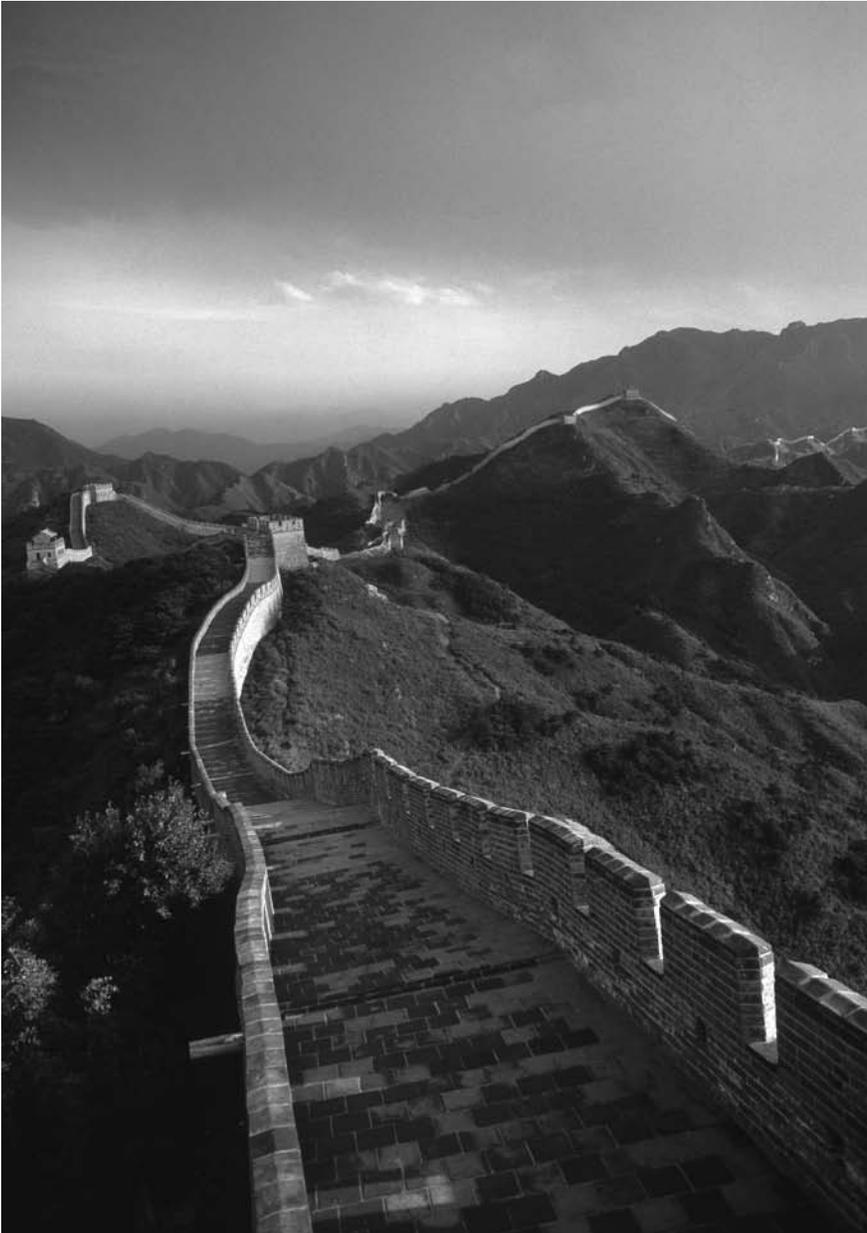


Reflections

The SoL Journal
on Knowledge, Learning, and Change



FEATURE ARTICLES

From Brainwashing to Organizational Therapy

Edgar Schein

Sri Lanka: Story of Hope

Karen Ayas

Stories from an African Learning Village

Marianne Knuth

EMERGING KNOWLEDGE

Organizational Learning in China

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Hindustan Petroleum's Structural Analysis of Current Reality

Ashis Sen

IN THIS FINAL ISSUE OF VOLUME 6 OF *REFLECTIONS*, we consider the consequences of culture for learning in practice, and benefit from a diverse set of illustrations in three feature articles and two contributions to our Emerging Knowledge Forum. Because we recognize that you are more than “readers,” and that learning is supported by a variety of resources, we are also introducing audio downloads as part of this issue. We look forward to your feedback about this new feature.

At SoL's Research Greenhouse in 2004, Ed Schein, professor emeritus at MIT's Sloan School of Management, a founding father of the field of organizational development, and one of SoL's first trustees shared his own cross-cultural journey, and how it has shaped his own practice. His story is told as a drama in five acts: “From Brainwashing to Organizational Therapy: A Conceptual and Empirical Journey in Search of Systemic Health and a General Model of Change Dynamics.” We are delighted to share an article based on his talk, as well as the original talk itself as an audio download.

In various public statements, the leadership of China has stated its aspiration to be a learning country. Darl G. Kolb and Tianjian Jiang share their observations and research in “Organizational Learning in China: Inroads and Implications for the Awakening Dragon.” SoL China Project Coordinator C. Will Zhang poses the possibility that organizational learning may be both the first and last imported “antidote” that will help China reconnect with its rich history of harmony between action and reflection. In further comments, Zhaoliang Qui (with Stephen Meng and Glenn Lauder) shares his experience of learning organization work in China, and a framework for encouraging a learning culture.

The language of systems thinking has often served a means to span organizational and cultural boundaries. “Hindustan Petroleum's Structural Analysis of Current Reality,” by Ashis Sen, one of the company's team of internal coaches, documents how a locally dispersed regional sales team used this analysis to build a shared understanding of how they could effectively achieve the results they care about most.

Service projects in Sri Lanka following the tsunami provide the context for learning for managers from Unilever's Asian food business. “Sri Lanka: A Story of Hope” by Karen Ayas continues to document the leadership development approach of cultural immersion originally reported in the book *To the Desert and Back*, and in prior issues of *Reflections*.

Kufunda Village in Zimbabwe is the setting for “Stories from an African Learning Village” as told by village co-founder Marianne Knuth. One of the local community members supported by the village reports this benefit: “I was helped to see myself as a person first. Not as a poor person.” This shift in mindset from poverty and helplessness to dignity and possibility is the heart of the Kufunda culture. Those who question the practicality of appreciative inquiry should find its use in this setting illuminating.

Finally, we appreciate our ability to promote dialogue on topics raised in prior issues. Dennis Sandow offers a connection between his own work (reported on earlier this year in *Reflections*) and Alain de Vulpian's recent article. Readers (and listeners), please continue to write!

We expect to send the first issue of Volume 7 – and, if your subscription includes it, the printed compilation of Volume 6 – in February. Happy New Year!



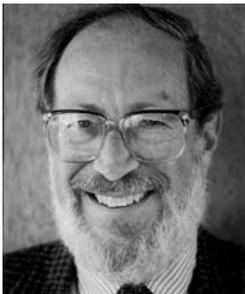
C. Sherry Immediato
Managing Director, SoL

From Brainwashing to Organizational Therapy:

A Conceptual and Empirical Journey in Search of “Systemic” Health and a General Model of Change Dynamics

A DRAMA IN FIVE ACTS

By Edgar H. Schein



Edgar H. Schein

Introduction

Neither individual health nor organizational/systemic health can be understood without the ability to take three different perspectives: 1) An individual perspective based on psychology; 2) a systemic perspective based on anthropology, sociology, political science and systems theory; and 3) An interactive process perspective based on social psychology, sociology and other theories of dynamic processes.

Individual perspectives are needed to understand the idiosyncrasies of the component parts of any system; systemic perspectives are needed to define what “health” or effective performance means at a systemic level and how culture forms and evolves; and interactive perspectives are needed to understand the dynamic interactions that occur between different components and levels of any system.

The never-ending dilemma of the individual vs. the group, organization or society, whether leaders create organizations and cultures or whether culture and social forces create leaders, how organizations influence their members and, at the same time, how members change the organization cannot be understood without seeing the interplay between the system and the individual.

I have been fortunate in my 50 plus years of involvement both with individuals and with organizations to be able to observe and experience social phenomena from these various levels and perspectives. In this drama I hope to share some of the main lessons learned from these experiences.

This article was developed from a talk given at Sol’s Research Greenhouse in 2004, and will appear in Cummings, R. (Ed.) *Handbook of Organizational Development* (Jossey-Bass, 2006). Audio downloads of the speech can be found at <https://www.solonline.org/reflections/>.



Prologue

As I look back on my life, I see more clearly than I used to how early influences shaped my concepts and skills (1993b). I was born in 1928 in Zurich, Switzerland where my father was finishing his Ph.D. in Physics. He was a Hungarian who had grown up in Czechoslovakia and was, therefore, a Czech citizen. In Zurich, he met my mother who was a German from a small resort town on the Elbe near Dresden. In 1934 the Swiss made it difficult for my father to retain his Assistant Professorship so he emigrated to Odessa where the Russians offered him a big job in order to build their science establishment.

We moved to Odessa where we lived in a large apartment complex. I did not go to a Russian school but did learn the language from friends my age in the playground. Our life in Russia included many trips to the Caucasus and Moscow and was generally very pleasant, but by 1936 Stalin's purges were beginning to affect foreigners so my father decided to move. We ended up in Prague where I went to a very strict German school for one year. My father had established a link with the University of Chicago and planned to go there as soon as possible since Hitler was beginning to be a threatening force in Europe. My mother and I moved to Zurich for half a year to get out of Czechoslovakia and emigrated to Chicago in 1938. My father had secured a professorship at Chicago where he spent the rest of his career.

These events are relevant in that I had, by age 10, to learn Russian, Czech, and then English, and had made four cultural transitions. I particularly remember the difficulty of deciphering American playground norms in the Chicago public grammar school. Later concerns with being careful when encountering new cultures, with not making too many premature assumptions, and with shaping diagnostic skills in the here-and-now situation all derived from these early experiences. I also learned how to adapt quickly to new situations, a skill,

which I now realize, was essential to doing effective consulting with organizations. This adaptive capacity shaped my career in many ways, as will be seen.

A Hutchins-style General Education. Public high school at Hyde Park High led directly to entering the University of Chicago that was operating by the general education system that granted a bachelor's degree after two years. I did not really know what I wanted (I tried physics and failed badly at it), so I stayed an additional year without a major. During that year I learned in the General Biology Course about Carl Rogers and his theory of therapy based on reflecting back to patients their own constructions rather than giving expert interpretations. My fellow students and I thought this was really funny and would go around campus "mirroring each other." Psychology did intrigue me, however, so I sought out a place to major in it.

Stanford Bachelors and Masters. Stanford with its four-quarter system proved to be the ideal place to concentrate into one academic year an entire major, and, in that process, to discover that what I really liked was social psychology and the experiments on social influence, which were being done by Sherif, Asch and others. I decided to stay another year and get a Masters Degree which involved doing an experiment under the guidance of Harry Helson. His theory of Adaptation Level was being applied to social situations so I did an experiment to see how weight judgments were influenced by hearing others make those judgments in a rigged experimental situation.

Harvard Social Relations. By the spring of 1949 I had taken every relevant psychology course that Stanford had to offer, so the decision to get a Ph.D. also required relocation. I wanted a Social Psychology program so the choice was Michigan or Harvard's Department of Social Relations that combined Psychology, Sociology and Anthropology into a single program. Within that framework one could major in Clinical or Social Psychology. The major attraction that drew me to Harvard was the active presence of Gordon Allport, Henry Murray, Jerry Bruner, Talcott Parsons, Sam Stouffer, Clyde and Florence Kluckhohn, David McClelland, and a host of younger faculty and graduate students in all of the fields.

In 1950 the military draft was still operating so I chose to enter the Army Clinical Psychology Program that provided financial support at the level of Second Lieutenant in exchange for a three-year stint in the regular army Medical Service Corps as a psychologist after obtaining the Ph.D. Harvard required a one-year internship as part of the Ph.D. program, and the Army provided the opportunity for spending a year at Walter Reed Hospital as a Clinical Psychologist doing primarily diagnostic work for the resident psychiatrists.

For my dissertation experiment I chose to work with Richard Solomon and Gordon Allport to determine whether human subjects would learn to imitate someone else whose judgments seemed more accurate than their own, and whether they would continue to imitate on other tasks that varied in similarity to the original one. I was able to use Army inductees for my experiment. The experiment was a success so I was able to finish my dissertation by the end of 1952 (Schein, 1954).

Chorus

The decision to go to Harvard was fateful in providing the exposure, mostly through fellow graduate students and some courses, to an interdisciplinary way of thinking. While experimentation was clearly the way to do psychology, learning about diagnostics from testing with Rorschach and TAT tests, learning that anthropology was done in the field by living with members of other tribes and observing them closely, and learning that large scale surveys

could reveal social patterns not visible without statistics broadened the whole base of what constitutes scientific inquiry.

It was apparent that “science” comes in several forms and it was essential to learn that there was no one method superior to all of the others. In fact, later in my career I learned that science was a culture in its own right, and that there were many sacred cows in each field, and even within sub-fields. Gordon Allport was a special influence on me in his insistence on good historical understanding of one’s own field and good writing. He was a merciless critic of the writing in the dissertation.

Adaptive ability had to be learned repeatedly. The choice to join the Army to insure the continued use of psychology, the use of the military connection to get subjects for the dissertation experiment, the clinical internship at Walter Reed were all opportunities to create a broad base for later work.

Though I did not realize it at the time, the exposure to other disciplines and to the real world of Walter Reed Hospital was critical in forming my later thinking about organizations. As long as I was focused on narrow experiments on imitation, there was no need to worry about how sociology and anthropology influenced these phenomena, but as I was to discover later, once one tries to conceptualize human systems on a broader scale, it cannot be done without an interdisciplinary point of view (as we will see).

The implications for graduate training are tremendous. Should all graduate students be required to do a year of “real work” in organizations as part of their graduate training?

Act I. Brainwashing or Coercive Persuasion—The Power of the System (Culture, Indoctrination, Socialization)

Scene 1: The Military and the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research

The decision to join the Army was validated by their assigning me to the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research where I joined an exciting interdisciplinary group under the leadership of the brilliant Sullivanian psychiatrist David Rioch. If Gordon Allport was my first important mentor, David Rioch was clearly the second one. He encouraged me to develop my own research program focusing on influence and leadership. I was well on the way to designing some new experiments in this domain when fate intervened.

Scene 2: Korea and the Study of Repatriates

One morning in 1953 a telegram arrived from Army HQ’s ordering me to appear at Travis Air Force Base in 72 hours, no further explanation offered. However, several of my colleagues at Walter Reed who were also in the Army received the same telegram so we knew something big was up. When we were all gathered we were told that we would fly to Japan for further briefing, then on to Inchon, Korea where we would meet with a group of repatriates being exchanged for U.S. held prisoners as part of “Big Switch” and the armistice that had been signed with the North Koreans and Chinese. A previous exchange of sick and wounded prisoners some months earlier had revealed that some U.S. prisoners had “collaborated with the enemy” and had been indoctrinated to an unknown degree. Repatriates were therefore to be put on ships for the 16-day voyage to San Francisco. A psychiatric team would join each ship to assess the mental state of the repatriates and provide whatever therapy they might need before being returned home.

When I got to Inchon I was told that my ship would be delayed for three weeks and that I should just wait in the repatriation center where truckloads of repatriates were coming in every day. Since I was very interested in social influence I decided to pull repatriates randomly off the line and interview them about their prison camp experiences. I asked each repatriate just to tell me his story from the moment of his capture. These stories fell into clear patterns that resulted in my being able to define in general terms what the Chinese indoctrination program consisted of, why it worked on a few people, and why most of the captives did not succumb to any collaborative behavior (Schein, et al, 1961).

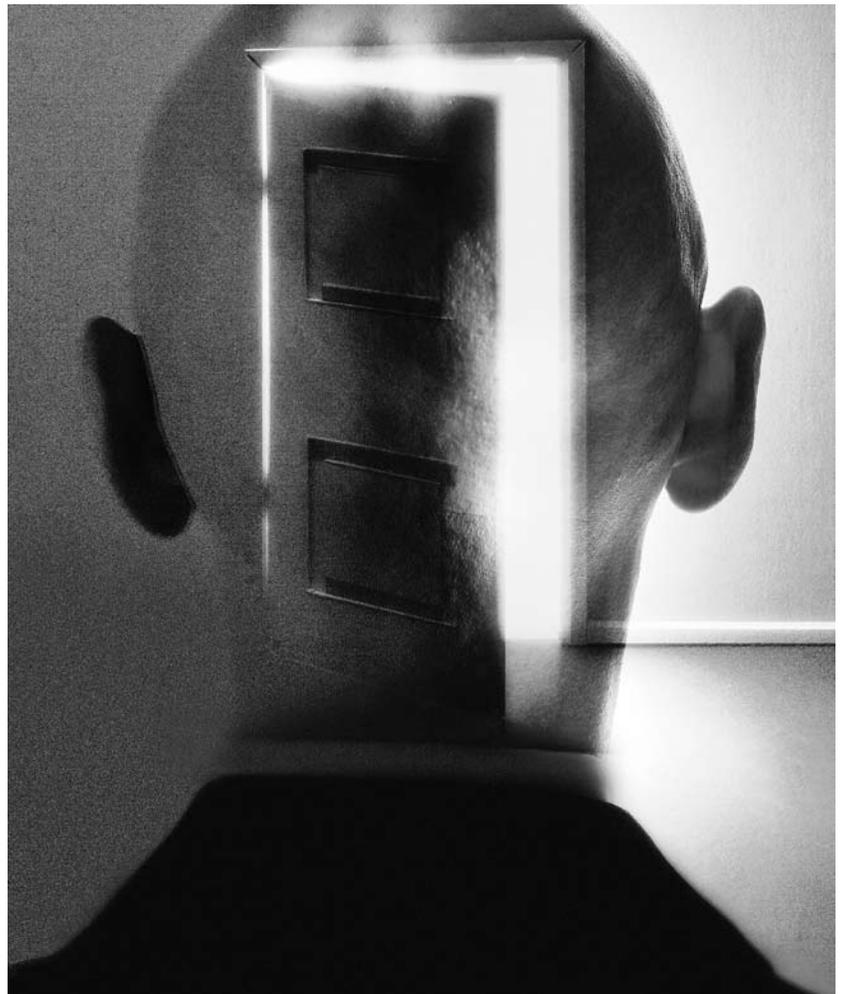
But “brainwashing” based on Edward Hunter’s 1951 book that freely translated the Chinese concept of “cleansing the mind of middle class values” took hold as a concept, in part because some of the western civilian businessmen, students and priests captured on the mainland did come out of prison admitting that they were criminals and spies (which was not true), that they were treated leniently in being allowed out of prison after just a few years, and that the U.S. and the West clearly did not understand the validity of the Communist point of view.

Further study of what happened under Chinese captivity became a central concern of interest and displaced forever my commitment to experimentation as the central way of gathering data. I began a several year study that led to the 1961 book entitled “Coercive Persuasion.” I realized that the indoctrination methods used were quite similar whether one was talking about religious training, or any other form of indoctrination. The message might be different but the process was essentially the same.

Chorus

While at Walter Reed the exposure to interdisciplinary work was again critical. The group had an endocrinologist, several Skinnerian behaviorists, an ecologists studying crowding in rat colonies, a statistician, and a number of psychiatrists and clinical psychologists. Most important, however, was that David Rioch had hired several consultants who came on a quarterly basis to share their views with the group. One of these was Erving Goffman whose influence was deep and lasting. Rarely has one person’s writing so completely taken hold as “truth.” To this day, people do not take Goffman’s work seriously enough.

Many important lessons derived from this early work:



- Group/Organizational forces are stronger than individual forces, but under coercive conditions some individuals are more active than others with mixed results. In other words, collaborators and intense resisters were similar in many personality aspects, particularly the temperamental bias toward action.

- Change must be distinguished from “new learning” in that it implies some unlearning which is intrinsically difficult and usually painful.

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- Change begins with “disconfirmation,” some upsetting of the “quasi-stationary equilibrium.”

- Motivation to change does not arise until the change target feels secure enough to accept the disconfirming data because the new things to be learned begin to be feasible. The change target feels “psychologically safe” if he or she can accept a new attitude or value without complete loss of self.

- Once the individual feels psychologically safe, he or she can accept new information either through identification with others or scanning the environment for new solutions.

- Change then occurs by “cognitive redefinition” through: 1) Semantic change in old concepts, i.e. the Chinese communist definition of crime and spying was “any behavior that could be harmful to the state” hence innocent postcards could be viewed as spying by passing on potentially harmful information to a potential or actual enemy. 2) Change in “adaptation level” or judgment standards as to how a given behavior or perceived object is to be judged, i.e. seemingly trivial types of information by U.S. standards were viewed as important intelligence information by the communists. 3) Introduction of new concepts and meanings, i.e. the abstraction of the “communist state” which could be harmed in the future and, therefore, justified seemingly excessive protection.

- The more ambiguous the situation, the more the individual will rely on the perceptions and judgments of others, i.e. the prisoner finally learned these new meanings and standards from fellow prisoners more advanced in their “thought reform.”

- New concepts and standards will not survive unless they are socially and personally reinforced, confirmed, i.e. once the repatriate returned to the U.S. they relearned our own definitions and standards, except in one case of a husband and wife who were imprisoned together and continued to maintain their newly learned views after returning to the U.S.

These cognitive and social dynamics proved to be a good model for organizational change projects I became involved with later. Often it is what we learn early in life that is the most valid and profound (Schein, et al, 1961).

Act II. Career Anchors – The Power of the Individual (Leadership, Entrepreneurship, Personal Integrity)

Scene 1: The Decision to join a Management School

After five years at Walter Reed I decided to pursue my academic career which boiled down to a decision between an assistant professorship in the Cornell Psychology Department or in the MIT School of Industrial Management. Though I was unsure about going to a professional school, the invitation from Douglas McGregor and my previous exposure to MIT via a seminar taught by Alex Bavelas biased me toward MIT and a career that involved more

applied than experimental work. I joined the Sloan School in 1956 and spent the rest of my career there.

After finishing the work on coercive persuasion I decided to study how corporations indoctrinate their employees and launched a panel study involving detailed career analysis of MIT Masters alumni. The evidence for indoctrination was mixed, but a 13-year follow up of the panel revealed a brand new concept –“Career Anchors.” As people matured they formed a self-image around their motivations, competences and values that served to guide and constrain career decisions. The concept and the interview methodology used to determine career anchors has proven to be an important contribution to career theory and an important tool in career counseling and coaching (Schein, 1971, 1975, 1978, 1985).



Chorus

- The degree to which change can be imposed depends on the degree to which the change target can “leave the field;” if the target can be coerced into staying in the field, change will inevitably occur, in part through “self-socialization” or “acculturation.”
 - If the change target seeks the change, he or she will voluntarily enter the relevant field and become “self-socialized.”
 - If the individual does not wish to change, he or she will seek “fields” in which there is no change pressure.
 - In the end, the degree to which the individual is subject to outside influences is then a function of his or her freedom to move, which, in the case of career influences depends very much on the state of the labor market.

In the study of coercive persuasion I learned how powerful the group can be. But in an open society, I later learned that individuals are equally powerful, if they can choose their own settings.

Act III. Process Consultation (Interaction of the Change Agent and the Change Target – Client)

Scene 1: Exposure to and involvement with the National Training Labs and “T-groups”

In the summer of 1957 I attended my first leadership and group dynamics workshop in Bethel, Maine where I was exposed to the whole concept of studying groups by analyzing our own group process. I found this to be a crucial experience in differentiating what I knew from

my academic training from what I learned through direct experience. I also found that traditional teaching and learning was a very weak experience compared to the immediate here-and-now feedback that occurred when groups analyzed their own process and members gave each other face-to-face feedback. Experiential learning became central to my own sense of how one learns in the human interaction domain (Schein & Bennis, 1965; Schein, 1993a).

Scene 2: Learning to consult in organizational contexts and the evolution of Process Consultation

The role of the “trainer” in the T-groups opened another area of insight—the role of the process observer and intervener. I learned within the group and in subsequent consulting encounters that the most effective intervention was not expert advice but 1) facilitating the client’s own understanding of his or her own problem and 2) teaming up with the client to jointly develop a solution. This brought me back full circle to Carl Rogers and his theory of how to conduct therapy. I learned that most consultants attempted to recommend expert solutions and most of those solutions were not implemented because they ignored critical factors in the clients situation. I had learned in the T-group that one does not really understand a situation until the participants have explored it themselves, and that the solution to problems have to come from the participants if they are to be implemented. Based on these experiences, especially the frustration of seeing how being an expert did not lead to any meaningful change in human systems, I developed a different model and called it “process consultation” (Schein, 1969, 1987, 1999).

The solution to problems have to come from the participants of they are to be implemented.

Chorus

- Working with groups and organizations revealed the need to take problem centered view in that most of the group activities were geared to improving the present situation in some way or another. The connection to “therapy” became obvious, but in group and organizational contexts it was group and family therapy that provided the most help not individual therapy. The models used by family therapists were the most useful because they were dealing with entire family systems not just individual patients. Such systemic thinking also revealed that the change target in a complex system is not necessarily the person that the therapist would work with. Redefining member roles and working with parts of the system that were more ready to change prove to be powerful change levers.

- The conceptual link between consulting to organizations and therapy led to explorations of family therapy and systemic therapy concepts (Bateson, 1972; Watzlawick, et al, 1974). The publication in 1965 of “Organizational Psychology” was one of the first efforts to define the systemic nature of organizations as contrasted with the mechanical models of “Industrial Psychology” that were extant at that time (Schein, 1965, 1970, 1980).

- The emphasis on “process” was missing in most organization theories, yet process reveals structure and is the dynamic that drives the system, hence better analyses of process such as those we were doing in the T-groups became an essential characteristic of how to study and work with organizations.

There is a kind of irony in the fact that I was working all of this time in many countries and was exposed to both national and organizational cultures, but was so focused on “process” that I never looked carefully at the content of what was being transmitted, i.e. culture.

Act IV. Culture—Dynamics of Complex Social Systems

Scene 1: Long range consulting with Ciba-Geigy and Digital Equipment Corporation.

I was, of course, familiar with the concept of culture from my graduate student days, but it was the contrast between the two companies that were for many years my client that really brought home to me how much difference culture makes to how an organization works. Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC) was entrepreneurial, academic, electrical engineering driven and was developing the entirely new technology of interactive computing. It was based in New England and reflected very much the U.S. culture. Ciba-Geigy (CG) was an old chemical company in Basel, run by the “Basel Mafia” of lawyers, chemists, and chemical engineers, reflecting age, chemistry, and Swiss-German culture.

The culture model of “Artifacts,” “Espoused Values,” and “Tacit Taken-for-Granted Assumptions” grew out of the dramatic contrasts that these companies provided at every level. I learned that people used the concept of culture at every level, so it was critical to identify what one should think of as the essence of culture – the shared tacit assumptions.

I began writing about culture in the early 1980’s partly because of my own observations and partly because the impact of the “Japanese style of management” was being felt everywhere. The notion that there are different ways to manage which create different organizational cultures became very evident (Schein, 1981, 1985, 1990, 1992, 1999, 2004).

Scene 2: The Evolution of the Clinical Perspective

When I decided to write about organizational culture, I found that my research data were primarily the observations I had made during my actual consulting visits. I found, once again, that the most relevant data come not from surveys or experiments, but from direct observation and direct personal experience. I evolved further what I came to call the “clinical perspective” in emphasizing data that surfaced not by passive observation as would be the case in ethnography, but by responding to requests for help in various ways and observing the reaction and impacts of different kinds of interventions (Schein, 1987, 1995, 2001b).

These experiences strongly confirmed the Kurt Lewin observation that “you do not really understand an organization (system) until you try to change it.” I also noticed that the longitudinal study of groups and organizations makes clear how all systems need stable self-images just as much as individuals do, and vary as much as individuals do in terms of their own learning histories. In organizations one could observe what the anthropologist could rarely observe – how cultures begin and evolve.

I became more aware of the cyclical nature of life. Individuals create organizations that develop cultures and organizations acculturate individuals; the balance between individual and organizational autonomy is a perpetual struggle forever modulated by dynamic “psychological contracts” between employer and employed. Leadership in starting an organization is a completely different process from leadership in a mature organization that is trying to change some elements of its culture. Leaders create cultures through imposing their personal values and assumptions on their colleagues and employees, but as the organization develops a shared view, i.e. “culture,” it imprints itself on its members who may then create yet other organizations on this same model (Higgins, 2005).

Scene 3: Organizational systems dynamics—the discovery of the power of subgroups and subcultures (the DEC story) to influence the destiny of social systems

Perhaps the biggest insight from years of consulting with DEC was the discovery that with success and growth, subsystems develop and these, in turn, develop cultures of their own. What is even more dramatic is the discovery that these sub-cultures may conflict with each other, making the managerial process inside organizations comparable to what it might be like to managing in the United Nations. When one sees the wars that develop between subsystems, one realizes why “hierarchy” as a control mechanism is so important in complex human systems (1996b, 2003).

Scene 4: Taking culture seriously and becoming culturally humble

As my written works circulated in Europe and Asia, I received more invitations to teach in various countries and learned how the same kind of material and teaching approach goes over very differently in China, Japan, Brazil, France, Mexico, Germany, Singapore, Denmark, the UK, Italy, and Chile. I also discovered that when doing process consultation in another culture it is essential to work with someone from that culture to avoid mistakes that might hurt the client (Schein, 1996a).

Chorus

- Once people make sense of their world collectively, creating norms and developing tacit assumptions, those norms and assumptions define reality, the individual’s identity and group membership. Individual change at this level can only be accomplished by group level interventions in that one cannot change shared assumptions or norms by changing one individual unless that person is the leader and imposes a new set coercively. And then things will change only if the behavior deriving from the new norms work better.
 - Assumptions that work, i.e. enable the group to survive in its environment and to integrate internally, become more stable and unchangeable.
 - The organization’s culture can be destroyed by destroying the organization as a cultural entity (by removing key people who are culture carriers), but the assumptions will live on in the individuals as parts of their identity.
 - With growth and success organizations evolve sub-groups which evolve sub-cultures; if those sub-cultures are not aligned, if they begin to conflict with each other, such conflicts are the greatest source of systems pathology.

Act V. Interaction, Change, and Therapy

Scene 1: The realization that health can only be defined as an interactive coping process in a social and cultural field.

The more I examined process consultation and observed my own behavior as a consultant, the more I realized that what consultants do is very akin to therapy, but this formulation is not acceptable to most managerial clients. Organizational pathologies of all sorts are very evident whenever one gets into client situations, and the clinical perspective is always the most useful and relevant, but in working with organizational cultures one must learn to use the metaphors and linguistic categories that make sense to them and enable them to save face

and avoid defensiveness. I realized that the best kind of “therapy” draws on personal and cultural strengths even though the process is triggered by pathology, weakness or problems. The consultant/therapist must learn to draw out the strengths in the culture and show how they can be used to solve the problems facing the organization.

Scene 2: Ambivalence about Organization Development (OD) and Organizational Learning (OL)

In my last 15 years or so at MIT a proliferation of “techniques” purporting to improve organizations sprang up under various labels and under the broad umbrella of organizational development (OD) and organizational learning (OL). My discomfort with both of these fields and communities of practice grew out of the recognition that they were highly normative without an underlying model or theory of health and pathology. The clinical perspective is normative, but the norms one strives for are based on an underlying model or theory that fits a wider reality.

In much of OD and OL practitioners sought to make organizations more humane and/or more efficient and/or more socially responsible without examining how those organizations themselves fit into a larger social system and what was possible to do, given their functions in the system. The process consultation model argued for locating the client’s reality before imposing the consultant’s norms.

I found myself quite involved in the teaching of process consultation as an important set of principles underlying OD, and I worked for many years with Peter Senge and the Society for Organizational Learning, helping to found and edit their journal *Reflections*. This was an effort to improve communications between scholars, consultants, and organizational clients but was only a partial success because the professional and occupational sub-cultures of these groups were too strong and too self-referential. My focus in these last years of full time work continued to be on the use of the clinical perspective to understand better the dynamics of social systems without getting prematurely into prescriptions of how they ought to function or what values they should hold.

Chorus

- With age there comes a sense of history and a sense of how very little is really new in life, and a sense of perspective about the complexity of the world out there
 - With the growth of technology and globalization have come many more organizational dilemmas that highlight the degree to which we do not yet really understand organizational and managerial dynamics well enough to be prescriptive about them.

Epilogue

Concepts that we publish lead us into new areas, sometimes in surprising ways. My work on culture has been picked by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna leading to a request to give a talk on “Safety Culture” in 2002. That, in turn has led the Institute for Nuclear Power Operations (INPO) to invite me to join their Advisory Board, again to work on safety culture. As one of my friends pointed out, isn’t it strange that I grew up in the shadow of the creation of atomic energy when I was in Chicago at the University, rejected physics as a field, but have ended up applying what I did learn to one of the outcomes of that very field. I have also been asked to consult on cultural matters with New York’s Con Edison

company to help them become more effective in the environmental, health and safety areas. Most recently this has led to being recruited to work on “safety” in the health care industry

I am left at this point (age 77) with more of a sense of realism about self, individuals, groups, organizations, societies, and health itself. The unfinished business is to figure out how teaching, consulting, therapy and other modes of influence draw on the same basic change model, but do so differently and with different goals and results. Naturalists, magicians, priests, shamans and mystics all can teach and influence behavior, but they do so in such different ways as to make us realize how contextual our knowledge must be if we are to be useful.

**Deep down I think
organization studies
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development.**

I find that the most stimulating way to proceed is to stay open and humble, get in touch with my own biases and filters so that I can see and hear what is really out there. Deep down I think organization studies is still in a pre-Darwinian state of development. We do not yet know what the key categories of variables are around which to build our field, but the search for them is great fun.

As I look back I also realize that I have been as much a practitioner as a scholar, or, rather, I found the most productive research to be an active practice of trying to help organizations. In reflecting on practice, I realize how much of it is artistry (1993b, 2001a). I have often found myself saying to practitioners in workshops that they need three things:

- 1) They need to learn to think like an *anthropologist*, accepting culture for what it is, suspending judgment until they see it from the “native point of view” and using the strengths of the culture to change those elements that have become dysfunctional;
- 2) They need to develop the skills of a *family therapist*, accepting the fact that human systems are complex and difficult to change; and
- 3) They need to trust their own *artistic impulse* in deciding what kind of intervention to make in a human system. There will always be more data than they can absorb, there will always be surprises, and there will never be enough predictability to determine a “correct” course of action. Just as the artist interacts with his or her blank canvas, so the practitioner must interact with his or her client system and rely on artistic instinct to decide how to proceed.

The artistic impulse provides several final perspectives. Much of what we learn from experience remains tacit and can only be expressed artistically. It is no accident that when a colleague has said or done something that really strikes us, we say “that was *beautiful*.” We underestimate the power of aesthetics to communicate the essential. Second, Don Schon reminded us years ago in his brilliant book *The Reflective Practitioner* that we cannot learn if we do not reflect. I have found that the best way to reflect is to face the empty canvas and think about what to put on it. Finally, artistic license gives us a chance to take some intellectual chances. Maybe what we produce is not right, but maybe it is, and maybe it will stimulate someone else more in the context of artistic expression than in the context of formal scholarship. In any case, it was great fun to write this little play.

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