Personal and Corporate Transformations Through Self-Renewal

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PERSONAL AND CORPORATE TRANSFORMATIONS THROUGH SELF-RENEWAL

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ABSTRACT
In this paper I argue for deep-structure ‘life inquiry’ management learning through sharing the dynamic five process model for individual transformation conceptualised as I sought to transform my own professional and life perspectives. The model is offered both as a guide and an example of how to engage in the deep-structure learning required to achieve the type of personal and professional transformations which contribute to corporate learning, transformations and ultimately self-renewal. I draw on my own learning experience to show how a clarified sense of purpose and vision, raised awareness of personal and social responsibilities, enhanced creativity and the realisation of previously untapped potential talent into actual talent are important benefits achieved as I engage in the processes described. My main purpose, therefore, for sharing these experiences are to both challenge the reader to look critically at their own life and practice within the context of the ‘cultural mindset’ that they operate as well as to offer a tool in the form of a pragmatic, accessible and highly useable model. Doing this enables me, as author, to remain focussed on my own commitment as an action researcher towards the goal of a transformed and humanised world in which as professionals we become accepting of personal and social responsibilities. The reader is left with a choice: awareness and the recognition of the need for personal change/growth or continued ignorance/avoidance. The fundamental characteristics of ‘inquiry’ as a management research/learning tool are discussed in some depth.
INTRODUCTION
The contents of this paper are the results of my experiences of ‘engaged’ and ‘organic’ as opposed to purely ‘objective’ and ‘mechanistic’ research. I, therefore, make no apologies for my presence in the paper. Rather, I acknowledge the freedom and challenge this post-positivist approach allows me, on a day-to-day basis, in better understanding my own practice and means of engaging with the world as I adopt this approach to inquiring into my practice. As a result of this ‘engagement’ I now find myself constantly undergoing self-renewal as my worldview and cultural perspectives continue to be enlarged and transformed. I realise too that I have gained a freedom as I have come to recognise myself as being ‘in process’. This being ‘in process’ means that I am continually growing and changing and am therefore able to share experiences without being bound by them. This was not previously the case:

“*The trouble with ‘transformation’ is that ... we keep trying to apply the tools of transformation without a corresponding shift in our managerial mindset.*” (Pascale, 1990)

My own personal experience supports Pascale’s quote above. To simply seek to apply the tools of transformation (i.e. teambuilding, 360 degree feedback, TQM, quality circles, psychometric testing and so forth) is to merely toy with the latest rounds of management fads as a hopeful quick-fix or a means of demonstrating that the organisation is aux fait with the latest managerial ideas. It is not, however, to go down to ground zero level and to engage with fundamental issues relating to the paradigm within which the organisation operates. This in turn would require an understanding of the mindset or paradigm which frames the way in which the individual manager, who is the recipient of such espoused transformational tools, views the world. For us, as individual managers and professionals, to attempt to research into our own mindsets is to challenge our very selves; this is a risky business. Nevertheless, a major management development challenge of the late 1990’s is, I believe, how to develop managers capable of achieving the individual and organisational learning and transformations necessary for personal and corporate success. That this learning and transformation should be at a deep-structure level that involves a shift in traditional mindsets and paradigms becomes apparent when the nature of our ever expanding, competitive, knowledge-based, globalised world and marketplace is considered.

STRUCTURE OF THIS PAPER
In this paper ‘inquiry’ as a means of management education and development is explored as a more appropriate means of achieving managerial self-renewal leading to organisational learning and success. Because I strive to be an ‘inquirer’ in my own life and practice it seems most appropriate for me to invite you, the reader, to co-inquire with me in order to consider the issues raised in this paper. This means I am asking you to become consciously aware of your own process as you engage with me, as co-inquirer, as I take you through my personal journey towards transformation and self-renewal. For example, how do you feel about the suggestion that the paradigm within which the organisation operates and therefore the individual mindsets of managers are identified as being of critical importance and therefore the emphasis that I place on this? In this paper I also share the SENSE model which depicts key processes with which I engaged and which enabled me to take on the responsibility of self renewal for myself and offer it as a personal development tool which can be appropriated by individual managers and professionals, like yourself, for their own use. Some personal and political implications of the SENSE model are discussed. The paper concludes with a discussion of the research methodologies which assisted me in my journey towards
transformations/self-renewal. If you find yourself challenged to reflect and to consider the choices that you have then this paper would have served its purpose.

LIFE INQUIRY AS A MEANS OF MANAGEMENT EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

The type of management education and development which is being suggested here is a more fundamental, sustainable, holistic, on-going, research-based, action-oriented approach to achieving these transformations. It is an approach which elsewhere I’ve termed as research as a means of ‘life inquiry’ (Bravette, 1997b) a process of continual questioning which includes self-questioning rather than assuming one knows the facts. Such engagement in managerial research as ‘life inquiry’ becomes a process of on-going self-renewal with the self(ves) being intrinsic to the whole research process and involves a critical and dialectical exploration of one’s own mindset and worldview bringing belief-systems, values, taken-for-assumption up to consciousness in order to better understand them and therefore ourselves and how they affect how we relate to others in our world. It is worth mentioning here the distinction made by Kegan (1994) between ‘informational training’, the acquisition of skills and transformational education which he describes as “a ‘leading out’ from an established habit of mind”. To engage in systematic inquiry, individually and collaboratively, is to engaged in transformational education.

Management education and development should, it is being suggested here, be ultimately about enabling managers to become self-directing and accepting of self-responsibility, that is, carry responsibility for personal decisions made. Personal and collaborative inquiry is a means of achieving this self-understanding. This is vital in an economic climate of empowerment of all organisational members because managers are, after all, people with power and responsibility over other peoples’ lives as well as important organisation and societal resources. Too often, however, it is the power that is sought after by would-be-managers and professionals and emphasised by the business schools, for example, rather than the responsibilities. Individual managers, as they clarify values, need to determine whether they are in fact ‘managers’ (i.e. ethically responsible individuals) or ‘bandits’ (ethically irresponsible and self-serving individuals). Power without accountability is tantamount to absolute power. These issues are ones which are worthy of deeper consideration and perhaps also says something about the ethics of a management education which does not include an exploration of the issues and dilemmas relating to power, responsibility and the manager/professional. Lloyd (1997) identifies the important link between managers and organisational culture when in his article Leadership for the new millennium he identifies learning as a critical process which can only emanate from a ‘responsibility-driven culture’ where knowledge is shared as opposed to a ‘power-driven culture’ where knowledge is understood as power and therefore held by the few. Engaging in personal and collaborative inquiry facilitates the process of self direction and personal responsibility.

Adopting research as a day-to-day means of personal life inquiry involves managers and professionals in engaging with their personal processes in the context of their professional practice and inevitably leads to the ‘leading out’ from an established habit of mind towards transformationary education. This is what I set out to do as an OB/HRM educator. I desired increased ‘authenticity’; to be more at ease with myself in my practice and in relation to how I understood and related to students and colleagues. As an OB/HRM educator/practitioner I wanted to be a more effective role model for the values I held to be important and the ideal that I have for a transformed and more humanised world where people are held as being inherently valuable. These values and ideals underpin the writing of this paper as I share
experiences with the intention of inviting you to empathise with these experiences as ones which are shared and so to alert you to the possibilities of also transforming yourself and your practice. Using the voices of students who have participated in my classes also highlights the possibilities for exerting a wider influence on the recipients of service as well as our organisations.

MINDSETS AND PARADIGMS
Why is the manager/professional’s mindset or dominant paradigm so important? Our mindset, which is largely unconscious, provides us with the lens with which we view the world, others and our own place in it. Argyris & Schon (1996) acknowledge the importance of the managerial mindset when they say

“... individual practitioners ... (are) centrally important to organisational learning because it is their thinking and action that influence the acquisition of capability for productive learning at the organisational level.”

If managers are largely unaware of their mindsets then they will be dysfunctional in terms of their ability to influence their own lives and practice effectively let alone being able to make a real contribution to organisational self renewal. It is this focus on the individual practitioner which is discussed in depth in this paper. This was also the focus of my doctoral research titled Towards Bicultural Competence: Researching for Personal and Professional Transformation in which I explored in depth my own life-world, personal and professional, seeking to become what Rogers (1961) refers to as ‘a person’ rather than an automaton. This acknowledges the ‘automatic’ way in which I was to come to realise that I had been engaging with the world the result of being immersed in my only and prevailing mindset. Torbert’s (1991) view that if we are to engage as humans then we cannot engage as automatons is also an important consideration. Key characteristics identified by Rogers (1961) and verified by my own research has been the movement from fixity to changingness, from rigid structure to flow, from stasis to process.

What then is this managerial ‘mindset’ which Pascale refers to in his book Managing on the Edge? This managerial mindset stems from the cultural roots of the society of which it is a part. There are a number of alternative concepts used to describe broadly the same issue. For example, Thomas Kuhn (1962) uses the term ‘paradigm’ to describe a shared system of belief systems and ideas. In addition, Hofstede (1984) and Bood and Postma (1997) refers to ‘mental maps’. Senge (1991) highlights ‘mental models’ and Myers (1991) the term ‘worldview’. Collectively we are talking about norms and values, assumptions about cause and effect relations as well as rules and guidelines on how to preferably act in certain situations. Page (1996) quotes a poignant statement by Konosuke Matsushita which he refers to as the ‘Matsushita curse’: “... we are going to win and the industrial West is going to lose; there is not much you can do about it because the reasons for your failure are within yourselves ... we are beyond your mind set.” This paper and the experiences detailed here can be considered as a denial of that curse. It is a testament to the fact that we can transcend our current mindsets to become learning, growing, self-renewing individuals who can act with responsibility and agency in our increasingly complex and turbulent world, if we choose.

I have looked at this subject from the point of view of culture in the acknowledgment that culture provides us with a lens for viewing the world from a particular point of view, that is, it provides us with particular mental maps and mindsets. My main thesis is that in order to
break out one’s prevailing mindset, paradigm or cultural perspective, one needs to be competent in at least one other paradigm, mindset or culture - hence my thesis of ‘Bicultural Competence’ (Bravette, 1997a). This alternative culture/paradigm provides another lens for viewing the world and a heightened level of critical consciousness enabling wider enhanced perspectives as well as the mobilisation of all of our intelligence. This can be a tremendous task to the extent that our education and socialisation has not enabled us to develop our critical thinking capability.

It is important to also note here that even how we perceive ‘learning’ is enclosed within particular mindsets and mental maps (Hallworth, 1996). This is also to acknowledge that the approach being recommended here is likely to challenge more traditional mindsets about the nature of education and learning.

**THE LEARNING INDIVIDUAL/ORGANISATION AND THE SENSE MODEL**

Kolb (1984) has identified how people’s mental models change as they gain experience and learn from it. Bood and Postma (1997) suggest that, seen from a cognitive perspective, people learn as they change their perceptions after surveying and evaluating the outcomes of their actions. Senge (1991) identifies ‘mental models’ as being one of five disciplines which are essential to the creation of a learning organisation. For Senge working with mental models involve: “learning to unearth ... internal pictures of the world, to bring them to the surface and hold them rigorously to scrutiny”. This requirement is closely linked to Argyris & Schon’s (1996) focus on individual practitioners and clearly indicates the importance of engagement with the mindset of the individual manager. There are clear parallels with my own SENSE model (below). Senge’s (1991) other four processes include personal mastery, shared vision, team learning and systems thinking.

The context around the need for personal growth, change and transformation or self-renewal, as I prefer to term the processes in which I am involved, is a familiar one for many managers, organisations and clients alike: ever-increasing work demands; external pressures from consumers, funding and other regulatory bodies; internal pressures; a sense of professional incompetence/inadequacy in the face of all the varying demands of the workplace, social and personal lives; ever-increasing changes in terms of technology, issues of accountability and professionalism. It was also likely that I had arrived at one of these critical milestones in the human life-cycle when managers/professionals find themselves reviewing their management experience to date (Kaplan, 1990), maybe experiencing some dissatisfaction and seeking more congruence between internal and external realities. These feelings which I dared not articulate lest my professionalism be questioned and/or challenged were nevertheless very real for me and in seeking to identify a means of working with them I was to use research (PhD) as a management tool to achieve the much strongly desired changes in my life. These are not experiences which were peculiar to me as an individual, rather they should be understood as experiences that I chose to engage with rather than avoid/dismiss. A male student from the final year of an undergraduate programme on which I teach makes the following observation of his own experiences of dealing with personal process in our ‘Ethical Management’ unit:

“It was a do or die situation, as my personal views grew stronger and I questioned those around me and myself, to then come to class and present the view I felt people would expect of me became self-defeating ... this was a frightening experience but one coupled with a sense of moving forward.”
This quotation from student coursework provides an example of how I have managed to extend my research beyond myself personally to facilitate student development and change too as engagement in the classroom triggers self-reflection and a challenge to change. Three important phases marked my research inquiry process:

**Issue clarification**

**Personal mastery**

**Identifying my passion/purpose**

Initially I was seeking clarification of my own personal values and increased self-understanding. This was to lead me to making a commitment to gaining personal mastery defined by Senge (1991) as:

“... clarifying the things that really matter to us, of living our lives in the service of our highest aspirations.”

He also identifies ‘personal mastery’ as gaining a special level of proficiency and commitment to one’s own life-long learning (Senge, 1991). Senge (1991) identifies personal mastery as the organisation’s spiritual foundation which crystallises this as being critical to organisational vitality and hence ability to engage in the self-renewal process.

It is also important to acknowledge that much of my inquiry was in opposition to the organisation’s established status quo. Senge (1991) acknowledges this when he says: “Surprisingly few organisations encourage the growth of their people in this manner (for personal mastery).” Also that: “... few adults work to rigorously develop their own personal mastery.”

This last point raises the issue of the political implications of research as a means of life inquiry and brings into focus the issue of whether or not individuals have the type of organisational infrastructure and management support to facilitate their development. In organisational discourse there exists management ‘high-flyers’ and the organisation’s ‘dead-wood’. How the individual practitioner is categorised can frequently be linked to the extent to which they fit into the dominant culture and mental model of what is acceptable within their organisational context. It is for individuals to determine for themselves whether or not they actually do fit into the latter category and the SENSE model provides a vehicle for such managers to transform themselves. Page (1996) likens the processes I have conceptualised as a ‘personal re-engineering method’ which enables the individual to move beyond ideas to solidity, coherence and strength. Page (1996) is graphic in his description when he suggests that this process re-engineering consists of:

“... stripping down old worn-out work processes to the core, then rebuilding more efficient, more effective processes. You will be exposing the core values and assumptions that are driving you, then examining and retuning them.”

The SENSE model consists essentially of a number of self empowering processes which enabled me to engage with critical aspects of my experiences allowing me to grow in self-knowledge, awareness and a deepening understanding of how to engage with agency in the world (politicisation process). The model is one which I also share with students in the
classroom and was instrumental in leading the student to make the comment noted above about his own increasing self-awareness. This empowering element could obviously be problematic for organisational structures with coercive management styles and narrow insular mindsets. To have senior management support will enhance and destress the whole process. The other side of the coin is that adversity, serious challenges, struggling against major odds and ‘trial by fire’ can very effectively prove the worth, integrity and resilience of the individual more than uncritical management support and cajoling without the necessary challenges. Engagement in the following processes heralded for me transformation from Ms Average towards that of peak performer. An important attribute of peak performers has been identified as ‘a capacity for self-observation and self-analysis’. It is also important to note that the model is simultaneously inner and outer directed as well as past and future directed.

Elsewhere I have discussed the SENSE Model in some depth (Bravette, 1996) and show it here in an adapted and shortened form to emphasise not just the processes which were important in achieving transformation but also the important phases which seemed to separate the processes:

**IT MAKES ‘SENSE’**

**Phase one: clarification “awakening” of issues**
- Self-knowledge

**Phase two: working towards attaining ‘personal mastery’**
- Education for critical consciousness
- Nourishing my internal worlds
- Support through networking
- Embedding ‘process’ in my life

**Phase three: determining my ‘passion’**

This following section elaborates on the phases and processes of the SENSE model. It is important to point out that all of these processes were underpinned by deliberate, systematic, rigorous research using the action research and action inquiry models discussed later on in this paper.

**Phase One: Clarification “awakening” of issues**
I have noted elsewhere (Bravette, 1997(a); Bravette, 1997(b)) that a ‘crisis experience’ (Outlaw, 1983) had been the key motivator for my engagement with personal inquiry. All of my previous ‘knowing’, beliefs and values had come under attack, even collapsed. I was ready for personal work, to bring everything which I had deemed as important and unimportant under the close scrutiny of the light of day. The key process which was to begin to bring me out of the chaos in which I experienced myself as being immersed was through gaining self-knowledge and the subsequent outcomes of that process.

**Self-knowledge**

“To thine own self be true and then thou cannot to any man be false.”
(Shakespeare’s Hamlet)

“Effective managers have a strong self-concept, for good or ill, they know who they are, how they relate, how they prefer to work, how they lead, how to manage power
and politics and consequently their impact on others and where they want to go and how to get there. No amount of knowledge ... will suffice in the tough changing world of contemporary management, unless it is built on a firmly based self-concept.”

(Smith, 1989)

The crux of this self-concept, this call to be true to oneself, identified in the above quotes, is encapsulated in the concept of self-knowledge. This self-knowledge can be understood as the trunk of a tree. The stronger the self-concept and self-knowledge (awareness of possibilities and potentialities, legacies, inheritances, strengths, weaknesses, makeup and so forth) the more solid and grounded will be the trunk of the tree. Like any other living entity, the better the nutrients with which an organism is fed and nourished on a regular basis, the deeper and stronger will be the roots from which it draws its sustenance. The nutrients are contained in a clear understanding of the entity’s makeup and needs for a sustained and effective life: metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy, psychology, ontology, cosmology, axiology are critical components of this self-understanding because they determine how we understand the world and our place in it. This grounding in self-knowledge and understanding pushes up the goodness and nourishment of self-discovery, self-awareness, self-love and self-preservation (Akbar, 1985). Major branches of the tree forks off into a variety of directions but includes a commitment to the other four characteristics of the SENSE Model: education for critical consciousness; nurturing one’s internal world; support through networking/affirmation; embedding process in one’s life. With these branches in place being fed by self-knowledge the process of self-renewal has been effectively put in place and the creative life of the tree is assured.

Self-knowledge is, however, lacking in our world because of past (and present) emphasis on received and monolithic knowledge which presents the world and its peoples as given (positivism paradigm/mindset). There is also the inability of education systems across the world to teach students to think critically and to question (Madhabuti, 1994). Because of this most of us are enclosed within a box, our current and probably only paradigm and worldview. We only see the world around us through the lens of that paradigm - but, sadly, we are largely unaware of it, much like a fish in water. Equally there are many whose interests are served by seeing the world through such a closed paradigm and so deliberately block their senses to any other stimulants/lens of vision. An African proverb says ‘There is no-one so difficult to awaken as the one who is pretending to be asleep’. But this is another issue.

Boydell et al (1986) in identifying the characteristics of successful managers highlighted ‘self-knowledge’ (personal insight (Woodcock & Francis, 1982)) as being an important characteristic. Self-knowledge provides us as managers with a clarified sense of the philosophical assumptions which underpins our lives, and an understanding of which values are important. Woodcock & Francis (1982) acknowledges that:

‘a manager who lacks clear values also lacks a firm foundation for action and may tend to be reactive or go along with the convention of the moment.’

An important dimension of self-knowledge is the coming into an understanding of this ‘self’ that is so commonly spoken and written about but which is so little understood. There is an implicit message in here for the expounders of the merits of cultural diversity. For example, the merits, in terms of cultural diversity, that I bring to any group as a ‘woman’ for example, is severely limited when I myself am unaware of what it could mean for me to be a ‘woman’ when unconstrained by self and societally constructed notions of what it means for me to be a
woman. From self-knowledge comes an appreciation of our own agency and responsibility to act in the world for good (subjects/actors). Also a heightened awareness is gained of the chains that have been constructed and which continue to shackle our creativity. From this root understanding came the incentive, responsibility and enthusiasm to engage in the rest of the processes as I sought to move out of apathy, powerlessness and silence towards personal mastery as defined by Senge (1991). This definition is also supported by the work of Dickens & Dickens (1991). In concluding my thoughts on the ‘awakening’ process of gaining self-knowledge Smith’s (1989) thoughts about the ‘marriage of inner strengths (i.e. self-knowledge) is important:

“If managers are to practise the type of visionary leadership that the uncertainties of our future demands, there is a need to search for purpose higher than just surviving or getting by ... the development of effective, learning managers, relies upon a judicious marriage of the inner strengths of participants with reflections upon learnings from experiences of action in the real world of work and life.” (Smith, 1989)

Phase Two: Working towards gaining personal mastery
As my self-knowledge increased I was to become aware of personal work in which I needed to engage in order to move myself out of crisis and to identify a more sustainable way of living my life while simultaneously gaining in personal mastery. As a consequence I was to engage in the following processes for which self-knowledge was the foundation.

Education for critical consciousness is the consequence of self-knowledge in that it extends self-knowledge to an interest in, curiosity and appreciation of others in relation to myself and experiences in the world. As we become open to wanting to know and learn about others and their experiences in a socially constructed world we also become increasingly aware of our agency to act in the world for good. This engagement was to herald for me the development of critical consciousness and the expansion of my worldview and mental maps. Developing a critical consciousness which engages and inquires with others enables me to have a variety of lens and perspectives from which to view the world, situations and people. An outcome of this is my ability now to view myself as part of a community of people who are interdependent and therefore also gain an appreciation of my personal responsibilities in that community.

An important outcome of the search for self-knowledge was the stripping away of blockages and pretensions which result from cultural blinders and unquestioned mindsets/worldviews/paradigms. Myers (1991) provides a useful instrument for gaining an awareness of oneself in relation to others. Gaining self-knowledge as well as expanding one’s education with the aim of developing one’s critical consciousness brings into one’s awareness an appreciation and curiosity about one’s own identity. I experienced this process as a movement out of the fixed ‘self’ that I had understood myself to be, to an exciting search to identify the ‘multiple selves’ that I actually ‘knew’ myself to be as a part of my tacit knowing. To fully realise and engage with this I found myself having to:

Nurture my internal world and personal processes. Nurturing the internal world involves working with one’s reality. Acknowledging the multiple selves and what it meant to me to be each of these selves: mother, woman, wife, daughter, academic, teacher/educator, visionary, healer, and all the other dimensions of my selves. This was to broaden my horizons and extend my creativity as I moved out of a state of thinking ‘I can’t do’ to a state of thinking
‘I’ll try that!’ Clarified self-knowledge enabled me to appreciate that there was/is more to me than my physical self and to becoming engaged in recognising, understanding and working with these ‘selves’. Very importantly I was to begin to own the darker aspects of myself, what Jung terms one’s ‘splintered personality’ or ‘shadow’. I was to also recognise the dichotomous thinking processes which made me construe in terms of ‘either/or’ rather than recognising the possibilities of ‘and/and’.

Nurturing one’s internal world means learning to stop and reflect. Stopping to listen to the messages that were coming from my own previously unacknowledged ‘knowing’. Also facing up to fear and other emotions and taking the messages which are contained in them rather than being afraid of the fear, the shame, the lack of confidence, for example. As I nurtured my internal world I found myself becoming cognisant of my agency to act in the world, to become a creator and a namer of my creations. I found myself moving from a state of powerlessness to one of empowerment. I was to also become aware of the societal categories and stereotypes which I had internalised, work with them, deconstruct them in order to better understand them, discarding or reconstructing as appropriate.

This nurturing of my own internal world was supported by making what I term ‘reality checks’ with others and this was achieved by gaining:

**Support through networking.** Developing collaborative means of working, sharing, and gaining affirmation was also an important mechanism for moving out of the sense of isolation and powerlessness which underpinned my everyday experiences. This is an important process in terms of achieving the necessary shift in one’s mindset. Keeping in touch with group reality is a means of keeping a check on one’s own understanding of experiences and knowledge in relation to that of others and their understandings. Working collaboratively leads to the development of a sense of interdependence and connectedness. Adopting inquiry and collaborative sharing are means of relating to others and of extending understanding, developing a sense of personal and social responsibility and gaining a more ethical perspective of what it means to live in community. It is also about having an environment and relationships with others in which one is willing to take risks as we test out our espoused theories against theories in use. The identification of ‘critical friends’ who are willing to provide me with feedback on my thinking and actions was another important set of relationships developed. Not limiting this collaborative form of inquiry to only one dimension of my experiences but building collaborative links on all fronts enabled me to create a number of networks: i.e. as a mother with other mothers; as an educator/academic with other educator/academics and resulted in a series of bridges linking me to a variety of networks.

All of this was to lead to the experience of “changingness” (Rogers, 1983) and allowed me to recognise that something which was highly desirable had become an important aspect of my life as I had begun to:

**Embed process in my life:** My life had become change and learning oriented as I had committed myself to working with uncertainty. “*We are in the midst of a whirlpool*” acknowledges Wallerstein (1994, quoted by Platt, 1995). The advice given is that we should at least know to which shore we want to swim (i.e. which values and end goals are important to us and, therefore, worth striving for) and to make sure that our immediate efforts seem to be moving in that direction (awareness of purpose/important values). He says “*If you want greater precision that that, you will not find it, and you will drown while you are looking for*
it”. And so I find myself working towards Popper’s conception of a ‘open society’ which he sees as placing emphasis on process and not end states of being.

The two phases and the processes which make them up were to enable me to advance significantly towards personal mastery and as a consequence to gain an appreciation of my ‘passion’ which continues to crystallise as I continue to engage in life inquiry.

EXAMPLES OF THESE PROCESSES FROM MY OWN LIFE AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE:
ON BEING A ‘WOMAN’ IN MANAGEMENT EDUCATION
An example from my own personal and professional practice of how I engaged with the above processes could be taken from my experience of being a ‘woman’ and the journey I have undergone in terms of coming into an understanding of how my identity as a ‘woman’ had been socially constructed for me (Spender, 1982). Gaining self-knowledge in terms of my gender required me to engage with an aspect of my experience which had been ‘silenced’ and ‘predetermined’ for me. In considering the experiences of women in management and organisations, Freire’s (1987) identification of management as a ‘discipline of domination’ is an important pointer to the type of culture or mindset which might underpin them where women are concerned. Morgan’s (1990) *Images of Organisations* also provides a variety of lens from which to consider management and organisations as a discipline/profession. Adopting a feminist perspective provides yet another lens of understanding (Marshall, 1984). The acknowledgment of female values (Marshall, 1993) and the shift from individualism to more communitarian values (Harris, 1992) other than traditional male values which underpin organisations are also important directions in which today’s organisations are beginning to move.

As a woman I was to come to realise that within my family life I had unquestioningly taken on certain roles but it was also true that within my inner sanctum I was experiencing myself as being unfulfilled, caged and chained. Within my professional context the same was true: I was told that as a woman I was best suited to certain jobs, I was not career material, I was not deserving of the same pay as my male counterparts - again I was experiencing the same lack of fulfilment, the same constraints of being caged and chained, and longed to break free. Becoming politicised and historically aware in order to gain a critical dialectical understanding of the issues involved (education for critical consciousness) was to bring me into an appreciation of myself as a woman and the unique qualities that are invested in that experience.

The critical and dialectical approach adopted was to enable me to take a much wider approach where I could see my position, as a woman, in relation to the also socially constructed role of the man and the obstacles, barriers to effective relationships and unfulfilled individuals, that this had led to. As I sought to re-awaken (or, indeed, give birth to this female consciousness) through engaging finally with those voices from within that had been pushing me to achieve my potential (nurturing through engaging with personal process) I was pushed to seek out the experiences of feminists and womanists writers, both male and female, and to begin to share these experiences with colleagues and friends (support through networking). What became clear to me, as I engaged in gaining support as well as widening my understanding of the issues, was that I hadn’t been the only person who had been silenced and who’s role in society had been predetermined! Today we see men also beginning to reconsider their value base seeking alternatives to established mindsets and to researching their own organisational experiences largely prompted by the work of feminists. The
personal was indeed political! What I’ve come to understand is that there is not any just one way of being a woman. Senge (1991), as noted, identifies personal mastery as being the spiritual foundation of organisations and my spirit, as a woman, seeks freedom and not the chains of the constricting constructed role of what it means to be a woman by anybody’s standards. Now, I strive to be who I am in my entirety and seek to bring that ‘added value’ (Dickens & Dickens, 1991) into the organisational context. My feminine consciousness, which I am now willing to own (in opposition to strong and established organisational forces), guides me to my relationship with wider cosmological forces and affirms me in the understanding there is much that I have to contribute to organisational life, if respected, nurtured and valued for the qualities I bring as a woman.

MY PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE
How have I applied the above as a professional? I am an educator and an academic. But what does it mean to me to be these things? Again I found myself going back to the process of gaining self-knowledge. I knew that my work was important to me and yet at the beginning of my research process I was unhappy with how and what I did (these were my personal processes arising from my internal world. I was experiencing myself as being inadequate and incompetent as a professional). As I clarified what it meant to me to be an educator and an academic I was able to begin making choices, to begin aligning my purpose and values with my external engagement with the world. This enabled me to begin the process of engaging critically with the education system both as a user and as a service provider. Developing collaborative links with colleagues either as a result of common interests or shared teaching commitments became important. Engaging with students in terms of the ‘ways of being’ or ‘culture’ of classes which I deliver and establishing a culture for engagement in my units which consisted of critical thinking; personal responsibility; community/interdependence, learning orientation, relevance to reality orientation (education for critical consciousness). The adoption of a process orientation within the classroom is a direct outcome of my research - moving away from a didactic pedagogy to a process oriented pedagogy in which I relate to students as knowing rather than empty vessels waiting to be filled. I have challenged myself to become a ‘developmental educator’, attempting to lead students towards developing fuller consciousnesses (Kegan, 1994) As a result the following comments and evaluations (written and verbal) have been made by several students (all of whom are invited to become co-researchers and inquirers with me at the commencement of our time together):

“This is the first time in all of the four years that I have been in the University that my values have been challenged and that is what university education should be all about.” (mature final year undergraduate female student)

“you have been an important role model to me and I shall take you with me throughout the rest of my life.” (female final year undergraduate student)

“In every other class we go we are told how to cross our ‘t’s’ and dot our ‘i’’s and so it is difficult to make the transition in your class to actually thinking.” (this statement was made with hesitation and some anxiety) (Mature, first year female student on first year of undergraduate degree programme)

“You don’t know what you’ve done! Everywhere students are in groups talking about ethics ... it’s not a bad thing. In fact it is a good thing”
Students actually take up my challenge to be critical of the Unit, of underlying assumptions, of models used to the extent when in frustration I asked one group ‘why are you so critical about everything?’ the response was: “you were the one who asked us to be critical!” This was/is true and constantly presents a challenge to me as I continue to engage with different perspectives and am forced to extend my own comfort zones in order to remain congruent with the vision I have of education being for critical consciousness and liberation (personal responsibility) as defined by Wallace (1979). We also engage with group process issues in the classroom and all students are asked to make a personal contribution even if it is simply to support something that someone else has said.

**LIFE INQUIRY AS A PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL CHALLENGE**

Lest the processes sound simplistic they were not. Rather they were real challenges as I confronted the ‘superego’, the ‘cultural eye’ which informed me of all the ‘shoulds’ and ‘oughts’ of my socialisation; all of those taken for granted assumptions which normally go unchallenged and unquestioned. I found myself engaged in a process of dismantling and recreating.

As I discuss these challenges I can reflect backwards and relive some of those very difficult times when I experienced myself as being driven rather than in the driving seat as I sought to overcome my socialisation. Mezirow (1981) discusses the pitfalls inherent in engaging in ‘perspective transformation’ acknowledging that it is a slippery slope consisting of:

“... a difficult negotiation, and compromise, stalling, backsliding, self-deception and failure are exceedingly common.”

Hale’s (1992) description of the ‘dark night of the soul’ is an apt description of the processes in which I found myself:

“... an upheaval of the ego or ‘self of everydayness’ reorienting inner awareness to the possibility of a shift from an old to a new worldview ... metaphorically, the event can be compared to an earthquake that splits the earth, revealing the riches of an ancient culture beneath the surface.” (p.66)

Today, whether in my professional practice or in my personal life the word’s of Nelson Mandela are held up high: “as I liberate myself my very presence will liberate others” and so I continually challenge myself and lead by example, a leading which is ‘responsibility-led’ rather than ‘power-led’. My chosen position is “I’m Okay - You’re Okay” (Harris, 1973) recognising that for our planet to achieve the healing it so desperately needs that we too, as individuals, must be healed. It is also an intrinsic agreement with Hale that only as we, as individuals, transform ourselves that we open the way for the transformation of our organisations and society.

What I’ve attempted to demonstrate in the above two examples from my own personal and professional practice is how I have been enabled to become a freer, more rounded, wiser and competent educator/academic and person generally. The organisation has benefitted in numerous ways from my achievements through research as ‘human life inquiry’. An expertise has been brought into the system; my creativity has become unleashed and as I engage in quasi-experimentation on a day-to-day, classroom-to-classroom basis, the institution and its clientele are the recipients of this creativity; I am more innovative and
creative in terms of my teaching practice; I have become committed to ‘on-line’ research which bridges the gap between theory and practice and so much more.

In summary important learning points include:

- expansion of my mental maps through the gaining of self-knowledge and the incumbent development of critical consciousness
- Learning oriented (action, reflection and change orientation which defied inertia and resistance to change extending boundaries to past (present) future and inner and outer directed)
- the release of potential talent and creativity into actual talent and creativity
- willingness to be accountable, ethical, professional, continuous learner and therefore engaged in self-renewal
- the ability to withstand stressful situations and to work with uncertainties as a part of life

At this point it is appropriate for me to describe in some depth the research methodologies which enabled me to achieve the personal and professional liberation that I had been seeking enabling me to become a healed helper within my personal and professional practice.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Action Research/Science (McTaggart, 1991; Argyris et al, 1990; and Action Inquiry (Torbert, 1991) methodologies were very important in terms of their potential for working with the very real issues that I have highlighted above. In this section I discuss the characteristics of the Action Research/Inquiry methodologies in some depth identifying how they have been effective in enhancing my personal growth, expansion of mental maps and the willingness of taking on personal responsibility while engaging me in an on-going process of self-renewal. Very briefly the Action Research/Science and Action Inquiry research methods are characterised by the following features:

- they emanate from a holistic and humanist perspective which recognises people as being important and acknowledges their subjectivity within the organisational context. Reason & Rowan (1981) describe ‘human inquiry’ as being about people exploring and making sense of human action and experience while engaging in praxis.
- adopts a phenomenological perspective in that they argue that reality is the social construction of the individual, that context is important and places an emphasis on values.
- draws on orthodox knowledge as well as ‘naive inquiry’ (practitioners everyday knowing) which Reason & Rowan (1981:xiii) describe as being “…prone to error, prone to biases and prejudices, of our anxieties, the error which arises from the pressure of group conformity … also has a lot of very good qualities, because it is involved, committed, relevant, intuitive: above all it is alive.”
- Recognises a holistic and extended epistemology which takes into account a variety of ways of knowing.
- Draws on an eclectic multidisciplinary theoretical base.
- Uses a rigorous scientific approach in terms of the systematic collection of data ensuring validity, relevance and rigour according to the context and situation being researched.
- Uses the notions of inquiry and collaboration requiring the researcher to participate with others as co-participants, co-inquirers/researchers thus engaging in ‘double’ and ‘triple’ loop learning. The critical subjectivity of participants is recognised as an important aspect of the process.
- They demand the taking on of a critical and dialectical stance.
Action Research

Action Research as a methodology was first conceptualised by Kurt Lewin and over the years has been redefined by Argyris et al (1990) as the process of the creation of usable knowledge:

“knowledge that can be used to produce action, while at the same time contributing to a theory of action”.

The methodology consists of a spiral of cycles of action and research. Each cycle consists of four major stages which are as follows:

- **Plan.** This stage involves a period of reconnaissance and problem analysis before drawing up a strategic plan of action.
- **Action.** This stage involves the implementation of the strategic plan.
- **Observation.** This stage is where the action is evaluated using appropriate methods and techniques agreed on beforehand.
- **Reflection.** This stage involves the researcher reflecting on the results of the evaluation as well as on the way the whole action and research process went (making sense of evidence).

The reflection may, in turn, lead to the identification of a new problem or problems and hence a new cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. It is important here to define ‘action’ as I have used and understand the term in the context of action researching. Action can include the act of ‘thinking’, ‘perceiving’ or ‘reflecting’ as well as the more commonly understood ‘active’ definitions such as ‘talking’, ‘chairing a meeting’ and so forth. For example, above I have discussed my coming into an awareness of my feminine consciousness. This was partially the result of the planning process underwent with the Participatory Action Research Group I started in 1992 (Bravette, 1994) where we planned to deliberately and consciously enter staff groups to identify what were the factors which were feeding into our sense of marginalisation within such groups. Previously when I had entered such groups I was literally incapacitated and overwhelmed by being immersed in the situation and my own confused feelings about the situation. In implementing the strategic action, I entered the staff meeting in a different frame. I was focused on being participant observer and not only of others but also of self. I had begun the act of engaging critically with personal and group process. These findings were taken back to the Participatory Action Research Group where issues were highlighted and reflections shared as well as new plans being developed.

The basic assumption on which the Action Research methodology is grounded and which is crucial to us as professionals is that people learn and create knowledge on the basis of their concrete experience through observing and reflecting on that experience. The Action Research methodology, therefore, allows the individual manager and/or professional the scope to develop a practical theory of knowledge based on his or her personal experiences; to validate his or her experiences and his or her knowing. It allows the individual the space to question the philosophical assumptions by which he or she lives and to confront his or her fears. This engagement with one’s own experiences within the context of one’s own practice is extraordinarily liberating if somewhat risky. On the one hand this engagement with one’s self and one’s experiences seems so practical and obvious but on the other hand is recognisable as being contrary to what our socialisation (education) through the scientific objectification of the self and the world has taught us to do. Action Research by its very
nature, therefore, requires the researcher to treat themselves as a subject within the context being studied and not separate from it. Argyris & Schon (1974) describe this as double loop learning (or meta-learning) being the process in which the manager/action researcher engages not only with the subject at hand but also simultaneously engages with how he or she is going about engaging with the task. Drawing on my own experience I was to make the following observation about my own engagement with double loop learning:

“Action research amounted to research at the micro level. I had to take into account and reflect on my weltenschauung which has been described by Bawden (1991) as the:

'value-laden, psycho-cultural, experience-modified knowledge or beliefs or assumptions which shapes the way we handle issues in our world.’

For example, instead of merely accepting my own feelings of powerlessness as unchangeable and inevitable, I was able to explore my theories-in-use about interacting, learning, managing and dealing with issues within the workplace. So while I learned about ... women managers, I also learned about how I was going about my learning. About how, for example, my silence was affecting me, my life and career development. In this way I became both an observer of myself and of others. I entered into a process of continual questioning: “why do I continue to act in a way which is opposed to the values which are important to me?” “Why am I afraid to test my theories?” “How can I as a ... woman be authentically me in my organisational life ...?” (Bravette, 1996:7)

This engagement at the micro level with my own experiences as a professional who wanted to improve her practice was to push me to engage with the philosophical basis of what it was that I was seeking to achieve in my practice. I needed to understand my profession, my institution, my practice and what it was that I was attempting to achieve in these contexts taking into account a number of variables such as history, organisational culture and climate, the power and political context, and so forth. It was through engaging with action research along with my own personal motivation for personal change that I was to find myself moving through the five phases of the sense model that I have detailed above.

It is probably worth acknowledging that I believe that ‘my own motivation for personal change’ noted above was and continues to be an important component in the success and sustainability of my own transformation and continuing self-renewal process. This motivation is intimately linked to the sense of purpose (philosophical basis) or ‘passion’ which I have determined as being important to me.

McCall et al (1988) identifies ‘hardship’ events in the lives of managerial executives as the type of situations which pushes them inwards and asking certain questions of themselves:

“Was there something they hadn’t done or something they simply couldn’t handle? Had a fatal flaw, hidden all these years, been revealed?” (p.88)

Whatever the event, McCall et al (1988) notes that the managers were forced to engage in lessons involving a confrontation with the self. In these situations:
the executives learned lessons about themselves in relationship to others, their career aspirations, their capability to overcome defeat and fear, and their ability to adapt in a sometimes arbitrary world. In each confrontation they came up short. Therein lay the lesson. As research as shown, the recognition and acceptance of limitations, followed by an effort to redirect oneself, are characteristics of successful people in general. (p.89)

McCall et al (1988) identifies that typical lessons included an increased recognition of personal limits; a heightened sensitivity to others; an increased ability to cope with events beyond the individual’s own control and, very importantly, finding the balance between work and life. The chief outcome was that of regaining a sense of balance. Torbert (1991) highlights this notion of achieving the ‘power of balance’ over the ‘balance of power’ which is the more common rhetoric of our times.

Action Inquiry
Action Inquiry (Torbert, 1991) was a natural follow-on to Action Research as I sought to hone up the skills and competencies I had been gaining over a sustained period of time as I engaged with and eventually became a full time action researcher. Torbert (1991) advanced Argyris & Schon’s notion of double loop learning to identify triple loop learning which he describes as ‘consciousness in the midst of action’. To achieve this desired state of triple loop learning Torbert (1991) spells out the requirement for the action inquirer to become aware of four territories of experiences simultaneously. This is supported by the practitioner identifying means of developing increasingly liberated structures in terms of how we relate and interact with others as well as developing peer communities of inquiry. I recognise myself as working towards this goal of ‘consciousness in the midst of action’ and recognise that this is only possible as I continue to engage with research as a means of life inquiry enabling me to take the most appropriate decision in the moment as a result of my experience of working experientially ‘on-line’ in my personal and professional life.

CONCLUSIONS
Undoubtedly the biggest lesson that I continue to take out of my engagement with the world is how little I actually know and how much I have yet to learn. I have become a continuous learner always seeking out new learning opportunities. I continue to question and challenge my own knowing and assumptions and become more and more able to risk testing them out. This has been achieved through adopting a systematic, deliberate and rigorous ‘inquiry’ approach towards my life and practice. The benefits have not only been personal but have made significant contributions to the organisational context within which I work. As I continue to work collaboratively with colleagues the development of communities of peers inquiring together will become an important aspect of the organisational structure and so contribute to organisational learning, transformation and ultimately self-renewal.

At the beginning of this paper I invited you to co-inquire with me so that you could become more aware of your own personal processes, explore issues being raised, ask appropriate questions, seek to find out more and so make a decision for yourself as to whether or not I have convinced you that ‘life inquiry’ is an important means of management development and transformation. As a result of the challenges highlighted, the experiences detailed, are you able to empathise with me in the journey which I am undertaking? Have I provoked your interest sufficiently to make you curious as to whether this is the type of process in which you would like to engage, despite the difficulties highlighted? Can you see the benefits not only for you as an individual practitioner, but also for our wider community? Are you willing to
join the inquiry with me to find out more, to transcend the Matsushita curse? I am recommending the SENSE processes as a dynamic means of expanding our mental models and therefore worldview and paradigms. These processes enabled me to become more aware of environmental uncertainties as well as connecting me with the wider globalised world of which we are a part.

In concluding, I would like to share just one final experience with you. An important aspect of my experience which I have omitted to include in the above discussion is the social construction of race and its impact on the mental models and paradigms of individuals and groups. I have deliberately omitted to draw on my experiences as a woman educator/academic of African Caribbean descent because of my understanding of how acknowledgment of this difference leads others to separate themselves from it and me. Taking up this challenge of deliberately omitting such an important dimension of myself as enabled me to demonstrate the commonalities of our experiences as human beings. I have also been able to remind myself that the category of race can become yet another trap which does not allow me to experience myself as fully human or to expect to be treated as fully human by other organisational members.
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