

A Way to Create Needed Change

How to make and sustain a personal contribution to this time of transformation.

A WIDER LENS Blog by Dr. Kenneth Silvestri

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“The crises of our time, it becomes increasingly clear, are the necessary impetus for the revolution now under way. And once we understand nature's transformative powers, we see that it is our powerful ally, not a force to feared our subdued.”

—Thomas S. Kuhn

Why there is such a drastic need to make changes

I am a firm believer that the major problems of the world arise, as anthropologist Gregory Bateson profoundly pointed out, from “the difference between the way nature works and the way people think.” Since we are part of nature, we must constantly deal with the ever-present contradictions or paradoxes that surround us. Carl Jung felt that this was the essence of our journey-to-find our sense of “self” and at the same time be part of our larger world. This is what nature is all about; part-to-whole interconnections and ever-changing patterns of interdependent relationships.

Unfortunately, we do not always see the “I-thou” unity of these living systems. Cultural and language constraints make us vulnerable to missing these relationships. Hence, our history is full of devastating examples of disconnecting from nature. We can now see how this has created far too many harmful health issues, political polarization, climate destruction, and educational fragmentation as well as wars, discrimination, economic inequality, and most recently, how we are dealing with a pandemic, etc.



"Here and Now" Source: (c) Natasha Rabin

Ecological Awareness

It was in the 1960s, with such publications as *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson and *The Closing Circle* by Barry Commoner, that this cause-effect thinking was challenged with the view of seeing nature as more complex and interacting; a system that is a collection of entities (persons, institutions, societies, atoms, etc.) so arranged that a change in the relationship of one part will produce some change in all the other parts of that system. The Greek word for earth, "Gaia," further underscores this awareness by pointing out that the whole biosphere is more than the sum of its parts.

The prerequisite to understanding and addressing this dilemma is to be mindfully present and see yourself as simultaneously being connected to wider contexts. In other words, observe yourself observing: Step back, make sense of each moment as if it was a poetic expression creating challenges and opportunities for new exploration.

This is the segue to recognizing that the world is ever-changing. How we respect each other and the multitude of contexts that we evolve and grow within is crucial for understanding our complex world. It is a framework that refutes fragmentation and reinforces ways to see and resolve problems from a new vantage point, which is congruent with how nature exists.

What follows entails reframing health issues, not just managing symptoms (as is the case with many medications) or dictated by insurance interests to physicians. Other concerns will need to be addressed such as: reinventing education to be more focused on the learner rather than evaluating the institutional achievements; food and wealth distribution that can benefit societies; new climate and socio-economic-political connections; so on and so on.

Mutual Learning

Nora Bateson, president of the International Bateson Institute feels that this process “cannot be found in individuals; rather, it is found between them. It cannot be found in organizations, nations, religions, or institutions; rather, it is found between them.” This refers to the ways in which multiple contexts come together to form complex systems. It allows for a concentration on the interdependency between contexts that give resilience to both living and non-living systems. This will only be driven by mutually learning from each other through win-win collaboration that forms a synchrony, or as anthropologist Paul Byers would say, “good vibrations” where there is a shared phase locking of biological rhythms between people who are truly communicating.

The world is not fixed in some sort of Newtonian box but is constantly uncertain and improvising through creative patterns that connect. There is no room for competition in this process nor a beginning or end. John Coltrane once said, when asked to describe his style, “I start in the middle and move in both directions at once.”

Solutions and Complexity

It is here that we can acquire the wisdom of knowing nature's “complexity,” which is defined as something being “interwoven,” and which cannot be undone. One of the ways to savor and explore this awareness is to meet within small groups of people with a collective focus on an issue that is common to all, one that has many interfaces and connections, i.e. with family of origin, work, school, temperament issues, etc. Then, after forming a consensus, bring that knowledge to other groups that are discussing different issues, especially considering the interdependency that exists across different contexts. There is no limit or right or wrong. Making sense and increasing sensitivity to each other in a multitude of interconnected ways is necessary to find new avenues that can avoid old injurious patterns.

In essence, we need to engage in new ways of collaborating that promote continuous, collective learning and innovation. This interface of evolving contexts is full of improvisational possibilities. So, pause, widen your lens, and allow the holographic intent of nature to unfold for you to create and sustain a personal contribution to this time of needed transformation!

*The above was adapted from a much longer version published in Medium, April 26, 2020, under the title of "How to see the world through a wider lens"