

ChMn747 Leadership Cohort
Leadership and the New Science: Reflections
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Wheatley speaks of this book developing at 37,000 feet in an effort to get beyond the parts of machinery and to the science of operating systems as a whole.

She basically develops a book that values both chaos and order. I can see her burden to unscramble the complexity of organizational charting and strategizing. She is bitten with the desire for her readers to see the big picture and accept with an understanding the value of risk-taking and susceptibility to change.

The author is the one who quotes Einstein as saying: "No problem can be solved from the same consciousness that created it. We must learn to see the world anew." p.5

I appreciate Wheatley's desire for her readers to see the world from a new way of thinking and accept the paradigm shifts coming our way. She earnestly pleads for her readers to move beyond the Newtonian 17th century perception of physics/mechanics.

Wheatley calls for engagement with others and events in developing our vision of reality. New science and quantum theory is her metaphor for explaining the working of systems.

I like her philosophy that models of thinking cannot be imported from elsewhere with success and expected to be successful in changing organizations. p.7

The author decries the Newtonian model that takes things apart to evaluate them; rather she promotes the new science movement toward holism and heaping primary value on relationships that exist among seemingly discreet parts. p. 9

From a church perspective I can see the value of community and relationships in working together with congregants rather than going solo as pastor. Building trusting relationships is so important for the unity and success of ministry. Effectiveness, as Ernest Young mentioned in our worship is just as important as efficiency.

This brings me to the dilemma of excellence. How do you incorporate interdependency with church members when pursuing a project to completion? Volunteers don't have the time always to pursue a project to completion, unless the trust and commitment is there.

When Wheatley discusses relationships she is explaining them in terms of how particles in quantum theory interact with each other. p. 10 She emphasizes the importance of leaving behind our machine models and looking more distinctly into the dynamics of living systems, which allows for imperfections, fluctuations, and disorder.

This is a real test to a perfectionist leader, allowing the fluctuations of disorder and change. p. 11 However, Wheatley calls the leader to a more simple system of

understanding as portrayed in nature, like a stream on the mountainside. p. 15 She calls her nature metaphor, the “teacher stream.”

I’m a bit nonplused with Wheatley’s entropy rule interpretation. She advocates a certain evolution in systems that keep regenerating themselves. She suggests that living systems create new forms of order as they expire and deteriorate. p. 19 In her mind disturbances and disintegration do not necessarily spell the death knell for systems, but rather invite the reconfiguration of a higher level of complexity. p. 20

From another author Wheatley explains that a complex system can be coherent and interactive while seeming to be chaotic. The example comes from Jantsch where he offers the caterpillar and the butterfly as evolutionary models of the same process. p. 21

And thus, Wheatley welcomes disorder as a partner in search for order. p. 22

In a very simple way I can see this evolution toward teamwork in the church from a series of evangelistic meetings where we received a new senior couple into our church which gave our secretary respite from chaotic scheduling in the office. They became the volunteers that do the preparation of the church’s newsletter. And so, out of difficulty, the Holy Spirit has provided another level of assistance in the office. That’s simple, but profound—valuable in assimilating this couple into our fellowship.

Wheatley further speaks to the importance of dynamic connectedness (Jantsch). p. 23 This clause speaks to the unleashing of the burden of control upon the leader of an organization. Permanent structure being imposed as control upon an organization the author calls suicide. p. 23

I like the author’s quotation about playing God: “I want to act from that knowledge (‘the issue is not control, but dynamic connectedness’). I want to move into a universe I trust so much that I give up playing God. I want to stop holding things together. I want to experience such safety that the concept of “allowing”—trusting that the appropriate forms can emerge—ceases to be scary. I want to surrender my care of the universe and become a participating member, with everyone I work with, in an organization that moves gracefully with its environment, trusting in the unfolding dance of order.” p. 23

This statement really challenges me as a pastor to release the reins of control of issues in the church completely to God. And by His grace to know when to step to the plate on a judgment call, guiding and leading with the trust of fellow followers/members.

Oh, how refreshing to be released from becoming the heroes/shamans that Wheatley touts as paragons of leaders in our society. And the press of numbers and charts, ugh! She releases the pastor/leader from the master magician status! Praise the Lord! p. 26 Her call for simplicity is refreshing. p.29

There is wisdom in Wheatley’s recommendation to stop studying the parts and view the whole. p.27. We can go either way in ministry: too detailed or too broad and not efficient

at all. There seems to me there must be a balance. The clamor in our society for heroes and the multiplication of analysis with charts and maps, bogs down true relationship progress with people. I do disagree with Wheatley's defamation of Newton. She dislikes his science, but I think we can still draw value from the contributions this God-fearing man left as a legacy. I like the influence that Newton gave us; albeit the organizational details and parts that proceed from his science may not be my favorite.

Wheatley goes on to herald the new discoveries in science to turn our focus away from individualism to uphold the value of relationships. She uses quantum physics to explain. I appreciate her call for relationships, but deplore her exclusion of the God we Christians give credit for the creation of this earth. She seems determined to dance around a divine being as originator and sustainer of systems on this earth. She waffles away from absolutes, but yet finds value in unity, diversity, and complementarity of relationships. p. 35 She seems to suggest that man has inherent abilities to create our own environment and interact with creation; yet she denies the God who made man in the beginning by her unspoken recognition of any higher power. p.37

The team player concept, the facilitation of process, and group listening I buy, but not that "stable, well-defined targets are a cosmic joke!" p. 38 Interestingly enough, Wheatley steps into Hagberg's thinking when she eschews power tactics rather than group relationships. She calls for love, but without the vertical love factor, our love can only ultimately become self-love in my thinking. p. 39

And Wheatley likes the surprises of jump starts, surprises, unseen connections, and quantum leaps. She favors these above the incremental changes of the Newtonian model. Page 43 summarizes Wheatley's call for change in organizational change. I agree with her summations mostly, but have problems with how she uses almost "reincarnation" methods to get there. p.45

In chapter 3 Wheatley becomes a bit mystical for me in describing vision by the metaphor of field theory. I understand the picture she is conjuring up from the broadcasting perspective. The allegiance to a field makes sense. But her call to faith in fields curiously makes me wish for her alliance with God rather than fields.

The psychology of self-fulfilling prophecies makes sense in human relations. When we give affirmation to some and neglect to other personnel, it can make a difference in their performance in an organization and on the job.

While I agree with Wheatley's overall point in chapter 4 regarding the value of relationships and organizational process, I probably missed the critical points she was attempting to make with the electron double-slit experiment and Schroedinger's cat problem. I know it had to do with observation, but I disagree that in order for something to exist it must be observable. Yes, reality comes to us by participation, but the material, animate or inanimate existed before we did.

Wheatley's point in observation and participation is to develop ownership. I guess her further point would be that reality exists for the one who participates.

Getting back to Wheatley's use of multiple connections in physics, my burden in response to her would be: Yes, it's good for everyone to be engaged in creation and participating in processes, but somewhere to keep system there needs to be an overriding absolute power to give order to all the diversity that exists.

Chapter 5 is obviously a major chapter for Wheatley's book. It's a call to embrace change. The chapter speaks to being comfortable with disequilibrium. While by nature I'm prone to seek equilibrium, I can definitely see the value of change. The author's suggestion to organize a company around core competencies has merit for our church to pursue. I have noticed that College View and Forest Lake churches have done that on their web sites. They are promoting their strengths and what they have to offer as skills for the community. p.93

From chapter 6 I understand more of the relational model that Skip is trying to accomplish right in this two-week course. Not that I have it all together, but it seems he is trying to expose us to multiple models of ideas in organizational dynamics that we can dialog about in our work groups and in our private reflections to see beyond linear thinking. The author calls for information to be more than a thing, but similar to a hologram where one individual customer coming for service meets the entire company by meeting one employee/associate. Wheatley wants information to be perceived like a the model of a salmon's journey thru life. Seeing information from the perspective of the whole, with a systems approach, allows for infinite communication with the whole of the organization rather than simple hierarchical levels of limited answers.

I too long for the team "jelling" experience in my church, where it becomes a pleasure to see the work flowing through many resources and skills in people. p.119

The more I read Wheatley the more I realize the book is about self—self-renewing organizations, self-reference, self-creating systems, etc. That's OK in science to the extent that Frankl demonstrates in his book that existence occurs for one basic reason: to give meaning for self. Life is of value only if it gives meaning. The greater altruistic purpose is to give glory to God. I guess we could say that that's a form of meaning—I would say a greater meaning for existence, where self-sacrifice plays deep meaning.

The part and the whole concept (p.127) I appreciate. It smacks of the body life found in 1 Corinthians 12 of the early Christian church. Any part of an organization or system becomes important for it manifests a picture of the whole body.

In my search for an anchor that is absolute, here near the end of the book Wheatley offers fractals and their patterns and principles as some form of a "north star" for guidance in organizational direction. p. 132 She offers some "guiding visions, strong values, organizational beliefs" as the "few rules individuals can use to shape their own behavior." p. 133

From the discussion of the chapter, “Chaos and the Strange Attractor Meaning,” Wheatley presents Viktor Frankl’s research from concentration camps as an explanation for the basis of her “strange attractor.” In other words, the basin for activity in both corporate and individual’s existence is meaning in life. I would simply offer this question: What brings meaning to church life? Is it self-help courses to meet my needs or is it defining my need of a Higher Power to shape ultimate meaning in my existence and help wind me through the detours of organizational blunders and self-incriminating gaffes? Somehow God must come first; even before my own personal pursuit of meaning.

I salute Wheatley for staking high claim to the value of free will and to the acknowledgement of the fact that organizational change takes time!

Actually, you have to respect the work and focus of Wheatley, for without a God-centeredness, she has come awfully close to connecting with Him. She’s a real nature bug! I suppose some of this comes from her New Agedness! Her center point of self-reference is beautifully illustrated from nature many times, whether chemical clocks, fractals of broccoli, the journey of the salmon, etc. We Christians find God not only by special revelation from His Son Jesus Christ, but through His 2nd book of nature. She has done well from the nature aspect in revealing the value of participatory management (her own words (p.143). She even supports the value of campfire storytelling, reflections of which take me to how Christ must have developed His 12 disciples in teaching them through participatory lessons in nature.

This storytelling effect can be highly beneficial as it leads to interactive relations. The dialogue of bouncing thoughts off each other is tremendously valuable in the learning process. And like Wheatley states, “Whenever you hear laughter...you can tell that things are going well and that something probably worth looking at has begun to happen in the lab!” p. 142 We can learn more I believe as we laugh together.

Where Wheatley promotes “plunging ahead into the vast ‘porridge of being’ I subscribe likewise, but with this caveat: We need both the being and the doing for an organization to be successful. Relationships and behavior must go together for the clockwork of success. I too wish that my formal education had focused more upon people skills in leadership than factual points of learning and theorems memorized.

Pages 144-147 provide a nice summary of Wheatley’s book as she closes her thoughts of the participatory nature of reality and relationships. Maybe the one word that summarizes her work of *Leadership and the New Science* would be trust—trusting that when a leader sets a vision in motion based upon clear values and vision, through continuing dialog, that vision will be realized. Oh for more trust!