

"SPIRITLINKING": A KEY TO DYNAMIC CHANGE

*Fostering Chaos Enables Leaders to Form the Networks
And Unity Needed to Fulfill Their Mission*

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In these times of escalating complexity and heightened ambiguity, how do leaders promote human dignity and creativity as they contend with the anxiety and chaos inherent in rapid change? A key is "spiritlinking," the deliberate and untiring act of building the circle of friends, the interconnections of human compassion—high-energy networks where new ideas are born and new ways of delivering service take form. Spiritlinking describes the connections between *leadership*, *community*, and *mission* that are crucial for organizational transformation.

LEADING THROUGH CHAOS

Spiritlinking leaders are able to envision and promote the paradox of disequilibrium. In the very act of upsetting the status quo resides the potential for new resolutions to emerge. These leaders foster disequilibrium by telling the truth about what is going on. They are not afraid of increasing the organizational pain that accompanies disruption of the status quo. Truth telling and truth

seeking promote chaos as they call for heightened communication, conflict, and differences of opinion. Truth pushes an organization beyond a state of equilibrium into a condition of imbalance, as staid settledness gives way to new paradigms founded on constant transformation. It is this boldness which differentiates those organizations which will die from those which will forge new expression.

Speaking the truth inevitably leads to challenge and confrontation. Leaders who risk this dangerous activity find their organizations increasingly questioning of autocratic modes of decision making and the exercise of authority at all organizational levels. Spiritlinking leaders are not bound by organizational charts. They promote unity by respecting the value and contribution of each employee and patient. Thus they do not restrict communication to top management—a process that limits the spirit and disengages the energy of the whole. Spiritlinking leaders have discovered that the greater the participation in the organiza-

Summary To contend with the anxiety and chaos inherent in rapid change, leaders can turn to "spiritlinking," the deliberate and untiring act of building the high-energy networks where new ideas are born and new ways of delivering service take form. Spiritlinking leaders are able to envision and promote the paradox of disequilibrium. They seek truth, pushing the organization into a condition of imbalance where staid settledness gives way to new paradigms founded on constant transformation.

Spiritlinking leaders are not bound by organizational charts. They have discovered that the greater the participation in the organization, the greater the access to vast amounts of information and insight, which will ultimately lead to profound transformation.

Spiritlinking is directed toward networking, community forming, and coalition building, often across chasms of ideological differences. Leaders must have the skill to manage the vision, which entails generating courage and belief through the cloudiness of ambiguity. Spiritlinking leaders must also create synergy from conflict, gathering strong-minded, self-assured persons who perhaps hold vastly differing perspectives, yet, in working for the common good, arrive at surprising, wonderful decisions.

Finally, spiritlinking leaders assist the organization in working through resistance by identifying the mode, motive, and meaning of the resistant behavior and determining the action the organization is willing to take to move beyond it.

tion, the greater the access to vast amounts of information and insight, which will ultimately lead to profound transformation. In the midst of such a spirit of inquisitiveness and discovery, new ways of doing business will develop, and massive energy will be freed to fulfill the Church's healing mission.

SKILLS FOR SPIRITLINKING

Spiritlinking is directed toward networking, community forming, and coalition building, often across chasms of ideological differences. Leaders must have the skill to manage vision, create synergy, and work through resistance to change.

Managing a Vision At one time, I believed a leader's role was to establish some clear destination for the organization and inspire enough enthusiasm in the group for it to move ahead. Later, I thought that, with the right facilitation, we could together arrive at a vision of a clear, preferred future, which we then would move to realize. Now, I think that is not only impossible, it is undesirable.

There can be no fixed vision, no preferred "state." There can only be a visionary direction that is profoundly faithful to the reason we are in business: the Gospel mandate to bring the good news of healing and health to those who suffer.

Vision is, at best, a fuzzy business. When driving on a foggy morning, we see a strange, eerie beauty, but it makes us uncomfortable because we are not certain what exactly lies ahead. We can see just far enough to keep moving forward, but our ultimate destination is shrouded in haze.

Spiritlinking happens in the fog and creates the vision at each signpost along the way. Leaders generate courage and the belief that, as long as we are connected and unified in single-minded commitment to the mission, we will contain our doubt and embrace what is yet amorphous, swirling, and fuzzy, but filled with potential and possibility.

For this to happen, leaders must eliminate the impact of fear on those who work with them. Seeking the truth means mistakes will be made. Fear of making mistakes, of doing something differently, of thinking creatively, of being wrong, of conflict—all these fears call us back to the certainty of safe yet deadly order and stability. Spiritlinking demands belief through the cloudiness of ambiguity.

As leaders repeatedly call their organizations to clarify mission and purpose and to articulate their most deeply held values, they ensure that visionary direction is maintained. As this vision pervades the lives and hearts of each employee, new forms and structures emerge and evolve to serve the most vulnerable.

Creating Synergy from Conflict Although consensus decision making represents an improvement over unilateral decision making, it frequently leaves

employees unexcited and uncommitted to decisions. An organization without passion will fail. Consensus arrived at by choosing an option that everyone can "live with" has often led to mediocrity. We must move beyond consensus to synergistic decision making.

Leaders who gather strong-minded, self-assured persons who perhaps hold vastly differing perspectives will create the agar to grow wonderful decisions. This necessitates a massive reenvisioning of our stereotypical perceptions of conflict—that it is to be resolved and avoided at all costs—if we are to move toward the discontinuity and unpredictability that synergistic decision making will generate.

Spiritlinking leaders engage boards in serious exchanges on how, for example, in these times of financial cutbacks, we will stretch the healing arm of Jesus into areas of desperate need. This is bound to generate conflict. Surprising, synergistic decisions happen when the common good, not personal victory, is kept as the clear end. These decisions arise from unimagined connections of disparate pieces of information. They take form out of the chaos of information overload and heated discussions that generate inordinate amounts of energy—and often volume.

Synergy happens when the secret poets, physicists, artists, and organizational analysts are encouraged to emerge and offer insight and perspective.

Excellent leaders are comfortable with the confusion of synergy and the creativity embedded in conflicting views. Spiritlinking happens in the midst of such risk taking. We begin to hear, "What if we . . . ?" more often than, "Why should we . . . ?"

Working through Resistance Although many leaders acknowledge the importance of working through resistance to corporate transformation, they often lack the skills to do this. As a result, many organizations have lost valuable time as the transformative process has been held at bay by various unexpected resistance strategies.

"Working through" describes the *management* rather than the *resolution* of resistance. This is an important distinction, since resistance will neither go away nor be obliterated. It persists in the life of any group that faces change, and it increases to the extent that the group is putting into practice more incisive ways of fulfilling its mission. An agitated resistance does not signal something is wrong with an organization. Rather, it signals that something is very right, that letting go of past forms, structures, and procedures is a necessary part of conversion to the new.

Effective leaders assist the organization in

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working through resistance by:

- Identifying the *mode* of the resistant behavior, asking, What's going on here?

- Engaging the organization in exploring the *motive* behind the manifestation of resistance at this particular time, querying, Why might this be happening *now*?

- Examining with the group the *meaning* it holds for the organization's future if the resistance is left unaddressed

- Determining the *action* the organization is willing to take in order to move beyond this resistant behavior

These skills are critical for the spiritlinking leader. Resistance continues to work through the organization like a three-dimensional spiral that intensifies as the organization draws closer to the heart of transformation. At each point of its appearance, leaders engage the group in reflective discussion that addresses the four components of this process of working through resistance.

In this way, the energy that could be misdirected toward organizational paralysis is directed instead toward freeing the group to take yet another step in its transformative process. It begins to feel excited about the organization's direction and is willing to take steps to realize its mission.

Conflict and resistance become means of solidifying rather than dividing an organization as communication, confrontation, conflict, and compassion explode and coalesce to create the new paradigm.

As chaos increases, a self-organizing principle takes over—call it "spirit"—until one day the new will become surprisingly apparent. Spiritlinking leaders are desperately needed in the midst of the maelstrom to announce the promise that there is at work in our world and within our Church a life-generating spirit straining to author the new. □

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