

## *Community Vision Beyond Dichotomy*

A unifying vision when it stems from realistic optimism provides an image for a more desirable community. As Peter Block (1987) explains, "A vision statement is an expression of hope, and if we have no hope, it is hard to create a vision" (p. 107). An effective civic leader is essentially a vehicle who articulates an image or ideal of what we should be striving for. "A leaders vision also inspires action and helps shape the future" (Nanus, 1992, p. 8). During the formation of the United States, a collective community vision played a crucial role in the creation of the Constitution. Nanus (1992) declares that, "The Constitution, for example, is a written description of the founding fathers vision for the United States, setting a clear direction and defining values but not specifying how to get there" (p. 8). Systemic vision is crucial in transforming communities because it involves setting direction and defining strategies for a future were every living organisms best interests are included.

Communities are essentially a group of subsystems in the midst of smaller and larger systems, all of which are intrinsically related. This interdependence is a primary reason that community missions or visions be all inclusive. It is crucial that civic leaders be cognizant of the many interrelated issues when formulating policies. Failure to develop an all inclusive community building strategy will result in the neglect of a particular subsystem and that negligence will eventually damage the entire system. Napier (1978) defines the system as, "any entity, the parts of which co-vary interdependently with one another, and which maintains equilibrium in an error-activated way" (p. 47). Capra's version of the system's concept asserts that this symbiotic relationship is the nature of the universe:

Systems theory looks at the world in terms of the interrelatedness and interdependence of all phenomena; and in this framework an integrated whole whose properties cannot be reduced to those of its parts is called a system. Living organisms, societies, and ecosystems are all systems. (p. 43) Systems Theory has far-reaching implications for community leaders, because of its all inclusive ideology and long-term discernment.

*Systems Theory* also allows leaders the framework to promote vision in such a manner that all are allowed to offer creative solutions. When all participants contribute towards a community's vision, commitment is at a maximum and both individual and group transform each other. Leaders who operate from a systemic or holistic mindset take into consideration the values and morals that followers hold in common. By appealing to these values, civic administrators are

thus able to articulate a vision that summons the mutually held beliefs of their constituents. Successful politicians realize that morals and values are core influences within an individual, for this reason, they are extremely potent motivators. Historian and Political Scientist, James MacGregor Burns, defines the style of leading which appeals to the ethical beliefs and needs of followers as moral leadership. In his Pulitzer Prize winning book, *Leadership* (1978), Burns asserts, "Moral leadership emerges from, and returns to, the fundamental wants and needs, aspirations, and values of the followers. I mean the kind of leadership that can produce social change that will satisfy followers' authentic needs" (p. 4)

Currently, the traditional ideals of present day leaders are being questioned. What has worked in the past is often unable to overcome present day social conflicts. As Einstein often stated: No problem can be solved from the same consciousness that created it. A point that certainly deserves merit, but is rarely tried. Many of the problems facing humanity are so ingrained that a complete new vision; one less self-seeking and more collectively beneficial, needs to purge our cultures previous bankrupt notion of the good life.

The original American dream has been assaulted by today's *culture of consumption*. We have altered the ideals of our forefathers to resemble "life, liberty and the *purchase* of happiness." This thirst for more and more is unquenchable, addictive and destructive. It is becoming more and more clear that our culture needs to restructure its self-serving values. Instead of merely addressing the poisons of society, leaders need to envision, share and direct us towards a more mutually-beneficial "pursuit of happiness.

"National, legislative, municipal and community, leaders need to evaluate today's current social problems and focus on systemic processes. They must be able to shift perspectives from the traditional linear focus of cause/ effect relationships to realize the cyclic nature of continuous feedback amongst subsystems within the whole. Effective leadership that encompasses the entire mutuality of humanity (and the organic community, for that matter) is urgently needed. The old dogmas are blindly leading us towards continuous calamity. The traditional ways, by no means need to be eliminated, leaders just need to broaden their vision and context of tried concepts. The old practices need to be either accented by or set in paradox to the vanguard of progressive scientific and systemic theories.

Those who seek to improve communities need to be aware of the continuum of thought

which defines how the world is viewed. One side of the spectrum represents the contextual frame of Newtonian mechanics and objective science. On the paradoxical side of the spectrum lie processes that fall beyond the immediate senses unfolding in the unseen orchestra of quantum physics, mystical wisdom and organic relationships. In order to possess holistic vision, leaders need to rationalize systemically, and be aware of the entire continuum of ancient and progressive thought processes. Thomas Merton (1964) exclaimed the necessity of both spheres of thought:

It is true that neither the ancient wisdoms nor the modern sciences are complete in themselves. They do not stand alone. They call for one another. Wisdom without science is unable to penetrate the full spatial meaning of the material cosmos. Science without wisdom leaves man enslaved to a world of unrelated objects in which there is no way of discovering [or creating] order and deep significance in man's own pointless existence. (p. 1)

One of humankind's most destructive impediments is the tendency to see things as opposing dichotomies. This either/or thinking tends to breed mistrust and hinders broad-based inclusive solutions. Exclusivity of this nature is common in Western culture. It limits our ability to expand our horizons-to gain an understanding of the full context. Frey (1994) notes that, "In these situations of polar opposites, any given position or category is arbitrarily perceived as not the other and is excluded from it" (p. 182). By viewing reality as either black or white, us or them win or lose, right or wrong, good or evil; we breed stereotypes, limit choices, and distort true-being. If society wishes to transcend current ills, all community members must look beyond their ethnocentrism and be willing to perceive reality outside their one-world, diametric view.

An essential trait of progressive community leadership is the willingness to take risks and utilize creative solutions. In order to do this civic governance must be able to look beyond conventional consciousness, have the faith to try new paradigms and be willing to perceive the world outside personal objectification. All too often, the objective mentality separates us from each other and the world of which we are apart. Objectivism by its very nature separates and analysis-while it understands the intricate specialization of its parts, it fails to grasp the meaning of the whole. Wheatley (1992) maintains that human-beings consistently perceive the world through objective terms:

We manage by separating into parts; we believe that influence occurs as a direct result of force exerted from one person to another, we engage in complex planning for a world that we keep expecting to be predictable, and we search continually for a better method of objectively perceiving the world. (p. 6)

Objectification separates ourselves from the world; hence we tend to manipulate objects-anything in our surrounding world-to fulfill our desires. "To term a phenomenon an 'object' is to ultimately render that phenomenon distinct and separate from the whole" (Frey, 1994, p. 163). Objectivism is rooted in Cartesian Dualism and, despite Descartes best intentions, the ideology has created an individualistic culture that revolves around self-interest and dominates the natural world in a mind-over-matter fashion. By bringing the world under the dominion of our mind we have isolated ourselves from it. Once more, this objective perception is also a key factor that separates us from each other.

Physicists now realize the limits of objectivism (the very objectivism that had been the foundation of the scientific method) when trying to understand subatomic particles.

"Quantum theory has changed the classical view of science considerably by revealing the crucial role of the observers' consciousness in the process of observation and thus invalidating the idea of an objective description of nature" (Capra, 1982, p. 376).

Municipal leaders must be able to see beyond their objective tendencies, step outside of themselves and embrace the world in a broader context. If they have the capacity to accomplish this, the "I" that they bring to discussion groups can then embody the "We" of the entire group. This form of consciousness is collective and united towards a common goal. Nielson (1991) declares that, "'I am We' consciousness is different. It is being united in a transcendent, common consciousness of a prior' We' "(p. 651). If communities can regularly hold forums where dialogue is held in the "I am We" frame of mind, then the harmful separateness of objectivism can be overcome and true mutuality of vision can be set into motion. Nielson's (1991) observations on Lonergan's theories exclaim how to achieve this subjective frame of mind:

How does one cultivate "I am We" consciousness and dialog as ethics method? Lonergan suggests a four moment process: (1) attention to experience; (2) interpretation of experience; (3) reflective, confirming judgment; and (4) responsible decision and action. (p. 662)

When individuals in group settings unite their conscious experiences, remove personal judgment and share thoughts collectively, isolated persons transcend their objective perception of reality and become open to subjective interpretations. Prior to the scientific age, humanity perceived the world subjectively and some cultures still do today. To do so takes a greater deal of faith in

the intangible aspects of community building-Platonic traits such as equality, morality, charity and justice. Traits that are often in short supply in many of today's communities. Parker Palmer (1993), an educator whom has lived amongst several spiritually based communities, i.e.; Monastic, Buddhist and Quaker, emphasized the life affirming quality of subjective perception:

The untrained mind of pre-modern times did not rely on factual observations and logical analysis but on the subjective faculties' emotions, intuition, faith. These modes of knowing do not manufacture a world to be held at arm's length, manipulated and owned. Instead, they receive the world as a given an organic whole, and they make the knower an integral part of it. Such knowledge does not reduce the world to lifeless "things" but fills all things with vital, pulsing life. (p. 25)

No man or woman is an island, in extreme scenarios one may be a narrow peninsula, but individuals will always need to be connected to the mainland of the entire human community. Furthermore, that human community needs to be connected to the entire mass of organic creation. Or as John Muir, founder of the Sierra Club, said with uncommon insight over 100 years ago, "When you pick up anything by itself, you find it hitched to everything else in the universe" (p. 9) All individual entities gather life-sustaining strength through their connectedness to the greater whole. There are no isolated objects, all are subjects of and within another. Subjectification of this kind, embodies the entire system, all phenomena is intrinsically connected and affirms itself through feedback relationships. Thinking along these lines is contrary to our society's objective inclination because it does not reduce reality to autonomous segments. Wheatley (1992) reflects Capra's sentiments on the failure of objective thinking [weather in physics or human organizations]:

Second, and much more important, the new physics cogently explains that there is no objective reality out there waiting to reveal its secrets. There are no recipes of formula, no checklists or advice that describes "reality." There is only what we create through our engagement with others and with events. We inhabit a world that is always subjective and shaped by our interactions with it. (p. 7, 8).

Animal, vegetable, mineral and spirit form a collective whole-a kinship where human individualism, self-interest and mind-over-matter ideology is incompatible. One identity is not reducible by another. The subjectification perception of reality holds that all matter is unified, and continuously involved in the dynamic interchange of information. All the universe "stuff" is connected, mind is in unison with matter and an entities self-interest is realized through cooperation within the collective whole. "There is little room for compartmentalization or for autonomous segments, separate from the whole" (Frey, 1994, p. 170). Community leadership needs to over-ride objective policies with subjective agendas that involve the representation of all

community, sects. With the involvement of all community members broader contexts are examined and this can result in greater flexibility and long-term group stability.

In order to promote greater participation, our communities need to become less hierarchal. These hierarchal formations are essentially power structures which classify and divide people as either upper, middle or lower class. This categorical gradation judges people by their differences and the "other" is thought of as either oppressive or inferior. In this arena common-ground is difficult to find and the possibility for overcoming conflicts is scarce to none. If community transformation is to occur it will certainly have to be grounded in more equitable notions of egalitarian philosophy. "Possible interpretations include equality before the law, equality of political power, equality of opportunity for social and economical advancement, equality of resources, equality of welfare, equality of freedom and equality of respect" (Dworkin, 1985, p. 248). This notion of mutual equity can't exist in a rigid hierarchal organization where the upper class is far too elite to deal with the concerns of the less fortunate. In order to conquer this negative gradation, community leaders need to promote a philosophy of equalization.

"Shared values such as interdependence, trust, egalitarianism, subtlety and intimacy as central to effective organizations, and by implication to effective leadership" (Ouchi, 1981, p. 17).

When all community members realize that each person is equal in spirit-regardless of their appearance or esthetic differences, common-ground becomes more accessible. In this environment mutuality becomes more recognizable, group confidence is increased and members share a sense of empowerment. With empowerment community members overcome the myopic viewpoint of power esurient politicians. Block (1993) suggests that, "Empowerment is embodied in the act of standing on our own ground, discovering our own voice, making our own choices" (p. 36). When power is dispersed, as opposed to being hoarded, people are more able to determine their own direction. "In addition to enabling us to find our own voice; empowerment means that we have the right to define purpose for ourselves" (Block, 1993, p. 36). Only when the traditional sources of power are challenged, will society's hierarchies crumble, and all community members are able to share in the leadership process.

When the higher, mutually held needs and values of the population are articulated by leaders, community members become stimulated toward achieving collective ends. James MacGregor Burns (1978) coined this transformational leadership. Morford's (1987) reflection on this leadership philosophy asserts that:

He [Burns] calls for more "transforming" leadership wherein the leader identifies and articulates a vision

which, flowing from followers needs and potential motives "seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower." The result "is a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents." This comes about when "the leader takes the initiative in making the leader-led connection" and through the transforming interaction changes "the followers' motive base." (p. 43; Bums, 1978, p. 20)

Many social reformers only recognize community improvements through statistical analysis. This quantitative viewpoint defines success as something that is only numerically measurable. Such statistical analyses are the favorite tool of many politicians, corporate accountants and civic administrators. Unfortunately, the temptation to manipulate statistics to serve a particular agenda is commonplace. Aside from this alarming occurrence, the actual relevance that quantitative research has for measuring such intangible phenomenon as leadership effectiveness or community transformation is negligible. Mats Alvesson (1996), critique on the quantitative assessment of social science clarifies this sentiment, "Practitioners [those employing quantitative assessments for the purpose of social research] seem to view the abstractions of quantified material and statistical correlations as very remote from everyday practice and therefore of little use" (p. 455). Typically, quantitative assessments measure short-term fluctuations as opposed to long-term transformation.

In order to overcome this numerically based dogma, social researchers and the politicians, who employ their findings, need to grasp all of the implications that contribute to a particular societal phenomenon. Like the fore-mentioned systemic thinker, they must consider the whole, not just the cause/effect fluctuations occurring in their particular frame of analysis. "In the new science, the underlying currents are a movement toward holism, toward understanding the system as a system and giving primary value to the relationships that exist among seemingly discrete parts" (Wheatley, 1992, p. 9)

Lasting community transformation requires long-term qualitative understanding as opposed to a measured index reflecting "quality of life" indicators. Quality orientated consciousness appreciates the preciousness of life and leadership of this nature seeks to foster a sense of purposefulness in community members. In fact, it seeks new perspectives amongst followers by encouraging creative solutions and that often results in greater degrees of quality. Not only does quality-focused leadership trust in the integrity of followers, it also realizes the intrinsic motivation that striving for excellence provides. "That again is what the whole 'Quality Movement' is about, and why the term excellence stirs so many people so deeply nowadays"

(Hawley, 1993, p. 140). A progressive community understands that its greatest resource is the vitality and ingenuity of its members. Consequently, in an effort to promote quality, councils should encourage citizen creativity when formulating policy. One of the world's foremost psychiatrists, James Masterson (1988) confirms the importance that creativity plays in the process of quality development, "Creativity... is the ability to replace old, familiar patterns of living and problem solving with new and equally or more successful ones." (p. 44) The quest for excellence through the employment of creativity motivates people; it also validates their existence and forges the way for community transformation.

Municipal leadership attune to the paradox of quantification vs. qualitation has the ability to balance the two. It recognizes many pathways and has a clear idea of the most choice worthy ends. By sharing its vision of qualitation, it inspires followers to seek the same ideal. This type of thinking is long-term and it allows the community to be healthy, adaptive and responsive. Present day communities need to move beyond the reductionist viewpoint. Like Isaac Newton, the reductionist's perspective of reality is limited to the material world which is immediately seen and empirically understood. The reductionist regarded as-truth. "The Newtonian model of the world is characterized by materialism and reductionism a focus on things rather than relationships and a search in physics, for the basic building blocks of matter" (Wheatley, 1992, p. 9). Reductionist thinking paved the way for bureaucracy. Once a needed regulator of social conduct, the term bureaucracy now resonates with government inefficiency and red-tape stagnation.

Reductionism lies at the heart of non-adaptive bureaucracies; it kills the creativity of community members and restricts any transformational efforts. When administrators become puppets of myopic bureaucracy, policies become bibles and progressive ideas never see the light of day. Often the conventional notions that bureaucracies regulate becomes an artificial state because they perpetuate their own existence. When this occurs the reason for which the policies were originally conceived are no longer relevant and the regulations only persists because they are unable to change. There are far too many examples of this occurring in any level of government. The competitive nature of business has forced corporate America to acknowledge this crippling malady; in response most firms eliminated several layers of middle management-the primary area of bureaucratic concentration. Social administrators would do well to follow this example. *When* governance is streamlined it is more adaptive to

changing realities and more able to override outdated policies. Bolmann and Deal (1991) describe the characteristics typical in a stagnate bureaucracy, whether it be a corporation or government agency:

These are usually older organizations controlled by past traditions and turning out obsolete product lines. A predictable and placid environment has lulled the organization to sleep, and top management is heavily committed to the old ways. Information systems are not sophisticated enough to detect the need for change. Lower-level managers feel ignored and alienated. Many old-line corporations and public bureaucracies have these characteristics. (p. 80)

All too often, the behavior that such bureaucratic policies control becomes viewed as the only way to do so. The reducing nature of such procedures becomes as real as that which they regulate and organizations become inflexible, non-adaptive and inert. Reductionism tends to be exclusive, it clings to tradition and lends to organizational stagnation. Transformative social progress, on the other hand, is inclusive because it requires the active participation of all community members. With proper leadership community members, like employees, become motivated by an organization's vision; the unseen binding force that guides the affiliation which transforms individual desire to group commitment. "I have come to understand organizational vision as a field-a force of unseen connections that influence employees' behavior-rather than as an evocative message about some desired future state" (Wheatley, 1992, p. 13).

Participation is manifest when leaders articulate a vision that appeals to a group's core-values. When this occurs the full-person becomes committed and the vision becomes the *esprit de corps* of all community members. Wise leaders know that when a person is fully engaged towards something that gives them purpose, motivation takes care of itself. When community policy is not structured through rigid bureaucracy; group vision can prosper to produce the greatest good for all. Gandhi's *Satyagraha* or guidance by truth consists of achieving a vision whereby all community members participate, including those with contradicting ideologies. Gandhi; the man whose philosophy of nonviolence liberated India from Britain, the reigning world power, believed that opposing relationships are necessary for communities to transform to a higher order. In order to create a community that facilitates opposing views all stakeholders must have open minds, patience and the courage to give-up their ethnocentrism. True inclusive participation is not objective; it does not try to reduce reality to singular dimensions. It is dynamic

and concerned with the highest moral ends and means simultaneously.

With systems theory or systemic negotiation principles (i.e.; a perspective that realizes the interacting, interrelated and interdependent relationships of all living organisms and organizations), opposing forces can occupy the same side. Gandhi believed that the truth can't be known without the presence of the "other" because it takes opposing forces to determine what is the highest good for all concerned. During the oppressive occupation of India by Britain in the early-1900's, Gandhi's philosophy of Satyagraha Satya (truth) Agraha (force) proved that politically opposed forces can reach consensus. Boundurant's (1988) observation on Satyagraha asserted that it consisted of five general principles:

- (1) recognize the truthful and untruthful on both sides;
- (2) put the truthful elements from both sides together;
- (3) form a new side while struggling with the opponent;
- (4) revise the new position even as the struggle continues;
- and (5) the end comes when both sides agree to occupy the same side. (p. 3)

Inclusive participation of this kind realizes that opposing forces provide a catalyst for new perspectives. Or as ancient Chinese wisdom professed, conflict is opportunity. In either light, this mode of thought envisions a world beyond the reduction of former ingrained consciousness.

Instead of striving to control, progressive leadership would fare better by adapting Gandhi's principles of Satyagraha. By systemically understanding dichotomies and the diametric forces of objectification vs. subjectification, gradation vs. equalization, quantization vs. qualification, and reduction vs. participation, communities will be able to forge a stable foundation flexible enough to facilitate dynamic equilibrium. "In life, the issue is not control, but dynamic connectedness" (Jantsh, 1980, p. 196). The pendulum of antithetical forces can never be stilled, it will continue to sway forth to the right and back to the left. Any attempt to adjust the pendulum only increases the pitch of its swing. Social leaders must accept this inevitable reality and fashion their guiding parameters to allow communities the necessary metamorphic flexibility to adapt to the ever-changing universe.

The noble intentions of "The Presidents' Summit for America's Future" did accentuate a promising American virtue-our capacity to volunteer and lend aid to the less

fortunate. "Even now, at the end of the 20th century, when more women work, more kids are raised by single parents and more families are struggling to maintain middle-class lifestyles, the United States remains one of the most volunteering nations on earth." (Hall, 1997, p. 2A) This charitable trait may be attributed, in part, to the fact that America is also one of the world's most prosperous nations. People who feel blessed often share their good fortune.

Unfortunately, we know that volunteerism alone can't solve the immense calamities that besiege our communities. Sociologists are also beginning to understand that the very prosperity that makes America an economic leader, is also responsible for a large portion of the country's social and environmental ills.

Progressive communities have to reevaluate the conventional meaning of prosperity for two primary reasons; First, because self-serving individualism strains social structures to the brink of collapse and Second, the unquenchable greed for profit, or continuous growth, is exhausting the life-supporting resources of our ecosystem. "For the first time we have to face the very real threat of extinction of the human race and of all life on this planet." (Capra, 1982, p. 21)

Fortunately, all visions of the future are not gloom and doom.

The scientific and systemic theories outlined in this paper represent the optimistic views held by many of today's leading-edge scientists, academics and business consultants. The implications their theories have for community development is enormous. This is because their ideas do not merely skim the surface of deep-rooted issues & social problems typical of most transactional political leadership—they probe deeply into the soil where the seeds of societal ills germinate. Like the ancient mystics, they too, believe in the omniscient wisdom found in the life & living systems.

Today our divining tools consist of the most advanced scientific theories ever presented in our kind's history. The metaphors found in quantum physics, unlike any other scientific phenomenon, engage, challenge and mystify the consciousness of the observer. What is to be understood is to be known relationally—not as object and observer, but as union sharing in life-sustaining information. With closer inspection science discovers that all is interconnected, one system composed of countless relationships, each a system unto themselves. Quantum physics has aligned the scientist's mind with the soul of the poet. In the words of Walt Whitman (1819-1892) "If the doors of perception are cleansed then we would see things as they truly are infinite"

Perhaps the scientists are discovering what the poets have always hinted at and what the ancient

Greeks referred to as *nous*. F. E. Peters (1967), defined this concept of *Nous*:

In Greek philosophy the highest form of rationality which is capable of grasping the fundamental principles of reality. In contrast to perception, which delivers awareness of the changing, accidental properties of things, *nous* consists in understanding their essential, immutable nature. Moreover, it supersedes belief, which may attain truth but falls short of explaining the why and wherefore of things. For Aristotle, the unmoved mover of the universe was a cosmic *Nous*. (629)

Since ancient times we have always had a sense that things were not as they should be. If they were then what would be the relevance of Platonic, Aristotelian, Taoist, Buddhist & Judea-Christian ideology. Individuals and their encompassing societies have always struggled with what St. Thomas Aquinas labeled as *the seven sins*. From this perspective we might surmise that little has changed over the last several millennia. However, one thing has changed, that being the cataclysmic nature of our present-day societal crises. With optimistic vision today's problems have the capacity to become tomorrow's solutions. The environmental crises that our planet is hurtling towards can only be solved when individuals, communities, and nations come together with a common purpose. With large scale dilemmas, the false perception that separates one community from another are superseded. The protective good of one ethnocentric group can only realized in a larger collective. When we acknowledge this we see the illusion of polarized views, our perceptions broaden and we gain a system wide understanding of the world.

With a systemic worldview—a perspective that accounts for the interacting, interrelated and interdependent relationships of all living organisms and organizations—community leaders will realize that every act, large or small, affects the other. This mindset also allows each of us a greater capacity to comprehend our own inner-beings importance to the other, hence we expand our conscious horizons and gain greater celestial understanding. When an individual undertakes this inner journey, his or her life is transformed to appreciate and serve the essence of the "life" force that both defines us and surround us resulting in a desire to serve the living community. This desire to serve life is, undoubtedly, the crucial ingredient for community transformation. When this consciousness manifests on a grand scale, the triumph of the human spirit will then ensue to guide humanity out of its self-imposed abyss where mind-over-matter policies have severed our connections from one another, the community and the fullness of life's meaning.

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