



Thinking Out Loud

Leadership Shifting Beliefs and Practices

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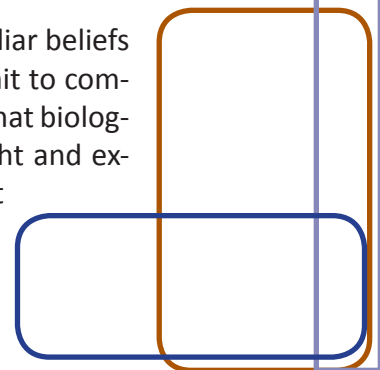
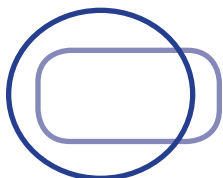
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I suffer from chronic optimism that helps me look past the broken stuff and see what is working or starting to work or maybe could work and I figure that we (like-minded people) can build on that. I see this as a time of new possibilities, of great hope and the promise of transformation.

At the same time some of the current systems and the underlying beliefs and practices that support them are making it very difficult to create the world we want to see. That existing models in economics and management and ultimately human systems are built on the scientific principles whose dominant metaphor is the machine. The whole is the sum of its parts and that there are a few basic laws and principles that make the machine work. This works well with actual machines but complex living systems include issues of choice and creativity that are unpredictable.

Those familiar beliefs and practices say that we exist as individuals outside a complex community context and free of the obligations of interdependence and are ultimately motivated by greed, selfishness and fear. That control and management through hierarchy is the best way to organize people. That a zero-sum philosophy (I lose if you gain) is the operating system of society.

My hope is based upon a *shift* away from those familiar beliefs and assumptions toward a belief in people to commit to community, to non-zero ideology and to the knowledge that biological metaphors have replaced the machine for insight and explanation. This hope is grounded in a sense that we live in a world of abundance rather than one of scarcity that dictates winners and losers.



This *shift* also asks for leaders that acknowledge, affirm and activate the capacities, creativity, talents and skills of people and groups of people. Each community around the world has a sprinkling of those people who are determined to lead differently. A recent article by Margaret Wheatley speaks about the trials that this pioneer leader faces in community. Aside from the loneliness that is inevitable, Wheatley sees five challenges such a leader will face from others who are confronted by a new world view.

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New leaders must invent the future while dealing with the past.

Without a model or roadmap the invention process is difficult and messy. At the same time it involves dealing with the existing problems.

It is difficult to break with tradition.

We are trained and familiar with our experiences and practices. Even with authentic commitment to new approaches it is very easy to default back to what is safe.

Supporters want leaders to look familiar.

We still want leaders to be idealized heroes that stand at the front and take us where we want to go. We confuse charisma and authority with leadership. We support, emotionally and financially those people who fit the image of the “hero” leader.

There is no room for failure.

We want results now, we want them efficiently and we want them to be measurable. It is rare to find patience for experimentation and exploration. If Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand were asked today, they would not invest in Columbus’ voyage.

We want them to fail.

To acknowledge that a new belief system with new practices is successful means that we have to change. That often brings out a zealous protection of prevailing approaches and practices.

We will continue to explore leadership, how it can help transform community and how each of us can create a community that nurtures it.

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