Don’t Fight Mother Nature—or Your

Preconference Workshop
Wednesday, 24 October
09:00 - 12:00 | Palm Beach County Convention Center – 1B/C

Overview

Wise leadership for our time requires levels of awareness that are not yet standard in leadership practice. While it was an advance to talk about human resources as a way of emphasizing the value of employee work, the human often gets left out. In fact, a major frustration of many executives is that they have to deal with real live people. However, that is exactly what leadership is about. This requires self-awareness and an ability to understand people and social systems. Some have this naturally, and most of us can also benefit from various ways of using psychological concepts without psychoanalyzing people, diagnosing them, or seeming to try to manipulate them. This workshop begins with a dynamic way to understand people that is respectful, non-intrusive, and appropriate for the workplace.

Human beings are story telling creatures. Just watch them gather and tell anecdotes to one another or even begin to speculate about the substance of the story behind the story being told in the executive wing. Narrative intelligence can assist leaders in developing self-knowledge, authenticity, and the ability to read others and the organizational culture by listening to the stories being told and lived in their own heads and in those around them. It can also help them notice when people are beginning to act like robots, just doing what they are told, bereft of all passion, enthusiasm, or good innovative ideas and then determining what story might bring them back to life.

As living beings, people thrive in living systems. Just notice how much better many people feel with just a few minutes’ walk in nature. But organizations actually are living systems, often pretending to be “well-oiled machines.” They are composed of flesh and blood people, so using mechanical or even engineering narrative frames to talk about them distorts their essential reality and encourages workers to act in robot-like ways that keep them from offering the fullness of their talents and perspectives. Even if an organization is “no walk in the park,” it can operate in ways that are natural for human beings, making it easier to bring out the best in them. These new understandings, inspired by human narratives and by natural processes, teach us about a new paradigm of leadership for today’s world.

Thus, this workshop will foster the development of new, emergent capacities that expand the ability of leaders to learn to work with the power of story and with natural processes to deepen our understanding of leadership of a living organization. Because these capacities align with the reality of organizational life, leaders who utilize them can get more done with greater efficiency and less stress.
Narrative Intelligence

Humans store our memories in story form, and the accumulated inner narratives affect what we notice around us. The brain filters new data according to preexisting patterns in our heads, many of which are narratives, which means what we notice is also determined by the stories we are already thinking and unconsciously living. Then, the brain also makes meaning of events by rather instantaneously creating narratives about them. This happens so fast that most of us do not even notice the story, thinking it is objectively true. The stories we tell ourselves have a primary influence on the plotline we live out, for good or ill.

If we become conscious of these narratives, we can reframe them and, in the process, discover new possibilities as we also live less like robots programmed by our history and more like fully conscious leaders.

In the first part of the twentieth century, the psychiatrist Carl Jung recognized the universality of characters and plotlines he called archetypes. These archetypes are the living system within the human psyche, whether within an individual or a collective. Carol Pearson has built upon his work to assist leaders in developing narrative intelligence as a leadership skill that can increase self-awareness, emotional intelligence, social awareness, cognitive complexity, resilience, and creativity.

Participant learning about narrative intelligence theory and practice will be furthered, by their analyzing, interpreting and applying their own Pearson-Marr Archetype Indicator® results, in order to be more conscious and purposeful authentic leaders who also have considerable situational flexibility and cultural sensitivity. Upon registering for this preconference workshop—through special arrangement with the publisher to waive the normal fee—participants in this workshop will be able to go online and take the newly revised and expanded PMAI® and receive a detailed report on their results. In this process, they will gain an awareness of the power of story that comes from becoming conscious of how narratives shape human thinking and group conflict or consensus. This capacity helps leaders recognize and tell the narratives that are right for a situation and for motivating positive, forward action in the people involved in it.

Living Organizational Intelligence

In the 21st century, the world is experiencing this shift as we turn from mechanical to biological metaphors. Shifting from machine to biology changes everything. Instead of mass production, we have mass customization. Values of replication and uniformity are giving way to valuing and leveraging the uniqueness of culture and context. Where we used to see organizations as inert and the people in them as organizational property, today we see organizations as living, complex, and interdependent systems just like nature. We used to not think twice about using tremendous energy to extract value from all types of resources—natural, human, and intellectual. Now, we’re looking for ways to leverage our resources in gentler, non-toxic, self-replenishing ways.
It seems the time has come for nature to become a “mentor, model, and muse” for the way we understand communities, organizations, and leadership; just as machines were in the 20th century. Nature is a complex, dynamic, open and interdependent system, much like the community and organizational systems in which we operate. And nature is designed in very different ways and with different assumptions than machines. There is a lot to learn and most of it challenges the prevailing leadership thinking, practice, metaphors, and narratives that emerged from the 20th century.

Nature, for example, teaches us key lessons about leadership in organizations. Mother Nature is designed in such a way that it rewards cooperation and banks on diversity. As ecosystems evolve into old growth forests and mature prairies, the become generous systems, where plant life and species give more back to the ecology than they individually consume. These generous systems depend on the diverse ecology to optimize their relationships and nurture each other. Mother Nature is also designed for engagement. There is no apathy in nature. Every species is engaged and therefore nature optimizes each contribution in service of the whole.

Wise leadership for our time requires levels of awareness that are not yet standard in leadership practice. While many leaders today recognize the power for story in leadership communication, few understand how narrative intelligence can assist in developing self-knowledge, authenticity, and the ability to read others and the social world. Similarly, mechanistic design is common in organizations and few are leading their businesses from a living system perspective. Shifting our narrative intelligence and living system intelligence can transform the way we think and practice leadership and can result in gaining higher results with less stress. These new lessons can use the inspiration from nature to teach us about a new paradigm of leadership for today’s world.

Thus, this workshop will foster the development of new, emergent capacities that expand the ability of leaders to learn to work with human psychology and with natural processes and deepen our understanding of leadership in a living organization. It will explore how our metaphors and narratives shape the way we think about our work as leaders and how understanding the power of story enhances leadership effectiveness and the ability to utilize organic images, narratives and processes that mimic nature in leadership practice. It will demonstrate how emergent natural design principles can help leaders achieve better process results and higher morale than processes based on mechanistic models.

Workshop Schedule

9:00 – 9:45 AM: Workshop Introduction: Narrative Intelligence as an Essential Leadership Capacity

A presentation that will define narrative intelligence as a living system leadership skill and then explain the significance of participants’ PMAI ® results—motivations, strengths, assumed plotlines for action, and potential blind spots—with applications to their own leadership, to supervising and collaborating with others, and to interacting effectively with their organizational culture’s narrative, potentially shifting its level of expression.
9:45-10:15 AM: Q & A and dialogue on this presentation, participant PMAI® reports, and the implications of dominant narratives in business today.

10:15-10:30: Break

10:30-11:15: Living System Intelligence

A presentation that will name the dynamics that all living systems display. Nature only uses the energy it needs to create the outcomes it seeks. Organizations often over control or engineer their work in a way that consumes more energy than it needs to use. By leading from a living system framework, it takes less time, resources, and energy because the leadership strategies are aligned with the dynamics of the organization not working against it.

11:15-11:45: Small group reflection and application

This will give participants an opportunity to apply the concepts of living system dynamics to their organization and see how it can shift their practices, habits, and narratives.

11:45-Noon: Questions and Wrap-up