

Organizational Purpose: Foundation for the Future

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Our desire to explore these questions led us to write "The Challenge of the New Millennium: Creating a World in Which Our Descendants Can Thrive"(1). In it we explored what we believe to be six levers organizations could use to achieve such a world (Figure # 1 below). Since then, we have continued our exploration through research, and through conversations with a series of "thinking partners." These have nurtured our commitment to refine and deepen our thinking, to learn from others' deliberations and experiments, and to find a pathway forward. This article has emerged from these explorations and is a "work in progress" about the first lever, "organizational purpose." It is about our tentative conclusions, but mostly about our questions. We start with "purpose" because we believe it is the foundation for all else.

Figure #1 - Six Leverage Points	
Define Organizational Purpose in terms of...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees • Community members • Organizational longevity • Global sustainability • Customers • Shareholders
Build more Inclusive Organizations by...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeing power as the ability to get things done, an unlimited resource • Creating various levels of influence and involvement • Involving stakeholders in decision making
Create Mutual Accountability via...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tying executive pay to performance regarding stakeholders (customers, shareholders, employees, community) and social responsibility (sustainable world) • Increasing shareholder influence • Expanding the role of the directors • ESOP's • 360 degree performance management • Adhering to core values and vision
Leverage our Interdependence by...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding the interdependence of individuals, institutions, economies and societies • Defining organizational purposes in a way which takes this interdependence into account • Nurturing the building blocks of inclusive organizations;

	relationships and conversations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing the ability of knowledge workers to learn so that achieving more comprehensive organizational purposes is possible
Expand our Perspectives the of Time and Space by...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considering the impact of our decisions for at least seven generations • Adopting a bird's eye view of our habitat
Properly Value and Wisely Use Natural Resources by...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning the facts about global demographics and its implications for the environmental burden, the relationship of the global economies, and the status of the world's renewable and non-renewable resources • Understanding the differences between environmental protection and contributing to global sustainability • Including goals and strategies regarding sustain-ability in an organization's mission and vision

The Tale of the Investment Banker and the Fisherman

A glance at any newspaper's business section could easily convince us that the sole purpose of all corporations is to make profit for its owners. Layoffs in the service of profit. Celebrations to laud profit. Hirings and firings of leaders based on quarterly profits. Certainly profits are important, even critical. But how much is enough? And, is the laser-like focus on profits leading us where we ultimately want to go? Are we in the middle of an undeclared war between stockholders and other stakeholders about the purpose of our organizations?

We are reminded of a tale about an investment banker who is vacationing on the sunny beaches of Mexico. Coming upon a fisherman just returned from catching a few beautiful tuna, he asks why the man didn't stay out longer to catch more fish, "What will you do with the rest of your day?" The Mexican fisherman replies, "I sleep late, fish a little, play with my children, take a siesta with my wife Maria, stroll into the village each evening where I sip wine and play guitar with my amigos. I have a full and busy life, se or."

The banker protests. He exclaims, "But you could spend more time fishing. You could then buy a bigger boat. Then, you could buy several boats. Eventually you would have a fleet. You could sell directly to a processor. Open your own cannery. You would control the product, the processing, and distribution. You could leave this small village and move to Mexico City, then Los Angeles, and then to New York City where you could run your expanding enterprise!"

The fisherman pauses, looks intently into the man's eyes and queries, "But se or, how long will all this take?" The banker says, "15 to 20 years." "But what then, se or?"

The banker laughs. "That's the best part. When the time is right you would announce an IPO and sell your company stock to the public and become very rich."

"But what then, se or?"

"You would retire. Move to a small village where you would sleep late, fish a little, play with your kids, take siesta with you wife, stroll to the village in the evenings where you could sip wine and play guitar with your amigos."

And what is the price we are paying for this inordinate attention to profit? We are paying the extraordinary costs of environmental degradation, of a growing imbalance in the allocation of resources and wealth, and the costs associated with the skewing of our values towards consumerism and away from family and community. And we are not the only ones paying. We are selling the quality of life for our descendants.

In the Beginning...

This inordinate emphasis on profit is not where it all began. Corporations were originally created in the sixteenth century by the British crown to serve the interests of the Crown. In the United States' colonial period, they were used to develop and maintain control over the colonies. However, after the American Revolution, with the memories of this tyranny fresh in their minds, our forefathers were wary of the concentration of power in either public or private institutions. Thus, in order to keep control as close to citizens as possible, rights to grant charters were given to individual states rather than the federal government. These charters included a number of restrictive provisions. For example, the charters were limited to a fixed number of years, they set limits on corporate borrowing, ownership of land, and sometimes even profits. Return to investors was used primarily as an inducement to fund the corporations. The financial return was secondary to the corporation's purpose, which was the benefit of society as a whole.(2)

The gradual shift of corporations in the United States from primarily serving the public interest to generating income for investors occurred during the 1800's. The still-fledgling state governments looked to private corporations to take care of those public needs which they had neither the resources nor the organization to handle. Private corporations provided, for example, transportation, water, roadways, banking services and libraries. Corporate charters also began to be extended to include work less concerned with the public interest, such as manufacturing. Private corporations were taking the lead in stimulating growth and settlement in the developing states. In an effort to continue this pattern, states began to woo corporations through a relaxation of the limits and restrictions in the charters.

This pattern dramatically increased after the Civil War (the age of the "robber barons") and continues to this day. Abraham Lincoln expressed his concern about this trend just prior to his death. "Corporations have been enthroned... An era of corruption in high places will follow and the money power will endeavor to prolong its reign by working on the prejudices of the people... until wealth is aggregated in a few hands... and the Republic is destroyed".(3) The long-term result of this pattern is that today's articles of incorporation are so devoid of content that there is little left for states to control. In fact, in 1886 the Supreme Court ruled that "a private corporation is a natural person under the U.S. Constitution... and is thereby entitled to the protection of the Bill of Rights, including the right to free speech and other constitutional protections extended to individuals".(4) This ruling did what the government wanted it to do-stimulate economic growth. By creating a fictional person of a corporation, the corporation carried more of a liability than the individuals who made them up. The "corporate veil" protected the rights of the directors and

officers from being individually or personally liable for the acts of the corporate entity. This freed entrepreneurs to take risks. This helped make corporations the economic engine of the post-agricultural, industrial society.

However, that was a different and simpler time. The lives of organizational directors, officers, and leaders were more closely and intricately interwoven with the communities in which the organizations and they resided. Their children went to the same schools as the children of their employees. They used the same libraries, attended the same churches, and shopped at the same stores. Now, ripped from community anchors and living a more complex, mobile, and global life, it has become harder to maintain one's internal moral compass.

Significantly, it was also after the Civil War that the number and the size of corporations increased dramatically. There were few, if any, mechanisms to monitor whether corporations were operating within their charters. What did exist, however, were the accounting mechanisms established by the early stockholders to monitor and report on their investments. Although these systems were never intended to report on the performance of the organization as a whole, they did exist and were adopted by those trying to manage the expanding corporations. These systems became the way corporate performance was measured. They did not measure the returns for any other stakeholders or consider the performance of the organization as a whole. For example, the systems did not report accidents, product defects, customer complaints, or community concerns. They did not consider the corporation's performance in relation to its public purpose.(5) It is only now that we understand that what one measures drives what one gets.

Is it too simplistic to blame an accounting procedure for how we went from corporations serving public interest to organizations exploiting it for private gain? Perhaps. Whatever the explanation, however, the point remains that "states and state governments, like national governments, are formed to 'promote the general welfare.' Their actions, including the chartering of corporations, are taken (or supposed to be taken) in pursuit of that broad objective... We should ask how well and in what ways the corporation has served, and how it has harmed, the public interest-because there is no other reason for us to charter corporations and to grant them special business privileges".(6)

Just as during the nineteenth century, corporate forms and the laws which govern them have to tinued to evolve in the twentieth. It is a cycle of action and reaction. When corporations exceed the boundaries acceptable practices, laws are enacted which require corporations to act in more "socially responsible ways." The Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act; the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act; and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act are examples of such laws. David Korten characterizes this evolution as "one of continuing pressure by corporate interests to expand corporate rights and to limit corporate obligations".(7)

However, it is not as if corporations only serve the public interest when forced to. Many enthusiastically carry out what they see as their social responsibilities through foundations, matching grant programs, scholarship funds, and other educational and community services. And, according to the Conference Board in New York, average corporate contributions to nonprofits have remained at 0.9 percent of pre-tax profits for the past several years.(8)

Although these efforts on behalf of the 'general welfare' are noble, and deserve to be acknowledged as such, three facts tell us they are insufficient. First, corporations do whatever they must to keep Wall Street happy. Second, the total burden of human activity now exceeds sustainability on a global scale.(9) Third, corporate profits are at an all time high, while the pay and benefits for U.S. workers rose at the slowest pace on record for the first quarter of 1999.(10)

Dee Hock, founder and CEO Emeritus of Visa International, summarizes the long-range impact of these trends in no uncertain terms. "Corporations... have gradually freed themselves of all restraint and have become mechanisms for the capitalization of gain, and the socialization of loss... all gain increasingly goes to shareholders, those with power and wealth, and not to the community or employees or customers. At the same time, the corporation demands the right to exploit irreplaceable natural resources with minimal payment, and to use the biosphere as a free sink for product waste. If a corporation fails, cuts twenty thousand jobs, or moves a plant overseas, the people and communities that supported them don't disappear, they become a social cost".(11) The Multilateral Agreement on Investments (MAI) is its most recent and extreme expression. MAI would, for example, "ban any government anywhere from making investment rules that protect the economic, environmental, and social needs of people".(12)

We think it is high time to revisit the purposes of corporations and ask whether they should have a purpose beyond profit. We believe the answer is a resounding "yes" and that it is time to create more comprehensive and balanced purposes for corporations. We are not alone in this belief. According to a 1996 Business Week/Harris poll, 95% of adults reject the view that a corporation's only role is to make money.(13)

Organizational Purpose Today

Mission statements have become the contemporary means for declaring an organization's purpose. There are different interpretations of what a mission statement is. In our practice, we have it as the "broad fundamental reason an organization exists. It is an enduring declaration that distinguishes the organization's business from that of others. It identifies the scope of its work in product, service, and customer terms. It clarifies the customer needs the organization intends to satisfy".(14) A mission statement answers the question, "What would the world lose if this organization ceased to exist?" Others define it more broadly and include elements that we would normally suggest be included in a vision statement, such as "the operational, ethical, and financial guidelines of companies... it articulates the goals, dreams, behavior, culture, and strategies of companies more than any other document".(15)

Regardless of what is included or what it is called, organizational leaders and members need to be able to define their purpose or intention. It is only through such clarity that we can know whether we are committed to achieving that purpose and whether our decisions, actions, and words support achieving that purpose.

Organizational Purpose for Tomorrow

In our article noted earlier, we made a case for defining purpose from the perspective of the stockholders AND the other stakeholders, both present and future. This includes customers,

employees, officers and directors, the organization itself, neighbors and community members, the planet, and our descendants (Figure #2).

Defining an organization's purpose for these eight stakeholders would demand that we be able to expand our sense of time and space and take a bird's-eye view of our organization. We would have to define our purpose in terms of our neighbors and communities, as well as our descendants and the planet. We would need to hold in our mind's eye multiple perspectives, including those of people who live many miles away as well as those who are yet to be born. Is it possible to hold these various perspective simultaneously? Or, are such perspectives mutually exclusive? The next few paragraphs explore these questions, first from the perspective of our descendants, then from the points of view of customers, stockholders, employees and the organizations itself.

Global Sustainability and Our Descendants. Economic growth is fueled by the desire for more wealth, more possessions and more influence. In turn, this consumerism fuels more growth. Growth is inexorably interwoven with global degradation. The problem seems intractable. It's so frightening, we don't even want to talk about it. Perhaps in some deep part of ourselves we believe that the situation is impossible so we, with great discomfort, slide into a state of helplessness.

After many years of noticing this slide in ourselves, we have taken Wendell Berry's words to heart: "And so maybe I am really saying only that I feel an obligation to make an attempt, and that I know if I fail to make at least the attempt I forfeit any right to hope that the world will become better than it is now".(16)

However, for the sake of ourselves and for those who are to follow, we must begin asking questions which, on their face, so terrifying we don't want to let them surface, let alone ask them aloud. As one of our CEO thinking partners asked, "Is it possible to do the right thing and make a profit?" That is the essential question we are asking.

However, we also are gingerly approaching other equally frightening questions: how much profit is enough? For whom? And, what is an acceptable human cost to pay for it? Does the survival and well being of our communities matter? Does the quality of life and values of our great-grandchildren matter? If they do matter, then what can we do? Are we, the leaders to whom we consult, and the organizations they lead behaving as if it does matter? Is what each of us is doing today going to create the planet, communities and values we want to bequeath to those who follow?

We are certainly not the only ones asking these questions. In a study commissioned by the Merck Family Fund in 1995, four key findings emerged. First, Americans believe our priorities are out of whack. "People express a strong desire for greater sense of balance in their lives - not to repudiate material gain, but to bring it more into proportion with the non-material rewards of life".(17) Second, people are alarmed about the future and the implications of our skewed priorities for future generations. Third, people are ambivalent about what to do. Their own desire for financial security and material comforts battles with their deeper, non-material aspirations. Fourth, although the majority had not thought about the ecological consequences of their life

style, they believe that our propensity for more, more, and more is unsustainable. 93% percent of those sampled agreed that the way we live produces too much waste and 91% agreed that we focus too much on getting what we want and not enough on future generations. In response to a number of questions related to "How much do we need?", 77% agreed that if they wanted to they could choose to buy and consume less than they do. 70% also agreed that they are satisfied with their economic situation.

To us, the situation is clear. If we assume that our present course is unsustainable - and the two of us do - then we must ask ourselves all these questions because the future of the planet depends on it. We are very seriously out of balance. Our attention to satisfying current needs and desires has overtaken our deeper desires for ourselves and for descendants. Consequently, we must ask ourselves what we really want. What are our intentions? And, if we were able to travel across time and space to listen to our great-grandchildren about what they really want, what would they say? Do we really think organizations and their purposes, as currently defined, will create a world in which they will want to live?

Customers. Conventional logic dictates that customers want the highest quality product and service they can get for the lowest cost. But this is not the whole picture. A 1995 study in Boston found that 31 percent of the respondents cited a company's sense of social responsibility as a key factor in their purchasing decisions; 54 percent said they would pay more for a product that supported a cause they care about. And, even more strikingly, in a survey of consumers by The Walker Group in New York, 90 percent of those surveyed said that when quality, service, and price are equal, they are more likely to buy from the company that has the best reputation for social responsibility.(18)

So a more comprehensive purpose which considers the long- and short-range effects on present and future generations may increasingly become a source of competitive advantage. Intuitively, it makes sense that an organization's survival is more likely when the survival of the context within which it operates is considered.

Stockholders. The understandable desire of stockholders for a high return on their investment is another significant factor at play. Certainly profit is necessary. As Charles Handy notes, "Profits are the lifeblood of any business, but life consists of more than keeping the blood flowing; otherwise, it would not be worth living".(19) Or, put another way, profits are "necessary for life but not the purpose of life".(20)

Is profit really the only perspective of stockholders? The rapid growth of socially responsible investors, investment advisors, and investment funds would indicate otherwise. For example, a number of traditional brokerage houses now have at least one socially responsible fund included in their family of funds. And, perhaps most notably, the socially responsible funds are matching and in some cases outperforming the more traditional ones.

The Parnassus Fund is one socially responsible fund. The selection criteria for their portfolio of equity securities include "enlightened and progressive management" and certain social policies. "Enlightened and progressive management" includes "the sensitivity of the company to the communities in which it operates; the company's treatment of employees; and the ability to

innovate and respond well to change." The social policies are "(1) treating employees fairly; (2) sound environmental protection policies; (3) a good equal employment opportunity program; (4) quality products and services; (5) a record of civic commitment; and (6) ethical business practices".(21)

The stock market is where perspective on time and the current market dynamics play a pivotal role. If shareholders, particularly the institutional investors, are in only for the short-term gain, it may be impossible for organizations to have a more comprehensive and considered purpose. As one senior executive said to us recently, "There is significant pressure to perform each quarter. Investments for 10 or 20 years are impossible to do. Companies are at the mercy of those who own them." And from the previously mentioned chief executive officer: "What is the incentive? What will compel people beyond the fact that it is the right thing to do? They have to believe that the market will reward them." The question we are asking throughout this article is what do people really value? What do they really want? And, what levers can be used to help us achieve our human, spiritual, and ecological purposes as well as economic ones?

Employees. Viewed strictly from the perspective of the stockholders' desire for profit, employees can be seen as "servants of the firm, functioning as the technical instruments in production, marketing, and sales."(22) However, as we have been learning, the role of employees in the creation of profit is a bit more complicated. Humans are complex beings, with bodies, minds, hearts, and souls; and accordingly, our relationship to our work is complex. Organizations' increasing dependence upon their people's knowledge and learning for survival makes the situation even more interesting. In order for us to bring our full selves to the job, the work needs to provide opportunities for growth and learning. It needs to connect us with something larger than ourselves.

Enter organizational purpose. Meaning and purpose are unique sources of focus, energy and commitment. When people share a common and inspiring purpose, they bring more of who they are to the task. When we work without a sense of meaning or purpose, the negativity and cynicism that ensue can rob us of our life, and ultimately of ourselves. Viktor E. Frankl's work in the concentration camps during World War II showed us that larger meanings or transcendent purposes encourage us to work together to survive rough times and face dramatic challenges.(23) These purposes can also guide us to answers that have previously eluded us.

We believe a sense of meaning emerges when one is living and behaving in congruence with what is held sacred, one's values and deep purpose. For example, it was Frankl's belief in the dignity of human beings that inspired him to minister to the physical and emotional sufferings of his camp mates. Perhaps the process of experiencing meaning includes the process of noticing and questioning our choices, making them and their consequences more conscious. Because we can sometimes fear the answer to the question, "Is what I am doing now meaningful?", we skip the question. Not all human activity feels meaningful. But, can't it? In our effort to remain sane in the midst of frustration or work that generates wealth for others while robbing the future, we want to distract ourselves. We distract ourselves with new things, which keeps fueling the fires of consumerism. It is important to ask ourselves "why...to what purpose" so that we can discover or remind ourselves of the threads that provide us with meaning, with life.

As Alan Briskin has noted, "In the workplace we have become polarized between managing the outer organization-work processes, organizational objectives, managerial structures-and the inner organization of people-emotional attitude, mental processes, cooperative spirit... an approach that borders both worlds but is not contained by them."(24) Defining organizational purpose from the perspectives of all stakeholders, as well as with an expanded sense of space and time, creates a bridge "between the world of the personal, subjective, and even unconscious elements of individual experience and the world of organizations that demand rationality, efficiency, and personal sacrifice".(25)

We believe it is time for us as consultants to advocate with our clients for defining their organizations' purpose in ways that balance attention to people and profit, and allow all employees to experience a deeper sense of meaning, connection, and fulfillment in their place of work.

The Organization. A corporation is a human invention. Its purpose is usually defined by its founder(s). But over time, organizations - like so many other creations - start to have lives of their own. The purpose evolves as new players contribute new elements and dimensions.

Why is it important to consider an organization's purpose from the perspective of the organization itself. First, because "the corporation has emerged as perhaps the most powerful social and economic institution of modern society."(26) Second, because when there is a disconnect between the purpose of the organization and the people in it, both suffer.

So, how do they match up? If an organization's purpose reflects the intentions and values of the people inside the organization, the purpose will need to be more expansive than generating profit. For example, in a survey conducted by Fortune, three of the most common reasons people cited for why they work (other than paying the mortgage) were: "to make the world a better place, to help themselves and others on their team grow spiritually and intellectually, and lastly, to perfect their technical skills."(27)

Based on his study of the history of organizations, Arie De Geus states, "mounting evidence suggests that corporations fail because their policies and practices are based too heavily on the thinking and the language of economics. Put another way, companies die because their managers focus exclusively on producing goods and services and forget that the organization is a community of human beings that is in business - any business - to stay alive."(28)

Statements of Purpose

In the context we are speaking of, not all organizational purposes are equal. Some are good. Some are great. Some are easy to dismiss or judge harshly. The essential point, however, is that an organization's purpose, if it is to be balanced, needs to be able to balance itself among an organization's contradictory requirements: to survive, to satisfy stockholders, to satisfy customers, employees, leaders, and other stakeholders yet to be born. The purpose must bridge between what we can see and what we cannot see, what is inside us and outside us, what is inside and outside the organization, and what is now and what is in the future.

It is time, we think, to consciously and deliberately craft the purpose from multiple perspectives. It is time to challenge our own ability-and that of our clients-to hold apparently contradictory thoughts simultaneously. We can really only do this if we stand at an appropriate distance... like seeing the whole pattern of an Impressionist painting. We are reminded of our experience of seeing Monet's water-lily series around the walls of the Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris. The panels swam, moved, and were a whole from a distance. Up close, they looked like a child's wild and uncontained swipes of color on canvas. "We need the skill of shifting our perspective."(29)

Here are some examples of corporate statements of purpose which strive to include a broader perspective:

Timberland's mission states, "Each individual can, and must, make a difference in the way we experience life on this planet."(30)

Merck & Co.'s "Declaration of Strategic Intent" includes a statement of mission, core values, and a description of their desired culture. The mission states: "provide society with superior products and services-innovations and solutions that satisfy customer needs and improve the quality of life-to provide employees with meaningful work and advancement opportunities and investors with a superior rate of return." Their "Core Values" include "We are in the business of preserving and improving human life. All of our actions must be measured by our success in achieving this goal... We are responsible to our customers, to our employees, to the environments we inhabit and to the societies we serve around the world. In discharging our responsibilities, we do not take professional or ethical shortcuts. Our interactions with our environments and with all segments of society-our customers, our suppliers, governments and the general public-must reflect the high standards we profess... We expect profit, but profit from work that satisfies customers' needs and that benefits humanity... We recognize that the ability to most competitively meet consumer and customer needs depends on the knowledge, imagination, skills, teamwork and integrity of our employees, and we value these qualities most highly."(31) This declaration was signed by 450 senior managers in a meeting in 1993.

Ben and Jerry's mission statement addresses mission from three different perspectives, and acknowledges the tension and interdependence among them. "Ben & Jerry's is dedicated to the creation and demonstration of a new corporate concept of linked prosperity. Our mission consists of three inter-related parts:

Product Mission: To make, distribute, and sell the finest quality, all-natural ice cream and related products in a wide variety of innovative flavors made from Vermont dairy products.

Social Mission: To operate the company in a way that actively recognizes the central role that business plays in the structure of society by initiating innovative ways to improve the quality of life of a broad community-local, national and international.

Economic Mission: To operate the company on a sound financial basis of profitable growth, increasing value for our shareholders, and creating career opportunities and financial rewards for our employees.

Underlying the mission of Ben & Jerry's is the determination to seek new and creative ways of addressing all three parts, while holding a deep respect for the individuals, inside and outside the company, and for the communities of which they are a part."(32)

Beyond the Purpose Statement. Defining a visionary and inclusive purpose, like the ones displayed above, is at the core of our being able to create a world in which our descendants can thrive. Such purpose statements can, if they include the perspectives of all stakeholders, help us define who we are and who we hope to become. They can also serve as our compass as we move through our day-to-day work.

However, by itself, a visionary purpose is not sufficient. There are too many other dynamics and agendas that push and pull our organizations for this to be THE answer. In addition, the shareholders and board need to support this purpose and redefine their roles beyond making sure that the organization is profitable. Societal pressure needs to be felt through investment and purchasing patterns and through our democratic processes. Governmental agencies must keep organizations true to the charters and laws under which they operate. Legislatures need to carefully reconsider the weakening of laws which govern corporations. This presents a significant challenge to legislators who are often beholden to these same corporations for their positions. (These ideas are discussed in more detail in our previous article.)

Building more inclusive organizations will increase the likelihood that organizational purposes will be meaningful and visionary and that they will be achieved. Accountabilities among all the stakeholders, including the shareholders, must be strengthened through performance management and reward systems, expanding the roles of the board and increasing the influence of shareholders over organizational social policies. Each of these is only possible if we expand our sense of time and space, clarify what it is we truly want for ourselves and our descendants, understand and honor our interdependencies, and commit ourselves to value and wisely use our natural resources.

The Role of Consultants

Of course, we must start with ourselves. For example, over the last few years, as we worked on increasingly larger and more complex projects, we began asking ourselves what we were really helping our clients do. What were the real and long-term effects of our work? We think the organizations with which we have worked have made the changes they set out to make. We also believe the leaders with whom we have worked have become more collaborative and conscious of how they involve people in change. And we believe they have more change "know how," to call upon. But, what are all these gains in the service of?

Today, the questions we are challenging ourselves to answer include: What are our intentions? Why are we doing what we're doing? What are the logical consequences of what we are doing? How can we make more conscious choices about our actions? We believe these are questions all of us as OD practitioners need to answer for ourselves. We need to be willing challenge ourselves and our colleagues about our intentions and our practices. And we need to be willing to be challenged.

From our own explorations, we hope to find ways to help our clients ask themselves these same questions. However, as consultants we know we're facing a significant challenge. Our clients are usually not asking us for this kind of help. They are understandably focused on organizational performance and survival. So, if our clients are not asking us for this broader perspective, what's our platform? Even if they believe our questions and issues are important, they may not believe that they can satisfy the fundamental demands of organizational survival while also achieving something larger. Accordingly, by pushing an agenda that is more ours than theirs, we run the risk of "biting the hand that feeds us."

What can we do? Certainly we can ask ourselves about the implications of what our clients are doing. We can advocate for fuller consideration of the consequences of today's decisions and actions. We can help our clients ask themselves evocative questions and frame potential answers. We can also include the perspectives of the eight stakeholders when clients ask for assistance in clarifying their mission and developing their vision. Finally, we can choose with whom we work.

Now, here's the really hard part. Once we ask ourselves the tough questions, the one's we've been avoiding, we have few choices. We can pretend that we didn't ask them of ourselves. Or, we can continue to ask the questions and hold the tension of asking sometimes unanswerable questions. At the moment, we're trusting that, by embracing the questions and searching for answers, we will, as Rainer Maria Rilke advised in *Letters to a Young Poet*, "Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer."(33)

As I write this piece, and in pursuing our research and our conversations, we remain attentive to the warnings of Meg Wheatley: "We so want to know our purpose that we too quickly determine what we think it is, and we kill ourselves in the process. We turn from stillness listening to earnest action, and Spirit disappears... this is a real dilemma. How do we attend to our purpose while holding the humility that we do not create it?"(34)

So, we are back to our question of balance. Our challenge is to be still and yet active; to listen and yet to express; to let go and yet care deeply. As consultants, all we really have to offer our clients is 100% of who we are: our knowledge, our values, our caring, our experience, and our skills. Given this, we are challenging ourselves and you, our colleagues, to expand ourselves and therefore our capabilities by deeply exploring the purpose for doing the work we are doing. Only when we have done this exploration ourselves can we legitimately challenge our clients to do the same. XXYY

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