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CHAPTER ONE

FIVE TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERS DISCUSS WHAT THEY'VE LEARNED

Sam Kaner

You're about to read an edited transcript of two conversations over dinner among five chief executives and a moderator. The topic was "What have we learned about creating collaborative cultures in our organizations?"

The executives are three CEOs and two executive directors. All five have led their organizations through deep, systemic transformations. They have each "earned their spurs" as leaders of change, and they each richly deserve to be seen as leaders in the broad-based progressive movement to foster healthy human systems at work and in larger constituent communities. This is not to say that they have positioned themselves as public speakers or professional experts on collaboration; far from it. In fact, all five have focused their professional efforts on advancing the missions of their organizations. These are CEOs, not management gurus. Nonetheless, in their efforts to overcome the challenges presented by hierarchical authority, tradition, dependence on expertise, and the other sources of inertia that make genuine collaboration difficult, they have gained much wisdom.

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Since every human organization is unique, perhaps it is self-evidently true that the specific day-by-day activity of creating a culture of collaboration will also have many unique components. This raises a basic question: are there any commonalities, any challenges or insights that might resonate or apply across different sectors and different types of organization? The organizations discussed in this chapter represent a broad range of enterprise cultures: business, government, human services, academia, and politics. Yet even though their organizations' missions and strategies were uniquely different from one another, the five chiefs had no trouble establishing a commonality of experience. They immediately found their way to the central question: what does it take for people—employees, customers, boards, other stakeholders—to contribute meaningfully to the success of the enterprise as a whole? On this topic, with its many various subthemes, the five spoke as colleagues, as though they could take it for granted that they shared many assumptions and goals.

In addition to writing this paper, I was also the conversation's moderator on both evenings. I am an organization development (OD) consultant, and all five executives and their organizations were current OD clients of mine at the time of the event. I was assisted in moderating this project by Susan Lubeck, J.D., a professional colleague and senior OD consultant at our firm, *Community At Work*.

In what follows, I have decided to let the wisdom of the conversation speak for itself, without providing any footnotes or other editorializing comments. However, I would like to use this initial moment, before the main event begins, to share one observation that stood out for me.

More than any specific insight I heard discussed at the dinners—and there were many, as you'll see—I was struck, overall, by a quality of transformational leadership that all five of these leaders shared:

They had more questions than answers.

They were thoughtful, curious, and eager to show each other their thinking. They wanted to get a better grasp on what they did not yet have nailed down. Throughout the conversation, and also back home at their organizations, they were able to “live in the question.” This is not to say that they were overly cautious or ruminative in their approaches to running their organizations. From watching them at first hand in each of their work settings, I know them all to be risk takers—a quality that I think goes with the territory of lead-

ing an organization through basically uncharted water. But what I saw at the dinners is that they did not feel they had to have all the answers.

They all understood the desirability—perhaps I could even say they all recognized the necessity—of embedding participatory, collaborative values into their organizations' mind-sets and daily practices. Yet they had acknowledged for themselves that the project of building collaborative culture is not scientific. They did not even presume that they could rely on a body of accepted practices that would work the same way in every case, with predictable results. Leading an organization to change itself into a more empowered, more inspired, healthier human system is a hope, not a formula; it's something you do, and keep doing, on faith. And you do it knowing you will face plenty of trials and errors along the way. It's an ongoing existential challenge, complete with the leader's burdens—being accountable (even if not solely responsible) for the painful, unpredicted impacts on real people and for the inevitable less-than-perfect outcomes for the system as a whole. The conversation got me thinking that where “change strategy” is concerned, living in the question is probably the only honest choice.

The five chiefs seemed to take this for granted, and it made them reflective and humble. It appeared to be clear to them, even without discussing it directly, that the unknowns of system change were deeper and more impactful than the models and techniques they employed. I suspect that this modesty is a characteristic that comes with time; it's a seasoning that I think develops after one discovers the hard way that “hip, hype, and hurry up” might get a new product out the door, but sustainable transformation is something else entirely.

I hope that message comes through in what follows. It was not the purpose of this chapter to celebrate leadership or even to propose that the leader is the key to a transformation. As Caroline Estes (1996) puts it, “Everyone has a piece of the truth.”

A leader has a role to play, yes, and in that role, he or she can provide the organization with many important elements: vision, insight, expertise, focus, resources, and so on. And I think it's self-evidently important to discuss and explore the role of leadership in a collaborative context, as this project has attempted to do.

But being the formal leader in creating a culture of collaboration is not the same as being the all-seeing, all-knowing provider of the “right way” to make it work. It takes the village to raise the child. And isn't that the whole point of creating a collaborative culture to begin with?

The Participants

Deborah Alvarez-Rodriguez: President and CEO of Goodwill Industries, San Francisco, San Mateo, and Marin counties. Deborah has enabled a systemwide rethinking of the Goodwill mission in the Bay Area. The result is a profound shift from the long-standing mission—managing thrift stores that also provide job training and transitional support for people with barriers to employment—to the revitalized new mission: *Goodwill Industries creates solutions to poverty through the businesses we operate.* At this writing, Goodwill is fully profitable, with gross revenues greatly increased from its historical norms.

Kriss Deiglmeier: Executive director of Stanford University Graduate School of Business Center for Social Innovation (CSI). Kriss is responsible, along with her two academic co-directors, for creating and following through on a systemwide shift in the CSI mission and strategy and in the implementation of many new programs and services. Stanford Graduate School of Business was recently honored by the Aspen Institute with the prestigious Beyond Grey Pinstripes award. Stanford ranked as the number one full-time M.B.A. program, leading the way in integrating social and environmental stewardship into business school curricula and research.

John Harris: Founder and CEO of California Birth Defects Monitoring Program (CBDMP). CBDMP is generally regarded as the world's largest research organization that focuses exclusively on finding causes of birth defects. To further enhance the reach and power of his organization, John also founded Pediatric BioBank, an international collaborative research organization that provides the best maternal health researchers in the world with state-of-the-art technology, to collaborate across traditional disciplines in studying why some babies are born healthy and others are not.

Kathy Kneer: President and CEO of Planned Parenthood of California. This organization is primarily an advocacy organization, affiliated with the nine Planned Parenthood–affiliated operating medical clinics in California. Under Kathy's leadership since 1993, Planned Parenthood Affiliates of California has become one of the leading voices in the

national movement for women's reproductive rights. Prior to 1993, Kathy was COO at CBDMP and worked side by side with John Harris for several years.

Jim Schorr: Executive director of Juma Ventures, Inc. This organization provides employment and job skills training and support to at-risk youth. Juma Ventures is frequently held up as a national model for a successful social enterprise and youth development programs. Under Jim's tenure, Juma was refocused and redesigned in a multimonth process that involved full participation from every staff person. In February 2005, Juma Ventures was cited in the *Harvard Business Review* as one of the most successful social enterprises in the United States.

The Conversation: Opening Thoughts

Sam Kaner: Well, how about if I start with the question in its most basic form: What do you think it takes to create a culture of collaboration?

Jim Schorr: I think it takes a really deep belief among the key people in the organization that a collaborative culture is the path to the best results you want to achieve. If they don't believe it, they won't help create it.

Sam: From your own personal experience, what suggests that as a key factor?

Jim: Some people, perhaps myself included, aren't collaborative by nature. They have been successful in their careers by being outstanding at what they do as individuals—by cranking out work and producing results. That attitude doesn't translate well into the leadership role. I have managers who I put into leadership roles because they're good at what they do, in their own area of competence. But once in the role, they need to develop a whole new perspective. They have to think on behalf of something larger than themselves, on behalf of the success of the organization as a whole, which is where the benefit of a collaborative culture comes in. This is a challenging bridge to help them cross—it has certainly been challenging for me!

Kathy Kneer: I agree completely. As a leader, I have to keep in mind that I'm doing this for the long-term benefit. There's surely no reason to do it for a short-term benefit.

Jim: I'm not even sure there *are* any short-term benefits. To my mind, the short term impacts are risks.

Sam: Such as . . . ?

Jim: Lost opportunities. Impatience from people with short attention spans and lots of work to do back in their own program areas. The lowering of morale that can come with that. And there's a discomfort many people feel at being expected to speak their minds when they aren't really used to talking to their peers that way. It can be polarizing in the short run.

Kathy: Yes, often the pressures to deliver a result in the near term are so strong, I have to hold back my own impulses and just keep reminding myself of the payoffs—even though those payoffs are two, three, five years away. This is a hard thing to get across to my managers. I have had to keep communicating about the value itself. And communicating about a value is always a work in progress.

Some things need to happen faster than the pace of collaboration and full participation can permit. So you have to strike a balance between short- and long-term impacts. It's a trade-off. And explaining that rationale becomes part of what needs to be communicated.

John Harris: For me, there is one key value that I want my managers to understand and endorse. There has to be shared belief among all of us that the team works better than the individual. If they can accept that value and treat it as a basic premise of our meetings and our projects, then they will have an easier time tolerating the frustration and impatience that accompany our efforts to build a shared framework of understanding.

Sam: How important is it for your groups to build a shared framework of understanding among the members?

John: It is absolutely necessary, but in practice, it is a really hard thing to do. You have to create an atmosphere where people are willing to listen and where they are willing to teach one another and learn from one another—and that's very difficult. You get into the issues of hierarchy and status, and people at both ends of the spectrum become reluctant to engage. So when I address that dynamic, I do as Kathy suggested: I communicate about the value. However, rather than try to explain to them the concept of shared understanding, I put it out as the principle that a team works better than an individual.

Kriss Deiglmeier: A favorite saying of mine is “No one is as smart as everyone.” I've used that as a shorthand way to remind people to stay patient. And I've found the result to be generally worth the effort. Even if a decision takes longer to reach, the implementation has a much better chance of

succeeding. Of course, like everyone else, I am dealing with many people who don't intuitively appreciate this value, so I agree. I put a lot of effort into communicating and staying committed to the value.

Kathy: Different leaders may have different reasons they think collaboration is important to their work. But once they come to that conclusion, I think there is often a period where that one person has to put himself or herself out there and stand up for the value—even in the face of a lot of people who don't support it. I remember when John and I introduced this value at CBDMP, we both had to put ourselves on the line, and for a while there, we were target practice! Regularly. And as things unfolded, we had to go through sustained periods of rebellion. We had to just keep living the value, modeling it, and not taking all the criticism personally.

Ultimately, you want a group that believes in the values of full participation, mutual understanding, and shared responsibility, but you don't start with any of that. No matter what words one communicates about the value or the benefits, it is just not real in the beginning—or for quite a while. So what you do have early on is a lot of personal risk taking by the leadership, a lot of being willing to lead by example under scrutiny. It took awhile for people to trust us enough to start taking risks themselves.

Deborah Alvarez-Rodriguez: To me, it's an article of faith. It's not a matter, exactly, of being able to achieve a linear result by a particular point in time. It comes down to faith—a fundamental belief or understanding that there is a better way. Yes, teamwork is harder, costly, slower in the short run, and yes, sometimes being autocratic is even really the better choice. But in the big picture, I just have a profound belief, a conviction, that collaboration will not only eventually get you to the best solutions but will in fact bring out the best in everyone. It will bring out the best in the organization and its people. This is what I try to get across to my people. I can put up with the level of risk and hassle because I believe in the underlying view of the world that collaboration represents. There aren't too many things in my life I'd be willing to sacrifice as much as I've sacrificed to try to build a collaborative culture in an organization. I don't want to come across sounding overly religious here, but this notion of faith and sacrifice, this is what it takes for me to get up every day and get back in there. All the operational issues, the policy meetings, the budget challenges, the personnel challenges, the lawsuits . . . all of it!

Kathy: And don't forget our boards of directors.

Deborah: Don't get me started! Sometimes it all just boggles my mind. It's like "What, you want to share another idea with me? Can you please take a number? Can't you just go away and deal with these things yourself?" And actually, it's at those very moments, when it would be so much more expedient to just forget about participatory values—those are the times that my faith kicks in. "Stop, Debbie, slow down and listen; you just might find the answer if you can just shut up and listen. You just might see someone else step up and rise to the occasion." And sometimes it happens and sometimes it does not. But if I didn't believe that it could happen, that it will happen, and that it matters—deeply—not only for my employees personally but for my basic view of the world—if I didn't believe it, I don't know if I would keep coming back to work.

Creating and Managing Participants' Expectations

Kathy: This is bringing something up for me: the issue of words versus action. I have observed leaders—and I'm sure I have been guilty of this myself—who have advertised to their staff the desire to keep everyone involved and obtain buy-in from everyone. And yet when they were under pressure, they fell back on their own instincts and made the decision. People can see through that, of course, and it becomes a setback.

Listening to Deborah, I realize that we are going to end up being true to who we are. If as a leader you are a person who operates best in a hierarchical structure, then fine—just say what's true and let yourself be as effective as you can be. I think it's a serious mistake to say one thing and act differently. And we need to be clear that what we *tell* people we want to create is what we actually *do* want to create. Especially in the early stage, when so much of our ability to make a change is based on our own behavior—on the modeling we do, not our words. We have to be careful not to communicate values that we can't model.

Deborah: I agree. This notion of "walking your talk" and being consistent with who you are is really important. People do pick up on the bull, really quickly. Even so, in my own case, my actions are not entirely consistent with my values, even though I truly do believe in them. I can jump too far out in front, and when I do, I sometimes pay the price we've been discussing.

At those times, one of the most helpful tools has been acknowledging that I made a mistake. “I made this decision based on such-and-such information and reasoning. I now see that it was not a good decision for these reasons.” When I’ve done that, it has been very powerful; it encourages a level of risk taking in others. Just sharing and being honest about the mistakes I’ve made has carried enormous weight. That’s been a revelation for me. If I don’t walk my talk sometimes, I can acknowledge it and hopefully learn from it, and we can move on.

Sam: Well, this raises a fundamental question: how do any of you manage to walk the talk of teamwork and participation, modeling collaborative values, when at the same time you are the visionary of the group? Sometimes you are the person who has done the most thinking about the future. On the strategic plane, you may well have the best judgment in the room. And then during a discussion, all the ideas people bring up are ones you’ve thought about and already dismissed months ago. . . .

So tell me, how do you balance this tension?

Kathy: Let’s suppose you do have a clear, compelling vision; you have already done the groundwork, the research, the background conversations, and so on. In those situations, you don’t want or need your staff to be reinventing the wheel. In that case, the nature of the collaboration is to bring all the players into alignment. You want them then to find ways to turn the vision from ideas to reality.

John: In our case, to make our vision come true, I knew I needed very strong implementation skills. I’m talking about the many skills that I didn’t myself have. So I was able to convey that I needed to learn from the people in the room what it would take to make our mission succeed.

The mission itself was not up for grabs—our mission is to find causes of birth defects, and even though that might sound like an easy and obvious mission to get behind, there are in fact reasons why a scientist might not like it or feel 100 per cent comfortable with it. But I learned to be really clear about what’s not negotiable. At a certain point, I learned how to bracket the academic conversations and move them out of our planning sessions. At that point, I was able to focus the group’s thinking, and everyone was able to relax. My message was, “I don’t have the slightest idea how to make this happen; designing this certain system or process is beyond me. I need people who can help me build this research apparatus, and therefore I need you.” And I genuinely believe that—I mean, I know my limits as an implementer.

Kriss: Do you believe that engaging your staff in designing the implementation will cause them to believe that they, too, helped develop the vision?

Jim: In my experience, yes, they did have that perception—because the vision actually changed slightly in the process of being implemented.

Kriss: I agree with that. Even if you have a vision that is 100 percent clear, it really ends up being about 30 percent different from what you initially brought to the group. It ends up better, in other words, because of everyone's unanticipated contributions.

John: Absolutely.

Leadership Competencies

Jim: As I listen to this conversation, a couple of themes are coming up for me: patience and accountability. These have been important learnings for me.

Sam: How so?

Jim: I'm someone who needs and wants to solve a problem as soon as it comes up. I'm not patient about discussing the issues; I want to get right to the heart of "the answer." And when I do make an effort to hold back and give people the chance to contribute, not everyone is willing to speak up and say what they really think. A few people, yes. But others seem, at times, prepared to just wait things out. Either they make statements that are innocuous, noncontroversial, or they don't say much at all. And then, because of my natural tendency, I'm often willing to jump in and fill the dead space. Then I look back later and realize I did more talking than I'd wanted to.

John: Me too, sometimes. For sure.

Kathy, Deborah: Me too!

Jim: So I have had to make a very conscious, thoughtful effort about how I carry myself at work. Every day. When I'm unprepared for a meeting—when I let myself "wing it"—I make the same mistakes: moving at my pace, not the pace of a group; giving the answers to every question that arises; not letting others wrestle with the issues. Not being a natural collaborative leader, I have had to learn to spend literally a couple of hours each night thinking about the next day's meetings. The one-to-one meetings, the supervision sessions, the group meetings. If I do think about

them and focus myself on being aware of the interaction, not just the answers, I find that I'm a lot more effective in the role.

Sam: You mentioned two themes: patience and accountability. Could you say more about the latter?

Jim: I don't think a participatory process will work if people feel that it is acceptable for them to sit quietly in a meeting, keeping their opinions to themselves so they don't have to risk dealing with others who might disagree with them. I can understand that some people might feel self-conscious for various reasons. And I don't mean that I want to pressure people to perform for the sake of performing. But on the other hand, I don't think it's good for me to accommodate their passivity either. If they are silent and I just jump in to fill in the blanks, I am in effect endorsing their passivity. At those junctures, my behavior is saying, "It's OK for you to be quiet and let me talk. I'll just go ahead and do that."

This is an insight that has proved very useful to me. I want people in my groups to understand and experience that I do expect them to give us their best thinking—not just as a nice idea, but as a responsibility.

John: Again, this rings true for me.

Deborah, Kriss, Kathy: Yes, me too.

Kriss: Speaking of preparation, I did not anticipate how much time it takes to plan a collaborative process. Setting the goals, defining what's not up for grabs versus what decisions are the group's to make. And this is true also for the participation of the individuals—the issues Jim just brought up. To me, whether it is silence or a different dynamic, the sort of endless discussion that happens in academic settings, or whatever, you don't just get people to behave differently by politely asking them to. It takes structure. There is a vast depth of structure to collaboration. And designing the structure and organizing the process take a whole lot of time and concentration.

Jim: Exactly.

The Value of an External OD Consultant

Kathy: This conversation about structure and planning is reminding me of Sam's role and how it affects me. Do any of us think we could do this kind of work if we did not have external consulting? I wonder. We've all

had the chance to work with Sam, a disinterested third party—not someone to tell us what to do but someone who helps us think things through. Is it realistic to expect that we could accomplish some of what we've been discussing without some degree of external coaching?

Deborah: You can use your own organization as your sounding board only to a certain extent. You can't ever lose sight of the impacts of your role and how your behavior is going to be perceived. My role, my authority, and my power affect how people engage with me, even how they look at me. I have to be careful how I phrase things. We can say, "Yes, we are all in this together," but the fact that I'm CEO carries a different weight, even when I don't want it to!

Jim: It's inherently challenging to be a CEO and to be a collaborator among others.

Deborah: That's where having a skilled person like Sam comes in. It's not just that he helps me achieve my goals; it's a lot more. I can learn—partly from our conversations and partly from watching him handle the people and the processes, in the various groups he facilitates at our company.

Basically, my relationship with Sam represents the maximum level of vulnerability I allow myself to have at work. That then becomes the context for my maximum level of "teachability." My chance to be reflective and let my guard down is wrapped together with my chance to learn and grow in this role.

Kriss: The isolation we feel is one problem; another is the challenge of wearing two hats. In my own case, I have to participate *and* facilitate. I have multiple advisory and faculty boards. They need to hear my thinking—and often I need to be thinking right alongside them. When I've got the external facilitation support, I can participate fully; when I don't have the support and therefore I have to facilitate as well, it's much harder to make my best contributions. I really notice the difference.

Deborah: Well, let's agree that the external process-consultant role is critical to success—yet there are so few people who do it well. Plus, it's difficult to fund, and it's difficult to carve out the time for it.

Kathy: I think we have all realized this is something you can't short-shrift. We can have the vision, but to really make it happen, we need to use external resources. It would be much harder if we didn't. I think this is about being honest with ourselves: are you really committed to collaboration? If so . . .

Deborah: Granted. Still, this has implications. For one, it's challenging to figure out where and when to deploy external facilitators and coaches and consultants and at what level within the organization. I want to support my middle managers and even my line staff to emerge as leaders. But it's very tricky to supply everyone with all the external support they might need. I also need to run a profitable business that aligns with market realities. So how does one multiply the "Sam Kaner effect"?

John: Part of our evolution to a collaborative culture was in the skills and tools we developed to manage our meetings. Collaborative culture is experienced in meetings, so I made it a priority for us to learn and improve those skills. I started out poor, and now I'm good at meetings. I can facilitate. So can others. Our staff uses flipchart pads. Without consulting support, this could not have happened. I had the insight to want to be better at meeting management but didn't have the skills.

Sam: You're pointing out that skill building is part of the answer to the problem of leveraging external resources. I'd like to pursue this a bit more. What are your opinions of putting a lot of employees through a two- to three-day workshop on a key topic? In your experience, how effective are those programs as a vehicle for building collaborative culture?

John: Workshops are an introduction, but the real training ground happens when you are inside a problem and you have to solve it. One time I ran an all-staff meeting that was a disaster. I walked into Sam's office the following week and said, "That's it—I'm quitting!" But actually, once I got over my initial discomfort, I found that the sense of failure gave me an enormous impetus to improve. That experience of trial and error, of falling down and learning how to get up—that was the real training. Similarly, with my managers, we have to wrestle with very difficult problems, and the experience of being frustrated, being disheartened, but still hanging in there and recovering and then learning how and why our recovery was possible—that was the training. After fifteen years of those experiences, I'm very versatile. And many people in the organization have developed their own competencies in similar ways—through real-world training, not just workshops.

Kathy: Let's acknowledge that it is important to build capacity in your organization. I think there are various ways you can do this. I routinely have consultants other than Sam who work with my staff—for planning, for big meetings, for coaching, and so on. But I want to be tenacious about

the importance of investing in ourselves as leaders. At some point, we need a truly safe place for ourselves. That is the hardest part for me to think about—because it is not comfortable to make the decision to invest in myself, as an asset of the organization. I want to reiterate: if we are going to make our commitment to collaboration and participation into something real, we have to be willing to invest in the resource of a talented, trustworthy outside consultant.

Kriss: Would I be at the same stage of success now if I had undertaken to change my organization without Sam or someone like him? Who knows? But there is a significant possibility that I would not be. The complexity of what I was undertaking was vast. I couldn't see clearly. Working with the consultant, assessing, helping make the options clear—all of that enabled me to make key decisions and then move forward in a conscious and intentional way. I had a gut commitment to be inclusive and build a critical mass of support, but there were so many variables in play. Politics, personalities, structure, funders. I can't envision that I'd have been able to juggle so many variables on my own. I'd have continued with my values, yes, true. On a "successfulness scale" of one to ten, maybe I'd have gotten to a five.

Jim: Would you say that a central factor was the opportunity to slow down and think strategically?

Kriss: It's more than that. I know how to set the time aside to focus on thinking strategically. But in the complexity of my whole situation—I'm overseeing operations, I'm engaged in all the fundraising, I'm interfacing politically throughout the system—it is extremely valuable to have someone skilled who can facilitate my thinking, someone I can bounce off, someone who sees things in a different way—that's their job.

Deborah: When I first became CEO of Goodwill, I was hired with a mandate to bring a lot of change to this company. I interviewed many people before I took the job. And then after I started, I spent several weeks continuing to assess and gain a sense of the scale of the needed organizational transformation. After a couple of months, it became clear just how huge the change was going to be. And it became equally clear that I couldn't lead this transformation without someone helping me with in the ways we discussed: helping me with my clarity, my discipline, my pacing. I would have gotten caught up in details and focused on the most

expedient solution, even though I really wanted to be collaborative and strategic.

Interestingly, the expenditures for consulting services introduce a level of discipline: when you're spending the time and money on this high-level consultation, it really makes you think twice about short-circuiting the collaborative process and undermining your investment. So the discipline in and of itself has been very useful to me.

Jim: I've found that my instincts are good in some areas and not so good in others. With people issues, I've been surprised at how often my instincts aren't as good as I need them to be. Working with Sam has helped me with that, helped me make better decisions, especially in the realm of various personnel issues. Dealing with the transition challenges of being successor to the founder of our organization, dealing with the human variables of building a whole new leadership team—all those types of decisions. On the people side, I don't always see the land mines. . . . That's a lot of what I get out of the relationship with Sam. In some areas, I can see pretty clearly. With human dimensions, I don't.

What Keeps You Up at Night?

Sam: As you've each been speaking about your relationships with me and what it means for you, you have also been speaking about yourselves—just as Jim just did. And you've been sharing your hopes and your fears and your sense of where you're strong and where you need help. I'd like to ask you to stay with this a bit longer—not about me, not about your relationship to a consultant, but just about yourselves as individuals in this role. You are each having to carry the ball of being the visionary leader, but also you can't avoid being the role model for collaboration—the chief implementer of the culture change—and you must also be the chief implementer of the strategy itself. With all the weight and all the pressure of having to measure up on competing and sometimes contradictory roles, what is hard for you about that? What keeps you up at night? What weighs on your shoulders heavily about playing this role?

John: People. There are many people I love to learn from, and I can and do learn from them. But now and then I have to deal with people I'd

basically just like to klunk!—on a good day! And they can be in positions of very high responsibility—for example, they might be high-ranking government officials, some of whom I have to deal with month in, month out. Or perhaps they are research scientists, based at a university but running studies through our organization so their influence is widely felt. And there have been senior people within my own staff, too. All these people are in their roles because they are capable at something, whether science or management. Yet for whatever reason, their personalities don't mesh well with mine.

What worries me is the way I might react to such people. I don't want to lose my objectivity, even when I'm having emotional reactions. Partly I'm concerned that I won't listen to them; I'll write them off. Or even more likely in my case, I worry that I'll overcompensate and give them too much influence on my decisions—not because they intimidate me or anything like that but because I don't want to let my anger get the best of me, so I lean in the other direction.

Sam: So it's how to manage your own feelings as you manage the relationships with the ones you're having trouble with?

John: Yes.

Sam: What's your M.O. for working with that concern, so you don't get constantly caught up in it?

John: I bought my own sound bite, believing the team works better than an individual. I have a deep belief in that. I like sports, and it works in sports. In research, it's obvious: you can't work in any way other than as a team. I really deeply believe in that. And I also deeply believe that many people can do many things better than I can.

Sam: So reaching to that belief in the power of teams and collaborating helps you get past your own personal feelings.

John: Yes—though I don't always get past them, as you know [*laughs*]. . . . Also, I think my fear of failure is another of these. It presses on me. And then I draw on my belief in the power of teams to help me override that fear.

Kathy: I too have a fear of failure—but even more than that, I have that nagging question, “Did I do enough? Maybe I should've done one more thing.” That's the fear that eats at me. The stakes are high. Not just for our employees or my board but, more importantly, for all women and their health and, even beyond that, the role of women in our society. There are so many things that need to be done; so many forces and chal-

lenges coming up all the time. Did I do enough? And the issue of collaboration gets in here because it begs the question, “Am I putting enough time into developing my staff? Am I doing enough there?”

Deborah: Two questions keep me up at night: Am I doing the right thing? And am I getting too far out there, too grandiose? Both questions are undergirded by that fact that so many of our employees are vulnerable, still learning how to get on their feet. If I make bad decisions and we have to downsize, I'm hurting the person with four kids including one who's autistic—I'm contributing to messing up their lives. Should I really put so much effort and money and time into this whole transformation process? Maybe I should slow down, focus on incremental gains.

And the vision that I have been holding out—am I crazy? I want to grow a major business, a real business; I want to prove you can do business in a way that treats poor people as the essence of value creation, not as a by-product of value creation. At the end of the day, I would hate to think I was instrumental in destroying an eighty-seven-year-old organization.

Jim: That fear of screwing up an organization—I've had to work hard on getting over that one. Juma Ventures, from an external perspective, was very healthy, innovative, successful, when I took over. Of course, it had its fair share of challenges and issues—but all the same, I was succeeding the founder of a successful, reputable organization, and I did not want to screw it up.

Even so, I definitely wanted to refocus the whole enterprise. We have closed businesses to streamline the operation, we have strengthened many programs, we have positioned ourselves for a significant expansion on quite a different footing than our previous approach, and one of the features of the change has been the depth of collaboration that has been undertaken by my new team. But the subterranean worry about messing things up—that has been tough to get my hands around.

Nonetheless, there is an even bigger weight I carry. That's the solitude of the role, the feeling of being alone in the job, in so many ways. It is ironic that despite my serious effort and investment to deepen our teamwork and collaboration, I myself feel so isolated.

Being collaborative, it turns out, does not mean being deep friends. The boss is the boss, and having a staff as youthful as mine just amplifies this condition. It isn't a fear, but it's a deep, nagging loneliness that keeps me awake all the same.

Difficult Dynamics, Part One: Individuals Who Are Reluctant to Embrace a Collaborative Philosophy

Sam: At the beginning of our conversation tonight, Jim suggested that one of the critical success factors for building a culture of collaboration was a deep belief in collaborative philosophy among the key players. The way you put it, Jim, was, “If they don’t believe it, they won’t help create it.” John, you echoed this theme a few minutes ago when you said that what keeps you up at night is the people who are not collaborative. So tell me, what happens with the people who simply don’t see it the way each of you does?

Kathy: Obviously, it’s not as simple as “fire them.” If you did that, a wealth of knowledge and seasoning would walk out the door.

Jim: Or maybe the person is someone you recruited and cultivated for a long time, perhaps because they provide cultural balance to a workforce that needs to maintain staff diversity.

Sam: Yes. What do you do about these types of employees? You don’t want to lose them, and they don’t want to change. And yet your other employees are watching you. If you don’t handle those people effectively, it will often be perceived as evidence that you don’t walk the talk. I’d appreciate hearing you talk about this struggle.

John: I’m very conscious of this issue. I’m also very sure I don’t have an answer—I’m very conscious of that too. I’m working with scientists whose main labs are based all over the world and who all share a few key assumptions of the academic-scientific culture, which are anathema to the collaborative philosophy. Being a principal investigator, a PI, is basically like being the lord of the land. In my day-to-day negotiations with PIs, I’m constantly trying to stand for a collaborative model, a model based on sharing protocols and data early on—not after studies are published but much sooner—so that we can get on with the business of actually finding causes of birth defects. And this is a very, very hard stance to take. These are people who have enormous research grants: they are tenured, they are deans, they are senior scientists in some of the largest research centers in the world, and they often don’t give a damn about sharing protocols—at least, not before they publish their own findings. To them, collaboration means reading papers at conferences or corre-

sponding about interesting questions. At most, it means working with a small group, their own individual research teams. But it does not, for example, mean sharing with their counterparts at other universities the set of raw data collected during interviews with pregnant mothers.

So I have to make trade-offs when I negotiate with these scientists. Sometimes I feel like I'm not walking the walk, I'm not consistent. I can say that I am conscious all the time of what is a collaborative arrangement and what isn't. But I don't have the . . . the what? Is it the power? The clout? I do have excellent resources and systems to share, which is why I'm even at the table. . . . I just don't have a model, I don't feel I've solved this challenge yet.

I do know and believe in my heart that science will find causes of birth defects sooner, and better, if the best thinkers in the world would do a better job of pooling resources and brainpower, and I want to make that happen as much as possible in my lifetime. But I don't know how to do it, against all the assumptions and culture and reward systems currently in effect.

Kriss: From my perspective, the answer is that there is no answer. You make your best guess, from a cost-benefit standpoint, about how to approach each test, and you evaluate whether the benefit will outweigh the cost. Because there's definitely going to be cost. There's no model for these really sophisticated challenges; these are judgment calls. And you're going to pay the consequences of whichever decision you make.

Kathy: Yes, this is life; it's reality. You can't eliminate "resisters." Sometimes they have their own important contributions to make. In those circumstances, you have to learn how to work around them, in essence, and still move the organization forward. Sometimes they may reach a point where the organization's momentum is too strong to resist; sometimes they may discover that they are in peril of being marginalized, left behind by the flow of events. Some change; some never do. Some leave.

Deborah: We have all faced this problem, I'm sure. At times the main problem is about lost opportunity, but at other times the problem is that damage is being done to the organization. In the latter case, you have to be thoughtful about how to contain the damage. Let's assume that the person is not easily "sent away"—perhaps because he or she is an expert in their area or because the person has built an important network for implementing things effectively. I have had to work with such people, to talk

through the new parameters within the organization, and help them define their job and their niche differently. For some people, this might mean limiting their scope of influence; for others, it might mean coaching them to become more involved or to become more of a mentor. I calculate the potential damage they can do to the effort, and then I make the appropriate move.

Sam: The other day I was at your organization, and I saw you struggle with a version of this issue. You had a meeting of key stakeholders who were making decisions about whether to treat a certain priority as having medium importance or super importance. You personally felt it was hugely important, and you wanted to use the meeting to build alignment. Most of the people you had invited to that meeting had misgivings, but you felt optimistic. If you made your best case and if you talked things through with them respectfully and if you operated from a commitment to problem-solve in order to deal with their concerns, then you hoped that the meeting would build to a consensus outcome. However, you already knew that you were going to have trouble with one particular stakeholder. This person—whose presence was not absolutely essential—was going to come to that meeting with the openly declared intention of defeating or at least constraining your initiative.

So you had a choice to make: should you bring this stakeholder to the meeting as a full participant and pay the various costs—the extra time it would take, the inevitable periods of frustration and misunderstanding in a meeting that was originally supposed to be upbeat, and most of all, the uncertainty and risk of a potentially troubling outcome—or should you move ahead with your core group and then, once you had built a critical mass, deal with this “resister” one-on-one—offline, as some people call it. And this question you had to deal with is my question to all of you: when you are facing that situation, when you are sizing up the trade-offs of including versus not including the people whom you know will make trouble, what goes through your mind? How do you size up the trade-off?

Kriss: I think in previous positions at different organizations, in more cases than not I have moved in the direction of isolating these people. And I think I have learned a lot from doing that. In hindsight, I’d have thrown them more into the mix and designed the process to accommodate more tension and disagreement. And most important, I would want to design a

process that aims at a high standard of actually thinking through and achieving a goal. I want the participants to see that I am not going to create a process that is superficial and noncontroversial just to accommodate the feelings of people who are stubborn or afraid. If someone does not want to collaborate in a well-designed process, I want all of us to see the challenge for what it is, so that we can keep thinking, keep working, accepting the reality but not becoming defeated by pretending to be “collegial” but actually being avoidant.

Jim: I had a situation last year that was of that ilk. Didn't handle it very well. I had a leadership team member who was really out of sync with me and my style and vision for the organization, just everything. This was a seasoned member of our staff—influential with the younger staff and very well-respected, for good reason. Still, we had a lot of differences, especially about vision and strategy. And rather than deal with the gap between us in a real-time, confrontational way—not in a negative, blameful put-down session but with productive confrontation—rather than do that, I chose to just observe it all and create a mental list of reasons why I couldn't work with this person. I waited till I had my whole case organized, and then I confronted her in a this-is-the-last-straw kind of way. In doing so, I created a wall between us. By design. I thought I could isolate her from the rest of the organization, and for some reason I thought that might work. Boy, did it ever not work. I essentially resisted the opportunity to confront her in small ways, in real time. Instead I let it build up to a breaking point: “Here's the way it is: you can keep your job, but you're off this leadership team. . . .” And of course the fallout was extremely negative. The isolating strategy was anything but effective. The fallout rippled all through the organization.

Sam: As you reflect on this experience, it sounds really hard to live through—for you and for everyone concerned.

Jim: You bet. If I could do it again, or if I ever come up to a situation similar to it again, I'd like to think I would handle it very differently.

Sam: One aspect of what you're sharing connects to a point you were making earlier this evening when you spoke about the theme of accountability. At that time, you were saying that it was critical, in building a culture of collaboration, to hold people accountable for saying out loud more of what they're actually thinking about key issues at work. Listening to you now, I'm hearing a closely related thread: that one of the things that goes

with the territory of handling people challenges is to hold yourself accountable to engaging with them.

Jim: Exactly right. You can't call it collaboration and then withdraw when the stakes go up.

Kathy: Sometimes we might represent collaboration as a process design, a map with milestones and stakeholders and such. But I think what Jim is talking about here is a lot more than designing and implementing a process to do a project. Jim's talking about an organic way of being. As we share our thoughts about these experiences, what we have in common is that we're trying to make a certain way of being become organic, natural to the organization. In creating a culture of collaboration, there's no such thing as "OK, we're done." It's organic; it's continuous; it keeps developing and transforming. And that's really hard and taxing. And so much of it is brand new because it keeps unfolding.

John: In my situation, I'm so personally ambivalent. The mission is to find causes of birth defects. For this you need scientists—the best scientists. The core value of collaboration seems like a no-brainer to me: why would we let scientific progress crawl along at the pace of one decade at a time when we can move things exponentially faster if people would work together? But those scientists aren't collaborative. I need them, and they are who they are. So I probably do accommodate in different ways because of my two competing values: "find causes" versus "be collaborative."

Kriss: I know what you mean. In my organization, not only are we part of a university, with all of the academic culture you're describing, but we're housed in a business school. So you can imagine how many people think collaborative culture is worth striving for. I remember one incident when I really caught on to this. I was working with one of the key thinkers at my organization, and we were talking about engaging with students, faculty, and a variety of other stakeholders to get input on a major upcoming initiative. I thought we were talking about "how to," not "whether to." But I realized I was wrong when this person said, "But if we get them involved in this, they'll think it's their idea!" The reward system in the university is based on ideas, holding on to ideas and positioning oneself over who takes credit.

John: Exactly. In my own organization, I built a collaborative culture and used it during a three-year reengineering, when we cut down from studying more than one hundred types of rare birth defects and got focused on

the five most common, costly, and deadly. And we reduced our “cycle time” enormously—that’s the time it takes to complete a study from start to finish. And yet when it comes to the actual ongoing scientific work, even with the research being done entirely with our own scientists at my own organization, I’m still not fully clear about where to come down. The mission value is toward the scientist, but the core value is toward collaboration. I’m sure the collaborative culture gets watered down; I’m sure I am making this mistake ongoingly.

Kathy: I don’t see it as a mistake; you’re dealing with the way things are. And like you said, you’re still conscious of it. You’re not just giving in to the mainstream cultural norms. This is, I think, what we’re all trying to do: change things. And real change is not going to be simple or easy. You’re doing it, John.

John: Well, it’s true that I’m constantly, painfully aware of the choices I keep making. I just don’t have a model for making the real, lasting change more likely to come true.

Kathy: You’re inventing the model. We’re all inventing it. By the way, Deborah, what happened? What did you do?

Deborah: Well, in this particular case, I chose to include the person and take the gamble. I thought my chance of bringing him on board was much greater if I could use the presence and strength of the group. We would all wrestle through everything together. We had several hours set aside, and this was a big opportunity. And it turned out wonderfully! We saw his objections melt when he had the chance to be taken seriously and have his concerns dealt with thoughtfully. So yes, I made the decision to put this right in the middle of the challenge, to let all the stakeholders duke it out as needed and work things through. [This key stakeholder went on to become a strong, vocal advocate for this decision, influencing and ultimately leading a key group to endorse and implement crucial elements of the decision.]

Sam: And what was your rationale, since you have sometimes made the opposite choice?

Deborah: I thought, “Now is the time to put them in the middle. There’s enough bench strength, enough dynamic support, enough good faith.”

Sam: Enough “bench strength.” Does that seem like a reliable criterion?

Deborah: Yes. And I have made the same decision at other times, over this past year, for a different reason. Sometimes you include people to get them

to either step up or step out. Like Kriss was saying before, sometimes it's important for people to discover the situation in a living, dynamic, social context. If they're doing poorly in it, they can see their situation and it can help them choose which change to make.

Sam: And does this interface with your thought about “bench strength”?

Deborah: Yes, exactly. Several months ago, I had a group that was composed primarily of either consultants or people who were on their way out. This was not a group to do a lot of pushing and testing and pressuring with. The payoff would not have been there. I would have been investing for nothing. I had one staff person in it who was maybe or maybe not going to stay with the organization. But instead of being clear in my mind about whether to use the group as an implicit context to help him self-evaluate, I was ambivalent. I put him in for a while; I pulled him out; I left him hanging about whether he should come back in—it became a mess. He left, but it was not an easy termination. And I'm still paying consequences in terms of cleanup.

In retrospect, I should have orchestrated his departure sooner. I was hoping that putting him in this group would help resolve the situation one way or the other, but I misestimated the strength of the group. It was simply not resilient enough to engage with problematic passive-aggressive behavior by a member, not strong enough to respectfully confront that behavior and push the person to shape up.

Sam: I see a lot of heads nodding.

Kathy: This is a key insight. A participatory process can be draining on a group—especially if it's the first time they're coming around. It can be draining. You're right—there are certain things you can only do with the right mix of people. You have to be thinking about this when you make judgments like which groups to use to launch a process, and which groups to include later. Yes, this is really, really important.

Difficult Dynamics, Part Two: Working with Newcomers

Sam: What about the newcomer? There are people in key positions who are not resistant in the sense that they actively disagree with collaborative philosophy, but they are naïve about it. Maybe they are completely unaware of collaboration as a legitimate approach to management. Or maybe they know the hype about it but have never lived through the

kinds of tests and character building that you've all been describing today. How do you work with the newcomer who just wants to "go off and do his or her job"?

Deborah: We're having this exact conversation now. We hired a key player, a senior manager who is excellent at the type of work we hired him to do. And he has a new team. I quickly saw that his team was going to need some attention because we're still in the process of building our culture and there was no reason to assume that this new team, led by a newcomer, was going to develop along collaborative lines. So I discussed it with him and we came to the conclusion that for a while, I would join his operations team. The idea is to make sure the team has the support and attention of the CEO to make it as successful as possible. We had to clarify that I'm not watching over him and his team; I'm offering coaching and support and vision while they invent themselves.

Jim: You're engaging with them.

Deborah: Yes, precisely. I can't afford to leave these early developments to chance.

Jim: Me too. I am so much more deeply engaged than I was a year ago.

John: About eight years ago, we did an analysis of the turnover pattern in our organization. We learned that we had a huge turnover rate among people who were in their first three years at our organization. But we also found that those who made it to the three-year mark were likely to stay forever. My strategic management team discussed this quite seriously, and we came to the conclusion, since borne out, that it takes a huge effort to build a shared framework of understanding with newcomers. For high-level people, the CEO has a major role in this. I can recall twice over the years bringing on high-level staff, whom I recruited for many months each, and then once they were hired, I moved on to other things—and in both cases they didn't last a year. At other times, I have brought in people who I have stayed closely connected to, and—surprise!—they're still here to this day. It takes an enormous commitment of senior staff to bring them in. I have seen senior staff be welcoming, and I have seen them be resistant, to the introduction of new managers, whether senior or middle managers. And you can predict the outcome, if you're paying attention.

Kathy: That goes to what Deborah was saying: she interjected herself into the situation where the newcomers were being indoctrinated with the vision and values and culture of the organization.

Kriss: At a previous job where I was COO, we went through a period during the early years when the organization was new, small, and very collaborative. Then we had a big growth spurt, and we made the mistake of thinking that collaboration was fully incorporated into the culture. We didn't systematize it. We didn't do anything intentional to integrate the way the leadership team worked with the way the rest of the organization worked. We had so many new projects and programs starting up that we just let people do things their own way. And sure enough, we paid significant consequences for that. That experience raised a question for me that I'm hoping we can spend some time on: how to institutionalize the culture.

Institutionalizing the Culture of Collaboration

Jim: Recruiting is one key, I think. It's more a question of how we recruit in a way that sets up for success. This past year, as I've been rebuilding, I am much more insistent on the alignment of values and people. I've got an idea in mind, a vision, I guess you could say, of the culture we want to create. Not the culture that currently exists, which is basically the culture that has existed for years, but rather a culture that is more in line with the type of values we have been discussing.

Kriss: It's one thing to hire good people, who at the hiring interview say they value collaboration and empowerment as a management style. I'd think, "OK, great, they're aligned with the values." But there's a large gap between statements made in a hiring interview and the ways people behave from day to day.

Jim: I may be a little delusional about how well I can assess that on the front end, but I'm making people decisions with a broader set of thinking and information than I did a year ago.

Kriss: You're right, we can do a lot of good or ill by the type of people we select to place in leadership roles. And I agree with you that conscious recruiting practices can play a strong role in institutionalizing a collaborative culture. Even so, it's a totally different thing to hold people accountable for their daily and monthly behavior. It's not at all obvious how to define objectives that pertain directly to participatory values or how to measure, monitor, and evaluate successful job performance. In other words, how do you build accountability into this value?

Deborah: This is a major question, and I wonder if part of the answer is that you can't be too methodical. I have 450 employees, spread across more than a dozen businesses. I have various layers of management, and I have a board. And I want to create a companywide mentality of empowerment and distributed leadership, with collaboration across sectors whenever appropriate. I keep wondering, is it possible to allow the leadership to emerge, not to force it or even structure it too much? Is that possible? What can I do to encourage a process that is more organic?

I'm trying to ignite my managers and sales staff with a different mentality, a real belief in their own power. It's working, too—we have plenty of data, from sales figures to retention rates, that show that it's working. But this growing belief in their own power was not ignited through some sort of organized team-building process or through any type of structured collaborative problem-solving project. It was mainly just role modeling. I have been dropping in, walking the ship, and making a strong effort to stop and listen, stop and listen. Then I bring people together to problem-solve and especially to figure out how to act on each other's ideas. It works.

I do see, however, that I am encountering various pockets of resistance, often from middle managers, who don't want to shift to new ideas and new ways of thinking. I have not been especially successful at inspiring all of them to change. A few, yes. Others, no. But with my hope for enabling leadership to emerge rather than force it, I've been approaching the situation more as one of encouraging little pockets of "change activity" as opposed to resourcing organized, ongoing, facilitated teams. So I'm not quite sure: it's a question—and it's one I'm asking a lot these days: Do you always have to have a methodical way to institute collaboration? Or can you build certain platforms or system—like a communication infrastructure and an accountability infrastructure—that can support the stirring of the pot, this pot of change?

Kriss: Your comments about some of your middle managers and your decision to try to enable change rather than force it remind me of some similar decisions I've had to make. We have significantly changed our mission, our vision, and our strategy. Now I'm faced with how to build the critical mass of support across our various constituencies. We have the business school to contend with; we also have influential alumni; we have wealthy and well-connected donors, some of whom are individuals and some foundations; we have a world-class journal on social innovation, complete

with a staff and its own board; we have undergraduates; and we have many, many programs to run.

I came to realize that I will not be able to acquire solid support or even endorsement from everyone at the same time. So I decided to focus on the early adopters. As a statistical probability, I know that only about one person in twenty from each constituency is likely to be an automatic, intuitive supporter of this or any change in our mission, vision, or strategy. So I am not going to push the river; I have embarked on a search to identify and cultivate the one in twenty. We have found that the early adopters are becoming our evangelists, and they are going to be instrumental in inspiring and encouraging the majority to change.

John: This may shed some light on an aspect of our experience that has puzzled me for years. In the mid-1990s, we invested heavily in using a collaborative process to refocus our strategy and redesign the organization. In terms of the strategic consequences, we benefited greatly. However, in terms of the culture change, it has been harder to characterize. A few of us were deeply and significantly influenced. I'd say that for a few of us, it was transformative. But for most of the organization, I would not say that our team practices are outstanding. Most people would probably say, "Yes, we function as a team," but in many cases, I can still see a lot of room for improvement—to say the least! Well, it has puzzled me; I wasn't sure how to think about what has gone wrong, though I have mainly blamed myself.

Sam: So you were saying that you might be putting this together in a new way this evening . . . ?

John: Yes. I wouldn't say we have a team culture. But we did have a few early adopters, as Kriss calls them, and I think that led us to a key improvement in our culture: we have created a learning environment. I think everyone in the organization would agree that compared to the mid-nineties, we now are much more goal-oriented, with milestones we can state and measure. We have "status meetings" to track our progress. Also, we have a formal process of lining up people's individual goals for the year with our departmental and organizational goals, and we do people's annual performance reviews with that alignment in mind. In other words, we have converted solidly into a project-managed culture, with more permission and more capacity to learn as we go along.

In the beginning of this transformation, which grew directly out of the organization redesign I mentioned earlier, there were a few people who really pushed it forward. It grew out of our determination to build

a project-managed, team-based culture. In fact, that's exactly the phrase I used—"a project-managed, team-based culture"—whenever I communicated about what we were aspiring to become. Well, I don't think we have done as well as I'd wanted, on the team-based side, although many people would disagree with me. But we have definitely accomplished the shift to project management. And that happened through the influence of our early adopters, who were, as I can see now, actually more aligned with project management via a "project team" model of implementation than they were aligned with a model that aimed at a deep, participatory-value-based culture.

Jim: Your experience suggests that a new culture can become ingrained even when you didn't fully understand what was taking place or how. This is both interesting and reassuring.

Deborah: It's another case of emergence rather than planfulness. The early adopters emerged as leaders and took the culture in a certain direction. Not 180 degrees different from where John had wanted to go, but not 100 percent the same either. This is the self-organizing behavior that I do believe occurs in a complex adaptive system.

Changing Systems to Institutionalize the Culture Change

Jim: Before branching in that direction, though, I would like to go back to something else. A few minutes ago, Kriss posed the question, "How can we institutionalize the culture we aspire to create?" This is a key question at Juma.

As a social enterprise organization, we've got a "double bottom line": because we are a business, we want to earn enough revenues to turn a profit or at least break even, yet our main reason for existing is to help our youth employees pull themselves out of poverty. Those two purposes are not easy to reconcile. It is much more profitable to sell ice cream when you don't have to provide additional programs and services to your ice cream vendors; yet if you just throw many of our youth into jobs without individual support, they can easily fail. We needed to take a huge leap forward—we needed to vastly improve our performance on both of our bottom lines, even though in some ways success on one side seemed like it would undercut success on the other side. In fact, this was the whole impetus for redesigning the organization in the first place.

Well, we have definitely made great strides on this: we have developed a deep, serious commitment to the principle of integration, integrating every aspect of our youth service with every aspect of how we run our business. That's the goal. And in practice, it means collaborating across functions, on every aspect of our work. My youth development staff and my business management staff have to collaborate on many, many issues. For now, we're successful at it. But this brings me back to Kriss's question, which is precisely the question I'm focused on now at Juma: "What can be done to ensure that spirit of collaboration in the long term?"

So Deborah, a few minutes ago you said something I wanted to follow up on. You said we could possibly build systems and platforms that could support people to step up and take initiative, try out new ideas, collaborate across sectors, and so on.

Deborah: Yes, exactly. That's what self-organizing systems do. They build platforms that support people to behave with some degree of spontaneity and autonomy. That's exactly what we're trying to do—determine which platforms, which systems, will support the broadest distribution of leadership, initiative taking, and teamwork.

Jim: Well, good; this is what I want to explore further. Here's my question to you about that: what systems and practices, from your experience, might be the ones that have the most leverage?

Deborah: I can think of a few. I'll start with one we're deeply engaged in right now. We are looking at our HR policies and programs—the whole HR function, actually—as the backbone of any organizational culture. This is because HR helps recruit, orient, and reinforce, through many different policies and procedures, what you want in the culture. Therefore, we decided, among other things, to completely redo every part of our performance appraisal system. And that's what we're doing. As a first step, we are working on changing the entire performance appraisal system so that individual goals are aligned with their departmental-organizational goals and aligned as well with agencywide goals so you can see the connection. Just like John described.

John: That's a huge project in itself.

Deborah: You bet! And by the way, the negotiating among the various players about how to do that in a collaborative, cross-functional way has been quite a challenge too. We're getting there, but building these systems is

not simple. Here's another one, Jim. Early on when I was getting the transformation under way, I made the mistake of relying on the old existing communication system. That was an absolute disaster. The messages I sent were not being repeated, the underlying philosophy was not being reinforced, and it continued to deteriorate until I faced up to what was happening—or, rather, what was not happening.

Except when I did it personally, there were no internal systemwide communications, period. So I proceeded to hire a whole new communications team, and they built completely new infrastructure to support internal communications. And they built it in a way that expressed and reinforced what I see as a core value of collaboration: open communication; dialogue; feedback. Now communication flows back and forth. The process of obtaining feedback has been built in to the communication system. I no longer worry that my messages are going to be filtered unless I do eighty million focus groups all the time.

Kathy: John and I had the same experience in the late 1980s, and we turned it around, with the same result.

John: Yes, it's true. When our internal communication systems are functioning well, the level of shared understanding is much better. And the morale is higher. People trust more. And they ask me better questions, too, and more of them.

Deborah: Another way to institutionalize our new culture is through training. We've always been big investors in training on basic technical skills for certain groups of our employees; but in this past year, we have been working hard to rethink the entire function and make it more available to more people—everyone, actually—in more modalities, such as mentoring and real-time problem solving, not just classroom training, and on different competencies, including culture-oriented skills of leadership and collaboration.

Kathy: I've been thinking along a similar line. At my organization, I've been focusing on professional development. It's related to training but more personal and more directed toward strengthening the courage and character of our emerging leaders in the movement. One of the deepest reasons I care about the culture at Planned Parenthood is because I care about the strength and effectiveness of the entire national women's movement. We need to be working to develop the next generation of leaders focused on women's rights. And collaborative processes are an

incredibly powerful context for building organizational strength and a movement. So I have been pretty intentional about bringing in external coaches and facilitators such as Phyllis Watts, Wildswan Resources, and Sunny Sabbini, from Community At Work. And I don't just bring these people in for a meeting here or there; we have long-term relationships with them so that my staff can gain personal opportunities to grow, both through one-on-one sessions and through participating in challenging thinking sessions. Earlier in this session, we spoke about the importance of having external support, the importance of investing in our own professional development. As I see it, long-term contractual relationships with external consultants are definitely part of institutionalizing the value of collaboration.

Jim: This is all really, really helpful. I'm thinking, as you're speaking, of opportunities to use these as I continue to rebuild my own organization.

Deborah: One more: incentives. We're doing that now—thinking through the possible ways of creating an “incentive infrastructure.” This is different from performance appraisal. The question here is, “How do we incentivize the culture of teamwork and innovation?” I don't have the answer, but we have a team now working on it.

Kriss: As the person who raised the question originally, I'm appreciating all of what I'm hearing and find myself very stimulated by it—and yet I'm struggling a bit with some of it. I'm questioning how to apply some of this thinking to a larger system like mine. For example, take compensation. The pay scales at Stanford are set far beyond my influence. The incentives and bonuses for the professors are established. Or take human resource systems and policies: same thing. My little CSI is independent in some ways, but not in those ways.

John: Us too. Much of our compensation structure and our HR policies are governed by the state of California, the Department of Health Services, the Civil Service union, the March of Dimes, the National Institute of Health, . . .

Kathy: Planned Parenthood too. In some ways, we're autonomous; yet in many regards, we voluntarily abide by norms and standards of the state and national federations.

Kriss: I guess what I'm realizing, then, is that the very concept of institutionalizing your culture is a balancing act between systems you can influence straightforwardly and those you can't. And as I think about this, I sus-

pect that for each of us, maybe there are one or two key systems, key components, that can drive the institutionalization of culture. I'm thinking, for example, of Nordstrom. I grew up in Seattle, and I saw it grow from one store downtown through all its stages of national expansion—in fact, I was with Nordstrom when they opened up the East Coast. And through it all, at every step of the way, it is “customer service” that has kept that company alive. They have a core philosophy, as many other businesses do, a key driver that guides the development of a few critical systems. It gives the organization its spine.

Sam: So let me check to see if I'm understanding you. Are you suggesting that each of your organizations may need to find its own one or two “key drivers,” as Nordstrom has?

Kriss: Yes.

Sam: So that those one or two key drivers would enable you to institutionalize the culture of collaboration in unique ways in your own systems?

Kriss: Yes. And you know, I have one other thought about this. We are all being pushed by many factors, and there is a never-ending supply of things to think about and things to do. This year we're focused on growth, next year it might be downsizing. My point is that we may never have the time to institute every one of our infrastructures perfectly. I think we each have to think for ourselves, determine and decide on the right priorities. If you want to promote a culture of collaboration, ask what are the one or two key drivers that will give you the most bang for your buck, to systematize and institutionalize collaboration.

Closing Thoughts

Sam: We're going to have to wrap up soon. First, let's see if I can summarize your thoughts on this topic—you've said a lot! Deborah mentioned four systems: performance appraisal, communications, training, and incentives. For each of those, Deborah, if I've understood correctly, you are in the midst of developing not just policies but an entire infrastructure, expressly with the intention of institutionalizing a culture of teamwork and innovation.

Deborah: Yes. We're right in the middle of all this now, so I don't know whether it will turn out to be right or wrong; I don't yet have a good sense of the

payoffs or the trade-offs. These are the four core systems we have identified to date, and I expect we'll identify others as we go along.

Sam: Earlier, Jim brought up recruiting. Jim, you reported that you were much more aware this year than previously that you could screen for a person's potential affinity for collaboration even before you hired the person. That struck me as another area that might clearly strengthen the culture.

Jim: I think so. I hope so.

Sam: John, you spoke about the importance of an environment that encouraged learning and continuous improvement through such methods as alignment of goals, tracking meetings and progress, and other project management systems and tools. Kathy, you brought up professional development, and you reminded us to think of long-term relationships with external change consultants as part of institutionalizing your culture. And Kriss has offered an insight that it might be most practical and perhaps most effective to focus on one or two key drivers, based on a core philosophy, and use those drivers to push the development of systems and practices.

Kathy: Good job, Sam. If we had more time, I think I'd want to look carefully at another one of these: participatory governance. Our boards play a significant role in how we do or don't walk our talk of collaboration.

Deborah: Our executive teams, too. Yes, that would be an important topic. As I've said, I'm working to create a distributed network model for leadership, and yet I still understand the importance of preserving a clear locus of authority. Balancing these two, living with the dynamic tension between them, and even consciously institutionalizing it—well, we would have a lot to talk about on this subject.

Jim: I'd want us to trade our experiences on the actual work of implementing the various systems we've been discussing; I'm thinking about phases and stages. At Juma, I think we had to go through some major phases before we could become ready to undertake the transformation. I certainly had to get ready myself; certain other alignments had to be dismantled, and there was also a transitional period of trial and error before I even knew what I was looking for.

Kriss: And of course at Juma you have the additional challenge of a workforce who are mostly going to leave the organization within a couple years of their arrival.

Deborah: Goodwill too. Almost all of our employees leave, by design.

Kathy: And what about the students at Stanford? Or for that matter, my volunteers . . . ?

Kriss: And our funders. And the faculty. Yes, there are loads of challenges about engaging the various constituencies, the stakeholders who are not our managers. This is actually the issue that most centrally affects me and my organization. Stakeholder engagement is the type of collaboration my particular effort has focused on, much more so than participatory management. And that does bring me back full circle to one other topic I touched on earlier: using early adopters to connect with these constituencies. I'd like to explore this more: what critical success factors are involved in improving and increasing your base of support with those stakeholder groups? I understand the value of early adopters; how do we substantially increase their numbers?

Kathy: I know we have to close, but I do have one response to Kriss that I really believe in. As you know, we work in coalitions all the time. It's one of my core areas of expertise. And one thing I've learned is that you don't try to convert everyone to your way of thinking; you develop a few key relationships and strengthen them. For the broader constituency, you send messages that speak to them, and you create an overall climate of common interest. But don't expect to get very many players from these other groups to take your projects seriously. They have their own projects to work on; that's where their passions are. So when you need support and effort from your other stakeholder groups, you use your key relationships to carry the water. Don't expect everyone to take responsibility for everything.

Deborah: Yes, but . . .

Sam: Excuse me, excuse me; sorry to interrupt, but we need to finish up. I see that there are many other meaningful questions we could explore. With your permission, though, I would like to override this discussion and move into a closing summary.

Everyone: Yes. Fine. Go for it!

Sam: Throughout this conversation, I noticed that each of you would take turns agreeing with something and then taking the thought in a somewhat different direction. You resonated with one another in many ways, yet you frequently had many perspectives on a single issue, and I often had the

sense that you were each emphasizing different things. Kriss drew this to our attention most explicitly when she encouraged us to recognize the different needs and conditions that distinguish one organization from the next. And this simple fact—the diversity of your organizations and their structures and missions—begs the question, “Is there ‘one right philosophy,’ one correct model or definition, of a ‘culture of collaboration?’”

We’ve been talking about five different organizations that share a core value of wanting to put participatory values into practice. Does this mean they each share the same meaning and vision of a culture of collaboration? I think I’m walking away tonight convinced that the answer is no. To my mind, we’ve been hearing that whether a particular organization leans more toward a project management culture or more toward a distributed leadership culture or more toward a stakeholder engagement culture or more toward capacity-building professional development or more toward a double-bottom-line integrative culture, all of them are manifestations, one way or another, of participatory values.

Jim: That speaks for me. I’m still not sure what the core of our long-term culture will be, although it’s true that “integration” will hopefully be our driver. And your point, Sam, brings me to a closing comment of my own. I think of myself as a practical person, a person who is driven by goals and results. As a consequence of that, I became a proponent of participatory leadership not because I felt it was great in and of itself but because I have seen quite clearly that as a practical matter, it’s a model that can help us achieve our highest potential. So yes, I have become a convert to participatory leadership. Thank you all for supporting my learning on this.

Deborah: For me, I’d like to end on a different note. Still hopeful, yes, and definitely inspired by all the thinking we have done here. But for me, the jury on the primacy of a culture of collaboration is still out. As I’ve said, I want to create a balance between planfulness and chaos, between teamwork and initiative taking, between doing really good thinking in groups and taking bold risks and sometimes even failing as individuals. I really want to work with that tension, experiment with it, use it. I agree with Sam’s point about participatory values: what I want most is not any specific formulaic culture; I just want to keep finding ways to bring out the best in everyone.

Kriss: And please keep me posted on how that evolves.

John: In fact, it would be great for us all to stay in touch.

Jim: To be continued, then.

Kathy: Let's hope. And not just for ourselves and our own organizations. *Every* organization can be strengthened from within. And we're all better for it.

Sam: Thank you, everyone.

Reference

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