

INGENUITY

HUMANS AND THEIR ORGANIZATIONS AT THE CROSSROADS

WHY ARE OUR INSTITUTIONS NOT WORKING?

Why don't things work the way that they used to? Where are our leaders? Why am I working harder and harder while I seem to be going backwards? Why do my children perceive that they will not have as good a life as mine? Why is violence rampant in our streets? Why are schools, business, and government broken? These are questions that we hear over and over again in millions of forms as we grope to grasp the meaning of what's happening to us.

The basic problem is that our models of organizations and of ourselves are out of date. We, as humans, our societies and their artifacts, have evolved. The gap between what is and what we perceive has widened to the point of breaking. We must change our mental maps to reflect the world. And, our organizations must emulate the new mental maps.

We are at a crossroads and we have a choice. We cannot deny any longer the existence of the need for change. And, we cannot waste our energies any longer fighting against change. We must embrace change and move rapidly towards a new state of being, knowing, and creating. We must develop our ingenuity and the ingenuity of our organizations.

HUMAN EVOLUTION AT A CROSSROADS

Critical periods of change have always existed throughout the history of mankind. Although they are at times represented as well defined points, more often these periods actually existed more as zones of great transitions, the points in time being a convenient convention for historical clarity. Throughout our history, we have sought to name these periods and to classify them according to some meaningful terminologies. These terminologies were intended to describe, in few words, the entire social-political-economic-technological make-up of the society, and thus convey simply a tremendous amount of information.

These periods of transition have occurred with great regularity and increasing frequency. The transition from the Paleolithic through the Neolithic period to the Agricultural Age was a long and, in human terms, slow process. The transition from the Agriculture to Industrial Age by the previous standards was quite rapid. Moreover, the current transition from the Industrial Age to the Interactive Age will prove to be the most rapid of all. Nevertheless, there is still a zone in time for the transition to progress through, rather than a sharp time point of delineation.

We can characterize these transition zones as crossroads, where critical interactions of the old with the new create turbulent, even tumultuous periods. Everything is in flux; change is all about. The old and familiar is replaced by the new and risky, but not smoothly. Not everyone will, or wants to, recognize that change is all about. Some will face change with recognition and move forward; some will refuse to accept change as inevitable and actively fight to keep things as they are; while others will deny or refuse to acknowledge what is happening all together.

As these crossroads become evident, both individuals and organizations recognize them or not, choose to or not to take action. There is never unanimous agreement. As a result, courses of human histories are altered forever.

THE INTERACTIVE AGE

The interactive age is the age of conversation rather than communication. The communication of information characterized the industrial age that culminated in what some call the "information age". The "information age" is not the start of the new but the end of the old.

Conversation is turning around together. Social, political, economic, demographic, and technical driving forces for change are creating the need for and enabling the transformation of communication into conversation.

The interactive age will be characterized by chaos. Chaos is not randomness. Chaos has order that we as yet can't perceive. Our role in the interactive age will be to continually seek to understand the order in the chaos of our continuously changing world.

In the interactive age, technology will assist us in conducting conversations with each other throughout the world. And, technology will enable us to understand our world. It will give us access to the knowledge we need to continuously recreate our world.

Systems thinking will develop in this age. Systems thinking is a method of perceiving, thinking, and acting which is based on the belief that all things are connected and interdependent, often in non-linear ways. As a result, perceptual boundaries that we establish will influence our identification of problems, and subsequent proposed solutions. In systems thinking, we realize that every closed system has built-in residual error.

Therefore, a critical element of systems thinking, and of the age of interaction, is the process of continuous improvement in which perceptual boundaries are established and a model proposed for the interactions within those boundaries. This model is tested by practical application and modified, or our perceptual boundaries changed, to reflect experience.

In the interactive age, we will move from symbolic experiences to essential experiences. The development of language, a powerful tool that fueled our evolution, taught us the power of symbols. The industrial age hammered this point over and over again, as segmental approaches outstripped integrative ones. Unfortunately, in the process, we began to worship the symbols. In the interactive age, we will shed symbolic experiences and search for essential experiences that will enrich our bodies, mind, and spirit.

THE CONTINUUM OF HUMAN INGENUITY

Language informs our civilization and civilization, in turn, informs our language. In instances where language and civilization have grown together over the centuries, we can reach down into the roots of our existence by reaching down into the roots of a single word. Ingenuity is such a word. From gn or gen in Indo-European, via Latin, ingenuity denotes our intrinsic ability to know ourselves, become ourselves, and continually recreate our organizations and ourselves. At each juncture of human evolution, it is these characteristics of ingenuity that have fortified our survival and advanced our evolution.

Our innate tools for survival and evolution, the seat of our ingenuity, are the three modes of perception -- intellectual, emotional, and intuitive -- inherent in the brain. The integrated use of these perceptions provides us with a perspective from which to identify and solve problems and make decisions crucial to our existence

and to our responsive and creative interaction with our current environment. Integrated, these perceptions continually strengthen our ingenuity, giving us the insights, wisdom, and courage necessary for us to move imaginatively into the unknown and give form to the future.

Over the centuries, it has been our consistent reliance on ingenuity that has enabled us to discern our purpose and recognize our usefulness, to generate change, and to make those gestures of the mind which expand our mental map, rediscover the essential forms beneath our existing symbols, and recreate our realities.

At this crossroads in human evolution, as at every other in the past, our ingenuity remains the regenerative wellspring of our existence.

Ingenuity -- knowing, being, and creating -- requires a landscape free of the stumbling blocks of expectations and pre-conceived results and free of the measurements of success and failure predicated on those expectations.

KNOWING

Naitre, pour tout, c'est connaitre. Tout naissance est un connaissance.

(To be born is to come to know. All birth is awakening to knowledge.)

In his observation, Paul Claudel gives expression to what we all sense -- namely, that knowing and being are inextricably entwined in the human experience. It is precisely that quest for knowing ourselves and our environment, our origin and our destiny, that defines our being, and, from that, our organizations. At the same time, that very quest, engaged in openly, leads us to perceive that all knowing is transient, that our ultimate knowing is knowing that we know very little and that one day's knowledge is reshaped by new information the very next day.

In fact, in the Judaic-Christian tradition, we are told that we forfeited our place in paradise because Adam insisted on knowing, thereby refusing his given place in the natural order of the universe. According to this tradition, all Adam, or any of us gain in knowledge when we insist on "eating of the tree of knowledge" is the knowledge of separation from God, from our own perceptions and ingenuity, and from meaningful interaction with our fellows. Grasping the illusion of being all-knowing and clinging possessively to our fragments of information, we shut ourselves off from the on-going process of knowing and becoming and are, finally, left behind in a darkness of our own making.

True knowing, then, is knowing one's relative place in the scheme of things, knowing oneself well enough to be a useful part of the environment, and above all, knowing one's vulnerability and the limits of one's ability to know. Only from this perspective are we poised to interact creatively and effectively in a continuously changing world.

BEING

If, as we have observed above, knowing and being are entwined, then being, like knowing, is in a constant state of transformation. We are always becoming, and, at each point in that progression, we are always new. Any mental or physical structure that stands in the way of that progression impedes us from being new, being innovative, and being effectively responsive to our ever-changing environment. Even being, itself, if for the sheer personal gratification of being and if devoid of the quest to know, becomes an obstacle to our

individual, and, by extension, to our global progress. Integrated with the quest to know, being becomes a moment to moment unfolding of our innate talents - our genius - and our purpose.

CREATING

We are created creative. As we mature, our social systems teach us not to be creative. As a result the mental maps we have limit our creative ability. However, we can change our mental maps. We can make decisions that will begin the process of our change. These first steps, and all subsequent steps, are, in and of themselves, creative.

The mental maps we construct, and the social systems we develop which reflect our mental maps, are only approximations of the actual world. The world we perceive is invented by our imagination. We chose which perception we will adopt. That decision is greatly influenced by what we have learned, and by cultural pressure. Creativity occurs when we reconstruct our mental maps. Therefore, every act of creation is an act of destruction. That is, when we create a new perception, we de-construct the previous one.

Life is a process of continuous creation. To live is to continually take in portions of our environment and restructure them into different forms living off the energy that is released by the change of form. To deny our innate creativity is to deny life. To live fully is to continuously recreate one's self, not only in our bodies, but also in our minds and spirits.

TECHNOLOGY AND INGENUITY IN THE INTERACTIVE AGE

Technology is the result of the application of our knowledge and being. As a result, it is at once both a driver of change, a result of change, and a facilitator of change. Technology is the message of our existence, the creation of the sum of our being and knowledge. Technology has propelled our evolution for thousands of years at a steadily increasing rate as we seek to expand the mental maps of our existence. Technology is a reflection of our ingenuity and supports us in the development and application of our ingenuity. It helps us to know, to be, and to create.

Technology can be a force for good, both the result of, the driver of, and the expansion of our consciousness. However, in the industrial age, technology became the result of and facilitator of our relentless pursuit of knowledge. And, in the last stages, technology became a symbol, and the symbol became reality. In the interactive age, technology will be re-integrated into the fabric of our lives as we seek a balance of knowing and being.

Innovation is the practical application in society of technology or a set of technologies. As technology is the result of our creativity, it is the vehicle for the transformation of our creativity into innovation. Technology can be directly involved in the innovation: it can support the development, production, or distribution of the innovation; or, it can enable the advancement of either the direct or supportive technologies.

The key direct, supportive, and enabling technologies of the interactive age help us develop and facilitate our ingenuity in the interactive age.

INTERACTIVE LEADERSHIP

In the interactive age, leadership is not a position but a perspective. Leaders in organizations will emerge from any position within and without the organization. The common characteristics of leaders will be their ingenuity, their ability to know, be, and create. They will be able to motivate others through their capability to ennoble, enable, empower, and encourage. They will be able to establish a shared vision, mission, goals, and

values in organizations. Interactive leaders will be able to discern the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic values of the organization. They will be able to guide the organization towards those intrinsic values that will facilitate the organization's discovery and realization of its purpose.

Interactive leaders will be responsive. They will be responsible to themselves, the organization's customers, its stakeholders, its strategic partners, and its members as well as society. They will understand the power of quality, vitality and ethical values and be able to develop those values in organizations. The leaders of organizations in the interactive age will understand and be able to apply the tools of organizational change and development.

LIVING LIFE RESPONSIVELY

The resources of life can be perceived as abundant or scarce. If life's resources are viewed abundantly, the response is to live life abundantly, which is to interact with the world responsively. Living life abundantly means balancing and integrating knowing, being, and creating; using ingenuity to interact with the world to create wealth. It means discovering who you are and integrating learning, work, and play throughout life to fulfill your purpose.

Living life responsively means to be open to interaction, available, and responsible for your life. An abundant life does not squander its resources or act irresponsibly damaging the lives of others or the environment. An abundant life uses only what it needs when it needs it, and in return, what it needs is available to it when needed.

There are two potential responses to a perception of scarcity. One response is to create a culture of poverty. This is the response of penury; suffering is a virtue and anyone who has created wealth is viewed as having done something wrong.

The second possible response to a perception of scarcity is acquisition; you never know when things will get worse, so we'd better acquire and store a lot. This response drives one to accumulate money and things; wealth is created, if it is at all, by accident. An acquisitive response puts the person on a treadmill of continuous desire for more; "He who has the most toys when he dies, wins!"

In western culture we fear dragons. A dragon accumulates. It hoards gold and virgins which it guards but can enjoy neither. Yet our western society worships the dragon of acquisition.

Both responses to a perception of scarcity breeds violence. The acquisitive response creates violence against others and the environment. The culture of poverty inflicts violence on the self, the family, and others caught in the downward spiral.

Both responses to a perception of scarcity breed a need for control. "Control Freaks" are people who are so driven by the conscious and subconscious fears caused by the perception of scarcity that their entire life is motivated by control. They will act in ways that attempt to maintain their sense of control at any costs. This can result in psychological and physical abuse of themselves and of those they feel a need to control.

THE CHOICES WE MAKE

Six blind men, in a well-known parable, examine an elephant. One stands at the elephant's side, touches the mass in front of him, and proclaims, "This is a great wall." Another runs his hand against the elephant's leg and proclaims, "This is the trunk of a great tree." Still another, running his hand along the tail, announces, "This is a mighty vine." The remaining three blind men follow suit.

Each of the men chose, in their blindness, to perceive only what was directly in front of them, only what they could reach out and touch. Avoiding conversation with each other, denying the limitations of their perceptions, they each claimed complete knowledge and stated their limited sense of reality with great authority.

Not one of them ever experienced the delight of perceiving the elephant.

In our fragmented, industrialized society, we have become much like the blind men, denying our limitations and choosing not to interact. Consequently, we lose sight of the reality of our environment and order our priorities accordingly.

The choices we make determine our perceptions, and, in turn, our perceptions determine our choices. If we choose to acknowledge our limitations, we can discover new worlds. If we insist on clutching to our fragments of information, we cease to discover, we cease to create, and, in essence, we cease to be.

There is inherent in our existence the potential for ecstasy, for dynamic freedom from stasis, for continual freedom to know, to be, and to create. In that potential lies the continual cycle from end times to new times, from death to new birth.

A choice to limit that freedom, to remain fixed by familiar symbols, personal gratification, and fear imprisons us, thwarts our ingenuity, and seriously damages our ability to survive and evolve.

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