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Communicating the Right Relationship— For Now

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This paper begins from the stance that the “meaning” of collaborations, alliances or any social relationships is not automatically shared by all partners in such relationship and, indeed may, in some instances, be incomprehensible to one or more parties. This lack of a common meaning derives from the specificity of cultural constructions overlying a commonality of evolved psychological mechanisms. By drawing extensively on anthropological theory, I construct a preliminary model to both explain this lack of common meaning, and show why certain specific safeguards identified by other researchers on alliances and collaborations are so important in collaborative relationships.

INTRODUCTION

The paper argues that many of the problems arising in the discussion of alliances and collaboration do so because of one simple problem: an assumption of a commonality of meaning. The assumption about a commonality of meaning derives from the implicit cultural assumption of the form and details of a collaboration and creates an outward appearance of Durkheimian organic solidarity. The problem, of course, is that any form of organic solidarity relies on both implicit and explicit trust in the actions of the other and, if this trust is broken, leads to a dissolution or weakening of social solidarity (Durkheim, 1984). This breakdown in social solidarity, in turn, may also lead to both structural, cultural and ideological changes (Rappaport, 1968).

Much of the foundational theoretical literature in the field (i.e., Durkheim, 1984; Weber, 1947) has operated on the assumption that analysis must be conducted on national structures (i.e., social structures, national culture, etc.), and this assumption has carried over into more recent literature with problematic results (see Hofstede and Peterson, 2000 on some of the current problems with this in relation to the concept of culture). The primary purpose of this paper is to reconstruct implicit theoretical assumptions about the operation of primary social relations and their cultural applications drawing on current research and knowledge in anthropology and communications theory.

At its core, the concept of collaboration relies on two higher order concepts: social relationships and communications. In this paper, I argue that in order to answer questions of how collaborations may happen

such as “What kind of collaboration and cooperation are needed and in what circumstances?”, we must first ask what is happening in terms of social relationships, communications strategies and symbol systems.

While the medium may be the message, as McLuhan argued, all media include assumptions about the form(s) of social relations involved between the communicating parties. These assumptions about social relations contain culturally specific components built around core forms that appear to be part of our evolutionary heritage (Fiske, 1992). The answer to the question of “what kind of collaboration” is appropriate depends on the cultural assumptions of the parties involved including external social structural pressures (e.g., legal requirements).

This paper draws from both anthropological and communications theories in order to construct a taxonomic model of social relationship/communications strategies as a first step towards constructing a larger theory of alliances-collaboration. I start by examining exactly what the concept of culture is inside anthropology. Anthropological understandings of culture have influenced the management discourse on culture in several broad waves: the human relations movement, the concept of national culture (e.g., Hofstede and Peterson, 2000), and various concepts such as organizational culture (e.g., Trice and Beyer, 1993). The current wave of anthropological influence in management theorising appears in notions of organizational culture (cf. Ashkanasy, Wilderom and Peterson [2000] for an overview) and, to a limited degree, in the application of evolutionary psychology (e.g., Nicholson, 1997).

This is followed by an examination of the basic forms of social relationships put forward by Fiske (1991). Fiske, a cultural anthropologist, drawing from both the work of Malinowski and Polanyi as well as evolutionary psychology, argues that each basic form of social relationship is part of our evolutionary heritage. Individual cultures define where specific forms are to be employed at any given point in time. In effect, while there is an assumption of a biological limitation in basic forms, cultures define when any particular form is to be used, in what manner, and how they may be modified: there is an interplay between nature and nurture. Each of these forms has inherent assumptions about how a relationship is constructed, how communications are managed within that relationship, and who may be involved in specific types of relationships (i.e., collaboration, alliances). Often, these inherent assumptions are part of the particular meaning assumed by individuals with regard to a specific symbol such as an alliance, collaboration or networking.

The role of symbols and symbol systems is crucial to the interface between Fiske’s model and later management work. It is not only the role that symbols may play within an organization and its culture (e.g., Alvesson and Berg, 1992), but also the role that symbols play as a medium of negotiation of meaning between people with different assumptions. Given the crucial role played by symbols in this negotiation, I draw on the work of Victor Turner (1967) to examine the operation of symbols in such a negotiation of meaning. Turner’s work has

been central to the study of symbolism in anthropology and ritual studies since the early 1970's.

Because specific forms of relationships are culturally and sub-culturally defined as appropriate to specific situations, conflict can easily arise surrounding which form is appropriate to this situation. Even if the same basic form of relationship is assumed by both partners in a collaboration, the exact details of how that form will be enacted may well differ. These two problematic areas, the specific form to choose and the exact details of the chosen form, account for the importance of many of the building blocks identified by Pitsis, Kornberger and Clegg (2004) as crucial to the success of any collaboration.

CULTURE AND BRAIN MODULARITY

The concept of culture has been assigned many different general meanings over the years, even though the core meaning has remained fairly constant since Tylor (1871) defined it as «that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society». The key words that illustrate the core meaning are “capabilities” and “habits”.

In order to reconfirm this core meaning as well as deal with the multiplicity of secondary meanings, Jordan (1994) argued that anthropologists use the term “culture” in two main forms. As I noted elsewhere: «The first concerns the ability of humans to generate symbolic and material “interfaces” (artifacts, organizations, belief systems, and the like) between themselves and their environments. The second meaning refers to the specific, historically situated interface structures of a particular group, a meaning often referred to as “the culture of [a specific group].» (Tyrrell, 2000b: 86).

Each of these current meanings reaffirms the core meaning used by Tylor even though they are cast in a more modern form of the language. Outside of linguistic usage, the only difference between Tylor's definition and those put forth by Jordan lies in the current practice of distinguishing the general ability from its specific instances.

The idea of culture as an interface has led many anthropologists to examine what stands on either side of the interface. In the case of the “external”, “objective” world (as opposed to the social world) this has led to the extensive use of natural science models (cf. Rappaport, 1979). In the case of the “human” side of the interface, most models have come out of either psychology or biology. Since Laughlin's work on the neurological basis of consciousness (e.g., Laughlin and D'Aquili, 1974) and Fodor's (1983) work on brain modularity, one of the more useful lines of thought has centered around the concept of an evolved psychology (cf. Cosmides and Tooby, 1992). In its simplest form, the argument is that thought depends on neurological structures in the brain that have evolved as a result of natural selection over several million years. As Cosmides and Tooby put it (1997: 11), «Our modern skulls house Stone Age Minds».

The idea of using models from evolutionary psychology to study business problems has been advanced by several authors (e.g., Nicholson, 1997; Tyrrell, 2000b; Tyrrell and Pitsis, 2002; Plowman and Gardner, 2003). However, with the exception of Plowman and Gardner (2003) this has tended to concentrate on the better-known forms of evolutionary psychology, i.e., those put forward by Cosmides and Tooby (1992). There are, however, several other stands of evolutionary psychology that may be fruitfully applied; in particular the work of Alan P. Fiske on relational models.

THE ELEMENTARY FORMS OF SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Fiske's argument is straightforward: every human interaction is defined by one of five primary relational models. While each of these relational models is what Weber (1947) referred to as an ideal type, they are also characterized by a form of social debt/obligation calculus. Fiske has identified five primary relational models, including the "null set" (i.e., no relationship). Each of the other four is described in the following sub-sections.

COMMUNAL SHARING

The basic Communal Sharing (CS) relationship may be described as "what's mine is yours and vice versa". It is the ideal described by many communitarian authors: "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need" or, that ideal ascribed to mothers caring for their infants. In most North American cultures, this form of relationship is really only appropriate for the mother/father-infant relationship and certain religious groups. Its application in a business environment, at least in North America, appears to be limited to situations of natural disaster, such as the 1998 ice storm, and to some charitable acts.

AUTHORITY RANKING

Authority Ranking (AR) relationships are those relationships where one person may tell another person what to do and both will expect that the lower ranking person will do it. This relationship is not, however, completely asymmetrical: the right to give orders implies the responsibility to care for those to whom you give orders within the range of the relationship. This is probably one of the two core relationships that we are most familiar with. When researchers talk about "span of control", "management prerogatives", or "chain of command" they are describing an authority ranking relationship.

The authority ranking relationship so familiar to the Euro-American culture is not, by any stretch of the imagination, the only form of authority ranking relationship. In most Western business cultures, the "authority" in an AR relationship derives from holding an office within an organization (cf Weber, 1947, etc.). There are, however, other authority systems that impact global businesses operations. For example, in most European cultures class or what Weber called *Herrenschaft*

(sometimes translated as “traditional authority”) plays an almost equal role to that of office or position. In many cultures that are lineage/clan oriented, such as most of China, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, etc., authority is invested in a person via a combination of placement within the lineage and age while, over the past 20 years, authority in many industries in North America has been invested in individual knowledge/competence.

EQUALITY MATCHING

An Equality Matching (EM) relationship is one based on “tit for tat” or reciprocity (Malinowski, 1922; Gouldner 1960; Mauss, 1990). Unlike the apparently simple form of “you scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours”, equality matching relationships can be expanded extensively and, in a number of cases (e.g., Sahlins, 1972; Polanyi, 1977; Mauss, 1990), become the basis of entire economic systems. In some Euro-American cultures, such as Canada, reciprocity/EM systems have taken on a major role in finding employment (cf. Tyrrell, 2000a; 2000b; Tyrrell and Pitsis, 2002).

The question of when to evoke an equality matching relationship is, as with all relationships, defined by specific cultures as are the specific lengths to which people are willing to go to achieve a successful resolution. For example, few people in North America would not let a friend know about a job opportunity if they were looking for employment. The typical “pay back” (reciprocal action) for such a piece of information in Ottawa would be buying the person a beer and both would consider it even, although mutual trust would have been strengthened.

Equality matching relationships rely on the concept of delayed pay back—the owing of favours if you will. No specific accounting is kept, so that the relationship between individuals is always in a state of flux. As long as some exchange on both sides continues, a giving and taking of favours, the relationship continues and, as long as the favours are of roughly equal value, expectational trust will continue to strengthen. In China for example, this is referred to as *guanxi*, a particularly strong form of EM.

MARKET EXCHANGE

A Market Exchange (ME) relationship is the classic form of exchange upon which capitalism is (supposedly) based (Smith, 1981). These relationships exist between two (or more) people only for the length of time necessary to complete an exchange of goods/services/money. The culturally acceptable use of market exchange relationships is one of the most problematic for North Americans. For example, it is perfectly acceptable for a market exchange relationship to exist in the hiring of employees (e.g., signing bonuses, referral fees, etc.). The converse, a potential employee “buying” a job, is considered to be immoral, unless it is a franchise.

We see exactly the same problems arising in situations where a market exchange relationship is customary when dealing with state officials. Bribery, or the purchase of a specific service by a government official, is considered immoral in most Euro-American cultures, but is

considered to be perfectly normal and accepted in many other cultures (e.g., southern China, India, etc.). Likewise, the culturally accepted (in North America) use of a market exchange relation in the selling of AIDS drugs to African nations provokes a strongly negative reaction from those African nations.

Even in situations where both sides involved in a transaction agree that a market exchange relationship is appropriate, there are still frequent problems over how far the relationship should be interpreted. There is clearly a definitional problem in what constitutes the basis of inclusion in a market exchange relationship. What is to be included or not included frequently constitutes an international problematic, where most nations/cultures have their own systems. For example, in the Dominican Republic, employment relationships are an almost pure form of market exchange relationship and, hence, subject to termination at will. In the United States, a similar relationship holds but moderated to some degree by legislation and unionization. In Canada, we find a situation similar to the United States, moderated by a common law principle of corporate responsibility for ex-employees (see Tyrrell, 2000a) and in France, terminations generally require a one-year notice period, whereas in former Soviet countries, such as Kazakhstan, termination is illegal unless dereliction of duty can be proven, a lengthy, and costly procedure. The relationship of employment shifts from an almost pure market exchange relationship in the Dominican Republic to fairly far away in Kazakhstan.

LINKING ELEMENTARY RELATIONSHIPS AND CULTURE

What does adopting Fiske's model give us? First, it allows us to identify core relationships within cultural specificities. Second, it can alter the way in which we view culture. Let us consider the first point: if we return to the basic definitions of culture noted above: 1/culture is the ability to construct symbolic interfaces between a group of humans and their environment, and 2/specific interfaces are referred to as a "culture of...". When we measure and/or describe a particular culture, such as a national culture, we are describing a "culture of...". Inevitably, given the first definition of culture, any particular description of a "culture of..." will be limited in time and space based on the ongoing utility of that particular symbolic interface in the day to day environment.

We need to unpack the term "symbolic interface" in reference to cultures. The historical introduction of human-machine interfaces and, in particular, of computer user interfaces, has created a common understanding of symbolic interface as something where you click an icon and an event happens. This understanding is far too mechanistic for a proper understanding of how culture, as a symbolic interface, operates. For Turner (1967), symbols and, in particular ritual symbols, have three components: condensation, unification and polarization.

The term "condensation" means that «[m]any things and actions are represented in a single formation.» (Turner, 1967: 28). By way of

example, think of the symbol “Enron” or any corporate name. All components linked to that symbol (name) will be condensed within that symbol and will be unpacked by individuals based on the knowledge of and reactions to specific components. The particular selection of which components will be unpacked depends on the individual based on their personal experiences.

For Turner (1967: 28), “unification” or, more properly, the «unification of disparate significata» refers to the property of a symbol to interconnect «significata (...) by virtue of their common possession of analogous qualities or by association in fact or thought». This property of unification may be more easily understood as the ability of a symbol to connect, at an emotional/reactional level a sign with a particular emotional reaction. Most advertising campaigns aim at associating particular events spaces with their brand names. Consider, by way of example, the association of alcohol consumption with social, party settings in North America, or the association of a particular brand of beer in Canada (Molson Canadian) with Canadian nationalism.

The third and final property is “polarization of meaning”. For Turner (1967: 28), «[a]t one pole is found a cluster of significata that refer to components of the moral and social order (...) to principles of social order [... while a]t the other pole, the significata are usually natural and physiological phenomena and processes. Let us call the first of these the “ideological pole,” and the second the “sensory pole.” (...) At the sensory pole are concentrated those significata that may be expected to arouse desires and feelings; at the ideological pole one finds an arrangement of norms and values that guide and control persons as members of social groups and categories».

This property of polarization is crucial for an understanding of how culture, as a symbolic interface, acts to guide and channel interpretation and social action.

Let us consider a particular example: networking. In much of North America, networking is held to be the best way to find employment (cf. Tyrrell, 2000a). Networking has also achieved the status of a symbol in North American job search literature and can be found in all job search programs in North America. The North American understanding of networking, and I am glossing over regional differences, is centered around a basic social relationship of Equality Matching—reciprocity or “you scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours”. Broadly speaking, there are two social categorizations of people with whom to network: people who must help you, based upon pre-existing social relationships (“strong ties”), and people who might help you (“weak ties”—see Granovetter, 1973).

The construction of unemployment as a ritual process between 1975 and the present in Canada formalized particular symbols including networking (cf Tyrrell, 2000a). Part of this process was the symbolic construction of an understanding of the power of weak ties in a job search, along with the formalization of the emergent *communitas* (shared experience and the mutual understanding that comes from it) amongst job searchers (cf. Tyrrell, 2000a; Tyrrell and Pitsis, 2002). In its simplest form, unemployment was being constructed as a common occurrence

beyond anyone's control and, hence, something that may happen to anyone. The shared possibility, and for many the reality, of unemployment created a shared experience, *communitas*, amongst diverse people. This shared possibility changed the emotional connotation of networking, the sensory pole of the symbol and, gradually, the ideological pole of the symbol shifted as well to match the lived experience of individuals (cf Tyrrell, 2000a, Ch. 7-9).

In 2004, many Canadians know "how to network", even though there is actually a diversity of meaning associated with that symbol. The same is not true of many newcomers to Canada who do not share the same polarization of meaning as many Canadians. For example, in China one would not ask for information and help from someone with whom one does not have a particular established tie (frequently a kinship tie). Indeed, the very act of asking for help may shame the individual and the lineage thereby destroying the lineage ties that grant access to resources. Furthermore, since many weak ties are established by socializing with others, the distinct cultural differences between recent Chinese immigrants and their co-workers frequently led to little if any social interaction and, hence, few weak ties were established (cf. Tyrrell and Wang, 2001). For many of the recently immigrated Chinese high tech workers laid off between 2000 and 2003 the core of the problem lay in the difference between how one accesses employment. In China, employment is accessed via an Authority Ranking relationship (within a lineage) and, secondarily, via an age-grade Equality Matching relationship.

If something as "simple" and "obvious" as networking can be so easily misunderstood what, then, can we say about something as "complex" as an alliance?

COMMUNICATING THE RIGHT RELATIONSHIP

How can we communicate what we mean by alliance or collaboration? Each of these terms is, in essence, a symbol that conveys multiple meanings and implications. Interorganizational collaboration (IOC) has been defined by Gray (1989: 5) as «[a] process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible». Huxham's (1996) definition concentrates on communications, exchange and risk sharing. These definitions are useful but, ultimately, subject to problems since the processes involved must, of necessity, change as the symbolic meaning of collaboration changes.

In a paper on interorganizational synthesis, Pitsis, Kornberger and Clegg (2004) identify ten core building blocks. The identification of these building blocks was based on five years of empirical research (see Pitsis, Clegg, Rura-Polley and Marosszeky, 2002; Clegg, Pitsis, Rura-Polley, and Marosszeky, 2002). As presented, these building blocks are useful as guideposts in constructing an interorganizational collaboration identifying, as they do, crucial areas of concern and potential mis-communication.

For the purposes of this paper, however, it is necessary to look at them somewhat differently—as indicators of key areas necessary to construct a shared “culture of...” or, at the minimum, a shared understanding of the symbolic meaning of a particular collaboration. These building blocks may be grouped into three main themes: formal structures, knowledge (broadly construed) and material resources, ideology and emotion. Formal structures include systems of governance, key resource areas and contracts. Knowledge and material resources include all aspects of knowledge—expertise, knowledge management, training, knowledge exchange, etc., along with all available technologies. Ideology and emotion include areas such as trust, commitment to an enterprise, an alliance culture (see Pitsis, Clegg, Rura-Polley and Marosszeky, 2002; Pitsis, Kornberger and Clegg (2004), leadership, and vision and mission.

These three main themes were chosen because they parallel the core components of symbols in a ritualized setting (Turner, 1967; 1969). Knowledge and material resources are the observable base for a collaboration. In and of themselves, they are incapable of guaranteeing a successful collaboration (or ritual). They are necessary but insufficient conditions for further communication and collaboration. Indeed, the assumption that two (or more) potential partners share a natural fit, based solely on material resources and available knowledge systems, has led to numerous collaborations that fail miserably. One need only consider the case of the telecommunications industry where a reliance on a supposed natural fit of technologies has frequently led to expensive and, ultimately useless mergers, acquisitions and alliances.

What of the formal structures involved in a collaboration? Clearly, they are crucial to the success of the venture but, in and of themselves, they are not sufficient to guarantee success. One might even note that, in an objective sense, formal contracts and governance structures are not strictly necessary but, rather, merely an outgrowth of risk containment and bureaucratic sensibilities. After all, how many successful collaborations have been undertaken based solely on a handshake?

Key Resource Areas (KRAs) do, however, appear to be a necessary condition for a successful collaboration. As Pitsis, Kornberger and Clegg (2004: 60-61) note, «It cannot be overemphasised how critical is the good design of KRAs. KRAs refer to the core aspects of a project upon which success will be measured. These can include the traditional Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) such as budget and schedule. However, more recently, as projects have become more politicised and open to public scrutiny, and there has been a shift towards more sustainable practices, the KPIs might also include “community”, “ecology”, and “sustainability”».

Part of the reason why the good design of KRAs is a necessary condition for the success of a collaboration is simple: KRAs define success or, more specifically, the agreed upon indicators that will be used by all partners in the measurement of success. As such, KRAs are both ideological and specific to a project—both part of the formal structure and, also, part of the ideological and emotional structure.

The third theme identified is the ideological and emotional theme. In many ways, this is the most crucial stream involved in a collaboration, at least for our purposes, since it centers on the collaboration as a symbol. Let us consider the components of this theme: trust, commitment to an enterprise, an alliance culture, leadership, and vision and mission. All of these components, with the possible exception of vision and mission, centre around two basic questions: 1/what social relations are the base of this collaboration, and 2/how shall individuals act within the collaboration?

Let us, for the moment, concentrate on the concept of alliance culture. At its core, this concept refers to the specific, "culture of...", an alliance/collaboration. It is the (hopefully) shared symbolic interface of the people involved in the collaboration operating within the environment encapsulating that collaboration. In speaking of alliance cultures, Pitsis, Kornberger and Clegg (2004: 59-60) note that «[t]here are professional consultancies that facilitate culture design. There are also certain initiatives organizations can use to build an alliance culture for synthesis. This can include the set up of vision and mission statements, and the design of innovative key performance indicators or key resource areas (KRAs), and enculturation programs like intensive workshops where stakeholders and employees are trained on KRAs and the interorganizational collaboration vision and mission. However, (...) there is a risk of having too strong a culture. A designer culture can take on cult-like properties where members blindly follow the vision and mission without questioning problems or errors as they occur».

The key point I wish to take out of this description surrounds the concept of designer culture—a symbolic interface created and instilled by professional consultancies and other organizations. At best, such a designer culture is a contingent culture (Tyrrell, 2000b) dependant upon the continuation of the collaboration. It lacks the grounding in everyday experienced reality and, as such, requires additional components in order to contain uncertainty, hence the danger of a designer culture becoming cult-like¹.

There are other dangers inherent in the deliberate construction of an alliance culture. In particular, unless the specific social relationships are clearly expressed, accepted by all partners (the people involved as well as the organizations), and then acted upon it will be impossible to establish trust within the collaboration. Trust, as a concept, revolves around the ability of one individual to predict the actions/reactions of another individual. But, in order to predict actions, one must first have a guideline to what those actions should be. These guidelines are the sub-conscious expectations of a particular social relationship filtered through a particular set of cultural filters and, if these guidelines are breached, trust disappears.

Leadership is a special case of appropriate action. Recent discussions of Emotional Intelligence (EQ) have noted that the ability to integrate the disparate needs, wants and desires of stakeholders is crucial to the success of a collaboration (Frost, Dutton, Worline, and Wilson, 2000). For Mayer (1999), this is formalized as «the capacity to reason with emotion in four areas: to perceive emotion, to integrate it in thought, to

1. The containment of uncertainty is a major function of culture. On the relationship between uncertainty and culture, see Douglas and Wildavsky (1982) and Turner (1969).

understand it and to manage it». Given the disparity between the scientific and popular conceptions of EQ, this is worth pulling apart.

The ability to perceive emotions is operationalized via the reading of emotions on faces. Indeed, the ability to perceive emotions is quintessentially biological; rooted in an evolved psychological mechanism (cf. Baron-Cohen, 1996). The ability to integrate emotions into thought and to understand them requires the pre-existence of a taxonomy of emotional placement—one should feel happy when X happens and sad when Y happens. These taxonomies of emotional placement are biologically (pre-disposed neurological connections), culturally (an appropriate emotional response) and individually constructed. Finally, the ability to manage emotion implies the ability to deal with ones' own and others' emotions in a manner such that the emotion becomes a means towards a desirable end rather than an end in and of itself.

What, then, does this say about the concept of leadership? Clearly, successful leadership in a collaborative effort requires an extensive knowledge of emotional taxonomies, many of which are culturally defined, together with the ability to maintain a goal orientation. However, the path(s) towards the achievement of a goal tend to be culturally limited. Consider, by way of example, the divergent paths exemplified in the works of Machiavelli and Sun Tzu.

Let us consider the final two components of the ideological and emotional theme: commitment to an enterprise and vision and mission. The issue of commitment to an enterprise is noted by Pitsis, Kornberger and Clegg (2004: 59) in their discussion of technology and people. «Often what occurs in collaborations is the movement of staff from one partner organization to another. (...) [T]his can often be detrimental because the key staff member will leave a parent organization for a partner organization when she or he perceives the parent organization is not providing a suitable working environment to match his or her skills, abilities, needs and wants».

The ability to commit to an enterprise requires individuals to move between organizational environments: from a parent organization to a partner organization, from project to project, etc. For individuals, the crucial ability is to adapt and commit to the organization at hand—where they currently are, be it a project team, a joint venture or a partner company.

For parent organizations, however, this individual ability is somewhat problematic in that it increases individual mobility and decreases the reliance of an individual on a particular organization. Often, this problem is discussed in terms of “corporate loyalty” (see Beyer, Hannah and Milton, 2000). It is crucial to understand, however, that loyalty implies a social relationship where the rights and obligations of each member of the relationship are defined and, in some way, are symmetrical. Current North American conceptions of loyalty derive from an authority ranking relationship where loyalty was exchanged for security. This cultural equation, at least in North America, is no longer valid for individuals as witnessed by the extensive use of downsizings, firings and outsourcing (see Tyrrell, 2000a: Ch. 6 and 7).

For Pitsis, Kornberger and Clegg (2004: 63), the vision and mission are entwined. As they describe them, «[v]ision is the grand picture of

where the collaboration wants to end up at some point in the future. The mission is an identifying statement of the collaborations stated objectives and intentions of how it will get to where it wants to go». This is such a clear statement that one is tempted to just quote it and pass on. This, however, would be a mistake.

Central to their definition of vision and mission is the concept of “the collaboration”. Inherent within this concept is the idea of an “us-ness”: we, those in collaboration, versus them, those who are not in collaboration. However, this sense of “us versus them” requires that there be an “us” in the first place. It is useful to recast the concept of vision in an older form: the visions of prophets. In his discussions on religion, Max Weber (1963: C.1) argued that prophets are «individual bearer[s] of charisma, who by one’s mission proclaims religious teaching or divine commandment».

Charisma, for Weber, is a social attribute held by an individual rather than an inherent property of that individual. That charisma is a social attribute is not surprising since religion is grounded in the structures of society. For Durkheim (1915: 47), religion is «a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them». Durkheim’s (1915: 417) conclusion surrounding cultic practice are notably on point: «[t]he cult is not simply a system of signs by which the faith is outwardly translated; it is a collection of means by which this is created and recreated periodically». If we were to substitute collaboration or alliance for Church and cult, we would find that we had a working description of a successful alliance (assuming that the practices were efficacious).

Both of the terms vision and mission have religious roots. What has been lost in the translation is the sweeping grandeur and social grounding in the modern, secular, profit-oriented concepts. Compare, by way of example, the difference between President Kennedy’s May 25th, 1961 call to land a manned mission on the moon versus Nortel Networks “What Do You Want The Internet To Be” campaign of 1999. Visions, as any prophet knows, are grounded in human longing and socio-cultural perceptions of reality.

This grounding of a vision is crucial. What is often forgotten in the hype surrounding collaborative visions is that they must be grounded in some deep seated human need or, in other words, grounded in a basic social relationship which has been defined as culturally appropriate for the organization to explore. And it is this grounding that can cause problems in a collaborative effort. It is not enough to say that “I have a vision of us controlling the world of X”. In order to engage and motivate all of the stakeholders (both people and organizations), the vision must address all of their needs.

CONCLUSIONS

There is a classic paradox in cultural anthropology that can be summed up in the phrase “the map is not the territory and the map is

the territory” (cf. Bateson, 1991). This apparent paradox is usually resolved by noting that cognized reality, that which we perceive and conceive, is not the same as operational reality (“the map is not the territory”). However, since we are unable to perceive operational reality, we must use our perceptions and conception, our culture, in order to navigate through operational reality (“the map is the territory”).

Maps and cultures are not, however, created *sui generis*. They are grounded in human biological reality, extended by our technologies and conditioned/mutated by our environments. They are composed of symbols, rather than signs, and condition how we live our lives by defining what is and is not possible, desirable and appropriate. In the realm of social relations, we appear to be limited to five core forms of social relationships which are extended, mutated and conditioned by our cultures and environments. Often, this conditioning must be subconscious, sacred, because to examine it would be to consciously admit that it is an approximation and we cannot know absolute (operational) reality. As Socrates noted in Plato’s Apology, «I am the wisest man alive, for I know one thing, and that is that I know nothing». No wonder he was executed by the Athenian government.

When we consider collaborations and alliances, we find that they are, of necessity, designer cultures—limited, contingent and, above all else, obviously artificial. Can we now answer the question “What kind of collaboration and cooperation are needed and in what circumstances?” The answer is both yes and no. We can certainly answer the question of kind—whatever is appropriate and accepted as appropriate by the stakeholders. The key to this is in the construction of cultural components—alliance cultures, leadership, symbols, visions—that mesh into the interiorized cultures of the stakeholders. Buy-in to a collaborative venture, the acceptance of a means-ends path, requires not only Emotional Intelligence on the part of the leaders of the venture; it requires the presentation of a motivating vision, the construction of a symbolic interface (a culture), and the construction of rituals designed to create/recreate that culture. To paraphrase Durkheim (1915: 417), the collaboration is not simply a system of signs by which the project is outwardly translated; it is a collection of means by which this is created and recreated periodically.

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