

Dances of Life

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Abstract:

This paper adapts Bowen family systems model to complex organizational systems. It examines the various responses to stress and anxiety on group behavior. It lays out five common patterns and processes and what they mean for leadership. Recognition of these patterns can predict behavior and provide tools to effectively deal with resistance to change.

Bowen family theory has been widely researched and is rooted in biology. However, it has not been integrated with other models of systemic thinking. It posits that the relationship system impacts the functioning of individuals within a group. The structure, culture and relationships are the primary factors driving behavior of individuals within any given system. The degree and intensity of resistance to change depends on the leadership and types of relationship that exists within the system. Leadership takes on new meaning when it is examined through the prism of Bowen family systems theory.

Eight words: Leadership, Bowen, teamwork, human behavior, resistance, sabotage, change, anxiety, emotional intelligence

**Yours is the dance
Of Authenticity
And truth
It is a fragile balance of
Aloneness and connection
May the art of leadership be your own dance!**

Much has been written on leadership and how to navigate in today's business climate. Many of us are well prepared in our chosen field, have the ability to work well with people and yet have a major falling out within the system because of what we call 'politics'. How do we react when we encounter politics? Most of us try harder, focus on problems, gather more data, or try to will others to change. However, despite our efforts, reactivity and anxiety increase rather than subside. We begin a downward spiral of blame and resistance. When we encounter rough seas we need to borrow some ideas from sailors. We need to read the 'winds' or invisible dynamics in the system and adjust our sails (reaction and behavior) accordingly. In addition sailors 'tack' which is to move in a direction parallel to the wind in order to reach the shore rather than using a short term, direct

cause and effect approach to reach our goal. Leaders get caught up in the next quick fix and miss the factors that would change the negative human dances. It is akin to sailing without a compass or map to guide us.

In order to be effective leaders we must acquire awareness of the common patterns of human behavior that I will refer to as 'dances'. It is important to become aware of the patterns and when and how they replicate. Instead of the specific 'event', we need to focus on the direction, distance and anxiety in a particular set of events. These dances are universal in all cultures. A specific culture only provides a framework for the expression of the dance. Understanding the dances of human behavior provides a guide to a new level of interaction and way of being with one another.

Organizational theories and management systems have conceptualized emotion as an intra-psychic phenomenon rather than a systemic response of the group as a whole. Although authors in the field note the impact of stress on groups, these conditions and responses are usually discussed in individual terms. The literature on emotional intelligence emphasizes a leader's awareness of the emotional environment. A person with emotional intelligence understands the impact they have on the group. The material in this paper will provide a greater understanding of group behavior and how to manage our own response. The dances drive resistance and sabotage change.

I lived in New Zealand for eight months. Upon my arrival I was totally unaware of directions, or the lay of the land. As someone who prides herself in her sense of direction, I felt totally discombobulated. Even the water goes down the drain in the opposite direction! I felt dependent upon others, and when I ventured out on my own I got lost. I was not able to reorient myself until I began using maps; they provided clarity, direction, and a sense of where things were in relationship to one another. Maps provided freedom and choice. Upon reviewing the dances of life and awareness of your role in the dance, it can provide you with a choice or map in complex systems.

We lack this map of human dances because the information is buried within the framework of family therapy, and not widely accessible. Lack of this information guarantees we will repeat history in our families, culture and organization in an unthinking, automatic way. Awareness of the dances can allow us to choose a different path rather than repeating old instinctual dances. It requires a new type of leadership (formal or informal) to evolve to a new level of interaction that is mature and enhances our soul. I will briefly describe the five dances and what this means for leaders as they learn to regulate themselves in the dances of life.

1) The dance of distance/ pursuit

Space is an important aspect in relationships. Each of us seems to have our own 'comfort zone' of emotional closeness or distance. The more anxious the person is internally the more apt he/she is to violate the comfort zone of others, wanting more closeness or distance than others want in the relationship. The best relationships are those that have a common 'comfort zone' or can adapt adequately to the others comfort zone for a length of duration satisfactory to both. It is a personal struggle in life to balance the need for closeness and separateness.

Actually distance—closeness continuum is all circular one leads back into the other, those of us that want more closeness tend to cutoff others when things do not go well over time. There are

reinforcing and opposing factors, however, the intensity of either extreme on the continuum will tend to destroy authenticity in relationships. Balancing the force for closeness and togetherness is a challenge. It is healthy to be able to tolerate separateness as well as togetherness.

One of our primary responses to stress is distancing. Some people are uncomfortable when others get 'too close' and react by distancing when the relationship system gets hot. How often have you heard the advice of a troubled relationship, "you should leave that job or leave that relationship"? The distance/pursuit dance is reflected in the workplace when some team members want more distance on the team while others want more closeness. Distancing can be useful if it is used as a 'time out' to reflect before coming back to the issue, person or group. Too often however the issues are dropped or not dealt with. This cutoff adds stress to the relationship system.

Those among us who are extreme distancers tend to be 'relationship nomads'. They do not stay in a close relationship for any length of time. They are loners or workaholics. Their effect on the team may be productive, but the team or system never reaches its full potential. This is because the distancer does not share information, add to the collegiality or group cohesiveness. Their low emotional intelligence reduces the productivity of the entire team as others adapt to the behavior. Too often our institutions reinforce distancing behavior, seemingly unaware of the negative impact distancing will have on overall results.

Teams/organizations can get into the intergenerational passing on of emotional cutoff. If a team is cutoff from the larger institution it is more fragile and less resilient. The same is true for a business that is cutoff from like organizations. It has lost information sharing, knowledge, history and awareness of trends. Cutoffs create an added intensity in the internal relationship system. Time and energy are spent on internal relationships instead of the business at hand. It drains the energy needed to pursue the organization vision or prevents it from ever developing a coherent vision. In the end, it can lead to burnout of the leader and members of the system.

There have been studies of intergenerational cutoffs and how the individuals are fairing in personal health and in current relationships. A notable study was done in Russia with families that had experienced Stalin's 'purge'. It affected one in eight families in Russia. Those families that kept the memories alive of loved ones and passed down stories of their strengths; had grandchildren with more stable relationships and were less prone to family breakups. On the other hand, families that changed their names and dropped their identity out of fear of reprisal, had grandchildren that were more prone to depression and broken relationships. The emotional connection with ones heritage and especially stories of success provide a sense of hope and resilience in life. Being cutoff from one's intergenerational story creates a harsh environment.

People on the other extreme of the continuum desiring very close relationships have a sense of entitlement. They will give a lot but expect a lot in return. They are even willing to 'give up self' in order to belong. A group example is overly close tightly knit systems such as cults. It is also part of the process of mass hysteria. There is a big price for disagreeing with the perceived 'truth', whatever it may be. To disagree with the status quo upsets the sense of closeness people desire. So disagreements are squelched and anyone pursuing a resolution or discussion can be seen as disloyal. As a consequence, issues are not discussed in an open or free manner. A disagreement with the leader will be experienced as a tearing away of self, an emotional separation the group can't tolerate.

Finally, overly close groups stress the hierarchy of the system and individuals place in it. Paradoxically, in the end, these systems often end up ‘splitting up’ and ‘cutting off’. This may look as if it is the opposite end of the continuum, and it is, however it is part and parcel of the same dynamic.

Recent surveys in the U.S. indicate that up to 70% of employees, are afraid to speak up at work*! This is an amazingly high percentage and that reflects our silent rule to refrain from disagreeing. We now know that engineers knew two decades ago that we could have problems with computers in the year 2000 however, they were afraid to speak up, or felt it was not their responsibility to bring it up to the leadership in the organization. This in part is due to an unwillingness to ‘rock the boat’, and become an outsider.

What does this mean for leadership?

Quote: Abraham Lincoln: I am not always bound to win but I am bound to be true. I am not always bound to succeed but I am bound to live up to what light I have.

In order to lead people need to be coming toward you. This is as an all-embracing law as the law of gravity, and it is just as subtle and impervious to measurement. But it is everywhere. People can hear you only when they are moving toward you. Communication does not depend on syntax, or eloquence, or rhetoric but on the emotional context in which the message is being heard. Others can hear you when they are moving toward you no matter how eloquently you phrase the message. As long as you are in the pursuing or rescuing position, your message will never catch up. Attention must be paid to the relationship system, and effort made to have others move toward you. This is not easy or even always possible, but there are ways to optimize the possibility.

Most of us have inner radar that senses when someone is distancing in the relationship. This is especially true with the leader. It is essential when a system is in transition, when hot subjects come up or stress is high to remain in contact and connected to those you are leading. In addition pay attention to your own anxiety when someone is distancing from you. Learn to tolerate the distance without personalizing the others need for space.

Teams that are formed with too much structural distant between the team and the decision-making body loose a major source of energy. We heard much in the past decades of ‘walk around’ management. This essentially taps the energy that is present when there is connection between management and line staff, or those making decisions and those who implement those decisions.

Leaders too often distance themselves when bad information is /has been given. Many a good leader has been done in by this behavior. Individuals in the system sense the distance and trust begins to evaporate. The presence itself of a leader during stressful times can lower reactivity. For example, when a hurricane happened off the coast of South Carolina the governor responded immediately and was on television and radio 24 hours a day, keeping the information and his presence available. In Florida a few years later it took the governor almost a week to respond! While the looting and general mischief was almost non-existent in South Carolina it was rampant in Florida. From a human systems point of view I would venture to say it was not coincidence. It was

due to the people knowing that leadership was present and doing all it could to alleviate a bad situation.

A leader can be too close as well as too distant. When one is too close you lose perspective. Problems become larger than necessary. Space in a relationship system is not a matter of physical distance but emotional space. It does not mean you stop caring, but are letting go of the need to control the outcome. One puts space into a relationship by defining oneself, that is, taking a position about one's own behavior and intent rather than making coercive effort to modify the other.

Distancing can trigger a dance of one distancing and the other pursuing. Over time the dance can go through many stages of reuniting, distancing with pursuit, until one or the other usually the pursuer gets out of the relationship first, with the distancer not knowing why it happened. The distance/pursuit dance has destroyed the morale of many teams. There becomes a we/they mentality. The distancer tends to think that the pursuer is 'needy' and dependent. The pursuers think of the distancer as cold, arrogant, and uncaring. Assumptions about character abound. This can become predictable over time. After time lapses the team may call in a mediator to resolve 'personality differences' or the more likely scenario; the team breaks apart or becomes stuck. Once we can see this behavior as a systems dance there usually is less personalizing of the behavior. If those who distance when issues arise stay in touch instead of withdrawing the team can become more effective almost immediately.

2) The dance of over and under functioning

In organization after organization that I have worked with I have seen this dance in full force. The result is the dependent, 'stick in the mud's' are in charge. The person with energy and drive is the one forced out of system while the dependent ones are calling the shots. How does that happen? How is it certain people time and again are speaking more than listening while there others listening when they should speak up? They often do speak up but only in private after the encounter expecting the team leader to fix it ---another dance on top of the first one. Why do some team members ask for advice when they don't need it and others never ask for advice, but have it for others? Why is the leader spending an inordinate amount of time with the acting out team member?

This dance happens when one team or one team member seems to be so competent and the counterpart cannot seem to be able to get it together. It begins when one person or part of an organization begins to do more for the person or group than they do for themselves. A prime component within this dance is each side is trying to will the other to change. The more extreme example is a chronic situation when one part of the system is taking on 200% of the responsibility and feels increasingly burned out and angry. It is often apparent on teams with the team leader feeling stuck with their team or a specific team member, the harder the leader pushes to get the other to do the work the more the team pushes back and under-performs.

A person that has a hard time delegating the work or feels he/she is the only one who can do the work satisfactorily often does the work for others and the dance begins. Or it can begin with a underfunctioning person who does little to contribute to the goals of the organization. They ask for advice, listen but do not seem to get the message. Neither side sees their own contribution to the

dance, the overfunctioning person may take on more work, push to get work done, set up the conditions thought to be more conducive to the under-functioner, work on their communication skills, and or, try harder to persuade the underfunctioner to change his/her ways. In the end they will often become critical of the underfunctioner and the trust between the groups, or persons becomes quite low.

An institution I once worked with had a culture of supporting and providing lifelong employment. This is a good thing. However, as our economy shifted this was no longer viable. Plus over time it created new unintended consequences. It became the norm to give undue attention to trying to fix the problem employee. The supervisors would switch the problem employee to the desired day shift and given lengthy absences for illness. The employer took 200% of the responsibility for the problem, and it created a culture of entitlement among the employees (especially those who had been in the organization for many years). If tough decisions had to be made, the supervisors were loath to lay the worker off and shifted the responsibility to human resources; human resources in turn shifted responsibility to the legal team who told the supervisors they should not lay the problem employee off. All of this cost the company lost productivity, low morale and animosity. It was a reinforcing loop that was very resistant to change, because it was difficult to address the core issue without many thinking you were attacking the entire culture. It is important to recognize that as long as they continued to overfunction in this manner it would impact the culture and the team negatively. Employees began to resent carrying the extra weight of the non-functioning team member. A major cause of discontent in the workplace is someone not doing their fair share while not being held accountable.

Have you ever been in a situation where you feel you are doing all the work and your teammates seem to be slacking off? Do you get in the mode of trying harder, wondering why you have to do all of the work? Get angrier and angrier? When you find yourself not trusting the other to follow through with a project watch out this dance can begin. I will never forget a young man working in a computer chip clean room. He was a hard fast worker, and very frustrated at teammates that left the clean room or didn't seem to be able to function in their role, he worked harder, faster and was increasingly frustrated. When we talked about this dance with the whole team, he said, "my working harder and being angry half the time is contributing to the others doing less. I need to manage myself better in order to change the outcome". He saw the dance and his part in it, plus he focused on what he could change!

This dance has a lot to do knowing when you are doing for others what they could do for themselves. Change requires taking a systemic view of what you are doing to see the consequences of your actions are over time. Dr. Kim of MIT has described this dynamic in another way that happens. A good example that he sites is when western aid builds wells in Africa but do not teach those who use them (the women) how to maintain or fix the wells to keep them functioning well. **Over time** they become **addicted** to someone from the west coming to dig another well or repair the existing well. Examples abound in society (slide).

* When we give a man a fish we feed him for a day, when we teach him to fish we feed him for a lifetime. When we are applying interventions or changes we need to ask many questions. What training, what time will be needed to implement a change? What are the potential resistance points

and how do we prevent this dance from beginning? Secondly it is important to seek to understand the unintended consequences of the intervention.

What does this mean for Leadership?

This dance calls for the leader to be willing to set and respect limits. It is being responsible to others rather than responsible for others. It is being willing to hold others and yourself accountable. It requires stepping back and being aware when you are taking on another person's issues, problems or anxiety as your own. In this dance, action speaks louder than words.

There is an example from Christopher Columbus's diary that highlights this dance. Some background on this story is needed to grasp the full implication. In that time, since most people in Europe believed the world was flat, when a voyage was headed west the sailors **sailed into** the easterly wind, so if they got to the end of the earth the wind would be in their favor and blow them back. But Columbus proposed to go to the Canary Islands and **sail with** the westerly wind as far as he could go. He believed that the world was round and by doing this he would sail farther West by having the wind at his back. When the three ships that were to sail arrived in the Canary Islands one of the companion ships, the Pinta, broke down. For three days they sat in port losing valuable time. Columbus tried to address their fears by attempting to convince the crew that everything was going to be fine. Finally, Columbus decided he needed to go on without them. Paraphrasing his journal, "I have to let go of what I can't control." A few days later the Pinta followed! Sometimes the leader has to be willing to let go, and act rather than try to convince everyone to go along.

Secondly to get out of this dance there needs to be accountability for behavior in the system. If someone has a task to complete there needs to be a built in mechanism to get quick accurate feedback on what is happening. In addition, training, support, public affirmation and a systemic point of view need to be in place. A well known psychologist Alfred Adler was clear that everyone needs natural consequences for their action as quickly as possible in order to foster responsibility. In addition, it releases the person applying the consequence because it is a natural outcome of the behavior. It is the responsibility of the whole team or the team leader to do so, and this is often misunderstood. This does not mean a lack of flexibility of response, systems can all implement some mechanisms and tools for unseen circumstances. What is missing in many situations is the quick non-judgmental feedback that will provide the ability to adjust our response. Cisco Systems has used computer contact to stay abreast of this kind of information, with commitments made in advance to the tasks to be accomplished. Part of their success is due to the ability to reduce the incidence of the over-underfunctioning dance.

Often the system's culture can contribute to this dance, and should be addressed at the structural level. A system I consulted with once unwittingly gave the implicit message that the system would take undue responsibility for an employees underfunctioning via getting better shifts, lots of attention from the supervisor, tolerance of absences, and supervisors that were to 'be helpful'. The employees quickly learned that some people were not going to be held accountable for their lack of functioning. The policy or structure would need to change in order to reinforce responsibility

Finally, over and underfunctioning can waylay the decision making process. When a decision is made some people sabotage it later by saying I never agreed to that decision, I did think it was a good idea. In decision making silence is considered agreement, therefore a commitment is made to

the needed follow through. Everyone present is expected to support it publicly and privately. I have known of this type of resistance happening often and no one is held responsible. If this expectation is not present I have seen a lot of sabotage of leaders and decisions take place needlessly.

3) The dance of triangles or---it takes three to tango

Triangles are created whenever some tension and anxiety arises between two people (or between groups). In order to lower the anxiety, and reduce tension, one of the twosomes will talk to a third about 'the problem'. Or the twosome will begin to focus their frustration on another person. Again it is an unconscious reactive response; its purpose is to stabilize the relationship, to avoid relationship issues and closeness, or to shift the responsibility for pain elsewhere. Triangles are the molecule, the basic building block, of all human relationships. Triangles exist in every relationship to some degree. Perhaps it is no mistake we find a triangle in one of the first stories of the Bible the Torah, and Islamic story of creation; the story and triangle of Adam, Eve and God. Adam blames Eve, Eve blames nature, and so it goes.

The aspects of triangles can best be illustrated by imagining a rubber band that must be held in place by three people. If one of the persons shifts, both of the others must adjust in some way to keep the band from becoming tense or falling down. The people in the triangle are locked in the same roles, rules and constraints in response to one another. When a triangle gets set in place, the persons in the triangle can change, but the reactions and stuckness are the same. You can recognize how dysfunctional a triangle is by its intensity and lack of fluidity. No one seems to be able to make a choice about their reaction to events, issues or others within the triangle. If they do so it is interpreted as being disloyal. An example would be when two departments are at odds with one another such as production and sales. Over time, the whole team can be composed of different individuals, but if nothing changes to the original triangle the people in the departments will continue to react to the other team in a predictable negative manner. Another common example is a team leader that places blame on others (outside or within the team) in order to stabilize the relationship he/she has with the team.

A classic example of a triangle is Cinderella and her stepmother and father. A wise rabbi wrote a letter as if written by the 'wicked stepmother' explaining that Cinderella was quite reluctant to do chores like her daughters, that the Father was absent most of the time, and if she attempted to set limits the Father or aunt 'fairy godmother' would step in and rescue the daughter. Hearing her side of the story certainly was illuminating! It could lead to a whole new perspective. In triangles we often do not get the 'whole picture' or the 'rest of the story'.

You can observe the number of triangles in a group by the level of tension when they are together, and in the intensity of reactivity to any change. In fact, change will increase anxiety within individuals and triangles are a natural response. So organizations going through change (and who isn't) will experience an increased amount of triangles that interlock and bind up energy into negative destructive behavior. In addition the pace of change will increase anxiety within individuals and triangles are a natural response. So organizations going through change (and who isn't) will potentially experience an increased amount of triangles that interlock and bind up energy into negative destructive behavior.

Often the person in management is triangled out; the team can stay close and avoid disagreements between them by distance and mistrust of management. When the norm of a system is 'to talk about one another' rather than 'speak the truth in love'; triangles will replicate and increase. Issues within the organization will become polarized. People become confused about what is wrong and often focus on the symptoms of the triangles rather than the process of the triangles. In the end, nothing ever seems to change for long and all involved feel stuck.

The functioning of individuals in the organization can also be linked to the position they hold in the triangle. This is more important than any individual personality. You are invited into a triangle if you feel as if you are being told about an interaction and are pulled to take sides. You may feel you need to align, with the person telling you about the 'incident'. Or you may sense you are somehow expected to 'fix' the problem. If you take responsibility to do so on the others behalf, you will carry the stress of the tension and stabilize the triangle and in the end perpetuate it. By becoming the one responsible you in fact stabilize the relationship in a stuck position. Issues may change but the process is remains the same in some relationships. Or that some individuals have the same kind of relationship issues perpetually? Remember the rubber band, everyone is locked into the same role and responds in a predictable manner thus maintaining the status quo.

The secretive aspect of triangles allows the most immature of the group to gain leverage. Secrets create pseudo alliances within an organization.. Secrets are part and parcel of a triangle. It can include an unmentionable subject (like I think the boss has a drinking problem), or hidden agendas. There is no way to contradict the story, and the core issues are not addressed. I have seen many lies that become 'the truth', because they are not exposed to the whole group in a way that they can grapple with all aspects of an issue. Members of the group then begin to diagnose one another, the leadership, and the organization. As a result, perceptions are not questioned and behavior is often misinterpreted. We fail to check out facts and gather information to support our viewpoint. The results are very damaging in the workplace. Disagreements do not surface, they go underground, and limit the potential for any real change. Secrets distort our perception and inhibit contradictory evidence causing decisions to be made on inadequate or false information.

Another aspect of secrets is that it creates unnecessary hostility and distance between groups or individuals. A good example was when a new manager came from a separate part of the organization to replace a local manager. The manager had a secret that she was unlikely to stay long because she had another offer forthcoming if things did not work out in the current situation. However, she did not share that information with anyone. The results were that many decisions were made that were damaging to the organization. In addition, the manager did not get feedback from the system to counter her negative outlook about the organization and thereby make an informed decision. Secrets highlight the need for communication flow especially during times of high stress or change in the system.

Finally, secrets stabilize triangles and slow recovery to major events. It has an avalanche effect in that it slows and sabotages communication. Our behavior is shaped by what we believe, and when secrets abound it leads to a lack of clarity, the feedback loop is blocked, too often a lie can become the 'truth' all because it was never confronted in the open. When we can address secrets, we are ahead of the game.

What does this mean for leadership?

We need to recognize that triangles are common and that they exist in every institution or team. They will increase in number and intensity whenever we introduce change. They are a fact of life. As leaders, however, you can reduce the potential for destructive dysfunctional triangles. The primary issue is to not take triangles personally, and to stay calm and thoughtful. By doing so, you can reduce the impact whether you are an informal or formal leader.

Staying calm and not taking triangles personally is much easier to talk about than to do. If you can step back and see the bigger picture, it will allow you to take time to think. One of the most helpful is to have a coach when triangles abound in a system. A coach can help you observe the bigger picture and assess the long-term impact of your actions. If an internal or external coach is unavailable, it can be helpful to get some distance from the situation to provide time and space to become more thoughtful and intentional about our role in triangles. Becoming comfortable with ambiguity, and even appreciating its value, can broaden your relational responses. Map out the triangles in your organization to objectify the relationship processes and make the process observable. It will help to put things into perspective rather than taking behavior personally.

Once you have some perspective, you can observe how you normally react when triangles occur. Do you take sides, even increase the tension by chiming in and adding to it? Do you keep silent when you think someone is wrongly accused? Do you 'go along to get along'? Do you feel it is your responsibility to fix it? Do you feel anxious if you do not do something? How often have you gone along to get along? How often do you look at structural or systemic reasons for disagreements rather than defining it as personality conflict? It is important to recognize your own pattern in a triangle. Often it is a repeated pattern we have picked up in childhood that we repeat again and again.

When you are in a position of leadership it is important to keep the information flowing and not become the one people complain to without it getting back to the person (s) it is directed toward. When someone comes to you with a secret, challenge the person to get closer to the person he/she is complaining about. Give the message they can handle the conflict or disagreement. If it is a complaint about someone make sure they get the feedback quickly and also the message you expect competence. Too often the leader ends up with all the secrets and becomes a dumping ground. He/she is expected to fix all the problems while the pattern of the interaction stays the same. So transparency is the watchword. Getting feedback loops that work for you in the organization is an important aspect to minimizing secrets.

There is a caveat however to what I just said that is the need to look at the structure of the organization and policies whenever there are many interlocking triangles in a system. Often the structure can create 'accidental adversaries.' A common structural problem is when two people are in ongoing conflict they are seen as the only aspect of the triangle. If they can get along everything would settle down. It gets referred to human resources and they intervene to 'fix it', thus unwittingly perpetuating the problem. Two departments, teams can be in perpetual uproar and it is seen as personality conflicts, when it is often a process problem. Ford Motor Co. made a change in the process of car design with its Lincoln Continental, it drastically reduced the conflicts between

teams, came in ahead of schedule and under budget. Triangles can be reduced when we pay attention to the overall structure and processes.

Secondly it is important to remember, as said earlier, the importance of your presence when there is turmoil in an organization. The wider your sphere of influence the more important you stay connected. Pay attention to how you normally respond to situations in which you are expected to take sides. Do you side with the one speaking? Do you say nothing and go along? Do you attempt to lower the upset, say it is not so bad? Do you get anxious and escalate the situation, increasing the cynicism and upset? Pay attention to your reaction and interactions. As a leader it can have a multiplier effect over time.

4) The dance of projection

It seems to be human nature to fix blame outside oneself, refusing to look at how you co-created the dance. Someone who refuses to accept responsibility for their part of a situation, and blames others sees the world from the prism of villains and victims. When this is our worldview we then look for evidence to confirm our beliefs and pay attention to information that supports this belief and disregard conflicting information. Since our beliefs will always find confirmation, we end up feeling like the victim. Dr. Friedman, a wise sage would say, you can always identify mature people in an organization, and they are the individuals who accept responsibility for their own behavior and do not blame or diagnosis others.

This is one of the more insidious dances and the most invisible. When we are unaware of negative parts of ourselves there is a tendency to project it onto others. Some teams or institutions seem to need a scapegoat in order to function well. Scapgoating is something that can keep things calm on the surface. Everyone pays a huge price in this dance. It kills the spirit. We can observe it in the animals that are part of a herd. It is common to have a 'pecking order' with some of the group on the inside and others on the outside. This pecking order is rigidly maintained. Scapgoating in the workplace has the effect of lowering the effectiveness and productivity of the whole team.

Sometimes scapgoating seems to be set up by the structure of the organization. Have you ever been a part of a team that believes everything would be great if a certain person left? Then when they do, you find the person who took that person's place is also the scapegoat? Have you wondered why? Are their impossible jobs? Or is the structure supporting blame? Organizations often unwittingly structurally set up a catch twenty-two position. A solution can be as simple as looking at the process of work in order set up new structures that reduce this potential.

Or it can be a positive projection, this new leader or person on the team is going to take on all the problems and solve them. Like a 1950ty's movie of the cowboy in the white hat that comes riding into town to solve all the problems, we put all our expectations on this new hero-leader. At the same time we often think this person will not need anything from the group, but is totally self-sufficient. Of course it also at the same time, absolves the group from taking their part in the solutions.

What does this mean for leaders?

Being alert to scapegoating within and externally and addressing the issue structurally can go a long way to reducing it. In addition making it a norm to take responsibility for your own actions and decisions rather than blaming reduces the need for scapegoats and increases the problem solving potential of the entire organization. However, if the scapegoating rotates it is not as serious as if it is constantly directed toward one entity, group or individual. Teaching some principles of system thinking can reduce the propensity to blame. For example, asking the 'five whys', or providing avenues for exploring the wider meaning of current problems, rather than a quick fix, is an important way to expand everyone's viewpoint and to address process issues. When you are aware of someone being scapegoated within the organization, communicating with that person directly about what you are hearing can turn a team around especially if you are in a leadership role.

If you are experiencing the positive projection of a group or organization, remember false expectations can cause a negative impact down the road. The 'honeymoon period' is a good example of projection. Enlisting ideas and problem solving from all involved helps reduce unrealistic expectations. Communicating how each team or individual fits into the vision of the organization, why their contribution is essential to the success of the organization, is a great way to reduce the impact of this type of projection.

5) The dance of conflict

Differences will arise in all systems; they are part and parcel of living. The constantly happy harmonious organization is an illusion. However, when differences are seen as a personal affront, as damaging to the relationship rather than an opportunity for growth, it can evolve into a destructive dance.

The dance of conflict is one of the more insidious and deadly of the dances. I recently watched a Bond movie and I saw the dance as if for the first time. Someone did some terrible wrong to a friend of Mr. Bond, and the rest of the movie was about the revenge exacted by Bond on the person, and his associates, that inflicted that terrible deed. If we live by a code that it is a matter of honor to avenge those who have wronged and hurt you or the ones you love it excuses the entire terrible behavior you do in the name of revenge. This thinking is prevalent in today's world. It is unquestioned in many circumstances. We recognize it in many ethnic conflicts around the world. History being repeated one group avenging another, and then (it may be many years later) the other group attacking back.

Some of us like this dance very much; it gets the juices flowing. If things are too calm and harmonious, conflict can raise its ugly head and derail our best efforts. Every group has a few people that are conflict generators, or persons who stir things up when things are going well. Do you recognize the conflict generators on your team? One whiff of something array and these people begin their dance. It is often associated with change. When a new aspect of business is being introduced, when a new staff member is added to the team, when teams are merged, when leadership changes are times when some among us will begin to grumble. You can count on it happening, and predict it. It can be as simple as a new process or as simple as changing something provided at

coffee breaks being discontinued. I heard of a story of a business that spent many hours talking about how terrible the boss no longer served donuts at coffee break!

Keep in mind that at times that you can be the conflict generator. When we feel strong about something, or a change is needed in the system, we can be the one that is stirring the pot. When we are the one generating the conflict, it is important to respect different points of view. The process of resolving differences becomes all-important. Many systems have no way to resolve differences. It is seen as a 'personality clash' or someone's 'agenda'. Instead it may be as simple as a lack of a process for resolving conflicts. Or it can be that some things need to be changed without a major discussion about it i.e. the donuts. Our response to the conflict is more important than the content of the conflict in the first place.

Many in our culture have become conflict phobic. We do not bring up issues or steer into the conflict, but will go to great lengths to avoid it. This has the paradoxical effect of giving power to the person who is a conflict generator. As a result, they are set the agenda in many organizations today. I have seen teams paralyzed and held hostage by the most immature member! One team had a member that stated "If I come to work and am in a crabby mood, I let everyone know, and they better stay out of my way". She believed that everyone else should take responsibility for her bad mood. And the amazing thing is that they did! This was a chronic condition; this response played itself out in many scenarios. Team members gave her wide berth, the supervisor gave her plenty of attention, and human resources spent time with the team to 'resolve the conflict'. Thus they all reinforced the cycle of conflict, by avoiding a direct confrontation. There was no accountability for the negative behavior. Conflict generators seem to have special built in radar for people who are 'consensus sensitive', who are 'very nice' or who are anxious themselves when they see others in pain. Thus, they can easily get a group of people going. No one wants to deal with this person's immaturity. When a group's goal is feeling good, immaturity will be tolerated to avoid disorder.

What does this mean for leaders?

Leaders need to function in a way that provides boundaries for behavior. In fact it is a reason for the failure of many self-managed work teams. No one wants to challenge the behavior of individuals that are outside the boundaries of the group. Without boundaries some will become invasive of others and a team can become emotionally stuck. Boundaries can be implemented via group norms, education about conflicts and a leader that does not seek consensus on every item. The most conflictual teams usually have a 'glad hander' or consensus seeker as a leader. Realizing that conflict is normal and part of life without personalizing it is a major challenge in life. When leaders abdicate their role of maintaining boundaries the dominos begin to fall. Conflict erupts in areas it has not been seen previously, and team members are sabotaged right and left. Addressing conflict at its inception, before it becomes a major issue by its replication throughout a system is an important function of leadership.

Leaders need to foster an environment where it is all right to disagree, in fact, encouraged. Decisions are more apt to be sound if all disagreements are on the table. No idea is the wrong idea. In concert with this encouragement there needs to be a clear way of communicating these ideas, while not falling into the trap that all decisions must be made by consensus. If you can state

differences of opinion without the need to 'change' the other, if you can use humor and not take others reactivity personally it will set the tone for the entire work group.

When new ideas are being explored everyone should be encouraged to bring up potential disagreements. Conflict should be seen as normal and in fact encouraged in discussions about ideas. When there is disagreement it should not become personalized. If someone disagrees on a implementation of an idea, it is good to uncover potential problems, and it is understood that it is not a personal attack. Problem solving can be face to face and/or on white boards or computer generated. It is more apt to include the thinking of the introverts as well as extroverts if more than one discussion method is used. A culture of intense discussion should be encouraged. Whenever there is too much consensus on a new idea beware, it might be an underdeveloped or bad idea. Once a decision is made everyone present or on the team signs off on it. Otherwise, the conflict generators begin to stir things up when they disagree with the decision and say they were not 'heard'. This can be interpreted that 'they are not doing things my way'. When this occurs the whole team is derailed while everyone takes time to listen and console the upset ones.

Self care in our leadership journey:

Let us begin with our own individual thermostats. Each of us has a certain 'set point' beyond which we begin to react automatically and instinctively. What level of stress can we normally handle? Many of us have a multitude of issues come up in our life and still function quite well. Others can't seem to handle stress well at all. A little bump in the road and they are too challenged to continue. What makes the difference? Science increasingly declares our set point comes from our upbringing, our genetics and even our intergenerational family. Stress can be handed down from generation to generation. Some families seem ill equipped to deal with change and stress in their life. And they take up an inordinate amount of our attention, social policy. Trying to understand their experience and alleviate their stress has shaped psychotherapy. In their own attempt to alleviate stress they can turn to substances or behavior that help in the block the pain in short run, but become addictive and increase the cycle of stress.

How do we increase our own resilience? It is beyond the scope of this paper to cover these aspects. However, I will touch on two that are not usually discussed in the literature. One is energy, in order to handle stress we need to have energy. When we are tired we are more apt to choose a dysfunctional way of reducing stress. Exercise, positive imagining, and care of our spiritual lives creates energy that otherwise is not available to us. Paying attention to the health of our soul and those around us is a major calling of life. A second way to increase our ability to deal with stress in a new way is healing old wounds, forgiving others that may have offended or hurt us in the past. Forgiveness can give us the momentum to move forward in our life. To be connected to our family of origin and still be our own person, to become more authentic in all of our relationships is most of us desire. The ability to make a choice to react differently in our family of origin provides us the choice to do it differently in the future.