RIGHT CHOICES IN A COMPLEX WORLD

Gary S. Metcalf

Contact Address:

Gary S. Metcalf
InterConnections, LLC
1544 Winchester Ave., Suite 704
Ashland, KY 41101
U.S.A.

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Gary S. Metcalf, Ph.D.
InterConnections, LLC
1544 Winchester Ave., Suite 704
Ashland, KY 41101

ABSTRACT

As the complexity of the world increases, so does the difficulty of making "right" choices. Businesses are faced with increasing global competition and the simultaneous needs to be flexible and adapt, but also increase efficiency. Organizations need creativity, innovation, and initiative from employees, but on a "plug-and-play, just-in-time" basis. Companies are to be profit-driven, stakeholder-focused, and environmentally and globally sensitive.

Within this turbulent environment, individuals often feel caught between doing "what has to be done" and doing what, more ideally, "should be done." As pressure for productivity and efficiency increases, time for reflection decreases and decisions often become a matter of expediency.

Thinking systemically means, at the least, seeing beyond the immediate and obvious and considering the larger environment in relation to our situation of interest. While there are no simple answers or explanations to the complexities facing us today, there are patterns at numerous levels within the larger social systems which can be of help. Luhmann (1995) described the ongoing fragmentation of society resulting from specialization and sub-specialization of professions. Bohm (1996) described the "necessities" that underlie many of our decisions, well beyond conscious awareness. None of this is to argue against individual responsibility, but to attend again to the history and environments which have shaped all of us, collectively.

Drawing from the work of systems theorists and thinkers, this paper will explore characteristics of social systems at a variety of levels which create the patterns we experience today. Through expanded awareness, we can increase the range of choices available to us. With increased understanding, we can overcome at least some of the complexity that currently limits us, beyond the apparent dichotomies.

Key Words: complexity, right decisions, global competition, systemic thinking

INTRODUCTION

The last few years have seen corporations and economies in a downward spiral, with the United States apparently at the center of both. The events of September 11, 2001 seemed

to mark a pivot point, and contributed to fears and loss of confidence in many ways. But September 11th was only a minor issue in relation to the much larger environment of mistrust, and even malice, which has developed towards both business and political figures in recent history.

While the high-tech speculation "bubble" that had artificially inflated stock prices effectively burst in early 2001, it was not until 2002 that corporate scandals truly began to unravel. What came to light was the intentional manipulation of their apparent value by a number of high-profile corporations, through a host of accounting schemes. The result, of course, was not just the downfall of corporations such as Enron, WorldCom, and Arthur Andersen, but the questioning of valuation and accounting standards for international corporations in general (as well as the loss of many jobs and further devaluation of stock markets.)

The key theme of the 2003 World Economic Forum (WEF), an annual international gathering of corporate and economic leaders, was trust. Just prior to the meeting in January, the results of a survey about global trust were released (World Economic Forum Press Release, 2002), which included responses from over 34,000 people in 46 countries on six continents. In a ranking of institutions trusted to operate in the best interest of society, large national companies and global companies fared the worst, with the exception of national parliaments and congresses. In each case, over half the respondents indicated "little or no trust" in any of these institutions. Similarly, when asked about their trust in leaders to manage the challenges of the coming year, only about a third of respondents indicated "some" or "a lot" of trust in corporate executives and managers and economic decision-makers.

Leaders in the US were trusted the least world-wide, with just over a quarter of respondents showing "some or a lot" of trust, though 75% of Americans did indicate trust in their leadership. By contrast, in a separate Harris poll conducted in the US in 2001, only 43 percent of respondents indicated that they trusted business leaders to tell the truth, and only 42 percent trusted members of congress. At the time of the writing of this paper, the US and British armies are in Iraq, with the outcomes and effects on perceptions of leadership uncertain. It would seem safe to say, though, that the principles and values guiding the behavior of corporate executives and world political leaders are not those shared by the world's populace at-large.

Equally interesting about the world-wide survey were the institutions that ranked highest in trust. Topping the list were the armed forces, followed by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), education systems, the United Nations, religious institutions, police, health systems, and the World Trade Organization. (It should be noted that the high ranking given the armed forces came primarily from stable countries currently experiencing heightened alerts of conflict, including India, Israel, Pakistan and the US. This was not the case for Latin America or Africa, where civil war and military rule have predominated.)

LEADERS AS SUPERSTARS

It seems in some ways ironic that corporate executives, as (arguably) some of the brightest and best educated individuals in the world, on whom millions count for both funding of "good causes" and jobs, would be held in such low esteem. Undoubtedly, the disparity between the pay of chief executive officers and hourly employees, which grew to the point that CEO's were making about 500 times the average wage of front line workers in the US, was an indicator of how out of touch they had become. This began to reverse slightly in 2002, but the median total direct compensation (i.e., salaries and bonuses, the value of restricted stock at the time of the grant, gains from exercising options, and other long-term incentive payouts) for CEO's of some 350 US-based corporations was still $2,959,361. This was after companies' profit plunged a median of 17.8% in 2001, and the Standard & Poor's 500-stock index fell 13%, its biggest one-year decrease since 1974 (Lublin, 2002). According to a report in the newspaper USA Today (Strauss & Hansen, 2003), if CEO pay at the 100 largest companies in the US were broken down to an hourly rate (based on 14-hour days, seven days per week), the median pay would be $1,017 per hour. The highest paid CEO (at Tenet Healthcare) for the year averaged $22,785 per hour. This compares to an average worker rate of $16.23 per hour.

To put this into a global perspective, in China, with one of the fastest growing economies in the world, the market rate for unskilled labor is about 60 cents (US) per hour, or about $60 per month. Pay for engineers starts at about $1.38 per hour, or $240 per month (Wonacott, 2002). The rationale for valuing work is sometimes based on productivity. Average Chinese worker productivity has been estimated to be only 0.8 percent of that in the US for agriculture, and 3.6 percent in manufacturing (Aubert & Dahlman, 2001). It is hard to reconcile the disparities, though, whatever the rationale or formula.

Compensation for CEOs, of course, is not based on the same notions of "output" as average employees. The job of CEOs, in current parlance, is to "create value" – most specifically "shareholder value." Essentially, it is the job of chief executives to plan and execute strategies, through the creation and implementation of organizational systems and processes, which turn into corporate profits and thereby increase the value of their companies, overall. They are expected to be wholly dedicated, and to do whatever it takes to achieve these goals.

By report, Jeffery Immelt, who succeeded Jack Welch as CEO of General Electric, has been working 20-hour days, seven days per week, since taking over in September of 2001 (Murray, 2003.) While his schedule seems a little extreme, it may not be without good reason. In a study of the 2500 largest corporations, worldwide, in 2001, more than half of the CEO's were replaced for reasons other than death or retirement (Lucier, et al, 2002). Generally, they either lost their jobs for inadequate financial performance or their companies were acquired or merged with others. (Between 1995 and 2001, the number of CEOs departing because of poor financial performance increased by 130 percent.) Contrary to popular assumptions, the majority of CEO positions lost due to these "irregular" reasons were greater in Europe than the US.

Of most interest here is not the exceptional efforts or compensation of corporate executives, per se, but the ways in which they tend to set (or represent) standards and expectations for organizations as a whole, including other, "regular" employees. Consensus at the 2003 WEF meeting seemed to center around three key issues: "values, volatility and risk, and the corporate role in sustainable development" (A New Agenda, 2003, ¶1.)

Recent corporate scandals were linked by some to an erosion of corporate values – or at least an indication of a need for values to be clarified and reaffirmed. Others focused on the individuals involved, simplifying the problems to one of "flawed people and flawed business models" (A New Agenda, 2003, ¶3.) Volatility and risk were understood to be simply a part of the world today. (The complication, of course, is that in free-market economies, increased risk demands increased returns on investments, which puts more pressure on CEO performance.)

An interesting connection was made by one participant between sustainable development and global security. As he noted, "the average cow in the OECD is subsidized at US$2 a day. More than two billion people around the world live on less" (A New Agenda, 2003, ¶2.) Another participant (the CEO of a pharmaceutical company) emphasized the importance of the global AIDS pandemic, which he saw as more of a threat to security and economic development than terrorism.

GOOD WORK

As described by Gardner (2002), regarding research done in conjunction with Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and William Damon, "We found that good work is most likely to come about when all of the stakeholders concerned with a profession agree about what they would like-- we call this desirable situation 'alignment.' In contrast, good work proves elusive when the various stakeholders disagree fundamentally about what they desire from a given profession" (p. 1).

Gardner and is colleagues found that scientists studying genetics felt very positive about their work, largely because genetics was a profession that was well-aligned. All the stakeholders seemed to want the same things, which were longer and healthier lives for people. Journalists on the other hand were often frustrated by working in a profession that was now dominated by media conglomerates, which stifled the basic practice of the profession they had learned. The principles of the profession were at odds with both the financial interests of the owners and the tastes of the audiences, leaving many journalists wanting to leave the profession altogether (Gardner, 2001).

A sense of "good work", then, is partly a matter of alignment of expectations. The difficulty is that finding this alignment seems to be getting harder all the time.

In the cycles of organizational development, there seem to be periods of time when alignment happens very easily. When new start-up businesses really take hold, there's a

great deal of energy generated. New opportunities can almost seem to create themselves. As the business grows, people are often stretched by the work to be done, but resources (money, time, energy, etc.) can almost always be found, based on the promise of what is to come. Maturity of the business is often a difficult time, as the excitement of the new gives way to the need to standardize and create efficiencies. Businesses in declining markets require a different orientation (and often different leadership) than start-ups and those in growth cycles.

When alignment exists it can create a very similar sense of "flow" or of "being in the zone" as in a highly functioning athlete or team. Maintaining alignment requires constant internal and external adjustment to changing circumstances.

For many years in the US, there were fairly clear expectations about organizational involvement. Essentially, if employees worked hard, the organization would take care of them – and often of their families. While there were certainly abuses of such systems early on (e.g. situations in which employees ended up as virtual indentured servants through pay in "company credits" and company housing, etc.), large organizations provided by far the best lifestyles available for most workers. Big corporations, especially, tended to pay the highest salaries and wages, with raises or cost of living adjustments that could be counted on each year. Medical benefits, paid vacation and sick leave, and many other perks were an assumed part of a corporate job. (Similar expectations developed for civil service jobs through the Federal and some State governments.) Corporations were often the primary benefactors of the communities in which they operated (and especially those in which they were headquartered), donating large sums to charitable organizations, sponsoring sports leagues, providing employee time and expertise to civic causes, and so on. In the early days of such corporate benevolence, practices such as buying individualized Christmas gifts for employees' children were not uncommon.

The price for employees was an assumed loyalty to the corporation. Employees staunchly supported the organization and its leaders (right or wrong.) Upwardly mobile managers moved with their families to new locations every two or three years in order to gain experience and fill the needs of the businesses. Those who refused simply quit advancing. Retirement benefits were directly tied to longevity in the organization, making the change to a new corporation a long-term financial penalty.

ALIGNMENT AND ASSUMPTIONS

As readers may note, we still live with the legacy of many of these practices. Some are beginning to change, but many still hold true in various ways. Whether you're in the US or China, working for a large corporation or institution still offers financial benefits that are difficult, if not impossible, to replicate by small businesses or independent entrepreneurs.

In the best of circumstances, there existed a mutually supportive and mutually beneficial relationship between corporations, employees and communities. As stated in a famous quote by a chairman of General Motors to the US Congress, "What's good for GM is good for the country." Despite its arrogance, it was a belief that in many ways at the time held true. Jobs are essential in any industrialized society, and the fates of politicians often rest on the success or failure of the economy.

What often remains invisible to people, though, are the environmental factors which create the circumstances in which they live. Many of the expectations about being a corporate employee in the US developed in the years following World War II. Much of the industrial base of both Europe and Japan had been decimated, leaving markets and opportunities wide open. Government funding backed both education and research initiatives, and US influence in the war provided great leverage for US interests abroad. Work was plentiful and incentives such as medical benefits began developing as a way for organizations to compete for employees. The entire US economy seemed to be in a growth cycle, even a sense of "flow", in which there was little that they could do wrong.

As Europe and Japan recovered, competition grew, but the US mindset of economic dominance remained. With each passing decade, though, many things did change. The war in Viet Nam dramatically shook the confidence of a whole generation of young people in the trust of their elders – especially political leaders. The oil crisis of the 1970s, along with the rise of the Japanese auto industry and its dominance in quality production, was probably the most dramatic "wake up call" that US faced real competition. This was also the time in which the ecology movement really emerged, and concerns about humans' impacts on the Earth, and its "carrying capacity" became very real. The 1980s saw the first real wave of downsizing in major corporations (many of which were now multinational.) The message to employees was clear and direct: "We're a business, not a family." The 1990s brought the breakup of the Soviet Union and the rise in prominence of the European Union. Organizational consultants preached efficiency, productivity, flexibility, diversity, teamwork, "global but local" and customer service, simultaneously. Employees were no longer rewarded for efforts, but only for outcomes, and everyone shared the risk of the business. On September 11, 2001, the US realized a sense of threat and vulnerability which it had never before experienced, and which continues to impact global relations and economics.

One of the difficulties of human cognition is that it's very hard to tell the magnitude of changes without a good deal of data and reflection. We use long-established belief systems (cultural, scientific, religious, familial, etc.) in order to give meaning to and make sense of current experiences. Because these belief systems are often tacit and outside of our conscious awareness, and because they are so crucial to our understanding of the world, we tend to hold very tightly to them even in the face of conflicting information. Beyond the individual predispositions of some people to be much more resistant to change than others, it is confounding to know when and how to let go of deeply held assumptions. We often judge leaders, in fact, by how certain and steadfast they have been through their lives, trusting that strongly held beliefs will lead to sound judgments about future decisions.

Despite the changes over the last half-century, many beliefs about how things should be were (and still are) based in practices and realities that have long since eroded. This is true for organizations as well as individuals. While companies seek to promote innovation, initiative and teamwork, almost all are still buried in reward and performance monitoring systems that were developed for industrial assembly lines. Organizations faced with slumping markets and increasing competition seek to do "more with less" while they strive to reorganize and re-image themselves (tasks that require excess capacity to achieve.) It is no surprise that employees find themselves caught between what they are supposed to do and what makes sense.

Corporate executives find themselves caught in the same kinds of paradoxes, but in grander scales. When "what was good for the company was good for the community" (to revise an earlier quote), the role of executives was fairly clear. The primary goal of companies was growth, both in size and profits. As noted, though, the world has changed in many ways. Pressure for performance (specifically stock price) has increased, driving many executives into a superstar role where they, like movie actors and professional athletes, work from an assumption of extreme demand and constant threat of becoming irrelevant or outdated. At the same time, the notion of the "community" to which they are accountable has grown from regional to national to global. Responsibility that once stopped with the processes and the products of the organization now expand to the protection and recovery of the ecosystems in which their companies operate.

Individuals at all levels of organizations find themselves wrestling with issues and competing interests both in and out of the workplace. In the US, certainly, there are more dual-career families, more single-parent families and more jobs that require shift work as 24-hour operations become routine. Children feel more pressure to perform academically, socially and athletically as competition for places in the "best" schools and colleges increases. Sports and artistic performance teams, which were once primarily for recreation, now practice more often, longer and harder. Parents are pressed to be more involved with their children's activities while enduring longer work hours, longer commutes, and more travel. In summary, there seem to be increased expectations for those who will "succeed" at every level.

CHANGING GLOBAL ASSUMPTIONS

Pressure for improvement and working towards excellence are not necessarily bad, when they are done in a context of meaning and purpose – when there is alignment with a sense of "greater good," on some level. The current problem is that the pressures of most "advanced" economies are for people attempting to retain lifestyles that are unsustainable on a global basis. As has often been noted, people living in Western economies, and especially in the US, use far more of the Earth's resources per capita and produce far more waste than those in less developed countries. Through centuries of colonization, less-developed countries acted as both the storehouse and the dumping grounds through which more technologically advanced economies grew beyond their borders. The pressure for improvement has now shifted towards these developing countries, with a

sense that developed economies have some obligation to assist them. There's also a sense, as voiced at the WEF meeting, that massive disparities and inequalities are themselves a threat to advanced economies in a variety of ways. Reducing disparities in sustainable ways will almost certainly mean a change in patterns on both ends of the spectrum – both at the high and the low ends of lifestyles.

It would be expected to hear such views from the most liberal arenas. What's new is how far-reaching such views are becoming. A 2003 report from the staff of the World Bank (World Development Report 2003) describes the necessity of working towards sustainable development. As stated in the report:

> The core challenge for sustainable development is to ensure a better quality of life for all [the world's] people while meeting everyone's aspirations for well-being. This demands substantial growth in income and productivity in developing countries. At the same time, it is necessary to sustain critical ecosystem services and strengthen the social fabric that underpins development (p. 1).

The usual assumption about anything coming from an institution such as the World Bank, based in and heavily funded by the US, is that whatever good might be done, it would only be as dictated by those in charge and primarily for their benefit. The primary means by which the World Bank sees sustainable development achieved is through the establishment of competent institutions. But this is not (according to the report) supposed to mean Western institutions dictating plans to everyone else. As they state:

> Institutions are often absent, or are flawed, when interests are dispersed or when some groups in society are poor or in other ways disenfranchised. Groups that lack assets tend also to lack voice, security, and a stake in the larger society…When more people are heard, fewer assets are wasted. As the world comes to resemble a single community, these lessons may apply even at the global level (World Development Report 2003, p. 1)

To be sure, not everyone trusts the World Bank or those associated with it, or similar institutions. The point, though, is that for common sentiments to ring through the World Bank, the World Economic Forum, and the UN's Summit on Sustainable Development, all within a year of each other, it would seem to indicate a fairly clear theme. What's important, or right, or at least politically correct, seems to be moving in a more global direction – a sense that we really are "all in this together."

It's very likely that this shifting sentiment is affecting what employees, at all levels, are feeling in their workplaces. In the US, there's been a movement for sometime that it's not enough for employees just to "do their jobs." There's a need for them to connect their work with the larger efforts of the organization, and therefore its customers and the communities in which it operates. (This assumes, of course, that there's a clear understanding of what the work of the organization actually is – often a real fallacy.) In most cases, employees do understand that events in the world can very quickly affect their jobs, even if the reverse (their affect on the world) is much less clear. At almost all

levels, there is a perceived need to align with the "right things," but often very little conscious understanding of what those are or how to find them.

DEEP BELIEFS AND "NECESSITIES"

There remains a deeply embedded notion for many people that there is (or should be) a natural alignment between culture, work and religion. In the US, the Protestant work ethic advocated hard work and self-sacrifice as a means of Christian piety, and the ideals of the American Way further connected these with democracy, patriotism, individualism, and self-sufficiency. For many years, these themes were reinforced through churches, schools, workplaces, and political rhetoric, all in concert. (Other countries and cultures, of course, have their own variations on these themes.) Within this framework of alignment, what's "right" appears self-evident. But because such assumptions tend to be so long-standing and deeply embedded (i.e., tacit) they tend to remain unexamined and out of ready awareness. Therefore, when they cease being functional, or are called into question out of conflict with alternative assumptions from other cultures, it's very difficult for most people to know what to adjust in order to reestablish alignment. The natural tendency, as is happening for many in the world today, is to view alternative assumptions as threats to their basic identities and simply work harder to reinforce their own beliefs. Such strategies can be successful in the short-term, but only with increasing amounts of energy used in the process.

Bohm (1996) describes such fundamental beliefs and assumptions as a particular type of thought that he terms "necessities" – from the Latin root *necesse*, meaning "don't yield", or as he interprets, "what cannot be turned aside" (p. 22). In his view, many of our most deeply held assumptions are actually based in the nature of language, and the ideas embedded within it. As he explains, "Language is collective. Most of our basic assumptions come from society, including all our assumptions about how society works, about what sort of person we are supposed to be, and about relationships, institutions, and so on" (p. 11).

Some of the most explicit teachings about beliefs and behaviors, including work, are actually quite old. Right Livelihood is a part of the Noble Eightfold Path of the Buddha's Middle Way, from around 500 BC. (The parts of the Middle Way are shown in the table below.)
This path is only a part of the Four Noble Truths, and its intent is to assist in releasing its practitioners from the suffering caused by cravings and attachments to unimportant things.

> The deepest, most persistent suffering comes from attachment to our desires, and our inability to accept the inevitability of change. Attachments cease when we let go of our fixed notions about the world and begin to accept things as they are, even while working to change some of them. As a result, suffering ceases (Whitmyer, 1994, pp. 9-10).

The Threefold Path of the Middle Way	The Noble Eightfold Path
Wisdom	Right View
	Right Thought
Morality	Right Speech
	Right Action
	Right Livelihood
Meditation	Right Effort
	Right Mindfulness
	Right Contemplation

Figure 1. The Noble Eightfold Path as it corresponds to the Threefold Way. From Whitmyer, 1994.

Right livelihood, in this sense, necessarily creates alignment because it is only one part of an overarching belief system, which could not be achieved in isolation from the rest. In fact, the essence of Right View, the first of the eight, is an understanding of the interconnectedness and interdependence of all things. Right Thinking has to do with one's values, vision, and personal sense of purpose. Right Speech admonishes against lying and deceit, and generally all unnecessary speech, as well as the active cultivation of honesty. Right Action focuses on the Five Basic Precepts, which call for refraining from killing, stealing, irresponsible or inappropriate sexuality, lying, and intoxication from alcohol or drugs. In Right Livelihood:

> We are encouraged to make our living only in ways that avoid deceit, treachery, trickery, and usury. Five occupations specifically condemned: trading in arms, living beings, flesh, intoxicants, and poison…In short, a Buddhist practicing "right livelihood" can do no work that might hurt living beings or the environment (Whitmyer, 1994, p. 12.)

Right Effort advocates for the cultivation of what is wholesome, and the avoidance of what is unwholesome. Specifically, it warns against greed, gluttony, hatred, anger, delusions and fantasies. Right Mindfulness encourages awareness of body, feelings, thoughts, and objects of thought. Right Contemplation moves on towards a place of enlightenment, through four phases which reintegrate other tasks. The first phase uses conceptualization and discursive thinking as a way of abandoning unwholesome desires, leaving a state of joy and well-being. In the second phase, these mental activities are rested until a centered and focused state of meditation is found. The third phase moves beyond the sense of well-being to a state of alertness and awareness of surroundings. The final phase moves to a sense of oneness, in which there are no longer boundaries between where we end and the world begins. At this point, understanding of the Eightfold Path moves from intellectual to experiential and the "journey" continues (Whitmyer, 1994.)

Teachings and admonitions about work and living are certainly not unique to Buddhism, though the degree to which work is integrated into the process may be more specific. What seems to have been lost, in many cases, is the foundational belief system to which

the teachings and principles were tied – or at least the centrality of the beliefs. Christianity in the US, for example, has moved away from an emphasis on piety and self-sacrifice to an ethic of "God wants you to be rich and successful." Mega-churches and tele-evangelism have adopted the strategies of entertainment and mass-marketing as a way to attract and keep people involved. Conservative religious leaders condemned such changes and called for a return to "old time religion," but those principles had simply quit providing ready answers to the complexity of most peoples' lives.

More recently, of course, principles of science have been used as a way of explaining "how the universe is" and how business should align itself (see for example, Wheatley, 1992.) Phenomena such as fractals, strange attractors, bifurcation, and autopoiesis were used to explain the natural self-organization of patterns in the universe. Most of this has been little comfort, though, to the millions of people who have worked hard but lost jobs when they became unnecessary, or to the millions more looking for work (almost any work) as a means to basic survival.

LUHMANN'S FUNCTIONAL DIFFERENTIATION

The suggested remedies for recent corporate scandals have tended to focus on values and ethics. This would assume that there is some clear definition or understanding about the moral basis beneath those – that there exists some natural or fundamental sense of right and wrong on which they could be based. As Luhmann (1995) explains, though:

> All morality finally relates to the question whether and under what conditions human beings esteem or disdain one another (p. 235). For societies that are becoming more complex, a global programming of the social dimension in the form of morality becomes increasingly inadequate….All morality finds itself relativized within horizons where one can ask further why someone experiences, judges, and acts in the way he does, how this occurs, and what this means for others (p. 82).

In relatively self-contained societies and cultures, based upon clear religious principles or philosophies, the moral basis for ethical decisions could at least be found. In an evermore diverse, global society, differences abound as to even fundamental tenets of human nature or history and reality.

Increasing this complexity further, economies and the business activities that support them, as well as many other systems of knowledge and activity, have become more and more autonomous, self-regulating systems on a global scale. Again as explained by Luhmann (1995):

> The functional differentiation of society achieves an enormous intensification. The media of some function systems, especially scientific truth and money, corrode all natural (spontaneous) physical, chemical, organic, and human relationships, interrupt existing interdependencies, and thereby unleash causalities

that cannot be controlled by the potential for planning and recombination of the corresponding systems. The support society received from an environment that was always balanced by evolution has become more and more endangered. This is especially so because recombinations (new products, new combinations of actions in organizations) do not aim at reproducing disrupted environmental stabilities but at acquiring new combinatory possibilities (p. 476).

In essence, the world was once comprised of organizational forms (tribes, nation-states, etc.) that encompassed and regulated human activities, and that defined and gave meaning to knowledge as it developed. Global economic systems and systems of scientific research (as the two examples note by Luhmann) have moved beyond any previously "natural" boundaries and become more and more self-generating. People participate in them simply because they have become essential to "advanced" human societies and must, therefore, be maintained.

The answer to such a vacuous moral state, in which we find ourselves participating in and perpetuating systems as automatons, might simply be that we stop – if there were a simple way to do so. The least would seem to be that we began to work together, to talk and understand on new, global levels, the current states of being in which we exist, and to find ways to undo or regain control of the processes. (This assumes, of course, that we as humans were ever capable of consciously controlling societal evolution.) But as explained (once more) by Luhmann (1995), our ability to grasp and resolve these problems in any traditional sense, at this juncture in time, is in question.

> Less and less can one count on solving societally relevant problems by interaction: for example, by using people's physical presence to gain a consensus or to prevent uncontrollable problems in the intercoordination of different societal function systems (science and politics, the economy and education, science and religion) by bringing the participants into discussion with each other would be pure illusion. Thus a gap emerges between the interaction sequences individuals live through, which are accessible and understandable to them, and the complexity of the societal system, which they cannot grasp, and whose consequences cannot be influenced, let alone controlled. This holds not only for the interaction of 'normal people' but in principle for every interaction, even those leaders of the 'new corporatism' (p. 426).

There will certainly be many who take exception with this view. As described earlier in this paper, the approach proposed by the World Bank for better aligning developed and developing nations relies on the establishment of competent institutions for governance and regulation.

EMERGING PRINCIPLES

At the current moment in the writing of this paper, the US has apparently removed Saddam Hussein's regime from Iraq, and "liberated" the Iraqi people. The situation with

North Korea remains tense and in question. Violence continues, unabated, between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. China continues its dramatic economic advancements, but with Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) emerging as the newest worldwide health threat. Leadership in the US and the UK remains at odds with that of many other European and Eastern nations, and with trust of political, corporate and religious leaders at possibly an all-time modern low. This would seem to be a difficult situation in which to establish new institutions, at least in a traditional sense.

So in what are people to trust, and with what to find again some sense of larger purpose and alignment? It is not likely to be a return to any previous cultural or belief system, whether for individual groups or the world at large (though many will advocate this in the process.) The emerging consensus about values at present seems to be for respecting and protecting all diversity and differences – human and otherwise. If this proves to be accurate, this value system is likely to continue developing over the next several decades, as we begin learning to become "one global community" (but all different.) Pressure for competition between differences will be replaced by a search for commonalities even deeper than what most cultures had previously assumed were essential and "necessary." As stated by Bohm (1996), "Freedom makes possible *a creative perception of new orders of reality*" (p. 23).

Following this assumption, individuals will find their sense of alignment in many different and varied ways, not just through the largest institutions of country, social culture, religion and occupation, as in the past. Bound less and less by traditional concepts, people may find a sense of resonance with any number of multi-cultural and multi-ethnic ideas and practices. Along with the increasing mobility and flexibility provided by technology (as it begins to fulfill more of its promises), doing truly good work and making right choices for oneself, in support of important relationships, will become a much more decentralized and diverse process.

While such a prediction seems to stand in direct contrast to the "homogenization" of the world, in which mega-institutions and -organizations seem to continue to form and dominate, it is likely that both directions will continue to evolve at once. The largest institutions must actually accommodate the greatest diversity, lest the lack of requisite variety create the need for alternative and competing institutions. If the United Nations, for example, cannot involve all recognized nations, competing platforms of discourse will develop. Likewise, institutions, corporations, and organizations which do not find adequate resonance with important cultural and societal groups will find resistance and alternatives building. The leaders of this new era are more likely to emerge as "guides" and visionaries than as tyrants and heroes of the past. Letting go of old and deep assumptions, though, will not be a quick and easy process.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The world at present is experiencing a great deal of turmoil. Trust in economic and political leaders, and in the institutions with which they are associated, has eroded

significantly. The simple and usual answer is that "bad people," driven by selfish motives and greed have somehow ended up in those positions. An alternative view is that these leaders have risen over time through organizations and systems to their current positions, based upon their fulfilling the expectations of those above and around them. The organizational assumptions, though, which supported their successes, are no longer aligned with those of the greater, global environment in which these organizations now operate. Likewise, this misalignment between organizations and institutions, and the larger societal systems, has left many "regular" people searching for a sense of purpose and meaning in their work, and in their lives in general.

The fundamental, tacit assumptions through which people operate daily, and through which they interpret the world and find meaning, often run much deeper than might be understood. They are often, in fact, associated with personal and cultural identity, the loss of which can be experienced as a loss of "self." Because they operate so far from conscious awareness, resolving differences through conversation or dialogue would be difficult, at best.

There does appear, though, to be an emerging set of beliefs and principles through which a new sense of alignment might be found. The difficulty is that they may require significant changes in assumptions, in international relations, and in distribution of resources for some time – and therefore in letting go of some strongly held beliefs, first.

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