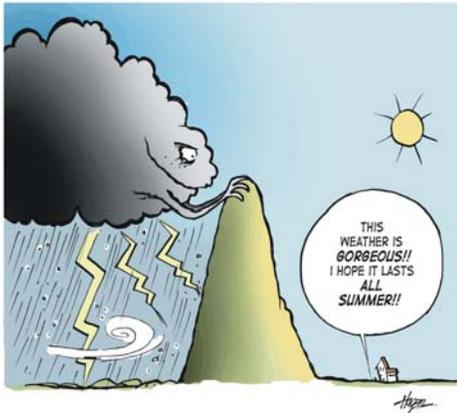




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Leadership Through Learning Part 30: What Can I Do?

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“People mistakenly think they must maintain control — as if life and success were all about overcoming and conquering. They speak of managing change. Given the amount of change people must deal with at the close of [the twentieth century], this makes about as much sense as *managing* the weather. ... We are not in control anyway; it is acting as if we are that exhausts us. There is a way to use this realization to empower ourselves”.

— 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 reflexive practice. In this newsletter, we will look at strategies to create a healthier pattern of behaviour. To do this, we will examine the strategies that both systems thinking and reflexive practice suggest.

Reflexive practice is the best place to look first, because it asks you to decide what you would like to do with your relationship with time (see **InfoMine**, Vol. 13, No. 3). Reflexive practice gives you six possible reflexive choices that you might select, in order to act in a critically conscious way within the patterns of behaviour you are living. These choices focus on creating new, and possibly novel, *patterns yet to be lived*. These choices do not define what the future will be; they simply provide a *direction* in which one can take action. Each reflexive choice is similar to, and distinctly different from, each of the others in certain ways. The six choices can be categorized as follows.

- Continue the Pattern
- Examine the Pattern
- Accept and Live with the Relationship
- Exit the Relationship
- Create a Charmed Loop Pattern
- Sustain a Charmed Loop Pattern

In your relationship with time, it is likely that you do not have a charmed loop pattern with time. This means that the *sustain a charmed loop pattern* choice is not available to you. It is also likely that you do not want to exit your situation, but rather want to find a way to work within it. So, the *exit the relationship* choice is not an option. However, you do have the other four reflexive choices available to you:

- **Continue the Pattern:** In this choice, you decide to take

responsibility for your part in contributing to the pattern you are living. In choosing not to change your expectations and hopes about your relationship with time, you must accept the fact that nothing may change. This choice takes away the need to focus on the fact that change is not occurring. For example, one of the ways to enact this choice is to stop complaining about the fact you have no time. This, in turn, may change the *stories told*, which, in turn, may change the *pattern yet to be lived* and the *stories yet to be told*.

- **Examine the Pattern:** In this choice, you decide to spend time examining the patterns of behaviour you are living in more depth before making a decision or taking action. This allows you to gain a deeper understanding of your relationship with time, by understanding your and others' roles in contributing to relationship dynamics.
- **Accept and Live with the Relationship:** In this choice, you decide to change your expectations of your relationship with time, and to alter the stories you are telling yourself about this relationship. This means making sense of unrealistic fears, hopes, and expectations, so that you can create a more realistic view of the situation. For example, you can stop having any expectations and hopes that anything will change. Although this may not change the situation itself, it can create a transformative change in

how you react to the situation, which is likely to create different ripple effects in your relationship with time.

- **Create a Charmed Loop**

Pattern: In this choice, you decide to create a pattern in which you want to experience your relationship with time as a learning dynamic. You are willing to experiment with openness, curiosity, and authenticity to discover what your relationship with time will teach you about yourself and others. James Ballard, author of **What's the Rush?**, describes a charmed loop pattern with time as letting go and going with the flow. Ballard realizes that people *work hard at trying* to let go. But letting go is not about working hard at trying to let go. "Human beings have trouble letting go sometimes, but [letting go] is the very opposite of effort. You just do it". For example, you can see your relationship with time as an opportunity for learning, rather than something to conquer. Another way to put this is to consider that what you are experiencing right now with time is exactly what you are supposed to experience. Now you are ready to discover what this relationship with time is teaching you about yourself and others.

Once you have selected your reflexive choice, you can now look at what systems thinking has to suggest (see **InfoMine**, Vol. 11, No. 4). In systems thinking, the key to changing a system is to select *leverage points* — places at which you can take small actions that need the least amount of effort to produce the largest amount of change in the system.

In the **Systems Thinking Guide**, each negative archetype has a list of leverage points that can be acted upon to create a change in your relationship with time. To begin, review the operational system map that shows the archetypes that describe your relationship with time (see **InfoMine**, Vol. 14, No. 1). Then select the negative archetype that is making the most *noise*. Noise in the system is an indicator of where you are focusing attention. It is likely that the archetypes that are making the most noise are *attractiveness principle*, *growth and underinvestment*, and *accidental adversaries*. A few of the leverage points for each of these three archetypes are listed below. Review these leverage points and select the ones that you feel able to take action on, and that require little effort:

Attractiveness Principle:

- Observe yourself. Look for events that trigger your behaviour to be all things to all people.
- Examine a demand or need, evaluating the consequences of your response.
- Make choices about what you will focus your attention on, and what you will let go.
- Manage others' expectations of you, paying attention to what is best for you *and* others.
- Wait to respond to a demand or need, so that you have some time to think about it.

Growth and Underinvestment:

- Identify the current limits to your success.
- Examine the system to determine alternatives for easing the pressure in the system.
- Plan to meet the current limits.
- Re-evaluate what you mean by *success*.
- Invest for success in the long term by building capacity for future demands.

Accidental Adversaries:

- Identify the accident that may have caused the problem in the relationship.
- Consider ways in which the accident can be resolved in a respectful manner.
- Communicate with those involved about what each party needs from the relationship.
- Create a shared vision and understanding of each party's needs from the relationship.

Once you have selected your leverage point, ask yourself what might be a first step to taking action on this leverage point. Make sure that this action is small, and one that you are able to do with little effort within the next month. Now, take action and see what happens!

"Throughout time, certain gifted individuals have managed to derive happiness and to experience well-being, right in the midst of adversity. These persons see the very conditions that overwhelm others as opportunities. They refuse to become disillusioned or cynical, or to allow their behavior to be determined by these conditions".

— 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 for more information

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