

A vision of the third wave of community quality...

On the quality community quest, we are not alone

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If we dream that community quality initiatives will transform the community, we will need transformational visions. While many such initiatives have already significantly impacted the practice of quality management in their community... more is needed.

Even as new groups emerge and network with one another, develop their own visions and actions, and advance the practice of quality management in their community, the need for a larger view — a whole systems view — of community is needed. Before looking at where we hope to go, we will trace the development of community quality initiatives to see if that record will help us to formulate a new whole systems view of community. **I**

services to citizens and firms, in support of the economic development of the region.

Visions for organizational growth... The vision statements of many initiatives reflect this economic development thrust. Some have a tendency to focus on a vision for the future performance of the excellence council itself, rather than the future of the community. The vision of the Philadelphia Area Council for Excellence (PACE) states, for example, "As a council of the Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce, PACE will be a critical force in creating a healthier economic climate in the Delaware Valley," and emphasizes as well economic development, job creation and enhanced community wealth.

Improve the communities by sectors: one by one — A second phase, which could be characterized as sector-by-sector, focuses on mobilizing citizens to continually improve various sectors or sub-systems of the community, including healthcare, education, export industries, the arts, the religious community and others. The approach adds to economic development through a human development thrust. It requires that community initiatives identify and focus on problems that the community faces, and that it provides support for work between and among organizations. Erie, for example, with over 20 sector-based teams, has helped to create a vision for schools in the year 2000, sponsored healthcare forums, and continues to launch new groups as interest and needs emerge.

This we know: The earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the Earth. All things are connected like the blood that connects us all: Man did not weave the web of life, he is but a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web he does to himself.
— Chief Seattle, 1852.

Step-wise evolution of community quality initiatives

At least three phases in the development of community quality initiatives are evident. In the first phase, communities aim to engage as many organizations as possible in the principles and practices of total quality.

Grow the economy — The focus here is primarily on awareness, education and training, provided either for membership organizations or open to all organizations in the community. During this organization-by-organization appeal, educate and convert phase, the thrust is primarily tied to economic development. The reasoning is that if the majority of organizations practice quality, the whole community will prosper and the area will become known for quality. The results will be retention and expansion of businesses and the attraction of new businesses.

As service organizations, schools, healthcare providers and others become involved, the perspective is one of providing continually improving

In our own work, the need for this approach became evident as we worked with various organizations which all focused on human development. For example, in Erie, Pennsylvania, has teams representing the police department, a university, schools and county services for youth worked together over a period of months, we all began to realize that these organizations could be viewed as a single system.

Visualizing systemic connections... The youth who had attendance problems or dropped out of school were also those who kept police in the courts, rather than in the community. These same young people were often placed in foster or delinquent settings and never reached the university at all. With this recognition, a need to collaborate, cooperate and continually improve the human services sector became apparent. The Erie Excellence Council vision, "To work together to continuously improve ourselves, our organization, and our community" reflects that broader view.

The third wave: the community system — There is now an identifiable third phase, a whole systems approach, based on a view of communities as whole systems. The vision of Greenwood, South Carolina, reflects a broader whole systems approach. Their *broad, decades-long strategy* is to move toward a vision of a "community that cares about learning; where everyone accepts a responsibility for encouraging and enabling all our people to reach their full potential and becomes a positive contributor to our economic well being and quality of life." While this phase promises to expand the work and impact of community quality initiatives, it also requires new learning, new theories and approaches, and consideration of an emerging world view based in systems thinking.

The emerging systems view of the world

Writers and scholars across many disciplines are suggesting that we are in the midst of a fundamental shift from the old dominant mechanical or Newtonian world view to a new, emerging one based on whole systems thinking, quantum physics and new visions of what is possible. **I**

The universe and society are not clockwork mechanisms... Physicist Fritjof Capra (in *The Turning Point*) writes that we are seeing a "confluence of several transitions: the decline of the patriarchal values and structure of the last 3000

Community quality, visions and world views...

Community quality — When the first known community quality initiative, GOAL/QPC, was founded in Lawrence, Massachusetts in 1980, its leaders saw that the theories and practices of Dr. W. Edwards Deming could help the community's business and industry recover, thrive and grow. Soon thereafter, in 1983, leaders in the Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce launched the PACE initiative to provide awareness and learning in quality management for its member organizations. Since then, nearly 200 others have followed in the path laid down by those early community pioneers.

Visions and world views — If we were to ask a dozen people to define vision, we would be likely to hear a dozen different answers. In the book of Proverbs the phrase, "Where there is no vision, the people perish," suggests that people have agreed for a very long time that vision plays an essential role in our lives.

Senge and vision... Peter Senge tells us in *The Fifth Discipline* that at its "simplest level, a shared vision is the answer to the question, 'What do we want to create?'" Visions help to give us purpose, meaning and significance. They help us to feel that we are a part of something larger and grander than ourselves. Shared visions, writes Senge, give us focus and energy for learning and the courage to take risks and experiment with new ways of being.

Vision, however, "becomes a living force only when people truly believe they can shape their future." He continues: "A shared vision is not an idea. It is not even an important idea such as freedom. It is, rather, a force in people's hearts, a force of impressive power. It may be inspired by an idea, but once it goes further — if it is compelling enough to acquire the support of more than one person — then it is no longer an abstraction. It is palpable. People begin to see it as if it exists. Few, if any forces in human affairs are as powerful as shared vision."

Senge's observations suggest that it is through vision that we create the future... that the future results from the pictures we carry in our heads, in other words, from our world view. Our "mental models," as Senge calls them, are our often unacknowledged, underlying beliefs and assumptions about the world. It is our world views that shape our visions or pictures of the desired future and guide the actions we take to carry us there. As surely as we created our current reality from our current world views, transformational visions for a better future will emerge from our own transformational world views.

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years; the decline of the fossil-fuel age; and change in four areas of thought, perception and values, including:

1. The belief in scientific method as the only valid approach to knowledge...
2. The view of the universe as a mechanical system composed of elementary material building blocks...
3. The view of life in society as a competitive struggle for existence...
4. The belief in unlimited material progress to be achieved through economic and technological growth."

“...we should work toward an aim of human development and a better life for all the world’s living beings.”

The earth is a living system... Similarly, economist Hazel Henderson (in *The Politics of the Solar Age*) writes that the current shifts in thinking entail a shift from “fragmented, *objective*, reductionist knowledge and the mechanistic, industrial world view to a comprehensive awareness of the interdependence of all life on earth — what is now well known as the Gaia hypothesis: that our planet is a living organism and we humans are participants (not just observers) in its evolutionary unfolding. ... This new era is one of mutual development — far beyond the narrow concepts of economic growth or development, which are proving disastrous in Africa and elsewhere and leading to hunger and desertification.

Improve the whole system... Systems philosopher, Ervin Laszlo, suggests (in *The Systems View of the World*) that the picture we hold in our minds of a perfect social system in which there is continual improvement of production, fueled by ever-increasing demand and consumption of material goods may not be the end, or the aim, toward which we should work. Rather, we should work toward an aim of human development and a better life for all the world’s living beings.

The current model simultaneously produces more goods and unemployment... Psychologist Willis Harman, supports the idea that our mental models of constant economic growth, have produced an economic system which no longer requires the number of available workers. Thus, our present structure cannot and will not provide enough jobs for people in the future. He predicts if we continue in our current way of thinking and acting, we will have increasing unemployment, social discontent and unrest.

The new war: environmentalists vs entrepreneurs... Cultural historian Thomas Berry and metaphysicist Brian Swimme (in *The Universe Story*) write that “The future can be described in terms of the tension between two forces, the ecological and the entrepreneurial.” They believe that, “If the dominant political–social issue of the twentieth century has been between the capitalist and the communist worlds, between democratic freedoms and socialist responsibility, the dominant issue of the immediate future will clearly be the tension between:

- The *Entrepreneur* and the *Ecologist*...
- Those who would continue their plundering, and those who would truly preserve the natural world...

- The mechanistic and the organic...
- The world as a collection of objects and the world as a communion of subjects...
- The anthropocentric and the biocentric norms of reality and value.”

The Wonderland myth... Berry and Swimme state that, “The present devastation is the consequence of a powerful myth that has seized the human soul in recent centuries, the myth of *Wonderland*, the *Wonderland* that is coming into existence by some inevitability if only we continue on the path of *Progress*, meaning by *Progress* the ever-increasing exploitation of the Earth through our amazing technologies.”

New learning theory — At least two developments are particularly relevant in learning theory:

1. The first is a new integration of synthesis and analysis as modes of inquiry.

“Synthesis,” writes Russell Ackoff, “or putting things together, is the key to systems thinking just as analysis, or taking them apart, was the key to *Machine Age* thinking. Synthesis and analysis are complementary processes. Like the head and tail of a coin, they can be considered separately, but they cannot be separated.”

2. The second view proposes that we learn only in relationship with another.

Biologists Maturana and Varela (authors of *The Tree of Knowledge*) challenge us to think beyond our traditional view of the generation of knowledge. “Biology,” they tell us, “shows us that we can expand our cognitive domain. This arises through a novel experience brought forth through reasoning, through the encounter with a stranger, or more directly, through the expression of a biological interpersonal congruence that lets us see the other person and open up for him room for existence beside us. This act is called love, or, if we prefer a milder expression, the acceptance of the other person beside us in our daily living.”

Applying the new views to the American communities and beyond

We suggest that the community picture we must create in our minds for the future is a natural systems picture. ^[2]

We must begin to think of the community itself as a natural, whole system made up of interrelated entities (individuals, families, friendships/alliances,

organizations and enterprises, flora and fauna, water, air and land) which must all work together to accomplish the aim of the whole.

The community's embedded entities taken individually do not constitute the whole, nor can the aim of the community be accomplished without collaborative relationships among the entities.

The characteristics or functioning of the whole community cannot be described or understood by describing or understanding the characteristics or functioning of the individual entities. Laszlo writes, "A fully autonomous (independent) set of units would not constitute a system, only a heap."

A community is more than its parts —

Similarly, the community as a whole cannot be described or understood without understanding the whole systems in which the community itself is embedded. In other words, one cannot hope to understand, describe, improve or transform a community without first understanding the aim of the larger system, and how the community interacts and collaborates with other entities in the larger national system to accomplish the aim of the whole.

What is the aim? This brings us to one of Dr. Deming's favorite questions, "What is the aim?" His own retort follows, "Without an aim, there is no system." Current community vision statements suggest that the most common aim has been to promote and teach the principles and practices of quality management in pursuit of economic development ends.

In current community quality efforts, we have been in the business of helping to:

- Implement better methods of work...
- Produce better products and services...
- Satisfy consumer demand...
- Keep organizations in business...
- Create wealth and jobs.

Improvement efforts in schools, healthcare and government have also been generally driven by the same aim: to provide the environment to fuel economic growth and material wealth in the community.

Time for a new aim — It is time to pursue a different aim. Using a natural systems perspective, we would say that the aim of any natural system is twofold: one, to maintain itself in a dynamic, symbiotic and learning relationship with its

The new emerging world view compared with the old/existing view...

Traditional/existing view	Emerging/new view
Mechanistic	Natural systems
Patriarchal, command and control methods	More <i>feminine</i> , democratic, collaborative, nurturing methods
Strategies for growth	Strategies for development
Anthropocentric	Biocentric
Fossil fuels	Solar and renewable fuels
Reductionist and analytic thinking	Synthesis and systems thinking
Valuing conformity	Valuing diversity
The world is static	The world is dynamic

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environment (the systems within which it is embedded) and two, to continually renew itself.

If we held a natural systems picture or world view in our minds, how might the future community that we would create look?

The third wave perspective of community systems — With the natural systems view in mind, we would say that:

The aim of a community is to help create a future in which it and the whole earth system can maintain themselves in a dynamic, symbiotic and learning relationship with its larger environment (system) and to continually renew itself.

A community developed from that model would:

- Use resources in a manner that accounts for the whole system's requirements...
- Recycle spent resources to sub-systems which support the whole system's renewal and evolutionary processes...
- Exchange knowledge with other communities around the world and use that learning to create still more self-sustaining systems...
- Import only those resources absolutely necessary for renewing itself...
- Provide satisfying, cooperative and evolving work processes that enable people to use and develop their best talents and skills...
- Make learning and personal development one of the community's highest priorities.

In Hazel Henderson's words, in the new reality, the "inputs to production are energy, resources and knowledge and the output must be more fully-human beings."

"Without an aim, there is no system."

"The aim of a community is to help create a future in which it and the whole earth system can maintain themselves in a dynamic, symbiotic and learning relationship with its larger environment (system) and to continually renew itself."

“A personal check list for getting from here to there”

- ✓ Learn to become agents of change and innovation...
- ✓ Learn from new lifestyles and experiments in community...
- ✓ Create opportunities for others to learn in community...
- ✓ Adopt new measures...
- ✓ Develop new leaders with new skills...
- ✓ Develop new relationships within communities...
- ✓ Develop new relationships among communities...
- ✓ New commitment and hope...
- ✓ In all of our work, we must become participants with, rather than controllers of the process.

We might call those communities *learning communities* — The ideas outlined below are just a beginning in thinking about the possible attributes of the community as a natural, *learning* system. In a learning community, the people:

- See the community as a natural system made up of its land and air, plants and animals and natural assets, as well as social system... its people, its organizations and its institutions...
- Recognize that the community is part of a still larger natural system in which communities, regions, states and nations are interrelated and interdependent. They value cooperation over competition...
- Understand that communities, like all natural systems, continually renew and transform themselves toward higher levels of complexity and order through the process of differentiation and integration...
- Value and encourage diversity, appreciating a “tapestry versus melting pot” image of the web of relationships and synergy among all groups...
- Have knowledge of and respect for the region’s history and heritage, live in the present, and anticipate and create the future through shared vision...
- Recognize that there are no single, right answers and that conflict is inevitable. They search for common ground and shared meaning through the process of dialogue, rather than violence and confrontation...
- Take advantage of a wide range of opportunities to learn and apply leadership skills, and understand that leaders come from everywhere: families, neighborhoods, all types of organizations and institutions and all walks of life...
- Build thinking and acting skills needed by all citizens (dialogue, mental models, system modeling, visioning, team learning, listening, et cetera). They see learning and growing (as well as helping others learn and grow) as a primary responsibility of community membership...
- Understand underlying system dynamics which impact the behavior of systems, identify leverage points and act collaboratively to intervene and improve...
- Measure success by indicators of health, environmental well-being and other issues of quality of life as well as by economic indicators.

Getting from here to there

In *The Age of Unreason*, British author Charles Handy says that “we are now entering an *Age of Unreason* when the future, in so many areas, is there to be shaped by us and for us — a time when the only prediction that will hold true is that no predictions will hold true; a time, therefore for bold imaginings in private life as well as public, for thinking the unlikely and doing the unreasonable.” A new vision for community therefore requires:

- New ways of thinking...
- New ways of imagining...
- New ways of acting.

A personal check list for getting from here to there — Thinking about communities as whole, natural, learning systems seems to suggest certain actions we can all take.

- ✓ Learn to become agents of change and innovation...

Most of us involved in community quality initiatives have come to this work from backgrounds and commitments to quality and human development. If we are to help transform communities, we must accelerate our own learning as agents of change.

We must ourselves learn from the larger systems in which our communities are embedded, and discover the local interventions that we can make. Theorist Eric Jantsch writes that innovations or “fluctuations” from individual sub-systems will always be subjected to dampening by the larger system. Innovations will either break through to create new structures or be destroyed by the dampening influence. His advice is that a successful system innovation takes more than a charismatic revolutionary leader and more than a small hard core of revolutionary activists: its success requires cooperation among groups and individuals that will “depend on sufficiently dense packing on the one hand and on flexible, not too strong and rigid coupling on the other.”

- ✓ Learn from new lifestyles and experiments in community...

We are beginning to see the reflection of changing values and world views in many simpler, less complex, less consumption-driven lifestyle choices that people are making.

The *voluntary simplicity* movement seems to be gaining steam. All over the world, people are experimenting with various forms of community, from the Mondragon community in Spain, to community land trusts in the US, and a computer-based, barter system in operation in British Columbia. We must begin to learn from these experiments and help to support and network among them.

- ✔ Create opportunities for others to learn in community...

Support both operational and conceptual learning... Daniel Kim (of M.I.T.'s Organization Learning Center) differentiates between operational learning and conceptual learning. Operational learning relates to the learning opportunities we create for applying the theory, process and tools of quality management to work processes. Operational learning enables organizations and communities to organize for both greater autonomy and responsibility through self-managed and self-directed workteams, as well as for reduced consumption and waste of resources. **3**

Conceptual learning, Kim notes will enable organizations and communities to begin addressing "the thinking behind the doing" and "opportunities for discontinuous steps of improvement where reframing a problem can bring about radically different... solutions."

- ✔ Adopt new measures...

Hazel Henderson and others point out that economic indicators such as the GNP and GDP were never intended, nor should be used as overall indicators of health of our communities or societies. Henderson insists that we must be "organized cybernetically to take advantage of feedback, not just in the form of prices (which often are rigged, or do not reflect full social costs), but also feedback from voters (i.e., democracy) and from nature (such as acid rain and climate change). The more a society is structured to use a variety of these multi-dimensional feedbacks — to learn from them, modify structures, behavior patterns, as well as values — the better they can also adapt to new conditions and survive."

- ✔ Develop new leaders with new skills...

Margaret Wheatley, in her book *Leadership and the New Science*, attempts a synthesis of the many interrelated aspects of the emerging world view and challenges us to think about leadership, its skills and attributes, in new and different ways.

An example of conceptual learning...

Viewing pollution as scrap, rework and waste... Al Gore writes in the introduction to *Earth in the Balance* that the Japanese are "again searching for ways to redesign the entire production process, this time with an eye to eliminating unnecessary pollution at every step along the way. What they are finding is that waste in the form of pollution is also economic waste. By eliminating the inefficiencies that lead to the initial production of pollution, they have discovered that it is often possible to simultaneously improve productivity, profits and environmental efficiency."

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She contrasts the concept of *situational* leadership with the leadership of *relationships*. She writes, "Leadership is always dependent on the context, but the context is established by the relationships we value. We cannot hope to influence any situation without respect for the complex network of people who contribute to our organizations."

- ✔ Develop new relationships within communities...

If we are to play a transformational role, we must begin to connect with and learn from others who are involved in the business of transformation:

- Those involved in the feminist, peace and green movements...
- Those with expertise in community organizing and community building...
- Those involved with other social movements in our communities.

Most importantly, we must connect with people from all walks of life who need to have a voice in the future.

Al Gore writes, "If we feel no connection to those in our own communities whose lives are being wasted, who are we? ... This reaffirmation of our connection to others involves an obligation to join with others in adequately defending and protecting those of our rights — such as the right to breathe clean air and drink clean water — that are naturally among the individual rights belonging to others as well as to us, and are vested in the community — or nation, or world — as a whole."

- ✔ Develop new relationships among communities...

We must also connect and learn with other communities... We must understand that we can have common aim, purpose and vision, and that we can work together to create a better future.

Laszlo suggests, “We must allow that several systems can jointly participate in an invention which makes them very close collaborators. Such systems will henceforth behave so closely in harmony that they respond to challenges from other systems as a team.”

✔ New commitment and hope...

The community quality initiative movement is not alone in the arena of trying to create a better future. There is a growing commitment to and belief that we can make a difference. One need only to look around to see that we have the opportunity to be a force for creative and positive change.

Robert Theobald writes, “We are creating a very different world. As we begin to discover its style, we shall like ourselves better, learn to use our strengths, and manage our weaknesses. Above all, we shall know that we can achieve nothing significant without colleagues who share our fundamental hopes and dreams and help us develop them. We shall show that this new world can develop more positive energy with less cost than the industrial era it is already replacing.”

✔ In all of our work, we must become participants with, rather than controllers of the process.

Jantsch suggests a creed that we might adopt and/or adapt for ourselves: “In life, the issue is not control, but dynamic connectedness...”

- I want to act from that knowledge...
- I want to move into a universe I trust so much that I give up playing God...
- I want to stop holding things together...
- I want to experience such safety that the concept of *allowing* — trusting that the appropriate forms can emerge — ceases to be scary...
- I want to surrender my care of the universe and become a participating member, with everyone I work with, in an organization that moves gracefully with its environment, trusting in the unfolding dance of order.” (bullets added for emphasis)

Writing a new story for community

We have said that if community quality initiatives are to play a truly transformational role in the global society, then we must have transformational visions. We must have pictures in our minds that represent the world we truly want to create and leave behind for its future inhabitants.

Thomas Berry, in a moving essay (*The Hudson River Valley: A Bioregional Story*) tells us that we need a new story to tell one another as we begin this quest. He writes:

Tell me a story. How often we said that as children. Tell me a story. Story illumined the world for us in childhood. Even now we might make the request:

Tell me a story. Tell me the story of the river and the valley and streams and woodlands and wetlands, of the shellfish and finfish. Tell me a story. A story of where we are and how we got here and the characters and roles that we play. Tell me a story, a story that will be my story as well as the story of everyone and everything about me, the story that brings us together in a valley community, a story that brings together the human community with every living being in the valley, a story that brings us together under the arc of the great blue sky in the day and the stary heavens at night, a story that will drench us with rain and dry us in the wind, a story told by humans to one another that will also be the story that the wood thrush sings in the thicket, the story that the river recites in its downward journey, the story that the Storm King Mountain images forth in the fullness of its grandeur.

...This is the moment of change from a sense of the valley as subservient to human exploitation to a sense of the valley as an integral natural community which is itself the basic reality and the basic value, and of the human as having its true glory as a functioning member, rather than as a conquering invader, of this community. Our role is to be the instrument whereby the valley celebrates itself. The valley is both the object and the subject of celebration. It is our high privilege to articulate this celebration in the stories we tell and in the songs we sing.

Perhaps this is the picture we must hold in our minds that represents the world we can create and leave behind for its future inhabitants. ♦

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