

# Reflections

The SoL Journal  
on Knowledge, Learning, and Change



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## FEATURE ARTICLES

### **Food for Thought: Discovering Common Ground**

Bart Hilhorst and Peter Schütte

### **Meetings That Matter: Conversational Leadership**

Raymond D. Jorgensen

### **The Unhappy Hedge Fund Manager: Thoughts on Work and Well-Being**

John Stutz

## BOOK EXCERPT

### **Power and Love: A Theory and Practice of Social Change**

Adam Kahane

### **On Stumbling and Learning to Dance – A Reply to Adam Kahane**

C. Sherry Immediato

## PUBLISHER'S NOTE 10.2

**C. Sherry Immediato**

**A**s an admirer of the Toyota system, I really want to know what happened. I am less concerned about how the defects made it through the production process undetected, although this is certainly a good question.

What really concerns me is why so many opportunities for correction after the fact were ignored or ineffectively used. There must have been a number of exchanges about the connection between driver reports of malfunctions and possible defects in design, materials or manufacturing. The capacity for conversations that challenge our most cherished beliefs, invite us to consider the legitimacy of another point of view, and move us toward action has emerged as a theme in this issue. (I hope we'll be able to consider how this applies to Toyota in the future!)

In "Food for Thought: Discovering Common Ground," SoL member Peter Schütte and Bart Hilhorst describe an interactive process, called Food for Thought (F4T), in which a group of 25 representatives from all Nile countries participated in a joint scenario building exercise to consider future water demands, particularly for agricultural needs. The Nile's waters are vital for the livelihood of over 200 million people in its basin. Rapidly rising populations and consequent environmental stresses have led to water scarcity and complex protracted negotiations. The authors share details of this process, demonstrating that scenario thinking can increase the appreciative understanding of a complex problem in a relatively short period of time, surface hidden assumptions, clarify desired futures, and foster trusting relationships among a diverse set of stakeholders and experts by including all points of view. Simon Thuo adds some reflections on his experience as a participant in the process.

For many, effective meetings equate to efficiency or improved time management skills, but for Ray Jorgensen and his colleagues, effective meetings capitalize on the collective wisdom of a group and generate higher quality relationships among group members. In "Meetings that Matter: Guidelines for Conversational Leadership," a generic approach to meeting design incorporating five behavioral guidelines for learning conversations provides a simple "recipe" for shared conversational accountability that teams can adapt for their own purposes. The result is the realignment of a group's energy with its larger system goals, which is achieved by integrating basic organizational learning tools into routine meeting design. In addition, group members deepen their own capacity for integrating these tools into their daily work.

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Following up on a theme introduced in prior issues, we asked John Stutz, co-founder and senior fellow at the Tellus Institute, to share his perspective on important aspects of well-being at work. In the ongoing debate on executive compensation and retention of professional employees, he asks, "Does being (very) well off enhance our sense of well-being?" In "The Unhappy Hedge Fund Manager: Thoughts on Work and Well-Being," he explores the role of well-being in the workplace by reconsidering the pervasive assumption that more income leads to greater happiness. He cites a number of examples in the current economic downturn in which companies who offer employees choices about their form of compensation enjoy the benefits of lower costs,

greater work-life balance, employee retention, and a general increase in well-being. As firms seek to increase employee engagement, these types of cases can prompt us to rethink our assumptions about what the real hierarchies of needs are in our organizations and how rewards of all types affect performance.

This issue's book excerpt is from Adam Kahane's *Power and Love: A Theory and Practice of Social Change* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2010). Kahane has been a major contributor to the field of scenario planning and his influence in Africa is noted in our opening feature. His new book's central theme is that if we want to be able to effect sustainable change in social systems – organizations, communities, societies – then we need to learn to work with two distinct drives that are permanently in tension: power, which Paul Tillich defines as “the drive of everything living to realize itself” and love, “the drive towards the unity of the separated.” Through the story of an ambitious and tough national dialogue project in Israel, this excerpt highlights “stumbling” (a stage in the process of learning to “walk”) as a metaphor for aligning these two competing drives.

Because Adam cites a SoL meeting as an illustration of his points, I have chosen to take advantage of this opportunity for public reflection – something we always hope will be a hallmark of this journal. In a contribution to this issue, “On Stumbling and Learning to Dance,” I offer my own thoughts on this chapter of SoL's life and of my own in the form of a letter to Adam. I continue to believe SoL is a great experiment in organizing for action learning in a wide variety of arenas. I hope we

will more actively model our own practices by reflecting on our own experiments and sharing our learnings.

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As we continue to make *Reflections* relevant to you, we hope to feature more cases like the lead article in this issue where we can report on experimental approaches, their relevance to organizational learning, and their results. Please let us know if you have a story you would like to contribute or one you know of that we should research and share.

We look forward to hearing from you – and welcome your letters!

With appreciation,



C. Sherry Immediato  
Publisher



# Food for Thought: Discovering Common Ground

BART HILHORST AND PETER SCHÜTTE

The Nile's waters are vital for the livelihood of over 200 million people in its basin. Rapidly rising populations and consequent environmental stresses have led to water scarcity and complex protracted negotiations. Peter Schütte and Bart Hilhorst describe an interactive process called Food for Thought (F4T), in which a group of 25 representatives from all Nile countries participated in a joint scenario building exercise to consider future water demands, particularly for agricultural needs. The authors share details of this process, demonstrating that scenario thinking can increase the appreciative understanding of a complex problem in a relatively short period of time, surface hidden assumptions, clarify desired futures, and foster trusting relationships among a diverse set of stakeholders and experts by encouraging a wider perspective.



**Bart Hilhorst**

The Nile is shared by ten countries. Ongoing population growth puts unprecedented pressure on scarce water resources. Concerted efforts are ongoing to strengthen cooperation among the Nile riparians, but progress in the negotiations over the joint development of the shared Nile waters is slow. In the face of high poverty levels and the large number of people intimately dependent on the Nile waters for their livelihood, it can be argued that delays in establishing effective cooperation pose a risk to the overall development efforts in the Nile region.



**Peter Schütte**

The "Food for Thought" (F4T) scenario exercise started in late 2006. It was initiated by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Nile project in collaboration with the Global Water Partnership (GWP) Eastern Africa. A group of some 25 decision-makers and stakeholders from all Nile countries engaged in a joint scenario building exercise to examine the uncertain future of the dominant driver of water use in the basin – demand for agricultural produce.

The anticipated outcome of the exercise was to obtain a realistic range of future agricultural demand levels in the basin, as a function of population growth, urban-rural population distribution, nutrition patterns, potential of commercial agriculture focused on export, biofuels prospects, etc. The outcome would serve as input into an analysis of the agricultural water variable in the Nile basin.

Early on in the process it became apparent that the structure of the demand function was determined by a wider range of parameters than originally foreseen. The exercise had to broaden its scope. Through a highly participatory process, it evolved into a systematic analysis of the complex rural development challenge in the basin, which is at the core of the ongoing negotiations regarding Nile water allocation.

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**"What gives us power as humans is not our minds, but our ability to share our minds."**

W. Brian Arthur

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Because of this wider perspective, the overall results of the exercise carried far more significance. Apart from answering a technical question, *What will be the future demand for agricultural produce?*, the exercise resulted in significant process gains. The process of collective sense making at the regional level increased mutual understanding among participants, while new shared interests and contours of common ground were identified.

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**Due to geography and history, there is limited economic integration between the upstream and downstream Nile regions. Apart from the river, there is little that links the ten states as a group. Direct common interests among the riparians are limited.**

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### **The Hydro-Political Context**

The Nile is the longest river in the world, shared by ten countries, and draining almost ten percent of the African continent. The text below describes the determining features of the Nile from a water policy maker's perspective, setting the scene for the hydro-political process.

**The Nile is a relatively small river in terms of volume of runoff.** From a hydrologic point of view, this is among the most characteristic features of the Nile. In spite of the size of its basin – over 3 million square kilometers – its annual renewable flow is just above 80 cubic kilometers. This volume represents a layer of less than 30 mm if spread over the Nile watershed.

**The Nile is the only significant source of water for the downstream riparians.** Egypt and northern Sudan receive insignificant rainfall. Over 80 million people in the downstream river stretch depend exclusively on the Nile for their water supply. Agriculture remains an important part of the national economies providing employment,

reducing expensive food imports, and generating foreign revenue. The agricultural economy has developed based on the existing Nile flows. Smaller quotas will require politically difficult and painful adjustments to the economy.

### **The upstream riparians have large rural populations that depend on subsistence agriculture.**

The upstream riparians predominantly consist of rural populations. For instance in Ethiopia – with a total population of about 79 million in 2005 – some 84 % are estimated to live in rural areas. Similar percentages are seen in other upstream countries. They derive their livelihood mostly from smallholder subsistence farming. Ethiopia's widespread poverty suggests that food security depends on local produce. This intimate dependency on agriculture – without alternatives – accentuates the importance of water.

**Ongoing population growth puts unprecedented pressure on natural resources.** The low-variant United Nations Population Division (UNPD) population prospect predicts an increase of 61% in the Nile Basin countries by 2030. It is 82% in the high-variant scenario. This rapidly expanding population, whose growth occurs in rural areas, puts unprecedented pressure on natural resources. Further, it entrenches the perception that the Nile waters are essential for rural development and food security.

**The Nile stream flow is fully allocated.** The limited Nile flows are now fully utilized for agricultural, domestic, industrial, and environmental purposes. The realistic potential for further supply increase (by draining wetland areas or reducing reservoir evaporation) is limited, particularly relative to the anticipated increase in water demand due to population growth. Hence, Nile water allocation represents a near zero-sum game.

**Rainfall is rather abundant but variable in large parts of the upstream riparians.** The average annual rainfall is 1150 mm on the Ethiopian Nile catchment. For Uganda it is 1200 mm. These are substantial figures, but the high temporal variability

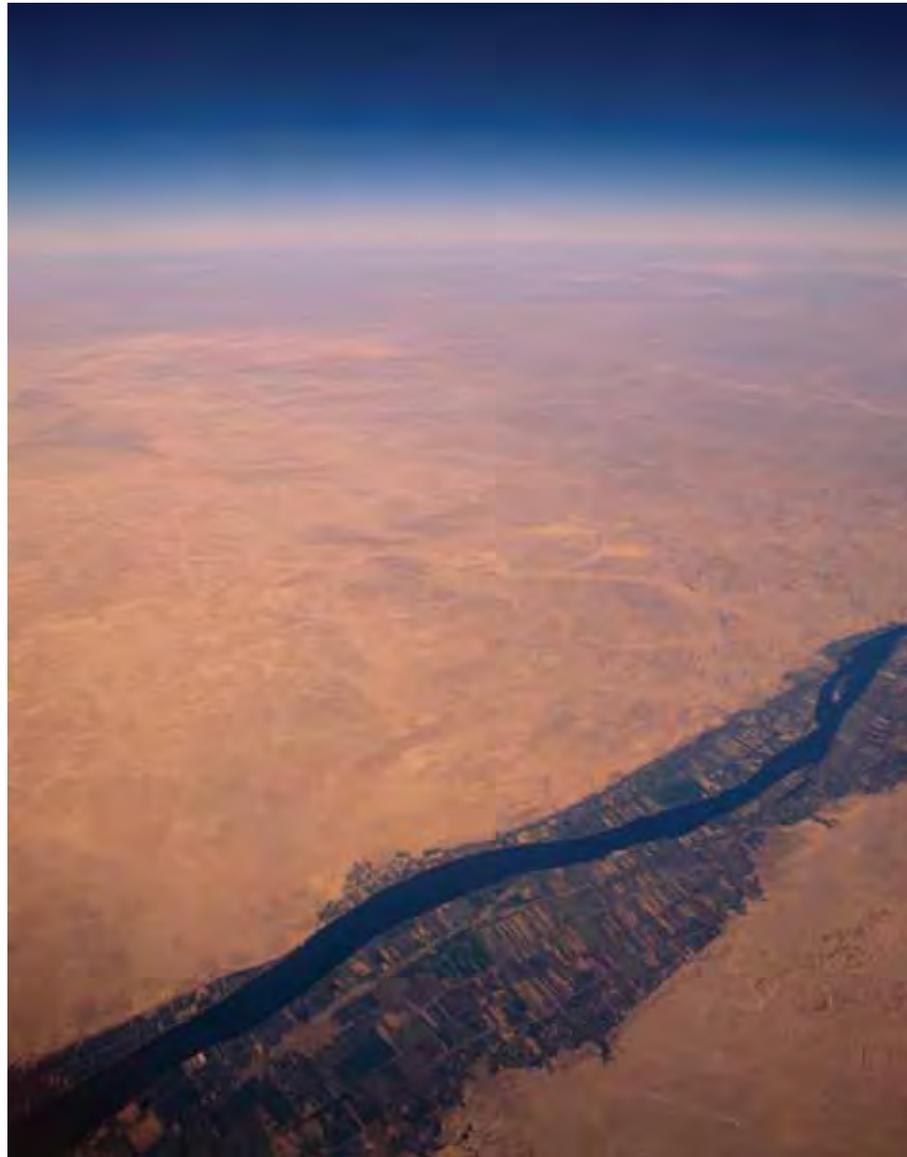
of rainfall has a marked adverse impact on the productivity of rain-fed agriculture. Some upstream countries have prioritized investments in large-scale hydraulic infrastructure to mitigate the effects of the weather uncertainties. In their analysis, hydrologic variability is among the key constraints to rural development.

**There are limited direct links between upstream and downstream riparians.** Due to geography and history, there is limited economic integration between the upstream and downstream Nile regions. Without effective north-south transport connections, inter-basin trade volumes are small. Apart from the river, there is little that links the ten states as a group. Direct common interests among the riparians are limited.

**The complexity of managing the Nile waters is increasing rapidly.** The principal cause is ongoing population growth, which increases pressure on the finite land and water resources as well as competition over its use. In addition, Nile management is no longer confined to the regional context alone. For instance, with rising dependency on food imports, Nile managers now have to take into account the uncertainties of international food markets, further complicating their decision-making process.

**Negotiations over the use of the Nile waters have been difficult.** Parties have held very different views about what constitutes their fair share of the waters and the principles that govern their allocation. One could argue that “sanctioned discourse” – limits in what can be discussed because of taboos or strong social norms – has complicated the negotiations.

**The Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) was established in 1999.** The Nile riparians have started a concerted effort to enhance cooperation. They are guided by a shared vision to “*achieve sustainable socio-economic development through the equitable utilization of, and benefits from, the common Nile Basin water resources.*” So far, progress toward a negotiated solution has been slow.



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### **The F4T Scenario Project: Participants, Setup, and Process**

Scenario thinking has proven effective in engaging decision-makers in a strategic conversation. In this capacity, the method has become popular in the corporate sector. In the public sector, dialogue-based processes like scenario thinking have demonstrated their value by contributing to the solution of highly complex problems and to building a level of trust in protracted and polarized conflicts. A well-known example is the Mont Fleur project in South Africa. During the uncertain transition to a democratic regime in the early 1990s, it contributed to the negotiation process by aligning views on what could be possible after apartheid.



analyze implications, and to identify signposts and trend breaking events (Cairo, April 2007, 1 day)

- fourth workshop, which focused on analyzing impacts, stakeholder reaction, areas of influence, and options to influence the course of events or adapt to new realities (Entebbe, May 2007, 2 days)

The process started with a round of over 50 interviews, with government officials, experts, academicians, and business people from the countries involved. The focus of the interviews was clearly agriculture and agricultural demand in relationship with water resources. The goal of this round of interviews was to provide an overview of views and issues that could serve to develop an initial strategic agenda for the workshops. The content of the interviews traveled well beyond the narrow water-related issues into areas such as international trade, rural development, population growth, poverty, education and health, and issues of (national) food security.

The interview feedback served as an input for a first workshop, where a group of some 25 participants discussed issues and uncertainties of the basin's future. During this meeting, the participants agreed to a first generation scenario framework that reflected those uncertain factors that were considered key to future developments in the region. Alignment among the participants on the factors that would "really make a difference" emerged very early during this workshop. Interestingly, both key uncertainties that emerged from the group's discussions were not directly water- or agriculture-related, but related to international trade opportunities and to what was coined "quality of governance" in times to come. Notably, the latter, on which consensus was very high, had not been or had hardly been touched upon during the initial interviews but moved to the center of the group's strategic conversations about the future.

In much the same composition, the group reconvened for three subsequent two-day workshops, which were used to discuss and probe the initial

FIGURE 1 **Four scenarios based on effectiveness of governance and international agricultural trade regime**



framework, develop and test the four emerging scenario story lines and so called "story maps", and subsequently to ponder scenario implications and the question, "What if we do nothing?" During the final workshop the group addressed new insights and the question, "What would/could we do if...?" A series of new insights was agreed to and options for each scenario and across all four scenarios were developed. Over time, confidence grew that the group's scenarios as a set were both highly plausible and highly relevant. More importantly, there was alignment among the participants on ways of moving forward as well as shared insights on possible risks.

### Scenario Storylines

Four scenario story lines were developed based on two uncertain elements: effectiveness of governance and international agricultural trade regime (Figure 1).

**Unintended Consequences:** Nile countries suffer high food prices when they fail to increase their agricultural output after OECD countries cut surplus production.



**Joint Effort:** robust governance and improved agricultural market conditions propel Nile countries into the middle class.

**Nile on its Own:** regional trade grows owing to improved Nile governance and limited international trade options.

**Double Burden:** inefficient governance conspires with unfavorable international trade conditions to frustrate agricultural development and keep Nile countries in poverty.

(The FAO scenario booklet presents the four comprehensive narratives, together with information on starting conditions, key uncertainties, and predetermined factors.)

### Common Ground

The Nile issue can be described as a protracted resource conflict in which parties have become committed to locked positions. Concerted efforts are being made to strengthen cooperation, but consensus regarding joint management of the scarce water resources has not yet been reached. The reasons for this are complex and interwoven.

Nile management is highly complex. It involves ten countries, each with its own specific development challenges, in an environment of high population growth. It has to address increasing pressure on a finite and fully allocated resource. Delays or failure may exacerbate critical food security or development concerns. Nile decision-makers have to take into account the diverse interests of numerous actors – both in the private and public sector, at state and sub-state level, and across diverse sectors of the national economy. The historic context has also made the Nile discourse sensitive.

Kahane has argued that such highly complex problems require a systematic approach that takes into account the functioning of the system as a whole. Compartmentalization – considering only some aspects of the problem instead of the full system – is a real risk when dealing with highly complex problems. It is fair to say that this applies to the Nile discourse, where most participants originate from the water or irrigation sectors. Furthermore, most can spend only part of their time on understanding the Nile context because their principal focus is on national responsibilities.

As a result, one could argue that thinking regarding Nile cooperation is still mainly focused on the river and water-related aspects (hydropower development, improving irrigation efficiencies, etc.). It reflects the historic context in which the Nile is, in fact, the only factor that unites the ten riparians as a group. It also reflects the shared vision to “achieve sustainable socio-economic development through the equitable utilization of, and benefits from, the common Nile Basin water resources,” which specifically concentrates Nile cooperation on the river and its derived benefits.

This situation is further complicated by the natural tendency in protracted negotiations to view the world from a rather strong partisan perspective, where mindsets and positions have become entrenched.

In the absence of a comprehensive perspective, it is difficult to identify the full set of shared or complementary interests of the parties involved, and the full range of options for mutually beneficial compromise. When the talks concentrate on the river alone – a near zero-sum game – progress is naturally slow as agreement may require difficult adjustments to national economies.

The F4T forum inadvertently served as a vehicle for stretching the Nile discourse and contributing to a better definition of the problems to address. To capture its original objective of quantifying a realistic range of future demand for agricultural produce in the basin, discussions quickly moved toward factors outside the traditional water-irrigation domain.

This is a characteristic feature of the scenario approach. The robust scenario development process, which starts by listing and then prioritizing driving forces, encourages the group to think beyond group assumptions. In the case of the F4T exercise,

the institutional factors – quality of governance and the international agricultural trade regime – emerged at the top of the list of key influencing factors. This steered discussions away from the natural resource base as the principal constraint to economic development in the region and resulted in a broader perspective.

A second characteristic of the scenario process is the systematic analysis of the causal structure that underlies the problem being addressed. It builds plausible scenario logics at the extreme corners of a scenario space defined by the two principal influencing elements. The scenario logics – and the critical assumptions involved in their development – are checked in a workshop setting. The process continues by systematically analyzing relevant policy questions, from the perspective of multiple stakeholders, with the scenario tool as backdrop. This methodical diagnosis typically results in a better understanding of exactly what needs to be solved. The F4T analysis prioritized rural development rather than optimizing water allocation

## Abbreviated F4T Scenario Storylines

**Nile on its Own:** Regional trade grows owing to improved Nile governance and limited international trade options. World commodity prices remain low but governments stabilize prices through regional tariffs. Policies promote local production and interregional trade. Gradually, Nile countries experience an increase in wealth and food security and a decline in poverty.

**Joint Effort:** Robust governance and improved agricultural market conditions propel Nile countries into the middle class. Governments stimulate rural development and, responding to higher commodity prices, agricultural productivity increases. Rural economies benefit and improve. Favorable economic conditions result in smaller families and reduced population growth.

**Unintended Consequences:** Nile countries suffer high food prices when they fail to increase their agricultural output after OECD countries cut surplus production. Only large export-oriented farms benefit from improved market conditions, but the majority of smallholders are unable to respond to price incentives due to the lack of an enabling environment. Subsistence farming dominates. With persistent high population growth rates, livelihood conditions deteriorate and economic development stagnates.

**Double Burden:** Inefficient governance conspires with unfavorable international trade conditions to frustrate agricultural development and keep Nile countries in poverty. Rural areas stagnate. High poverty levels and insecurity lead to adoption of family-based survival strategies, resulting in accelerated population growth and a downward spiral of economic decline.

as the principal task at hand for Nile managers. The analysis also brought to the fore the importance of addressing the non-biophysical constraints of rural and agricultural development.

Two more aspects of a scenario process deserve mention. The first relates to the relatively safe space that is created by discussing the future. Even with different backgrounds and aspirations, it is quite easy to agree on a future in which most of us can lead a meaningful and fulfilling life. No immediate hard choices are required when discussing multiple futures that are 20 or so years ahead. This safe space encourages unofficial views, and creates an atmosphere more conducive to free discussions.

The second aspect concerns the highly participatory nature of the scenario process. First, it should lead to a better problem analysis. Knowledge of a group – if mobilized in a systematic way that encourages open discussion – typically exceeds that of an individual. But the most crucial aspect of the group process is the joint discovery of insights by the scenario team. It builds common ground.

One should note that the insights gained by F4T are not new. In fact, they are well known to sector specialists. However, they were new for those outside their respective disciplines, and formed crucial input for the joint problem analysis made by

the team. One could argue, therefore, that the relevance of F4T lies in the *joint discovery* of these insights by a diverse group of decision-makers and experts from all riparian countries. The strong convergence of views that emerged in the scenario group is considered the most important outcome of the exercise.

Subsequent interviews with key players among the participants confirmed some tentative observations about the scenario process.

- Quickly moving away from the problems and differences of today into a conversation about the future, enabled a quick process of “unfreezing” among the participants.
- The scenario process has contributed to mutual understanding and trust among the participants, to the reframing of mental models, and to seeing the world in a new way. (Pierre Wack referred to this as “re-perceiving”.)
- Specifically the process has made the sensitive factor “effectiveness of governance” discussable.
- Mutual understanding and alignment on issues and options has markedly grown among the participants. [NB: A number of participants considered this to be the single most important outcome of the process.]

Through the F4T process a number of new shared interests emerged, in particular those related to agricultural trade regime. Notably, these are not



directly related to river flow and therefore offer better prospects for negotiated solutions. It created an opportunity for enlarging common ground.

### Reframing of Mental Models

The reframing of mental models is illustrated by two examples.

The first is that by looking at the Nile challenge from a new vantage point, it was possible to reformulate the problem description.

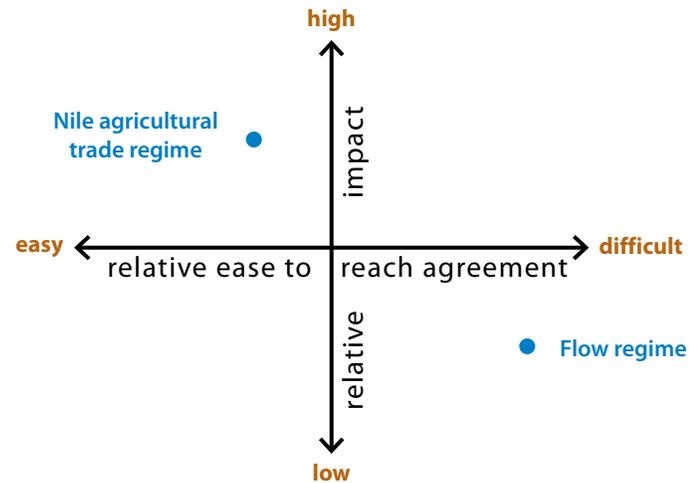
The original problem description was, “The main problem in the Nile region is that we are – or will be – water scarce; if we do not get our fair share of the water and its benefits, and without optimal management of the Nile resources, there could be major negative impacts on our development.”

The alternative problem description was, “The main problem in the Nile region is the large and very poor rural population who fully depend on small-holder subsistence farming for their livelihood and food security. While climatic variability has a marked negative impact on improving agricultural productivity, in some regions the non-biophysical constraints are more prominent than those related to the natural resource base.”

The latter description moves away from the near zero-sum flow allocation process and makes it possible to identify new shared interests. It offers opportunities for meaningful cooperation on an important subject (e.g., how to promote rural development, and in particular how to address the non-biophysical constraints to rural development) that is not directly related to the Nile flows and should, therefore, be easier to attain.

The second example illustrates “unfreezing” mental models. During a negotiation skills training, F4T was used as backdrop to assess implications of possible agreements. An informal discussion emerged in a small group. It plotted negotiation topics on a two-dimensional “negotiation space,” impact of agreement and anticipated difficulty to reach agreement. It was quickly agreed that con-

FIGURE 2 **Negotiation space plotting the relative ease of reaching an agreement versus its anticipated impact.**



sensus on flow regime would be difficult to attain. But it was also agreed that a realistic compromise on flow allocation would not dramatically alter the existing situation. Hence, its overall impact on the Nile economies was considered comparatively low. By contrast, establishing joint agricultural trade policies was considered easier, with much higher expected benefits, particularly for rural areas (Figure 2). Although these findings may be obvious in hindsight, they were quite unexpected in this improvised exercise.

### Enlarging the F4T Footprint

This article reports on the first phase of the F4T scenario exercise: building the scenarios. While it has been insightful for the participants, one can argue that so far the overall impact of F4T has been rather limited. This is because of the relatively small size of the original scenario group. It also points to an inherent limitation of the scenario process: only a relatively small group (approximately 20 people) can participate in the original scenario building exercise. A key challenge for scenario thinking, therefore, is how to communicate the process gains and insights to a wider audience. This is especially true for a scenario project whose explicit purpose is to contribute to a negotiation or reconciliation process, where legitimacy and inclusiveness are key requirements.



This factor was not taken into account when designing the original F4T process, when the focus of the exercise was still on examining a technical question (future demand for agricultural produce). As a result, no (financial) provisions were made for disseminating the process results, and the selection of participants was guided by professional qualifications rather than by their networks of influence.

To reap the full benefits of the exercise, the process of scenario-based strategic conversations needs to involve the right people – those with the power to influence and act.

We envision a two-pronged approach to enlarging the F4T footprint: inform people of the scenario stories and their possible implications; then engage a large group of Nile Basin stakeholders and decision-makers in a scenario-informed thinking process.

The second component is clearly more ambitious, and takes the form of a series of national and regional workshops. Here, the strategic conversation plays an important role and the workshops must be run by a trained facilitator.

During such workshops the scenarios are considered one by one. It is important to remember that all are plausible. The first step is to engage the participants in the scenario stories and have them understand their drivers and causal structure. The next step is to use the scenario set as backdrop to examine relevant policy questions from the perspective of multiple stakeholders.

The workshop concludes with a dialogue about insights gained, questions remaining, directions to follow, actions to take, and, ideally, some common ground and ideas on how to take the process to the next level.

### Conclusions

With growing populations and the size of the Nile economies increasing relative to the finite natural resource

base, pressure on the Nile waters is rising to unprecedented levels. Failure to effectively manage the resource may affect millions of people who intimately depend on it. Within this context, Nile water management is highly complex.

As mentioned earlier, Kahane has argued that such highly complex problems require processes that are systematic, emergent, and participatory. F4T met those criteria and this led to a more comprehensive analysis of the development problems in the Nile region. The exercise confirmed the importance of rural development when addressing the Nile challenge, and examined how, and under which conditions, changes in trade regime could have an impact.

F4T proved that scenario thinking can increase the appreciative understanding of a complex problem in a relatively short period of time. The highly participatory process was stimulating and productive as well as useful in developing more trust in the decisions made by the Nile experts.

The results of the F4T exercise were emergent. While the initial objective was to answer a rather technical question, “What is the range of future demand for agricultural produce?” the final results carry more significance.

Among the most striking aspects of F4T was the strong convergence of views that emerged in the diverse scenario group. There was general acceptance of the plausibility and relevance of each of the four story lines that were developed.

By taking a wider view, F4T proved useful in stretching the Nile discourse. A number of shared interests were identified and examined, in particular those related to agricultural trade regime. Notably, these are not directly related to river flow and therefore offer better prospects for negotiated solutions. This demonstrated the effectiveness of scenario thinking to support a highly complex negotiation process.

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### **F4T proved that scenario thinking can increase the appreciative understanding of a complex problem in a relatively short period of time.**

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F4T has concluded the scenario-building phase. We learned that this first scenario group is too small to maintain momentum in this ten-country environment. Process results need to be disseminated to a wider audience through a facilitated process of scenario-based strategic conversations, involving the right people with power to influence and act. If these conditions are not met, F4T, though very interesting and educational for its participants, risks having only limited impact.

Or maybe not. As one participant observed, ideas embraced by collective awareness do not easily go away. ■

## **Collective Insights**

**A** selection of collective insights from the F4T process is presented below. While well known to sector specialists, their joint discovery by the F4T group contributed to the common analysis of the Nile challenge.

- The natural resource base was not considered the principal constraint to economic development in the Nile countries; institutional aspects like international agricultural trade regime and governance—political accountability, and the quality of bureaucracy and the rule of law – were regarded as more critical.
- With dominant rural populations, the state of rural areas determines demographic developments in the upstream riparians; this underscores the importance of rural development in shaping the future of the water-demand function.
- Rural development depends on improving agricultural productivity. While the temporal variability of rainfall has a marked negative effect on agricultural productivity, the non-biophysical constraints are dominant in some regions.
- Profitable and stable farm gate prices are key starting conditions for all agricultural activities. Therefore, a coordinated agricultural trade policy – regarding both the internal Nile market and the external international market – could significantly benefit the riparian community.
- However, the prospects for rural development are limited if the right conditions – stable land tenure, extension services, infrastructure, fair access to markets, etc. – are not in place.
- Improved terms of agricultural trade, therefore, are only positive when an environment exists where farmers can respond to price incentives. Otherwise, unintended consequences ensue. This scenario underscores the importance of proper sequencing and timing of policy measures.

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# Meetings That Matter: Conversational Leadership in Today's Organizations

RAYMOND D. JORGENSEN

**For many, effective meetings equate to efficiency or improved time management skills, but for Ray Jorgensen and his colleagues effective meetings capitalize on the collective wisdom of a group and generate higher quality relationships among group members. A generic approach to meeting design that incorporates five behavioral guidelines for learning conversations provides a simple “recipe” for shared conversational leadership that teams can adapt for their own purposes. The result is the realignment of a group’s energy with its larger system goals by integrating basic organizational learning tools into routine meeting design. In addition, group members deepen their own capacity for integrating these tools into their daily work.**



**Raymond D. Jorgensen**

If the element in greatest evidence in any business is reports, and the second most prevalent feature is memos, surely a close third would have to be meetings. From frontline staff members to team leaders to department heads to CEOs, every individual in almost any organization attends a significant number of meetings. On average, professionals spend 25 percent of their time in meetings of one kind or another. Department managers are likely to spend up to 40 percent of their time around a conference table. Executives take the prize, typically spending 80 percent of their time in structured conversations.

Is spending all this time in meetings a good thing? The answer, of course, is that it depends on the quality of the meeting. When asked, most professionals concur that a good deal of the time they spend in “meeting mode” could be better used otherwise. Are we to conclude, then, that meetings should be abolished? On the contrary, an understanding of systems and how we learn suggests that meetings can and should be powerful vehicles of positive change, leading participants in common understanding that results in authentic engagement and alignment.

## A Systems Perspective

The fault is not in the meeting form itself, but rather in our approach to meetings. According to Fred Kofman and Peter Senge, (*Learning Organizations: Developing Cultures for Tomorrow's Workplace*, eds. Sarita Chawla and John Renesch, Productivity Press, 1995) “the main dysfunctions in today’s organizations are actually by-products of their past success.” As a culture, we have become accustomed to going to meetings that are rarely interesting, much less opportunities for learning and community development. Nevertheless, those poorly constructed gatherings have managed to move us forward as organizations. Any hint of doing away with or dramatically changing them is often viewed as heresy, heard as “that’s not the way we do things here.”

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**In a systems worldview, as we move from the primacy of the pieces to the primacy of the whole, each meeting provides an opportunity for participants to develop a collective understanding of their connectedness and interdependence.**

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The solution? Looking at organizations from a systems perspective. In a systems worldview, as we move from the primacy of the pieces to the primacy of the whole, each meeting provides an opportunity for participants to develop a collective understanding of their connectedness and interdependence. As people evolve from focusing on self to focusing on self as a member of a larger community, the purpose of meetings shifts from

solving problems to creating solutions, from defending absolute truths of the moment to achieving coherent and collective interpretations of what they want their organizations to be.

Gone are the gripe sessions, the meetings that take place simply because it is the appointed time for the appointed group to convene, and the gatherings that subtly pull a subsystem (department, team, staff sector) off the track from their established vision and mission. Participants no longer come to the table with the burning personal questions such as, “How is my job to be redefined today?” or “How can I use this meeting to get what I want within the system?” Instead, every meeting within the entire organization centers on aligning people’s efforts to help achieve the system’s vision and mission.

This new meeting paradigm enables leaders to steward the system rather than control it. Instead of poking around in unfolding business and

## The Art of Conversation

**A**s a State Farm Insurance agent, I have been building and leading sales teams for 29 years, and for me one of the most – if not the most – critical skill for building successful sales teams is effective communication.

A very successful peer of mine once told me that meetings are everything, and although I haven’t always been convinced of the wisdom of his assertion, I now believe that meetings are the single most important part of my work week. As an agent and agency manager, I have conducted hundreds, and probably thousands, of meetings over the years, always believing that I was successfully imparting enormous amounts of useful information and knowledge to my sales teams. For many years, I overlooked, or simply wasn’t aware of, the fact that during most of the meetings I conducted, there was little constructive feedback or what I now recognize as genuine participation.

As I become more and more familiar with Jorgensen’s conversational leadership model, I am also enjoying more and more success in leading my teams toward a common understanding and common framework from which we can address our most difficult issues and challenges. The premise of Jorgensen’s model is that the meeting leader is ultimately responsible for helping the organization achieve its goals and objectives. Understanding and integrating this premise into how I lead meetings has been an eye-opening and satisfying experience for me.

When I look back at the conversational leadership training sessions I have attended, one of the most compelling aspects has been the participants’ eagerness to engage and learn. I realize now that this is precisely what I want to create for my own team meetings, and am confident that I am well on my way to achieving that.

— Curt Myers, State Farm agent and agency manager since 1981  
Member of the State Farm President’s Club and Chairman’s Circle

administrative processes, the facilitator clarifies and aligns the action of the group. As each participant experiences personal learning through conversation, time is redirected from “administrivia” and ritual actions to the development of shared meaning. This shift enables meeting leaders to identify problems that can best be addressed through collective action and to involve all relevant players in finding solutions. The leader of such a meeting is now a community agent helping to align his or her group with the system’s goals and facilitating the design of methods for achieving those goals.

### A FOCUS on Conversational Leadership

To make this shift, businesses of all sizes, executives, department managers and team leaders regularly engage people in results-oriented, focused meetings based on a communication model called “conversational leadership.” (The phrase is believed to be coined by Carolyn Baldwin, an elementary school principal from Winter Haven, Florida.) Conversational leadership (CL) uses multiple learning tools to develop a common understanding and align actions in an organization. The philosophical foundations of this approach derive from multiple sources: Malcolm Knowles’ adult learning models, the total quality work of W. Edwards Deming, Peter Senge’s work on learning organizations, Edward Schein’s ideas of process consulting, leadership philosopher Robert K. Greenleaf’s servant-leadership model, and effective communication theory.

Using the conversational leadership model, the designer and steward of each meeting is responsible for helping to achieve the organization’s desired outcomes through learning. The successful meeting, then, will have as its particular outcome some type of personal or team structural change – a change in thinking, acting, or interacting. As this change occurs, the group becomes realigned with the system’s goals, identifying and committing to methods it can adopt to help achieve those goals. As each meeting is focused on supporting the success of the system as a whole, the meeting leader – whether team or project leader, supervisor, department manager, or CEO – crafts and



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stewards the meeting toward alignment with the system’s mission and goals.

Each meeting begins with ground rules, which can be posted and referenced as needed. We recommend using FOCUS:

- F:** Follow the Five Guidelines for Learning Conversations
- O:** Open with Check-in and Context, Purpose, Outcome (CPO)
- C:** Clarify each agenda item with CPO
- U:** Use Closing-the-Learning-Loop protocols
- S:** Support safe space

Begin with a simple check-in procedure, inviting each participant to make a short statement that bridges the gap from their previous task or experience to the one at hand, ending with “I’m in.” For example, a simple check-in prompt could be: “What is most pressing for you right now?” or “What did it take for you to come to this meeting?” Such a check-in demonstrates respect for the time each person is giving to the meeting, and allows each person to give voice to the distractions that might otherwise rattle around in his or her head during the meeting. It is an opportunity to ground everyone in the work at hand – that is, what is to be accomplished during the meeting.

## Five Guidelines for Learning Conversations

These guidelines (originally developed by Sue Miller-Hurst), are really disciplines requiring practice, not unlike healthy eating or exercise. They are not learned instantly nor are they transferred immediately to the meeting participants. However, each individual committed to improved meeting outcomes can begin to practice these skills and encourage their growth in self and others. A good place to start would be with the leader.

**Listen for Understanding.** This means to listen openly, without judgment or blame, receiving what others say from a place of learning rather than from a place of knowing or defending your own position. Listen with equal respect for each person present, striving to understand rather than to fix, argue, refute, or persuade. At the same time, listen quietly to yourself as others speak.

**Speak from the Heart.** Speaking from the heart means speaking only when you are sincerely moved to make a contribution and when you can speak honestly from your own experience. It also means speaking to contribute to the stream of developing common understanding, not just to fill silence or to have your position heard.

**Suspend Judgment.** Suspending judgment is holding at bay your certainties and assumptions. Suspend any need to be right or have the correct answer. In fact, try to suspend any certainty that you, yourself, are right.

**Hold Space for Differences.** To hold space for differences means to embrace different points of view as learning opportunities. Don't counter with "but." Instead, contribute with "and." Remain open to outcomes that may not be your outcomes. Encourage contributions from those who have remained silent.

**Slow Down the Inquiry.** Slowing down provides silent time to digest what has just been said and allows further conversation to develop, deepen, and flow naturally.

Once participants have been reminded of the ground rules and have centered themselves, the leader provides a quick but essential overview to put the meeting into **context**: How does today's meeting fit into our larger, ongoing efforts and vision? The leader then states the **purpose** of the meeting (which should never be "because it's the day of the month we always meet") and tells participants exactly what **outcome** they can expect.

**Context:** How this meeting/agenda item fits into the overall mission/vision

**Purpose:** What common understanding or shared meaning we intend to develop

**Outcome:** What we will each know or be able to do when the meeting concludes

Some examples of context might be:

- *An incident involving student rights has occurred that needs our attention.*
- *We are three months out from our audit report filing deadline.*
- *The Board has requested our input on a matter of policy at its next meeting.*

Using these three examples, a purpose statement for each might be:

- *I want to share the details of the incident and build consensus for a response.*
- *Today we'll look at our timeline and make course corrections.*
- *I want your opinions on this matter to help me make a recommendation that represents your interests.*

Finally, with those purposes in mind, the outcome might be stated in one of these three ways:

- *At the close of this meeting, each of us will know the Board's position and how we can support it.*
- *By the end of the meeting, we'll have identified a handful of target areas and the steps we'll take, collectively and individually, to bring them up to speed.*
- *I hope to have a rough draft of my recommendation, with your help, before we adjourn.*

Once the CPO (Context, Purpose and Outcomes) is clear, the leader can engage the participants through conversational learning techniques, clarifying for understanding as needed. Some organizations devote numerous meetings and retreats to mastering the concept of “learning conversation.” The leader’s efforts to confirm that there is common understanding are critical in developing shared meaning that results in purposeful action. She does so by closing the learning loop, inviting participants to share their understanding about the information presented thus far. And, through it all, the facilitator must work to create a safe space, a team setting that promotes forthright sharing and discussion so that participants feel comfortable and trusting.

Groups often apply three steps of this four-step process repeatedly throughout the meeting, bringing each topic of interest through the stages of learning conversation, clarity, and confirmation. When all business has been concluded, it is important to invite participants to assess the meeting’s effectiveness for the purpose of improving on the process at the next meeting. Such a protocol, in partnership with a new understanding and appre-

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**Once all the leaders at all levels within the system are able and willing to use conversational leadership to facilitate meetings that move the system toward its goals, the system begins to speak with one voice.**

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ciation of the meeting as a valid way for a system to learn and grow, can turn all gatherings into meetings that matter.

### **One Voice**

Once all the leaders at all levels within the system are able and willing to use conversational leadership to facilitate meetings that move the system toward its goals, the system begins to speak with one voice. This, however, does not preclude disagreement. Vigorous disagreement among leaders using learning protocols does not damage effective communication. On the contrary, disagreement allows for learning and enhances understanding, which in turn leads to shared meaning.



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Sincere disagreement should not be construed as disloyal or as a threat to the system's unity. Difference of opinion marks an opportunity to deepen understanding, enhance the quality of working relationships, and achieve alignment. Disciplined meeting conversation is one of the answers. "If we cannot talk together, we cannot work together." (William Isaacs, *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*, Doubleday, 1999.)

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### **A good meeting is highly structured in its core processes but fluid in nature, welcoming and encouraging participation.**

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Through conversational leadership, participants are gradually able to recognize the interdependence of the varying subsystems and appreciate the value of constructive interaction with others. The steady stream of documents for approval disappears from the regular agenda as the "approval" syndrome becomes inconsistent with proper delegation. Everyone does his or her own work instead of pretending that endlessly supervising the day-to-day action of others is a meaningful contribution.

Meetings no longer aim at managing individuals or incessantly redefining operational details. The executive team learns that what it previously thought was "monitoring" was merely wandering around in the presence of data. Meetings no longer focus on complaints. Problems are expected to be resolved locally; if they are not, the issue is

viewed as symptomatic of a system flaw. All players get to have their say, but they maintain the priority of the organization's performance outcomes and common mission.

Conversational leadership leads to meetings where more time is spent learning diverse points of view regarding the heart of the organization's purpose and vision, a vision that supports and nurtures its client base by projecting its future needs and garnering wisdom for long-term decision making about performance results and structures. On a daily basis, employees can learn from one another through conversation with their peers; this eventually becomes the predominant meeting structure. The former preoccupation with what organizations *do* takes a back seat to clearly defining what organizations are *for*. Finally, leadership becomes visionary, focusing on the shared dreams of the community rather than on a flurry of trivia, micromanagement, and administrative detail.

Successful meetings in any organization, at all levels and for all purposes, can become significantly more effective and productive if they follow a carefully tested protocol. A good meeting is highly structured in its core processes but fluid in nature, welcoming and encouraging participation. Ironically, the more carefully structured the meeting, the easier it is to invite dialogue and allow meaningful conversations to take their course. Following the format outlined on page 16, meetings can achieve clear communication and common understanding – outcomes vitally important in today's business environment. ■

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Raymond D. Jorgensen, Ph.D.**, is an author who consults, facilitates, and conducts workshops for public and private school systems, city and county governments, hospitals, banks, branches of the military, physicians' offices, and a variety of private businesses. He has spent 30 years in private and public schools as a teacher, coach, department head, collegiate faculty member, and school administrator. Ray earned his Ph.D. in the area of learning organizations and organizational change.

# The Unhappy Hedge Fund Manager: Thoughts on Work and Well-Being

JOHN STUTZ

**Does being (very) well off enhance our sense of well-being? John Stutz, co-founder and senior fellow at the Tellus Institute, explores the role of well-being in the workplace by reconsidering the pervasive assumption that more income leads to greater happiness. He cites a number of examples in the current economic downturn where companies offering choices to employees about their form of compensation result in lower costs, greater work-life balance, employee retention and a general increase in well-being. As firms seek to increase employee engagement these types of cases can prompt us to rethink our assumptions about what the real hierarchies of needs are in our organizations and how rewards of all types affect performance.**



**John Stutz**

In an economy focused on growth and wealth, it is difficult to create the space for a broad discussion of whether compensation should be the key measurement of a successful work life. The truth is that income is only one element among many that contribute to our sense of well-being at work. A long and satisfying work ex-

perience depends on a host of tangible and intangible factors:

opportunities for learning, interactions with colleagues, the chance to make a contribution, and much more. The current economic crisis provides a rare opening for rethinking the connection between well-being and compensation – a rethinking that is long overdue.

Consider, for example, a recent look into the hedge fund industry. A December 2009 report analyzed a dozen different positions in the field, all paying \$150,000 or more per year, with the highest averaging \$600,000. In which positions do you think people were the most content with their income? It was the accountants (70 percent were satisfied), the employees who were paid less than virtually everyone else in the industry. Meanwhile, portfolio managers and chief operating officers earning the highest salaries, \$600,000 on average, were among the least happy with their compensation (only 40 percent were satisfied). Overall, a striking 61 percent of people in the hedge-fund industry were unhappy with their jobs (Salmon, 2009).

How can people making \$600,000 a year be dissatisfied with their income? And perhaps more importantly, why does this fact surprise us? The surprise itself is telling, for it reveals a good deal about what we unconsciously assume happiness is about.

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**The current economic crisis provides a rare opening for rethinking the connection between well-being and compensation – a rethinking that is long overdue.**

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### What Is Well-Being?

Many of us operate with a tacit assumption about well-being. If we stated this assumption as an equation, it would look like this:

$$\text{Well-being} = \text{annual income}$$

As economist Amartya Sen puts it, we tend to confuse “well-being” with “being well off” (Sen, 1985). If, however, we define well-being as an individual’s prospects for a long, healthy, and satisfying life, it becomes clear that well-being is about far more than income.

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**People with strong materialistic values have more anxiety, a greater risk of depression, higher use of alcohol and drugs, and more problems with intimacy. Their increasing wealth not only fails to satisfy them, it distracts them from the things that would truly satisfy.**

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There are both inner and outer components of well-being. The outer component is physical well-being, which in the broadest sense can be thought of as Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE) – the number of healthy years we can expect to live and enjoy life (Burd-Sharps et al, 2008). The inner component, generally referred to as Subjective Well-Being, refers to how satisfied one is with one’s life as a whole (Layard, 2005). If we were to combine these two components and state the combination as an equation, it would look like this:

$$\text{Well-being} = \text{Healthy Life Expectancy} \times \text{Subjective Well-Being}^*$$

That is, well-being is about a long, healthy, and satisfying life (Marks, 2006). Challenging work contributes to well-being, but more important is our ability to enjoy intimacy, marriage, and closeness to others. Research shows that people who have friends with whom they share their concerns are healthier, less likely to die prematurely, and more likely to be happy than those who have few or no such friends (Myers and Diener, 1995). Conversely, people who experience the loss of a spouse through divorce or death have approximately 20 percent more chronic health problems – such as diabetes, cancer, and heart disease – than those who remain married or remarry (Parker-Pope, 2009). In his book *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science*, Richard Layard refers to the *Big Seven* factors affecting happiness, the first five of which are listed in order of importance. These are family relationships, financial situation, work, community and friends, health, personal freedom, and personal values (Layard, 2005).

Earnings can certainly add to our broad sense of well-being, but they can also subtract from it. This happens, for example, when the effort required to bring in earnings exacts a large cost from us in terms of overwork, anxiety, ill health, loss of family time, and loss of time with friends. Indeed, those hedge fund managers making huge amounts of money might be leading lives that are stressful, brutal, and short. Psychologist Tim Kasser has shown that when people *organize their lives* around the pursuit of wealth, they actually undermine their well-being. People with strong materialistic values have more anxiety, a greater risk of depression, higher use of alcohol and drugs, and more problems with intimacy. Their increasing wealth not only fails to satisfy them, it distracts them from the things that would truly satisfy. This is a reality not taken into account in the equation we unconsciously embrace, that more money always equates with greater happiness (Kasser, 2002).

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\* One might ask, why multiply rather than divide? When researchers use this equation to establish a numerical value for well-being, they multiply HLE times SWB, then divide by 10. The division by 10 is an adjustment made so that the values of WB lie in the same numerical range as human life spans.

### How Much Does Compensation Matter?

While it is generally assumed that compensation provides the most important linkage between work and well-being, the study of well-being tells a different story. Let's consider the two components of well-being separately. The first is the association between income and lifespan. Historical records show that there is an association between the two: as income goes up, people live longer. While correlation is clear, causation is not. In a number of nations, increases in lifespan have occurred with only minor gains in income. Further, for wealthy nations that currently enjoy the longest lifespan, much of that increase in lifespan took place while income was low. Studies show that gains in lifespan are due to a variety of factors, with no common or consistent role for income. However, what we do know is that gains in longevity of life depend on nation-specific social structures, particularly those that relate to good health habits, such as more frequent hand-washing, disposal of human waste away from sources of drinking water, acceptance of immunization, and so forth (Riley, 2008).

When we consider the situation in the United States, we gain further insight into the relationship between income and Health Life Expectancy (HLE). Compared to Japan, for example, the United States spends more than twice as much *per capita* on health care, yet Japan ranks first in lifespan among OECD countries, and the United States ranks 24th. Despite the billions of dollars that we spend on health care, we are not buying longer, healthier lives. While HLE varies throughout the United States, statistical analysis shows that only 12 percent of that variation is explained by differences in income (Burd-Sharps et. al., 2008).

If rising income doesn't buy a longer, healthier life, does it buy an increase in Subjective Well-Being (SWB)? Unlike lifespan, there is very little long-term historical data on Subjective Well-Being. The best data available is for the US, Western Europe, and Japan and that covers only the period from 1950 to the present. During that time, income for these nations increased dramatically, ranging from gains



that tripled to those that increased by tenfold (Maddison, 2007). Yet there was no corresponding increase in well-being. Since the 1950s, experts have been unable to find any evidence in the US of a rise in the average level of Subjective Well-Being. For Western Europe and Japan, there is some evidence of very modest increases in SWB, but this finding is controversial. In sum, once one achieves a certain minimum standard of living, there is no empirical evidence that increasing income has much bearing on increasing well-being.

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### While our income may rise, we keep feeling we need more and more to be happy and to achieve a better quality of life.

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#### Why Income Doesn't Equal Happiness

A good deal of ink has been spilled on the question of why massive gains in income have not been associated with demonstrated, substantial increases in well-being. To find the answer to this question, it's worth exploring two factors in particular. One is the importance of *relative income* – the importance of feeling one is better off than one's peers. The second factor is *adaptation*, the fact that we become accustomed to ever higher levels of income.

To appreciate the importance of relative income, consider the results of a well-known research experiment. College students in the US were asked to imagine two different outcomes when they entered the workforce. Either they would earn \$50,000 while their classmates would average \$25,000, or they would earn \$100,000 while the others would average twice that. The students were asked which outcome they would prefer. Most chose the first. Absolute income mattered less than the sense that one was ahead of one's peers. A *New Yorker* cartoon captured this sentiment well. Showing a white collar worker leaning over his boss's desk, the worker said, "OK, if you can't see your way to giving me a pay raise, how

about giving Parkerson a pay cut?" It is relative income, not absolute income, that seems to matter. As H.L. Mencken said, "A wealthy man is one who earns \$100 a year more than his wife's sister's husband."

That brings us to the second factor, adaptation, which helps explain how massive shifts in income may be accompanied by little or no change in Subjective Well-Being. Here again, a bit of research is useful. Between 1955 and 1985, the Gallup Poll asked respondents in the US to indicate the minimum income a family of four needed to get along in their community. The figure rose over time, tracking the growth in actual real income. The more people had, the more they felt they needed to have. A larger home or a newer car might have excited people for awhile, but soon they became new necessities rather than simply desirable objects. Thus, while our income may rise, we keep feeling we need more and more to be happy and to achieve a better quality of life.

#### Other Factors Creating a Decline in Worker Well-Being

The research is clear: income growth has, at best, a limited impact on well-being. But this is not a reason to ignore income altogether, particularly the share of corporate income allotted to workers. Indeed, standard economic theories of wage determination stress the importance of perceived fairness in setting wage levels (Akerlof and Shiller, 2009). The point is not to disregard income but rather to adequately address well-being. Corporations must look beyond income and consider other factors that contribute to a marked *increase* in job quality as well as those that contribute to a marked *decline* in job quality.

In his recent book, *Demanding Work: The Paradox of Job Quality in the Affluent Economy*, Francis Green provides compelling evidence that documents the decline of job quality in the US, Western Europe, and elsewhere. Over the last three decades, he writes, surveys show a "stark and remarkable finding" – that average job satisfaction in industrialized nations is either stationary or falling. Among

the factors contributing to this decline are *intensity* of work, lack of *autonomy*, increasing uncertainty about job *security*, and long *hours*.

It is in the 1990s, Green notes, that work intensification begins to become a widespread phenomenon in Europe, with workers reporting that although they are working at top speed, they lack sufficient time to carry out their assigned tasks. People are “working much more intensely, experiencing greater mental strain, sometimes to the point of exhaustion,” he writes. Much the same is true in the US, where formal evidence for work intensification is found in the Required Effort Index, which tracks a substantial rise between 1992 and 2002. Indirect evidence of work overload is also seen in the increasing incidence of the workplace illness of repetitive motion syndrome (Green, 2007).

In many cases, workers are being more controlled, subjected to closer monitoring, and enjoying less autonomy over their daily work lives. Green estimates that roughly half the decline in job satisfaction can be directly attributed to this decline in worker discretion.

To help in understanding this increase in work intensification and managerial control, Green observes that practices deemed profitable for employers “may not be so conducive to security and peace of mind on the part of employees.” Indeed, as Green notes, these practices can leave workers “stressed and exhausted.”

Of particular importance is the rising sense of uncertainty about job security. To appreciate the strength of this pressure, consider for a moment the pace of change. In the US between 1990 and 2003, the net change in the number of jobs was seemingly modest, averaging .03 percent per quarter in the private sector. However, that .03 percent growth represented the *net* difference between the elimination of 7.7 percent of all jobs per quarter and the creation of 8.0 percent new jobs per quarter (Cahuc and Zylberberg, 2006). In such a turbulent labor market, job loss is always just around the corner. Recent research by the Economic Policy Institute shows that losing one’s job can create long-term “scarring” for both workers and their offspring. Workers earn about 13 percent less when they find new employment, and their children also earn about 9 percent less





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than those whose parents did not experience significant bouts of unemployment. The unemployed may experience deteriorating mental health, while their children may experience diminished educational achievement and inadequate nutrition (Irons, 2009).

The threat of unemployment adversely impacts even those who are employed. The fear of becoming unemployed in the future is more destructive to subjective well-being than having been unemployed in the past (Knabe, 2008). In addition, studies show there has been an upward redistribution of insecurity. While low-status workers have long experienced high insecurity, this insecurity has recently been increasing among white-collar workers (Green, 2007).

Finally, the extent of those working long hours has increased substantially. In the US, between 1970 and 2000, the percentage of men working 50 hours or more per week increased significantly. For women, the percentage more than doubled. When asked to compare their ideal with their actual hours of work, roughly 60 percent of workers

said they would like to work less. Fully 28 percent wanted to work at least 20 hours less than they were working (Jacobs and Gerson, 2004).

It is not difficult to see how these developments work against employee well-being. Some effects are relatively direct, such as the fact that long work hours reduce the time available for exercise. Other effects are more subtle. Long hours, intense work, and insecurity are sources of stress, and we know that stress can, in turn, have significant impact on physical health. In addition, working too many hours or worrying about job security can make it more difficult to maintain a healthy marriage and friendships, both of which contribute to well-being. Work thus delivers a one-two punch: increasing factors like stress that harm well-being, and potentially diminishing factors like marriage and friendship that enhance well-being (Helman, 2007).

Overworked and insecure workers can easily become demoralized, resulting in a diminished commitment to work quality. Unhappy workers also tend to get sick more often, and sick employees

are costly. But the impact of worker well-being on the bottom line is only part of the story. The larger issue is not one of corporate welfare but human welfare. The right to pursue well-being is arguably a universal human right, for the pursuit of happiness is among the inalienable rights that all persons enjoy.

### Time as a New Currency

Today, corporations have an opportunity to change in ways that can benefit both workers and employers. With employees saying they want to work less and have more control over their work lives, and management needing to cut costs in the downturn, some creative employers are turning to mini-sabbaticals, reduced schedules, staggered hours, and remote work options as solutions. Treating time as a new kind of currency – potentially more desirable than money itself – turns out to be an effective strategy to tackle the recession and to increase employee well-being.

Consider the law firm of Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom, certainly a high-pressure work environment. In 2009, in an effort to avoid layoffs, it extended to its 1,300 associates an option to take a year off while being paid one-third of base pay. There were no *pro bono* requirements so employees could spend the year as they wished. One associate, Heather Eisenlord, decided to take a trip around the world, hoping to teach English to monks in Sri Lanka and also to bring solar power to the Himalayas. The firm assured those taking sabbaticals that their time away would not hurt them; they would be protected if there were layoffs while they were gone (Dominus, 2009).

In a similar approach, the global consulting firm Booz & Co. offered sabbaticals ranging from one to twelve months, during which employees would receive 20 percent of base pay and full healthcare benefits. The firm had previously offered unpaid sabbaticals only to consultants, while the new partial-pay plan was offered to all 4,000 employees and included a guaranteed job upon return. In the US, 20 percent of employees opted to join the program, while in Europe 32 percent opted

to join. These are striking numbers in light of the 80 percent pay cut, and speak to many professional workers' hunger for more discretionary time (Hewlett, 2009).

In a more comprehensive approach, in January 2009 the accounting firm KPMG announced a new Flexible Futures program for its 11,000 UK employees. Employees could opt for a four-day work week with a corresponding 20 percent reduction in base pay; a sabbatical of four to twelve weeks at 30 percent of base pay; or a combination of

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**The right to pursue well-being is arguably a universal human right, for the pursuit of happiness is among the inalienable rights that all persons enjoy.**

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the two. As Rachel Campbell, the manager who created the program explained, the aim was to both cut costs and “give employees some control over their own destiny.” A surprising 85 percent of UK employees opted to join the program, which translated into an estimated 15 percent savings in payroll (Hewlett, 2009).

If the well-being of workers is a concern, creative reductions in hours are preferable to wholesale layoffs, which many employers resort to reflexively. It may be time for a widespread rethinking of the layoff, and a new turn toward options that can satisfy the same cost-reduction aim but preserve the intellectual capital of the company and enhance employee well-being. Some may be concerned that the ability to take such actions is limited by the behavior of competitors. Following the model established by the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), it may be possible for firms to come together by industry and jointly adopt common employment flexibility practices. This could reduce the likelihood of competitive disadvantage for firms which adopt these choices individually rather than collectively as their competitors did.



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### Is This the Time for Change?

The old equation of *well-being = annual income* seems to have outlived its day. When high-earning lawyers jump at the chance to forego two-thirds of their pay for a year, and 85 percent of UK employees at an accounting firm voluntarily choose options that involve pay reductions, a new equation may be taking shape, fostered in part by the desire for more time, and perhaps in part by the desire to hang onto jobs for the long run. Given the unconvincing role of income in fostering well-being, accompanied by the increasing sense of stress in the workplace, business may have finally reached a point where it can recognize that employee well-being is about far more than money. Once we understand how a corporate environment affects the complex web of mechanisms and relationships that determine well-being, it becomes clear that a profound shift is needed.

If worker well-being is to improve, issues of job insecurity, control over one's time, flexible hours, and a healthier work-life balance must be addressed.

While the challenge of addressing working conditions is significant, the current financial turmoil may make action easier. There is a long history of social progress during times of financial crisis. The best-known example in this country is the New Deal, which emerged in 1933 following the Great Depression and forever altered key elements of the relationship between workers and management (Friedman, 2005). A more recent example is the work of the Green New Deal Group in the UK, which links progress on energy and climate issues to the resolution of the current

financial crisis (Elliott et al., 2008). When economic distress is widespread and business and political leadership are forced to re-examine conventional wisdom, changes that under normal circumstances may seem impossible can be moved into the realm of the possible. Today, as more and more people begin to question the primacy of compensation as the defining element of a successful work life, the economic crisis may be providing the opening we need for a long-overdue rethinking. ■

*A different version of this paper originally appeared as part of the paper series for the 2009 Summit on the Future of the Corporation sponsored by Corporation 20/20, an initiative to chart the future course for corporations that integrate both financial and social concerns at the heart of company design. [www.corporation2020.org](http://www.corporation2020.org).*

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## BOOK EXCERPT 10.2

## Stumbling: Bridging Divides in Israel

ADAM KAHANE

The central theme of Adam Kahane's new book, *Power and Love: A Theory and Practice of Social Change*, is that if we want to be able to effect sustainable change in social systems – organizations, communities, societies – then we need to learn to work with two distinct drives that are permanently in tension: power and love. Kahane refers to Paul Tillich's definition of power – "the drive of everything living to realize itself" – and points out that Tillich also "argues for differentiating between *power-to* that destroys oppressive institutions and *power-over* that destroys people." He (Tillich) defines love as "the drive towards the unity of the separated." Through the story of an ambitious and tough national dialogue project in Israel, this excerpt highlights "stumbling" (a distinct phase in the process of learning to "walk") as a metaphor for the most difficult challenges we face in aligning the competing drives of power and love.

*We stumble when one of our legs is stronger than the other. We stumble when our power dominates our love, or our love dominates our power. Stumbling is not controlled and smooth; it is uncontrolled and unstable. When we stumble, we move forward, but haltingly and erratically and always at risk of falling down.*

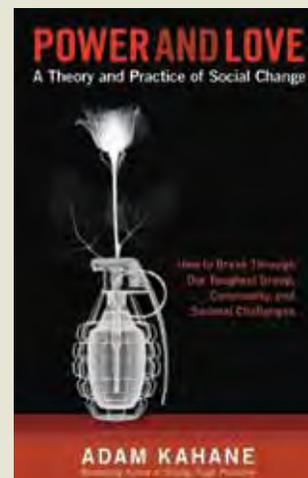


Adam Kahane

In 2006 I was happy to be invited to work in Israel. I had been there only once before, briefly, but had felt an unexpected sense of connection. Then when I was in India and needed to locate a synagogue for the Jewish High Holidays, I was surprised that

the Israeli Embassy assisted me as if I was one of their own. So when Avner Haramati, a consultant and entrepreneur from Jerusalem, asked me if I would be willing to help him and some of his colleagues organize a national scenario project, I agreed enthusiastically.

The Israeli military had just suffered an unexpected defeat in Lebanon, and Haramati and his colleagues thought there was an opening in Israeli society to



Excerpt from  
**Power and Love:  
A Theory and Practice  
of Social Change**

Adam Kahane  
Drawings by Jeff Barnum

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Berrett-Koehler  
Publishers, Inc.  
San Francisco, CA  
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rethink where the country was going.<sup>1</sup> "The bitter joke here," he said, "is that, 'If force doesn't work, try more force.' What if that strategy is no longer viable?"

Haramati and his colleagues thought it would be particularly useful to convene a strategic dialogue, not among Israelis and Palestinians – there were many of these, all stuck – but instead among leaders of different sectors of Jewish Israeli society. Their

logic was that until Jewish Israelis could agree among themselves on where they were trying to go, no Jewish Israeli leader would ever have a stable base from which to negotiate a way forward with the Palestinians. One of Haramati's colleagues, Shay Ben Yosef, a consultant and community leader who lived in one of the West Bank settlements, said, "It's always us who is blocking us." So from the beginning this project was, both in its overall framing and for many of the individual participants (including me), richly self-reflective.

Jewish Israeli society is deeply divided and stuck. There are angry and bitter conflicts between religious and secular, left and right, immigrant and native, West Bank settlers and people who live within Israel's pre-1967 armistice lines, and across other cultural, religious, and political fault lines. These deep internal schisms and blockages mirror deep external schisms and blockages, with and among Palestinians and the larger Arab world. In such a fractured social system, people typically try to address their tough challenges by pushing for what they want, regardless of what others want, through some form of aggression.

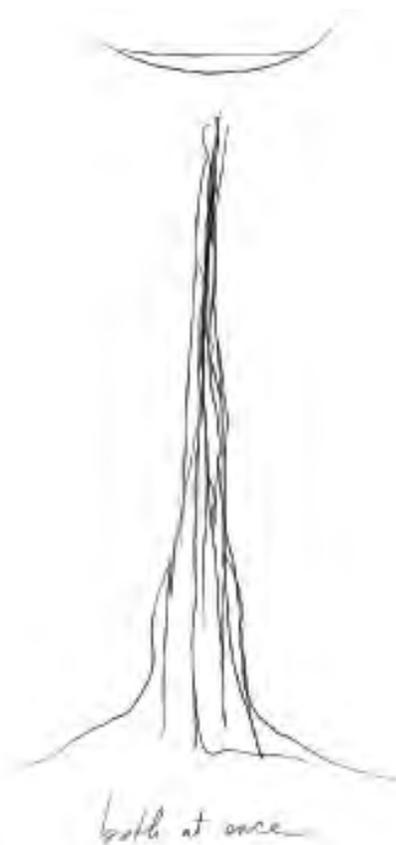
I once spoke at an Israeli conference of people involved in many kinds of intergroup dialogues: Israeli-Palestinian, Jewish-Arab, religious-secular. I talked with two people who had been involved for years in different dialogues between Jews and Arabs – they said at that time, several hundred such "coexistence" initiatives were under way – and they were deeply discouraged. Steps forward that they had made within particular groups or communities were often reversed by crises in the larger national and international spheres.

I spoke about these challenges to coexistence with Ofer Zalberg, a political analyst who was a member of our project organizing team. He gave me some insight into the history of such initiatives:

There is a common misunderstanding about what it means for us to engage in a "Track 2" process. Originally "Track 2" referred to informal meetings of top leaders or negotiators who were also involved in formal "Track 1" negotiations. But this crucial ingredient – the involvement in the dialogues of people with real power – has gotten lost, and now people think that any meeting of concerned citizens, influential or not, is a Track 2 process. This is why most of these dialogues produce no results at all.

Later he added further insight into the importance of power:

It is difficult to achieve a sustainable negotiated settlement, through whatever tracks, in a situation that is characterized by asymmetrical power. The





stronger party – which in the Israel-Palestine case is Israel – always has the option of enforcing its own solution rather than accepting a mutually agreed solution. You can't make any progress here if you ignore power.

Avner Haramati and his colleagues had years of experience using cross-boundary dialogue to move beyond aggressive war and submissive peace. They invited a diverse cross-section of Jewish Israeli leaders into our project to look for answers to the question "What kind of society can we envisage, to which we and our descendants would be proud to belong and in which we could live together with our non-Jewish neighbors?" The innovation in this holistic framing was to review the stuck internal questions of Jewish values and vision in the context of the related and fraught external questions. This innovation was mirrored in joint support of the project by Tzav Pius, a Jewish Israeli organization focused on internal cultural-political dialogues, and Oxford Research Group, a British organization focused on international (including Israeli-Arab) peacemaking.

The first workshop was to be held in October 2007. We wanted a setting where the participants would stay for the whole four days, and not come and go to other meetings (the largest distance within Israel is only 250 miles). Cyprus is close by and has several significant resonances: it is partly Middle Eastern and partly European; many Jews had been interned there when trying to get to Israel before independence; and it is a popular place for secular Israelis to get married, since within Israel only religious weddings are allowed.

The first workshop almost didn't happen because there were so many heated points of contention among the prospective participants. The different groups of religious participants disagreed on what constituted an acceptable standard for kosher food and on whether a Torah could or should be brought from Israel. Some participants thought it would be morally or religiously incorrect to have such a crucial national conversation on non-Israeli soil; others were reluctant to be so far away from home during a period of elevated security threats. Some left-wing invitees thought it was wrong to have such a conversation without the participation of Israeli Arabs. But in the end, solutions were found to most of these problems, and 31 of us met in Cyprus.

The part of the Israeli situation that seemed obvious to me was the manifestation of the two sides of power. On the one hand, I could see in Israelis an impressive and inspiring example of collective power-to: the passionate drive of a people, rising from the ashes of the Holocaust, to realize themselves with increasing intensity (including cultural and religious revival) and extensity (including territorial conquest). Over the sixty years since independence, Israelis had succeeded in co-creating a new social reality. On the other hand, I could see how this drive, set against the analogous

and conflicting drive for self-realization of the Palestinians, was producing terribly and reciprocally violent power-over.

Similar power dynamics showed up within our group in Cyprus. All of the participants were seized by a passionate drive to realize themselves: to say what they were thinking, to argue their point of view, to be true to themselves. The culture in the group was democratic and horizontal, and nobody seemed to feel a need to hold back or be deferential. One participant harshly challenged Tova Averbuch, the organizational development consultant who was cofacilitating with Shay Ben Yosef and me, about every aspect of the project plan. Afterwards another participant, seeing that I had been taken aback by the ferocity of the questioning, tried to reassure me: "Don't worry, Israelis are always like this. Even in the Army, we won't follow an order unless the next six steps have also been explained to us." This drive for self-realization, set against the conflicting drives of other participants, created heated and lengthy arguments. Yosef offered an explanation for why workshops in Israel usually aren't placid and conclusive. "Israelis don't like things to be 'tied up neatly with a bow,'" he said. "When we see a package like that, we worry that it might be a bomb."

Working with Avner Haramati, I noticed the primacy he placed on giving everyone the space to exercise their own self-directed power-to. In his roles as both an activist and a consultant, he opposed any attempt to compel or impose change from outside: he believed that change had to come from the inside. In his role as a leader of this project, he fought against any attempt to manipulate or constrain the team's work.

A philosophical and practical pillar of Haramati's way of working is the "Open Space" approach pioneered by Harrison Owen and developed in Israel by Averbuch and Haramati. The only rule of Open Space, says Owen, is "the Law of Two Feet, which says that every individual

has two feet, and must be prepared to use them. Individuals can make a difference and must make a difference. If that is not true in a given situation, they, and they alone, must take responsibility to use their two feet, and move to a new place where they can make a difference."<sup>2</sup> Over the course of the Jewish Israeli Journey project, the participants often used their two feet to move into and out of the project, which therefore swelled and shrank from meeting to meeting.

It took me until the team's third workshop – this time held in the southernmost city in Israel, Eilat, beside the Red Sea – to see the manifestation of the complementary dynamic: the two sides of love. One morning the team was having a long and heartfelt dialogue about inclusion and exclusion in Israeli society. To me, every part of the society seemed to feel excluded: the religious, the secular, the settlers, the gays, the Russians, the Arabs. I could hear the pain in participants' voices, but I couldn't make out why this conversation was so important to them.

Suddenly I saw it. The pain in the room arose from a longing for what wasn't there: a sense of inclusion, of connection, of oneness. What I was noticing was the love, the drive towards the unity of the separated, that had motivated the convening of the project.



The drive towards the unity of the separated in Jewish Israeli society is so strong because the separations are so severe. The increasing conflict both among Jewish Israelis and between them and their neighbors creates increasing physical and social disconnection. In this context, the centrifugal drive of power and the centripetal drive of love are severely in tension.

Within the team, this drive to unity, like the drive to self-realization, was experienced as having two sides. On the one hand, as the work progressed, there was an increasingly relaxed and warm feeling of being in a family. This feeling of unity was particularly noticeable during the twenty-four hours of religiously mandated Sabbath rest in the workshops. Instead of working, we relaxed and talked about the meaning and applicability of the week's Bible reading; these Sabbaths gave our workshops a productive spaciousness. As Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel suggests in his book on Jewish spirituality, the Jewish "architecture of holiness" appears not in space but in time. "The Sabbaths," he writes, "are our great cathedrals."<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, some members of the team felt this drive to familial unity to be stifling. Many of the more universalist, secular members strongly opposed framing the unity of either the team or Israel in exclusive, religious terms.

Underlying many of these conflicts about the right way forward for both the team and the country were disagreements about what constituted the scale and definition of the unity we should pursue. Was it a particular community? All Jewish Israelis? All Israelis, including Palestinian citizens of Israel? Israel and Palestine? All humanity? I thought again about Paul Tillich's definition of love as "the drive towards the unity of the separated." In his book he goes on to say, "Reunion presupposes separation of that which belongs essentially together. Love cannot be described as the union of the strange but as the reunion of the estranged.

Estrangement presupposes original oneness."<sup>4</sup> The members of the Israeli team had deeply divergent answers to the fundamental question of what it is that "belongs essentially together" and therefore of what merits unifying action at any particular time.

Knowing that the self-realizing drive of power and the unifying drive of love are always present in every social situation, the challenge is how to notice, reveal, activate, and nurture them, and especially the one that is weaker. Tova Averbuch made a related observation:

The relationship between power and love reminds me of the figure-ground theory of perception in Gestalt psychology. Often power plays the figure and so is the focus of the people's perception, and love plays the ground and so is overlooked. By making both of these drives visible and discussable, a facilitator can help a group balance itself.<sup>5</sup>

I have talked about these dynamics with Barry Oshry, an organizational development practitioner and theorist, who has for decades studied the behavior of human systems.<sup>6</sup> Oshry has observed four parallel systemic processes: differentiation (the development of a variety of forms and functions), homogenization (the sharing of information and capability), individuation (parts operating separately from one another), and integration (parts connecting into a whole). The power drive, he suggests, involves the processes of differentiation and individuation, and the love drive involves homogenization and integration.<sup>7</sup>

When I looked at the Israeli situation through Oshry's lens, I could see that at many social scales, differentiation and individuation exceeded homogenization and integration. At all of these scales, the fear of being hurt – even of being annihilated – exceeded the fear of hurting others, and so power exceeded love. This phenomenon is accentuated when our ideas are



conflated with our identity, so that we take an attack on the former as an attack on the latter. This is a recipe for what U.S. political philosopher John Gardner calls “a war of the parts against the whole.”<sup>8</sup> Such imbalances between power and love hobble our attempts to move forward on our tough social challenges.

(Israelis are, of course, not the only ones who have been hobbled by a fear of annihilation. In 2004 my colleagues and I facilitated a workshop for the executive team of one of the U.S. government’s homeland

security agencies. In the aftermath of September 11, they were immersed in fear. When I started off one day by asking as I often do what questions the participants were asking themselves, one of them answered, “This morning when I woke up, the question I asked myself was the same one I ask every morning: ‘Will New York City be attacked today?’” At every turn, the workshop conversation ran into this wall of dread. One important conversation based on anonymous verbatim quotes from individual interviews with participants about their perspective on their situation ran aground amid suspicion that the reported statements had been made up. A creative dialogue about possible new forms for the organization, sparked by a playful exercise of building models out of sticks and pipe cleaners, was aborted when the agency’s CEO, returning to the workshop grim faced from his daily briefing of the president about the day’s possible terrorist attacks, suggested that he found the exercise silly. The CEO said about his management philosophy: “A little fear isn’t a bad thing,” and the final session about how to act on the results of the workshop was cut short when one executive declared deferentially, “We don’t need to talk about how we will act; we will simply do what the CEO tells us to do.” I have never been in a workshop where so little moved. Fear rigidifies us and leaves us stuck.)

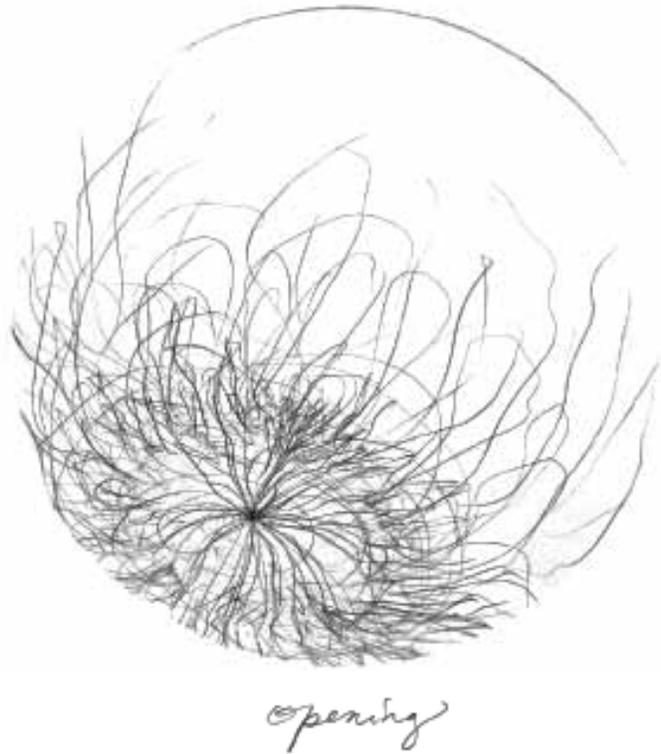
Through their being and talking and working together, the Jewish Israeli project team increased their homogenization and integration. The team built a common language – a set of scenarios – for talking about what was happening and might happen in and around Israel. They built relationships among themselves that served as bridges across the chasms that separated their communities. Averbuch gives an example of this bridging that resembles the moment of communion in Guatemala:

In one of our later meetings, Rabbi Azriel Azriel, from the Council of the Rabbis of the Settlements,

was reflecting on how fundamentally his perspective had shifted through our working together. He said: "What I now see, and what surprises me, is that I would rather live in a scenario that I didn't choose and do not like but that takes me and my needs into consideration, than in a scenario that I do like but that does not take you into consideration." After he said that, the room fell into a sacred silence – and Israelis are not often silent. This was one of those precious moments of grace that makes worthwhile all of the trials and tribulations of our journey.<sup>9</sup>

This increased homogenization and integration and hence increased balance of the team's drives enabled them to discuss previously undiscussable realities and to create new options. New social realities within the team opened up possibilities for new social realities in the larger system. This was especially true of innovative political and diplomatic options for depolarizing the conflicts over Jewish versus Palestinian sovereignty and identity. Subsequent to the scenario workshops, many members of the team became better known and more senior and influential within their own organizations and communities, and so these realities and options also became better known and more seriously discussed within Jewish Israeli society, with Diaspora Jews, and between Israelis and Palestinians. In these ways, the work of the team is contributing to rebalancing these interconnected social systems and thereby helping them to advance.

The team had no illusions about the extent of their contribution or influence. The oldest member of the team was Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim, a leader in the ultra-Orthodox community. He reminded us of the admonition in the Jewish *Ethics of the Fathers*: "It is not up to you to complete the work, but neither are you at



liberty to desist from it." The team did not desist, but neither have they completed what needs to be done.

Right after the Jewish Israeli team's third workshop in Eilat, I flew to Oman to give a speech at the biennial global meeting of the Society for Organizational Learning. I had been a member of the SoL community for years, and we were excited to meet for the first time in a Muslim country; the title of the meeting was "Bridging the Gulf." I expected that this encounter might be charged, because within the meeting's organizing committee there had been months of anxiety about whether and how many Israeli members of SoL would be granted visas for Oman. At the last minute only Avner Haramati and another Israeli member of the committee got visas, and they decided not to attend. There was one Israeli at the meeting, a man who held dual nationality, but he was afraid and wasn't letting anyone know where he was from. I could feel the tension in my stomach.

I gave my speech about power and love, using as one of my examples my two sets of two-sided experiences in Israel. This provoked an angry response from many people in the audience. One Palestinian man stood up and complained that my talk had been unbalanced in its empathetic interpretation of the Israeli situation. I was nervous, but thought this argument was healthy because part of the reality of the gulfs between us was now being discussed.

But then the chair of the session cut off the argument and moved us into a break. I was scheduled to be on the meeting's closing panel at the end of the day, but now I was too controversial and was removed.

In this meeting in Oman I saw the opposite dynamic from the one I had seen in the Israeli meetings. In Oman the fear of offending or hurting others (including the conference hosts and sponsors), of shattering the fragile unity of the group, dominated. Love exceeded power. This left the SoL members – like the Israeli team had been at first – constrained in moving forward on the challenges they wanted to address.

### How to Stumble

We often stumble because often one of our drives is stronger or more relied upon than the other. In some places and times, the drive that we emphasize is power – for example, in many business and political contexts and in periods of conflict. In other places and times, it is love – for example, in many community and spiritual contexts and in periods of communion.

What must we do when we find ourselves stumbling and thus impaired in our capacity to co-create new social realities? We must build up or bring in our weaker drive.

When our power dominates, we must pay attention to and strengthen our love. In the context of a multi-actor initiative to address a tough social challenge,

this means emphasizing processes for social homogenization and integration. These include dialogic processes such as meetings or encounters or workshops that bring together and connect separated actors and help them see their shared situation more empathetically and holistically.

When our love dominates, we must pay attention to and strengthen our power. This means emphasizing processes for social differentiation and individuation. These include activist and entrepreneurial processes that empower actors to recognize, choose, and act on their own course of self-realization. (Zoughbi Zoughbi, the Palestinian activist and facilitator who in 2005 warned me of the danger of ignoring power, also shared with me his recipe for righting power imbalances: “Strengthen the weak and bring the strong to their senses.”)

When in these ways we employ more of both our power and our love, each builds the other and makes it stronger and more generative.

In addition to employing these processes for strengthening our weaker drive, we must also pay attention to processes for bringing into play our already strong but underemployed drive. These rebalancing processes include focusing on feedback, regulatory, and governance processes and containers that help us notice where we are and correct ourselves accordingly.

Stumbling is dangerous but also healthy. To be healthy does not mean that we never fall ill. It means that when we do fall ill or out of balance – physically, mentally, spiritually – we have the capacity to heal and rebalance ourselves.

Often stumbling is as good as it gets. Stumbling is more advanced than falling, and walking is harder to achieve. It is worth understanding and learning how to stumble. ■

## ENDNOTES

- 1 This team consisted of Tova Averbuch, Helio Bar, Avner Haramati, Baruch Ovadia, Mario Schejtman, Shay Ben Yosef, and Ofer Zalberg
- 2 Harrison Owen, *A Brief User's Guide to Open Space Technology* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2008), 95.
- 3 Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2005).
- 4 Paul Tillich, *Love, Power and Justice: Ontological Analysis and Ethical Applications* (Oxford University Press, 1954), 25.
- 5 Personal communication with Tova Averbuch.
- 6 See Barry Oshry, *Seeing Systems: Unlocking the Mysteries of Organizational Life* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2007).
- 7 Barry Oshry, "Power Without Love and Love Without Power: A Systems Perspective" (unpublished paper, 2009).
- 8 John Gardner, *On Leadership* (New York: Free Press, 1993), 95.
- 9 Personal communication with Tova Averbuch.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Adam Kahane** is a partner in Reos Partners ([www.reospartners.com](http://www.reospartners.com)), an international organisation dedicated to supporting and building capacity for innovative collective action in complex social systems. He is an Associate Fellow of the James Martin Institute for Science, Innovation and Society at the University of Oxford's Saïd Business School. Adam is also the author of *Solving Tough Problems: An Open Way of Talking, Listening, and Creating New Realities* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2004), about which Nelson Mandela said: "This breakthrough book addresses the central challenge of our time: finding a way to work together to solve the problems we have created."

## RESPONSE

## On Stumbling and Learning to Dance – A Reply to Adam Kahane

C. SHERRY IMMEDIATO



Lately, I have been giving some thought to what I have learned and what I might have done differently during my tenure as SoL's managing director. I'm grateful to Adam for offering the gift of sharing his own experience of the 2008 Global Forum in Oman as an illustration of "stumbling" in this excerpt. Because I had significant responsibility for the design of that meeting and for aspects of the specific incident he mentions, I feel this opportunity should not pass without reflection and comment. For reasons that will become clear, I decided that I should reflect in a letter to Adam that we have both agreed I can share with all of you.

Dear Adam,

**W**hen you offered to make *Power and Love* available to the SoL community, I was touched by your generosity and pleased to share the book because, in my experience, you are an especially reflective and articulate practitioner. While we have spoken about some of the cases in your book, I thought it would be appropriate to use your example of SoL's meeting in Oman as a catalyst for public reflection.

As you know from our conversations, I have been giving thought to what I have been learning in my work at SoL overall. When phrased as "what I might have done differently," I was reminded of a letter Charles Darwin wrote in 1892, toward the end of his life:

"Up to the age of thirty, or beyond it, poetry of many kinds, such as the works of Milton, Gray, Byron, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley, gave me great pleasure.... But now for many years I cannot endure to read a line of poetry.... My mind seems to have become a kind of machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of facts...and if I had to live my life again, I would have made a rule to read some poetry and listen to some music at least once every week.... The loss of these tastes is a loss of happiness, and may possibly be injurious to the intellect, and more probably to the moral character, by enfeebling the emotional part of our nature."

As it turns out, his specific advice speaks directly to your primary thesis: we are more complete human beings when we are both rational and emotional, task and relationship oriented, and fluent in the language of power and love. Many of us also tend toward an imbalance that, if gone unchecked, can cripple us.

However, it was not the content of Darwin's advice that brought this particular quotation to mind but rather the clarity of his insight about what had dangerously atrophied and how this process might have been stopped or at least moderated. I like Darwin's notion that practices can help us keep the otherwise unused capacity supple. I was also drawn to the form of his

communication – a letter. In Darwin’s day, these quasi-private (and later public) musings were perhaps the most common form of reflection. As a formerly enthusiastic letter writer myself, I know the practice has almost reached cultural extinction in spite of a profusion of words of exchange – albeit in 140 characters or less. (I refer to the length of “tweets” on www.twitter.com or rampant text messaging.) For me, there is an accompanying loss of consciousness that surely enfeebles the reflective part of my nature – journaling doesn’t fill the void. I do seem to need an audience of a least one more than “dear diary.”

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**If I could live my life again,  
I would have made it a rule  
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So if I could live my life again, I would have made it a rule to write a letter to someone every week. And if I could repeat the last nine years, I would make it a rule to write to the members of the SoL community, at least every six months, engaging in some form of public reflection about the work of SoL. This would include our hypotheses, results and lessons learned as well as our fears, joys, sorrows, and hopes as we pursued our

mission of enhancing the interdependent development of people and their institutions. I often observe that people are attracted to SoL because it is a space of reflection that complements the action orientation that dominates most of what we do. Well, I’ll accept that the truism applies here: you teach what you need to learn.

Given my renewed commitment to letter writing, I thought it best to direct my comments about this question of learning you have often posed to me and to reflect on the specific incident you mention. I appreciate that you have agreed that we don’t have to wait until the death of either of us to share this correspondence with others!

First, the specific case. As you may know, I recently announced that Sol’s next Global Forum will likely occur in 2011 at a time and place yet to be determined, so your illustration is particularly timely. In thinking about Sol’s work over the years, the Global Forums are for me the premier example of embodying our principles and practices. They have been true community creations, and have rigorously applied tools like after-action/forward-action reviews to every aspect of these meetings – site selection, session selection and overall design, meeting facilitation, logistics, marketing, etc. The documentation is extensive and the human process has encouraged both continuity and innovation. I believe we’ve created an organizational memory that holds these learnings in trust for future use in a way that is unique and quite different from any other SoL topic or activity. Even so, I recognize that it can still be improved upon, and I welcome your example of the Oman Global Forum as one that provides an underutilized learning opportunity for the community as a whole. I also believe that our respective roles in the Forum might provide personal insights still waiting to be harvested.

In our past conversations, I know you have offered the observation that SoL tends to be drawn to the language of love and has not adequately developed its capability to similarly engage the dynamics of power. I think this is a rich observation, and I still fear I will not do

justice to it here. Your specific illustration of the truncated interaction at the SoL gathering in Oman raises a number of valid questions that I would summarize this way:

1. What are the conveners' intentions in designing a global gathering and how are they shared with and by the community?
2. How do we deal with the reality that some members wishing to attend are unable to due to both personal and systemic reasons? In my experience this has been an issue at all major SoL gatherings and is something we must address.
3. How are feedback and reflections from both participants and conveners invited and shared during and after the meeting?
4. How does the reflection and feedback process determine correction/change during the meeting? And how does it affect future meetings?
5. How do we take all this beyond any specific SoL gathering and apply it to SoL's work in general?
6. How do we as a community engage in meaningful assessment of our development needs and address them on an ongoing basis?
7. And finally and most generally, how do individuals get their own needs met while also honoring the needs of others and the community at large?

These are all questions I will encourage the next design team to address. For now, though, I want to speak directly to your experience of the Oman Global Forum. I was a key decision-maker in determining how to process the response to your session you described in the excerpt. Based upon discussion with a number of other design team members and participants I took action that I felt was in the best interest of the whole. In retrospect, I realize that very specific individual needs were not adequately considered. For example, as a group of decision-makers, I don't think we asked for your input. I honestly don't remember whether or not we created an explicit opportunity for participants to continue the conversation that officially ended with a break (called for 30 minutes later than the scheduled one). If we didn't offer such an opportunity after a much needed break, we should have. We also could have asked those speakers scheduled for the closing sessions to make more explicit links between what they were discussing and the issues raised in your session.



At a personal level, I would have been wise to have taken a few more deep breaths and let some of the emotion go. As a facilitator, it's always hard to deal with the unplanned when there is little time left. This presents both an emotional and a technical challenge in reconsidering the design. While I am legendary for changing my mind at the last moment, in this case, I think I decided relatively early on what I thought was needed, and probably advocated more than I inquired. (I'm aware that there's a great deal of research (e.g. R. Hackman et al) that suggests even in true emergency situations, a good solution can be improved by consideration of a little more data and a few more questions by the people in charge.)

There is one question I want to take up explicitly and it has to do with what can be interpreted as an effort to smooth over or even suppress a conversation that the group needed to have. I have been influenced by Argyris' notion that you can bypass, name, or engage a dynamic that you face. I think you are right that we bypassed it. We might have been better off if we had named it, but I do not agree that it was best for the group of over 400 to forego what we had planned and engage it. I still believe that we made the best decision for the many with careful, reflective consideration in the moment, although I can understand other points of view. I also believe that we could have done something else for the few.

In retrospect, because we were aware of the wide range of responses and takeaways it might have been helpful to explicitly invite public dialogue by the participants about the entire experience in the weeks after the session. While we intellectually appreciate that others will see things differently than we do and that they will take away different insights, questions, delights and concerns, we don't seem to be able to integrate this knowledge until we are aware of the specifics. I think it is only then that we know the actual results compared to what we intended, and have the right data to inform the design and implementation of the next iteration.

Finally, I hope that I have explicitly and publicly thanked all those who acted courageously that morning and spoke their truths. Many participants remarked in informal conversations that day that the exchange that occurred in the Q&A /comment period was model changing for them: they experienced for the first time a container where widely divergent points of view could be expressed without violence. One participant remarked that had a similar interchange taken place in his country, chairs would have been flying – and that the result for this group would have been different a mere two days before.

It is this comment that still stays with me, and for which I will be forever grateful. I am truly sorry that some, including you, still did not feel safe or included, but I also recognize that many key intentions had been realized. A large group of Westerners had made an important step on their own personal journeys. Many remarked that it was their first experience of being in the minority, and of confronting their own assumptions about people whom they had previously known only as a stereotype. Similarly, our hosts, largely unaccustomed to public meetings attended by both men and women, much less students and senior executives, and even

unknown guests from around the world, warmly welcomed us all and overlooked our gaffes. From my point of view, this is hardly stumbling. It is leaping into the unknown and being gracefully caught.

I think it is worth noting that simply having this forum was part of an ongoing process of development for SoL. In June of 2001, a group of executives (“the Marblehead group”), who had provided economic sponsorship for the founding of a global SoL network, met to provide counsel on what our next steps should be. They identified a number of key global concerns, among them bridging the social divide and creating more capacity for systems – within large corporations and beyond – to see themselves. We agreed on the value of convening dialogue groups of international leaders and planned to meet again to finalize action plans in mid-September.

As you might imagine when we met again, the events of September 11th dominated the check-in for the group, highlighting an even more urgent need for dialogue between Western and Arab/Islamic communities. We were concerned with the fear mongering already occurring in the US and Europe and wanted to consider what SoL could do in its small way to make a difference. Based on

this conversation, we began our efforts to bridge this gulf with an Executive Champions Workshop in Egypt in 2002. Gulf SoL was formed shortly thereafter, leading to a series of dialogues about the future of the region. In 2007, the local SoL community coordinators accepted the proposal of Gulf SoL to host the global forum in 2008, culminating in the event in Oman. I appreciate the trust that the Gulf SoL members placed in the community in creating this opportunity for us and the graciousness of our Omani hosts who always seemed to hold us in a gaze of love, compassion, and possibility, not unlike a doting parent. Since the forum, more active SoL communities have emerged particularly in Asia. And now we are at the point of what comes next.

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**One participant remarked that had a similar interchange taken place in his country, chairs would have been flying.**

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What am I taking away from this? Here are a few things that I think apply to the larger question of what I am learning on my own journey. First, I believe that the unity of power and love is a concept that needs further development. Walking is still much too power-oriented for me as a dominant metaphor, although it has its value in depicting a natural process that we all have to learn – some of us always being more graceful than others in its execution. I find myself turning to dance as a more appealing image of moving – or not – with the flow. It can tell a story (i.e. accomplish something) or simply speak a truth, usually inviting a response/relationship. Speaking to the point of unity, I am reminded of the advice of a dance teacher, Arawana Hayashi, to be mindful of your back as much as you are of your front as a simple physical practice from the world of dance. Every time I hear her say this, I wonder, “How I could be ignoring half of me?” In this particular case, it’s so obvious: it’s all me so how can there be front without a back? Perhaps the larger question for me is one that is at the heart of the unity: What is animating the dance? Or where does the flow come from? How am I and we in tune with this force such that we are fluently multilingual in power and love?



Courtesy of Gulf Sol

Second, I know I am often caught in the duality; I put relationships second in my pursuit of results, or conversely trust an unfolding process that seems geared toward creating connections knowing that there may be no result. I believe I am much more skilled in supporting others when I am an outsider to their process rather than enmeshed in it myself. On the particular day in question, I was clearly putting our relationship on the back burner, although not ignoring it completely. Still, I need to take responsibility for collateral damage and embrace it all in what I am choosing. I can see some useful work I can do in this regard that may open up some new choices that I don't see easily with an either-or mind. I like Otto Scharmer's provocative idea of observing from within the system rather than from the periphery. It feels a little like writing with my left hand – something wholly unnatural! Nevertheless, simply naming it as a distinction creates it as a possibility.

Third, while I think we need to provide for the possibility of redemption, some human systems are more rightly considered networks of ambition than networks of collaboration. Anne Murray Allen has helped me appreciate this distinction. In the former case, individual realization is paramount and relationships amount to no more than back-scratching or convenience at best. We seem to be learning more all the time about how developmental experiences of children and young people affect their ability to develop the maturity needed to "walk" (or dance!). Rather than focusing our work only on adults, I hope we will turn more of our attention to the process of developing good systems citizens.

Fourth, we should expect and welcome that SoL is a microcosm for the aspirations and tensions in our world today. We can more actively consider how to learn from our own experience so that we are all more effective global citizens.

Finally, I am going to be a much more active advocate for timely individual and collective reflection. In the moment, this creates the possibility to learn how to sense the system as both an individual and collective capacity. And on the specific dimensions you mention, we can collectively assess whether we are creating what we want, having determined that we value both our accomplishments and our relationships.

I want to thank you, Adam, for the ongoing inquiry and momentary provocation, which I hope will be useful to all of us as a reminder that reflection needs to begin at home. I remain interested in continuing the conversation about power and love in SoL and beyond. And perhaps others will be taken by this question and join in. SoL seems to attract many who, in the paraphrased words of Robert Kennedy and George Bernard Shaw before him: "See things as they might be and ask 'why not?'" While they may enjoy each other's company in SoL, they won't be happy without making a difference.

Authoring a book commits you to record your point of view as it was on a particular day. I'm curious about how your thinking and experience continues to evolve. While I hope we will talk about it, I trust we will all read about it later – in your next book.

With deep appreciation for your commitment to the journey, one step at a time. ■

  
Sherry

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**I can see some useful work I can do that may open up some new choices that I don't see easily with an either-or mind. I like Otto Scharmer's provocative idea of observing from within the system rather than from the periphery.**

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# Reflections

## The SoL Journal

on Knowledge, Learning, and Change

Volume 10, Number 2

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*Reflections: The SoL Journal* is published quarterly in electronic format and once per year as a hard copy compilation by the Society for Organizational Learning. Inquiries regarding subscriptions, address changes, back issues, reprints, and permission requests should be directed to:

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© JUPITERIMAGES

ISSN 1524-1734  
EISSN 1536-0148

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Design & Production: DG Communications (NonprofitDesign.com)

