IN THIS ISSUE:

WELLTH-DRIVEN SUCCESS: A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR 21ST-CENTURY LEADERS

B Y   R E N E E   M O O R E F I E L D

"Is life really a game of just survival? Must dog eat dog? Can there be no meaning beyond making money and acquiring power, both of which can be lost in a heartbeat? Is there a way that matters by which I can contribute, not just to my family, but to my neighbors, the truly disadvantaged, my peers, my country—the global village?

A growing number of business people have begun answering these questions in an altruistic manner. No longer is their goal solely to look out for number one—themselves—but now, it's also to contribute to the greater good in a particularly novel way—through their business practices."

—Daryl Paulson, Author and CEO of BioScience Laboratories, Inc.

The brand team for a major soft-drink company faces a dilemma: It must decide whether to advertise its well-known diet drink to teenage girls in the U.S., a sizeable market opportunity for immediate sales. Yet the latest research screams that girls in that age range are plagued with poor self-esteem, obsessed with the "be thin to be happy" message rampant in Western media. Should the company turn a blind eye to the research and make a substantial profit or turn away from the money with eyes wide open. What is the right thing to do?

When we lead an organization that relies on profitability to exist, the answer isn't always obvious. As we become mindful of the myriad of outside factors that influence our business success, we confront troubling dilemmas and are called on to make choices that we know will have larger implications for the future of our companies, cultures, and lives. We must tirelessly invent new products, services, and often entire markets, while we secretly reminisce about how much easier things used to be.

We must focus on the business of doing business, but in today's climate, we can only do so by navigating difficult social issues. We aim for growth, but we want to stay true to the purpose and values that make our organization a great place to work. Likewise, we want to reinvigorate our personal health, yet we struggle with the weight of work on our shoulders.

Every moment seems like a compromise, a juggling act, a constant "give and take" with no end in sight.

> **We can either stick our head in the sand or discover fundamentally new ways to see our problems, make decisions, and relate to others.**

The stark truth is that the world is continually shifting right before our eyes, in ways we cannot control. The more we see the consequences of our values and actions, the more we realize that we can't succeed any longer using the exhausting and uninspired approaches of the past.

Today's world is challenging us in ways we could not have imagined (see "Twenty-First Century Challenges and Opportunities" on p. 3). We can either stick our head in the sand or discover fundamentally new ways to see our problems, make decisions, and relate to others. Ultimately, the current circumstances invite us to cultivate a radically new approach to directing our businesses and our lives. To do so, we must become *twenty-first century leaders.*

Who Is the 21st Century Leader?

Twenty-first century leaders, and the organizations they head up, come in all shapes and sizes. They are:

• Ari Weinzweig and Paul Saginaw, owners of the wildly popular Zinger-man's Deli in Ann Arbor, Michigan, a mid-sized enterprise that achieves sustained growth year after year through passion, purpose, and principled, well-managed strategies to benefit the company and local community.

• Linda Distlerath, head of Grameen-Phone Global Health Policy at pharmaceutical giant Merck & Company, who collaborates with the Gates Foundation to guide a multi-year, $50 million strategy for mitigating AIDS in Botswana.

• Iqbal Quadir, founder of Bangladesh's largest phone company, who uses the savvy of business not only to provide communication services to more than 50 million people, but also to encourage democracy in the region.

• Dianne Culhane, director at the Coca-Cola Company, who takes care of her health so that she has the physical stamina, emotional grit, and mental ingenuity to meet the world-spanning demands of her frenetic job.

Twenty-first century leaders are the professionals, managers, and human beings who choose mindfulness and inner wisdom as resources for success. They are motivated to transform human, financial, and natural resources into outcomes that serve both business and society. Instead of treating new markets, breakthrough technologies, and business profits as an end in themselves, twenty-first century leaders see these as instruments of a more authentic aim:

constructive, long-lasting change. Instead of growing organizations and brands for the sake of reputation or size, they use the power of their organizations and brands for the sake of well-being and effectiveness no matter where they operate.

True twenty-first century leaders don't pursue do-gooder public relations ploys. They see a clear reality in today's world: modern issues, like environmental challenges, and business results are inextricably coupled. As a result, it makes sense to redefine wealth altogether as "*wellth*," an ideal that embraces sound economics and good health—personal, organizational, societal, and global. Through their wisdom, visions, and deeds, twenty-first century leaders are creating reference points of wellness and balanced growth from which to measure themselves and their organizations.

These leaders stand apart from the success-at-any-cost management style that reigned in the last few decades. They rise above conventional corporate logic to generate what we might call "enlightened" results. Essentially, twenty-first century leaders are carving out a new consciousness for living, working, and leading that stands the traditional model of business on its head. If you long to use your self and your skills as tools to help business and humankind function on a higher ground, you too may be a member of this ever-growing group.

Wellth-Driven Results

Twenty-first century leaders don't choose goals randomly. They consider themselves stewards of changes that improve the health, prosperity, and effectiveness of people, businesses, and the larger natural and social worlds. These leaders are apt to regard *wholes* rather than parts, to *influence* and *partner* rather than intervene or force, to *balance short- and long-term objectives* rather than succumb to immediate pressures, and to *create* results using a naturally present momentum for change rather than foist new programs on the organization (see "Diagnosing a Problem Using a Systems

TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES	
How is your business answering the twenty-first century challenges and opportunities on your doorstep?	
Challenges	**Opportunities**
Conscientious Consumers	**Billion-Dollar Market**
Consumers who hold companies to a higher standard than simply providing low-priced and convenient goods and services. Now, what you stand for as a company and how your products contribute to society affect your profitability.	A $230 billion—and growing—market of consumers who are: • intensely brand loyal • highly influential over family and friends • shifting toward healthier choices • less sensitive to the price of products and services.
Wary Investors	**A Reputation for Integrity**
Investors who (thanks to the Internet and media) can and do scrutinize the details of corporate governance. They will rapidly punish your stock at the slightest sign of impropriety.	A chance to create a company brand that radiates integrity—one that contributes to a greater good—is resilient in economic downturns, and stands on its own ethics before the scrutiny of consumers, workers, and investors alike.
Enlightened Workers	**Creative Capital**
Workers who define the terms of their work as separate from the company they work for. Other priorities (health, family, where they live, personal dreams, and so on) now take precedence.	A pool of professionals whose values, work, and lifestyles highly correlate with the fundamental driver of our economy: creativity, the critical resource for all new technologies, knowledge, industries, and sustainable wealth.
Ethics Requirements	**Better Partnerships**
Governments, social action groups, non-governmental organizations, vendors, and customers who require —whether through legal means or social pressures—a higher standard of ethics and accountability before entertaining the idea of doing business with you.	Stronger business partnerships based on mutual advantage, values, trust, and accountability. These relationships enable shared innovations and business practices to emerge, such as radical product designs and cross-marketing. All parties get to capitalize on these win-win approaches.
Short-Sighted Leaders	**Progressive Leadership**
Leaders who rely on traditional, ineffective, and even harmful modes of decision-making, based on business models designed to manage the company purely to a short-term financial bottom line.	Leaders who understand how to: • manage and measure performance based on a broad definition of business success • work with complex systems • choose the most powerful actions for healthy financial and societal returns • motivate today's workforce.

For more details about the challenges and opportunities, see *LOHAS Journal Factbook Edition*, Volume 5 Issue 1. www.lohasjournal.com

View"). In turn, their businesses, large and small, actively seek ways to:
• Transform collective difficulties, such as the digital divide or malnutrition, into social and business profit
• Engage in industries that benefit humanity instead of only individuals
• Shape consumers' lives with marketing messages that are conscientious, truthful, and educational
• Sponsor transparent audits of their financial, social, and environment performance
• Use their aspirations, deeper purpose, core values, and company strengths to regulate and conduct strategies for business growth
• Provide safe and healthy working conditions as well as cultivate a *wellth-driven* business culture
• Use corporate power in ways that promote healthy and sustainable leadership practices in the larger geo-political and economic arenas
• Leave a legacy of leaders and initiatives that fosters the values of health and sustainability within the organization and around the globe

As systems architects, twenty-first century leaders see their jobs as generating environments and structures to promote self-determination, collaboration, and the healthy evolution of systems everywhere.

Becoming a Twenty-First Century Leader

To pursue a twenty-first century leadership agenda, start with these actions:
• *Choose* **wellth**-*driven outcomes.* Help the system you work with, such as a team, business, or organizational culture, to connect with deeply held aspirations, a motivating purpose, and outcomes worth changing for. Select goals that are positive, meaningful, and relevant. When people believe in what they're working toward, they are more likely to use their creative energy to achieve it.
• *Forecast the consequences.* Consider the short- and longer-term impacts of your actions on multiple stakeholders—your company, the workforce, business partners, the environment, the communities you operate in, vendors, other alliances, and yourself. Factor these potential benefits and losses into your plans for change, and keep your plans aligned with the intent to produce good rather than harm.
• *Assess the readiness for change.* Change is often like a rollercoaster ride, so prepare for the ups and downs. Assess your organization's readiness for change by asking: Are we free of problems that would distract us from reaching our goals? Are we open to radical ideas and solutions, plus willing to let go of approaches that may prevent progress? Are we prepared to build on and go beyond the values of our past so that we can bring about greater health and effectiveness in our future? Can we commit the time, energy, and resources required to sustain our change for the long haul, especially when we hit bumps along the way? If the answer to any of these questions is "no," consider what you and others need to rethink before embarking on your *wellth*-driven goals.
• *Determine your role in the change effort.* Figure out how you, as a leader, can be a constructive and enabling influence. Uncover the deeper purpose, values, and strengths of your leadership, and allow them to guide your thoughts and actions. Doing so will help you bring the best of yourself to your leadership role and perform your responsibilities with a minimum of effort and maximum of enthusiasm and integrity.
• *Cultivate the capabilities of others.* Assist the people you work with to contribute to the desired goals on their own. Your job isn't to fix anything or anyone as an all-knowing, all-seeing expert; your role is to enable people to solve their own problems and create sustainable results, ultimately without your guidance or resources.
• *Ask strategic questions.* For example, when stuck at an impasse, asking "How else could we interpret this?" could be just the right question to prod people toward views they'd never considered. Strategic questions open up new possibilities and deepen

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DIAGNOSING A PROBLEM USING A SYSTEMS VIEW

Choose a problem that you are attempting to resolve. Based on your answers to the following questions, consider alternative approaches you can take to better understand your problem and make sustained progress to solve it.

• Am I pushing too hard or too directly on the system to resolve this problem? How might the system compensate to stay as it is?

• Am I applying old or familiar solutions to this problem? What is the same about this situation, and what might be different? What new options can I consider?

• Am I trying to address this problem with quick, short-term solutions? How might these solutions slow me down or hurt my effectiveness in the long run?

• What appears to be the obvious cause of the problem? What deeper causes could be contributing to it?

• Am I trying to resolve this problem by applying a lot of resources, such as time, energy, money, etc.? Am I overwhelming the system with these resources? Alternatively, what small actions might I take to better use these resources as well as have a better impact?

• Am I seeing my options for resolving this problem as an either/or choice? How can I generate other solutions to give me more latitude and freedom?

• Am I blaming someone or something else for my problem? Who or what do I believe is inhibiting me or my problem-solving efforts? How might I be contributing to this problem with my thinking and actions?

people's ability to access their own wisdom. Additionally, these questions ensure that people are concentrated around the right challenges and aspirations, rather than responding from stress, denial, ignorance, or fear.

• *Influence and let go.* As you influence change toward the desired results, let go of control. By design, a living system—individuals, teams, and whole cultures alike—cannot be externally controlled *and* thrive to their fullest. Shifting toward a new quality of results (i.e., a more integrated focus on the social and commercial impact by your company) will put different demands on the system; the system may respond by stopping short of its potential, resisting the change, or learning how to flourish. Stay in a facilitative role, show humility and respect, and pay attention to how the system changes best.

• *Apply standardized tools as appropriate.* Utilize tools and methods only to the extent that they are useful. Human and natural systems are too unique for any one-size-fits-all approach. Technologies, such as change management techniques and strategic planning methods, are valuable guides to get new results, but they cannot be imposed in the same way every time for every living system.

• *Balance sustainability with growth toward* **wellth-driven results.** To foster sustainable results, help people consciously manage the pursuit of change goals by identifying the internal and external barriers to change, rectifying these barriers, and exercising different values, structures, and practices for a healthier, more mindful, and more stable way of functioning.

While you are carrying out all of these activities, don't miss the most powerful tool you have at your disposal: *you!*

The Most Powerful Tool

Achieving *wellth* isn't just for the benefit of business or society; it's also personal. Twenty-first century leaders strive to live a life that reflects the same values of health and sustainability that they advance in their companies and the world. Among other things, a *wellth*-driven life actively

integrates a sound mind, fit body, sense of belonging and purpose, spiritual core, and healthy emotional expression. It is a life of wholeness, meaning, competence, and effectiveness. In fact, a Stanford study of 53 successful leaders, including physicians, authors, philanthropists, managers, and others, found that these individuals not only take care of their health, they also *draw on their health as a resource* to meet challenges, solve complex problems, innovate, and productively lead. *Wellth*, then, isn't merely the outcome or experience of how you live and lead; it is a prime resource for living and leading itself.

On the other hand, the lack of *wellth* can erode your leadership. Consider the predicament of many CEOs who spend their entire careers focused on improving organizational performance while ignoring their own health. According to a 2002 World Economic Forum report, "CEOs are increasingly suffering from stress, sleep deprivation, heart disease, loneliness, failed marriages, and depression, among other problems. And those woes are taking toll on the bottom-line" (www.wef.org).

Thus, the personal well-being of CEOs directly affects the health of their businesses. Unhealthy CEOs and leaders at all levels lack the physical and emotional resilience, clear-headedness, and world-centric awareness to make the best decisions for their organizations and society as a whole. Without robust personal health, they can't access the depth of wisdom they need to make their lives, projects, and businesses better, or to navigate complexity. The leaders don't have the physical, psychological, or spiritual capacity from which to exercise the kind of leadership required in today's world.

Your personal *wellth* is the most powerful change tool you possess. Prestige, titles, and money may come

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PERSONAL *WELLTH* CHECKLIST

Are you taking care of your personal *wellth*? If you experience any of the following warning signs, you are already compromising your life and organizational well-being:

☐ You have a hard time assimilating information, innovating, or learning. Life seems as though it is coming at you too fast, and most of the time you feel overloaded and overwhelmed.

☐ You are unable to sustain the results you want in a way that's healthy for you.

☐ You are less efficient and productive than you'd expect.

☐ You don't know how to bring your strengths to your role.

☐ You are living and leading in conflict with your personal values.

☐ Your sense of success is tied up in attaining money, prestige, or authority, often at the expense of a deeper quality of purpose or happiness.

☐ You are just "going through the motions."

☐ You depersonalize and objectify others, often without knowing it. Relationships seem like a nuisance to you rather than core to your success. You may even find yourself in conflict with employees, family members, colleagues, and clients.

☐ You have an inescapable feeling of personal inadequacy and emptiness. Your accomplishments don't mean as much as they once did. You've lost contact with the bigger reasons behind why you lead.

☐ You hear distress in your language: *My work feels arduous. I'm tired all the time. Why do I do this every day? I can't seem to strike a healthy balance in my life and work. I have nothing left to give.*

☐ You suffer physical and emotional symptoms, like chronic tension, nagging colds, depression, and other maladies.

and go outside your control, but you always have the power to optimize your well-being. Personal *wellth* enables you to lead with inner authority rather than vacillation, discernment rather than thoughtlessness, resilience rather than burnout. As an individual, your *wellth* provides an inexhaustible energy supply, as long as you safeguard and manage it. When leading from personal *wellth*, your deeper inner truths naturally produce value in your outer life and work.

Are you taking care of your personal *wellth*? If you experience any of the warning signs, you are already compromising your life and organizational well-being (see "Personal *Wellth* Checklist" on p. 5).

This short list of warning signs sends a clear message: Focus on what it takes for you to feel personally whole, and learn to use your health as a resource for leading successfully. Your success—and the meaningful impact you can generate beyond you—relies on it.

Surprisingly, many leaders think these symptoms are the price they must pay for accepting a leadership role. On the contrary, they are a knock on the door, instructing you to realign your life based on balanced success. For the sake of your business, your life, and the health of society, explore the aspects of your well-being—such as your spiritual core, exercise, or friendships—that you can develop to bolster your psychological and physical well-being and, in turn, your overall effectiveness. What few changes could you make in your health today so that you are a better instrument of change for the welfare of others?

A Call to a New Kind of Success

Twenty-first century leadership is an evolutionary leap from the leadership styles we've known before. In the midst of traditionally wealth-driven circles, today's true leaders are using their selves and their businesses to elevate a *wellth*-driven consciousness, where health and sustainability is endeavored for its own sake rather than purely because of moral, legal, political, or commercial obligations.

> **What few changes could you make in your health today so that you are a better instrument of change for the welfare of others?**

Instead of fixing crises using worn-out approaches, twenty-first century leaders use problems as the impetus to evolve healthier values and practices for the future. By attempting to use all forms of power more conscientiously and wisely—whether financial wealth, corporate reach, brand presence, charisma, or personal health—these leaders set the stage for innovative collaboration and decisions that embrace the whole. Essentially, twenty-first century leaders endeavor to align their lives, relationships, and companies with unfolding a deeper *wellth* for business and human evolution. ◘

Renee Moorefield, Ph.D., is CEO of Wisdom Works, a firm that specializes in cultivating the mindfulness, health, and effectiveness of twenty-first century leaders as a strategy for conscious business and society. To learn more about the pioneering leadership programs, in-depth *wellth* assessments, services, and publications of Wisdom Works, contact: 303.772.9000 or www.wisdom-works.net.

For Further Reading

Beck, Don, and Chris Cowan. *Spiral Dynamics: Mastering Values, Leadership and Change* (Blackwell Publishing, 1996)

Florida, Richard. *The Rise of the Creative Class and How It's Transforming Work, Life, Community and Everyday Life* (Basic Books, 2002)

Paulson, Daryl, and Ken Wilber. *Competitive Business, Caring Business: An Integral Business Perspective for the 21st Century* (Paraview Press, 2002)

Pelletier, Kenneth. *Sound Mind, Sound Body: A New Model for Lifelong Health* (Simon & Schuster Adult Publishing Group, 1994)

NEXT STEPS

First, read the article. Then, with a group or partner in your workplace:

- Discuss the choices you face in your organization that you know will have larger implications for the future of your company, community, or life. In your role, do you ever experience a pull between upholding organizational values and making a profit? If so, what are some examples? How could you and your organization handle this conflict differently?

- Assess your organization's commitment to sustainable goals by referring to the bulleted list starting on page 4 under the heading "*Wellth*-Driven Results." Is your enterprise poised for success in today's climate? Why or why not? How can you contribute to helping your organization make the changes needed to thrive in the twenty-first century?

- Discuss how you and your colleagues manage your personal *wellth*. Have you noticed links between your mental and physical well-being and your overall effectiveness? What few changes could you make so that you are a better instrument of change?

—Janice Molloy

A FRAMEWORK FOR ACHIEVING CLARITY FOR YOU AND YOUR ORGANIZATION

B Y   J I M   R I T C H I E - D U N H A M

I am going to take things you already know and show you how to put that knowledge to work in your organization. One of the keys to being effective in your role, whatever it may be, is to understand the complexity of your organization, what it seeks to achieve, and how you can contribute to that objective. Doing so isn't hard because you don't have the tools; it's hard because you haven't been shown how to use them. The process outlined in this article takes the understanding and tools you already have and shows you how to use them to gain greater clarity about how to get your organization to where it wants to go.

Your Relationship with the Organization

You contribute to and depend on the success of the whole organization. As part of a group, department, or business unit, you must have access to certain resources (including people, capital, physical assets, and technology) in order to do your work. In turn, you use these resources to create value for the organization.

Your contribution to the organization depends on the quality of the decisions you make. Every decision is based on your understanding of what is important to you and to the organization and how to most efficiently and effectively achieve those goals. This is true for long-term decisions as well as daily ones—you act based on your own perspective of reality in your organization.

Obviously, the clearer you are about what you and the organization truly want to achieve and how the whole company actually works, the more likely you are to reach those results through your decisions. This is not strategic planning, but *strategic action*. So, your understanding of what you and others want to accomplish and how the organization actually works greatly influences your day-to-day efficiency and effectiveness.

You know better than most others what is important in your own work and how your part of the organization functions. You have gained this understanding through lots of experience and training, so you would not expect that others without that experience and training would have your clarity—and they don't. Likewise, you do not have the same clarity that others have of their part of the organization.

While this point may seem obvious, most people assume that their understanding of different functions is sufficient, while others obviously misunderstand their part of the system. Why else would workers in other areas make decisions that cause problems in your area? The truth is that you probably do not have a clear understanding of what other parts of the organization are trying to achieve or the reality of how they function, and others have the same lack of clarity about your area.

Clarity
Clarity is the correspondence between what is understood and what is actually observed.

Increasing Your Clarity

To gain clarity so that your actions help you achieve what is important to you and to the organization, you need to understand:

- what values drive the system's behavior
- how the parts of the system function
- how the values and parts relate

To help you gain understanding of these three items with as little effort as possible, my colleagues and I have developed a comprehensive, rigorous, and integrative framework called "GRASP" (Goals, Resources, Actions, Structure, People). GRASP is relatively simple to understand and focuses on the purpose of different areas and the overall organization. The three exercises on page 8 are intended to improve your clarity; each exercise is linked to one of the necessary understandings.

I mentioned in the beginning that you could do all of this with the understanding and tools you already have. As you will see in the exercises, all you need is some time (25 to 40 hours), the ability to ask questions, and the ability to listen with empathy. While some people are better at this than others, we all have the experience of asking questions and listening. I have found that these exercises are practical for both individuals and groups. If you are in a relatively autonomous part of the organization, they can help you understand how you and your team relate to others in your unit and in other departments. If you work with or oversee a substantial part of the organization, these activities provide a more strategic view of the whole enterprise and help you see how you contribute to it and how it fits in the larger system, such as your industry or community.

Understanding the Values That Drive the System's Behavior

Overview of Exercise: You want to understand the goals that define the "reason for existence" for the overall system, for each functional area, and for each key stakeholder.

GRASP Elements: "Goals" describes what the organization and its external stakeholders want to achieve through the organization. "People" describes what the internal areas of the organization want to achieve. (For more detail, see "Reconciling Local and Global Goals," *The Systems Thinker*, Volume 11 Number 2).

Set-up: In this exercise, you want to talk to people who have insight into the key areas of the system. We find that, in a 45- to 60-minute interview, you can inquire into why individuals think the overall system exists and what they think is most important about their work. The key is to approach the task with empathy and inquiry—you care about how they experience their part of the system.

Example: When we did this exercise with the Mexican Secretariat of Health, participants agreed that the overall goal was to minimize morbidity from an epidemic, which involved keeping the epidemic from entering Mexico, keeping people from getting it if it did enter, and helping people if they got it.

Understanding How the Parts of the System Function

Overview of Exercise: You want to understand how "experts" from each part of the system see the functioning of their area, including the resources they use to create value for the organization and for the different stakeholders they influence, and the actions they take based on those resources.

GRASP Elements: "Resources" describes the inputs used by each area to achieve its goals and those used by the overall organization to satisfy its stakeholders. "Actions" sheds light on where people can actually take action in the organization.

Set-up: In this exercise, you want to talk to people who have enough breadth and depth of experience to know how their part of the system works. We find that in a 45- to 60-minute interview, you can inquire into the resources they use to achieve their functional goals and the actions they take using those resources.

Example: When we did this exercise with an electric utility firm, we interviewed people who were considered the "go to" people in key areas—they knew how things worked much better than did the leaders in charge. They were able to explain to us how the operations group developed strategic human, equipment, and infrastructure resources to deliver on its promise of safe, reliable electricity. Likewise the call-center expert explained how the resources at the center's disposal influenced its response quality.

Understanding How the Values and Parts Relate

Overview of Exercise: You want to understand how the values and parts of the system link together.

GRASP Elements: "Structure" describes how resources and actions relate to each other and to the overall and local goals. (For more details, see "Breaking Down Functional Blinders," *The Systems Thinker*, Volume 10 Number 10).

Set-up: In this exercise, you can talk to the same people as in the previous exercise. We find that, in a 30-minute interview, you can learn how people think they influence and are influenced by other areas. Whether you use systems modeling tools such as causal loop diagrams or stock and flow models or simply develop a deeper understanding of these relationships, you will gain insight into how the values and functional parts of the system relate to each other.

Example: When we did this exercise with a European equipment manufacturer, the different experts we interviewed were quite clear how their work in sales, design, and assembly was influenced by the actions of the other areas. What was most interesting was when they did not know how they influenced other groups!

With this integrated understanding of the reality of what the different organizational areas want to achieve, how they function, how they interrelate, and how they are doing, you will be much clearer in how your day-to-day actions will help you achieve the desired results for your area and for the organization. This understanding will give you clarity about what resources you need to do your work and how you can help others do theirs most efficiently.

Not Just for Top Executives

Most people think that this more systemic, overall understanding is probably important for senior executives and strategic planning, but not for getting the real work done in their area. This is not true. By understanding the whole system, the interrelationships within the system, and their own role in it, people from throughout the organization become more efficient and work together more effectively. The alternative is to remain in our own individual silos, where we focus on strengthening our part of the organization and our results, often to the detriment of other areas and the whole on which we ultimately depend. ◘

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Research Supporting These Exercises

The selection of the five elements of GRASP and their relationship is based on research and experience over the past decade, trying to understand how these principles improve a person's "intuition" about the dynamics of complex organization. This minimal set of exercises includes the comprehensive rigor of most previous strategic frameworks in a simple, useful format.

YOUR THOUGHTS

Please send your comments about any of the articles in *THE SYSTEMS THINKER* to editorial@pegasuscom.com. We will publish selected letters in a future issue. Your input is valuable!

FORGING SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS TO COMPLEX PROBLEMS

B Y   J A N I C E   M O L L O Y

Solving Tough Problems
by Adam Kahane

T he next time you are involved in a seemingly unbreakable impasse, think about the dilemma faced by South Africans in the early 1990s. After centuries of violent and repressive white minority rule, the country began the long, painful transition to a racially egalitarian democracy led by the black majority. The situation was rife with danger, and yet opposition leaders and governmental officials—who came from dramatically contrasting worlds within the same society—found a way to overcome their tragic history to create a new South Africa.

How did the country's citizens manage to solve this almost impossibly complex problem? And what lessons can the rest of us learn from this brave process and others like it around the world? According to Adam Kahane in *Solving Tough Problems: An Open Way of Talking, Listening, and Creating New Realities* (Berrett-Koehler, 2004), the key to forging a better future in our personal lives, organizations, and world is talking and listening openly.

An Alternative to Force

Although this approach may sound simplistic or naïve, Kahane has stories from some of the world's most charged conflicts to show that it is neither. In Guatemala, home to a brutal civil war that left more than 200,000 people dead, representatives from all facets began to mend the tattered social fabric through devastatingly honest yet respectful conversation. In Argentina, a country that has been buffeted by economic woes and social chaos, leaders from the legal system engaged in a series of frank dialogue sessions that opened the door to judicial reform. And in South Africa, rather than remaining entrenched in fear or resorting to violence, white and black, right-wing and left-wing, jailers and jailed joined together to listen and be heard in the service of national reconciliation.

> **People typically approach complex problems either by maintaining the status quo or by trying to force a solution on others.**

This approach to tough challenges is unusual, because it involves lowering defenses at a time when participants are most inclined to raise them. It requires openness in settings that have thrived on secrecy and silence. And it demands mutual trust from victims as well as from perpetrators.

But the reality is that, in every setting—international, community, organizational, family—people typically approach complex problems either by maintaining the status quo (that is, by doing nothing) or by trying to force a solution on others. In the latter case, those with more power generally prevail, at least in the short run. Kahane says, "Families replay the same argument over and over, or a parent lays down the law. Organiza-

tions keep returning to a familiar crisis, or a boss declares a new strategy. Communities split over a controversial issue, or a politician dictates the answer. Countries negotiate to a stalemate, or they go to war."

Using force is problematic, in that it leaves behind a swath of physical and psychic damage, perpetuates fear, and sows the seeds of rebellion. Rather than drawing people together, it drives them apart. In imposing their will, those in power shut down all other approaches, options, and possibilities, relying solely on their own judgment.

Kahane points out that this approach might work for straightforward issues, but it is woefully inadequate for dealing with today's intricate problems. He defines these as situations that are:

Dynamically complex—Causes and their effects are separated by space and time, making the links between them difficult for any one person or group to identify.

Generatively complex—They are unpredictable and unfold in unfamiliar ways.

Socially complex—The people involved are extremely diverse and have very different perspectives.

Based on this definition, solving tough problems requires input from a wide range of stakeholders. Without the open and honest involvement of people from throughout the system, any resolution will be at best short-lived and at worst brutal.

Beyond the Comfort Zone

What kind of magic lies in talking and listening? After all, we talk continually, even when we're disagreeing.
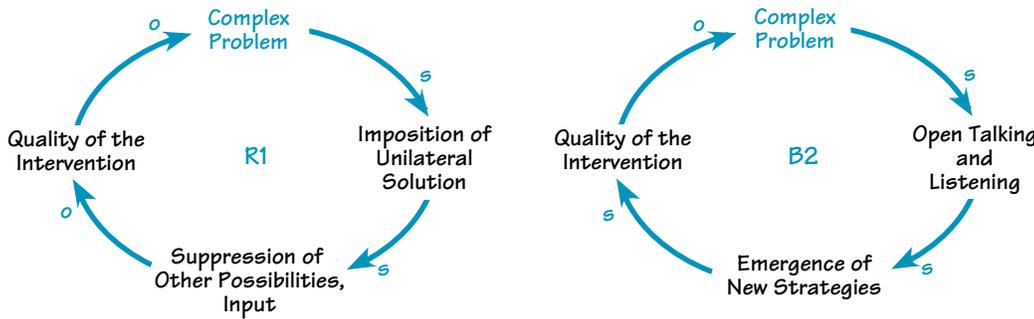
People typically approach complex problems either by doing nothing or by imposing a solution (R1). But without input from others, the quality of the intervention is generally poor, and the problem reappears. With each turn of the cycle, the severity of the problem grows, and the level of force required to implement a solution rises. A more sustainable approach is for stakeholders to talk and listen openly, which can lead to the emergence of new strategies and high-quality actions (B2).

Kahane shows that the *quality* of our interactions can make a major difference in the outcomes we achieve. Most of the time, when we talk, we're asserting one point of view—our own—as being *the* truth. And when we listen, it's generally to ourselves, as we prepare to refute something someone else has said.

To avoid becoming mired in conflict, we need to transcend our typical modes of talking and listening (see "Two Approaches to Complex Problems"). Based on his experiences, Kahane observes, "When someone speaks personally, passionately, and from the heart, the conversation deepens. When a team develops a habit of speaking openly, then the problem they are working on begins to shift." But he adds, "Often this is extremely difficult. People hesitate to say what they are thinking for many reasons, not only extraordinary but also ordinary: fear of being killed or jailed or fired, or fear of being disliked or considered impolite or stupid or not being a team player." Nevertheless, if we want to create a new reality, we need to find the courage to speak up.

Listening in new ways means stretching beyond our comfort zone and being willing to be influenced and changed by others. It entails noticing and questioning our thinking and letting go of our attachment to our own ideas. Finally, open listening requires empathy and a genuine interest in other people, their experiences, and their perspectives. As Kahane quotes a South African bishop as saying, "We must listen to the sacred within each of us."

Our Role in the Problem *and* Solution

But talking and listening aren't enough—to create something new rather than merely re-create the past, we need to be able to translate novel forms of conversation into innovative modes of action. Central to this process is being able to see ourselves as part of both the problem and the emerging solution.

To illustrate this point, Kahane describes what happened during a series of workshops that he facilitated in South Africa, known as the Mont Fleur scenario project: "A small group of leaders, representing a cross-section of a society that the whole world considered irretrievably stuck, had sat down together to talk broadly and profoundly about what was going on and what should be done. More than that, they had not talked about what other people—some faceless authorities or decision makers—should do to advance some parochial agenda, but what they and their colleagues and their fellow citizens had to do in order to create a better future for everybody." They recognized that, just as they and their fellow citizens and their forebears had created the past, their collective actions would shape the nation's future. That awareness opened up the possibilities for people to address the problems at a fundamental level.

For most of us, the consequences of continuing to rely on old ways of talking and listening are less dire than for the people whose stories are recounted in this book. But over the long run, we all face extraordinary challenges, including global climate change, the disparity between the wealthy and the poor, growing political instability around the world, and falling resource levels, among other growing crises.

These kinds of complex problems require people of courage to join together and forge peaceful, sustainable solutions. As Kahane concludes, "Every one of us gets to choose, in every encounter every day, which world we will contribute to bringing into reality. When we choose the closed way, we participate in creating a world filled with force and fear. When we choose an open way, we participate in creating another, better world." ◻

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Resources by Adam Kahane

Adam Kahane was a keynote speaker at the 2003 Pegasus Conference. His presentation, titled "The Potential of Talking and the Challenge of Listening," is available in various formats:

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To view excerpts, go to www.pegasuscom.com/m2/media.html, scroll through the Video Gallery until you find Adam Kahane, and click on "Play."

DOESN'T ANYONE USE TURN SIGNALS ANYMORE?

B Y   J E F F R E Y   C U F A U D E

Doesn't anyone use turn signals anymore? That was the thought running through my mind after two recent near collisions, with other cars making sudden turns or darting recklessly between lanes. It sometimes seems that people have forgotten that our roads are community spaces meant to be safely shared with others. Doing so requires giving some advance notice to our driving colleagues about what we are thinking of doing before we get involved in doing it.

Flash back to your days of driver's education and you may remember being extensively schooled in defensive driving. I can still recall the acronym SMOG as the precursor to changing lanes: Signal, Mirror, Over the Shoulder, Go. It seems like a quaint and forgotten custom nowadays that you might actually signal your intention first, check the mirror for traffic behind you, look over your shoulder to scout for cars that may be in your mirror's blind spot, and then proceed if it is safe to do so. While it may feel cumbersome, doing so often helps you avoid an accident.

Defensive Living

Given our fast-paced world, information overload, and people's greater attention to their own needs rather than those of the community, we might all benefit from having a "defensive living" mindset for life overall and for our work as a member of a team or organization. Many avoidable sources of conflict in organizations result from individuals or departments simply "changing lanes" without any advance notice to others or any real awareness of how their actions are going to affect others. Human nature being what it is, the more stressed the conditions, the more likely individuals are to focus their attention on their own interests as opposed to shared or community interests. But if cutting people off on the road inspires road rage, similar behavior with colleagues at work or in volunteer settings can only inspire equally over-the-top reactions.

Adopting a modified version of the SMOG principle can lead to respectful relationships that acknowl-

> **If cutting people off on the road inspires road rage, similar behavior with colleagues at work or in volunteer settings can only inspire equally over-the-top reactions.**

edge both work and volunteer organizations as community spaces. When going about our paid or volunteer work, we would be wise to:
1. Signal to all interested parties and stakeholders what our intentions are, especially when we want to introduce a significant change.
2. Check in the mirror to see if there are any lessons from the past that we should draw on to inform the efforts we are about to initiate.
3. Look over our shoulders to cast a wider net in terms of identifying how our actions might affect others and their efforts.
4. Go forward when we feel we've done appropriate due diligence. Acting in this *defensive* manner might reduce the likelihood of others finding us *offensive*.

Rules of the Road

All communities and work groups need some succinct, mutually under-stood "rules of the road" to guide their efforts in the workspace they share with others. We certainly don't want leaders to become the equivalent of traffic cops who sit by the side of the road in their squad cars to make sure that people drive safely. They would be wise, however, to have some equivalent of the radar gun at play in their organizations, some mechanism that generates real-time feedback as to the speed at which others are operating and how much it is exceeding defined limits for community safety. Creating relationships grounded in genuine commitment among all involved and in shared ground rules often can allow for feedback between and among peers as the primary enforcement system for any violations.

Initial violations of these shared principles might send you back for a bit more driver's ed to school you in the organization's culture and expectations for individuals who want to be a part of it. Consistent lack of regard for the rules of the road should result in your license being revoked and your ability to "drive" in the organization being ended.

Driving is a privilege, not a right, as is being a member of a team or community. Our individual choices and behaviors at work and when volunteering need to demonstrate that we are concerned about the safety of others and that we value sharing the road with them. ◘

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ChangeThis Offers Thoughtful Analyses of Important Issues

ChangeThis (www.changethis.com) is a web-based not-for-profit aimed at changing minds and spreading ideas. In this age of quick sound bites and shrinking attention spans, the goal of this nonpartisan group is to facilitate the spread of thoughtful arguments through free "manifestos"—PDF files that outline in careful language why you might want to consider an issue differently. Manifestos cover a wide range of topics, from steps we all can take to avoid heart disease to guerrilla marketing ideas.

Contributors have included Al Gore, Tom Peters, and the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, but anyone can submit a proposal. Visitors to the site then vote on which proposals they'd like to see as fully developed manifestos. You can e-mail a manifesto to anyone you think will benefit from it, post it on a web site, or print it out—all at no charge. The point is that the more people read a given manifesto, the greater the chance that it will spur much-needed change.

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