Notes of a Management Watcher: Discontinuity, Discourse and Dialogue

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FULL SCRIPT VERSION FOR WEBSITE

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OHR Credo: Community through respect & civility. Experience through diversity. Success through learning.

Pre-Note: The underlining in some sections were for spoken points-of-emphasis for use during my presentation.

Introduction

The word “keynote” is variously defined as “a central or determining principle or principal theme in a speech” or for the musicians among you “the first note in a diatonic scale” relating to its pitch and duration.

My keynote title takes some liberties with this definition. Its content and format are a collage of cameo comments and notes to myself regarding concepts, ideas and approaches which seem to me to have sustainable value and adaptive use over time for leaders and managers. It’s like excerpts from a personal Wikipedia, a selected bibliography on steroids or simply some random things worth knowing.

[Sidebar. The reasons I asked you to share the name and author of your favorite book and most recent book read to inform, enhance and enable your career are threefold: I want to learn from you, I want you to learn from each other (so I’ll reprise the list on the OHR website along with the full script of this presentation) and, if time permits at the end, I may pick a few of your selected books on which to comment.]

The purpose of this keynote is to set the stage for your exposure to and hopeful immersion later today in a three-part array of learning opportunities to help you promote “effective workplace dynamics.”

Your choices for knowledge entrees in the first session afford insight into enhancing employee engagement, facilitating generative learning environments, dealing with accidental adversaries at work and supervising the “not me” employee.

Second session entrees include a sustainable managerial behavior model, reclaiming lost motivation, realizing the promise of wellness, and systems for effectively managing conflict.

Your third session options include creating necessary conditions for successful change, using Lean/Six Sigma as an organizational improvement tool, a repeat wellness offering, and engaging your strengths at work and in life.

You have committed this day to your professional development -- away from your normal workplace, and hopefully undistracted by cell phones, text messages and agenda anxieties. And for those from UW, coming to a place apart from academe to learn is both a lesson in irony and in introspection.
Whether any or all of this provides some teachable moments for you personally -- depends on whether you earnestly invest yourself and your mind -- in active real-time listening and the learning experiences these sessions offer.

If we and you are successful in this collaborative professional development effort, you will return to your workplace with some new perspectives and motivation. In short, it will have made some difference for the better back there in the way you participate, contribute, lead and/or manage.

Being invited to give a talk, present a paper or otherwise contribute something in the forum or context of an event like this triggered a number of reactions in me. For whatever reason, one or more persons with responsibility for planning the event apparently determined I might have something useful to say.

I deeply treasure my professional life experiences in the public, private and university sectors, and the constant opportunity and appetite to plumb the ever-changing knowledge bases that attended each. Well before the digital world with all its trappings appeared, I kept personal reference file folders by job, by topic and by profession.

I actually prepared multiple versions of this keynote presentation before settling on this morning's offering. The first version was driven by the early need to provide a title for the conference registration flyer. I decided to do them one better, alphabet-wise, and chose Discontinuity, Discourse and Dialogue) as three safe generalized havens for my thoughts-in-waiting.

In retrospect, I suspect I should have opted for a more general title like “Some Random Things Worth Knowing” -- with the caveat that they come from someone who is still discovering every day how much he does not know!

(Sidebar Segue: At some point in my career, I moved away from using the classic pyramidal organization chart to graphically depict an organization. Instead, I began to use a series of concentric rings (think archery target) where the top of the pyramid moved to the center and the boxes depicting reporting relationships became arcs in outer rings.

Later, I replaced all solid lines with broken ones to signify the expectation of collaborative permeability where organizational intelligence rather than silo constrained mindsets were nurtured. Depending on the purpose of the organization, I found interconnected clusters of pods (think DNA) to be a helpful alternative especially for the flatter organizations.

A few of you also know that in my role as a chief executive occupant of the center-most circle, I developed a practice of having an introductory seminar with groups of new employees to describe our organization’s shared hopes, vision and values.

If you were one of those employees you would hear me say something like this as we finished the seminar: “We believe that each of you brings a unique gift to our collaborative enterprise that we are anxious to open, enable and nurture so we might become better by virtue of your unique contributions, growth and presence among us. Periodically hereafter you will participate in all-staff or cluster education and idea-sharing sessions led and energized by staff.

As a manager, I sought to remedy my knowledge voids prior to making key major decisions I would prepare and circulate “thinkpieces” -- insights into what I was thinking about a particular matter and invite my colleagues’ reactions, suggestions and opinions. My final question at decision time would be “is there anything else I should know about this matter and the implementation of the decision before I make it? I knew the organization’s culture was improving when staff members were emboldened to create and send their own “thinkpieces” to me.
If you and I were all members of a common organization, my keynote portion of today’s program serves more like the initial new employees meeting. The more important other sessions you will attend today have a more participative and dialogic character. At a minimum, I hope my keynote notes of a management watcher serve to stimulate a dialogue with your individual and collective minds and open you to the possibilities the other sessions offer and the importance of reading to learn.

This morning’s keynote then is a “thinkpiece” and “sampler” of cameo insights developed specifically for each of you. I hope one or more of them will stimulate a dialogue with your individual and collective minds and open you to the possibilities the other sessions offer and the importance of reading to learn.

I. DISCONTINUITY

*noun: lack of continuity; irregularity; a gap*

A. Introduction

The word “discontinuity” obviously presumes an opposite state, “continuity” (i.e. a *continuous and connected whole*). An orderly and healthy life, we are told, needs large doses of predictable continuity and connectedness. In an organization, we design-in these characteristics and set up systems to guide and govern its operation and alert us to variations and aberrations.

Our organizational and systems designs and assumptions often fail to take into account the key variable, i.e. humans are involved and someone has dubbed Harvard’s 4th Law of Human Behavior comes into play. It reads *Under the most carefully controlled conditions, human beings often do as they dam well please*. While systems designed to avoid it can trigger discontinuity, it is also true that people by their actions, interactions and inactions have a stronger finger on that trigger.

Discontinuity both “happens” and “evolves” and it’s best to find a way to keep your eyes and minds open for the possibility. One of the ways to discern and deal with discontinuity in the micro sense is to listen for its signals among your staff and clients/customers, and to read what is said in the literature on research about it in the macro sense.

In 1995, I was midway in my 12-year tenure as President and CEO of the UW Credit Union – my second private sector job experience. My reading list had expanded to staples in the financial institutions world and included more regular doses of the Wall Street Journal, the Harvard Business Review and books in the business section of the local and online booksellers. It was there I picked up a copy of management guru Peter Drucker’s best seller’s 2nd edition *The Age of Discontinuity (Guidelines to Our Changing Society).*

The book’s cover commentary read: “Drucker focuses with great clarity and perception on the forces of change than are transforming our economic landscape and creating tomorrow’s society.

He discerned four major areas of discontinuity underlying contemporary social and cultural reality: (a) the explosion of new technologies resulting in major new industries; (b) the move to a world economy; (c) a new sociopolitical reality of pluralistic institutions that poses drastic political, philosophical and spiritual challenges; and (d) a new universe of knowledge based on
mass education and its implications in work, leisure and leadership. This book was a fascinating and important blueprint for shaping a future that was already very much with us.

(This was the future which Alvin Toffler in 1970 had previously warned would shock us as we moved from an industrial society to a super-industrial one. We would be overwhelmed as a greatly accelerated rate of technological and social change and attendant informational overload would leave us “disconnected and suffering from shattering stress and disorientation.”)

Does any of this sound familiar as we are now 15+ years into the future Drucker described and nearly 40 years into Toffler’s shocking world? Drucker’s chapters on Work and Worker in the Knowledge Society, Has Success Spoiled the Schools and Does Knowledge Have a Future particularly resonated with me. Over the years Drucker was also a source of many pithy observations whose value endures. Here is a sampler.

- Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things.
- Effective leadership is not about making speeches or being liked; leadership is defined by results not attributes.
- Knowledge has to be improved, challenged, and increased constantly, or it vanishes.
- Management by objectives works - if you know the objectives. Ninety percent of the time you don’t.
- Most of what we call management consists of making it difficult for people to get their work done.
- The best way to predict the future is to create it.
- The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn’t said.
- We now accept the fact that learning is a lifelong process of keeping abreast of change. And the most pressing task is to teach people/managers how to learn. (What better introduction to this conference!)

B. Cameo Notes

My personal DEPedia files include summaries of key ideas in books, articles and presentations that struck me as having continuing value and which have over time. Here are a few cameo summaries of their main points. They deal with some aspect of change or tools to deal with discontinuity and other changes facing managers. Most of the original thinking described was done by others; my main contribution was their eclectic combination for this event.

I do this mindful of the warnings about pop management and self help books and motivational speakers that tell us success depends on your becoming more intuitive, compassionate, sensitive, rigorous, biased for action, willing to risk failure, adventurous or open-minded.

The basic message in many of them seems to be that you’d be a much better person if only you were someone else!
1. **Our Iceberg Is Melting (Changing & Succeeding Under Any Conditions)**
   John Kotter (2005)

Using a fable about a colony of penguins in Antarctica, Kotter describes how to achieve successful change. Kotter’s classic book *Leading Change* came out in the mid-1990s and along with Drucker’s insights, enhanced my perspective and equipped me with helpful tools.

Here’s the Eight Step Process of Successful Change the penguin fable Illustrates

**Set the Stage**

1. Create a **Sense of Urgency**
2. Pull Together the **Guiding Team**

**Decide What to Do**

3. Develop the **Change Vision and Strategy**

**Make it Happen**

4. Communicate for Understanding and Buy In
5. **Empower Others** to Act
6. Produce **Short-Term Wins**
7. **Don’t Let Up** (see 1 above)

**Make It Stick** (See 2. below)

8. Create a **New Culture**

2. **Made to Stick (Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die)**
   (Chip and Dan Heath 2007)

   Six Principles (SUCCEES): Simplicity-Unexpectedness-Concreteness-Credibility-Emotions-Stories)

3. **Leadership Training from the Classics**: A book called *The Classic Touch* (Lessons in Leadership from Homer to Hemingway) by Clemens and Mayer (1987) tapped the collective wisdom from the classic works of Western philosophy, history, biography and drama and applied it to the problems of modern day managers and leaders as they deal with another “D” word -- dilemmas.

If your mind grows numb from all the current management and leadership books, you may discover a new management/leadership perspective in the following:

- Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* – full of leadership insight
- Plato’s *Republic* – the best text ever written on leadership style.
- Machiavelli’s *The Prince* – on the uses and abuses of power
- Shakespeare’s *King Lear* – a drama of succession, delegation and decentralization
- Burke’s *Reflections on the French Revolution* – look backwards before you leap.
- Thoreau’s *Walden* – on the badness of bigness
- Darwin’s *Origin of the Species.*” - on adapting to change

4. **The Element (Finding Your Passion Changes Everything), Ken Robinson, 2009**

The “element” is defined as the point in your professional life at which talent meets personal passion and you feel most yourself, most inspired and seek to achieve at the highest level. The author’s aim is to “offer a richer version of human ability and creativity and of the benefits to us all of connecting properly with our individual talents and passions…a new paradigm of human capacity to meet a new era of human existence. We need to create workplace environments where every person is inspired to grow creatively.

This book is a *hymn* to the breath-taking diversity of human talent and passion and to our extraordinary potential for growth and development. It’s also about understanding the conditions under which human talents will flourish or fade. The only way to prepare for the future is to make the most of ourselves on the assumption that doing so will make us more flexible and productive as possible. The element is *different for everyone*. As for luck, luck is *partial* to those who prepare well.

5. **Insights from Insects.** Jonas Salk said “It is interesting to reflect that if all the insects were to disappear from the earth, within fifty years all other forms of life would end.” He went on to say “If all human beings were to disappear from the earth, within fifty years all other forms of life would….flourish.”

Using story in *National Geographic*, M.J. Mauboussin finds the behavior of ants a useful metaphor to demonstrate how groups, whether ant colonies, markets or corporations can, under the right conditions, be smarter than any of their members. In these complex adaptive systems, like the ones you work in, hard-to-predict behaviors emerge from the interaction of individuals. He goes on to suggest that executives, who really don’ grasp how systems work (or don’t work) make three common mistakes:

- **Extrapolating observations individual behavior to explain collective behavior**

- **Failing to realize that changes in one component of a complex system may have unintended consequences for the whole** (see Lewis Thomas essay on “Meddling”)

- **Have a tendency to prize a few standout employees while ignoring how much they depend and draw on their surrounding colleagues for support.**

*Same root problem = The executive makes wrong assumptions about the relevance of individual element and agents to the behavior of complex systems.*
II. DISCOURSE

*noun: communication of earnest and intelligent thought by words, talk or conversation*

A. Introduction.

When it came to deciding on some random things worth knowing and sharing under the heading of “Discourse” I decided on three for emphasis and a few others for cameos.

1. **Measuring the Value of Information.** N. M. Bedford and M. Onsi, 1970 article

Think of **Data** as a “collection of signs and symbols generally arrayed in some orderly fashion to represent facts which may be used as a basis for inference.

**Information**, then, consists of data evaluated for a *specific use*, material upon which *intelligent actions may be based*. The *value of information* differs as problems change, people change or time passes. “Value” is not detached – it’s a function of information’s uses.

**Knowledge** emerges when data are evaluated or information is accumulated for *general use in the future*. It’s “value” does not depend upon its particular use by a particular person.

There are three ways that Information influences or changes a manager’s action (Ackoff)

1. It *informs* by changing the *probability* of choice or course of action.
2. It *instructs* by indicating a *basis of choice* among potential choices.
3. It *motivates* by *changing the value of the outcome* of an action.

As for accumulating wisdom…rabbis story

2. **Making the Undiscussable and Its Undiscussability Discussible.** Chris Argyris, 1980

I love titles that are able to use the same word three times and still make sense. This paper emerged in the May/June 1980 issue of the Public Administration Review in the aftermath of Watergate with the discovery “there were *layers of issues* that were Undiscussable, and their undiscussability was Undiscussable.”

In more recent parlance, there were elephants in the room and no one acknowledged their existence.

Argyris highlighted the inability of organizations to discuss risks and threatening issues, especially if these issues questioned underlying organizational assumptions and policies. The curious factor Argyris discovered is in most cases the information required to discuss the issues was available (albeit scattered) in the organization.

While he implied that organizations should be managed in such a way that there is less conformity and group think, his research indicated that an organization may not be the basic cause of the problem but rather the victim of the individuals who work within it. Human beings, it seems, think that truth and transparency are good ideas when they are not threatening to them personally.
Organizational learning occurs when ever there is a match between intentions and results or whenever a mismatch is detected and corrected. A key task and responsibility of managers is to facilitate the “learning capacities” of the unit for which they are responsible.

Single-loop learning (a.k.a. thermostat learning) occurs whenever a match or mismatch is detected and corrected without having to question organizational assumptions and policies.

Double-loop learning occurs when a match/mismatch is detected and corrected and changes are then made in the basic assumptions and policies.

Single loop learning dominates everyday actions and operates in the majority of problems you will have to deal with. The very success of single-loop actions, however, can become the source for powerful credibility gaps. The technology, created to make sure single-loop are dealt with, often contain the seeds for its own failures.

The dilemma arises because organizations cannot be managed effectively without routinizing activities. Yet, the very managerial technology invented to make sure those routines are working may inhibit the double-loop learning that is crucial to the long-term effectiveness and survival of the organization. The challenge and solution according to Argyris is to implant more double-loop learning in the organization.

[Sidebar: Ironically, the case study example in the paper was about the government’s response to the swine flu outbreak at Ft. Dix in 1976 (later dubbed “The Epidemic That Never Was (outside of Ft. Dix)!). President Ford assembled a group of experts to advise him on the wisdom of the decision to produce the vaccine proposed by subordinate officials. When no one spoke up, he asked again. Ford then said he would go to his office and be available to anyone who preferred to speak to him privately. No one took him up on the invitation.

Their silence was engendered by the fact that no one told the experts ahead of time that this was not an Imperial President asking them to pour holy water over a decision already made, but a serious entreaty for their opinions about the reality of the threat, the risk of not doing anything and other “expert” perspectives to help him decide. A later independent study (1978) identified seven leading factors of ineffective decision-making that yielded this sad result.]

Argyris suggested that “theories of action” occur at two levels in organizational and management decision making. One theory is what people say or espouse. Double-loop learning quickly reveals that most people do not behave according to what they espouse.

Another theory of action produces their actual behavior. Understanding the actual theory-in-use is critical to understanding, predicting and changing human behavior, yet most individuals are unaware of it.

To make this all the more baffling, if people are unaware of the discrepancy between their espoused theory and their actual action theory, and if all actions flow from some design….then their unawareness must be by design as well. They must have at some level a design to design their ignorance! We learn our TIA (no pun intended) through acculturation and use it to produce skillful actions, and apparently do so effortlessly.

(CA dubbed this “skilled incompetence” and wrote another paper about it in 1986, HBR)

Our theories in use are so ingrained that we eventually learn to ignore their presence. We are unaware that we are unaware. (I love the way CA uses redundancy to drive home a point!!)

Even when managers are able to create processes for double-loop learning, these processes become embedded and take on a life of their own. And when they discover a problem in
embedded processes, they are likely to solve it in a way that will either escalate the error or translate the double-loop problem into an impervious set of single-loop problems.

The swine flu case and many others like it demonstrated that a primary causal factor was that the conditions of decision-making were undiscussable and their undiscussability was undiscussable. The paper goes on to suggest possible solutions.

3. **Multiple Intelligences**, Howard Gardner, Harvard University

The theory of multiple intelligences was developed in 1983 by Dr. Howard Gardner, professor of education at Harvard University. It suggested that the traditional notion of intelligence, based on I.Q. testing, is far too limited. Instead, Dr. Gardner posited eight different kinds of intelligence to account for a broader range of human potential in children AND adults. He became the guru of gifted and talented program advocates in our elementary and secondary schools. A number of variations on his theme have emerged, many of them useful mirrors for managers and leaders.

[Aside on “management with mirrors” – time permitting.]


Emotional Intelligence for Self-Mastery is a new way of thinking about the ingredients of life success (and workplace success). Goleman writing in the 10th anniversary edition of this classic indicates that perhaps the biggest surprise has been the impact of EI on business, particularly in the areas of leadership and employee development. HBR characterized EI as a “ground-breaking, paradigm-shattering idea, one of the most influential business ideas of the decade.”

*Emotional* Intelligence is a matter of developing self-mastery via self-awareness and self-management


Social Intelligence focuses on how to Engage Others in Collaborative Mastery via social awareness and social facility (a.k.a. relationship management)...SI is a "recipe for rapport". The subtitle of this book hyped it as “beyond IQ and Beyond Emotional Intelligence -- A revolutionary new science of human relationships”.

Here are some section and chapter headings to invite your interest: Under Wired to Connect (Neural WiFi, the Neuroanatomy of a Kiss); under Nurturing Nature (Genes Are Not Destiny, The Biology of Compassion); under Social Consequence (The Sweet Spot for Achievement, From “Them” To “Us”).

5. **Social Intelligence (SI) (The New Science of Success)** Karl Albrecht 2006. Albrecht’s take on SI blends Goleman’s SI and Gardner’s MI. He posits six kinds of intelligences:

   - **Abstract.** Symbolic reasoning (IQ)
   - **Social.** Dealing with people – external oriented, interpersonal
   - **Practical.** Getting things done
   - **Emotional.** Self-awareness and self management (EQ)
   - **Aesthetic.** Sense of form, design, literature, arts, music and other holistic experiences.
   - **Kinesthetic.** Whole-body competence (sports, dance, music, flying a plane, etc.)

His writing style and terminology are distinctive and readable.
SI = Basic understanding of and interacting with people...strategic social awareness. The ability to get along well with others and to enlist them to cooperate or collaborate with you.

Toxic SI causes others to feel devalued, inadequate, angry, frustrated or guilty (social incompetence).

Nourishing SI causes them to feel valued, capable, loved, respected and appreciated.

We don’t “perceive reality”...we create it at the instance of perception. We subconsciously ingest our own perceptions, interpretations, reactions and distortions.

Albrecht’s Examples of Social Incompetence

Blind Spots: Reality we block out through inattention, subconscious repression and denial.

Lenses: That magnify the reality with we preoccupy ourselves to the detriment of other realities.

Filters: Selectively exclude or rearrange aspects of our reality to suit our brain patterns.

Social Halitosis: Inauthentic, inconsiderate behaviors that comprise “conversational bad breath.”

Social Flatulence: Originates in ignorance, lack of awareness/respect for accepted forms of behavior

Social Dandruff: A pattern of behavior that selfishly imposes one’s interests (or lack of interest) on others ...imposes on others’ politeness to ask for favors inappropriate to the relationship.

Dilbert Factor: Stereotyping...a workplace culture consisting of a subpopulation of persons which the world doesn’t take seriously or try to understand. A techno geek and a bumbling boss with a Machiavellian disregard for the humanity of underlings coupled with nonsensical policies that waste time and resources; nerdy personalities.

Sidebar Observation courtesy of Thomas Szasz: Classifying people is not a way of knowing them better, but assures that you will not know them at all. (Depersonalizing Examples)

Five Dimensions of SI Competence: Situational Awareness – Presence – Authenticity - Clarity - Empathy

(Sidebar: Empathy in Four Minutes from Leonard Zunin: Most people who meet a stranger in a social setting will decide within approximately four minutes whether they would like to continue to engage/interact with that person, and, if so, whether the idea of continuing interaction or involvement would appeal to them.)

Albrecht notes that people in close friendships or intimate relationships unconsciously recapitulate the event of their first meeting every time they come into contact with each other after any period of separation.

Now extend that latter point to workplace relationships which you restart every time you meet with a colleague or group of colleagues with whom you’ve previously empathized...and thus can reaffirm and continue that basis for positive interaction and cooperation.)

6. Organizational Intelligence (OI) – Thinking Outside the Silos: Monograph-K. Albrecht,

Albrecht links the Goleman’s two domains of intrapersonal (self-mastery) and interpersonal (competence in human situations) and offers a further delineation of the interrelationship of the two in workplace organizational settings and calls the concept:

Organizational intelligence: The capacity of an enterprise to mobilize all of its available brainpower, and to focus that brain power on achieving its mission.
Human beings seem to be constituted to think and react individually and locally rather than collectively or globally within organizations. The tendency of well-conditioned employees and many managers to identify themselves with their “group” (department, section, bureau, division, etc.) and to live within their respective organizational silos is often so fully engrained that it has become an instinct.

Attempts to mobilize the collective talents of an organization toward some kind of key priority, change initiative or improvement can be stymied or even sabotaged by the “silo effect.” As a result, those aspects of the noble venture that necessitate building bridges and tapping talents across an entire enterprise (division or department) are often rendered dead on arrival. It is not only big ideas that fall victim to the silo effect. Even at the level of day-to-day business, silos can sequester cross-fertilizing new ideas.

Albrecht coined his own law (Albrecht’s Law) to explain why this occurs: *Intelligent people, when assembled into an organization will tend toward collective stupidity.* This may sound harsh sounding, even a bit condescending, but in 30 years of experience, Albrecht saw it validated every day.

He says this collective incapacity is neither a necessary nor an inevitable part of the life of an enterprise. It is optional to the extent that intelligent people including managers allow it to happen and that leaders show by their behavior that they accept and condone it. (Or sigh and accept it as an immutable phenomenon)

Our best opportunity for making our enterprise more creatively successful may lay right under our noses (or, better, right outside our silos). The answer may lie in making an organization more “intelligent” by teaching it to capitalize on the real potential of the total brainpower they have at hand.

The idea that something as organically diverse and dynamically productive as human knowledge can be “managed,” at least in the usual sense of the word, seem to some to be fatally flawed at the outset. While imposing some kind of order and control (traditional management) on any spontaneous phenomenon can be counter-productive,

**What we can do – and must do Albrecht argues is to manage the circumstances in which knowledge can flourish.** DEP - We are “cultural environmental engineers” of a sort.

The now-emerging concept of knowledge as a shared cultural proposition has to be nurtured, not managed, and can open up a new dimension of strategic and organizational thinking. Albrecht says that before we can navigate to this brave new world, we have some serious repair work to do in our own organizations and in the thinking of people who run them.

Our employer has already paid for our combined IQ’s, whether it uses them or not. When under-used, our daily IQ contributions are lost forever. The “collective stupidity” phenomenon in “Albrecht’s Law” comes in two varieties: learned and designed-in.

The learned kind prevails when people are not “authorized” to think, or don’t believe they are.

The designed-in kind prevails when the organization’s rules and systems make it difficult or impossible for people to think creatively, constructively, or independently.

Almost every organization has at one or more outrageous examples in its history of self-inflicted incompetence, better known as *ballistic podiatry*, or “shooting ourselves in the foot.

The waste of human knowledge and mental capacity in most organizations is so commonplace as to be accepted as an unconscious fact of life. Lack of common purpose, internal feuds,
interdepartmental politics, mal-organization and of host of other dysfunctions cause an appalling waste of brainpower.

These patterns result in what Albrecht calls an organization’s “state of increased entropy,” borrowing a term from physics to describe “a measure of the disorder in a bounded system” and also “the amount of the system’s energy that is unavailable for conversion to work” or, in information theory, “a measure of the loss of information in a transmitted signal or message.

In a knowledge-based organization, entropy then is the amount of lost or wasted brainpower that cannot be mobilized toward achieving its mission.

The basic truth of organizational entropy is that this lost/wasted resource acts like an internal tax. In a for-profit organization, this is an extra levy against profit. In a non-profit entity, it is equivalent to a reduction in funding or resource levels because major part of its existing and paid for resources has been compromised or rendered nonproductive.

Even if we can’t precisely measure entropy in a human-populated system, we can use the concept to draw attention to the possibilities of improvement. You and many of the people you work with are, after all, knowledge workers (another Drucker term).

That being said, it is helpful to highlight the difference between knowledge and the raw material from which it emerges. Think of it as a pyramid or hierarchy of knowledge which ascends through four levels of progressively greater value: Data, Information, Knowledge and Wisdom.

[Sidebar on Wisdom: Rabbi story]

To realize a better R.O.I. (Return on Intelligence) we need to make better use of the brainpower we now have and continuously grow our own.

The opposite of entropy is syntropy (a medical term meaning “a number of similar structures inclined in one general direction, such as the ribs) which Albrecht defines as the coming together of people, ideas, resources, systems and leadership in such a way as to capitalize on the possibilities of each. While entropy is the loss of available “organizational energy,” syntropy denotes a gain in organizational energy made possible by intelligent integration (and re-enablement) of human resources.

Entropy may be the defining characteristic of Albrecht’s collective stupidity, but syntropy can become the defining characteristic of organizational intelligence. To create the latter tendency in an organization requires intelligence applied to intelligence. Syntropy has its causes and enablers --- find ways to free them!

Entropy increases when we withhold or are not enabled to share information/ideas from/with one another. Syntropy increases when we voluntarily share what we know, trade ideas and encourage all others to do the same. The antidote to collective stupidity is collective intelligence, or brain power “writ large”.

B. Cameo Notes

1. **Predictably Irrational**, Dan Ariely 2008. “We are not only irrational, but predictably irrational and our irrationality happens in the same predictable way – again and again. (Subprime mortgage crisis). There are some good lessons for managers and leadership in this book.

Ariely’s “theoretical and applied interest in “irrationality operating in the “real world” led him to conclude that we need to “fundamentally rethink what makes us and the people around us really tick.” In leading and managing organizations and programs we tend to misunderstand what
constitutes reality for people affected by our decisions. Similarly “other people misunderstand the consequences of their behaviors, and for that reason, repeatedly make the wrong decisions.

In short, “we are not only irrational, but predictably irrational – and our irrationality happens in the same (predictable) way, again and again."

Assume for the moment that the predictably-irrational “we” includes all those people with whom we work and all those affected by our work. Employees and their customers rarely choose things in absolute terms. They tend to focus on the relative advantage (to them) of one thing over another, and estimate value accordingly. (Pricing example). People don’t know what they want or with employees, on what they are willing to do for the firm unless they see it (or leaders present it) in context.

Key Ariely Titles and Terminology include: Arbitrary coherence, Self-Herding, Anchoring, Social Norms and Market Norms, Procrastination and Self-Control, and the Power of Presentation.

**2. Leadership and Self-Deception, The Arbinger Institute 2002.** Learn why self-deception is so pervasive it touches every aspect of life and actually determines one’s experience in every aspect. It is a central issue in personal and professional leadership. To the extent we are self-deceived, our leadership is undermined at every turn.

Self-Deception (SD) blinds us to the true cause of problems, and once blind, all the “solutions” we can think of will actually make matters worse. To the extent that we are self-deceived, our leadership is undermined at every turn.

The book takes the form of a fictional story about self-deception. It takes the reader away from current reality and brings the reader back with a new perspective and the means to solve the problem (treat the germ) of SD (disease).

The discovery of the cause of SD amounts to a revelation…of a unifying theory, an explanation that shows how the apparently disparate collection of symptoms we call “people problems”— from problems in leadership to problems in motivation and everything in between – are all caused by the same thing.

With this knowledge, people problems can be solved with efficiency never possible before. There is a clear way to attack and solve them --- not one by one, in one disciplined stroke.

We need to learn how to properly sense how other people are feeling toward us, remembering people can always tell when they are being coped with, manipulated or outsmarted. They can always detect hypocrisy.
III. DIALOGUE

**noun:** a conversation between two or more people; an exchange of ideas; a discussion of areas of disagreement frankly in order to resolve them

A. Dialogue and the Downside of Technology

1. **The Miracle of Dialogue, Reuel L. Howe, 1963**

I came across this book over four decades ago while exploring a non-business-related subject (spirituality and religiosity). Reuel Howe's insights on the being a dialogical person have been a singular sustaining influence and resource in my life and my continuing development as a manager.

His opening statement in the book is this: “Every man is a potential adversary, even those whom we love. Only through dialogue are we saved from this enmity toward one and other...but only if it is mutual, proceeds from both sides and is persistently practiced. It is not easy nor comfortably achieved, which may explain why it occurs so rarely.” Howe sketches the need for dialogue and dialogical persons in all walks of life including our educational, business and professional lives...and in politics --- and of the barriers our communication must overcome to become true dialogue and for us to become more dialogical persons.

**Barriers to Communication.** It is false to assume that if one can talk, one can communicate. Our attempts to achieve a “meeting of meaning” through communication are frustrated by five barriers cross-fertilized by a sixth ---- our ontological need and concern for our own being. This sixth overall barrier is built into human existence and stands between person and person in every instance. There are no exceptions. It manifests itself not only in anxieties and defenses. To transcend this barrier we must work at all five other barriers to communication the sixth one spawns.

- **Language Barriers.** Language is the process of knowing and being known through the use of words, but language is not exact and precise. The same word can have much different meaning for different people even though long usage has made standard its meaning. Emotional accompaniments to language present complications for communication. Blocking comes from all parties to communication.

- **Image Barriers.** Images which participants have of one another or of the subject matter can effectively obstruct/filter the communication. Filters distort communication and person is separated from person.

- **Anxiety Barriers.** Anxieties during communication can flow from images (above) or other sources. Our anxieties keep us from being attentive and make it difficult for the other person to remain open to the meanings being presented.

  My favorite is “agenda anxiety” – the speaker who rushes to get across every topic on the agenda to his or her satisfaction runs the risk of non-communication. Have you every come away from a presentation and told someone it was good or bad but cannot remember its content? There was no “meeting of meaning”.

- **Defensive Barriers.** Anxieties lead to the fourth barrier – defensiveness. As vulnerable humans, we function within certain well-established defenses in the interest of our personal and professional well-being. Self-justification is among the more common defense and
projection of blame is another. Clinging to prejudice is often a defense against disturbance of your asserted truth. Compulsive talking is another.

+ **Contrary Purpose Barriers.** The communicators’ respective holding of contrary purposes. In the macro sense think of labor contract negotiations and legislative conference committees, and in the micro sense think of pre-empting communication with the pursuit of a personal vendetta agenda.

**Monologue: A Common Misconception.** Many misconceive the nature of communication itself. They believe communication is accomplished by telling people what they ought/need to know (*the monological illusion*). The monological speaker (MS) is so preoccupied with him/herself that s/he loses touch with those to whom s/he is speaking. The speaker is often concerned with getting across an important truth, while the listener is concerned or pre-emptively distracted by an important (unrelated) problem which has meaning for him/her. The monological speaker’s communication is parasitical because the s/he is not really interested in others and values them only according to the feelings they produce for him/her.
From Monologue to Dialogue.

An MS is thus parasitical, anxious for self-confirmation and is afraid of a personal encounter. The word of an MS is not only blocked by meaning barriers, but creates them as well and thus is without hope of overcoming them. [Sidebar: A “classic illustration: Ionesco’s 1952 one-act play “The Chairs.” Google it as a metaphor for the monological illusion previously described]

Dialogue defined: Dialogue is that address and response between persons in which there is a flow of meaning between them in spite of all the obstacles/barriers that would normally block that relationship. It is that interaction in which one gives himself to others as one is, and seeks to also know the other as the other is. He does not seek to impose (without question) his own truth and view on the other. He chooses instead to “experience the other side.” Anything less is exploitation.

It is important to distinguish between the principle of dialogue and dialogue as method. The principle is openness to the other side with a willingness to not only speak but to respond to what we hear. This is not advocacy or employment of D. as a method of communication. Any method of communication may be the servant of the dialogical principle – such as a creative lecture (like this monological keynote!) in which the lecturer is alert to and activates the meanings of his hearers in relationship to what he is saying. At its best, this is an implicit dialogue based on the dialogic principle.

Use of the dialogical principles calls for correlative thinking; a thinking that looks for reciprocal relationships between things, between ideas, between persons, between meanings and truths, between theory and practice, between little meanings and ultimate meanings.

While he anticipated its prospect, Howe had no way of knowing that a seventh and most significant barrier to dialogue would arise in the first decade of the 21st century in the form of surrender of our personhood to the ubiquitous hand-held iconoclastic maidens of his contemporary Neil Postman’s worst Technopoly dreams – cell phones, IPods, You Tube, Face Boo, Tweeter-Dee and Twitter-Dumb (with apologies to Alice in Wonderland) and DWT (Driving While Texting).

2. Technopoly (The Surrender of Culture to Technology, Neil Postman, 1992)

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The following excerpts were taken from an online (of course) summary of Postman’s books:

Postman emerged in the early 1990s as one of America’s most eloquent and outspoken critics of technology contending that “the uncontrolled growth of technology destroys the vital sources of our humanity. It creates a culture without moral foundation,” and reorders our fundamental assumptions about the world at large. New technologies alter our understanding of what is real, "which is another way of saying that embedded in every tool is an ideological bias, a predisposition to construct the world as one thing rather than another.”

A "Technopoly" (a word Postman capitalizes throughout the book) is a society that believes that "the primary, if not the only, goal of human labor and thought is efficiency, that technical calculation is in all respects superior to human judgment ... and that the affairs of citizens are best guided and conducted by experts." The United States now ranks as "the only culture to
have become a Technopoly," he says. It does not come about by design, he says, rather it is
the end-product of a system of beliefs predicated on science as a source of moral authority.

One of the most ominous consequences of Technopoly, according to Postman, is the explosion
of context-free information. "The milieu in which Technopoly flourishes is one in which the tie
between information and human purpose has been severed, i.e., information appears
indiscriminately, directed at no one in particular, in enormous volume and at high speeds, and
disconnected from theory, meaning, or purpose."

The "information glut" leads to the breakdown of a coherent cultural narrative, he argues, for
without a meaningful context, information is not only useless, but potentially dangerous. He cites
the old saying that, to a man with a hammer, everything looks like a nail, and therefore, "to a
man with a computer, everything looks like data."

Postman describes the rise of new "control systems" to manage information, such as statistics,
opinion polls, SAT and IQ tests, etc. These are predicated on the fallacy that information can be
scientifically measured and stored, he says. The result is that we believe our IQ "score IS our
intelligence ... that the results of opinion polls ARE what people believe ... as if our beliefs can
be encapsulated in such sentences as 'I approve' and 'I disapprove.'"

What we often fail to recognize is that using statistics in polling changes the very nature of
public opinion, he argues. "That an opinion is conceived of as a measurable thing falsifies the
process by which people, in fact, do their opinion-ing; and how people do their opinion-ing goes
to the heart of the meaning of a democratic society."

Since traditional information filters no longer work, Postman explains, we turn increasingly to
experts, bureaucrats, and social scientists who, abetted by computers, control the flood of data.
Experts are one thing when a technical solution is called for (space rocketry or the construction
of a sewer system, for instance), but since even human relations have become "technicalized"
there are now experts in social, psychological, and moral affairs. The result is that we look for
technical solutions to human problems. But it is a Faustian bargain, Postman says, one we can
little afford to make.

[Sidebar: A 5-Frame Cartoon]

Alvin Weinberg, presidential science advisor and long time director of the Oak Ridge National
Laboratory, reflecting in his nineties, declared “Technology makes it easier and easier to
disconnect from people and from ourselves. Civilization is in the midst of a “vast singularity.”
What was once meaningful has been wiped away. Lives are lived in front of a computer screen,
getting personal connections at a distance. We live in a metaworld with our focus fixed on the
latest technology.

Daniel Goleman (see Social Intelligence above) refers to this phenomenon as “digital
disconnection” as people are increasingly in one-person shells created by headphones – social
insulation…as we look right through people who want to converse with us.

Constant digital connectivity means that even when we are on vacation, work stalks us (34% of
us check in with the office so much that we come back to work as stressed – or even moreso –
than they were when the left. When we get back home (with our families) we diligently prefer to
go through our email. (I plead guilty). And of course the kids don’t really notice because...you
guessed it, they are fixated on their own email, You Tube, Face Book, a Web game or their
personal TV in the bedroom.
Poet T.S. Eliot in 1963 lamented the new medium (television) spreading into homes…as permitting millions of people to laugh at the same joke at the same time and still remain lonesome.

**B. Cameo Notes – Wider Range of Topics**

If dialogue is the “meeting of meaning,” then one who wishes to engage in it (or to prepare a presentation for a group like this) is challenged to examine what do ideas and things “mean” or have potential for creating meaning for listeners. My closing cameo notes are a sampling of some other things I’ve discovered that hold potential meaning for you.

1. **An Educated Person** (Sir Fredrick Dainton’s list of minimum expectations of an educated person…as someone with:

   + Enough knowledge to acknowledge one’s own ignorance
   + Some understanding of the relationship between one’s own field and other categories of knowledge
   + A feel for the ethical problems inherent in the application of one’s knowledge.

2. **A University.** Eric Ashby dubbed it “a decent and useful anarchy” Stephen Bailey asserts that “a university at its best is a dazzling phenomenon; a place of excitement and ferment; a place where history meets and informs the future; a forum for re-examination of each generation’s eternal verities, a luxuriant garden of wisdom and skill, a refiner of style…a knowledge cafeteria of options.”

3. **On Becoming a Community of Professionals, James Autry** (Life and Work, Love and Profit; The Art of Caring Leadership). I found in Autry’s writings insights as to what characterizes a professional workplace at its best:

   + We commit to a mutual vision
   + We each contribute to the best of our abilities and each contribution is recognized
   + We provide a forum for all voices to be heard
   + Our individual success contributes to the success of others and to the success of our common enterprise
   + We can disagree and hold differing views without withdrawing from the community
   + We feel as well as think
   + Our value to the organization is directly related to the quality of our commitment and our effort
   + We take care of one another and of those we serve.
   + We commit to a mutual vision.
4. **No Easy Victories**, John Gardner

Institutions are often simply the sum of the historical accidents that have happened to them. Like sand dunes on the desert, they are shaped more by influences than by purposes. We can shape our institutions by avoiding complacency, myopia and an unwillingness to choose.

5. **Classifications of People**. According to Renaissance Man Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) there are Three Classes of People: Those who see, those who see when shown, and those who do not see.

Spanish writer and philosopher, Salvador de Madariaga (writing on “The Dangerous Lure of Parrotland” in the Saturday Review, April 1967) noted the Leonardo classification, and offered an modified view of the three classes as (1) aristocrats led by intuition and thinking of the future, (2) the bourgeoisie ruled by reason and concerned with the present, and (3) the people impersonating the instincts and rooted in the past.

Both sets of classifications are models or “paradigms”. They are to our societies what a sphere is to a potato. I have come to think society would not work without differences of class level. Our problems, such as they are, are not there for us to solve but for perhaps them to solve us.

6. **Tipping, Blinking and Outlying**, Malcolm Gladwell

(Wikipedia summary) Tipping Point discusses the potentially massive implications of small-scale social events. (I was smitten by J. C. Maxwell’s observation a century and a half earlier that an infinitesimal event by virtue of its placement in time could have a disproportionate effect on an outcome.)

Blink talks about how our human subconscious interprets events or cues and how past experiences allow people to make informed decisions very rapidly…especially when their cell phone is vibrating or their email is beeping.

Outliers describes how our environments affect our possibility and opportunity for success.

Gladwell says he wrote the first book to help us understand that real change was really possible, the second to help us afford more status to our intuition, and the third to help us see how our individual success as outliers is the result of lots of different people and circumstances.

7. **The Leadership Paradoxes**, James A. Autry (Slightly Paraphrased)

The consummate leader must be:

1. Be long-term and short-term at the same time.

2. Be in touch with and aware of what's going on without looking over peoples’ shoulders.

3. Inspire and often direct people in accomplishing the vision and mission and purpose of the organization, while empowering people to manage themselves and make their own decisions.

4. Accept and perform the role of spokesperson for the company/division/department, the person in the spotlight, the person upon whom much attention is showered while at the same time letting go of ego and control and becoming a resource for the employees.
5. Encourage and support the rights and the growth and the independent thinking of individual employees without sacrificing the rights and growth and interdependence of the community of employees.

6. Care for people and fire people, sometimes the same people.

7. Encourage risk-taking and reward mistakes as a learning experience, while preventing any mistakes that could jeopardize the survival of the enterprise.

8. Embrace with full commitment the demands and responsibilities, as well as the rewards, of the job with all its paradoxes, while embracing with equally full commitment the demands and responsibilities, as well as the rewards, of being a parent and spouse or a friend.

C. A Dessert (Dis)Course on Civility
(From DEP’s 2001 Presentation on Credibility, Civility and Collaboration)

Civility, Redux ala Stephen Carter

The illusion that we travel life alone is ruining us all. The proper name of the illusion is incivility and we are in the midst of an “incivility crisis.”

What do we mean by “civility?” Is it manners, standard of moral conduct, a standard for public argumentation?

Civility is “the sum of the many sacrifices we are called to make for the sake of living together. (Erasmus)
Civility is an ethic for relating to the stranger in our midst. We require civility precisely to mediate our relationship with those we do not love. Civility requires respect for the privacy of others. Cynicism is the enemy of civility.

Civility as a moral proposition begins with the assumption that humans matter, that we owe each other respect, and that treating each other well is a moral duty.

Humans do not possess freedom to do what we like, but freedom to do what is right.

Anything that interferes with dialogue is bad for civility.

What is at stake when incivility reigns? Our humanity.

The reconstruction of civility might help us to behave like adults.

15 Rules for Reconstructing our Civility

1. Our duty to be civil toward others does not depend on whether we like them or not.

2. Civility requires that we sacrifice for strangers, not just for people we happen to know.

3. Civility has two parts: generosity even when it is costly and trust even when there is risk.

4. Civility creates not merely a negative duty not to do harm, but an affirmative duty to do good.

5. Civility requires a commitment to live a common moral life, so we should try to following the norms of the community if the norms are not actually immoral.

6. We must come to the presence of our fellow human beings with a sense of awe and gratitude.

7. Civility assumes that we will disagree; it requires us not to mask our differences but to resolve them respectfully.

8. Civility requires that we listen to others with knowledge of the possibility that they may be right and we may be wrong.
9. Civility requires that we express ourselves in ways that demonstrate our respect for others.

10. Civility requires resistance to the dominance of social life by the values of the marketplace. Thus, the basic principles of civility – generosity and trust – should apply as fully in the market and in politics as in every other human activity.

11. Civility allows criticism of others, and sometimes even requires it, but the criticism should always be civil.

12. Civility discourages the use of legislation rather than conversation to settle disputes, except as a last, carefully considered result.

13. Teaching civility, by word and example, is an obligation of the family. The state must not interfere with a family’s effort to create a coherent moral universe for its children.

14. Civility values diversity, disagreement and the possibility of resistance, and therefore the state must not use education to try to standardize our children.

15. Religions do their greatest service to civility when they preach not only love of neighbor, but resistance to wrong.