

The Necessary Evolution of Human Consciousness:

A Collaborative Inquiry – sponsored by The Renewal Foundation

Context

On the weekend of 5th/6th December 2015 at Barrow Castle in Bath, England, a collaborative inquiry into the necessary evolution in human consciousness was undertaken, with a focus on how the three fields of Sustainability, Spirituality and Individual/Team/Organisational Transformation can inform and transform each other to make the best contribution to this evolution.

The following people participated: Mark Drewell (Senior Partner, Foresight), Richard Barrett (Author and Founder, Barrett Values Centre), Mila Aliana (GPS Collective), Frederic Holscher (Director, Civil Society Forum UK), Ed Gillespie (Co-Founder, Futerra), Karen Downes (Founder, The Flourishing Initiative), Sharon Olivier (Faculty, Ashridge Business School), Andrew Thornton (Chairman, Thornton's Budgens), Nigel Hughes (Director, Maynard Leigh), Charlie O'Malley (Founder, Responsible Leadership Forum), Trevor Waldock (Founder, Emerging Leaders and Author), Scilla Elsworthy (Founder, Oxford Research Group and Peace Direct), Dr. Judy Ryde (Founder/CEO of Trauma Foundation South-West, and The Bath Centre for Psychotherapy and Counselling), Dr. Malcolm Parlett (Author, Future Sense), Donna Steinhorn (Co-founder, The Coach Initiative), Professor Peter Reason (Author, Spindrift and many other books), along with facilitator Jenny Mackewn and co-hosts Professor Peter Hawkins (Chairman Renewal Associates and Professor of leadership Henley Business School) and Giles Hutchins (Author and Speaker).

This brief paper acts as a synopsis conveying the general atmosphere and some of the shared insights of this collaborative inquiry, itself forming the first part of a two-phased inquiry into the necessary evolution of human consciousness – the second inquiry being held on the weekend of April 16th/17th 2016 with a selected group of millennials to explore how we can most effectively utilise multi-media channels to catalyse this shift in consciousness.

Overview of Approach

On the blustery late-Autumn morning of December 5th, 19 participants came together for what proved to be a thought-provoking, enriching and engaging weekend. Over light refreshments, people captured their perspectives on the top three challenges facing our world over the next thirty years on a large sheet of brown paper which was visible throughout the weekend, to remind us of the urgent, systemic and inter-relational nature of the challenges we face.

After an initial 'check in' with all participants, the inquiry commenced with an embodied spatial exercise where people positioned themselves within the dimensions of Organisational Transformation in the North, Personal Transformation in the South, Spirituality in the East and Sustainability in the West. People stood where they felt most engaged in their life at present. Clusters formed in the four quadrants for people to share with their neighbours, before a whole group sharing was undertaken.

Participants then formed into three pre-assigned inquiry groups and, in break-out rooms, explored the first inquiry question '**What is emerging for us now. Do we sense a shift in**

consciousness/awareness in our fields of work and how is the shift manifesting? This then fed into a general discussion over lunch.

After lunch, as a whole group, the inquiry deepened in to exploring the question **'What is already happening that is creating the Consciousness of Tomorrow?'**, whereupon news of innovation from our respective areas was shared and discussed.

Then, after light refreshments, a Way of Council was held to inquire into, **'How do these emerging innovations need to be connected and what extra is most needed?'** All participants shared and listened within a soulful atmosphere.

After some relaxation time before evening dinner, people started to explore over dinner the question **'Are there optimal ways to help catalyse this shift through communications, leadership, interventions, etc.?'**

Then there was an evening storytelling circle for each person to share personal stories about, **'A time in my life when my consciousness shifted in a way that involved aspects of spiritual, ecological and personal transformation.'**

Sunday morning was a leisurely start with people exchanging insights over breakfast, and then a 'check-in' circle commenced at 9.15am, and then into a sub-group inquiry on the question **'How do we accelerate the dialogue, co-learning and co-creation between the polarities of spiritual transformation, Sustainability and personal/organisational transformation?'** Three groups convened, one worked on the link between Spirituality and Sustainability, one on Sustainability and Individual and Organisational Transformation, and one on Personal Transformation and Spirituality. This then moved on to a whole group inquiry on **'Are there optimal ways to help catalyse this shift through communications, leadership, interventions, etc.?'**

During Sunday lunch everyone captured a list of their Top 3-5 emerging ideas, which after lunch was gathered into a 'Collective Build' activity to form a Collective Emergent Statement created by the whole group, as 10 activities to take forward post-weekend.

A final check-in round then allowed everyone to share their closing thoughts, key take-aways and personal action commitments from the weekend, as well as outlining the intent of the second inquiry in April 2016. Here is sample of some of the participant feedback:

'A dynamic and profound weekend'

'Deep appreciation, I learned a lot and met some really fascinating people'

'Nourishing'

'Deep and practical'

'An inspiring weekend with such rich conversations and so many wise hearts and minds'

'What a special group of people'

Some of the Key Insights and Themes from the Weekend

A shift in consciousness does seem to be happening at personal and organisational levels. Over the last couple of decades this shift has manifested in certain ways.

A trend discussed within personal and developmental psychology is a relatively recent shift in focus from self-development to looking beyond one's self through the development of a more relational, transpersonal inter-subjective awareness. This is aided by the increasing acceptance of field phenomena, quantum intelligence, living-systems emergence and the application of this living-systems logic and quantum intelligence to organisational and leadership development. The importance of self-mastery is still core to this deepening awareness, as is our personal soul-calling and innate capacity to lead across personal and organisational thresholds, yet there is an increasing emphasis on the 'self' as interconnected rather than encapsulated.

It was also noted there is an increasing recognition of the importance of social/collaborative and spiritual/quantum intelligence within organisational development, along with practical methods for enhancing our awareness of the transpersonal nature of our teams, social fields and co-participatory emerging futures in our organisations, for instance: Peter Senge and Otto Scharmer's Presencing and Theory U work, the take-up of Systemic Constellations, applied improvisation, Social Presencing approaches, and expressive artful inquiries.

There is an increasing recognition in leadership, coaching and management practices of the importance of balancing both yin and yang qualities (yin – feeling, sensing, relational, empathic, compassionate, interconnectedness, grounded in presence, more of a 'being' mode; yang – rational, analytical, focused, moving forward with progress, more of a 'doing' mode). Also the recognition in coaching and mentoring that it need to be in service not just of the individual being coached but enabling that person to better serve their wider stakeholder world.

Also, there has also been a notable increase in the recognition of the importance of values, ethics and a personal and organisational moral compass to guide us individually and collectively.

It was also discussed that, while there is evidence of a shift in consciousness emerging in myriad ways, there is also inertia and myopia within leadership when it comes to embracing a significant cultural shift in our organisations, so inured many of our organisations and leaders are in the status quo business-as-usual mind-set.

Yet, there is increasing recognition that the organisational logic must change, along with a shift in consciousness if there is to be anything resembling a successful outcome for our personal wellbeing, organisational resilience and systemic viability.

It was noted that there are still many leaders who simply do not care about their people or who are simply too caught up in a short-term fear-based logic inherent within some of our current cultural narrative. This dominant cultural narrative undermines the necessary shift in consciousness now required. As one participant noted and others echoed, 'We have a great task to do in challenging the dominant narratives of our culture.'

As the inquiry moved into what we need to do to help catalyse this shift in consciousness, much was shared about our own quality of attention and presence throughout our busy work routines. The

challenge of how to ensure we each remain present and grounded so that we can feel and resonate with the interconnectedness of our social-systems and wider life-systems was discussed. For instance, one question put forward by a participant and echoed by others was, 'What are the daily practices of compassion that keep expanding and extending our connectivity?'

There was discussion around the need for surrendering judgements and pre-conceived notions while opening up with humility to what is emerging within our teams and ever-changing context. As leaders we are being asked to develop the art of hosting, of holding space, of nourishing curiosity, creativity and courage. As one participant noted, 'How can we best develop the art of asking questions with genuine, deep curiosity?' Another asked, 'How can we enhance the quality of presence in our connections and conversations?' Another explored, 'How can we best host sacred spaces for healing, rejuvenation and renewal?'

A recurring theme throughout the weekend was about the importance of sensing not just the interconnectedness of our human family and social systems, but also of grounding this within the 'more-than-human world'. For instance, one participant asked 'How do we avoid being human-centric?' Another asked, 'How do we speak for Gaia?', and another explored, 'How can we best practice remaining grounded in Gaia as we go about our work life?'

There were discussions around embracing rituals and practices as part of our daily life to assist in our openness, connectivity, perception, humility and attentiveness; and also how such practices could be brought into our organisations: 'ways of being' infusing 'ways of doing', to ensure we speak, act and relate from a place of presence and interconnectedness, in service of Life.

As we moved into Sunday, questions were raised around how to best utilise social media and the power of social networks and web technologies to help with this shift in consciousness. Discussions on how best to do this formed around playing to the 'humanity' of this shift, highlighting that the shift is essentially towards more flourishing, life-enhancing, creative, joyful, purposeful living and working. One participant noted 'If you want to subvert the dominant paradigm, you have to have more fun than they are and let them know.' There was also a discussion around creating disruptive messages that act as 'Trojan mice' amid the current logic, undermining it while opening people up to new ways of attending and relating.

This inquiry then drew to a close with a collective build activity where participants' individual insights were combined and condensed by the whole group into ten activities to form an emergent statement of things we could practically take forward, play and experiment in the days, weeks and months after the weekend.

Every participant committed to practising one or more of these practises and sharing back their experience.

Here is a synopsis of this **Collective Emergent Statement**:

(1) Sharing 'I don't know'

Supported by creating the sacred space to hold the not knowing, uncertainty and authenticity; create opportunities to experiment using ritual linked to spirit & Gaia.

(2) Ritual Linked to Spirit

Ritual = expression of values of the organisation and we need to recognise ritual in its widest sense, building on what is there and not there. We can do this by creating a space/time for Gaia in all meetings, having a Non-dual perspective to ecology, challenging others when they split the human from the more-than-human-world and moving from creation to collaboration, co-creation and co-evolution.

(3) Stating awkward things - the truth that needs to be spoken, noticed, and included

Accessing what we need to call upon from ourselves, each other, 'the more than we', for the awkward things that need to be expressed for truth to be spoken; to practice this and be accountable for sharing feedback.

(4) Accountability

Testing ours and others accountability and commitment through action inquiry cycles of experimentation and prototyping.

(5) 'Bringing in the Ghosts'

- a) Unheard and excluded voices including our own excluded voices.
- b) Using empty chairs in meetings for representing these voices, which different people can occupy and speak from. Including stakeholder voices, marginalised groups, ancestors, future generations, aspects of the 'more than human world'.
- c) Ruthlessly confronting with compassion both exclusion and tokenism, in a way that is non self-righteousness and avoids over-attachment and polarisation.

(6) Community

Cycles of connecting to community; nurturing community and connection; being accountable to our communities

(7) Wrath

Speaking truth to injustice - letting it come through as 'Soul Speak'; invoking the images of Kali or a Volcano

(8) How to get business leaders to do inner work

Developing a common language for this including:

- a) Personal mastery
- b) Understand our own shadow / blind spots/ self-deception / unconscious bias/ wilful blindness
- c) Providing practices for regular connection to spirit & Gaia
- d) Reflective practice with self & others

(9) Begin to become 'indigenous earthlings'

- a) Feel Gaia through our body
- b) Eco pilgrimage, Vision quests, Empathy walks, Listening posts
- c) Bringing back objects from nature to help sustain the connection

10) Conversations and contact (Link this to (6) community)

Creating moments of deeper contact and developing methods and ways to sustain and deepen them:

- a) Noticing when the 'way of being' is interrupting deeper contact and how to 'interrupt the interruption'.
- b) Expressing appreciation to anyone we meet; e.g. road-workers, train and bus attendants
- c) Ask questions that connect:
 - a. What is the most important thing in your life?
 - b. What is alive in you today?
 - c. What's on your mind now?
- d) Intention – regularly check-in with our inner intention, and quality of attention.

Please note that this synopsis paper is not meant to provide a detailed coverage of the Collaborative Inquiry on 5th/6th December 2015, it is only intended to capture aspects of the atmosphere and themes discussed so as to feed into the second part of this collaborative process, whereupon outcomes will be captured and shared with both inquiry groups and other interested parties.