

Editor's Comment

Last eZine was the first to be produced in PDF format. We received only positive feedback from people regarding using this medium so, naturally, all future issues will be mailed out as PDF attachments. Thanks to those who provided us with this feedback. ✉

Complexity & Life

A complex world is what we are familiar with. Complexity is normal. It is something we have grown to respect. We stand in awe of nature's complexity, from the function of the human body to the incomprehensible marvels of microscopic particles. This reverence for complexity has led us to develop our own complex machinery and intricate social support structures.

We fail when we confuse "complexity" with "complication". To messy minds, complicated things are much easier to construct than complex orderly structures.

Nader 1999, pp. 331-332

As an Engineer, I have always been fascinated by the complex world around me and sought to understand it through models, equations, metaphors, or whatever means provides sufficient understanding to predict the most likely outcome of

any action in a given context. I also have always been bemused by those who seek to relate to the complex world through ignoring its complexity and proceeding to make important decisions utilising overly simplistic thought processes.

Complexity itself is the answer to the age old question, "What is the meaning of life?" the answer being, "To decrease entropy — increase complexity—in the universe." Thus, the arrow of evolution of points in the direction increased complexity. It is not surprising, then, that we are genetically programmed to only be happy when we engage in activities that lead to increased complexity.

Csikszentmihalyi (1998, pp. 74-75) describes activities that

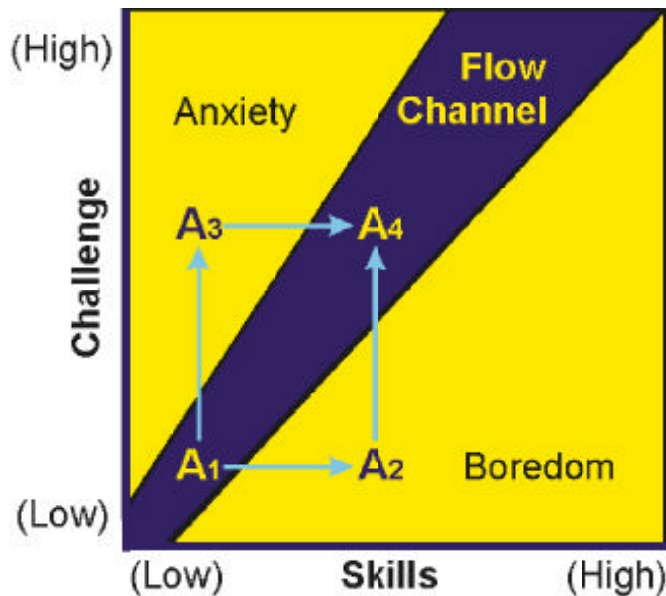
lead to happiness as *flow activities*. He believes there is a strong link between flow experiences and the increased complexity of consciousness:

In our studies, we found that every flow activity, whether it involved competition, chance, or any other dimension of experience, had this in common: It provided a sense of self discovery, a creative feeling of transporting the person to higher levels of performance, and led to previously undreamed-of states of consciousness. In short, it transformed the self by making it more complex. In this growth of self lies the key to flow activities.

A simple diagram might help explain why this should be the case. Let us assume that the figure below represents a specific activity—for example, the game of tennis. The two theoretically most important dimensions of the experience, challenges and skills, are

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represented on the two axes of the diagram. The letter A represents Alex, a boy who is learning to play tennis. The diagram shows Alex at four different points in time. When he first starts playing (A₁), Alex has practically no skills, and the only challenge he faces is hitting the ball over the net. This is not a very difficult feat, but Alex is likely to enjoy it because the difficulty is just right for his rudimentary skills. So at this point he will probably be in flow. But he cannot stay there long. After a while, if he keeps practising, his skills are bound to improve, and then he will grow bored just batting the ball over the net (A₂). Or it might happen that he meets a more practised opponent, in which case he will realize that there are much harder challenges for him than just lobbing the ball—at that point, he will feel some anxiety (A₃) concerning his poor performance.

Neither boredom nor anxiety are positive experiences, Alex will be motivated to return to the flow state. How is he to do it? Glancing again at the diagram, we see that if he is bored (A₂) and wishes to be in flow again, Alex has essentially only one choice: to increase the challenges he is facing. (He also has a second choice, which is to give up tennis altogether—in which case A would simply disappear from the diagram.) By setting himself a new and more difficult goal that matches his skills—for instance, to beat an opponent just a little more advanced than he is—Alex would be back in flow (A₄).

If Alex is anxious (A₃), the way back to flow requires that he

increase his skills. Theoretically he could also reduce the challenges he is facing, and thus return to flow where he started (in A₁), but in practice it is difficult to ignore challenges once one is aware they exist.

The diagram shows that both A₁ and A₄ represent situations in which Alex is in flow. Although each are equally enjoyable, the two states are quite different in that A₄ is a more *complex* experience than A₁. It is more complex because it involves greater challenges, and demands greater skills from the player.

But A₄, although complex and enjoyable, does not represent a stable situation, either. As Alex keeps playing, either he will become bored by the stale opportunities he finds at that level, or he will become anxious and frustrated by his relatively low ability. So the motivation to enjoy himself again will push him to get back in the flow channel, but now at a level of complexity even *higher* than A₄.

It is this dynamic feature that explains why flow activities lead to growth and discovery. One cannot enjoy doing the same thing at the same level for long. We grow either bored or frustrated; and then the desire to enjoy ourselves again pushes us to stretch our skills, or to discover new opportunities for using them.

There is another crucial dimension to the above description, the *values* dimension. If Alex does not have the values to motivate him to play tennis in the first place, no flow channel will

ever exist on the tennis diagram for Alex. The implication is that we can only ever achieve happiness and develop as a person—*increase in complexity of consciousness*—when we engage in activities, or have life experiences, which match our values.

“Personal mastery” is the phrase Senge (1994, pp. 141-142) and his colleagues use to describe the discipline of personal growth that leads to increased complexity of consciousness:

Personal mastery goes beyond competence and skills, though it is grounded in competence and skills. It goes beyond spiritual unfolding or opening, although it requires spiritual growth. It means approaching one’s life as a creative work, living life from a creative as opposed to a reactive viewpoint...

When personal mastery becomes a discipline—an activity we integrate into our lives—it embodies two underlying movements. The first is continually clarifying what is important to us [i.e. values clarification]. We often spend too much time coping with problems along our path that we forget why we are on that path in the first place. The result is that we only have a dim, or even inaccurate, view of what’s really important to us.

The second is continually learning how to see current reality more clearly. We’ve all known people entangled in counterproductive relationships, who remain stuck because they keep pretending everything is all right. Or we have been in business meetings where everyone says, “We’re on course relative to our plan,” yet an honest look at current reality would show otherwise. In moving toward a desired destination, it is vital to know where you are now...

People with a high level of personal mastery share several basic characteristics. They have a special sense of purpose that lies behind their vision and goals [i.e. they are clear about their values]. *For such a person, a vision is a calling rather than simply a good idea.* They see “current reality” as an ally, not an enemy. They have learned how to perceive and work with forces of change rather than resist

those forces. They are deeply inquisitive, committed to continually seeing reality more and more accurately. They feel connected to others and to life itself. Yet they sacrifice none of their uniqueness. They feel as if they are part of a larger creative process, which they can influence but cannot unilaterally control.

People with a high level of personal mastery live in a continual learning mode. They never “arrive.” Sometimes, language, such as the term “personal mastery,” creates a misleading sense of definiteness, of black and white. But personal mastery is not something you possess. It is a process. It is a lifelong discipline. People with a high level of personal mastery are accurately aware of their ignorance, their incompetence, their growth areas. And they are deeply self-confident. Paradoxical? Only for those who do not see that “the journey is the reward.”

Why would you choose to measure your life by endings when all the experience, the felt sense of being alive, is in the journey?

Phillip Moffit (2000, p. 60)

Latest brain research, utilising diagnostic tools that have only been available for the past decade, confirms the position taken by Csikszentmihalyi and Senge. It has been found that the highest levels of consciousness are attained when a person develops large brain assemblies—large complex brain structures—to process each different type of input to the brain (Greenfield 2000, p. 168):

Although we all understand the idea of raising or deepening our consciousness, the actual direction does not matter as much as the amplitude of the excursion. It is hard to put into literal terms just what one means. A definition of sorts of a “deepening consciousness” might be that you are aware of a greater significance in the world around you, rather than the mere zap of sensation that comes with staring up at twinkling stars or down at a churning, foaming ocean. The more the stars or the ocean “mean” to you, the more associations they will trigger [—increased “meaning” is synonymous with increased complexity of brain structure]. Hence a small child or a nonhuman animal would not be able to experience the same depth of consciousness as a human adult.

...a pivotal property of consciousness is that you can have more or less of it: a continuum. If consciousness is continuously variable as we grow, there is no reason why it should become static once we mature. If consciousness is variable, then it should also be able to expand not just during childhood, but from one moment to the next.

A commitment or otherwise, to personal growth, in terms of increased complexity of consciousness, by a critical mass of people, will likely determine the rise or fall of civilisation as we know it. As David Loye (2001, p.125) says, “...the message is open-ended and eternal, stretching out of the dim past into the mists of the future for our species. It tells us that we have a voice in the shaping of the message - but this message needs a great more nurturance, and understanding, and the assignment of much more of the power of the media to its spreading. Above all, it tells us we are not just what we more or less dutifully adapt to. Much more importantly, *we are what we refuse to adapt to.*”

The Arrow of Progress

Many of our social systems have been set up to function on the false assumption that evolution naturally results in progress—there is no evidence anywhere that confirms, that, left to its own devices, the “natural” or “mindless” process of evolution will lead to progress through survival of the fittest in a competitive world. The reality is that progress is synonymous with increased complexity and a commensurate simplification of the interface to the evolving entity. It is evident that moving in the direction of increased complexity requires disciplined effort—the mind has to be involved.

If we continue to create our social systems (and then protect their mode of function) based on the false assumption that mindless/natural evolution leads to progress, it may very well lead instead, to the ultimate demise of human civilisation—non-human species would no doubt see that as progress!

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IMCA News

Memories of Reg Revans - 1907-2003

Dr Reg Revans, who died recently, was an extraordinary man by any standard. Born in 1907, he trained as a scientist and worked as a young man with the great names of his day including Einstein, and those at the Cambridge Cavendish Laboratory. During this time he represented England at the 1928 Olympics. He then established a career in education both at the University level and within industry where he was Director of Education for the National Coal Board after the end of the 2nd World War.

He said that there were so few people who could manage the mines, due to the losses during the war years that it was not appropriate to take them off the job to attend courses. Therefore, he adopted a system he had seen in the research laboratories, where colleagues shared and compared their problem, ideas and findings. He invited the managers of coal mines to do likewise. He invited them to visit each other's coal mines often in groups of three, which he called "a set of managers". One of them could be managing safety very well. He was asked to share his methods. Another might be doing well on productivity, and another might

be controlling costs well. By their visits and discussions, they not only learned best practice, but also had mutual support to introduce the new methods to their own mines.

Revans called this "Action Learning". It sounded simple enough, but to his dismay he found the training profession going in the opposite direction. The professional trainers wanted to control the agenda, and set up courses and have people sit in classrooms. They introduced a passive, rather than active approach to work based learning. Revans said that could be appropriate when the issue was a puzzle, and the solution already known. But for real work problems, where there could be various options, it was best to research the action, and help people share what they do.

I first met Reg Revans in 1973. I was in Belgium at the European Foundation for Management Education. A colleague said there was an Englishman nearby who was advising the Belgium Government. It was Reg. He welcomed me and outlined how his ideas had not found favour in UK universities, so he had accepted the challenge of establishing action learning with a consortium of Belgian companies.

His ideas had however been accepted by the National Health Service. He introduced a range of challenging processes that brought doctors, nurses and administrators to work in the same project groups. Independent research later showed that in those hospitals there were a number of clear improvements, such as reducing the number of days in hospital per patient, in comparison to others that had not used action learning.

Later, he was to accept the challenge from Arnold Weinstock, Head of the GEC Company, to introduce action learning. He again he rose to the challenge with great success. He brought managers from different parts of the business together to ask questions, find the facts, assess options, make choices and implement them and share the learning. It sounds straightforward and obvious. But, I can tell you from personal experience that it is not. The reason is that the learning is rarely shared. People focus on getting the task done then rush to the next assignment. The learning is rarely shared and often lost. As Revans kept saying, it is not just the action, but also the learning that is important.

I met Reg again in 1979. I was by then a Professor of Management at Cranfield University School of Management. We invited him to speak, and he did so with gusto, for he was a brilliant orator with people waiting upon his word. Afterwards, we had a discussion, and I asked him a question about the progress of action learning. He replied, "it will not be a success until places like Cranfield, and other universities, offer doctorates in action learning". At the time, we thought we knew what a doctorate was based on traditional scientific method, but Reg was talking about work based doctoral work and the acceptance of that. I am pleased to say that I am now involved in that work as a member of the International Management Centres Association - www.imcassociation.org Dr Revans was the first President of the organization. For those interested in the doctoral level work please see

www.i-m-c.pacific-garc.org

I began to realise that what Reg Revans was saying added up

with what managers were saying, albeit they did not have a process or structure. I therefore invited him to Australia, where I emigrated in 1982. He was now in his late 70s but accepted the invitation, and gave a brilliant series of talks. I can see him now talking with a group in the sunshine on a beautiful Australian afternoon. The listeners sat under the shade of a tree while Reg gave forth, in Old Testament fashion, for he was without doubt a prophet. During the meeting, he said something that has always stayed with me. "Remember," he said, "the measure of the person is not in the statements he or she makes, but in the questions they ask."

So, it was with Reg. He would expect you to ask questions about your work, your team, your life, your relationships, your career, and so on. Yet, he had strong opinions and felt that too much money was wasted on non-work based training.

He was a modest man in terms of his approach to business and style of life. He never tried to establish a business out of action learning and was suspicious of those that did. He was reluctant to institutionalise his ideas, as he wanted them to challenge the status quo. In that sense he was a revolutionary, out to build and develop people and organizations. He did not want followers, but rather for each person to be their own leader contributing to improvement at all levels. Management education was not just for managers. It was for all; including the unemployed, who he encouraged to get together to assist each other find work.

He was a fund of knowledge, and called upon the scriptures in the widest sense for he understood many faiths, plus his deep knowledge of philosophy and science and history. At another

level, his memory was incredible. I remember being with him at a conference where he was asked for names of people who were applying action learning. He not only gave the names, but also reeled off their phone numbers and addresses without reference to any notes.

Reg Revans believed in the ordinary person, and their factory floor understanding and streetwise knowledge. He was suspicious of business schools, and their restricted entry, and divorce from the real place of work and learning. He was a populist without a big organisation or army of people supporting him.

Open the doors and the windows, bring people together who share problems and care about getting solutions. That was the start point. Then encourage them to understand qualitative and quantitative research and focus on the real positive politics of how to get action. That was the message of Reg Revans. It was so obvious, that many people ignored it, and still do. To my knowledge, he never received an OBE or MBE, or other similar award. Yet, his contribution to the nation, and the world, was many times greater than so many who have been recognised. It was a pleasure, and honour, to know him and to learn from him what action learning can mean and can do, for I have benefited considerably.

Charles Margerison

11.1.2003 ✍

IMCA Faculty Membership

Are you accredited to use a values inventory (AVI) with your clients? If so, you may like to consider accrediting others in its use. To do so, you must firstly

become a Faculty Member of the International Management Centres Association (IMCA). Secondly, you will need to have your proposed AVI Accreditation programme approved by Paul Chippendale, Fellow in Values & Ethics (IMCA). You will find details of IMCA Faculty Membership at:

http://www.i-m-c.org.au/html/faculty_membership.htm ✍

VBO

Would you like to have your organisation endorsed as a Values-Based Organisation (VBO)? Endorsement is available through the IMCA - details will shortly be available at: www.i-m-c.org.au However, If you are eager for your organisation to start a VBO Endorsement Programme right away, contact Michael Henderson or Dougal Thompson at: info@valuesatwork.org ✍

MBA

Lastly, the costs of the MBA programmes have recently changed. The latest details are in the application form which you will find at:

http://www.i-m-c.org.au/html/master_programmes.htm. ✍

About Minessence

If you would like to know more about us and the methods we use to elicit personal values, to increase personal effectiveness, or to transform organisations into values-based organisations, then we have a comprehensive publication available at:

<http://www.minessence.net/pdfdocs/aboutus.pdf> ✍

Principles to Live By

The principle to live by for this issue of the Minessence eZine comes from Victor Frankl, reflecting on his experiences in a concentration camp during World War II, Frankl (1946|1984, pp. 86-87 & 98). He explores the 'true' meaning of human liberty:

Is there no spiritual freedom in regard to behavior and reaction to any given surroundings? Is that theory true which would have us believe that man is no more than the product of many conditional and environmental factors—be they of a biological, psychological or sociological nature? Is man but an accidental product of these? Most important, do the prisoners' reactions to the singular world of the concentration camp prove that man cannot escape the influences of his surroundings? Does man have no choice of action in the face of such circumstances?

We can answer these questions from experience as well as on principle. The experiences of camp life show that man does have choice of action. There were enough examples, often of a heroic nature, which proved that apathy could be overcome, irritability suppressed. Man *can* preserve a vestige of spiritual freedom, of independence of mind, even in such terrible conditions of psychic and physical stress.

We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: *the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.*

...It can be said that the last inner freedom cannot be lost. It can be said that they were worthy of their sufferings; the way they bore their suffering was a genuine inner achievement. It is this spiritual freedom—which cannot be taken away—that

makes life meaningful and purposeful.

An active life serves the purpose of giving man the opportunity to realise values in creative work, while a passive life of enjoyment affords him the opportunity to obtain fulfillment in experiencing beauty, art, or nature. But there is also purpose in that life which is almost barren of both creation and enjoyment and which admits of but one possibility of high moral behavior: namely, in man's attitude to his existence, an existence restricted by external forces. A creative life and a life of enjoyment are banned to him. But not only creativeness and enjoyment are meaningful. If there is a meaning in life at all, there must be a meaning in suffering. Suffering is an ineradicable part of life, even as fate and death. Without suffering and death human life cannot be complete.

...Woe to him who saw no more sense in his life, no aim, no purpose, and therefore no point in carrying on. He was soon lost. The typical reply with which such

a man rejected all encouraging arguments was, "I have nothing to expect from life any more." What sort of answer can one give to that?

What was really needed was a fundamental change in our attitude toward life. We had to learn ourselves and, furthermore, we had to teach the despairing men that *it did not really matter what we expected from life, but rather what life expected from us.* We needed to stop asking about the meaning of life, and instead to think of ourselves as those who were being questioned by life—daily and hourly. Our answer must consist, not of talk or meditation, but in right action and in right conduct. Life ultimately means taking the responsibility to find the right answer to its problems and to fulfill the tasks which it constantly sets for each individual.

Reference:

Frankl, V. (1946|1984) *Man's Search for Meaning*, Washington Square press, New York. ☞

PRINCIPLES TO LIVE BY

~ Attitude - The Ultimate Freedom ~

The longer I live, the more I realise the impact of attitude on life. Attitude to me is more important than facts.

It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people think or say or even do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness or skill. Attitude will make or break a company, a church, a home, ...

The remarkable thing is: we have a choice everyday regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day.

We cannot change our past. We cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude.

I am convinced that life is 10 percent what happens to me and 90 percent how I react to it. And so it is with you

—we are in charge of our attitudes!!

Anon

Visionary Leadership Program

June 19/20 & July 24/25, 2003

energistic's next Open Visionary Leadership Program is scheduled in Sydney for June 19/20 and July 24/25 2003.

ABOUT THE VALUES-CENTRED VISIONARY LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Purpose: *To liberate the Visionary leader through the language of values*

Results: The rapid enhancement of your leadership qualities with the practical skills of learning, leading and serving.

This program is for leaders who are engaged in leadership, *are willing to explore their core values, and aspire to develop their Visionary leadership capabilities.*

What recent participants have said about their experience of The Visionary Leadership Program:

"Excellent, life-changing experience. The most valuable educational course, by far, that I have ever attended (including doing an MBA). The groundwork (i.e. prework questionnaires) made the experience very personal, believable, and practical. It gave me the specific answers for my needs and development. The course talked to me and about me and not AT me."

"Challenging at times and enlightening. Fantastic learning experience"

"Well related to my needs within a changing organisation"

"Loved the fact that there was strong research to support what you present. The content was rich, varied and very challenging"

Stage ONE: What you will discover, learn, enjoy and experience:

- The content for this Stage is delivered via email.
- You will be advised of the URL and instructions to enable you to complete your online Leadership Development Profile. This leads to the main document of the program, your Values Profile, a 50 page detailed analysis and graphic display of your core values.
- There is also some recommended pre-reading to advance your understanding of leadership.
- You will also receive specific directions to locate the venue.

Stage TWO This is the first two days of the Program in which you will:

- Clarify the Purpose and the Results of the Program.
- Discuss the nature of leadership and the philosophic assumptions of the Program.
- View the Program's metaphors - The Fan, The Telescope, The Bounty
- Expand the Program's prime model - *'The spirit of leadership is 'being'*.
- Commence the development of your *personal Purpose and Vision Statements*
- Crystallise a range of goals, advance them into 'choices' and wire them to your core values.

- Progress this data into an Energy (time) Management tool, the Weekly Navigator.
- Calibrate a range of *personal communication preferences*.
- Commence unpacking the wealth of information in your Values Profile.
- Appreciate your World View and Leadership style from this Profile.
- Discuss *several models about values, their formation and modification*.
- Commit to writing two Action Papers to advance the new knowledge in to practical applications.
- Review the *nature of motivation and the role of a leader* within a team.
- Reflect on each day in an ‘auditory concert review’ presented with baroque music.
- Provide written feedback of the day to the convenors.

**Stage THREE (after a month of reflection and action “back at work”)
This is the second two days of the Program in which you will:**

- Share your success and progress experienced since Stage TWO, both at work and home.
- Review and advance the writing of your personal Purpose and Vision Statements.
- Understand the *power of the words you use as leader* and consider your options.
- Calibrate your *tendencies to be optimistic and pessimistic* and consider your options.
- Enjoy a powerful experience to advance your skill as a listener.
- Be introduced to *Chaos theory and Self-organising systems with Mant’s metaphor - ‘bike & frog’*.
- Deepen all aspects leadership as opened in Stage ONE.
- Enjoy several fun experiences to *deepen your communication skills*.
- Celebrate the Program at a dinner on the final evening.
- Review the textbooks issued to you for the Program.
- Write a substantial Action Paper detailing how you will roll out the learning from the Program.

Dates: Thursdays and Fridays 19/20 June and 24/25 2003 (non-residential)

Fee: \$3,600 + GST (includes all materials, textbooks, catering, and celebration dinner on final evening)

For further details and to register, please send an email to leadership@energistics.com.au

As places are limited to 20 participants, please reply by June 5, 2003

Warm regards, The Visionary Leadership Team

“Growing Tall Poppies”

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