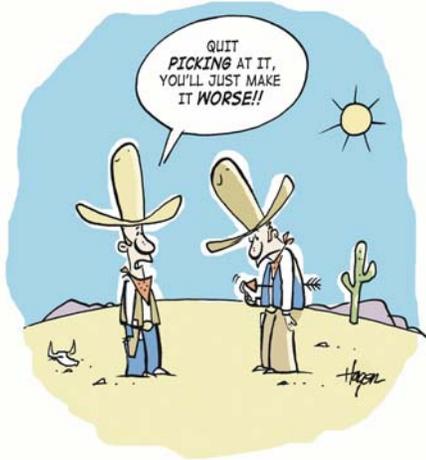




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### Leadership Through Learning Part 3N: It'll Be Different Next Time

by Christine Oliver, Marilyn Herasymowych and Henry Senko

“We have entered a stream of continuous change, unparalleled for its complexity. Never having lived with this amount of unpredictability and uncertainty before, we are confused and disoriented by it. ... Living in an environment of great turbulence, we typically act by speeding up, rushing about, trying to keep up with all the changes. When we operate in a state of constant stress and anxiety, our view of life becomes distorted and we develop tunnel vision”.

— James Ballard, **What's the Rush? Step Out of the Race, Free Your Mind, Change Your Life** (1999)

In the last newsletter, we examined your relationship with time using systems thinking. In this newsletter,

relationship with time is to consider what happens at each step of the strange loop pattern, using a technique called a *narrative*, which is shown below (see **InfoMine**, Vol. 12, No. 3).

#### 1. Feeling (Reflexes)

**Pressure increased / feel out of control / increased anxiety:** The reason that many people feel pressure about having no time is because they are experiencing real time complexity. They feel:

- They have to be all things to all people.
- The demands outweigh the amount of time available.
- They have to meet false expectations that appear real.

- They are moving in fast-forward and that they never have time to take a breath.

Pressures people experience include:

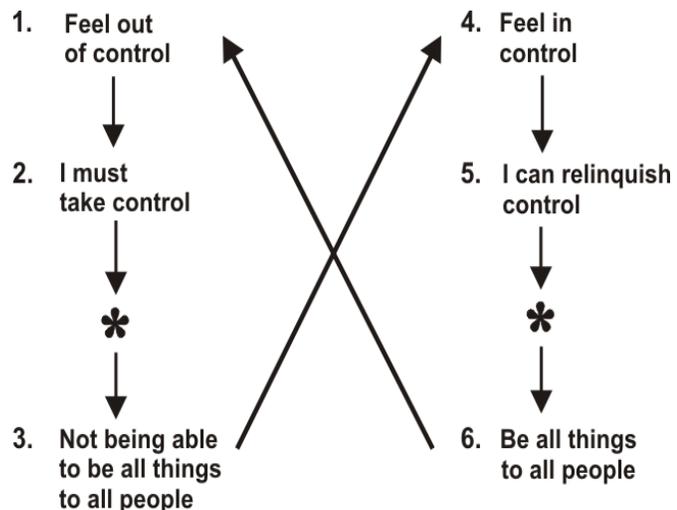
- A need for perfection
- Not enough time and too much work
- Not being in control of your work
- Unreasonable expectations
- Others not appreciating time constraints
- Being overscheduled
- Shifting priorities
- Too many interesting and important things to do
- Illusion that more time will solve the problem
- Dealing with emergencies

#### Relationship with Time Loop Pattern

**Cultural Story:** Get the work done at all costs.

**Relational Story:** If you don't know how to manage your time, it's your fault.

**Identity Story:** I must do it all, whatever the cost.



2. **Meaning (Reflection)**

**Narrow / pessimistic mindset:**

Most people like the work that they are doing, but find the increasing pressures oppressive. Unhappiness and dissatisfaction at work are much more related to a growing frustration that expectations are not being met. Some of these expectations about time are:

- People should be in more control of their time and work.
- Time should be limitless.
- Time should be on my side and not working against me.
- Plans should be able to be carried out and completed on time.
- Work should be managed with the available resources.

3. **Reaction (Mindless patterns of action)**

**Closed reaction:** As a result of unmet expectations, people unconsciously decide to react in repeated patterns of behaviour. They can react in a number of ways. Some withdraw, others become defensive. Some vent and complain, others react by using disrespectful language and/or raising their voices. Some talk about the good old days, others just accept their disappointment as part of the job.

**Ripple Effect**

Without realizing it, every person's closed reaction has the potential to increase pressure on others, thus creating accidental adversaries (see previous **InfoMine**).

4. **Feeling (Reflexes)**

**Pressure relieved / feel in control / reduced anxiety:** In many cases, people feel better after they have reacted, even

though this feeling can be temporary. In these moments of relief, people say that they feel life is back on track, and that they are more in control, more clear, more open, and happier. Some people also state that these feelings can quickly be followed by regret at their reactions.

5. **Meaning (Reflection)**

**Wider / optimistic mindset:**

Because people feel in more control, more open, and happier, they start to hope. Some of the hopes about time include:

- I will have more time.
- It will all work out.
- I can do this even if it feels it might be impossible.
- Someone will notice and help me.
- I can be all things to all people.
- This time will be different.

6. **Reaction (Mindless patterns of action)**

**Open reaction:** As a result of having hopes that the future will be a better place, people often revert back to old patterns of behaviour. One of these old patterns is to say *yes* (see previous **InfoMine**) when asked to take on more work, or to change direction, or to shift priorities, or to work harder. Hopes drive people's good feelings, which only lasts until their hopes are dashed, and they start to feel more pressure. Hopes are the fuel that starts the strange loop pattern again. The other aspect that drives the strange loop pattern are the stories we tell ourselves, such as "I don't have a choice," and "I don't have time."

This relationship with time can also be diagrammed using the strange loop

pattern (shown on the previous page). Notice the stories we tell ourselves that keep the strange loop pattern in play.

In the next newsletter, we will share the strategies people have used to create a healthier pattern of behaviour.

"Working within the laboratory of our own experience, we develop our ability to see things in new ways, and in the process we come to know ourselves. ... As students of this discipline, ... we are taking each unhappiness-making instance as a personal challenge, an opportunity to go inside and examine our belief structures. By this process we gradually gain mastery over reality (defined as 'the way I am seeing things')".

— James Ballard, **What's the Rush? Step Out of the Race, Free Your Mind, Change Your Life** (1999)



**Complexity, Relationships, and Strange Loops: Reflexive Practice Guide**, see [www.mhainstitute.ca](http://www.mhainstitute.ca) for more information

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