

BUSINESS IS NOT A DISCIPLINE

By Prof. Kurt April

GREETING

Greetings to everyone present (VC, DVCs, Deans, Director, A/Prof Steyn, Honoured Guests).

When I first thought about preparing for this lecture, I was convinced that I should do something quite formal and theoretical – befitting of a traditional inaugural. However, after consideration, I was convinced that this would belie the situated nature of my experience, and would deny the very many people who have played a role in creating the aggregated me.

I would like to thank my dad for his unwavering presence, the security of his solid principle set and, his teaching always that life and living is always about others and the common good.

Most importantly, I want to greet my wife, Amanda, specifically – who, from high school, has stood unwavering in her emotional, spiritual, intellectual, social and practical support over the last 27 years, who has been by my side all this time, has pulled me along at times, and has always challenged me to explore the possibilities of my potential, in order to be a better Kurt.

I also want to thank God almighty for keeping me, seeing me through many miracles, and the amazing extended family he has surrounded me with, who consistently and continuously pray for me and provides my basis for both connection and coherence.

My only disappointment is that three important people are not here this evening: **my late mom** (because she did not think that I could hold down a job, and sometimes questioned whether I was made for work – I would have liked her to see that I am enjoying what I do now), **my son Jordan** (who is 4 years old, but challenges me even more than my PhD students: “I need you more than students”, “I won’t talk about Captain Hook’s ship, I promise to talk about Leadership”), and **Prof. John Bell** (because he did not believe that I should enter the business world – it was he who stated that “business is not a discipline”).

INTRODUCTION

Twenty years ago, in 1988, I was in this very lecture theatre, feeling overwhelmed and out of place (because I was initially educated at College, not at University) as a student starting the Higher Diploma in Education at the University of Cape Town. More about that later.

It was 1986, and again in 1987, when I attended my, then girlfriend, and now wife's Social Science graduation ceremonies that I 'caught the spark' – I too wanted to go onto the podium, I also wanted a degree, I also wanted to taste a small fraction of my own intellectual capacity. As things happened, it was Professor Spargo (UCT) who ate every Wednesday evening at Dean Street Spur in Newlands, at which I was a part-time waiter, who encouraged me to apply to do an HDE. Ultimately, I landed up in this very lecture theatre (the then Education Department was housed here). I was to meet an eccentric academic, Chris Breen who taught Maths Method, who challenged me to contribute in class. I knew that he was different when he showed up to class in an academic gown, shorts, barefeet, and told us all to shove the tables to the sides of the room. He apparently noticed that I wasn't contributing too much in class (I knew much about electronics, but had never heard of the many theorists in sociology, psychology, and philosophy, which were taken for granted by my classmates ... so I spent many a late night and early morning in the library next door, playing catch up) – and after piercing through my denial arguments, Chris managed to get me to write in a daily reflective journal in which I wrote about my feelings of inadequacy, my emotions, my fears, and so on. At the end of that year, I was placed among the top performers on the HDE and believed that anything and everything was possible for myself. Soon thereafter, I enrolled to do a (proper) engineering degree. At the end of my undergraduate engineering degree, I was supervised for my thesis by the late Prof John Bell – a phenomenon and purist, who (1) demanded excellence, (2) who had a breadth of knowledge which most engineering students wished they could download from his head through a bio-port, if it existed, and (3) who was respected and feared by other academics and Professors (they all understood intimately what it meant to be prepared before asking him a question). The day I handed in my thesis, he encouraged me to do my Masters degree in engineering – due to lack of funds I could not continue, and in an instant he reached for his own personal cheque book and inducted me into post-graduate study (through personal means). He always had it in his mind that I would one day do a PhD in engineering – he had a faith in me which I thought was unwarranted, and I did not see what he apparently recognised in me. But I will never forget the day I told him that, after long consideration, I was instead going to opt for a career in business, and do an MBA degree rather than specialise in engineering. For 3 months thereafter in the lab, I was ridiculed, was told about the follies and superficiality of business, was told how easy it was to make one's mark in business as opposed to engineering or physics, was explained the tarnishing that business brings to human endeavours and souls, and ultimately discouraged from moving away from a "real discipline". However, after this 3 months of purgatory, Prof

Bell changed tack. I walked into our lab one morning, only to find our favourite green board (which usually was filled with equations, and experimental dilemmas we were pondering over) now filled with company names, PE ratios, gearing ratios, and recent stock market results (much of which I did not understand myself, at that stage). Prof Bell each day would then challenge me to learn more about this fad called “business” (it had only been around for two centuries, so in his mind it could go away), he would invest some money in companies based on advice I had to give him – in his usual way, he was pushing for me, and challenging me, to become excellent in this non-discipline, “business”. And this never ended ... even over braais and dinners at our place, his place, in restaurants, here in South Africa or even in his beloved England, he would question me, have a business dilemma to solve over our meal, ask my opinion on all sorts of business-related matters. What he began to show me was the interrelationship between systems and their properties, earlier described by Bertalanffy (1968) as: organisation, wholeness, directiveness, teleology and differentiation. These features introduce a lot of concepts like self-organisation, hierarchy of systems (physical to biological to human and social) through organisational properties, openness, feedback loops, circular causalities, nonlinear interactions, emergence of one level of organisation to the other, etc. (Le Coze, Salvi & Gaston, 2006). All these are core concepts of complexity that can be applied to several levels of the world, from physics, biology to society (and within that, to business and leadership). Prof. Bell later revealed that his initial (fatherly) hesitance with my wanting to defect to business, was that I was going to move from complicated technological systems – which were neat and obeyed certain rules – to complex human and social systems – which was less neat and very often did not obey a set of rules (as defined by Lemoigne, 1999). Complex systems which naturally require complex thought and study, as I learned, tackle the epistemological underlying issues of looking at the world through a systemic way (Le Coze, Salvi & Gaston, 2006) and which allows for richer pictures and representations of the world to emerge – it demands and should always be studied through its context, its wholeness, its multi-dimensions and its complexity (Morin, 2000).

I learned that because of its characteristics (contextual, wholeness, multidimensional and complexity) the management process needs to be carried out by generalists – this served to justify my decision to complete an MBA. However, specialists, such as engineers, mathematicians, psychologists, sociologists, etc. are also greatly needed. In fact, I came to understand that management processes, and the study thereof, needs to be carried out by specialists (who provide in-depth information, data, analyses on the processes and probabilities on the performance) and generalists (who collect and integrate the information provided by specialists, which they identify as relevant, and overcome the interface difficulties generated by the selected views of specialists). When I eventually went and did my MBA, I met some interesting folk, none more so than Prof Frank Horwitz (who himself was spanning the boundaries of human resources, law, sociology and psychology) – and who asked me one day (in planting a seed) if I ever considered academia as a career. He would

leave little notes and articles in my pigeon hole, which I appreciated ... and he still does so today!

What the afore-mentioned people taught me was what it meant to be responsible. What they demonstrated through their often selfless action was that it was important to look beyond your narrow confines as an individual, and to develop others and allow them to become powerful. In fact, when I co-authored my first book in 2000, I defined responsible leadership, based on my experiences with all of the people I mentioned above, as follows: “Responsible Leadership starts with an intention of wanting to be the best for the world, not necessarily only the best in the world. It is the basic call for all of humankind to become more than we currently are. But you can only be more if you, through purposeful action, help others and allow them, to be more than you. You can’t be more, if you don’t know how to be less.”

And when I went and started my PhD at the University of Oxford (UK), my supervisor, David Feeny inducted me into the Oxford method – where the concern is less for outcomes, but rather the focus is on the process of developing arguments, and rigorously establishing viewpoints, and made me write and re-write my literature review multiple times, each time drawing from another body of work and from different disciplines. So even though my PhD was in Information Technology, it draws on philosophy, economics, divinity studies, sociology, and so on.

INTERDISCIPLINARITY & HYBRIDISATION

From the technical (engineering) view to the sociological perspective (regarding organisational dimensions) through psychological and cognitive insights (introducing human factors), there is a wide range of possible sources of understanding, which are all of them complementary in theory (Turner, 1978; Le Coze, Salvi & Gaston, 2006).

In many ways, my mentors all introduced me to ideas relating to interdisciplinarity – and I do not want to get caught up in the semantics of whether it is cross-disciplinary, interdisciplinary, trans-disciplinary, inter-disciplinary or hybridisation – I merely want to ponder on the implications of spanning the nature of knowledge, the nature of experience, the character of problem-solving and sense-making, the structure of the University, the dialogue between science and humanities, and the theoretical relationships between various disciplines. It would seem, given the ancient nature of interdisciplinarity, quite odd not to consider its relevance in modern day academic pursuit, and the comfortableness with which we locate our primary identities, as academics, in one discipline or another.

In 1972 Erich Jantsch (1972: 102), at one of the early conferences on interdisciplinarity research and higher education, called for a new approach capable of fostering judgement in “complex and dynamically changing situations”. Indicative of the era, the organising languages of Jansch’s model of the system of education and innovation were logic, cybernetics, planning, general systems theory, and organisational theory. A decade later, Smirnov (1984: 71-72) identified “system-complex inter-disciplinarity” as one of the main ontological forms of interdisciplinary developments in modern science. According to Klein (2004), Smirnov believed the discovery of systems-forming and systems-organising links and regularities among distinct diverse departments, parts, and elements held the promise of elaborating a common theoretical structure. Knowledge itself, according to Klein (2004), which was once described as a foundation or linear structure, is today depicted as a network or a web with multiple nodes of connection, and a dynamic system. Images of boundary crossing and cross-fertilization are superseding images of disciplinary depth and compartmentalisation. Isolated modes of work are being supplanted by affiliations, coalitions and alliances. And, older values of control, mastery and expertise are being reformulated as dialogue, interaction and negotiation (Klein, 2004).

Surprisingly, a significant number of new specialities are even being borne out of the hybrid character of new knowledge. They constitute a second form of specialisation, focused on areas missed or only partially examined by traditional disciplinary specialities. Examples range from astrophysics and artificial intelligence, to medical anthropology and child development (Klein, 2004). Hybrids also beget other hybrids, especially in natural sciences, where higher degrees of fragmentation and hybridisation occur. Neuro-endocrinology, an alliance with neurophysiology is a second-generation hybrid. Dogan and Pahre (1990) view hybridisation as a general characteristic of knowledge production today. As innovative scholars move from the core to the margins of their disciplines, specialities are recombined continuously, with two results: (1) formally institutionalised subfields of one or another formal discipline or permanent committees or programs that regularise exchanges; and (2) informal hybridised topics, such as development, that may never become institutionalised fields.

Closer to my heart, the rethinking of theory has stimulated new historical-cultural (Klein, 2004), socio-political, socio-techno and socio-economic studies of the discursive practices relating to the family, ethnicity, the contested notion of ‘race’, power constructions, access, and the gendered nature of work. Such changes, Klein (2004) informs us, are often difficult to map, but its difficulty should not be justification for inaction to do so. In making the attempt in literary studies, Gunn (1992: 248-249) highlighted: “overlapping, underlayered, interlaced, crosshatched affiliations, coalitions and alliances”. The threading of disciplinary

principles and procedures is frequently “doubled, tripled and quadrupled in ways that are not only mixed but, from a conventional disciplinary perspective, somewhat off centre”. Interdisciplinary activities interconnect in a shifting matrix with unpredictable synergistic relationships (Klein, 2004). Some refer to it merely in passing, others claim a more analytical status with regard to its existence, while still others take more regional and thematic strongholds of their theory through terms such as: hybridity, collage, *mélange*, hotchpotch, montage, synergy, bricolage, creolisation, mongrelisation, syncretism, transculturation, or even third cultures. The “jungle of phenomena” (Huber, 1992: 195), or contiguous coexistent consciousness, associated with interdisciplinarity has implications for how we think about the place where knowledge is represented – the University.

But, not only are disciplines hybrid in nature, but so too are contexts – and none more so than our African, and in particular, South African context.

HYBRID CONTEXT

The canon of knowledge in the fields of management and leadership has been developed from Western capitalist principles, with leading thinkers in the field being mainly of American or European descent. These ideas have then been “exported” beyond Western boundaries as trade, and its accompanying practices, have expanded globally. Although some areas of the world may be willing to adapt to some of these Western practices, other areas such as in Asia and in Africa are not so willing.

The West has supplied leadership and management ideas, political systems, and economic infrastructures to Africa from colonial times to the present. Most Western theories used in organisations in Africa have not achieved their desired outcomes, however, because many Africans find they have to sacrifice their authenticity in order to fully embrace such Western ideals. This highlights the need to understand the African context and, in particular, the perspective of the African worker. African theories are seldom captured in literature, and specifically not in organisational literature – rather, the “African Way” has been to pass down the wisdom of the ages through the oral tradition. This no longer appears sufficient, as many Africans, particularly educated and skilled Africans, have been drawn to urban lifestyles, separating them from the traditional forms of oral transfer and placing them in direct contact with the Western organisational norms and cultures that dominate many of their employing organisations.

Increased international business activity and emphasis on globalisation have rekindled interest in the convergence/divergence debate among organisations. The *convergence* thesis maintains that economic ideology drives cultural values, such that exposure to Western ways of engaging in business will result in the adoption of Western values (Ralston et al., 1993). This suggests that a society’s value systems respond to technological advances, rather than to

indigenous cultural forces. As a result, industrialized nations will develop common values in the realm of economic activity and work-related behaviour. Culture, therefore, is treated merely as something accidental that could have been different.

The *divergence* perspective, on the other hand, recognizes national and cultural differences. Its proponents maintain that culture is deeply rooted and drives the values of any society beyond economic ideology. The divergence perspective is consistent with the dominant view of some cross-cultural theorists (e.g., Hofstede, 1980, 1991; Adler, 2002) who emphasize that all management practices are in large part culturally determined, although there is little consensus on the significance of particular cultural variables.

More recently, a third perspective has developed: *crossvergence*, based on acculturation theory within the field of anthropology. Ward et al. (1999) and Ralston et al. (1993) proposed that when two cultures meet, a blending of values may result. The crossvergence perspective therefore recognises the importance of economic ideology and national culture, as well as the importance of the synergetic interaction between the two. Moreover, it is consistent with a more balanced perspective of global integration and local responsiveness. Country-specific characteristics, such as culture, socioeconomics, political-legal climate, and technological factors, however, influence the meaning, interpretation, and implementation of the foreign practices in these organisations. Understanding these characteristics is necessary before crossvergence can be achieved. The influences of other cultures tend to lead to the development of a new hybrid value system, rather than a convergence of value systems. A common sense of identity within the emerging hybrid culture may be manifested as agreement on what the current situation in the organisation is, in terms of organisational and management attributes; what the ideal situation is, in terms of management style and such organisational factors as hierarchy, decision-making process, and control; and how the ideal contrasts with the way these aspects are likely to change. Logically, organisations are likely to evolve in a positive way if the various stakeholders concur on these fundamental matters.

The root difference between Western and African cultural perspectives stems from the principles on which they learn and develop throughout their lives. The Western world adopts a primarily scholastic approach based on facts, logic, and the nature of reality, whereas the African approach is based in humanism. In Western Europe, humanism originated in the study of classical culture and was part of the Renaissance that took place in the 14th and 15th centuries. It got its name from one of the era's most important goals: the promotion of a new educational curriculum. This curriculum consisted of *studia humanitatis*, or the humanities, a group of academic subjects concerning the human condition. Humanities subjects included grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry, and ethics. These disciplines were all studied, whenever possible, in the original classical texts and with a qualitative approach. The humanities curriculum conflicted with more traditional education that was based on scholasticism. Scholastic education concentrated on more "factual" subjects, such as logic, natural philosophy (science), and metaphysics, or the nature of reality. Scholars often clashed sharply over these two systems of education. A lot was at stake in these academic controversies, which were, and still are, related to the question: "What is education for?"

African humanism is embodied in ritual, story, cultural practices, symbolism, and myth, and takes the human being as the starting point, emphasising the dignity and worth of the individual. A basic premise of humanism is that human beings possess within themselves the capacity for *truth* and *goodness*. We are currently in a perverse situation in which the West is traversing a path toward a more humanistic approach, particularly in business and government, while Africa is being criticised for not being scholastic enough, be it in business, government, or society. Modern Africa still stresses the importance of human needs, both on an individual basis and, more importantly, on a collective basis. African humanism requires interconnected individuals to contribute to the welfare of the society in which they reside. This is Africa's gift to the world: social leadership within a context of humanistic citizenship. This approach may not be the most expedient or efficient, but it promises a more sustainable society.

This is unlikely to be a purely African phenomenon. There is evidence, from India (Jackson, 2002), for example, that hybrid human resource development systems are being designed to manage Western (instrumental) and Indian (humanistic) orientations in organisations. Their applicability in other regions, such as sub-Saharan Africa, needs to be investigated. The Japanese (holistic) management approach has also provided systems of management in East Asia that appear to be successful in collectivist societies, and they, too, may have some parallels with African societies. The influence of Asian management collectivist philosophy has to be taken into consideration, since Asian businesses have made significant investments (particularly in South Africa) in recent years. Ahiauzu (1986: 54) points out that “though he may work in industry, the African lives in a wider society; and it is from this society outside the workplace that the elements that constitute the framework within which the African indigenous thought-system operates derive.” This “thought system” includes features like a high degree of harmony between humans and the world around them, the use of symbolism to make sense of the world, a spiritual connection to something larger than the individual, the use of an oral tradition for passing on collective wisdom, and a strong emphasis on family and the immediate community. The importance of family is visible in the network of interrelationships, extended family and mutual obligations, similar to the paternalism found in Thai organisations (Kamoche, 2000). This results in a sense of communalism and traditionalism (Nzelibe, 1986; Onyemelukwe, 1973), which is not unlike the Confucian influence on Asian cultures (Horwitz, Kamoche & Chew, 2002).

Within post-colonial systems, management is oriented toward internal processes and power relations. Individuals' perception about the control they have over what happens to them is vital to their understanding of how they live and what their meaning in the world is (Shapiro, Schwartz, & Astin, 1996), and can affect how new experiences change the individual's behaviour. This perception is referred to as “*locus of control*” and stems from their expectations about what will happen following a particular behaviour (Rotter, Seeman, & Liverant, 1962). Western culture promotes an internal locus-of-control orientation; people are expected to perceive themselves as the active determiners of their fates and accept full responsibility for their outcomes. Over the years in Western society, the locus of control has become “good guys/bad guys,” with internality being substituted for “desirable, intelligent, and bright” and externality for “failure, dull, and inadequate” (Lefcourt, 1982: 182). The research and practice in the area has been biased by the popular assumption that internal locus of control is a positive asset and externality is a deficit (Evans, Shapiro, & Lewis,

1993). An internal locus of control became the “moral vision” of Western cultural ideology (Christopher, 1996), whereas African culture generally features an external locus of control. A useful alternative conceptualization of *locus of control*, in our attempt to find a *crossvergence way forward*, is provided by Wong & Sproule (1984). In their study, they noted the importance of distinguishing “realism” from “idealism,” suggesting that people’s reality tended to account for their external scores, and their ideals tended to account for their internal scores.

Building on this, it is possible to view *locus of control* as involving a two-dimensional view, such that dual control (or shared responsibility) can be described in terms of both internal and external *control*. Individuals who understand *control* to be from both internal and external sources could be considered to be “bilocals,” individuals who strike a healthy balance between beliefs in internal and external *control*. Wong & Sproule (1984) hypothesised that bilocals cope more effectively because they observe an optimal mix between personal responsibility (internal *control*) and reliance on appropriate outside resources (external *control*). Indeed, Gurin et al. (1978: 292) argued that scores of greater externality on measures of locus of control among minority (oppressed) groups were incorrectly interpreted in several reports as demonstrating that “cultural values and beliefs in external forces needed to be altered, when in fact [subjects’] sense of low personal control reflected a correct perception of a harsh environment over which they had little control.” Hence the importance of emphasising both internal and external aspects of control, instead of only the benefits of internal (ascribed to Western leaders/managers) or the distresses associated with external (ascribed mainly to African employees).

This is a sensible alternative to prevailing discussions of locus of control, and fits within a crossvergence perspective. In multicultural environments, bilocals are expected to be better adjusted than controllers (those with internal control beliefs) and controlees (those with external control beliefs) in many ways (Wong & Sproule, 1984). Others (e.g., Hannerz, 1969; Valentine, 1971; LaFromboise et al., 1993) have referred to the impact of cultural acquisition and the creative tension between maintaining a balance between internal and external control as “biculturalism.” The concepts of bilocals and biculturalism are key to making sense of the collective behaviour and social life, as well as the individual and work life, of the African community. Members of the community draw upon both a distinctive repertoire of standardised African group behaviour and, simultaneously, patterns derived from the mainstream cultural system of Western derivation. For most Africans, socialisation in both of the systems begins at an early age, at home and in school and through the mass media, and continues throughout life – and therefore the two are of equal importance.

An opportunity exists within the post-instrumental management system for a crossvergence hybrid model to emerge. Africans can extract useful Western knowledge while discarding dysfunctional practices, and combine the result with context-appropriate native insights and knowledge, thereby creating a unique hybrid. This also affords the West, and its institutions, the opportunity to enrich its own perspectives and reconstitute its organisations along the hybrid model, providing they are prepared “... to be shaped by more diverse cultures and perspectives, [then] there is every reason to expect that organisations will change” (Weber, 1993: 93). Valuing diversity in African workplaces seems to be compatible with stressing common goals and standards, provided the attention to diversity is not allowed to undermine

the emphasis on community and what the community stands for. Since African employees are engaged in common effort rather than individual effort, organisational processes and human resource practices and policies should seek to guide behaviour standards that address the collective effort (shared goals, shared rewards, shared performance standards, shared operating norms, and so forth). Yet Africa is far from one large, harmonious community. There are frictions and tensions between sub-communities as exist between different ethnic groups all around the world. The challenge becomes finding the right balance between the humanistic collective orientation of the community, and the different ethnicities and communities within the nation-state or even within the African Union. “If we do not recover and identify with the particularities of our community, then we shall lose what it is we have to contribute to the common culture. We shall have nothing to bring, nothing to give. But if each of us dwells too much, or even exclusively, upon his or her ethnic particularity, then we are in danger of fragmenting and even destroying the common life” (Alasdair MacIntyre, quoted in Quay, 1991).

LEADERSHIP

Twenty-first century society yearns for a leadership of possibility, a leadership based more on hope, aspiration, and innovation than on the replication of historical patterns of constrained pragmatism (Cameron, Dutton & Quinn, 2003; Seligman, 2002, 1998). Luckily, such a leadership is possible today, through anticipatory creativity. For the first time in history, companies can work backward from their aspirations and imagination rather than forward from their past (Hamel, 2000: 10). “The gap between what can be imagined and what can be accomplished has never been smaller” (Hamel, 2000: 10). Designing options worthy of implementation calls for levels of inspiration and passionate creativity that have been more the domain of artistic processes than of most managers (Adler, 2006). The shift from a focus on the leader, to an understanding of leadership, is challenging the very hierarchies and structures set up to uphold the heroic individual in positions of power.

Getting the Best out of all Workplace Archetypes (Can't Influence from Authority Anymore)

CLASSIC & INDIVIDUAL (LEADER)

Displayed by a person's **position** in a group or hierarchy (power is positional)

Leadership **evaluated** by whether the **leader solves problem**

Leaders provide solutions and answers

Distinct **differences between leaders and followers**: character, skill, etc.

Independence is highly valued – **lead on one's own**

Communication is often **formal**

Can often rely on **secrecy, deception and payoffs**

INCLUSIVE & SHARED (LEADERSHIP)

Identified by the **quality of people's interactions** rather than their position (power is negotiated)

Leadership **evaluated** by **how people are working together**

All work to **enhance the process** and to make it **more fulfilling**

People are **interdependent**. **All are active participants** in the process of leadership

Communication is crucial with a stress on **conversation**

Values **democratic processes, honesty** and **shared ethics**. Seeks a **common good**

Major corporations these days are inviting poets and artists into their workplaces, to address their executives, to run development workshops, they are learning the practice of mindfulness, they are exploring portraiture and clay modelling, they are working with lego to better understand strategy, they dance and touch, they are using comic graphic artists to enrich scenarios, they ask symphony conductors and jazz bands to help employees explore all of their intelligences and draw on the aural, the aesthetic, the visual, the tactile, and embody the cognitive, the emotional, as well as the spiritual. And, at the Graduate School of Business, we are doing the same.

LEADERSHIP & THE ARTS

I find that I am most creative when I am able to simultaneously answer my own anxieties through my work. Anxieties which carry questions with it: How do I leave a theoretical legacy? How do I best communicate my intentions? If I write that, what will people think of me? When do I compromise, and when do I take a full stance? Am I a fraud? What is my own contribution?

In many ways, to bring together, in a synergistic manner, that which is most illuminating of my own life, my own curiosities, my own sense-making, and ultimately adds value to organisations, communities and societies. I find that I research from a very deep, personal quest. Why would leaders, managers and employees not do the same?

Why am I here? I struggle with identity, I always have. The pioneer African-American intellectual, DuBois (1903/1961: 16-17), best captures my dual personal sense of tragedy and strength in the face of adversity: “It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength keeps it from being torn asunder”.

I find that I often ponder on this twoness: a person of colour; an academic in which I am a minority voice. I do not want to belong (loyalty sucks) but enjoy belonging to an institution like the University of Cape Town. I do not want to be only South African, but want to be a global citizen, yet I am immensely proud of being South African (and Capetonian, in particular). I suppose, I have been most comfortable, and most tired, in bounded fluidity – not too many rules and procedures, but also not such slackness that excellence is compromised. I too feel the endless gaze of perceived colleagues (in this, but also other Universities globally), whom I assume are continuously measuring me against what it means to a world-class academic. When I sit in Senate, I have mixed feelings: I feel honoured (sometimes disbelieving) of my presence amongst such academic and societal giants, but also feel that I can never rest: their and my burning desire to ever improve pushes me on, to want to do more, to expand the boundaries, to push the envelope ... there is never rest. This got me thinking.

Why do we take on knowledge, why do we take on assumptions that other people have given us. When I first entered academia, I taught Information Technology and Leadership, and I was pushed by the then Director of the Business School to be in one discipline, to specialise – later on, though, I taught and researched both Knowledge Management and Leadership, and ultimately today I teach and research Leadership, Diversity and Inclusion. The joy I receive by working across disciplines is what keeps me engaged in academia, else I would have been long gone. I am reminded about the work of Leonardo Da Vinci who showed us that one can be both a specialist and a generalist at the same time. Not long ago, I sat in a meeting in the Robotics Lab in the Mechanical Engineering Department of the University of Cape Town, with engineers who were drawing on theory relating to mechanics, materials science,

chemistry, and mathematics, computer scientists who were drawing on artificial intelligence theory, Bayesian understanding from statistical sciences, and psychological principles relating to the A- and B-brain, and I was representing business with my systemic understanding of engineering.

It was my mother who nurtured my self-esteem – when I was in primary and high school, my school reports always stated that I should “stop the incessant chatter” and “cut out the clowning so that I may amount to something one day”. My dad, who attended PTA meetings, used to get quite upset with me. In fact, if it was today, I most likely would have been diagnosed as ADHD, given a pill, and told to calm down. But, as Sir Ken Robinson, likes to point out, it was not an available condition then, and people did not know they could have that. Instead, my mother explained that my dad was upset because he had to face the teachers’ distaste of my ‘difference’, and that teachers did not really know what they were talking about because they went to school, went to teacher’s training college, and then went back to school – so, she said: “Don’t let them ever tell you what you can and cannot be”. And ... for some reason, I chose to believe my mom – and today, I quite happily earn my living through incessant chatter.

Academia, I have found, is a much more constructive outlet for my anger, generated from not fitting the contemporary mould (whether that was my colour/ethnicity during Apartheid, my refusal to be boxed into a single discipline, or standing in criticism of some things which my community held dear).

CONCLUSION

With everything in life, there is a place of balance, and so it is quite critical to be able to look at associations between objects, people, their relationships, knowledge and sense-making constructs. So many instances and experiences in my life have been in places out of balance (often my most creative moments, and highest periods of learning have been experienced in this way). In fact, it was the University of Cape Town which helped grow my learning outlook, my life of imbalance – late nights, many of which were spent in the iconic Rondebosch all-night restaurant, Kuzmas, long hours trying to solve Physics weekly problem sets with many of my classmates, work and academic pursuit at the expense of my well-being, not saying ‘no’, pushing the boundaries, challenging the status quo – everything good academics recognise.

I have discovered that it is most often when I am not in the know that I learn best. And, I only begin to ‘notice’, truly ‘notice’ through the absence of things, absence of people, absence of knowledge, absence of sense-making constructs. When I was doing my Engineering Masters degree, under the supervision of Prof John Bell, I would regularly call him over to my desk to show him ‘something’ to do with my experiment. However, he would always ask me what I ‘noticed’ – this always threw me off ... I wanted to show him ‘something’, but he wanted to know what I had ‘noticed’. The ‘something’ I was wanting to show him, was secondary to him (almost obvious), but the ‘noticing’ was primary to him. What I learnt over time was that in order to ‘notice’, I almost always had to draw from other disciplines (thermodynamics, physics, mathematics, management history, etc.). He would, for instance, call our home on a Saturday morning at 6h10am and claim to be sitting on his porch, looking at the mountain. He would, for example, ask me whether I knew anything about meteorites, and I would answer: “very little”. “Well” he’d say, “they are falling toward the earth, and when they enter the earth’s atmosphere, many burn up and explode”, “Yes” I would reluctantly respond. He would continue: “I wonder what the effect is of those explosions on wind drafts around Table Mountain ... see you in the lab in 30 minutes”. I had to rush through to varsity on a Saturday morning, and he and I would work on this for two months, designing experiments, taking measurements – drawing on disciplines for which I had no real grounding or rigorous education. We would ultimately get to some satisfactory answer, after which he would instruct me to abandon the experiment, and return to my engineering Masters work. Prof Bell was just endlessly curious, and could talk about anything (this, many found to be the basis of his charm).

I suppose, where I am in life now, I am seeking whether it is possible to stay productive (and all the other things mentioned above) while living more balanced. As I hang onto the hope that it can be so, and seek to solve that question for myself, I also ply my energies to help organisations (in my view, the ultimate unbalanced system) achieve such balance. I am not an NGO person, nor do I enjoy working in hospitals or old-age homes. My energy is consumed by trying to enrich the intellectual genealogy of contemporary understanding, that makes it possible for others to find peace and rest for their own strivings and shift the ethos away from quiet pain – and such understanding seeking cultural recombinations, renegotiation of power and ideology, and celebrates mongrelisation, hybridity and perhaps even a reconciliation. So my moral response has been to help organisational life become more fulfilling for more employees – and I choose to do so through the people at the very top. There are eleven levels of anxiety, and they all operate at the same time. Business people are multi-dimensional in this sense – so I often see my role as assisting business people find solutions (at best) or calming (more common) some levels of naturally occurring anxiety.

I have come to recognise that being in balance allowed me to see the “something”. Being out of balance, however, allows me to “notice” something. Prof. Bell did not tell me, but I

witnessed in his life: (a) he had time for Dot, family, walks, chats, sleep, he followed sport and the stock market, and (b) that one has to *become* the story to understand yourself, understand others, and in order to teach authentically, and (c) that being specialised makes you ‘a something’, but being a hybrid transforms you into ‘a noticer’.

So, if I would answer a rephrased statement in the form of a question, namely: “Is Business A Discipline: my answer would be, “Yes, a Hybrid Discipline”!

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