

Human Systems Integration – Building Vital Communities

Greatness in the 21st Century calls upon communities (profit and not-for-profit organizations, cities, states, nations, committees, clubs, teams, families, friendships, and others) to recognize their vital nature and conduct themselves as vital to their constituents and to the interdependent web of life of which they are a part.ⁱ

Vital

Of, relating to, or characteristic of life.
Necessary to the continuation of life; life-sustaining.
Full of life; animated.
Imparting life or animation; invigorating.
Necessary to continued existence or effectiveness; essential.

Community

A group of people:
living in the same locality and under the same government,
having common interests,
viewed as forming a distinct segment of society.
Society as a whole; the public.

Reality from a Traditional View

Today's world is tenuous in multiple regards: economy, environment, war, corporate fraud, shrinking middle class, increasing poverty, political gridlock, terrorism, fear, hatred, and micro and macro inability to listen to each other. I have heard with increasing frequency, while facing known problems, that "nothing can be done." There is truth to this assertion, if our perception is narrowed by 'structures' that continue to confine creative thought and resulting possibilities.

“Structures of which we are unaware hold us prisoner.”

—Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline—The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization*ⁱⁱ

Structures securing these prison bars are rooted in the Laws of Motion conceived in the 17th Century by Sir Isaac Newton. Legions of followers adapted those Laws, appropriately and inappropriately. Moon flights, computers, and cable cars would be impossible without understanding Newton's Laws. These same Laws, however, used to direct and predict human behavior have resulted in loss of human potential, unnecessary human suffering, and degradation of earth's natural environment.

Reality from a Realities View

For hundreds of years we have sought human order assuming the efficacy of Newton's Laws to achieve that end. We defined communities as they do not exist and then built systems to lead and manage them based on those erroneous definitions.

“Living systems isn't a metaphor for how human institutions operate. It's the way it is.”

—Richard Tanner Pascale, *Surfing the Edge of Chaos*ⁱⁱⁱ

The reality that human institutions are 'living' systems (Complex Adaptive Systems^{iv}) is generally unknown to most community leaders. This lack of understanding holds serious consequences if left unattended. Without recognition and response by leaders to "the way it is" communities are bound to mediocrity or worse.

Difficulties for many leaders grow from an illusion of knowing. Mark Twain advised; "It's not what you don't know that's the problem, it's what you know that just ain't so." Methodology embedded in years of experience, still taught in university programs, and advanced in current public and private policy dampens the call to challenge the sacred. Continuing catastrophic failures spanning communities from profit and nonprofit organizations to educational systems to cities to states to nations and to families, however, paints a dark future without change.

Einstein said, “The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them.” Thankfully, the paths to be taken are not paths untrod. Leaders around the world have adapted to the reality that their communities are ‘living’ complex adaptive systems. Of greater consequence are the results of transformation to “the way it is.” Communities are more effective, efficient, and creative, far surpassing possibilities inherent in those relying on hierarchical structured command and control systems. Facing complexity as it is, paradoxically, requires a simpler way to lead and manage where responsible freedom provides ultimate control.

The Mandalan Quest demystifies the “way it is” and offers a highly practical set of systems, concepts, models, processes, and tools assembled into a large-scale integration of human systems.

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ⁱ Definitions below adapted from The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition copyright ©2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Updated in 2009. Published by Houghton Mifflin Company. All rights reserved. Accessed at <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/vital>.

ⁱⁱ *The Fifth Discipline – The Art and Practice of The Learning Organization* by Peter M. Senge, © 1990, A Currency Book published by Doubleday, New York, NY.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Surfing the Edge of Chaos—The Laws of Nature and the New Laws of Business* by Richard T. Pascale, Mark Millemann, and Linda Gioja ©1996Crown Business Publishing Group, New York.

^{iv} General features of Complex Adaptive Systems include self-similar structures (fractals), nonlinearity, complexity, self-organization, and emergence. Examples include stock markets, developing embryos, ant colonies, the ecosystem, political parties, the brain, England, New England, Best Buy, the space program, and the great variety of communities as noted above.