Tending the Fires of 21st Century Organizations

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I have a confession to make. I seem to be obsessed with fire. I love sitting in front of a fire in my living room. It has always been a requirement over many years that a home I purchase will have a living room fireplace. I have even built fireplaces in a dining room and bedroom that I have owned. I have also been fascinated with fire as a dynamic, physical phenomenon. This all came to a head when I read Ilya Prigogine's account of fire—when compared to the pendulum (Prigogine, 1984). This Nobel-prize winning physicist noted that much of traditional science has focused on phenomena and physical objects that are predictable and orderly—such as the pendulum with its to-and-fro movement. As one of the founders of Chaos and Complexity Theory--an area of science that is particularly problematic, Prigogine has encouraged his fellow scientists to focus on processes and physical entities, such as fire, that are much more elusive. He notes that fire has often been used to elicit a process or transform an object—but has rarely been studied itself.

With my colleague, Agnes Mura, I drew an analogy between the study of fire (as opposed to the study of a pendulum) and the study of an equally as elusive phenomenon: the contemporary organization (Bergquist and Mura, 2012). In our essay entitled "To Flicker or Swing: The Fire and Pendulum of Leadership", Agnes and I wrote about the ways in which complex and often chaotic organizations operate. I want to move further in this analogical analysis by drawing a comparison between the fire that I tend in my living room hearth and the "tending" that is done by those leading 21st Century organizations. If nothing else, this essay has provided me with a wonderful excuse for spending some time sitting in front of my fireplace on a cold, wintery Maine afternoon or evening. It is now Spring and time to prepare my reflections on fire and leadership.

What is Tending?

I begin my journey into the nature of fire and organizational tending by going to the Internet for a clear definition of the word "tending" – and it's root word: "tend." As in the case of the flames flickering in my fireplace, the words "tending" and "tend" are themselves a bit elusive. Multiple meanings can be assigned to the word "tend". On the one hand, it can be used to describe a regularly or frequently occurring behavior ("she tends to . . . '") On the other hand, "tend" refers to a caring act and to a specific kind of behavior: attention to the welfare of another person (" I am attending to her health . . . "). Along

with many other meanings – including the "tending of a fire"—these two seem to capture the essence of the Tending process.

First, when we "tend" there are no obvious or completely predictable outcomes—there are only tendencies. Tending is more like a fire than a pendulum. We kind of know what is about to happen—but can't be sure. We can predict and calculate probabilities; however, there is no 100% certainty. Under conditions of uncertainty, we are asked (as a leader) to care about the welfare of our organization and those working in our organization. We must be generative in our role as leader—tending to not just the immediate concerns of our organization and colleagues, but also the long-term welfare (the "legacy") of our organization and colleagues (Bergquist and Quehl, 2019).

This generativity extends out not just in time, but also in space: we must ultimately be "good for" the world in which we live and work, as well as being "good in" this world (Jones, xxx). Generativity and the process of tending are engaged in yet another multi-tiered manner. Generativity extends both outward (the actions we take) and inward (the manner in which we perceive our colleagues and their own strengths and aspirations). We must be appreciative in our actions and perceptions—being collaborative as we lean into our collective future (Bergquist, 2004; Bergquist and Mura, 2011).

We tend to our organization much as we attend to a fire—by watching it carefully, adjusting to changing conditions, and making predictions regarding the outcomes of our actions without knowing for sure what actually will occur. Under conditions of not only uncertainty, but also volatility, complexity, ambiguity, turbulence and contradiction (VUCA-Plus) (Bergquist, 2020), it is quite a challenge—yet a necessary challenge—for us to be attentive tenders of our organization's fires. What then is the nature of fire and how does it relate to 21st Century leadership challenges in a world of VUCA-Plus? I begin by asking the fundamental question: how big of a fire should we build—and how big of an organization should we build (or at least envision)?

Determining the Size of a Fire

My home in California housed a large stone fireplace sitting at the end of a two-story living room. We had many trees on our property (located in a rural area of California just north of San Francisco)—ranging from fir to redwood. All of this meant that I could build some "really big" fires in our large fireplace. I never had to worry about finding enough wood to burn—I could always throw onto my fires the wood I could retrieve from trees I had cut. My fires were filled with Spirit—and I, in turn, was filled

with spirit and dreams of what could be done to change the organization that I led. I could cut down an unlimited number of trees—while changing the world in which I worked and lived.

Now I live in the State of Maine. My home has a brick fireplace that is much smaller in size than my fireplace in California. The size of my fireplace is appropriate, given that it resides in a single-story living room. There are not many trees located on my property, so I usually have to rely on cut wood that I order (mixed with some of the wood I am able to retrieve from several trees that I have cut down or more often pruned). Next door to my home is a small cottage I bought many years ago (before my wife and I purchased our current home). This cottage has an even smaller fireplace. I spent many years sitting in front of fires I built in this cottage, and I now love sitting in front of the fires I have built in my home. My fires in Maine are filled with soul—and I, in turn, am filled with soul and reflections on the dreams that were realized and those that were not realized in the organizations I led. I have had to come to terms not only with the limited wood that is available for my fires, but also my limited ability to change the world in which I have lived and worked.

The transition from big house and expansive spirit to smaller house and more intimate soul is not easy—nor is the transition from dreams and aspirations (in midlife) to reflection and integration (in later life). Fortunately, transitions can be supported by what some psychologists (especially those who embrace object relations theories) call "transitional objects." These objects are often actual physical objects that we carry with us from our former life into our new life. At the very least, they are memories that we hold over from the old life. Childhood transitions are often aided by the child bringing something from their "old" life into the "new" life – this might be a piece of blanket or a teddy bear. A little later in life, the transitional object can be a yearbook filled with signatures, a set of photographs, or a bookcase filled with memorability. For me, the transition between fireplaces was aided by tools I brought with me from California to Maine. Because the fireplace in California was quite large, the poker and shovel were also quite large – probably too big for my current fireplace. Still, I love tending my somewhat smaller Maine fire with these majestic bronze-tipped tools.

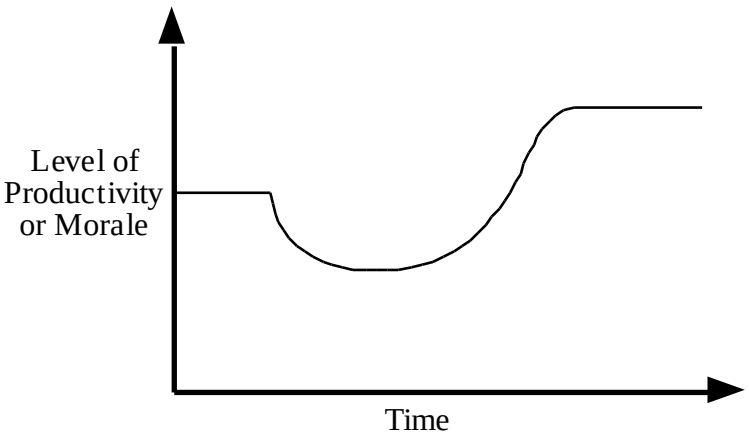
A parallel process has occurred in my tending of fires. In California, I often accompanied my fire-tending and fire-watching with grand symphonies that were shouting out from some large speakers I had installed in my home. Here is Maine, I have much smaller speakers and I often play much more constrained music while tending and watching my fire. I love to listen to chamber music—especially piano, violin and cello trios. Symphonies are still wonderful, but I sometimes like something a bit smaller that fits better with my smaller fire.

Starting Up the Fire

I cheat quite a bit in starting my fires. I use one of the "Fire logs" that burn for 3 or 4 hours. I know that they are intended to serve as the entire fire, but I like to use them as a way to "kick start" my fire, helping to "fire up" the other logs I have placed on the grate. And to be even more brutely honest, I place some newspaper below the grate and get the fire started by setting a match to the newspaper, which in turn lights up the artificial fire log. This log in turn lights up the other "real" logs I have placed on top of, in front of, and behind the fire logs. No boy scout rubbing of sticks for me—it is all about getting the fiery show underway with minimal effort. Eventually, however, the fire must burn "on its own" with nothing but real wood doing all the work. I refuse to add another fire log. This is beneath my dignity. After all, I once was a boy scout . . .

The same can be said for organizations. There might be an initial infusion of capital (money, time and energy without pay), but the organization must eventually be able to operate on its own. Leaders of the organization can't continue to pump in "artificial" resources. Money needs to be generated, and employees need to be paid. We might think of this as a *Sustainability Curve*—which is closely aligned with the now legendary change curve (first presented by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross).

Here is what the classic change curve looks like. I propose that the same curve applies to the process of sustainability when it comes to portraying the life of a new program or organization.



When initiating a new program – or establishing an entirely new organization—we typically attend to the positive outcomes that we envision for this program or organization: a new accounting procedure will cut down on paperwork by twenty percent, a new health care organization that focuses on streamlined patient intake procedure will significantly increase both staff and patient satisfaction. While these outcomes might realistically be expected of a successful effort over a relatively long period of time, we must recognize that sufficient resources are needed to sustain the program or organization over a longer period of time. The start-up log will eventually burn out.

At the start of any new program or organization, there typically is some sense that the current situation can be improved. It is better to try something new than to accept the current circumstances as givens. Thus, the impetus for creation of a new program or organization is persuasive and enduring. We look forward to the warm fire and are excited to embark upon a new journey. While there is energy and often resources (money, work) associated with the startup, there are also several important barriers. First, things are disrupted. An *unfreezing* process is essential to any planned startup. At the individual level, we can speak of the transitional periods or psychic limbo states that intercede between more stable periods in the lives of adults (Mura and Bergquist, 2020). During each transitional period, some fundamental assumptions are questioned—and the existing life structure is reappraised. Previously dismissed options and possibilities for change in oneself and in one's world are now given credence. For the first time, we hear voices from other rooms in our psychic structure and consider profound changes in the way we engage our world. There are lingering doubts or at least worries even when we are true believers in the new initiative.

Whether engaged in organizational unfreezing or personal transitions, people are forced to adjust and learn when first initiating the new program or organization. This is often a painful and consuming process. Participants in the change understandably begin to focus more on their own coping and their own learning, than they do on the task at hand. They become introspective. Old memories, hopes and fears often are evoked as people being changed seek out the stability of the past amidst the new values and behaviors. The old boundaries between home and work often are broken, as are many interpersonal constraints and traditional role differences (teacher and learner, young and old, male and female). Many startups will open up new perspectives that seem on the surface to have little to do specifically with this program or organization. Change processes and learning often are not very discriminating. The fire burns without fully predictable patterns or outcomes. It doesn't behave itself—

nor do new programs or organizations. That is what makes all of the entities and processes so enthralling (and potentially hazardous).

Sustaining the Fire

The start-up log has begun to burn out. Other logs are now catching fire and seem almost to be on their own. It is at this point that we (as tenders of the fire) have a "critical" decision to make. When do we start adding other logs to the fire? If the original logs are not yet sufficiently "independent" of the startup log then new logs are likely ("tend") to smother the fire and remain unburnable. On the other hand, if new logs are not added, the fire might burn out quickly with the startup log accelerating the consumption of all logs—not just itself. In other words, when does our fire become "self-sufficient"?

This is analogous to a major question that should be posed during the early life of a program or organization. The initial startup money, energy and excitement can no longer keep things moving forward. We can rely on people to continue working with little pay nor can we ask our friends and family members (or local bank) to lend us some more money. We must now put in place some solid and realistic plans and commitments. The program or organization must, like the fire, become "self-sufficient." Our aspirational stance must at least temporarily be replaced by some realism. We can't keep adding "artificial" logs or rely on "artificial" dreams.

We have much to learn about the Sustainability Curve at this point. Because of unrealistically high expectations and the often-distracting learning that accompanies most new ventures, the energy and productivity of a person or organization will eventually drop off. The startup log is burning down. Accompanying this reduction is a drop off in morale. The "new day" has not yet come; in fact, the "old days" are looking better all the time. At least there were fewer problems in the old days that were so unpredictable and difficult to solve. Maybe we should have stayed with the gas-log fire that we could turn on and turn off. We didn't need to decide when to add new logs. This drop-off in morale often further exacerbates production problems, which in turn further lower the morale. A vicious cycle has been started which can leave an individual or organization in a rather long-term depressed state.

Sometimes when a new program or organization is begun, there is a short-term boost in productivity and morale. This is the so-called *Hawthorne Effect*. While the actual Hawthorne Studies involved the investigation of many different aspects of worker motivation and performance, they are best known for an early finding that workers will try harder because they are involved in an experimental program or, more basically, because they have been singled out for special attention of some type. This short-term

boost has commonly been labeled the Hawthorne Effect. People try harder because they are involved in a new venture—particularly if they have some psychological or financial stake in the outcome of this venture. If the decision to initiate the new program or establish the new organization was difficult to make, then people will also attempt, for a short period of time, to work toward its success. They will at least ignore its initial failings, in order to reduce the cognitive dissonance associated with this difficult decision (if this was the wrong decision to make, then we might not be as smart as we thought we were!).

This post-decision tendency to justify one's choice often will give any new program or organization an initial boost. It operates like a fire-log—helps to get things started. However, this boost usually is short-lived. This is especially the case if there are people involved in the startup who benefit in some way from the failure of this initiative (e.g. “See I told you so. . . “). Most importantly, the tendency to ignore negative implications of a chosen course of action, once the decision is made, will itself often contribute to the downturn in productively and morale. Problems associated with a new venture often will be ignored until they become particularly difficult to resolve. The "bugs" in a new computer program, for instance, may be overlooked during the pilot test phase because those involved in the program want it to succeed and therefore ignore these "trivial" difficulties. The true extent of the problem only becomes apparent when this program is distributed to all the operating units of the company.

What typically happens after this downturn in productivity and morale? People involved in the startup will either wait it out, to see if productivity and morale improve over time—or panic and decide to close the program or organization and return to a more comfortable (and usually traditional) setting. Alternatively, they decide to get out of this line of work all together. At the very least, those who formerly were optimistic about the new venture are now disillusioned—because it is not working.

Worst yet, they are embittered, because the program or organization was never given an adequate chance to succeed. New problems may be added to the list of old problems as the person or organization attempts to make up for the drop in productivity and morale. Because of the negative consequences associated with an aborted effort, it is better for a person or organization never to undertake a major initiative if this person or organization is unable to see this initiative through to the end. To paraphrase a passage from Ecclesiastes: for everything there is a season—a time for something new, and a time to refrain from starting something new.

Shifting the Logs

Fires don't just keep burning. They must be tended—meaning that one must occasionally get up from a comfortable chair and change the location of logs in the fire. A fireside implement is engaged for poking, prodding and perhaps even lifting up and moving a log or two. The fire lights up more fully after its logs have been moved a bit, exposing new (fresh) sides of some logs to other burning logs. A log that is burning brightly will "lend a hand" to the log that has either just been placed on the grate or has resisted burning very much (because of moisture content, age of the wood or position on the grate). Rather than resenting intrusion of the new or ill-positioned log, the older ones that are burning in a successful manner help this struggling log get started. Rather than resenting the recalcitrance of the unburning log, those that are burning acknowledge that this log needs a bit of assistance—and some patience (as it slowly loses its moisture or loses its youth as a log that is still "green"). The fire is teaching me about collaboration and is thankful that I am helping to facilitate this collaboration by moving the logs around so that they find new ways to be helpful.

In reflecting on what I have learned by tending the fire, I have come to recognize some important ways in which organizations also must be tended. Elements of an organization, like logs on a fire, must be rearranged on occasion, so that they might assist one another in new ways. Support must be found from new sources, Various stakeholders in an organization can be of assistance in new ways if invited to shift a bit in their perspectives and practices. I am reminded of the thoughtful analysis offered by Frans Johansson (2004) in his book on *The Medici Effect*. He not only reminds us of the highly productive period in Italian history when the Medici family brought together diverse ideas, concepts and cultures, but also offers an important concept that is related to fire tending. Johansson introduces us to *intersectional ideas* and *intersection innovation*. Johansson provides the following distinction and description:

> The major difference between a directional idea and an intersectional one is that we know where we are going with the former. The idea has a direction. Directional innovation improves a product in fairly predictable steps, along a well-defined dimension. . . . Intersectional innovations, on the other hand, change the world in leaps along new directions. They usually pave the way for anew field and therefore make it possible for the people who originated them to become the leaders in the fields they created. Intersection innovations also do not require as

> much expertise as directional innovation and can therefore be executed by the people you least suspect. (Johannsson, 2004, pp. 18-19)

While Johansson's directional idea and innovation seems to align with Prigogine's pendulum, his intersectional ideas and innovations leap forward as examples of Prigogine's fire. My occasional yearning for a gas fire reminds me of the appeal offered by directional ideas. When I have chosen a wood-burning fire, the intersectional burning of logs is at play. It is the same for organizations (and entire societies). Intersectional results are unpredictable—in large part because any intersection of ideas becomes immediately complex.

Many years ago, I had the privilege of working for a short period of time with Virginia Satir, the groundbreaking practitioner of systems-based family therapy. Virginia noted that a family becomes much more complex and unpredictable once a child is added to the two-person couple. The family system grows exponentially more complex with each additional child. Similarly, an organization becomes exponentially complex with the addition of each new unit. As Miller and Page note (2007) it is not only a case of new entities being added. This will make the organization complicated—but not complex. Complexity is a matter of these entities interacting with and becoming dependent on one another – much as in the case of Satir's growing family. This is also the case with Johansson's interaction and the stirring up logs in a fireplace.

Johansson (2004, pp. 19-20) offers the following (partial) list concerning the outcomes of a successful intersecting processes:

> [The innovations are] surprising and fascinating.
>
> They take leaps in new directions.
>
> They open up entirely new fields.
>
> They provide a space for a person, team, or company to call its own.
>
> They generate followers, which means the creators can become leaders.
>
> They provide a source of directional innovation for years or decades to come.
>
> They can affect the world in unprecedented ways.

While Johansson offers some valuable advice regarding how to bring about the intersection (I recommend his book), I find that there is an initial simple strategy which one can engage. We can move around the logs (entities) in an organization, so that they can ignite one another. We can also move

around ideas for intersection ignition. In my own consulting work, I have often brought together people from units in an organization that traditionally don't interact much with one another. I bring together faculty members in the sciences with those in the arts to help design physics studios and art laboratories. I invite those working on an assembly line to assist C-Suite leaders in the design of a new production facility (often in alignment with what are called "social-technical systems"). I welcome members of the local community to help government workers identify the government-related projects that have been most successful during the past year (they are often projects involving collaboration between governmental and nongovernmental agencies.

At an even more basic level, I will stir up the organizational fire by engaging a process called *morphological analysis* (morphology referring to the nature of forms). This process requires that the major parameters of a proposed project first be identified (such as number of people involved, duration of the project, location of project, type and breadth of people being served, and budget for project). We then identify the extremes for each parameter (such as the project being run by one person or by everyone in the organization, or the budget being zero dollars or $500,000). A matrix is created, with multiple (usually 6) options for each parameter being identified (such as project being run by 1 person, 5 persons, 20 persons, 100 persons, 200 people, or all members of the organization). Those participating in this morphological analysis—who come with diverse perspectives and diverse experiences—now play a morphological "game."

Project designers roll one dice for each parameter (yielding one or six numbers) and then are given the challenging assignment of designing the project making use of the identified options associated with each number rolled on the dice (for example the project will be conducted by 20 people, over a two-year period of time, serving only very poor people, operating with a budget of $50,000). The dice is rolled again, and a new design is created (the project is being conducted by everyone in the organization, for two days, serving only young people, operating with a budget of $100,000). This process of morphological analysis can be reenacted multiple times, with new ideas emerging from each throw of the dice. The logs have been stirred about and new intersecting ideas are igniting one another. We don't know what the outcomes will be—but they are unlikely to be mundane. Ralph Stacey (1996, p. 55) adds a touch of formality to this fire stirring process: ". . . novel rules of interaction will generate novel kinds of possibility that have never existed before and that are not yet embodied in some know purpose or future state."

Providing the Back Log

I often place a large log at the back of the grate before striking the match. This log will only slowly fire up—but it can be an excellent backstop against which the smaller burning logs can reflect heat. Furthermore, this large log will slowly burn and provide heat and glow over the course of several fires I will build. In many societies, the big log is requisite and even takes of a mythic or ritualistic quality. The Yule Log, for instance, is found in many Christian communities and is burnt during the Christmas season. There is something about a log that burns for a long period of time and offers "support" to other logs that bespeaks spiritual themes of longevity and care.

Since the back log is usually large and quite heavy, it offers its own unique challenges. I often imagine myself in dialogue with this log. It is saying to me:

> I am huge! Come on big shot, try to lift me and see if you can set me on the grate. . . . Not much success . . . The tongs won't help you either. . . . not easy is it? But I am ultimately worth the effort, because I will be with you for many evenings of warmth and glow. And I can assist my much smaller colleagues in providing you with a wonderful fire. We are all in this together!

Later, as the back log slowly burned away, I find myself grieving its slow death. The log speaks to me again:

> Now I am an old log and will soon be gone. I am helping other logs to flame and am helping to keep them alive. I have led a good life and leave my legacy in the logs that follow me. I hope that you can appreciate my presence on your fireplace grate . . . even though I know I caused you some problems when you first tried to position me in the appropriate place on your fireplace.

I like to listen to this old log and am learning about growing old and remaining generative from this once big and heavy entity.

In an organization, the "back log" might initially seem to be the "cash cow" (Boston Consulting Group) – but I think it is much more than this economically based back log. The back log can be the reputation of the organization's products and services; it can also be the long-standing banking relationship or an informal long-standing partnership. I was fortunate for many years to have a long-standing partnership with a colleague from Asia. He provided my business with financial assistance whenever requested. We had only a hand-shake agreement—no official legal documents. I was there for him whenever he needed me to teach or consult with his associates in Asia. This trusting relationship was of great value to

both of us – yet it had no formal economic value. Our agreement was a major back log for both of us and it sought out our mutual appreciation on frequent occasion (usually during a sumptuous multi-course banquet in a Chinese restaurant). Most Asian cultures are fully conversant with the back log's request. It is not about economics.

As Ralph Estes (1996) has noted, many of the most important and valuable elements of an organization are assigned no economic value. It is only tangible entities, such as property, buildings, and equipment that can be considered the formal economic assets of an organization. Generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP) that rule contemporary accounting practices do not recognize less-tangible elements of an organization—such as its reputation, quality of work, levels of employee education and training—or trusting interpersonal and interorganizational relationships. You don't find these intangible elements represented on an organization's spreadsheet when leaders of this organization are applying for a loan or fulfilling accreditation requirements. The back log burns unacknowledged on the organization's accounting fire—for most contemporary leaders pay exclusive attention pay to those burning logs that provide immediate heat and glow. This selective attention is inherent in their short-term "bottom line" perspective.

Adding the Odd-Shaped Log

Sometimes I like to place a big, odd-shaped log in the fire. It will help enliven the fire (providing new fuel and "virgin" edges that can readily catch on fire). For me, it also adds a new pattern of flames. The key question is: how will it be received by the other logs that are already burning in the fire? Other pieces of wood need to be burning very hot and there must be a good bed of embers if the new oddly shaped log is to contribute to the fire. Furthermore, the fire must be carefully monitored and tendered for a short while, as the new odd-shaped log begins to interact with the "established", normally shaped logs that have been on the grate for a relatively long period of time or have been newly placed on the grate.

Sometimes the odd-shaped log needs to be repositioned if it is to flame up. This placement reminds me of organizational mergers (Galpin and Herndon, 2014). Mergers are often envisioned so that "logs" of different size and shape can be joined together to form a new, more powerful organization made up of complementary (though not always complimentary) parts. With this diversity of organizational form and functioning—offering an array of products or services—there is the promise of greater agility and broadening markets. The Medici Effect is fully in forced (or at least anticipated). While this envisioning is

not always realistic, it certainly has been a driving force in recent years that has accelerated the use of mergers to solve organization's problems.

Unfortunately, mergers are not always (or even often) the answer. Whatever problems exist in any one of the organizations often 'infects" the other organization and both organizations share in the problem of size (which I described above). Mergers are typically only successful if at least one of the organizations is strong. When two weak organizations merge, they usually sink one another (pulling each other down so that both drown). Might this be the case with the merger of Sears and K-Mart? It is often quite a challenge to reposition the products or services aligned with at least one of the organizations that is involved in a merger. Did H-P do this repositioning of Compaq when these two organizations merged? What about the merger of AOL and Time-Warner, or Daimler-Benz and Chrysler? What can be learned about successful merging from these case studies?

Appreciating the Log that Refuses to Burn

I recently placed a log in my fire that seems to be like every other log. However, for some reason it refused to burn and over three evenings of fire it remained unburned – scorched but unburned. And it messed up the burning of other logs I placed in the fire around it. I was frustrated and eventually grabbed the log with my fireplace tongs and placed it to the side of the grate. This recalcitrant log refused to disengage from the action. It continued to smolder—but did not burn. I considered the smoke emanating from this log to be a sign of its resentment.

Two days later, I lite up a big fire and placed the non-burning log right in the middle of this conflagration. All the logs that I positioned around my recalcitrant log burned with great intensity. My unburning log succumbed to the pressure and gradually burned down. It eventually became nothing more than a small pile of ashes. While I was glad to get rid of this pest, I must admit that I admired the tenacity of this log and found it to be a source of important new lessons about the role placed by recalcitrant players in organizations (Rogers, 1995).

In seeking to understand this recalcitrance in organizations, we can return to the Sustainability Curve. When a program or organization is abandoned during the downturn in its life, there often is an unacknowledged casualty. Those who were early enthusiasts become disillusioned not just with this program or organization—but with future program and organizations as well. As a result of this disillusionment, these visionaries and initiators now become recalcitrant – they join those who resist new ideas and ventures in the future.

Frequently, we find in history of recalcitrant, that they were formerly those who supported new ventures. These folks are now the logs in a fire that refuse to burn. They have concluded that new ideas and projects will always be unsuccessful or are never given a fair test. Furthermore, if the new idea or project is a success, then the recalcitrant is faced with a new reality: they really "messed it up" when they were involved in their previous initiatives. Their new program or organization might have been a success "if only they had . . . ". Thus, when we abort a program or organization in the middle of a Sustainability Curve, we may be producing people who will be hindrances to new initiatives efforts in the future. Like recalcitrant logs that are resistant to firing up, these members of the organization not only take up room on the organizational grate, but also tend to hinder the performance (burning) of other members of the organization (logs).

Making Use of the Bellows

Sometimes I pump up the fire a bit, by using the bellows that I inherited from my father. The increased air (oxygen) flowing over the burning logs and embers will temporarily increase the burn. However, I find that this is not a long-term solution. While my bellows represents heritage (my father) for me, it is actually a tool for refreshing and energizing a fire. Heritage meets renewal. There is a fresh, creative idea that is blowing through an organization. It is refreshing and energizing—and often harkens back to the early exciting life (and enduring heritage) of the organization when intersecting ideas were to be found in abundance. However, this idea, in isolation, is rarely sufficient to keep the organization operating in a sustainable manner. The fresh idea might not do any harm if it requires no major change or adjustment, but it is unlikely to have a lingering impact.

I are reminded of the many consultations I have done where leaders of an organization want one of my bright new ideas. They have read one of my books and believe that the ideas contained in this book could make a difference in their own organization. I am brought in to deliver a speech or meet with the Board of Directors. This is often a source of ego-gratification for me—and it might a source of some income (greater than what I get from book royalties). However, I fear that there is minimal long-term impact. My "hot-air" (push of the bellows) might offer some inspiration (a brief flame), or at least some respite (I am often brought in during the dead of winter); however, a concerted and systemic strategy must be engaged that goes well beyond my speech. I am reminded of the requirements for successful change and development that were offered many years ago by Goodwin Watson (Watson and Johnson, 1972). Attention to matters of organizational structure, process and attitudes (culture) are all required – an idea being offered in only one of these three domains can rarely be enacted in a sustainable manner.

Valuing the Embers

The embers of a fire are like the lingering reputation of the organization and its products and services. The embers provide some additional energy for the fire—but are not active agents in the ongoing burning of the wood. The embers also provide some warmth that emanates out from the fireplace. It seems that embers represent both what lingers and what remains as a memory of a fire that has been well tended. In an organizational setting, embers are the memories that remain of a program or organization's history and life span. At the very least, organizational embers are represented and retained by those members of the organization who are *Remnants* (definition: "small remaining quantity of something"). These long-standing employees represent the values and purposes that existed at an earlier point in the life of the program or organization. It is often the case that remnants represent those values and purposes that were present when the organization was formed – or reformed. They may actually have been present at the organization's formation or re-formation. Alternatively, they have been appreciative recipients of stories regarding the founding or restoration of the program or organization.

It is important to distinguish between the remnants in an organization and those members of the organization who are recalcitrant (though remnants can become recalcitrant if they are consistently ignored). One of the best representations of the remnants and important role they play in an organization has been offered by Gregory Bateson (1979). He wrote about whales and femurs (the fin located on the upper side of the whale). The femur is of no practical contemporary use to whales, yet it remains intact. Bateson notes that at one point, the oceans of our world were much more turbulent than they are today. The femur served as a stabilizer in this turbulent aquatic world. While evolution could have gradually removed the femur, it instead reduced in size this structure of the whale's anatomy—but retained its structural integrity. The ocean might once again become turbulent. The femur could once again be of value. As Bateson and many other observers of Mother Nature have noted, she seems to be quite conservative and hates to throw something away if it might once again be of value.

A similar case can be made for the value inherent in an organization's remnant—those members of the organization who were around in the "good old days" and who can share stories about and argue on behalf of these values. I was consulting several years ago with a bank in the United States that had "lost its way" and was floundering (losing customers and finding that its new ventures were not working out). My work with this bank included helping it re-discover its founding values. Members of the banking staff

who had been with the bank during its founding or soon after its founding talked about what worked in terms of the distinct services it provided and the customers it best served.

While the banking world has changed considerable since this institution was founded, the wisdom and insights offered by these remnant members of the bank became important. They offered stories and lessoned learned upon which all members of the organization could reflect. I encouraged leaders of this bank to become active and appreciative listeners (Bergquist and Mura, 2011), rather than tossing aside the "old" stories or listen patiently (but inattentively) to these stories being told yet again. What can be extracted from these stories that is still applicable and that can help drive the bank into its future? It is critical that an lingering image of our organization be sustained and reasserted—for without this image the bank will have no future (Polak, 1973). The remnant can provide continuity in the midst of change. As Bateson (and Mother Nature) would suggest, the organizational "water" has once again become turbulent, and the femur/remnant is once again of value as a stabilizing agency.

It is important to note that the remnant serves a particularly important role in providing continuity if the program or organization has a long history (as was the case with the bank where I served as a consultant). However, this historian and guardian of values is rarely the source of new learning in a program or organization—especially if the program or organization was recently created (there isn't much of a history to be recalled in a young system). We must usually look elsewhere in the program or organization for the new learning. Usually, it is to be found among those actively engaged in the new program or those who started the new organization. What must be learned and remembered about what recently has worked or not worked in the program or organization.

The Sustainability Curve is likely to yield the most important lessons—especially if those involved in the program or organization wish to initiate something similar in the near future. What then are the conditions under which one can sustain a new program or organization through the period of disillusionment and disruption? When do we add new logs to the fire? First, people who will be involved in this effort must recognize that the Sustainability Curve is likely to be present. They should not immediately judge the worth of a new venture—but wait instead until there has been ample time for the system to adjust to this venture.

Second, people who are immediately involved in the effort should be sufficiently committed to this effort to give it a good try. If the new program or organization has been started without adequate consultation with those who must enact it, then the Sustainability Curve is likely to dip quite deep and

be debilitating. There will be no Hawthorne Effect to provide an initial boost in morale and productivity. There is no fire log to get things started. There won't be much motivation to continue with the new program or organization, once the deep disruption sets in. There is no second fire log to reactivate the initial energy and commitment.

Third, the person or organization must be sufficiently "healthy" to live through the disruption. Ironically, new programs and organizational startups often are most successful when they are not really needed. Successful initiatives often follow other successful initiatives. Success does breed success. Conversely, something new is usually not a successful escape from failure. Under conditions of crisis, a person or organization often is unable to live through the Sustainability Curve, hence will return to the status quo or initiate yet another program or organization—hoping that it will be immediately successful. Since the latter hope is rarely realized and the return to a former crisis state is rarely gratifying, the stress on a person or organization is usually intensified by any new initiative.

I found in my own consulting (and perhaps, painfully, in my own career), that there are *Serial Initiators*. They go from one project to the next and rarely see any one of their projects to a successful end—often blaming other people or societal factors for the failure. While it is important to not hang around too long, it is also important not to give up too soon. "Chumming the water" can be a valuable strategy—with several different projects being initiated to see which one clicks. It is essential, however, that this "chumming" be complemented by a clear plan for the realistic, systemic and ongoing assessment of each project, so that it (and those people who are involved in its implementation) are given a fair chance to succeed. Serial initiators often leave behind many casualties of their cavalier attitude regarding quick program and organizational startups and quick departures.

Fourth, a Sustainability Curve can successfully be endured if the person or organization sets realistic deadlines and high but realistic goals. In other words, adequate planning and evaluation must precede and accompany any successful initiative. The Sustainability Curve must be anticipated in setting up deadlines and timelines for program planning, initiation and review. Formative, nonjudgmental evaluation of the initiative may be appropriate at a relatively early point (for example, after one to two months), while more judgmental, summative evaluation should not occur until the Sustainability Curve can be expected to be on an upturn (usually four to six months after the start of a major initiative).

In sum, it is important to remember that four central ingredients are to be kept in mind when initiating or encouraging others to initiate a major new program or establish a new organization: (1) awareness of

the Sustainability Curve, (2) broad-based commitment to the startup decision, (3) capacity to sustain the system beyond the startup phase, and (4) adequate planning for and monitoring of the initiative. If awareness, commitment, capacity and planning are not present, then it might be better to stay with what is currently in place. It is a time for stabilization rather than change. Stay home while planning for the trip away from home. During a period of stabilization, one can encourage those involved in the potential new program or organization to become more fully acquainted with the dynamics of change and development—especially the Sustainability Curve. At the same time, those planning the start up can working closely with these people who will be involved in this new initiative to build their commitment to the new program or organization when it is time for this startup. For everything there is a season and with sufficient awareness, commitment, capacity and planning, the fires of a new program or organization can be sustained and enjoyed even after the startup log has burned out.

Terminating the Fire

Eventually, the fire comes to an end. We must let it die out, perhaps moving some of the logs that haven't been fully burned to the side of the fireplace—saved for the next fire. By setting the logs that remain, we have enabled the dying fire to leave a legacy. The partially burn logs that I set aside will more readily burn when I lite the next fire, for much of the moisture in these logs has already been released. There might be an even more profound legacy being left by the dying fire. As the final glowing embers flicker out, I am reminded of the perspectives of our distant forebears and their animistic perspectives on life. None of us are living very far away in time from our ancestors' beliefs that every living organism (and perhaps even inanimate objects) possesses a spirit—a "being". This spirit (anima and animus in Jungian terms) may be leaving the wood as it is being burned. Perhaps, it leaves in the fire's heat and smoke. Where does the spirit go?

Perhaps, instead, the spirit somehow does not escape. It might reside in the ashes accumulating below my grate. It is noteworthy that ashes are wonderful fertilizers. I spread them out over my own flower beds in the Spring and Summer. Is the spirit somehow transferred from the ashes to the flowers or to the soil and fungi that nourish the flowers and link them to all the other living beings in my garden. As MacFarland (2019) and other ecological observers have noted, there is a Wood-Wide Web that interconnects all of the flora in my garden to one another and even to flora in the nearby forest. Is the spirit in my ashes simply returning to the forest from which it originally came? Or am I simply regressing to an outmoded and outdated perspective that was squashed many centuries ago by modern religions and the sciences?

I can return to the world of modern science and contemporary systems theory—and will still find that analogues to embers plays an important role in all organizations. In my own experiences as leader and consultant I have found that organizations leave an ember while they are burning and even after they seize to exist. While this might not initially seem to be the case, it is matter of widening our perspectives in time and space. As MacFarland (2019) has noted, we need not only broaden our view of ecological interconnectedness, but also lengthen our temporal perspective by looking at change and causation over what he identifies as *Deep Time*.

A deep time journey might be taken when considering the observation that Parker Palmer (1999) has made regarding the impact made by a pebble when dropped into a bowl of water. Ripples are created. A change seems to have taken place—the pebble seems to have made a difference. Action has led to results. Yet, the water soon returns to its original form and there no longer are any ripples. The water has lost all memory of the dropped pebble and the ripples. The same could be said for the life and impact of a program or organization. Long-term impact is rarely sustained—even if the program or organization itself is sustainable. We must acknowledge that the impact our program or organization has made is an illusion. Viewed over the short term, there is no memory of impact when we are seeking to take action and make a difference in the world, As beings who are cursed with the capacity of transcendence (ability to see into the future and into space), ultimately, we are never able to take credit for any lasting change—be it positive or negative.

There is a second version of the pebble dropping in the water that I have offered with my colleague, Suzy Pomerantz (2020). Embers do remain when we broaden our perspective and enter upon a deep time journey. There is a lasting impact and lingering causation in the embers left behind. The bowl has now been replaced by a lake (usually with a sandy shoreline). The pebble is dropped in the water. There are ripples in the water that soon dissipate, apparently leaving nothing behind. Yet, if we wander along the edge of the lake, we find that the ripples have left an imprint in the sand or even more subtly has made a minor erosion of the rocks located in and beside the lake. There has been an impact, be it ever so small and perhaps ever so remote.

Our program or organization has made a difference. We have only to search for and be patient in discovering the difference our program or organization has made. We have only to be appreciative in reflecting on and learning from our own work (Bergquist and Mura, 2011) As part of a community and as one element in a complex system, our program or organization can't help but influence everything around us. We live in MacFarland's interconnected web. We only make no difference if we have

managed to never start the program or organization--though even the dream of starting the program or organization has left a ripple (at least in our own head and heart).

What then about the nature of the impact our program or organization has made? Is it necessarily positive? Do our actions (our dropped pebbles) cause harm or are they helpful and healing? In part this depends on how we interpret the impact that has been made. Do we want the sand to remain pristine—without any sign that humans have intruded? Do we worry about the rock being eroded? Over the short run, the indentations and erosions might be fine, but the sand might eventually be lost (especially with much more extreme generation of ripples and waves with the introduction of motorboats to the lake). The rocks are needed to ensure the structural integrity of the lake and play a role in sustaining the lake's biology. Deep time requires that we take longer term impact into consideration. As we find in the cultures of many indigenous people in North America (and throughout the world), a 7-generational perspective might be appropriate. Deep time necessitates deep concern.

There is also the matter of what happens to the ripples as they cross the lake. Systems are always complex and all part of a system direct and disrupt the movement of other parts of the system. Ripples are rarely allowed to proceed without disruption. There are other ripples being produced by other pebbles being dropped by other people at the edge of the lake. Winds are blowing across the lake. Currents are generated by water entering and leaving the lake. The flapping of wings by a lovely loon that is traveling across the surface of the lake might be causing its own ripples. Fauna interacts with flora. A fish splashes the surface of the lake or generates movement of the water far below its surface. And let's not even begin to unpack the effect of a butterfly's fluttering wings from the other side of our planet on the lake's surface.

All these other factors influence the nature and impact of the ripples we have produced. They also have something to say about whether our ripples are doing good or harm. We would suggest that it is not so much a matter of recognizing that water in our bowl may have lost all memory of the ripple, and that there might be an impact when a broader, deep time perspective is taken. It is ultimately, a matter of recognizing that our actions are rarely themselves solely determinative of their impact when we are operating in a complex system (as is always the case). The embers remain. We can sift through them, spread them (and the animus spirit embedded in them) as fertilizer in our flower garden. It is up to us to decide what is to be done with what remains from the fire we have tended. And it is up to us, as transcendent beings, to review and reflect on the pebbles impact elsewhere on our lake.

Finding the Perfect Fire

We can now leave the lake and turn back in time when reflecting on the fire we have tended. What exactly am I striving for when I build and tend a fire? What does the perfect fire look like and how often do I achieve it? Whether in California or in Maine, I try to create and maintain a fire that is generating flames at three levels—four is too many (confusing) while one or two levels just aren't quite enough (though I often have to put up with a two-level fire). I recognize that I am looking for a pattern: the first level can be quite large (California) or somewhat smaller (Maine). Still, I look for three levels. I find that it is not, ultimately, a matter of size. For me, it is a matter of pattern that serves as the primary criterion for determining the quality of a fire (or an organization). The fire (or organization) needed be big to be impressive. I am impressed with the dynamic process operating in the first or organization. For me there is a wonderful feeling I experience –a "Flow"—when I am watching a three-tiered fire with the lights out, listening to a bit of Mozart, Faure or (more recently) Florence Price. I suspect that there is a similar experience of Flow when I observe or participate in a well-functioning organization (such as my favorite restaurants in San Francisco and New York).

The single-tier fire is easy to tend. It needs just an occasional poke; however, this fire is quite vulnerable – often the single-tiered fire is near the end of its life. The multi-tiered fire is much harder to tend. It often requires some repositions of burning logs. A simple poke is rarely sufficient. This might be a good time for fireplace tongs, rather than just a simple andiron. Logs might have to lifted and moved somewhere less in the fire. A major challenge concerns the nature of learning that must attend perfect multi-tiered fires. When the fire is "simple" then a simple poke will suffice. This requires what Chris Argyris and Don Schön (1978) call "single-loop learning". It is not hard to give a couple of logs a poke and then see what happens regarding new or intensified flames.

When the fire is "complex" then the learning also becomes more complex—and the addition of one additional layer of logs does make the fire complex. As Virginia Satir noted, all it takes is one new member of a family to make this familial system much more difficult to understand (let alone manage). All it takes is one more level of burning logs to make the fire challenging to understand, predict (or manage). How do we even determine if the flaming has improved, since something is happening at multiple levels? And what about the impact of poking on not just each level, but also the interaction of flames between the levels? A different lesson can be learned, and different criteria can be established for determining the success of my intervention (fire tending). It all depends on the perspective I am taking. I am learning about my own perspective and my own learning. Double-loop learning is required.

There are only “tendencies” in the way I have influenced the patterns and intensity of the flames. How do I learn from tendencies rather than certainties? How do I learn from and about fires rather than swinging pendulums?

As we return to our life and leadership in an organization, much the same thing awaits us. First, the multi-tiered organization is likely to be resilient--much as in the case of a forest of diversity or diversity in the crops being grown in the field. We can first observe and seek to understand the ecology of a forest consisting of nothing but fire or pine trees--such as we find in a grove of old, overgrown trees in a Christmas tree farm that has long been abandoned. There is often nothing growing in this ecology but these trees. Most of the other flora and the fauna reside elsewhere. Sadly, we find a similar, sparse ecology operating in many of the “farms” where trees of a single species are being grown for timber. These are single tier systems. They need only an occasional poke and can be “managed” with single loop learning—just some start-up fertilizer, pest control, and logging regulations.

Conversely, we can observe and appreciate the ecology of second or third growth forests that have remained “unmanaged” for many years. We might even be honored with the opportunity to observe and roam in a first growth forest. As Dewitt Jones has noted poetically, these forests are calling out to us: “come on in and see all the wonderful images I have to offer!” The natural (primitive) forest is not just beautiful. It also retains much greater environmental resilience than the managed forest. Similarly, the single crop farming (usually wheat or corn) that was common for many years in American Midwestern states, left this region of the country vulnerable to the invasion of specific pests or destructive climatic events. Multi-crop farming –at least in a specific farming community if not specific farm—made sense in terms of environmental reliance. It is not quite so simple, for the challenge of understanding, predicting and in any way controlling a multi-tiered eco-system is great. Double loop learning is required—and nothing more than “tendencies” can be found in the way the forest or multi-crop farm will grow.

Similarly, an organization that is founded on a multi-tiered mission had greater reliance—and is much harder to understand, predict or control. While the mission statement itself might be simple and direct, there will be components derived from the mission statement that speaks to multiple possibilities for product and/or service lines. It is important to realize that an agile, adaptive organization will be complex—not just complicated (Miller and Page, 2007). As I previously noted, a complicated system (organization) has many parts, but each of these parts operates pretty much in an independent manner.

This is the one-tiered fire with multiple logs but no layers. This is the tree farm with many trees, but all of the same species, or this is the farm that grows only one grain.

Conversely, a complex system (organization) is one in which the parts are interconnected. This is the multi-tiered fire, the unmanaged, diverse forest and the multi-crop farm. Parts in a complicated organization are often interchangeable, while those in a complex system are not easily replaceable and not easily understood or controlled. These complex systems elude our predictions because of their interconnection with one another and because of the unique, complementary role played by each in the ongoing life and success of the system (organization). Stated in slightly different terms, a complex organization is agile. It can bend like the branches on a complex tree (such as an oak or maple tree), while a less complex tree (such as bamboo or a palm tree) is ultimately less agile and more vulnerable. A palm tree or bamboo shoot is designed to successfully address one type of environmental challenge – heavy tropical winds. An Oak or Maple Tree, on the other hand, can address the many types of environmental challenges to be found in more temperate zones—major changes in weather, droughts, a diverse set of invasive pests.

While one might think that a complex organization is much harder to lead than a simple or even complicated organization, this is not the case. It is true that complex organizations, like multi-tiered fires, are difficult to tend and hard to change—but this is actually one of the strengths of this type of organization. It's resistance to change is closely aligned with its resilience in the face of challenging outside forces. Like the change in temperature that a tree faces with the change in seasons, so a change in directives attending a change in leadership is often just as easily resisted in a complex organization. There might be some accommodation to the new leadership, but more likely there will be assimilation of the new leader. [example of my work with federal prison system).

This effective resistance to change on the part of complex systems (organizations) is founded, in part, on a process that has rather recently been discovered (or at least articulated) by those who focus on complex systems. As identified by Prigogine (1984), this process is called "self-organization." The term Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) has been applied in more recent years to those organizations that operate in this self-organizing manner. Here is a brief description of CASs, offered by Scott Page (2011, pp. 6-7):

> Complex systems are collections of diverse, connected, interdependent entities whose behavior is determined by rules, which may adapt, but need not. The interactions of these entities often

> produce phenomena that are more than the parts. These phenomena are called *emergent*. . . . Each [CAS] contains diverse, connected entities that interact. Each produces outcomes that exceed the capacities of its component parts.

Here is the first key point. Complex adaptive systems tend to self-organize—and in this self-organization they will inherently be adaptive, creative, and evolutionary. There is a second key point that concerns how the CASs operate. It seems that the more complex and adaptive the nature of a system, the less amenable this CAS is to hierarchical control. This insight flies directly in the face of conventional wisdom—especially about the way in which to lead organizations. We have always assumed that large, complex organizations require strong, coherent leadership. The opposite appears to be the case. When the parts of an organization are tightly interwoven and unique, then no one policy nor one intervention will do the trick. The new policies and interventions bounce off the complex organization – just as a hard chill will bounce off an Oak Tree (exemplifying the CAS) without changing it in any significant way. Alternativity, the new policies and interventions are assimilated (absorbed) into the existing interwoven dynamics of the organization – much as an invading pest is isolated or chemically destroyed by the Oak Tree (unless it is a very old tree or has been the recipient of major damage). If the tree is in trouble, then other trees in the forest come to its assistance. The trees help out one another primarily through the transmission of information, nutrients and other forms of energy through the fungi that resides abundantly in the forest's soil (MacFarland, 2019) It is in this assistance provided by other trees that we find and can fully appreciate the true adaptive power of a forest-based CAS.

In essence, each part of a complex adaptive system "comes to the rescue" of all other parts, since the parts depend on one another for sustenance and survival. If this is the case among trees in a forest, then imagine how it operates in complex human organizations. "One for all and all for one" is the clarion call in a complex organization and in a complex forest. No single invasion from a newly appointed ambitious leader of vision will win the day. No intervention by a well-intended consultant will lead to sustained, long-term change. The Oak Tree and the Complex Organization both live for yet another day—and creative, emergent properties arrive unannounced and unanticipated from the self-organizing dynamics of the complex system. Fires burn brightly and in constantly shifting ways that sustain our attention and enthrallment. The spirit of animus might be found fully in operation and fully expressed in the fire and in the life of complex, adaptive systems—be they a *forest primeval* or an agile 21st Century organization.

Learning from the Fire

The fires that I set and that I tender are teaching me about organizational life and leadership. Its like the octopus teaching the diver in South Africa (as portrayed in the movie, *My Octopus Teacher*). We are not alone in the universe. In many ways, we are surrounded by "consciousness". As conscious beings, we are being taught by many dynamic systems that in some ways seem themselves to be "conscious" (be they octopi or fires). There is "consciousness" throughout the universe—and it is critical that we learn from all complex, dynamic systems—for these systems have much more to offer us than do pendulums (which are the source of much greater study).

I believe that the fire can teach (just as the octopus can teach) because we have entered a new realm when sitting in front of and tending a fire. Just as the ocean water is a new transforming element for the protagonist in *My Octopus Teacher*. The warmth and glow of the fire creates a new, transforming environment which I can enter and in which I can learn. Why is this new environment transforming? I would turn to a phrase introduced many years ago by the ego psychologists. They identify a process that is highly adaptive for human beings. It is called "regression in the service of the ego." In their use of this phrase, the ego psychologists have expanded (and transformed) our notion about the adaptive and maladaptive properties to be found in the psychodynamic processes of regression.

Many forms of regression are profoundly dysfunctional when they lead to more primitive states of being and functioning, to unconscious sources of energy, or to early states of our own being (childhood). They are divorced from reality and lead to rigid, maladaptive behavior. Other forms of regression, however, can be of great value ("in the service of the ego") and are highly adaptive. In his psychoanalytically oriented study of art, Ernst Kris (1953, p. 60) puts it this way:

> Inspiration—the "divine release from the ordinary ways of man," a state of "creative madness" (Plato), in which the ego controls the primary process and puts it into its service—need be contrasted with the opposite, the psychotic condition, in which the ego is overwhelmed by the primary process.

Many creative acts (especially in the arts) are "regressive" as are regenerative forms of daydreaming. Even nighttime dreams can be sources of great insight and wisdom regarding interpersonal relationships (Fromm, 1951) and even organizational functioning. A dream can serve as a "committee" offering diverse perspectives on creative personal and organizational functioning (Barrett, 2001) I suggest that "regression in the service of the ego" resides at the heart of the teaching and learning that occur while

observing and interacting with a fire—or an octopus. We relax while moving into a new environment and open ourselves to learning in this new environment.

With the help of some music (and perhaps a little wine) I am drawn to the flames. The warmth and glow are regressive. They bring me back to old movies and moments when I have been enthralled by another person. I watch the fire and recall dancing by a swimming pool to steel band music with a dear colleague. This recollection leads me back to the theme of this Bermuda-based conference and to the work in which I became engaged as a result of this conference. I became committed to working in new ways with colleges in Western Canada that are becoming universities.

I poke the flames and recall a scene from the TV Series, *Treme*, when one of the protagonists pulls out his trombone for a New Orleans gig. This, in turn, brings me back to memories of wonderful evenings spent listening to Sweet Emma Barrett at the Preservation Hall. By this time in her life, Sweet Emma was playing piano with only her left hand. She had suffered a debilitating stroke, but still played a mean base line. From this reflection comes new appreciation for not only the arts, but also adversity in my own life, as well as the afflictions encountered by the fictional and real-life musicians of New Orleans. Where do we find courage and persistence as an African American musician or as the leader of an organization that is operating in a world of VUCA-Plus? How do we best tend our organizational fire?

Conclusions

I appreciate the opportunity to learn from Sweet Emma, from my fellow educators at a conference in Bermuda—and from an Oak Tree and Forest. I tend fires to relax and savor the aesthetics of flames and linger in the warmth of the fires' heat—and find that I am also blessed with new insights that this fiery, complex and adaptive system is teaching me. I eventually leave my living room to record some of these insights in my much colder and less enthralling office. I return from my fire-based regression in the service of my ego to complete my lesson as a fireside learner. This essay represents a partialrecording of insights I received. Thank you, fire.

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