been focused on what went on inside individual organizations, while the biggest societal problems tended to reside in the space between institutions and individuals, among sectors, systems, and their citizens.

One day, during a conversation about this with our friends Peter Senge and Dayna Cunningham, we finally decided to do something about it. Otto would go out and talk to some of the key organizations that we had been working with over the years. Starting in 2005, Otto met with some key stakeholders in these organizations and presented the issue as follows in order to recruit them as founding partners into our idea for ELIAS:

© Stephen Bures/iStockphoto

Okay, we don't know what the future will bring, but we all pretty much know one thing: We are entering an age in which the leaders of the future will face a series of disruptions, breakdowns, and turbulence that will be unparalleled by anything that has happened in the past. So what matters now is how we prepare the people who will end up in key leadership positions over the next decade or two, how well they are networked across systems and sectors, how well they listen, how creative they are in turning problems into opportunities. And given that no single organization can build these critical capacities alone, are you willing to experiment? Are you willing to ask some of your best high-potential leaders for four or five weeks' time, over twelve months, to join a global group of young leaders from government, business, and the nonprofit sector in exploring the edges of both their systems and their selves?

Very much to our surprise, with only one exception, all of them said yes.

In March 2006, 27 high-potential young leaders from ELIAS partner organizations, including Oxfam, WWF, Unilever, BASF, Nissan, UNICEF, InWEnt (Brazil), and the Ministry of Finance in Indonesia, began an innovation and learning journey that followed the U process of co-sensing, co-inspiring, and co-creating. While continuing in their day jobs, they joined us in developing and learning how to use a new set of innovation tools, including deep sensing journeys, stakeholder dialogues, strategy retreats, design studios, and rapid-cycle prototyping of their ideas in order to explore the future by doing.

By the end of the journey, we saw the following results:

1. profound personal change
2. deep relational change within and beyond the group
3. prototypes that showed a variety of new approaches. Some of them were really inspiring.

Others simply seemed, at the time, like valuable learning experiences for everyone.

But what no one expected is that this mini-eco-system of small seedlings, or mini-prototypes, would continue to grow over the following years into a global ecology of innovation that is nothing short of amazing. Without anyone making much noise around this, these initiatives have organically replicated themselves multiple times and now involve dozens of institutions and thousands of people who continue to co-initiate new platforms of collaboration.

What's so interesting about the ELIAS network is that it continues to generate an ongoing flow of ideas and initiatives.

Here are some examples.

ELIAS Prototypes: A Global Innovation Ecology

- Participants from South Africa, the "Sunbelt team," wanted to explore methods for bringing solar- and wind-generated power to marginalized communities using a decentralized, democratic model of energy generation to reduce CO2 emissions and for fostering economic growth and well-being in rural communities. Today the project has changed the strategic priorities of a global NGO and resulted in the formation of a mission-based company called Just Energy that operates in South Africa and helps local communities to participate in the rapidly growing market for renewable energy.[6]
- In Indonesia, an ELIAS fellow from the Indonesian Ministry of Trade applied the U process to establishing new government policies for sustainable sugar production. His idea was to involve all key stakeholders in the policymaking process. The results were stunning: For the first time ever, the ministry's policy decisions did not result in violent protests or riots by farmers or others in the value chain. Now the same approach is being applied across ministries to other commodities and to standards for sustainable production.
- Also in Indonesia, a trisector U-based leadership program was launched on the model of ELIAS (now called IDEAS), involving 30 leaders from all sectors. They are working on several prototype initiatives, one of them being the Bojonegoro case. IDEAS Indonesia now has about one hundred graduates and started its fourth program in spring 2013.
- An ELIAS fellow from GIZ (the German Ministry of Development Cooperation) developed and launched a lab for combating climate change with emerging leaders in South Africa and Indonesia.
- Using ELIAS and IDEAS as a model, in 2012 the first China-based IDEAS program was launched, involving senior government officials and executives from Chinese SOEs (state-owned enterprises). The second IDEAS China program, working with some of the biggest SOEs on this planet, will be launched in 2013.
- At MIT, two ELIAS fellows teamed up to create a collaborative research venture that resulted in the founding of the MIT CoLab (Community Innovators Lab). The CoLab has since emerged as a hotspot for innovation around field-based action learning for students at the MIT Department for Urban Studies and Planning, putting Theory U and related methodologies into practice.

We have also become aware of initiatives that were inspired by ELIAS, among them the Maternal Health Initiative in Namibia and the Coral Triangle Initiative (CTI), which has produced a six-country treaty linking sustainable fishing practices with revenue-sharing and economic opportunities.[7] What's so interesting about the ELIAS network is that it continues to generate an ongoing flow of ideas and initiatives.[8]

So what did we learn from the ELIAS project about building presencing platforms for co-creative entrepreneurial initiatives?

Five Learning Experiences

ELIAS has challenged many of our deeply held assumptions. First, we now realize that although it might well have been our most powerful and influential initiative to date, ELIAS was not born out of a client-driven relationship. No one asked us to do it. It was born out of our deep frustration and aspiration.

Second, we learned that the framing around "problem solving" that surrounds most multistakeholder work may be limiting. The deep principle should be "Energy follows attention." A mindset that is only about fixing a problem or closing a gap puts limits on creativity. In our case, it worked well to simply bring together young high-potential change-makers from diverse systems, sectors, and cultures, throw them into a broad set of unfiltered, raw experiences at the edges of their systems, equip them with good contemplation and reflection practices, and then let them make sense of what they saw and experienced together. Out of that, interesting new ideas were sure to emerge. With a supporting infrastructure, the result of such a process will be powerful – if the leaders have the opportunity to prototype what they believe in.

Third, we learned that individual skills and tools are usually overrated. While methods and tools have been a very important part of the ELIAS journey and the projects would not have been successful without them, it is also clear that the deep journey we were on made all the difference. Disconnected individuals became part of a co-creative network of change-makers. That journey seems to have switched on a *field of inspired connections* that helps people to operate from a different place, a place that is more relaxed, calm, inspired, and focused. Igniting this flame of inspired connections is the heart and essence of all education and leadership today. Everything else is secondary. In the case of ELIAS, the flame was sustained long after the program ended, and we also see it sparking outward and being reignited in many other areas. Overall it feels as if we touched a source of collectively creative power – and of karmic connections – that even today we do not fully understand.

"Energy follows attention." A mindset that is only about fixing a problem or closing a gap puts limits on creativity.

Fourth, we learned that cross-sector platforms of innovation, leadership, and learning require a high-quality holding space. Part of that holding space is process, part of it is people, part of it is place, and part of it is purpose. But the most important ingredient is always the same: a few fully committed people who would give everything to make it work. Sometimes it's just one or two people. But if you have four of five, you may be able to make mountains move.

Fifth, we learned to attend to the crack – an opening to a future possibility that everyone can support. All cross-sector platforms suffer the same problem: The people you need are already over-committed in their existing institutions, which explains why in most multistakeholder platforms there is a lot of talk and little action. So the only chance of building a successful platform for cross-sector, cross-institutional innovation is to pick a topic that all of the participating individuals and their institutions value very highly.

Growing the Co-Creative Economy

ELIAS, the CDKN Action Lab Event, and the Girl Scouts – ACPC Leadership Circle have other lessons to teach as well.

First: Redraw the boundaries between cooperation and competition. Capitalism 2.0 is constructed on the logic of competition. The 3.0 economy adds government action on top of that (an example is the welfare state). Today we face challenges that are characterized by simultaneous market and government failure. These problems invite us to redraw the boundaries of competition and


© martinplkang/iStockphoto

cooperation by introducing arenas of premarket cooperation among all sectors.

Second: The most efficient way to redraw the boundaries between competition and cooperation is to build arenas or platforms of co-creation within existing eco-systems in business and society. Eco-systems are societal systems plus their enabling social, ecological, and cultural context. Examples include education systems, health systems, food systems, energy systems, and specific business systems. The stakeholders in an eco-system share some scarce resources (the commons) that all partners have a material interest in preserving and sustaining instead of overusing.

The most effective mechanism for changing our mindset from ego-system to eco-system awareness is to take people on sensing journeys to the edges of the system, where they can see it from other perspectives.

Third: The platforms and arenas of eco-system innovation need new social technologies that help stakeholders shift their collaboration from ego-system to eco-system logic and awareness. One of these social technologies is Theory U. From a Theory U point of view, it would be key to build the following five types of innovation infrastructures:

1. Infrastructures to co-initiate.
Successful multistakeholder projects are built on the same currency: the unconditional commitment from one or a few local leaders who are credible in their own communities. If the eco-system is highly fragmented, the core group that co-initiates the project must reflect the diversity of the overall eco-system.

2. Infrastructures for co-sensing.
The simplest and most effective mechanism for changing our mindset from ego-system to eco-system awareness is to take people on sensing journeys to the edges of the system, where they can see it from other perspectives, particularly that of the most marginalized members. Shadowing practices and stakeholder interviews are other activities that help participants learn to see the system from the viewpoints of multiple stakeholders and from the perspective of the whole.[9] Effective co-sensing infrastructures are the ones we lack most.

3. Infrastructures to co-inspire.
Another increasingly powerful leverage point in the area of distributed leadership concerns the use of mindfulness and presencing practices that help decision-makers to connect to their deep sources of knowing, both individually and collectively.

4. Infrastructures for prototyping, or exploring the future by doing.
Prototyping is a process. You stop worrying about what you don't know and start acting on what you do know. A successful prototyping process requires a dedicated core group that is aligned around the same intention; a network of supportive stakeholders and users; a concrete "0.8 prototype" (one that is incomplete but elicits feedback

from partners throughout the system); a firm resolve by the core group to push forward while integrating feedback from stakeholders; and review sessions that look at all the prototypes, conclude what has been learned, take out what isn't working, and strengthen what is working.

5. Infrastructures for co-evolving.
Micro- and frontline prototype initiatives are seeds that leaders can plant and support in selected parts of the system. Growing, sustaining, scaling, and evolving these initiatives in the context of the larger system require cross-functional, cross-level, and cross-institutional leadership learning and hands-on innovation initiatives. In order to provide this support, the team at the top also requires a helping infrastructure to progress on their own leadership journey from ego- to eco-system awareness. ■

ENDNOTES

1 See *http://climateinteractive.org.*

2 Isaacs, W. (1999). *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together.* Doubleday.

3 See *http://wwf.panda.org/what_we_do/footprint/water/dams_initia tive/dams/wcd.*

4 Personal conversations with authors.

5 Quoted in ibid.

6 See *http://just-energy.org*.

7 See *www.worldwildlife.org/what/wherewework/coraltriangle*.

8 Recently, for example, we received three new inquiries about developing country-level tri-sector innovation and leadership platforms using the IDEAS/ ELIAS model in Brazil, Zambia, and the Philippines.

9 Methods and tools for collective sensing sessions include voices from the field, personal storytelling, systems thinking, scenario thinking, modeling, constellation practices, world café, and social presencing theater. See, for example, *www.theworldcafe.com* and *www.presencing.com/embodiment*.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

C. Otto Scharmer, PhD, author of *Theory U* and co-author of *Presence*, is a senior lecturer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the founding chair of the Presencing Institute. He also is faculty chair of MIT's IDEAS program.

Katrin Kaufer, PhD, is co-founder and research director at the Presencing Institute and research fellow at the Community Innovators Lab (CoLab) at MIT's Department of Urban Studies and Planning. Her research focuses on leadership, social transformation, and socially responsible banking.

FEATURE 13.2

Disaster as a Springboard for Thriving, Resilient Communities

BOB STILGER

What happens when catastrophe fundamentally shifts the world we know? In March 11, 2011, the triple disasters of earthquake, tsunami, and radiation leak devastated northeastern Japan. In the aftermath of the tragedy, people from throughout the country began to gather not just to share their grief but to consider how they might create a new future together. Numerous initiatives have been launched to experiment with the structures, processes, and practices that create conditions for creativity and collective action. As we enter a time when the world as a whole may experience even more collapsing systems and disasters, the people of Japan – and especially of the Tohoku region – are showing us the way to build healthy and resilient communities.


Bob Stilger

It was pitch black outside in the early-morning hours of March 11, 2011, when the phone rang. Startled, I answered and heard my daughter Annie's frantic voice asking, "Are they okay? Have you heard from *obaachan* and *ojiichan?* Are they okay?" I asked her what she was talking about, and she told me that Japan had been struck by an earthquake and tsunami. The next day, the disaster triology would be complete when the nuclear power plants started to explode. News was sketchy. Annie was worried about our adopted Japanese family, who lives 500 miles away from the Tohoku region where the disasters struck.

My Japan story begins in 1970. When the US invaded Cambodia and the National Guard murdered students demonstrating against the Vietnam War at Kent State University. That year, as a young peace activist, I just wanted to be away from the US. A door opened to Japan. Shortly after arriving, I began to develop a deep relationship with the "grandfather of my heart," Nakatsugawa Naokazu. We met when he was 71 and I was 21, and he helped me discover my own spirit and opened the door into the rest of my life. I also met my spouse, Susan Virnig, that year in Japan. Our daughter, too, has grown up embraced by the Nakatsugawa family and Japanese culture.

I arrived in Japan about three weeks after my daughter's frantic phone call. For the last two and a half years, I have spent about half my time in Japan. I stay there for five or six weeks, return to the US for five or six weeks, and then travel once again to Japan. It's been a rich, challenging, exhilarating, and grief-filled time.

Shortly after arriving in Japan in early April of 2011, I facilitated a workshop of business leaders in downtown Tokyo. All of Japan was in a state of shock in those early days. People arrived quietly, inwardly focused, unsure that they would be able to speak with others. The air was thick, and people's hearts were heavy. Three hours later, the air in the room was filled with excitement. The change from the beginning was so extreme that I went to a quiet corner and tried to sense what was happening. I heard these words in my mind: *We have been released from a future we did not want*. Disasters had cracked open the old normal. A new normal was waiting to be born.

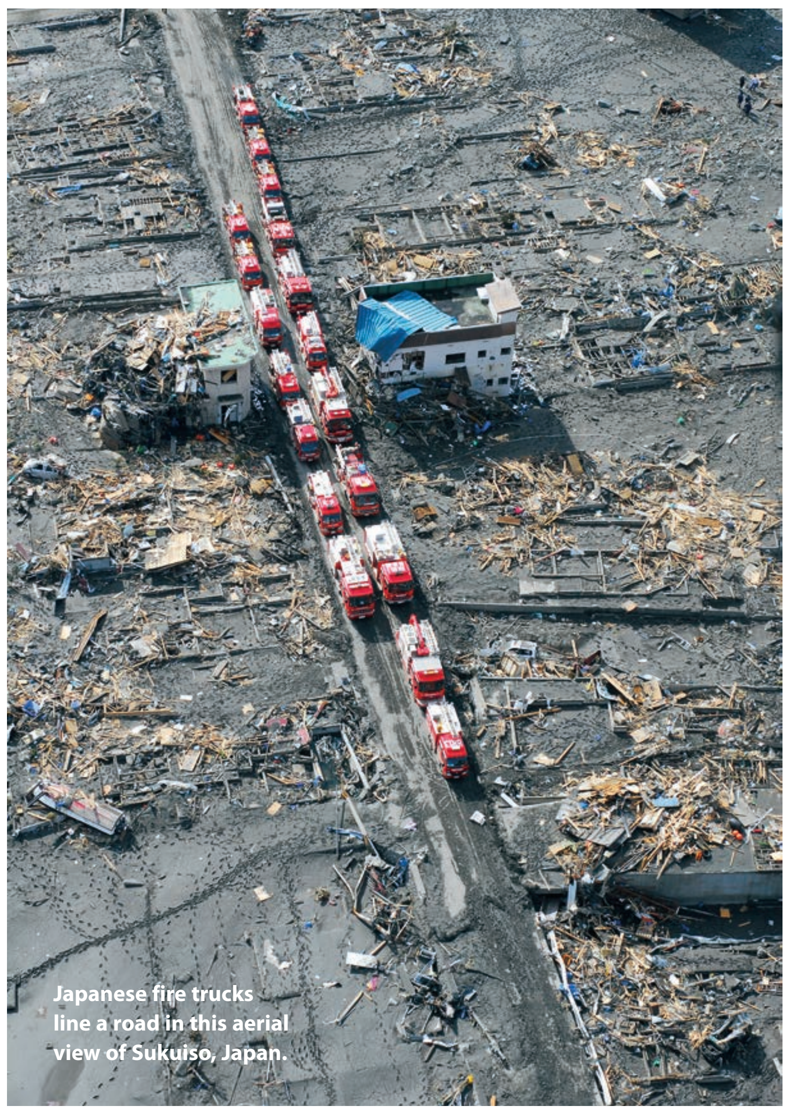
Very Different Disasters: Kobe (1995) and Tohoku (2011)

On March 11, 2011, the earthquake hit first, with the epicenter 70 kilometers off of Japan's north-eastern coast. Buildings as far away as Tokyo swayed. Others collapsed. In some places, the land literally dropped away, creating huge holes more than a meter deep. Then the two tsunamis hit. The larger one had waves 20 meters high that moved at almost 100 kilometers/hour. In the aftermath of earthquake and tsunami, the nuclear reactors at Fukushima exploded and began to release significant radiation. In total, nearly 20,000 people died. Another half million were left without homes or jobs or both. Many hundreds of fishing boats were destroyed, fish processing plants swept away, and forests and fields made unusable because of salt water, radiation exposure, or both. The world was forever changed.

People comment on the difference between the mood after the 1995 Great Hanshin earthquake in Kobe and the 2011 disasters in Tohoku. Yes, of course, the scope was different, but there was something else as well. In the mid-1990s, most people in Japan felt that the country was on the right course: build a strong economy, create access to economic prosperity, achieve upward mobility. The job after the Great Hanshin earthquake was to get back to the old normal: Japan was on the right track.

By the end of the first decade of this new century, the mood was different. The political party that ruled Japan since World War II was tossed out of power. More and more people complained about their lives. The older generation had retired and gone hiking in the mountains. The younger generation, having coming of age after Japan's economic bubble broke, was not stepping forward to hand their lives over to the economic machine. People in the middle – in their 40s and 50s – were left with little support from those older or younger. The 3/11 disasters created a psychic shift of huge proportions. Something else was possible. But what might it be?

I heard these words in my mind: *We have been released from a future we did not want.* Disasters had cracked open the old normal. A new normal was waiting to be born.



Japanese fire trucks line a road in this aerial view of Sukuiso, Japan.

© Stocktrek Images

Seasons of Grief

For most of 2011, my work was still outside of the Tohoku region. Others were doing the emergency work; my focus was thinking with individuals and small groups about how to support people in creating a new Tohoku. I traveled to many parts of the country to host community dialogues in which people talked about their hopes and fears. Among other things, my partners in Japan and I convened a series of five Community Youth Leader Dialogues. These events brought together young people from across Japan to talk about their lives and the future they wanted. Many dialogues were about how to support people in Tohoku. There was a shared sense that the government could re-create the past, but only people could create a new future together.

There was a shared sense that the government could re-create the past, but only people could create a new future together.

Because of my travel back and forth between the US and Japan, I was able to experience the changing seasons of disaster:

- **In April and May of 2011,** the sense of grief was almost overwhelming. Whenever people came together, there were tears. I remember an older television executive looking at me with moist eyes saying, "I thought Japan had ended." Everywhere there was confusion, grief, uncertainty.
- **By autumn,** a sense of determination was emerging. Miraculously, temporary housing had been constructed for everyone who had lost their homes. People were lifting their heads and beginning to find the next step. Grief was still present everywhere, but things were starting to move.
- **In the cold of winter,** people began to stand up for what they wanted. In January 2012, we invited people to a gathering in Tokyo to launch the Future Center approach as a vehicle for forming new collaborative partnerships. Having expected 30 or so people to come, we were amazed when more than 100 filled the room. Young and old. Men and women. Activists and businesspeople. Academics and priests. A new energy was present.
- **By the spring of 2012,** there was a sense of urgency, an energy of *get on with it,* although people were still unclear about what *it* was. People wanted to talk with each other. They wanted action. They wanted to work with the energy they felt.
- **By the fall,** there was a sense that the time is *now*. We need to move. I remember a gathering of about 300 called Fukushima Kaigi, where people from all walks of life came together to talk about everything: protecting themselves from radiation hazards, making safe play spaces for children, supporting young women in Fukushima, creating new industry, dealing with nuclear waste, finding opportunities for youth. People with many different points of view gathered, but they didn't waste their time arguing about their differences. They simply supported each other in finding their next step forward.
- **By the winter of 2013,** there was a new stuckness. People were exhausted. Some who had been giving everything they had for two years were hospitalized with sickness and stress. The emergency was over, but now the real work of building a future had to begin. The clarity of purpose of responding to the disaster was gone, and the funds that supported the response were spent. But 20 or 30 years of work remained to build a new Tohoku.

What a confusing time! Through it all, my colleagues and I are learning many lessons as we work with and host dialogue among many people in many communities inside the disaster area and all over Japan.

It Is About Community – Always

After the earthquake and tsunamis, the distribution of temporary housing was complicated. The government's highest priorities were speed and

Photo courtesy of Bob Stilger

fairness. A lottery system was used to ensure fairness. Unfortunately, that process meant that people already isolated from their former neighbors in emergency housing were separated further, as they were assigned randomly to different temporary housing groups. I encountered some notable exceptions:

Building Community in Temporary Housing

The entire village of Oosawa in Minami-sanriku was destroyed. When the temporary housing allocations came, a man named Chiba-san noticed that he and several other residents from the village were assigned to the same temporary housing site. An idea formed. They went to the local officials and asked, "Can we exchange certificates with others?" A miracle happened: The local officials agreed, and the work began. Chiba-san and his friends were able to gather almost all of the villagers together in the same temporary housing site. They had community. Even if some didn't particularly like each other before, they had community.

The emergency was over, but now the real work of building a future had to begin.

One of their first projects was to build awnings above the doors of their temporary housing units. These awnings provided a place for people to sit, to take off their shoes out of the rain, to see each other. Then the villagers organized nighttime patrols for their own safety. Next, they started gardens so they could grow part of their own food. They were still alive, so they organized a fall festival to celebrate life. By the time winter came, they thanked the nonprofit organization that had been helping them and invited it to go help someone else. They could take care of themselves.

Rebuilding in Jusanhama

In the small fishing village of Jusanhama near

Ogatsu, 10 fishermen had been able to take their boats out to sea between the time of the earthquake and the time the tsunamis came. Their fathers and grandfathers had told them, "When the big one comes, take your boat and go as fast as you can. Get to a depth of 60 meters or you will die." They traveled together, keeping sight of each other. They got out far enough and felt the tsunami pass beneath their boats. When they left, they did not know if they would live or if their families would survive. As darkness came, the fishermen had no contact with their loved ones. They stayed together and turned on all their lights so that people on shore, if they were alive, would know the fishermen were alive, too. They returned to the stark devastation of the tsunami the next morning, but they had their boats, and they had each other. The fishermen and their families began to rebuild. One of the first things they did was to clear a piece of land. They went to the local officials and said, "Please build our temporary housing here so we can stay together." The officials agreed.

Businesses across the region were decimated. The questions became, what are the businesses we believe in now?

Photo courtesy of Bob Stilger

Forming communities of interest

Most temporary housing was built in small clusters of 50 to 200 dwellings. There were so many evacuees from areas of Fukushima radiated by the nuclear power plants that an exception was made, and a site for nearly 1,000 people was created in Koriyama. This larger project had an unexpected benefit: there was enough diversity for communities of interest to form around weaving, baseball, aikido, cooking, children, and more. Some feared this temporary housing community might become a "ghetto," but the arrangement actually helped people find others they wanted to be in community with.

Business – It Is About Community, Too

Businesses across the region were decimated. Products, facilities, and workers were destroyed, damaged, and displaced. The questions became, what are the businesses we believe in now? How should we rebuild them?

Restoration through new forms of energy

In Kesennuma, a large fishing town in Miyagi, a local energy company decided to abandon its pre-3/11 plans to develop solar as a new energy alternative. It decided to do biomass-based energy generation instead. Why? Biomass is less profitable and takes longer. It's more complicated. The reason the company made this decision is that biomass creates the opportunity to restore the forests in the hills around Kesennuma. During the Tokugawa period more than 150 years ago, Japan had one of the best-managed forest systems in the world. People worked with nature to insure forest health. Modern times brought overuse to the forests, something that severely compromised the watershed. A focus on biomass production could restore the forest, restore the watershed, and help restore the ecosystem of the nearby bay.

The past as inspiration

Further north, in the Iwate town of Otsuchi, others also thought the forest and the surrounding mountains might provide the key for new opportunities. Of 250 boats in the port, 249 were destroyed in the tsunami. Both fishing areas and agricultural fields were destroyed. In response, people turned around, looked at the forest and surrounding hills, and asked, "How can we rebuild community with what we have?" Some have begun to create a new wood products industry. Others are looking to the past for inspiration. They noticed, for example, that 100 years ago, Otsuchi was famous for its tofu and wasabi, made delicious by the underground springs present in the surrounding hills.

Futures Fair. Minamisoma, a community of 70,000 people about 25 kilometers from the nuclear reactors, evacuated 50,000 residents after 3/11. By early 2012, nearly 30,000 had returned. Radiation was present on the ground and in the buildings, but this area was people's home, and they would find a way to live again. Organizers created a Futures Fair, expecting a few hundred people to participate. More than 1,000 came. They came because they needed each other and because they wanted to discover what businesses they could create to support themselves and the country as a whole. Participants shared plans for everything from solar-powered communities to development of hydroponic and aquaponic systems for food production free from radiation. They recognized that new businesses need to work with and for the community.

These are small examples, but they give a flavor of the spirit that is present in the Tohoku region. The future is not built with master plans. It is built when people come together, look at what they have, and begin to create.

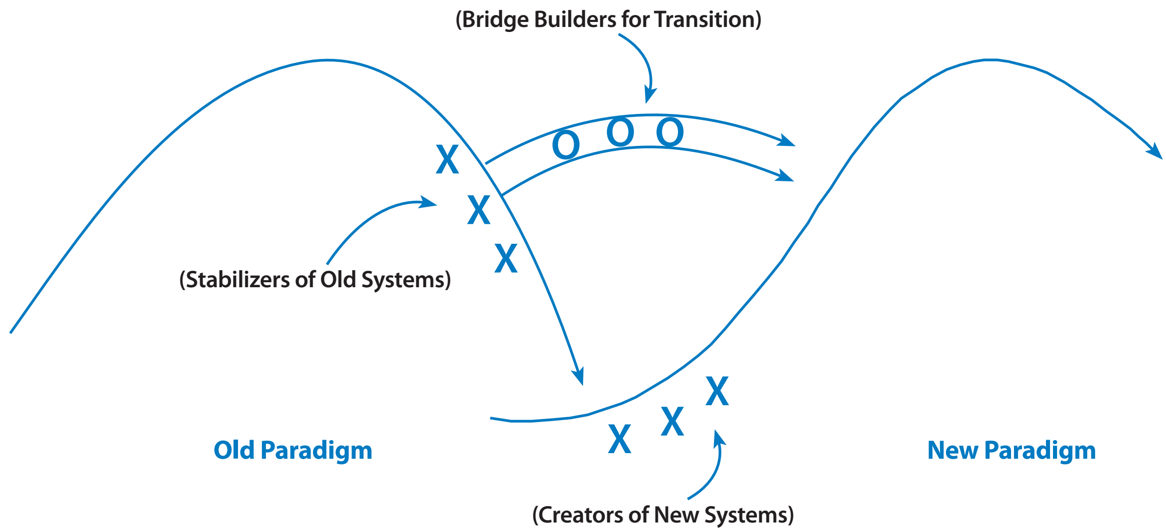
Two aspects of Japanese culture, the ancient and the new, are now coming together. If we go back a couple thousand years, Japan was made up of isolated villages separated by steep mountains. The main food was rice, cultivated in paddies. It takes a village to cultivate a wet rice crop. The alternatives were simple: People either worked together or starved. Business, life, and community were inextricably bound together. Business was not primarily about making a profit. It was about serving community needs. This spirit, somewhat tattered under the onslaught of consumerism, is still alive and is being rekindled in Japan.

If we come forward to the present day, Japan is still a collective culture. Numerous strengths exist in the collective. One weakness is that the collective deters individual initiative. The expression in Japan is, *The nail that sticks up gets pounded down*. People regularly push down their own ideas and aspirations out of fear of disrupting the collective. 3/11 has created a new attitude. Government is not going to fix the problems created by the disasters. Individual initiative is required. But here's what's happening – people are standing up and taking initiative AND they are staying with and in the collective.

The future is not built with master plans. It is built when people come together, look at what they have, and begin to create.

This energy of individuation in a collective field is the energy needed in Japan today, as well as in the rest of the world. Those who live in Tohoku have key character traits many of us would do well to emulate. Although some describe the people in this region as being shy and conservative, my experience is that they are thoughtful and deliberate. Deeply grounded in nature, they are more likely than most to find their way forward in this uncertain time.

FIGURE 1 **Stabilizing the Old System, Creating New Systems, and Building Bridges**



An Opening

Disasters create a crack in our habitual ways of thinking. Alongside the tragedy, an opportunity arises for new possibilities. As we enter a time when we may experience even more collapsing systems and disasters, perhaps we can learn to use these experiences to create a new future. The people of Japan – and especially of the Tohoku region – are showing us the way.

> **The triple disasters created a moment of "punctuated equilibrium" – a break with the continuity of the past in which the possibility of new future action is born.**

The triple disasters created what systems scientists call a moment of "punctuated equilibrium." Put simply, this means a break with the continuity of the past in which the possibility of new future action is born. How does one work with the energy of a time of punctuated equilibrium? What are the structures, processes, and practices that create conditions for creativity and collective action?

During my time at The Berkana Institute, we saw three different kinds of work needed in times such as these:

- **Stabilizing the old system.** We need to keep alive those things that will continue to be important in a new age and let die those things that no longer serve us well. Sometimes we speak of this work as "hospicing the old," because things do need to die – and they need to die well. There are many examples in Japan, ranging from nuclear reactors to the increasingly problematic medical and education systems.
- **Creating new systems.** As people turn away from trying to make old systems work, they start to construct alternatives. Most often, their early prototypes do not work. If they have the vision, courage, and support to continue working, they learn, and new systems emerge. In Japan, examples of this work include the closed hydroponics and aquaponics systems that are being conceived of for production of food in Fukushima.
- **Building bridges.** This work of making it possible for more and more people to embrace new alternatives is essential if systems transformation is going to take root.

Future Centers in Japan

Future Centers were initially developed in Europe at the end of the last century as a creative space where diverse people could engage with each other to define new collaborative actions. In 2009, Japan's Knowledge Dynamics Initiative at Fuji/Xerox began looking closely at how to develop Future Centers in Japanese businesses. Two months after the 3/11 triple disasters, Future Center Week was launched, becoming an annual event in 2012 and 2013.

In its most basic form, a Future Center is simply a place where people gather with the intent to discover and prototype new collaborative projects. Using dialogue methodologies like circle, World Café, Open Space technology, and Appreciative Inquiry, participants build trusting relationships and find new possibilities for collaboration.

We are working with five types of Future Centers in Tohoku:

- **Grief and Possibility.** People, especially in Fukushima, gather to share their collective grief and explore new possibilities. There is so much to be said, and it requires quiet spaces that cultivate a deep listening presence.
- **Local Action.** Grief and possibility give way to development of collaborations and projects to make things better, including new businesses, new ways of helping children learn, and better ways to help people be healthy.
- **Translocal Systems.** While change is always local – it occurs in a particular place – transformative change arises when people engaged in similar actions are connected with each other across distance and difference to explore deeper systemic shifts.
- **Stories of the Future.** Actions begin to take on a deeper focus when people share a collective sense of the future. Stories of the future are a way of introducing the transformative scenario planning that is necessary to ground and connect action in separate domains into a rich ecosystem of emergent possibilities.
- **Deepen Learning.** Finally, Future Centers engage people in learning from their own experience, from the experience of others in the room, and from knowledge and experience from the larger world.

Work in these five domains is accelerated through a series of related activities:

- **Imagine**, always. It begins with imagination and with people who come together to begin to imagine what might be.
- **Invite** the right people, either by scoping the situation and determining who needs to be present, or by developing crystal clarity about a purpose that attracts the right people.
- **Engage** in deep dialogue using a variety of methodologies to uncover the wisdom and experience present in the room.
- **Harvest** the dialogue well, as one would harvest a productive yield from any planted field. What's happened in the engagement is precious and needs to be preserved.
- **Make visible** the harvest so it can inform and inspire others who are engaging in similar efforts.
- **Connect** with others engaged in similar work. Reach out. Draw them together. Find points of common interest and see what else is possible.
- **Imagine**, again and again. ■

Photo courtesy of Bob Stilger

In Tohoku, some of us are using a form adapted from Europe called Future Centers (see "Future Centers in Japan," on p. 33). Future Centers use dialogue as a core methodology for creating new partnerships for collaborative action. We are using the Future Centers concept to weave people and places together into an ecosystem of practice that we call the Tohoku Futures Network.

What's important is that we discover how to connect the system to itself, developing a rich new ecosystem of possibilities as people work together to build healthy and resilient communities.

The work of building a future in Tohoku is just beginning. It will take several decades. The nuclear disaster at Chernobyl in 1986 is just now giving way to new, grounded community. It takes time to learn how to thrive after a disaster. What's important is that we discover how to connect the system to itself, developing a rich new ecosystem of possibilities as people work together to build healthy and resilient communities. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bob Stilger is the co-president of New Stories. He previously co-founded and served as executive director of a community development corporation in the Northwest. Bob followed Margaret Wheatley as co-president of The Berkana Institute. ***bob@newstories.org***

FEATURE 13.2

Healthcare at Its Best

Southcentral Foundation's Core Concepts Training

KATHERINE GOTTLIEB AND MICHELLE TIERNEY

True transformation, particularly in an organization, is a rare occurrence. It requires unswerving commitment to vision, leadership that is willing to learn, and an organization determined to change in a way that is beneficial to all, not to just a select few. To guide it toward achieving its vision of creating a community that enjoys physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual wellness, Southcentral Foundation (SCF), an Alaska Native-owned, nonprofit healthcare organization, worked with SoL to design and implement a foundational program, the Core Concepts Training. SCF's story not only presents an exemplary model of change but perhaps more importantly illustrates what can be accomplished when people choose to control their own destiny.

Katherine Gottlieb

Southcentral Foundation (SCF) is a nonprofit healthcare organization serving more than 60,000 Alaska Native and American Indian people in Southcentral Alaska. It was established in 1982 by Cook Inlet Region Inc. (CIRI), one of the Alaska Native regional corporations created by the United States Congress in 1971 under the terms of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. CIRI founded SCF to improve the health and social conditions of Alaska Native people, enhance their culture, and empower individuals and families to take charge of their lives.

Michelle Tierney

The Transition to "Customer-Ownership"

Over the last two decades, Southcentral Foundation's workforce has grown from fewer than 100 employees to more than 1,600, and its operating budget has increased from $3 million to $227 million. This growth can be attributed in large part to a change in ownership of the Alaska Native healthcare system – from government control to "customer-ownership."

For 50 years, Alaska Native people in Southcentral Alaska received their healthcare as patients of the Indian Health Service's Native hospital. It was a large, bureaucratic system centrally controlled from Washington, D.C., 5,000 miles away. Patients had to wait weeks to get an appointment and saw different providers each time. Treatment was inconsistent, care was impersonal, and patients were identified by numbers not names. There was an obvious disconnect between care of the mind and care of the body. Departments and programs acted independently. Patients weren't happy; employees weren't happy. Health statistics were bleak.

Under these grim circumstances, many patients left the Alaska Native system to find better care. Along with American Indian people, they began advocating for a voice in program planning and service

Photo courtesy of Southcentral Foundation

Southcentral Foundation's Vision and Mission

Vision
A Native Community that enjoys physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual wellness.

Mission
Working together with the Native Community to achieve wellness through health and related services.

Key Points
Shared Responsibility

We value working together with the individual, the family, and the community. We strive to honor the dignity of every individual. We see the journey to wellness being traveled with shared responsibility and in partnership with those for whom we provide services.

Commitment to Quality

We strive to provide the best services for the Native Community. We employ fully qualified staff in all positions, and we commit ourselves to recruiting and training Native staff to meet this need. We structure our organization to optimize the skills and contributions of our staff.

delivery of their healthcare system. In response to this demand, in 1994 Congress passed legislation in favor of self-determination. The new law opened the door for tribes to choose between ownership of their healthcare service or dependence on other entities to deliver the services. For SCF's Alaska Native leadership team, self-determination was an opportunity to redesign the tribal healthcare system based on Alaska Native values and needs. It was an opportunity for innovation.

By 1999, Alaska Native people were no longer "patients" of a government-run system, but rather self-determined "customers" and "owners" of their tribally managed healthcare system. Alaska Native people were now in control of decision-making and administration. Along with this new status of customer-ownership came a set of responsibilities requiring informed choices, not only for setting priorities for the healthcare system but also for working to sustain the system for future generations. The effort that followed produced a customer-driven overhaul of Native Alaska healthcare delivery and a culturally based redefinition of its philosophy and values. As a result, Southcentral Foundation now has what is known as its "Nuka System of Care," an integrated healthcare system created, managed, and owned by Alaska Native people with the goal of achieving physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual wellness for all.

Shared Vision and Mission
Southcentral Foundation's Nuka System of Care reaches beyond merely providing treatment and health education. The system is designed to optimize relationships with individuals, families, and households by supporting them in reaching their multidimensional health and wellness goals. The mission statement emphasizes getting there by working *with* (not doing *to* or *for*) the Native community. It requires looking many years ahead to ensure that improvements in wellness sustain from one generation to the next. The system is as much about prevention and maintaining health as it is about treating symptoms and regaining health.

Service Delivery

In order to achieve its vision, Southcentral Foundation provides a wide range of health and social services. These services include primary care, home-based services, dentistry, optometry, audiology, outpatient behavioral health, residential behavioral health, traditional healing, complementary medicine, health education, and more. Southcentral Foundation measures its progress through a robust data collection effort, benchmarking with other healthcare organizations, and tracking health disparity data at the local, state, and national levels.

Most services are provided "prepaid," based on legislative agreements and funding requirements to members of 229 federally recognized tribes who live in Anchorage, the Matanuska-Susitna Valley, and 55 rural villages. This service area stretches about 2,000 miles from west to east.

Results

Over the past 14 years, SCF has demonstrated dramatic achievements, with over 70% decrease in hospital admissions and hospital days, and over 30% decrease in outpatient visits. SCF clinical outcome performance exceeds the performance of more than 75% of other healthcare organizations, as measured by the Healthcare Effectiveness Data Information Set (HEDIS).

Customer-owner and staff satisfaction has remained above 90% for many years. SCF's Nuka system is recognized by the National Committee on Quality Assurance as a Patient Centered Medical Home™ Level Three – the highest level. SCF also received the prestigious Malcolm Baldridge National Quality Award in 2011 from the US Commerce Department. Because of its success, the Nuka system has attracted the attention of healthcare leaders around the world. SFC has been asked to partner with groups from New Zealand, England, China, Sweden, Norway, Australia, and Scotland, among others.

The Seeds of Change: The Family Wellness Warriors Initiative

In the early 1990s, Southcentral Foundation developed the Family Wellness Warriors Initiative

Photos courtesy of Southcentral Foundation

Southcentral Foundation's Nuka System of Care is designed to optimize relationships with individuals, families, and households by supporting them in reaching their multidimensional health and wellness goals.

Photo courtesy of Southcentral Foundation

(FWWI), which became the foundation for what is known as the Core Concepts Training. FWWI is a prevention program designed to address the needs of adult survivors of domestic violence, child sexual abuse, and child neglect.

The goal of the FWWI program is to end domestic violence, child sexual abuse, and child neglect in the state of Alaska in this generation.

The initiative brings together leaders who represent the Alaska Native community, the faith community, regional corporations and agencies, and healthcare providers in an effort to break the vicious cycle of abuse. Based on a culturally centered resiliency model, the training focuses on identifying protective factors such as social connections, stable family relationships, and community support to help prevent abuse, build resilience, and reduce risk factors. The program gives Alaska Native people an opportunity to experience their history, their stories, their challenges, and their pain. At the same time, it allows them to celebrate successes, healing, and growth by providing intensive training and education community by community in order to gain the trust and commitment of local leaders. As a result of the FWWI training, more than 3,300 people in Alaska stand ready to work toward eliminating all types of abuse within the population.

FWWI's psycho-educational process includes tools and skills that are critical to domestic violence survivors. Being emotionally self-aware, making safe choices, focusing on self-care, understanding how to enter safe and supportive relationships, learning and implementing protective factors, observing and practicing effective boundaries, and embracing empowerment and choice are just a few of the principles taught so individuals can start healing and moving toward healthier relationships. The power of "story" is another critical tool that helps participants evaluate and address the root cause of their behaviors and motivations. A psychologically safe environment is provided so that they may dig down to the depths of their pain and rise up to healing and redemption.

The trainings also work toward eliminating the shame and guilt felt by people harmed by domestic violence; reestablishing the role of parents as protectors of families; making one's own story coherent; and using spiritual beliefs to reestablish moral and ethical direction. After attending FWWI trainings, participants report a greater sense of satisfaction and less stress and conflict within the family. "Arrigah House" and "Beauty for Ashes" are initial trainings that provide participants with the opportunity to recognize the impact of trauma, abuse, and neglect in their communities. These intensive programs not only address how to interact with, work with, and respond to those whose lives have been impacted by abuse, neglect, or domestic violence, but also teach how to build protective factors and resiliency skills so people can deal effectively with these chronic issues.

Positive change is evident among FWWI training participants. Participants report a decline in depression, substance abuse, trauma symptomology, and anxiety. They also report an increase in the ability to control anger and a decrease in the risk or threat of intentional harm (either to self or others). Evaluation findings indicate significant positive changes associated with key protective factors, including enhanced family cohesion, cultural connectedness, self-esteem, and spiritual well- being. As a result of FWWI's instructional approach, participants indicate a high level of content understanding and skills development after completing the training and for the year following the program.

Development of the Core Concepts Program

Based on the success of the FWWI program, in 2006, SCF began to develop the Core Concepts Training Program as a way to train employees and transform the organization as a whole. For more than 18 months, SCF worked through the development process, using the ADDIE (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation) model.

Southcentral Foundation also developed a partnership with the Society for Organizational Learning (SoL) after several of SCF's leaders attended SoL's Core Competencies Course on Organizational Learning. Many of the tools and processes introduced in that course informed the development of the Core Concepts Training.

The development process included several pilots with different populations to ensure that the program would be applicable and well received across the entire organization. Gathering feedback from participants and integrating it into the curriculum of the program was a particularly effective element of the training.

Analysis

The first step in developing the training was to determine its purpose and goals. During the first phase, a gap analysis of current state versus future state was completed. The results of that analysis showed a need to enhance employees' skills so they would be able to support the integration of the FWWI philosophy into Core Concepts and also to create and maintain effective relationships. Healthcare employees have knowledge and expertise in science and medicine – skills that they continually practice throughout their training. But the knowledge, skills, and abilities to create and maintain effective relationships often fall outside of the more traditional healthcare education curriculum. We determined that in order to fully realize our mission and vision, we would have to provide training that included a common language to be used throughout the organization.

Design

The second step was to design a training consistent with our mission and goals. During this phase, we focused on developing the objectives,

Southcentral Foundation's Core Concepts

The Core Concepts are:

W ork together in relationship to learn and grow
E ncourage understanding
L isten with an open mind
L augh and enjoy humor throughout the day
N otice the dignity and value of ourselves and others
E ngage others with compassion
S hare our stories and our hearts
S trive to honor and respect ourselves and others

techniques, tools, structure, materials, and resources needed for successful implementation. We began by identifying existing trainings whose philosophies were consistent with ours, and used those as a basis for building and customizing our own programs.

During the design stage, SoL consultants introduced us to new tools and concepts, including the effect of creative tension, Chris Argyris's ladder of inference, and David Kantor's four-player model, which we readily incorporated into our training. SoL also helped us think through our design, engagement, and delivery process for the training and provided guidance to our internal facilitators on teaching and applying its tools and methods.

Photo courtesy of Southcentral Foundation

Development

The development phase consisted of producing the training materials and facilitator guides, and running pilot programs. The first pilot included senior executives who we knew would be tough critics but who we also knew were not opposed to the new initiative. We ran three pilots and made significant revisions as a result. We included a cross section of people in each pilot – people of different ages, gender, cultures, and professions. These heterogeneous groups included people who were able to share their stories easily but also those who were more reluctant. The pilots were also instrumental in training our group leaders.

Implementation

The next step was implementation, which included the initial roll-out and its evaluation. All SCF leaders participated in the first official training. If the training was to be successful, our leaders would have to demonstrate their support of it by applying what they learned to the day-to-day management and operation of the organization.

Evaluation

The final step in the process was evaluation, using Donald Kirkpatrick's Four Level Evaluation Model for instructional design.

For Level 1, How well the learners like the process: We asked participants to complete a survey at the end of the training. In addition, we conducted a large-group debrief, during which participants sat in an open circle. Each participant was given an opportunity to comment. Typically, participants reflected on how meaningful the training was for them personally.

For Level 2, Learning: We sent participants a survey within a week of completing the training, to assess what they had learned.

For Level 3, Behavior: This evaluation was more conceptual and focused less on the content that managers and employees had learned and more on how they perceived certain behaviors in the workplace. It was done through an employee satisfaction survey. As part of the survey, which was administered by a third-party vendor, we asked questions directly related to the Core Concepts. These questions focused on how important training was for employee success, for connection and commitment to the organization, for connection to coworkers, and for the supportive nature of the organization's environment. More than 90 percent of workshop participants completed the survey.

For Level 4, Results: We collected customer feedback specifically related to the skills and abilities that comprised the Core Concepts. These surveys included feedback from customer-owners immediately after a visit to a clinician, from an annual survey assessing the overall organization, and from focus groups and one-on-one interviews that identified areas for improvement. Questions focused on how effective people in the system were at listening, responding, connecting, and caring.

As a result of the success of the training, SCF's Nuka System of Care received the highest level of recognition from the National Committee for Quality Assurances as a Level 3 Patient Centered Medical Home (PCMH). Receiving this award was one indication of how effectively the Core Concepts program supported SCF's mission, vision, and operational principles.

Key Elements of the Program

Several components were essential to the success of the Core Concepts design. One was that the highest-ranking person in the organization was willing to lead the training. Over the past six years, SCF President and CEO Katherine Gottlieb demonstrated a strong commitment to acting as the lead facilitator of the training.

Another essential component of the training was the willingness of employees to share their personal stories with their learning circles. Because some found doing so difficult or awkward, senior leaders started by sharing their own stories. Katherine Gottlieb shared her personal story on the first day of every training session. By doing this, she served as a role model and a source of encouragement so that employees felt more comfortable and willing to share their own, often painful, stories. This component required an especially strong commitment from the CEO and proved to be essential to the success of the training. While the story itself is an important component of building relationships and trust, the main goal is for everybody to get a better understanding of why they think and act as they do. This increases each person's capacity for generative listening, compassion for one another, and productive collaboration across all parts of the organization.

An essential component of the training was the willingness of employees to share their personal stories with their learning circles.

The process of reinforcing the training was another key element in the program's success. This was done by incorporating standards of behavior based on the Core Concepts in job descriptions, in interview questions, and in performance evaluations. An example of this is the expectation that all employees are able to develop, foster, and maintain positive relationships with coworkers and customer-owners. In addition, managers were required to lead groups. They used Core Concepts

Participant Comments

"I feel fortunate to work for an organization that gives me the time and tools to understand myself."

"I know the story behind the eyes of leadership and they are more human to me."

"My life is better because of my time working for Southcentral Foundation. The things I learned at Core Concepts and Beauty for Ashes make me a better father, son, and spouse, and I thank you."

tools consistently in meetings and in conversations to help them succeed in this role.

Refresher training for staff was also essential for reinforcing new learning and behaviors. In other trainings that used learning circles and sharing story as tools, Core Concepts tools were added to support and build on the common language that reinforced SCF's mission and vision.

By continuing to be open to modification, we were also able to keep the training fresh. While we did not make significant changes once we began implementation, we did tweak around the edges and make some mid-course corrections. The structure and process of the training, which is mandatory for all employees, supported who we were as an organization. The training intentionally included the practice of working in multidisciplinary teams. For example, rather than having a training exclusively for doctors, each training included employees from all areas of the organization – physicians, administrative support, board members, senior leaders, and other healthcare and technical professionals. This approach demonstrated and underscored what we meant when we talked about shared responsibility and team.

Core Concepts Training Objectives

The objectives of Core Concepts Training are:

- Understand how we impact others by:
  - Understanding your relational style
  - Understanding how your experiences contribute to how you approach others
- Learn how to articulate your story from the heart
  - Understand the power of empathy and compassion for yourself and others
- Understand your personal and professional aspirations
  - Align your aspirations, intentions, and behaviors
  - Understand how you can create shared vision
- Learn methods for good dialogue and productive conversations
  - Understand the impact of intentions
  - Understand how to listen effectively
  - Understand how good dialogue and productive conversations will affect SCF
  - Explore tools for having good conversations

Curriculum

The training is hands-on and interactive. Over the course of three days, every activity and training element prepares participants for sharing stories with their learning circle. This approach has been especially effective for transferring meaning and creating alignment among SCF employees. Learning occurs in a variety of ways: individually, in pairs, in learning circles, and in large-group discussions. Learning circles, which consist of no more than seven participants and a group leader, are a critical design feature because they create an environment in which participants have time and space to engage and respond. Because participants are able to bring their own knowledge to each session, over time, the role of the group leader/trainer has gradually shifted toward more of a facilitator role. This shift gave the group even more ownership of the process.

A host of other activities were also designed to support learning. We feed the soul with inspirational readings and feed the body with hearty breakfasts and lunches. We also include wellness activities to bring participants back to the program refreshed and ready to reengage. For example, the game musical chairs encourage playfulness; team Pictionary reinforces positive mental models; and energetic aerobic exercise celebrates the experience.

More Than a Training Program

Core Concepts is more than a training program. It is central to the way SCF functions as an organization and therefore requires a commitment from the most senior leaders of the organization. CEO Katherine Gottlieb spends three days with every employee as they share story and learn about how to relate and communicate with each other. She is the first one to share her story, and she leads the training. Leaders are expected to manage and lead in a manner consistent with

Photo courtesy of Southcentral Foundation

Core Concepts principles and practices. They are also expected to serve as learning circle leaders at least every 18 months and to attend quarterly leadership sessions led by the CEO to refresh and improve their skills. As a result, all employees have the same language and are aligned with the organization's values.

The last exercise in every Core Concepts program gives each participant the opportunity to share a thought with the whole group. The comments from the employees are inspiring and heartfelt. Employees express feelings of belonging to a family, an organization, and a mission; of feeling heard, valued, and appreciated by their leaders; of understanding and knowing each other and the leadership team on a personal level; and of their commitment to the organization's vision.

The Core Concepts training was developed to support employees in achieving the organization's mission and vision. Any organization planning to embark on implementing this kind of training program must understand that it is more than a training. It requires a significant commitment of time, resources, and passion. Top leaders are the role models and the example of what is being done to carry out the organization's vision. Leadership isn't a *hand-off;* it is *hands-on* in trying to keep systematic and sustainable change moving ahead. Leaders have to put themselves into the effort. At SCF, we believe the effort is worth the investment. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Katherine Gottlieb, MBA, DPS (h.c.), is president/CEO of Southcentral Foundation. She is a tribal member of the villages of Old Harbor and Seldovia, and is an honorary member of Eklutna. In 2004, she was a recipient of the MacArthur "Genius Award." In 2005, Katherine received an honorary doctoral degree from Alaska Pacific University in recognition of her extraordinary public service.

Michelle Tierney, MPA, is vice president of Organizational Development & Innovation at Southcentral Foundation. Michelle served for many years on the Board of Examiners for the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Program. She holds master's degrees in Public Administration and Human and Organizational Systems, and is currently a doctoral candidate.

COMMENTARY 13.2

Commentary

ROBERT HANIG

Robert Hanig

All too often the job of building an organization's capacity to better serve its customers, beneficiaries, and workforce is seen as something to be outsourced. The organization's leaders may give little sustained attention and sponsorship to these efforts beyond formal public introductions, exhortations, and appeals for participation. No matter how well intended these efforts, the lack of deep understanding of what the journey will require from the people who make up the institution – and the failure by senior executives to role model the very values and behaviors they seek to instill in others – sadly diminish or negate the positive impact these initiatives are intended to achieve.

From an organizational learning standpoint, the elements required to build sustained capacity for performance, learning, and growth in a human system are personal and collective aspiration, the ability to have productive conversations – especially when deep and legitimate differences arise – and the capacity to account for multi-temporal systemic and cultural interdependencies in formulating strategies and taking action.

In the case of Southcentral Foundation (SCF), a simple and profound reframing of these elements based on Confucius may be more representative of the context within which the Core Concepts Training initiative took place:

Virtue: Having a benevolent purpose and acting ethically in all transactions

Compassion: Understanding the implications for people's lives and focusing on benefit for all

Action: Considering multiple perspectives and timeframes and then acting decisively

To understand how these elements affected our work at SCF, we need to appreciate CEO Katherine Gottlieb's extraordinary commitment to the well-being of the Alaskan Native population. Her commitment stemmed from an intimate understanding of the source and nature of the suffering this population was experiencing as well as a profound belief in the power of the human heart to overcome challenges and realize the promise of a brighter future. This understanding and the deep relationships she had developed over time included both the more traditional tribal culture of the SCF owners and the western cultural dimension of many of the SCF faculty and staff. Katherine's sense of compassion assured that any program created on her watch would recognize, respect, and account for individual and collective perspectives and benefit the whole. In addition, because Katherine's personal life story had elements that were deeply rooted in the history of the community and because she was an executive with a strong track record of delivering sustainable results, she was able to engender a condition of trust that was the underpinning of the staff's willingness to engage.

The design process we embarked upon for the Core Concepts Training, led by Michelle Tierney (SCF's VP of Organization Development and Innovation), was characterized by ongoing connection to and communication with the

COMMENTARY 13.1

larger SCF community, including key staff members and the executive team. This approach assured that the program we produced would be relevant and effective. We also wanted to be sure that the process we used to design the program reflected the values and behaviors we wanted to create in the organization itself. Pilot and delivery dates were established to generate creative tension and to keep the team focused on delivery. Key design principles, including the selection and creation of human-centered tools and methods and the active participation of senior leaders at each program, were established.

In fact, senior leaders were required to share elements of their own life stories at critical times in the program. Their stories described what made them who they are today, the challenges they needed to face and overcome, and their reasons for choosing and continuing to choose to be members of the SCF family. The design principle of having senior leaders participate in key development programs is well known in the field. However, because it requires a deep commitment and a willingness to speak from the heart rather than delivering well-meaning expressions of altruistic platitudes that do little to build relationships and alignment, it seldom succeeds to the degree it has at SCF.

The stated goal of the Core Concepts Training is to provide employees with the knowledge and tools needed to integrate the core concepts of the Family Wellness Warriors Initiative (FWWI) throughout Southcentral Foundation. I think the program fully accomplishes that goal. I also see the training as a journey that articulates, in a culturally appropriate way, the spiritual and emotional essence of what it feels like to be an honored, generative member and leader in a human community. By participating in the development of this program, I have received infinitely more than I have given and am honored to have been part of SCF's extraordinary journey. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robert Hanig is director of RLH Consulting and a founding member of the Society for Organizational Learning. He currently designs, directs, and delivers management and leadership interventions and programs for the World Bank, the International Finance Corporation, and the International Monetary Fund.
robert@rlhconsulting.com

Reflections

The SoL Journal
on Knowledge, Learning, and Change

Volume 13, Number 2

Photo courtesy of Michael Goodman

ISSN 1524-1734
EISSN 1536-0148

Design & Production: NonprofitDesign.com

Reflections: The SoL Journal is published by the Society for Organizational Learning. Inquiries regarding subscriptions, address changes, back issues, reprints, and permission requests should be directed to:

reflections@solonline.org
Reflections: The SoL Journal
PO Box 425005
Cambridge, MA 02142-0001

+1.617.300.9530 (phone)
+1.617.812.1257 (fax)
E-mail: reflections@solonline.org
www.solonline.org/?Reflections