

to imagine why the government is hoping for a technological solution rather than trying to influence a major social dynamic.

Using Articles for Practice

Using the truffle example, we have tried to illustrate how one might practice developing causal theories using stories found in magazine or newspaper articles. In summary, the process would be to:

1. Look for articles that talk about a problem over time. Avoid specific cases (Joe lost his job today) and hunt for trends (more and more people are losing their jobs).
2. Draw out the behavior over time. This provides a reference point of behavior that the causal theory should be able to explain.
3. Map out the problem as described in the article, first limiting yourself to the data directly mentioned. Then add other variables or feedback loops that you would hypothesize are driving forces behind the problem.

4. Map out any proposed solutions, and then look for unintended consequences or other alternatives.

Peter Senge has said, "We only learn what we want to learn." By using real-life news items as the starting point for developing theories, the practice of systems thinking becomes more than an academic exercise. It can serve as a true exploration of issues that are important to us. ☐

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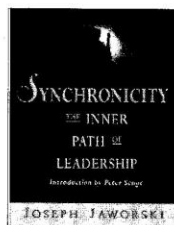
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IN REVIEW

The Inner Path of Leadership

by Peter M. Senge



Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership

by Joseph
Jaworski

Synchronicity: a meaningful coincidence of two or more events, where something other than the probability of chance is involved.

In *Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership*, Joe Jaworski illuminates the nature of the choice to lead and the profound worldview out of which such a choice might arise. As suggested in *Synchronicity*, true leadership—the *decision to serve life*—has relevance today for several reasons. First, it shifts the conversation beyond formal power hierarchies of "leaders" and "those led." Second, it redirects our attention toward how we collectively shape our destiny. Perhaps most importantly, it emphasizes that this domain of leadership is available to us all, and may indeed be crucial for our future.

In the West, we tend to think of leadership as a quality that exists only in certain people. Thus, we search for special individuals with leadership potential, rather than trying to develop leadership potential in everyone. We are easily distracted by the melodrama of people in power trying to maintain their power and others trying to wrest it from them. When things are going

poorly, we blame the situation on incompetent leaders, thereby avoiding any personal responsibility. When things become desperate, we can easily find ourselves waiting for a great leader to rescue us. Through all of this, we miss the bigger question: "What are we, collectively, able to create?"

Because of our obsessions with our leaders, we forget that, in its essence, leadership is about learning how to shape the future. Leadership exists when people are no longer victims of circumstances but participate in creating new circumstances. Ultimately, leadership is about creating new realities.

Exploring such a view of leadership through a book is almost a contradiction in terms, because this territory cannot be fully mapped out conceptually. In *Synchronicity*, Joe chooses to enter this territory through his own story. The result is an unusual book: a deeply personal, reflective account of one person's journey. This approach may be rare among business books, but Joe's insights and the process by which he came to them are inseparable. His life has been his vehicle for learning, just as his learning has been about how leaders must serve life.

A Personal Tale

The story begins when Joe's father, Leon Jaworski, became the Watergate Special Prosecutor. During the harrow-

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ing investigation, father and son asked each other the same questions the nation would soon ask: How could this have happened? How could our highest and most trusted officials act like common criminals?

These questions eventually led Joe to a remarkable series of undertakings, including leaving the prestigious international law firm he had helped to build in order to create the American Leadership Forum (ALF). The ALF is a national network of professionals committed to bringing forth a new generation of public leadership. Later, Joe accepted a four-year position as head of scenario planning for the Royal Dutch Shell Group; joined the MIT Center for Organizational Learning, where he works with a consortium of leading corporations to build learning organizations; and founded the Centre for Generative Leadership, a professional consortium that collaborates with clients to develop the leadership required to shape the future.

Below the surface details of the activities Joe describes were profound personal changes he experienced, guided by a series of meetings with remarkable people including John Gardner, Harlan Cleveland, and Francisco Varela. Joe especially valued his 1980 conversation with the physicist David Bohm, which planted the seeds for a radical view of how human beings can shape their destiny. This new view centered on learning to operate in the moment, to participate meaningfully in the unfolding of reality, and to tap into the deeper domain of wholeness.

For me, Joe's story represents one person's journey taken on behalf of all of us who are wrestling with the profound changes required in public and institutional leadership for the twenty-first century. Our lifelong experiences with hierarchy cast a long shadow, and abuses of hierarchical authority, sadly, are still with us today, eliciting deep

concerns about our collective capability to lead ourselves. In this book, we get a glimpse of what committed people can do to positively affect public leadership.

Joe's descriptions of his meetings with various thought leaders beautifully demonstrate the personal orientation required for a learning organization to operate. With his ability to wonder and to question, and with the sense of destiny that travels with him, people tend to be open around Joe. They also tend to feel that by telling him their story, their story will actually be *heard*. In this way, all of the conversations that Joe mentions in this book contribute threads that make up the deeper fabric of his message.

Moving as it does between historic public events and key intellectual discussions, Joe's story naturally draws us in. We are all seeking greater insight into these remarkable times, when there is so much cause for both despair and hope. Even as our political and institutional leadership is losing respect and credibility, we are gaining a greater understanding of how the universe works, which is leading to an historic shift in

worldview. Perhaps the two trends are connected—our institutions and leadership are falling apart precisely *because* they are grounded in a way of thinking about the world that is increasingly obsolete and counterproductive.

The sixteenth-century Newtonian mechanical view of the universe, which still guides our thinking, has become increasingly dysfunctional in these times of interdependence and change. As *Synchronicity* implies, the new leadership must be built on new understandings of how the world works. Nothing will change in the future without fundamentally new ways of thinking.

Fundamental Shifts of Mind

At one level, the larger purpose of *Synchronicity* is to suggest that we can shape our future in ways that we rarely realize. Joe's story offers an emerging understanding of how this might come about, primarily through the book's organizing principles (see "A Conceptual Map").

First, we need to be open to *fundamental shifts of mind*; specifically, a *shift from seeing the world as being made up of*

A Conceptual Map

In *Synchronicity*, Joe describes several shifts of mind that are part of the unfolding journey toward leadership. Taken together, they form a set of organizing principles for the book as a whole:

- We must open ourselves to fundamental shifts of mind.
- Once we have opened ourselves to new ways of understanding, we can begin to see the world as a set of possibilities, rather than fixed events.
- With this shift from fixed events to possibilities, our sense of identity and relationship to others shifts too.
- When we accept this shift in identity, we begin to see ourselves as part of the unfolding. We realize that it is impossible for our lives not to have meaning.
- Operating in this different state of mind and being, we come to a very different sense of what it means to be committed.
- When this new type of commitment starts to operate, there is a flow around us. Things begin to happen in new ways.
- When we are in a state of commitment and surrender, we begin to experience what is sometimes called "synchronicity."

things to seeing it as open and primarily made up of relationships. When we understand this, we begin to see that the future is not fixed, that *we live in a world of possibilities*.

Second, when we go through this shift of mind, our sense of despair about being able to influence reality begins to ease. We start to realize that, in fact, *everything around us is in continual motion*, and that nothing in nature stays put. This realization lets us see the world as a place of continual possibility, and allows us to feel more alive. Sadly, because of how we think, we're strangling the life out of ourselves. When we start to see the world more as it is, we stop strangling ourselves.

Third, *when this fundamental shift of mind occurs, our sense of identity also shifts and we begin to accept each other as legitimate human beings*, not just the stored-up images, interpretations, feelings, doubts, and anxieties that each of us evokes in one another.

Fourth, *when we start to accept this fundamental shift of mind, we begin to see ourselves as part of the unfolding of reality. We also see that it's actually impossible for our lives not to have meaning*. At a deep level, our lives cannot help but have meaning, because everything is continually unfolding, and we are connected to that unfolding in ways we can't even imagine. This participation is actually our birthright. It's what it means to be alive.

Fifth, *operating in this different state of mind and being, we come to a very different sense of what it means to be committed*. In our traditional image of commitment, things get done by hard work and sacrifice. We vacillate between getting things done by telling ourselves to work harder, and feeling guilt because we think we're not good enough to accomplish our goals.

But neither of these states of being has anything to do with the deeper nature of commitment. When we operate in the state of mind in which we realize

we are part of the unfolding, we can't *not* be committed. In this state, nothing ever happens by accident. Every single thing is part of what needs to happen right now. We make only the mistakes that we have to make to learn what we're here to learn right now. This is a commitment of being, not a commitment of doing. Our being is inherently in a state of commitment as part of the unfolding process.

This discovery leads to a paradoxical *integrity of surrender*: We actualize

We've all had those perfect moments, when things come together in an almost unbelievable way, when events that could never be predicted, let alone controlled, remarkably seem to guide us along our path.


our commitment by listening, out of which our "doing" arises. Sometimes the greatest acts of commitment involve doing nothing but sitting and waiting until we just know what to do next.

In most organizations today, managers who adopt this attitude would be considered nonmanagers because they are not doing anything to fix problems. We're hooked on the notion that commitment and activity are inseparable. So we create a continual stream of activity, making sure that everybody sees us doing lots of things so they'll believe we're actually committed. If we stay

busy enough, maybe we'll even convince ourselves that our lives have some meaning even though, deep down, we suspect that everything is hopeless, and we're helpless, and we couldn't possibly affect anything anyhow.

One of the interesting indicators of this paradoxical connection between our sense of helplessness and our ceaseless activity is how much difficulty we have actually saying, "You know, I can't do anything about that." I often find that people in organizations feel they have to create a belief that they can make change happen in order to justify their meaningless activity. As a result, they get caught in an enormous set of contradictions. At one level, they believe they can't influence anything. At another level, they create a story that says, "We can make it happen," and they busy themselves doing things that they know won't have any impact. We live in a contradictory state of frenzied commitment, of treading water, knowing we're actually not going anywhere. But we're terrified that if we stop, we'll drown. Our lives will be meaningless.

Sixth, *when a commitment of being, rather than doing, starts to operate, there is a flow around us. Things just seem to happen*. We begin to see that with very small movements, at just the right time and place, all sorts of consequent actions are brought into being. We develop "an economy of means," where, rather than getting things done through brute force, we start to operate very subtly. A flow of meaning begins to operate around us, as if we were part of a larger conversation (which is, incidentally, the ancient meaning of dialogue). We start to notice that things suddenly are just attracted to us in ways that are very puzzling. A structure of underlying causes, a set of forces, begins to operate, as if we were surrounded by a magnetic field with magnets being aligned spontaneously in this field. But this alignment is not spontaneous at all—it's just

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that the magnets are responding to a more subtle level of causality.

Last, when we are in a state of commitment and surrender, we begin to experience what is sometimes called synchronicity. People tend to elevate synchronicity into a sort of magical, mystical experience. In fact, it's very down to earth. Water flows downhill because of gravity. Of course, gravity itself is a pretty mysterious phenomenon. It seems to be a type of field, as if all physical objects in the universe have some sort of attraction for one another. But even though no one knows exactly how gravity works, we can observe the result: water flows downhill. We don't argue about the result because it is observable. That's much the way synchronicity seems to operate in this field of deep commitment.

In the same sense, this attractiveness, the field that starts to develop around people who have experienced these shifts of mind, creates a phenomenon that Joe calls predictable miracles. *Miracle* is a funny word because it connotes the unusual or mysterious. But in fact, what is "miraculous" might be just what is beyond our current understanding and way of living. If we were not making such an immense effort to separate ourselves from life, we might actually live life day to day, minute by minute, as a series of predictable miracles. ☐

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Peter Senge, best-selling author of *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, is director of the MIT Center for Organizational Learning.

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CALENDAR

The sessions below are sponsored by partnering companies. Please contact them directly for more information.

- November 18-20. **Systems Thinking and *ithink*® I**, Washington, DC. In this workshop, participants will develop a solid foundation in systems thinking skills and the use of the *ithink* software to address a wide variety of organizational issues. Contact: Lisa Kilmer, *High Performance Systems*—(603) 643-9636.
- November 18-21. **Business Process Reengineering with *ithink*®**, Berkeley, CA. This workshop focuses on the skills needed to use systems thinking and the *ithink* software to leverage reengineering, TQM, and continuous-improvement efforts. Contact: Lisa Kilmer, *High Performance Systems*—(603) 643-9636.
- November 20-22. **Systems Thinking and *ithink*® II**, Washington, DC. This workshop builds upon the foundation laid in the introductory workshop, with special emphasis on further developing modeling skills. Contact: Lisa Kilmer, *High Performance Systems*—(603) 643-9636.
- November 20-22. **Leading Learning Organizations**, Dallas, TX. This program provides grounding in the five disciplines of the learning organization, based on the best-selling book by IA co-founder Peter M. Senge. Contact: *Innovation Associates*—(617) 398-8500.
- December 2-4. **Systems Thinking Workshop**, Chicago, IL. This three-day program for individuals/teams provides an in-depth introduction to the discipline of systems thinking from those who helped pioneer it. Contact: *Innovation Associates*—(617) 398-8500.
- December 3-5. **Leading Learning Organizations**, Toronto, Ontario (see November 20-22).
- December 4-6. **Leadership and Mastery**, Boston, MA. A three-day program for executives and managers who want to utilize more of their natural leadership skills. It will enable participants to clarify and communicate a realizable vision of the future for themselves and their organization. Contact: *Innovation Associates*—(617) 398-8500.
- December 9-11. **Systems Thinking and *ithink*® I**, Washington, DC (see November 18-20).
- December 11-13. **Systems Thinking and *ithink*® II**, Washington, DC (see November 20-22).

- December 11-13. **Leading Learning Organizations**, Charlotte, NC (see November 20-22).

- December 11-13. **Leading Learning Organizations**, Los Angeles, CA (see November 20-22).

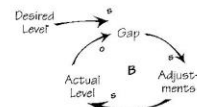
1997 CONFERENCE PREVIEW:

- May 12-16. **The Power of Systems Thinking™ Conference**, Boston, MA. This third annual conference will showcase the tools and techniques of systems thinking. Contact: LeAnne Grillo, *Pegasus Communications, Inc.*—(617) 576-1231.
- September 14-17. **Systems Thinking in Action™ Conference**, Orlando, FL. Pegasus Communications' 7th annual conference will explore the use of the five disciplines in developing the full potential of organizational learning. Contact: LeAnne Grillo, *Pegasus Communications, Inc.*—(617) 576-1231.

The Language of Links and Loops

- S Links two variables, indicating a change in the same direction.
- O Indicates a causal change in the opposite direction.
- R A "reinforcing" feedback loop that amplifies change.
- B A "balancing" feedback loop that seeks equilibrium.

Balancing Loop Example



If there is a gap between the desired level and the actual level, adjustments are made until the actual equals the desired level. The starting variable is in **blue**.

The Language of Accumulators

"clouds" represent the boundaries of what we want to include in the diagram

