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Attached you will find an article by Fritjof Capra on Life and Leadership. It offers a definition of leadership that we could aspire to, or reject. Be sure to read the paper and decide for yourself.

In the meantime, the award for best pupil for last Friday's class goes hands down to Pete. Congratulations! Pete is genuinely trying to live this class outside of our Friday discussions, so he did an attention study. He tried not to look where he habitually looks, and discovered that Cal Poly campus has beautiful trees. He felt as if a good bit of his energy is normally used for watching his surroundings and he could be more reflective if he didn’t use his energy that way. Sadly, Roger put this knowing smile on his face and pronounced that Pete would re-habituate. Roger urges Pete to watch that process to study why re-habituation happens. Pete will report back later in the quarter. Re-habituation aside, it's now our turn to try the attention experiment for ourselves and see if it's true about the trees.

For Roger, attention is the primary component of leadership. For example, and please don't spread this around, the CEO of Motorola would sit ¼ hour each day in the office and do nothing. Why? Evidently, the idea is to intuitively feel the organization. It's a reflective process that wouldn’t work for me, but I know that some people tap into intuition better than others. If it works for you, go for CEO.

Another related leadership model is by Pete Senge which has no individual in it. The organization behaves consistent with stated aspirations. Peter relates a goal to the nature of a dynamic system. He recommends that if you stay present to the creative tension, you will know there is leadership because you can see the community. A corollary to this is that if you want to be someone to identify their role in a change model, you will learn their leadership model. Consider the sentence “the best work always gets done when there is a clear deadline.” What do you immediately notice about the words best, always and deadline? If you deconstruct this, you will learn how the sentence speaks volumes about the speaker’s leadership concept. Another example of this is retirement, which is a goal based process. The systemic structure is that the goal (retirement) is outside of you and you don’t get any practice at it before you arrive. Some people die because of this. My PhD thesis advisor is 80 and he has no retirement plan. He says he doesn’t know how to do retirement, so he isn’t. He will stay at the university as long as he can. Doesn’t everyone know someone like this?

While we have been talking around leadership for weeks, our class is still struggling with the basic definition of leadership. Kurt looked up two definitions which he read to us who would probably send out to us if we ask nice, and Rakesh asked about the difference between a good manager and a good leader. In the Rakesh model, the hierarchy is manager, leader and great soul (who transcend leadership). What does a leader have that a manager does not? I didn’t get a precise response. Roger regularly brings up the viewpoint of the extreme, so my notes have the question of can a person be a leader if they have no followers, no apparent goal, and no obvious direction? We might put Gandhi or Buddha in this category. Another prophetic observation came from Trevor who points out that natural systems do not have leaders, so there is no requirement for a leader in all systems.

So then there’s the recent story of the Chilean miner’s which brought up the question of how the group picked the leader and whether the leader was acting out of fear or love. Fear based action is anxiety, and it doesn’t take much to conjure up an example of that within ourselves. Love based action is a bit trickier because it could be fear based in disguise. During the conversation it sounded like Roger would prefer us all to have more love based than fear based activity. Liz wants to know what happens to you if you are a leader in a system, but the system sees you in a different context. Think about artists who become famous only posthumously. Roger brought up historical references to a leader being consistent with society, being immoral and being successful. The flip side is a pious, brilliant leader who is out of touch with the context of the society and loses.

Kurt doesn’t want to be a leader in an oppressive system, but was cautioned never to use the word never. Trevor wants to sign up for leading in a system where the individual defines their contribution and the system doesn’t dictate. He suggests that being compassionate takes a lot of energy. It would be great if Trevor could be a leader in an unconstrained system. Consider it a homework assignment to stay on the lookout for unconstrained systems.

Also keep in mind the Torbert developmental model which moves a person from achiever, to expert, to strategist to myth-maker. It also makes the assumption that everyone acts with unconditional positive regard. If you don’t see someone’s actions that way, you just don’t understand their world. Really gets you thinking about what motivates people. Try this when skateboarders jump out in front of your car.

So that's plenty enough material for us to have a midterm this Friday! What you have learned? Can you represent what you have learned to someone else in the class? Can you give a progress report on your leadership project? When you are the listener, can you reflect back what you hear?

And finally, can you answer the question every morning: Do I want to enjoy the world or change it?

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Fritjof Capra.doc (90 KB)