

Principles for organizational change...

In the company of hope

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*Red... "Hope is a dangerous thing. Hope can drive a man insane. It's got no use on the inside. You better get used to the idea." "Hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things. And no good thing ever dies" says Andy, in response.**

"Too much of the time we miss the power of hope when we really need it."

What can we make of hope in organizational life? Is it a dangerous thing or the best of things? How should we make sense of empowerment, collaboration, partnership with clients and customers, participative planning, self-managing work teams, and innovative reward systems — are these good things?

Hope can help... In many organizations, such concepts are moving from rhetoric to reality and having substantial impact on results.

But hope may also hurt... Yet, at places where employees are becoming uncertain about things making any sense at all, hope may well be dangerous. When personal ambitions and dreams are disconnected from organizational realities, hope invites cynicism. ¹

Our purpose here is to build on learnings from hopeful, organizational best practices and place them within a framework that reestablishes the unambiguous linkages of hope to human action. We simply want hope to be more accessible to groups of people at work.

Reconnecting hope to human action

Hope can reorient the heart and soul of an organization when attention is paid to the pragmatic, moral and spiritual requirements of the work itself. These include realistic action plans, expectations to achieve worthy aims while embracing

openness in their pursuit, and genuine involvement of people who are parts of the puzzle.

Hope can provide a way forward, but its reputation is muddled — In common usage, hope is an expression of an upbeat frame of mind that expects things to get better in the face of difficulty — expressing a hope is supposed to make a positive difference. In these situations, hope is a well-meaning utterance that risks little. Yet when we invest heavily in hope and face repeated disappointment, hope feels like a fraud. Too much of the time we miss the power of hope when we really need it.

Trust makes hopping and hoping possible... In Erik Erikson's theory of the human life cycle, hope is "pure future," the primary building block of development. Hope emerges during infancy when basic trust is nourished by maternal care. Linguistically, Erikson reminds us, hope is related to "hop," which means to leap or spring forth. From our first steps and playful risks we learn ways to persist and grow throughout life. Hope is central to our understanding of human beings — and at the core of human organizations we know as companies.

Hope and organizational change... For hope to be relevant to organizational change, two shifts need to occur:

1. Hope must be made practical, pulled out of the realm of wishes and feelings into the world of experience and action.

* Dialogue between two characters in the prison film, *Shawshank Redemption*.

The paradox of hope...

Grounded in reality and possibilities, it can lead us forward;

Without any grounding or connection to the possible; hope may lead to hopelessness.



Hope must be reconnected to life as we live it in order for it to move toward our preferred existence.

2. Hope must be applied to shared and solitary pursuits. We see hope as a collective endeavor, which is why we prefer the word company to organization or institution. From the same root as companion, a company is a group sharing bread together, a most hopeful act in itself. All of us want to live in the company of hope.

Driving out fear — Samuel Coleridge's verse places hope in meaningful context:

*Work without hope draws nectar in a sieve,
and hope without an object cannot live.*

Is work without hope occupational despair? We see symptoms of despair in the workplace around the world: overwork and its flipside absenteeism, ever-shortening time horizons, relentless downsizing, high-flown pronouncements of corporate visions and values, major investment in purported panaceas that do more for the bottom line than the employment line. Where is the hope in these?

The late W. Edwards Deming devised a set of fourteen points for managers, of which one is: "Drive out fear, so that everyone may work effectively for the company."

Deming is not wrong; fear can take a terrific toll in the workplace. What has become obvious to us, however, is that intense focus on driving out fear can cause unwanted effects. We do not want fear to be denied or ignored, made undiscussable or unwelcome. Fear can be a messenger of alarm and a stimulus to timely action, and to the degree that fear is based in reality, it is joined with hope. For Benedict Spinoza, "fear cannot be without hope, nor hope fear." Hope without fear is ungrounded and suspect.

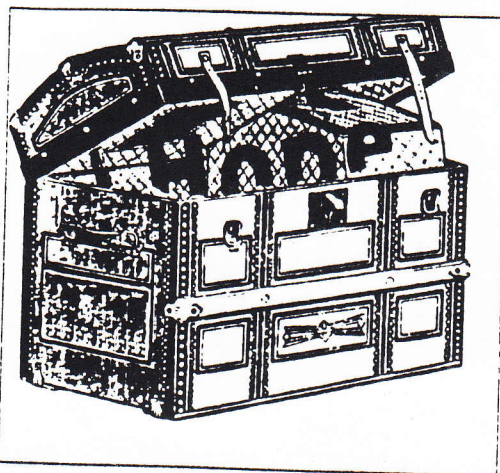
Our fear can open the way to hope...

When a new product development group is intent on making a breakthrough commercially viable, for example, hope is attached to the possibility that deadlines will be met and the marketplace receptive. Fear is also the group's partner. Maybe the technology will be too complex, or the competition will get there first, or the home organization will stand in the way. To dismiss such concerns as pessimistic or negative and therefore "part of the problem" is to veer toward despair. Hope is tied to making something real happen in the world, and fear is a part of that reality.

In our experience working with individuals and groups, when people express what's true for them, no matter how devastating or fearful, they feel hope.

Hope and Pandora's box...

The classical source of hope's ambiguity is the tale of Pandora. When Prometheus stole fire from Zeus to distinguish humans from the other creatures, Zeus took revenge. The beautiful Pandora was created by Zeus as an Eve figure and sent to earth to lure Epimetheus, the brother of Prometheus, who had the wisdom/foolishness to marry her. It was Pandora who opened the forbidden box of Epimetheus,



out of which escaped all manner of evils to plague humanity. At the bottom of the box one thing remained — hope. Is hope therefore a cruel joke, just another evil in Pandora's box, or is it a gift from the gods, a force greater than sickness, insanity and vice?

"We would have preferred Deming to say: Encourage hope (and know fear), so that everyone may work effectively for the company."

Hope emerges from contact with truth, from facing real situations in life... When a leader expresses a hope in a way that is connected to the whole of reality and not just its upside, the message connects to followers. Martin Luther King's dream moved us because he had his finger on the pulse of racism and violence, and not just on hopefulness. We would have preferred Deming to say: *Encourage hope (and know fear), so that everyone may work effectively for the company.*

Hope and its many aspects — Hope's origins are ancient, and hope's definitions are diverse. Depending on the culture, era, or field of knowledge, hope is defined as: a passion, a curse, an emotion, a feeling, a climate of the mind, a strength, an act of imagination, a waking dream, or a chemical balance. There are manifold poetic expressions, as well as scholarly studies of hope in relation to politics, metaphysics, biology, theology, philosophy, and so on.

- Nietzsche called hope the worst of evils, because it protracts human torment.
- Within Christianity, in the words of the theologian and social critic Cornel West, hope comes from trying to sustain a sense of faith, "out of struggle and moans and groans and cries and screams," yet leads to "love and care, concern and kindness and sweetness."

Hope's range and reach is enormous, and yet there is little recognition that hope pertains to human organizations. We experience complex connections to hope in our daily lives. Desiring and wishing, needing and wanting, praying and waiting: all feel attached to hope in some important ways, as does goal-setting and working hard.

The shadow side of hope... We also recognize the downside of hope, its shadow. Trivial hopes may be a waste of our time. But self-deceiving hopes can be false prophets or worse, diseases of the spirit. James Hillman, the Jungian therapist and theorist, suggests "the soul builds its endurance through hopelessness and depression." Hope as a lived experience is deeply connected to who we are as human beings.

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Why does hope receive mixed reviews and contradictory interpretations? If hope is commonplace and ubiquitous, why isn't it more central to our thinking, more subject to research, more accessible to leaders working to improve things for people? Pandora may have us in her box. What explanations do we have for our wonderment and confusion?

Predictably, perhaps, hope shows up at the edges of our culture... If contemporary media can be interpreted as having a message for our times, it is that pathology has become a worldview. War, crime and disaster compete for our attention. Hope, connected to health, light and reality-based strengths, appears only on back pages or in lifestyle sections.

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Hope involves a spiritual dimension that is at odds with the pervasive materialism of our time. Emily Dickinson reminds us of hope's resilience — and generosity:

Hope is the thing with feathers

That perches in the soul
And sings the tune without the words
And never stops at all,
And sweetest in the gale is heard;
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little bird
That kept so many warm.
I've heard it in the chilliest land,
And on the strangest sea;
Yet, never, in extremity,
It asked a crumb of me.

This then is why hope is so hard to grasp; it exists at the juncture of the human spirit and pragmatic know-how:

- Hope is paradoxical because it moves us where we want to go while it stays firmly rooted in where we are today.
- Hope is illusive because it mirrors us, nature's most illusive creations.
- Hope is too close for us to gain perspective, too near and dear to let go. All that we love and fear about ourselves is somehow present.

Hope: an act of becoming — We view hope in a provocative way, as an act — not as a wish or a desire or a feeling. For us, hope is causative — things happen when hope is here. Further, we believe hope is connected to both being and doing, to both spirit and practice; hope is an essential expression of who we are:

- In corporate terms, we understand hope as an act of human community.
- We define hope as an act that generates movement toward a shared, desirable future.
- We believe hope, understood in this way, has profound implications for how we work in organizations, for the results we achieve, and for the ways we identify with the common enterprise.
- To be about as blunt as possible, a company without hope is not only a company without a future, it is an inhuman organization, machine-like, soulless, uncaring, cold.

Five principles of hope...

1. Possibility: Hope stretches limits.
2. Agency: Hope inspires action.
3. Worth: Hope engages cherished ideals.
4. Openness: Hope welcomes discovery.
5. Connection: Hope finds common ground.

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We all have knowledge of such workplaces. Activities are mechanized, supporting structures are concretized, thinking is solidified, and *CHANGE* is manipulated. Though lifeless, too often these words are accurate. When we envision a company full of hope, new words are made welcome. We find room for light, truth, beauty. We experience purpose and progress. We simply enjoy our jobs.

Given that there is always fear in the workplace, the question can become, fear of what? Most likely the fear of retribution is replaced with the fear of not being able to create something as wonderful as we desire, or the fear of not being able to express ourselves the way we like, or the core fear of not being fully who we are.

Fear itself need not be feared, nor its expression be taboo.

Hope is an orientation of the spirit, an orientation of the heart...

It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out. — Vaclav Havel, 1990

Principles of hope

From classical interpretations of hope, philosophical treatises and psychological research, we have distilled five principles that define, for us, its essence.

When all five are with us, hope's power is manifest. Missing any, hope cannot be fully present. We see these as being actionable principles. The first two are pragmatic in nature, the third is essentially moral, and the final two are related to the human spirit. 3

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The sources of hope's power...

Five diagnostic scales		
No reason to hope	Passion for the possible	Hopelessness
Guaranteed	Possibility	Impossible
Passivity	Bold action	Powerlessness
Autocratic	Agency	Anarchic
Foolishness, evil	Energy and purpose	Cynicism
Trivial or immoral	Worth	Grandiose
Absolutism and perfectionism	Trust and discovery	Vague optimism
Predetermined	Openness	Formless
Despair	Compassion and mutuality	Confusion
Exclusionary	Connection	Enmeshed

1. Possibility — When the object of hope is out of sight and felt to be impossible to achieve, the result is hopelessness. Conversely, when the hoped-for object is sure fire and guaranteed, there is no reason to hope for it in the first place — it is wasted breath, pointless. The principle is then, one of possibility. We hope best when we hope for something in the range of what is really possible. In Kierkegaard's phrase, "hope is a passion for the possible."

Hope and goal setting... When realistic, stretch goals are agreed to, those who must achieve them can feel empowered. Because such goals are not easy and yet not ridiculous, hope plays an integral part. Organizations that set unreasonable goals for themselves and then punish those who fall short, set themselves up for failure just as surely as organizations with low or no expectations.

Targeting the inevitable is hope's loss; targeting perfection is equally hopeless.

Dialogue about true possibility is what is hopeful.

The principle of possibility is pragmatic... We hope for what we now have, only different and better, and so we can calibrate expectation with likelihood. The task is to determine the art of the possible. Is 50 percent improvement within six months too little to expect, too much, or in fact a goal supported by hope?

2. Agency — When we hope for a change in weather, we can only watch and wait. Rain dances or their equivalent may help us feel at one with the environment, yet we're not fooled into believing we have any influence. This is hope without the principle of agency — idle, *not-my-job, out-of-my-hands, maybe-somebody-else-will-take-care-of-it*, hope.

Like the principle of possibility, agency also is pragmatic. Hope must invite a sense of personal ownership. As hopeful persons, our conviction is that we are agents sufficiently free to influence the future. Hence we engage ourselves in activities where we both have a stake and the wherewithal to make a difference.

In an autocratic work environment, where one person is in charge and that's that, the principle of agency deteriorates — passivity is more likely than individual initiative. In another work setting, where everyone is responsible but no one is accountable, agency is weakened in a different way. In anarchy, people may experience powerlessness. In either case, bold action inspired by hope is lost to the system.

Hope takes agency to heart... Using goal setting as our example, both the process of setting goals and the process for achieving them must involve the very same people for whom those goals really matter. So it is important to invite people into the action and make it possible for them to influence events. It is wise to avoid the extremes of *my way or the highway*, or *let them go their way without me*. Instead, the theme may well work best to build on hope is, *we've all got to find a way*.

3. Worth — We hope for what is truly important to us, not for trivial, immoral, or grandiose things or events:

- Hoping to be a good enough parent, for example, matters greatly...
- By companson, hoping for victory in an athletic contest is of little moral consequence...
- Hoping the boss will get hit by a bus is evil...
- Hoping for it all — to do all, be all, have all — is silly.

The principle of worth has a moral component as well... Hope touches the vital interests of a person or a company, circumscribed by what is morally and socially acceptable.

Hope's object must be worthwhile for people to feel energy and purpose... When an organization sets goals for itself that are not in its own best interests, hope is squandered. Short-term financial goals, though necessary, are trivial if they are the organization's only purpose. Stealing secrets from rivals is an immoral goal. Trying to kill the competition and gain 100 percent market share is grandiose. Goals such as these are not worthy of a company's best efforts.

What is worthwhile? What kind of goals do we want to achieve? Can we envision a workplace where:

- We all want to show up...
- We willingly give what we have...
- We achieve sustaining results?

To do so lays groundwork for a company of hope.

4. Openness — Hope depends on pragmatic estimates of possibility and, equally, an openness to the unknown. Hope's world is not circumscribed by what we can measure. The principle of openness holds the world as a place of unrealized potential, where breakthrough discoveries and creative strokes of genius can occur. Hope lives in an open system of reality, where we welcome what we can't predict.

No limits versus some limits... Openness is held back by the perfectionist urge to tidy things up and make them presentable, predictable, prescribed. On the other hand, openness gets stretched thin when there are no boundaries whatsoever. Openness requires balance and trust, and requires risk. How much should parents welcome the unknown with their teenagers? Too much, and parental guidance is formless; hopes for their general welfare may be vaguely optimistic at best. Too little openness — a cult would be the extreme case — and hope is squashed by the weight of absolute authority.

Applying the principle of openness to goal-setting suggests finding minimum critical specifications for company performance. Overdetermined specifications hurt hope because they limit possibilities. They also deceive us into thinking the organization will be well run by an autocrat, or the reverse, that it will be able to run itself without outside guidance. Under determined or absent specifications yield incoherence no matter how much optimism.

The power of hope...

One of the magical qualities of hope is its ability to silently reformulate itself to adapt to changing conditions. It defies logic; presses for life when life is impossible; turns us to the future when we are tempted to stop and wrestle with the past; and then moves us to begin that future. It makes us talk success in the presence of fear; encourages us to leap over obstacles; enables us to recoup it after we lose it; and then miraculously adjusts itself to suit our every change. — Maurice Lamm

Hope is inspired by listening to the call of the human spirit for elbow room... In our experience, when the HOW of achieving goals is open to the resourcefulness of the achievers, we're not surprised when goals are met or exceeded — or when there are unlooked-for discoveries. Hope is willingness to expect the unexpected.

5. Connection — The most cherished hopes we have for ourselves are pointless without other people. We are connected in both obvious and spiritual ways. We learn from experience that we can make things happen only in relation to others. On a deeper level there is the conviction that what is common among us is the call of the future. Hope is connected to community, however local or global we define it.

The company of hope is a well connected place... There is companionship and mutuality among members, and linkages to shared experience. People know where they've come from and where they're headed, and they're hard at the business of working together to get there.

Disconnected organizations can be exclusionary, even toward their own people... When differences are penalized — whether in race or gender, style or standing, culture or capability — alienation gains the upper hand. At the other extreme, over-connected organizations spawn enmeshed relationships, smother individuality and create confusion. Hope gets lost in the crush.

The implications a connected organization are many... People appreciate being connected with each other and with the larger whole, and so personal gatherings become vital. This is really true in workplaces dominated by the asynchronous communication patterns of voice mail and e-mail. We should not expect our numbers and our memos to carry the weight of connection for purposes of goal-setting.

"Hope lives in an open system of reality, where we welcome what we can't predict."

Meeting the future...

The future of hope, in a sense, is an invitation to learn more about its workings in human community.

An example where all five principles of hope are developed into an enduring pattern is a future search conference, a special kind of strategic planning meeting where a large and diverse group of an organization's stakeholders are convened for two or three days. A participant in a recent search conference in New York City describes the experience this way: "The air crackles and buzzes with creative energy that is hard to describe.... People's best thinking and positive energy are released to create tangible results, including real breakthroughs in tough situations." Future search conferences are greater than the collected individual acts of company

The conference task is to envision a desired future for the company (principle of worth) and discover common ground among company members (principle of connection), so that informed, shared activity follows (principle of agency). Participants include a broad group of people, both from inside and outside, including clients and customers, who have a genuine stake in the company's fortunes and who can make a real difference in reaching the desired future state (principle of agency). Activities include reviewing milestones in the world, in the company and in individual lives over several decades, and graphically depicting forces impacting the company right now (principle of connection). Along the way, there is a time to express what the community feels "proud" and "sorry" about in the present and past, which publicly acknowledges feelings (principle of connection). The culminating activity is the creation of ideal future scenarios in small groups; these are presented to the conference as a whole often with surprising results (principle of openness). The conference concludes with action planning — choosing priorities, naming short term results to be achieved, and making assignments (principles of possibility and agency).

The future search conference example yields general lessons for change processes in the company of hope. We can sketch just a few here:

1. Build a context for meaningful activities in the company with community events (such as future search conferences or other large group meetings.)
2. Create a future vision that is at the upper end of what is realistically possible, and keep it open to changing events and new horizons.
3. Communicate ideals and virtues in words and behavior. Emphasize what's really most important to the company.
4. Design in individual control and voluntary cooperation whenever possible. Rely on minimum critical specifications to carry the load of accountability.
5. Seek feedback as an opportunity to make course corrections. Respond to feedback, move on, and be open to more.
6. Welcome diverse experience and a full range of expression. Encourage multiple and even seemingly conflicting ways to give voice to deepest aspirations.
7. Continue to involve the entire community in meaning-making, and turn sporadic events into continuing processes.

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members. They generate movement toward a shared, desirable future. Hope is palpably present.

"Hope requires connection to higher purposes, sometimes experienced through stories, creative excursions and poetry, as well as to company metrics."

Hope requires connection to higher purposes, sometimes experienced through stories, creative excursions and poetry, as well as to company metrics.

The future of hope

Our work with hope begins to bring new questions to light:

- Are these five principles — possibility, agency, worth, openness and connection — as capable of guiding future choices as they are useful in interpreting current events?
- How can we encourage hope in our workplaces?
- Is hope-full behavior learnable?
- Does hope offer useful criteria for leadership and coaching?

We believe hope is present in organizational processes such as strategic planning, new product

development or work redesign — when:

1. The targets for such activities are challenging.
2. The right people are involved.
3. Vital interests are at stake.
4. There is room for the unexpected.
5. The overall context is shared.

The future of hope, in a sense, is an invitation to learn more about its workings in human community. ⁵ Our thinking is preliminary, at best an invitation to inquire openly. Ernst Bloch, the philosopher of hope, both challenges and reassures us: *The main thing is to learn to hope. Hope, being above fear, is not passive like fear, nor is it loaded into a nothing. Hope... needs human beings who throw themselves actively into what is becoming, to which they themselves belong.*

As we throw ourselves into this work, we welcome you in the company of hope. ♦

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Perry and Hutson's previous article in this journal was "Buying in without sell out," June 1992.