

Organizational Consultation XXXI: The Appreciative Leader: From A Traditional Perspective

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How does one address this interplay between order and chaos? How does one move beyond the contextual model of leadership to a more fully appreciative model? I propose that contemporary leaders must not only embrace multiple roles and functions in their organization. They must embrace a multitude of roles that come from different eras in our society and that represent a complex interweaving of order and chaos.

Some of these roles and functions are decidedly traditional in nature and build on a sense of community. These roles tend to be effective in addressing the challenges of order. Other roles and functions are appreciative and reflect shifting notions about organizational life in contemporary society. These roles and functions tend to be aligned with the dynamic chaos in contemporary organizations. I turn first, in this section, to traditional roles to be played by leaders.

In looking at traditional concepts of leadership that might be of value to contemporary leaders, I turn to an unusual source, Teilhard de Chardin. Teilhard was a renegade priest, scientist and philosopher who wrote during the first half of the 20th Century. His vision and analysis is remarkably relevant to 21st Century realities—especially with regard to appreciative leadership.

Teilhard's notion of leadership takes the form not of directing or even managing; rather, Teilhard believes that effective leadership builds on a process of synthesis: the synthesis of ideas and the synthesis or uniting of people. This appreciative and holistic emphasis on synthesis contrasts sharply with the emphasis in modern society on deficit and analysis. In modern management theory we break things down into their constituent parts and identify problems that justify dominating control of discrete entities. In Teilhard's world we put things together and grow to appreciate them.

Leader As Lover and Partner

Love is a key word for Teilhard in examining this synthesizing relationship between the individual and collective: "considered in its full biological reality, love—that is to say, the affinity of being with

being—is not peculiar to man. It is a general property of all life and as such it embraces, in its varieties and degrees, all the forms successively adopted by organised matter.”^{viii} In emphasizing the role of *leader as lover*, Teilhard states that:^{ix}

. . . love alone is capable of uniting living beings in such a way as to complete and fulfill them, for it alone takes them and joins them by what is deepest in themselves. This is a fact of daily experience. At what moment do lovers come into the most complete possession of themselves if not when they say they are lost in each other? In truth, does not love every instant achieve all around us, in the couple or the team, the magic feat, the feat reputed to be contradictory, of ‘personalising’ by totalising? And if that is what it can achieve daily on a small scale, why should it not repeat this one day on world-wide dimensions?

Riane Eisler offers an appreciative emphasis on relationship and *leader as partner* that aligns with that offered by Teilhard.^x Eisler proposes that seeds have already been sown for the movement of our society from a highly individualistic and competitive dominator model to a collaborative and more feminine model of partnership.^{xi}

She comments extensively on the reexamination of cultural history that is now occurring. This history, according to Eisler, shows that our world has known many eras when highly advanced civilizations have existed successfully with partnerships rather than domination. Eisler dramatically documents the destructive consequences of a world that fails to value the feminine characteristics of collaboration and collegueship.

War, poverty, and ecological dislocation arises from an indiscriminate valuing and rewarding of more masculine characteristics: hierarchy and the use of force to establish status.^{xii}

Drawing upon a wide range of relatively neglected old as well as recent social scientific studies—in particular, recent and potentially revolutionary findings by archaeologists in Anatolia, Crete, and Old Europe . . . Eisler proposes two primary models of social organization characterized by widely differing social guidance or values systems. The first, designated the partnership or gynanic model . . . is characterized by “soft” or stereotypically feminine values such as mutual accommodation, cooperation, and nonviolence. The second model is the dominator or androcratic model . . . with a

characterizing value and social guidance system idealizing “hard” or so-called masculine values such as conquest, mastery, and force.

Teilhard and Eisler offer us rich, provocative food for thought, especially when their ideas are linked with processes of appreciation. The notion of appreciative leadership as synthesis and partnership is truly radical. Yet the seeds for an appreciative model of leadership have already been sown in the mundane and daily experiences of many contemporary leaders.

A man I know who heads a successful gourmet coffee company talks about sitting in his office and knowing exactly what is happening throughout his company as a function of the sounds he hears through the wall and the smell of the coffee being produced. He doesn’t know exactly how he is able to gain this appreciative sense of the company’s overall health at any one point in time, but firmly believes that this unifying sense of his company is essential to his leadership role in this organization.

Another leader suggests that she appreciates the overall, coherent intentions and dynamics of the school she heads when she serves in the role of teacher. To be a leader she needs to get out of her office and head into a classroom. Like the coffee maker, she can sense and fully appreciate the quality of education in her school only by participating directly in this educational process as a teacher and co-learner. When she is not teaching, the school often seems to lose it’s unity for her and she feels out of touch with its essential properties.

Leader As Servant

We find a parallel analysis to Teilhard’s and Eisler’s notions of leader as lover and partner in Robert Greenleaf’s description of *leader as servant*:^{xiii}

A fresh critical look is being taken at the issues of power and authority, and people are beginning to learn, however haltingly, to relate to one another in less coercive and more creatively supporting ways. A new moral principle is emerging which holds that the only authority deserving

one's allegiance is that which is freely and knowingly granted by the led to the leader in response to, and in proportion to, the clearly evident servant stature of the leader. Those who choose to follow this principle will not casually accept the authority of existing institutions. RATHER, THEY WILL FREELY RESPOND ONLY TO INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE CHOSEN AS LEADERS BECAUSE THEY ARE PROVEN AND TRUSTED AS SERVANTS. To the extent that this principle prevails in the future, the only truly viable institutions will be those that are predominantly servant-led.

Teilhard, Eisler and Greenleaf all offer encouraging and inspiring models of leadership. One may be inclined, however, to dismiss these portrayals as hopelessly out of date or out of touch with reality. A similar critique is often drawn with regard to many of the other appreciative approaches to organizational life. Yet all three visionaries, Teilhard, Eisler and Greenleaf, speak to the necessity for making this shift in leadership, given the critical condition of many 21st Century organizations.

Furthermore, there is ample evidence all around us in our natural world that suggest the abundance of love, partnership and servanthood. According to Teilhard: “. . .[if] a universal love is impossible, how can we account for the irresistible instinct in our hearts which leads us towards unity whenever and in whatever direction our passions are stirred: A sense of the universe, a sense of the All, the nostalgia which seizes us when confronted by nature, beauty, music—these seem to be an expectation and awareness of a Great Presence.”^{xiv}

ⁱ Teilhard de Chardin. *The Phenomenon of Man*. New York: HarperCollins, 1953, p. 264.

ⁱⁱ Teilhard de Chardin. *The Phenomenon of Man*. New York: HarperCollins, 1955, p. 265.

ⁱⁱⁱ Riane Eisler. *The Chalice and The Blade*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1987.

^{iv} Riane Eisler. *The Chalice and The Blade*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1987.

^v David Loye and Riane Eisler. “Chaos and Transformation: Implications of Nonequilibrium Theory for Social Science and Society,” *Behavioral Science*, 1987, 32, p. 63.

^{vi} Robert Greenleaf. *Leader as Servant*. Peterborough, New Hampshire: Windy Row Press, 1970, pp. 3-4.

^{vii} Teilhard de Chardin. *The Phenomenon of Man*. New York: HarperCollins, 1955, p. 266.

^{viii} Teilhard de Chardin. *The Phenomenon of Man*. New York: HarperCollins, 1953, p. 264.

^{ix} Teilhard de Chardin. *The Phenomenon of Man*. New York: HarperCollins, 1955, p. 265.

^x Riane Eisler. *The Chalice and The Blade*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1987.

^{xi} Riane Eisler. *The Chalice and The Blade*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1987.

^{xii} David Loye and Riane Eisler. “Chaos and Transformation: Implications of Nonequilibrium Theory for Social Science and Society,” *Behavioral Science*, 1987, 32, p. 63.

^{xiii} Robert Greenleaf. *Leader as Servant*. Peterborough, New Hampshire: Windy Row Press, 1970, pp. 3-4.

^{xiv} Teilhard de Chardin. *The Phenomenon of Man*. New York: HarperCollins, 1955, p. 266.