The New Johari Window:
#9 Turbulence

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Contemporary relationships exhibit not only the postmodern characteristics of complexity and unpredictability—they also exhibit a third characteristic: turbulence. The condition of turbulence is perhaps best described by drawing an analogy between postmodern relationships and the complex dynamics of white water streams. I spent many summers during my youth hiking through the Sierra Nevada range of California. There is nothing more beautiful and variable than a mountain stream, with its falls, whirlpools, rivulets, and quiet pools of water. If one looks more closely at this extraordinarily complex system, one finds that four different kinds of subsystems are operating in the stream.

White Water World

First, there is the rapidly flowing subsystem of the stream. The movement in this subsystem is highly predictable. When we watch a leaf being carried by this subsystem we can readily tell where it will be two seconds from now. The flow of water in this subsystem resembles the flow in a large river: powerful, constant and quiet. This subsystem of the stream exemplifies the orderly element in a relationship. We are both moving—but in the same direction and at the same speed. We share a perspective and set of values (third form of interpersonal trust). This aligns with the stable point attractor (Arrow, McGrath and Berdahl) that I described in an earlier essay.

A second kind of subsystem of the stream is also orderly, though it is much more complex. This is the whirlpool that is formed when the water hits an impediment (such as a submerged

rock). The water in a whirlpool keeps changing directions; however, one can predict the change in direction since the water is moving in a predictable spiral formation. We know where the leaf that enters a whirlpool will be two seconds from now. However, we may not be able to predict where it will be in five seconds, since the whirlpool is likely to pull the leaf down below the surface of the water and throw it off into some other subsystem. This subsystem is aligned with either Arrow's periodic (cyclical) or sequential (developmental) attractor system.

In a relationship, this whirlpool-type subsystem is represented by predictable changes in the life cycle and seasons of the relationship. Change is occurring in the relationship, but it is change that has occurred before in the way(s) in which these people relate to one another (seasonal change) or it is change that one can anticipate given the experiences of comparable relationships as they mature (lifecycle change). There is the unknown aspects of the change—as the relationship (like the leaf) is pulled into the vortex of the compelling change. We don't know where it will end up after it completes the predictable cycle, but we can be relatively confident regarding the pattern of interpersonal change while it is in the cycle.

The stream also embraces a third subsystem that is to be found in the quiet pools that are tucked away behind a large boulder in the stream or at the edge of the stream beside a large sunken tree trunk. It is remarkable that a stream with rapidly flowing water also inevitably contains many subsystems that are not only very quiet but also stagnant. We can usually drink from the rapidly flowing water in a stream, but are warned (often by the smell) to avoid drinking from the stagnant pools. Yet, these pools are often the sources of nutrients for the ecosystem of the stream. Our leaf floats into the stagnant pool and remains there. It eventually sinks and joins with other rotting leaves to form a richly nutritious bio-mass for the living organisms of the stream. The quiet pools represent yet another form of order in the turbulent stream. Nothing changes. Everything eventually sinks and rots—contributing (paradoxically) to the ongoing revitalization of the bio-system. There is no attractor operating in this subsystem—other than gravity (which results in the sinking of leaves and other debris).

The quiet pool is represented in a relationship by those subsystems that never change or change very slowly. These are the subsystems that provide what Talcott Parsons calls the latent pattern maintenance of the system. (I will later in this book relate this subsystem to the fourth Quadrant of the Johari Window). These subsystems preserve the continuity of a relationship, while other subsystems in the relationships are rapidly changing. Continuity comes through the rituals, ceremonies, norms, values, and narratives of the relationship—deeply embedded and often invisible (latent) patterns of interpersonal behavior.

The quiet pool is also represented in both informal and formal processes that often dictate the nature of relationships in specific settings. Rules and regulations (that are slow to change and that seem to have a life of their own) dictate the form and function of the relationship—the external panes of the two windows are in charge. These rules and regulations are reinforced even when no longer appropriate. They are followed even when no longer formally in force. They are cogently represented in the phrase, "that's the way we have always done it around here," and are often reinforced by the remnants of the organization—those people and departments who represent the old ways of doing things in the organization. Everett Rodgers identifies these people as the *recalcitrants* of an organization who forever struggle against change and innovation.

This quiet pool may at first seem to represent a deficit and a source of resistance and consternation for those seeking to improve and adapt a relationship (or organization) to a changing world. We must recognize, however, that a quiet pool is the primary source of nutrition for the stream—and that (in a comparable manner) the quiet pool in a relationship (organization) is the primary source of its distinctive character, traditions and culture. Without this core subsystem, a relationship will fall apart. It will lose its integrative glue and its sense of abiding values and purposes. In a postmodern world where boundaries are falling away, the quiet pool contributes in a profound way to clarity in a relationship—particularly with regard to shared intentions and a sense of continuity and commitment. From this perspective,

the remnant of an organization provides an invaluable wisdom regarding the deeply embedded patterns of relationships in the organization, and the stagnant resistance of the organization becomes a fertile ground for the formulation of new strategies that honor the past while leaning toward the future. From this perspective, the entire subsystem is a strange attractor—and the ultimate source of energy (as well as nutrients) in the organization or relationship.

There is finally a fourth type of subsystem in the stream. This is the subsystem that resides on the boundaries between the three other subsystems. When we look at a stream, we see this type of subsystem in the area that exists between the rapidly flowing section of the stream (subsystem one) and the stagnant pool (subsystem three) or between the whirlpool (subsystem two) and either the rapidly flowing or stagnant water. Turbulence and unpredictability are endemic to this fourth subsystem. A leaf that floats into this subsystem begins to move in a highly erratic manner. One cannot predict from moment to moment where the leaf will be. It bobs and weaves, darting from one point to another in a seemingly random manner. Eventually the leaf will end up in the stagnant pool, the whirlpool or the fast lane (subsystem one). Meanwhile (to borrow from the movie *All About Eve*) it is in for "a bumpy ride!" Two of Arrow, McGrath and Berdahl's alternative equilibrium attractor systems seem to produce this chaos: (1) contradictory and (2) reversible.

The fourth subsystem is common in postmodern relationships. We find high levels of turbulence and unpredictability in organizations when there is a new boss, when representatives from the marketing and production departments get together, or when innovators try to implement new policies in the face of long-standing bureaucratic structures. We find turbulence and unpredictability outside the organizational setting when a young man and woman meet for the first time at a singles bar, when a daughter first tells her parents about her alternative life style, when a wife tells her husband that she is pregnant with their first child, and so forth and so forth.

It is tempting to describe this fourth subsystem as chaotic, yet in recent years many of the theorists who write about chaos and complexity (notably Stuart Kaufmann) have suggested that this type of subsystem isn't chaotic—rather it is turbulent. On the one hand, some systems are highly orderly. Kaufmann draws an analogy between these highly orderly systems (often closed with regard to boundaries) and the most stable state in which many ingredients exist, namely, frozen. Ice, for instance, is highly orderly and none changing. There is also a second physical state in which most ingredients exist. This is the gaseous state, which Kaufmann suggests is chaotic. Water vapor, for instance, is unpredictable in its movement and destination—one has only to observe the steam that comes out of a teakettle. According to Kaufmann, a third physical state is represented in the condition that is intermediate between frozen and gaseous. This is the liquid state of an ingredient. Kaufmann suggests that this state represents the interplay between order (frozen) and chaos (gaseous) and is typified by turbulence. Kaufmann would suggest that the turbulence existing in the fourth subsystem of a stream is not chaotic but is instead turbulent.

Order and Chaos

The white water model of turbulence is a very important corrective on many of the recent attempts at applying chaos theory to interpersonal relationships. Kaufmann suggests that chaos, *per se*, does not exist in an isolated form in any biological system. Rather, chaos is always being played off against and being balanced by the orderly functions of the system. When I was consulting to organizations in Eastern Europe immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union, it was amazing to learn that the Russian Mafia was providing much of the order in many of the former Soviet countries (particularly Russia). It seems that an unlawful and criminal organization (like the Mafia) needs an orderly and lawful society in which to operate.

I discovered that the American Mafia played a similar role in the United States Federal prisons with which I consulted during the 1980s. After the Attika State Prison (New York) riots many years ago (when the inmates stole the correctional officers' guns), most high security prisons in

the United States no longer allow correctional officers to carry weapons (unless they are stationed in one of the protected control towers). Thus, without weapons, the correctional officers must control the highly volatile situation inside the prison through earning respect—and through the "informal" assistance of powerful inmates (often with Mafia or other criminal group ties). These inmate leaders are just as concerned with preserving law and order as the guards. Order must reign for the chaos of criminality to be successful—whether this is in Russia or in an America prison.

The same holds true in interpersonal relationships. Chaos can only reign supreme if there also is order. In his classic play regarding a chaotic marriage (*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?)*, Edward Albee describes a relationship between Martha, the daughter of a college president, and George, her husband and a "stuck" and despondent professor of English in this same college. A young couple has been invited over for dinner to witness the wild and chaotic ride of George and Martha's relationship. Yet, underlying this chaos is a very important set of rules that govern the conduct of the interpersonal games that George and Martha play (often at the expense of and with the unwanted assistance of their guests). At a critical moment in the play, these long-established rules are about to be broken and we (along with George and Martha) recognize how profoundly important these rules—and this marital order—are to the psychological survival of both George and Martha.

In their seminal book, *The Pragmatics of Human Communications*, Paul Watzlawick and his colleagues recognize and discuss this interplay of order and chaos in George and Martha's relationship:

> A system is said to be stable along certain of its variables if those variables remain within defined limits, and this is true of George and Martha's dyadic system. "Stability" may seem the least appropriate term to describe their indoor commando games, but the issue rests on the variables intended. Their conversations are mercurial, noisy, shocking; restraint and social graces are quickly left behind, as it seems that anything goes. Indeed it would be extremely

> difficult at any point to guess what will happen next [chaos]. It would, however, be fairly easy to describe *how* it will happen between George and Marta. For the variables that here define stability are those of relationship, not content, and in terms of their relationship pattern the couple demonstrate an extremely narrow range of behavior [order].

This interplay between order and chaos is central to the analysis of complex human relationships—and to the New Johari Window. With this appreciation of the dynamic relationship between order and chaos, I will return to the turbulent world of the white water stream and to another critical function that is served by turbulence—namely, the buffering of contradictory subsystems from one another.

Subsystem Interactions

The turbulent subsystem in a stream only exists because it serves as a buffer and point of transition between two orderly systems that are operating in quite different ways (stagnant versus rapidly moving; whirlpool versus stagnant; whirlpool versus rapidly moving). Similarly, turbulence in a relationship only exists because it is buffering or serving as a transition point between two other subsystems in the relationship that operate with their own patterns and underlying order. I am in the midst of writing a book on this subject. I have found after interviewing many adults who have been in a significant, committed relationship for many years, that virtually every couple goes through several (perhaps many) highly turbulent periods of adjustment. Typically, these periods of turbulence occur when one or both partners shift in their own lives from one orderly pattern to another. They change jobs or careers. They return to school or graduate. As the primary caregiver, they adjust to their children leaving home or their elderly parent either dying or moving to a nursing home. They re-evaluate fundamental priorities in their personal life: free time vs. money, living in the country vs. living in the city. I use the metaphor of tectonic plates to illustrate this dynamic.

As in the case of geological tectonic plates—massive blocks of highly stable rock (often covering an area as large as a continent)--the life patterns of two members of a couple are often very orderly. However, when these plates start to move even a little bit, they rub (or more accurately grind) against the adjacent tectonic plate (in this case, their husband, wife, lover). At times this interaction is smooth, resulting in the interrelated moving of both plates. At other times, the plates get caught and tension builds. At some point, the two plates can no longer handle the tension and they break free of one another—this is what occurs when there are earthquakes. I would suggest that most (if not all) of us have experienced "interpersonal earthquakes" in our own committed relationships. While these interpersonal earthquakes are very painful and sometimes very destructive, they also keep the relationship alive and responsive to the shifting priorities in each partner's life. Earthquakes destroy buildings and kill people, but they also create majestic valleys and mountain ranges. Turbulence is inevitable—and essential—in the adjustment of one orderly subsystem to another orderly subsystem if one or both of these subsystems is shifting in some manner.

In essence, our emerging postmodern world of interpersonal relationships is filled with a set of these interacting subsystems. Each of these subsystems is internally consistent, coherent, self-regulating and self-fulfilling. Furthermore, subsystems in the whirlpool, stagnant pool and rapid flowing segments of the stream tend to replicate or mirror each other as well as the overall system. One part of the stagnant pool closely resembles all other parts of the pool, just as each of the dynamic elements of the whirlpool or moving water is replicated in all other parts of the subsystem. In the stream, however, there is also abundant disorder and turbulence as represented in the fourth type of subsystem. Turbulence, unpredictability, and complexity are found in those areas of the stream where more orderly subsystems are interacting.

As in the case of the postmodern relationship, streams that have many subsystems in interaction tend to create more turbulent subsystems than do streams with few subsystems. Streams will have many subsystems if there are many submerged rocks or trees (creating whirlpools and stagnant pools). At an even more profound level, it is interesting to note that

any stream will tend to become more turbulent the more rapidly the water in it is moving. Any system will tend to become turbulent as the movement of subsystems within the system is increased. This acceleration of movement produces an increasing amount of interaction among the subsystems. Since there are not only an increasing number of people in our world who differ from one another, but also an acceleration in the change within and among these people, there is an increasing amount of turbulent, unpredictable and fragmented space in which people are interacting. Thus, we find, as in the mountain stream, a rich interplay between elements of order and elements of chaos, all intertwined in complex and turbulent subsystems of contemporary interpersonal life.

Thus, in relationships as in streams there are eddies, swirls and pools as well as very quiet but powerful flows of water. Sensible systems and subsystems meet one another and form turbulent and unpredictable white water conditions. We must somehow navigate these white water conditions as friends, lovers, parents, spouses, leaders, visionaries and co-workers. What are the interpersonal skills needed to navigate the white water? Whereas one can travel on a river by canoe or boat, the white water conditions of a mountain stream requires a kayak. Associates who are conversant with outdoor sports tell me that canoeing and kayaking require quite different skills and that kayaking in particular requires a clear sense of balance and the capacity to make quick decisions. I will be identifying many of these interpersonal ("kayak") skills throughout this series of essays.

Living in a White Water World

Given the turbulence of the postmodern world, the phenomenon of overwhelmed self which I introduced previously in this chapter might be just a matter of cognitive challenge (complexity) or just a matter of emotional challenge (unpredictable). It might also be a matter of what might be called "non-adjustability" (to coin a horrible world). In living with turbulence, we might simply not be capable of "adjustment" to four different subsystems. Just as we learn how to adapt to one of these subsystems, we find ourselves pulled (external locus of control) or even attracted (internal locus of control) to one of the three other subsystems. We long for quiescence

(subsystem three) or for patterned change (subsystem two) after living in a condition of rapid change (subsystem one) or chaos (subsystem four). Alternatively, we are pulled toward the excitement of subsystem one or four, away from a world of predictability (subsystem two) or even stagnation (subsystem three). We are truly over-whelmed in a world of turbulence and are very much in need of both a place on the "shore" (a sanctuary) and a sense of balance and values that can be sustained throughout the four subsystems. I described this sense earlier with regard to a quest for the authentic self in the context of situational and contextual selves.

In the midst of the "white water" what really are our needs? Several postmodern theorists (notably Peter Vaill and Peter Senge) believe that the sense of balance to be found in kayaking must also be found in our postmodern world as we navigate through a turbulent, white water world. Vaill suggests that a spiritual center—an internal coherence—is a prerequisite for navigation in a white water environment:

> It is hard in the environment of constant change to discover the spiritual possibilities of the work we do and of the people we do it with. This is why we have to learn to work spiritually smarter—because inspiration is so much harder to come by in the world of permanent white water. . . . I think that all true leadership is indeed spiritual leadership, even if you hardly ever hear it put that flatly. The reason is that beyond everything else that can be said about it, leadership is concerned with bringing out the best in people. As such, one's best is tied intimately to one's deepest sense of oneself, to one's spirit. My leadership efforts must touch that in myself and in others.

Senge suggests that we must be able to reflect on our own practices and learn from our past mistakes rather than repeatedly make the same mistakes. What is the answer or what are the answers to these complex problems regarding living and working in a postmodern settings? We would suggest that the new Johari Window provides some of these answers—at least with regard to ways in which we navigate through the turbulence waters of postmodern relationships.

While the postmodern condition can lead us to a pessimistic perspective regarding the overwhelming challenges we face, there is also reason for optimism. As I noted previously, there is good reason to be believe that people will develop fewer and deeper relationships with our population growing increasingly older (the "graying" of our society):

> . . . it appears that the decade of their fifties, for most [of the people in the study], is a time when the need for a few significant relationships becomes critical. Solid friendships deepen over the years. By the time we reach our fifties, we treasure those friendships that have lasted a long time. . . . These one-to-one intimates help to give us the inner strength and comfort that we desperately need in our fifties if we are to be growth-oriented and generative.

We may soon be talking less about the overwhelmed or minimal self, and more about the selective self. We may be talking and writing about people who are discerning in their relationships—in the way in which they present themselves to the world (Quad One), in what they disclose to other people (Quad Three), and how they choose to live in each of the four subsystems. The selective self will find time for reflection on the choices one must make in life—often establishing or finding a sanctuary in which this "on-shore" rather than "white water" reflection can occur. We can only speculate at this point as to whether the selective self is just a pipe dream or a viable image of the future for a "graying" society.