

MAKING NEW SENSE OF OUR COMMITMENT TO LASTING CHANGE THROUGH PHILANTHROPY

Discussion Summary
from
GHC Conversation 2010

Edited by Gary J. Hubbell

© 2010 Gary Hubbell Consulting

This is copyrighted material. All rights reserved.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons copyright that allows the copying, distribution, and display of this material if credit is given to the authors.

This license is classified as an Attribution-Noncommercial-
No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.



P.O. Box 510257 ▲ Milwaukee WI 53203 ▲ 414-962-6696 ▲ www.garyhubbellconsulting.com

Table of Contents

FOREWORD.....	1
GHC CONVERSATION 2010 CONTRIBUTORS/PARTICIPANTS	4
SECTION I: CONVERSATION SYNTHESIS.....	7
LOOSE FROM OUR MOORINGS	8
IMAGINING HOW OUR ORGANIZATIONS MIGHT CHANGE.....	13
Both/And...For a New Culture of Philanthropy	13
We are Not Imprisoned by Our Circumstances – We are Freed by Our Choices	14
The Locus of the Big Idea.....	15
Seeing Each Organization as Part of a Whole System	19
EXAMINING THE KEYS TO LEADING CHANGE.....	22
Personal Courage, Authenticity, and Alignment.....	22
Making Stone Soup.....	25
TRANSFORMING OUR SHARED UNDERSTANDING OF THE CURRENT DISRUPTION AND RECOGNIZING THE ADAPTATION OPPORTUNITIES.....	28
Adaptation and the Nature of Complex Systems	31
CONCLUSION	33

Foreword

I can think of no better way to introduce this summary of *GHC Conversation 2010* than to share a story. Tom Soma surprised me—and all of us at *Conversation 2010*—by harvesting in real time our discussion from the first day of our meeting into a poem, which he read aloud to us at the conclusion of our day. Tom, a longtime friend and colleague, is the Executive Director of Ronald McDonald House Charities of Oregon and Southwest Washington (Portland, OR). He is a 2009 and 2010 participant at *GHC Conversations*. Following is the first of four poems Tom wrote for *Conversation 2010*. For me, this poem describes the very essence of *Conversation 2010* and what I strive to catalyze in every *GHC Conversation*.

Setting the table -or- Grace before dinner

Dream makers
in a middle place,
surrounded by a different mix of friends—
both known and to be known—
starting with blank pages,
suspending judgment,
considering “things that make you go, ‘hmmm,’”
challenging former assumptions within a space to think,
searching for more meaningful, more fair ways
to do good...

Together
we are writing a story
which will end,
ironically and paradoxically
with a more passionate listening
and a letting go
of outcomes—

For we already know
that the traveling, the journey
matters far more
than any anticipated destination,
and that
the conversation,
the dialogue
are intrinsically worthwhile...

Friendship, encouragement,
affirmation, inspiration
all await our embrace.

Energy will emerge naturally
from the bouncing around of ideas,
and community fueled and forged likewise
through trust.

The table is set,
the menu nutritious and unlimited.
Let us partake of the feast.

Tom Soma
28 April 2010

Fourteen social sector leaders assembled in Colonial Williamsburg for *GHC Conversation 2010*, held April 28 through May 1. The group composition was a fascinating mix. The Pacific Northwest was well represented (5 people); the East North Central U.S. states brought us three participants; Ontario, California, Minnesota, and Arkansas each offered one representative. Interestingly, two participants were locals, one of whom had just days before concluded his senior role as part of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

Categorizing the organizations represented is always tougher than it appears on the surface. This year, four participants were from higher education, three each from health care and from consulting firms, two from human service organizations, one from a community foundation, and one from an advocacy organization. By design, I worked hard this year to get three generations of leaders in the room, ranging from an energized first-time executive director to a wise and reflective recently retired college president. The final result was a great blend of wisdom, interests, and perspectives.

As with last year, participants reported a deep appreciation for this reflective moment in their busy lives and, above all, for the generous, thoughtful, and challenging contributions of all participants. It was abundantly clear from the start that this group was deeply committed to going deep, to asking themselves and others hard questions, and to working to see their work and their world through a new lens.

Much of this monograph is a collection of essays. As we did for *Conversation 2009*, participants were asked to write and submit in advance an original essay. Each was asked to reflect on philanthropy, organizational change, and community. Our shared intent in our essays was to explore these topics—alone or in combination—in some way that may shed new meaning, if only for the individual essay author. Essays were compiled and shared with all invited participants prior to our gathering in Williamsburg. While these essays were not formally presented during our gathering, their influence on our discussions was evident throughout.

Obviously, neither the essays nor our subsequent conversation occurred in a vacuum. Most essays were written between November 2009 and March 2010. During this period, the world economy continued to sputter. Some improvements were becoming more visible, yet lingering difficulties

were evident everywhere. The nature of the political climate in the United States remained volatile and polarized. The world climate summit was held in Copenhagen. The presence of war was a daily occurrence for us—if only (for most of us) through media coverage. The complexity and promise of sweeping health care reforms were reaching a point of formal adoption in the U.S. These and many, many other factors influenced each of the participants, sometimes unconsciously. This context is, however, important to remember when reading this summary and the collection of essays.

An additional highlight and added dimension to *Conversation 2010* are the graphic vignettes that, together, reinforce and reflect the “story” of the conversation. As before, my brother, Ken Hubbell, not only brought these graphics to life in real time during the conversation, he added insight and interpretation that is invaluable. These wall sized graphics enabled us to see and interpret ideas differently than we might have otherwise. While elements of what became a virtual library of graphic symbols are woven throughout this summary, most are not reproduced here.

By preparing this monograph, I intend only to provide a snapshot of what we as participants felt was a powerful and insightful dialogue. I remain curious and committed to exploring ideas in collaborative learning laboratories like *GHC Conversations*. And I feel compelled to continue this journey.

“The more present and aware we are as individuals and as organizations, the more choices we create. As awareness increases, we can engage with more possibilities. We are no longer held prisoner by habits, unexamined thoughts, or information we refuse to look at....As we explore our organizations’ opportunities, life is calling us to experiment and change. We might discover some bold, as-yet-undreamed-of solution, some unique quirk of design or expression. When we do, we can feel pleased. But not for long. The world moves on. The world does not stay attached to a particular way of being or to a particular invention. It seeks diversity. It wants to move on to more inventing, to more possibilities. The world’s desire for diversity compels us to change.”¹

It is my hope that the reader may find in these pages a question or an insight that adds value to your own journey. Together, I believe we can change the world.

Gary J. Hubbell
July 2010

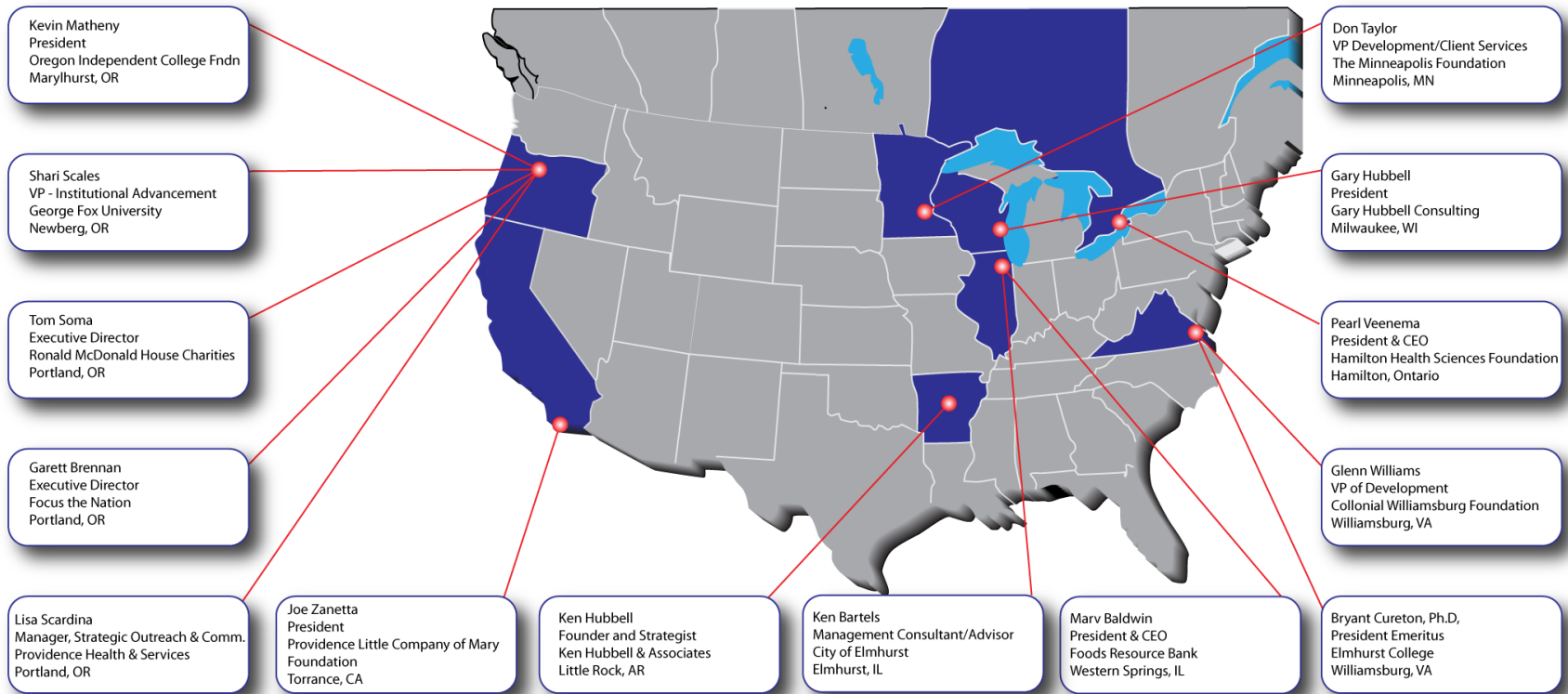
¹ Wheatley, M. J. and Kellner-Rogers, M. (1999). *A Simpler Way*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.: San Francisco, pp. 26-27.

GHC Conversation 2010 Contributors/Participants

<p>Marv Baldwin President & CEO Foods Resource Bank Western Springs, Illinois www.foodsresourcebank.org</p>	<p>Ken Bartels Principal Ken Bartels Consulting Elmhurst, Illinois</p>
<p>Garett Brennan Executive Director Focus the Nation Portland, Oregon www.focusthenation.org</p>	<p>Bryant Cureton, PhD President Emeritus Elmhurst College Williamsburg, Virginia www.elmhurst.edu</p>
<p>Gary Hubbell President Gary Hubbell Consulting Milwaukee, Wisconsin www.garyhubbellconsulting.com</p>	<p>Ken Hubbell Principal Ken Hubbell & Associates Little Rock, Arkansas www.kenhubbell.com</p>
<p>Kevin Matheny President and CEO Oregon Independent College Foundation Marylhurst, Oregon http://oicf.org</p>	<p>Shari Lynn Scales Vice President of Advancement George Fox University Newberg, Oregon www.georgefox.edu</p>
<p>Lisa Scardina Manager, Strategic Outreach & Comm. Providence Health & Services Portland, Oregon www.providence.org</p>	<p>Tom Soma Executive Director Ronald McDonald House Charities of Oregon and Southwest Washington Portland, Oregon www.rmhcOregon.org</p>
<p>Don Taylor Vice President, Development/Client Svcs. The Minneapolis Foundation Minneapolis, Minnesota www.mplsfoundation.org</p>	<p>Pearl Veneema President and CEO Hamilton Health Sciences Foundation Hamilton, Ontario, Canada www.hhs.ca</p>
<p>Glenn Williams Development professional Williamsburg, Virginia</p>	<p>Joseph Zanetta, J.D. President Providence Little Company of Mary Fndn. Torrance, California www.lcmhs.org</p>

Gary Hubbell Consulting
Conversation 2010
 Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia

Confirmed Registrants



SECTION I

CONVERSATION SYNTHESIS

Loose From Our Moorings

Thinking back on our conversation, it is clearer now that the tone of the early stages of our discussion reflected people being “in transition.” For some around the table, this may have been driven by personal and/or professional uncertainties. For others, it may have been an unconscious psychological pall resulting from continuous retrenchment during the recession. Several participants with direct fundraising responsibilities suggested they felt higher degrees of pessimism and cynicism than they’d ever felt before.

The story of our conversation is indicative, perhaps, of the process many individuals, organizations, and society at large are experiencing. We found ourselves seemingly grappling for our moorings during a sustained turbulent time unlike any other we had experienced. During this time, it is becoming increasingly evident that things are different, yet it remains unclear what is emerging. Reflecting society and the social sector in general, philanthropy is in a transitional space. Seemingly, we are unsure what we value in this time and we search for clarity and understanding of what is most important during “this moment” in our personal, organizational, and globally-connected lives. For some, this moment is characterized by scarcity, increasing polarization, and rootlessness. For others, it is characterized by new openings and opportunities, a sense of empowerment and a desire to teach from the future. We see the symptoms of a clash of cognition, a clash of values, and a clash of operations.

Unwilling (or unready) to let go of what has worked well before, we find ourselves working harder to control our environment. Leadership conversations narrow around “sticking to our knitting” and focus more intently upon the quantifiable scorecard to gauge our effectiveness. Frustration builds as we realize that this posture is increasingly ineffective and out of balance. Constantly in search of the big idea, we speculate about the locus of control or influence on that idea, wrestling sometimes with the question of “who leads” during times like this.

As this discussion unfolded—clearly reflecting a shared sense of struggle—we lifted up the concept of the *mandorla*, introduced in Ken Hubbell’s essay (see page 74). The mandorla is a concept that describes a transition that is underway. Used in Christian and Buddhist iconography, it is an ancient symbol of two circles coming together, forming a transformation of opposing forces. In his essay, Ken notes, “[s]cholars and psychologists describe the transition space as ‘the place where you arrive after you leave one room and have not yet entered another. In this place you are living on the threshold and this requires faith.’”

So we drew a mandorla during the discussion to help us visualize the work that must be done to be whole and to understand what from the past we need to hold onto and what in the future is best and richest toward which we want to move. We came to understand that we have been trying to piecemeal change and it is not working satisfactorily. Now we may be coming more to realize deep interconnectedness and the wholeness of the system. This systems thinking perspective was one that we would return to several times in our discussion.



Emerging mandorla showing overlapping circles (L to R) representing characteristics of the past, the present (which we kept calling “the middle”), and the future. (Illustrated by Ken Hubbell)

Several among us felt the social contract has been tested by the new economic realities. The recession is turning out to be a defining moment. We have to rethink everything. Some question, though, whether we are seeing a collective reevaluation of what matters most. They bristle at the realization that contemporary philanthropy pales in comparison to the U.S. federal government flow of funds. Others counter this argument with a different view, suggesting we consider all these investments combined rather than looking at them separately. Look at the U.S. government’s \$900 billion stimulus package *plus* the money being invested through philanthropy collectively. The issue is less about which source is dominant; rather it is about the collective impact and societal improvements being made.

While there are now, and will always remain, large societal needs, our institutions are supposed to provide a sense-making role for people, providing a sense of hope and accomplishment. This is the vehicle through which we can make sense of all the current

inconsistencies, changes, and uncertainties. We need to help our constituencies see the bigger picture so they can feel momentum and hope and so that they can engage in the work of growing hope—which is one way to look at philanthropy. By playing some direct role in the movement toward a hopeful future, it helps our organizational constituents have some context and framework to address their fear and disorientation. Many of our essays touched on this theme in various ways—bringing clarity about the environment; connecting with heart and soul; living life with others; modeling sustainable behavior—all of which is an interesting contrast to fear and disorientation.

Organizations, foundations, groups, individuals, and governments are trying to step up and demonstrate leadership, but it is being done from a silo orientation. Some locus of leadership may be shifting away from institutions and moving more to individuals and groups. We're seeing some shift away from the "traditional" big philanthropy initiatives, and movement toward smaller, closer-to-the-impact undertakings. The microloan pioneer Kiva (www.kiva.org) is a perfect example of that movement. We may be in a period where neither governments nor big organizations can control the environment (if, in fact, they ever could). In the future, nonprofit organizations and foundations may be less able to shape or control these movements. Instead they may have to become more collaborative. Contemporary evidence suggests the need to find better ways to collaborate. There is a need—and, maybe, a growing sense—of a "community of institutions" trying to create more partnerships and more leadership. If there is going to be lasting societal change and lasting impact, we all may have to leave behind our habitual and familiar siloed organizational leadership thinking and embrace the mindset of behaving as a "community of institutions."

Still, this is all pretty murky. The mandorla represents the in-between place. We can see the signals of what we're called to create. We're trying to address a new future that isn't yet. It *feels* to us that there is another way, but we can't really *see* it. Our current space is impacted by many factors, including the globalization of change and the acceleration of technology innovation. From our organizational perch, we may share a feeling that ours currently is "a space between" and there is growing recognition that the "playbook" seems to be a bit exhausted.



(Illustration by Ken Hubbell)

As individuals, each of us has had to do our own work to interpret this setting. We must accept that we are always in 'the middle place,' which may never be completely comfortable or familiar. Yet our goal should not be to get comfortable. Too often we are too quick to try to "fix" things. A Buddhist view holds that pain is

inevitable, but suffering is not. We are defined in part by how we choose to perceive that which is before us.

Philanthropy can be a lever for authentic dialogue. It can be the bridge to what Marv Baldwin referenced in his essay as finding our way collectively to emptiness—the place “where people stop arguing with, agreeing with, supporting and fixing others. It is the place where truth can begin to emerge, where people can speak from a core place deep within themselves and be heard human to human. *Community then emerges from emptiness.*”

Stay with that last concept for a moment—community emerges from emptiness. One may be quick to dismiss this idea, feeling that it sounds defeatist or nihilistic. Even attempting to hold the concept in mind creates no small amount of internal tension for many of us. Yet, the emptiness may simply refer to the growing emptiness of traditional approaches to philanthropy and to societal change that no longer work. The emptiness may refer to the emptiness of the siloed approach. It may refer to the inherent limitations of our quantifiable business framework with emphasis on the short term, quantifiable metrics, and measurement tactics and touches.

Ultimately, we came to understand and appreciate that leading requires a recognition and willingness that each of us must play multiple roles at different times—visionary, leader, facilitator, follower, and teacher.



(Illustration by Ken Hubbell)

Leading requires equal parts personal insight and personal courage to recognize the need to be in a different conversation than those in which we typically engage. We are called upon to be aligned and authentic with our organizational leaders (CEOs, boards, executive teams) and with our funders and grantees (donors/partners/grant recipients), born of our recognition as practitioners that our approaches to philanthropy and, oftentimes, the application of those donated resources are not working as well as we’d hoped and the continuation of our approach is unlikely to be adequate to the challenges of the future.

Who are we? We must ask ourselves: “What force in the world do we *want* to be as an organization?” For many organizations, their mission, business, spiritual, and philanthropic pursuits have all been pursued in silos. Now we have an opportunity to cross

into this new place, as reflected in the right side of the mandorla. In this new place, the definition of philanthropy is much bigger than The Money and, probably, much bigger than our institutions alone.

After a day of grappling for our moorings, Lisa Scardina read aloud to us an often-used prayer of Hopi Elder Wisdom. In my judgment, its timing then, and its reproduction here, are right on target.

Hopi Elder Wisdom

To my fellow swimmers:

There is a river flowing now very fast. It is so great and swift that there are those who will be afraid. They will try to hold onto the shore, they will feel they are being torn apart and will suffer greatly. Know that the river has its destination. The elders say we must let go of the shore, push off into the middle of the river, keep our eyes open and our heads above water.

And I say:

See who is there with you, and celebrate. At this time in history, we are to take nothing personally, least of all ourselves; for the moment that we do, our spiritual journey comes to a halt. The time of the lone wolf is over.

Gather yourselves. Banish the word “struggle” from your attitude and vocabulary. All that we do now must be done in a sacred manner and in celebration.

We are the ones we have been waiting for.

Imagining How Our Organizations Might Change

Both/And...For a New Culture of Philanthropy

Over the course of our conversation, we sought to more clearly recognize the multiple tensions and the seeming dichotomies that exist. Some of those tensions stem from development professionals feeling liberated by “whole system” conversations, yet feeling that “the reality is” and “at the end of the day” development work is “all about the money.” After repeated exploration, we came to see that this perspective is unconsciously sapping the energy from people—development professionals, organizational leaders, and the donors/partners themselves. It becomes unintentionally and unnecessarily limiting of choices and learning.

The cornerstone question of “what is most important about this moment” creates for us an opportunity for reflection and a new opening. We came to recognize this as a “both/and” situation. It is *both* the reality that many people have an expectation that development professionals (in their siloes) should just go raise money *and* it’s an opportunity to teach that in order to perform in a richer, more robust, and more fulfilling way, we have to re-perceive the culture and practice of philanthropy. We cede the higher ground when we lose the both/and and end up submitting to the sole and narrow expectation that it is the responsibility of one team or unit to condition the environment for raising money.

Storytelling helps accomplish this teaching. We have to have a different type of conversation. To bring about a new culture of philanthropy and a deeper appreciation of philanthropy, we have to lengthen the time and thought horizon. We’re stuck having to change the way we perceive the world. We must reframe the development tension in the most creative way we can—through the processes, the tools, and the metrics. Horizons need to be reconsidered. As long as we are held captive by last world’s rules, we won’t break through. While this won’t solve the immediate demands of the quantifiable scorecard keepers, it seems to be the right thing to do and may be the only real alternative left.

Pearl Veenema picked up her copy of Seth Godin’s Tribes and read to us about belief:

“People don’t believe what you tell them.

They rarely believe what you show them.

They often believe what their friends tell them.

They always believe what they tell themselves.

What leaders do: they give people stories they can tell themselves. Stories about the future and about change.”²

² Seth Godin, *Tribes: We Need You to Lead Us*, Portfolio, New York, 2008, p. 138.


Inculcating a strong organizational culture of philanthropy has long been a topic of great interest in the development profession. Sadly, we too often get it all wrong. Great energy is misspent trying to identify “best practices.” Unimaginable dollars and time are consumed trying to demonstrate through quantifiable metrics that our organizations possess a solid culture of philanthropy. Development professionals everywhere harangue the CEO, insisting that she do more to personally engage donors and, in general, “advocate for the culture of philanthropy.”

Instead, the culture of philanthropy is inextricably wrapped into an organization’s clarity and focus on the deeper question of “What are we trying to accomplish in the world?” In this light, philanthropy becomes the living, embodied mission of the organization. As such, the culture of philanthropy grows naturally, much like the quantifiable results we seek coming naturally if we pay closest attention to the soft side, the people and process side.

We are Not Imprisoned by Our Circumstances – We are Freed by Our Choices

The concept of “both/and” takes us back to the symbolism of the mandorla—two circles coming together, forming a transformation of opposing forces. We may see our position in the current trajectory as crossing into a new territory, a new place....evocative of something that isn’t built yet. Circumstances seem to be calling for leadership in a new way. Our discussion of leadership revolved around and repeated these characteristics: catalytic, renewal, reframing, reinvention, refreshment, and relationships. These are all anchored in some heart-filled, spirit-filled way.

At present, we are collectively navigating “the middle” in search of different conversations about what might be true in the future. We are navigating a clash of old values and operations that might not be fully suitable in the future. Part of navigating from the present to the future is trying to understand the portal as passage into a new future, which could be seen as an inspiring frame of personal meaning, a process of serving, teaching, and learning from others, very collaborative in a new way.



Mission is what centers us. It's the thread from past to future.

In *Theory U*, Otto Scharmer³ tells us that we have choices about how we learn. The more uncharted—but potentially more fruitful—way is how to *learn from the future*. At this time, we should be asking what it would be like to learn from the future of philanthropy, so we

³ C. Otto Scharmer; *Theory U: Leading from the Future as it Emerges*, Society for Organizational Learning, Cambridge, MA, 2007.

don't get stuck by traditions. The danger, of course, is that if we are always trying to figure out the next blip on the horizon, we will have trouble trying to imagine the larger, longer future and the drivers of change.

Part of the tension we feel, of course, results from our deeply reinforced training to plant our flag, determine a solution, and consider the tactical strategies during times of uncertainty. Instead, this is exactly the time where we may need to have the courage to ask what the future would be like if there was unprecedented collaboration among those with interest in philanthropy.

In this future, what type of leadership would be required in organizations large and small? Leaders are catalysts. This may be a frame for our conversation. Leaders can be teaching people about the future, about what can be. In general, we're not doing a good job of this, because there are so many reinforcing demands on the very short term. Teaching from the past helps one understand what comes to be thought of as "the rules" (based on experience). Teaching from the future helps one understand how to reframe those rules to accomplish big things. Tradition should be a guide, not a jailor. We must appreciate the best of what is past, but not be bound by it. Leader catalysts understand how to reframe. The reframing reflects our search for an opening, an aperture to help us see or re-perceive the transitions we're in.

We need to discover our imaginations about the future. Imagine if philanthropy became the incubator and the cultivator of what's possible? Can philanthropy be the "industry" that helps people imagine the community they want to be and provide a mechanism to pursue it? The goal of philanthropy could be empowerment, bringing resources that didn't previously exist. Through collaboration, more can be done. In the current reality, we feel an absence of power, so this is a way for philanthropy to empower.

Marv Baldwin leaped in to the conversation with the caution: "Don't try too soon to make sense of this transition to the future. If you do, you will miss the embedded opportunities." He cautioned us not to fall into the trap of being "fixers," trying to converge too quickly on a path or a way of considering the future. Instead, he suggested the stronger position was staying open to new possibilities and to taking very different approaches to issues. Marv was saying it's too soon to take advantage of the aperture, which by this point in our conversation we hadn't fully built.

The Locus of the Big Idea

Our conversation evolved to explore the notion of a central big idea; the search in our world and in our work for some things that are powerful, lasting, and necessary that should be grounding much of our lives and our work. The big idea is often the catalyst to attracting

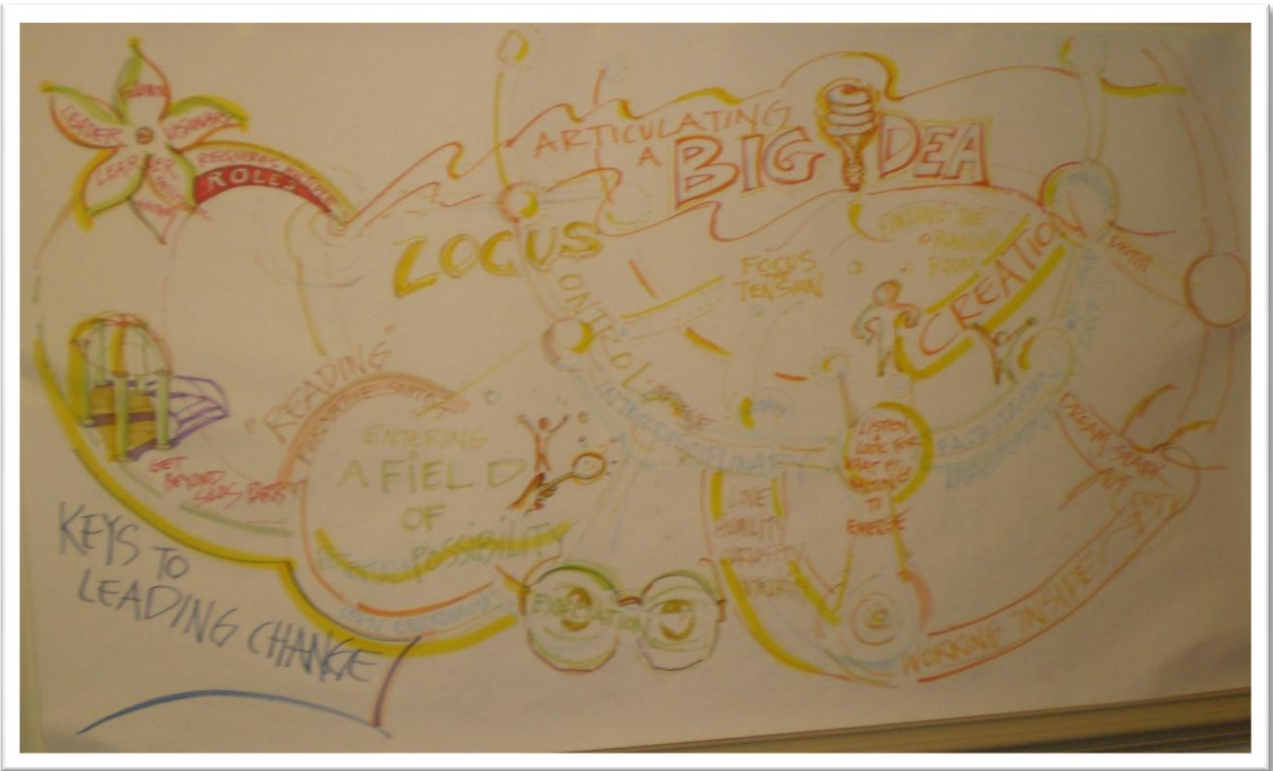
significant gifts. Yet in many organizations there is greater emphasis on the strategies for fundraising, but far less on the responsibility of articulating the big ideas. Case statements often read like the strategy for raising the money, but less evident is clarity around how philanthropy will create real change and realize the big idea.

One college president emeritus in our midst, Bryant Cureton, suggested that we must embrace the question of the locus of control – who comes up with the big ideas? Big ideas can/should come from the CEO, but they also originate with philanthropists. Contemporary evidence suggests this is happening more often, especially with younger philanthropists. Our institutions are often the *means* for creating the changes that philanthropists desire. It is our responsibility to listen to them, he argued. Leading change means viewing our role as an interdisciplinary leader of people to talk about what's possible. As leaders, we often find ourselves in the role of facilitating the dialectical process by which ideas are formulated, facilitating the process of getting at the big idea the hard way, through give and take. Somebody needs to be focused on moving this conversation forward, he said. Ideas mature and often morph over time, as evinced by the story of the founding and development of Colonial Williamsburg. What happens to institutions that are organized around a big idea (its mission)? "It raises the more troubling issue of who is creating the ideas we pursue."

As one might expect, this perspective evoked considerable discussion among our group. Said one participant, "Who has the big idea? It doesn't matter. It only matters that the leader responds to it." The fundraising professional is supposed to manage to the ideas. The vision is drawn out of the environment by the visionary who sees some running room, where others may not have seen the opening in the environment. The leader's role is to focus attention and energy around the idea, which is the first step in the philanthropic process.

Other participants weighed in, noting the acceleration of technology and the increasing diversity of our constituencies – among many other forces – necessitates that leading change becomes less about the locus of control and more about finding moments of true catalysis. The distribution of technology, instantaneous social mash-ups, and other aspects of our changing society may move us away from "control" and more toward the concept of "influence." Control won't rest squarely with *any* of the players. The role of the leader, then, is to spot the truly transformative idea and to catalyze, not control. The leader creates the environment where the whole organization can foster openings and transformation. This discussion triggered for Tom Soma the observation that the qualities of future leaders are being: 1) the visionary; and 2) the vision inspirer; vision distiller; vision synthesizer; vision enactor.

We must broaden our expectations of where big ideas will come from in the future. To do so will require a broadening of our connectivity—to each other and to new ideas—which will generate new pathways to where big ideas come from. What will assist the leader to identify these opportunities? We think it is in being connected; taking the pulse of your environment rather than feeling like we've got to be at the top. Scharmer talks about figuring out a process to see what's waiting to emerge through imagination, discernment, and conversation.



(Illustration by Ken Hubbell)

Leaders draw vision from the environment; from being external; and “just watching.” Two cautions were offered at this point in the discussion. First, leaders are too often prone to “watch” only long enough to see the strategy, the “fix,” or the solution. This triggers responses that try to manage the response and to control, all of which results from a short term perspective. Second, many organizational leaders who go external—outside their institutions and into their constituencies—do so myopically engaged in their “internal” perspective, resulting in going external with only the organization’s internal agenda and “talking points” as the platform for connection. Alternatively, if the leader can go external with the primary intention of connecting and watching the environment, he or she is more likely to connect with the inspiration, the openings, and the opportunities embedded in big ideas and to interpret the relevance of one’s organization in that light.

Seen through this lens, the desired characteristics of the leader are love, curiosity, and humility. Okay, don't dismiss this thought as just more cosmic flippy jive talk. Many widely respected business leaders take on the notion of love without flinching. Ken Hubbell references in his essay (see page 68) that in *Fifth Discipline*, Peter Senge describes love as an attitude and sensibility; as commitment to serve and a willingness to be vulnerable in the context of that service. It usually requires the full and unconditional commitment to another's completion.⁴ Max DePree recommends leaders form what he calls covenantal relationships despite the risks involved "because they require us to be abandoned to the talents and skills of others, and therefore to be vulnerable. The same risks as one has when falling in love."⁵ However we choose to characterize this, what we're suggesting is a sincere and selfless openness by leaders.

Does philanthropy facilitate this process of becoming more creative? How do we do it better? Who are the gatekeepers? What is the process that works and when doesn't it work well? What are the barriers? Certainly, we believe that leadership, of necessity, will increasingly be interdisciplinary and diverse. There are principles to that leadership—focusing the tension, finding the running room, creating the ability to incubate ideas, fostering a way to spark dreams, distilling them and working through the testing of those ideas. Getting beyond silos and parts is required in order to get to something new.

Powerful, big ideas emerge from a field of potential and possibility. The leader's work is to understand this and to be able to read the environment and create a formative context, an open space, and a sense of expectation. It requires a process or people (or both) to be working inside and out *and* back and forth. Movement through the continuum from opening to creation to distilling to implementation naturally requires multiple roles for people in leadership positions, as introduced with the flower graphic about leadership roles on page 11 above.

Our discussion led us to an important collective observation:

Leaders can't change their organizations,
but they can change *themselves*
and their organizations will then
change around them.

⁴ Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, Currency-Doubleday, New York, 1990, p. 285.

⁵ Max DePree, *Leadership is an Art*, Dell Publishing, New York, 1989, p. 38.

If one's focus is love, curiosity, and humility, those around you often begin to mirror those characteristics and the potential for change grows. If one is truly looking for ways to identify what is waiting to emerge in the future, one should live with love, humility, curiosity, and integrity.

Seeing Each Organization as Part of a Whole System

As noted earlier, within our group were representatives from a wide assortment of social sector organizations: hospital systems, universities, human service organizations, foundations, educational/historic institutions, and advocacy groups. Each organization is guided by a strong and gift-worthy mission, as evidenced by the significant philanthropic support each attracts. We are proud of the contributions our organizations make to society and, for the most part, feel that our organizations are essential to a strong and healthy society. We would like to think that there is great commonality around the ends our institutions are trying to solve or serve in pursuit of a better world. Yet, if we're honest with ourselves, we must acknowledge that we sometimes lose sight of what it takes to bring about a better world, unconsciously getting distracted by a focus on "our route" to get there or the recognition we earn or the tactics we employ. These are inputs only. Instead we must ask, "What do we value? What are we trying to bring about?" Each organization has a piece of the work to a better world, but not the whole. Collectively, if each of our organizations is not working to produce a whole and healthy society, then each of us is simply getting lost in the parts. Because the power of the self-distraction is so strong, it takes many more conversations over time with our contemporaries outside our organizations to connect these parts.

All these organizations are participating in an ongoing conversation about a world that is in constant motion. When we are working with our constituents, we have some choice whether to enter a collective conversation about the shared world of health, wellness, community, and the big ideas or whether to focus more narrowly on *our* route, *our* tactics, *our* projects. All of our work is connected whether we recognize it or not. Too often, however, we lose this focus because of our more immediate pursuit of endowed chairs, new buildings, or the next grassroots campaign. Instead, each of us must reframe this—and our organizational mindsets—as a "both/and" conversation, connecting our tactical pursuits to the bigger collective vision. In so doing, we will be looking for the causal contribution to something around which we have shared value. Sadly, this is often an assumed perspective around which we seldom have conversation. This evokes questions of the depth of connection we really seek and how we invite people to participate.

Further distraction results from a myopic focus on metrics and performance measurement. To adapt, we must balance our focus on quantitative analysis with more qualitative analysis in order to judge the impact we're having. It often doesn't take huge resources to have great

impact, but it often requires great resources to report back the impact in ways that people require. This is a dichotomy. Currently, expectations quickly devolve to expecting to measure inputs rather than impact, which unintentionally reinforces the wrong organizational focus. An organizational shift needs to happen. We need to reframe the conversation away from quantitative versus qualitative analysis to one of sound analysis versus superficial analysis. This is perhaps best addressed in the admonition shared with us by Bryant Cureton: *Don't waste your time trying to make the quantifiable important; concentrate on trying to make the important quantifiable.* The objective is clarity, honesty, and thoroughness and we are looking for symbols to demonstrate that clarity.

The social science mental models to which we so widely subscribe have stalled in really understanding what it takes to measure impact. The foundation community is struggling with this limitation. While many are still not highly motivated to shift their thinking about this, a vanguard is making this more important and are now or will soon be moving more deeply into rethinking the measurement of impact. Due to the complexity of the issues we face, each of us must work to avoid narrowly viewing only the piece our organization is working on.

The canvas is already filled with potential. It takes new ways of seeing the existing potential in all the people, places, and communities surrounding us. How are these interveners pushing on the system, how are we responding, and how are we, as organizations, learning? The system is capable of instant adaptation. Funders often don't consider the adaptation, they instead think about *their* intervention and *your* impacts on that intervention, as if there wasn't anything else — almost as if the system were static and not really alive. This requires leaders to be disciplined and ongoing learners about the ecosystem. It requires *organizations* to be better learners.

It will likely require organizations to move away from solely focusing on their own core competencies to a posture of thinking about the rest of the system and how it is constantly adapting and changing. We must shift the way we orient ourselves. One highly regarded systems thinker, Donella Meadows, encourages us to “dance with the system” instead of trying to direct it.⁶ This will require us organizationally to work for the good of the whole, not solely for our piece of it. We will have to expand time horizons and our expectations accordingly, as well as our boundaries of caring.

The current philanthropy system is out of balance which represents the focus of the new learning in philanthropy. The arguments about taking solutions to scale may or may not work. The approach hasn't worked with the World Bank, for example. In our work with

⁶ Donella Meadows, *Thinking in Systems: A Primer*, Chelsea Green Publishing, 2008.

philanthropy, we need to better understand what the whole system is telling us. It is very complex, it is not well connected; there are fights over control, direction, and measurement. These challenges collude so that systems clarity eludes us.

As people and institutions, we are operating inside a larger social world where the assumption is that each of us is responsible for taking care of people. Our stakeholders have a role in this, too. The constituents who are the beneficiaries of our organizational missions are not being allowed to help shape the system. Philanthropy has a piece of this responsibility but not the whole responsibility. We must, however, avoid the language of victimization and “otherness.” Sooner or later, we each need to acknowledge that each of us is a part of this whole system. It stretches our thinking if we come to understand that we’re all together, all connected. It requires us to move outside our siloes to a more integrated view. Our organizations have to adapt by recognizing that we’ve gone about as far as we can by the old rules. We must have the courage to ask even the simplest reflective question: Why is it important that we do it the way we’ve always done it? This requires a non-hurried learning agenda. It requires us to adapt our learning even as we continue our current work.

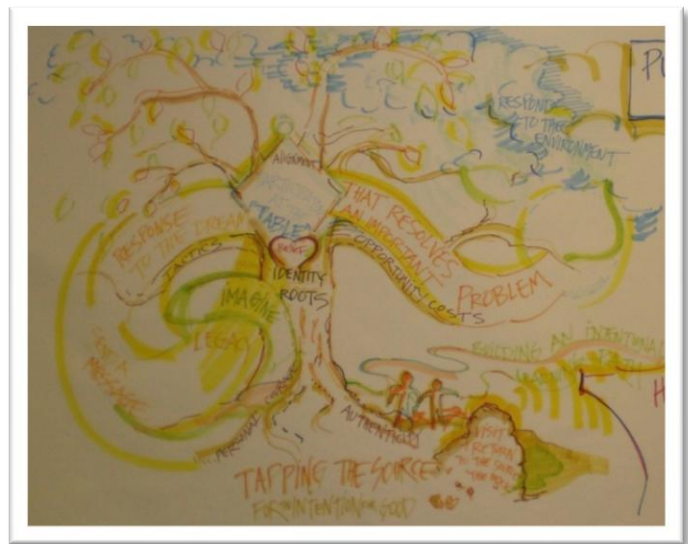
Examining the Keys to Leading Change

Personal Courage, Authenticity, and Alignment

Our conversation surfaced that an institution shares with its donors/partners a set of beliefs in some process of imagining and responding to a dream or a shared opportunity that can resolve an important problem. Our role is to set the table in order for that shared imagining to take place. This early process can be fraught with—but also enriched and framed by—some unstated things like imagination, identity, beliefs, and dreams of problems resolved.

Providing leadership during times of great change is rooted in the personal courage to have authentic conversations with people. Candor, trust, and the leader’s own personal alignment are important in order to have tough talk (authentic conversations) with the people with whom we’ll ultimately need to partner to bring about the change. In his essay, Marv Baldwin introduced us to Scott Peck’s book, *The Different Drum*⁷. True opportunities to transform oneself and others only arise, Peck suggests, from conversations that reach a deeper level—a level of seeming chaos, marked by truth and honesty. Conversations at this level reflect the leader’s degree of authenticity and level of personal alignment.

It is, therefore, important for each of us in a leadership role to be personally aware of that alignment. Personal courage and authenticity needs to tap a deep source for what is highest and best. Ken Bartels told a story about “seeking the source from behind the rock”—in reference to an old BC comic strip—that requires a relationship over time, where both the rock and the seeker are different—changed in some way—with each visit.



(Illustration by Ken Hubbell)

Certainly this is the harder path to take, yet the leader who can get in touch with this source can repeatedly use it for guidance. Lasting changes are hard to make. The ones that stick take leadership courage and authenticity and emanate from having found this source of what is highest and best.

⁷ Scott M. Peck, *The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace*, Touchstone, 1998.

True transformation—breakthrough opportunities—is about having fewer, deeper, richer conversations that produce those opportunities. Deep conversations are often missing in the contemporary philanthropy exchange. The practice and pursuit of philanthropy might be very different if your thinking was framed by an authentic, intentional deep conversation to identify one’s intention for good...to identify what is highest and best.

The process of leading through change is also framed by your response to the environment, choices which have opportunity costs and which put pressure on your tactics. The core value of these conversations is often marginalized in deference to tactics and tools (e.g., new donor software programs, metric reports) that erroneously keep conversations at more superficial levels. The successful practice and pursuit of philanthropy, therefore, is not about a deeper immersion into tactics; it is about a deeper discernment about what the donor/partner seeks to accomplish.

Our conversation moved from the ephemeral to the practical in how to do this. We talked about how to achieve alignment and a way to do culture building. We concluded that for individuals and organizations to enrich these connected conversations, to get better at them, would require working beyond silos; connect the silos, but don’t get stopped by them. Leaders will have to help their organizations create a new and intentional learning agenda to see their operating environment as a whole system which is ever in flux, constantly seeking change.

In a more philosophical moment of our discussion, Marv Baldwin challenged us to slow our headlong rush to figure out the best ways to discover someone’s intention for good. He asked: “Should we try to discover that intent?” While temporarily confounding some of us around the table, the question opened the conversation to a deeper level of thinking. We reasoned that the answer to the “should we” question is yes, IF done with the leadership characteristics mentioned above: love, humility, curiosity, and integrity.

Both you and the person sought are different each time you engage them. If you approach the search for one’s intention for good from a position of personal courage, alignment and authenticity (curiosity, love, and humility), you now have a platform for asking some very basic questions in a very open way about what one values, how they view the social contract, and how those who share an interest and an intention for good can have impact and, at times, lead.

Leaders are often consumed with thoughts of what they must give up to pursue this type of interaction more fully. They puzzle over what they can do differently in order to get more (of the right) people understanding this mindset and, as a result, letting go of the tactical and short term approaches that can suck the life and energy out of the larger objective. We concluded that

building community around a new path typically begins with individual courage, authenticity, and alignment.

“Building community is harder to define today than in past eras,” Don Taylor observed. “What does community look like anymore—how do we harness community to solve problems?” From his own work perspective in a major Midwestern community foundation, he characterized one of his critical roles as being always in search of the dream maker. The dream maker may at times be inside (the foundation CEO) and at other times outside (the donors). “Everybody gets to be the dream maker but we have to have them around the table (virtual or co-located) if we’re ever going to have fruitful conversations.”

We began to explore the philanthropy continuum as a process for defining and building community. Many contemporary and leading edge technology applications were discussed as ways of building community, yet we surmised that technology is not the connection; it is a tool for connection. At best, it is another example of a both/and situation. Technology is a tool for creating other ways to participate in a fertile environment for finding and participating in new ideas.

While many of the participants around our table represented organizations whose primary fundraising strategy revolved around major individual donors, one young advocacy organization leader, Focus the Nation’s Garrett Brennan, shed an entirely different light on this issue of building community. He reminded the group that advocacy and other similar organizations are more involved in creating and sustaining conversations with large numbers of widely dispersed people with an interest in the organization. Their work is more about creating and fueling a movement, seeking to get constituents to step up and take action. In his particular case, his primary funders are corporations and foundations who, he was reminded, are comprised of individuals, with whom direct conversations and relationships can be built.

Advocacy organizations are not about something that can be easily touched or experienced like hospitals and colleges, he continued. When the organization succeeds, there is an “awakening” that happens within every donor. Marv Baldwin echoed this perspective, acknowledging a similar environment for Foods Resource Bank.

*“We look for ways to have conversations with all donors about big ideas that can evoke that awakening. We should avoid narrow labels that unintentionally divide and segregate our total constituency. Recognize that it may be much more impactful in the world by engaging many, many people (probably through communication technology) who engage with you in the pursuit of the cause. What we’re saying is that philanthropy is bigger than philanthropy. We’re talking about **a way of thinking about institutional progress** that is the real gift to our institutions. If we can bring into our organization a new way of thinking about our future role in society, it will be worth more than all the money donated to us.”*

These ideas were embraced by many around the table, feeling that the best insights of the philanthropic discipline can become even more powerful if embraced by the organization's leaders. Because movements are intangible, what frames the conversation with constituents is "the big idea." The small donor (e.g., \$20 online gift) really represents personal commitment and the people power to fuel the movement. This impact is far beyond the isolated "value" of their individual monetary gift.

"Yeah, but at the end of the day, it's all about the money," said one participant from a large, traditional major gifts program. Rebuttal came swiftly from our advocacy colleagues. "We *can't make it* about the money; it's about making authentic difference in the world. It's not about the money, it's about the movement....because it's the movement that will change the world. The money will follow."

There is nothing new about this thinking, but all the growing complexity of our work has made this fundamental truth more opaque. Many around our table concluded that each of us as leaders need to have the personal courage to "speak truth to power" in our board rooms and executive suites. Doing the right thing requires courage. This requires honesty and personal integrity; being truly transparent. This sometimes requires a humility to recognize that we, as leaders, may be the barrier and we may need to step away.

Is this the time to rethink the "traditional" fundraising model of 90/10? Are we seeing signals to ask a very different question about our roles as nonprofit organizations in society? Are we needing to rethink the value proposition we present to our entire constituencies? There are alternative ways of maintaining engagement during a down cycle—getting people involved in activity. The question changes to 'What would we have to do, be, or become to appeal to the masses that they would come willingly to support us?' instead of 'How do we get the 10% returning to previous levels of support?' Have we convinced ourselves of the "certainty" of the 90/10 rule so much that we are blinded to ask the bigger reinvention and adaptation questions? We have an opportunity to change the culture of philanthropy in ways that we didn't imagine before. We can't continue to ignore the "little guys" in our constituencies. We now have the opportunity to be more inclusive.

Making Stone Soup

As discussed earlier, one of the keys to leading change is in taking a systems view. Hard questions get asked. What does the context of the current reality mean to my organization? Are our institutional projects still important in this context? Which kids go hungry? Tom Soma said many of these questions reflect a limited resources mindset. He then told the

story of making stone soup, which reflects a mindset of expansive resources, where everyone contributing something feeds the entire village.⁸

Tom drew four quadrants created by the intersection of human nature and human emotion.



Intersection of human nature and human emotion

Strongest leadership emerges in the top right quadrant, where hope and generosity are both high. This is where stone soup is made and where new resources are created. It is incumbent upon us as institutional leaders, he said, to live in to the upper right quadrant.

⁸ Stone Soup is an old folk story in which strangers trick a starving town into giving them some food. It is usually told as a lesson in cooperation, especially amid scarcity. According to the story, some travelers come to a village, carrying nothing more than an empty pot. Upon their arrival, the villagers are unwilling to share any of their food stores with the hungry travelers. The travelers fill the pot with water, drop a large stone in it, and place it over a fire in the village square. One of the villagers becomes curious and asks what they are doing. The travelers answer that they are making "stone soup," which tastes wonderful, although it still needs a little bit of garnish to improve the flavor, which they are missing. The villager doesn't mind parting with just a little bit of flour to help them out, so it gets added to the soup. Another villager walks by, inquiring about the pot, and the travelers again mention their stone soup which hasn't reached its full potential yet. The villager hands them a little bit of seasoning to help them out. More and more villagers walk by, each adding another ingredient. Finally, a delicious and nourishing pot of soup is enjoyed by all. (Wikipedia, downloaded July 17, 2010, from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stone_soup.)

Pearl Veenema shared the story of Bill Strickland⁹, whose collaborative approach between philanthropists and institutions is contemporary proof of leadership from this quadrant.

Some of us believe that we are suffering from a loss of spirit and heart in the current recession. Despite that ache, we still acknowledge the presence and the power of a shared sense of potential for that spirit and heart. In fact, we must acknowledge that each of the quadrant characteristics in Tom's chart above is present today. Thus, we came to graphically reflect this observation by placing the "both/and" duality in a heart—a symbol for the intention for good—and placed it at the very center of the two axes.

The much heralded wave of generational leadership retirements is creating a complex time for organizational culture and adaptation. The thing that has the potential to cascade is the drumbeat of a certain kind of storytelling. The transcendent piece needs to make sense to all of us. The story must be a human story with transparency—not just of success but places where we've screwed up. This is the authentic moment where culture changes.

The challenge is to figure out who moves the current environment toward some kind of new place or to something that is better. What kind of leadership does that require? Does philanthropy enable this movement? Is it being done well now? Things are not working the way they used to. Perhaps our assumptions are flawed, which is becoming more evident during this seemingly chaotic and messy period. As noted earlier, Bryant Cureton's essay reminded us that leaders must be both inside *and* outside. One has to build a sense of community within and a sense of partnership outside. Yet it is the uncommon institutional leader who is truly visionary and externally oriented.

In the future that we somewhat see emerging, we don't know what we value yet. We don't know how to give expression to that yet. Kevin Matheny recalled for us that William Faulkner wrote about the "tiny inexhaustible voice of humanity" that still squeaks out in hard times. We are not certain how to shape the future, so we must take solace and confidence in the tiny inexhaustible voice. We're grasping at things as we try to find our way. What emerges from fire and chaos is hope. Philanthropy provides a shared sense of hope. Institutions and governments are not what causes leadership to happen, they are places where leadership can be manifested. Great leaders emerge from the pursuit of philanthropy.

⁹ Bill Strickland (born 1947) is the founder and CEO of the Manchester Craftsmen's Guild, an innovative nonprofit agency in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania that uses the arts to inspire inner-city teenagers. Strickland, a winner of a MacArthur Fellowship "genius" award, started the Manchester Craftmen's Guild in 1968, while still an undergraduate at the University of Pittsburgh. He added the Bidwell Training Center in 1972. Both reach out to disadvantaged young people with (respectively) the arts and job training. (Wikipedia, downloaded July 17, 2010, from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bill_Strickland).

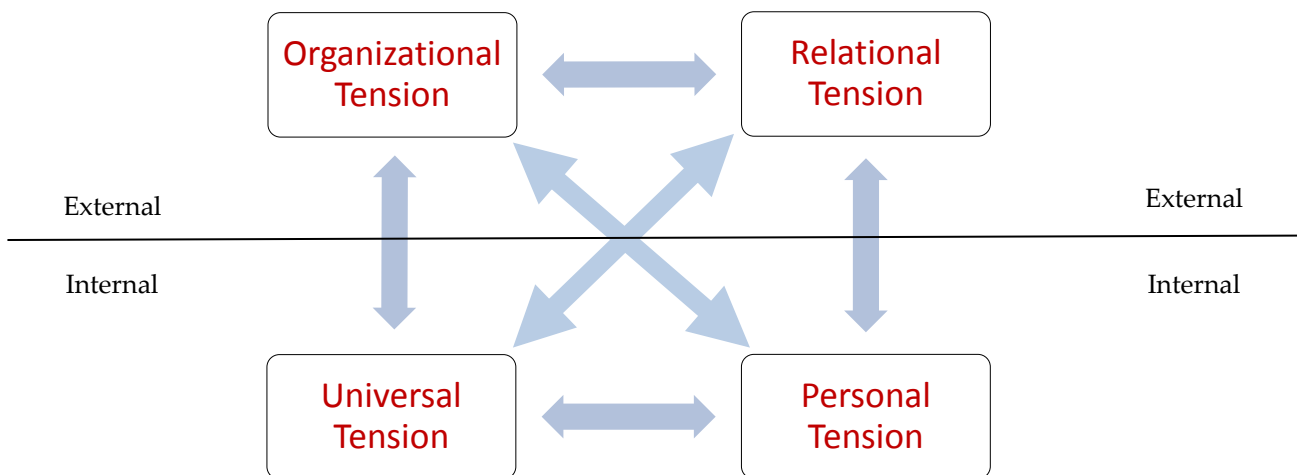
Transforming Our Shared Understanding of the Current Disruption and Recognizing the Adaptation Opportunities

Late into *Conversation 2010*, we asked subgroups to consider what they thought might be the one question about which we still hadn't gone deep enough. Once agreeing on the question, groups were asked to address the implications for leadership roles, organizational change and adaptation, and the teaching/learning agenda necessary to bring about the highest and best outcomes.

One group identified the following as a question requiring further thinking:

How do we prepare for an unknown future?

In addressing this question, they reported significant discussion about tension. They had to acknowledge the reality of just how resistant we can be to finding new ways to think and to behave—as persons and as organizations. The tensions identified occur on four levels, often coexist, and potentially trigger tensions in the other levels. Two tensions were identified as being primarily exhibited internally (personal and universal), whereas the other two (relational and organizational) were thought to be primarily exhibited externally. The tensions are diagrammed and described below:



Personal tension. We carry very real tensions that sometimes lead us to reexamine our own work in light of shifting human needs. There is energy in just realizing the reality of the current environment and recognizing the opportunities that may still be there. The

downturn has created new groups, new relationships, new connections. We are approaching life differently. Development officers are asked to be Pollyanna, while at the same time painting a picture of hope. This may seem difficult if we are to be courageous and authentic. Yet, authenticity is the antidote to anxiety. Leaders who tell stories about the future create the vehicles to be authentic, to be true to the experience, and to avoid being Pollyanna.

Relational tension. The psychological effects of crisis are often worse than the reality. The same will likely be true of the current economic recession. The depth of this crisis will leave a lasting imprint, akin to economic posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It poses very real questions of how we manage our relationships, our donors, etc. The stress makes it harder to see the values shift that may be going on and to understand what those values are. It is hard to be authentic in light of the realities of all the current hardships but it is our responsibility to lift up hope in a very authentic way. We have to redefine what success looks like as we talk truth to power.

Organizational tension. Trying to interpret signals is confusing and hard. Preparing for an unknown future requires leaders to embrace the tension. It forces us to consider ways we may need to reinvent ourselves. We will need to create opportunities by significant and more frequent and lasting collaboration with other organizations. This produces tension. Organizations are so deeply embedded in their own missions that the collaborative opportunity often get's couched as "giving up turf" to others, which is hard for any leader to imagine. Tension will result and become an obstacle for organizations. Significant tension exists between adherence to mission and the uncertainties of the future.

Universal tension. The psychological effect is creating new opportunities. Despite our attempt to make things linear, we need to recognize what seems like empty or blank spaces, which are often the spaces for recognizing opportunity. If we don't go to these spaces, we miss the opportunity to renew, refresh, and reinvent. The global recession is our opportunity to provide leadership in these blank spaces. We are learning how to lead from the middle.

A second group identified a different question as one requiring further thinking:

*Tomorrow, what will I do differently and what will I do the same?
(Will I play backgammon, checkers/chess, or Go?)*

This group thought the question of personal behavior and world view deserved the most introspection. They used three old games which enjoy worldwide popularity to illustrate their point. Backgammon is described as a "man vs. fate" contest, with chance playing a strong role in determining the outcome. Chess, with rows of soldiers marching forward to

capture each other, embodies the conflict of "man vs. man", as does Checkers, with its goal of eliminating the opponent's pieces. Because the handicap system tells Go players where they stand relative to other players, an honestly ranked player can expect to lose about half of their games; therefore, Go can be seen as embodying the quest for self-improvement—"man vs. self."¹⁰ Therefore, for this group, the powerful introspective question of "what will I do differently" was not about trying to change external events; rather to reset and realign personal mental models and deeply held assumptions. Therefore, personal learning becomes the catalyst for seeing new possibilities.

A third group offered an alternative question perhaps not fully examined to this point in our conversation.

What is important about our moment?

The collective thinking of this group fostered a deeper look at the characteristics of the present, not just as a portal to the future but as "our moment." They explained that each of us has a relatively few years to make an impact. There is power, they suggested, in fully embracing the present for itself and all that it brings. What are the challenges and opportunities that are embedded in the hand each of us has been dealt?

This group suggested the special characteristics of this moment are:

- Scarcity – economic as well as scarcity of imagination (recall the story of Stone Soup). Scarcity of imagination is more frightening than economic scarcity.
- Generational characteristics – we may be looking at a Millennial generation which is more able to incorporate philanthropy into their lives at a much earlier period than the generations who preceded them.
- Polarization – what is missing in the conversation if there are few opinions in the middle and only intransigence on the left and the right? Polarization results.
- Technology and its impact – especially its increasingly disruptive nature.¹¹
- Mobility and rootlessness – personal mobility and the sense of rootlessness and absence of connection.

¹⁰ The philosophy of the game called Go was downloaded July 19, 2010 from:
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Go_\(game\)#Philosophy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Go_(game)#Philosophy).

¹¹ See the pioneering work of Lucy Bernholz with Edward Skloot and Barry Varela, *Disrupting Philanthropy: Technology and the Future of the Social Sector, Draft v 2.0*, November 2009, page 10. Downloaded December 2, 2009 from: <http://philanthropy.blogspot.com/2009/12/disrupting-philanthropy.html>

They also identified special potential during this “moment” (maybe because of scarcity):

- We may be able to nudge ourselves from “fixing” to “prevention,” a reprioritization made necessary because of having fewer resources. We may be putting the few dollars we have to work upstream where they may be better leveraged.
- Technology may support community in new ways – technology may be a partial response to the issue of disconnectedness and rootlessness. Kiva and similar organizations (especially those embraced by young people) are succeeding at bringing hearts and minds together. The social entrepreneur is not about the size of the wallet, but the connection between hearts and minds. The Millennials are making that connection much earlier in their lives than previous generations.
- Philanthropy as a possible end-run around polarization – it may be the one thing that the left and the right agree upon, opening opportunities for new solutions. Philanthropy doesn’t require people to vote. The money can be put to work much faster. Metaphorically, does philanthropy become the new “party” of change? Philanthropy bridges polarization (which is perceived more than real). Philanthropy’s role is to do the inviting—getting people to the table.

Adaptation and the Nature of Complex Systems

It is the nature of complex systems—in nature, in business, and in philanthropy—to go out of balance. There is a fight between old habits, the old order, and the new. Not everything of the old order still makes sense. We must recognize there will be more disturbances. We must further recognize that we can’t *fight against* the disturbance; we have to *live with* the disturbance and figure out how to respond to it in a different way. Complex systems cannot be fully predicted, understood, or controlled. What is important at this moment is that we should be looking for the new places for opportunity. If we still need philanthropy as a creative catalyst, then this is the adaptive process we need to figure out and embrace. This is the time and the place for fertile reexamination by all of us.

Ultimately, our conversation reaffirmed a shared belief that this moment is different. As we are trying to understand it, we should look to the adaptation cycle in living and evolving systems as a helpful framework.

Ecosystem Response to Disturbance



(Illustration by Ken Hubbell)

Organizations seeking to adapt must develop greater resilience. The nature of change processes follows a certain path through the tension. We've recently been through a complete disruptive time which is leading to new frames, new constellations, and new opportunities. The rules no longer apply. The system reorganization is not yet clear and it is still turbulent. No one is telling us how to navigate the right side of the cycle (see illustration above) yet the typical institutional (and individual) response is to demand clarity! Rather, we need to imagine how the system works in a different way and get the players together in innovative ways. The backside path of the cycle provides room for innovation where the old structures aren't working. In this reorganizational mode, there is a chance that the whole system will morph into something totally unknown or it will re-gather itself into a new shape with a new set of rules.¹²

The adaptive game one chooses to play is reflective of one's mental model about opportunities (as reflected in our discussion of different games played on the same boards—backgammon, chess, or Go). If we had a different set of conversations about the opportunity matrix, we could, perhaps, deal more effectively with the imaginative tension among these things, recognizing they are in flux and providing life tension for individuals and institutions.

¹² For much deeper exploration of this thinking, see Lance H. Gunderson and C. S. Holling; *Panarchy: Understanding Transformations in Human and Natural Systems*, Washington: Island Press, 2002, pp. 51; 395-438.

Conclusion

After only two *GHC Conversations* (2009 and 2010), I'm beginning to see our discussions as a living mandorla—"the place where you arrive after you leave one room and have not yet entered another." While the pages above do little justice to the depth and quality of the discussion, there is a certain satisfaction in getting it on paper and trying to do so in a way that honors the commitment and contributions of those present. Not everyone is directly quoted or cited. Forgive me. That reflects only on the editor (me), not on the contributors.

There is much about society—and with it the social sector and philanthropy—that is changing. Watching these changes is fascinating; understanding these changes is challenging; imagining the changes yet to come is exhilarating. For these reasons, our work is never done. There is much more to learn and much more impact for each of us to have on our organizations, our communities, the sector, and society at large. Too big a task? Perhaps...but there's something *so* compelling about the deep end of the pool. Thank you, fellow swimmers.

Finally, I want to close where I opened this summary—with the surprise gift of poems written by *GHC Conversation* contributors Tom Soma and Ken Bartels in real time during our discussions. Tom read aloud to us his daily distillation of our discussion. Ken closed our last day in Colonial Williamsburg with his offering.

Distillation: Conversation 2010 Day Two:

Cutting to the heart

From our dialogue,
many questions emerge.

Like kittens with balls of yarn,
we unravel ideas,
entangling past, present, future.

What meanings are we to make?

What will change the game?

Que sera, sera?

That, too, is a question—
as is this:

What will emerge
from our silence?

Tom Soma
29 April 2010

Distillation: Conversation 2010 Day Three:

A Williamsburg Onion Vow

Layers and layers
of questions.

As we peel,
we are centered
by both asking
and answering.

At the center,
if we are honest,
we find *ourselves*—
and if we are fortunate,
a glimpse of the Source.

Do we lead?
Do we follow?

Yes/And...

I used to want
to change the world.

Now I seek
to know myself.

Today
I accept and embrace
this responsibility:

To listen compassionately,
to learn humbly,
and to love authentically.

Tom Soma
30 April 2010

Distillation: Conversation 2010 Day Four:

Telling the story –or– Living the dream

“Life calls us to experiment and change.”

“The world moves on.”

The world *needs* to move on.

Every moment
is a step into the unknown.

Staying put
is not an option.

We reside
permanently
in a middle place—

all teachers,
all students,
forever defining
and re-defining,
inventing,
and re-inventing
ourselves.

“In my end,”
writes T.S. Eliot,
“is my beginning.

“The end is where we start from...

“And the end of all our exploring
will be to arrive where we started
and know the place
for the first time.”

In a crucible here,
once,
a nation was born of ideas.

To what
will our exchange
give birth?

Where,
when,
how,

and why
should we continue digging?

Here.

And now.

However we may.

Because we must.

But as we dig,
let us plant.

At this simultaneous ending and beginning,
I bestow deep gratitude—
and these parting seeds
(not surprisingly,
in the form of questions):

What do I seek to inspire and achieve?

Who do I hope to attract and engage?

How would I like to be remembered and celebrated?

From *these* questions,
the poetry of my life will emerge.

The answers will be evident
soon enough,

and written, perhaps,
someday,
by someone else...

Tom Soma

1 May 2010

Myths of Meaning

Ghosts of Williamsburg;

We walk alone, yet together.

We care personally, but in union.

We risk individually, and grouped.

We believe, with hope.

We love ourselves, through others.

We are the past, the present and the future.

Ghosts of Williamsburg...Be well.

Ken Bartels

May 1, 2010

###

Gary Hubbell Consulting works with organizations on the cusp of doing great things – retooling business income and philanthropy strategies; engaging board members and community in unprecedented ways; raising more money than ever before. Clients contact us seeking help to develop strategies that foster organizational agility, setting a plan in place around which commitment runs deep, and determining how to generate philanthropy and other resources to fuel the resource engine of the future.



P.O. Box 510257 ▲ Milwaukee WI 53203 ▲ 414-962-6696 ▲ www.garyhubbellconsulting.com