

mentoring human action



BUT FATHER, I DON'T WANT TO PLANT CORN
AND RAISE PUMPKINS, I WANT TO SELL
REAL ESTATE!

with you (see arrow #3 on the diagram).

- Your team has a relationship, with respect to managing time, with the organization (see arrow #4 on the diagram).
- Your organization has a relationship, with respect to managing time, with you (see arrow #5 on the diagram).
- Your organization has a relationship, with respect to managing time, with your team (see arrow #6 on the diagram).

Leadership Through Learning Part 4H: Managing Time in a Cultural Dynamic

by Marilyn Herasymowych and Henry Senko

“The psychological experience of living through constant whitewater is something like passing through scores of ... grief stages, superimposed upon each other. ... Constant change and constant loss characterize modern life, and we struggle with how to cope with it. ... People can and do get up each day and go to work, so eventually this state of unconscious mourning becomes business as usual. Even though everyone is going through it, they have no ways to get together and talk it over or find remedies for the pain.”

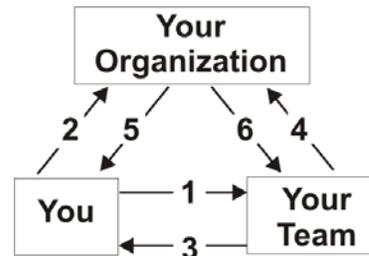
— James Ballard, **What's the Rush? Step Out of the Race, Free Your Mind, Change Your Life** (1999)

In previous newsletters (**InfoMine** Vol. 14, No. 1; Vol. 14, No. 2; and Vol. 14, No. 3), we analyzed the relationship people have with time

using systems thinking and reflexive practice. In this newsletter, we examine the relationship people have with time using strategic practice. Recall that strategic practice analyzes the power dynamics that are resident within a cultural system, and how these power dynamics unconsciously affect the stories we tell ourselves and the patterns we live within that system.

Below is a diagram that illustrates one possible generic representation of the relationships between the different parties in an organizational setting when it comes to time management:

- You have a relationship, with respect to managing time, with your team (see arrow #1 on the diagram).
- You have a relationship, with respect to managing time, with your organization (see arrow #2 on the diagram).
- Your team has a relationship, with respect to managing time,



In order to do a cultural system analysis, we need to make some assumptions about the organization and your team. These assumptions may or may not fit with your actual situation, but this example may help you to view your situation in a different light. The assumptions are as follows:

- Let's say that **your organization** is focused on the efficient use of time. This means that everything is measured in terms of how much time something takes. The organization tells its employees to “do everything they are asked to do, get the work done in as little time as possible, and make sure they do it right, at whatever cost to themselves.” This organization

operates from the assumption that employees may not be committed to the organization or its goals, so they must be told what to do and monitored to make sure they do what they are being told to do. This fits a Level 1 or con~forming cultural stance.

- Let's say that **your team** operates from the perspective that everyone is responsible for managing his or her time. Your team might assume that "you can manage your own time, and, if you don't know how to manage your time, it's your fault." This team operates from the assumption that team members are empowered to achieve organizational goals, are adaptive, and are independent. This fits a Level 2 or com~peting cultural stance.



When it comes to your reaction in this cultural system, this depends on your own personal cultural stance, and how the power dynamic might affect you. Some possible reactions are described below.

If you operate from a Level 1 or con~forming cultural stance, you would *conform* to whatever power dynamic you encountered. For example:

- Your reaction to the organizational message of "do everything you are asked to do, get the work done in as little time

as possible, and make sure you do it right, at whatever cost to yourself" might be to say "yes" to everything you are being asked to do.

- Your reaction to the team message of "you can manage your own time and if you don't know how to manage your time, it's your fault" is to keep your head down and do the best you can. It's likely that you will do a heroic effort in order to get it all done, and pay the ultimate price of becoming overly stressed.

If you operate from a Level 2 or com~peting cultural stance, you would *compete* within the power dynamic you encounter. For example:

- Your reaction to the organizational message of "do everything you are asked to do, get the work done in as little time as possible, and make sure you do it right, at whatever cost to yourself" might be to question or challenge what you are being asked to do, to determine if you are the right person to do it, and what the timeline might be for getting it done.

- Your reaction to the team message of "you can manage your own time and if you don't know how to manage your time, it's your fault" is to show people that you can manage your own time and exert a heroic effort to prove that you are right.

If you operate from a Level 3 or co~operating cultural stance, you would *collaborate* within the power dynamic you encounter. For example:

- Your reaction to the organizational message of "do everything you are asked to do, get the work

done in as little time as possible, and make sure you do it right, at whatever cost to yourself" might be to expect to discuss how this might be done in a collaborative way that is based on everyone agreeing and helping each other out.

- Your reaction to the team message of "you can manage your own time and if you don't know how to manage your time, it's your fault" is to bring up the issue of too much work by asking the team to meet to discuss this collective issue in a collaborative way.

"Behind the stream of chaos we call 'constant whitewater' there lies a wonderful secret: If we are not unnerved by the constant flow of changes, we can be energized by it. We cannot only be changed, but renewed and empowered by it. By ceasing to fight the current and by concentrating on balancing initiative with wise surrendering, we enter a wondrous realm wherein we can view the shifting world from an entirely new perspective. We are fully as active in it as before, but our actions all mean more. What we do *counts*."

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



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